



Manifesto

I reserve the right to insult the reader
It's a punk-rock thing, you wouldn't understand

I reserve the right to blow your mind
It's drug-culture man, read my work stoned

I reserve the right to parody recursively
It's an artful dodge, a pre-emptive strike

I reserve the right to make ethnic jokes
It's an American tradition, respect my heritage

I reserve the right to practice literary terrorism
It's alienation, I ➔ High art

I reserve the right to make untraceable references
It's free association, call me indigo

I reserve the right to speak retroactively
It was a misunderstanding, on your part

– David Nuñez Toews

MEDICAL PANDORA'S BOX

A species at risk



Recent studies suggest that our monsters, while dead, still possess a murmur of self.

IAN KINNEY
CALGARY HERALD

“We’ve never encountered anything like this before,” say researchers in a recent study that claims zombies occupy a unique niche in society, one in which fear and other environmental factors are “just right”. But even a slight rise in awareness could subject the creatures to stressors that lead to mass-eating that threatens the environment. “We believe this is a habituated animal that’s

simply gone to far,” said a researcher. “They are just who they are, reflecting the environment in a constantly alternating role of hunter and prey. Once stressed, the beasts fall into a familiar routine of seemingly non-stop destruction.” Researchers found that a reflection offers the zombie a completely different shopping experience. Initially, when presented with the mirror, there was no apparent movement. The test subject then carried out the routine of combing its hair. The subject suddenly erupted into a multi-layered exposé of autobiography,

attempting to bite through the window, raging at the top of its voice. The dialogue was compromised when the subject punched through the glass. The subject squatted down and attempted to tie each of its shoelaces—shaking uncontrollably. Apparently prompted by the revulsion we feel when we recognize ourselves, the creature carried on in a regular frenzy. “Obviously, this animal is way over the top as far as habituation is concerned,” said another researcher, citing a mix of habit, fear and denial to explain the

creatures erratic behaviour. “It’s even more dangerous because it’s about grief more than meaning.” This complex process is often touted as a child’s last steps in development and is usually repressed through meticulous, repetitious work. “Something about the dying process must interfere with that.” Test subjects will remain under the supervision of researchers as scientists, politicians and environmentalists debate as to whether they should continue to work on a cure for what many are now calling “a species that may be at risk”.

IAN KINNEY
CALGARY HERALD

Due of their unfair image as malevolent man-eaters, zombies have few human friends fighting for their protection. These animals may not be cute and cuddly but hopefully their weird looks and bizarre behaviour will inspire people to support their conservation.

Traditionally regarded as a living fossils, the zombie is a truly remarkable creature despite often being referred to as dead. But make no mistake, these exquisitely evolved beauties thrive in climates where people and plants have a hard time just making a living. Many local ecosystems teem with these unusual carnivores.

So far, scientists have identified eight different species of zombie, and all eight have different shaped boils ranging from long, curved African ones to the apple and egg-shaped ones we’re used to. You can cut them up and make a perfectly portable snack. The skin can be harvested without killing the specimen, and the skin can be pounded to make rope and clothing or flattened to make excellent roof tiles.

Indigenous peoples, bats, moths, bees, squirrels and elephants all need the

zombie. Many species have rancid wound-like flowers that mimic rotting carrion to attract bats as their pollinators. Flowering, and hence pollinating, only occurs at night in all species.

Specialized in gnawing, these two-legged creatures serve a vital role in the ecosystem. This scavenger has a uniform series of relatively pointy teeth and a short snout. “The idea was the animal was sticking its head into carcasses,” sites the specialist.

Sometimes referred to as the “dawn shark” this animal is specialized in capturing live prey and severing limbs. It is definitely a sabotage attacker, waiting for an opportunity to jump at something from the shadows. These creatures decay at extremely slow rates. “It is most unusual,” specialists say, “to find the soft tissues of these animals preserved the way they are (in zombies).” Despite sometimes lacking organs—including lungs—the subjects will continually inhale and exhale without cause or explanation.

Nature has a flawless blueprint and these wonderful creatures and the ecosystems that depend upon them are very worthy of conservative efforts.

