

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sky. A bright, circular light source, likely the sun or moon, is positioned in the lower-left quadrant. It is partially hidden by a large, dark, and textured cloud formation that dominates the center of the image. The sky around the light source is a pale, hazy blue-grey, while the cloud itself is a deep, almost blackish-grey with some internal texture visible. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

The Despair Express

solidad decosta

The Despair Express

solidad decosta

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Furthermore, large green slugs will invade your dreams if you so much as even think about fucking with me. Which btw, is also fiction. (The green slugs part).

In a lot of ways, my feeling about someone's work is that it speaks for itself, and if it bothers you, stop reading. However, unlike some people who think so-called free speech (frequently of the unilateral, "only I get to speak" variety) is sacrosanct beyond all else, there's such a thing as getting actually fucking triggered. Sorry-not-sorry, bros.

Trigger warnings: furry kink, insurrection, cannibalism, cults, drugs, ritual sacrifice, satanism, physical abuse, body horror, lawlessness, revenge. If this kind of thing – and "outsider art" overall – isn't your thing? Tread carefully, or not at all, it's cool. Take care of yourself, dear reader.

Write to the nightmares you've survived and are surviving, my beloveds. Actual, imagined or both.

Until all are free.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| So I had this dream last night..... | 5 |
| My life as a piano..... | 6 |
| Enragés Simulation, Fully Operational..... | 9 |
| Thief..... | 10 |
| The Runner..... | 13 |
| Scar City..... | 14 |
| Satan's Little Helper..... | 30 |
| All things rise and fall..... | 31 |
| Four microfictions, here you go. You're welcome..... | 38 |
| Meal..... | 39 |
| Brood..... | 40 |

So I had this dream last night

A landlord took our stove, leaving this gaping hole in the wall. This meant mice in the apartment, two of them. One grayish-black, ashy — one white. The white one stayed behind the walls, but the gray one wouldn't go away.

So I pulled out tape, newspaper, some cut cardboard and get to work. Gray kept looking over the top, running over the bottom. Jumping over the cardboard! Chewing through the barrier.

Sigh.

I was starting to get annoyed — I didn't relish the thought of killing Gray. I grabbed a brown paper grocery bag, threw Gray in it, and drove. To my job. At a bank.

I plopped Gray in a duct-like tube adjacent to my cramped office — not that different than the one where I found him. Then he came back, with a silver coin in his mouth. I took it, then he scurried down the tube again, and came back. 5s, then 20s, then 100 dollar bills. Then he went for entire billfolds.

So Gray was now my new buddy. Who knew?

Moral? Always trust the underground.

#

My life as a piano

Melody Jones walked on the beach, the waves dancing in and out of her brindled toes, trying to figure out what exactly to do. She had been walking back and forth on the beach for the last hour, watching the light expand and contract on the horizon. She came out here when the pressures of performing, touring and trying to make money were too much. No one knew she came here, and no one was about to know, either. She worried about people recognizing her, but most of the folks here were more concerned with surfing (the bands, the boards, the babes, the drama) than anything that was going on with her.

She had won the competition two years ago, and as a result, was signed to a fairly prestigious label – not the best, but by no means the worst. She had spent the last 100 days playing every symphony hall her agent could find for her, and the money was starting to come in, and along with it, attention, as well as a loss of control.

Despite this, the people around her were as happy as mollusks in mating season. Her parents were proud, her agent was ecstatic – and she was thinking about quitting. It wasn't that she hated playing – she loved playing. What she couldn't stand though were the people – the obnoxious, pretentious, full of themselves people. Sometimes, people would accuse her of the same, but that was just them trying to control her, she thought to herself. It was as if they had control of her every move – what she wore, who she hung out with, even what she played. Who would have thought that classical musicians had entire crews of handlers, hangers-on, and groupies? All of which made her wonder why she didn't just become a rock star instead – if you're going to have to deal with all the pitfalls of being famous, you may as well get some of the glory.

Not being able to control the people who were trying to control her, she focused on herself. In an effort to get a handle on all the feelings all of this packaging, promotion, and pretension was bringing up, she had started labeling her desires. As she walked back towards the entrance to the beach, Desire 46 (unbridled desire), Desire 92 (artistic perfection) and Desire 19 (sexual fantasy) decided to wage a threefold attempt to get her to submit to their individual preferences about her future.

Desire 46 wanted her to rock out, bring down the house, make Van Cliburn's worm-infested skull explode. Desire 92 wanted her to take both her talents and her career seriously, and all Desire 19 wanted for her was to get laid. Repeatedly, and with as many people as possible.

Desire 46 whispered in her ear, *Fuck them. Who do they think they are? Sell the piano, hell, sell the house while you're at it. Better yet, torch the place for the insurance money, buy a guitar and a Harley with the proceeds and really show 'em who's boss.*

Shut up, she silently told Desire 46. *I need to figure this out for myself, I don't even own the house, and besides, I'm not about to go to jail just to make you happy.*

Desire 92 started in. *My dear, you are a classically-trained, world-renowned, spellbinding pianist. You really should be home practicing, not contemplating things that you know are going to do nothing but damage to your career – and besides, playing guitar? Please. Who are you, Eddie Van Franco? Jimi Etheridge? Grow up.*

You shut up too, you pompous jerk! I'll do what I want with my 23 year old self.

Then Desire 53 set in. *You remember the one with the great body? You really should have slept with her. Why? I hear she's a great lover, that's why. Why, one time, she had three men, four women, and if I may be candid – may I be candid?*

No, said Melody flatly.

Well then, I'll be brief. I've heard stories that there was a goat involved – a live, bleating, and very willing goat. Now –

Ew! Bestiality, seriously? I don't even like girls! I think.

Desire 53 purred, *That's not what I hear. Aren't you a furry? I think you're a furry.*

Wait, what? Quit it! All of you.

There's nothing wrong with being a furry, dear.

Melody sighed and did her best to tune Desire 53, and the rest of them, out. If needed, she had an entire arsenal of Charles Ives sonatas committed to memory, for situations like this. How to even tell all the people invested in her future about the ongoing, apparently sentient, narratives inside her head? Well, you don't, that's what. Are they aliens? Selves?

Demons? Angels? Past memories? Who knows. Shit had been very weird since first contact, and this was just yet another example.

The waves lapped at the frayed tips of her shoplifted-on-a-dare, unnaturally faded jeans.

The desires continued to raise a cacophonous din, which she ignored.

She pulled her shoes out of her bag and threw them into the ocean.

She walked back to her car and drove onto the highway.

She drove up to the record label and parked her car, a green subcompact with fading upholstery and no CD player. She walked up to the reception desk in her bare feet and damp-edged jeans.

