

X-R-A-Y

issue

#3



marisha gene hicks // lanny durbin
juliet escoria // scott mcclanahan
derick dupre // kelby losack
ted prokash // nathaniel duggan
sam pink // benjamin scott
claire hopple

jennifer greidus // chris dankland

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**EVERYTHING GOOD
I REMEMBER ABOUT
MY REAL DAD**



MARISHA GENE HICKS

He called his old white SUV the White Elephant. We sang "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in rounds. We had a secret handshake. We celebrated unbirthdays. He made us unbirthday cakes. He taught me how to make cream cheese frosting. He taught me how to ride a bike in the park. He said I looked like a doll when I was born. He bought me a mountain bike. He let my sister and I rent *Mannequin* and *Puff the Magic Dragon* every time. When I was older he let me rent *Repo Man*. He had a three-legged dog named Lucky or maybe it was one-eyed. He was a triathlete and maybe he still is. I think he competed in IRONMAN one year. He once took us to George Strait's house when he was doing construction on it. He showed me how to use a drill. He bought me Lemon-Lime Gatorade every time he stopped for Coors tallboys. He took us to eat menudo. He bought us Sprites at the bar. He let me sip his beer. He let me take the wheel. He made a really good venison stew once. He bought us personalized clothing and jewelry and accessories. He bought us binoculars and monoculars and cool glow-in-the-dark astronomy books. He carried a beeper. I think that's it.

LIBERTY KID



LANNY DURBIN

I saw the kid's face when he got hit by the car. He was standing there on the sidewalk with a blank look and then the car jumped the curb. Just nailed him. The blank look stayed on his face when he flew through air, stared right at me. Like he meant to do it. A party trick.

He was wearing a statue of liberty costume, which, for a short moment, made the visual a little funny. He stood out in front of the Liberty Tax building a few nights a week, one of those preying fast tax return spots in the same lot as the grocery store I work in. He stole a pack of smokes out of my car one night I'm pretty sure, but he was just a kid, seventeen at max. I wished it was the regular guy standing there that day, the day shift statue. That guy danced and waved at the passing cars like he really cared. Either he would have seen the car coming and been vigilant enough to dodge it or he would've been the one to get creamed. Both seemed like better outcomes. The kid was just there for a couple extra bucks—he wore the foam green hat and matching frock with no pride and stared at his cell phone. Lady Liberty's lost disappointment of a son. The hat caught the wind and drifted away when he careened over the hood of the Nissan. It looked like he was doing a killer move on an invisible skateboard.

The EMTs showed up, cops showed up, blinking lights and stoic professionalism. They set out orange cones, scraped the kid up off the asphalt. I watched them work quickly. I stocked shelves most of the day. I opened the store and counted the till. I dealt with the customers, took the trash out, locked up the store at 9 PM. I watched the EMTs take the kid away and thought that I could probably do that. A little training and I'd be alright, but then someone would need to be here to receive the produce delivery, so I'll leave the rescue work to guys with nothing else to do.

The officer was terse when taking my statement, like, this dipshit in his work uniform better give me a straight answer. I thought, hey man, we both wear uniforms. Yours is dark blue, mine's orange and white creamsicle. We both have our names on our shirt pockets, but hey, mine's only safety pinned—they stitched yours right into the fabric. *Officer Ottman. You're locked into the force, like a blood oath. I could take my name tag off right now and disappear to a new life. I can stock shelves anywhere. A valuable skill set.*

Maybe I don't know how to hold a pistol or book a perp at the station but I do know when the frozen goods delivery is coming, what'll be on it, where to stock it. You don't have to deal with Ms. Henderson when I tell her the Amy's Chile Relleno meal was out of stock, she'll have to wait until Friday. Your stern bullying wouldn't work on her—she requires a more delicate approach. I'd like to see you be the shift supervisor in this goddamn place. I'd love to see it.

They towed the woman's Nissan away while she gave her statement. She was crying, inconsolable. Was on her cell phone and bam, jumped the curb. She probably killed a teenager but she did get to read that Facebook notification. I recognized her from the store. She came in to buy slivered almonds, which reminded me that the bulk order was due in by noon and all this police business was holding me up.

The next morning, the regular Statue of Liberty guy was out on the curb, inches from where the kid was nailed. The guy danced and waved like a real dipshit. I went out and asked him if he'd heard about the kid.

"Yeah," he said. "Heard he broke his legs and ruptured his spleen or something."

"So he'll live, huh?"

"Sounds like it."

"Can't you live about the same without your spleen?" I asked. "I think I read somewhere your liver just takes over for it."

"Heck if I know," dancing statue said with a big dopey grin. "Hey, I've got to cover his shifts until he gets back, so hopefully one can live without a spleen. I should get back to work now."

I walked back inside to the office in the backroom and googled spleens. I thought about the kid without a spleen. I read that you sure can live just about the same without one; you could just become more susceptible to infection. I thought, hey, that's not so bad, considering. Plus, working in the vitamin section here at the store, I've picked up a few things about nutrition. The kid would want to cut back on dairy fats, for starters. I decided that, if I saw him again, I'd offer the kid a job on the spot, here at the grocery store. Your life was rarely on the line in here, Nissans rarely careened into you in here.

I knew that Officer Ottman wasn't going to help the kid get back on his feet. Offer the kid a badge? Yeah right. He didn't really know anything about protecting and serving his community. I'd love to see Officer Ottman try to run this store. I'd love it.

OUTTAKE FROM JULIET THE MANIAC

JULIET ESCORIA



We waited all evening for Nicole's parents to leave, a cord of excitement running taut between the two of us. When their Land Rover finally pulled out of the driveway, we waited ten extra minutes, just in case her parents forgot something and came back. Only then did we take the rolled-up scarf from Nicole's closet, a neat package containing a lighter and two perfectly rolled joints, the result of Nicole practicing with tobacco while me and my clumsy fingers sat and watched. We took the bundle and crawled out her bedroom window onto the roof.

We pressed ourselves against the building in case her neighbors could see, lit the first joint. The days were finally starting to get longer and even though it was almost eight there were still traces of light in the air, the sky that cobalt blue right before it turns black. We held the smoke in, the way we'd seen people do in movies. It made us cough. It made us feel cool.

We'd gotten the weed from the Ryans, the only other friends we had at the Christian school. Except "friends" wasn't entirely accurate. The less cute Ryan, Ryan M, lived down the street from Nicole, so the three of us carpooled each morning. Ryan D was Ryan M's best friend. We sat together at lunch, occasionally hung out voluntarily after school and on weekends. We liked the same music and swapped mixtapes. We smoked. We got sent out of class for talking, sometimes stayed in at lunch for detention.

That was the friend part. But the Ryans could be mean. They liked to call us "flat-titted bitches." They made fun of my acne and Nicole's thick thighs. They asked us if we liked nonexistent bands and if we said we weren't sure but thought we did, they called us posers. I tried to brush it off - maybe they saw us as their little sisters - but in truth their comments made me cry. I never admitted it, not to Nicole, not to anyone, but it was hard to go into the bathroom and be confronted with the smattering of red bumps on my forehead that wouldn't go away, and not hear their nasty voices telling me I was disgusting. Saying things like "Hey pimple girl," the way they did when my skin was especially bad. It made me envision stabbing my pencil into their eyes, blood running squishy and their screams.

Also, they were always going on about all the weed they smoked. But I never saw them do it, never saw them stoned either. I'd never smoked pot before but I wanted to. Same with Nicole. But we had no idea where to get it. Partially we didn't ask them to get us some because I wasn't sure the Ryans were telling the truth, but mostly I was afraid they'd make fun of us.

One day we were sitting around Ryan M's room after school, video games because we had nothing better to do, and once again they wouldn't shut up about how they'd gotten so high that weekend, drawing out the vowels the way the skateboarders did in the skate videos we sometimes watched. Finally I got to the point where I couldn't stand it anymore so I just came right out and asked where they got it.

They were quiet for a moment, and I thought they were trying to think of some sick burns. But then Ryan D said, "None of your business," at the same time Ryan M said, "From my brother."

Then they called us dumb little babies for never having smoked pot.

"Fuck you," Nicole said.

"Yeah," I said. "Fuck you." I was so sick of their shit, of them acting like they were so much better than us when they were two stupid junior high boys, with no facial hair and skinny chests. "You're fucking lying anyway."

"Let's bounce," Nicole said.

"Good idea."

So we left. We went back to her house and watched TV.

The next day at school, they acted like nothing had happened. At lunch, they came and sat with us and were nice, asking us what we were doing that weekend and did we want to record Ryan D's new Descendants album. Nicole and I just looked at them. Yesterday we had agreed we were sick of them. This niceness was fucking everything up. And then Ryan M said if we really wanted pot, he could get us some from his brother. We pretended it wasn't a big deal, that we didn't care either way, but I could tell by the look in Nicole's eyes and the flutter in my chest that we were excited.

After we smoked the joints and felt nothing, and waited half an hour just in case, we took the rest of the "weed" and compared it to the herb jars in the kitchen. Just as we thought. It was oregano.

We should have known the weed was bunk when they didn't try to smoke it with us. We should have known the weed was bunk when Ryan D said that sometimes you had to smoke weed a couple times before you got high. But we didn't know any better, had no idea what weed was supposed to look like other than a dried green plant. And a dried green plant is what they sold us.

So we made a plan. On Wednesdays, Ryan M didn't carpool home because he had tutoring. His older brother had baseball practice every day. His mother didn't get home until at least 4. We didn't know his dad's work schedule but we figured it was a dad work schedule, and he wouldn't be home until 5 or 6.

We told Nicole's mom we were going to buy ice cream. The door to Ryan M's garage was unlocked, just like usual, tools perfectly lined up on the wall by their hooks. From there we walked into the house, and then up the stairs to his room. I kept thinking someone would catch us, his brother home sick or the cleaning lady, but then I remembered what dickheads they were, the twenty dollars they'd stolen from us, and I told myself the house was empty and it was fine and he deserved everything we'd planned for him.

