

# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS



Issue 132

April 2026

# **Jersey Devil Press**

April 2026, Issue 132

ISSN 2152-2162

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

All stories and other contributions are copyrighted to their respective authors  
unless otherwise noted.

[www.jerseydevilpress.com](http://www.jerseydevilpress.com)

# Table of Contents:

<b>Editor's Note</b>	3
<b>Banshee</b> , Andrea DeAngelis	4
<b>Weepuls</b> , Jason Schwartz	6
<b>Insect Etymology</b> , Randy Brooks	8
<b>Arctic Treasures</b> , Robert Perchan	10
<b>Englishtown</b> , Michael Kwolek	12
<b>Show of Force</b> , H. A. Eugene	29



## Editor's Note

I'm in kind of a weird place as I write this. Thanks to wild spring temperature swings and an antique residence that struggles to adjust itself to them, I am wedged on a child-sized purple sofa in the upstairs playroom beside a resentful cat, who admittedly was here first, because it's the only comfortable spot in the house at the moment. It's a narrow room with an angled ceiling and a floor that tilts enough to send any spherical object on a swift and tumultuous journey to the eastern baseboard. This combination of unexpected proportions and angles infuses the space with a slight uncanniness, a sense of being someplace that is an imperfect imitation of reality.

It's not a bad a vibe for collecting my thoughts on issue 132, which brings together some of our favorite things: folklore, trinket nostalgia, invertebrates, poop, flea markets, and inexplicably tiny things. So settle into some peculiar corner of your own world and give it a read.

— Laura Garrison

# Banshee

Andrea DeAngelis

I sing of death but who sings for me?

When I sing, I transcend. Hitting that special note, there's a ripping in my throat, torn fissures of bloodied sound. At the crescendo, I am hoarse and depleted but come my next performance, I'm ready to howl and wail again.

I've never had an orgasm, but I imagine it is as elusive as those upper registers of my voice. I feel an ebbing and crashing ecstasy as I approach the hairbreadth crescendo of tone and power.

"You have the voice of the drowned at sea," a wino slumped over the bar once slurred.

I'll put that in my promo pack once I get an album together. Some leave the room when I emote and there aren't many people to begin with in this dive bar in Yorkville. But Dusty, the owner, lets me do my thing and really, I'm mourning for everyone who is about to die. In high school, I predicted that Jimmy Priddy was going to bite it. No one believed me until he didn't hear the train coming, drunk and high, doing his own off-key crooning on the railroad track.

The premonitions start as dreams. The other side scratches me. One of my former friends, Hui, used to joke, "Moria has night vision." But he didn't like it when I dreamed of him, when I told him to stop taking chances and driving backwards three times at midnight on the devil road in the pine barrens. It was only going to summon Mother Leeds' spawn. Hui didn't listen. It was for his podcast. So he kept traveling on that winder. A spooky environs of

pitch, pine and pain, orchids and carnivorous fauna that would consume you if they could. The shrieks of night birds cry out as warnings. My friend was subsumed by his obsession. I don't know if Hui ever found the devil or the devil found him. The obliteration was the same. Some parts of him were never found like his heart or his eyes or even his skin. I didn't see the last taking. I just saw the smear of him and night screaming.

"Go to the devil in your voice!" Debra catcalled from the meager audience.

And now tonight, this guy came up to me speaking in what I thought was a stutter but turned out to be his weird Welsh accent saying that what I do is historical. I thought he said hysterical which pissed me off. But he babbled on saying it's called keening, and did I want to sing in his band? This is how I fulfill my destiny. Reviews in Pitchfork and opening for an indie wunderkind can't be far behind.

Those in the audience won't know who I'm singing for. It could be you or someone close holding your hand while in the other a sweaty beer as you shiver and death opens a door.

**ANDREA DEANGELIS** (she/her/hers) is at times a poet, writer, shutterbug and musician living in New York City. She tries not to disturb her neighbors by putting her guitar amp in the closet. Her writing has recently appeared in *Molotov Cocktail* and *Rawhead*.