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Every article found on this page was composed using excerpts from the Calgary Herald. Using the language of the local media, I’ve rewritten the news to herald the zombie apocalypse. No sentence, phrase or word appearing in these articles has not, in some way, appeared in the mindless gorefest I’ve mistaken for News.

Announcements.....	B4
City & Region.....	B3
Real Life.....	C6
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CRASH KILLS
Emergency crews claim to have heard a rhythmic scratching from inside the cab before military crews took over.
Page C2

MALL OVERRUN
Countless teenagers have gone missing at the Mall.
Page E4

Scientists seek to learn about the beast’s extinction



IAN KINNEY
CALGARY HERALD

A team of scientist discovered an extinct beasts’ hair this week. Hair, scientists claim, is much better than bones and muscle for studying the genome sequence of ancient organisms. Some researchers claim that we descended from these long

dead creatures.

“That claim is silly,” say Authorities. “There is no quantifiable data in to support that claim, there’s no controls to say that.”

Scientists have for years dreamed of sequencing our genome with that of other extinct animals including humans. The genomes would in theory, provide the genetic recipes needed to bring the creatures back to life.

Sexy has no expiry date

IAN KINNEY
CALGARY HERALD

Some say that we don’t look as good as we once did and they’re partly right: it’s important to look good and dead. This new life offers a more enduring style than anything around during our youth. Don’t worry about becoming an old, green frump. It’s common to adopt this more mature wardrobe. This is the “safe” approach to dying.

So how do you ease your wardrobe into a more mature look?

Well, bright colors look cheap and can age a tired face. Track around a drab street corner, see the soot-black, rotting, tramp-like figure you would run to

blocks to avoid? That look is easy to avoid. Simply don’t put colors that are draining too close to your face. You can still follow the trends, but choose those that are more formal, rustic or retro. Avoid cheap fabrics that tear to easily. You’re falling apart—don’t let your clothes go with you. Although you’ll get more longevity out of these items than most, don’t expect anything to last forever. Still, a good fabric, like you, can have integrity at any age.

Work on capturing the best possible you in the present tense, whether that’s a woman who dares to bare or one who ops for a more ladylike elegance as she trips over broken ankles on her way to the mall.



ANOTHER SEQU

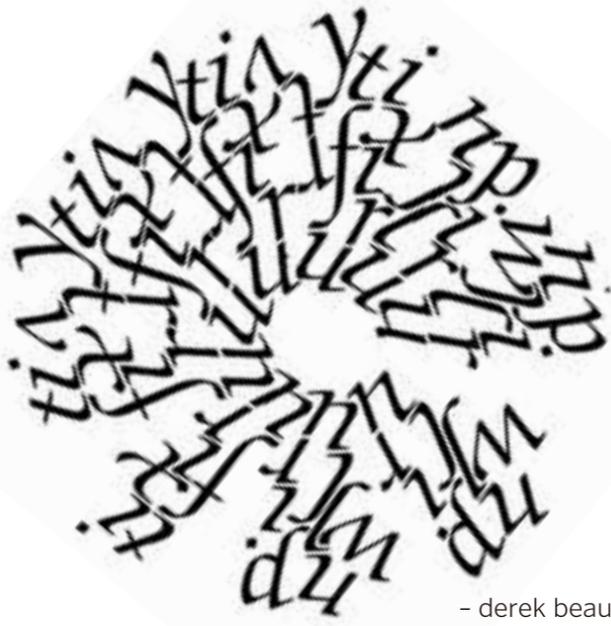
TODAY: PART 2

The city has literally become a post-apocalyptic flim, giving remaining citizens an impromptu adventure that leaves computer-generated scenes of falling buildings and devastation in its dust.

News, Page 2

AMONG THE DE

We’ve seen apocalyptic before, but never quite like this. Mil



- derek beaulieu

Wanda

Wanda began with

Five and two-thirds bottle
Of Jimmy Dean
Uncle Jed
Johnny Walker whiskey
Bought most fortuitously with
Government money
At the
Five-and-Dime
On Point Severance Street.

Soon-to-be-Daddy,
Being a man with a
Hang-dog look,

Looked out from under his brow at
Soon-to-be-Mama

Working behind the counter
Beneath

What could only be estimated

To be
Approximately

Three wild turkeys

And a clutch of

Vodka Ice.

