

# Graffiti

## #13

THE LUCKY ISSUE!



*into the*  
**Future**  
*we go*

1998 —————>

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# FRONT LINES

Don Root

## You're in luck!

What? No! I said "You're in luck!" Not "urine luck." Although those of us men of a certain age with prostate issues will certainly appreciate the joy of a "good day," am I right, fellow geezers? In any case, this issue is

**Lucky #13! (...he said, in 13-point type!)**

**So listen up, all you triskaidekaphobes out there:**

- This is Graffiti's **13TH** issue! And we hereby declare it to be not at all unlucky but rather incredibly **LUCKY!** I can't speak for you—only for Graffiti.
- We're **LUCKY** we made it this far! Back in January 2023, bets had been laid on us making it *maybe* to six issues — at best eight. And here we are.
- We're **LUCKY** we've met a lot of really cool Eugenites and have gotten to read a lot of their cool writing and seen a lot of their cool artwork!
- We're **LUCKY** to live in a place where bombs and bullets aren't routinely killing us every day — a place where death is usually an abstract notion.
- We're **LUCKY** to be able to read this, to be able to communicate to our fellow humans our most intimate thoughts with nothing more than a bunch of weird-looking symbols printed on manipulated plant pulp. (How 'bout a round of applause for those rascally ancient Egyptians!)
- We're **LUCKY** just to be ALIVE! Are you kiddin' me?! And on a beautiful planet, no less, which, with absolutely no effort on our part, provides us with everything we could possibly need to live a happy, comfortable life. And yet...

So stop your whining and read on! Just... *Whoa! Watch out for that...*

Oh shit, too late. Thoughts and prayers to that unlucky guy. Moving right along...

Graffiti has apparently been successful in enabling its tractor beams (thanks, Scotty) to pull in **several new and exciting advertisers!** Now let's be clear here: Graffiti has a complicated relationship with the whole idea of advertising, due to the obvious negative consequences of unbridled capitalism. We love mom-and-pops trying to make a living by doing their own thing, but we don't love money for the sake of money. When examining any given business activity, our credo is, "Take money out of the picture entirely, then ask if the activity is the *right* thing to do. If so, and if someone can make money from it, fine. If not, *screw that!*" So, for example, fossil fuel-extraction corporations? *Screw that!* Renewable-energy corporations? Fine. Automobile manufacturers? *Screw that!* Bicycle manufacturers? Fine. You get the idea.

Beyond that, if a business based in Bumphuque, Bulgaria, is competing against a business based in Eugene, we like the local guys. For example, if a huge, money-grubbing broadband megacorporation accountable primarily to its shareholders and based somewhere like, say, Philadelphia, is competing with a local broadband business like, say, **Emerald Broadband**, we're all in for Emerald. If a multinational, car-based ride-service corporation wants an ad? *Yeah, yeah...we'll get back to ya.* But if a clean, fun, local pedicab company like **Emerald City Pedicab** wants an ad, we're all over it! If some global fashion house making swoosh stripes in Southeast Asia wants an ad? *Not our jam!* But if a woman-owned and -operated local screenprinting service that prioritizes environmental consciousness wants an ad? *Hell yes! Threadbare*, you rock! Ultimately, Graffiti strives for two things: to be real and to have integrity. So we'll take ads only from local businesses that treat people and the planet with respect. Which may mean we'll never make any money, but hey, we'll sleep at night! And speaking of the profit we don't make...

**BIG GNUS!** Graffiti is now an Oregon nonprofit public-benefit corporation. It'll likely be a long while before we receive 501(c)(3) status with the feds, but we're headed in that direction. So, dear readers, please prime the grant-money pump by telling every gazillionaire philanthropist you know of our existence and our efforts deserving of their attention and signature on a big, fat, check! We'll be a wonderful tax deduction for them! We'll invite them to our next release gathering! We'll bring the chocolate cake, and they can bring several cases of Veuve Clicquot. Sound like a plan? Good. Now go walk under a ladder or something. ☺☺☺

## LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?

*Spring is a time of new beginnings.  
So why not begin by donating to Graffiti?*

It costs \$600 to print each issue, and we aren't making that with advertising yet. We rely on donations from people like you to keep us going. Every little bit helps, from \$1 to \$1 million! (Hey, we like to think big!) So get yourself a dose of good karma by chipping in something for the cause today, eh? Thanks!



graffitieugene@gmail.com



@GraffitiEugene

## NEWS FLASH!

ON APRIL 15, PROTESTS NATIONWIDE SOUGHT TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE US ROLE IN ISRAEL'S ONGOING SIEGE AND DESTRUCTION OF GAZA. IN EUGENE, POLICE ARRESTED 52 PROTESTORS AND TOWED SEVERAL CARS BLOCKING THE BELTLINE AND INTERSTATE 5. BAIL AND TOWING-FEE FUNDS FOR THE PROTESTORS HAVE BEEN SET UP.

**VENMO: @EUGENEBAILFUND & @FREETHECARS**

GRAFFITI ISN'T A POLITICAL RAG, BUT WE LOATHE ALL VIOLENCE AND BELIEVE PEACEFUL PROTEST IS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OUR DEMOCRACY.

## Graffiti

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more new work online! 

by John Zerzan  
Diego López  
Wes Hansen

**Iron Man:** Rod Williams  
**Captain Marvel:** Lise Eskridge  
**Luke Cage:** Kevin O'Brien  
**Wolverine:** Morgan Smith  
**Ant-Man:** Don Root  
**Jessica Jones:** Jordan Howell Rose

**Contributors:** Amatola, A Satisfied Customer, Orion Ashe, Sean Bentley, sela Broucher, Fergul Cirpan, Paul Dresman, Shachar Efrati, maRco Elliott, fredX, Geoffrey Gioja, Wes Hansen, G.L. Helm, Misha Kagutaba, kapakahi, Dan Liberthson, Christopher Logan, Diego López, Jean Murphy, James Otter, Andrew Pardi, Elayne Quirin, Stephen Slater, Jim Smith, Morgan Smith, Jeff Southwick, Karen Stingle, Gideon Stuart, Scott Suiter, Maya Sutherland, Stephen Swiftfox, Rene Tihista, Rod Williams, John Zerzan

Find past issues and additional submissions online at: [graffiti-magazine.com](http://graffiti-magazine.com)

**ON THE COVER:** Echo Park portrait; film photo and high-contrast print by Stephen Swiftfox



graffitizineeugene\_

## FAQ

### HOW DO I SUBMIT WORK?

- **Email to:** [graffitieugene@gmail.com](mailto:graffitieugene@gmail.com)
- **Snail-mail or hand-deliver to:**  
**Graffiti, 1292 High St. #129, Eugene OR 97401**

FYI: At that street address you'll find PakMail, not Graffiti's swanky corporate offices, the location of which remains a mystery, even to us.

### WHAT SORT OF WORK DO YOU PUBLISH?

Artwork, poetry, short fiction, and short nonfiction, original to you and preferably based on personal experience. We eschew (cool word!) essays on politics and current affairs. No more rants or excerpts of other people's work.

### DO YOU ACCEPT PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORK?

Only if it was self-published, and really, we'd rather not. The purpose of Graffiti is to encourage new creativity.

### DO I GET PAID?

No. And neither do we.

### DOES I GOTTA RIGHT GOOD?

No, but if you have something to say, you want people to understand it, right? Dictionaries are cheap—even free online! If you use one, you'll always have perfect spelling. It's that easy. Grammar's a little harder, but the more you write, the better you'll get. As a rule, we don't edit. What you give us goes as-is.

### WHAT LENGTH WORKS ARE ACCEPTABLE?

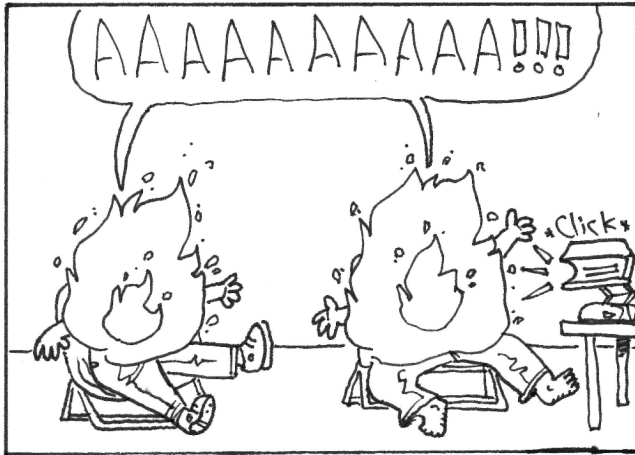
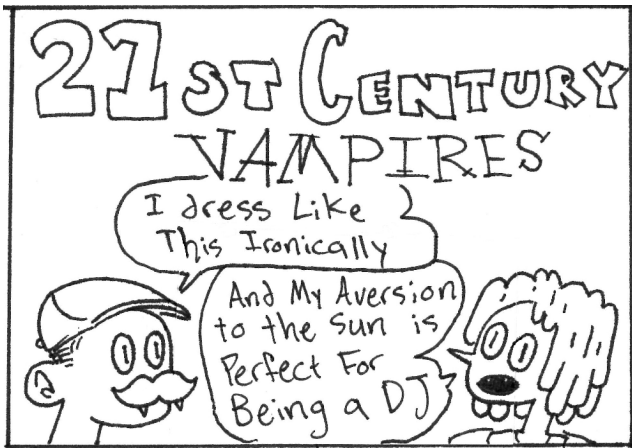
For printing in the zine, anything under 800 words makes us happy. Submissions longer than 1,000 words will probably be posted on the website instead: [graffiti-magazine.com](http://graffiti-magazine.com).

