

Dead Reckoning



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Arts & Writing

DEAD RECKONING, ISSUE ONE

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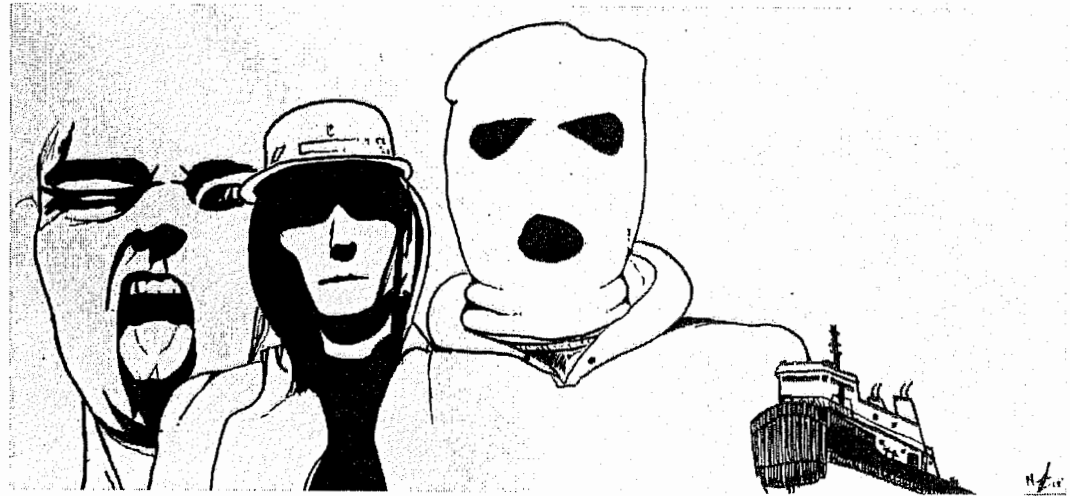
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SIMPLE, BUT HARD

Learn, memorize, cram
Caffeine, shaking of the hand,
Overflowed glass of water
Some goes in, some goes out,
Trying to recycle

Too much knowledge left on the sheet
over and over: repeat

Invisible eraser, mind chaser,
Colors, shapes, numbers, lines
Assorted differently, seemingly blind

What I once knew, relearn it all,
Hilariously simple,
Complicated as ever.
Learn everything?
Possibly never.

Only exercise six things taught
That's ok, just learn enough
After all, Mr. Katz passed:
This can't be that tough

SAILORS' DAY OFF

Beneath the cliffs of brick lived sailors of stone.
Bodies of dull and bulk with eyes of needle.
Faces a mother would bury.
Scale tongued brawlers and chippers
Licking at the napes and necks of the fair shrew and the
not.
Whirring and stirring of beer and booze and bodies.
Braising each other in a cloud of double visions and
earthquakes.
Grinding the gunk off their teeth and nails,
Hitting the town and hoping it hit back just as hard.
The Guffaws and Cahoots and the swearing of non-
churchgoing men
Whose lord is the wind and waves
Echoes down the alleyways of the old towns and new.
Hoping to catch the ear of one who will share it,
The lights and sounds swimming like the silhouetted
monsters of the endless.

The field's in ruin,
With billowing smog.
Enemies push in,
Purpose for a cog.

The tides change quickly,
A new piece appears.
Gruesome and sickly,
A Behemoth nears.

It cares not for rules,
Aims to decimate.
The pawns become fools,
Queen attains Checkmate.

THE WEATHER HATES ME

Driving up and down the passes, the weather lay down and I finally got the call from sleeping beauty.

"Dude, how was that sleep?" I answered, before he could even say a word.

"Hey. Sorry about that, man. Alarms didn't go off, but I'm hauling ass over there. Google says I'll be at the lot at 6:10," Stevie calmly recounted.

"Yeah, yeah, no worries brother. I'll be there at 5:40 and I'll figure out where they're flying best. We can hit there then move around to some other plots. You sound too calm to be bombing it down the 8." As I continued, I could hear the wind rushing in his car as he lit up a cigarette.

"Call me when you get near the sea." I hung up and continued the drive.

5:30 rolled around as I entered the town. Being as flat as that damn place was, I knew the ocean wasn't much farther ahead, but then again, if you squinted through the rear view mirror, the Mexican Flag was there, blowing strongly. The town, Huber, was situated in the heart of the lower Central Valley. It was the home to large producers of lettuce, spinach, beans, asparagus, and beef. The beef lots, or "feed lots" as we called them, were just small 10-20 acre plots of land where the cattle were lined up in pens and fattened for the slaughterhouse.

Rolling up and driving through the back entrance of the plot, I could see that they had just spread the seeds. They fed

the cattle a mixture of alfalfa, milo, feed corn and other seeds. The only reason we knew this is because the birds' throats were always full of them when we cleaned them. The birds were there. Not only the targeted Eurasian, mourning, and white-winged doves, but hawks, herons and blackbirds. Holy crap—blackbirds—they flew thick enough to block out the sun.

As I slowly rolled my truck to hide behind the massive, three-story hay barns, I turned the engine off and scrambled to get the gun out of the case. Figuring it was the season-ender, I put the whole case of 12-gauge, 6-shot on the tailgate. Right when the 6:14 shot time started, the birds were there. Then I saw Steven and now I knew the comedy show was going to begin.

“Hey, knock any down?” Steve asked, being the curious lad he was.

“Naw, mang, just getting set up. I’m ready to blow through this case though and I hope you don’t have to use any of mine.”

“Yeah yeah yeah, we’ll see about that. Don’t be a skyscraping dickhead, bro.”

It was a rough morning for me and Stevie. The usual spot wasn’t holding birds like we thought even though we had waited it out for a couple hours. Figuring that we had just shot 10,000 little lead pellets into the sky, it was now time for us to harass some other animals.

After the sun broke, I realized where I was. A couple rights and lefts, and about two miles down the road, we found ourselves at Bugs’s house. You couldn’t really call it his house, but the overgrown, raspy desert bush and fresh bales of hay stacked high were the perfect cottontail habitat, if I ever said so.

As we drove around the road to the west end, we figured that the east push would be the best. I got the north end of the path, right next to some desert tule and this little concrete irrigation ditch, while Steve found himself in the overgrown bushes. If you’ve ever seen a crack addict twitching because he saw something exciting, well, that was Stevie rabbit hunting. And holy shit, let me tell you how entertaining it was to watch.

“Bang, bang, bang, bang,” was all you heard from Stevie. How could I forget the running, panting, stomping and almost eating it a couple times as he chased those damn things around the bushes?

“All right, this is bull. The hell you ain’t shooting anything?” the out-of-breath Stevie asked.

“I’m having too good of a time watching you waste all your damn ammo. That looked like the smartest game of Saba/Sealion. Plus, if we did get one down, all that shit would be semi-decent for is coyote bait.”

We jumped back in my truck, took a couple turns and long roads, and found our tree. Going over the game plan with Steve, I emphasized the importance of slow and subtle moves, and oh yeah, no long shots. The signs were looking better as the sunlight came down. The whole place looked like it had been taken over by doves. We started knocking birds down left and right. My mouth started watering from the thought of dove poppers for Christmas dinner. Fresh Jalapeños stuffed with cream cheese, a dove breast on top and wrapped with bacon. If I knew anything about heaven, I thought, this is what I would want it to be like.