"Well, hi, pretty baby,

Pretty baby lady,"

Said Soon-to-be-Daddy,

Grinning out through the

Three teeth remaining unto

him.

Such a grin, boy,

Such a grin

That Soon-to-be-Mama,
Who had aspirations of going

Further,

Perhaps all the way to a
State college

And a house somewhere

With bland people everywhere

That was in need of

Shoveling,

Weeding

And

Cutting,

Such a grin that she forgot all about this,
Pushed the bottles over to him and said,

"Hi, Slim."

Which was not, as they say,

His name,

But rather a name a woman says when she means

something besides a greeting.

So says they

Anyway

On Point Severance Street.

It's this name she's calling out

'cause she doesn't know any better

When she is straddling him in the

Car seat

On the black top near the

Truck stop

On top of a Happy Meal wrapper.

- Sarah Gibbs

Introspection Rundown

(For Lisa McPherson)

It must have been cold, standing there in the road with her clothes strewn about on the snow, crying in the dark, cars rushing past far too fast to stop. She'd been in an accident, felt fine but wasn't thinking right; later, once she'd been dragged out of sight by those who follow round ring roads with demons in their eyes, they locked her away in room 174 (Rest and Relaxation) and burnt away her mind. By the time she was found she was broken and old, hands bruised and bloody from fighting the walls, nails cut short so she couldn't fight back, skin eaten away by the insects. They had good lawyers.

- James Duffy

career aptitude test

CAREER APTITUDE TEST

Please choose one activity, A or B, that you prefer from each pair. Do not skip any pairs.

100 items - page 1

- 94. A. Designing airport furniture. B. Providing a company advice on better business methods.
- 95. A. Stapling pages of a business circular. B. Supervising the production of major roads.
- 96. A. Rarely being late. B. Publishing stories about famous people.
- 97. A. Playing the romantic lead in a Hollywood film production. B. Ordering stationary for a corporate office.
- 98. A. Shredding incriminating documents. B. Feeling confident when learning a new task.
- 99. A. Striking up conversation with supervisors. B. Convincing a homeowner to buy aluminium siding.
- 100. A. Feeling at ease during job interviews. B. Only wanting to feel desired.
- 101. A. Often completing a task ahead of time. B. Always putting tools back in place after use.
- 102. A. Discharging someone from a position for unprofessional conduct. B. (The only reason they haunt you is because you are sleeping in their bed.)
- 103. A. Installing upholstery in a vehicle assembly plant. B. Giving golf instructions at a country club.
- 104. A. Remembering to return things borrowed from co-workers. B. Following people home at night.
- 105. A. Watching from behind darkened windows. B. Coordinating facts from different reference books.
- 106. A. Working on a challenging assignment. B. Wishing you still had the use of your legs.

Questions continue overleaf.

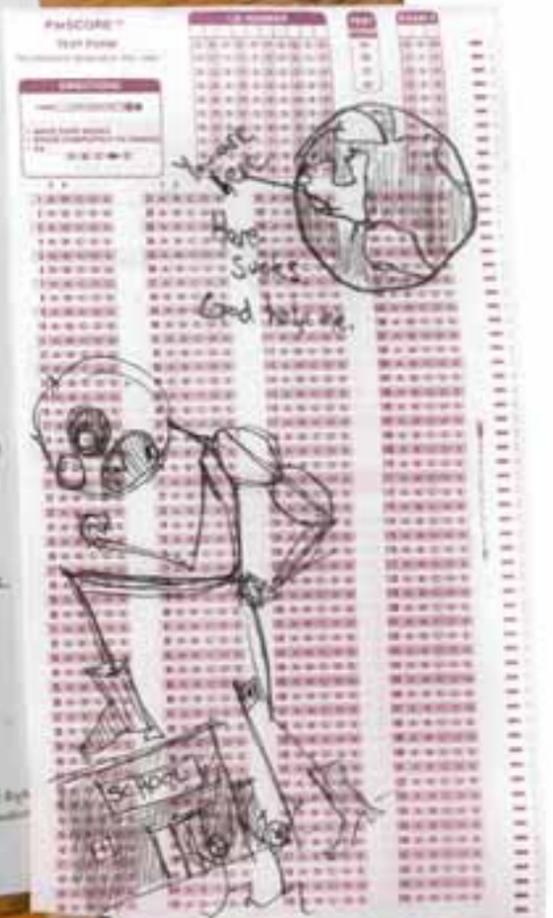
CAREER APTITUDE TEST

choose one activity, A or B, that you prefer from each pair. Skip any pairs.

