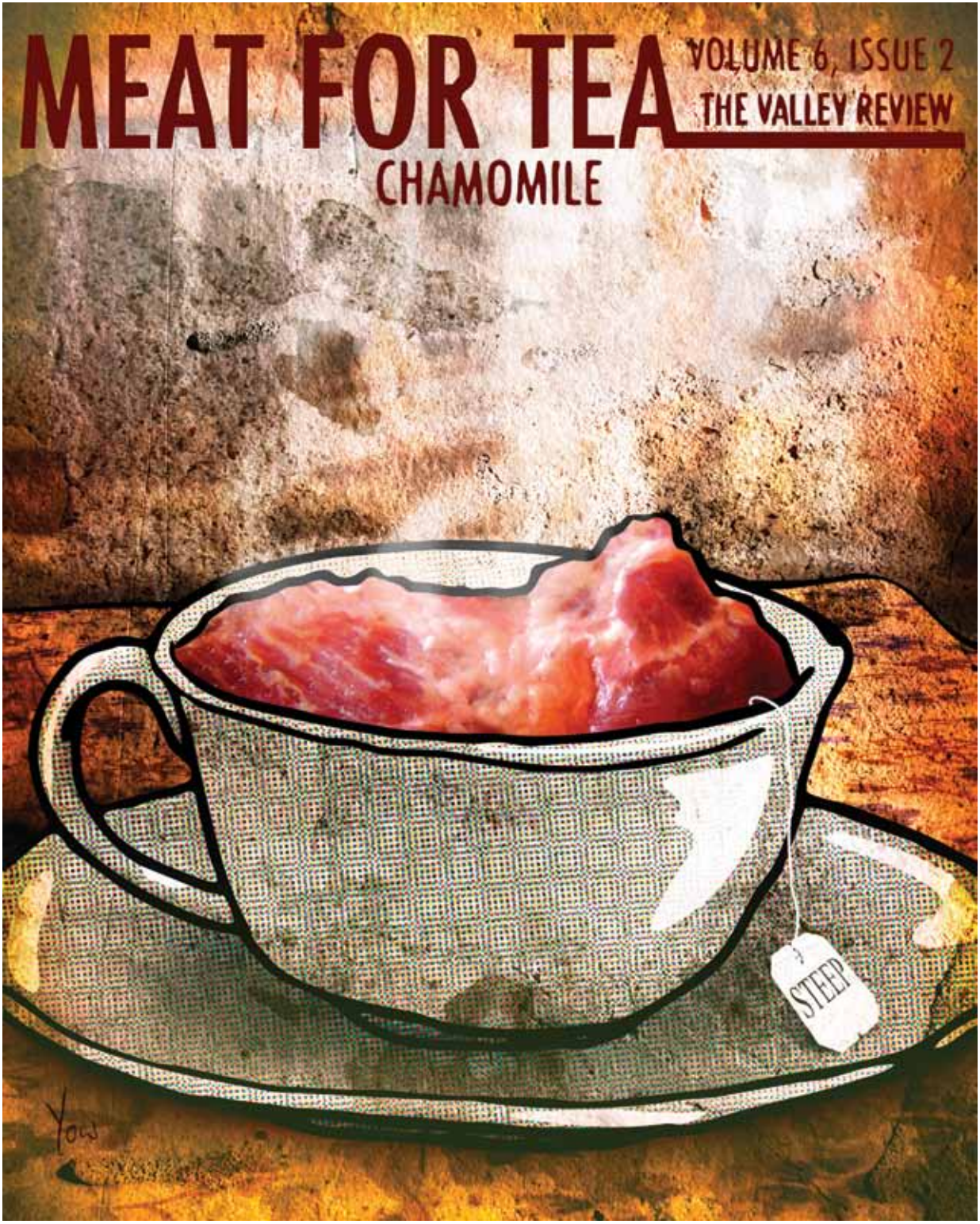
# MEAT FOR TEA

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2
THE VALLEY REVIEW

## CHAMOMILE



## Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

**Meat for Tea: The Valley Review** was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.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# in memorium

Meat For Tea would like to recognize the passing of two local musicians, David Marcus (Of Blessings and Burdens, Arrows Over Athens) and Jameson Greeley Lavo (Trials and Tribulations). They will be dearly missed.