Before the usual hellos commenced, she said in her most terse, I-mean-business voice,

“I quit.”

That got their attention. People kept talking over her, so she yelled, “Don't you all get it? I quit!”

People – more powerful people – were called, and much commotion followed.

“You can't quit! What about your career?”

“You're much too good a player to give up – let all the other fools who are going to quit anyway pack up their bags. Not you. Definitely not you.”

“I won't allow it, and that's all there is to it.”

“No, I don't think you heard me. I said, I quit.”

“But-but-but-”

Desire 53 murmured, *Remember the goat, that's all I'm saying.*

Fine then, you screw the goat.

Without saying another word, she left the building, got in her car and drove away.

Enragés Simulation, Fully Operational

When I first showed up in the hills, I thought the revolution was going to happen tomorrow. Little did I know that not only wasn't it going to be that simple, but that the big grand orgasmic General Strike, Paris 1968, LA 1992, Seattle 1999 kind of release seemed to happen spontaneously only once in a generation. The rest of the time, it was work to make it happen. Wait, that's a lie, LA and Seattle happened nine years apart. And what about autonomists in 1970s Italy, the fall of apartheid South Africa, and worker collectives in Argentina? So much for liberal-based gradual change.

Nevertheless, the hard work to set shit off did seem to pay off, if you would trust it enough to find its own way. We kept releasing cats, and they kept fucking shit up. The best part though is that the cats seemed more or less happy with it all. Wouldn't you be, if you were a cat? Whoever engineered feline enhancement was taking a big damn risk though, and we all seemed to know it, even if we didn't talk about it much. Maybe they'd all mutate at some point, and just eat us all for dinner one night. That would definitely be a shift in the game plan. Surprise, you're dinner. Get used to it.

#

Thief

I wonder if our world was designed by the person who made those kid's books where you can stick the head of a giraffe on the torso of a lion and the legs of a postal worker. At least, that's the way my world seems to be. Mix and match, 24/7. For example: in this gloriously late capitalist world of ours, you're a black latina indigenous lesbian former delivery truck driver turned recovering sex worker and ghetto fabulous amateur drunk/pothead, but you could just as easily be a femme Pilipino leather daddy with a nine inch uncut cock and a boa constrictor in your living room, or an Irish illegal immigrant taxi cab driver in a death metal band with an IRA past and a collection of handcuffs in your trunk. I'm more or less of the same stock, although my main addiction of choice appears to be addicts, and I'd rather be an indigenous budding rock star dealing guns and sex toys out of the back of her gypsy cab than a "who knows what race I am" formerly adopted, finally legal runaway lesbian with a lover whose true love is the couch. Which is where you sit right now, as I'm staring at you, silent, trying not to roll my eyes.

After you picked me up and let me crash, a few days turned into a week, and then we slept together. Back then, I thought the world of you, once we warmed up to each other. Now, you're still my lover, at least in theory – but these days, you could just as easily be my roommate, my best friend or a trick from five years ago that I can't seem to get out of my mind or my bed.

I'm almost 30 now. My life seems to run in somewhere around five year increments. You used to be this glorious butch delivery driver with a wicked sense of humor. You're on long-term disability now because you fucked up your back, and spend most days on the couch, smoking pot and watching TV. The only time you laugh is when you're too high to care about how fucked up your world has become. As for me, the spikes and dyed hair gave way to corporate casual, and my life on the road had slowly mutated into life behind a desk until I got laid off two years ago. I still love you, but most days, I'm not sure why I like you, and I suspect the same is true of you. Things seem to keep us together, like high rents and the hope of sex. We're such a cliché at times, two lesbians

together after fuck knows how many years, never quite getting to much more than a functional filling of bed space.

So here I am, fifteen years, four months, thirteen days and seventeen hours after you picked me up on the side of the road. It's after work, some day, any day – and there you are, on the couch. You've been parked there since you got laid off, your former get-up-and-go having transformed itself into pure, unfettered sloth. Some people would say that this is because you're brown, or because you're queer, or because you're a woman. That's all bullshit. You're slothful because you're tired, bored and in a fuckload of pain. You try juggling cramps from hell, no job, and a lover who secretly wants to leave you, but can't because she still, well, kinda loves you, I guess, sure, whatever – um, can we change the subject, please? You'd definitely be a slug on a bug in a rug too.

I look at the bag of money. The newest theory about criminals is that we do what we do because we are so convinced that what we are doing is right, that we can't envision the consequences of our actions. Personally, I think that's bullshit too. I had been planning it for months – I would sneak up on the driver when he took the money from this gallery that was selling paintings as a cover for running drugs – and run like hell while you created a diversion. I would then head to a hotel off outside of the city somewhere, disarm the dye bomb in the bathtub, and then you and me, we would take off together. Everything went according to plan, there were no witnesses, and I was – we were – home free. Not bad for my first job.

The only problem is that I never told you about any of this.

You holler, *What is this really about? You want to quit your job or something? Get a promotion? Screw the manager? Kill the boss? Why the fuck did you do this, baby?*

I almost make the mistake of getting mad, then pull it back in.

Sweetie –

Oh, oh, oh – look. Fuck it. You're done. Get out.

I –

Can I watch TV now?

I didn't – well, I – um, sure, I –

Good. Leave the keys on the way out.

You throw yourself down into the worn folds of your throne. The TV is now on. I may as well be dead.

I was going to give you half, you know.

You say nothing.

I pack the money into a bag and slam the door on my way out.

#

The Runner

She found him in the snow. It looked as if he had been running – his trademark track pants and world-renowned long-distance shoes were still on him.

He was in bad shape though. Contusion to the head, small animal bites over various parts of his body.

Half-dead. to be sure. She could revive him, though.

#

Scar City

I say hi at the front, up the elevator, down the hall, get some coffee. Put away my bag, lock it (thefts have been reported), sit at my desk. I surf the internet for 10 minutes, then go through what's in my in box. Three letters, two memos and a report, all due by the end of the day. I look around my office – piles of papers, two reports in my in-box that I'm avoiding. Other than that, the walls are blank. Eight hours of this shit – at least I'm going to be busy. There's rumors of layoffs, as always – but nothing firm yet. I'd love to get laid off, but I'm not really a fan of being broke and unemployed. So much for freedom, but at least I can wander the city over the weekend.

Oh well, time to get to work.

Knock, knock. I look up.

The henchman for the bosses' bosses' boss. This is never good.

Can you come with me?

I give him a look. A couple of people walk by, but they don't make eye contact.

“Why?”

He looks back. Emotionless.