# Weepuls

Jason Schwartz

I didn't know I couldn't see  
until the social studies teacher  
phoned Mom about my index finger  
curled to make a pinhole.

Minus-six-diopter glasses  
warped the fifth grade hallway  
like a Mercator projection, swelling

googly-eyed  
sticker-footed pom-poms  
in my oil-smudged periphery.

Populars pressed them to their lockers  
or held them in their palms,  
microfibers feathering their lips.

Heather was first to own the rainbow  
because her mother ran the snack shack  
that traded them for lunch money.  
My mother emptied bedpans.

But they propagated uncontrollably,  
pushing out the ceiling tiles.  
We tunneled

single-file through the cotton thicket,  
clawing over  
hairless limbs.

Glasses skittled.  
I kept my eyes  
trained on Heather's Birkenstocks.

**JASON SCHWARTZ** is a crypto tax lawyer who grew up in New Jersey and now lives in Washington DC. His work has appeared in *Dodging the Rain* and *Toasted Cheese*.

# **Insect Etymology**

**Randy Brooks**

dead insects under glass  
a little boy  
made up names

when it opens its wings  
he knows  
it's an admiral

giant swallowtail  
pinned to the drying board  
one antenna moves

unidentifiable cricket  
in the bug collection  
named Jiminy

under the display glass  
a water strider's legs  
akimbo

in the driveway  
he identifies  
bugs guts on the car

**DR. RANDY BROOKS** is Professor of English Emeritus at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, where he teaches courses on haiku, tanka, and Japanese poetics. He and his wife, Shirley Brooks, are publishers of Brooks Books and co-editors of *Mayfly* haiku magazine. His most recent books include *Walking the Fence: Selected Tanka* and *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*.

# Arctic Treasures

Robert Perchan

Well, what is the fate of polar  
bear scat in the end, anyway?  
Are we to imagine glaciers  
littered with dark brown spoor  
like vanilla ice cream sprinkled  
with chocolate jimmies?  
Sliced, does it become  
Official NHL Hockey Pucks?  
Do the Inuit call these hefty turds  
*Coconuts of the Arctic*  
and carve frozen faces on them  
to peddle to tourists  
who fly back home to Florida  
and unpack their suitcases  
among palm trees  
and a most disagreeable odor?  
And should you and I think twice  
on a blistering summer's day  
before wrapping our lips around  
a creamy, chocolate frosted  
global warming inside our heads?

**ROBERT PERCHAN's** latest books are the comic futuristic novella *Tropic of Scorpio* (Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2022) and *Last Notes from a Split Peninsula: Poems and Prose Poems* (UnCollected Press, 2021). His short story collection "Shocks, Meester?" is out now from Spuyten Duyvil as well. His poetry collection *Fluid in Darkness, Frozen in Light* won the 1999 Pearl Poetry Prize. Bob continues to eat, drink and write in Busan, South Korea, under the bemused gaze of his translator wife, Mi-kyung Lee.

# Englishtown

Michael Kwolek

Something crazy went down last Saturday when Carmen Pantaloo invaded Englishtown. You might've seen clips online, but there's a lot more to it.

You know Englishtown—that huge flea in Central Jersey full of vendors selling gray market electronics, off-brand yoga pants, funnel cake and cheesesteaks, watered-down cleaning products, used pet supplies, and socks (so many, many pairs of socks.) They banned sales of CBD and firearms to keep things quasi-sane.

Tamale and the Freaks had that song, “Jerkin’ It With Judy At The Englishtown Flea,” on their infamous “Taster’s Choice” EP back in ‘94. The track featured the inspired couplet “Pepperoni hand grease summertime sweet / My Judy rubbin’ on me at the Englishtown flea.” Real poetry.

The place is defined by its many aromas. Desiccated potpourri, kettle corn, shore dust, farm dust, city dust, sprawl dust—every dust has a different tone. Salsa and hot sauce and old stamp collections and sizzling asphalt, Amish cinnamon rolls and salt pretzels with brown mustard. Four Brothers Pizza, Three Sals’ Slices, Coupla Tonys’ Tomato Pies. Recently sweaty dudes and guys who haven’t bathed in some days. Feral dupes of Britney Spears Circus Fantasy Eau de Parfum.

