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Curbside Splendor Publishing

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Poetry:

Veins by Elizabeth Manno

Three Poems by Allie Marini Batts:

Bill & Patsy's Zippo,

I'm Not Talking about Love on a Roof in Brooklyn, and

A Particular Sadness at the Laundromat

Acapulco Nightclub by Matt Carmichael

Fiction:

Masks by Matt Kimberlin

Everybody is a Secret Identity by Steve Gillies

Cover, "Cities in Dust" and photography by Adel Souto

Editor – KC Kirkley

Elizabeth Manno

is a content strategist from Chicago and can't wait to live somewhere with more trees. Despite her strong affection for poetry, she hopes to expand her writing repertoire to include short stories by her mid-twenties.



"Love Your Neighbor" by Adel Souto.

Veins

by Elizabeth Manno

On the blue tracks I travel
under tissue paper skies,
speckled with Time's pre-cancerous stars.

And if I dream bad dreams
the ride still won't stop—
rather, the pace quickens into a
rapid pulse of dread.

The gushing journey is a strange one;
wandering an infrastructure, fragile
and prone to crack,

shielded by the shallowest of atmospheres:
thin blankets
of man-made insecurities.

This trip has no end,
these tracks run in circles,
pumping hope mixed with
blue deterioration
and tragic decay.

- -

Matt Kimberlin

earned his MA in English at Missouri State University. He is the founding editor of *Suburban Diaspora*. He has contributed to *Moon City Review*, *Unstuck*, and *Mid-American Review*. His fiction has appeared in *Paddle Shots*. He is a fiction PhD student at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he serves as fiction editor for *Rougarou*.



"Don't Walk" by Adel Souto.

Masks

by Matt Kimberlin

Bill put his face on before going to the open bar. The seams were invisible to the naked eye, and he didn't expect to be probed by a magnifying glass. He left his hotel room and went down the stairs. He hated people who took the elevator from the second floor.

A barren dance floor invited all, but no one accepted, save a nondescript couple making fools of themselves. Bill had no desire to join them. He ordered a beer, wanting something in his hand. As he scouted the room, one woman caught his eye. She sat alone, but she had a few full tables next to her.

Hey, you mind? he said over the horrible music.

She looked up from her papers. Yeah, sure.

- -

As the open bar closed, they were sitting together. Bill had learned her name was Amanda. He remembered from college Latin classes that her name meant *she who must be loved*. As the music died, their conversation drew on. He asked her back to his room; she agreed. They spent the night together, and it was the second time that Bill had gone upstairs with company that week.

The sun came up a few hours after they went to bed. Bill realized that he'd left the curtains open during the night. He went to shut the curtains, but got lost in the view. The sunrise encroached on him. He felt boxed in looking at it. In the bed, Amanda yawned and smiled, the only communication they needed. She gathered her clothes, saying she didn't want anything complicated. They exchanged numbers, and he said he probably wouldn't call her, but he knew he would.

- -

The day he returned from the conference, Bill sat across from his boss, congratulated on finding a new client. The new account tripled their expected earnings for the fiscal year. It was a short conversation, but his boss gave Bill a pat on the back before sending him out. It was an unnecessary gesture, but Bill never got that type of recognition.

On break, Bill went around the office, basking in his new celebrity. He said hello to everyone he saw under the fluorescent lights, most of whom he had never been formally introduced to. Everyday social pleasantries were beyond him, but he tried. More conversations ended as a result of his small talk than began. It wasn't that he didn't care. He just couldn't engage people unless the circumstances were right. Alcohol helped.

- -

When he got home, Bill removed his face. The skin peeled away to leave his musculature visible, red flesh interlocking with tendons in a macabre postmodern mural. His cheekbones pursed against the tissue to form bubble-like pockets, and the white of his eyes and teeth was magnified by the skinless flesh. He looked like a character in kabuki theatre, meant to scare children into believing in some divine enterprise. He always lived alone, kept the curtains drawn.

