



a book of short fictions

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Bird

A bird on the balcony. A budgie, squawking and fluttering, stuck against the mesh. Barricaded by wind, incapable of flying off. Green, yellow, red feather ruffle.

It is tired, worn from attempts at escape. Owners yelping below, helplessly holding high an open cage. The budgie was only curious, let loose in its cage within a cage. The guilty open window still gapes, curtains lashing a stream of obscenities.

"Get back here, you fucking bird, or they'll shut me up for good!"

Riverview

Riverview, the gargantuan mental health institution sprawls across acres.

As spring arrives the coarse, thickly branched tree alone in the middle of the lawn grows leaves again.

This aging place, no longer filled to capacity, appears lonely and hollow. It aches for bodies to wander its corridors and occupy its little rooms.

Is the river really in view? regardless, does the coastal rain soothe a troubled mind?

Plastics

"Empty a room of plastics and nothing is left. They're everywhere. Polyethylene has swallowed the world whole. Polystyrene enhances moments of convenience. Polycarbonate protects."

"And they're in everything. Bottle, containers, appliances, toys, sporting equipment, implants, automobiles, clothing, the list goes on. We literally pleasure ourselves with plastic."

"Eventually we will simply recycle the world wholesale."

"The ultimate in ease. No more messy humans. Pure reuse of resource. Each of us a small part of something great."

"If there isn't a god of plastic, someone should get on that."

"I'd definitely worship."

Accident

An accidental dose of life. Giving him three years yet until he croaks. But no one wants him or needs him anymore.

He doesn't know any of this. Unaware and preoccupied with his life's work, the grand project.

Today, he thinks, will be the day of mastering the one move chess game. Once this is accomplished he believes he will finally matter.

The Moon is Waxing Gibbous

Looking up at the night sky, swallowed by his own imagination. A distraction, however momentary, from the fact he is dying by his own hand.

The universe shifts, galaxies blurring, reason now indistinct and distant.

He clutches the pills as the galaxy of blood vessels and capillaries expand and contract. Molecules explode, muscles convulse. Another dead star, collapsing in on itself.

Sculpture

Rupture. The plastic, thin and tense, begins to open its gaping mouth, quietly screaming its last regards. Barking a commentary on what it was and will be, undergoing a mutation in form. The sculpture cools and heats, translucence to transparency, heats and cools.

A child giggles, wriggling in her mother's arms, as the plastic transforms, mocking the form of dozens of animals and objects as it escapes its confines.

After an indeterminate range of time the sculpture collapses in on itself, congealing, coagulating, eventually reconstituting.

The Bus

'contain yourself,' she whisper yelled. Her son was patting the bus window beside him repeatedly. He imagined soldiers running behind bushes, firing ammunition at each other, his window thumping in time to the rhythm of death.

'are you going to be a drummer when you grow up?' mum asks.

Boy does not respond, a look of shock. A collective gasp on the bus before squealing tires and a thump.

End of the World

Last night I dreamt about the end of the world. It was a pleasant feeling, warm and certain. There was no anxiety over the impending event, there was only one possible course of action. My singular role in the whole affair was to cease.

When there's no question about your place in the order of things you relax. All is decided for you. This must be the calm surrounding belief in god, or the kind of powerful powerlessness one is *supposed* to feel. An overwhelming awe at simplicity and complexity. Astounded by our growing brilliance and impossible stupidity.

Nothing mattered while the world decelerated, my shallow, slumbering breaths soothed. Time melted while the sun swallowed the earth. It was relieving, and I awoke refreshed.

The Body Soon Relaxes

Drinking from the river, hand cupped. As his head nears the water he feels a push from behind.

He cannot swim, and quickly finds himself submerged and incapable of surfacing. This can't be happening, he thinks, shocked at the coldness of the water pushing him along.

The body soon relaxes, spasms, turns limp. His mind grasps at everything that should have happened, a sudden shock of consciousness rising, surging, subsiding.

Go/no-go

Fatigue falling, war rumbling. Go/no-go. Soldier slips the small pill into his mouth, military issue, tucks it under his tongue. smooth feel of the casing, rolling it around the mouth. Go/no-go. He's been up for over seventy hours, the voices tickling all around him. Sleep abandoned.

She's probably tucked into her bed right now. Teddy watching over her. Go/no-go. If he closes his eyes he can see her for a moment, thousands of miles away, home.

Looks over the trench. Bodies running. Gunfire. A screaming. Penetration. Go/no-go.

Hitler

We stand there gawking at the wall of the stamp shop. None of us know quite how to respond to the sight of the German stamp, the ghost of Hitler's face printed upon it. Did he dream that his power would last this long, haunt this far?

Paused, stunned, unsure what to say about this.

Speaking at once, we all express the peculiar feeling it's conjured. Transfixed, we continue staring.

Conspiring Against Him

"Slow down, stupid car!" the ten year old yells as he is nearly run over crossing the street. He stops, stares at the car driving away, continues crossing the street.

Once across the road he pauses to regain his composure. This is the third near-miss this week, and he feels as though certain mechanisms are conspiring against him.

The Drunk's Hand

The drunk's hand moves. It is hanging at his side one moment, and leaping up to grab the knee of the man next to him a second later. He mumbles something incoherent to the outside world.

The man quickly brushes the drunk's hand aside. Uncertain where he is, the drunk opens his eyes and stares at the man. The man is terrified but doesn't know what to do other than stare back.

Other passengers on the train become tense. Some secretly hope for violence, while others want to get off of the train as soon as possible. At the next stop the drunk stumbles off in confusion.

Hole in the Wall

There is a draft coming from the hole in the wall. I left the room for a few moments to warm up outside in the path of the sun. When I returned, there was a one foot by one foot panel cut out of the wall directly in front of my desk. While the room was frigid before, now there is a winter draft that climbs up my pant legs and cuts through my shirt.

After staring at the hole for a few hours I walked over and peered inside. It is dark, and there are all sorts of conduit running throughout the cavity. There is a bright red wire that isn't in conduit that I want to touch, yet won't.

I tried to speak to the manager about the hole, but he isn't around. My fingers ache when I type, and I think I'm catching a cold. Tomorrow I'll bring a sweater.

I'm concerned about the hole. I looked around for debris to see if someone quickly cut the hole and left. I see nothing. Perhaps the hole has been there all along and I've only noticed now.

Wrong Number

Standing outside behind the car. He takes food from a plastic bag and begins to eat. While I walk by he stares blankly. As I pass I wonder if he's trying to stare me down. He looks too relaxed, eating his snack, to appear threatening. There is still something vaguely menacing about his eyes.

When I come inside the building I receive a phone call. It is a wrong number. A woman's voice insisting that someone named "Delgado" is here. I inform her she is mistaken.

She calls again later in the afternoon, two minutes before I usually go out for lunch. When I step outside the staring man is still there, eating the same snack. I look quickly at my watch but the battery has died.

Lull

There was a lull in the conversation. They both wanted to leave but couldn't. Their manager wouldn't be back in the room for another seven minutes.

He smiled. She smiled. She looked out the window. He looked at the wall.

The manager didn't arrive for eighteen minutes. By that time they were both exhausted from avoidance.

The Message

The message never came. She waited. Two days passed. She grew hungry and impatient. She couldn't sleep. The room was cramped and dark. There was a distinct, unpleasant odour. She had to urinate down a drain hole.

The messenger bumped his head while showering. He slipped and fell forward, banging his skull against the rim of the toilet. He lived alone, and the body was found when he didn't pay the next month's rent.

She waited. Eventually she left. Later she was found under a bridge, dead from exposure.

Oncoming Traffic

A lack of concern as she crossed the road in the path of oncoming traffic. She knew she would barely avoid being hit. She also knew there was a slight chance that someone wouldn't be paying attention and would drive their car straight into her. This is what she hoped for, sometimes, though she would never admit it.

Her dress was torn, the faded flower design flapping wildly in the breeze. It wasn't yet summer. Still, optimism was in the forefront of her mind today.

Earthquake

No one was injured. The earthquake shook his desk. The building was not damaged. Everyone in the city paused for a moment. A bridge collapsed. Four cars were crushed. The weather forecast wrongly indicated rain in the late afternoon. Certain people sleeping at the time did not notice the event whatsoever.

For weeks after a wave of paranoia filled people. Everyday tasks began to overwhelm them. Their world was filled with uncertainty.

He found himself placing his hands on his desk to steady himself. He moved his trash can out from under his desk in case he had to duck under it.

Bohemian

Smoking, he stood in the doorway of his shop. He hadn't washed his hair in several days, and smoked no less than a pack of cigarettes a day. He considered himself bohemian, though he was several decades late for the fashion he was imitating.

Still, he found no lack of impressionable minds that were attracted to him. After the store closed several of these acquaintances would stay around and fill the basement with thick smoke.

Some of them would form a loose group of friends. Shortly thereafter, however, the group would dissipate, for reasons unclear. The bohemian storekeep would continue to scrape by each month. Two and half years later his store would close and he would disappear. Some of the original group, having met each other by coincidence, shared rumours. Some thought he went to Mexico to pursue his obsession with peyote and mysticism, while others suspected he fled to France where it was thought he had a wealthy aunt.

The Sign

The sign is new. He built it last week to replace the old one he had been using for years. It finally wore out from and time and use.

Jesus saves, it informed.

He got the idea, a flash of inspiration, while he was forty and unemployed. It began as an act of penance, atonement for a lifetime of sin. Soon people give him money and praise, two things he had been a stranger to previously.

Years passed and he kept on, holding his sign all day. Same place. Sometimes he remembered the past and the freedom of doing whatever he wanted whenever he felt like it. Now he had a sign.

Waiting and Remembering

Waiting and remembering. Mind slipping from scene to scene, shifting through memories, shuffling faces.

She sat at the window. Watching. Her days occupied by the past. Occasionally, while eating dinner in the dining hall with the others, she would become bitter. Suddenly stricken with the foul taste of age and abandonment.

Every second Sunday her son would come to visit. Sometimes his wife or one or two of their children would come along. The rest of the week was spent in years gone by, and she didn't mind this for the most part. She had friends back there she liked to visit.

Degeneration

"Terminal illness is a condition of being," he said.

It was true. He was dying. But he had always been dying, he knew. The difference now was that it was a certainty he would die sooner due to the cancerous growth in his stomach.

When he pressed on the side of his abdomen he thought he could feel the lump beneath the bloated mass. He had once watched his body get strong and fit, but now he could only ponder its degeneration.

Shopping Cart

The shopping cart lifts up onto two wheels turning the corner, entering the mouth of yet another aisle of food.

Sunday morning. Dehydration. Exhaustion. Mild irritation. Growing into aggression. Knuckles tighten across the handle of the cart. Grinding teeth, muttering "Come on and move you fuck" quietly.

Rolls the cart forward and backward in sharp jolts. No one senses his frustration and mounting hostility. All he wants at this moment is to be home.

Instead of patiently waiting for the consumer blocking his path to move, he considers ramming his half-filled cart into theirs. Full speed. Clang of metal. Scream of broken glass. He breathes. Relaxes his grip on the cart. Turns and walks out of the store.

A Shard

She lifts a shard and gazes into it. When she drops the bit of reflective surface it crashes amongst the other fragments scattered on the floor.

A moment earlier she shattered the mirror as she sat before it brushing her hair. The mirror had been judging her, she felt, so she had struck it with the head of the hairbrush.

She stood, surrounded by jagged edges, stunned at her impulse, unsure as to what she should do next.

Internal Corruption

She's so full of damage. Filled to internal corruption from trite comfort.

The woman she's talking to can hardly utter a word without being cut off. The damage has succeeded in passing itself off as knowledge, and now she believes that she understands the filaments of humanity.

Accepting her own word as gospel, she's temporarily healed the damage's points of entry.

Voices

Wind, excited and howling around the structure. Inside, he could hear it scream between the joints of the old window.

There was work to be done outside, within the punches of air, though he couldn't rouse himself from the half-broken chair. Hands folded, as though in prayer, he stared at the table.

It was another day where he would have to push his limbs into action with force. A voice, rumbling somewhere behind his thoughts and memories began to yell at him to get up.

Troubled

"Who knows what we are, broken with rage and humiliation"

"There are no justifications that suffice"

"Yet you and I stand here, troubled, but still capable of carrying on"

Microcosms

The coin operated massage chairs won't shut up, demanding payment, the old couple refusing to insert coins or move. He curses at no one in particular while she nervously knits.

Outside, the ocean ripples on the verge of whitecaps. Intersecting mounds of water, countless momentary landscapes, microcosms of tumult.

Currents form patterns, smooth smears across the ocean's surface. A blue plastic container interrupts the image.

Noise

Baby boy in a smock. Laughing mother playing hand-clap games. Sitting on a jacket laid out on the floor of the ferry.

The worker, a young woman, enters the room with a vacuum cleaner and extension cord. Sets the vacuum down beside the mother and child. Walks to the adjoining room and plugs the cord in. A wall of us sitting, watching, anticipating deafening noise.

Vibrations, combined with a crunching sound as the ferry grinds against rocks, settling up to its dock point. The child is carried off to the car deck, continuing to gurgle and laugh.

Exhibition

The railway engine creeps into the city with dozens of containers in tow, bound for a central shipping yard.

One of the cars is filled with explosives. Detonation time determined as noon.

The group has been planning this catastrophe for years. It is neither ideologically or politically motivated. It is an exhibition of the art of chaos.

Mouth

While pouring the water into the prisoner's upturned mouth he can't stop glancing at the face.

