

Lilt

Naturally Curly Hair!



RUMBLE FISH

Spring 2017

25

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By Zoe Johannas

Originally from Richmond, VA, Zoe has since moved up to New York City where she works at a B-Corp that connects professional volunteers to nonprofits. Whenever she's not mulling over the benefits of nonprofit capacity building, you can find Zoe, brush in hand, painting anything from cute floral cabinets to creepy surrealist still lifes.

Editor's Note



With a nine month old in the house, I've needed somewhere to store my thoughts, specifically the ones I usually burn off by reading books whose main characters aren't the letters of the alphabet. It's not that easy to compartmentalize the imbalance, so I decided to live with the Wild Things for a few months and indulge in a monster-themed issue. Here's my monster.

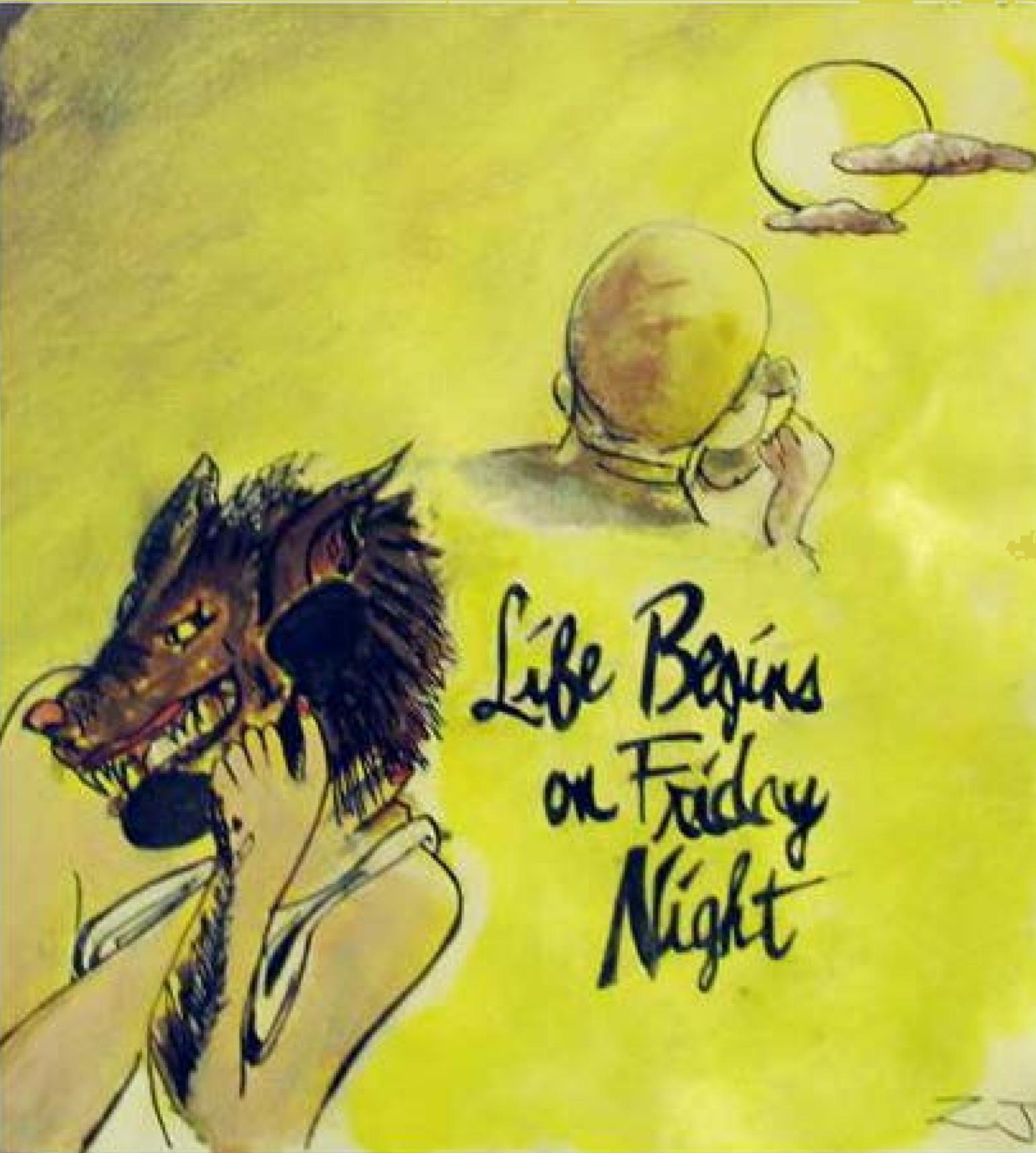
During nap time this winter, I would sit on the couch imagining car crashes. I was always the driver. I was always the lone survivor. The baby would be upstairs going back and forth in his swing. Mostly I would search for ways that I could hold off the truck with one hand while using the other to get the baby out of the car seat. I was always too tired to stop the truck, so I would go to sleep, because sleep when the baby sleeps, right?