No skin remained where his face once had been. The outline of where it began and ended was well-defined, a floppy pseudo-circle that hung like dog ears. He wondered if his face was a necessary thing. Everything worked well enough without it. He could breathe, eat, talk, do all normal functions, but he wouldn't have met Amanda or Gabby, the other open-bar connection, without it. He considered calling one of them, but thought against it. Gabby was his new client, a businesswoman from the suburbs, probably cheating on her husband. Her finger was losing its tan, maybe a recent divorce. She was the kind of woman he'd always wanted to have a fling with—older, but not too much older.

He set his face on the nightstand in a pan of murky liquid to keep it hydrated and flipped on the television, trying not to mar his evening with thoughts of change. He liked the way things were going. He gave it about three months before his life exploded back on him, but it was going to be worth it in the meantime.

He let his muscles relax. They were tense when covered. He wondered if the rest of his muscles were that tense. He considered trying to remove all of his skin, but thought it might be uncomfortable, especially with clothes. Instead, he let the air flow over him, a moving, comforting blanket. He fell asleep.

- -

When Bill was typing up a report the next day, three people came by his desk. Each offered congratulations on his success. He walked to the water cooler to get away.

Hey, Bill?

He turned around. A woman he had never seen before knew his name. He tried to hide his discomfort.

Oh, I'm Amy, she said. Wouldn't expect you to know that.

Yeah, hi.

I heard you're the go-to guy around here. Thought I'd ask you a few things.

Sure.

Amy was a straightforward woman with a genuine smile. Bill answered all the questions he could and directed her to the boss for those he couldn't.

He stayed at the water cooler long enough that several people walked by. Seeing him advise the new employee solidified his role in the office. Looks of admiration—and even jealousy—were cast his way with growing frequency. His star was rising.

- -

It's been great, Gabby said.

I'm glad I was able to bring you into the fold, Bill said. The boss is glad to have your business. Bill felt constrained by his face in the evening, but he recognized its necessity on a date.

I think you're the one who's really happy, she said.

Not complaining, he said. That's for sure.

They sat together at one of the nicest restaurants in town. Bill had never been, and he was glad that Gabby had asked him. That was her only rule; the one who asks gets the tab. It was their third date, and he was pretty sure she was tired of Chinese. She was fond of wine.

How do you do it? she asked.

What?

Never mind.

He let it go. It wasn't as if he had the secret to eternal life. He pondered what she was going to ask for the rest of the night, even as she pulled the check to herself.

- -

The boss called Bill into the office later that week. Since Bill hadn't accomplished anything new, he sat outside the office like a kid in elementary school wondering which rule he had broken. He wasn't used to reprimands. Not since high school.

Bill, said the boss. Come on in.

Yes, sir. Bill stepped in and took a seat, his hands fumbling on his knees.

The boss moved a paperclip sculpture out of the way. Bill stared at the sculpture, unable to figure out what it was at first. He decided that it had to be a dolphin when his boss spoke up. You know you didn't file the trip with corporate?

No, sir, Bill said.

It's going to take a couple of weeks to re-file the paperwork. I don't have to tell you what that means.

Man hours?

You're a smart one. It's not a big deal if you don't make a habit of it. Understood?

I apologize, sir. It won't happen again.

Make sure it doesn't. I don't like having these conversations.

Bill left. He didn't have anything else to say, but he felt like people were looking at him. It wasn't with the admiration that he felt before. It was like they were waiting.

- -

Bill didn't take his face off that evening, since he had a date with Amanda. They had a pleasant meal and pleasant service, capped off by a pleasant bottle of wine. Everything was going well until Amanda choked. When Bill asked what was wrong, she pointed to his lips. He felt them. The right side was drooping. He excused himself and went to the restroom.

Looking in the restroom mirror, he pushed the flesh back into place as gently as he could. His face hadn't done that before. It looked like something heavy was hanging from his lips, but it stayed in place once he pushed it back. Once he returned, the rest of the evening was pleasant.

Bill contemplated not taking his face off for bed. Maybe he was removing it too much. Maybe it was losing form. He wondered how people would react to him without his face. Would they be interested in how he was able to remove it? Would they be frightened? Maybe it was a worthwhile experiment to go somewhere without his face.