Some people have kindly offered some words in regards to Jameson's passing:

"*Without Jamie, I feel so strange doing normal every day things. I feel a sadness around me, I feel confused, I feel hurt and angry and self loathing but I FEEL.*" - Jessie Beland

*"I'm remembering that laugh,that brain, the way you were so sweet when I was pregnant, and that voice, that voice, that voice."* - Madeleine Darling

*"Jamie-the inquisitive, skeptical, boundary pushing innovator musician philosopher that i knew at PVPA, your spirit, drive and energy lives on in our hearts."* - Paul Eggleston

*"Jamie was literally the best hugger I have ever met. That man hugged more tears out of me than anyone I've never dated."* - Cora Gaulin

*"All of the best and worst parts of Jamie were characterized by one thing- he was entirely too god-damn loud. I'll miss him."* - Kyle Gintzler

*"Oh, Jamie, I wish I'd baked you a cake. I'll miss you."* - Elizabeth MacDuffie

*"RIP, Jameson Lavo. The music world - the world in general - is at a loss now."* - Mark Alan Miller

*"Often when Jamie would show up somewhere I was he would give me a big bear hug, him being so tall and I being so short it caused my body to end up high in the air, Jamie always picked me up when I saw him, he always made my spirits high."* - Steven Schmeltz

*"There were many really amazing shared moments with Jameson Greeley Lavo! Most were when I was really feeling down, he literally would pick me up and bear hug me. He always expressed so much admiration for me, and I hope he knew how much I had for him.*
*My favorite memory was the first time I played VS' he was on Team: Shopping with me. I remember his fervor and excitement at times couldn't be contained or controlled. He always was very passionate about the music he played. That night ended with me leading my team with a song I came up with on the fly. Jamie played so gentle and pristine, and with fiery passion and gusto all at the drop of a hat. I later recorded that same song. I now know that the song will never sound that good/way ever again. Thanks for being such an amazing soul, I cherish all the times we got to play music together dearly. RIP."* - Matt Silberstein

**'I am sitting alone in the corner of Kathy's Diner, drinking my weight in coffee, and reading the bible.'**
**'You are every Smith College freshmen who has ever read 'Catcher in the Rye' 's wet dream. Keep it up, buster. You are bound to get laid.'**
"*-I am going to miss our silly conversations most of all.*" - Ms. Something



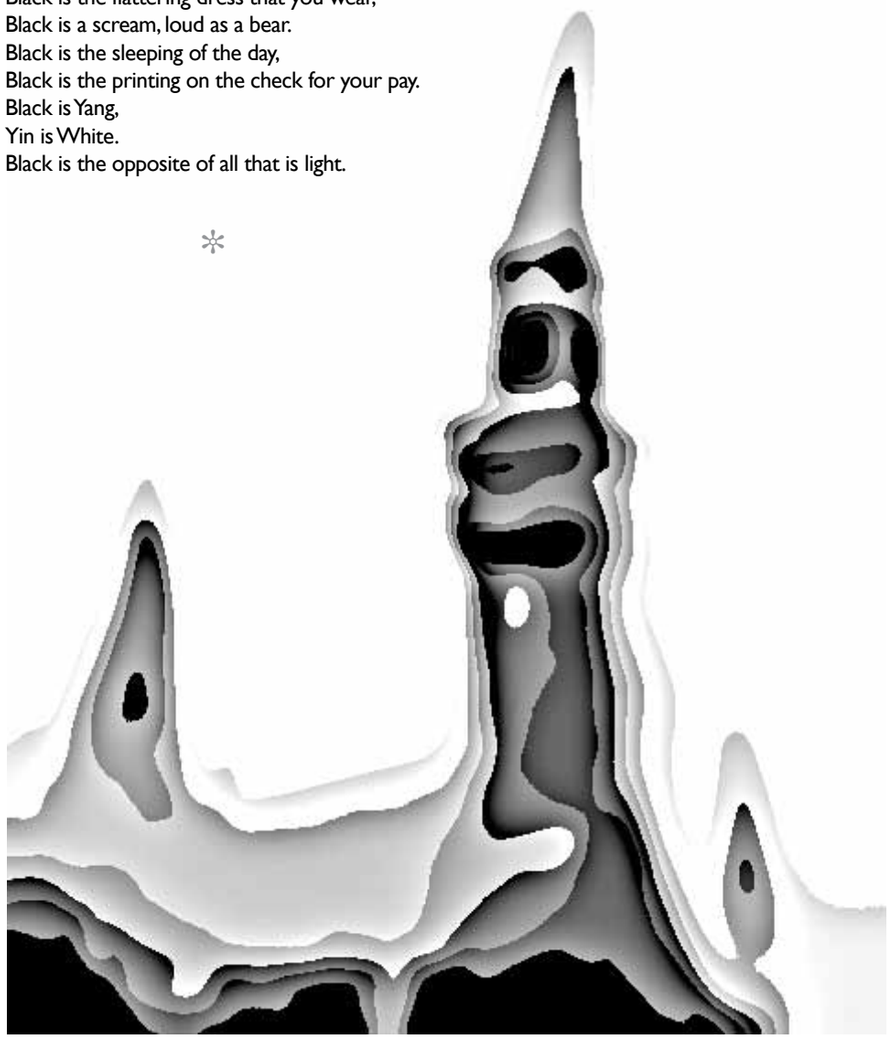

Kyle Gintzler

a jolly good fellow
Thomas M. Campbell

# redemption of black

Miranda McClave

Black is the bird that carries my dreams,
Black is the night, steady as beams.
Black is the thoughts I have in my head,
Black is the cloud hanging over my bed.
Black is the flattering dress that you wear,
Black is a scream, loud as a bear.
Black is the sleeping of the day,
Black is the printing on the check for your pay.
Black is Yang,
Yin is White.
Black is the opposite of all that is light.