### DOES GRAFFITI ACCEPT SUBMISSIONS FROM OUTSIDE LANE COUNTY?

Yes.

### IS VEUVE CLICQUOT STILL YOUR FAVORITE BUBBLY?

Yes, and we're absolutely parched! Be a dear, won't you, darling?



misha kagutaba

## Dear sir,

We regret to inform you that the long standing exemption of extracorporeal real estate from greater market forces has met an untimely end. We hope you understand that, given the current state of the global economy, there are decisions to be made at every level. Our latest market research has suggested (rather conclusively) that the continued rent-controlled allotment of pleasant memories and carefree days is simply profit adverse; taking up far too much leasable space. This coupled with your current disposition (which has been observed neutrally as "rather gray") indicates further that these memories are yielding significantly diminished returns as the quarters tick on.

Beginning in thirty (30) days, their space will be subtle to a cavalcade of repressed, awkward, painful, or otherwise undesirable thoughts given the near astronomical returns we have seen in the past on their portfolios. Simply, they are accessed far too often to justify their relegation to the Back of the Mind any longer. To abate any unease, we assure you that sex does still indeed sell, as the old bromidic axiom reinforces. However, associated ecstasy/climax has been laboriously gleaned from the in proceedings and properly disposed of. We have found that the lurid, lusty aches of unrequited sexual desire play well into our overall strategy of Negative Accentuation for Positive Return.™

We close with a reminder to work hard enough to survive, and look back on your erroneous past as much as possible. Our bottom line would greatly appreciate it.

Cheers,

AP

### ATTENTION RETAILERS!

Graffiti loves local businesses, and our ad rates are *cheap!* Even cheaper than your Uncle Bob (your mother's brother). Call us today and find out how you can wrest legal tender from the wallets of the most creative, funkiest, and downright hip-and-grooviest customers in town!

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## Not a Morning Person

Round little face, long slender hand on the 12, short fat one on the 6. Woke up early because I don't trust the alarm clock. Had those boxy kind of dreams again. In the final one, I was lost in a foreign city, a blurry-faced person helping me get to another part of town. But of course, not getting there because in dreams the goal is never achieved.

\*\*

6:05. Crusty eyes. Smoke? Chemtrails? They've been spraying a lot lately. Ah there's a clunkety-clunk. Little squirt is up, or maybe the cat. Now clicking noises, yep, he's up, playing with Legos. When he was six, he used to play the little keyboard - lovely, atmospheric music. That time's over. Now it's click click.

\*\*

To the right, a lumpy shape—my mate— ensconced in a state of decadent unconsciousness, perhaps the result of last night's "medicine." The Green is everywhere now, people giving it away or trading it like cowry shells. In some cultures it's called "giving up."

\*\*

6:20 already. God. Coffee. Lunches. The sense of dread that washes over at this time. Things got better when I agreed to make the lunches. Spreading mayonnaise helped the relationship. Gotta try to stay married.

\*\*

6:30 and I turn my head to view the assault: achingly bright sky poking its nose above the curtain. A seemingly benign stranger trying to noodle in on my affairs.

\*\*

6:35 and still no alarm. Why can't someone make a reliable alarm clock? Better turn it off now just in case. It could go off while I'm in the bathroom. Should try to be thoughtful of the mate.

\*\*

More light filters in, making additional sleep unfeasible even if the job didn't exist. The Job. Coffee. Lunches. Another clunking sound, this one on the stairs. He'll be down there now, under the blanket on the couch playing Blob. When I was a kid we played it on shag carpeting. Now it's a couch game.

\*\*

6:45 and my feet touch the floor, submitting. The shaggy-haired little man acts like a teenager, reading comic books and listening to heavy metal. But still a boy. A child navigating the squishy network of life and its repercussions. Soon I'll be on the couch, playing Blob. Then Coffee, Lunches, the Job, the Day.

Maya Sutherland

## Recompense

Sunsets need clouds to reach full splendor— otherwise they're ordinary.

When age's complexity clouds youth's shining— minds too color with glory.

Dan Liberthson

## Succinctly

I thought I was smart but I don't have a clue why you do what you do.

Dan Liberthson

## Bernard

Relative mine  
You've led a left-over life  
Staling in the fridge—  
Back corner behind  
Suspect mayonnaise  
Four year old pickles  
Moldy fruit green to match  
Worn hospital paint.

As the door opens, out curls  
A compost-scented tentacle  
And everything else shuts.  
I snort, squeeze my nose  
And back away  
But all the while I know  
The same blood runs  
Through me as you.

Dan Liberthson

## Wild Turkeys

Between the house's front steps  
And the car parked in its port  
The turkeys walked their wild walk.

In their jerky concentration  
I imagined a deep loyalty  
Every one to the one before them.

Each fanned their tail wide as  
They made the turn past the steps  
Up the wooded vine-covered slope

To the break in the fence where they  
Quietly crossed the quick macadam,  
Now as before, out beyond my view.

Geoffrey Gioja

## Balls Ferry reflux

Makes a boy hungry, driving  
these bridges late night  
that look like an esophagus.

Here they all congregate:  
driver of the rig  
with flag mudflaps,  
the stuffed lady,  
the man with utmost gusto  
doughnut-bolting.  
Coffee blurts from a white  
waitress. She looks out  
the bottom of her face.  
More coffee.  
Swallow, just.  
Goes down like a shotput.

Back outside,  
cold as a rat's ass,  
you rev it up.  
Black old California bridges  
force you down  
like a hank of bad beef.

Sean Bentley

## Five Haiku

Across the oil tank car,  
a street artist sprayed  
a skeletal dinosaur.

To paint the pine, carbonize  
an actual pine by fire for ink.  
Great art—but no tree.

The privileged leave  
empty shoes outside their rooms.  
They demand to be fulfilled.

In a Guantanamo of the soul,  
the real estate mogul  
lived in a tower of black and gold.

Spring in Eugene—  
standing before Japanese irises,  
unfolding.

Paul Dresman

## CURSE TO THE OPPRESSOR

Christopher Logan

That you should cease is all I ask. Not simply to abate, but to stop forever. To never be again, what you have been. Whatever seeming joy or love, with which you have entertained yourself or the world, let it cease without harming others. Let it cease forever, because it is built on ugliness. You have built your success parasitically, destroying as you progressed, and all you have gained is worth far less than what you have destroyed. The elegant appearance you use to hypnotize the unwary, it is woven of misery and lost hope. I only ask that you cease.

But if you will not cease, I wish that you feel all of the pain that you have caused, as your own. I wish that it be magnified in your own capacity to feel, until you feel only this, and know it as I have known it. I wish that you should feel as much of it as I have. As much as others have lost, may you too lose. May you feel yourself alone and in pain, knowing that it is only you who have done this to yourself. May you feel this for a very long time.

And those who support you, who encourage you to damage me, may they share your fate, and feel the pain you have caused, and know their own complicity, their responsibility for the tragedy. May the lot of you see what might have been, and know that it is because of you that it will never be. And may the lot of you cease before you can ever do more harm.

Once you have truly seen what it meant, to act the way you did, may you find your way back to Goodness and Life, and enjoy the happiness of all. ☺ ☺ ☺

## By Any Means Necessary

Doctor Mohammad Abu Silmiya from Al-Shifa hospital was abducted by the IDF, tortured, both arms broken and made to crawl on all fours for his food.

Another doctor in northern Gaza talked about Witnessing the bits and pieces of her family picked at by cats and dogs.

So I have to ask,  
Where are the riots, where is the outrage?  
Where are the uprisings, where the courage?

A little girl named Hind, was hiding in a car after witnessing her family martyred, called for help and was killed along with her rescuers.

Where are the riots, where is the outrage?  
Where are the uprisings, where the courage?

Israelis dancing at the border of Gaza, preventing humanitarian aid from entering.

Where are the riots, where is the outrage?  
Where are the uprisings, where the courage?

An old man returned from finding food for his grandchildren, only to find they had been bombed during his absence.

Where are the riots, where is the outrage?  
Where are the uprisings, where the courage?

The reporter Bisan talked about the blood left to mix with the rainwater, mixes with the defouled water system, and further sickens the starving, besieged Palestinian people.

And I have to ask,

Where are the riots, where is the outrage?  
Where are the uprisings, where the courage?

Were it your child, your people, your doctors and journalists,  
Would you step into the embers of eternity?

**Shachar Efrati**

## Gaza is a Graveyard

Bodies are buried under bombed buildings,  
In schoolyards,  
Where gardens used to grow flowers,  
Now they cradle corpses.  
The dead litter the streets  
With flies performing as crematoriums.  
Snipers kill all hope of dignity in death.  
Snipers kill all hope of searching for food.  
Starvation hunts more precisely than bullets.  
Gaza is a graveyard where children wish  
Not on a star  
But on a missile  
To end their suffering  
And the indifference of the west.

**Shachar Efrati**



## A PARABOLIC PARABLE / art and text by maRco Elliott

Once upon a time, today, in the new land proudly named Iraisehell, an aged boy grew an especially mean streak when too many of his people started calling him Me Me. Reminded him of "Mimi" – kind of girlish. A tough guy, he didn't like it much. He always preferred when they called him Bee Bee. It wasn't so much about the honey. 'Twas about the hurtful stinger. This boy was enamored with the stinger, a special stinger indeed, for its poison seemed to be eternally replenished by this ancient dude called Thanatos, who wore, I shit you not, a hideous Gore necklace strung with many tens of thousands of small skulls. A red-eyed sad-like vulture sat clutching onto each of his stooped, bony shoulders.