Really, Englishtown is its own ecosystem: an object dies and its molecules are processed, reused, re-reused—economic food for a bevy of local organisms. Scrap it and sell the parts. Nothing goes to waste. There's a buyer for anything at the right price.

Nowadays, the place is cleaned up some. Collectors have to scrounge. Small business owners have mostly pushed out the junk monkeys, trash perverts, porch sale grubbers, purveyors of the odd and outré, and thrift stand miscreants. So the hustlers, thieves, Bennies, trawlers and weekend scroungeabouts who partook of their wares left, too. Today it's mainly wandering suburbanites and families looking to stretch a buck.

But Englishtown still has its characters, several of whom encountered Carmen that day.

Take that rat-proud grub monger, Tall Cornelius. He loves the flea. Not all the new stuff—not the hot pink feather dusters or the salt water taffy tent, not the boxes of trading cards (mint condish) or textile remnants and notions (generally musty.) He likes the grunge from deep in the trunk of a knocky Cavalier. Rust piles and rot loads on mildewed table runners, knobby furniture and plastic takeout bags laden with moist clothes. He feels weird poring over some desperate boot hawker's detritus. A weird he likes.

The small network of jumble sale charlatans and grot peddlers that still hover the periphery at Englishtown all know Cornelius. He's the creep the creeps talk about, the lurky slimer who "never buys nothin' just asks a lot of questions and touches on all my good stuff."

Corny likes leading them on. Talking Carbo Johnston down to a buck-fifty from \$2.25 for a half-empty sleeve of used 3" flathead wood screws then walking away without transacting just to hear Johnston call him a "cheapshit" under his tobacco slaw breath.

The fateful morning Cornelius oozed into Carmen's orbit, Corny had just gotten run off by that snobby prince, Les Vidalia, who apparently thought Corny was getting too handsy with one of his precious little sculpture things. Vidalia yelled, "That objet d'art is pre-war! You owe me 285 bucks, freakin' degenerate. I know Mr. Wells personally." Mr. Wells is the wet cigar general manager at Englishtown Auction Sales.

Anyway, Corny wondered which war that lumpy thing was "pre-" of. Maybe Iraq the First, but barely.

"You'll be banned for *life*, you slipperdy twit." Les had this way of adding extra letters in certain words like "ekspecialy," and Corny got a thrill when he heard "slipperdy," which was a new one. After that, he slermed away, high on the cut-rate atmospherics of the place.

Ronda Leadweller is another Englishtown classic. She's come every weekend sniffing around for Beanies since '94 (same year as that "Taster's Choice" EP, incidentally.) Way smarter now with spotting fakes, she hasn't been conned in years. Only true Beanies. She has all the custom accoutrement: "Bless My Babies" t-shirt, red polyester vest with pockets for her rotating cast of Beanies, vinyl shoulder bag brimming with other "carrying" animals (the slightly imperfect ones are for loving, mint Babies—or just Babes—are for

treasuring.) Silly Beans, Special Beans, Legendary Beans, Felt-Bad-For Beans. So many beautiful Beanies.

The flea is her weekly social hour and Beanie fix. If you hear a lady asking, “Who’s got Beans for me?” that’s probably her, not some frijoles fiend.

The day Carmen came around, Ronda was riding high after scoring an original Patti the Platypus, no stains on his little yellow bill or anything. She traded a vendor for a tie-dyed bear stuffed with the old PVC pellets (it said so on the tush tag)—the poor guy always felt off for some reason. She confided, “I’m happy to pass this little one along to a new forever home.”

Then there’s Martha de la Cruz, who is only sort of goth. Her friends are all the way. She got tired of the commitment when her temp-to-perm job at the vet clinic went full-perm. Patent leather, clown white makeup, all the straps, studs and buckles. Goth is heavy. Goth is hot. Goth is pinchy. Martha feels like a poser in the transition period from full-on Peter Murphy praise-him to desk job goth-lite realness. Still, her friends accept.