Michael Anton Wertelet



# ex-exanimate

Corey Mesler

The Lady Banks rose,
choked by vines and
crap saplings, seemingly
executed by nature's
ruthless profusion, is
now sporting
a bright green
robe. How did I not
kill you? I say to it.
How do you come back
from something like that, a
thing both natural and
cannibalistic? Tell me,
I whisper, be-
cause I need to know that,
after all the jugulating,
there is more life, more life.

# why gayla

Corey Mesler

I once knew a woman
named Gayla.
She burned with a green
flame, a flame
of life. She was carnal.
She was lovely.
And, like an opening,
she was impossible.
And like a shadow
she was ungraspable, ex-
cept in the lonely
precepts of the poem, here
pinned, here laid
out like the perishing bride.

# into the woods

Corey Mesler

*"Is sign language the real language of Paradise?"*
*–Hugo Ball*

I stepped into the dark of the woods
as if I were a returning astronaut.
The crepuscule shut its one good eye
and I wanted to be naked and fine.
I stepped into the dark of the words
as if they alone could embrace me.
I whispered my spell to the seasick owl
just as a clutch of daffodils ignited.

## a dream on mars

Kelsey Swanson





# the new year's gown

Cyn Capeloto

The fabric was spread out across the chaise lounge in my mother's bedroom. It was a deep burgundy velvet, luxurious to the touch. The soft pile of the material felt both silky and warm and it reflected the overhead light in a muted glow that was not harsh to the eye. Alongside the velvet lay a long strand of rhinestone trim, tiny prisms glittering blue, pink, and purple. Dazzling. In a box on the floor in front of the lounge was a pair of silver high-heels peeking out of the bright red, fluffy tissue-wrap. Next to the shoes was a long silver evening bag with a crystal clasp. Tossed to the side was a paper packet reading "Butterick Patterns" with an illustration of a woman impossibly tall and lean wearing an elegant floor-length, figure-hugging gown, one hand holding an evening clutch, the other held up seductively to her hair.

Ophelia was about to embark on sewing a dress, from scratch, for the first time in her life. Having just suffered through and barely passing a sewing class for 7th grade home ec, I saw trouble ahead. There is a real art and talent to sewing. Dexterity and patience, intense concentration, attention to detail . . . all qualities I did not think my mother possessed . . . are necessary in order to complete a garment that does not look homemade. The ability to install a slim zipper without catching it up in the needle-plate helps, too. My own class project, a simple wrap-around skirt (no darts, zippers, buttons or pockets), made from washed denim, was a mess. I got a D. I tossed it into the rag bag as soon as I brought it home and never looked at it again.

But here was Ophelia, cooing over her rich-looking treasures, excitedly describing to me how the dress would look when completed. Well, I could see how it was supposed to look; the cover illustration made that clear. She had never done anything like this and it did not look like a simple design. I smirked and went into the kitchen to make a bologna and mayonnaise sandwich. "Good LUCK", I thought.

For four weeks, my brothers and sister and I made dinner. We heard the sewing machine whirring away, occasional curses, whirring, curses, until it was almost time for Conrad to come home. Ophelia always bathed and got glamorous for my stepfather. The house would fill with the scent of her Chanel No. 5 perfume beginning at 4:30. The casual pants and baggy tops would be exchanged for hostess-wear, the Keds sneakers for stylish ballet slippers or high-heeled sandals. He came home every night from his job as an electrician, hard hat and lunchbox in hand, to his beautiful wife and a glass of port. This was adult time. We kids were not permitted in their large, pink, ultra-feminine bedroom until we were invited in, usually an hour or so after his arrival home.

The evening came, however, when Conrad was not greeted by his wife holding his glass of wine. What he came home to was four of his cranky children yelling at each other in the brightly-lit kitchen, arguing over who was going to do the dinner dishes. Doors and drawers were being yanked open and slammed shut, and silverware and plates were being slapped onto the table as the smell of scorched potatoes hung over the room. Chula, our little poodle, was agitated by our ruckus, jumping and yelping, waiting to be picked up and comforted. Ophelia, frustrated, had slammed the bedroom door shut, hair a mess, white cotton shirt full of dark velvet lint, eyes bloodshot, hands shaking as she tried, between drags on her Pall Mall cigarette, to work with this slippery fabric, which kept getting away from her. So, the dress was going to be a failure. I didn't want to say "I told you so" but you know . . . I did tell her so.