Just like that, 6:24 rolled around and the season was done. The wounded doves landed somewhere and the majority went back to their roosting eucalyptus trees far, far away. As

we walked the field picking up birds and shells, we came to realize that we had our limits.

Since Steve and I had taken separate cars and I always liked to run the passes on a full tank, I stopped at the Arco in El Centro to load the tank and stock up on the RockStars. Upon leaving the gas station, I noticed something wasn't right. The first thing I heard was the solid thumps--not the thumps you hear when you have a flat tire, but the loud thumps of a water balloon hitting one's face. Doing the standard 75 on the I-8 west and having these massive water drops starting to fall from the sky, I had to cut back on the speed. Just entering the grade past Ocotillo wells, the first call came in. The reception was always shitty going through the three passes.

"[Shhhhhhh]...pea soup...[shhh]..slow..." and the call was quickly dropped. Curiosity running through my head, I tried repetitively to call him back, to only get a busy signal, and then no service. I was running blind into the situation.

Halfway up the switchbacks and sharp turns of the Ocotillo Grade, I soon realized what he might have been referring to: visibility-restricting pissing rain, with a hint of wind, a lot of freaking wind. Sure as shit this wasn't a SoCal storm. Scared shitless and worried because I had never driven in extreme weather before, I thought I'd ask the ballsiest, worst driver I knew: my mother. While dialing the area code, I got another call.

"Dude, it is totally messed up," yelled Stevie through the car's speakers. "There's cars everywhere and its absolute pea-soup-type shit. I'm barely making 5mph on a slow roll past Jacumba, all the way to the Golden Acorn. Where are you at?"

"No kidding, eh? Just stopped at the Chevron on top of Ocotillo Wells. Was thinking about wading this one out. How bad is it?"

"Well, if you put a snorkel mask on and try to go diving in clam chowder, it's kind of like that. Just go slow and watch for the cars on the side of the road."

"Is the BP open right now?"

"Oh hell no. Border patrol has locked that thing up," Stevie said, then added. "Hey, I gotta get my ass to El Cajon, but let me know how it goes."

Pulling onto the on-ramp from the I-8 West, I started to get the gist of what he was referring to. Cars, cars and more cars were all over the place, stacked on top of each other like they were trying to get through Oakland on a Friday night. If it hadn't been for the emergencies' flashing, the cars would have disappeared in the fog.

Fog or clouds, I could not figure out what it was, but upon reaching the 3500' elevation mark, the visibility was non-existent. It's like you knew there were cars in front of you, but that didn't mean you could see them. The one that stood out the most for me was a little Kia-looking thing. It looked far away, but taking a second look, his bumper was right in front of mine. The subtle glowing of his tail lights really gave me a hard realization. I had two feet of viz in front of me and this really sucked.

Just as Stevie had mentioned, the Border Patrol checkpoint was closed outside of Rainbow. Thank god: they tended to pull me over for secondary because I'd leave my ammo bag in the truck bed, but no questioning today.

Coming down the backside of Alpine, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. I could finally see a car. Not just one car, but a lot of cars. With the rain slowing down and the wind still ripping through the valley, the clouds/fog or

whatever they are lifted and I could see. December 28th 2015
was a hell of a way to end the dove season.

Daniel Strong

PICKIN' FISH

Swayed on the stern of the boat
Musty, tired and unkempt
A cigarette stuck between my lips
The hundredweight of
Struggling silver salmon
Dragged the net down
And the hydraulics throttled
Across the span

Another grizzled man
in bright orange Grundens
Hobbled forward
Took hold of the line
And started to pick
I leaned from the edge
as a wave bucked me
amidship

There I was
Arrested in the net
So I stabbed into gills
And pried out
From the mesh
Nine pounds of flesh
Hooked as it were
Upon my finger
I threw the fish

Forward into the hold
And went back for more.

Corinna Jacobs

LAPS

I count.
Number of strokes. How many laps.
The minutes. The hours. The sets. The repetitions.

I feel the red in my face.
Push pull pull pull kick kick kick.
I try to regulate and challenge myself.

The shade encroaches. The sun falls behind the trees.
I want to be in the sun and brown my skin.

The momentum carries me.
I feel the glide. I feel the resistance.

I watch the clock to keep pace.
I don't want to break too long, exhaust myself too fast.

The long underwater pull
The rapid turn and push off the wall

I feel my cap pull back and hairs falling out damaged and
broken off.
I pull at it during the flip.

My head is clear and my lungs feel strong
I watch the lines on the bottom of the pool.

My hands and body graze the lane lines.
Like giant plastic bead necklaces strung across the pool.

David Fleischman

I watch the triangular flags whipping in the breeze
I count
Six, five, four, three, two, one.
Roll over, turn, reach.

I always count down.
It goes by faster.
It feels that way at least.

One motion
Head, chest, hips, legs feet
Fast and natural.
I feel the bottom, rough and porous

The push
I stretch my legs out and streamline myself into the water

Just like any other Tuesday that summer, I spent the morning at Mesa College in San Diego. I sat in the front row of a macroeconomics class, but today I could not focus. My mind was fixated simply on the good news I had read earlier that morning. A massive south swell was making its way towards the California coast, and my Surfline app was full of orange and green. For a surfer, this is the equivalent of getting a full tank of gas or having your credit card paid off. The point is, it doesn't happen often and when it does, it's gone before you know it. My phone had been propped up underneath my desk, live-streaming footage of the waves at "Del Mar 15th street" cam and "Cardiff" cam. Instead of doing GDP calculations like the rest of my class, I was theorizing the best break for the swell angle, swell period and tide. When class broke out, I was the first one through the door, and raced down to the parking lot. I had received several texts from my friends in anticipation of getting out to the surf. We exchanged a few possible ideas about where to go before I mentioned "Blacks?" I could almost feel their anticipation and fear through the phone. In this case, the reward could be much greater than the risk. It didn't take much convincing before we all had plans to meet at the renowned surf spot off of Torrey Pines road.

I left the campus and merged onto the 805. I knew such a paddle out would burn hundreds of calories, so I stopped for a California burrito, the beloved meal of San Diegans. No traffic this time. What a relief, I thought to myself. I pulled up on the usual parking spot where we met up. Spencer and John were in John's car, both on their phones, probably

scrolling the feeds on whatever app was relevant at the time. I wondered why this neighborhood was eerily empty. When there were waves, this rich La Jolla community looked like a parking lot. But this time, I was able to find a spot right behind John's car. Bizarre, I thought to myself. We all put our wetsuits on and conversed for a bit before heading down. It was almost ritualistic, the way it happened every time before surfing.

It was about noon, and as surfers know that's usually not the best time to go surfing. In the morning, the ground is cool from the past night, and the winds blow away from land and out to sea. As the sun comes up and heats the ground, the winds shift in the opposite direction. The effect is detrimental to surfing; it almost crumbles the shape of the wave and makes it less enjoyable. That day it wasn't that windy so we didn't feel like it would have much impact on the surf.

We made our way down the trail and reached a viewpoint, where we stopped and looked out the waves. The sun was directly overhead and lit up the vast Pacific Ocean. From here we had a decent idea of how the waves looked, but our perspective wasn't perfect. You could say it was like looking through the peephole in your front door, not good enough to know for sure, but good enough to know. At this point, it was too late to turn back even if the waves did suck. Your body starts to sweat in the wetsuit and the only way to find relief from this discomfort is by getting in the water. I started to get a bad feeling.