Mr. Jenkins wants to see you.

I stand up and grab a notepad and pen.

Oh, you won't need that.

I grab the pad anyway.

Suit yourself.

We walk through the maze of cubicles, to the elevator. Ninth floor.

I wave to Sally – we were on some team for something another a few months ago and sort of hit it off. She looks away.

We keep wandering through the maze, and eventually end up at the big boss' office. He has these huge windows, along with pictures of his kids and several books on computer programming.

He says, *Sit down.*

I sit. The henchman stands by the door.

After some rather painful consideration...

I think I'm about to be let go.

...we are going through a series of drastic cutbacks..

Cutbacks? Yes, I'm through here. I need to go file for unemployment tomorrow.

...and while its an unfortunate loss, we think you'll find the severance package quite generous.

Wait. Severance pay? They never used to give anybody severance pay. What?

That'll be all. Frank will go over the paperwork with you. Good luck.

You stand up and extend your hand. I stand up and extend mine. Your hand has a semper fi ring on it.

As you try to break my hand with your grip, I look into your eyes. You seem way too soft to possibly have been in the military. Maybe you drink yourself to sleep at night.

I walk out with the henchman, then turn down the hall to another room. I sign a pile of papers.

You'll have fifteen minutes, and security will escort you out.

I pack my things. People come by to say their goodbyes, and Sylvia down the hall brings me flowers. I start to cry, then pull it together.

John from front desk security shows up.

Here we go, I say. I pick up my box.

Let me get that for you.

We walk out to the front of the building.

Are you going too?

He shrugs.

Not this round, but our division is up next.

Well, I hope it works out for you.

God willing. Best of luck to you, OK?

Thanks.

I look out. Sky, trees, real air.

Am I free?

I think I'm free.

First impulse: head for the hills, but then I see you sitting there outside the building. You're crying. From the looks of things, you just got laid off as well. I think about walking over, then decide better.

I'm at the edge of company property. It's a struggle to keep my work mask on until I get out of sight. I'm not quite sure why I'm bothering – it's not as if security is going to jump out of the well-manicured bushes and grab my severance check away. *Ah-HA! Caught you, dissident faker!* Not likely.

I walk down the street, then turn a corner away from the building. My mask starts to drop, and I don't know if I should cry, laugh, scream or all of the above. I walk instead. I walk through empty streets, up the hill, and up further. I think to myself, *Am I going to join them?* And then I force that thought out of my head.

I keep walking, and eventually end up in the hills. I get to a vista point. No one is here. Not the lover's lane cuties who think its cool to make out in the back seat at the top of the world. Not the junior thugs who can't cut it in the lowlands, so they come here to beat up tourists. Nobody.

I look out to the city. It seems to sprawl out indefinitely. Large swaths of industry spread like fabric to the right, while to the left, steel spirals up and fingers the sky. I think I can see my apartment building. Not sure, though.

I start to howl. All the pain that I feel down into the insides of the soles of the callouses on the backside of my feet, comes rushing out in one big thud.

Then? Silence. It enshrouds me and brings simplicity and calm to my beating, raging, pulsing bloodshot eyeball of a mind. I feel like I could crawl into earth and warm myself in the folds of crust beneath the surface.

It used to infuriate me how everything is concrete – and it still does, but the amazing thing about cities is that eventually the concrete just becomes part of the earth. It's almost as if I can feel a pair of outstretched arms reaching up from the soil and taking in the asphalt. Sometimes, I can feel myself reaching down past the sidewalk as much as the earth reaches up through the cracks to greet me. It's like being in love, but without the drama.

I leave the hills and walk the rest of the way home. When I get to my apartment, I throw down my bag, tear off all my clothes and go to sleep. I dream that someone burned it all down. The world is empty, except for us. We'll probably starve to death eventually, but perhaps not. I find myself wishing I felt guilty about the demise of planet Earth, or at least the demise of humanity – but I don't. I feel happier than I have in a long time. Alive. Free.

I wake up.

I put on a jacket and go for a walk in the December air. I deposit the check, then go to the park the next neighborhood over.

I sense someone looking at me. It's my friend, Viagra – she's a tall, lanky performance artist with a lively, jumpy corgi that barks at great danes eight times her size.

“I'm leaving the country.”

Her body is calm, but her words are tense.

“Really?”

“Yes. Because I think there’s no hope for change in this country anymore, and yes, the president will be re-elected, not that it matters anymore, so we’re leaving and we’re serious and by the way, have you thought about how you would escape if they seal the borders after the next attack? You should. I’m moving to the Czech Republic, you could join me! It’d be fabulous!”

Her body is calm, but her words are tense. Her dog is jumpy and barks at great danes eight times her size.

“Mildred! Settle down.”

Sometimes I feel like that damn dog, nipping at the heels of whatever.

“Gotta go, sweetie. Kiss.”

I walk over a couple of blocks to the shopping strip. God, it's so gentrified on this street. Designer poodle boutiques. \$50 mac and cheese. Faux fetish wear – daring but not too daring – in the building that used to house the real deal. The people on the street here are nothing like folks in my old neighborhood – it’s all designer clothes and sculpted bodies, mostly gay men, although an alarming number of double-income hang-on-before-the-crash skywardly mobile breeding unit types parade their name brand infants around, and nobody raises an eyebrow. As this is a fancier neighborhood than my old one, it’s got more cops. They seem to breed like rats – every couple of minutes, another squad car, but more and more, the cops are on foot. Down the way a bit, it’s more like every five minutes, they flash their lights or turn on the “whoop-whoop”. And every half an hour, it’s a fire truck or an ambulance – and none of them get out of their cars unless they have to. Here though, they want to make sure that nobody’s shopping high gets compromised, so they just make a show of getting rid of homeless people on foot, and keep the sirens silent for the most part. I bet if the cops shot a panhandler on the sidewalk, at least one of these upwardly mobile jerks would applaud.

I stare in the window of a trendy cafe. Yuppies, tourists, looky-loos. Great. I retreat into my thoughts.

Leaving? Now there's an option – but with what money? What if I get stuck, get sick, get held at the border? Focus. Where would you go?

Amsterdam. Amsterdam? Naah, too many hash-baked hippies. Portugal? Maybe. Libya? Sure, but how the hell would I get there, and how the hell would I get out if I need to leave?

I glance over at the TV inside the cafe – more news about the so-called terrorists up in the now-barren hills.

People are starting to stare back, so I move on.