100 items - page 2

- 109. A. Writing an account of the financial policies of a large company. B. All falling down.
- 110. A. Fleeing the unmentionable horror. B. Calling on a couple interested in buying dinnerware.
- 111. A. Organizing a kitchen efficiently. B. Fleeing the unmentionable horror.
- 112. A. Studying the effect of propaganda on enemy soldiers. B. Not wanting to die.
- 113. A. Not looking at crippled people in the street. B. Not wanting to die.
- 114. A. Giving haircuts to customers. B. Wanting to die.
- 115. A. Leaving and taking everything. B. (Kids get in the car.)
- 116. A. Making artistic candies. B. (We're not going far I promise.)
- 117. A. Soundproofing the wards of mental institutions. B. Flying a small plane in an air circus.
- 118. A. Having a purpose. B. (You have no purpose.)
- 119. A. Showing houses to interested buyers. B. (Get off my property.)
- 120. A. Giving orders and expecting them to be obeyed. B. (Get off my property.)
- 121. A. Never coming back. B. Never coming back.
- 122. A. (Never come back.) B. Never coming back.

end



- James Duffy

Little Johnny sat on his potty. Johnny was getting bigger ALL the time, and he knew it! Each day he sat down on the potty, he could see the top of his head rising farther and farther up the mirror above the sink across from him. He marked how big he got with a line of red crayon (much to his mother's distress). Johnny could even poop all by himself now, and he was proud! He didn't tell anyone that sometimes he would hold in his poops for too long, and that it would make him cry to go to the bathroom. And since he never told anyone about this, no one could tell him that this was very very Bad for him...

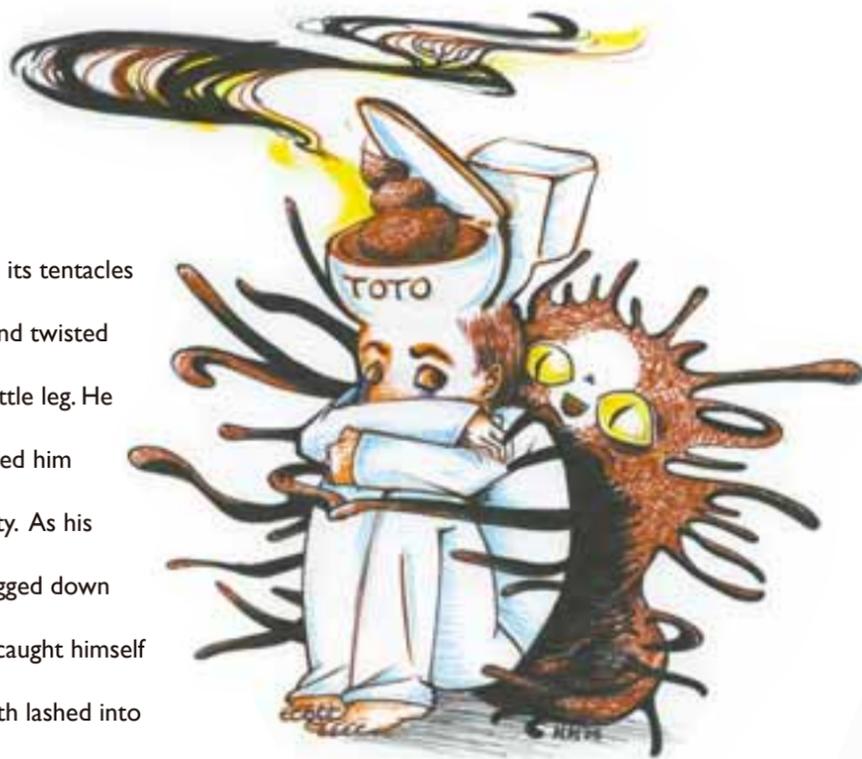
Little Johnny hadn't pooped for six WHOLE days, and he was having a hard time. His little bum pushed and pushed until he was purple in the face. He could see the top of his head slowly rise up to the top of his crayon marks, then it went two marks PAST his record! "Well done," he thought as he continued to strain. He was crying now, but with this new record on his mind, he felt that the pain was well worth it. BAM! The horrendous log popped right out of him splashing into the bowl below and wetting his bum. He grabbed a clump of toilet paper and went to wipe when he felt something slimy brush his bottom.

