

Fiction at Work

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Issue #33

2 March 09

Oddly Evolved in the Gardens of Academia

by Heather Momyer

Rumor has it that all purple elephants love yellow flowers and savor the golden pollen that travels up their trunks making them drunk and giddy from floral bouquets, and I guess that it must be true, as you, my young purple elephant, favor daffodils over my irises; you prefer buttercups to my violets, sunshine roses to my spring sweet lilacs, and I must admit that inverse must then be true as well. All yellow hippopotami like purple flowers always best.

I feel that it has become evident that we have grown as the antithesis of the other, but in ways the complement and not negate. We have grown as large mammals hunkered down in searches for other purple elephants and yellow hippopotami, ready to quickly abandon the colorless amphibious sludge from which we came, where we feel our heavy feet slowly sinking in the mud, always threatening to engulf our bodies. We have become too massive to learn how to swim through our primordial waters. We have forgotten what it was like to be the light-footed brown toad climbing up out of the coal heaps of half-abandoned Pennsylvania mining towns.

So, we trudge away from the land of genesis and move onto the atomic flat plains of scientific reasoning where all that is visible is limited only by the capability of the elephant's vision, or to the quickly moving water of art and the humanities, discussions of the constant flux of identity whirling in the eddies surrounding the behemoth body of an animal that seems too awkward to be placed in any other environment. But yet, it is always awkward, because I see no other yellow hippopotami here in my waters and I constantly move farther downstream, and when I look out to the plains where electrons whirl and swirl, defying the very laws of nature that mammals have come to comprehend, I see that you are the only purple elephant, and irises and daffodils grow neither in the currents of the river nor in the openness of the wilderness landscape.

We have forgotten that space where identity and language and atomic movement can be as simple as living, and the moistened soil that rises around slower waters springs the vines for yellow honeysuckle and purple wisteria and the mountainous forest that covers underground caverns is where violets and buttercups will always grow, always best.

Issue #34

9 March 09

Direct Pressure

by Robert Michael

Aside from the sergeants, I was the oldest enlisted man in the unit, and the younger guys were like my kid brothers. Just after Christmas, walking past the darkened room of Bobby Joe from Tennessee, I saw him head in hands. "What's going on?" I asked.

"Ah jist came back from a week's leave in Tinsea. Momma tole me ahve heurt her most grievously."

"You hurt your mother?"

"She tole me it's mah aaceynt. Ahve been up heah in Yankeeland, in Virginyah, and I done lost mah Tinsea aaceynt."

"Don't worry, you'll get your accent back as soon as you get back home." I was reminded of Robert Service's lines about the cremation of Sam McGee from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows. Why he left his home in the South God only knows.

"Let me tell you a Christmas shtory to cheer you up," I said to him as he cocked his head to the side with my Yiddish for story. "When I was a kid, around Christmas time, without telling my mom, my dad took me to Jordan Marsh in Boston, a big department store, to sit on Santa Claus's knee. So Santa asked me what I'd like for Christmas and I told him that we celebrated Hanukah instead because we were Jewish. Then he bent down and whispered in my ear, Ayn lang leben oif dein kepeleh. Yiddish for a long life on your sweet little head."

"What'd he mean, sweet little haid?"

Bobby Joe never did get it.

Sometimes Bobby Joe and I played tennis. A natural athlete, he was the only guy I ever saw who hit only forehands, shifting the racquet from his left to his right hand. Playing one spring day, I hit a lob, and he charged back to retrieve it, missed, and smashed against the chain-link fence. When I saw him, speechless, staring down at his right forearm, blood squirting out in two streams, each spurt timed to a heartbeat, I cleared the net and ran over to him. As soon as I grabbed his arm, his eyes rolled back in his head and he dropped to the ground. My Army training was seldom used, but I remembered two magic words, DIRECT PRESSURE. While yelling for an ambulance, I clutched his arm where two rusty pieces of metal wire holding the fence together had punctured an artery. He must have thought he was dying, but the spurting blood had cleansed his wound and my hand pressing on his arm finally stopped the bleeding. After he was released by the medics, I suggested he tell his mom that a Yankee saved his life. I don't know whether he told her or not, but he never played tennis with me again.

Issue #35

16 March 09

Spinning Some Old 55's

Way back on October 14th of last year, Quickies! Chicago held a fundraiser, and invited a few dozen writers to read 55-word stories. I thought they'd work nicely on the site, so I asked the writers to send them in. Enjoy.

The Girl I've Never Told My Friends About

Lee, all slick-fat and pale, rubbed her breasts real proud.

You my man, she said, leaning heavy against the fridge.

With one hand, she hiked her shirt up over her belly. Her panties had grape juice stains on the hip.

I'm God's gift, she said, and I wondered what I had left to offer her.

by steve tartaglione

Maui

Maui hasn't rekindled our marriage. Boarding the flight home, this old man cuts between us.

"Hey," I say. "That's my wife."

"Jackass," Caroline hisses. "That was Ed McMahon."

"Sorry!" I call over my shoulder. "Sorry!" to Ed, to everyone, sprinting back into the airport.

And I wonder: is this only the start of my apologizing?

by colt foutz

Hunger Moon

[This is about a goat named Yoshi, who has the power of human speech every full moon. Also, he is in love with a girl goat named Dinkle. This is supposed to be sung...]

Whaaaaaaa Haaaaappppeennnn? Dinkle, you ate my favorite book, my only book. I'm not mad, this is just how my faces look in the moonlight. Oooooohhhh spit on this X I've scratched on the ground and bite at the air if you knowwww what I knooowwww, what I mean. Dink this is totally off the cuff.

by nicole bond

Not in Knoxville

Ashleigh calls, says her mom up and ran away.