Ophelia stormed out of the bedroom, completely disheveled, sweaty and defeated. Conrad patted her on the back and murmured that he would take her shopping for a New Year's gown on Saturday. That was all she needed to hear. "I STARTED this damned thing and I am going to FINISH it and I am going to WEAR it and you will LOVE it!" she snarled at him. He shrugged his shoulders and decided he would rather be in the kitchen salvaging dinner with us than in the bedroom dealing with her wrath.

New Year's Eve, 1964, one long month after she started her project. We all waited in the living room in anticipation, anxious to see this gown that we felt had taken so much from us and so much out of her. Conrad came out first in his tuxedo, looking dashing. We all stood in line, waiting. Out came Ophelia. She looked splendid. The dress was perfect both in detail and execution. The rhinestone trim glimmered at her throat, the clutch bag sparkled in her hand. The silver sequined shoes picked up the dazzle, almost as if she wore diamonds on her feet. Her hair, upswept and dramatic, held a glittery clip within its piles of curls. But the dress . . . the deep burgundy velvet dress . . . was the show-stopper. It clung to her curves and draped elegantly in back in a dropped cowl rimmed with the rhinestone rope. She smiled triumphantly and said, "Well?" Well! I burst into tears at her beauty, holding onto Chula to keep her from jumping and clawing at the dress. They swept into the night to drink and dance and have their photos taken.

Years later, when I was 16, I was invited to a party. It was a costume party, and I wanted to wear that gown. My mother, not the least bit bothered by the request, altered the gown to fit me, expertly taking it in here and there. I went as Audrey Hepburn, hair piled high, tiara atop my bangs, and carrying an unlit cigarette in Ophelia's long black holder. I won the prize for the most beautiful costume. I wish I had that dress today.





## John Yamrus

a pretty good

poem
popped into my head.

i was
out back
in the hot tub.

it was
near midnight

and
i just
poured a
glass of wine.

i wasn't
about to get out,

so i
repeated it
over and over
in my head, until

i
had it
memorized.

and
i hope
you like

it.

## John Yamrus

Old Clarkie

was
known
for stripping down

and
throwing
her boobs
over her shoulders

for
drinks.

it
wasn't
very pretty.

but,
it sure
was entertaining.

i
heard
she was
in show business

a
long
time ago.

i wonder
what
she

did.

## John Yamrus

dear Liz;

thanks
for sending me
the note about that
poetry show on tv last night.

i ended up
tuning in for a bit.

unfortunately,
i couldn't get past
her inability to read her work very well.

she had
absolutely no sense
of pace, timing or delivery.

that's
probably
the main reason
why i hate going to readings.

most people
don't have a clue
how to showcase their work.

anyway,
i've got to run.

i'm in the middle
of painting two rocking chairs.

not art...
just lawn furniture.

there's a poem
in there somewhere.

i'll let you
find
it.

# the meaty interview: John Yamrus

**What's your favorite color?**
Medium rare steak.

**What's your favorite animal?**
Magnetism.

**If you could choose to fly or to be invisible, which would you choose?**
I've got enough problems the way it is, who needs more super powers?

**Are you happy and if not, why not?**
Why is a fair enough question. Why not, is an unacceptable answer.

**It is clear you admire Charles Bukowski. Who are some other poets, living or dead, you admire?**
You'd be surprised how few there are. Most are just pretenders, fakes and wannabes.
The real deals, guys like Walt Whitman, Milner Place and Rob Plath are few and far between.

**Can you name any influences on your poetry?**
Willie Mays, Groucho Marx and Miles Davis.



**Name some contemporary poets you enjoy reading?**
Rob Raymond, Wolf Carstens, Ann Menebroker
and that nameless guy who writes on toilet walls.

**Describe your training as a poet.**
At eight I was hit in the head with a rock. At sixteen I was hit in the head with a baseball.

**From what sources do you derive inspiration for your poems?**
I don't look for inspiration. No matter how hard I try to hide, it finds me.

**Can you briefly describe your writing process?**
Sit down at the keyboard and let her rip.

**What advice do you have for young, aspiring poets?**
Take up house painting. It's a good and steady pay check.


Michael Anton Wertelet

# hydrotherapy

David P. Miller

He shudders out of sleep,
eyes open past midnight,
stares at a black envelope.
It's only his bedroom.

Or a prone full-body spasm,
then another, together
with a faint high choke
squeezed like a muzzled animal.

The deck chair startles
in a sudden high wind.
A sympathetic response
to the moment in his dream

when they can't, won't listen.
When they keep asking.
When he *said* he doesn't know.
When they keep asking.

Now seated on the porch
he and the chair together,
darkness and fog bathe them
like a wet cool sheet.

Both of them patients
awake in the night,
grateful to be still,
grateful to be breathing

as the first light arrives
and the first bird calls.



# not fully grasped

David P. Miller

Aware of the instant after the moment
but not of the moment itself.
The clock tower chimes one,
distant single bell tone
already in decay
fades toward my ear,
the stroke itself unheard.

