

**100 STORIES.
10 WRITERS.
1 NEW GENRE.**

**COVER
STORIES**

A EUPHICTIONAL ANTHOLOGY

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COVER STORIES

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STRANGE SPECIES

Adults can be hard to understand sometimes, even when you become one.

I was six years old and adults were a different species to me; and the most weird and wonderful and totally incomprehensible of that species were parents.

'You'll understand when you're older,' says Dad in the living room.

'In a few years you'll understand,' says Mum in the kitchen.

But why can't I understand now? If you are getting divorced, that's a lot to understand and it's better I start now, isn't it?

Maybe I understand a lot more than they think. My feelings are like a copper wire, conducting their silent anger and their hidden sadness; it is flowing through me all the time and this is something that they do not understand.

'Sometimes, Simon,' says Dad, 'sometimes people...the love...'

'When you grow up, Sim,' says Mum, 'you'll realize that...that love is a funny thing.'

If love is a funny thing then why isn't anybody laughing? They are right, I don't understand – where does this love go when it disappears? Is it like heat from the fireplace that comes into the room, making your face glow and your fingertips tingle before seeping out

the windows and dissolving into the sky? Why can't we put another log on the fire?

It is my birthday. I am seven years old. Getting older hasn't brought the understanding I'd hoped. At Dad's I ask if we can go to the zoo. Later, I ask Mum. I have a plan.

The first thing we see are some kind of big cats, not tigers or lions or leopards, but a mixture of all three. One cat has its front legs on the back of another and I ask Dad what they are doing even though I know and he goes red and mumbles something and Mum laughs and he goes even redder. I hold both their hands tight, I am conducting Mum's laugh through me to Dad and the laugh travels along the copper wire and Dad laughs a little too.

It is a bright spring day and I want to remember how the white and pink trees stand out so brightly against the blue sky so I can paint them at school on Monday.

'Mum,' I tug her hand. 'Can you paint smells?' Mum looks to Dad for help, but I already have another question: 'Would those flowers on the trees smell so nice if there wasn't other smells too, like the smell of the animals?'

'You mean, Simon,' says Dad, 'if there wasn't anything to compare it with, would we appreciate how lovely the blossom smells?'

I nod, that's exactly what I mean.

'Yes, I think you're right,' says Dad.

‘And isn’t that like love?’ I say, but this time Dad doesn’t say I’m right; he just looks down at the petals on the ground and Mum suddenly says, ‘Oh look, there’re the pandas,’ and I think I’ve blown it now. I guess they are right, I should stop trying to be an adult.

The pandas don’t look as cuddly as I imagined; I suppose that’s another part of getting old – the tooth fairy and Santa are obvious but I never thought pandas would not be pandas. There are two of them and Dad tells me one is from China ‘on holiday’ but she doesn’t seem to like the other panda and they sit at opposite ends of their yard, like they are in their own kitchen and living room.

‘Isn’t it sad?’ says Mum, more to herself than to me or Dad.

‘What’s sad?’ I ask.

‘The pandas,’ she says. ‘There aren’t many left, they’re an endangered species, it’s a shame they don’t get on.’

I guess I’ll understand when I’m older why parents aren’t also a dangerous species but for now I just nod and say: ‘Yes, it’s a shame.’

We sit in the café for lunch and I tell a funny story about school and they both smile and laugh separately. Dad says, ‘Let’s go to the reptile house next, what d’you say!’ and Mum says, ‘Yes, let’s!’ and I am finding it difficult to finish my sandwich because there’s a lump in my throat but I’m not going to, no way am I going to cry.

I like the iguanas best. They are sad and funny at the same time – they sit for ages without moving, then suddenly scuttle away all jerky legs and swinging tail just like a cartoon. Dad explains how they are cold blooded and that's why they only live in hot countries, and I say if global warming continues at the same rate, when I'm older, maybe we'll have iguanas in our back garden; and they both look at me in a strange way but this time a nice warmth comes through the wire.

Me and Dad wait by the elephants while Mum is in the bathroom. I won't get another chance so I force it out: 'Dad, I don't want you and Mum to be divorced.' Dad sighs and puts his hand on my shoulder, and I feel like one of those kids in the films that talk like adults and solve all the problems but I think I don't have a winning smile and I can't talk like an adult and maybe in real life problems don't always get solved.

'Animals don't get divorced, do they, Dad?'

'True, but animals don't get married either... Maybe that's one thing they know better than us.'

Mum is back and she has some peanuts to feed the elephants, and Dad shows me how to let the elephant snuffle a peanut from my palm. And now I realize it's not going to turn out like the films but I feel happy all the same because now I know that parents aren't the only strange animals; and we all give each other a hug and the elephant sucks the whole bag of nuts out of Mum's hand, and the copper wire is alive with laughter.

ESTA NOCHE

Jack had begun sipping a collection of cocktails starting just before sunset at a ground floor hotel bar. He'd always had an affinity for dusk, that in-between time, and there were few things he enjoyed more than having a drink or two as evening overtook the day. It was that sense of potential; that anything could still happen. Plans were formulated and troops were rallied. You could see the evening – it was right there and it was all yours for the taking. Once it was night, it was just dark.

Not that that didn't have its own advantages.

Normally Jack would start with whisky and water and slide into beer when the time felt right. Tonight things were a little different. He hadn't been in this bar since he was 20, but one thing was the same: Jack was drinking for very cheap. Then it was because he knew the bartender. Tonight, it is because the bartender wants to know him. Carolyn, the bartender, tells Jack that she is new at the game and wants to practice. Since the bar is empty except for two kids playing foosball, he lets her pour whatever strikes her fancy when his glass is empty. For his bravery, he only pays for about every third drink.

Jack plays the part of weary world traveler and Carolyn eats it up. In this small touristy town, that may not be such an unusual role to have. But it was different

in that he grew up here, and now had returned. He could tell old stories from this town that Carolyn could appreciate and then go into tales about living overseas that she could only dream about. Jack was good with a story, especially when he had an appreciative audience.

Jack had been in the States for less than a week, after having spent four solid years in Europe, most of that in Poland. He was still acclimating himself to actually understanding surrounding conversations that did not involve him. It made him feel uncomfortably voyeuristic. It would pass, much like the feeling that everyone was talking about him when he first got to Europe. For now, he relished the relative quiet, appreciated the pleasant company in Carolyn, and enjoyed watching the ocean do its thing through the large window behind the bar.