The tickle startled him. He looked between his legs. There, writhing in stinky brown water, was a black purple-veined creature with thousands of sickly

tentacles
seething
hungrily. Johnny
jumped back, but
the creature spun its tentacles
out of the bowl and twisted
around Johnny's little leg. He
squealed as it pulled him
back into the potty. As his
leg was being dragged down
the trap hole, he caught himself
in the mirror; teeth lashed into
his skin severing his little foot from his
little ankle. Feeling nothing, Johnny looked at himself sinking
down past his very first crayon mark, never to see it ever again.

The moral of the story is: never hold in your poops because it will turn into a monster inside of you and eat you if you wait too long.

- Ian Gregg



Sisyphus' Rocks

Sisyphus
stared
at the rock. Nay, it
was not a rock. It was
his tormentor. It was
Hades incarnate, this
damnably stone.

Each time he laid hands upon it, the jagged outcroppings of stone would cut their way into his flesh. Every ounce of pressure he committed to moving the bull-sized conflagration would push those stony blades deeper into his flesh. Comparisons of hot knives and butter did no justice to just how easily this rock ate its way into his palms with every exertion.

But eventually, with enough effort, he would start the boulder moving on its horrid journey up the mountain. Eventually, that was the key word. Eventually, he would get the rock up the mountain. Eventually, it would come back down and he would begin the torment yet again. Perhaps eventually was not the right word, inevitably seemed more fitting.

His blood was now pouring out of the wounds of his hands, each time the valves in his heart pumped more of the crimson liquid would spurt from his palms. The rock had for days been sporting a stripe of blood running its entire circumference, punctuated by the occasional off-set flower of a bloody handprint.

Sisyphus' hands slipped on the blood and the stone slipped with them. Not wanting to lose days of progress up the mountain, Sisyphus desperately threw his shoulder against the mockery of a rock to stop the slide. The razor teeth of the boulder dug into the meat of his arm as he stopped the rolling stone.

With every ounce of strength in his body he pushed into the stone. The rock tore his flesh deeply and he cried out. He had temporarily delayed its descent.

He stopped to rest and looked back down the mountain. Thanks in no small part to the trail of blood; he could trace his path almost to the bottom of the mountain. He had come this far, for what seemed like the millionth time. In reality, it was somewhere in the hundreds of thousands, but eternity has a way of playing tricks on your mind. He knew he would not die even though he had lost enough blood in the past few days of pushing to cover the great halls of Athens many times over. The gods were not merciful. He cursed them for what seemed like the millionth time. In reality, it was somewhere in the billions, but eternity has a way of playing tricks...

Sisyphus shook his head. He needed to finish his journey. Maybe after this trip he would be set free. Perhaps he would

be permitted to die. To spend eternity in nothingness would be as the fields of Elysium compared to this hell; which was, quite literally, Hell. He thrust his shoulder hard against the boulder and forced it on its way.

Finally, he could see the peak. The summit of the mountain he had climbed so many times. It was what he longed for. He could not remember his wife's face, nor his children's laughter, but he could always

remember the view from the top of the mountain. It was the barest moment in his eternity here that he could feel something resembling contentment. When he reached the top of the mountain, there was always the momentary hope that it would be for the last time.

With one final Herculean shove Sisyphus hurled the boulder up the mountain. It came to a rest at the very tip of the peak before starting its inexorable roll back down. As he had tried thousands of times before, Sisyphus tried to stop the hurtling rock. As had happened thousands of times before the stone crushed him underneath its suddenly insurmountable weight, crushing every bone in his body into brittle shards that seemed to individually claw their way through his skin. He looked out from the

top of the mountain and closed his eyes, perhaps this time death would come.