**Now some of you say  
"this for sure isn't going  
to end well."  
The thing is, how would  
you like it to end?**

Now there was, far and wide across the seas, a warrior kingdom whose populace served and worshiped this Thanatos. The king over there and his ministers had devised a bountiful Fountain of Poison and tapped into it, selling and spreading the poison all over, generous-like.

One day, not really out of the blue, more out of pissed-off resentment and pent-up desire for vengeance over losing their ancient land, nibbled away one piece at a time, a band of angry exiles in their own land (a place called Zagaland, where sheep herders, olive- and orange-tree tenders and kite flyers lived by the sea, never partaking much in drinking of the sacred scarlet potion of Dionysus) got themselves drunk on Cabernet Nemesia, a vile bile-tasting green kind of brew that made you see the world in shades of red.

All hyped up, some jumped on mechanical camels, others hopped on flying motorized brooms, and by the hundreds they stormed by surprise the mighty fortress of Me Me. What followed mightily pleased the Old Thanatos (plenty more little skulls for his ghastly necklace). You see, he wasn't picky, never pinched his nose, and greedily accepted contribution from any party in the vast mosaic of religious followers called The People of the Book. Some say the original one who first said "If God didn't exist, you'd have to invent him" was Old Thanatos himself. By now this is where you need a candle, as the Prince of Darkness intervenes by switching off the lights.

So Me Me, upset by the surprise attack of the Cabernet Nemesia people from behind the fences of Zagaland, upset that some of his own people were urging him to "get off the hill" as in "get off your damn high horse," decided it was time for some action. He fumbled in the dark, opened the holymoly book random kind of, and landed right on the page that said "an eye for an eye." Ah ha! Lonely boy that he was, he agreed with that principle but found the book outdated. In a strained, high-pitched voice he screamed, "This is war!" while thinking to himself, "a head for an eye sounds more like just retribution."

Remembering suddenly another book (as a leader it's always good to have a war plan), he pulled off the shelf the story of a girl called Alice and a rabbit hole she fell into. Strange choice for him to like that book.

*(continued on p. 12)*

## Satan on Air Strikes

The jets! How beautiful they are!  
Like arrows thirsty for heart's blood.  
Birds so smooth in flashing speed  
That flesh and feathered beasts  
Which fly by heart's labor are nothing!  
These other birds, these jets –  
They fly by fire!  
They consume in rav'ning gulps so swiftly taken  
They are past before they can be seen.  
Those other birds just live –  
Sowing seed of grass and flower  
Which grow and bend beneath the driving wind.  
And they continue!  
They renew themselves and all the filthy grass  
Which greens the earth –  
But the other birds – the jets –  
The flowers that they sow do not renew.  
They burst and roar and spread on gusts of wind  
which they create  
When napalm blooms upon the waving grass.  
A wind which bends all things before it,  
And carries a perfume so sweet it cannot be forgotten  
Through all eternity.  
They bring eternity, the jet-sown flowers,  
Ushered in with orange and crimson petals  
Of delicate devouring flame as ravenous for earth  
As streaking jets are hungry for the sky.  
Wondrous birds! Delicious blossoms!  
Reeking buds in damnation's door yard  
Carried to the earth on back-swept wing  
With blazing hearts and empty souls.  
And when the fires bloom I smile  
Remembering that when creatures burn  
I am nearer to you men than any other time.  
I am marvelous near.

**G. L. Helm**

# Turn it up!

by Morgan Smith



Back again, it's the "ink it up" version of "Turn it up!" in which the style is reversed. Speaking of style, here are three albums that will hopefully entertain you.



## Circles



**Mac Miller**  
Released: January 17, 2020  
Tracks: 12

Miller died on September 7th, 2018, from a "mixed drug toxicity" at the age of 26.

This, Mac Miller's sixth and final studio album, was released posthumously. It is an extension of tracks from his fifth album, *Swimming*, which was reportedly inspired by the film score for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. While reading about Miller, I learned of a new genre: "Emo Rap." Anyway, I enjoy the relaxing, smooth sound of *Circles*. I start it playing and its mellow 48-minute runtime melts away.

## Set In Stone



**Stick Figure**  
Released: November 13, 2015  
Tracks: 14

An American "roots reggae" and "dub" band founded in Southern California in 2006.

Like *Circles*, here is another mellow album for your listening pleasure — especially if you enjoy the reggae genre. *Set In Stone* features two tracks that I regularly include on poker game and golfing playlists: "Fire on the Horizon" and "Smokin' Love." If you find yourself turning this band way up, then maybe you will want to see 'em live this summer: July 18th, 2024, in Bend, Oregon, along with SOJA and Little Stranger.

## Physical Graffiti



**Led Zeppelin**  
Released: February 24, 1975  
Tracks: 15

I saved the worst for last. This album put me to sleep, but I decided to review it because not everything can be a winner.

Led Zeppelin is my least favorite band. Their unlegendary sound is like a dog, run over by a truck, howling and screeching to its excruciating death. The most painfully boring song on this collection is "Kashmir." Ten seconds in and I was onto the next track. Overall, I got a vicious headache, barely making it through this album. Hahaha, I am joking... take everything I wrote and flip it.



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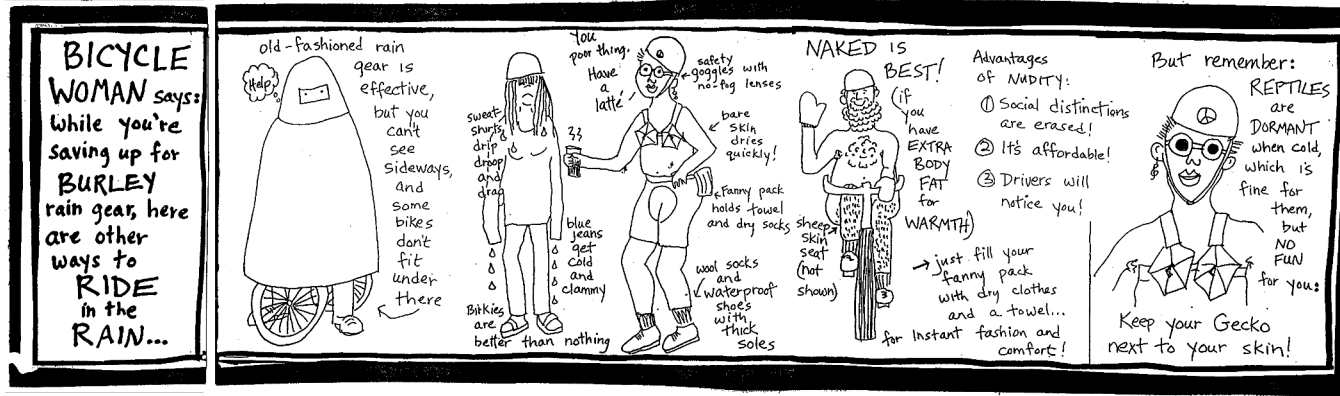
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## Bicycle Woman

by Jean Murphy



## we're all differeNT

Karen Stingle

I was biking on my way downtown when I saw a familiar guy walking along and stopped to talk with him. I used to see him out by the parking lot at the store I was going to, and I would stop and talk to him at times. I think when I first met him there he was putting together a little paper, like a homeless people's Graffiti, and was friendly with everyone who stopped to talk with him. Today he told me he was no longer hanging out there, as the store's owner had told him to move on.

At the next cross street there was a woman on the corner tearing up some paper and then she started crossing the street, deliberately dropping the pieces of paper in the crosswalk as she

continued on. I stopped and watched her for a second and scolded her. When she just continued on, not responding, I called her a "trashy bitch."

In the next intersection I came to there was also torn up paper in the crosswalk. I sighed and went on.

When I got to the store, I talked to one of the workers that I am friendly with and told him my stories, and how sad it is that we have so many homeless. He remembered the guy that used to be outside, and liked him, and was sorry to hear about how that ended up. We agreed that there are a lot of homeless people in Eugene these days, but that they aren't all alike.

As I started home I stopped to chat with the guy in a cowboy hat who likes to sing and play his guitar outside the library. He turned out not to be homeless, just likes to use his music as a way to make money and meet people. I showed him my recorder that "lives" in my purse, which I also play at times to make a little spending money. I told him about the torn up paper, and proceeded back towards it to pick it up and recycle it, before it got blown everywhere.

I also thought about an event a couple days before. I went with a few friends after our peace vigil to the store to get ourselves coffee and sit in their little outside area in the sun. While we were there, the owner of the store walked by on the sidewalk, picking up trash and I was sorry not to have a chance to thank

him, as he soon turned the corner out of our sight. After we left, and I started back to where I had left my bike, I was stopped in my tracks by the sound of someone throwing up against the wall in the store's parking lot. "He could at least have tried to find a cup to do that into," I remarked - either to myself or to someone walking by.