He couldn't remember anyone seeing him without his face. He learned how to take it off in college when he had no roommates. He'd never had a serious enough relationship to worry about a significant other. No one else had a key to his apartment. He didn't like the idea of giving a key to anyone. If and when a relationship took a turn for the worse, he didn't want to come home to his apartment ablaze due to repressed anger management issues of someone he had taken on three dates to the Italian restaurant around the corner.

He decided it was best to keep his face on, hoping it wouldn't create problems. He had trouble getting to sleep, and the fan didn't feel as nice.

- -

It was worse in the morning. Both sides of his lips hung below his chin, and his nose looked like an icicle, ready to drip. He pushed the impressionist pieces back into place, reconstructing the found art of his face. The perfection in the mirror didn't feel like his anymore.

On his way to work, he bought a mirror to keep at his desk so he could make minor adjustments over the day; the skin was falling faster than before. By the middle of the afternoon, he was looking

in the mirror every five minutes to make sure his face was in proper working order. In the morning it had been his lips, but now his eyebrows and cheeks would flop down. The boss called him in at three.

Have a seat, the boss said.

Yes, sir.

The boss pushed aside the paperclip sculpture. Do you have any medical issues, Bill?

No, sir.

Are you aware that your face is falling off?

Bill hesitated. No, sir.

It is. I can't do anything about an unseemly medical condition, but I would appreciate if you'd take the rest of the day if this is an outbreak of some sort. Don't worry. It won't come out of your sick days. I'll eat the cost. Take tomorrow if you need it and get well soon.

Yes, sir, Bill said.

He went to his desk, picked up his briefcase, and noticed a splotch on it. His face was melting like candle wax. Running to the restroom, he tried to catch as much of the ooze as possible. He wasn't successful. A trail of wax skin stuck to the ground in his wake. He stared at the putty in his hands. Pushing it back on, he constructed little more than half a face. It was enough to get him out of the building, but it was still dripping.

He walked out toward the lobby. A janitor was scraping Bill's face off of the ground while his co-workers said goodbye with big smiles. Are you leaving for the day? See you tomorrow. Take as much time as they give you; I'd try to get Monday off, too. No one likes to come in on a Monday. Have a good evening. Try to get some rest. You look like you need it.

By the time he got to the car, Bill's face was gone, and he couldn't go back to get it.

- -

Gabby didn't want to cancel their date. She didn't believe he was ill and insisted on coming over to see him if he was. It was the mother in her, she said. He didn't think it would go well, but he wasn't sure what he could do. If he denied her access to the apartment, she would think he was with another woman.

With no good options, he answered the door without his face. Gabby was going on about homeopathic remedies for every ailment when she saw his blood red faceless face. You weren't kidding about not feeling well, she said.

Yeah, he said. I wasn't.

I'm going to walk away now, Gabby said. I hope you won't take it personally if you never hear from me again. It's just that your face is gone. That's disturbing.

I think my boss will care more than I do, he said.

Personal relationships were the least of his concerns if he couldn't get a new face. He took a long bath, letting the steam relax his muscles so he might get some sleep.

- -

When Bill woke up, all of the skin and hair on his head had pooled into a hardened mass on his pillow. He had trouble raising his head at first, because the malleable substance stuck to the back of his head until it snapped like a rubber band. He stared at the solid puddle on his pillow.

Bill had never been a thinker. He followed instructions for the most part. He had nothing but time to think now, and he wondered if it was permanent. Could there be some sort of skin graft? Would he look normal in a year or two if his cells were replicated in a Petri dish? He thought about whether they still had freak shows. Maybe he could find a new career. He imagined himself on stage next to the bearded lady and the amazing lizard boy, finding true love with the most tattooed woman in the world. People could come and stare at him without any shame. They wouldn't have to keep the smile on or be polite. Their revulsion could be on clear display, uninhibited by tact and decency. He would be the star of the show, the man with no skin, the man with nothing to protect him.

A call from the office broke his concentration. Bill didn't pay much attention to the rant, but he was fired. He had to pick up his things, skin disease or not. The bravado was infuriating, and he decided to go and get everything.