They all drove down to Englishtown in her friend Buzzy’s converted mortuary van last Saturday. Before Carmen accosted them, they scrounged for old Banshees vinyl and pored over the discount makeup testers and poked fun at Wendel while he gooned on the vapes.

\* \* \*

So there are Englishtown regulars—minding their own biz browsing the flea on a temperate Saturday morning—and then there’s internet bozo, Carmen Pantaloo, who was down there shooting content. The complete video hasn’t shown up online, but any basic gunge nard can find clips in two seconds. You see moments of Tall Cornelius, Ronda Ledweller, and Martha and her crew in the footage that has surfaced.

The director’s cut is probably under ransom by some Baltic darkweb sadist for 20 BTC, but it’s clear from the clips that something weird happened. Fact is, Carmen Pantaloo is a total nightmare, so maybe that’s why local cops don’t seem to care that he’s M.I.A.

Besides, a lot of people are convinced this is follow-grubbing at its most dire. Carmen hasn’t been offline for more than three hours in six years. Now he hasn’t posted in days. People could stop caring about Carmen any second, which for him is worse than mysteriously vanishing in the depths of Central Jersey. The view counts on the Englishtown clips must be staggering by now, but he’s apparently not around to have a clout-gasm about it. Skeptics assume he’ll pop up with a smarmy apology vid any second.

For the uninitiated, Carmen is one of those mostly-intentional nightmares laying it on thick and horrible like the algorithms want you to. Incessant yammering while peacocking spendy streetwear and his many luxe “timepieces.” Too much and utterly devoid. So naturally Carmen has cultivated an audience of hundreds of thousands—nothing crazy.

His schtick is being loud on the subway, being loud in front of bodegas, being loud in stuffy art museums and beloved indie bookshops. Being loud at people and directly into camera. Being

loud to a Duane Reade clerk who don't get paid nearly enough for this nonsense. Loudness without consent.

The whole reason Carmen went to Englishtown in the first place was because of this jag who struts down Flatbush decked out in buggywug Kikui denim and desiccated 90s noiseband merch that would be impossible to find in even the most pretentious West Village thrift emporium. "Englishtown, man. You can't get there on the 2 Train though." Then he'd put his finger in front of his lips and shush wetly like it was a big secret. That friggin' guy.

Carmen thought he was gonna beat out the horde of richboy Instagram vintage sellers who have already turned other area fleas into speedruns of cash-only distressed workwear and L.L. Bean canvas totes and "archival" preppy knits and baggadouchery. How do you bro-kill a flea market of all things? They did.

Carmen obviously grew up in New Jersey (probably Summit or Chatham or one of those other monied Route 24 hamlets) but in his videos he always says, "I'm from New York" or "I never go above 14th Street." Still, the prospect of a vast trove of Japanese denim and crop tees from defunct scuzzwave bands he never heard of was apparently worth breaking his never-step-that-side-of-the-Hudson-again rule.

"Who leaves the boroughs on a Saturday morning to drive to Jersey? No one!"

“I’m missing brunch for this? Deluxe Disgusto (salt, pepper, ketchup) with a side of extra-crispy No Thanks, babe. Saint Mugler, the things I do for style.”

“Jersey is a non-issue. How do people even live here?”

Those quotes are from the clip of Carmen driving south over the Driscoll Bridge on the way to Englishtown, not paying attention to the road then almost missing the Route 9 exit a few minutes later and nearly sideswiping a minivan to cross seven-ish lanes of traffic. Matty the cameraguy can be heard gasping a few times out of frame.

“Chill out, babe, I don’t need your stress right now.”

Carmen calls everyone “babe.”

Here are some of Carmen’s observations from the next clip where he’s just arrived:

On overall impressions: “This place is a total refugee camp and, like, not in a fun way.”

