

Unscroll

Volume 3

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Andrew Borgstrom

“The Dog I Never Had or Was and the Dad I Never Knew or Had”

My mom made antelope sandwiches for picnics. Dad paid for the antelope meat and fell asleep during conversations. Mom worked at a nursing home. I had to feed my baby sister with a bottle because mom used up all her milk at work. Dad lived next door. Mom called him the neighbor. I remember being stuck in a snow storm with dad. He had to tuck me inside of his coat and walk to safety. If I was on the other side of his coat, I would think he had a puppy under his coat. I would think this was the surprise he'd brought me back from wherever he went and never brought me back anything. I was my own gift of a puppy. I remember petting the lining of his coat. Telling the lining we would make it home alive. Telling my dad to please leave me in the coat when we made it home alive. Begging him to sew me into the lining and tell the neighbor I had been kidnapped. Waiting for him to wake up. And kidnap me.

Michael Bernstein

from nanostars

Arctic

shattered

barren,sold

scraping

spirals

Jeff Crouch

“overflow”

Master Lee had fallen in love and married the woman of his dreams, but the woman of his dreams wanted to keep her religion.

But Master Lee enjoyed fine things, and he had the money to do so. His wife’s religion, however, was one of poverty, a tenet, at least at the onset of the marriage, she intended to keep.

failed to tell you
the pool is dirty

something glistened

among the ash
belly up

a rubber shark
or something glistened

like a gland
if glands can glisten

I am not sure what

Throughout his life, Master Lee had kept his wealth hidden. To do so was a necessity in his line of business, one of the very conditions of his survival. But he had things he enjoyed, and he would do so, circumstances permitting.

Master Lee believed that circumstances allowed for unorthodox behavior—his wife, however, believed in simplicity. She did not know, however, of the enormity of his wealth.

licorice snap turtle

a name for a yet-to-be kind of cookie

where’s the baby?

Life had prepared Master Lee for the simple path, for he often had to deny himself a luxury he could easily afford in order to hide his riches.

That his wife kept her beauty hidden was not a joy to him for Master Lee came from a world where the beauty of one’s wife was a blessing to be shared. Yet Master Lee knew that the beauty of his wife would only make the other husbands jealous.

ritual mowing of the lawn

hair pile, grass clipping

cheese spread
and bacon
on a hot pan

biscuit

the wet dog
at the back door
barking

fresh cut
pants

like the wet dog
at the back door
barking

biscuit

Master Lee went about his business, and he won, as he so often did with his graciousness and honest speech, the trust of his associates.

Meanwhile, religious service days were harder on him than he expected for Master Lee needed his rest and his religion proved as hard as his work.

Accustomed to the best music and entertainment money could buy, Master Lee grew impatient at temple. He imagined that he might replace the wooden temple with one of ivory and gold, and then he thought better of it. But the image of a heavenly orchestra would not leave his thoughts.

Master Lee realized that buying a live orchestra would be expensive, even ostentatious, but his dream was soon interrupted by his business sense. He realized that bringing an orchestra to the temple would require him to reveal his intentions. He thought about an anonymous donation.

“And how does one donate an orchestra?” he asked himself.

it's absurd, this sense of perfect
face drawn—it guntotes a frown
becomes his mama's voice
cunning, clever boy

Surely, Master Lee thought in this paraphrased version of his thoughts, his intentions would be an insult to those volunteering their musical talents—“or their lack of them,” he remarked out loud—to the service. He decided to on *simpler* terms. He decided to introduce talent into the ranks of the worshippers; he would recruit the singers.

Master Lee opted to hire six singers to blend their voices in with those in the service. “I must be patient,” he said to himself, “for no one in the body of the worshippers much sings, but in six months, this service will have six beautiful voices in its ranks.”

spilling over the lawn

freshly cut

the straining gate yelps
the coathanger, her whip

a waterhose spouts
that that dog licked his own butt

her hand in the pouch
an envelope

laden in pennies
the pharaoh

who rolls down the passenger
window

By the sixth month, the news of the blessed service had traveled far and wide, and Master Lee had to work diligently to keep his secret. Harder yet for Master Lee was having to arrive to services two hours early just to get a seat.

small-boned butterfly

Shortly after the sixth month, the campaign began to build a bigger temple, but the wife of Master Lee, keeping to her faith in the simple, decided that a change was in order and found, once again, a simple place to worship.

 cracking
sugar
 sugar wound
sugar
 brick
by airplane glue
or x-ray
or juggling shoe
 splint by part and
paying rent
 the gauze
sugar stint

Lest his secret be known, Master Lee continued to fund his singers until his obligation with them was met—at his sixtieth payment. Indeed, his payments were a duty and an obligation. Master Lee thereby funded a sanctuary he could not attend.