The other day I was on the phone with my mom and we were talking about her fish tank. It's a sixty-four gallon ocean and my mom doesn't realize she's Poseidon, but she is. Every time I call my mom we talk about baby things and then we talk about fish. It's fun. The fish are a sort of comic relief. This time we also talked about my granddad and his dog. My mom was telling me a story from before she was born, mostly just to keep the stories alive now that my grandparents are old. It was a story about parents and babies, but the dog in it is the car crash. Here's how she told his story.

After five years of trying to conceive a baby, we found out we were going to have twins! Finally the day arrived and my boys were born. They were named for both of our fathers, and we determined how the names were to be assigned by the genetic formation of the boys ears: attached ear lobes and not attached. It was perfect that the first born was named after my father and his twin was named after her father. After a week in the hospital, we were finally a family in our two bedroom ranch. Before the children were born we had a dog. He was a small pup, part toy poodle and part chihuahua, so ugly he was cute. After a time, we began to settle into our routine of feeding, diapering, and feeding. Notice I did not mention sleeping. Not too much of that was going on in February of 1963. We had our routine down pretty good. Babies would cry every two hours all night long. My wife would get one of the boys and head to the kitchen to prepare two bottles of formula. I would retrieve the other baby

and meet her in the kitchen. This was all carried out with great precision. Once the babies were fed, burped, and changed, off to bed they went until we were summoned for the next round. I could not wait to go to work so I could recover from the constant demands of twin boys. Then the night came that I was sure was going to end in loss of life. We were both awakened to the normal sound of screaming from across the hall. My wife bundled up a baby and proceeded to the kitchen. I also bundled up a baby and proceeded to the kitchen. My wife abruptly brought me out of my sleep deprived stupor demanding to know what I had in the blanket. Had the woman gone mad with lack of sleep? Of course I had one of our sons, or did I? Unbeknownst to me, that not-so-cute pup had jumped up on the bed and allowed me to swaddle him like a baby.

I'm just looking for the baby in the beast. ♦



dressed by devils



W. Hunter Wojohn

Go to sleep my devils.
I need some sleep tonight.
The darkest you'll ever do, you've done,
and we're almost in morning's sight.
The shadows dressing the doorway
have me uncovering yesteryears.
All the layers I've chosen are weighing on me,
and my chest grows heavy with fear.

Go to sleep my devils.
I am more than what I've worn.
When the glass is full you kissed the rim,
and when the fire is hot you let it burn.
The dawn will be ready in moments,
and I'm not sure if I want the light.
Why should the World get to see my clothes
when it only dances halfway in the light?

Go to sleep my devils.
I want to walk naked in the morning mist.
Can't this be resolved, despite my scars,
and the blood upon my fists?

W. Hunter Wojohn was born and raised in the deep south. His artistic voice is shaped by the speaking styles of the people he loves. He currently resides in Richmond, VA where he works in the finance industry. Find more of his writings at hunterwojohn.wixsite.com/hunterwojohn.