On the mission: “I came here for one thing only: this crusty dump is supposed to be absolutely crawling with Kikui and there’s clearly no way, not on this day, honey diva. Everyone here is *so* Contempo Casualty. Kirkland multi-pack for the win, right? And whatever potato sack that chick is being Boston strangled by.” Carmen casually thrusts that last comment directly at a mom in a nondescript sweatshirt and jeans who is completely oblivious to his entire existence, which sends him further spiraling.

On paying for goods: “These bridge-and-tunnel trolls probably accept shiny rocks for their little... wares, right?” He then waves his hand dismissively.

Carmen loves to punctuate such observations with a thick, put-on guffaw or that rhetorical, “Right?”

In the next clip, Carmen happens upon Tall Cornelius by a heap of rusty metal thingamajigs laid out on a yellowed She-Ra bedsheet. You don’t see what started their interaction, just this exchange:

“Ball-n-chain-ga? What’s that, man?”

“No, it’s *Balenciaga*. And yes, the shirt is real if that’s what you’re asking. Check the tags, babe. I don’t do knockoffs.”

“Ooh, Balenciaga? Is that a band from Czechoslovakia or something? And why is it so huge?” Corny stretches his arms out.

“Brand—it’s a *brand*, grosso. And it’s supposed to be slouchy. Why are we even engaged in this dialog right now?”

Tall Cornelius then croaks the word “slouchy” and starts tromping around hunched over like Golem and drools some, giving slouchy.

“Oh my god, this place so tremendously sucks.”

“I’ll give you three bucks for it!”

“Are you serious? This is a \$900 garment.”

“Three twenty five!”

\* \* \*

Sometime after the Cornelius run-in, Carmen confronts Martha and her friends.

“Oh my god—actual mall goths. Matty Mattswell, make sure you get them. Hi, babe. Love this... frilly... whatever this is. And OMG, ironic footwear at the flea—I adore. Creepers are *everything* to mall goths. Right, Ms. Leather and Lace?”

“Yeah, my footwear. Post-post modernist night prowler,” Martha deadpans. In the corner of the frame, you see her friends Buzzy and Wendel make eye contact with each other and try not to die laughing.

Carmen keeps going, oblivious: “I know, right? What are you shopping for today, babe? Something fishnetty? A Viralia Imperia cover-up moment? Honey, definitely go with a stretch fabric situation, right? Guessing you’re about to hit the deep fries?”

“Stretch—oh, yeah. Because I’m fat. No actually, we’re on the hunt for Nightmare Before Christmas panty liners? They’re supposedly *super* absorbent and I’m having a heavy flow moment, *right babe?*”

“Um, excuse me?”

“And have you heard of Tragique? The new fragrance by Robert Smith? Momma, it smells like gray cats and Victorian drowning. But they only made 666 bottles. Super limited edish.”

“Robert Smith? Who’s that, your high school guidance counselor? Wait, have you guys seen Snookie? She’s somewhere, right?” He scans the crowd, ignoring Martha.

“Check the spray tan booths. Snookie is such an of-the-moment reference. So funny. What’s your PostPage again?”

“PostPage? Aww, you loves are still stuck in the mid-2000’s. So adorable. My handles are—”

“Wait—I’m so sorry. A bout of dropsy mayhap—” Martha wisps away in wide-eyed bemusement for a beat, then she and her friends burst out in hysterics just as the clip cuts sharply.

Then there’s this final bit of footage where things really get interesting:

“No frackin’ way. A giant booth with nothing but those dumb whatchamacallits from the 90s. Oh my gush. Beano Babies. The worst! My fam out there agrees, right? And no!” Carmen feigns shock as he catches sight of Ronda Leadweller and her Beanie vest. He fake swoons.

“I can’t. I can’t! You guys, this creature—” He smirks conspiratorially.

You can tell Ronda has heard every sideways comment Carmen’s been spewing. She looks *lih*-vid. No one’s ever seen her like this.

In this sudden motherly rage, she clutches her new Patti the Platypus to her heart as if she’s gonna lob it like a fuzzy fuschia hand grenade.