“Why’d you leave the States, anyway?” Carolyn asked.

“Let’s just say that the time had come to get gone.”

“Why Poland of all places?”

How many times had he been asked this same question in Poland?

“Family roots, good beer and a reputation for beautiful women, and not necessarily in that order,” Jack replied, not for the first time. Even if every time he said it, it was still basically a lie.

“Are you happy to be back?”

“I am tonight.”

As the Singapore Sling turned into a Tom Collins, Jack slipped out of storyteller mode and slipped into the rock 'n' roll villain persona. He smiled that smile. You know the one. He used his best lines and flirted more aggressively. Jack grabbed a guitar that was on the makeshift stage in the corner of the bar and played a song. He was the magnificent bastard; the sexy motherfucker. Employing a smattering of the new language that he picked up abroad, Jack drank to the health of the bartender with what appeared to be a freshly poured Manhattan.

"Na zdrowie!"

"God bless you," Carolyn said in response with a smile.

Jack laughed, fished one of the maraschino cherries out of the drink and popped it into his mouth.

"Ačiū is 'thanks' in Lithuanian," he said, chewing.

"What's that?"

Jack laughed. Carolyn laughed. Jack drained his drink.

Carolyn picked up a menu, thumbed through an old copy of *Mr. Boston's*, scribbled something on a napkin and turned towards the bottles arranged neatly above the bar. She did her thing and a few moments later, slid a lovely looking Tequila Sunrise on the napkin towards Jack.

Jack was loose, feeling good, and didn't particularly mind when the Tequila Sunrise turned into a Dirty Martini, even though he knew at some point he

would have to pay for his promiscuous alcohol consumption. But that point wouldn't be tonight. His blood was flowing in all the right ways and he had the bartender's address and phone number written on a cocktail napkin in his shirt pocket. Anything painful would just have to wait.

After the sun had completely disappeared, the bar started to fill up with equal parts sunburned vacationers and toasted-brown locals. Jack went from charming the bartender to entertaining the whole crowd. If there was one thing that Jack was good at, it was this. This could have been his destiny. And I don't mean getting a small bar full of people to sing along to Neil Diamond or Johnny Cash songs.

No, Jack should have been on a big stage somewhere, singing his own songs right now. Maybe that's what he'd be doing if he hadn't taken a bad situation and made it worse; if he hadn't cut and run in the face of a genuine opportunity. He tried not to think about it, up on this rickety stage with about 30 people looking at him with real pleasure. No, he wasn't going to think about that tonight.

He hopped off the stage and made his way back to the bar. Carolyn was waiting with a smile and a white, frothy drink.

"That was great. I wondered if that stage would be used in my lifetime."

Jack picked up the drink and took a small sip. He raised his eyebrows approvingly.

“Esta Noche,” Jack said, raising his glass and then taking a healthy draught of the piña colada.

“What does that mean?”

“Tonight.”

“That’s it?”

“Well, I want to stop thinking about yesterday and,” he said looking at his drink, “I don’t want to think about tomorrow.”

Carolyn laughed, raised a glass of her own, and drank to tonight.

HERE'S TO YOU AND THE STARS ABOVE

He looked harder than she remembered. The softness in his stomach and face were gone. His skin was golden, his hair shorter and lighter. Even his green eyes had changed. Before she asked him why he did it, she sighed and gave him one of her looks. He knew the look well because he had seen it every time he closed his eyes, her standing there inside his head, ready to talk, ready to remind him of all of the things he wanted to forget. He tried to remember a time when he was alone in his head, when it was his voice that narrated his thoughts, when he didn't have to explain everything to the imaginary version of her that haunted him like a blister on the roof of his mouth.

She looked stunning, vivid, reality seemed displaced around her. She was older, but age worked as a blessing, not a curse. She was still worth starting a war over, still worth risking everything for immortality if it meant forever waking to her face. If you say "I love you" to a face like hers, you knew instantly how weak the words were. Terms of endearment did not apply to her. She was the kind of woman who inspired new religions to prosper without the need of commandments.

Finally, she asked him where he'd been. He told her about Europe. How he walked through France, through Germany, through Poland, and then I kept on walking. He found himself in countries he never knew

existed until he found Russia. Like Texas, Russia never wanted to end.

When he found nowhere, he'd stay until it became somewhere, and then he'd keep going. Then there was the ocean and the islands, where he declined a thousand invitations to live with the sun for the rest of his life.

"What then?" she asked.

He pointed a finger to the sky.

He told her about the rocket, the way gravity does everything in its power never to let go, and when it finally does, you wonder why you ever needed it. He aimed that nose to the first star he saw and let the darkness swallow him. He enjoyed the view, but mostly he slept. He thought that maybe his memories would get pulled back with gravity and he'd finally be free, but instead he dreamed of the past. Maybe in all that darkness, all that silence, he'd finally find some peace. It might happen in his final moment before death, it might never happen at all. He wouldn't know until he got there. Just the thought of the possibility kept him moving. He said, "The thought of escaping the memory of you."

It was years, decades, he didn't know for sure. The star he chose grew bigger, until finally it was inescapably blue.

"And I was back *here*," he said, his voice breaking with the final word. He wondered if the universe was like a hall of mirrors, distorting, elongating, shrinking, twisting, until you were right back

where you started. He felt the muscles in his body contracting, the bones threatening to shatter, his eyes aching, his head throbbing. She reached out and touched his cheek gently. He flinched as if she had slapped him. He stepped back and closed his eyes. He rocked his head to the left and his neck snapped. He turned his head upward and opened his eyes slowly as if looking into a bright light.

She told him about the time machine. How she went back in time starting with the day before they met and fell in love with him again. When it was evening, she went back to the day before that, falling in love over and over again, one day older for her, one day younger for him. As she explained, new memories overwhelmed him. The echoing of a thousand perfect loves with the same woman made his heart beat faster. All the pain and tension in his body dissipated.

The stars looked down at him. He had seen infinity, the way it spreads out in all directions, backwards and forwards, and then deep down inside you. Back on the rocket a lifetime ago, he suited up and went out drifting. Space was cold and smelled of burnt toast. At one point, he held out the things he had to forgive to the universe and the universe responded with silence. He should have known, bringing a grain of salt to a desert and expecting water.