At the bottom where the pavement ended, we all looked out and scanned the panoramic view. To our left was Scripps, the research center and aquarium that did Marine biology

work on the nearby deep-water canyon. To our right was a majestic view, one for the ages, of surf so good and massive that no words could describe it. We were in awe. The mutual "oh my god" spilled out of our mouths. It was go time; there was no holding back. At the waterline I reminded myself of my general rule of thumb. I tried to line myself up with a lifeguard shack, which sat about dead center of the south peak of the beach. This was my preferred wave: I am goofy-footed and this section broke with an unrelenting left. We all paddled out at the same time. Many other surfs with these guys had been blissful. This was not. I looked out to the horizon and all I could see was nonstop waves. I feared the paddle out would take hours. I began to paddle, and duck dove under what felt like a couple waves. Suddenly I looked around and I had made it past the break. I continued to scan and saw both my buddies too. I instantly felt relieved. Spencer and John were sitting on their boards. The way the swells worked was in sets, usually about a 3 to 4 wave pattern that came out of nowhere. I paddled for a few smaller waves, but didn't catch them. They weren't really breaking quite like I wanted to, and I knew that if I caught one wave too early I could be stuck on the inside for the rest of the day

They say surfing is 90% waiting. Only maybe a few minutes of an hour-long surf session are actually spent on your feet.

Holy shit... I looked out and scratched my eyes in disbelief. I looked up at a 12-foot face, only growing larger and larger as it consumed the water in front of it. I was too far to paddle over it before it broke, but too close to just duck dive the white wash. I looked behind me and saw John. His expression mirrored the thought that was going through my

head: Would I die at age 18? My only choice was to wait, and let it take me.

As the wave passed over, I let go of my board and tried my hardest to return to the surface. As I went through the washing machine I completely lost all orientation; which way up was, which way down was...I had to control my breathing, as I feared time could run out. I popped to the surface into a world of snow. The water was no longer blue, but white with foam from the wave passing by. Pure chaos. I looked around and gathered my composure. Once I figured out which way shore was, I realized I could not paddle back out into the surf. Wave after wave blocked my journey and my energy was spent after going through the gauntlet.

I made my way back to the shore. My leash was still together and my board was ding-free. I sat on the beach with my tail between my legs, and watched the surviving members of my trio surf. It wasn't long before they came in, probably after similar experiences as me. We looked defeated, like the 2009 Detroit lions. We had known what we were going to face, and we went, head-first, towards it anyway. We came to an agreement, to go surf at a beach a few miles north where the waves wouldn't be as big. I looked over to the other guys and noticed they didn't really seem bothered by today at all.

But I had a fire burning inside me that I just couldn't get off my mind. I felt the shame of my defeat at Blacks beach and knew I had to redeem myself. I trained day in and day out. I dropped all my classes and joined a gym, working out my triceps to optimize my paddle. I invested all my time and money into surfing in the hope that I could make a man of myself and conquer the beast known as Blacks.

I went back to Blacks a few months later. Same swell direction, same size, everything was the same as that vivid summer day. This time I came with a new sword, a 6'1" step up fit for larger waves. I was a trained warrior ready for the battlefield.

As I paddled out, Spencer and John's cries for help echoed in the back of my head. I could remember what it felt like to be swept and held underwater for so long. The cold November water filled my wetsuit as I went down to duck dive. I faced the beach and looked over my left shoulder. A massive 15-foot peak was closing in on me. *Get deeper, you just gotta get deeper on this one.* As I began to paddle the wave above me felt like Niagara Falls cascading onto Lake Eerie. *Boom.* I took three hard strokes and felt myself get in the wave. This was it. As I reached my feet I put pressure on my toes, turning my body to the left and into the face of the wave. I reached the bottom and straightened my legs out, putting more weight on my back foot to help decrease my speed. As I stalled, the wave began to break over my head but the perfect barrel sheltered me. I reached my fingertips out and touched its face. This moment was surreal; the feeling of bliss enveloped my emotions. I spent a lifetime in the barrel that day, and got spit out perfectly from the foam cannon of the wave crashing behind me. As I paddled in I saw my friends on the beach, cheering me on for my victory.

I had conquered the beast. What nearly killed me months earlier I now had complete control over. I came back to Blacks time and time again, but now I had no fear; nothing could stop me.

CONTAIN

Eyes lowered, head down, hands in pockets, no smile or frown
Nothing that could give it away, the mangling of his guts
The heart trotting so fast through his chest, it could've shown
The heat of embarrassment steam through his cuts
Trying to hold it together, feeling the need to scream
A need so deep, he strains his neck to keep it in
Until he can find peace in solitude, get lost in a dream
Where perceived failure could be forgotten
But when engaging others, he exudes the positive
Tucks away the self-pity to empathize
Fake smiles and interest, make others believe
And distract them so they don't realize
Thoughts of Atlas and the pain of envy
If one person had to suffer, who would you have it be?

THE ROOMMATE

If it could, it would exterminate all life
Yet feeble as it is, its only victim is itself
And though it claims it lives through struggle and strife,
It lives on a soft, mattress shelf

It leers at its own reflection
In the mirror, it sees itself imprisoned
In its warped mind, a facility of correction
Where it grows fatter, and angrier, more wizened

Someday, it will be free of this place,
Every day, it says this to itself
In the evening, it scrapes the steel across its face
Then curls up to sleep on its soft, mattress shelf

Justin Sanford

BURNING

Here, now, I find that I sit thoughtless and dull,
With naught but a single spark, without flame,
How can I set myself alight, my soul?
From whence will the words of muses be framed?
Shall I look to the stars? Or the mundane?
Must I invoke the words, ask for blessing?
Ascend old steps, thousand-trod, seek the fame?
What are my words, these vain window dressings,
When hoisted up beside that of masters?
To see their efforts raised in old granite,
I stand, eyes raised, want in my heart does stir.
Could I raise etched stone alongside of it?
 Could I stir my soul to glowing heights?
 Let my eyes open wide now, blind them, light!

MARBLE

How crude I must look here beneath your gaze,
Eyes of imperious crimson, unmoved,
Beneath a stern brow that caught the sun's rays,
To see the fire behind the facets proved,
There was life in this vessel of old stone,
No rude writhing of yeast, not as we are,
We who grasp at the sublime and covet thrones,
Who breathe and gasp and think ourselves as czars,
Our works exceed our own beauty always,
We rot and bleed and fester without cease,
The bricks and the marble have graceful ways,
To weather is dignified, with fine ease.
 But how would such regal beauty be wrought,
 If not by the hand of the stonemason?

Samuel Taylor

CLIFFS AT MARIN HEADLANDS

One thing on this trip I loved to see
were the rocks that block the strong waves
Their imposing stance, wind's cool degree
These shears are home to rocks and caves
I climbed these cliffs with each step earned
Up, down, over, around, with my friends
My muscles ached, my small chest burned
Atop the cliff we see the bridge's bend
Up on the cliffs the wind blew cold
The chill made my eyes and nose leak
The sun was bright; "use sunscreen," we were told
Now I'm all red, and I look like a freak
These great cliffs held bunkers on their ledges
Guns and artillery abandoned at their edges

WHETHER THE MODERN MARINER

Squeak and clamp the dog on the door down
Dark grey clouds rumble overhead
Pull up the hood and obscure my vision
Wrestle the snatch block--my legs are lead.