Lip quivering, Ronda shouts, “You crummy mummy, why dontcha mind your own darn business? You better not go anywhere *near* these Beans!” Ronda stands between Carmen and the Beanie Babies, chest heaving, platypus squeezed tight. The dealer looks on with vague interest.

Just then, Tall Cornelius saunters over from the booth kitty corner, the one with smatterings of old cooking stuff—not sought-after depression glass or KitchenAid in discontinued colorways—

just mounds of rotty utensils and gunky can openers and such. He was over there nosing about and likely sorta creeping in Carmen's wake since their earlier encounter.

Corny's ears must have pricked up when Ronda got going and "crummy mummy" really sent his guts leaping hot and bubbly. In the video, he drops a blighted rolling pin back on the pile and skitters into the foreground with Ronda fuming alongside.

"Hey you. Hey you. Bawlenchiyarga, can I be in your video? C'mon, can'tcha put the camera on me? This some kind of far out Hollywood picture? You must be super duper famous. So forget this lady and all them rip-off animals. I hafta show ya some really wowie zowie stuff. I know exactly where the buried treasure is, *where X marks the spot!*" He sprays that last bit like Daffy Duck in a tizzy.

Carmen turns away and mutters, "Ugh, Matty, we're going—"

But Cornelius pulls at Carmen's slouchy tee with his grubby fingies and Carmen visibly shudders. Then Corny bellows the word "Dungarees!" like it's abracadabra and for a half-second Carmen miraculously goes silent then weirdly follows him like Corny is some spindly alien mesmerist.

At that point, the camera pans toward the ground and you see what appears to be Ronda's khakied legs. "What are you doing hanging around that crummy mummy, young man?"

Off camera, (presumably) Matty mumbles, "I don't even know—" then the clip ends. That's it. There's nothing online about what happened next. Matty must have GTFO'ed at that point—Carmen was likely paying him in "exposure" after all.

As for what actually happened to Carmen, if you go to Englishtown a lot and get to know the regulars, stories abound.

\* \* \*

Here's one: A few stalls from the Beanie Babies, there's a rickety tent encased in blue tarps run by California D-Nez. He's a rock guy—minerals, petrified wood, stuff like that.

Some people say they saw Corny and Ronda go in the tent with Carmen, but no one saw Carmen come out. And supposedly somebody else later left the tent carrying a big chunk of cauliflower coral with rust all over it. It could have been red coral, but that stuff's extremely rare and kind of illegal. An old hunk of regular coral covered in blood is more likely.

Then other Englishtown folks say stuff like:

"I thought you weren't allowed to sell knockoffs here. These Armani sweats don't have tags. Plus, what is this funky stain in the crotch? There's no way they're worth twelve bucks." The dealer of casual separates in this situation then swore up and down they were the real deal, but he put them on the bargain pile because of the crotch splotches. The sweats did resemble the ones Carmen was sporting the day he poofed.

\* \* \*

“Siiick. What is this thing made out of?” a middle-aged metalhead was asking Madam Gamalan, the woman who sells witchy tchotchkes. She had a queer little cage on display made from what looked like the delicate bones found in human hands and feet. She replied with possibly put-on Eastern European flair, “Is made from skeleton of chicken, blessed by ancient sacrifice. Put living bird in prison of dead bird, create very much spirit force.”

“What’s that raunched-out smell? It’s like something barfed a gall bladder and died a week ago.” That was over by where the flea backs up to a stand of teetery pines. Probably just a rotting squirrel, *right babe???*

Then Mr. Manuel said he saw a bunch of “youths pale like a damn ghost” loading something big and blue into a giant hearse, like a body in a tarp. But that guy’s worn the same prescription glasses since last century and couldn’t tell Gary Busey from Godzilla at ten yards. If he was talking about Martha and her friends, what he probably saw was the enormous Squirtle stuffy with the generally run-over look that Kiki got for next to nothing from one of the Pokémon dealers.