At the piano
Amy Beach's broken chords
almost falling under my left hand
felt in muscle and sinew
but not fully grasped,
like Brahms' broken chords
almost under the same hand
hesitating before
a realized gesture.

Bare awareness of the moment
as a circle arises
in the puddle outside the window
and vanishes,
being seen.
But no notice of the drop
at the center of the circle,
its strike
and disappearance.
Relaxing the regard
one sees a myriad
of vanishing circles.
Each has its ripple effects
but they escape
notice.

# pellet petals

David P. Miller

As the tide recedes
the sand crabs reappear. They
recreate their holes
filled in at high tide,
doorways plugged with silt. Crabs
view the beach with caution.

Crabs scrape the sand with
inch-long strokes. High tide
brings fresh food, now
washed across the beach.
Crabs feed, taking what they can
from each scrape, discard the rest
as pellets. They move
sideways from their holes,
scraping, feeding, discarding,
and return. Sinuous loops
of short strokes drawn into the
sand. Each stroke dotted
with a tiny sphere.

As morning goes on
a manifestation of
petals takes shape surrounding
each hole, a corona now
become a corolla. Or
a mandala of hunger.
Drawings made by crabs.
Hundreds of lines per drawing,
dozens of crabs, ten
thousand pellets spread across
the beach. Thickening,
overlapping, the flowers
become network diagrams,
impenetrable, each crab's
exit a point of synapse.

Late afternoon, and
as the shadows move
a thick branch arches
across the sand. Volunteer
shoots bearing pinnate leaves sprout
from the old wood. Here
a silhouette, a wheel of
shoot spoke and leaf radius,
lies near a sand flower drawing,
profligate of wildly traced
petals. They echo.

The tide advances.
The crabs retreat below ground.
High tide erases at once
scrape marks, pellets, even the
holes. Sand mandalas
washed out to sea.

# this string walks into a bar

Rachel Hoogstraten

Alan Thornton glanced at his watch. Five of five. He shuffled the papers on his desk, separating them into neat piles squared off against his pen cup and his name plaque. This way he would be able to get right to work in the morning, everything organized. He snapped shut his briefcase, threw his long dark trenchcoat over his arm and, straightening his tie in the mirror on the way to his office door, left work at exactly five o'clock.

Alan strode through the maze of cubicles between his office - not quite in the corner though the view wasn't bad - and the elevator. He nodded to the receptionist, Angela, as he passed her desk and stepped in just ahead of the sliding doors. He pushed L and rode the ten floors down. It wasn't fifteen, but ten wasn't bad. He was only thirty-two, after all: a fact that had engendered gossip during his rise in the company. Most of the men in his position had at least ten years on him, some twenty. Alan ignored the rumors of those he considered to be flighty and foolish; the rumors weren't true. He had made it to the tenth floor through his own dedication and focus. No funny business. *Not bad at all*, he thought as he left the building.

Alan walked the few blocks to his favorite neighborhood bar, something he often did after work. A few beers before going home, home to his calculated marriage and his reserved wife. It's not that they didn't like each other, they got along fine; it had been a marriage of convenience, of arrangement. Both parties had gained from the alliance and they had a comfortable routine worked out. It had never occurred to Alan to wonder whether she loved him. Or, for that matter, whether he loved her. *Passion is feeble*, Alan had been heard to say. He pushed open the grimy oak door to the grimy oak bar.



Seedy was really the only word for the place. Alan knew this, knew that his colleagues would have been surprised to see him in such an establishment, but he liked it there. Alan picked a stool and ordered a drink. The old TV perched in the corner above the dusty top shelf liquors, liquors that at a nicer bar would only have been middle shelf, was turned to the five o'clock news. Alan watched the text scroll along the bottom of the muted screen; fire in Nevada, hundreds evacuated, *what'd they expect?* Alan thought, *no one made 'em live there.* The screen changed, the debate over wind power on the Massachusetts cape, environmentalists concerned about the migratory bird population; *hippies,* Alan thought, *famine and disease all over the world and they're making a fuss over a bunch of birds.*

Alan lit a cigarette as the bartender set down a beer in front of him. *They'll kill ya, ya know,* the bartender said, watching the curl of smoke rise from Alan's fingers.

*I'm gonna die anyway,* Alan responded, *why not chose how I go?*

Down the bar to Alan's right sat a man. He appeared to be about fifty, not particularly young looking or old looking, just weathered. *Used*, Alan would have thought had he noticed the man. The stranger beckoned to the bartender who made his way over like a cat. This was something Alan always admired in bartenders, their way of making everything seem like their idea. *Nonchalance,* was the word Alan would have used, had he not been distracted by the tragedies of the world. The man tipped his head in Alan's direction and said, *Just outta curiosity, you know that guy?*

*Sure do,* the bartender said back. *That's Alan Thornton. He's in real estate. I knew his Daddy.*

The man pondered this information, prodded it to see if it was the answer he was looking for. *Knew?* He asked.