He turned to her, their noses now inches apart. This close, he knew it was already over. He looked into those blue eyes and saw oceans and universes. He had

been here before. There was no point in fighting it any longer.

He kissed her then, a kiss as inevitable as autumn and as hard as winter. He pulled her body into his and pressed his lips against hers like a near-drown victim fighting for air. He could feel the gravity of their past and the weight of the universe around them. His eyes were open at first, staring into her eyes, and when he closed them, he took the blue with him. Their lips moved, their teeth crashed, and their tongues came together like hurricanes. This was the kind of kiss that could wake the dead, the kind that could create whole new worlds, the kind heard around the world. Time and space stopped like it did and would every moment they touched. They were the beginning and ending of every love story ever told.

A crowd of people walked by, some were annoyed they had to walk around the oblivious couple, some bothered by the display of affection.

You were one of them, just trying to get home after a long evening out, knowing tomorrow was another day of repetition, and wondering what the deal was with those two drunks kissing.

A PRODIGAL SON

Glass showers from windows blowing out. Shards snap under the boot heel of a soldier. Bangs and blasts pound nearby.

He covers his face from another rain of window; a sting on his forehead lets blood. Smoke and dust cloud together, obstructing his vision. Coughing.

The soldier rounds a corner, surprising an enemy. They both freeze.

A trigger is pulled, a racket releasing a piece of metal that zooms across the way to land square in the face. The enemy falls, never again to laugh, like wood landing on concrete.

Increasing pace, the soldier darts into the next building. Spotted by the other enemies, the barrage increases. He retaliates by letting off a burst in that general direction.

Blood burning his eye, the soldier wipes his forehead. Returning his hand to steady the rifle, the other enemies announce that they are closing in, and the soldier begins firing again.

Casings like castanets dance from the gun as he plants his feet. These enemies don't fall, but tuck tail and cover themselves from his rifle.

Throughout the confusion, the soldier hears a scream. An older woman shakes in front of children.

TP WHEED

Lowering his weapon, attempting to communicate peace, the soldier raises his arms. The old woman doesn't understand this stranger.

She shakes; another distant rat-tat-tat followed by a whistle.

The whistle heads straight down to a black flash, and the room breaks into fractions. Wood splintered and decor mangled with collateral concussions.

Insects swarming deafness, the soldier is under a wall. More enemy combatants approaching to sweep the mess; the soldier abandons aim to burst fire.

Vicious screams erupt from the mouth of the soldier and the barrel of the gun. Enough bullets connect to the flesh of the other enemies to secure the soldier.

Knowing before seeing, he still looks for survivors near. Their faces lifeless, ready to haunt. The breath of the soldier pulls short as the rest of the world collapses.

Distant street-side shouting in familiar language breaks the insect wall. Fellow countrymen rush the soldier, pulling him free from the wreckage. The soldier motions to the other bodies.

Two countrymen pull the soldier to safety. Distant rat-tat-tats build and release.

The soldier looks at all of these men, his blood brothers, and how they will all hope the taint rinses off before it can smear the face of someone they love. All of them, everywhere.

KINGS AND QUEENS

Bender sat stoic in the high school library. The final dismissal bell had sounded an hour ago, but here he was, silenced in a room with 15 others.

Make that 14. The librarian just left.

Bender watched her go. Mrs. Sheedy was older, maybe 45. She still had a fetching caboose, though. Her hair was nice, too. Straight, shoulder-length, blonde – the kind that would look fantastic cascading across your thighs while she blew you.

I wonder what that would be like, Bender thought, adjusting his glasses.

Then he sighed again. *I wonder if I'll ever get laid.*

Giggling and nonsensical chatter approached the open door leading to the hall. Madison, Morgan, and Camille walked past, unaware that Bender and his kind were concentrating within. Truth be told, they were unaware that Bender and his kind existed. That hadn't stopped him from jacking off to exquisitely explicit fantasies of their naked, toned bodies everyday for the past two years, though.

Even their names are hot.

"Shh!"

Bender snapped to attention, momentarily questioning whether he'd just spoken. He looked around nervously.

No. He hadn't said a word. Mr. Spader was apparently irritated with the external noise. He walked to the door and pulled it shut. Turning towards the 13 others, he flashed an apologetic smile. The man had perfect teeth.

Bender's heart sank. Against all odds, he'd hoped the girls might stop by to see him in action. He was mentioned during the morning announcements after all. But Madison, Morgan, and Camille weren't just the hottest chicks in school. They were the hottest chicks on Earth. They did not associate with Bender's ilk, and they certainly were not the girl-next-door, cute-but-not-slutty, attractive-but-approachable, anyone-has-a-shot-with-her Molly Ringwald type that John Hughes brainwashed dorks of the 80s with, convincing them they could actually bed a hot chick.

Why must you create such an obviously out-of-reach fantasy land, John Hughes? Why? Bastard!

Named for the rebellious hood in *The Breakfast Club*, Bender had seen way too many Hughes films in his day. His parents could—and would—recite dialog from *Pretty in Pink* and *Sixteen Candles* whenever the mood arose. And that mood arose frequently. It was Bender's secret desire, other than nailing Madison, Morgan, and Camille in a chocolate covered orgy, to travel back in time, cut out Ducky's heart, and shove it down the throat of Jake Ryan. That would exorcise some demons.

Taking a deep breath, Bender pushed those lovely thoughts from his head and gazed across the table dotted with royalty and serfs. There sat an Asian

boy about his age. He'd arrived about 30 minutes prior, donned a headband resembling the one worn by that dude in the Prince video "1999,"—*damn you, Mom and Dad*—and ate five ketchup packets.

It was a shameless intimidation ploy that failed miserably. You don't give Wyatt and Garry mad props for staring down a mutant motorcycle gang to earn a shower with Kelly LeBrock and then back down because some poseur with an outdated head covering jams generic condiments in his mouth.

Bender removed his glasses and cleaned them with his knock-off Tommy Bahama shirt. After replacing them, he glanced around the room. All eyes were on his table.

He checked the timer. Three minutes. Bandana Boy looked nervous now. Either that or the ketchup wasn't sitting well.

The library door squeaked open.

Holy shit!

Madison, Morgan, and Camille appeared. If there'd been a smoke machine and twin guitars, this could well have been a Bon Jovi video. Or maybe Poison. Even Winger. (*Give me a break, Mom!*) They looked in Bender's direction and made their way towards some open seats.