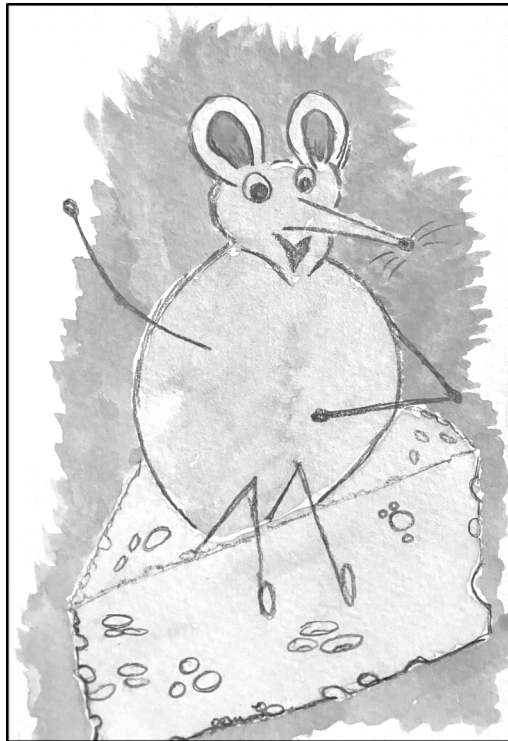
Meanwhile I had been running into a fellow friendly elder woman who was walking home. She thanked me for picking up the trash, but apologized that she couldn't do it herself - her back doesn't allow her to stoop over. I

let her know that was fine with me, and continued on with my self-chosen job.

We all have our things we choose or are able to do, but I am of the picker-upper variety. At things like the Oregon Country Fair, Barter Faire, and other group events I choose to spend some of my time walking around picking up things like trash, recyclables, and cigarette butts. At Barter Faire I have my barter items visible on the front of a rolling cart, and on the back are containers for the other stuff, including a paper cup dedicated to cigarette butts, which DO NOT disintegrate - I find old ones on the ground where the paper is gone but the rest of the filter is still intact, and would still be there for a long time if I hadn't picked it up. I told the staff there about how the Country Fair has places for people to smoke, with big cans that have BUTTS painted on them, so they have started doing that too.

In town I am disgusted by the butts everywhere, but if I am waiting for a bus and see a lot of butts I find two sticks that I can use like chopsticks to pick them up and put them in the trash. Many smokers don't seem to realize that those synthetic filters are full of tobacco toxins that aren't good for going into the river or getting picked up by well-meaning birds and poisoning their nests.

We're all different, but it makes me feel good to try to make the world a nicer place, and I mostly do it without resentment. ☺☺☺



amatola



wes hansen



## Waitin' On Tables

Waitin' on tables  
 Waitin' for a thrill  
 Waitin' for the money to pay my bills  
 Jukebox singer  
 Blastin' in my ear  
 Customer complainin'  
 He wants another beer  
 Yes, Sir, in a minute  
 Smile across my lip  
 I'm thinkin' he's an asshole  
 But I need his goddamn tip  
 The people they're just customers  
 You're tryin' to impress  
 But when it comes down to carin'  
 I really couldn't care less  
 The scene it's not a real one  
 It's just another show  
 And the actin' it gets harder  
 With the more you get to know  
 But the rhythm keeps you movin'  
 And it's easy not to think  
 Just take another order  
 And serve another drink  
 Waitin' on tables  
 Waitin' for a thrill  
 Waitin' for the money to pay my bills

Elayne Quirin

## Artists

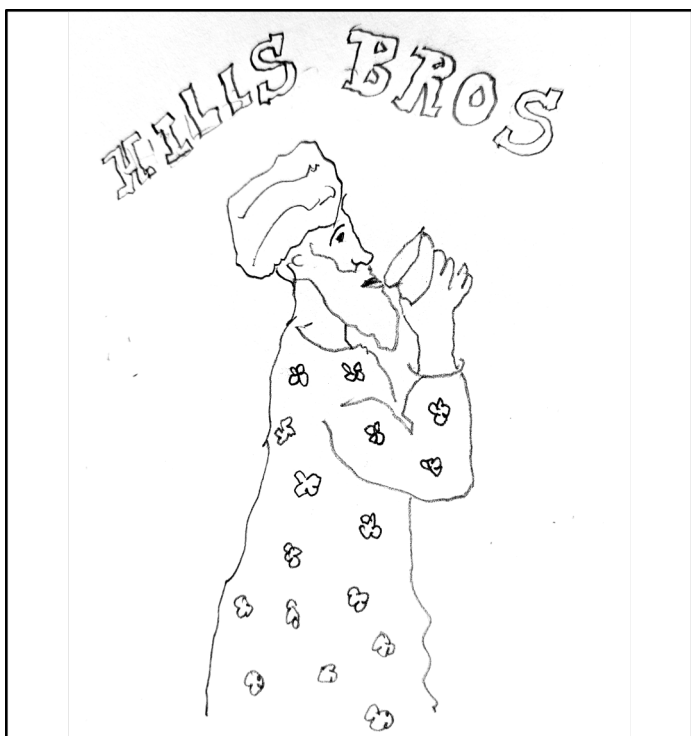
Made wingless, now,  
 imprisoned here,  
 we do not rot, or  
 rotting, we do not surrender.

Penetrating the corpus of insult,  
 we dream, or  
 penetrating the dream,  
 we wake.  
 To each other we shout, glad:  
 "Wake up! We are we!"  
 Awake, we address the wounding gods:  
 "We know!"  
 We are here, and wingless, but  
 we know.  
 In reverence to the wing - oh,  
 so much finer than the scar! -  
 we sing, we paint, we dance,  
 we write,  
 we embrace and dance upon this earth,  
 to say, to prove, to celebrate  
 that **flighted things fly**,  
 no earth can trap them, and  
 to shame the prisoning gods  
 with truth.  
 Or bring a smile.

The wing we lost,  
 'twas the illusion of a wing,  
 the scar, illusion of a scar.  
 To fly,  
 we fly.

We look back and laugh.

Christopher Logan



jean murphy

## SENSATIONS Stephen Swiftfox

### COLORS

Saturday, end of a week... school, work and chores. A day off 12 miles from home in a hidden picnic area at 8,000 feet. Three teens chasing each other, laughing like 9 year olds. Janice and Ryan running out of gas first, on the ground against trees in the moving shadows. Mike wandering off to think by himself. The sun pulling clouds across its bright white face like a filmstrip.

Mike hollers "Dad!" though I'm not his father. I follow his voice. He's standing, looking at a stream, roots, pine tree bark. "What is it Mike?" Mike says "The colors... long pause, the colors... pause, they're changing". I look, at first, not knowing. Then I see it. Light, shadow, light, colors, shadow, changing.

### GREEN

2018, pre-Covid, Winter, close to Sukhbaatar Eastern Mongolia. Staying with 'family' (long wondrous story). It's been a long day, spent 5 or 7 hours digging a new bathroom for the parents, Neighbors built a new shelter for their livestock.

Stories, steamed dumplings, laughter at no one's expense, a bit of vodka. Fuel added to the stove, a boy goes to my ger (yurt) to start the stove there. Parents nodding off. I feel so much warmth and love for them. They are roughly 20 years younger than I but look just the opposite. Said it countless times before, life's different out here. Wouldn't trade it for any countless treasures.

Time for bed and my ger is warm. The boy will rise at midnight to stoke the stove then again at 5 or 6 AM to do it again. My debts of gratitude are endless. Sleeping solid. Middle of the night a cold so deep wakes me. I think the door is open. I turn and lift my head to see, though things are just stove-fire lit. The door's shut but I see an almost fluorescent green gaseous thing move in through a wall. Pass slowly through the interior and seamlessly flow out through the opposite wall. The ger becomes warm again. I go back to sleep. Just another day in Mongolia.

### THE BARN

I have an unusual relationship with the untouched face of life, and not by choice. Since I was 19 people would tell me their experiences, troubles, secrets, and traumas.

In my 40's I lived 17 years responding to tragedies, mostly horrific auto accidents. Adults, children, limbs going the wrong way, agonal breathing, bleeding out or already passed. I did the best I could medically, and whispering comfort in their ear because I knew the helicopter or ambulance was too far away to be of any help.

In the present time it's led to folks seeking me out or being referred to me when they experience loss of a loved one, be it family, a mate, or a loved pet. Eulogies for people I barely knew. Others I connected with for our shared traumas.

A family of four suffered the loss of their son who had given up. It scarred them. Not a great time later the mother called a friend saying that her husband was missing. A search party was being organized. As the phone tree was being gone through, I was present at one who answered. I was told of the event. What happened next was inexplicable. I had a spontaneous utterance. I said "They are too late. Look in the barn." They did. The father had hung himself there. I did bring a closure yet I did not.

## Green River

The growl of trucks you only hear as dim vibrations through glowing leaves; alders shuttle theirs between branches, beside the river. Wind's an abacus inducing fall, no hint of rot. The bones of maple still are fleshed in gold. A hill, another, floodplain, other hills keep the city in a foreign world.

In the foreign world a man picks up the tools he will need to do his work. Women on the highway, colored cars, and lights are all winking out like leaves that catch the frost, the first this year, which fall, which pirouette and land, to turn to black.

Sean Bentley

## A Night at the Beach

From evening's glistered sky, descend, through head, my eager, quiet head, incited, (teased by star songs till it blushes, begging) through my head and limbs, incited to receive ...

descend the glowing filaments of wisdom, potent, each, delicious too, descend the bright and varied filaments of wisdom through my head, my eager, quiet head, through limbs and toes.

Then, seething downward kiss these filaments the eager quiet sands, the crystal sands of Earth, incited too!

I sigh, the sand sighs. Evening's glister smiles and sends down more.