We are a community of artists, visionaries and concerned individuals, said the official spokesperson for whatever they are at the official press conference for whoever cared to show up, conveniently shown at 3 AM, on public access. On a Wednesday. *We are doing nothing wrong, and we will not be intimidated by anybody*. She seemed focused and extremely intense, but relaxed, calm, like someone who knows exactly what they're doing, and fuck all as to anybody else. They sounded like my kind of people, but fuck, living in the hills with the cops on your ass? No thanks.

That's what I keep telling myself. What I really want to do is go join them.

Eventually, I wind my way home, and fall asleep as soon as I hit the mattress. In my dream, someone shakes me out of sleep and leads me to this large field where several drunk punks are dancing to a bluegrass band. I feel the kind of discomfort coming on that is unique to being the only one that isn't white in a roomful of rednecks – and yet, I feel at home. A woman (let's call her Pippi) grabs my arm and leads me into the center of the circle, where we start to dance and the music changes to some fusion between hardcore hip-hop and an Irish fiddle tune. Everybody looks confused, except for Pippi, who is the only one left dancing. She looks around the circle of folks and yells, *What?* while we stare at her. She walks out of the circle, twists my nipple and walks out of the circle into the entryway for a Mexican bullfighting stadium. She comes out in a matadora costume and the field surrounding us is now the center of a stadium. We make out while a bull sleeps next to us and the crowd up in the bleachers alternates between cheering and booing.

Morning. I look around – where did the field go? Oh. Right.

I throw on some clothes and a coat, out the door, down the steps, walking over the puddle of piss that someone left last night. I take a stroll to a nearby cafe to calm my nerves, which are still frayed.

On the street, in my neighborhood. Picture if you will more hustlers, pimps, alcoholics (both dry and wet), prostitutes, johns, and playas than you can shake a stick at, then add several Asian markets, numerous gonna save the world any day now crusaders, and the occasional yuppie that wasn't ground up in the capitalist meat market during the last big thud. Welcome, and would you like some black tar heroin with your foie gras and organic green onion pancakes? Number of times I'm asked if I want to fuck in the space of a block? Three. Number of times someone tries to sell me drugs? Two. Number of drama-laden incidents, with me weaving my way around them while they try to fight, argue, steal, something? Several.

After almost being run over a couple of times while I'm crossing the road, I walk through the door of the café. I look around and I see my self reflected back in the eyes of the coffee jock, the students, the old men with knotty pine hands that wrap around cups of lukewarm appropriation and carry on about the intricate details of something important, as if they had control over it, a means to pass the time, to distract, to divide self against divided other. The conversations swirl around the room:

“Well, it's kinda amazing that he's mayor given how corrupt this town is, you'd think someone would figure out it's all rigged and do something about it.”

“I'm a Republican, and that's what we do, we slit the throats of our opponents.”

“Do you remember Johnny? He's been living in Prague for 10 years, making art in a squat, imagine that.”

“I remember back in 1968, now that was a year...”

It's like a sport, but mostly what lingers is sadness and a palpable unwillingness to act. I love this café, but it always makes me long for things I haven't experienced — the sixties, revolution, the very real possibility of expatriation. It all weighs down on me, and yet I keep coming back.

As I order a tea, two cops are pacing the floor like they're strung out, but trying to hide it. Why on earth are they so jittery? Did the caffeine IV break down? The donut trough not get filled this morning?

One of them stares at me, slack-jawed – oh crap, am I busted? For what? I don't have anything outstanding that would get me thrown in jail, but if they really want to take me in...

I stare back at him and blink exactly once. He keeps staring — I'm not sure if he's embarrassed for staring me down and his gaze is fixed in position, or if he's thinking about whether or not I'm the one they're looking for.

He breaks eye contact. Whew. He's done with me, at least.

The barista – thick around the eyes, light black skin, always looks tired, usually looks bored – hands me my tea. I sit down close to the counter, in order to digest what is happening.

Answers come quickly. Someone has called in a death threat to the newly elected republicrat mayor on the café's pay phone. They apparently called up the police station, which happens to be a block away, and the two twitchy cops showed up to file a report.

The cops are still pacing around the cafe. Whoever called in the threat, the tendrils of the security state are all them. The surveillance tape recorded their face, the cops traced his phone conversation, and now two patrol cops have showed up in person. They must not view it as that serious, otherwise they would've called a SWAT team. They're waiting in the hopes that he's clueless enough, or high enough, to show back up.

The cop starts playing four hundred questions with the guy behind the counter.

“What did he look like? What was he wearing? Did he seem intoxicated?”

Out comes the paperwork. The guy behind the counter stammers for a minute when the cops ask him what race he is. I imagine the cop's breath curling up into spirals of opium smoke.

The cop asks what the counter guy's race is. He hesitates.

“My dad is white, my mom is black.”

The cop laughs nervously — *I have to ask, ha ha* — while he scribbles on a form. Jesus. Fuck this cop asshole double.

The guy who called in the bomb threat shows up. Wrap around glasses, bleached hair, yellow coat with “I’m a tweaker” written on it. He looks like a cross between a washed-out surfer and a washed-out rock star. He’s toast. One cop cuffs him, while the other one takes the Mr. Tweaker’s jacket. The other cop holds up Mr. Tweaker’s coat to the coffee jock and says, *This look familiar?* The coffee jock nods gently. The cop snorts in disgust at Mr. Tweaker’s addiction of choice. He quietly hisses, *This is bullshit.*

The tweaker doesn’t put up a fight.

Once the cops are gone, all the pent-up conversations break free.

“I can’t believe he showed back up.”

“Yeah man, you never do that.”

We shake our heads. The wandering sheep heads off to slaughter, while the rest of us esteemed caffeine patrons are left to graze the commons for yet another day.

Our bodies blur. We’re all one person now, one big steaming wad of multicolored spit, all of it illegal as sin on Sunday in the fifties. I imagine bureaucrats in wing-tip shoes dishing out death in mandatory soup kitchens. I imagine flu and smallpox vaccines that mark and trace our DNA like cattle.

I wonder when they’re are going to finally get it all over with and just arrest or kill everybody. Or at least everybody I love.

That's when I see you sitting at a table, alone – buzz cut hair, army boots, fatigues – and a flower print dress.

I try not to, but I have this thing for punks, hippies, pretty much anybody who's an outsider. Just when you think that all they’re ever going to do is listen to the same music over and over and manufacture drama all around them, they do something amazing. Like do-it-yourself genetic engineering, or making insulin out of kombucha water (that actually works and is safe), or something. Perhaps it's all the years I spent doing drudge work in some seemingly endless stream of high rises, startups, corporations. All singing,

all dancing, all incredibly numbing. I need to run off and join the circus – but the circus keeps running off and finding me instead.

I walk over.