A bead of sweat formed on Bender's forehead. His palms suddenly moistened. His mouth felt Sahara dry. His heart raced like a thoroughbred in the stretch run of the Kentucky Derby. Then his wand got hard.

Relax, geek. It's not like you have a shot.

In the deep crevasses of Bender's mind, he knew these girls were out of his league. Two categories of men had a shot with chicks like this: ruggedly handsome college guys and somewhat handsome college graduates with good jobs. End of list.

Someone in the room cleared his throat. Bender looked around in a sudden panic. He prayed that no one had noticed the 6.125-inch extension in his pants. He found Mr. Spader staring at him. Bender was confused.

What do you want?

Mr. Spader, pearly whites and piercing eyes, would not turn away. Worse, he'd apparently developed a neck spasm. His head jerked to the left once, twice, and then thrice. Bender finally got the message.

He looked back at Bandana Boy. The teen's complexion was Caspar white. Instantly, Bender knew what happened.

His sweat dried. His erection dropped. His heart rate slowed.

Kind of like Kevin's heart after Alec stopped dangling him upside down from the fire escape in "St. Elmo's Fire." Wait, that wasn't a Hughes film, was it? I'll have to check IMDB on my iPhone... SNAP OUT OF IT!

Bender's focus returned full force. He was Keith Nelson embracing Watts at the end of *Some Kind of Wonderful*. His prize was within reach. He need only grab it.

But first...

He shot Madison, Morgan, and Camille his best seductive look and then caught Bandana Boy in his crosshairs. Without glancing down, Bender clutched his black queen, slid her diagonally across the chessboard, and calmly released the piece.

“Checkmate.”

The spectators clapped politely. Mr. Spader strode towards his student and placed a hand on Bender’s shoulder.

“Ladies and gentleman, I present to you the Illinois High School state chess champion for 2009. Bender Taylor. Congratulations, Ben...”

Morgan was suddenly beside them. Still riding the adrenaline rush of victory, Bender looked to seize the day.

“Morgan, will you go out with me?”

Her eyes met his. Her perfect lips smiled.

“No.”

Her hand then brushed the sleeve of Mr. Spader’s jacket.

“Can we get that ride home now?”

CAN'T CHANGE THE BEAT

(Combichrist)

To say her act was exotic was probably the biggest understatement since someone cut up a loaf of bread and called it the best thing. Her act was the stuff of wet dreams and quickie afternoon sessions of self-abuse. She was the guilty fantasy, the picture in a man's head as he fucked his cow of a wife.

The music began for her set and she walked onto the stage. The ambient noise of conversation and catcalls ended abruptly as she began to dance. Slowly, deliberately, she moved with the music and dropped her semi-fitted dress to the floor without touching it.

Beneath her black lace dress were black latex panties and a black latex bra. A delicate chain of silver encircled her waist, running through the hoop of her navel ring.

The audience stared in rapt attention, some men had forgotten the money they held in their hands. Others had spilled their drinks into their laps.

She tilted the corners of her mouth into a perfect rendition of a knowing smile and reached up toward her head. With a wet lick of her blood-red lips she let her blond hair loose from its bondage, and felt it cascade down her naked back as she turned to face her audience. Her mouth twisted to a perfectly twisted

smile, and she regarded every last one of the men beneath her with ice blue eyes as she mounted the pole. She scissored her thighs around it and locked it there, allowing the pole's turn to perpetuate the illusion she was sliding in a horizontal circle.

With a swift flick she released the front of her top from her upside-down position into the breathlessly silent audience. The beat of the music was driving; filled with so much bass she could feel it in her thighs, sex before it became a tumultuous fuckfest.

She wrapped one long leg up the pole, the black latex of her thigh high boot appearing to slither like a snake over the brass. Her other leg she wrapped down the pole, her hands propping her in place more than her legs. With a twist of her body and perfectly on beat, she flipped upside down, her legs twined around the pole as she held her arms out to the audience.

She eased her hold on the pole slightly and slid down until her hands touched the floor. She released from the pole into a handstand, then kicked each leg deliberately one by one to the floor and stood up, continuing to move with the music all the while.

Her sisters were working the crowd, but knew that during her set they would not be needed by any of the patrons. One of the younger sisters came to the stage, where she leaned over until her breasts were all but out of the shiny slick vinyl of her top. She gripped a dollar in her teeth.

"Lilith," she sang quietly, a smile of mischief lighting her face.

Lilith returned the smile and dropped to all fours. She crawled carefully, each movement of her body exaggerated for effect to keep in time with the beat. When she reached the girl with the dollar she took the other end of the bill in her teeth. They danced together, their lips so close and eyes locked. They could swear they heard zippers in several pairs of blue-jeans breaking at that moment.

By the end of her set, Lilith always had a line of men waiting for the second half of her act: when she put her clothes back on and beat the shit out of every last one of them.

As they screamed her name behind the ball-gag she felt only the electric surge of power. They loved her, and she loathed them. They were a means to an end only, passing time until Nemesis returned to lead them once more, to give them purpose.

She gave the bared ass before her a hard hit, breaking the riding crop in the process. The man began to cry in low, miserable sobs. Blood welled up in the wake of the crop, tiny beads at first and then small rivulets. Lilith reached to the table on which she kept her implements of pain, bringing over a bottle of vodka. She poured it onto the man's cuts and he writhed, crying out in renewed pain before finally screaming out the safe word.

She walked around him, faced him, then took his face in her hands. Almost lovingly, she licked away his tears.

The man turned his face away, regretting that he

had come to her and knowing he would be back again. He also knew he would once more cry out the safe word and earn her scorn. He hated himself for his own weakness, never suspecting this woman was nowhere near human.

"I will give you advice," she said to the man, "Never fall in love with a Fury."

With almost cruel glee she released him from his bonds and stepped to the doorway. He struggled to rearrange his clothes and cover himself, but it was the final humiliation. The line of men would laugh when they caught sight of his trembling, half-naked form huddled in the corner. Each believing that he would not be reduced to this man's state, and each finding out how wrong he was by the end. The man ran past Lilith, avoiding eye contact and with the others waiting for their turn. Lilith stared at them all, wishing she could kill them. Soon, she promised herself silently.