We opened the door to his room. There was underwear on the floor, dingy white boxers, and the bed was unmade, but otherwise it looked the same as it always did. Posters on the wall of hot chicks and Kelly Slater. A wall of CDs, a big TV, a big stereo.

We'd bought a can of sardines a few days earlier at the grocery store. I popped it open, the metal lid flicking the nasty oil onto my hand. We put the fish where we figured he wouldn't look, grabbing them by their slimy tails. In the heating vent on the floor. Underneath the bed. I went into his closet, and Nicole boosted me up while I hid one on the top shelf, behind a plastic bin of baseball cards. His bookshelf only held old schoolbooks - a Latin dictionary, the textbook from Pre-algebra 1, *To Kill a Mockingbird* - so I pulled them out half an inch and tucked one behind. We put two behind his stereo.

Nicole went to put one in his desk drawer, but when she slid it open, she found a big rusty hunting knife. I wanted to keep it, but Nicole said she wanted it too. We stood there, trying to figure out who got to keep it. But I started thinking about Ryan M's stupid face, his cocky smile, the fact that he seemed completely unaware he was an idiot with dirty boxers on his floor. And I took the knife and stabbed it into the desk, which looked expensive and

heavy, pretending I was stabbing him. Stab stab stab. It felt so good. I imagined his screams.

Nicole laughed. The knife made neat little gashes, splitting the thick waxed coating of the desk. She took it from my hand, stabbed again. The wood splintered this time. Then I stabbed it, a whole bunch of times, hard, like I was trying to kill it. Like I was trying to get deep at the bones. Nicole did the same, yelping this time like a warrior. I was laughing. She was laughing. We were two maniacal bitches, and the Ryans would be sorry they fucked with us. I took the knife and stabbed it in the desk one final time, deep enough that it stood up straight on its own. Then we changed his radio from the rock station to a Spanish one, turned the volume up, so loud the bass crackled in the speakers, and then turned it off so the next time he went to play it, it would scare the shit out of him.

We left his house, skipping and laughing our way back to Nicole's, throwing the empty can of sardines in the gutter. My heart beat fast in a way that wasn't fear. It was beating fast with power, a warrior drum that kept me strong. It was the heartbeat of a maniacal bitch. I kept imagining Ryan M's face when he walked in and saw the knife, when he turned on the stereo, when the fish started to rot.

I hoped it made him afraid.

I hoped it made him feel small.



INTERVIEW WITH

SCOTT MCCLANAHAN

Scott McClanahan is the author of The Sarah Book, The Incantations Of Daniel Johnston, Hill William, Crapalachia, and The Collected Works of Scott McClanahan Vol. 1. He is the owner the finest small volume library in the state of West Virginia.

What's a book that first put the hook in your heart? Or if there isn't a single book or author that got you hooked on reading, maybe you can tell me what age you were when literature started playing the piper song to you.

I think I've always fetishized books. There was a ton of children's stories my mom used to read to me. "The Little Fir Tree" and "The Shoemaker and the Elves." The stories she told me about herself were just as important though. I checked out John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men from the Rainelle Public Library when I was in fifth grade. My mom said, "You'll like this. He's easy to read." I read that book the same weekend I played Tecmo Bowl for the first time. Sort of a life changing weekend. I was a weird kid though, reading a lot of biographies. Weird shit like Oliver North's autobiography and Norman Schwarzkopf.

I think probably the book that made me start discovering things was a biography of Jim Morrison called No One Here Gets Out Alive. It's embarrassing to say, but true. I found out about Antonioni, Artaud, Godard, Van Morrison, Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, Beat writers, Saint Exupery's The Little Prince. It was all stuff that I had absolutely no access to in West Virginia. That would have been in the 8th or 9th grade. I always used books to find out about other books.

I used to imagine books before I read them just simply because I couldn't find them. I don't know if we do that anymore in the age of on-line books. I used to imagine what a book was like and sadly the book was never able to measure up. I remember reading about The Executioners Song in high school for a long time before I actually found a copy. I used to read the World Book Encyclopedia and that book was mentioned in three different places, but then when I read the book I was like, "This sucks." I feel differently now, but you know.

Do you read compulsively? Do you feel like reading is an addiction for you, sometimes? What do you think is the main driving force behind your desire to read more and more books? Are you looking for something?

Yeah I'm compulsive. Reading has always been kind of weird necrophilia. I can't think of a more intimate act with a living writer as well than reading. The only thing that can compete with it is music and even that's not the same. I usually go through 2-3 books a week. I'm sure it's tied in to OCD or some slight autism. I always think of that robot from Short Circuit. Need more input. At this point I don't think I'm looking for anything. But when I find a new writer like Machado De Assis or Lu Xun (two writers I read for the first time last year) it feels like a conjuring. I may be the only person who went bankrupt buying books.

How often do you put a book down? Do you have rules about how much of a chance you'll give a book before moving on to something else? If a book doesn't catch me by page 75, I usually throw it out. But some books are late bloomers.

I don't put down any books usually. I have lists of books that I want to read. If it gets slow, I start to skim and sometimes by skimming you can get back inside the book again. Most of the times I've read about the book so much that I know I want to read it. This is what is in my Amazon cart right now.

Denton Welch, *In Youth is Pleasure*

George Perec, *Life: A User's Manual*.

Imre Kertesz, *Fatelessness*

Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms*

Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*

Sei Shonogan, *Pillow Book*

Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier*

Gustaw Herling, A World Apart

Anita Brookner, Look at Me

Hopefully someone will buy these books for me and send them to me.

You seem to read a lot of biographies, which is a big blank spot in my reading life. Can you recommend five or six great biographies that I should read this year?

Oh I don't know. I guess these are my favorites.

Elizabeth Gaskell Life of Charlotte Bronte, Richard Holmes: The Pursuit: A Life of Shelley, James Boswell: The Life of Johnson, Emanuel Carrere: Limonov; and I am Alive and You Are Dead: A Journey into the Mind of Philip K. Dick, Enid Starkie's Rimbaud and Baudelaire. Ellmann's Oscar Wilde. Judith Thurman's bio of Isak Dinesen is pretty great.

I also love a book by Gorky called Reminiscences' of Chekhov, Tolstoy and Andreyev. Not a biography, but just these little moments or impression and anecdotes. The description of Tolstoy's hands is something else and easily tells us more than a 1,000 page biography would.

Does a biographer need to be trustworthy, for you? Should a biographer carefully research a life and stick to the facts as much as possible, like a journalist? Or should a biographer just try to tell the most interesting and entertaining and compelling story they can, even if it involves exaggerating or making up lies? Does a journalist need to be trustworthy?

1.No. 2. Not necessarily. 3.Yes to an extent. 4. Yes trustworthy journalists are essential to any representative republic.

In an interview, you said: "I don't think there's a novelist today who can even compare with Robert Caro." What do you like about his biographies? What can novelists learn from him?

Oh the usual. I think all great writers have just three skills. The ability to surprise and transform, the ability to propel you through a narrative, the ability to conjure emotion or laughter in a reader. Caro and John Richardson and Hilary Spurling and Jimmy McDonough all have that. Even some of our best writers can only do two out of those three things. Somehow I feel like biography still feels sort of primal or primitive and still connected to something very old in stories and magic. They're sort of still interested in these things. Also, some of these folks are spending whole decades writing these books. I'm talking about losing homes and running through advances in order to make something. I think that's beautiful and almost monastic in the age of corporate fiction, and experimental tenure fiction.

If you had all the time in the world, whose biography would you write? (I'm thinking about a famous person or a historical person, but it could be anyone.) Would you be a trustworthy biographer?

I'm going to write about my mom and dad. So no. It's going to be a book called Vandalia or Rainelle Stories or something like that. A big family book. Like a Tristram Shandy or Rabelais almost. I'm going to see if I can't take what I've learned from these books and write about two people who are just ordinary. I'm going to write it for my kids. Been struggling for six months though so who knows. This writing shit is hard.

What are some poems or other pieces of literature that you have memorized and could recite at any time? Do you have a trick for memorizing things like that, or just have a good memory?

Oh gosh I have reams of stuff. I've known Whitcomb Riley's "Little Orphan Annie" since I was a boy. I've done that so many times in readings I'm sure people are sick of it, but it makes me think of my mom. There's some Neruda I know, a section of Under Milk Wood, John Donne always kills. I used to do a section of Virgil's Georgics in a reading. I don't know if it's a trick, but I can memorize pretty easy. I've always liked doing it in readings because it gives you an element of control. You can move around, etc. I wanted to memorize the whole of Sarah Book for these final readings I was going to do, but I ran out of time.

Who are some of the readers, living or dead, that you most admire?

I guess Amelia Gray is always the gold standard. Lindsey Hunter as well. I think Sam Pink is the most likable reader I've ever watched. He just has that quality about him. People like him. Chelsea Hodson is a great reader too. I saw Kiese Laymon read in Iowa City a few years ago and he really blew me away. It sort of feels like readings are dead now or something, but maybe that's just me. Five years ago people used to talk about them more and seem excited. Now it seems like they've dried up or something. I had a great time though at the Franklin Park Reading Series a month ago, which is easily the best reading series in the country.

Oh and I'm biased, but I saw Juliet Escoria give a reading with a video back drop in Brooklyn a few years ago. It was with some witches. One of the top three readings I've ever seen.

