

device [di'vais] n. Expédient, moyen, truc m. || Stratagème m.; combine f. (fam.). [trick]. || Dispositif, système, appareil m.; invention f. (contrivance). || BLAS. Devise f. || ARTS. Dessin ornemental m. || Pl. FAM. Plans m. pl.; activités f. pl.; to leave s.o. to his own devices, livrer qqn à lui-même; laisser qqn se dépatouiller (fam.):

grain short/grain long
issue no. 1

Summer 2008

Contents

Editor's Notes	3
Poetry: Ether-bound Suzanne Grazyna	4
Prose: Royal Seven Virginia Reeves	5
Poetry: The Long & Short of Third to First Elizabeth Kate Switaj	14
Poetry: The Binding of Your Words Elizabeth Kate Switaj	15
Prose: from <i>White Kitty</i> C. R. E. Wells - Featured Writer	16
Contributors	30
Submissions & Information	31

Editor's Notes

Grain short, as defined by [Etherington & Roberts's Bookbinding & the Conservation of Books: A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology](#), is "a term sometimes used in paper manufacture to indicate that the grain or machine direction of the paper is parallel to the shorter dimension of the sheet." Conversely, *grain long* refers to grain or machine direction that is parallel to the larger dimension.

Originally envisioned as a one-off project by [Flaming Gibleet Press](#) & [Sundress Publications](#), *grain short/grain long* has evolved into a (hopefully) long-term exploration of the limits of text & the visual. For our inaugural issue, we asked writers & artists to interpret the idea of "grain short/grain long" as freely or literally as they wanted. What we received delighted us—poetry & prose that pushed the limits of the theme, all going "with" or "against the grain" in fun, interesting ways. The four authors featured in this issue represent the most surprising looks at the grain, & I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with them all. Enjoy.

Ether-bound
Suzanne Grazyna

Your predetermined size is unsuitable.
Volumine refused to acquiesce
to your slight condition.
She crossed the path of the Gamine,
who sneered of unflattering
horizontal stripes.
She used them as steps to the edge
of your earth, where she leapt to her
weightless abandon.

Royal Seven
Virginia Reeves

The buzzer on the door goes, and Dustin ass-firsts his way into the room, pressing the tight black of his jeans against the glass, just below the push-bar. "Hot-crossed buns!" he shouts. "Black coffee!"

Hot-crossed buns, Alice thinks, taking the coffee and roll he holds out to her, intentionally laying her fingers over his. They're inky—her fingers—black around the cuticles. She's thinking about things that could make them this way. *Dyeing t-shirts*, she thinks. *Painting a white dog black*.

She has a list of excuses.

"I changed the oil in my car," she told a guest earlier.

"I weld," another time, though she isn't sure that welding causes black cuticles. It seems likely.

"There's ink near your ear," Dustin says, tapping his own for emphasis. "I'll get a washcloth," he says, heading around the counter to the shelves in back, the shelves crammed with thin washcloths and thinner towels, small bars of soap, tiny shampoos. There's also a stack of shower-caps, but the guests never seem to use those. The housekeepers don't even take them on the carts anymore.

She takes a drink from his coffee while he's gone, putting her lips on the plastic lid where his lips had been.

"Kiss me," she whispers to the lid.

"Give me that," Dustin says behind her. "What are you doing—smelling it? You think I got myself better coffee than you? You think I'm that kind of friend?"

She shrugs.

"Turn your face toward the door."

She turns.

"What is that shirt you're wearing?" he asks, rubbing at her face with the washcloth.

She pulls back the flaps of her motel vest.

"Is that a dead dove?"

"Yes," she says.

"You're so dark," he says, rubbing harder at her face.

"Skinned?" she asks.

"Funny," he says. "I wish you were dark-skinned so these goddamned spots wouldn't show. This is not coming off. Are you using a new ink?"

He's still wearing a scarf though it isn't cold—a long, narrow scarf. The ends of it dangle near his belt. *I make belts*, Alice thinks, noticing the sting near her left ear.

"Stop," she says. "Maybe it's not ink. Maybe I have a new melanoma."

"You don't have any old melanomas, so how could you have a new one?"

He throws the washcloth into the back and leans against the counter.

"Tell me about the night," he says. "Anyone notice your shirt?"

"I'm wearing the vest."

"I noticed."

"You think to notice."

"What's that mean?"