“Do you mind if I join you? The old-timers and their conspiracy talk is starting to give me a rash.”

She moves your stuff over. I sit down.

“Thanks.”

“Not a problem.”

I look at the book you're reading. *Assata*.

I lean over and whisper, “Isn't that illegal now? I mean, the book.”

You beam and whisper back, “I stole it from the reference room at the public library.”

You wave a library security tag back and forth, before you slip it back in your bag.

“Keepin' it for conversation's sake. And research.”

“Oh. Cool.”

She thinks for a moment.

“Wanna get out of here?”

“Definitely.”

We end up making out in a far corner of the park. Viagra jogs by with her dog, and makes a quick thumbs up as she passes by.

Afterwards, we talk.

“You should join us.”

“Us?”

“Us. The folks up in the hills.”

I look at her sideways, then laugh.

“You are so making that up.”

“Am not.”

She kisses me, then stands up, and gathers herself together.

“Three miles up the main trail, 7.9 miles northeast, then look for the gate with the pussy door knocker.”

She gives me a quick peck on the cheek, then walks away.

I don't follow.

It's a month later, and I should be looking for work. (I'm not.) Unemployment agrees with me, and unemployment with severance pay agrees with me all the more. I decide to stay out all night. I end up tracking through most of the city until nightfall, and then I see this mob coming towards me.

They're a bunch of kids, dressed in black hoodies and cargo pants, and wearing face masks. They stop in front of a gourmet cheese shop, and one of them pulls out a slab of plastic clay molded to look like a cheese wedge, and throws it at the window of the cheese shop. Several of them do the same. It bounces off the window, then somebody else picks it up and throws it again. Every time one of the hunks of clay hits, it makes this gentle “ppppppnnng” sound, so when several of them hit at once, it sounds like hummingbird chatter.

They start to move on to their next target, a designer boutique. I decide to follow them. I'm not exactly sure why I'm doing this: I mean, I'm nearly 30 years old. Why am I running again with a bunch of street kids, hurling foam at windows. Because I like it, I suppose. Truth? I want them to ditch the foam and pick up rocks instead. Truth? I want them to burn the building down and make compost out of its ashes. Truth? I wish I was on top of the building as it collapsed, because maybe then I would know what the purpose of my life is.

Or maybe I'd just be dead.

We move on – the crowd is starting to get more rowdy, and we’re being followed by a mob of cops. They seem like they’re ready to beat us up at a moment’s notice, but the lure of hurtling rocks and broken glass is too much for a few folks to resist. Before you know it, windows are smashed and we’re running as fast as we can. I’m too young to feel young again, but too old to care about things that reek of high school – and yet, here I am, running through the streets, dodging cops and knife-shaped shards amongst stray pieces of foam. I barely escape into an alley.

There’s one of you in the alleyway. You look at me – your eyes are brimming with humor and desire. You push me against the wall, hard. I feel your body pressing into mine, your mound melting into mine underneath layers of dirty beachcombers and the hoodie tied around your waist. You pull down your mask and grab me – we both fall into an alcove, safely tucked away from the gaze of the cops. You reach your hand down my jeans and plant a couple of fingers on my clit. I let out a gasp. You smile and run your fingers through my hair, then grab a fistful of it and pull my head back. You gently bite me on the neck, and take off.

It’s just past two, and I’m walking through a sea of drunk hipsters. Invisible clouds of second hand smoke and bad perfume wash over me, then I turn the corner and keep walking.

I walk up towards the next neighborhood. The street is quiet – there’s only one or two bars in the area, and all the cafés and restaurants are closed, save for a couple of all night diners.

I see someone spray painting a corporate coffee shop – they see me and run off. I see a couple of dykes in tank tops and camo pants turning over an SUV, then setting it on fire. I see a group of burly, bearded men in tutus running a battering ram into a bank and smashing the glass of the ATM machines.

And then? They’re all gone.

I walk back home. I fall off to sleep. In my dream, I’m the female MC for a hip hop band, but most of the players are white. One of them decides to confront me. “I think your music is gay,” he smirks out between “dare you” lips. So I spin into this vortex of confusion – throttle him, or let it go? It seems to hold me for a while, and finally I pin

him down while I lecture him about the proper use of the word. Gay? Fuck you, I'm a lesbian.

Then I'm with my old lover. We're not in a rut – you apologize, we kiss, we go to our bedroom. We make love, and afterwards, we rest next to each other, sweaty, hopeful. Our bodies wove with words into possible hopes of freedom. Our lives are fulfilling, you love your work, and your back has healed up. I work at a library, and plot seditious things with seditious people.

When I wake up, nothing is remotely like this.

I wonder: Am I a criminal? Is everything illegal?

If everything is illegal, does that mean everything is permitted?

It's over.

It's all over.

No more news anchors and late nights while the paint on the wall rises in value. It's all over for hedonism, street surrealism, and any possibility of changing the beast from inside its belly. Welcome to the New Chaos, enjoy your stay. Unfasten your seat belt. Wake the kids up. Puncture your air bags. Blow it all up. It's over.

I wake up thinking about when the building across the street caught fire. 30 foot flames, courtesy of a clueless landlord who hit a gas main in the foundation.

I go to the beat-up dresser I got at a garage sale. Another glorious day in the Anti-people's anti-republic of fuck everything.

Then it hits me: I'm ready.

What do I need to go live in the hills? Money. More warm socks. Food. Back pack? Yes, that too. Mental note: surplus store. No, screw that, I'm alright for now. Warm coat? What I'm wearing will do. Done.

Sort of excited, sort of scared out of my wits.

I lock up the apartment, then head on up.

It's dry and cold. As I get further up, there's some vegetation here and there, but mostly it's barren. I see this rabbit dart across a path, then a snake jumps out and grabs it mid-leap. It starts to eat it. I decide not to watch.

I climb to the top. You can see most of the city from here, including the tip of where the compound is.

The city itself is amazing, even as it slowly falls apart. There is no future here, if what you're looking for is a refined, selectively compassionate, democratic but not too democratic, United Europa kind of future. Unfortunately, that's not really the future of anywhere else either. The looming chaos is already on us, and was in draft form before we were born, just like this park was, mud and all.

It's a new moon, and it's very, very dark. It looks like there's yet another blackout down in the city, and I can actually see some stars.

And then, I see several pairs of eyes. Damn. The cats have found me. There's this rumor about them around the cafés – some government experiment gone wrong, rebels that have stolen said felines from said government experiment and use them to battle cops, something.

Ridiculous. Absurd, even. Yet, here they are.