The prisoner's eyes are closed, throat attempting to gulp as much water as possible. He's not certain when he'll drink again. His hands are bound behind his back and he can't manage to get his head inside the small pail collecting water in the corner of the room.

There is nothing in the cell, save for the rotting corpse of the second prisoner. The prisoner does nothing all day except not looking at the bloated face.

Raging

Finger raised, mouth fixed on anger, the person behind the thick glass is raging against something.

It is impossible to make out the words, but the body carries much volume. Arm shaking, throwing the finger of discipline, of disappointment. The head jolts as critical phrases are spurted out

Uncertain how this will turn out, barking an unconscious manifesto.

Gauge

"That's a nice green shirt"

I looked at her with uncertainty. As the past had shown, it was impossible to gauge her intentions. She would often try to surprise people with pointless flattery.

Later in the day she gave me a dirty glance for no apparent reason.

Panicked

Against all probabilities. But that wasn't the worst of it.

When he came at me like that I wasn't sure what to expect. I panicked.

I'll never absolve myself of this now.

Handshake

His father stopped the car, rolled down the window, and beckoned him to get in.

None of them had ever had a friend move away before. What protocols were they to enact? he reached out to shake his hand. They were too old for hugs, he thought, and the other boys eagerly reached out to follow his lead.

Watching the car drive away, he felt satisfied at their ending. He was glad to have found the appropriate social interaction at the crucial moment, something entirely new to him.

Note

As he sat on the bus seat he heard the crinkle of paper. He reached under his rear and pulled out a small scrap of brown paper, apparently torn from a grocery bag.

"Make sense of yourself, then destroy the information."

He folded the note in half briskly, before anyone else saw it, and stuffed it in his pocket.

Garbage

It's a windy day for the garbage men. Broken bags' contents strewn down streets, across lawns.

Diapers, bloodied sanitary napkins, semen spilling from condoms. The detritus of daily life.

A slurry of rain water and dog shit splash the garbage man as he empties the can's contents into the back of the truck. He swears, kicks the garbage can onto the lawn, and yells at the driver to move on.

Narcissus

A mannequin, frozen, staring at herself in the train's window. Strong scent of hairspray, perfume, and cosmetics. Concealed face, construction of a new identity.

Maintaining. Narcissus on the train, more than willing to fall into the pond of her own reflection.

She reapplies her lipstick and moves a pocket mirror around to verify her blush. This is a game, a ruse she is eager to enact.

The Purse

She stops and examines the discount purses on her lunch break.

Her white, discoloured shirt and black, ill-fitting pants are not flattering. She wants a new wardrobe, but, like the other employees, knows she cannot afford the luxury.

The item she considers does not suit her, though with her staff discount she would save considerably on her purchase.

Reminder

When he moved the box across the carpet his finger was caught underneath. The moment he slid it he could feel a burning sensation.

After he was done moving the box he examined his finger. It wasn't yet bleeding, but there was a large piece of skin missing from the middle finger of his left hand. A few moments later it began to bleed. There was no pain associated with the wound.

The remainder of the day he kept glancing at the dried blood and wondered if it would leave a scar. In some ways he hoped it would. That way he would have a reminder.

Hand on His Hat

The cowboy boots produced a loud noise as he walked into the subway terminal.

His black, felt hat proved useless in this covered area. It did hide the bald patch on the top of his head, though. He shifted from foot to foot while he stood waiting for the train that would take him to his meeting.

The rumble of the oncoming train was audible long before it entered the tunnel. He placed a hand on his hat to prevent the train from blowing it off.

Haze

He couldn't concentrate. The haze in front of his eyes was absolute, a translucent film between his mind and the physical world.

The sun felt especially bright, painful to the eyes. Noises blurred, muted. Other humans gave the impression of vague threat, faces transmogrified, a mass of fleshy hate.

When he stepped outside it started to rain, though no clouds were apparent. The cold drops of water began to wake him from his walking dream.

Rupture

Answers the cell phone in mid conversation. She likes the way it feels, slipping from a conversation with the person across the desk to a phone conversation all in one breath gives her a rush. It is as though she is connected to something larger.

For a few moments she is a goddess of business. Her control over communication is immaculate, and her heart beats slightly faster in response.

The person across the desk from her shifts uncomfortably. Communication rupture and a flash of ego dissolve the conversation.

Retired

This morning when the train leaves the station he won't be on it. Standing at the platform are the usual faces, except for his.

He's retired, disappeared from the routine of labour. This morning he wakes up at the same time he has for the previous 23 years. After his routine of showering, shaving, and eating breakfast, he feels an urge to take the train.

A few people notice his absence on the other side of the train platform, though no one guesses the cause of his disappearance.

Smelt

Leaning against the log, tending a small fire, he watched his net in the water.

The hip-waders were hot in the sun, but blocked the early morning wind off the ocean. He watched the light flicker on the surface of the water, reflecting the mountains surrounding the straight. His mind kept coming back to memories of smelt fishing with his father. He died on the beach the year before of heart failure.

The smelt catches were small this year. Although he enjoyed the ritual of spending his weekends by the water talking with the other fishermen, he thought he might start spending more time with his grandchildren.

Smoke

As the smoke trickled through the air behind her as she walked, he breathed deeply. The scent of tobacco, and muted perfume, trickled through his nostrils, exciting memories at least a decade old.

He recalled a time when he, too, smoked on his way to work. The pleasure from the first cigarette of the day caressing his lungs. The comfort of the cigarette between his stained fingertips.

While his mind raced, his footsteps closed the gap between their bodies. He wanted nothing more than to kiss her and absorb her breath.

Past Concern

Walking faster than the rain. It's been coming down for five months and they're not sure if it will ever stop.

It defies logic. The media is comparing it to a broken sink, and he thinks that analogy is perfectly reasonable. He's wearing four layers of perma-damp clothing, and he's chilled straight through. He can't remember the last time he was warm.

He hears an alert warning of floods in the neighbouring city. Everyone is past concern. Pragmatism is the dominant coping mechanism.

Blacked Out

Abstract terror in a world of collapse. She scolded him for frightening their party guests with his ramblings.

The guests drank more than they should have, trying to cut an uneasy feeling floating around them. Pregnant with paranoia, they each went home to ruminate on the state of things.

One guest vomited in the bushes in front of the house, and another blacked out in the bathroom. After they picked the lock they found him unconscious in front of the toilet with a bottle of whisky resting beside him.

Teeth

While he was chewing the food he felt the jagged edges of broken teeth crunching. All of his teeth felt as though they were crumbling.

He went to the bathroom to rinse out his mouth. There was no pain as he ran his tongue across the coarse chunks of teeth now populating his gums.

Bits of blood and food covered teeth crumbled through his hands while he rinsed out his mouth. He smiled in the mirror, and several of his front teeth were missing. Red gum holes glared back at him. He pulled back his lower lip to investigate the full extent of the damage and saw that a large chunk of his lower gum had been brutally severed and rested on his tongue. A lone root was the last remaining link to his jaw.

The sight of the carnage woke him up immediately. For several moments he was unsure what had taken place. The details of the dream were hazy and uncertain. The dream populated his thoughts for days, yet he still could not make sense of what had happened.

City

Sunday night, empty city streets, dusk approaching. He stood at the railing, arm against the cold metal, watching the waves touch the embankment.

The working world was at home, anticipating the approach of Monday morning. Two seagulls fought, banking and diving towards the water, both desiring a piece of garbage the other had.

Street lights turned on. Slowly he watched the inner glow of the buildings, lights left on all weekend, become apparent as the sun descended below the mountains. The city began to feel warm and secretive.

Target

She listened to the gentle whirl of the satellite as it changed positions. Every noise was amplified in her mind as she had been working for forty-three hours non-stop. Now she had a moment to breathe and regain her composure as the tracking equipment reconfigured.

There was a new target to focus attention on, she had been told. While she waited files were being transferred to her display and in a few moments the hunt would begin anew.

To this point no one fully appreciated the impact this situation would have. In a few hours many civilians would die. The aim here was to keep those numbers as low as possible.

Button

He held the worn button in his hand for a moment before placing it in his mouth and swallowing it. When he died, some months later, they would find dozens of small foreign objects in his stomach.

The remainder of the day he felt like crying, though no tears actually came. There was something wrong, he thought. He had been told the medication should dissipate these feelings.

Later, in the afternoon, he went for a walk to the nearby pond and watched the ducks. He pulled pieces of bread out of an old plastic bag and threw torn up bits to the birds.

An old woman, attempting to collect some change well-wishers had thrown in, slipped into the water and almost drowned. He pulled her out of the water by her jacket and yelled for a doctor. While her bruised hip would begin to heal, she would die at home of pneumonia.

Slaughter

The rancher loaded the .22 and shot the cow. He had brought his youngest son and daughter outside to help calm the beast before he put it down. The cow had been sick and there was concern it would infect others in the herd.

Disgust lined the rancher's face. This cow was going to waste, since the meat was tainted and inedible. It sickened him to think about how much meat he had destroyed in the past week. When he drove into town to pick up supplies at the co-op, he noticed how others also carried a worn look.

Everyone mentioned the slaughter in near whispers, seemingly afraid their words would carry the contagion. All of the ranchers knew this was not an isolated event. This was the beginning of something new, reeking of death and hinting at an unsustainable future.

The Meeting

Each person at the table knew what was at stake. It was both their jobs and reputations that would be determined by the decisions they would proceed to make.

They had gravitated towards these positions by the double headed motivation of control and financial compensation. It had come to the point, however, where they faced cutting their own wages in order to keep the company active for another few months.

In the end they decided to accept the fate of markets, continuing as they began.

The Snail

The snail's shell is bright green, and easily catches the focus of morning eyes.

He jumps over the snail, running to catch the bus to work. His eyes freeze on the snail for an instant, allowing him to divert his path to avoid crushing the small creature.

As he boards the bus he begins to feel badly for not having taken a moment to move the snail off of the cement. He cringes at the thought of someone running over it with their bicycle.

Magazine

The train attendant walked through the empty, decommissioned car to check for stray passengers. This car was headed for the repair yard.

While moving down the aisle he spotted a magazine face down. He picked it up, observed it was a fashion magazine, and carried on.

A few moments later, when he had a break, I watched him read the magazine with a smile.

Bedtime

When the man with the cane approached me on the sidewalk he smiled. Though I was busy working, he began to laugh. "If you listen closely you can hear that it's bedtime."

I raised my eyebrow at his curious comment. He continued, "As I was walking along I could hear a kid crying in almost every house. I guess there are a lot of families in this neighborhood."

We both laughed, and he commented on how the last time he could remember crying was when he was a young man breaking up with his first girlfriend. We laughed again before he continued his slow pace past me.

Identity

He had formed his identity in elementary school. The bad kid. Everyone knew him, and he understood who he was.

When he graduated and began looking for work, he found his identity didn't fit his intentions. In order to keep his job, which interested him, he changed his appearance and mannerisms so he would appear like one of his coworkers.

This only lasted a few days. He felt uncomfortable and out of place. His old friends laughed at him and his new clothes. Wearing a tie, something he had never done in the past, made him feel conspicuous. He quit his job.

Woodshop

The house smelt of wood shavings and freshly cut timber. Grandchildren played in the kitchen, while the grandmother cooked a stew. When it was time for eating she began to yell out for her husband.

He couldn't hear her, since he was in his woodshop. There was a piece of oak he kept running his hand across. The subtle ridges of the wood grain pleased him. The short block of wood was sanded and free of splinters.

The grandmother sent one of the boys downstairs to fetch the grandfather. She had grown accustomed, over many years, to her husband's continual absence. It gave her time to tend to her garden and enjoy the company of friends and relatives.

Sunglasses

Aging, peppered hair and a shirt several seasons out of fashion, he felt confident in his sitting next to the most beautiful woman on the transit car. She ignored his presence, fixing the maladjusted strap on her bra. It was only nine in the morning and already uncomfortably hot.

Every so often the man would pretend to look out the window beside the woman, tilting his head slightly in order to glance at her breasts. He thought he was being coy because he was wearing dark sunglasses, but several other passengers saw what he was up to and gave him discouraging glares.

He was aware of their dirty looks, his ears reddening slightly, but he continued to peek at her chest. Briefly, he enjoyed being the subject of scorn. As the transit line neared termination, he felt an all consuming compulsion to touch her thigh.

Thief

She had bought a new purse today, and secretly hoped that others would take notice of it on her arm. It was a small purse that matched her cream coloured outfit.

Though she did not realize it, a man had been following her since she left the shop. His intention was to steal the young woman's purse, yet he hoped to do it in such a way as to not injure her.

He stood next to her at the crosswalk, contemplating the most advantageous moment to grab the purse. She was standing awkwardly, with her arm locked firmly around her recent purchase. He looked to his left and noticed two police officers. When he tried to look at the woman she was gone, having disappeared into the afternoon crowd.

Wheelchair

The electric wheelchair careened down the sidewalk, narrowly missing several pedestrians. The driver used both hands to control the driving mechanism and struggled to turn his head enough to view the path ahead.

Earlier in the day he had run over a young boy's foot and had bumped a woman into a busy intersection while trying to drive around a crowd.

Traveling fast was one of the only thrill he had left. Although he couldn't travel as fast as a motorcycle, it was still fast enough to cause serious injury if he came to a sudden stop. He had taken a few minor spills before, requiring the assistance of a few helpful people and twelve stitches, but had never any broken bones.

Bakery

Everyone knew he was overweight. They would joke about how he compulsively pulled at the sleeves of his shirt to prevent the sweat from clinging.

Even though they were in grade five they knew the source of his obesity was due to his father being a baker. Each day he came to school with fresh baking his father had brought home from the night shift.