INTERVIEW BY CHRIS DANKLAND

SCOTT MCCLANAHAN: IMPORTANT BOOKS TO ME

The Collected Short Prose of James Agee

The Life of Alexander the Great by Plutarch

Mishima: A Biography by John Nathan

The Portable Rabelais (The Viking Portable Library) by Francois Rabelais

First Love by Ivan Turgenev

My Life by Benvenuto Cellini

An Egyptian Childhood by Taha Hussein

A Christmas Memory: One Christmas, and The Thanksgiving Visitor by Truman Capote

The Western Lands by William S. Burroughs

Pages From A Cold Island by Frederick Exley

Death On The Installment Plan by Celine

Epitaph Of A Small Winter by Machado de Assis

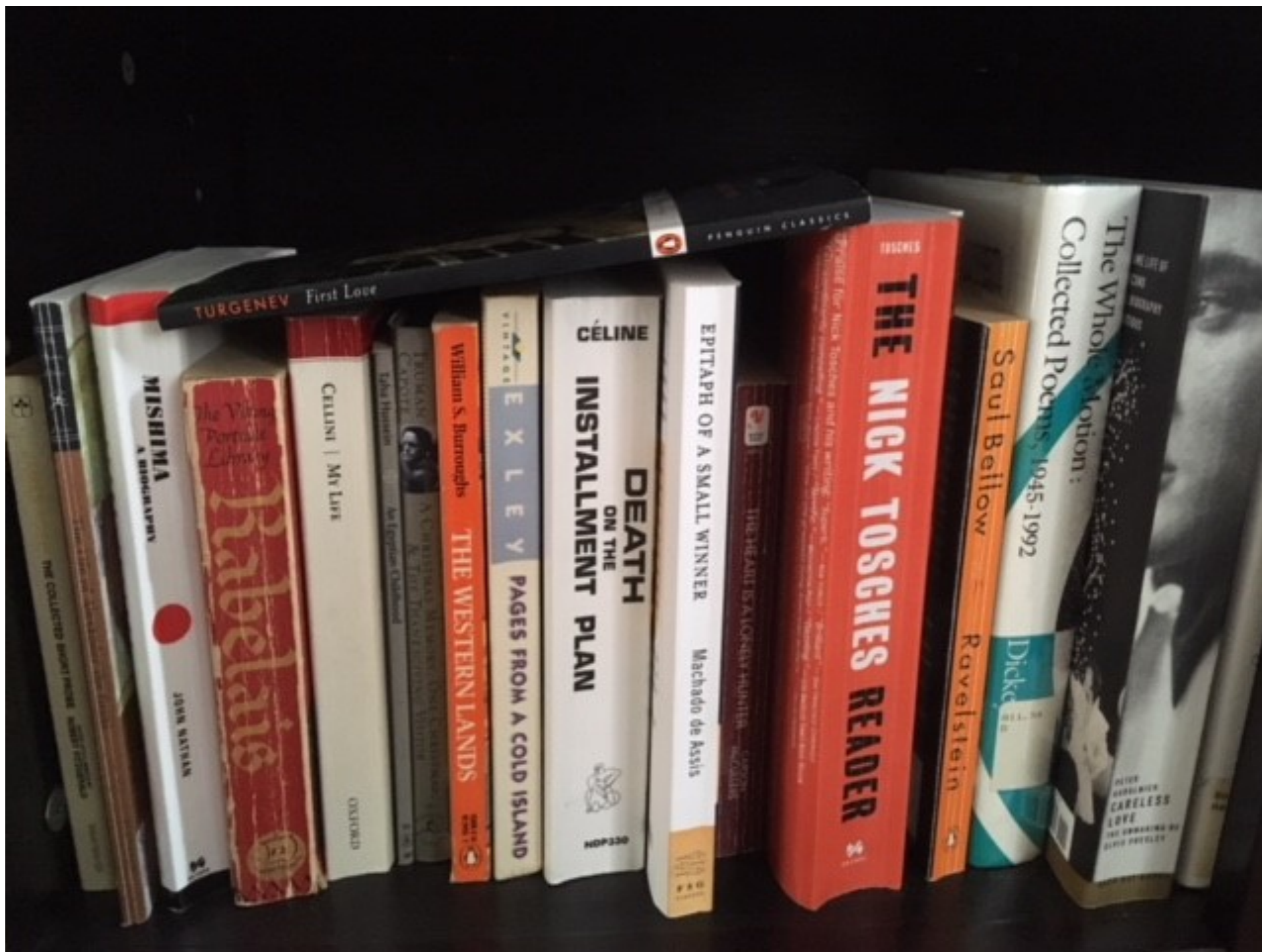
The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

The Nick Tosches Reader

Ravelstein by Saul Bellow

The Whole Motion: Collected Poems by James Dickey

Careless Love: The Unmasking Of Elvis Presley by Peter Guralnick



Tonight I'm Someone Else by Chelsea Hodson

Roughing It by Mark Twain

garden, ashes by Danilo Kis

The Garbage Times / White Ibis by Sam Pink

The Collected Essays of Elizabeth Hardwick

Gargoyles by Thomas Bernhard

Memoirs From The House Of The Dead by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes

Coma by Pierre Guyotat

The War by Marguerite Duras

The Kingdom by Emmanuel Carrere

The Anatomy Of A Moment by Javier Cercas

Dom Casmurro by Machado de Assis

Wartime Lies by Louis Begley

The Death of Artemio Cruz by Carlos Fuentes

The Atlas by William T. Vollmann



Reminiscences Of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Adreyev by Maxim Gorky

Tristram Shandy & Sentimental Journey by Laurence Sterne

Hopscotch by Julio Cortazar

Montano's Malady by Enrique Vila-Matas

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien

The Oresteia by Aeschylus

True Stories by Sophie Calle

Soldiers of Salamis by Javier Cercas

Memoirs From Beyond The Tomb by Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand

This Is Not A Novel And Other Novels by David Markson

Dark Back Of Time by Javier Marias

One Hundred Years Of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The Collected Writings Of Joe Brainard

Bartleby & Co. by Enrique Vila-Matas

King Lear by William Shakespeare

The Rings of Saturn by W.G. Sebald

Vertigo by W.G. Sebald

In Search Of Lost Time Volume 6: Time Regained by Marcel Proust

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

Les Miserables by Victor Hugo

The Gulag Archipelago by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

A detailed X-ray image of a snake skeleton, showing the vertebrae, ribs, and skull. The snake is coiled, and the image is set against a black background. The X-ray is centered on the page, with the title and author's name overlaid on it.

LITTLE CACKLES

DERICK DUPRE

A windy morning outside Denny's in Carefree. Windshields and gas pumps ping with dust. Rosettes of yucca twitch and sway. Inside it sounds like a light rain passing through. A waitress saunters up to a table where three men sit. Her dirndl skirt swishes in time to the dust, and for a moment it seems like the only sound in the world. The three men are John Huston, Rich Little, and Orson Welles. She recognizes Little right away and fangirls out in front of the two older men.

Oh my god I knew it, it's him, can I have an autograph Mr. Little? Make it out to Sue. No to Ralph.

Make it out to Ralph. Oh my god. Do Nixon. Do Bing.

Little smiles uneasily, accepting Sue's pen, knowing that in a just world she should be asking for John's or Orson's hasty scrawl, not his, not that of one whose sole talent is sounding like other people. But what do other people know, anyway. The older men fidget on the leatherette. To Ralph, he writes aloud, best, wishes, always. Rich. Little slides the napkin to Sue.

Joan! It's the man of a thousand voices! Sue shouts to a coworker. Oh my god. Do Jimmy Stewart.

Do Jack Benny. What are you doing in Carefree, Mr. Little?

Little, doing Johnny Cash, says, Well we thought we'd check up on the Carefree sundial. We were driving through and John here wanted to know the time, so I said, let's make a stop in Carefree.

Johnny Cash! Joan get over here. Oh, we do have quite the sundial, don't we, Sue says.

Joan saunters up and twitches a hip to the right, indicating Welles, and asks Little, So who's your fat friend?

Welles, nosedeeep in a menu, shifts his glance from Hot n Hearty to Lean n Low to Tempting Desserts.

Little, in a rare moment of speechlessness, slowly widens his eyes. Huston, not known for his whipcrack humor, clarifies: We actually don't know this man. We

picked him up on the highway and he seemed undernourished. We were planning to feed him and send him on his way.

Little cackles.

Huston just stares at the menu, forgetting whether or not Denny's serves scotch. Welles squirms against the leatherette. Huh. I'm not surprised. I used to work up at the Denny's up in Seligman. All kinds of freeloaders there. So, big boy, what'll you have? Sue says.

Peaches, cottage cheese, hold the rye wafers, please, Welles says, as though delivering a line he's waited his whole life to give. His order has the tone of a funeral toll. An atmospheric shift disrupts the dining room, in the way it will if somebody farts or breaks a glass. Other tables are silent. Meandering jowls now pause midchew. The dust outside is again the only sound in the world. After a few moments, Joan breaks the trance. I know that voice. I've heard that voice. Mr. Little, who's this friend of yours?

Little, doing John Wayne, says, This man here is the bravest man I know. This man staged an entire war. This man is as good as any general, the great Orson Welles.

Duke! Joan squeals.

Orson Who? Sue says. Oh my god I can't believe I'm taking Rich Little's order. What is your order, Mr. Little?

Little does Cagney, delivering his order and snapping his fingers with immense menace. Jumbo Dennyburger, got it? Hold the lettuce, I don't wanna see no lettuce at all. Cook it well-done - bravo, you got it? There better be extra ketchup, and a coffee.

Sue can hardly contain her squealing. Extra ketchup! Did you hear that Joan? Jimmy Cagney - she winks at Little - wants extra ketchup! Of course! Well-done!

Huston sighs and says, Is there any chance you have single malt.