Broken Glass



Timothy Glenn Little

We are glass broken
Shattered by life
Cracked by grief
Many pieces...too many

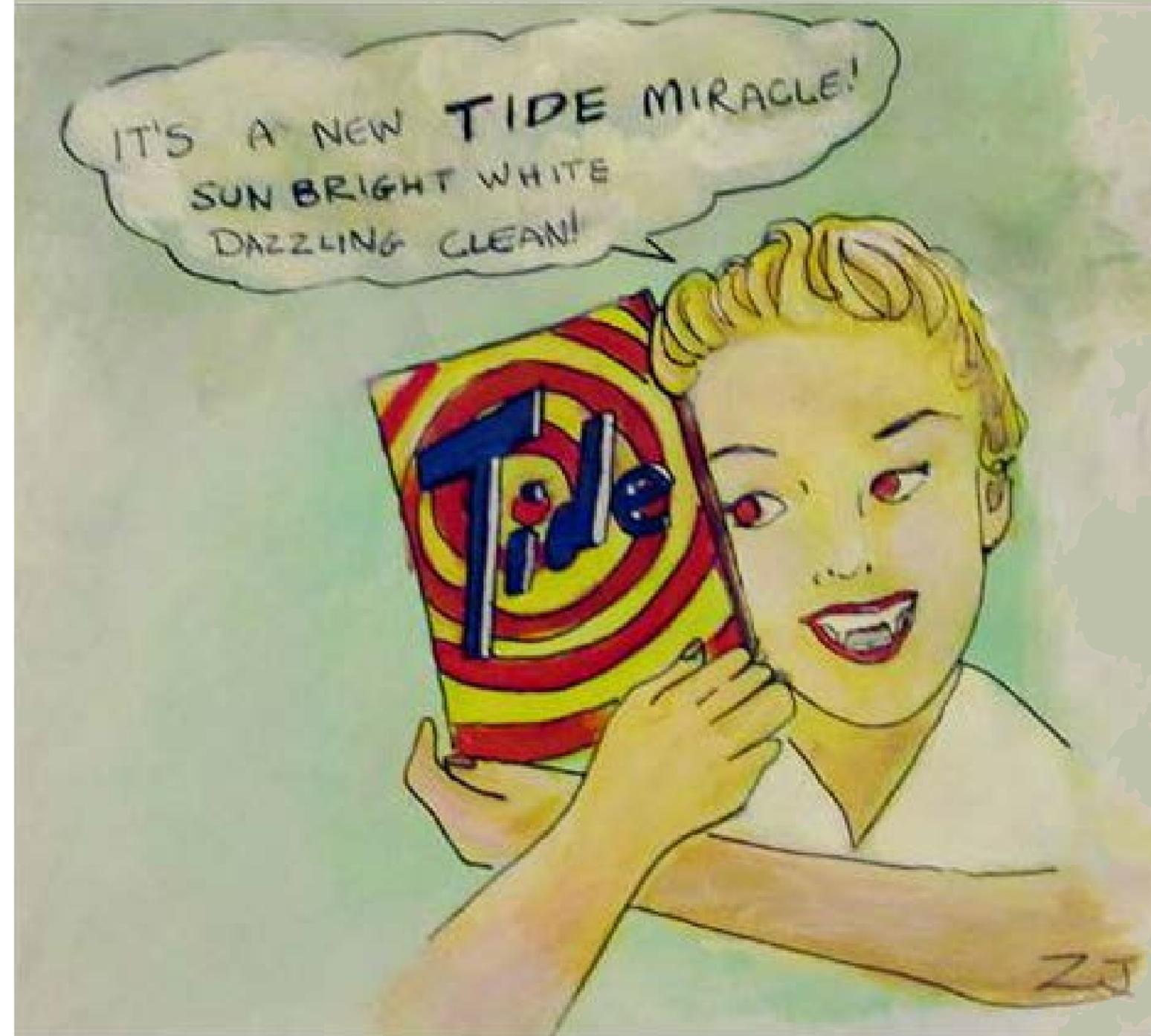
Never whole
We search
Missing parts
Voids to fill...empty spaces

Sea Glass

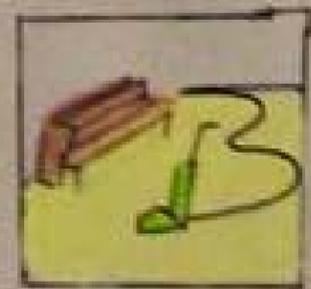
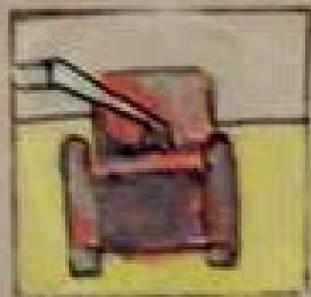
Shards thrown away
Washed by oceans
Polished by sand
Disregarded...by most

Many colors
If gathered
Value found
Second chances...at beauty

Tim Little is a father, writer, and photographer with seven travel articles published in various magazines. He continues to write in a variety of genres, as well as chronicle his travels from Alaska to Ankara, Turkey. Tim lives in Turkey and sails as often as he possibly can.



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ZJ

For Nappy

On the Beauty of a Love that Grows Out of Season

○○○ ————— Shirley Snyder Boardman

It was late, late Summer
When this unexpected, out-of-season shoot began to grow
And what a growing season it has been!

Long, soft, warm nights of laughter . . . and purring
Brief days, it seems, of mostly rain and cold (to toughen the shoot, perhaps?)