His dad did not think his son fat since he was also much heavier than his optimal weight. His doctor had told the father that he ran a high risk of heart failure if he did not stop eating so many cakes and doughnuts. The doctor simply shook his head each time he saw the son.

Two Brothers

There are two brothers living in a metropolis. One brother constructs buildings for a living. The other brother is a demolitions expert. Sometimes the second brother destroys the first brothers' buildings when they are old and no tenants want to move in.

Both brothers are kept busy by the desire for new buildings. Everyone wants to lease space in the shiniest, fanciest, most technologically equipped building in town. It impresses their clients and attracts new employees. After a time, when a better building becomes available, they move away.

Eventually, everyone moves out of a building and the second brother is brought in to destroy it. The first brother is then brought in to build a better building in its place. Both brothers make a great deal of money and enjoy their jobs. In some ways, they joke, they work together even though they only visit each other every few months.

Haircut

She brushed the slivers of hair from her arm, stopping the story she was telling for a moment, consumed by the annoyance of removing the freshly cut hair.

"I hate it when I get hair slivers. Once I noticed my arm was beginning to swell, and I kept scratching it and scratching it. Finally, I tried to figure out what was causing the irritation and I found this long white hair, with the root attached and everything, stuck in my arm. It's amazing, hair sticks in you like wood splinters."

He smiled. She talked nonstop through their time together. There were dark rings around her eyes. She owned the shop, and she was concerned she may have chosen a poor location. She had moved back in with her mother to make ends meet, and found that she could hardly sleep.

Door Lock

While walking down the hallway they hear something clicking. It sounds like a leaking pipe or a defective elevator switch.

When they pass through the double doors to the adjoining hallway they see a door open and a bearded man, with red hair, holding a screwdriver. He's fixing his door lock, pushing it firmly against the screw's head with a look of panicked concentration. It is early morning.

"Hello." No response. The bearded man doesn't look up or acknowledge their presence. They recognize him as the man who always rides the bus with gloves on. It seems he is a hypochondriac. He continues working on his lock.

Diaries

The diaries burned slowly. He opened them up with a stick so they would catch fire quickly. It was his archive, his history, that he was destroying. It wasn't everything, but it was enough to erase the past. The rest of his papers sat in an archive, waiting until after his death to be opened to researchers.

it had taken several weeks of convincing himself that this was the right thing to do. He was burning decades of his memories, things he would soon start forgetting. The fire eliminated the recorded past, but could not destroy the memories that still pressed their way into his mind daily.

after the diaries were completely charred he walked inside and made a pot of tea. He took it up to his study and wrote about the fire, about why he was scratching out the past, preparing for his own destruction. He was anticipating the ongoing disintegration of his mental records.

Entrance Point

He opened the door and assessed the room. It was empty except for a table and a chair. There was a small window on the right side of the desk that he used to look out of when he was bored. While he often used to write in this room, he had recently found himself incapable of expressing himself through writing.

Sitting at the table. Turning to his right and watching a crow peck at a red coloured berry.
Running his hands across the thin film of dust on the tabletop.

Now that he had decided on the direction of his next project he had to overcome his fear of beginning. He saw the plot and characters and themes, but could not figure out how he should open the book. In the next room he could hear the kettle beginning to scream.

Spider

Standing in the train station, sipping espresso. Standing, eyes closed, absorbing the morning sun. He opens his eyes and watches boats drift through the inlet, the movement on the shipping yards and the quiet brick buildings.

Along the wall directly below the window a large black spider hurries by. He does not believe in omens or foreshadowing, but the spider gives him pause. Insects don't frighten him, but he always watches them with a sense of unease. He thinks he was probably bitten as a child, though he doesn't remember an incident.

Concentration broken, he finishes his coffee and heads outside. Morning commuters shove by him as he strolls along the brick walkway in search of something as of yet undetermined.

Imagination

While sitting at the desk he began to wonder if his imagination had been stolen. He paused, tried to think of the last imaginative thought to pass through his mind, and sighed in disbelief. There were no imaginative thoughts to be found in recent memory.

The more he thought about this, the more it bothered him. It wasn't only his waking life that had been damaged somehow, it was his sleeping life too. There were no dreams anymore. Straining, his brow beginning to show dampness, he still could not recall a recent dream. He was sleeping, he was quite sure, but did not recall any mental activity.

His job did not require any type of creative thinking, so he had been capable of going weeks without becoming aware of any problem. He felt the urge to vomit, worried over what must have happened to his brain. Sudden compulsion made him want to go to a doctor immediately. The thought of living the rest of his life without an imagination began to terrify him, though he wasn't capable of conjuring a mental image of what this possible future would be like.

Stairwell

Now that the parkade had been demolished there was the remnant of a stairwell, scarcely more than a shadow, visible on the side of the building next to it. Each floor was clear as a forty-five degree angle strip of missing paint with a few steps visible.

As the demolition occurred he watched from the café across the street. Jackhammer throbbing, concrete cutting, white noise of construction. A maximalist soundscape absorbed by his body, pushing out semi-forgotten memories of late night excess and early morning introspection sitting on those now disappeared stairs.

He wanted to take a photograph of the ghostly stairs, a reminder of a past he longed to return to, but he didn't have a camera. It had been stolen recently when his apartment was broken into. He had bought the camera on a street corner, and hadn't yet had a chance to see if it even worked.

Tracks

Empty train drifts forward, stopping. Clank of tracks switching. A decomposing fire hose, a pale snake in the short grass, rotting from neglect.

The train waits without patience, an automated pause, before sliding back into the station on another course. Passengers scurry above. Schedules are met, and missed.

Mechanics of transport. Fleshy cargo shifted between fixed points. Today a body will toss itself onto the tracks and disrupt the regulated rhythm of transit.

Open Window

A thousand windows, punctures in the stone and steel faces of monoliths. Entrance points to countless, seemingly unrelated, narratives. This is what she thinks while she sits in her chair, looking out of her third story window, a slash of sunlight coursing imperceptibly across the room.

"How many of those windows can't be opened? how do those people continue to process that stale air?" She no longer thinks of the work in front of her, completing tasks absently. Her concentration is mistaken for attentiveness to her job and she is given promotions accordingly, though she has not been engrossed with her daily functions for several years. "This doesn't mean anything." Thoughts echo, a blank gaze at the papers on the desk.

Each day she wonders what it would be like to toss herself from the window, visualizing the slow, quiet arc of her body falling, never imagining the crunch of her bones landing or the wetness of her flesh rupturing. She will never act this out, yet the thought never ceases to excite her. The rapid beating of her heart is visible through her thin shirt. Her eyes move from the window back to the mountain of words in front of her.

Morning Bathroom

As he entered the bathroom he was overwhelmed with the smell of feces. The stall door was locked and he felt nauseous, yet incapable of stopping breathing in the thick air. This environment pushed an unwelcome intimacy upon him. A forced sharing of odours.

Urinating. Acrid. Early morning piss. Stinging his nose. Filling the air further. Smells intermingling. Stomach lurching from the thought. Bowels loosening. Dizzy. Hand on the wall. Steadying himself. Zipper zipped. Splash of water. Exit.

Breathing. Sickened with the thought of being nothing more than another animal. Looking at the hair on the backs of his hands he recoiled, stuffing them into his pockets. Eyes filling with tears. Walking through the fire exit and into the stairwell so no one could watch him cry.

New Shoes

Her toes peeked out from the tips of the shoes and she wriggled them as she stared down, looking at them as though they weren't hers. The shoes pleased her, happiness building up and manifesting in a smile. Another shopper saw her happiness and began smiling as well at the infectious feeling.

While walking to the till with the shoes she began to think about how she couldn't afford them, or shouldn't afford them. Her smile evaporated, replaced with a look of confusion. A great argument began taking place, panic mounting, as she tried to decide what to do about the shoes. She desired them more than anything else she had seen in months. I'll never find another pair like them. But I really shouldn't spend the money. But my other shoes are worn out. But they can last a bit longer. But I deserve them after waiting so long. You don't deserve anything.

However inanimate the shoes were, they still had the ability to coax, cajoling her in a seductive voice. You want me. I want you. Yes. I want you. Putting the shoes on a display stand, excusing herself, walking out of line and leaving the store. The autumn air stung her arms and she put on her sweater.

Waiting at the Station

When she arrived at the station she was impressed with its interior architecture. Smooth curves intersecting at the vaulted ceiling. Sitting on the uncomfortable wooden bench, she noticed a man staring at her. She looked away, and would glance back at his direction occasionally to see if he had stopped or gone away. He did neither.

She became increasingly agitated, fixing her skirt, checking the buttons on her shirt, redoing the strap on her shoe several times. It was a paranoia of hers to be objectified. The thought of someone mentally groping her was disconcerting, and she nearly began hyperventilating. Her cheeks flushed, and she began drumming nervously on the side of the bench.

The train whistle blew, people hurried past her bench. Undisturbed, she remained determined to ward off this man. With a deep breath, her fists clenched, she stood up and began walking towards him with brisk steps. As she grew closer, it became obvious that the man was not a man, but rather a very realistic looking mannequin. She walked a few steps closer, slowly, her hands relaxing, her shoulders dropping, the creases in her forehead dissolving. After laughing aloud for a moment she walked back to the bench and resumed waiting.

Others

"I only knew the sting of being called a motherfucker after my mother died." The phrase constructed itself in his unconscious mind and spilled out, as though accidentally, while he ate dinner. It was one of those mysterious phrases that appears whole, born onto the tip of his tongue and repressed by closed lips.

His friend's mother had recently died and he was thinking of impermanence. Another friend had lost her way with reality, and a third friend was held by the ropes of loneliness.

Selves defined by others, forged in the sadness of being and being alone, caught in the struggle of existing as an individual that desires companionship. They tried, unsuccessfully, to avoid meaning, and its inverse, and were injured by the force of its intrusion.

Squirrels

The black squirrel hops across the path and onto the grass. I wonder if the dew chills its belly. I wonder how to tell if it is male or female.

From my left a grey squirrel crosses the path, following the black squirrel. A sense of panic embraces me as the grey squirrel begins chasing the black squirrel. This is not a game, and they are certainly not playmates.

There is fear. The black squirrel disappears into nearby bushes, the grey one in pursuit, their tails jogging up and down as they run to and from. Soon they are out of sight, and all I can hear is the sound of scuffle and the thought that this is not a parable.

Apple and a Gaze

Sitting on the old wooden bench, hunched over with her left elbow on her knee, she eats a pale yellow apple. There is a bottle of water and a knapsack on the ground beside her. In front of her is a vista of the ocean, with a stretch of mountains behind it, a painting of some kind.

The apple crunches, audible to the two other people also sitting at the scenic view point. It makes a crisp, slightly moist sound. It tastes mildly bitter.

She contemplates the bright afternoon, taking respite from the rushing around she spent the morning doing. This scene inspires her, and she regrets having come here. A beautiful view I'll have to abandon in a moment, she thinks. A few minutes later she picks up her belongings and limps back in the direction she came.

Falling

She watched him walk along the steel beam. Though she dismissed the thought immediately, she wondered what it would feel like to fall from that height. A feeling of emptiness filled her. Her eyes traced the route between the man and the ground, pausing for a moment when they fell on the pile of rubble at the base of the construction site.

The air was filled with a fall chill and she buttoned her jacket without thinking about it. She stood in the middle of the sidewalk, people coursing around her, while she continued staring at the specks of workers on the building.

When he did fall she became him for an instant, feeling the rush of air and overwhelming pulse of adrenaline and panic. He tore through the air for only an instant before crashing into a pile of broken concrete. She immediately closed her eyes and tried to decide if she had imagined this. When she opened her eyes the world came back, screams became audible, and a crowd of people pulsed around the body of the man.

Brick Wall

While it rained outside he sat in the library and stared at the brick wall adjacent to the building. Behind the trees, growing orange-red from the onset of fall, he could see the dark coloured bricks defined by rows and columns of white grout.

The more he stared at the bricks the more he came to notice how uneven they were, and how licks of grout remained on the edges of some bricks while not on others.

It was clear that the imperfect craftsmanship of a human hand had been behind the construction of this wall. Staring yet closer he thought he could see patterns in the work, a sudden understanding of the hand that had lain row after row. He imagined the good days the worker had experienced, flush with enthusiasm and pride, as well as the tired and bitter days where the bricks were heaped up in near recklessness.

A Thousand Films

The fog refused to lift, as did he. Sipping tea he decided impulsively to make a thousand films. They would be about the world around him, with no aim at ever showing them to anyone. He simply determined he had to accomplish this.

Without a script or any help he braved the murky weather and began to film anything that caught his eye. His first film was about the installation of a street light near his house. Everywhere he went he did this. People whom he would have otherwise thought unfriendly became suddenly cooperative when faced with the prospect of being in his film.

This went on for many years until he remembered what his initial aim had been. When he counted up all the five minute, two hour, and four hour films he had created he realized he had come nowhere near his goal.

The Only Dry Spot

In the midst of the pelting rain and the settling fog she appeared across the street. Her bone coloured raincoat and enormous matching coloured umbrella were the brightest things he'd seen all day. She stood there patiently, completely dry.

Her shoes were dry and the filled shopping bags she carried were dry. She looked as though rain had never touched her. Dreary weather was something she loved walking in so long as she did not get wet, or even damp.

He had spent the morning in bed weeping about his miserable life before he was forced to leave his house and go to work. While he watched her on the other side of the street he felt he was witnessing a form of happiness float in front of him. His attraction was obvious as he stared directly at her spectral form. When the traffic light changed, and she began to cross the street towards him, she caught his stare and looked away immediately.