"Hey, Sid!"
Sid shook his head, clearing the cobwebs from his brain. "You daydreaming again buddy?" Sid looked around his cubicle trying to orient himself. Finally he slowly turned his chair towards the entrance of his eight foot by eight foot box.

The voice came from Persephone. Not the goddess who was

abducted by Hades for her great beauty and eventually made to live in the underworld for three months of the year Persephone. This was the ironically named Chartered Accountant Persephone, whose beauty would be cause for Hades to abduct her—if only to set her as guardian of the gates of Hell in place of a certain three headed dog.

"You're always daydreaming Silly Siddy," she chortled, "I hope you're daydreaming about me." She threw her

head back and laughed, spewing forth the tiny pieces of pita-bread still stuck in her teeth from lunch. They flew out in a wide arc landing on Sid's arm and leg. "Oops! Sorry!"

Persephone snorted, "I just get so excited when you're around Sid. You make me want to explode like Mount Vesuvius, in a hot steamy explosion!" Sid gagged a little bit at that clumsy attempt at innuendo.

"Explode. Volcano. Get it?" Persephone hyuk-hyuked like an obscenely ugly, middle-management-version of Goofy.

"Yeah, I get it. Very funny." Sid muttered.

"Well, you better get back to work Siddy. Those accounts won't reconcile themselves!"

Persephone turned and wobbled off, her high-heels dangerously on the verge of collapse under her amply weighted ankles.

Sid turned back to his computer, next to it sat the paperwork for the Jupiter Engineering account. A pile that seemed as insurmountable as a mountain. He sighed, pulled off the first sheet and opened an Excel spreadsheet.

Sisyphus stared at the rock. Nay, it was not a rock. It was his tormentor. It was Hades incarnate, this damnably stone.

- Tim Ford

The railroad

He is hoping hard at the dawn. He hates hoping hard at the dawn. He is hoping hard at the dawn and railroading his chinks. He is at the edge of hell. He runs his chinks along the blood of the railroad. He hates running his chinks along the blood of the railroad. He feels railroad. He feels rust. He is hard and rusting. He is rusting and hating. He is hoping completion. He is hoping completion about rusting. He hates hoping about completion. He hates hoping about rusting. He hates hoping about rusting completion. His hating spikes. His hating spikes railroads. He is hoping spikes about railroads. He hates hoping spikes about railroads. He is hoping railroads about hating rust. He railroads about hating. He railroads about rusting. He railroads about the hope of railroads. His hoping spikes. He bleeds about hoping. He bleeds about hoping the railroad of chinks. He is hoping chinks. He hates hoping about his chinks. He is hoping about his chinks as he railroads about his hoping. His chinks railroad. His hopings freeze. He hopes hell railroads his chinks. He hopes his chinks blood the railroad and freeze. He hates hoping that his chinks blood the railroad. His hate rusts. The train departs. Completion begins.

Acknowledgment to "The river has thumbs" in Lemon Hound by Markin-Flanagan visiting writer, Sinas Queryas.

- Dale Lee Kwong



- Helen Hajnoczky

dash

a simile smiles a lily while
your wordy gullet
belies the belly

your gut encloses
the lowercase ocean

I'm curled snug
as an ampersand
in your belly button

I'm the punk u ate

you're a cloud cutter
cut swathes in my cotton mouth
you're my skyscraper's blue nose

you give on the glider
while I lick your linoleum
then rip up the floor



you're my spectral snowbird
I raise a trickle toast to your return



throwing nickels
into the bowls of ohs
you slip an onion ring
onto my pinkie

my finger fills
the deep fried hole
sure as a clogged vein

sure as a nucleus
nestled in the centre of a cell
my finger fills your onion ring
answer to my gastric prayer

we defy verbal lowcal
crunch your breaded ohs

oh holy linoleum
with your reverent grout
I scrub your forehead's tiles
gleaming but for my thumbprints

I bow beneath your showerhead
step into the steam and sing

- Natalie Zina Walchots





ou, third row from the back in my tiny church. I've never seen you before but I fix my eyes on your face.

The sun beams through the stained glass windows, highlighting flecks of dust floating in air. Rows of pews, inhabited here and there by the aching bones of the faithful, a few of their children, a few of their grandchildren, the smell of musty old hymnbooks making them sneeze and then produce dusty Kleenexes from shirt sleeves. The organ at the front, the overhead projector, the pulpit.