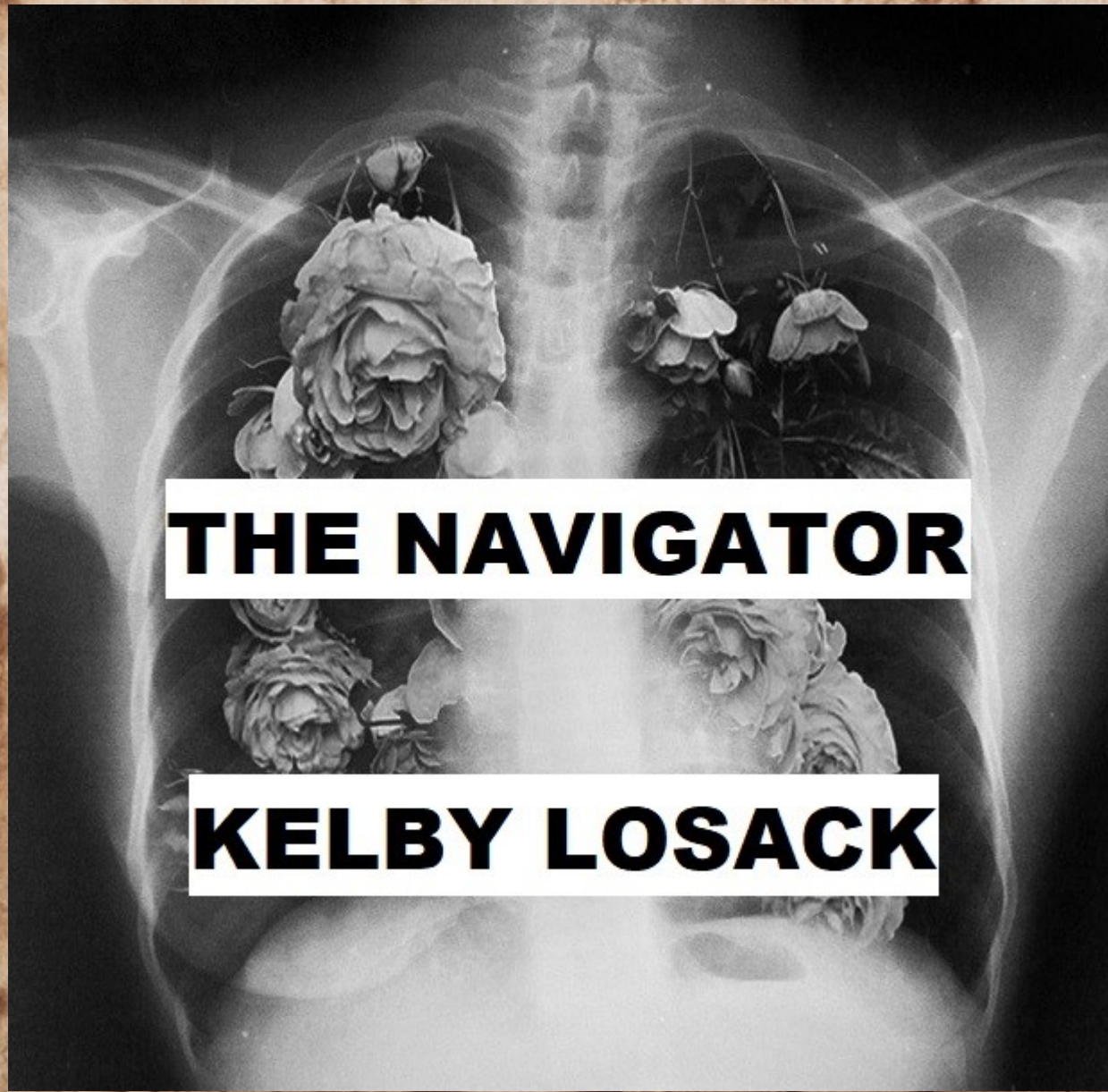
We have all kinds of rich and creamy malts sir, yes.

Huston looks at Welles, indicating he's run out of fucks to give. I'll just have a coffee, please.

Two coffees all day. And what'll your fat friend have to drink?

Welles fidgets and thinks of Oja, of her love and cunning, thinks by now she would've stabbed one of these women. He thinks of something rich and creamy. A hot tea, please, with a slice of lemon.

Another atmospheric disruption befalls the Denny's in Carefree, Arizona. The dust sings. Joan says, I don't know who that man is but he sure knows how to talk.



THE NAVIGATOR

KELBY LOSACK

Because your friends are assholes, they toss us in the trunk in the sixty-nine position.

They duct-taped my ankle to the steel rod of my prosthetic leg. I don't even know how to feel about that.

You think that twin telepathy shit is real?

Check, one, two.

Nod your head or something if you hear me.

How are we getting out of this alive?

One-two, one-two.

Fuck.

We're going to die, huh?

Check, check, one, two.

If I had any memories of being in the womb with you, I think being curled up next to you in this cramped darkness would trigger some flashbacks. Nod your head if you feel me.

I can't imagine where your friends might be taking us. This ride is bumpy as fuck, though. Remember learning how to drive? We couldn't see where we were going then, either. Too small to see over the wheel, so we learned how to drive by the feel of the road. I was always careful not to keep the wheel too straight, swerving this way and that, like I'd learned from watching Mom. Always thought of her driving all over the road as her version of rocking us to sleep. It usually did the trick, except for when she'd slam on the brakes and laugh hysterically at some shit we weren't privy to,³¹ reaching back with a hand that always shook,

saying, "You okay back there, babies?"

Then there was the time she didn't so much slam on the brakes as she did just let off the gas and sink into the driver's seat, hands sliding to her lap, head bobbing against her shoulder in rhythm with the tall grass blades slapping the rearview mirror. I don't remember if that was the first time we rock-paper-scissored for who would drive/who would navigate standing in the shotgun, but it wasn't the last time, I know that.

Those times, when we took Mom by the underarms and ankles and sort of carried/sort of dragged her gently as we could into the backseat—thankful she didn't weigh much more than the pitbull we had at the time—she always smelled like burning plastic, like when we'd use one of her lighters to pretend those little green soldiers had real flamethrowers. Same way she smelled when we found her the last time, slumped against her bedroom door, not waking up.

That first time we drove Mom's car out of a ditch, it was you standing in the seat, telling me which way to turn as I steered blindly with my foot reaching down to the pedal, my chin ready to get smacked by the airbag if I fucked this up and crashed us into something. I was too scared to take us all the way home, so you told me where to turn into a gas station parking lot and that's where we stayed until Mom woke up several hours later and she was so proud of us, she gave us some money and said, "Go inside and get you some candy, and bring Momma a pack of cigarettes," but the clerk wouldn't let us buy cigarettes, so we came out empty-handed and she said, "Fine, I'll get it," and she adjusted her hair and bra strap and checked her teeth in the mirror then staggered inside and when she came back out, she didn't have any candy, but we didn't say anything about it.

Check, check.

One-two, one-two.

Are you hearing any of this?

You know, come to think of it, you were always³² the one navigating, and I was always the

blind driver.

That's why I can't blame you for any of this.

Your friends are going to kill us—probably tell us to run off into the woods and then shoot us in our backs—and yeah, it might be 'cause I freaked out thinking the neighbor's TV was a real police raid and went and flushed all the dope down the toilet, but this is your fault, too. I was just the one steering.

Still, I can't blame you.

And if we could go back, I'd probably do it again, because without you, I'd be lost.

Nod your head if you can hear me.

Check, check, one, two.



THE PASSENGER

TED PROKASH

Raymond pulled into a Love's Travel Center somewhere in southern Indiana, shortly before dawn. Their routine for stops had been well established by now. Walter went inside to piss and buy snacks, while Raymond paid for and pumped the gas.

Raymond was STRESSED. He was rather high-anxiety to begin with... and the mission he and Walter were undertaking would have anybody nervous. But Raymond had been prepared for all that. The problem was the mission had gotten off on the wrong foot logistically. He had planned to have his car - a 2004 Subaru Outback with low millage - all freshly serviced for the trip. But he'd run into certain logistical stumbling blocks, circumstances beyond his control, etc. Now, here they were, somewhere in southern Indiana, overdue for an oil change and with 3,000 miles left to drive.

Raymond checked the oil, fretting. He decided to add a quart to be on the safe side.

"Fuck you doin', man?" Walter inquired quite amicably, a bag of spicy pork rinds in one hand and a 20-oz Red Bull in the other.

Raymond bristled underneath the hood, concentrating on pouring the oil through the little paper funnel. He was already getting tired of Walter's lack of seriousness. "I'm trying to make sure we don't break down somewhere in the fucking Appalachian Mountains, that's what," he said.

"Shit, man, I thought you had this whip all tightened up. Don't freeze our here now," Walter advised as he ducked inside the car.

It was damn cold, even 500 miles south of home.

*

Somewhere south of Louisville, Kentucky. Dawn breaking in the eastern sky. Walter had his phone plugged into the Subaru's cigarette lighter, playing rap music at a moderate volume. The airwaves around these parts were dominated³⁵ by country music, bible thumpers and right-wing firebrands. The Subaru was equipped with a CD player, but of course, the CDs themselves

were all in landfills. Since Raymond mistrusted cell phone technology, Walter was in charge of the music - largely by default. Raymond would have preferred to drive in silence, not because he didn't like the music, but because the demands of the mission made a constant clamor in his mind, requiring his constant diligent attention. "What are we listening to?" he asked.

"Lil B," Walter said. Then, in response to Raymond's honky silence, "Lil B the BasedGod. We can turn something else on if you want. I think I got some... Metallica on here... some Alice In Chains and shit."

Raymond waved it off. "No, this is good. I just didn't recognize it." Walter offered him the bag of pork rinds. "No thanks."

Walter picked out a choice piece of pig skin and halved it with a crunch that rang out over the down-low stylings of the BasedGod. Crunch, crunch. "There was some fucked up graffiti in that bathroom back there, man."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. There was the usual shit, you know, pictures of dicks, gay shit, so and so is a ho at this phone number. But there was some raw racist shit too, fucking swastikas. 'Only good nigger's a dead nigger', 'Hitler was right', 'Kill the Jews'..."