Childhood Trance

The children were playing on the carpet when the daycare worker left the room. One of the kids acted in a manner disagreeable to three other children so they jostled him. Soon, several others joined in this quarrel.

Quickly, the pushing and shoving lead to scratching and biting. Biting led to more biting and when the adult returned to the room she saw a bloodied child buried under a pile of gnawing faces. Thoughts of horror films flashed in her mind, though dispelled immediately, as she ran yelling to the rescue of the wounded child.

Her yelling disrupted the trance state the children appeared to have fallen under while acting out their inexplicable violence. Soon there was much agitation and crying amongst the youth while they struggled to grasp the gravity of their actions. That night over dinner the worker would tell her husband about the attack, breaking down several times in the course of her narrative and drinking the better part of a bottle of wine during the meal.

Waiting

As he came to the table and asked the customers what they would like to drink he was mostly ignored, while some stared with contempt for his having come to the table before they had consulted the menu. The waiter, aware that he was facing a tough table that would likely screw him on the bill, still retained his professionalism.

While preparing their drinks a co-worker commented, "A lot of assholes, they are. You should spit in their drinks." He considered this for a moment. However, the desire for revenge had never had much force within his mind. Delivering the drinks with utmost care, he patiently took their food order. They chided him for his uniform and for his accent.

Throughout the meal they would demand attention to their whims. The temptation to spit in their drinks arose in him again, though he would not. Another waiter, one that had been short-changed the month before by the group, went outside and emptied the air from their car tires. Twenty-eight seconds later the leader of the group would storm inside, demanding that the restaurant be held accountable for their flat tires. The waiter was fired immediately, without protest by anyone.

A Pair of Gloves

She opened the safety deposit box and found a pair of gloves inside. She stared at them for a moment, having expected something much more interesting and valuable. In fact, she expected either cash or its equivalent in jewelry.

After several more moments of disbelief she swore aloud at the gloves, her dead father's last malicious token to her. She had endured his tyranny throughout his short life, which had increased several-fold after the untimely death of her mother.

She slipped the gloves on, still wondering why he had left these for her. Staring at the gloves, now on her hands, the image of police photos flashed in her mind. In one photo lay her mother, dark bruises decorating her neck in place of the broken pearl necklace on the floor.

The Dark Recess

The three of them huddled in the doorway, uncertain about what the next move would be. There was a certain comfort in the dark recess. Each of them had been up for several days, their mind overly sharpened, yet unbothered by the heavy scent of urine coming from the ground and walls.

A small step separated the doorway and the beside it. None of the three wanted to be the first to step out into the evening rain and lead the way back. Besides, paranoia was fully established in all their minds, and conspiracies in which the other two were scheming against the third danced through all of their heads.

Several moments would pass before they would lunge into the rain, all at once, as though incapable of tolerating the thickening suspense building up in their troubled minds.

A Moment of Panic

In a moment of panic she shoved the knife into his side. She could feel it slip between his ribs. He began to thrash his arms around. His fist connected with her cheek and in three months time a coroner would find out it had lightly fractured the bone.

She didn't know why her immediate response had been to kill him. Murder was something she hadn't thought herself capable of, and she carried the knife more as a deterrent to some of the aggressive men she knew. As he screamed she released her grip on the knife and watched it jiggle, jutting from his chest.

When he fell over, bleeding heavily and soon to be dead, she had already run down the street and into a coffee shop. In the washroom she washed a few specks of blood from her hand. She ordered a coffee and spent twenty minutes trying to settle her mind enough to drink it.

Good Morning

The same cheery voice rang out each morning as the mail was delivered in the office. He sat in the back room, never seeing the deliverer, but always responding to the upbeat "Good morning!" that she bellowed out in a sing-song voice. "Good morning!" he would mirror, "Thanks!"

He came to appreciate the cheeriness of this disembodied voice. It was a moment of friendliness not often found elsewhere. Even the clerks and shopkeepers of the area had become cold and distant, as though they weren't at all concerned if you purchased their goods or not. He was increasingly disconnected from these people, and he felt himself disassociating from the concept that they were even the same kind of creature. "They are becoming something else entirely," he thought as he interacted with them each day.

One morning, while on the way to the coffee machine, he saw a mailbot enter the office. "Good morning!" He paused and stared at the humanoid form in traditional mail-carrier clothing. "Good morning," he coughed. A few moments later he locked himself in the bathroom and cried. When he returned to his office he was distracted and unproductive.

Mannequin

The baseball bat felt light. No one in the mall thought it unusual that he was openly carrying it. Perhaps he was returning the purchase. He wasn't sure why he was here, didn't recall the trip over to the mall.

When he saw the mannequin his intentions became obvious. Raising the bat impulsively, instinctively. Four heavy strokes, reducing the headless clothing display to rubble. Quickly walked out of the mall, suddenly aware of what he had done, of his anger.

The intensity of every step increased as he walked across the street to the bus stop. He considered waiting for a bus home, sitting down for a moment to calm his nerves. A young man gave him a dirty look, throwing his cigarette on the ground. He stood up and raised the bat in one swift motion.

Red Hat

A bright colour in the distance caught the boy's attention, and he instinctively ran towards it. His hat bounced off of his head, and he was knocked back several steps as he ran into a large glass window.

Stunned, it took a couple of seconds for him to realize what had happened. Out of nowhere, it seemed, something had hit him directly in the face. When the tears began a bloodied snot ran out of his nose and down his face. His parents, embarrassed by the event, began laughing at him. They were trying both to cheer him up and to make light of the situation.

I stood on the other side of the entranceway talking on the phone. I, too, laughed. Then I related the incident as it happened to the person I was talking with. What concerned me most was that the boy might forget his tiny red hat, knocked off and hiding in a shaded corner.

Ascent

Diving deep was something she had done since she was a child. It was a relaxing experience, taking a large gulp of air and pushing herself down in the water as far as she could go. The weight of the water would bear on her frame and she would wonder what it would be like to have her body implode from pressure. She knew she would never be able to dive this deep, but the thought repeated itself often during the day. It also worked its way into her dreams.

Occasionally when diving she considered what it would be like if she kept going, deeper into the blackness of the ocean. The further she dove the less she felt like breathing. It was at this point that she would have to pull her mind away from its drifting state and force herself to begin the ascent to the surface.

When I am old and tired of the world, she thought, I will touch the black heart of the ocean.

Exit Wound

When he returned to the apartment he found his father in his favourite chair. Beside the chair there was a pile of unread books and a half-corrected manuscript. On the floor in front of him was a handgun that had been used to blow his brains out with.

The body had lurched to the side, and the exit wound was plainly visible. A smear of shattered skull, tissue, and dark red matter matted the back of his father's head and the head-rest of the chair.

This was the story he reiterated to the police as they reviewed the evidence and questioned him. He told them how his father's mind was beginning to deteriorate and how he could no longer bear the weight of living. They believed him, but wondered aloud at whether or not he had left his father alone knowing what would happen.

A Moment of Intimacy

When I approached the train station he staggered out of the doors. Immediately he tilted his back and locked eyes with me. "Will you help me across the ice?"

I offered my arm to him and he latched onto my hand. He was incapable of gripping and could only walk with small steps. A moment of intimacy with someone who relied entirely on the kindness of strangers.

He thanked me when we reached the other side of the parking lot and continued on with his eyes scanning the ground in front of him. These are the moments when social norms and other trivialities are suppressed. For a brief moment I felt that there might be something promising in the core of humanity.

Pigeon and Seagull

The pigeon was already wounded when I first sighted him moving across the ledge of the building. I was in the adjacent building, looking down on the roof where the pigeons spent their time. A seagull began running at the pigeon.

Blood was visible on the pigeon's chest and the seagull began pecking his large beak at the wound. Panicking, the pigeon struggled to defend itself against the sudden offensive. The seagull was nearly twice the size of the pigeon, and it was clear that the seagull's attack was finishing the pigeon off.

When the pigeon fell the seagull began ripping its organs out. Long strands of what appeared to be intestine were reeled from the dead bird's body. The scavenger gulped the organs while a group of pigeons watched the scene from a distance.

The Wallet

As he was about to sit on the seat he noticed a wallet. Picking it up, he quickly opened it to see if there was money inside. It's not that he wanted to steal any money that might be there. He was curious if a thief had already made off with the contents. Would I have taken the money? He wasn't sure if he was honest enough to have tracked down the owner.

Depends on a lot of things. Whether or not the wallet looked expensive. And how much money there was in it. And how destitute the picture on the driver's license looked. If it looked like a rich person then he may have taken the wallet's contents.

His mental interrogation was useless. There was nothing in it. The wallet had been emptied hours earlier. He tossed it on the floor of the train car, sat down, and stared out the dusty window. It was sunset and the distant clouds were a deep orange colour.

Five Tons

After several attempts to park the truck, all five tons of it, he succeeded in steering the large tire into the curb. The hill was steep. Nervously, the driver released his foot from the brake pedal and climbed out of the cab. He stood still, watching the truck. "She ain't going anywhere," one of the passengers offered.

Two of the men climbed inside the back of the truck and began hauling out a mattress. They carried it up the hill to an apartment complex and went inside, leaving the truck in the care of a second passenger that emerged. "I'll watch the truck. That brake makes me nervous." They laughed.

The delivery men were gone for more than the estimated ten minutes. Examining his clipboard, the third man wandered around the truck. Eventually he stood in front of the truck, his attention consumed by the sight of a couple fighting in one of the apartment suites. The woman was slapping the man repeatedly. He could see her face contorted by anger, but the only thing he could hear was a strong wind swaying the nearby trees.

Field of Interest

Egos burning brightly against each other. The aging group would gather once a month for dinner, drinks and discussion. Tonight, like most meetings, began politely and degraded into deafeningly loud conversation in a bid to get the attention of the others.

All of them had achieved a certain degree of success beyond their specific fields of interest, however they felt a continuing need to reaffirm their self worth. Pointed humour, boasting, and inevitably, variants of old arguments. It was a drama that wrote itself.

She had attended religiously for years, but found herself growing weary of the repetition. The familiar faces aging imperceptibly due to routine. The rising cacophony of drunken self-righteousness. After this evening, she thought, I'll never see these people again.

Briefcase

She was trained to watch suspicious customers like this one. It might only be luggage but people will steal anything that ain't nailed down, her boss used to tell her. Anyway, he looked like a thief.

Eventually he came to the counter with three identical briefcases for purchase and she blurted out "Go through a lot of briefcases, then?" He stared at her, unsmiling. She began to feel unsettled, getting the impression that the items were going to be used for something illegal. The moment before he left the store after paying for his purchase she took a mental snapshot of him.

The transportation of drugs or money? some sort of transaction? bombs? with increasing unease she wondered if she should call the police and inform them. It would be embarrassing if it turned out to be her being panicky, she thought. Or I can do nothing and assume this is the universe's way of leveling things out.

A Certain Form of Madness

A certain form of madness. Pervasive. He is certain this trait is congenital. When he begins to examine his genealogy he sees it everywhere.

An aunt that always thought people were watching her. Certain traits in his grandparents and parents. His inability to sustain any particular mode of emotional stability.

There are quiet days, like the one he had yesterday. Other days he vomits rage and anxiety. He knows it is paranoia, but he is convinced it is a completely accurate perspective. Although his parents have told them that this is normal for someone his age, he still considers burning down the house while they sleep.

Boyfriend

"Your knees must be cold in that skirt," he says to her with a chuckle. She smiles politely. "That's what my boyfriend always says."

The next week she wears pants. It is the middle of a summer heat wave and she feels dizzy. "I don't mean to be forward, but you're very pretty." He smiles. "That's what my boyfriend always tells me," she replies, thinking that he isn't taking the hint.

Several days later her roommates contact the police and report her missing. The investigators interview people from her class. The boy tells them that she was very depressed and considering leaving her boyfriend.

One Hundred

She blew out the candles on her cake. Nobody counted them, but there were definitely not one hundred of them. "I've gotten to be so old that I've forgotten why I keep living," she joked. "I do look forward to my book club, I suppose."

With the aid of a cane she was fully mobile. The most important part of her day was the time she spent outside caring for her garden and walking underneath the large trees she had helped plant decades earlier.

Grandchildren generally annoyed her, though she would tolerate their presence as part of her duty as the senior matron of the family. She didn't think any of them to be particularly intelligent, and was mostly disappointed with the results of a life of struggle.

Building 6361

Green suited this building for some reason. It was a long workshop, rows of windows along the side, and a sloped roof. Ventilation pipes littered the top of the structure.

Inside they made sculptures. Absorbing the world around them and making it real through constructions of the mind. She had watched some bright intellects create in this space, some of whom had gone on to considerable acclaim.

She always regretted her own limitations as an artist. One of the problems, she thought, was her perception of skill and accomplishment. While she had never moved past building 6361, she still took a degree of pleasure from being a mentor.

Trashcan

After removing the lid from the trashcan the blood became immediately obvious. He stood back, stunned by the bright smears across the crumpled pages. Shock, mostly, then fear of being perceived as the perpetrator.

Within moments he placed the lid back on the can. He cracked his knuckles, a nervous habit. Without stopping to think further he picked up the can and carried it back to his maintenance office.

He stared at it while slouched in his chair, hands folded across his lap. After double-checking that the door was locked he began to remove the papers from the can. There was nothing remarkable about the bloodied documents, and he couldn't find anything to account for the three inches of blood accumulated at the bottom of the can.