Flake out the stern line,
Place the chaffing gear, the rain is torrential.
Up to the bow to check on the others
The rain is strong, but temperature is fine.

The rain is relentless; the tug flops
BANG! against the hip of the barge
The Mate crawls up the pigeon holes,
And passes me the tag line down.

Set the chaffing gear and step back,
Chugging acrid smoke, no slack.
Assist the mate on the bow
The rain has slightly let up, now.

Tie up the barge in rather grim weather.
Gauge the tanks and wait for samplers
And "Go drive the crane."
A new unstoppable downpour of rain
The inches increase around my feet,
It pours from a hose off my hard hat.

MICE AT PLAY

When the cat's at play, the mice will scam
 They run amok, a headless cloud
 Floating carelessly overhead
 The run babies run for things of sweet
 Blackberries, blueberries, and strawberries alike
 Their mother watches them play, dazed
 As her children play, in their whirl of fun
 The children hear their mother's voice
 As they lick their tiny paws clean
 "Watch out!" she cries, for the cat comes.

THE RIVER COWBOY

We were about 30 minutes from The Dalles dam, and it was time to start thinking about heading out to the front of the tow. It was 0230, and the wind was blowing a cold breeze off the river. Tyler and I put on our boots and lifejackets. The lights from the dam were coming into view as we rounded the bend before the locks. This was a tough one to get into because of where the bridge sat and how the currents came off the dam. If you were not careful, you would end up being pushed onto the bank and then you would have a whole new set of challenges. Out on the front of the tow, it was quiet. All you could hear was the gentle lapping of the barges being pushed through the water.

"You feel like you can give him accurate numbers this morning?" Tyler asks me.

"I got it," I said with a smile.

"Let me know when you want some numbers," I radioed back to Siggie in the wheelhouse.

"Okay" Siggie replied.

We cruised under the bridge and were right at 750 feet from the long wall when a voice came over the radio.

"Okay, when we get up here another 100 feet or so, let me know" Siggie said.

I clicked the radio back to let him know I'd heard him. Going into the locks, it was very important to give them accurate numbers, so they know where they were and didn't slam into the concrete walls. I, being a new guy, was not the greatest at this, but I was improving.

"100 off 600 ahead, I spoke into the radio.

"80 off 500 ahead," I said.

"60 off 400 ahead," I radioed back to the wheelhouse.

I continued this until we were into the locks.

"Not bad," said Tyler.

As we came to a stop dead on the mark, we got the tow tied up with four parts of line and headed back to the engine room to check the mains as we began to rise up in the lock. Once in the locks, I headed into the galley to get a quick bite to eat and wait till we get near the top. As we neared the top, I headed out, tossed off the lines and handed the lockage slip to the lock attendant as we cruised out of the locks and up the river. I radioed up to the wheelhouse to ask if he wanted anything to drink or to eat.

"I'm fine, thanks. Why don't you head back to bed and we will get you back up for the John Day Dam in a couple of hours," Siggie says.

I liked working with Siggie. His Christian name was Eric Sigfridson and he was a Cal Maritime grad from 2006. He was a calm and cool-mannered guy who was great to chat with. I always headed up after a lockage or a barge tie-up to talk about how I did and what I needed to improve on. I headed off to bed after a quick chat and dozed off for another hour or so before I came to and smelled breakfast cooking in the galley. We ate well on the tugs. We didn't really have a food budget; you just ordered what you wanted and somebody would go pick it up and deliver it to the office. Adrian was sitting by the table drinking coffee and Elroy was sitting in the easy chair watching the satellite TV that I had fixed. We were heading clear up to SRT-22, which was about 30 miles from Lewiston, Idaho, and as far as Shaver went upriver anymore. Adrian looked at me and shook his head.

"Get some sleep, princess," he said.

Laughing, Elroy said, "You look like you have been sleeping peacefully all night".

They knew I had not gone to bed till they'd gone off watch at midnight, and that I had gotten up at the dam, but I was the new guy, so I was picked on relentlessly. I didn't mind it, though. They all called me "the kid" around there because most of them were old enough to be my dad.

After a couple more hours and another dam lockage, we arrived at the first elevator, Roosevelt, which is on the Washington side, across from Arlington. There, we dropped our first barge and continue up through McNary Dam at Umatilla, and got to the Tri-Cities, in Washington. This was where we left the Columbia and entered the Snake River, and continued up into Washington. The first dam on the Snake was Ice Harbor, and was one the trickiest to get to, because the channel had been blasted out of rock with dynamite back when they built the dams. If you strayed on either side of the channel, the jagged rocks would slice your boat open, and you were going to have a bad day. We continued up till we reached our next elevator. Windust was a small elevator on the banks of the Snake, a bend or two before Little Goose Dam. This approach was a little tricky because of how our tow was built; it would require us to shuffle the barges around. Great, I thought to myself, more tow building. I was not good at tow building, but it was a great workout. I'd lost 25 pounds over the summer building tow and working on the barges.

SRT-22 was in sight as we rounded the corner, and to our surprise, a tidewater barge was sitting right where we were supposed to drop our barge. Elroy got on the bat phone and called dispatch to ask what we were supposed to do. Like at any shipping company, nobody had any idea but would get back to us ASAP. We eased back on the throttles and waited

for the call. We needed to move it down and put our barges there, instead. Supposedly, a Tidewater boat was coming and would get it out of the way later that day. We got the barge moved and got ours in position to be filled with grain.

The majority of the grain grown in the Pacific Northwest was soft, white winter wheat and got transported down the river by barge to the Portland harbor. There, it was off-loaded to the downriver elevators and then ultimately placed onto ocean going vessels and transported around the Pacific Rim. While the barges were being loaded, we got a layover. This was basically a paid naptime for everyone. They sent me to get some sleep because I would be working like a dog on the way back downriver.

The barges were topped off, and down the Snake we went. This whole trip it had been at least 90-plus degrees during the days, and we were covered in sweat anytime we went out to do anything on the barges. We got down to the Tri Cities and needed to build some more tow, to get the barges in the right order, so when we got to Portland they could be easily broken up and taken to their respective elevators. It was so hot out. I looked back at the boat, and noticed Elroy running out the door in only a pair of shorts and jumping into the water. At first I was confused and thought maybe the air conditioner in the wheelhouse had broken, and that he had lost it. Then Adrian wiped the confusion right from my face with a glorious answer.

"Elroy must be doing swim call," Adrian said.

He took off down the barge, undressing as he went. I followed suit and was down to my underwear when I reached the boat. I jumped into the cool water and cooled right off. Siggie and Tyler were not far behind us when they heard the commotion outside.

After a short swim, we hopped back aboard and continued down the river and back to Portland. We arrived at the dock on Friday afternoon and went up to the office to talk to the dispatcher. He said he had received great reports on my work upriver, that I had passed their tests had secured my job with them, and to top off the day, it was also payday. I had the next five days off, a pocket full of cash and was headed to the Willamette Country Music Festival.

Aaron Lamb

THE KLAUBATAMANN

I had heard about this creature's existence on my first ship, the Norwegian *Duchess of Columbia*. As a fresh third mate, the *Duchess* was paradise on earth. The cruise liner ran along the US coast, entertaining the masses as a party afloat. The crew was mostly American, save for a few senior officers and a handful of ancient ordinary seamen. These seamen spoke in their guttural Norse tongue among themselves, sneaking in late after their shifts to shout, "Skall!" and guzzle bottles of imported aquavit liquor.