- -

By the time Bill got to the office, skin dripped off his fingers, and his shoes overflowed with goo. No one batted an eye, but they all expressed sympathies for his job loss. The Stepford co-workers made no attempt to ask him about his worsening condition, but the janitor scoffed when he saw Bill leaving another mess.

As layers of skin fell from Bill's hands, it hurt to pick things up. He gathered everything up into a single box, leaving the office computer there, but stealing an abundance of office supplies. Several paperclips fell and got stuck in the goo trail he left behind. He didn't need to make more of a scene. No one would forget him, even if they would never admit it.

When he got into the car, he noticed a missed call from Amanda. Apprehensive, he called her back as he drove home. Touching anything hurt the exposed muscles in his hands. Even sitting was painful.

Hello?

Hey, you called?

Yeah, Amanda said. I heard you got fired. Want to talk about it when I get off work?

Bill thought about it, but he said yes. He wanted company.

- -

Amanda knocked on the door at ten after six. She hadn't even gone home. Bill answered the door, and waited for her to back away like Gabby, but she didn't.

Your skin is gone, Amanda said.

Yeah, Bill said. I know.

That's really strange.

I've heard that.

Can I come in?

- -



"To Build Again" by Adel Souto.

Allie Marini Batts

holds degrees from Antioch University of Los Angeles & New College of Florida, meaning she can explain deconstructionism, but cannot perform simple math. Her work has been a finalist for Best of the Net & nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She is managing editor for the *NonBinary Review*, *Unbound Octavo*, & *Zoetic Press*, and co-editor-in-chief for *Lucky Bastard Press*. She has previously served on the masthead for *Lunch Ticket*, *Spry Literary Journal*, *The Weekenders Magazine*, *Mojave River Review & Press*, & *The Bookshelf Bombshells*. Allie is the author of *Unmade & Other Poems*, (Beautysleep Press, 2013) & *You Might Curse Before You Bless* (ELJ Publications, 2013). She has 5 collections forthcoming in 2015: *wingless, scorched & beautiful* (Imaginary Friend Press), *Before Fire* (ELJ Publications), *This Is How We End* (Bitterzoet), *Pictures From The Center Of The Universe* (Paper Nautilus, winner of the Vella Prize) & *Southern Cryptozoology: A Field Guide To Beasts Of The Southern Wild* (Hyacinth Girl Press). Allie rarely sleeps, and her mother has hypothesized that she is actually a robot fueled by Diet Coke & Sri Racha. Find her on the web: <https://www.facebook.com/AllieMariniBatts> or @kiddeternity.

Three Poems by Allie Marini Batts

Bill & Patsy's Zippo

cost me \$3 at the flea market & I say with a smile as I
spark it against my jeans—a habit I picked up in my first dorm room,
when being able to smoke inside seemed so adult—
I guess they didn't make it.
if they had, it seems I wouldn't have picked up their
lighter, engraved with their names—but no date—
for less than it costs to buy a pack of the cigarettes they'll light.
even as I'm stubbing out the butt of my own marriage,
smoked straight down to the filter,
I find myself insistently turning over a lucky,
wondering whether Bill ever bounced back from Patsy
up & leaving him one day when she'd finally had enough, & if
Patsy ever managed to find whatever it was she was looking for.

- -

I'm Not Talking about Love on A Roof in Brooklyn

Four cigs deep and I suddenly remember
why everyone told me
New York wasn't for me.

It'll make you hard, they said,
people aren't like they are here—
your heart is too tender and you walk too slow—
they won't love you like we do.

I got blood blisters my first week.
Learned to pick up my pace.
Stopped saying Excuse me
to everyone I bumped into on the train.
Dropped my drawl and forgot
what fresh peaches taste like in June.

Blowing smoke off the tips of a \$10 pack of Pall Malls,
watching the glitter of the skyscrapers studding the vista
instead of being able to see the stars—
listening to the whoosh and roar of taxicabs
that never stop flooding the grid of streets below.
The bright chirrup of cicadas and tree frogs,
a splinter of memory that aches and stings
as I learn a hard lesson
about following your tender heart to places far and wide.