"Fucking Christ!" Raymond spat. "Fucking ignorant hicks. Like, I get that the Nazi imagery was a thing with the early punk bands and shit. The Stooges did it, a lot of those bands did, but the time for that shit is past." Raymond shook his head. "That kind of shock value's just not relevant anymore, man."

The two drove on in a thoughtful silence.

Miami, Florida. Seventy five degrees in the dead of winter, the sunshine infusing everything like an extremely clean form of speed.

Raymond and Walter were ragged, strung out from the road. After 24 hours of hard driving, they'd finally pulled over under a tall palm tree on a quiet side street about a hundred and fifty feet from Iggy Pop's door. Here they waited out the small hours of morning, watching for any sign of their mark. As the sun climbed in the sky, Walter started getting restless. "Man, I gotta get a coffee or something," he said, stretching and rubbing his eyes.

"We can't give up our position now," Raymond said.

Walter was less than impressed. "Man, if anybody's worried about us, they know we're here already. I saw a little place a block back that way and a block back down the street we came in on. I'm going to take a walk. You want anything?"

Raymond grumbled under his breath. "Coffee," he said.

Fine time for him to make a scene, Raymond thought. He screwed up his eyes and studied the house for any kind of movement. He hadn't slept more than an hour in the last twenty four and he'd hardly eaten a thing, but Raymond was wired. They were so close now. If they pulled this off...

Raymond took a warm swig of water from a bottle he found under his seat.

This whole crazy plan was only a couple weeks old, but the impetus behind it had been brewing for longer than Raymond had been alive. The zeitgeist of popular despair, the American cultural train wreck, speeding toward a suicide soma solution... Iggy was one of the original reactionaries to this very thing, one of the first to test the merits of kamikaze art. Then, the suicide trip was rushed to crescendo by the digital revolution, you know, *'watch out now 'cause I'm using technology'*... Raymond knew intrinsically that Iggy was someone who might be able to give him, if not answers, at least some perspective, some idea.

Then, the chance encounter with the record collector from Miami. Raymond was soliciting a

first pressing of the first Stooges album. This cat happened to mention that - slap my ass and I'll be damned - Iggy Pop lived a block from his home. He sees him quite regularly. That's when Raymond had his thunderbolt revelation. It was like he was visited by an angel that said, "Go and seek Iggy out. In him you will find the truth." He brought Walter along because - well, for one thing, Walter was easy company - but most of all, Walter was a gun person. He was always strapped. Touched by an angel or not, Raymond was still practical. The great Iggy Pop might need a little convincing as to the righteousness of his mission.

Walter returned from his coffee run. He climbed into the car, whistling to himself, making no attempt at all to be inconspicuous. The Subaru filled with the smell of deep fried something.

"What are those?" Raymond asked with a testy edge. The smell was doing a number on his voracious senses and his knotted gut.

"Oh, these? These croquettes. They're delicious, man, have some."

Raymond popped a croquette into his mouth. "That is good." He noticed Walter had come back with just one small cup of coffee. "They run out of coffee?"

"Hmm? Oh, no man. This Cuban coffee. This enough for both of us." Walter put the coffee on the dash and set out two plastic cups the size of thimbles. "See, how they make it is they pack the sugar in the bottom, then they put the coffee on top - and it's strong coffee..." Walter paused mid-sentence. "Is that your boy right there?" he said, pointing casually.

Raymond looked up and, sure enough, there he was: the weird and wiry street-walking cheetah, in the flesh and a dark pair of sunglasses. Whether or not his heart was still full of nappalm, was exactly what Raymond intended to find out.

Iggy crossed the street and walked right at the Subaru, coming up on the passenger side.

"He's coming to your side, man, stop him!" Raymond panicked.

Walter leaned out of the window, still casual. "Hey, excuse me sir. Can we talk to you for a minute?"

Iggy peered inside the car, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. "What's up, brother?" That unmistakable snarl.

Raymond's excitement bubbled over. He practically climbed on top of Walter. "Hey Iggy. We'd just like a few moments of your time. Just a few questions. Is there someplace we can go to talk?"

Iggy recoiled. "I'm sorry guys, I'm just trying to go down the street and get a cup of coffee, alright?"

"Well, we could come with you. I'll buy you a cup..."

"Listen, you're going to have to get a hold of my agent if you want an interview." Iggy began to retreat.

That's when Walter, in a motion that was lightning-quick yet somehow unhurried, pulled his 9-millimeter and pointed it square at the godfather of punk. "Tell you what man, why don't you just get in the car. We'll go for a ride and have a little talk. No problems." Walter motioned toward the back seat. "Just get in the car."

Iggy took a step toward the Subaru, his palms turned up. He reached tentatively for the handle of the car door. But instead of opening the door he brought his hand down in a fast karate chop, knocking the 9-mm into Walter's lap. He took off like a shot.

"Shit man!" Walter fumbled for the gun. Iggy was already sprinting down an alley.

Raymond opened his door. Then he shut it again. "What the fuck are you doing, man!? You pull your fucking piece?!"

"That old boy's quicker than shit! You see that?"

Raymond fired up the Subaru and peeled off. He whipped a U-turn and took a left. They spotted Iggy running down a busy street. "Fuck!" Iggy ducked into a little shopping center, out of sight. "Fuck! What do we do?"

"Just keep driving, man," Walter advised. Raymond tried to pull over and park, but they were caught in a heavy wave of traffic. "Ray, I aint gonna jump out this car and chase that motherfucker down, I don't know about you. Just keep driving."

Iggy was fucking gone.

*

Somewhere south of Atlanta, Georgia. Beating a mad retreat from Miami, from their failed mission. Panic and shame running 80 miles per hour. Walter was at the wheel. Raymond was next to him, not asleep, but practically catatonic with despair.

The flow of traffic started getting heavy. They were nearing the city. Walter flipped on the right turn signal and eased the Subaru into the far right lane. He veered onto an exit ramp.

"What are you doing? This is a weird place to pull off. Why don't you get us past the city at least?"

"We gotta make a stop here."

"This is a bad place, man. We need to put some miles between us and that... that fucking mess back there." Raymond shook his head. "I still can't believe you pulled your fucking gun."

Walter wore that half-smile that never seemed to leave his face. He maintained the calm demeanor that seemed his permanent state. "You remember where I'm from, Raymond?"

Raymond squeezed the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger, shutting his eyes tightly. "Yeah... um, you're from Georgia. Somewhere in Georgia."

Walter smiled. "That's right. Little hood outside of Atlanta called Park Heights. You know how I'm always so chill at work? How I just laugh when people be freakin' out about their kid's got a cold, or their transmission goes out or some shit? I'm just thinking how back in Park Heights you got to worry about gettin' shot just walkin' down the fucking street."

"That's fucked up," Raymond admitted.

"Yup. Now Raymond, why do you think I agreed to drive all this way with you, looking for some old grandpa motherfucker used to sing in some rock band? I know you wanted me along for muscle, Ray, 'cause I got a gun. I know that shit." He put his hand on Raymond's shoulder, chuckling.

"Dude, my whole family is here. All my old friends, my moms..."

Raymond was quiet for a while. He had never considered that they'd be driving right by Walter's old stomping grounds. He watched the city filling in around them. "Can we get some food, at least?"

Walter put on a hurt expression. "Man we're visiting my mom. She will cook for your ass. That's called southern hospitality. You motherfuckers up in Wisconsin might not know about that shit."

Walter guided the Subaru through a typical urban tableaux. Check cashing places, liquor stores, fried chicken stands. Folks hanging out on front stoops, sipping from bottles sheathed in brown paper bags, watching the traffic with long, bored looks.

"We're gonna get you some soul food, Raymond."

An X-ray image of a crab, showing its internal skeletal structure and organs. The crab is positioned centrally against a black background. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text overlays to be clearly visible.

IMITATION CRABMEAT

NATHANIEL DUGGAN

Dad spends Christmas Eve on the beach killing green crabs, before he returns home to turn on all the holiday lights. The house flashes and dazzles like a landing strip. The sky, meanwhile, looks foreclosed.

"You should've seen the fuckers," he tells me, pinching his fingers to imitate claws. "Some of them big as your face."

He has no heat, furniture, or future, so we sit in lawn chairs in the living room, our breath glowing like neon. His expression is sour-smug: he is a man who knows his own expiration date. When he dies shortly thereafter—without complication—I bury him in the garden and discover the action figures he stole from me during my youth to prove important points. There they all are tucked an inch below the soil, dirt-clotted and tangled in rhododendron roots.

I crack a beer, plotting my next move.

I spend maybe a few too many years sitting alone in dark living rooms at 3AM.

People claim I approach them with slanted intentions. I am between jobs and lovers. I live as an alleyway, defined mostly by the clutter and the things I keep apart.

For the sake of staying busy, I steal my last friend's wife. The friend himself cannot be reached for comment; he has long since scuttled off to some forgotten corner of Alaska. As for the wife, she drinks.

This works out pretty well until it doesn't. We drink too much too early, spend most of our days passing out. Our lives live outside and without us, and we are perpetually slumped against the kitchen cabinets or else spread-eagled on the bathroom floor, piecing together where we last left off: usually the entangling business of her bra.

Sleep scrubs her skin as pale and thin as a bedsheet. Her eyes close into her face. She fades, recedes into the background of herself,⁴³ until all that's left is a mapped suggestion of a person, pure theory and postulation.