*Yessir, knew. Passed away a few years back. Thought it woulda been hard on young Alan there, but he didn't get set back much. Not much that showed anyways, though Alan's never been one for showin'. Growin' up he's always quiet like. Not too quiet, but not loud. Not too anything.* The man and the bartender reflected on this statement, then the bartender added, as though prompted to sudden wisdom by the man's silence, *his mama died when he was born and I've heard speculation that she never quite finished getting him out. In a spirit'al way, I mean. Got all his fingers and toes and wiggly bits, but something else stayed with her.*

*What do they mean when they say that?* The man asked.

*Well they mean he's all there alright, gets along just fine, but he doesn't seem to enjoy nothing. 's Daddy wasn't much one to joke around; now that I think on it I can't recall ever seeing him smile even. After she died that is. Maybe it's nobody ever taught the poor thing to laugh. Alan don't seem to relish a goddamn thing about living. 'Ts unnatural if you ask me.* And with a slow shake of his head the bartender moved off to wipe another section of bar top.



The man studied Alan all through his first beer and joined him, unsolicited, for his second. After that one was gone, along with the better part of an hour, and Alan was tracing patterns in the condensation on his empty glass, the man got up. He threw down a few crumpled bills and walked over to Alan. The man leaned in next to Alan's face and grinned. *So this string walks into a bar.*

Alan, startled from his musings by the sudden intrusion, could only manage an unintelligent, *what?*

The man continued, so close that Alan could smell the tobacco and dust on his worn jacket. *So this string walks into a bar and goes up to the bartender and says, gimme a drink. The bartender refuses him, says, I'm not givin' you a drink. You're just a string. So the string goes away.* Alan stared at the man in astonishment. *Next day the string comes back, says gimme a drink, and again the bartender says, I'm not givin' you a drink. You're just a string. And the string goes away. So the third day the string comes back into the bar and goes up to the bartender and says, gimme a drink! And the bartender says, listen, I told ya, I'm not givin' you a drink. You're just a string!* The man clapped a hand over Alan's shoulder, he had gotten to the good part and wanted to make sure Alan was paying attention. *So the string goes into the bathroom and ties himself in a knot.* The man chuckled preemptively. *Then he goes back up to the bartender and says, gimme a drink, and the bartender says, I told you no, you're just a string.* The man's hand tightened around Alan's shoulder. *And then the string says, no, I'm afraid not. Get it?* And with that the man broke into a snorting laugh, slapped Alan on the back several times, and walked out of the bar, still chuckling quietly to himself.

Alan stared after the man, his mouth slightly open like he had wanted to fire a come-back at the man but couldn't get one out before he vanished. *I'm afraid not.* Alan studied the dark wood of the door. *Afraid not.* There was a lighter colored scar in the wood where something had gouged out a chunk, perhaps in a bar fight. *Afraid not.* The brass handle was coming loose on the bottom, soon the screw would fall out and the bartender would have to dig the screwdriver out of the toolbox in back and twist it into place.

*A frayed knot.*

Alan cracked a smile at the door. He let out one gruff snort; a quiet, deep in the chest sound that was followed by a whole string of chuckles. Alan turned to face the bar, laughter welling up in his throat until it burst forth, spilled down his front and over the sticky oak of the bar top. *A frayed knot.* He may have started out rusty, but once he started at all he couldn't stop. Alan laughed loud and unabashedly, leaned back on the stool and really let it fly. *Guffawed,* was the bartender's word for it.

The bartender casually wiped his way down to Alan and asked, *what'd he say that's so funny?*

*A frayed knot!* Alan exclaimed, still chortling.

*A what?* The bartender said, skeptically.

*A joke*. Alan replied. *He told me a joke.*

*How's it go?* The bartender inquired, eager to be in on the laugh. *I love a good knee-slapper.*

*It wasn't!* Alan said, sliding off the tool. *Good that is. It was terrible!*

*Then why're you laughing?* Asked the bartender, but Alan didn't respond, just picked up his coat and briefcase and left, shaking his head in wonderment. The last strains of his receding snicker ended only when the heavy door came to a close with a soft thump.





Kelsey Swanson

# d.o.b. + 195

Anthony E. Hoyle

With the hemp bills folded into my antique "U.S. of A." nickel money clip, it felt like crystalline starlight was leaking from my right hip pocket to glow over me and all that I saw, heard or laid hands upon. I slipped my augmented retinae into place to boost the orange glow of the summer afternoon. For a few moments, I forgot the weight of the vocopter and its holster.

Half my fee had been paid up front. It was made in illegitimate currency delivered by a third party, but those were the client's preferences and they were fine with me. Success requires flexibility.