Maybe by next winter,
I'll finally have a jacket that will keep me warm enough,
or at least have some calluses on my heels,
instead of a shoe full of blood.

- -

Steve Gillies

has had work published in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Artifice Magazine*, and the *American Journal of Orthopedics*. He lives and works in Chicago with his family and mostly works from home these days.



"Our Future" by Adel Souto.

Everybody is a Superhero
by Steve Gillies

GREY SALT STAINS THE PLASTIC FLOOR FORMING CONSTELLATIONS OF GRIME IN A UNIVERSE FILTHY WITH THE MUD AND SLUSH OF A CITY CAUGHT IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE VILLAINOUS . . .

OLD MAN WINTER

FORGIVE THE POETRY, TRUE BELIEVERS, BUT WE'VE BEEN SITTING IN THE OFFICE WRACKING OUR BRAINS TRYING TO COME UP WITH A NEW WAY OF DESCRIBING THE INSIDES OF AN EL TRAIN. OH, SURE, OLD MAN WINTER HAS MADE SEVERAL APPEARANCES THROUGHOUT THE YEARS*, BUT HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU READ ABOUT SALT STAIN CONSTELLATIONS? STILL, IF ALL YOU WANT ARE THE FACTS, IT'S WINTER, EVERYONE IS OVER IT AND WE'RE ON THE TRAIN. YEAH. A TRAIN.

*FOR THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF OLD MAN WINTER, SEE TALES FOR THE LONELY #35, IF YOU CAN AFFORD A COPY! -- EDITORS

THE DRIVER FROWNS AS PEOPLE CROWD THE DOORWAYS, THEN LEAPS INTO ACTION.

STEP AWAY FROM THE DOORS SO OTHERS MAY ALIGHT THIS VEHICLE. STEP AWAY FROM THE DOORS. DOORS ARE CLOSING. DOORS ARE CLOSING. STEP AWAY FROM THE PLATFORM IF YOU CAN NOT ENTER. DOORS ARE CLOSING. DOORS ARE CLOSING. IF YOU CAN NOT BOARD THIS TRAIN THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE FOLLOWER. DOORS ARE CLOSING. THERE WILL BE ANOTHER TRAIN RIGHT BEHIND THIS ONE. BACK AWAY FROM THE PLATFORM FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY AND SO THE TRAIN MAY DEPART. BUT THERE WILL BE ANOTHER TRAIN RIGHT BEHIND ME. DEFINITELY. I THINK. TRUST ME, OK?

THE PASSENGERS BRACE THEMSELVES AGAINST THIS VILLAINOUS COLD WHILE MUTTERING WHAT MUST BE VITAL CODED MESSAGES.

MY TOES ARE REALLY BIG BUT THEY SKINNY TOES SO I CAN'T IMAGINE THEY WEIGHED MY WHOLE FOOT SKRRRRFFFT SHOULD GO AHEAD THEN AND SAID THAT I TRAVEL IS MY PASSION
COURDOROYS ^{I FEEL SO SMALL TODAY}
SO BRING MAYNO SO WHAT I'M SAYING IS HOW DO YOU TREAT A STAIN LIKE WHAT I'M SAYING IS NO THE THING IS YOU HAVE TO MAKE SURE WITH A STAIN LIKE THAT NO WAIT YES NO NOOOOOOPE UH-HUH GO AHEAD
WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS MAYBE DENIM THE THING ABOUT IT NO LIKE THIS NO LIKE THIS NOT LIKE THAT JUST DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT PLAID
THIS ANECDOTE SHOULD ILLUSTRATE HOW MUCH BETTER I AM THAN MOST PEOPLE
WHAT I'M SAYING IS NO WHAT I'M SAYING NO I TOLD YOU NO NO THATS NOT WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY AWW MAN YOU AREN'T EVEN LISTENING TO ME AT ALL ARE YOU