And always the two of us
Tasting the sweet juicy nectar of life and love again
From this wondrous blossom.
How lovely it is!

But what is growing?
Affection? Of course.
The fulfillment of desire? Indeed.
A closure to loneliness? Perhaps.

But how to trust a blossom that blushes its high hopes so unseasonably
It's hard enough to trust one in the Spring

And so I'm cautious when approaching this rare, unexpected bloom
Timid about getting too close, of bruising its priceless, precious beauty

And yet . . . unable to step away
So entranced am I . . . and astonished . . . and enchanted

By you.

Shirley Snyder Boardman is an award-winning feature writer who began her writing career in the editorial department of Wayne (NJ) Today Newspapers. She has worked freelance and on staff at several North Jersey advertising and marketing agencies and has been published in The New York Times. She currently is a medical editor with an agency in Mountain Lakes, NJ.



The Huntsmen

○○○ ————— John Matthew Gillen

Carter Jefferson was a crack shot, and had been ever since the day his father first taught him to shoot. Going on hunting trips was both pastime and profession for the father-son pair, and they had done so on countless occasions. Some of Carter's fondest memories were of the long, quiet, hours he had spent with his father stalking game on their land.

The Jefferson Farm wasn't much really, more of a family living off the land than a proper farm. It was tucked into a deep, still valley at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western Virginia. Carter and his father were intimately acquainted with every field, stream, and tree trunk in their valley, and they knew the slopes of the mountains like the faces of old friends.

The house set atop the gentle crest of a hill, and offered a survey of the valley with a few trees for shade. Beside the house, stood a small red barn, and leading up to both, was a narrow dirt road.

The Jeffersons kept a modest patch of crops out back where they grew tomatoes, potatoes, and a few rows of corn for feed. They had animals too. A few chickens, goats, and a cow. Each with a name and place in the family.

Carter remembered his father in those first years of his life so well. How his eyes lit with fire in the clear springs when Carter would point out the first deer of the season. How warm summer light would turn the morning fog into a silver blanket that covered the entire valley and his father would breathe the air to the bottom of himself. How autumn would bring a starburst of vivid color, and his father's beard would begin to grow long against the coming winter. How they would relish the cozy glow of the fire and look out on the tranquil white snow.

As much as Carter loved to hunt, he had never killed for sport. Father Jefferson impressed upon Carter how important it was to treat animals with dignity. "A righteous man is neither a glutton, nor a sadist, but a man of compassion, justice, and love."

In order to teach Carter this lesson, his father had given him a newborn calf at the age of nine for which he was to be responsible. Carter named her Marla, and

the two were a fine couple of friends. Carter looked after her, and cared for her when she was sick. He kept her warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Marla slept in Carter's room until she got too big, and they passed many nights together in the soft warm barn, or out under the stars. Carter always made sure that Marla had the greenest grass for her grazing, and pristine spring water to drink. She followed Carter everywhere and lavished him with affections. Mr. Jefferson often joked that Marla loved Carter almost as much as his own mother had.

Each morning, Carter would rise from bed an hour before dawn, and take the big tin bucket out to the barn to milk Marla. If anyone else tried to do it, Marla would raise an awful fuss, and if they were able to get any milk from her at all, it was usually sour.

One day, when Marla was grown, Mr. Jefferson took her into town, and soon she had a baby calf of her own. Carter wasn't allowed to name this one though.

"Every bull our family has ever owned has been named Joab," Mr. Jefferson had said. Since Carter had done so well with Marla, it was only natural that he help care for Joab too.

But Joab wasn't like his mother. Marla was a gentle dignified creature with a kind of demure grace. Joab was a huge petulant creature with thick black fur and a strong voice. He ate fast and always wanted to move to a new patch of grass. He would stamp and bellow constantly. His sleep was restless and he always had to be kept tied or locked in a pen to keep him from wandering off or harassing the other animals. Carter could hardly ever get Joab to cooperate when it was time to work. At mealtime, Joab had to be fed first, or he would go into a tantrum and eat the food meant for the other animals..

"Don't worry son," Mr. Jefferson had said, "He's just ornery cuz he ain't a steer. That there's a bull cow, and that means he needs a heifer, and from the look of things, he needs one mighty quick too."

And so, Mr. Jefferson went to town to see about a heifer.

*

Through the memories of Carter's childhood, like a serpentine stream in the mountains, ran the blue silver trickle of moonshine.

It was always there, in some form or another, although it was seldom acknowledged. To Carter it was just another part of the family business. A way for them to make a little extra money so they could afford to have the barn repainted or get the tractor fixed.