Out loud she said only, "Next."

This time the screams began before the door had even finished closing.

KILLING THE PAST

He pulled on to the dirt road and stopped for a moment.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" he said to himself. And the truth was he didn't. But he knew he had to go. "These women mean to do you harm."

He put the truck in drive and started down the road.

Eowyn was his first dog and she was the kind of dog you read about in books and watch in movies. Loyal to a fault, full of energy and possessed of the greatest disposition you could ever ask for in an animal. In the twelve years he had her, Eowyn taught him all the things that a dog can teach a human. She taught him how to care about something more than you care about yourself. She taught him how to love unconditionally. And most importantly, she taught him how to live in the moment.

He remembered the day he had to put her down; the cancer had spread to her lungs and she struggled to breathe and it wasn't fair to keep her alive. Every dog he took in after her didn't quite compare. They were all good dogs, but he felt that each one had something missing. He found himself perpetually watching the horizon, waiting for another Eowyn. He imagined another dog like her and longed for that kind

ACQUINOV

of spiritual completeness between animal and master...

He could almost make out the cottage through the dune grass. The sun reflected off the ocean causing a backlight behind it which covered the front of the house in shadow.

As he got closer he could see the dull white shutters and the rose covered lattice begin to peer out from the blackness.

He stumbled upon the Inkwell his freshmen year and spent every Thursday afternoon there for the next four years. That first visit after graduation he went in to browse its collection of rare books as usual, only this time he walked out with a job.

Hattie, the old woman who owned the Inkwell was the greatest boss he ever had the pleasure of working for, mostly because she didn't act like a boss and didn't treat him like a subordinate. She knew he shared her love for the written word and understood the power held in the ancient tomes she collected and sold. He never remembered feeling as content as he felt when he was at the Inkwell.

When he sits in his cubicle now, occasionally his eye is drawn to the delicate first edition printing of the Count of Monte Cristo that Hattie gave him when he left the Inkwell to get a "real job." Sometimes he longed for those shelves of damp and dusty old books. Sometimes he wondered about the possibility of owning his own "Inkwell" one day. But that was a dream, and on a copy-

editor's salary it would have to remain one for the time being...

He pulled up to the cottage and opened the door. The smell of the sea was overpowering but if he concentrated, he could pick up the underlying scent of roses mixed with the salt water. He closed the truck's door and started up the path that led to the house.

"Have you ever been so in love with someone that you can't remember where you end and they begin?"

That is how he would respond whenever anyone broke protocol and asked him about Emma. After so many years, his time with Emma seemed almost like a montage in a film. He often found himself struggling to remember little details about her and became distressed when he found that some of them had slipped away. Sometimes he could even remember parts of memories but not others.

He remembered how she would constantly push her blond bangs out of her eyes but couldn't remember her reason for not cutting them shorter or growing them out. He remembered that she would react almost violently when presented with a dish made with tomatoes, but her reasoning for this tomato hatred escaped him. He remembered her laughter and tears when he presented her the sapphire engagement ring but couldn't remember what she mumbled to him in between kisses after she had accepted it.

From the day that she died, he had to endure the psychological mudslide of eroding memories that didn't ever seem to stop. She was gone and he knew there would never be another Emma again. But that didn't stop him from searching for pieces of her in every woman he was with after that...

He didn't bother to knock; he knew he was expected. He turned the handle of the ancient knob and opened the cracked wooden door.

Present's body lay on the floor in the middle of the room. Her remains were nothing but a pile of bones and decomposed clothes and her severed head was dropped a few feet away. Past sat on a chair in the corner, still fingering the blade in her hand, and Future stood by the window with her back to him as she stared at the ocean. Her arms were still covered in the dried blood that splattered her as she held her sister down.

The truth of the situation struck him immediately. He never forgot how to live in the moment the way Eowyn taught him. He never forgot the contentedness that could come from simply turning the pages of a book. He never forgot what it was like to lay in bed with a woman on a Sunday morning and just be. His Present was taken from him by her two jealous sisters.

Suddenly he understood as anger, stronger than anything he had experienced before, welled up from within him. He pulled the snub nose revolver out from the waist of his pants and pulled back the hammer.

IMMORTALITY

“Did you say something? Simon?” I stop myself from turning on the light, because I know without looking that that was the last sound you’ll ever make, but as long as I don’t look, as long as the light stays off, you’re still there, still fighting for breath. Suffering, but still there, alive.

I just need you there for another little while.

The clock ticks and ticks. If I lie in the dark, perhaps I could keep you forever.

“Go back to sleep, my Lovely.” I hear my own whisper. Then I turn on the light and try to let you go.

There’s a lot to do, and so many people to deal with, and then there’s all the conversations about better places, and better to go in your sleep, and how you’d suffered, and how I shouldn’t feel guilty if I feel relieved because you’d suffered, and how time heals all wounds.

I go through it all, and Erica, our youngest (do I have to say *my* youngest now, will people correct me?) is incredible through it all, and Shelley, our eldest, well, she never did so well with her emotions.

And then it’s a quiet empty flat and memories. I don’t sleep in the bedroom anymore; the couch is just as comfy, and I fall asleep watching the telly more often than not.

And I don't wake up thinking I can hear you singing in the bathroom or down in the kitchen.

It's been a year, and it's high time I got out and about, and it's not good for me to just be at home, and so many other things that people have to say. Did I say them myself? When Joe's wife passed away, what did I say?

Everyone knows that there are reminders everywhere, but not everyone knows that sometimes the reminders make you forget, and then you have to let go all over again.

"Mum, I got us tickets to a show and you're going." Erica's taken to coming by on Wednesdays, and she thinks I don't notice her tidying up and doing some cleaning while she's here. I don't mind really. But a show...

"Don't give me that look, Mum. It's *The Tempest*. I really want to see it and I don't have anyone else to go with." She looks so like you when she folds her arms like that.

I haven't been to a show since before you took ill.

"You could take Shelley."

"Mum, Shelley's not been in a theatre since before her A-levels! She won't go. Go on, say you'll go."

"All right, Love. I'll go to the show."

"You never said it was opera."

“You used to go all the time.”

“Your Dad always loved the opera...”

“So did you.”

We get to our seats and sit for a while.

“Mum? Are you all right? Was this a bad idea?”

She doesn't sound at all confident now. I'll need to make an effort.