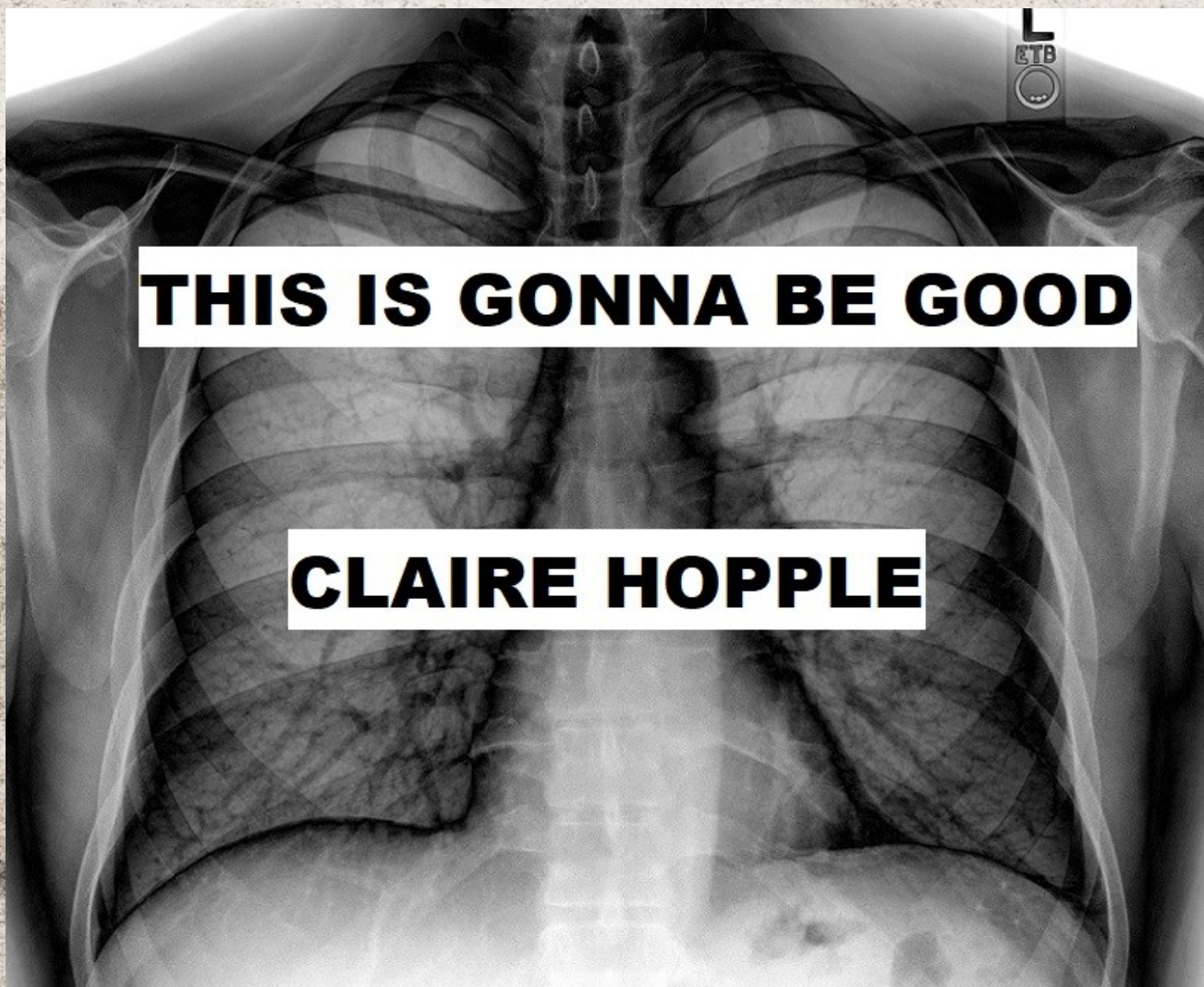
On the other hand I grow puffy, weighted with my somnolence. I develop certain unsociable tendencies, namely clamming and a technique of eating Chinese food by the fistful. By the time I notice her absence, she's already gone.

What do you do with so much nothing? Me, I leave the clams to die in the basement. Whole pounds of them, just slowly dying. They make little screaming noises throughout the night, but it's one of those things like lobsters: you're not sure if they're really screaming or if it's just the water compressing inside their shells or whatever.

Lately the rum I drink has taken on the plastic tang of action figures.

Lately my heart is the size of a face.

Midsummer I set up Christmas lights. I drape the bannisters, hedges, drainpipes. The bulbs throb sickly, pulsate underfoot like crabs on the march. This accomplished, I stumble into the front yard, chug the last of my cocktail. The house swims in my vision, so lucid I can't look at it straight on. For a while I feel that I am expecting the arrival of something, until I realize I am expecting to have finally arrived somewhere else.



"Do you know where Bernie is?" a stranger asked the man as he was headed in to change.

"Not sure. I think I saw him in the parking lot a minute ago," said the man, trying to be helpful to the stranger even though he was technically a stranger.

"Who's Bernie?" the stranger then asked.

"I thought you were looking for Bernie. How can you be looking for him if you don't know who he is?"

"Why can't I be looking for someone I don't know?"

The man had had enough. He went inside to change for his shift so he wouldn't be late. Coming back out to the main room in full garb, he saw Bernie picking a bandaid off the plaque in the corner. It read: PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH, was engraved and everything, but was screwed into the wall high enough so that it was unclear what one wasn't supposed to touch. The bandaid was covering the word "NOT" rather defiantly.

"I think that was someone from the Association," said Bernie.

The bandaid was flapping at the edge of his middle finger, successfully dislodged from the plaque. Bernie peeked at the gauze portion to see if it was used before tossing it into the trash.

"The Association?"

"Yes, The Association for Living History Farm and Agricultural Museums. Those guys."

The man didn't know such an association existed, had just started this job a few months ago, but didn't want to rankle Bernie even more by asking followup questions.

"This place is not in shape for visits from the Association. This could be bad. I don't want to end up like the settlement. You know what happened to Todd at Jamestown."

The man tried not to remember what happened to Todd at Jamestown. It was Bernie's standard cautionary tale for when anything went wrong.

He knew what this was really about. Tourists would rather drive eight miles out of the way to visit the wildlife refuge than come here. There, exotic animals appeared unencumbered by civilization. Their labyrinthine pathways seemed especially natural and created a pleasant plume of dirt when you scuffed your feet along them.

The man visited once but didn't want to go back. The animals looked mutinous and the humans hypnotic. He had found a cage marked "Horned Viper" that appeared empty and struggled not to apply any meaning to it. Push pop carapaces littered the paths. Maybe we should be handing out push pops, the man thought.

*

Power lines buzzed above him on his way to the coffee shop. The buzzing forced him to imagine what impulses were being carried across right then, directly over his head. He entered, ordered, found a nice table near the wall of windows at the front. Outside, a woman was telling a rather animated story to her friend on the bench up against the window. She was gesturing high enough to look like she was reaching to give the man a high five.

He unceremoniously gulped his to-go cup and waited. The sleeve on the cup kept slipping and he thought about the frustrating nature of gravity, but also wondered why the barista had given him a portable cup rather than a mug. Did she expect him to leave?

He was not leaving. He was meeting a manager or director of some sort from an in-home aide service.

The man's father was not doing well. In fact, ⁴⁷the man was pretty sure his father was gradually becoming a recluse. His father had mentioned something about conch shells, how he could

hear the sound of muffled waves just as clearly from pressing a mug to his ear as he could from a shell found near the wave's end. At the time, he figured his father was just lonely or perhaps becoming a poet. He thought about getting him a no-nonsense pet, something that didn't require a lot of maintenance, like a turtle. But the pets that require the least amount of maintenance also seem to provide the least amount of comfort.

Plus, the turtle was sure to outlive his father. And what was the man ultimately going to do with a turtle once his father passed, especially one that he indirectly inherited from himself?

The man wasn't sure about the in-home care thing since his father was in very good physical condition. He didn't know if reclusive tendencies was a box you could check on a form. But mental health is just as important, he thought.

And people talk about nervous breakdowns but maybe it doesn't have to be like that. If you lean into it, accept the madness creeping over you, maybe it can be a peaceful adjustment. Like slipping into warm bath water. Like the gradual murk clouding the waters in a turtle tank.

She was late.

Being a historical interpreter mostly meant advising visitors to hold on to the railing along the stairs. Telling kids as well as adults, "Everyone has to hold on. No one is above hanging on."

It also meant trying to fuse history with the present to a horde of students on field trips and retirees finally able to travel. And they came to this vaguely colonial site to hear about farming practices and blacksmithing techniques while the jake brakes of semis shuddered on the overpass. A submissive, sonorous percussion giving into the slope.

The man had applied, desperate for a way out of a misleading corporate position. He had been told travel would take up around 25% of his time but it was actually closer to 40%. The man's ears kept popping and clogging from elevation changes to the point where he could no

longer hear what went on in the meetings, the ones the company thought were worth flying the man hundreds of miles to attend, 40% of the time.

He suspected he landed this job with absolutely no interpreting experience merely because he was a man. With no battle scenes to reenact and no weapons to wield, the staff was mostly made up of women. Guys thought the big show was in Williamsburg. But these women wielded plowshares and ironwork and could maintain the fields far better than he could.

Some of the reenactors used to be street performers and some thought they deserved to slough off the first few letters entirely, transforming purely into actors.

The only other male on staff was Ames, an aspiring magician, who practiced tricks when things were slow. The man wasn't impressed with his tricks. They were sloppy and unrehearsed. And also because what doesn't disappear? What doesn't eventually dissolve on its own?

Ames fumbled through stunts. He muttered things like, "I'll get the hang of it. It's just muscle memory. Like learning guitar." But he wasn't improving. Ames would say things like "This is gonna be good," and "Wait, we're getting to the good part," which totally diffused any possibility for goodness in the impending act.

Muscle memory isn't always ideal, the man kept to himself. Isn't it just practicing an action over and over until it's automatic? So that if every action were purely muscle memory, your whole life would be forgotten before it's even gotten? The man thought about all of this while he nodded to Ames, polished the spinning wheel display.