It was a good enterprise, albeit a small one, or at least it started out that way. But word about good moonshine has a way of getting around. It wasn't long before Old Man Jefferson's Wahoo Whisky had become something of a local legend.

When prohibition came, so did opportunity. Demand for Mr. Jefferson's family recipe spread all across the state and was even asked for by name in the speakeasies of Washington.

The Jeffersons had been glad of the increased profits from their little still, and took extra precautions for security while increasing production. The father and son team usually worked once a month at the dark of the moon. They would put up a makeshift shack by a quiet remote stream and send a slender trail of white smoke up into the Virginia sky. All unseen under the cover of night.

When morning came, they would close down, pack up, and go home with plenty of whisky. It was a prosperous little business, but of course, as with any business, there was competition.

And with the increased demand and opportunity also came increased competition. The Jeffersons found themselves in the precarious situation of having too many friends. And so, naturally, it came to be that some of these friends became enemies.

*

Long about midnight one summer night, a black Ford truck came prowling down the road toward the Jefferson farm with its headlights off.

It stopped about a hundred yards away and a passenger got out of the cab and approached the house.

His hands were plunged deep in the pockets of his suit jacket and his hat was pulled low. He carried himself with a confident strut and a quick pace.

The man walked up to the door like he owned the place and gave a frenzied knock.

“Help! Help! Please, won’t somebody help!? There’s been a terrible accident and I need to use your phone. Please, there are people dying out here. Please let me use your phone, please.”

The darkened house gave no reply.

He listened for a moment, and he tried again.

“Help! Please help! Isn’t there anyone home? Please, there are people dying. There’s so much fire and blood and I’m all alone, please let me use your phone.”

The man stopped knocking and listened again.

He checked one window, then the other.

He stepped off the porch and circled the house. Silently treading through the damp grass with his wingtips.

When he’d completed his orbit and felt satisfied that no one was home, he cupped his gloved hands around his mouth.

“Dey ain’t here, Charlie!”

The headlights came on and the engine roared as the truck started up the hill to the house.

As the Ford labored its way up the hill, a barefooted Carter Jefferson tore out the back of the house, clutching his rifle and fumbling with his overalls.

He took shelter in the crop patch out back and laid flat on his belly in the dark. He felt the grass sticking to his sweat and his panting breath stirring up dust.

The driver got out and opened the tailgate. A large bald man in a wife beater and suspenders climbed out of the bed.

A peculiar little man in a fine pinstripe suit was the last one out of the cab. He wore immaculate spats, a Windsor knot, and a sharp fedora.

The peculiar little man looked at the house, and the barn, then back to his men.

“Alright boys, make it quick. Gloves, you check the house. Bull, you look in the barn.”

“Okay boss,” the dim giant said.

“Wheels, stay by the truck, but keep an eye on him and make sure he doesn’t get lost.”

They split up on their assignments. Carter saw Gloves walk back up to the house and heard the sound of glass breaking. The lights came on and a silhouette with shoulder pads moved through the house.

Wheels lifted a Tommy gun out of the cab and turned one of the headlights on the barn as the giant plodded to the door, busted the lock with a single jerk, and disappeared inside.

Pinstripes took a relaxed stroll toward the oak in the side yard.

Carter could hear the sound of more things breaking and being overturned inside the house. He considered running, but what if they saw him? He could start shooting, but he’d never get all of them before they got him. He decided to wait and see.

He pointed with his cigarette at one of the graves.

“Boss, there’s nothing in the attic, and I can’t find a false floor, or a trap door, or nothin’ in here. Place is bone dry,” Gloves reported from inside the house.

Just then, Bull burst back out of the barn and slammed the door closed behind him.

“What is it Sammy? What’s wrong? What’d you see in there?” Wheels asked.

“Bull’s in there and it’s dark. It’s scary. There’s a bull in there.”

“No, I know you were in there. I’m asking you what you saw.”

“Bull!”

“Yes, uh huh, that’s right. Sammy the Bull. Now what did Sammy see in the barn?”

“A Bull!” The giant had real fear in his voice.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake.”

“Boys.”

“Yea boss?”

“Come here. Alla ya. Wheels, bring the shovel will ya?”

They gathered under the oak. Pinstripes was looking at two grey headstones sticking up out of the grass.

He pointed with his cigarette at one of the graves. “Dig here.”

The men all looked at each other in confusion.

“Here?”

“Yep. Here. Right here.”

“...boss, I...I don’t get it. What’s the gag boss?”