Though the music at the new temple was also intolerable for him, Master Lee brought his ear plugs in case the drone became horrific. The food at the luncheons was likewise intolerable, and Master Lee thought about hiring a caterer for his new temple.

Master Lee then thought about his wife's simplicity.

wooly mammoth

Alex Stolis

“On finding *Exile on Main Street* in the bin at Cheapo”

the whirr
of a turntable,
the scratch,
pop and click
as needle
hits groove;
the hushed
snap
of a bra,
a not quite
stolen kiss,
the end
of side one.
impatient
palms, sweaty
on black edges,
side two;
the wet shhh
of a beer, shallow
breaths in time
with the music.
a smile, traced
with a finger,
lips brush
against the curve
of a shoulder.

Ben Spivey

an excerpt from *Flowing in the Gossamer Fold*

The drive back to my wife's, excuse me, my ex-wife's apartment took longer due to traffic: an awful pileup reminiscent of early Pollock.

I listened to the Radio move through static.

Passed the time outside of time by thinking about the droning chatter of the woman who'd just made me come, and the realization that when I got home my love would be gone. But I knew that, I told myself, I knew she would leave. I felt as if I was an empty house with an open door, *come right in*, I'd tell anyone passing by, anyone looking in, anyone at all.

Claire would shut the door quick, secure, bolting it.

I had until the end of the week to leave, until the end of the week to find a new place, until the end of the week when Claire would return to her home forever, no longer mine.

I held the bag of her orange pubic hair in the density of human congestion.

Congestion caused by people looking out of their windows like they'd never seen a television program.

I ate the hairs; holding them pinched between my fingers, I pushed them on my tongue, down my throat.

When I finally passed the wreck I didn't look in the direction of the crushed cars like everyone else.

Later, on the fifth page of the paper I read that three people died in that crash, ink from the printing press smudged over the ages.

My thoughts shifted, I couldn't stop thinking about that young woman. I didn't get her name. Not that getting her name mattered.

I was simply someone she looked up to in some way, that's all, an idol.

She said she liked my book, that's it.

What could a girl like that want with me anyway? And Jesus, my wife.

Inside the apartment a few days later I was undressing.

It was late and I hadn't slept well for a few nights. The games Claire would play on me, the tricks, the hidden messages in drawers, behind curtains and whatnot, all that was gone, I didn't find anything of hers, nothing personal at least, left.

In a couple of days I had everything packed and boxed up; everything that I needed or wanted to take with me. I still didn't have a place to stay.

I wanted to get out of the city. Maybe I could find a place out in the countryside, preferably somewhere forested.

By the fourth night I was miserable.

I had no one to call, no one to see, nothing to do; I ate a few meals, bowls of cereal and sandwiches mostly; Claire did most of the cooking.

Time passed with relentless hindsight; it slowly became Saturday as I sulked about the apartment, eating, doing nothing I could recall, remember.

Saturday night, I decided to get drunk.

Trying to find a place to park during the weekend was almost impossible.

So I walked to a bar, past night-lights of the city, some of them shuttered, out of whack.

While pacing the sidewalk I decided to celebrate: celebrate the last five or so days of solace, contemplated suicide, tears, lack of tears, new direction, set the sails, raise the anchors. I sobbed a small amount during the walk, I thought about the etched memories and the parts of a person that stays with you during and after a relationship, or even a routine encounter, it stays.

It stays forever.

I couldn't remember all of the things I'd thought about over the past few days, but I knew

that I'd sustained the feeling that I was *entirely* surprised by her decision to leave.

I thought about how much I enjoyed waking up to find myself tied to a cross, tied to the stove, cut, bruised, or the cold tip of her pistol tapping my temple. Oh! How much I loved her.

I thought about that new girl, the one that read my book, about her hair dipping below my belly button. The city's light drowned the dark sky overhead. I could faintly see a sparrow flying high above me, black on a shade of black.

Alone, I sat at the bar and bought seven beers, a sandwich and onion rings. The bar was full of single people, most seemed younger than I.

"I got divorced," I slurred in someone's direction.

The someone replied, "So what?"

The mentality of America, of the youthful American, *so what*, and *fuck you*, and *I don't care*. A generation of nihilists: without understanding, fogged, pathetic, lost, Godless. *Drink up young men*, I would have said, *you're only going to live long enough*.

I'd been earning tally marks on my tab for half a handful of hours and I didn't feel any better. I felt that brief induced happiness, but it was fleeting. Fitting how fleeting it was. I in fact felt worse, lonelier. The walls of the bar were splintered wood. Someone kept playing thumping sounds on the jukebox. When it was last call the sparrow landed in front of me, pecked my hand, pulled on my fingernails; I tried to smack it away, "Leave me alone," I said. Its eyes, dead eyes, looked at me slanted, it flapped its wings.