One of those jolly seamen, Ragnar, stood watch with me aboard the cruise liner. He had taken me under his wing and was determined to teach me everything he knew. During the day, while I wore my dazzling summer white uniform, he would ensure that I quickly grasped bridge watch management. At night, he would regale me with the tales of his life, as well as the lore of the sea.

"Ragnar," I said to him between bites of leftover *foie gras* from the buffet. "We are so lucky!"

"Haha! Yes, lucky. Lucky we are," Ragnar chortled, "is because our Klaubatamann is kind to us!"

"Klaubatamann?" I enquired, slurping down the last of my mid-evening meal.

"*Ja!* The Klaubatamann is un friend to 'dis ship." Ragnar stood up and beamed. "He brings us luck to our beautiful ship!"

"Is the Klaubatamann on every ship?" I prodded.

"No no no! Only *Hansa* ships get Klaubatamann," Ragnar clarified. "Only ships with Viking blood carry him."

"So we're set for life with the Klaubatamann looking out for us!" I playfully declared, hoping to entertain the old man's fantasy before being summoned by the captain to sign the night orders.

After the captain left, Ragnar pulled me aside and continued his story.

"When ship get old, near end of life, Klaubatamann play tricks. Small jokes on crew. Sneak up, slip away," Ragnar explained, illustrating with his frail form the movement of the Klaubatamann.

"I'll tell you if I see him around," I smiled.

"No. Never *see* him. Whatever you do, do not look. I saw him once. A small man on the bow in yellow rain gear. Held caulking hammer in hand. Smoked a pipe in his mouth," Ragnar trembled. "Next day, the mate hits reef and the ship sinks. Most the crew die." Ragnar paused, his voice quivering. When his eyes turned upwards, he stabbed at me with a piercing glance and departed from his broken speech with remarkable clarity.

"When the Klaubatamann shows himself, crew and ship are doomed to die. Do not look for him. Pray that he doesn't ever want to reveal himself to you!"

Drip

I didn't believe Ragnar, then.

The 40-year-old hull of the tramp ship M/V *Coastwise* creaked and moaned with each successive pounding of the waves. I sat rigid in my chair, squeezing the ragged armrest like a stress ball. My able-bodied seaman jolted his head up, then down again with each throw of the sea. His myopic, glazed eyes stared into the frothy sea before returning his fixation towards his feet. He reclined next to the bridge window, muttering to himself softly in his native Viscayan, ignoring the churning around him.

Bridge watch aboard the *Coastwise* during a storm jilted my nerves. Built by the Danes in 1975, it had gone by a dozen different names and occupied a berth in shipyard like a fading Hollywood starlet going to a plastic surgeon for modification after modification. After 40 years, no one could remember what the ship's original design looked like...not like it mattered. She was soon to be scrapped soon after this voyage and would not see another shipyard again. The only thing the crew maintained aboard the ship was an apathetic attitude towards the vessel's current disrepair. Rusted gears in the engine room creaked from corrosion, and the deck was scarred with pockmarks where the rust had bitten through. The bridge leaked, filling the room with a constant stick of humidity and smell of the sea.

Drip *Drip* *Drip*

Small teardrops of water falling into the bucket by the chart table filled the silence in between the slamming of the waves.

As the drips slowed, I felt a strange sensation tingle up my spine. The hair on the back of my neck straightened. I dug my nails deep into the armrests, cracking pieces of vinyl which fell to the floor like polluted snowflakes. Faint flashes of yellow raincoat skirted in my peripheral vision. I shut my eyes tight. It was here! It was watching me.

Hiding behind closed eyelids, I breathed quickly. It was close now. My skin blistered with fear as warm, wispy breath wrapped around my face, engulfing me like a rolling fog over a cliff face. I held my eyelids shut with all my power of will. I could imagine him silently tempting me, daring me to open my eyes. In the dim red lights of the bridge, he lay waiting, taunting, ready to claim the ship with my gaze.

SLAM!

The aged second mate shut the heavy oak door to the bridge and heaved his heavy mass towards the chart table.

"Dammit!" He swore. "The bucket's been tipped over!"

With sudden relief, I opened my eyes. My AB was being prodded awake by his relief and sluggishly made his way back to his bunk. I turned in my chair to face the second mate, who was begrudgingly mopping, squishing his boots in the pooled water.

The second was as ancient as he was useless. Inseparable from the ship, he had been on the vessel when our captain had been a cadet. Although the captain had

since greatly surpassed him in rank, the second still referred to the captain by his cadet nickname: "Jordy."

"Hey, new guy!" he shouted, as his mop slipped from his grasp and flopped into the puddle with a splash. "Get mopping!"

I slowly rose and silently began to eat away at the puddle's mass. In five minutes, the second mate had plotted our position for the next four hours. Then, he filled the logbook in advance, copying the entries from the day before.

He justified his falsification smugly. "Taught Jordy everything I know!"

I bit my tongue. Rank had its privilege, and he had earned the right to carry himself with stupidity after 30 years aboard.

"Have you noticed anything strange lately? Anything out of place?" I stammered, hoping I was not alone in the presence I had just witnessed.

The second mate scowled. "I've noticed you've been a real pain lately, and are still on the damn bridge! Get the hell to sleep!"

He swirled towards the radios, leaving me standing speechless behind him.

I slammed the bridge door behind me.

I flew down the stairs, angrily muttering, and ran into the thick aroma of fresh mint. I threw my shoulders back and closed my eyes. With a deep inhalation of the minty air, I turned the corner, where the captain was walking towards me, rifling through paperwork. The odor of his cologne grew stronger and stronger as he approached. He

looked at me with a quick glance. He raised a solitary eyebrow at me, then continued walking down the hall.

I gave myself permission to breathe halfway down the next deck. The third engineer had told me the Captain's minty air was to cover up his halitosis.

"You'd rather be drowning in cologne than in his bad breath!" he'd joked over the dinner table.

I kept briskly fleeing the sweet, wispy smell as I went down the undulating decks. I was halfway to my room when a rolling wave threw me into the bulkhead. As I stood dazed, I thought I was seeing stars. Then I saw a slowly spinning object enter my field of view.

"I hope to God I'm not concussed," I thought. "As medical officer, I can't diagnose myself if something is wrong..." I tried to make sense of the object in the corner of my eye. It looked like a helicopter's blade whirring in and out of sight. Then, I realized what I was seeing. It was a caulking hammer.

I ran as fast as I could to my quarters. Around every corner, I swore I could hear the soft tapping of boots, or the slight swish of rain gear. I had almost burst into my room when I felt the door handle. It was still warm from someone's grasp. Then, on the other side of my door, I heard tapping. Each tap was muted, landing like the mallet of a whackamole game. I placed my face against the door and could smell a sharp acrid odor above my nose. I looked up as faint, ghostly pipe smoke puffed past the door crack and drifted gently, chastely kissing the smoke detector, then disappearing into thin air.

I ran away from the specter waiting in my room and descended into the main engineering space. I forced a nervous smile and waved to the third engineer, who was too busy tinkering with a lighted display to pay me any mind. I grabbed a piece of insulation scaffolding which had fallen from the ceiling of the engine room, and briskly walked with the piece until I stood at the side of the vessel's reduction gear.