Catalogues the abandoned: "wheel, kiln, artwork, cats."

"Your dad," I suggest, "Her husband."

Over coffee and bronchodilators I wake up to the dual rupture of it.

Null set, no unknotting: "just gone."

But – to disappear, weightless all the way down, lunging at the possible...

Not me.

by spencer dew

I Am Rich

Two dogs. Fitz and Seth. One big, the other small. Love walks. Love to smell. Spring, summer, fall, winter. Long walks or short. It's all the same to them. Walking dogs is my start for each day. Rain. Snow. Ice. Sunrise or Dark. Found 20 dollars one day. 10 cents on another. I am rich!

by donald hamilton

I Tried Really Hard to Fix It So You Wouldn't Notice What I Did

I glued whatever hair I could find to a dog the same size of your cat. I sanded its tongue, fiddled with it's brain. You will find it not panting at the door, but staring out the window.

You'll scream, Where's my cat? I am so sorry, I will scream, over your cats ferocious barks.

by chris bower

Last night I dreamed that my best friend had gotten a pet dog-cat.

It was a beautiful creature, long and lithe and strong and very soft to the touch. I awoke and told my boyfriend about the dog-cat hybrid, to which he responded, "Wait, she got a dog-cat? Like, part dog, part cat? But that's not possible." At which point I reiterated that it had been a dream.

by lauren pretnar

Contractual Obligation (or, I cannot maintain an erection, but in no way hold QUICKIES! much less Mary and Lindsay anyway responsible for that)

I can't eat, sleep, or maintain an erection. I drink too much, can't concentrate and panic uncontrollably whenever I hear a loud sound.

I guess being whistled off of the stage last time I was here was pretty traumatic for me.

That all changes tonight though, because tonight, I am here to reclaim my former self.

Well, that and hype my new book.

Thank you.

by ben tanzer

Petty Theft I Regret

Drunk, we stumbled past a flower-filled yard. Dozens of poppies with swollen seedheads grew by the sidewalk. "Help me," Paul said, opening his Swiss-Army knife. He piled poppies in my arms for later intoxication.

Hungover, I stumbled past the flower-filled yard; an old-woman mourned her lost poppies. "Who would do this?" she asked.

I shrugged.

by melanie datz

Tracy Stomped Mark

Mark was dreaming in trailer at Greenhead Farm. Mark felt bed move, opened eyes to Tracy over him with leg cocked and three-inch black heel sparkling. She stomped him in gut with heel. Blood shot from hole in stomach like steaming geyser and covered collection of die-cast John Deere tractors. Mark always liked combine best.

by lex sonne

Unneighborly

"I don't think you're hearing me," Cat pleaded with Canary. "Your gramophone hasn't stopped for days. I have trouble finding food without silence." Canary cocked his head, adjusted his wings. Cat begged, "I'm tired. The hunger is worse than the noise." Canary had found Cat's weakness and held it like a mouse in his beak.

by jac jemc

Wasp in Sombrero

Wasp-in-sombrero you beckoned: "Sweetheart! Fuckin' Cinco de Mayo!" As I overheard you tell your busboy, "We're celebrating your freedom to live here! Bossman should fuck off so

you can drink cervesas, bro." I knew you were of greatness.

I was sorry to leave, wasp-in-sombrero, when the busboy said "No, and my boss is a lady."

by amy guth

Dearest Twins,

Lying on the deck, I saw a constellation of us drinking barrels of wine down by the beach. I hear birds eating each other alive. I miss you terribly. "You're a bored-again Virgin" Brandy said as we watched lava off the starboard side. When I return, let's have a baby. Or a drink.

by zach dodson

Stick with me and Theodore Huxtable, kid, we'll take you to the Emerald City.

Put your hands up. I'm gonna blow your face off. See how I put you in an oven. Put you in a pot. I clean the dirt and the skin off your bones. I cut your hair and I clothe you with sequins blue and green. Now you're my fancy dancer. You're my Prom King.

by mary hamilton

Issue #36

30 March 09

The Last Day of My Life

by Joe Cappello

I am sitting on the edge of my bed, my feet flat on the floor. The alarm is still making those annoying beeps but I stop it by jamming my finger in its face. I'm still for a second. How many years have I put up with this? Like I need those beeps to turn on some latent switch in my brain to get going in the morning. Or a cup of coffee...or the dog licking my face (after he licks himself)...or those two "anchor persons"...a couple-less couple whose whimsical banter is supposed to make me feel good about the news. No matter...this is the last day of my life so I won't have to put up with any of it any longer. I can do anything I want. I am the condemned man looking at a menu of last meals and the choice is all mine. I could cower and shake and scream and yell and cry. Loudly. For hours. Or I could lament about the usual, how I never got the chance to fulfill myself and I'll never get to see my kids' kids and why me, and so on. I could do any one of those things, but I want something that deflates this ritualistic bag of wind. So I'll reverse things. Instead of taking my shower first, I'm going to floss and brush my teeth, gargle with mouth wash and shave. Then I'll take my shower. How delightfully irreverent.

I find it easier doing it this way. The mirror would fog over when I took my shower first and I'd have to wipe it with the towel so that I could see my face. I usually had to do this several times. But now that I've reversed the order of things, I don't have to deal with a foggy mirror. Too bad I had to wait until the last day of my life to make this discovery. Living is learning and you can still learn even on the last day of your life.

The only drawback: I don't have time to write it down.