The Task of Forgetting

It wasn't the feeling he had anticipated. His erection disappeared almost immediately after ejaculating on her face. She had initially shown enthusiasm for his desire. Anticipation now fulfilled, her face feeling sticky and cold, the come running down her cheek.

His lust turned to guilt while he lay on the bed beside her, cupping her right breast with his left hand, curled against her. He wanted to apologize but couldn't speak.

It wasn't repulsion she felt, but a sense of loss. Up until now he had shown nothing but tenderness. She considered this transgression an insight into who he really was, and she knew that after she cleaned up and went home she would put her memory to the task of forgetting.

Pharmaceutical

"Living is much more tolerable when you take the reigns and direct your physical self. Each moment can be controlled. The imagination envelopes reason, manifesting in authentic existence."

His ability to conceal his actions had eroded, and everyone in the pharmacy program either suspected, or had evidence of, his use of chemicals. Word of his psychological explorations had reached the faculty members and his expulsion was assured.

"I've become aware of my awareness and can no longer conceal. I'll be dropping out of the program. In the fall I will join the psychology department. Perhaps there I'll find kindred spirits to share my exultations." He knew, however, that he'd likely be permanently barred from the university and possibly facing criminal charges.

Human Relations

Feeling his gaze she looked up and focused her attention directly at him. He looked away, embarrassed. He hadn't been staring at her. It was the mural behind her that he had been trying to figure out.

Human relations are the most unfortunate kind, he muttered to himself. There is something so base about our interactions, about our misguided assumptions. I wish I could live free of judgment.

Later that evening, at home, his roommates complained that he hadn't done the dishes. Grasping a kitchen knife he considered for a fragment of a second what it would be like to slash their throats and watch them fall to the floor, gasping at the air between living and dying.

Disconnect

He marveled at the disconnect as he lay on the table, his eyes wandering amongst the coloured tiles on the ceiling. One of his shoes was missing and bits of dried vomit dotted his pants. The light stung his eyes.

When the tears came he wasn't sure if his eyes were reacting to the pain of the fluorescent bulb or if he was crying. He was uncertain of uncertainty, double-guessing his attempts at cognition. Logic functions abandoned without notice of his faculties.

As he sat up he grasped the pen and began pressing the point into his palm. Still crying, he continued through the increasing pain and gasping onlookers. With each moment of suffering he felt relieved, made suddenly aware that he was awake.

Nothing but Static

Surprised that the reels of tape still existed in the attic, he went about the task of procuring a machine to play them. After slightly more than three weeks he found one for sale by an elderly woman at a garage sale. She assured him that the machine functioned and provided him with several blank reels.

Before placing his own precious history into the machine he decided to test its functionality by using one of the blanks. He loaded the machine and began to narrate the events of the day. As he played the test message back he heard nothing but static and shrieking tones that made the speaker crackle.

Dissatisfied with his test, but certain the machine wouldn't ruin his tape, he began to play it. Voices, almost forgotten, rushed to the present. He listened to the narration of his great-grandmother's final words right before she fell unconscious and passed into the void.

No Such Thing as Good People

"Why do bad things happen to good people?" he asked, saddened by the recent mugging of their elderly neighbour. Three youth had beat him unconscious when he took a shortcut on his daily walk.

"Because there is no such thing as good people." She smirked at him. He hated how she could make light of any situation, no matter how gruesome or depressing. Rolling his eyes, he made a clucking sound.

"You know he's done bad things in his past - we all have. I'm not suggesting he deserved what happened to him. I'm saying that who knows what kind of questionable or immoral things he did when he was young. He was in the war, wasn't he?" she changed the subject by walking out of the room mid-sentence.

The lot

Peeking over the hedges, the arm of the machine came up and quickly smashed down. The sound of tearing wood rippled out towards him as he watched his father's house destroyed.

A truck hauled away the broken building materials, returning every hour or so. He couldn't force himself to walk to the front of the yard to get a better look at the process - preferring, instead, to imagine the house as it was.

The lot had already been purchased by a developer. In some ways he regretted the decision to sell his memories. In other ways he was glad to watch the past destroyed, resisting the urge to assist in smashing his memories.

Stare at the Storefront

Kicking the garbage pail outside the store, yelling. The clerk cowered and kept his arms raised by his face. "Gimme a fucking light!"

Across the street, in the school playground, a boy stood watching the incident. His heart rate increased and the back of his neck became sweaty. Even after the enraged customer had rushed off the boy continued to stare at the storefront.

He remained like that in the yard for nearly ten minutes, intent on squeezing every last perception from this event. What if the man came back and began freaking out again? what if he came back with a gun? what was he yelling about?

Undignified

Being found dead in a stairwell is an idiotic way to go out, he thought. He always assumed he'd be killed while traveling on an adventure somewhere. This is undignified, he grumbled, his voice barely a whisper, as he lay on the landing between floors seven and eight.

He had experienced life threatening illness while in Asia, a kidnapping he miraculously escaped from in South America, and a riot he was caught up in during his short stay in the United States. My girlfriend will be very sad. I'm glad my parents died last year so they don't have to suffer through this.

While he lay there, trying to calm his breathing, the pain began to subside. He knew that whatever had happened was life threatening and that he should go see a doctor immediately. He opened the eighth floor door and stumbled to the hallway washroom.

Train Station

The old woman stood at the front of the line, immobile. Everyone standing behind her stepped around in order to enter the train car. As the doors closed in front of her she observed her reflection in the sliding door windows.

After the train had left she remained standing in the empty station. Eventually she awoke from her trance and walked home. Sitting at the kitchen table, she felt lost and anxious.

Later, in the evening, she became hungry and made herself some food. She turned on the television to watch the evening news. When she went to sleep she dreamt about the empty train station throughout the night.

Rows of Headstones

Overlooking the valley was the graveyard, and beyond the rows of headstones was a hill. The meeting was already supposed to have taken place. "Have I gone to the wrong location?"

He began to think about all of the people buried in the ground below. That section of the cemetery had been filled for years. It represented people who had died no less than fifty years earlier. So much illness, violence, and old age.

He pictured, for an instant, his own children. They had died the previous year when their boat overturned during a family vacation. He nearly died from grief, and his wife hadn't spoken to him since. Tears beginning to fill his eyes, he looked at his watch and noticed that it had stopped.

Missing

In a puddle, the missing persons poster had been torn off the pole by wind. The face on the poster had been drawn over with a sombrero and long moustache. It also appeared someone had drawn bullet belts across the figure's chest, making the missing man resemble a bandit.

According to the date he had been missing for three months. He had last been seen at a local nightclub. A small cash reward was being offered, which had led to many false leads thus far.

She stopped in the intersection and looked at the poster, caught by the missing face staring back at her. The phrase "He's not dead" echoed in her head. A car horn made her jump and prompted her to get out off of the street, just before a car ran over the poster.

The Deal Collapses

They share the same birthday, and, as such, read the same horoscope each morning in the newspaper. Today's tells them that they should be cautious of what they say to those around them. Particularly, it notes that they should avoid answering questions directly. "You should respond to direct questions by saying that you will give it some thought and respond later."

Both of them being superstitious, they heed the advice of the stars to avoid any potential disasters. Thus, during an important business meeting they both defer any decision making. The deal will be dead in a week, though they are not yet aware of this. They work for different companies that are trying to create a joint venture, and will both be accused of sabotaging the deal.

Each worker will be fired after the deal collapses. One will become deeply depressed for a month, recover, and will find a better job soon after. The other will sue the company for wrongful dismissal, but will be killed by a speeding motorist before the matter is settled.

To Exact His Revenge

Tailored lies kept her. This morning she drummed enthusiasm, revealing her insecurities about the current direction of their venture. It was unlike her to display alliances openly.

This wasn't the only issue bothering him, but it was enough to scramble his thoughts and make focusing on his present workload near impossible. Knowing you are being lied to is the worst kind of knowledge. Unless you have the capacity to confront it, without fearing for your job or life, it makes common interactions unbearable.

Her duplicity, though not shocking, provoked a feeling of anger he hadn't felt towards a colleague before. When their immediate business together concluded he decided to cut ties to her. To exact his revenge, he was considering a form of blackmail involving her, an imaginary cohort, and a substantial sum of money.

Centre of Manufacture

The valley is filled with industry. A landscape he's known since youth. Smokestacks have stopped coughing up clouds and the rumble of factories has been replaced by the sound of the wind sliding through fall leaves.

Hundreds of workers are picking up this same weekend and heading out to one of the larger cities. They've heard there's work for the willing. In a week or two most of them will have found these rumours to be false, moving on towards the next centre of manufacture.

They drive by the bloated corpse of a cow at the same time one of the children asks the perennial question. The result is a twist of words that comes out as "Are we almost dead yet?". The father, having put his life on autopilot, responds "Almost".

Porcelain Teapot

"You are a porcelain teapot," her mother always told her. This phrase followed her wherever she went, directing the course of her daily activities. Sitting on the train, she carefully unbuttoned her purse and removed a book. She held the book as though it had the weight of a large stone.

The thought of bumping into other people terrified her, and prevented her from being close to other people. Taking public transportation to work each day was a traumatic experience. Reading was the only thing that kept her from gasping with anxiety. She kept her arms and legs tucked close to her body to prevent herself from shattering.

At night she cried so violently she would shudder, although almost imperceptibly to avoid damaging herself. Tears poured out of her eyes, though her face wore a mask of constraint. Yes, it is true that I am an empty porcelain teapot, she thought.

Fear of Flying

The bird stood atop the still train and pumped its wings. Jerking itself forward and backward it appeared as though it were preparing for take-off. It continued this for a few moments, stopped, then took it up again, only to stop again just as soon.

While it seemed to be a mechanical issue, an injured wing or sore neck, it was more problematic. The bird has become aware of its capacity for flight. A moment of self-awareness, which the bird no longer remembered, had generated a fear of flying.

Instinct did not aid the bird in overcoming its concerns. It knew it had to get off the top of the train soon and feed. But it could not force itself to take the great leap with the assurance that its wings would open and flap.

Knuckles

Frequent games of knuckle-rapping had left him with bruised hands. It was a sign of strength. The bruises were a mark of his imperviousness to pain.

This afternoon they gathered as usual at the downtown park. Sitting on a picnic table facing each other across the chess board painted surface they began pounding knuckles together. Girls stood by, watching, today, and the aggression was more vivid than on previous days.

Looking down at his hands, their surface now split and bleeding, he began shouting random words. While everyone was still confused he leapt across the table and bit the face of his challenger. All the children began screaming as he spit out a chunk of flesh and started running towards them.

Rites of Devotion

When the hit is done I feel as though I've conquered that part of myself that ordinarily remains restrained. I've operated beyond my normal, safe, standard parameters. Breaking the laws of decency, embracing the world of nightmare turned real.

There is no badge of achievement you can wear for this sort of accomplishment. You avoid getting drunk in public, lest you open your trap in a moment of braggadocio. Avoiding people is the best solution.

What I do has the immediate stigma of godlessness, but it couldn't be any different. I perform acts of ritual, rites of devotion. Performing works that must be enacted by a hand, led by the inspiration only divinity can provide.

A Ringing Phone Unanswered

Can there be anything more irritating than a ringing phone unanswered? she watched the device, unwilling to find out who was calling. Is the phone even ringing? she asked herself.

Paranoia over who might be calling was displaced by the question of whether or not she was having auditory hallucinations. A combination of stimulants and sleep deprivation were beginning to show their mark in the ways she clenched her fists and tapped her teeth together. The character was nearly fleshed out, the plot structure in its final stages of editing.

Her book was already overdue and the publisher was going to call this afternoon to see how she was coming along. She had already written the book, then destroyed it, three times. She worried that the story was getting too close to the truth, and that was something that no one would allow to happen.

Bad Information

Unaware that he was being lied to, the child began to believe that humans were all really robots under their skin. It made perfect sense to him, and helped alleviate some of the confusion he had been experiencing about human behaviour. Some people have bad code, others seem to experience complete system failures.

His grandfather, then, was on the brink of a system crash. It seemed plausible that his grandfather had somehow become susceptible to the memory erasing disease his parents talked about. Someone had given his grandfather bad information and it threatened to destroy him.

"Grandpa, who gave you the bad information?" He whispered into the old man's ear. Grandfather looked at him with a stunned and confused look. "Who told you about that? there are some things you shouldn't know and others you should forget."

Mulchman

The smell of mulch had soaked into his clothes, his hair, his skin. His wife complained when he came home that he reeked of rot, and that when he spoke the words were carried by the wind of dead things. A long, soapy shower did little to mask the smell permeating from him. It was the damnation of the mulchman's business.

He now found himself sleeping on the little cot in the laundry room. Sexual advances towards his wife had long been rebuked due to the unbearable odour of his body and sweat. The mulchman found himself contemplating hanging himself from the rafters in the shed in order to end his misery. "It's not as though I enjoy my position in life, smelling as I do," he would tell his wife. He had long ago given up on the hope of attaining her sympathy, and desperation had shifted to hopelessness.

It was while the mulchman was thinking his darkest, most self-injurious thoughts that the obvious solution came to mind. Rather than focus his attention on the elimination of the reek of mulch, which proved impossible, he would find a method to mask the smell. After work he made his way to the local spice shop and inquired as to which spices were strong enough to conceal, or even dissolve, his aura of mulch. "Curry," he was informed. "Curry," the mulchman cautiously repeated, and he purchased a large quantity of the spice so that he could begin consuming it daily.

Physical Limitation and the Train

Leaping out of the bus he sprinted towards the train platform. The 7 am was rapidly approaching on schedule and he still had to run the distance between the bus and the terminal, and through the terminal itself. No one else noticed the train, stuck in their morning stupor, still fixated on the soft feeling of the pillow on their cheek.