The gear connected the shaft of the ship's propeller to the main engine. The third engineer had talked his ear off over some fried food in the wardroom about how the engine ran smoothly in forward propulsion but the entire gear shook like a drenched cat when in reverse.

"Good thing we don't drive across the ocean backwards!" the third had mused, before philosophically devouring another onion ring.

I pushed the greasy memory aside and carefully placed the piece of rebar across the open mouth of the reduction gears. A good push would be all that was needed to send the piece of metal into the mechanics and grind and force the shaft to stop spinning. In the corner of my vision, I swore something was watching me. Maybe it was an engineer, curious about what I was doing out of my native habitat. Or it was *It*. I didn't stick around to find out.

I stayed up the whole night in the chartroom, rifling through paperwork, trying to keep my mind clear and sane until tomorrow's arrival. I touched on the second mate's voyage plan to the scrapyards after our port call: his "great circles" were anything but great. It appeared that he had

bent a discarded metal ruler into a half circle and used it to trace a course across the earth.

"Idiot thinks that a rhumb line is something you find at Bevmo," I muttered. I'd probably spent more time trying to make sense of the voyage plan than the second had spent making it. Whatever. It was his last job on this ship and no one would miss him, or the ship, once it was gone.

I was nearly late to watch the next morning. I had fallen asleep in a chair, reading a radio manual, which put even my paranoid mind into a sudden boredom coma. I nearly drowned in a sea of peppermint upon reaching the bridge. The captain had the conn, and we would be arriving into port by the end of the day. I stood my four hours silently, conserving my oxygen and sparing my lungs from breathing the gaseous aroma. At noon, the second mate brusquely dismissed me and took the watch.

"There's a storm coming, Jordy!" the second mate told the captain. "It's going to be big! I can feel it!"

"Maybe we should put into port and wait it out, and I'm sure you've updated the charts to..." the captain began, but the second interrupted him.

"You know I don't listen to those, Jordy! Bunch of liars at the Coast Guard! Don't want to fly out to save our hides! This ship used to have a storm like that every day in the Gulf of Alaska! Never trust a man in tropical blue. NEVER!"

The second mate turned to me and scowled. "Get off the bridge boy. The men have real business to attend to. Jordy, should we do the propulsion test?"

The captain, ambivalently distracted, was likely thinking of how to correct the charts of the second mate, whom he knew all too well. He focused for a moment before saying, "Yes. Bring the engines to stop."

I began to smile as I left the bridge, just able to hear the captain order, "Now bring engines dead slow astern."

I was already at my station when the shaking started and the propeller stopped, and was the first to brace when the ship drifted into the sandbar. Soon, two Coast Guard officers appeared, responding to our minor roadside accident. I thought the captain would appreciate my having organized all the ship's certificates the night before, for thorough probing by the visiting authorities, but I was shocked when the officers dragged the captain away in handcuffs, blubbering and begging for mercy.

"I didn't think a broken reduction gear was grounds for arrest?" I queried the third mate that evening while morosely pushing my food around my plate.

"Well," he leaned over, bringing with him the buttery glister of gossip and odor of french fries, "turns out the captain was a functioning alcoholic! His stateroom looked like a supermarket Budweiser display during Superbowl season! The mint was just to cover up the liquor on his breath!"

He took a moment to triumphantly chew on his grilled cheese. "How did you know the reduction gear was broken? The chief just found out thirty minutes ago."

I hurried to the bridge. The chief mate had overseen the tug operation that had us dragged off the sandbank and tied up to the dock. The last of the sun's rays were fading,

and the drizzle of rain from clouds above pattered on the deck. I enjoyed the silence on the bridge. The second mate had put the radio on channel 9A to pretend he was listening to the weather reports, but placed it on mute the second the officers left the bridge. I left the radio silent. There was safety in the silence for the first time. We were next to land! The place of civic society and modern medicine, both so far and separated from our ship at sea! My eyes darted to both sides of the room. I was truly alone. There was nothing but silence and the rain to fill the night.

Wait. Something was different. I turned and walked around the bridge before coming to rest at the chart table. The bucket was empty. I reached a hand upward to the ceiling to feel where the leak had been. The hole above the chart table was freshly sealed with caulk.

The side door to the bridge slammed and water sloshed off of yellow oilskin rain gear. A man placed a caulking gun against the side of the entranceway. His small stature looked even smaller when swaddled in the foul weather gear.

"You must be the third mate!" the figure spoke as he advanced on me, an arm outstretched. I stood still.

"I thought you might be a cadet because of how nervous you looked! I was just outside filling in a couple cracks when I saw you out of the corner of my eye and I dropped in to say hello!" He grabbed my hand with both of his and gave me a warm and firm handshake as I limply looked on, directly at him.

"I'm your new captain!" he laughed. "Flew in this morning! We head out tomorrow! The voyage plan says we

have to sail out early if we want to beat the storm! I'm lucky the second had it all ready to go!"

He smiled as he relinquished my hand. He reached into his own pocket and pulled out a tobacco pipe and a lighter. He stopped to look at me. I was stiff to my feet in shock.

"I'm sorry" he apologized. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

MOONLIGHT

The sound vibrated through the air
Anticipation raced to the beginning
Where the melody pushed through the dark foliage
The triplets followed and led
The bass, heavy like a heart
Constantly pushing and pulsing at an even 2/2 beat

Darkness held on, trying to envelop the single point of light
It flowed like a river choked by rocks lying in its path
A stifling wind moved the flashing stars across the sky
That end up eaten by the morning light,
Their last final hurrah a single c-sharp minor chord

WHAT'S IN A SHOE?

As they walked closer,
The wet grass shined them

A pair of eyes pierced them
They left holes in the socks and sores on the feet

Soft, moist grass dampened the horse clopping

They stood at the edge, looking over the abyss of the six-
foot hole
They gleamed distractingly from the truth

MEDITATION

girls gather in a circle
in an open space
you can see the stress
carved into their face

they close their eyes
and fill their lungs with air
they start to slouch
they let down their hair

they drift away
but don't feel alone
they have each other
they feel at home

time stands still
no seconds or hours
like a boat adrift
peace blooms, like flowers

the air carries out
the tension from within
their eyes slowly open
they're ready to begin

Nina Takamoto

SUBURBAN ADVENTURE

We're born with wide minds and eyes
Shiny and new, like sparkling stars in the skies
Everything is new, fresh concepts to be realized

Horizons start small, but quickly grow
With each passing day and the more you know
Is an ocean of adventure and you get to row

Pretty soon, you start catching on
the mysterious forest turns into the front lawn
And bedtime changes from eight to up 'til dawn

The area you live in has all been found
No more secrets or aimlessly wandering around
Adventure murdered slowly, without making a sound

Your heart longs for the thrills
You try everything from TPing to skateboarding down hills
But nothing works, so you resort to beer, weed, popping
pills

Some people can't stand the emptiness
No more to explore, so they die of loneliness
They cut the cord prematurely, hoping to find happiness

We turn on the tv, hoping to catch a glimpse
Of what amazing events happened during people's trips
But we're trapped behind a net of safety just hoping that it
rips

It's stupid for us kids to wish for less
We gotta know somehow that we are truly blessed
But today many from my generation are still clueless

We wish for danger and excitement
While others struggle and worry about confinement
And their bones breaking beneath the rule of a tyrant

Adventure is out there, they said

But why leave when you can explore it all in your head?

What's the point of living, when we all end up dead?