Behind me, the hills rolled northward to the feet of weatherworn mountains without peaks; the summits had been sheared away long ago to provide shortcuts into the mineral hearts of the rocks. Once the land had been sapped, the old industries took their wealth elsewhere and left the fools who remained nothing to pass down to their bitter children but a heritage of mud. Grand schemes of rural renewal came and went; roads, bridges and spaceports promised went unbuilt. Afterward came the permanent heat and the kudzu, advance guards for the northeast march of the jungle. The second coming of the great forest to these parts brought a new people speaking a new language. I was born among them, but never belonged. Business provided the reason for my return to this province, readily abandoned in my late adolescence for several tours of service with the Tsongwing Merchant Marines.



Only as a Silencer, a veteran demolisher, would I have come home.

Heat poured into the valley below, where dark grasses rolled to the banks of the New Ur. Birds covered with pink, carmine and lemon plumage flew alone or in pairs. Great white avians with broad, black-tipped wingspans swooped from treetop to treetop. Shrubs and vines bore flower blooms of colors beyond recall. Mammals and reptiles must have certainly stirred about, unseen if not unheard.

Regrettably, the terms of my contract beckoned. The key to an effective soundwipe lies in the silencer's selection of the best site for the vocopter's barrel and funnel: maximum exposure to the targeted landscape yields the highest likelihood of client satisfaction. Optimally, the embedded device will be provided at least ninety minutes to record, copy and convert the captured noises into the ammunition needed for an overwhelming solid-force blast. Simply put, a vocopter inhales sound and exhales a violent hush. Fauna are crushed, but flora and realty are left intact. A second detonation is never desirable: failures wound every animate being within the strike zone and—given the cost of repeating the process—reduce the silencer's profit margin. Third, fourth or fifth attempts are only undertaken by incompetents who ought to be stripped not only of their weaponry, but of their licenses as well. Unholstering the small cannon, I implanted the barrel so that it stood upright on the side of the hill, flipped open the funnel, and turned on the intake primer.

My bilateral scopes focused on the terrain rising beyond the far bank of the glittering water. There, a vast canopy of kudzu was draped atop great earthen shapes of soft boxes, cones, and pyramids. Across the walls of vines, sunlight refracted thousands of times from the cuticles of greedy leaves.

That place was once a city, and that night, Dhalihal Architectural Salvage was to exhume its precious corpse from nature's firm reclaim and turn it upside down. By midnight, all the skybarges were due to arrive for the hover-and-plunder routine, teeming with overpaid thoughtform crews and surrounded by the drones of gunboats flown by security personnel who were inevitably lazy and rotten to their spines. My job was to make their jobs easier, to depopulate the necropolis of its wildlife in advance of the ships' arrivals. So goes life with a vocopter for hire.

I felt sorriest for the birds. I remember listening to them sing their melancholy songs into the wind. I hear them crying, still. Someone should have admired them on that day, especially the man who intended to shove their music back down their throats with killing force.
But for the first time in my career, I failed to deliver my performance. My arrest came without warning two hours later, and that day—my Day of Birds—marked the start of a new calendar for me, one that tolls the time spent down here in The Mines.

Blissfully oblivious to the impending reversal of fortune, I started the copter's recording sequence and then flew my rented skysleigh back to the inn at Middletown, an atavistic rural hamlet that was a short but safe distance away. Once there, I perched a remote monitor on the northwest windowsill of my suite; range readings across its display spectrums confirmed that the funnel was functioning normally. I could responsibly break for lunch at Miko's Dragon Saddle, an enchanting bordello crucial to Middletown's tiny economy. There is no place better than a whorehouse to spend illegitimate currencies like hemp papers—the exchange rate cannot be beaten.



Having overexerted myself in the Saddle, I later departed the villa, its façade dripping with wisteria and begonias, less than fully alert to my surroundings. As I stepped through the gate, I should have seen the silver globe right away, hovering above a nearby rooftop with its ruby eye ogling about—I remember ignoring a flicker in my peripheral vision. Had I simply followed my intuition and glanced sideways before stepping into the empty street, my life might have followed a better course. Instead, I walked half a block before I heard behind me a sudden whoosh and hum that anyone who may read this journal has surely come to dread; though we seem to have heard it a thousand times since our childhoods, we falsely assure ourselves that its wave will never rush our way, that the sailing Eye which brings it will never trail us with a reddened stare.

With no one else about to spy upon, the roving drone locked on me and, presumably, ran its check. Sometime, somewhere, someone filed a complaint. Surely the Mexican paper was not the problem. I must have underbid the wrong competitor or disappointed a client with high connections. Or not. Perhaps the shiny predator was malfunctioning after the previous night's heavy rainfall. Whether or not the Eye had rightly singled me out for apprehension made no ultimate difference: as it is always illegal to disclose that one is under investigation, objections or cries for help were worse than futile. All I could do was run.