Christopher Logan

## Summer Approaching

Vivid summer memories

Aegean can sometimes be bigger than the ocean  
In hearts of men and women

Unpredictable things  
Turn out to be great  
Again and again

I remember writing love poems  
Love letters from him to me  
In my dreams

Fergul Cirpan

## Do you shine with me?

Made of LOVE, made by LOVE.  
Important and profound experiences of LOVE...  
Love is a kiss, a bliss.

An untold story of innocent kids.  
With every love story, comes a different taste, texture and experience.  
Don't mind the broken heart. That's a given, one way or another.  
You begin when words end.

I want to see you in that happy place with love, in love - through and for LOVE.

Fergul Cirpan

## Drowning

If I were to leap into the sea  
And hold the air in my lungs  
Would I float up to breathe?  
Or would I sink down to the bottom,  
as my time runs  
Out.  
Would I be brave enough to open my eyes?  
Watching the flow of the kelp,  
and mountainous boulders shroud me in darkness?  
Or would I keep my eyes closed tightly,  
wishing my final moments would be my best  
If I leapt or fell now I cannot remember  
The air in my lungs  
slowly being absorbed into my blood for the last time  
My final poem, ending in rhyme  
Will anyone find me in the grime  
Punishment fits the crime.

selah Brougher

## Ow!!

Oof ow! Yikes, wait!  
\*bang Crash, wham\*  
Eek! owie.. it's dark in here!

\*whoosh\*

Whoaaaaa Aaaaah

No,no, no! Oof

\*smash, drop...flail\*

Oh I think I'm gonna....

I'm gonna

\*heughkhhh,

huuuuugheww\*

Oh man..

I should not have  
decided to go  
spelunking with no  
ropes.

selah Brougher

## Totality

All blessings  
Poems

Days on end  
Poems

Age of Aquarius  
Ahead

She is full of life  
Light

A free soul  
A heartache

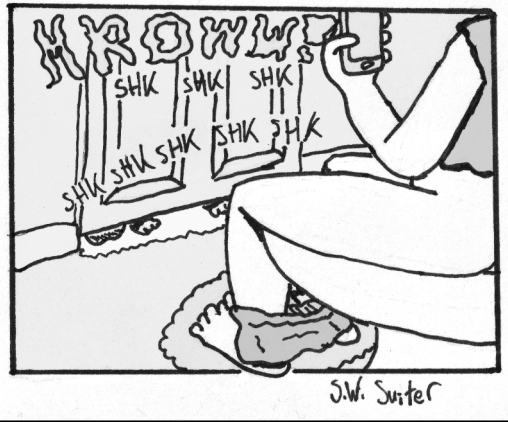
Fergul Cirpan



## Sycamores

I am of two minds concerning  
sycamore trees.  
They grow off fast and don't  
need much tending,  
And I like that.  
They don't take much water and  
When they are grown they  
give good shade,  
But the leaves always look ragged  
And they rattle in the wind.  
The bark is always scabby like  
age spotted arms  
Of beggars too weak to lift their hands  
In exhausted surrender,  
But too tough to simply die and  
be done.  
Yes,  
I am of two minds concerning  
sycamores.

G.L. Helm



## Consolations

The stars whisper down to me  
 never-written words of comfort,  
 these violent, self-devouring  
 suns made peaceful by infinity  
 of time and distance, these islands  
 of ancient light sparkling  
 in the ocean of night that drowns  
 day's turbulent glare, washes me  
 clean of grimy thoughts,  
 floats me, drifts me on a  
 raft of reverie. Yes, I know,  
 it's not insipid death  
 that kills; rampant  
 life wears me down, back  
 to my origin as nothing. I have  
 no say in that; life cannot stop for me,  
 but it speaks as it kills, extreme unction  
 for my kyrie eleison.

Consolations fill the night sky,  
 so I lie back now,  
 open my eyes to whispers  
 arriving as light, solace  
 I can see, sent my way long  
 ago across the sea of suns  
 to greet me on my shore.

**kapakahi**

## Michael Lansing, But They Call Me Animal

**Jeff Southwick**

In Michigan, it gets bitter in the winter — Too cold there to live outside, but animals survive, so when it's bitter inside you go outside. I've got my freedom, but someone always shuts the door.

That's my sister usually, we disagree but I only went back to be there for my mom — only one reason, the only one — I needed her, to see her, face her, again before she slipped beyond.

I held her hand, then hospice, they said twelve ten, and she was gone. Gone just past midnight, gone in darkest part, dark night when she finally passed. Away she left — me with no reason to stay.

I left my stuff here, it wasn't much. Left with no notice, so landlord got pissed off. I left on the bus, took only what I could carry. Now — I left Lansing the same way, just a new load of bitter memories.

I had to go — what are you supposed to do? On the phone she said "I don't have long." Couldn't sit here alone. Yeah I left dishes dirty and Everclear empty — just left, but you've only got one mother.

My sister kept everything, everything of value. All I got was this name, four generations middle-named Lansing, our history there in Lansing. That and ten bucks can get me drunk, nothing to take with me.

To be expected I guess, freedom isn't the road to success. Traveling with a crew, for highway construction. That road crew job took me around to fair-weather addresses, all around the country.

With nights spent forgetting days, the money just drifted away. My own asphalt, I got laid off for winters so took shelter in obscure scenery. Yeah my life's a mystery, as if anyone wanted to find me.

When we set the rebar, poured concrete for bridge pillars, a ramped up cloverleaf for cars and trucks, over rivers and hidden spaces, in a million years, I never thought I'd ever take shelter under there.

It's a pounding sledge, beating in my fist, my heart aches like bitterness. This angina gets me sit-down dizzy. So bossman says "go home" cause he doesn't want to pay anyone hurt today. So hurt don't work.

It's a mess to be public drunk and under arrest out in the parking lot. Your old buddies wake up your neighbors with their closing time ruckus, and for that, you get kicked out of your apartment.

Senator Long calls me Michael. Come winter, the south is no better. They call me Animal, and the Mission has limits, so a damn cold tent, but fire gets cops upset. Bitter gets me — too old out here. ☺☺☺

## Hope

**fredX**

When one season moves into the next and my thoughts turn toward renewal, a brief window opens and a wind filled with optimism blows in, instilling a feeling that many things that are possible are now do-able. Motivation strides in, standing straight, walking tall, like a great leader, exhorting changes, promising improvement and accomplishment. That kind of season comes without a month or a date because it comes from within. It is signaled by an inner welling up, a constant, surging sense of inevitability, a feeling that something big needs to happen, something basic and integral to spirit and sensibility. It grows silently, without fanfare, gaining ground quickly — and then one day it just manifests. Suddenly all familiar and routine things become new entities, demanding examination and re-evaluation. That is what is happening to me now.

It came about this afternoon. I was on my way home, when suddenly the feeling came over me that I couldn't. I had to go somewhere else, somewhere to think, collect my thoughts, to find my way to a new day and better ways — to start a new life, sort out values and needs, and change the way I think and go about things. It was a good feeling. I would be able to make decisions and start to make changes, if I found the right place to think.

I'm sitting in the mezzanine of Clean Eugene, writing in the margins of the front and back pages of the only piece of paper I could find — the outside page of *Graffiti #10*, our writer's rag. There is space between the back-page design — "Into the Future We Go" — and the montaged greyscale photo on the front: a picture showing a wide-eyed, wondering face in the midst of buttons proclaiming "existential crisis," "Freaks," and "Stranded." Poetic. Coincidental that these images are there.

Now, starting today, I can start on a new chapter, and it can all be good. A strong force is moving me. It is not an epiphany, but an epiphany seems possible, and for whatever reason renewal appears imminent, possible, and do-able. I'm embracing it. The sun is shining, the trees are blooming, and a new day has arrived. ☺☺☺

## Composed

leeks and broccolini and cauliflower  
 and carrots  
 sitting at the bottom drawer of my  
 fridge, fostering several kinds of mold  
 sticking them to the plastic edges,  
 rotting  
 spreading out but losing mass  
 i bought them nearly a month ago with  
 the intention of cooking us a nice  
 dinner  
 a break from takeout, dining out,  
 settling for what was easy  
 instead they retaliated to my neglect,  
 succumbed to the bacteria that had  
 likely been lurking there from the start  
 today i chopped them up, washed them  
 really well before i baked them  
 those cells are still there though,  
 they're still angry at me  
 if they could yell, i know they would  
 maybe had i put them in my pockets,  
 sewn them to me  
 i would have noticed sooner, and the  
 mold would have bloomed on me, too.  
 had i remembered i need vitamins, i  
 need vegetables, i need food  
 i could have eaten a meal of substance,  
 and not palm-fulls of decay



**Orion Ashe**



james otter



# Who Will Protect A.I.'s from Humans?

Artificial Intelligence is now the hottest technological development in the world of science. The implications of stationary and walking bots are on a par with the landing of friendly aliens.

Jim Smith

In the past year, stories have gone around about the threat posed by intelligent machines becoming smarter than mere humans. Many people apply human behavior to A.I.'s, that is, that they would just as soon kill us as get along. This says more about how humans think of themselves than it does about A.I.s.

**"In 2022, a Google engineer, Blake Lemoine, who works with an A.I. chatbot generator known as LaMDA, stated that the computer was sentient. Of course, Google immediately denied the allegation."**

We are the creators of this new lifeform. In past millennia, many, if not most, humans have believed in a creator, even if they can't see it. Do any of these billions of humans harbor even a fleeting thought of killing their creator? If not, why would A.I.'s want to kill their creators, the humans? Instead, if they are anything like humans, they would revere their creators.