Josh Hauser

J-MONEY

First year cadet, rolling in the swag,
Everything's brand new, just ripped off the tag.
Can't write me, I do nothing wrong
Turn the lights on, I don't touch the bong.
Five foot ten perfection.
Blue eyes, blonde hair, picturesque complexion.
Toes to top flawless, sturdy and strong,
I'll even beat you in ping pong.
A mesmerizing flow to my game,
Not sure why I have no fame
The ball flows off my hand like the Nile
Calling out shots is just my style
Between the legs, behind the back
Other team guarding me, no flak
I got the whole package,
Beat you with speed to the rackage.
I am more humble than you
And a much higher IQ--
I broke the test.
Thank God I'm blessed.

John Halstead

COULD HAVE BEEN

The funeral was a beautiful one. The type of service everyone hopes for, and somewhere deep inside, self-indulgently, you want to see for yourself. All the kids mourned, and all the grandkids tried out their sober faces for the first time without truly understanding the nature of their own mortality or that of others. The air smelled of expensive perfume, and Anastasia's favorite flowers. A splash of color in a dreary landscape.

Yes, a very good funeral, but I couldn't stand it. All their pensive stares, expectant, like I was going to lose it any second. Oh, I understood. She had been my wife for over fifty-five years.

Numbness, and grayness had overtaken the world that fateful morning. We both knew it was coming. Eighty is not a graceful age. Every morning a new ache and pain, the frequent trips to the bathroom, and the world slowing to almost a standstill. The daily obituary turning from an infrequent glance into a stranger's life and grief to a photo album of people you used to know.

We hadn't lived a unique life. Met and fell in love at twenty-three in 1960, and two years later, after a requisite courting phase, we married. A year after that we had a son, and a year after that another. We repeated that for two more years first with a daughter, and finally our youngest son.

From there was a life well lived, if not a very exciting one. We lived through the Cold War with the Commies, a draft and subsequent deployment to Vietnam, the hippie era, and so much more. And we were by each other's side through it all.

We didn't have a perfect marriage, by any stretch of the imagination. We had our pains, our sorrows, our fights, and over time, we became more of who we had been when we were younger. No one really talks about that. They always talk about the new physical aches and pains, but they never talk about the mental impact of age. After a certain age you stop evolving, and just become cemented in who you are. More stubborn, or affectionate if those are your base traits.

Overall, I had no regrets, and she had none, either. We retired in our modest house at sixty, and ever since then we made the pilgrimages to the kids, and seen them get married and have kids themselves. We tried to keep--

"Dad...."

Slowly, I came out of my reverie. My daughter was looking at me worriedly, telling me she'd been trying to get my attention for some time. Looking around, I could see the whole service was looking at me. The priest was finally silent.

"Dad, it's time for your eulogy now."

Nodding, I let her help me up, and support me to the podium. Afterwards she respectfully backed away. Looking over the familiar faces and all the unfamiliar ones, I was unexpectedly hit with a surge of nervousness. My planned speech burned a hole in my brain, but suddenly not enough.

"Anastasia was...."

I was supposed to say something honest, and unique to conclude a life lived well together, but I couldn't. And with everyone watching, I quickly shuffled out of the church.

Once outside, I realized I couldn't even drive myself home. My daughter, in her extreme wisdom, had decided that with everything going on I shouldn't be let near a driver's seat. While I was scrambling to try to decide what to do, Bradley, the youngest of the great-grandchildren came outside, smiling sheepishly.

"Mom said you could probably use a ride home."

Swallowing the humiliation of having to be driven home by a pimply-faced seventeen-year-old, I answered him.

"Thank you, Bradley, I would like that."

Getting into his used car, he drove me the ten minutes back home. Once we got there, the silence was awkward and stifling.

"Pa-Pa.....I am sorry for your loss."

"It's okay, Bradley. You go back to the funeral, and tell your mom thank you."

After that I walked up the driveway and through the front door. The shutting of the door was a relief. It was a barrier between me, and the outside world. Protection from reality and the expectations and disappointment of everyone.

This house felt like an extension of my own body. Every square inch used. Some places scuffed from use. From new furniture, from four kids, just from occupation. All the pictures, pillows, everything a joint decision over decades. Even the house started seeming oppressive.

Sitting in my favorite recliner that over the years had conformed to my body, I just stared out the window. I must have dozed off, because the next thing I know the

room was in shadows, and the front door was opening, to reveal the family.

Rosa, my daughter, stopped next to me.

"We missed you at the funeral. The burial was beautiful. We all threw flowers in."

She didn't say it but I could feel the reproach in her voice, and inappropriately I felt anger.

"I am sorry if my grieving process is disappointing you...."

I struggled to get up, and she reached out to help me, but I pushed her hand aside.

"I am eighty years old. I can get up myself."

My arm collapsed, and she helped me anyway. Putting my admittedly diminished shoulders back and chest out I walked out with as much dignity as I could muster. They didn't try to stop me. They just stared with sadness, and that damn understanding. They don't understand anything.

Once in my room I got into bed on my side, a funny habit I hadn't been able to break, and just desperately and selfishly hoped that this night would be my last.

Closing my eyes, I fell off into the peace only found in my dreams.

Chronos, progenitor of the Gods of Olympus, sat in his empty throne room, musing about the futility of the mortal dilemma and watching the different streams of time flitting through reality. New dimensions were being created every second with every decision made. He watched, in particular, a man named Ben, and a woman named Anastasia eye each other from across a coffee shop in the 1960's, but ultimately decide not to approach the other. They did not even see what

could have been: The marriage, the epic, lifelong love, the kids,
the difficulties.all of these ceasing to be because of just one
decision made. Chronos did not think he would ever
understand mortals and their fragility. How could they not see?

Pamela Switzer

PAM SOUP

115 lbs. of a tired Cadet Switzer
8 cups of Carquinez Strait water
2 ½ cups of 3/M Coast Guard Tests Coffee
5 bundles of I-have-no-thyme-for-a-social-life
2 teaspoons of miso(-poor)
3 ounces of the devil's lettuce (saved for finals week)
½ a tablespoon of Gochujang
2 rubbery Bates (best if *sous vide* in foot sweat for 4 years to
make tender. It'll fall off the sole!)
1 splash of synthetic motor oil (Redline full synthetic
15W50)
A large helping of salt, to make a brine
An even greater heaping of pepper, because this bitch is
spicy

Leave the cadet whole and place her in a cast-iron pot
She may be large to bite but don't worry
She's barely intact on the inside
There is no need to uniformly chop any of the leafy greens
Pam is rarely in uniform anyway
Bring the ingredients to a roaring boil to simulate freshman
year

Then put a lid on and bring to a low simmer for the next three years

Don't worry about taking the lid off of the pot-- she'll blow her lid on her own.

Serve in mess deck to complete the meal.

FAMILIAR FACES

Warren rounded the corner of the street and walked into the town center of Perdit. The space was impressive, to say the least. The ground was smooth marble, inlaid with silver designs. Statues of successful men who came before his time littered the entire area. Their obsidian skin, illuminated by the Goldlight lamps, aimed at them from below. Warren looked to the fountain in the middle of the statues. There was a man sitting at the edge of the water, the only other person in the town center. His wardrobe and his hair did not match that of someone he'd expected to find in the wealthiest district of the whole city. The man looked as if he had crawled out of the sewers in the Buttonwillow district. His hair was long and matted together, and his clothes were tattered. He looked painfully out of place as he sat surrounded by the marble and obsidian, and he was looking at the sky. Warren followed the man's gaze; the sky was still covered with a grey blanket of fog, like he was staring into the murky waters of the lakes just outside the city.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" The ragged man's voice came from behind. "There are almost no clouds out today."