Point is, since the whole Pantaloo Affair last Saturday, you hear details any conspiracy theorist with a few yards of red string would determine leads to: somebody offed Carmen and distributed pieces of him and his personal effects around Englishtown.

But Martha and her friends are no corpse handlers. Tall Cornelius might be the town leech, but he's never killed anybody with a chunk of coral. And Ronda Ledweller is certainly not about to be an accessory to said murder. It doesn't add up.

More reliable sartorial sources say that a coterie of d-bag vintage hounds also heard that jag on Flatbush rave about Englishtown. D-bag vintage hounds usually act like lone wolves snarling over pre-fast fashion Ralph Lauren leftovers. But this time, these dudes coordinated.

They saw Carmen blowharding in a livestream about how he'd "defy all reason, skip brunch and drive to Englishtown this Saturday so stay tuned, fam—I might *die* out there. It's for throwback Kikui denim, so... worth it!" and decided Carmen had to go. It was unacceptable to even conceive of that Insta clown parading around in such venerated indigo. Though not necessarily in a sleeps-with-the-fishes way.

These toolbags in their Off-White sneakers and crusty Styx tees and oversized Belgian peasantry-inspired choreshirts were in competition with themselves but hated "that Pantaloo squatter" even more. They were not about to let some gauche low-level SnappyGram flex-a-lot get first dibs on such transcendent garb.

Carmen was gonna blow up their spot and the whole Tri-State area would be swarmed with desperate third-wave trendsters and bourgeois brandsluts (just like, they knew deep down, themselves to be.)

So one of the nameless cabal borrowed his girlfriend's Corolla. The group filled the trunk with their least-gougable inventory (mid-2000's Gap, for example) and drove down to Englishtown early without posting about it even once.

They pulled in at 7 A.M. sharp when the office opened, slapped down thirty bucks cash (finagling with Mr. Wells for a space on the far periphery near the overflow parking) and haphazardly set up and tagged their wares. [*Note: The office security cameras have been busted since Tamale and the Freaks were all the rage.*]

The bros probably hadn't thought much beyond intercepting Carmen at the flea, like what they would do once they lured him with promises of sacred denim. They did, however, conduct a speedy recon and sniffed out nary a stitch of genuine Japanese anything in all of Englishtown, then realized that jag on Flatbush must have been a blue jeans double agent the whole time.

But hey, they ended up unloading a lot of pieces (they call their too-distressed bottoms and pit-stained polos "pieces") while waiting for Carmen to whirlwind over. Mainly XL+ Carhartt and aforementioned Gap basics, but also several pairs of extravagantly adorned and "hilarious" Z. Cavaricci balloon pants.

Anyway, this was the "dungarees" Corny was pulling Carmen toward. Who knows, those guys probably paid Corny five used tissues to do the dragging, though Corny would have done it for three. After he completed his little hypnotism act, he no doubt lost interest and went sniffing around the food trucks for freebies.

The bros seduced Carmen with promises of a secret stash of "elite product, real indigo" when it was obvious he had no interest in their mall-brand dross. "I gotchu, I gotchu. All this stuff is out

here to appease the teenyboppers. I can tell you have your own thing going, bruh.”

They charmed him back to the Corolla where they promised a load of “Kikui selvedge and archival shirting for our most discerning clientele.”

When one of them popped the trunk and Carmen saw it was empty save for a single insulting pair of Old Navy stretch skinny jeans, he must have been stunned for a second before the dudes surrounded him and stuffed him in there, closed it up and drove off. They even left their remaining merchandise, mainstream as it was, out in the elements for the scavengers to pick clean when everyone else called it a day.

It’s highly unlikely they chopped him up and dumped the pieces in the Hackensack River among the many other anonymous corpse parts. Maybe they freed him out back of the Jon Bon Jovi Service Area in South Amboy if he pinky promised to steer clear of Brooklyn forever-ever. It’s also entirely possible they stripped him down to his Tom Ford undies and left him in that maze of wetlands covering half of Staten Island and he still hasn’t found his way to the ferry. Without his phone, Carmen is/was useless.