Primal instincts rarely overcome high technology. Zigzagging through the village, I made a right, a left, another left, and then came two of them. Were they police? Bountymen? I will never know: a pair of muddied skinsuits wrapped in Y-shaped combat harnesses strode toward me through the carriage-cloven slop of the road; the tarnished metals on their helmets were free of agency insignia and reflective visors shielded their faces from view. Without uttering a word or projecting a thought, the one on the right made a sweeping gesture with his—or her—hands, and my legs were pinned together by a smoky nimbus that manacled my knees. I pitched headlong into the muck, and though a cushion of horse manure prevented the dislocation of my left shoulder, my joints ached for weeks afterward.

It took them several minutes to truss me up for trundling. Apparently, some sort of power flow problem in the taller one's harness required repairs that delayed our departure. As I writhed, I noticed that off to the roadside, shadowed by the planks of a tack peddler's boardwalk, a pigeon struggled against its badly broken wing. It desperately changed positions from moment to moment, first laying on its side with its little breast swelling and shrinking, then standing to peck its feathery limb, and then stumbling forward only to fall again. The creature's neck was twisted with pain and its eyes blazed with panic. I had slaughtered thousands upon thousands of its kin without a whit of regret, but seeing it there—so tantalizingly close that had I been able I could have cupped it up and carried it away—I could only empathize with its plight and, weeping, wish it the swift mercy of death.

My captors levitated my body onto their large sleigh. There were no other pickups; mine must have been the last of the day. As we flew without conversation to the prison where I have remained for one hundred and ninety-five days, I absorbed the heat of the setting sun, the winds, the jungle scents. We rounded the flatheaded heap of Black Mountain and descended past the guard towers and rows of baled wire shortly after nightfall and landed upon a cracked pad near the center of a circular, graveled courtyard illuminated from above by a rack of spotlamps. Close to the pad was a waterless fountain set at a thirty-degree tilt, its unpainted concrete basin filled with leaves, branches, crumpled bags and assorted plastic trash.

Out of a stonework gate in the mountainside emerged three guardsmen who were dressed in nearly identical khaki coveralls. I was rough-handedly turned over to them. The tallest one had a well-trimmed moustache, a potbelly, and a few stripes on the right shoulder of his uniform. "Rehabilitant FFF408," he said through a smirk, "I am addressed as Sergeant Uben. Your former name shall not be returned to you until the moment you are released from Common Ethics Rehabilitation Facility 19, should that moment come. Should you refer to yourself or otherwise use your former name during your term within this Facility, the penalty shall be a period of supplemental rehabilitation. Do you understand what I have explained to you?"

Nodding my head, I demurred. One of the shorter, fatter ones slapped me in the face. I came to know him later as Guardsman Mannadou, whose cock is torqued with a rightward curve. "You must answer aloud," he barked. So I did. "Now you strip and stand over there, just inside the gate."

Doing as I was told, I placed myself in the entranceway, where, like all rehabilitants, my new status was sprayed onto my skin: from apertures on three sides of the automated portcullis sprayed a shower of deep purple dye. My body tingled with a slight burn until a thorough drenching of clear, cold water followed.



As I stood naked, alone, and dripping into the rusted grate beneath my feet, Sergeant Uben thought at me with a wink: *"Welcome to The Mines. Don't fuck up."*

I was put to work on the sandal-sewing production line the next morning and have put in ten-hour shifts every day since. No one has told me the reason for my arrest or my anticipated date of release; this experience is common to all rehabs I have met. Those who are released are peremptorily tapped on the shoulder by a guard and escorted to the exit. From hearsay, I understand there is also a thought-projected notice to "get up and get out" that is concurrent with these actions.

The Mines are warrens of ancient mine tunnels used by Common Government as a subterranean gulag. Our shelter could be worse: I live in a hundred yard square cave with two roommates, a man and a woman. The door has no lock. We travel to and from our workplaces through channels kept clean by rehab janitors and the wages for our labors are food and water rations, assuming we are not robbed by guardsmen or our fellow rehabs. Just as in the world outside, there are legitimate and illegitimate economies here.

And I learned not to fuck up: a rehab must be adaptable if he is to survive. Over time, I found that job skills learned under my former name could be employed under the new one to obtain compensations beyond mere sustenance. Last night, I helped a rehab named TripleT Twelve smuggle eight blindfolded teenage girls who had been kidnapped from local villages from the front gate to the Game Section in our Sector. I owed TripleT the collusion because he was the middleman who obtained for me the tablet, pen and ink that I am using to make this record. By the time we finally reached Game Room 45, the girls were inconsolable. They could not stop moaning and soaking their gags, and we could not make them stop. I did what I could to clean the piss and shit off of them before sergeant Uben arrived and ordered us—the two male rehabs—out of the room. As we left, three officers entered. I closed the door behind us, but I could hear the cries from inside.

I hear them crying, still.

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