“No gag. Dig here. Wheels give Bull the shovel. Start digging.”

Wheels looked at Gloves, Gloves shrugged, and Wheels gave Sammy the shovel.

Bull took the shovel and obeyed with a smile. He reared back and brought the shovel down hard. The sound of splintering wood and a hollow echo came up from the ground.

Bull straightened up with a confused look on his face.

“Get away from there Bull,” Pinstripes said.

“Gloves, open it.”

Gloves felt around on the ground ‘til he found the hatch door handle and lifted the grass covered wooden panel up high in the air. Cheers broke out as Carter finally realized what the men had come for.

“Load it.”

“Boss how’d you know? I mean how could you tell it was a fake?”

Pinstripes’ eyes drifted and he played with his cuff links.

“I didn’t know, but I know Jefferson, and I knew Laura.” He looked at the real grave and his voice trembled a bit, “And I know The Huntsman couldn’t find a woman to replace her if he searched the whole damn world.” He nodded at the whisky stash, “So I knew there was something phony about this one here. Now stop asking questions and load it up. I want to get back to civilization. Gloves, whip up a nice calling card for our dear old friend. I want him to know we dropped in.”

Bull carried cases of whisky to the truck while Gloves set a case aside and started fixing up Molotov cocktails.

Carter clutched his rifle close. He had carefully watched all these proceedings unfold while looking down his sights. Carter was only fourteen and had never had a man in his crosshairs before, let alone killed one, but with his father gone and no way to defend himself if he was discovered, he had started mentally preparing himself to take that action if the need arose.

Carter ran his hands over the smooth wood and felt the familiar tension of the trigger. His thumb pressed against the safety latch and his breathing was slow and steady despite the adrenaline. Carter’s heartbeat was almost as loud as the distant voices and he was on the verge of panic until his frantic mind suddenly hit upon the notion that this was just another hunt. These were not men, they were faceless figures of amoral beasts, and if they threatened his life or property, they could justly be killed.

Once this idea had entered his brain he felt much more at ease.

When hunters go in groups to hunt game, they will frequently use a nonverbal signal system to communicate so as not to alert the prey of their presence. There are many ways to do this, but one of the oldest is the Indian trick of mimicking songs of indigenous birds.

The song of the Black Capped Chickadee is a simple one and easily imitated with a bit of practice. It sounds a bit like a very high pitched “Hi Sweetie.” When Carter heard his father whistle out this call from somewhere in the night, he almost laughed out loud. But instead he waited for a few seconds, and whistled back.

*

Sammy Bull had nearly finished loading the whisky, and Gloves had distributed his improvised explosives when Pinstripes called out for quiet.

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“The crickets?”

“No, God damn it, listen!”

“I didn’t hear nothin’.”

“Sorry boss, that was me. I just flicked my lighter.”

“No.”

“What?”

“Just shut the fuck up and listen!”

Above the noise of the countryside, after a few long seconds had passed, a dull copper thunk came from down the dirt road.

All the heads whipped around and guns were pulled and pointed.

“Who’s there?”

“Hands up!”

“Jefferson? Is that you?”

Wheels swung a headlight around and pushed back the night to reveal the source of the terrifying sound.

A copper bell hanging from the neck of a heifer wandering up the road.

All the men laughed, except Pinstripes.

The cow lazily walked the rest of the way up the road toward the house.

Pinstripes didn’t like it.

“Let’s go.”

“But boss we’re not done loading yet.”

“I said let’s go. Now. Right now. Let’s get-”

A gunshot split the night like the judgment of God.

Wheels yelled and went down, while Pinstripes dove for cover by the front porch. Bull dropped a few cases and they broke on the ground. He pulled two more Thompsons out of the bed of the truck and ran back to Pinstripes. Gloves ducked down by the truck with a cocktail in one hand a lighter in the other. Wheels didn’t wait for orders and started shooting into the dark.

“Jefferson!? Hold your fire boys!” Pinstripes yelled.

On his next breath, Carter flicked the safety and squeezed. His shot caught

A gunshot
split the
night like
the
judgment
of God.

Gloves in the right arm.

“God dammit Jefferson hold your fire! I swear to God if you fire one more shot I’ll burn it all and even if you kill us they’ll find you and skin you alive. Now God damn it hold your fire! Gloves, Wheels, get over here. Crawl now. Stay low. Low, God dammit! I don’t trust that bastard Jefferson.”

Carter waited. He couldn’t see either man but he heard every word as the old rivals shouted at each other through the darkness.