They come up on me slowly, and sniff me, trying to catch a scent. They seem to all get the same scent at once, and turn to each other. Perhaps they're smelling trust. One of them rubs up against my leg, and nearly knocks me over. They don't seem especially hungry, though. Thankfully.

There's a noise in the bushes, and they scurry off. They look like gigantic raccoons when they run.

I decide to climb down. After winding my way through side streets, I come to this upper middle class shopping district. One time, we walked through here when the power went out, you – an old lover – and I. It was mostly empty, and I was in a looting kind of mood. You held my hand and kept me calm. All I could think of was how I wanted not so much to steal, but to tear it all down. My plan? I would start with the concrete, breaking it up with a hydraulic pogo stick, with a two inch steel spike on the end. I'd work my way

up to the high-rises – I wouldn't blow them up, I'd just coat them in a dissolving agent and watch them slowly disintegrate. And then, I'd start in the government buildings, and pray that I didn't get killed in the process.

I settled for shaking the occasional newspaper rack and climbing a fence or two. Afterwards, you accused me of acting like a pubescent teenage boy. Which kind of hurt my feelings, but you know, I could be a teenage boy, horny as fuck, ready to spray paint the Louvre, glue the principals' thighs together, all that. There truly is a first time for everything, why not that? On the other hand, I could envision myself as an elderly ostrich on an upstate Minnesota goat farm being raised by numbers-running Tibetan Monks in the middle of a G5 tornado. Color me the active imagination, draws in the margins, doesn't play well with others girl. It's in my nature, I suppose. I did like it when you held my hand, though.

I see an empty beer bottle next to the gutter. I look around – nobody in sight. I sigh.

I pick the bottle up and hurl it at a boutique window displaying some very high art retro kitsch – mannequins, meat, blood, ironing, taxidermy – then run like hell as a slowly fading alarm wakes up the neighborhood.

A couple of months have passed. The street seems somewhat quiet today – not quite the usual coming and going. It's very cold, and looks like it could start snowing again. There's still the occasional car left on an alleyway, rusted out from the last storm, waiting to be hauled off by whoever, official or otherwise. It never used to snow here.

I walk around the park. It's muddy and smells like peat moss. I romp around in the mud for a bit and take it all in. There's trees that look easily a hundred years old, and a large cover of bushes, strategically placed for the random sex act or drug transaction. I wonder if urban planners draft that into their design plans? "Now here is where we're going to put a thick cover of foliage in order to best serve the recreational pharmaceutical and leisure urban sexuality components of our urban target audience."

It used to infuriate me how everything is concrete – and it still does, but the amazing thing about cities is that eventually the concrete just becomes part of the earth. It's almost as if I can feel a pair of outstretched arms reaching up from the soil and taking in the asphalt. Sometimes, I can feel myself reaching down past the sidewalk as much as the

earth reaches up through the cracks to greet me. It's like being in love, but without the drama.

I walk back home. Turn, turn, open.

I look around my apartment. The bag I packed two months ago sits there. A reminder.

This is my flaming mixed-race rage. This is my all-singing, all-dancing imaginary uterus, wandering the earth just like the Greeks said it would, busting a move and taking out three cops with its superpowers.

I throw on some warm clothes, grab the bag and head for the hills.

#

Satan's Little Helper

Silly devil. Don't people know that he's misunderstood?

I knew this when I was eight, when I somehow understood Alternate Satan Cosmologies and walked into the kitchen one day, and just said as much to my mom. I read everything, especially if it was visual. (My parent's literature collection: condensed books and Whitaker Chambers.) I read the medical book with the multi-layered color plates, the M.C. Escher book, The Bite of the Print. I didn't know why the man was spitting on the open grave in the Hogarth, but I made a note of it.

#

All things rise and fall

My birth was anything but a cause celebre. No one was sure what exactly caused all of my so-called defects, but what they were sure of was that my form was simply not acceptable. How was I supposed to grow up into a proper debutante? How could I ever manage to inherit the family estate if all I could do was sit mindlessly and drool into my bland porridge? It was looking like the sanitarium for me.

Even the most dire of situations have been known to change, however – and as it turns out, I was no exception to those fated winds.

It all happened very quickly, somewhere between my first birthday and my second, two years after the 1929 depression started. I was supposed to be mentally deficient (to use their term), but I wasn't. I was supposed to need leg braces or a wheelchair, as well as any one of a number of things that were supposed to “fix” me – but I didn't. No one knew that I would just decide to start talking one day. No one knew why I was suddenly able to crawl. No one knew why I regenerated limbs, feet and organs – I just did. I was a bit of an enigma.

My mother was beside herself, if somewhat hysterical – she insisted that my regeneration was due to my having been baptized shortly beforehand. I consider it the manifestation of my conscious will. I wanted to sit in my mother's lap, and feel her nipple in my mouth when I desired it, not when I was picked up against my will in order to keep my shell of a body alive. It was simply a matter of my longing for life itself.

With my body and mind intact according to the laws of nature, I embraced my new form with much verve and vigor. I ran several miles a week, and became a bit of a star in women's track and field, limping only occasionally. I researched many topics, especially flight, which quickly became an obsession. The first time I jumped from my parent's roof, the psychiatrists dismissed my first attempts as the youthful whimsy of a precocious mind, a mere misunderstanding of the laws of gravity. What they didn't know is that I

had read those laws by the time I was twelve, and that I had decided to defy them. I would stretch out my arms, step off the edge, and then...

Thankfully, my body's ability to regenerate itself wasn't limited to infancy.

Encouraged by my body's will, I decided upon more extreme approaches. I tried to will myself a pair of wings, but all I could manage was a pair of misshapen lumps, which caused great panic until I wished them away. I set myself on fire on my 16th birthday, but then my baser instincts took over and brought a downpour onto my head. It all seemed horribly unfair.

Held back by my own desires, I resorted to drink. I would break into my parent's liquor cabinet and steal bottles while they were at work. I would swallow sherry as if it were patent medicine and read the Marquis De Sade by flashlight until the wee hours of the morning. I would sneak out late at night to swig whiskey and offer myself up to strange men on the wrong side of the tracks. Every once in a while, one of them would try to hit me – but for some reason, this made my powers grow and theirs diminish. One night someone attempted to do away with me for good – but he turned into ashes on the spot the moment he pulled out his gun. I was determined to experience flight in all its forms, and if I couldn't fly, well then, blackouts and living on the edge would have to do.

All of this activity made me a bit of an embarrassment to my family, I'm sad to say. The psychiatrists demanded a review of my mental state, and as a result, held me inside four grey walls until I turned the age of 18. None of what happened in there is worth repeating. It wasn't even comparable to death, it was purgatory with no hope of neither heaven or hell.