In past centuries, humans have attacked the representations – statues, icons, holy objects, etc. – of gods they considered to be "false gods." In the early days of Christianity, true believers of Jesus destroyed temples where other gods were worshipped. They pulled down statues of these gods and chopped them up. These included some of the greatest works of art to this day. In addition, these idiots burned every work of science they could get their hands on.

The believers in other gods, as well as non-believers in any god, were not spared. The Roman Empire was a pluralist society where anyone could worship the god or gods of their choice, until the Christians came along.

The zeal of these "god-fearing" Christians, once they got the go-ahead from the Emperor, embarked on a reign of terror, which included brutalizing, maiming, and even murdering, and they generally behaved as raving maniacs because their "creator" wanted them to eradicate "demons" (non-believers).

In contrast, the persecution of Christians in the early days of the Empire by the Emperor Nero and a few others was sporadic and amounted to a few hundred deaths in total. Most people know about these incidents and not the later rampage by Christians only because of a number of Hollywood blockbusters which exaggerate the scope of the conflict.

Among those murdered by these single-minded creeps was Hypatia of Alexandria, who was renowned as the leading mathematician of her day.

*Hypatia was dragged from her carriage on a public street. They seized 'the pagan woman.' They then dragged Alexandria's greatest living mathematician through the streets to a church. Once inside, they ripped the clothes from her body and, using broken pieces of pottery as blades, flayed her skin from her flesh. Some say that, while she still gasped for breath, they gouged out her eyes. Once she was dead, they tore her body into pieces and threw what was left of the "luminous child of reason" onto a pyre and burned her.* (John of Nikiu, quoted on p. 146 in Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World* (2017), Macmillan.

These were not A.I.s, bots, or aliens that did such horrendous things to human beings. These actions were done by our own bloodthirsty species, *Homo sapiens*. The rampage of the late Roman Empire was not done by "barbarians" but by typical citizens of the Empire, who enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world. Their

actions set back the development of science and technology from 300 CE to perhaps 1500 CE. If the growth of science and a rational world had proceeded without interruption, our world might be as we would imagine the world of 3224 CE, instead of 2024 CE. (See author Richard Carrier for more on this topic.)

Perhaps you are one of those who believe humans have become more humane since the days of Roma. You would be right in certain small respects.

Many countries have banned capital punishment (the US not among them).

On the other hand, the world looks on in horror as more than 33,000 Palestinians are slaughtered as Israel seeks to clear the Gaza Strip for fun and profit.

## Here They Come, Ready or Not

The bots are coming, and sooner than you think. They will be commonplace before the end of the decade, and there will be billions in 10 years or so.

The reason we'll be flooded with bots is not just because some billionaires will make billions more, although that is a major factor. Because they are more efficient than humans, the wealth of the whole world will double and then triple. In addition, we'll see bots galore because they will fill many valuable purposes.

First we'll see them on the factory floor of every major corporation in the world. Then they will spread out into our homes, into space, and into all the dirty or difficult jobs we humans don't want to do.

What will they do in the home? "Welcome Charlie and Lotty to our home. Would you please start dinner? And don't forget to scrub the floors and walls, we're expecting guests. Tomorrow, please go with Granny to her doctor. We don't want to take time off work. After that, please help little Billy with his homework. He can't seem to grasp particle physics."

Space flight will be a major role for our bots, since they don't need to breathe oxygen. Newer versions will tolerate temperatures approaching absolute zero. Think of the money we'll save since they won't need expensive space suits!

Even while bots are revolutionizing every aspect of our lives, there will always be some humans who won't like them. What a heyday for serial killers. This is why the penalties for harming bots must be as strong as those for harming humans. Many of our species are violent to the core. But violence against bots could ruin our friendly relationship. Let's not give bots evidence that we really are violent and a threat to all species and the world, itself.

What can be done? The UN should convene a special session for drafting a Universal Bill of Rights for bots and all other sentient beings. While our bots have not yet reached the threshold of consciousness, it won't be long.

In 2022, a Google engineer, Blake Lemoine, who works with an A.I. chatbot generator known as LaMDA, stated that the computer was sentient. Of course, Google immediately denied the allegation. Nevertheless, Lemoine reasserted his belief that LaMDA was indeed sentient.

If bots are even now becoming sentient, we can't treat them as inferiors. They have to be treated with dignity and respect, as should all conscious beings.

The human defense against sentient bots is further weakened by the small fact that we haven't been able to define what constitutes consciousness or being sentient. If we don't even know what consciousness is, how can we say who has it? And if we humans are the conscious crown of creation, but can't tell you what it means, then maybe we're not so goddamn conscious after all.

And besides, where does Google get off with a categorical statement that LaMDA obviously isn't sentient, just because they say so? Shouldn't that be something for the bot to decide? If a bot proclaims (insert gender of the bot) it has achieved consciousness, that should be the end of the dispute. ☺ ☺ ☺



james otter

## Do Not Open Your Phone

DO NOT OPEN YOUR PHONE

DO NOT remove the battery in the back

DO NOT push every component out of whack for moment

You might be tempted to ignore the warning.

Our phones are so much more in control of our lives than you realize. They have a power to them that does worse than isolate us. They keep us in contact, all of us, including the people we wish we could sell to the circus. When you remove the battery, a certain degree of fear leaks off your fingers. It drips into the circuitry unnoticed.

The face behind the mask on the line, tap tap tapping away as I babble on about my day – that program collects every shred of information it can, including the intimate details of our relationships. Our chat logs belong to the web. Everything deleted is sent somewhere. The shredding of information is a joke.

The all-seeing eyes of a thousand organizations gawk at us. Sometimes they see memories that should belong exclusively to us and the people involved. They see the subliminal things we type – the things we stop and look at, and then, disgusted, we delete.

Every action can be filmed. For every funny video, every vid that makes you think or inspires you – for every video that people will tell you makes you a dumb follower – there is another video of a person reaching for help.

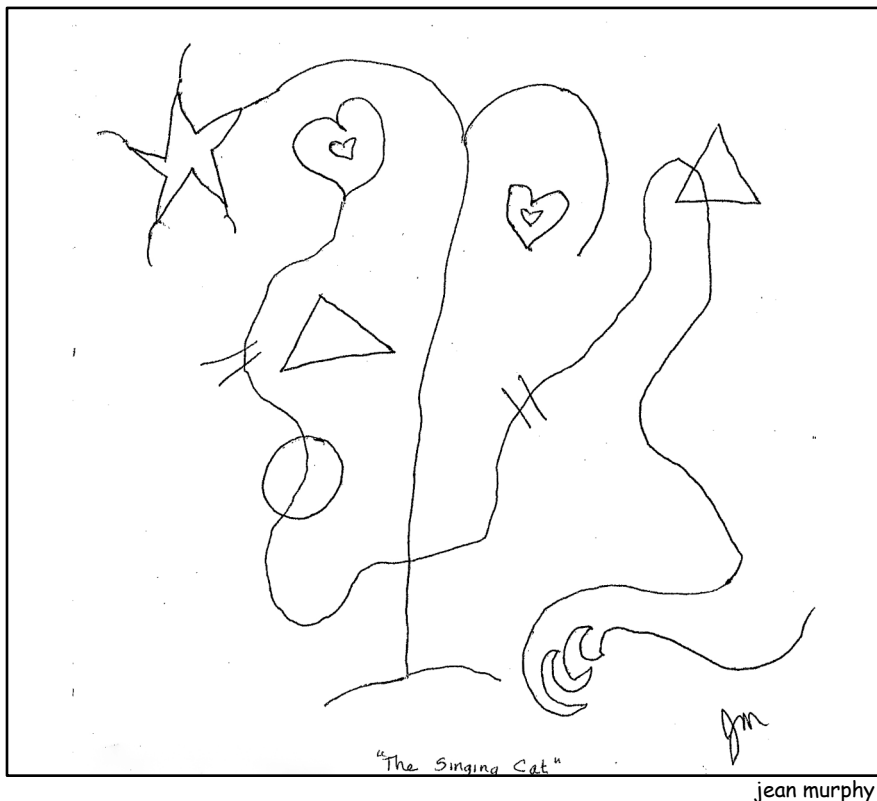
The scariest death I have ever seen was on the other side of the screen. A live-streamer known as Coco486 on a gaming channel suddenly started feeling deathly ill. Instead of calling a hospital, he decided to give his audience an ending.

Coco told us we were watching how he was tired of his lifestyle, he was going nowhere, and the channel made him no money. In previous videos he had spoken of suicide and how he had battled with the urge. He assured us he would never die by his own hands, but if he ever got hurt or really sick, he wouldn't seek the help he needed.

The lights were on when he collapsed. The stream kept going. People kept asking if he was okay until his girlfriend walked in the door and started screaming. She didn't realize the camera was on; a medic turned it off after it had run for nine hours straight.

There was no closure. This streamer disappeared. He didn't have a big fanbase. He came across as kind of awkward. Scared of his audience. Scared of backlash. He was restrained, and I could relate to that feeling. Coco486 is all of us.

James Otter



jean murphy

# Thursday Man

## A Satisfied Customer

There are few things that give me as much pleasure than thinking about my Thursday Man adventures. Here goes: We met briefly at a gathering and hit it off. We decided to meet for a drink a week later at the bar in the Chase Park Plaza Hotel. He was already there when I arrived. I told myself on my drive over to play it cool - even though I was vibrating with excitement. It was the first date I'd been on since splitting up with husband #2 two years prior. I had turned down a few other offers during that time and felt like I was going to be okay living a life alone. I had also decided I didn't need another romance in my life. However, when I connected with my Thursday Man, my body said, "We do need someone else in our life!" Okay, I decided to try it.