TO THE UNTRAINED EYE, IT'S ANOTHER TYPICAL WINTER DAY IN THIS MOST TYPICAL OF MIDWESTERN AMERICAN CITIES. BUT IF YOU TAKE A CLOSER LOOK, TRUE BELIEVERS, YOU'LL FIND THAT IT'S THE TYPICAL SCENES LIKE THESE THAT CAN CONTAIN THE STRANGEST STORIES OF ALL! FOR AMID THIS TRAIN FULL OF ORDINARY COMMUTERS YOU'LL FIND THE MOST AMAZING CHARACTER WE'VE EVER COME ACROSS. PREPARE YOURSELVES TO BE ASTOUNDED, CONFUNDED, AMUSED, BEMUSED OR AT LEAST HOPEFULLY A LITTLE DISTRACTED! WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT THE EPIC, TITANIC TALE WE LIKE TO CALL . . .

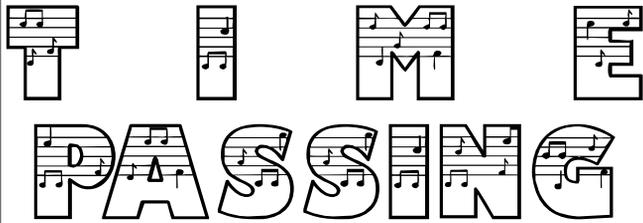
THE MAN WHO WENT TO WORK

OBSERVE AS HE SITS, UNMOVED BY THE FORCES OF CHAOS THAT SURROUND HIM!

HEMMEED IN BY OVERGROWN PEOPLE IN OVERCOATS, FORCED HALF OF HIS SEAT BY A MAN WITH A STANCE SO WIDE IT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS AGGRESSIVE. HEAD CONTINUALLY IMPERILED BY THE ARC OF A BARELY ATTENDED SHOULDER BAG SWINGING FROM ABOVE. SENSES ASSAULTED BY ODORS THAT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS CURIOUS UNDER THE MOST GENEROUS OF CIRCUMSTANCES (WHICH THESE ARE NOT) AND THE LINGERING GHOST OF GRAZED CONTACT ON THE BACK OF HIS HAND THAT FEELS LIKE IT MUST HAVE BEEN BUTT. STILL, HIS STEELY GAZE REMAINS UNDETTERED AS IT REMAINS FOCUSED ON THE PALE BLUE SCREEN IN HIS HAND.

OPINION PIECES ON THE MORALITY OF REMOTE CONTROL BATTLESHIPS. CELEBRITIES GETTING MARRIED. TIPS ON NAVIGATING A SHOPPING EXPEDITION IN LOGAN SQUARE. CELEBRITIES HAVING BABIES. ANALYSES ON THE FRAGMENTED POLITICAL CONSTITUENCIES IN THE COMMENTS SECTION OF A SITE FOR MEMBERS OF A FRAGMENT OF A CONSTITUENCY. CELEBRITIES TAKING NAKED PICTURES WITH THEIR PHONES. THINK PIECES. LOGAN SQUARE IS HAPPENING. ORAL HISTORIES ON THINK PIECES ON THE ORAL HISTORIES OF THINK PIECES. COMPLAINTS MASKED AS OPINIONS. BRIEF MENTIONS OF A SHOCKING NUMBER OF DEAD PEOPLE SOMEWHERE WHERE IS THAT AGAIN. CELEBRITIES HAVING BREAK UP SEX SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO. LOGAN SQUARE IS SO OVER ISN'T IT.

SUDDENLY, HIS COMPLETELY AVERAGE AUDITORY CAPACITIES CAN'T HELP BUT HEAR A RINGTONE!



GO... I'M ON THE TRAIN... YEAH. ON THE TRAIN. RIGHT NOW... NO... ON THE TRAIN. NO. LISTEN... YEAH. I TOLD YOU. AT BELMONT. NO. I AM ON THE TRAIN BUT I'M AT BELMONT... NO. ON THE TRAIN. NO. YEAH, NO. WHAT I TOLD YOU. I DON'T KNOW... ON THE TRAIN. YEAH, YEAH... UH-HUH. IN A MINUTE. RIGHT NOW. ON THE TRAIN.

HE BLOCKS IT OUT THE BEST HE CAN. BACK TO...