What’s weird though, is today a bunch of people saw Tall Cornelius at the flea wearing a giant white t-shirt that hung off him like a shredded sail on a ghost ship. It was obviously a fake Balenciaga because it was filthy and inside out and one of the sleeves was missing, but you could still see the big dumb logo in

reverse through the fabric. Of course, someone like Corny could never afford real Balenciaga.

But Englishtown is indeed its own ecosystem, so who knows.

**MICHAEL KWOLEK** was raised in suburban New Jersey near an abandoned psychiatric hospital. He has been a pizza delivery boy, junior hedge fund analyst, touring musician and brand strategist. He is now a marketer and science writer for University of Colorado Boulder. Michael holds a BA in English from Seton Hall University and an MBA from CU Boulder. His writing has appeared in *McSweeney's* and *96th of October*, and his forthcoming novelette *A Face That Knows* will be published by Foofaraw Press in Spring 2026. Michael has also put out several LPs of sweeping indie rock.

## Show of Force

H. A. Eugene

Maricel looked up one morning to see a cloud of what she assumed were spider cocoons, but were little parachutes, each carrying a soldier the size of a very small army man. They landed on the driveway. Some snagged on trees. Their compatriots cut them down.

She watched as they swarmed her husband Vicente's car and shimmied up the mosquito netting on the back of the house. It wasn't clear who they were fighting until she realized they were fighting her. They celebrated when she got up from her chair by the veranda, annoyed by their swarming numbers, and stood up to go inside.

A few days later she discovered that they had established a command base in their living room. They swarmed like ants, their little bivouacs covering a section of the hardwood floor. Little MASH units treated their wounded, occasionally bringing in a beetle or a gecko who got caught in the crossfire. They cheered when news came in from the front that Vicente had moved his car.

Maricel heard one day from uncle Bening that they had set up some sort of industry around the coconut trees near the house, harvesting sap from the trees' bases, which they'd bled into containers, to be shipped out in endless fleets of little trucks. Their army guarded this factory with checkpoints.

Within days, the area of the living room where the MASH unit was now housed a permanent military base, filled with tiny Jeeps and American flags. By the weekend they had developed an

attachment to Auntie Joselito, who caroused with them and sung their favorite karaoke song, which she'd determined to be *Lucky Star* by Madonna. Tiny boos rang out whenever she tried to sing anything in Tagalog or Bisaya. Meanwhile, they decided they hated Uncle Bening, who walked around the house pointing at his head, as swarms of tiny helicopters attacked his receding hairline. The choppers followed him and didn't peel away until his Jeepney passed the creek they had dammed up and redirected into some unfinished industrial concern; a project they had begun after quickly losing interest in the coconut trees.

One morning, Maricel awakened to the sound of a tiny brass band and found some sort of presentation at the foot of their bed, complete with a little man giving a speech. It was not immediately apparent what the speech was about, but it was solemn. And it was most certainly directed at her.

A certain solemnity befell her as she walked over to the yard to find their military base being disassembled, and the construction by the creek, abandoned. At the end of the veranda sat a little statue of their soldiers raising an American flag, complete with a little plaque. She took her child's magnifying glass to it, but still couldn't make out the words, only that there were many.

She wondered what changed. Had sentiments about the war shifted at home? Solemnity curdled to irritation as she saw that they had built an airport at the edge of their driveway, on which bird-sized jets landed and took off.

She went to the phone to call her neighbor, Juji, to let her know they were preparing to strike their house.

**H. A. EUGENE** is an O. Henry-nominated writer of strange stories about food, work, and death. His work has appeared in *X-R-A-Y Lit*, *Radon Journal*, *HAD*, and *Flash Fiction Online*, among others. Witness him talking to himself on Bluesky @autobono.bsky.social and Instagram @h\_a\_eugene.





On the cover:

## “Woman”

**ENRIQUE MESEGUER** is an artist and illustrator based in Madrid, Spain. He specializes in fantasy photomanipulation & digital art as well as designing book covers.