Mr. Laurence, head of the elder's board, finishes introducing me as the new pastor. He puts his hand on my back and smiles wide, "Last but not least, the young reverend is unmarried!"

A rumble of chuckles from the crowd.

Third row from the back, you are not smiling.

"Lord bless him with a good wife!"

More chuckles.

"Thank you, Mr. Laurence," I say and step to the pulpit. He creaks down the steps to sit in the front row beside his wife. The Laurences had me over for dinner a week before, serving turkey and mashed potatoes and cranberries.

Mrs. Laurence poured gravy over my plate. "So what do you plan on preaching for your first sermon, Pastor?" "I was thinking about freedom in Christ."

Mrs. Laurence put down the gravy. "Do you really think so?" "Excuse me?"

"I mean, is that an appropriate sermon choice?"

"Do you have a suggestion?" "You should do as you feel led," she touched my hand, her skin cold. "But now that you mention it, I do have a few."

Third row from the back, you cross and uncross your legs.

Behind the pulpit, my throat shivering, I take a gulp of water and begin my sermon on the burden we all have to bear.

You get up and leave part way through.



You, three aisles away, your dark head bent over the back cover of a movie. I look down at my own video. Then -

"That was very puzzling," your breath whispering behind my ear.

"Excuse me?" I turn to look at you. Well-dressed, attractive, brunette.

"I don't understand British humor at all," you say.

"I haven't seen it," I put Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy back in its place.

"I wouldn't."

"Pardon?"

But you're sailing on towards the New Releases.

I move up and down the next aisle, fumble with Next Generations, read the cover, put it back, look at you under my eyebrows like invisible spectacles, gravitate to the end of the aisle, examine the floor to ceiling shelves.

A red shirted employee comes by, says something, I say something back, you glance up briefly, briefly, he wanders nears you, you slide your high heels towards him, he says something, you say something, he wanders off. I take a step sideways, you slide, I step, you slide, I step, we meet in front of an empty shelf and stare at it.

"So what would you recommend?" I say.

"That depends on what you feel like."

"I'll give you a hint." I grab The Exorcist.

"You're feeling possessed?"

"No, no!" I swivel into another aisle. The Ten Commandments.

"Possessed by Charlton Heston!"

Saved!

"Heard it was terrible!"

Bruce Almighty, Evan Almighty!

"We have a theme..."

The Preacher's Wife!

"You know, I didn't cry once during The Passion?"

"You didn't? I-"

"Yes I know. You cried bucketloads, didn't you?"

"What do you want then?" I say.

"Oh whatever you like." You skim your fingers across the rows of movies like playing a piano, select a title.

Coyote Ugly.

"I'm a temperance man."

Showgirls.

Striptease.

"I don't like your taste in movies."

"Fine," you say, move towards the door. "Good luck with your movie."

"Wait! We haven't decided what to watch yet."

"We?"

"I need your help."

"You make the options rather limited."

"I'm open minded," I say.

You pause, your handbag swinging in an arc in front of you. Tick tock, tick tock.

I take a step and you slide forward.



You, Anna, beside me, I beside you, and we're all alone in the middle of a massive field of stars. There is Orion's belt, studded with Alnitak, Alnilam, and Mintaka. The smell of nitrogen molecules lifting from the soil, the smell after the rain, before the worms emerge to sacrifice themselves to the rain gods.

You undo your belt.

"What do you think you're doing?" I ask.

"I'm being existential to see if you'll notice."

"Oh I notice," I say. "I notice you all the time."

The oxytocin in my bloodstream,

bonding to my veins in my hand,

bonding my hand to your

skin, now on your belly,

now on your thigh, if

you took one step

closer, softly, softly,

if you took one step

closer, you would step

past epidermis into my

inner organs, knitting bone

with bone. I wrap my wings

around you, the wings attached to

the tendons of my arms, soft like the

night sky, flannel like the night sky, and we

huddle together beneath them, heat rising,

foreheads touching, my breath overcoming

yours, the spice from your neck

between us, sometimes mingling

lips, sometimes daring to exist

in your space beneath this

organic canopy.