“These seats are very good. They must've been very expensive.”

“My...friend got them for me. He's attached to...he's in the chorus.”

“You're blushing, Love.” I smile. That makes it easier to chat.

Prospero's voice is wonderful. When he hits his mark and begins...oh, Simon, you'd have loved this. I want to turn to see if you're enjoying it as much as me. I want to have a quiet cry. I want to stay. I want to go.

The singer's name is Simon too. Coincidences are just coincidences, my Lovely, you always tell me that, but there you go.

I should let you go and I don't want to let you go. I'm stuck and I'm not.

The music falls silent and Simon sings again, and I hear every word.

And I understand.

“Mum? Are you all right.”

“...yes. Right as rain, Love. Thank you so much. That was wonderful.”

“Are you sure you’re all right?” She starts to help me up, and I give her a glare before I can stop myself.

“Honestly, Erica, I’m only 61, I can stand up on my own.” She blushes, and I probably do too. She gets it from me, after all. “I loved the show Erica. Really. And I’m fine.” I fuss with my bag looking for lip balm, just to give me something to do with my hands. “So...which one of the chorus was your fancy man?”

Her blush spreads, and I manage a smile as she protests. I gather myself, and we go out into the night. Erica drives me home and once I’ve shooed her away, I can sit down on the sofa. I sit, and have a little cry, and dry my eyes.

The house is so quiet.

Except for the sound of your voice.

I listen.

I don’t have to let that go.

RUFUS' ROOSTER

On October 30th, 2009, Rufus Duprey did what he had done every fall. He went out to his combine to watch his corn crop being brought in. He was 95 years young.

Rufus Duprey had worked his family's farm since he was a boy. A farm that had been owned by the Duprey's for nearly 200 years.

Rufus Duprey was born in 1914. Years later his family would proclaim that he was born under a halo of light and possibly in a manger.

In actuality, none of his family says that, but it sounds good, so I wrote it.

When he was a little boy he and his sister were supposed to be feeding the chickens. While goofing around they accidentally clunked their mother's prize rooster on the head and it went "BOCK" and fell over. They thought it was dead and hid it behind the barn to bury later when their mother wasn't around.

Later they went back to bury it and discovered it wasn't dead, merely knocked unconscious.

Rufus Duprey was born in the same house where he has lived his entire life. When Rufus took over running the farm in 1946, his parents and his older sister, Elizabeth, moved to the original farmhouse which was one mile down the road.

Rufus and Elizabeth lived just one mile from each other until Elizabeth's death in 1997. For 83 years, they had never lived further away from each other.

Growing up Rufus loved baseball. He was a catcher, and a good one. When he worked the fields Rufus was known to crouch in a catcher's stance as he ate rather than simply sitting down.

In 1986 Rufus was working in his barn when he had trouble seeing. He then sat and patiently waited for his eyesight to return before going into the house where he told his wife Ruth that he had gone blind in one eye and that she should call the eye specialist. After which Ruth took him to the hospital.

Rufus is a world champion at patiently waiting. Unfortunately, the rest of his family did not inherit this gift.

Rufus was diagnosed with a faulty valve in his heart which had caused decrease blood flow to his eye. He underwent a valve transplant. The donor of the new valve? A pig.

In 1986 Rufus officially became a chimera. In Roman times he would have been considered a demi-god.

His ten year old grandson just thought it was weird.

Because of the surgery, Rufus was forced to retire from farming at the age of 72.

Rufus loved farming. Even after his retirement Rufus was known to break both doctor's and Ruth's orders, and get his hands dirty.

When age finally caught up to him, he still found any excuse to take out his lawn tractor and drive it around the farm, doing chores that most would find tedious or boring.

When Rufus' niece, Trina, was a child she once wanted to ride on the tractor with Rufus while he worked. He told her that she could but she'd have to stay with him the whole day and she couldn't cry if she got bored. Within a few minutes Trina, already bored, began to cry and yell at Rufus to let her off. Rufus simply kept driving.

He had warned her after all.

Rufus had a mischievous side, though it often remained hidden. While stationed in the Philippines, he once got so drunk that he decided all of the cots needed to be removed from his tent. His bunk mates were less than appreciative.

In Mexico, he once went to a movie theatre where he shot rubber bands at women posing as statues. They didn't appreciate it, so he was thrown out.

At a bullfight he caused a commotion when he started cheering for the bull. While the bull appreciated it, he was still thrown out.

Rufus' family once tried to get him to watch *Saturday Night Live* and *Monty Python*. He laughed during both shows until he cried. Afterwards, his family asked him if he enjoyed the shows, and he said he didn't.

When pressed on why he was laughing so hard he said he wasn't laughing at the TV, but at how much everyone else was laughing.

In 1970, Rufus married Ruth. They met when Ruth's daughter Deb married Rufus' nephew Dave three years earlier. This wedding made every relative of theirs inbred by proxy.

For the record, my Grandfather on my Mother's side is my Great Uncle on my Father's side. Please, take your time trying to figure that one out. We still are.

If there is one thing Rufus loved more than farming, it was horses. Rufus would spend hours out at the fairgrounds watching his horses train.

Once, Rufus named a horse after his favorite grandson. Though unable to decide who his favorite was, he simply named it Momatt, after two of them. Unfortunately, due to injuries, he had to be put down.

The horse, not the grandsons.

Perhaps most importantly, Rufus had a nickname, bestowed upon him by his grandson Logan. It was Papa D. This has since been picked up by his numerous grand and great-grand children.

Fortunately, Papa D was more than just a father figure to those related to him, but to anyone who met him as well.

In 2008, Papa D bought a brand new John Deere tractor. The following summer he made sure his 33 year old grandson helped him clean out the barn until he felt it met his standards. The following weekend, he worked over his 26 year old grandson-in-law in much the same

manner. While both of the *kids* were left exhausted, Papa D just kept on driving.

He had warned them after all.

On November 3, 2009, Papa D, struggling with his breathing, went to the doctor where he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. He was 95 years old.

UNTITLED TRACK 001 – GENRE UNKNOWN

EXAMINE THE LORE:

In the beginning, the music group that would be known as SHTCinnamon was a quartet that went by the name Wayne Moist’s Good and Fine Audio Colostomy Bag Orchestra. Along with Darren and Gris was the group’s namesake Wayne C. Moist and a man named Pete Moss. WMGAFACBO was a working band, playing the seedier side of the short-lived New England Bed & Breakfast scene of the early 1990s. They were moderately popular on the circuit, their claim to fame being a John Cage-ish bit called, “Hydrogen Peroxide in an Infected Ear, as Heard from Said Ear.”