THE SITUATIONS BREWING IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MIDWEST. SHORT STORIES ABOUT SAD ADULTS BREWING TEA AND THINKING ABOUT THEIR DIVORCES. OH! THE STEAM COMING OUT OF THE KETTLE. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?* MANOUVERINGS, ACQUISITIONS, MERGERS AND OTHER WORDS THAT BANKS USE TO EXPLAIN THEMSELVES TO THE WORLD. COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE WEARING RED PINS TODAY. TOO MUCH. THE WHOLE WORLD FROM HIS FINGERTIPS BUT ALL IT DOES IS MAKE HIM FEEL SMALL. HE CAN'T FIND A THING TO READ THAT FEELS LIKE THE WORLD HE KNOWS.

But then, he muses, couldn't this train be the whole world. The woman nervously touching up her makeup before work its doomed celebrity. His seat partner its every day bully.

Come to think of it, quite a few people here as arguments for or against Logan Square as a neighborhood or concept. Certainly enough sad adults clutching paper coffee cups though it's not that hard to picture plenty of tea brewing in their past, present, future.

He pictures ethnographers years from now recording the oral history of this train ride and noting that yes that guy was on the train.

* BEATS US! --EDITORS

He wonders about this car's midwest, or its Middle East, where would they be?

Factions debating the morality of drone strikes on hobo corner at the back of the car. Surely there must be another way to confront these olfactory affronts. Continued strikes will only lead to new and deadlier smells in the future. But if we never address the root cause of inequality between the people in hobo corner and ...and shouldn't we talk about the standers vs the sitters? Is hobo corner just a distraction cooked up by the sitters to keep the standers scared?

AT THE HUNDRED BILLIONTH STOP, HIS REVERY IS SUDDENLY BROKEN BY A PACK OF CHILDREN.

THEY PUSH, THEY SHOUT, THEY SCREAM AS THEY FORCE THEIR WAY ONTO AN ALREADY CROWDED TRAIN. (WHERE DO THEY FIND THE ROOM?)

IT'S AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT ON THE PREVIOUSLY ONLY-MUSED SOVEREIGNTY OF THE TRAIN. WITH A HOOT AND A HOLLER THE TRAIN IS THEIRS!

A WAVE OF TENSION WASHES OVER THE PASSENGERS.

THEY SAY NOTHING, THEY LOOK TO THE FLOOR, THEY GRIT THEIR TEETH, MAYBE THEY LIVE TWEET IT, BUT THEY SAY NOTHING. EVERY SCREECH, EVERY CACKLE, EVERY SHOVE IS GREETED BY A HUNDRED SILENT WINCES. SOMEONE SHOULD SAY SOMETHING. SOMETHING THAT REQUIRES TACT AND UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES COMMUTERS AND, AND ARE THEY EVEN STUDENTS? AS THE TRAIN RIDE TEETERS ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL ANNOYANCE SOMEONE MUST TAKE A STAND. IS THIS OUR HERO'S MOMENT TO SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID WITH THE GRACE, DIGNITY, AND WISDOM WITH WHICH IT NEEDS TO BE SAID?

IF YOU ANIMALS DO NOT SHUT UP RIGHT NOW I WILL CALL MY COP BUDDIES AND THEY WILL PLANT ALL THE DRUGS ON YOU AND YOU CAN JOIN YOUR PARENTS IN JAIL.

A SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE AND MOSTLY CONTINUED AWKWARD SILENCE FROM THE PASSENGERS. THE KIDS MUTTER, BUT THEY'RE GONE AT THE NEXT STOP.

Our hero can't tell what part of this affair is the most troubling: the obvious, without saying that one word, racial overtones of the exchange or his own silence, confirmation of the notion he's had that if it came down to some real-life Snowpiercer type situation it would be Wide-stance over here running the show. He's also a bit worried about being considered an asshole by proximity for the rest of the ride. Has it ruined his imaginary shot with Makeup Girl?

JUST AS ONE THREAT TO THE COMMUTE PASSES ANOTHER REARS ITS UGLY HEAD.