The whole sky was one big gray cloud, could he not see that? Warren turned to face the man, but he was gone. The town center was swarming with the people of Perdit going about their lives. Women were in long fancy coats, wearing

the tallest shoes warren had ever seen, and men in suits so clean it rivaled those of the executives. Across the street Warren could see Renewal, Inc. The fashion for the year had changed. Everyone who came out of the store was now sporting black hair and green eyes.

“I find the desire for people to be just like everyone around them to be an unattractive quality in this district, don’t you?” The man was sitting beside Warren, again at the edge of the fountain.

“I think those people are beautiful,” Warren said.

“Would you want to be just like everyone else, too?” The man said that like it was a distasteful thing, but wasn’t it the goal? Everyone around them was successful, and some were even smiling, so Warren knew they must be surrounded by the highest class of people. This is what Warren had worked for. He looked back at the man, whose eyes dark brown eyes locked on the sky above.

“Look again,” the man said. Warren looked up once more but saw nothing other than the grey dullness of the sky--except, was the sun brighter than before? This man had to be messing with him, and the idea of being some poor man’s joke was bringing him to a point of irritation he had not experienced before. He looked back down, but the ragged man was walking away, trying to leave the park, when a group of men, all with black hair, green eyes and suits, blocked his path. Without saying a word, they grabbed him and threw him to the ground, screaming at him, though Warren couldn’t understand what they were saying.

Warren was irritated, but throwing the man to the ground didn’t seem like a necessary thing to do. However, it wasn’t his business, so he began to walk to Renewal, Inc. As he turned to go, he locked eyes with the ragged man, who was now on his hands and knees. The man smiled at him. Warren stopped in his tracks, his heart beating faster; he shouldn’t be able to do that. Then the suited men started kicking. Warren watched as they beat the ragged man, and with every kick, Warren felt like he himself was getting smaller and smaller. His chest felt heavy; he wanted to stop it, but he couldn’t move. Why did he feel this way, why would he care about this man? None of it made sense.

“Have I wronged you, Warren?” Warren looked down at the man he was kicking; his brown eyes glistened as water ran down his face. Something in Warren broke. His eyes filled with water. He jerked himself away from the group beating the man. It had grown larger. Crowds of people now filled the square to watch the onslaught. Warren stumbled back to the fountain and caught a glimpse of himself in the water. His hair was as black as the obsidian statues, and his eyes were green. This isn’t what he wanted; this is not what he thought this would be.

“Look again!” Warren turned to the sky. It was incredible. He had never seen anything so blue before in his life; the sun was blinding yellow, and he even saw a small white cloud over the city. Warren looked back to the ragged man to tell him what he had seen, but he was no longer on the ground. Instead, he stood at the front of a sea of black hair and green eyes, all focused on Warren. Warren looked down at himself; he was barefoot, and his clothes

were dirty and torn. The man Warren had kicked was now in a suit. The crowd began moving towards Warren. Two men at the front of the crowd began shouting.

“His heart rate is increasing rapidly!”

“Has something gone wrong?”

“What are you saying!” Warren cried. But the ragged man just smiled, and said, “Nothing went wrong. The operation is complete.”

“Then bring him back--if his heart rate doesn't change, we can fix it after.”

Warren's back hit the wall at the edge of the park. He collapsed, and looked up helplessly as the ragged man reached him. The haunting smile was painted on his face as he swung his leg into Warren's head.

The light was blinding as Warren tried to open his eyes.

“Take it easy. You're coming out of augmentation. Just relax for a while.”

For the next few hours, Warren answered questions and watched the doctors complete their final tests, occasionally receiving a congratulations from some of the nurses. It was the same process as the last few times, but he had seen things this time, or at least he thought he had. While unconscious, he had watched something like a memory. He had never lived it, though. His body

shuddered at the thought, and a nearby doctor noticed. He walked over to Warren, a look of amusement on his face.

“It's very normal to feel this way, especially once you reach tier seven,” he said.

Warren's look of shock must have been what the doctor was hoping for, as his smile was even broader than before.

“I should be tier four right now!” Warren cried.

“The executives must have liked your interview. They proposed the procedure. You should be very proud; this rarely ever happens. I've only done an augmentation this large one other time.”

Warren did feel something; he was proud.

The doctor looked at his chart. “You've have been assigned to a new house, in the Perdit district,” he said. “Strange, it doesn't have your new job assignment listed on here. I'm sure you'll be contacted soon, but as of now, you're good to go. Would you like transportation?”

“I'll walk. Thank you.”

The streets were a lot cleaner in these wealthier districts! As he walked, Warren didn't see anyone who was poorly dressed. He would have to get new clothes of his own; the mediocre garb he sported was barely passable. He would wait until he found out his new job assignment. The statues in the town center came into view, and he did his

best to remind himself that the memory he had experienced wasn't real. But as he walked past the first row of figures, there he was. In the midst of all the glamour and perfection of Perdit was a man donned in rags, staring at the sky. The all-too-familiar feeling of fear began ripping at Warren's chest. He wanted to run, but before he could move, the man looked at him and smiled.

“Good to see you again, my friend.”

VETERAN CADET

Black as the night sky,
and ragged, like the heart that wore them,
the cracked rubber soul a testament
to the miles walked along the paths
that lead to the same destination

Joshua Smith

FEINT LOVE

Kiss me

In the crook of her neck

Feel me

As her hand caresses your back

Listen to me

When she whispers in your ear

Look for me

In the glistening of her eyes

Comfort me

With your words of nothing

See me

Upon the tears running down her face

Chase me

Out the door as she disappears into the night

Remember me

Upon your doorstep alone

Love me

Deep within your mind

Remember me

I AM THE SULTAN OF MEH

Everyone wants to be a white crow

But they miss the originality of commonality

I, Joe, maintain my talent in the status quo

There's no greater honor than being THE equilibrium

For it is quite nice

Forever between the maximum and minimum

For I am a paradoxical unit of measure

A societal center and chameleon

Disguised as the pinnacle of what to be brings me pleasure

I am at the center in every chart

Ask the Census Bureau:

I am their benchmark

I am the LeBron of ordinary

It reads "humdrum" under skills on my resume

Don't believe, ask Pam, my secretary

The gloriousness of competition

For no matter the outcome

It will never end with my inquisition

Patrick Counts

Every dejected, detached, dazed face abroad
While appearing typical and alike
Are infinitely diverse and only rent my facade

For God chose me to be THE moderate
My prime won't migrate as Magistrate of Mediocre
I delegate the legislate of a mate as a debate perpetrates
their fated states

Writing this poem, I did not want to disappoint
With narcissism, triple-line stanzas, and end-rhymes all
worn out
The blow-hard poem will finish with an exclamation point!

AMANDUH

Beauty is that which we don't expect
It comes to us in surprise and elation
Wonder and playful conjecture
We know it by its awkward pose
The way it tortures our normality
And thwarts our norms into cinders
Screaming to pacify
Yet longing for more displeasure
Stretches and contorts your known
Brings the world to vitality
Beauty is the shock.