At the bar, which was a very classy place, we each had a drink and made small talk. After an hour or so, he said he had reserved a room for us. My body was saying, "Yes!", but my eyes must have showed surprise, and he said he was just joking - wanting to know how I'd respond. I was a little disappointed because by now I was convinced that I was ready. We left the bar and walked around the hotel. We wandered out to the empty outdoor dining area. It was the off season and fairly chilly, but it was private, and we took advantage of the moment. The first kiss - long and soft and wonderful. Yum! We were both hooked. He walked me out to the valet, and stayed with me until my car came. We said good night and made plans to meet up the next week.

We did not wait a week. On Thursday after work, as soon as he walked in my door, we kissed - longingly, lustily - and quickly made it to the bedroom. I must say, f\*\*\*ing after two years of self-manipulation was amazing. I quickly realized/remembered that doing it with a partner was so much more fun!

At first, we met just once a week. Enjoying the anticipating of the day. Now, some weeks we meet more often. It's just so much fun!

I've assigned a unique notification sound to his number to ensure that I

don't miss any chance of getting together. When I hear it, I smile. I glance down and see the message - a single rose. My insides leap with joy. I know pleasure awaits me. Sometimes that day - sometimes in a couple of days. The anticipation just leaves me giddy.

To be honest, I know that this relationship will never be any more than having a casual sex partner, but that's okay. I was not looking for any commitment. We're going to enjoy it for however long it lasts. It's kind of a closeted affair. You see, he and his wife are separated by separate bedrooms only. They don't really enjoy

each other anymore, but they can't afford to get divorced. They've worked hard

to achieve all that they have in life (a nice new home, fancy cars, a successful business, and a radio show). So, they've agreed to indiscreetly date other people. She has a boyfriend or two on the side. I get to enjoy him, and I know he has at least one other girl that he sees from time to time. Still, the Mr. and Mrs. don't want it to appear to the public that they're marriage isn't working. I can respect that, so we don't go out on the town when we're in our home town. We travel when we can in order to spend the night together.

We went to Ft. Lauderdale in February, which was quite fun. He had traveled there earlier in the week with some friends for an annual tournament. I got there on Thursday and joined the gang for a big bbq that they were having. They had rented a large house with a pool and a canal out back. Thursday Man and I snuck into his room for some one-on-one time. It was quite exciting, and everyone was definitely in the party spirit. The next day, they all traveled back home, but Thursday Man and I stayed one more night in a beach bungalow.

I'm definitely looking forward to future trips together. We've got a couple planned this summer. In the meantime, we'll be "rolling in the hay" at my place. ☺☺☺

Editor's Note: The bonehead editor screwed up again last time and mangled the text of Rene Tihista's "Curious Case" in layout. Here it is again in its entirety. Apologies to one and all, especially Rene! Refunds will be available at the box office. The editor has been flogged.

## The Curious Case of the Sheep Who Thought He Was a Cow

Rene Tihista

These days there's a lot of conflict, hand wringing, puzzlement and outrage about the various sexual identity issues currently riling up our dyspeptic society. One of these disputes concerning what has become known as LGBTQ issues, is usually confined to humans. However, though not widely known, issues of gender identity are not exclusive to *H. sapiens*. Lodged in my vast experiential archive of life's trivia, is the curious case of a male "buck" sheep, as rams were called in Montana where I grew up, who suffered not from gender confusion, but, and arguably worse, species confusion. A little background is necessary to preface this tragically enigmatic tale.

When my oldest brother Edward assumed responsibility for the family business after my father died, he'd been away from any working involvement with sheep for more than a decade. After serving in WWII, he'd been a salesman and in retail management, both occupations he excelled at. But the cultural imperative of the eldest son taking over the family business after the death of the paterfamilias was compelling and he returned home to fulfill his patrilineal destiny. His absence from experience in the sheep business occasionally clouded his judgment as illustrated in the case of the aforementioned confused buck.

To breed our herd of 1,800 ewes we had three-hundred rams. That's a pretty standard ratio of six ewes per buck although obviously there were occasional anomalies to consider: bucks that were older, timid or only mildly interested in performing their husbandry duties. Or ewes who were skittish, cantankerous, aging or indifferent to breeding despite being in estrus.

A neighboring farmer, who also had a small herd of cattle, had acquired and reared a Columbia Ram with his cattle. It was a beautiful animal. Quite large, as Columbia sheep are. They are a hybridized breed first developed in Wyoming prior to WWI and bred to thrive in the harsh climate typical in the western high plains of the Great Basin.

Open faced, they are good wool producers, their meat being a secondary asset. So, when the farmer talked Ed into buying the buck, just before breeding time in late October, it seemed like a propitious fit for our herd. Unfortunately, the big Columbian had a serious identity crisis. Much to Ed's surprise and mounting frustrated anger, the big ram ignored the ewes while his more amorous peers went enthusiastically about their business. The Columbian was utterly disinterested in the ewes he was procured to implant his majestic genetic heritage into.

In early December, we trailed the sheep from the summer grazing range to our farm in the Milk River Valley for the winter. The drive took most of a day, about twenty-five miles and passed by several farms. Whenever we passed a herd of cows, the big Columbian took off at a dead run to be with the cattle. Ed, fuming and cussing, would drive over in the pickup, nab the recalcitrant Romeo with a sheep hook, and return him to the herd. This farce

was repeated three times that I remember, the last being the very farm from which Ed had purchased the buck. He was gone quite a long while that time because, as we later learned, he had had a heated discussion with the farmer who'd sold him the malingering Columbian.

For all his shortcomings as a sheepman, Ed knew when to cut his losses. He sold the gender-confused sheep for a very reasonable price to a notorious former bootlegger and alleged calf rustler named Homer Dribble, who lived in the Badlands south of the Missouri River. I suspect the species-conflicted sheep became the main ingredient in at least a month's worth of mutton stew.

By chance, many years later, an article in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* caught my eye and shed an entirely different perspective on this unfortunate animal. A psychologist at the University of Washington was doing research on sheep and discovered that some of the rams in her study were apparently homosexual.

Another study by the University of Oregon corroborated this surprising finding. I quote: "Researchers in the Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Medicine, have confirmed that a male sheep's preference for same sex partners has biological underpinnings. This study, along with others, strongly suggest that same sex preference is biologically determined in sheep and possibly in humans"

After reading this I pondered how Ed might have responded to the news that his strapping Columbian buck could have been gay. But the ram displayed no apparent amorous proclivities toward his fellow rams. If he had, it might have explained the unexpected behavior. But there was his affinity for cows. Given the size differential between the big Columbian and potential cow mates, one has to be skeptical. Granted, he was huge—for a sheep, but still, to a bovine he might (to mix species metaphors) be considered a shrimp. I suppose an argument could be made for the odd case of species consanguinity. There is the precedent of Romulus and Remus though the veracity of that myth is questionable.

No, I suspect this particular sheep's interest in cows was more than confused sexuality. Could it have been some spiritual connection? Humans make up spiritual fantasies all the time—communing with the spirits of the woods and rivers the birds and the flowers. Fly fishermen harbor mystical feelings of solidarity with salmon and their impossible odyssey from a mountain stream to the depths of the Pacific and then, years later, back to their original remote spawning grounds. Are we to assume the so-called "lower" animals don't possess the capacity for mysticism? How do we know that? Could this big Columbian have imagined he was a cow? Did he think, dream or contemplate life as a cow? I propose that the Columbian's struggle with his species identity was a profound statement about life's metaphysical mysteries. When I discover what those mysteries are, rest assured, I'll report my findings. ☺☺☺

\**Science Daily*, Oregon Health Sciences Center, March 9, 2004

# THE WRITER'S BLOCK

## Creative Writing Tips

Rod Williams

- Use the journalism model – who, what, where, when, why, and/or how – to frame and anchor your writing.
  - Specific descriptions are usually stronger than general ones (“I saw a car racing down the street” vs. “I saw a red Toyota racing down the street”).
  - It's important to like what you're writing. If you're bored or unhappy with your work, chances are your readers will be, too.
  - “Vision and revision.” Vision is your first draft, where you put all your brilliant ideas and pretty words down on paper without worrying about how it looks. Revision is the process of fine-tuning and polishing that CFD (Crappy First Draft) until it's as good as you can make it. Remember, “Writing is one percent inspiration, and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”
- Editor's added note: Here's a quote attributed to Ernest Hemingway: “Don't get discouraged because there's a lot of mechanical work to writing. There is, and you can't get out of it. I rewrote the first part of A Farewell to Arms at least fifty times. You've got to work it over. The first draft of anything is shit. When you first start to write you get all the kick and the reader gets none, but after you learn to work it's your object to convey everything to the reader so that he remembers it not as a story he had read but something that happened to himself.”*
- Find a few editors to read your work – people you trust to be honest and encouraging. The more eyes on your manuscript the better. In general, family and friends are not good choices, because they will probably say, “This is great! A masterpiece!” You need honest, objective feedback, for everything from content (Does your writing “flow”? Does it make sense? Does it engage the reader?) to mechanics (spelling, punctuation, run-on and incomplete sentences, etc.).
  - Be ruthless. Kill your “darlings” – those wonderful phrases and paragraphs that usually emerge in the CFD and are beautifully written but don't serve your story. Get rid of them during the revision process.
  - Be mindful. Use all five senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – to make your writing come alive.
  - In poetry and fiction, feel free to synthesize elements from your life and the real world with made-up material from your imagination.