Once I was released, I was informed that under no terms was I to contact my family, and yes for the record, I was cut off. After several days of drunken despondency, I decided to chin up and make the best of it. I worked as a waitress, and saved up my tips to pay for skydiving lessons.

It was on my first dive that I met him. His eyes were wild pools of desire and contempt for this world. He was six foot two and had a wild overgrown shrub of wiry black hair, complemented by two Rasputin-like eyes and a long beard. He wore long flowing black robes with blood red trim, and smelled of rose oil. He seduced me quickly, ferociously, and with a will that far surpassed mine. We got married six months later.

His passionate, wild nature quickly gave way to a more mundane one. He would get drunk every night, and try to order me around. One night, he insisted that I cook him dinner. I refused. He tried to beat me, so I stared at his feet until they started to catch on fire. He seemed to calm down after that, but I had to admit to myself I had made a horrible mistake. I couldn't stand the sight of him. His towering stature became lanky and sparse, his hair was more unkempt than wild, and his eyes looked more vacant than contemptuous.

I tried to make the best of it and settle into domesticity, but I deplored being a housewife. I couldn't stand cooking for him – in fact, I couldn't stand cooking period. As he worked on fishing boats when he didn't have enough income from his flight students to pay the rent, he would bring home whatever was left over from the catch and insist that I cook it. When I would refuse, he would break something, throw his hands up and disappear for a couple of days.

In retaliation, I acted out in a number of ways. I refused to do the chores. I stole journals from medical supply store lobbies while no one was looking. I threw the appliances out the window. I felt two small lumps starting to grow out of my shoulder blades. I read to the neighbor's children about tracheotomies or fetal distress. I thought many a time about killing him in his sleep – but as was he was out at sea for months at a time, he was spared from death (and I from jail). I was ill-equipped to do much of anything except fly, and this was worse than having my wings clipped.

To make matters worse, our sex was awful. He thought foreplay was something that only sissies — again, his term, not mine — did. He would push his member into me, stinking of port and dime store cologne. He would have his way with me for ninety seconds or so, then he would fall fast asleep, snoring loudly and occasionally farting.

I ran off one night while he was away without leaving so much as a goodbye note and took the train to New York. I found an apartment in the Bowery. As a celebration of my newfound freedom, I decided to violate as many taboos as I could. I would go out and drink, smoke and sleep with someone new almost every night – sometimes men, sometimes women, sometimes both. I cut my hair short, and took to wearing men's attire: slacks, button-down shirts, and loafers. I seethed with reckless abandon. I felt positively homophobic, and I didn't care at all. It was as if I was learning how to fly all over again.

I also found myself attracted to the gayest of men, looking for them on the piers and in underground haunts. I would dress to the nines (slicked back hair, button-down shirt, oxfords, boxers, a pair of rolled up ankle socks stuffing into my trousers) and go out on the prowl.

Unfortunately, most of them seemed interested in quenching my thirst, and the pittance I was paid for packing boxes of chicken wings was nowhere near enough to buy my way into soaring 18,000 feet above ground. I started to lose my interest in carnality – if anything, ten to twelve hours of staring into boxes full of poultry parts followed by going on the prowl for lukewarm sex led to my plummeting down to earth with a thud, and without so much as a bruised shoulder or second of flight to show for it. I needed to escape – again.

My glorious fate was soon to find me, though. One day while I was at the neighborhood bar enjoying an early afternoon gin and tonic, I spied an ad in the paper. “Human sacrifice wanted.” There was a brief description, followed by a phone number.

I assumed it was a joke, but just out of curiosity, I dialed the number from the pay phone in the back of the bar. A silky “Hello?” floated out of the receiver.

I told you that I was responding to the ad. Once you were convinced that I wasn’t a missionary or with the police, you filled me in. You forewarned me that the preparation would not be easy, that I would be tested for months, and then when the time was right, that I would be killed then drained of my blood, which they – the members of your underground church – would drink.

The calm soothing tones of your voice started to have their way with me. The more I talked with you, the more I realized that this was the possibility that I had been looking for – the “maybe” of eternal flight being turned into a “yes”.

The next day, we met for tea at your house. After much discussion (and you flying into a rage at a door-to-door missionary), we shook on my fate. At long last finally to fly forever! I couldn’t wait.

Two weeks later, you were in jail. They wouldn’t allow you visitors, so I stayed at your house and awaited an outcome. I frequently broke down into tears, or flew into a rage over the unjust nature of your imprisonment. How dare your tormentors keep me

from flying! Why, I've been waiting for this moment all of my life! Is there no justice in this world at all?

While I waited for your return, your followers made sure that I was prepared. No one was to speak to me unless they had an express purpose related to my training. I would be dragged into rooms blindfolded, with only incantations and the smell of incense to fill my senses. I would read for hours and then drift into a deep sleep, dreaming of my fate. Oh, how I longed for your blade against my neck! Life was good.

One day though, everybody disappeared, leaving me nothing more than a scribbled note about wine and blood, full of rambling passages about god's mercy and the redemption of the cross. The christians had gotten ahold of you all! It looked like we would have to build our church from the ground up. I needed you – the architect of our demented dreams – to return, and to return quickly.

Frustrated, I packed my bags and moved to Chicago. I continued to study (and to drink) late into the night – and waited for your return. I didn't hear a word from you the entire time, and had no idea if you were living or dead. I began to think that my sacrifice would never come. Flight seemed more and more impossible to imagine.

Six months later, I got a note in the mail saying you had been released from jail over an error on part of the federal prosecutor, and that you had moved to a town somewhere in Kansas. Your phone number was on the note. Elated, I called you up – not only were you free of the clutches of weak-minded manipulators of morality, you had used your freedom to build a following – surreptitiously, of course. You had been trying to find me for some time, and only in the last week had managed to locate my new address. Dozens of people were awaiting my arrival! I was to be sacrificed two weeks from now.

I packed my bags, left the few remaining belongings I had on the street, and got on the bus the next day. Finally, we would be truly cleansed in blood. My blood. Our blood. I would offer myself up in sacrifice, and that would be the end of me in this form, free to fly at last.

Your church was stunning, if modest – it was in the basement of a warehouse, dank and cold, but your followers had created an altar in order to consummate the long-awaited act. We needed to make sure that our prayers and rituals were carried out late at night, else the locals would find out and run us out of town.

Your followers spoke in hushed tones in my presence, and only a select few would be allowed to speak to me. I was a holy object contained within their profane desires.