*

“Is that you Toothpick?”

“Yea, it’s me you crazy fucker. You and your bastard son shot Wheels and Gloves, God dammit!”

“Come out where I can see you Toothpick.”

“Who’re you working for Huntsman? Is it Sullivan?”

“I don’t work for anyone Toothpick. I quit. You oughtta know that better than anyone by now.”

“Bullshit Jefferson. You said you’d stay gone. That was the deal. But you couldn’t just leave well enough alone. You had to come out here and set up your own little bullshit operation. You’re cuttin’ in on Acey’s business, Huntsman. You oughtta know that better than anyone by now.”

“Tell me something Toothpick, are you still bringing knives to gunfights or have you finally learned to shoot worth a damn?”

Toothpick turned to Bull, “Gimme that chopper.”

“I don’t need to aim. I’ve got an arsenal.”

Carter could see figures moving and suddenly there was a burst of sound and fire as the Tommy gun spoke. The machine gun’s chatter was followed by an agonized moo, a heavy thud, and a dull copper thunk.

“How’s that for shootin’, Huntsman?”

“NO! Toothpick you heartless fucking bastard!”

Carter had never heard his father use that kind of language before.

“I swear by Satan and all his demons I’ll get you for that, Toothpick. You’ve had this comin’ a long time, you piece of shit.”

There was something moving in the barn.

“Oh, yea, yea, I call that big talk from a little bitch like you Jefferson. Why don’t you come out and face me like a real man instead of running and hiding from your problems like Laura always made you do.”

“Fuck you, Toothpick! Gloves, I’ll give you ten thousand in cash if you shoot that miserable cocksucker.”

The noise in the barn was getting louder.

“Fuck you, Huntsman!”

“Jefferson, if my driving leg is fucked up from this I swear to God I’ll castrate you in front of your son,” Wheels said, clutching the wound in his right leg.

“Shut the fuck up!”

“I don’t care if it takes all night Toothpick, I’m not going to let you walk out of here without a bullet in you.”

“Well that’s your business Huntsman. I know you’ve never been one to listen to reason, but if you’ll listen to me for five fucking seconds I’d like to explain this situation. I mean aren’t you even curious why we’re here?”

“Not really, no. At this point, I just want to watch you die.”

“Well listen to me for your boy’s sake then because if you want to save his life you better not fuck around out here tonight.”

No answer.

“Huntsman!?”

“Who says my boy’s out here?”

All the men groaned.

“Oh for fuck’s sake Jefferson, don’t gimme that bullshit. We heard the shots. I can’t believe you’d —”

“Alright, alright, you mother fuckers, I’m listening. But you better get to the fucking point pretty quick cause the sound of your voice drives me to murder.”

“The fucking point you graceless, idiot farmer, is we’re shutting you down. That’s it. That’s all we’re here for. We’re supposed to take your booze, shut down your operation, and go home. That’s all. Acey knows you did a lot for him back in the day and he still remembers how much he owes you and that God dammed rifle. I pleaded with him for a fucking week to just let me kill you and be done with it, but the stubborn son of bitch wouldn’t give me the go ahead. Can you believe that? After all the territory I won for him and all the fights we’ve been through together over the years, he’s *still* more loyal to you than to me or his own Goddamn business.”

“That’s because you’re a graceless, idiot gangster, and you have no sense of honor like Acey does. Hoods like you are a dime a dozen. You’re a vain, greedy, little man of low character, and that’s what you could never understand, Toothpick. That’s why you’ll never be the boss, you back stabbing murderer.”

The noise in the barn was getting louder.

“Look Jefferson. What I’m saying is this. If you let me and the boys get in the truck and drive off, we’ll call it square. But if we walk out there and you take one single fucking shot at us, Acey’ll come down here like the wrath of God and scorch everything in this valley. And then you and your son’ll be in that fake grave next to that dead bitch you stole from me!”

“ALRIGHT TOOTHPICK THAT DOES IT!! I’ve listened to you, now you listen to me. I want you to shut your fucking mouth and get the fuck off my property right now. Just take what you have and get the fuck out of here. And not one more God damn word. Do you hear me? I don’t care if you were sent here by God himself, if you say one more God damn word to me I will fucking kill you. You tell Acey if he wants to see me or talk to me to make other arrangements, but for right now, tonight, I want you and your goons to shut the fuck up, and get the fuck out!”

With that, all the voices fell silent.

*

Carter saw figures moving again. The truck doors opened, the engine started, and the headlights came on.