It landed on my shoulder and told me in small words that elsewhere, parallel in time, my ex-wife was planning on having another man move in with her. The man, she met through work, was ten years older than I. But that didn't mean the sex wasn't incredible, said the sparrow. In fact, told the sparrow, the sex was better, Claire felt, than any sex she'd ever had: that his sperm felt full.

I decided to walk home- my home for a few hours more- in that night's lush slush. I could only see and count twenty-three stars in the sky. The street lamps drowned out the night's nude blackness. Blackness dressed like removed silk. A woman was sitting on the curb wearing a dress, milky, sparse, flowing; the sparrow pranced on the curb only a few feet from her- almost dancing- it was pecking little crumbs of rye bread off of the splotched cement. The woman in the dress was sprinkling the breadcrumbs from a loaf she held loosely with a limp wrist. She tilted her head at an obscure angle. "I think it is best to do nothing," she said to me or at me. The bird then turned its head to pay attention to who or what the woman in the dress was talking to.

I said: "About what?"

"About everything, the results are the same," she said, crumbling the bread to the ground, the sparrow prancing, walking, and tapping its little feet from one crumb to the next.

"Okay lady," I said in sarcastic slurry slush.

The woman in the dress met my eyes with her eyes- dark and void, the blankest eyes I'd ever seen. The sparrow hopped, flew for a second then landed on the woman's shoulder. "You're leaving so you can find yourself. But you already know that, you're already leaving, already running away. Or running to," she said. And I blinked a few times, rubbed my long face, feeling its sweat. I shook the sweat from my hand, from my fingertips.

"But I don't have anywhere to go."

The woman in the dress then disappeared.

The light from the street lamps began to suck from the bulbs like wind; the light then turning into butterflies and each of the thousands of butterflies flapping their shining wings toward the sky, in circles around the street, making more stars- a more visible heaven in some sort of time. I sat on the curb where the woman once was, watching the butterflies, a few of them landed near and on me.

Eventually I slogged the rest of the way home.

I was drunk, very tired, and very alone.

Lying in bed, in the swirl of the sheets, looking at nothing but the ceiling and its intricate splotches of spinning decorative splatter.

I imagined my ribs ripping from my chest, my heart leaking blood into my lungs.

I turned off the yellow light, pulled the sheets to my neck, and closed my eyes.

David Peak

“Separation Films”

When I was a child
it was difficult for me

it was difficult for me
to grasp, that
I could never touch something,
that
atoms would always be
in the way—coating two surfaces—
a film of separation.

When I was a teenager
it was difficult for me

it was difficult for me
to get close to
people

[and now
I am older
and I have woken
after a long winter
and I am hungry
and I will eat light]

—the films of me,
as a child,
they are separate—

and it is difficult for me
to know that
they show someone else.

Eric Burke

“Dressing It Up”

It was already red and infected, already causing the usual problems with my fiancée. But I was afraid the splinter would splinter further in the extraction -- that being pulled against the flesh, slivers of it would lodge, like errant fish hooks, in the palm of my hand.

"I am, however, improving," I would think. (I was now performing my secret alchemy only in secret, only in the most private of places (Only here would I transmute my leaden willingness to endure into golden virtue and patience.)). You see, I was learning self-awareness.

It would be five full years before I allowed her to perform the extraction we both knew was necessary.

Jeanette M. Sayers

Sky Palette at Dusk

The sun, going down, saluted electric
bedtime and lunar-light-tarnished
night, laying back long in the middle
of the hall half-dull. Half an hour ago
there were no letters for every person
engaged in reading by candle caustic books
surfaced with corroded clarity craters,
rotted remarks, silence likened to half-decayed
moon sounds. Now the pause is a cemetery,
a house roused that careless round the rooms
fixed native spears arranged to point clearly
at the illuminated. A sky is fixed closely blank
upon bodies too far, to hear
what they are saying, to mimic in clouds
their theories, gestures, appearances.

Cooper Renner

"Lykos" from *A Death by the Sea*

When I woke the room was dark: my computer had put itself to sleep, and I had been working solely by its light. I could see, through the open window, the fifth floor of the building opposite, lit at an angle by the moon. I had often seen residents on the lower floors coming to their windows or balconies to smoke, to hang wet clothes, or to call down to neighbors on the street below. But the fifth floor had always seemed vacant -- never a light behind the window-glasses opaque with dust; never the sound of one person calling to another. The window was always closed, as were the French doors that gave way to the narrow balcony.