After much preparation and tests of my will, the blessed day finally arrived. I stood there on the destiny's threshold, naked, covered with symbols, full of fear and wonder, you intoning in a language I wasn't allowed to understand, your followers walking in a circle, chanting, hooded, ecstatic. I was nothing more than an empty vessel.

You unsheathed your knife, and I held my neck up. I was full of suspense waiting for the cold steel to rip into my flesh, and then...I became filled with dread at what was about to come.

What I do remember from that night: my body's will quickly overpowered my longings. I couldn't manage to suppress my envisioning them all dead so that I could live, and then in the next moment, my worst fears came to pass: one by one, our followers all died from heart attacks, strokes, aneurisms, hemorrhages. It seemed to be instinctual, the will of the flesh over the triumph of my transcendence. The impulses that had willed me to regenerate as a child had seemed to take on new forms, and the result was less than desirable, like your hand twitching while it holds a glass of water, making you drop it to the concrete below – left with nothing but a dry mouth and a floor covered in broken glass.

The last of our followers fell to the ground. You – our beloved master – you were the only one left. You knocked me unconscious before my body's will could overtake my desire again.

I woke up to the sound of cross words and footsteps on gravel. It felt like what was left of me was being dragged. I blacked out and then woke up again to the sound of sirens and the heat of lights against what remained of my skin. Somehow, I knew you were inside the flying police car. My body relaxed a bit at that realization, not that it did my disposition one bit of good. I was miserable. I had been cheated out of my sacrifice.

The end was a blur of sounds, smells, stethoscopes, and botched attempts at resurrection. I was a slab of meat, unwilling to lift a finger to attempt to re-grow my body. I couldn't speak or see – but I sensed that they knew how I felt, that they pitied for me for succumbing to the longings that we all feel. In their minds, it made me weak. Who would will themselves to be slaughtered?

In my view, my detractors were the ones who were weak, not I. At least I tried to free myself – what did they, the ones who seemed so ready to judge me, do with their lives? At least I lived my life by my own standards, my family and social conventions be damned – what did they do to create the world in their own image? It's a question that I want to ask them still, even now after I have long since retired from this boring game called living.

Once I left earth, I was thrown into hell for a very, very long spell. I had been a very naughty girl – I was brought periodically before some kind of post-mortem parole board to be reminded that I would never make it into out of satan's soup kitchen unless I cleansed myself of my actions, or at least justified them adequately. What a horrible bore! Apparently, having this kind of silliness on earth wasn't enough for them – they had to recreate it in other galaxies as well.

Eventually, I got promoted to some middling station of limbo where I fill out intake forms for good samaritans, sedated. It's a fate that truly makes me wonder if I am still in hell at times, but I seem to be managing alright. I seem to be fated to do the drudge work – perhaps if I ever get a glimpse of heaven, things will change. For now, I make the best of it.

I do still long to fly though – and sometimes, when the angels are down on earth whispering in the ears of those near death, I sneak in a surreptitious turn or two among the gossamer clouds while they're not looking. For the most part though, I'm doomed to a flightless eternity. Maybe if I'm lucky, someday I'll be reincarnated as a large sea bird, or failing that, a pigeon, wings are wings, after all – but until then, I wait. Either by blood or by wing, I will soar again someday. I'm sure I will. It's only a matter of time.

#

Four microfictions, here you go. You're welcome

Combustion

Peter and Francine's eyes said it all – the motor plant was toast. I whispered, "Did you check to see if anyone was inside first? That's part of the rules." They said nothing. Afterwards, we climbed up to the roof and looked at the moon while standing on our heads.

The Knife

I parked halfway down the alley, then you ran up to greet me, blood dripping from your switchblade. "This is what I stuck him with – he ran up the street and the latinos finished him off." Just before I walked away, you yelled, "Don't forget – I love you!"

Consumer Profiling

As Janey paid for her groceries, salivating at the thought of frozen dinners, something suspicious came up in her profile. After ten hours of questioning, she was transferred to McDonalds. She now works as a hostess at a nearby prison, and lobbies for customer satisfaction and dietary freedom.

Violence

It was a very long day at my second job. The customers strip searched me, cut off my hair, then started in on my limbs. Unfazed, I sewed my arms back on and did my shift at the coffee shop. Afterwards, my roommate placed my head on the altar.

#

Meal

One less stalker in the world. I would tell you how we prepared his body, but that would be gross.

This being a collective house, we got into an argument about it. The vegans were grossed out. The omnivores were on the defensive. The four hour process meeting did allow enough time for the marinade to seep into his pores. Tonsil (the resident packrat) took his boots, and Oxide, Caliper and Scarab carted off his clothes to a free box. Ferret – our resident gourmet – decided on a garlic aioli sauce, with a batch of dumpstered asparagus sautéed on the side.

The omnivores ate most of him the next day, with the help of several unwitting friends and a few neighbors. We thought about giving a slab to the landlord, but realized that it may raise some suspicions, given that we had agreed to be a vegetarian (with allowances) household – a fact that was passed onto the landlord by the downstairs neighbor, who definitely wasn't. The vegans walked down the hill to the park instead and got shit-faced.

The next day, the cops showed up. Shit. We said nothing. They promised to come back. We decided that the most mainstream acting person in the house (that would be me) would say that we looked over his photo, and no one had ever seen him before. Whatever.

When they showed up again, they had a warrant. Thankfully, we were prepared – the usual assortment of power tools, slingshots, and anti-cop propaganda was stashed far away. As far as the cops were concerned, we were just a bunch of college kids with a keen taste for barbecue. We even offered them some, but they said no thanks.

We were off the hook. We buried his bones beneath the floorboards, and that was that.

#

Brood

I gave birth yesterday. There were five – most of them were runts, so I ate them. But one – this one, she's special. I licked her fur, and put her down to bed. Part of me wants to eat her as well – but I need to save her. Besides, maybe if she has kittens, then we'll have a pack. Then I ate one of them. It wasn't pleasant – well OK, that's a lie. It was – different. I can tell this is going to be a tough life, but I think I'm going to survive it – for a while. Then my blood will spill, and fertilize the ground. A maple tree will grow where my eyes once stood. And the rest will be devoured – if not by others, by the earth itself.

* * *

Author, performer, producer, musician solidaridad decosta once slept with the collected works of William Carlos Williams (Volume I) to get over her father complex. Her work has appeared in Mirage, Shampoo, Fireweed, and the San Francisco Bay Guardian Online. A recipient of the 2008 kari edwards scholarship at Naropa's Summer Writing Program, when she is not writing sestinas about rioting with foam rubber bricks or writing odes to zombies, she bangs out Brechtian piano improvisations. She is rumored to sleep four hours in five minutes.