He had barely begun running when he felt the burning in his chest. Both legs sent a jolt of pain, as though to query him on what was going on. Altogether, his body was a disaster. Years of smoking and inactivity were presenting a barrier to his ambition. "I must start visiting the gym," he repeatedly thought to himself, a mantra of will that propelled him past physical limitation. A barrier that was, for him, significant.

In a manoeuver of daring and prowess he skirted around the escalator, filled with nothing but human obstacles, and challenged the near-empty stairwell. Stepping, jogging, two stairs at a time, he approached the top winded, but victorious. He was grinning a fool's grin, a disproportionate and empty eyed stare that made the woman sitting across from him feel awkward. Sweat began to form on his brow, his breathing now coming and going in long, heavy waves. While the train pulled away from the station he watched the others only now reaching the platform, and he began laughing.

Blink

She didn't blink. Minutes had past and her eyes were still open and fixated on a point far in the distance. Everything slowed. He began to wonder if the distortions were a product of his overactive brain.

Earlier in the day he had eaten lunch at a small eatery and had been convinced that everyone stared at him while he wasn't looking. He'd never previously been subjected to hallucinations or severe paranoia, which made all of this even more disquieting. Losing your mind is one thing, he thought, but *thinking* you're losing your mind is another matter.

When he glanced back her eyes were closed. When he looked aware he felt her stare. Looking back again he was not entirely surprised to see that she was gone. He walked over to where she had been sitting and saw a red, circular pin, with a hollow centre, resting on her seat.

Focal Point

While the train stalled at the station, held longer than usual due to a suicide at another stop, the car began to fill with people. Eventually the platform was empty, the train full, and people continued to run for the train with the mistake that the doors were about to close before the train disembarked from the platform.

The train did not leave the station. People shifted uncomfortably, unsure as to where they should steady their stare. Although the train doors remained open it felt uncomfortably warm for most of the passengers.

As each new person stepped from the stairwell, onto the platform, all eyes within the train shifted their uncomfortable focus for a few moments. Eyes held longer on the sight of a blind woman and her dog, standing, still unsure about whether or not to board the train. She flushed, confused, embarrassed as she knew she was a focal point.

Buying Time

Studying the room, while waiting in line, he decided on a seat. It was still free after he purchased his tea, a surprise on such a busy evening. Sitting down, gauging the chair, he placed his drink on the coffee table.

The chair was worn, the table scuffed. His back relaxed and the sharp pain in the mid region eased. He sipped his tea.

Most evenings the shop was noisy, a cacophony of competing conversations. Tonight there was the noise of the music from the stereo system and the hiss of the espresso machine. Typically, it felt like life was happening, people sharing their existences, but tonight it was a group of strangers in a room buying time.

Forced to Evolve

She used to hate first dates. It wasn't that she found them uncomfortable or frightening, but rather that she couldn't bear to be around people exhibiting those emotions. Awkwardness disgusted her as a feeble trait to be avoided.

The same afternoon she watched the bicyclist hit the dog, she made a decision to embrace awkwardness. It can be neutralised if I crush it in my hug, she thought. Like a disease it can be eradicated and superseded, and the host can be forced to evolve.

After twenty three first dates that evolved in a manner that can only be described as failures, based on her parameters, she considered that her methodology was flawed. The social dilemmas happened as frequently as ever, but she now began to accept them as a curious phenomenon worthy of tolerating.

Bottom of her Shoe

Looking at the bottom of her shoes, seeing the way that the left side of the right shoe scuffed more than anywhere else, he decided he was in love. When she sat down and crossed her legs he could see the price tag on the bottom of the left sole.

Staring at her knees, their knobiness, he could be certain, more certain than he'd been even about the death of god, that this was the woman he must marry if he was ever to have a shred of happiness. He wasn't aroused by her good looks, her provocative dress, or her giggle. It was the intangible that drove him mad.

The habit, dare we call it addiction, of staring at her and her shoes went on for several months until he reached the conclusion that he was not in love with her. He had fallen in love with the idea of the unobtainable. He loved being obsessed with the various bits of the everyday, and when this understanding came to him he drank his tea and never returned to that café.

A Vulnerable Moment

Scrubbing with a piece of damp paper towel, rushed in case someone reports him to mall security. His limbs ache from lack of sleep, and his skin itches from healing sores. This bathroom is home for a few minutes.

Sleep begins to overcome him and he looks at the bathroom stall. Ten minutes, he tells himself. He's barely slept in weeks. Since the rainy season started bathrooms are the only warm place he doesn't get kicked out of immediately.

When I enter the bathroom we startle each other a bit. He's in the process of putting his shirt back on. I step to the urinal, a vulnerable moment, and try to relax. My eyes keep gravitating to his direction and fear floods my system.

Empty Bottle

He takes his evening stroll with a wine bottle jutting out of his pocket. Whistling, he nods and smiles to passers by. Age has worn his left hip down and he limps, though it doesn't ache most days.

Pausing, staring upwards, taking a long slug from the bottle, he sees a woman fall from the roof of a nearby building. Swallowing, he slips the bottle back into his pocket and begins to walk towards where she should have landed. The liquor has done little to affect his reality, though he feels a warmth despite the fall breeze.

When he arrives at the spot where the body should be he sees no one. Staring at the ground he spies a puddle of blood with a leaf that has blown into it. Pulling the bottle out of his pocket, he realises it is empty.

Reverential to the Suffering

Hand held above the glow of Christ's halo. Bending forward, he smells the book. Yellowing pages and a green leather cover. Before he opens it he kisses the four corners.

This morning he had made a short prayer about his eczema his hair was filled with small pieces of scalp, and several raw areas made shaving near intolerable. He was reverential to the suffering the of the man in the book. You are the only one who can possibly understand me, he thought.

Staring out the train window into the still dark morning, he catches his reflection. He quickly averts his eyes and begins to flip through the pages of text again. He had never learned to read, helping at home as he did, and now that he was old he consoled himself with images and the comfort of sermons in his mind.

Dinner Stories

Window washer view. The bird circled around the roof as he rappelled down the face of the building, inching his way across its face during the course of the day. His mind veered towards narrative, and today he had constructed a melodrama that involved most of the fourth, fifth, and sixth floors.

His father had also been a window washer. Over dinner each night he would regale the family with tales of corporate life. He had never worked for a corporation, but felt he had gained significant insight during his many years as a window washer to some of the city's biggest companies. At parties he always joked that he rubbed elbows with greatness, or at least rubbed the smudges off their windows.

Most of the dinner stories involved deception, adultery and corporate intrigue. The stakes were high, men worked and drank hard, and the women were described in lengthy detail. His wife always chided him, saying that he read too many Ian Fleming and John le Carré novels on his lunch breaks. Thinking back on the dinner stories, he saw that he had become his father and didn't mind the feeling at all.

Two Arm's Length

She kept eye contact long enough to ensure that her interest was understood. The book she was reading assured her that this was a simple yet effective means of engaging another person. She smiled slightly, in a way that she thought would be read as sweet or innocent. The smile was returned.

This was as far as she took her flirting. It made her feel good and did not involve ongoing communication or physical contact with others. The few date proposals she had received were easy enough to brush off. Everyone was kept at two arm's length, just as she preferred it at the moment.

After dinner that night she had a glass of wine and returned to her thoughts on what it means to be human. She was completely capable of physically engaging humans in an intimate manner, however she felt she had not yet fully understood how to interact with them in an emotional-intellectual manner. Day to day functionality at the workplace were not difficult, but advanced interpersonal situations had proven elusive.

Outsider

The train engineer had been nearly asleep when the train struck the body of the man. Over the course of the next three days the remainder of the carcass was packed away by various animals. The man, a drifter, had only been seen in town the afternoon of his accident.

Purchasing some groceries at the town's store, he was immediately recognised as an outsider. He was treated with a certain degree of indifference by the locals, as social protocol in the town decreed. His presence, though maltreated, had a particularly strong impact on the woman who ran the post office.

To her confidants she claimed that she had powers of the mind. Something she said she had discovered as a child. Many of the town folk thought she had been touched in the head, while others warned their children to steer clear of the witch. Regardless, each night since the man's disappearance she dreamt of him and his message. In the morning she awoke with a sense of urgency, making preparations and bracing herself for the coming days.

Absence of Pain

The light tripped out in his head. When he became aware of where he was again there was a sense of dullness, as though the ambient noise of the world had been dampened and the brightness of the sun smudged the edges of reality. It was the medication.

Shifting his body against the wall, he was surprised by the absence of pain. Earlier, sometime after lunch, he had almost blacked out from the continuous jabs of pain bolting out from his mid-back. He wasn't sure when he had left, but the taste in his mouth reminded him that he had vomited in the lobby.

Now he was in a grey space, a soft textured world of carelessness. All he wanted to do was drift and think of nothing. It was all he could do to even have that thought, and before he realised it he had returned to a semi-vegetative state. It was much later that this moment would be linked to the exploding blood vessel in his head.

Design Flaws

He hadn't thought they were serious when they suggested they might have to demolish his building. The claim being put forward was that his design had flaws not originally detected due to lack of understanding at the time the building was originally constructed. His designs were considered progressive, though the engineering community remained skeptical over several of his main design techniques.

To date, none of his designs had shown signs of structural instability. The general public, which had once hailed his gifts to the city landscapes, now absorbed the skepticism of the critics. It was this changing attitude that had driven him to retreat from the world.

Alone, with his unread notebooks and unseen designs, he had reconfigured the world to match the landscape of his mind. He would be dead before they would ever come to realise the vast enterprise he had dedicated himself to. Decades later his creations would once again rise out of the ground and gaze into the distant sky.

God of Death

Everyone knew he championed death and stayed clear of him come nightfall. This evening he had gathered three heads, and while he sat on the ground he opened the sack and admired his work. His god of death had demanded a dedication of skulls, as it did each year.

A few months earlier citizens of the area had gathered at a meeting to determine if he should be run out of the district or executed. The conclusion was that his god was too powerful, and that the prophesy must be fulfilled if they were all to prosper in the coming year. There were dissenting votes, naturally, but they did not make decisions by consensus.

For the next year ten heads on sticks would adorn his house, less intended as a menacing threat than as a reminder of the power of death. The corpses of the victims would be gathered from their random locations and interred by their relatives. He would lay down his axe for another year and be absorbed by the community again.

All We Have

She grabbed his hand and said, "This is all we have, this humanness." As she smiled he smiled back, though he felt a creeping discomfort at the thought of all the other people in the train car looking at him. But no one else was paying any attention at all.

Relaxing, he squeezed her hand back and returned the smile. "Yes, I suppose it is, isn't it?" At once, all her physical details became the most overwhelming stimuli. The smell of her hair, her perfume, the warmth of her skin. Every line in her face and each red hair became his new definition of beauty.

The next thought that braced his mind was how much he felt compelled to have sex with her. He felt ashamed. Although he knew the feeling itself was not wrong, he was upset with the way it manifested itself in the middle of one of the greatest experiences of his life.

Burning in the Distance

Snow was still falling when they opened their doors and saw what had happened while they slept. Years could go by without snow falling in the region, making this a monumental event. Today there will be car accidents galore, she thought, and as the image formed in her mind a car skid through the intersection in front of her house and crashed into a lamppost.

She ran to see if the driver was alright, but saw that the car had no driver. Opened the doors confirmed that the car had been empty. Drops of snow melted on her neck and rolled down her back. It was snowing heavier now, and when she turned to go back to her house to call the police she could not see it.

"Where am I?" she asked aloud to no response. "Where do you want to be?" echoed in her mind. She wanted to be warm and safe and walked towards a fire she saw burning in the distance.

Night Terrors

The dream did not get written down like all the rest. "What did you dream about last night?" "Either I didn't or I can't remember." He always told her about his dreams but knew that the one he had this past night was too disturbing to pass on to her.

Three months of continual stress at work and in his personal life had finally led to the point of mental collapse. His unconscious mind could no longer process the anxiety and fear in a constructive manner and was now, frantically generating warnings in the form of night terrors. This dream was the first in a series of progressively frightening dreams that he would fail to recognize.

That morning on the transit ride he fell asleep and awoke to the sight of an empty train except for one hooded figure. "Why are you here?" he asked. "I've always been here, you've never seen fit to notice me before."

Suckerpunch

A fireball of mirth roared inside his belly. He felt loathing for those around him, and spent his work days suppressing the urge to suckerpunch one of his coworkers. "I can hardly stand to listen to these imbeciles," he would yell to his cat when he came home each evening.

The next day at work he finally cracked apart and tried to put his fist through the head of a coworker. She didn't see the suckerpunch coming and it broke her nose. He continued down the hall until he came across a male coworker and unsuccessfully attempted to hit him.

When his boss finally cornered him, and had called security, he distracted his boss momentarily and suckerpunched him as well. Security wrestled him to the ground, dislocating one of his shoulders in the process. There was nothing but trouble ahead for him, but he had managed to take control of his reality, however briefly.

Impulsion

He wasn't sure what kept him from jumping in front of the train. A voice, seemingly out of nowhere, would pipe up in his mind and inform him of several valid reasons why he shouldn't. It was only a voice, however, and he thought his self-destructive impulses ran deeper than that.

"Am I afraid of death on an unconscious level?" He knew he was, and had been trying to overcome this for many years. Some kill themselves because they are tired of living, but he wanted to do it because he wanted to discover death.