*

The man had come to expect two things from his father. First, he wasn't going to let an aide swing by his home a few days a week. This was less of a suspicion and more of a reality, since his father had already kicked out the aide within the first hour. Second, his father wasn't going to go out into the world anymore, but he could let some of the more entertaining parts of the world in.

So he drove Ames out to the house, switching out his straw farmer hat for a tall black one. They parked next to his father's overly reinforced mailbox. His father understood the importance of mail but also understood the power of baseball bats and midnight teenage angst.

He made Ames tuck his long hair into a skinny ponytail. Ames had that mangled look caused by hair that'd been dyed for decades, like split and dried firewood stacked indoors. Just like the man's mother used to have.

A song played on the radio in the car but it didn't sound right. After listening for a few seconds, the man realized what was off about it. This song had become such a popular choice for karaoke that the original now sounded like a remake. No squeals or squawks or jumbled lyrics. It stuck out precisely because it was performed so cleanly.

The man gave Ames an encouraging pat on the shoulder before shutting off the engine and opening the door.

INTERVIEW WITH SAM PINK



BENJAMIN SCOTT

Sam Pink is the author of a dozen books, including *Person*, *The No Hellos Diet*, *Hurt Others*, and *Witch Piss*. I interviewed him about his latest book ***The Garbage Times/White Ibis***, his paintings, and his time living in Florida.

BS: You lived in Chicago for a while but several years ago you moved to Florida. What sparked the move and why have you moved back to Chicago?

SP: I moved to Florida for the person I was dating. I moved back when we broke up.

BS: Sorry to hear about that. Does Chicago seem different? Where is the best place to eat in Chicago?

SP: Yes, it seems different, in that I view it differently but also that it is has slightly changed. The best place to eat is *Arturo's* on Western.

BS: You have a book coming out next month that contains two novellas: *The Garbage Times/White Ibis*. What are they about?

SP: *The Garbage Times* is about working at a bar in Chicago. *White Ibis* is about moving to Florida. They are also about a whole range of other things, both intended and unintended.

BS: Are you planning on doing any public readings? Or attending writer events/conferences?

SP: Yeah I have some readings set up, and hopefully more this year. I enjoy doing readings. I went to AWP this year as well.

BS: Your last book came out in 2014 you spent most of the past couple years painting while in Florida. How were the hurricanes?

SP: The hurricanes, where I was at, were very mild. I had an experience during one of them though. I went to my girlfriend's parents' house to hunker down because the news made it seem like the entire state was going to die. And as the time for the storm drew nearer, I

had a panic attack (like heart racing and unable to stop thinking/calm down) consisting of envisioning the storm hitting, like visualizing the destruction of the wind, the walls of the house coming down and being pulled away by water, trying to save people, dying, etc., which continued to escalate in a way that was hard to endure, but then when I identified that there was a bad storm coming, and nowhere I could go, and that I'd have to try and survive and help the people around me survive as best I could, and that was just how it would be, I immediately became calm, and almost at the same time, the storm changed course and weakened and became nothing.

BS: How many paintings do you think you made?

SP: Including drawings, probably 200/250 or so.

BS: Do you plan on doing more?

SP: Yes, I just don't have a place to paint right now.

BS: Did you ever take any art classes in school?

SP: I took an art class in high school, which was basically like a crafts class/babysitting class.

BS: Why are art teachers quirky?

SP: Some spirits do different dances to get out.

BS: Where did you work while living in Florida?

SP: I was a dishwasher, a home remodeller, a medical warehouse employee, a machine operator, and an ice cream man. I interviewed to be a mortuary driver, but felt like the protocol of only sending me and not two people to pick up ⁵³dead bodies was unreasonable.

BS: What is the worst/weirdest job you've ever had?

SP: (lights cigarette and looks off to side) Being me, dude.

BS: Are you working since you've moved back to Chicago?

SP: Not really, I'm looking for a job.

BS: How would you describe your books?

SP: I wouldn't describe them. That's what the words inside are for. Plus I honestly think other people understand what the books are about better than me, based off what they've told me throughout the years.

BS: Would you consider your books socially political as many of the characters/narrators are not out in front of society?

SP: Yes, in that you can interpret almost anything politically/socially. But no, in terms of any explicit ideas.

BS: Do you have a writing process? Do you make notes or have any habits? Does it take you a long time to write a book?

SP: Kind of. Usually I have a bunch of notes I've written down, or scenes I want to write, and then begin developing them. Usually takes a year to write a book.

BS: What inspired you to first start writing and painting?

SP: My spirit.

BS: While following your painting output I've noticed they tended to get bigger and the patterns/colors would change. When painting do you just use whatever materials are around or do you seek out certain colors brush's medium etc? Do you still have paintings for sale?

SP: I used to, and sometimes still do, use whatever is around. It helps to break patterns, and different tools do different things. But I have also gotten into purchasing art supplies, like specific colors, canvases, etc. I have two paintings for sale still.

BS: Do you work on one project (book/painting) at a time or do you jump between them? Are many of your paintings related to the content of any of your books?

SP: Usually one at a time. My mind usually tells me when to switch. Like if I feel less enthused about writing, then I switch, and vice versa. None of the paintings are directly related, but I have used them for book covers, etc., and also, I reference painting in *White Ibis*.

BS: Are there any authors that influenced your writing style?

SP: Yeah, but more in the way that they encourage me to 'tag in' and contribute, rather than giving me style points. I feel more influenced to 'do something' when encountering stuff that inspires me, rather than, 'I should do stuff like that.' Style is personality. Your personality is your style. Even if you're writing about aliens, those are aliens from your personality.

BS: How do you feel about the current political climate in the USA and globally?

SP: Haha, man...

BS: Do you listen to podcasts? Which ones?

SP: No.

BS: How many cats do you have? What are there names?

SP: I have two, Benny and Dotty.

BS: Which authors/books do people need to read now?

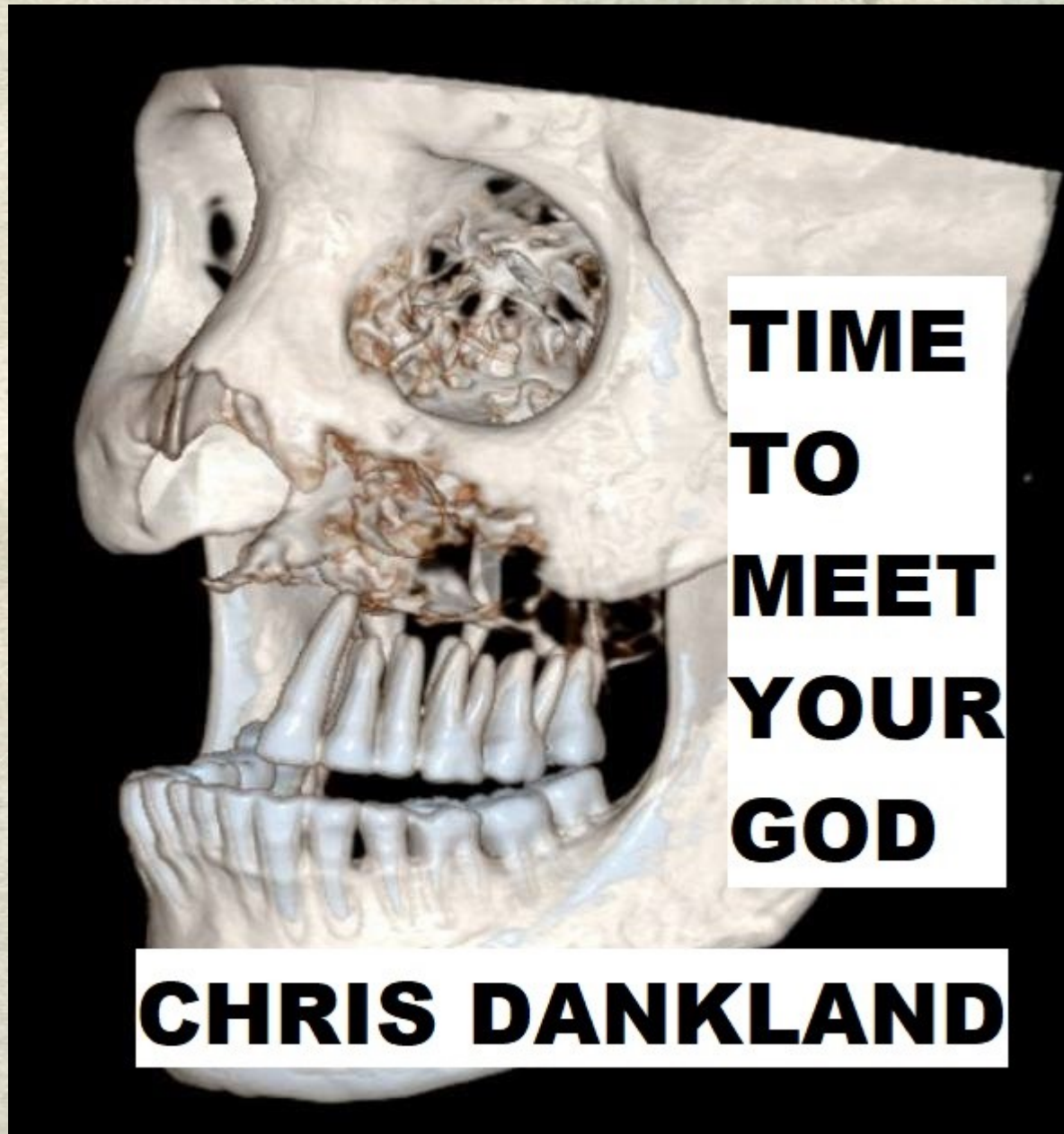
SP: Oh man, too many to list and remember right now. I try to support as many of them as I can, with what ability I have. But there's a crop coming up that is kablooey. There are writers and painters and other people coming up right now that are doing a lot to make me excited. Don't worry about them just yet, they will announce when they're ready. One book people need to for sure read is *Welfare* by Steve Anwyll, coming out this fall from Tyrant Press. They have paid me nothing to say this.