Then suddenly Carter saw spinning lights sailing up into the air. Two were headed for the house, and two were headed for the barn. They made long sweeping arcs through the night sky and seemed to hang in the air for hours. Carter followed their light with his eyes watching them turn over and over as if his pleading gaze would somehow put out the fire. But it didn’t. The firebombs landed and burst into flames and the air was full of machine gun fire. There was a rifle shot and Carter saw Gloves fall.

Just as the truck started to move, there was an awful crash of splintering wood as Joab’s hulking figure came smashing through the barn door. His bellowing could be heard over the roaring machine guns and shouting voices. The headlights and the engine caught his attention and he immediately lowered his long sharp horns and began to charge the enemy that was facing him.

The enormous black juggernaut made a fearfully awesome sight stampeding into the oncoming lights. Carter could feel the Earth shaking under the weight of Joab’s giant frame and the ferocious pace of his thunderous steel hooves.

Sammy Bull was standing in the bed of the truck with a Tommy gun in each arm blasting away at the raging beast while Wheels floored the gas and Toothpick leaned out the passenger window to throw a fireball at the blitzing colossus.

Joab was bathed in fire, and pulverized with lead, but didn’t flinch a muscle or slow his pace.

The crash filled the entire valley with light and sound. Screaming beasts

and mangled chromium. The truck slammed to a halt and the glass bottles of Old Man Jefferson's Wahoo Whisky shattered, releasing a flood of fire that consumed everything.

Sammy the Bull dropped his guns and threw his burning body to the ground.

Carter saw his father's silhouette running toward the crash. Carter stood up but was too stunned to move.

As Sammy thrashed in the grass trying to put out the flames, Joab's massive blazing body came lumbering around the side of the destroyed black Ford.

Carter's father stopped and knelt, taking aim at Joab.

Joab staggered toward Sammy who rolled onto his back writhing and screaming in hellacious agony.

The giant flaming bull reared high up in the air, and both Joab and Sammy screamed in pain and fear as The Huntsman pierced the beast's heart with a round from his thirty-ought-six.

Joab faltered and collapsed on Sammy, and then it was quiet.

Nothing but the sound of the bull, the truck, the house, and the barn burning.

Carter's father cautiously approached the fiery wreckage. He bent down to check Sammy.

There was a river
of firewater
separating them

The passenger door opened and Toothpick's blazing pinstripes came shrieking out of the truck.

Carter began to run.

Mr. Jefferson was too slow with his rifle, and Toothpick knocked him onto his back.

One of his eyes was hanging out of its socket, his body was wrapped in flames, and he was covered in blood, but still Toothpick Charlie raised the long skinny blade

of his namesake Arkansas Toothpick high up over his head and shouted, "It's a knife fight now, Huntsman!"

Carter's hands were shaking with adrenaline. The sweat was now mingled with tears as he lifted the rifle to take aim. He steadied himself, flicked the safety, and looked down the sights.

"You didn't deserve her."

Toothpick's insane laughter was cut short as The Huntsman pierced the beast's heart with a round from his thirty-ought-six.

Toothpick swung his arm down with ancient hatred and collapsed on top of Carter's father. Toothpick's toothpick pinned The Huntsman to the Earth.

The fire was spreading all over the hill. Carter looked at his father burning under the hideous corpse of his foe. There was a river of firewater separating them, and Carter knew he couldn't cross it. His father gave the whistle of the Black Capped Chickadee, and Carter gave it back, then fired again.

It was the first time he'd missed a shot since he was a boy.

Carter Jefferson wasn't sure if it was sweat or tears that caused his finger to slip off the trigger the first time he tried to shoot his father, but he blinked away the tears, took firm grip of the cherry wood stock, and gently exhaled as he squeezed the trigger again.

*

Carter surveyed the carnage around him and saw Marla.

Lying on her side by the barn.

Peacefully burning.

And The Huntsman began to reload. ♦

When John Gillen was about ten years old his parents sent him to a Christian Kids Camp. Almost everything was structured and planned, but campers were allowed to select one elective activity and given dozens of options. Out of about four hundred campers, he was the only one who chose Storytelling. The camp director asked him to choose something else so they wouldn't have to offer that class that year. He refused.

Blue Grey Skies



Joanne Litzinger

Blue grey skies
Needing to be rinsed
Of the foul smell of the oily harbor
Full of tethered boats swirling and twisting
Like wild horses

Joanne Litzinger, a jack of all trades, master of none, has been hoping to have something published for years. It finally happened. Thanks Rumble Fish!