Since childhood his curiosity about death had been strong, thought he had never been able to overcome his impulsion to keep living. There was nothing about existence that particularly engaged him, so he couldn't understand his inability to stop it. He often hoped he would get hit by a bus accidentally while crossing the street.

The Situation

Other train passengers were visibly shaken by the yelling, but the two men were acting out parts on a television show they watched together. It didn't seem like a joke. They were beginning to get aggressive with one another and other passengers shifted in their seats out of concern.

One of the men pulled a knife from his coat pocket. What had been playacting, public theatre, was turning into something even more unnerving. Their concern was substantiated when the man without the knife leaned forward and slid his throat across the blade.

Someone began screaming while the man staggered back, grinning and dazed. A few moments later he fell to the floor, hitting his head on a metal railing halfway down. Before anyone had time to collect themselves and address the situation, another man stood up to take his place.

The Hand

The hand didn't immediately capture her attention because she was staring at the architecture and the way the morning light created various geometric shadows. As she walked closer to it she became aware that something was sitting by itself in the middle of the sidewalk. When she was a few steps away she understood what it was.

Opening her purse, she removed a plastic bag. She picked the hand up from the ground and inspected it for damage. It appeared to have been cleanly severed and was not disfigured by burns or punctures, as so many hands were these days.

Smiling, pleased with her morning's discovery, she placed the hand into the plastic bag and into her large handbag. When a man walked by her a few moments later she smiled and bid him a good morning, something entirely uncharacteristic for a person as curmudgeonly as herself. The man returned the smile and felt glad that his day had begun with such a warm greeting from a complete stranger.

Damage

Laughter filled the library as he began to uncontrollably chortle at the cruelty of humanity. On the street below the window he was sitting at there were two men punching each other in the face. One man had accidentally bumped into the other man, making him splash some of the drink he was holding onto his suit. The suit had been purchased that same afternoon and was to be worn to an important job interview.

He continued laughing, looking below, as a crowd gathered. No one was attempting to break the fight up. Almost two dozen people now stood and watched as fists flew and faces began to become bloody and puffy from damage.

Looking down at the book he was reading he could not stop giggling. It was a book on abstract geometrical paintings, and inside was one particular painting that made his mouth water for some imperceptible reason. As his laugh began to fade he contemplated what he should eat for lunch.

The Broadsheet

The business section isn't filled with much of interest today, he thought, as he spread the paper out on the seat beside him on the train. A depressed economy was creating very boring reading each day for innumerable business people in the country. He was in the middle of checking his stocks as a young boy began coughing.

"You okay?" the man asked since the boy's cough only seemed to be getting worse. "No I'm not ok you fucking geezer, you goddamned failure of a businessman and a bloody awful human." The man reached out to grab the boy by the collar but suddenly his vision shortened and the boy appeared to be in the distance.

After he blinked the boy was gone completely. Also gone was the broadsheet he had been reading. The man could feel his blood pressure rise, and shortly thereafter he suffered a fatal heart attack, the cause of which was documented as relating to the incredible stress he was suffering at work.

Crime Scene

No murder had taken place, so the investigator decided to leave the crime scene. A team of special investigators would follow up with the claims being made and would provide him with a complete report. Supposedly a murder had been committed, but there were no victims, suspects, or murder weapon.

An anonymous call had come into the station claiming that a ritual involving human sacrifice was taking place at a specific location and time. Police had naturally staked out the area, although nothing happened. In fact, the opposite occurred.

The area, normally a busy part of the city was completely empty. One investigator notes that he couldn't see a stray cat or even an insect. This caused a hesitant concern, as no one wanted to appear paranoid, but on the decision of special investigators, two officers were assigned to watch the area for two days following the initial call.

Treasure

A large pile of dirt covered an area of lawn ten feet by ten feet. The boy had been digging for days on end, enjoying the sun and his summer vacation from school. After watching a certain film involving buried treasure, the boy was obsessed with the idea that the world around him contained valuable secrets to be uncovered by those with patience.

His parents, who had consented to his activities, were busy with their day jobs and evening visits to an aunt sick in the hospital. They were completely unaware of the scale of his excavation operation. They had noted, however, that he was now exhausted in the evenings and able to sleep despite his chronic insomnia.

When he made his discovery they were doubly shocked. They were amazed by what he had found and stunned by the damage to their yard. The treasure, if it could be called that, was a box containing an old man, still alive despite untold years underground.

The Beautiful Noise

Walking past the temple was a daily event. It was on the path between his house and the train station. Each day the temple continued to fascinate him, mostly because he never saw a person on the grounds or even near the buildings.

A large bell hung in the yard, unring, although a large bell ringer hung in the position awaiting energy to force it into the side of the bell. He could imagine the shudder of the bell as it was struck and the beautiful noise that would emit from it. Once in a while it would require a severe act of restraint for him to resist running past the gate, into the yard, and begin ringing the bell.

His dreams often involved the temple, wherein he would find himself wandering through the gardens and structures, as though he were intimately familiar with it. Upon waking, he would have to exhibit severe self-restraint to prevent himself from getting up and going to the temple while still in his pajamas. Deep in his mind he would suddenly hear the bell and he would be calmed, remembering that he had a busy life now that he must get on with.

Lead or Magnets

There was hardly anything he could focus his mind on to escape the grinding pain of the stomach cramps. He had expelled the contents of his body once already, and felt there was nothing to get rid of now save for some vital organs. Still, he continued to feel queasy and the pain continued unabated.

Food poisoning had already been ruled out since he had cooked the food himself and it had been completely fresh. He didn't think he was developing an illness since no other symptoms had manifested. The pain seemed to come from nowhere and refused to stop until he had killed himself.

Each hour it felt worse, and he wondered at what point he would black out. How much pain can I stand? he asked himself. Not enough, he was sure, and he felt his body sway as his knees began giving out and his head was attracted to the floor as though filled with lead or magnets.

The Neighbour

She watched the neighbour lady bring her dog into the yard to relieve itself. Within seconds she had become so angry that she leapt out of her chair, raced to the front door, and swung it open only to find the neighbour gone. The scene would repeat itself regularly over the following weeks.

Finally, out of utter frustration, she pulled an electric saw from her shed and began to cut the tree down. As she was doing this the neighbour walked by and watched. "Why are you doing that?" she asked. "My dog likes to pee there."

Instead of becoming angry and attacking the neighbour she focused on cutting the tree down. When she was halfway through finishing the neighbour began to wrestle the saw from her hands. In doing so she released the dog's leash and after a few moments of wrestling she realized how grave her mistake had been.

Disappearance

He hesitated, and in that moment was trampled by his own indecision. His body, what remained, was never found. No one had been looking either, which rendered his disappearance especially successful in design and execution.

No belongings could be attributed to him, and none of his family had been in contact with him in more than twenty years. He did not have a job and did not participate in some way to the social fabric around him. He was empty and wanted to become nothing.

The conductor did not realize what had happened, and did not report the death. Animals were attracted to the scene and rapidly dispersed the bits and pieces. In an attempt to become nothing he had become food for animals that were in desperate need of nourishment during a particularly drought ridden year.

Endgame

If the gossip was true he would have very little time to make arrangements and flee to safety before he found himself dangling from a rope. This wasn't the first time he had found himself in this situation, but the last time he had used his political connections to ensure blame had been deflected elsewhere. This time he had made too much of a mess and no one would stand behind him for fear of being implicated.

He had destroyed many careers during his days of power, and now he found himself in a position of helplessness. All along he had known this was the endgame to his lifestyle. Wealth and power had been alluring enough that he disregarded common sense and decided dying gracefully would be a small price for a life of luxury and pleasure.

Each moment now he awaited the breaking of his door and the rushing of the guard. As he imagined his fugitive future, a life of simplicity and survival, he became less sure that he wanted to run. He had enough clout remaining that he could at least ensure his death was swift.

Perfect Forms

Small details are what he falls in love with. A dozen times a day he sees a woman that makes his heart ache and his cheeks flush. Being in love is easy, he thinks, but falling is more complicated and mentally exhausting.

Today, for instance, he sees a Japanese woman with a small pink purse and black stiletto boots. Her pant legs are rolled up four or five inches and she had a tight, black wool jacket. He possesses the image of her, the perfect form, for a moment before he looks away.

Each time he glances back imperfections appear and the disappointment of reality sets in. She slowly gains solid edges and the weight of humanity becomes apparent in her eyes. She, too, is broken, and incapable of carrying him from suffering.

Dying by His Own Hand

An old red brick, blackened from pollution, came loose from under the window sill of the ancient building and fell towards the ground. As it grew closer to impact its trajectory happened to place it in line with the head of a man who had been laid off from his job only moments earlier. He did not feel anything as it shattered his skull and caused his mind and body to cease functioning.

In the man's pocket was a picture of a building he had drawn on his lunch break the previous day. He knew that he was losing his job and had decided to throw himself from the top of that building if it actually happened. Now, however, he had failed even at dying by his own hand.

The man who had fired him felt horrible about the matter and took it on as personal stress. After the funeral, at which he had given a glowing speech, making his ex-employee sound like a model worker, he began drinking heavily. His liver, already weakened, would not tolerate this for long before failing.

Made Real

They had both passed out on the train from exhaustion, the two old friends. "How'd we get on this train?" the one asks the other, still stuck in a stupor. Neither of them are entirely sure, but both know that it is warm and safe and better than wherever else they might be.

"Today is Friday," she says to the other. "All day long," the other responds. "Let's live today like it is the last day of our lives - let's do something crazy like kill someone."

They giggle, knowing that once it had been said, made real, they were bound to follow through with it. "I like it better when we're drunk." "Then let's get drunk."

Killing Each Other

The sensation of seeing someone die in front of him was not a new one, and he had lost concern about much of what was going on around him. Shells had grazed his skull twice and his scalp was pouring blood down his face. Only hours earlier his focus was on not getting killed, but his entire being, every cell in his body, was now fixated on killing as many as possible.

Bodies were strewn on the ground around him, though he paid as much attention to them as one might a candy bar wrapper. He stepped over one of his old friends without even acknowledging the loss. People were reduced to targets, and he began firing fearlessly into the oncoming rush of soldiers.

His shots were true, and bodies crumpled under the force of bullets. As he continued shooting his comrades it still did not become clear to him that he had advanced past his regiment, become turned around, and was now attacking his own front line. He had drifted clear of conventional morality and now constituted his own army.

Sensation of Living

After they sat down in the train she hugged him, expressing a kind of desperation. She needed him, as he did her, though he exhibited tepid emotions to the outside world. Her openness was not an act of exhibitionism used to affirm her love for him to the outside world, it was an all encompassing devotion to the feeling of love.

It was at this moment, when she was at her most powerful, that the train derailed. It smashed into the earth, spreading rocks and soil and foliage with violence, and she thought that her love made her incapable of death. Immediately after this thought her head was sheared off by a broken piece of metal.

Upon exiting from the hospital he built a shrine in his house to love. She became his deity, and he knew that in those moments that he had held her head on the train that an awakening had taken place. His heart and mind were now in union and he felt an overwhelming joy in the sensation of living.

The Mouth of Existence

Body shock recoil as his mass pushed through the glass. A torso surrounded by shards, run over with edges, beginning to respond to the damage. This is what it is to be human, he thought.

Onlookers sat stunned, disbelieving that they had watched a man hurl his naked body through a sheet of glass. Their minds could not grasp the magnitude of what his psyche was doing to accept this new reality. The flesh interface had been breached and the program now functioned under modified parameters.

Reconfigured, thoughts pertained to the next task at hand. Where does the human go now? A forced encounter with the mouth of existence generates the germs of transmigration.

Dialogue is Over

Conversational structure dissipates under the weight of expectation. Collapsing words trigger mental implosion. Dialogue is over and one of the participants falls face first to the ground.

He walks away, holsters his language, and enters a nearby café. Mission accomplished, he sips on a coffee and considers the rain. Momentarily reminiscing, he recalls once delivering a fatal blow with a colloquialism.

If only I could heal with words, he thought. On rainy days he became meditative about his skill. If only I could be with someone I could talk to.

Colony of Fear

Distant volcanoes sputtered while she watched a pair of birds perform a mating ritual. They will be the only ones to leave here and carry on, she thought with a feeling of uncertainty. The sky was filled with black clouds and she had been coughing up chunks of soot.

No one had discovered the secret of flight yet, so the majesty of birds swooping and soaring still brought a feeling of wonder to her. The certainty of his own death frightened her, and she drew her shawl close to prevent the chill overtaking her. But the gesture was useless as her problems were from her mind, not the outside world.

She lived in a colony of fear with several hundred other inhabitants. Terror infused every element of their daily life. What she wanted more than freedom from the volcanoes was freedom from fear itself.

Fantastic Invasion

A fantastic invasion gripped his body, anchoring itself in the far reaches of his grey matter. The invaders clipped his mental connections one by one and rewired the brain. When he awoke the next day he was not the same individual he had been eight hours earlier.

Confused and disoriented by the new reality he had been given birth into, he spent a while sitting in bed trying to recall where he was, who he was, what he was. His memories, now scrambled into a chaotic jumble joined in unpredictable, and often disturbing, patterns. The past became frightful and the future terrifying.

Social norms, speech patterns, and all the other things that he had once put great effort into were now impossible. Existence had been reduced to a primal matter. He began screaming and did not stop.

He Would Be Forgotten

He moved ahead with searing candour, a mountain of broken acquaintances and a stronghold of unwavering friendships. His death came as no surprise but with much sorrow from those that knew him at all. And yet he would be forgotten, like the rest, as the failing memory of time shifted forward.