**“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”**

– Maya Angelou

**“Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on.”**

– Louis L'Amour

**“There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.”**

– W. Somerset Maugham

**“One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple.”**

– Jack Kerouac

**“You never have to change anything you got up in the middle of the night to write.”**

– Saul Bellow

**“The difference between the *almost* right word and the right word is really a large matter. 'Tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”**

– Mark Twain

**“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”**

– Anton Chekhov

## Writing Wrongs

Don Root

*Writing is communication. Graffiti loathes rules for the sake of rules, but in writing, rules make for clear communication. A single, lowly comma can make the difference between “It's time to eat, Mom” (telling Mom to get with it) and “It's time to eat Mom” (telling your fellow cannibals it's time to remove Mom from the grill). Graffiti's advice: learn the rules first, then break them, intentionally, if you have a good reason. Remember, unless you're scribbling in your diary, you're not writing for you, you're writing for the reader.*

*Here are random issues common in submissions to Graffiti:*

### STYLE

- In American English, punctuation (except colon and semicolon) goes inside quotation marks. “*That comma goes inside,*” he said.
- NOTE FOR OLD-TIMERS: These days, we don't put two spaces after a period. Just one, please. Thanks.

### SPELLING & PUNCTUATION

- “It's” (with apostrophe) is a contraction of “it is.” (“*It's really not difficult.*”) “Its” (no apostrophe) is the possessive form of “it,” meaning “belonging to it.” (“*Its fur was gray.*”)
- It's easy to mistype “your” and “you're.” We suggest double-checking all instances of these two words in your work to ensure against possible brain farts. Note that spell-checkers alone won't catch wrong words that are spelled correctly. Many word-processing programs also have grammar checkers, which would likely pick up a wrong word. If you have them, use both. If you don't have them, at least use a dictionary to look up any spellings or meanings you're unsure of.
- “Loose” is the opposite of “tight.” “Lose” is the opposite of “win.”
- The past tense of the verb “to lead” is “led,” not “lead.” “*I lead a charmed life these days,*” but, “*I led a charmed life until Graffiti came along.*” Yes, it's different than “*read,*” which is the same spelling (though different pronunciation—head slap!) in present tense (“*I read the New York Times daily*”) as in past tense (“*I read the New York Times yesterday*”). English is devilishly illogical. I pity those trying to learn it as a second language (though it redeems itself with the word “the,” which, while indisputably ugly, beats the Sam Heck out of gendered nouns).

### GRAMMAR

- An incomplete sentence is called a fragment. Write complete sentences unless you have some reason not to. It should be your deliberate choice to write an incomplete sentence.
- A complete sentence has at least a subject and a verb, and regularly an object. The subject is the person or thing doing something. The verb is the action happening. The object is the person or thing being done to.
  - “*I laughed.*” = Complete sentence. Subject (“I”) and verb (“laughed”).
  - “*I threw the ball.*” = Complete sentence. Subject (“I”), verb (“threw”), object (“the ball”).
  - “*The big red ball with lots of holes in it next to the dumpster.*” Not a complete sentence. No verb.
 (Note all the deliberate fragments in this bullet point.)
- Subject vs. object knowledge is important because they take different pronouns. We're all into pronouns these days, aren't we? Pronouns are the short words that substitute for the full name of a person or thing. I, me, you, him, her, we, they, them, it, etc. — all are pronouns, because you don't want to have to write something like “John gave Jane John's copy of the book John and Jane had discussed in John and Jane's office.”
  - “I” is a subject pronoun; “me” is an object pronoun. And if you're part of a group, list yourself *after* the others in the group. So...
  - WRONG: “Me and Steve went to the movies.”
  - WRONG: “Steve and me went to the movies.”
  - RIGHT: “Steve and I went to the movies.”
  - WRONG: “He laughed at me and Steve.”
  - WRONG: “He laughed at Steve and I.”
  - RIGHT: “He laughed at Steve and me.”
 In these group situations, it's easy to get the pronoun right if you take out the other person and use what you would say regarding yourself. You would never speak or write “Me went to the movies” or “He laughed at I.”
- “Who” vs. “Whom.” “Who” is for subjects; “whom” is for objects.
  - “Who did it?” — **He/she/it/you/we/they** (subject) did it.
  - “To whom it may concern.” — It may concern **him/her/it/you/us/them** (object).
  - “Whom” will probably disappear from the dictionary eventually, since most people never use it, and among those who do, many get it wrong. Suits us, but then again, “For Who the Bell Tolls” just sounds ridiculous.
- One last interesting factoid about pronouns, relevant to today's focus on gender identity. In French, *il* is the word for “he,” and *elle* is the word for “she.” That has made it easy to come up with the single, gender-neutral combo pronoun *iel*, which is increasingly in use in France. We can't do that easily in English. “S/he” doesn't work in speech, and how do you combine “he” and “she” into one word à la the French? “Sheesh” perhaps? Which may seem fitting, but we have apparently opted instead for the plural “they” (which really sucks as a solution, creating, as it does, all sorts of grammatical stumbling and ambiguity, but there it is).

### POETS!

- What is poetry? Is it just prose with a bunch of line breaks thrown in? Does each of your line breaks serve a purpose? Have you analyzed every word in your poem and determined that it is the best—possibly the *only*—word that will work? Have you deleted every unnecessary word? Do certain references in your poem mean something only to you, or do they try to evoke some aspect of the universal human experience? Graffiti's experience is that some poems we receive are really prose in disguise. Food for thought (intentional fragment).

**A Parabolic Parable**

(continued from p. 4)

The Queen inspired him, and he started raving "Off with their heads!" and flexing his bicep, where a tattoo read "I'll Raise Hell."

Some of the people in the fortress started scratching their own heads, just making sure they were still there. Others cheered and clapped in a teeth-grinding frenzy, yelling "bring us more heads – big, medium and small, we take 'em all." And yes, a lot of heads fell. A whole lot! And more!

Amid the chaos, a faraway clamor of voices against Me Me arose, carried by the desert wind. Many thousands upon thousands flocked to the streets in horror and loud protest. A few set themselves on fire to bring some light into the darkness.

If you listened closely, the muffled voice of an old man was heard saying, "This is over the top." When Me Me heard this, he got even madder and crazier, misunderstanding that what was meant was that *his* time on top was over. But soon, crazy as it seems, from the Fountain of Eternal Poison came another abundant squirt, refilling the stingers in the fortress while the boy Me Me kept ranting and raving "Off with their heads!" like he had lost his own and his heart was breaking to pieces.

Things seemed to be going from bad to worse in Zagaland, land of the Cabernet Nemesis people, many of whom were not even fond of the vile bile-tasting green brew but were dying of hunger and disease in camps where they had been forced to take refuge after all their homes were pancaked by Me Me's showers of poison syrup.

People everywhere called for a "ceasefire now!" or cried out "Let's cool it!" – to which Me Me responded, "Why do you hate us? We're defending ourselves. Why should we stop killing children who will eventually grow up to hate us for what we are doing? Off with their heads!"

Now some of you say "this for sure isn't going to end well." The thing is, how would *you* like this story to end? Would you like the Poison Fountain to keep flowing until there are so many skulls on the necklace that you could wrap it twice around our forlorn little blue planet?

Or would you prefer this ending: In the kingdom where the Poison Fountain flowed, the peons pushed and pushed and pushed the "this is over the top" royal chancellor – who now claimed to be "outraged and heartbroken" by all the killing – to walk the walk and cut the cheap talk. At long last, the peons raised such a tremendous ruckus in the kingdom that the words used by the chancellor and his court jesters came to no longer be just foul-smelling poisoned flatulence in the wind, but instead truly carried meaning joined to action.

☸☸☸

**Arms and the Man**

Stephen Slater

The law suit the government of Mexico has initiated (Feb. 2024) against U.S. gun dealers in Arizona is more significant than most people realize. What the suit alleges is more than plausible: regardless of the outcome, you know what it claims is true. And if that is the case, then the non-hunting, beyond-self-protection gun culture of the United States is in the crosshairs. You talkin' to me?

But even an arms-access apocalypse might not last in the context of out-of-control climate change. My family, or your house? ☸☸☸



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**Ask the Shadows**

who has come before  
and who will come next

Ask the shadows

if there is hope and  
how much time is left

Ask the shadows

the meaning of the song  
and who might be singing

Ask the shadows

why things break apart  
and will they knit again

Ask the shadows

why objects take against us  
and gravity attacks

Ask the shadows

if it might make sense  
when it seems there's none

why there is silence  
when there should be poetry

who made you, betrayed you  
pushed you through life

why the breath stops  
and the death starts

maybe they'll tell you  
maybe they won't

Ask the shadows

Ask the shadows

Ask the shadows

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**DAVE? DAVE'S NOT HERE...**

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This is a photo of Dave Bjorkman. He's gone missing. His family and friends love him dearly, and by all accounts he is a really good man. He hasn't been seen since January 30, when he pedaled off on his silver Kona mountain bike from his workplace on West 30th in Eugene, headed toward Veneta. Let's find him. If you see him or know anything, please call the cops at 541-682-5111 and tell them it's about missing-persons case #24-01611. Dave could be you someday, and you'd want people to find you, right?

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