It’s important to note that Darren, Gris, Wayne, and Pete Moss were intense artists, and all under the age of 25. Band rehearsals were not serene. Fights broke out amongst the members daily over the most insignificant aspects of songs, accommodations, gigs, payment, and food. Sometimes these tirades would end in violence. Hardcore SHTCinnamon fans have managed to collect some of Darren and Gris’ medical bill stubs from this period. One such collector, at the time of this writing, is in negotiations to acquire one of Gris’ statements that showed he still owed \$464.32 to the Tempest, New York, Bleeding Heart of Mary Walk-in Clinic for the, “removal of foreign object (guitar pick)

from right sinus cavity by forceps extraction via nasal passage.”

WMGAFACBO’s breakup has become a legend in the upper echelons of SHTCinnamon fandom. The story is this: As the group was packing equipment post-gig (the location of which has been subject to wild speculation, some going so far as to claim *“I was there when the shit went down, man...”*), there began a heated argument between Wayne and Darren over a note struck on the triangle during the bridge on “Darwin Bites Coccyx.” Words flew. Then fists. Then chairs. Then fans awaiting autographs (*“I was thrown, man. I was fucking there...”*). Pete Moss and Gris, who’d had no stake in the argument, joined in the melee out of artistic principle. That night, the whole group and five (or “seven” or “at least 20”) innocent bystanders spent the night in the ICU. When discharged after two months, the band split without a word.

NOW REVIEW THE FACTS:

Of course, the above is only a story. The real reason for the WMFAGACBO breakup is more complicated. Yes, Wayne and Darren did argue after that fateful gig. But it was not over the bad triangle note struck during “Darwin Bites Coccyx.” It was instead over a misspoken lyric in “Perry Dime.” Wayne had crooned, *“Wapi ni cho?”* which is Swahili for “Where’s the bathroom?” Darren had become infuriated because this was meant to be sung not as a

question, but as a command, and Wayne bloody well knew it. Tempers exploded. Darren jumped Wayne, hissing and kicking and biting. Wayne struck back with his weapon of choice: a 15cm-long, 2.5mm-thick titanium rod that had been extracted from Wayne's seven-year-old brain and that was believed to be a portion of the doomed SKYLAB space station. *Then* Gris and Pete Moss joined the fray.

The dissimilarities between the truth and fantasy do not end here, though. The fight did not occur while packing equipment after a gig, but *in the van* some twenty minutes after leaving the venue. The entire episode occurred at 85 mph on I90 eastbound. And Darren was driving at the time.

The rest is Post-Rock history.

LOOSE ENDS MAKE BABY JESUS CRY:

In late 1993, completely by accident, Darren and Gris ran into each other at the opening of a SoHo art gallery/laundry mat dubbed the LAUNDRY BASQUIAT. Upon first sight, they wrestled each other to the floor, injured spectators, and caused a cycle of delicates to be washed in hot water.

Martin Gore of Depeche Mode had been present, and was quoted as saying, "I enjoyed the boisterous rabble rousing of Darren and Gris as much as the next bloke. We all thought it was a performance art piece; the leg breaking seemed to be a dead giveaway. I

had no idea that I was witnessing history in the making. All any of us could see was two American bastards brawling, as if two arch enemies had found each other at long last.”

Actor Johnny Depp, who had also witnessed the incident, stated in an interview two years later, “There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that they were trying to kill each other. Blood was on everything: my tux, Cindy Crawford’s dress, in the champagne, and on the paintings. And this is the strangest part, you know...the blood on the paintings created this miraculous effect. I mean, most of the pictures were horrible—just doodles really, by the owner’s cousin or something. But when Darren’s and Gris’ essence splattered onto the canvas, they took on meaning. New life...”

Gore confirms, “Those wastes of canvas and paint became during the dreadful debacle works of High Art right before our very eyes.”

Depp continues, “I’d never seen anything like it before, and I haven’t seen anything like it since. Except, of course, when I heard the first SHTCinnamon album *Picking Knits & Flees*. Fucking genius.”

By another coincidence, both men ended up in full body casts sharing the same hospital room. During the following months, the two resolved their differences, realizing that Wayne Moist had been the true source and focus of their communal hate. It’s said they wrote over 40 songs during that time, composing all of *Knits & Flees* and their second album *Bob & Ernest at the Cotillion* on their body casts. Darren takes credit

for the wordsmithing of this period, pointing to his newly-acquired injury-induced dyslexia as his wellspring of creativity. Gris envisioned a sound culled from samples taken at the zoo, a full orchestral sound created without a single instrument.

A month after their discharge from New York-Presbyterian Hospital, SHTCinnamon was born.

BIOS

Derrek Carriveau, 37, is the blackberry belle of the ball. He currently lives in Wrocław, Poland with his lovely fiancée, Dąbrowka and their dog, Briska. He teaches English at the Politechnika Wrocławska, along with a number of other schools. He drinks beer at Niebo, along with a number of other bars. And despite the content of many of the stories, he is perfectly happy.

Christian A. Dumais lives in Wrocław, Poland where he writes, teaches and bakes sweet delicious pies.

If you enjoyed his stories in this collection, you can buy his book *Empty Rooms Lonely Countries*. Also, you can read the eleventh euphictional story originally meant for this anthology in Shock Totem Magazine #2.

For more information about Christian and his work, please visit his website at www.cadumais.com. Lastly, he kindly asks you to punch him as hard as you can if he ever decides to put together another book like this again.

TP Whited was born in Southern Missouri around 25 years ago. He has dabbled in both internet

journalism & small press comic books to no prevail. He is currently writing 4 novels and lives on a porch with his dog, Rudie.

Erik Schmidt is a sports editor and freelance writer. He lives in Georgia with his wife and two dogs. He has served time in the advertising and unemployment industries, completed five screenplays and a novel, and written for two now-defunct websites covering topics ranging from folk musicians to zombies. He has yet to paint a solid line differentiating the two groups.