The cities of words he had pulled from his mind, and set to page, disintegrated from neglect with each passing year. Ideas, once considered important, now sat with discarded philosophies. He appeared archaic in short order.

Drunk on whisky, permanence had once been important to him. Upon sobering he smashed the empty bottle and laughed at its emptiness. Amber droplets clung to shreds of broken glass.

For Every Mind, Its Terminus

For every mind, its terminus. The fire between his brain cells stopped not long after impact with the kitchen. The pistol dropped from his hand into nothingness.

Being crackled for an instant, a faulty signal, before transmission ceased. Meaninglessness for the ego had been achieved. There were only external references now.

Death was noted, probed, and catalogued. Mourning and celebration. A sheet of grief enveloped the mind of another man who encountered the report.

Superstructure

Impeccably bruised superstructure born on the hiatus of love. Anything else, at that juncture in time, would have been a sentence of death. She caressed his cheek with the back of her hand.

A victim of her own creation, her sense of belonging was born of the inverse. Each relationship was a construct of distance. Emotional aloofness saved her from the necessary deceptions to both herself and those around her.

This kind of collision cannot be sustained he knew. Their particles would continue to travel their respective arcs. His loneliness would be magnified in the coming years by her shearing force and inevitable absence.

Life in Flux

A slave to desire like the rest of them. Experiential necessity propelled his actions, compelled his mind forward. It was trouble every time.

One day his life was filled with certainty and stability. The next it was a roiling mass excited into risk taking behaviour. Why do I do this to myself? he would ask. A few days later he would do it all again.

Addicted to the rush of change. The only life for me is a life in flux, he told those around him. You catch more venereal diseases but you have a lot of fun.

Half Full

Defeated, she smashed her hand on her desk. Fucking fuck! she screamed. Control had slipped away and her novel was collapsing one page at a time.

Plot, characterization, all of the hallmarks of the traditional novel were floating out of her grasp. 'Experimental' would be a polite way of describing her unraveling narrative. It had reached the point where she no longer clearly remembered why she started writing the book in the first place.

The bottle of vodka was only half full. Middle age had hit and she had achieved most of her goals already. It would be days of drunken stupor before she realized that she had depleted her experience supply and had to engage the world once more.

The Stranger

While the stranger talked to her she questioned her sense of reality. He had sat next to her on the train and had been blathering for some time about the weather and his family and the state of poverty in Africa. Saddened by being fired from her job an hour earlier, she couldn't care less about the dull man and his need to listen to himself speak endlessly about things he knew nothing.

"I would kill you and throw your body off of the train if I could," she thought to herself. The man recoiled in horror. "Why would you do that," he asked? shocked that she had spoken aloud, she told him that he was a lout.

He suddenly fell silent, his face reddening. His eyes welled with tears and he muttered an apology. Sleeping, she suddenly awoke to see the stranger from her dream sitting down beside her.

Spectacle of Death

The inspector collided with the train as he fell from the platform. It was not dramatic and no one except for a small boy saw it happen. The paramedics and police all attended to the emergency, but none of them had the insight to question the young boy about what he may have seen.

In fact, no one stopped to consider what a young boy was doing at the train station in the crime ridden part of town all by himself. He watched the situation unfold with curiosity. Although he had witnessed the suicide of both his parents, several months apart, he had never seen anything like this.

We all must die, he thought, and it is amazing how many ways it can happen. He wondered how he would die. Most of the time he hoped it would cause a spectacle.

Crushing Defeat

There is a crushing defeat. He is not aware of it yet, but it will manifest in the next day or so. His failure is due to his own lack of foresight, so no one will feel sorry for him.

The probabilities of this occurring have been calculated, and it is now absolute. Uncertainty principles have been removed and it is almost as though predestination rules the day. He is entirely unaware and the surprise will prove devastating.

Those in the know will have a good laugh as they clink their glasses and toast the promising future. Someone feels a tinge of guilt for a moment. It is erased with four pints of stout.

A Distant Destination

Incalculable is how her attraction is best described. At the end of the day she takes off her heels and puts on a pair of running shoes. Rolling up her dress pants somehow humanizes her, stripping the layer of formality between them.

This prompts his latent desire to manifest, and he feels a sudden and compulsive urge to be close to her. Relaxed, her smile now appears coy and her laughter as an invitation to a kiss. Restraint is required as he knows nothing will come of his hyperactive imagination.

For a moment he is tempted to disregard his judgment. Crawling out of his body with excitement, it is scarcely within his domain to retain rationality. As he catches her gaze, however, he sees neutrality and understands that reality is a distant destination he must travel to.

Wasteland Logic

Remote hostility. Truncated communication. Removal of the ear of reason.

He is yelling, incapable of focus. Spastic. Aggression blinding.

A finality of the situation has produced volatility that permeates each molecule of transaction, leaving wasteland logic to conclude interaction best left to tranquility and kindness. There are casualties, numerous, and an escalation to what has proven to be dramatic, to say the least. He will die tomorrow.

A Thousand Pages of Death

His novel, a thousand pages of death, was widely criticized as nothing more than a morbid celebration of morality. To this, he would agree. It had been his sole intent.

The next great work manifesting from his cruel skull was the long term assassination of critics that had panned his writing outright. It would take place over two decades, and at each crime scene he would leave the clue of placing his book in a prominent position in their personal collection. One killing had already taken place, although its timing was nothing more than happenstance, as his hand had nothing to do with it.

In a turn of misfortune, his second and third victims would find themselves killed while walking together through a busy intersection a week later. Dejected, he briefly considered suicide before changing directions entirely. He would die of malaria while performing aid work in a poverty stricken country.

Teased Dreams

In a fit of absolute fury. His screaming had frightened most of the staff to clear the area. When he finally exploded there were seventeen witnesses and no injuries or fatalities.

The legacy of his untimely, and still unexplained, demise shook the core of the corporation and prompted staff members that were already looking for other work to move ahead with those opportunities. Weeks later there were still the occasional shrieks of fear and disgust when a chunk of human matter was discovered lodged in a vent, under some paperwork, or in an otherwise unexpected place. In the disconnected nomenclature of a senior executive, the incident proved bad for business.

The lead investigator was consumed by the event, and could not sleep due to anxiety. It was the most shocking death he had been assigned to, by far. Its inexplicability teased his dreams and tormented his unconscious mind.

Splinters of the Universe

Splinters of the universe fall and further shatter at her feet. A collapse of her own creation. Destruction in the most personally devastating way.

As the pieces fall, almost appearing to float in her hyper-aware state of mind, the thought of self-destruction becomes paramount. Through her mind a rapid fire string of imagined possibilities for death. Drowning, burning, hanging, bleeding.

After this she anticipated tears. Waited for them. They did not come and the result was self-directed fury and loathing that propelled her into living against her own desire for termination.

Oscillating Between One and Three

Collapsed, tears streaming down his face, the big man has fallen. There is a moment of awkwardness, unsure minds working over the stream of images in front of them. One by one, two by two, they leave the room, forced out by the cloud of shame emanating from him and filling the room.

He finally looked inside himself and shattered at what he saw. Having deferred the excuse for so many years is what destroyed him. The buildup was too much to bear.

What do I do now? he asked himself. After such an explosive and public purge he didn't know what his next move should be. Whether to go home and hang himself in the closet, go to each person that had been present to try and explain it to them, or to act as though nothing had taken place

Mental Masturbation

He considers his fantasy. It typically involves one woman in a public setting. There is the fear of being caught.

This rush he gets from his shame drives him, and he sees no need to discard it or restrain his desires. He wants to lift up her skirt and feel her legs, her ass, her vagina. He wants to tell her about how warm and wet and all the other standard hallmarks he imagines her to be.

It is the rush of his honesty, the inappropriateness of the situation that drives his arousal. The train is approaching the station, however, and he must quickly change mental gears. When he stands up to exit all indications of his mental masturbation have been vanquished.

Addicted to the Pain of Attraction

Her look is coy and knowing. She knows where all of this has already gone and is taking me there out of curiosity. Will I act the same this time?

She stares and smiles, making overt suggestions that are impossible to respond to with any sense of decorum or station. Did she pucker her lips slightly, a promise of a kiss I know I'll never accept? my only hope is that she takes me, but I doubt that is the future she has planned for us.

Her heart is addicted to the pain of attraction, and her mind provides an endless stream of desiring suitors. She tickles them with brilliance, seduces them with her half-concealed sexuality. The beauty of her entire existence is undeniable.

Anomalous Blocks of Time

A smashed window greeted him as he walked up to the doors of the office. Opening the door produced a scraping sound. Inside there were no changes, no items strewn about or stolen computers.

He sat in his chair, slouched, dejected. Everything felt like a heavy liquid. It was a feeling that enveloped him once every month or two.

Each time he fell into their mindset he would try to pull himself out with the reminder of why he was doing all of this. Some days he could not be justified, and he was worried about these anomalous blocks of time. He could sense entropy surrounding his life, and he felt increasingly helpless to fend off the invasion.

Temples of Commerce

Transcendent concrete shadows, reminders of the temples of commerce, hung in the air. The sun had recoiled from their vastness. Time had come unhitched from space and the two now operated on independent trajectories.

Frames of reference, shattered in the ruins of a lost universe, remained as a record of decay. Mortality had disappeared immediately during the initial politically seismic days. No one noticed in the confusion.

Triumph came to those who adjusted faster to the new rules. Resources drained and priorities shifted. Violence was constantly heard in the distance.

The Shores of Reason

Penstruck destruction spilling futures. Uncertainty no longer accurately describes it. A state of pandemonium has been achieved.

Cracked histories disintegrate. Unintelligible allegiances dissolve into their own nonsense. A crash is heard upon the shores of reason.

When the world disappeared everyone thought he had performed a magic trick, a clever ruse. But illusions do not realign the universe. Indifference inked itself across expanses.

Corroded Midnight Consciousness

Corroded midnight consciousness. Logic gates jarred open. Streaming reason splashing into a pool of uncertainty.

She stands in the cold, wearing a light blue toque, wishing tears would fall down her cheeks. Caught in a mental circle, she no longer realises what is and what isn't. Panic transits her every synapse.

Snowfall covers her in a layer of light flakes. Convulsed with shivers. Unclear if it is from cold or fear.

A Sanitised Version

A sanitised version of truth came out of his mouth. Love could not be expressed or admitted so he spoke around the idea. But there was nothing more he wanted to shout out.

Declarations of love filled his head. A million scenarios, an infinite number of methods of making his feelings clear to her. And yet there was still repression.

Afraid of confessing his love, even more frightened by the thought of speaking the truth to himself. Each passing moment created fractures in his already wounded heart. Death did not find him useful, so he spent his years in this state.

Valentine's Duo

A valentine's duo. They had been raised wards of the state but had now gained a high degree of independence. More importantly, they were fond of each other.

She leaned against him while they rode the train to school and slept. He held his arm around her. Proud of their relationship. After several years of abuse and name calling he was well prepared to fight anyone who so much as looked at him crossly.

The councilors at the school were convinced that their clinically diagnosed mental deficiencies posed no impediment to their ability to function in a standard relationship. Although the boy, 26, was still fixated on emulating Sid Vicious in attire his attitude was much improved. The female, also 26, and diagnosed depressive as well, had never been happier.

Empty Days

Lunch was something of a discomfort, as they sat around the table making light conversation of the most banal kind. Avoiding offensiveness, or the possible perception of it, led to the avoidance of most topics of conversation. Principally, they discussed the weather, traffic, the food, their children (for those that had them), and the general stress of the company.

With each passing day he grew more furious. Each empty day seemed to magnify the hundreds of empty days preceding it and suggested that nothing resided in the future except further days devoid of anything. He felt lost.

Convinced that the only way to save his life was to attack the emptiness, he began acting increasingly outlandishly at the lunches. To his surprise, the behaviour was reciprocated by many of those around him. Within a few weeks he was revered for his behaviour, followed by his dismissal for two indiscretions.

Intellect

"It's not that I feel like fucking. I want flirting and crushes. I don't want the complications that come along with sex."

"Why can't it be like that then? all fun and no physical or emotional commitment. Only intellectual."

"Can it ever really stay that way? Can we pretend to be nothing more than intellects, deeply in love with each other's minds? I'm so smitten with you that I'm not even sure I can still be considered to have any kind of intellect at all."

Salacious

The old man sat on the train reading his usual round of salacious novels. He didn't bother hiding the titles or covers. Indifferent to the stares and curious over the shoulder readers, he enjoyed his end of the day diversion.

Balding, glasses, grey jacket wearing. He was the image of elderly perversion. It was a book about a protagonist named 'Coco' that currently kept his interest.

There was nothing left in life that interested him now, except for the steady stream of easy reading. He never went further than this, either, attempting to live out his elderly end of the road fantasies. Life provided him with no challenges, and he preferred it this way.

A Fragment of History

A collapse of distant buildings. Pressure waves ripped across the landscape. Houses exploded, blown backwards in a stream of fury.

There was no one left to stand witness to the annihilation. A fragment of history marked their self-inflicted defeat. Their conclusion came as innocuously as their inception.

Time evaporated as celestial bodies danced their way across the universe. Existence removed, a short-sighted concept no longer valid or required. A collective sigh drifted outwards, a whisper heard only by passing stars.

I Am a Child

I am in love with her. There are no qualifiers like "sort of" or "possibly". I wish there were.

An engulfing absoluteness. There is comfort in this certainty, but also distress at my helplessness. Conscious decision making process nullified.

The awkwardness of internal conflict is embarrassing in its immaturity. Opening my mouth reveals nothing, my inner self-deceit concealed. I am a child, uncertain, longing for the future to arrive.