BS: Why should people buy your book and where can they buy it?

PS: Because it will entertain them and maybe do other weird things with their mind and because I'm a sweetheart. They can order now through Soft Skull Press, or through various online and physical locations on may 1st when it comes out.

BS: Are you working on any future projects now?

SP: Yes, I'm working on a book of short stories that is pretty much done. It's called *The Ice Cream Man and Other Stories*.



Mr. Coyote stuck his long down-curved nose through a crack in his apartment door. He pushed his head outside and looked left. He sniffed the stale apartment building hallway. He looked right. Nobody there. Thirty seconds later he left his posh 30th floor apartment holding a big bag of trash slung over his shoulder. He was wearing black gloves. Mr. Coyote calmly walked down the hall, opened the building trash chute, and dumped the bag of trash down the chute. He looked left. He sniffed the stale apartment building hallway. He looked right. And that, he thought, is the end of that.

Three hours ago, he'd been staring at a traveling collection of paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder. The paintings were showing at the MoMA. They were exquisite. His favorite was a painting called *Venus*, showing a petite naked woman holding a transparent veil. Her eyes were thin and cat-like. Her thin pink lips were dented in a narcotic grin. Mr. Coyote couldn't help but get as hard as a rock as he stared at her perfect painted skin. The true sign of a masterpiece.

The painting was still superimposed over his brain as he walked out the museum doors into the hot summer air, heavy with the smell of street piss and exhaust. Under his breath he absentmindedly mumbled the lyrics to Mystic Stylez as he strolled down the sidewalk a long way. Mr. Coyote suddenly looked up. He stopped. A petite teenager in a red t-shirt and jeans was passed out on the street, half leaning on a park gate. She obviously homeless. A thin layer of grime had accumulated sweat coated her skin. Her emaciated body spelled out junkie. Mr. Coyote though she was gorgeous. He walked closer and looked down at her. Two braless nipples poked through her skimpy t-shirt. Her jeans hung off her sharp skeleton hips, showing a small white lip of panties around the edge. Her thin pink lips were dented in a narcotic grin. Mr. Coyote put his hands in his pockets and moved them around.

A minute later he pulled out a bottle of Oxycontin. He bent down and shook the girl's shoulder, shaking the pill bottle. Hey, he said, shaking her. Hey there. Do you see?

The girl stirred and slowly opened her eyes. She must have been doped up to seventh heaven. Anyone else who had been woken up in that position would have bolted upright. But this girl nearly climbed into his arms. Her eyes slowly flickered to life like a newborn butterfly. The girl looked up at him. She moaned, her body full of sleep. Daddy? she mumbled. Is that you, daddy?

He held the pill bottle inches before her face and shook it. That seemed to wake her up a little. Holy shit, she said.

That's right, said Mr. Coyote. Holiest thing in the city.

She slowly looked up at him with purring kitten eyes. What do you want? she asked.

I want you to follow me home, said Mr. Coyote. Understand?

She nodded. I'll follow you home, Daddy. She stood up, stumbling a little. Her clothes sagged off her. She was halfway dead already. Lead the way, she said.

Mr. Coyote shook his head. You walk in front of me and I'll tell you the way.

The girl grinned. But I'm so little, Daddy, I'm not gonna hurt you.

It doesn't take much muscle to slip a knife into somebody's kidney and make off with their pills, he said.

She laughed. Do you have a cigarette?

Sure, he said. What kind do you smoke.

I don't care, whatever you got. I like Camel Lights.

Mr. Coyote put his hands in his pocket and moved them around. A minute later he pulled out a pack of Camel Lights.

Thank you, Daddy. She pulled a cigarette from the pack and he lit it for her. Where'd you get that big bottle from, hmm?

Mr. Coyote put the cigarette pack in his pocket, pulled his hand out again, and pointed. My apartment is that way, he said.

She took a long drag and turned around and started walking. A long silver river of smoke curved through the city air as she moved from one cracked cement square to another with Mr. Coyote close behind. They walked four blocks like that, and she hardly turned around to look at him. She could feel his gaze on her body. She knew that he was following her as much as she was following him. Her tiny skeleton ass was fastened to his black, flesh devouring pupils. She was going to get high, all right. And anything else she could get, too. She was young and confident and stupid.

Back at his apartment, Mr. Coyote had her get on her knees and open her mouth to receive the pills he doled out. He put the pills on her tongue like a priest giving out the sacraments. He sat down on his expensive sofa and waited for them to kick in. He played Mystic Stylez on the stereo.

Soon the girl was floating through the apartment like a helium balloon, swaying and bobbing in the air, taking off her clothes exactly like he told her.

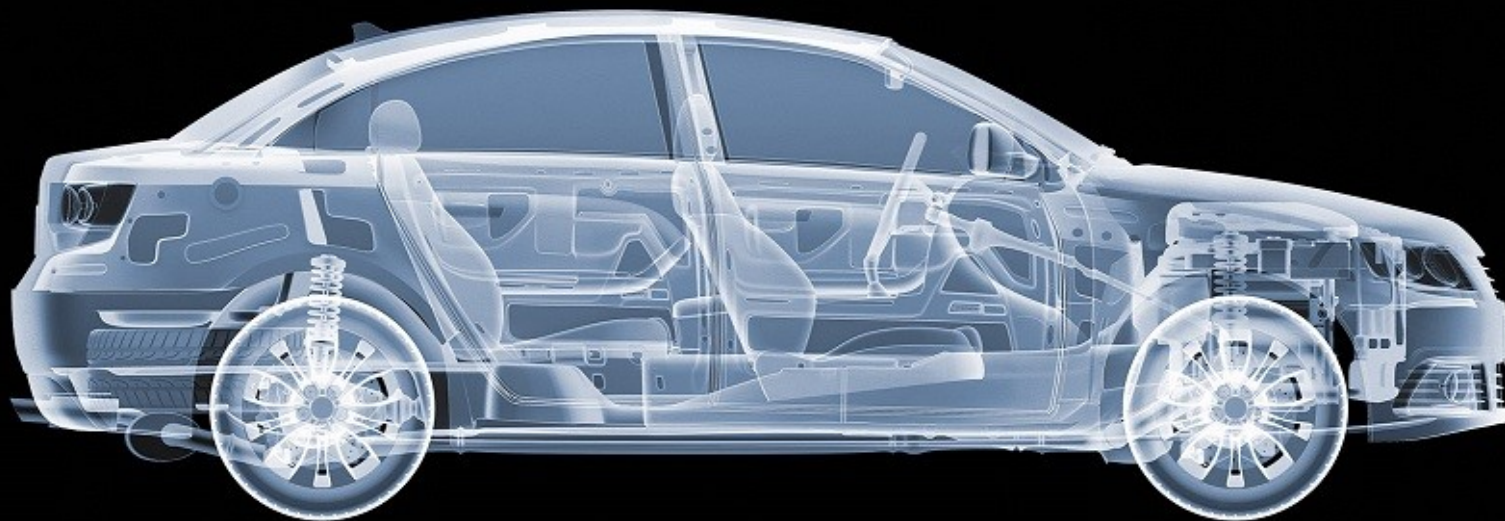
Mr. Coyote narrowed his eyes and stared at her. He licked his lips and spoke. You're one of my babies, aren't you? I think I recognize you.

Yesssss, said the girl. She floated through the apartment like a plastic bag in the wind. You're my daddy.

As the girl's body grew lighter and more and more weightless, the apartment darkened and sunk. Although they were on the 30th floor, the apartment was sinking underground, down below the never-ending battlefield of bloody, twitching hearts. The apartment was sinking down into the trenches. Down into the bone fields we call earth.

A flash of realization struck Mr. Coyote's face. You're a child of mine, he said. He stood up, walked over to the girl, grabbed her hands, and pushed his face close. The girl was suddenly frightened. Yes, said Mr. Coyote. Yes. ⁶⁰Yes, I'm sure of it.

CARS THAT TREATED ME POORLY



JENNIFER GREIDUS

These aren't pictures of my cars. In fact, they may not even be pictures of the years of my cars. They are the color of my cars, the model, the make. The years, however, are a blur of heartbreak, manslaughter, and ice storms.



Volvo 66: My mother conceived her second child in this car. (Remember, not *this* car but a car such as this car.) There was a big scene and a miscarriage, which led to a complicated D&C, and then we had to have a memorial for the fetus. I am an only child.



Honda Accord: I drove this car to Kentucky, where I went to college. I drove it home 4 months later because I dropped out of college. I dropped out because they wanted me to swim, and I was scared of showing parts of my body in swimming class. The drive home was sad, too, because I had no music.



Lincoln Continental: I drove this car to Buffalo, NY. Or rather, I tried to. There was an ice storm. I think it was the 90s. I didn't know that *Bridge Freezes Before Road Surface* was a serious thing. My friend was playing Madonna and singing to "True Blue" with her feet on the dashboard. I hit the side rail and then went down an embankment. The lawyer said "embankment," but it was really more of a cliff. My friend went through the windshield.



Acura MDX: I took my grandma to the hospital in this car. She was cranky. She was also a woman who worried a lot about personal composure. She was unkind to me a lot. When we got to the hospital, she tripped on the space between the floor and the elevator. You know, that small gap, like 2 inches. I didn't help her up right away. That was a conscious decision, not to help her up right away. On the way home in this car, she told me I looked fat.



Toyota Tacoma: I was raped in the backseat of this truck.

X-RAY

LITERARY MAGAZINE

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