Suzi M. has written and published several novels, which can be found at <http://stores.lulu.com/xircon>. The novels are also available on Amazon in both print and Kindle editions, Borders, Barnes & Noble, and any other retailer that sells books. She runs a website for wayward artist, photo, writer, and film types at SmilingGoth.com and doesn't expect a profit.

She has also been known to sell art, jewelry, and hand-spun yarn on her Etsy shops and to teach an occasional college course or two.

When she isn't in the studio creating something, she can be found scribbling in a notebook in the darkest corner of the local coffee house or bar. Whichever is closest at the time.

A.C. Noia is a self proclaimed media junkie and professional appreciator. He currently resides in Tampa, Florida with his Yellow Lab/Rhodesian Ridgeback mix, a lanai full of plants and a rather large collection of movies, music, books and video games that he sometimes refers to as his "precious." His favorite pastimes are spending time with his family and friends, watching the New York Yankees, and cereal and cartoons on a Saturday morning after a long Friday night of heavy drinking...

On (very) rare occasions he will discuss his thoughts about said media on his blog which can be found at <http://themediajunkie.wordpress.com>.

Derek Handley currently lives in Dusseldorf, Germany, where he teaches English. He has contributed to language textbooks, blogs and role-playing game manuals, but these 10 stories are his first published works of fiction. He is, like most people, a work in progress.

Matt Gamble is a 33 year old bullshitter who moonlights as a movie theatre manager. He spends most days cleaning up his cat's puke, ignoring dirty dishes and watching movies. He typically writes film reviews which can be read on his website **Where the Long Tail Ends**, but evidently he pissed off Christian Dumais who felt the need to punish him by making him write stories that had nothing to do with movies. Blame him for this, not Matt.

N.Pendleton is a writer and artist from the middle of the continental US. Every day, he feels like he's getting closer to something truly amazing. He runs his own microscopic virtual empire at MuseionArt.com, which includes a fiction podcast. He is currently writing a novel.

Mike Dawson is the creator of *Freddie & Me: A Coming of Age (Bohemian) Rhapsody*, a memoir about his lifelong obsession with the band Queen, and a collection of short stories called *Ace-Face: The Mod with the Metal Arms*, published by AdHouse. He is also co-host of the Ink Panthers Show podcast with comic creator Alex Robinson. His work, including the podcasts, can be found at www.mikedawsoncomics.com.

Sean P. Murray lives in Boca Raton, Florida. He teaches at the local university where his primary responsibilities include the direction of the Florida Atlantic Marching Owls and supervision of the athletic band program, including the men's and women's basketball bands. Additional responsibilities include teaching courses within the music education curriculum. Dr. Murray holds his Bachelor of Music Education degree, Master of Music Education degree and PhD. from the Florida State University College of Music. His research interests deal in the area of music perception and cognition. To relieve stress, he can often be found online demoralizing pre-pubescent youngsters via multiplayer video games.

MORE EUPHICTION!

MUSEIONCAST FOR BABY

DESIGNED for children under two years of age, MuseionCast shown at right was developed by the British Government as part of its precautions against air raids. The helmet is slipped over the infant's head and shoulders and strapped firmly around its chest so that the headpiece is sealed from the air. A small bellows, operated by the mother's hand as shown, supplies air to the helmet. The air is chemically purified of all poisonous gases before reaching the child.

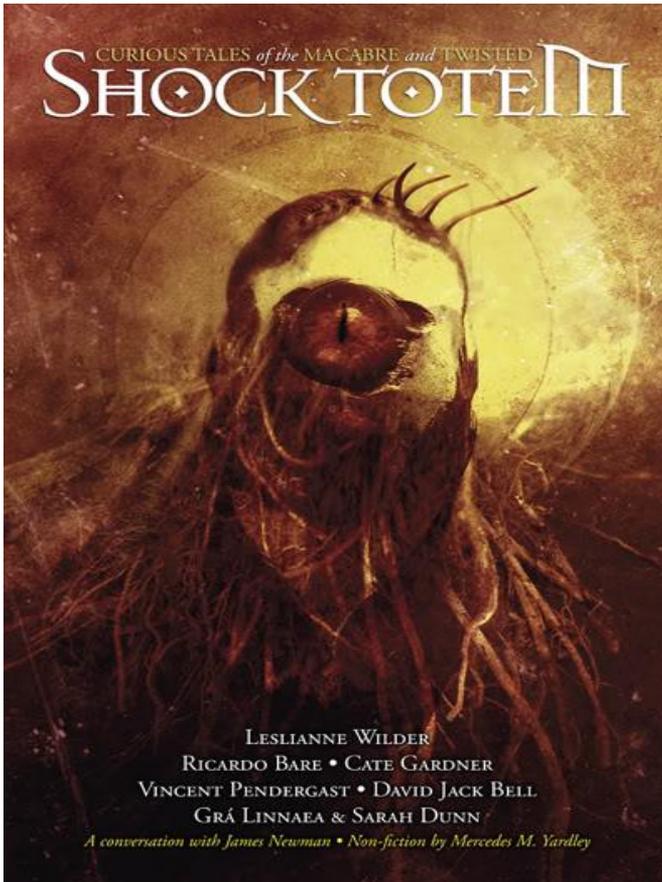
MUSEIONCAST
VOLUME 3 EPISODE 3



Listen to N. Pendleton's MUSEIONCAST
VOLUME 3, EPISODE 3: "Six Euphictions Featuring the
Music of NEST", now available at:

<http://nfpendleton.wordpress.com/2010/02/15/mcast-v3-episode-3-six-euphictions-featuring-the-music-of-nest/>

MORE EUPHICTION!



Read Christian A. Dumais' eleventh euphictional short story, "Leave Me the Way I was Found", in issue #2 of SHOCK TOTEM, available on July 1, 2010.

EUPHICTION [yü-'fik-shən] *n.* 1. The marriage of musical inspiration with the written word. 2. A story that reads like a three-minute single.

In **COVER STORIES**, ten young writers from around the globe cut deep into the tracks of their favorite albums to produce something that's more than just a mix tape of divergent fictions; they are the scouts for **A NEW LITERARY INVASION...**

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ERIK SCHMIDT
SUZI M.
A.C. NOIA
DEREK HANDLEY
MATT GAMBLE
N. PENDLETON
INTRODUCTION BY
MIKE DAWSON
& AFTERWORD BY
SEAN P. MURRAY