THE TRAIN SUDDENLY BUCKLES AND STOPS, THEN STARTS AGAIN, THEN STOPS AND CONTINUES TO NOT MOVE. APPARENTLY BEEP BEEP BEEP THIS TRAIN IS EXPERIENCING AN EQUIPMENT FAILURE. THE DRIVER IS OFF THE TRAIN PERFORMING MAINTENANCE. BEEP BEEP BEEP. THE PASSENGERS GROAN. THEY COUGH. THEY SNIFFLE. HIS NEIGHBOR DECIDES IT'S TIME TO RELAX AND SOMEHOW MANAGES TO TAKE UP EVEN MORE OF THE SEAT. THE WOMAN STOPS APPLYING MAKEUP AND BEGINS TO TEXT SOMEONE FRANTICALLY, UNTIL SHE REALIZES THERE IS NO RECEPTION UNDERGROUND. THE AIR GROWS STALER.

A TRAIN SPEEDS BY IN THE OTHER DIRECTION, PROVIDING A WINDOW INTO SOME BEAUTIFUL MIRROR UNIVERSE WHERE TRAINS MOVE WHEN THEY SAID THEY WILL.

EVERYONE IS SMILING AND FULL OF JOY. WIDE-STANCE IS LOOKING AROUND FOR AN OLD LADY OR PREGNANT WOMAN TO OFFER HIS SEAT UP TO MAKEUP GIRL DOESN'T NEED MAKEUP IN THIS TRAIN CAR. SHE'S LOOKING INTRIGUED AND RADIANT, THOUGH OF COURSE THE MEN ONLY GAZE AT HER WITH APPRECIATION AND RESPECT. AND OUR HERO HAS ORGANIZED THE KIDS TOGETHER, THEY'RE GOING THROUGH THE TRAIN PICKING UP TRASH AND HELPING EACH OTHER WITH THEIR HOMEWORK.

Matt Carmichael

lives in Chicago, IL. His writing has appeared in the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Gravel*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *The Eckleburg Review*, and *After Hours Press*, among other places.



"The Streets Run Red" by Adel Souto

Acapulco Nightclub

by Matt Carmichael

There are black metal bars
in the windows and neon
green city stickers
keeping the door
sealed shut

but paradise is still
painted on the sign
above the entrance.
A beach scene. A seagull
suspended

in flight over warm sand.
Palm trees and orange flowers,
a sailboat on the ocean.
Saltwater. Paradise.
Life's a beach.

An empty cardboard canister
of Quaker Oats
rocks in the doorway.
Make a small boat of it
and pray

for a day with heavy rain,
when grocery store weeklies
clog the sewer intakes
and the streets flood with
the bright red ink

of those *on-sale-only-*
ninety-nine-cents-
per-pound-
red-ripe-tomatoes
-on-the-vine.

Sail that soggy canister
of easy pour oats
down Fullerton Avenue
as far as it will take you
before it dissolves.

Drink and dance
to Latin beats
underneath the sand,
intoxicated and swimming into
clean early morning streets,

bodies pulsing with lust
and still the pull
of the music's undertow,
the goodnight kiss of the club's
neon lights,

the buzz that comes
with a drink bought by
a stranger, the hope
of a drink bought for
someone new.

Paradise. That seagull still
suspended in flight,
stuck, until somebody gets around
to scraping the paint off of
everything.

About the Artist

Adel Souto

Selected Works

Adel Souto is a Cuban-born artist, writer, and musician, currently living in Brooklyn. He has written for his own fanzines, and has contributed work to numerous magazines, fanzines, and websites. He has released several books, including a “best of”, and a chapbook on the subject of a 30-day vow of silence, and has translated the works of Spanish poets. His work, both art and photography, has shown in galleries throughout the U.S., Europe, and South America. His music videos have been screened at NYC’s Anthology Film Archives, and he has lectured on the subject of occult influences in photography at NYU’s Steinhardt School of Culture. He also produces the public access tv show, *Brooklyn’s Alright*, and is heavily involved with his musical outfit, 156.



“The Streets Run Red” by Adel Souto

Curbside Splendor

www.curbsidesplendor.com