Then a flicker caught my eye. To the left of the balcony, where the residential high-rise abutted the commercial building to its right, a shape -- half-dark, half-lit -- stood on a limestone ledge. There were several windows, I knew, above that ledge, though I could not see them from where I sat on the bed. Presumably the ledge-walker had exited one of them. He (she?) sidled along the ledge till it ended at the red brick of the residence. There was a gap of perhaps four or five feet -- gauging distances is not my talent -- between the lip of the ledge and the railing of the balcony. The figure crouched -- or perhaps *hunched* would be the more accurate word -- and I wanted to shout out a warning. But I was still hazy from sleep and medication and, to be frank, was not sure I had not wakened from one dream directly into another.

The moon was apparently about halfway up the eastern sky because the figure's back and part of its head were highlighted; the rest of it was dark against the limestone blocks of the office building, though almost identical in tone to the adjoining brick. I leaned forward, forcing myself to behave as though awake, at the same time the figure leapt. It was, to me at least, an astonishing performance, as though the legs were propelled by some other force. I almost lost him against the dark top floor of the residence -- he was no more than a richly brown smear sliding across a richly brown backdrop until, that is, he landed. He had entirely cleared the railing and managed to land on the gray planking of the balcony, on all four.

I shoved the heels of my hands against my eyes. I felt the warmth of my laptop on my thighs. The breeze ran, just for a second, against the thin skin between my left ear and the leg of my glasses. That head not more than sixty feet away, because the street cannot have been wider than a couple of compact cars, turned toward me and I caught the glint of moonlight on one eye. The other eye, on the head's left side, was blocked by the shadow of an upraised furred ear.

One side of the French door opened and a hand extended out, snapping thumb and middle finger. Then the creature on the balcony curled back on itself, its sinuous spine making an elongated C, and the dog -- the wolf? -- padded softly inside.

Audri Sousa

“trial by moon”

blue waifs bloomed from the milky river, their pallid mother, her current sewn into moons. i held my distance in a fist of sweat and ambivalence, kissed it with tongue. they were calling my name, their dress hems solid milk and moon caked on cotton fiber to line the walls of me. calling in pulses like shivering sirens, a meter i recognized as a death suite, a plate of pulses. the pulses were not their own voices, were dozens of gramophones indwelt by eels in the womb of the riverbed, coral rusted. the mother under moons sewn into shivering milk. the hem kissed by blue lips of eels blooming from the river of gramophones. the cotton, soft as the rock from which i watched myself tread milk, blue twin of waifs now, tread slower, finally yield under my new mother in a swirl of pink. the waifs unfurling the river as peppermint cord to sew a new moon, to unpulse my pulsing children.

Bios:

Andrew Borgstrom is the author of *Reflected Off the Occasional Bone* (Publishing Genius, 2009) and *A State of Unbelief and Hawthorn Blossoms* (Pear Noir!, 2010). He lives in the Pacific Northwest and is a web editor for Pindeldyboz.

Michael Bernstein is the author of *8s* (Scantly Clad Press, 2009). His poems have appeared in magazines such as *Puppy Flowers*, *Conundrum*, *Moria*, *BlazeVOX*, and *New American Writing*. He has taught Creative Writing through Boulder Attention Homes in Boulder, CO, and as a visiting artist at the University of Tulsa. He currently co-edits the online literary arts magazine *Pinstripe Fedora*. Michael lives and writes in Milwaukee, WI.

Jeff Crouch is a writer in Texas. Google him.

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Ben Spivey lives in Atlanta. His stories have appeared, or are forthcoming in *Corduroy Mtn.*, *Titular*, *Kill Author*, *Thirst for Fire*, and *Writers' Bloc*. He likes his coffee black. He blogs at www.yourbrainsblackbox.blogspot.com

David Peak is the author of two forthcoming books: *The Rocket's Red Glare* (Leucrota Press, Winter '10) and *Surface Tension* (BlazeVOX Books, Winter '10). His writing has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Lamination Colony*, *Abjective*, *Pank*, and others. He lives in New York City.

Eric Burke works as a computer programmer in Columbus, Ohio. Recent work can be found in *elima*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *The Driftwood Review*, *Otoliths*, *Pank*, *nibble* and *Unscroll Volume II*. You can read his blog at <http://www.anomalocrinus.blogspot.com/>.

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"Lykos" is excerpted from Cooper Renner's novel *A Death by the Sea*. Selections have also appeared or will appear shortly in *New York Tyrant*, *The Anemone Sidecar* and *Keyhole*. Selections from *Disbelief*, a novella also concerning werewolves and Malta, are scheduled for 2010 with *New York Tyrant* and *The Anemone Sidecar*. Renner's chapbook "Dr Polidori's Sketchbook", featuring text and illustration, will appear in 2010 from *Mud Luscious Press*.

audri sousa fakes dire illness to avoid weddings. she is the author of *speak easy symmetry* (gold wake press) and her chapbook *caspian quilt* is forthcoming from *bedouin books*. she can be unearthed at <http://www.audrisousa.blogspot.com>