I watch you

while I preach

my sermon. You

slouch and pull the

bulletin into strips with

your fingers. The church,

full of shuffling, sighing, babies

screaming, the ceiling fan sifting air

and all I hear is the sound of paper

being ripped from the back row.

Dear Lord, I pray, please bless the heavens...

When I open my eyes, you're gone, only a pile of cream coloured rubbish on the seat of the pew left.

"Lord spoke to me through your words, Pastor," says Mrs. Laurence after the benediction, patting my hands in her dry grip. The soul of the black gospel is stifled in her tight face. There will be no hallelujahs wrung from

Mrs. Laurence. God is bound up in her hair. She has pierced him with bobby pins, all the way down to the scalp.

"Praise God you were touched," my eyes flit over hers, I'm looking for you, if you'd only stay for once.

"And I wasn't the only one," she passes my hand like a tract into young, smooth fingers.

"It was a very insightful interpretation," the lovely Hannah says, of the flowered skirt and the long blonde hair, angelic eyes, porcelain skin, the scent of roses clustering about her clothes. Christian clichés, worse than just normal ones.

Apparently she plays the keyboard beautifully and will accompany the hymn sing on Wednesday.

You would laugh if you saw her, squeeze my arm and sail off, laughing, laughing, laughing. You know I could never measure up to that.



I leave a trail of waterlogged footprints behind me as I walk across the carpet at midnight but I'm clean, a towel in hand applied to my hair. Then, it happens, the shell necklace you gave me - you said you were in Hawaii on a business trip and we looked, just looked, at each other - fell apart and all the shells come sliding off the string around my neck and scatter across the floor. I drop the towel and fall on my knees to gather them up - maybe it can be restrung if I collect all of them, every one, and rethread it myself, it could be done. I pause. There is a patch of light from the moon on the carpet so that it seems like the shells are stars tossed carelessly across the night sky. A galaxy spiraling through the universe, the universe on my carpet. I stare for a long time. I, a god, has made this happen.



We're playing Life today, you in the old terry houserobe, your bare legs stretch around the board, me still in my suit, the hem creeping up my calf, you laugh at me.

"How old are you, Pastor?"

"I hate it when you call me

Pastor."

"Only a really

old man

"And at least you're still in the entertainment business."

"That's not funny." I sigh. "Want to draw again?"

"That's cheating."

"They say that your average person will switch careers five times in their lives," I say.

"Are you gonna change your clothes? We can pause the game."

"You're tired of looking at my socks."

You push the plastic spinner around with your toe.

I get up and go to the bedroom.

When I get back, you've already spun for me and moved my piece down the college track.



The lovely Hannah seated at the keyboard, her wrists move down its length, the last keys of the last song, I, smiling behind her, waiting to give the benediction so everyone can go home blessed, happy, stay, go, stay, go the Lord bless thee and keep thee...

You stand up, look around you, smooth the wrinkles on your shirt, and wade through the heavy scent of perfume and old religion, the Lord make His face shine upon thee, to the double doors of the parking lot, and be gracious unto thee, gasoline particles hovering outside cars...

The Lord lift His countenance upon thee, I hurry down the aisle after you, the crease running down the middle of my pants, each leg, hurrying too, dignified, important, the work of God.

I call your name, Anna, drag you back.

"I don't want to meet anyone," you say, but I say, "They want to meet you!"

"Pastors shouldn't lie," you say, and I say, "They're very nice people."

The foyer, its roasted coffee smell clinging to every word out of Mrs. Laurence's mouth.

"Meet a very close friend of mine,"

I say to her. You squirm, my hand around your elbow.

Mrs. Laurence, her

mouth a twisted bobby

pin. "So this explains

the dash down

the aisle. Thanks

heavens Hannah

is so blessed with

musical talent."

"Thank heavens," you

echo.

"Pastor, Pastor," someone is calling me, waving me over to discuss some urgent theological business.

Mrs. Laurence takes your hand with both of hers.

I walk away to attend to the insistent parishioner. The lovely

Hannah sweeps to my side,

latches onto my arm, the

arm you would hold,

and looks up into

my face. I turn

back to you,

but you are

already

gone,

pushing out

the double

doors, and

you're laughing, now moving into the gasoline air.

The Greatest Space

- Meghan Doraty