"You try to notice," she says, picking at her thumb.

"What are you talking about?"

"You want to seem critical," she says, thinking, *I polish hubcaps*.

"What?"

She looks at him. "Why are you wearing that scarf?"

"It's a nice scarf."

She shrugs.

"Tell me about the night," he says.

She's tired, even with the coffee and the bun.

"Seven by my count," she says, looking past him toward the lobby. It used to be the living room of the manager's quarters—plaid sofas huddled around a white stone fireplace. *I sweep chimneys*, she thinks.

"Did they use brooms, those chimney sweeps? Is that what they'd use—real brooms?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" he asks. "Alice," he says. "Seven hits or seven different parties?"

"Seven different parties."

"On a Tuesday? This early? My goodness."

Goodness gracious, Alice thinks. There was a night at the press when he didn't wear a scarf and didn't say *goodness*. She'd been there with Sally, a housekeeper from the motel, and he'd peered in the glass of the door and watched. She'd watched him watch before he turned the knob.

"Grampa wouldn't approve of this behavior, ladies," he'd said, and Sally had started crying and Alice had realized how ugly she was—Sally—the small forehead and the extra space between her nose and lips—like it was waiting for something to fill it, a moustache maybe, which Sally could probably grow.

"You should go," Alice had said, and Sally had looked at her hopefully.

"No," Alice had said to Sally. "You should go."

The manager had hired a guy who called himself Pretzel to take over Sally's cart when she didn't show back up for work.

"How many rings?" Dustin asks.

"Four," Alice says. Dustin leans in.

"Come on," he says. "Let's have it." She thinks of all the *its* she could give him. She could jab a pencil into the back of his left hand. She could lick his ear. She could say, "Remember Sally? Maybe Sally would've made me really, really happy."

"The four with rings—two of them could've matched, but they arrived in separate cars and they parked at opposite ends of the restaurant lot next door," she says. "See those beige sedans—the women arrived in those. Creepy, huh? Who drives a beige sedan?"

"Adultresses," he says.

"The other two were wearing rings that didn't match," she says.

"Easy ID. How different were they?"

"Oh, one pair—his was gold with the field of crushed diamonds—you know those ones—the field next to a bigger solid diamond and then a strange smooth black part. And she's wearing this little silver band—really quiet. A bad choice, I say, stepping out on the poor man who *marries* you with the small ring to meet the rich guy who'll fuck you at the Royal Seven."

"What's so bad about getting fucked at the Royal Seven?"

"I get fucked at the Royal Seven every day," she says.

"What's that mean?"

She shrugs again and looks at her nails.

She inherited the press from her grandfather when she was still in high school. "Who gives a sixteen-year-old a goddamned printing press?" her mother had shouted at her father, days after the funeral. "That's *just* what she needs. You think her grandfather's press is going to get her a date? Have you noticed the clothes she wears?"

"Clothes?" her father had asked and Alice had decided to walk into the room at just that moment to announce that she was moving into an apartment with a guy named Jerry and three of his friends.

"Well, congratulations, Alice!" her mother had said. "If you didn't look just like a little boy, I might be worried these men were taking advantage of you."

"You look like a model," Dustin had told her that night after Sally left. He'd run his hand from the lobe of her right ear to the well of her collarbone.

"A male model," she'd said.

"But a model nonetheless," he'd replied, and then he'd taken her pants off.

"Pawy?" Dustin asks.

"All but the last ones," she says. "They were subtle."

"Well?"

She's picking her nails again. She scrubs them every evening before coming on shift at the motel, scrubs them with the grainy soap her grandfather had sworn by. He'd ordered cases of it that he'd store in a closet at the press. They're still there, all those boxes. Alice hasn't even gotten through the box that'd been open when he died.

She holds up her hands, ducking fingers as she talks, "Giddy. Loud.

Nervous. Separate luggage and very light. No touching, Cash." She looks at the fingers still up and thinks, *I'm a machinist.*

"That's only six," Dustin says.

"Separate luggage and very light," she says. "Those are two hits. Separate's a hit and light's a hit. Two."

He stares at her.

"There might have been other things," she says. "Why do they call them that—hot crossed buns?"

"Because there's an x on the top and they're hot when they come out of the oven—I don't know, Alice. What's with you?"

I am a hot air balloonist.

"Alice?"

"Hmm?"

"What's up with you this morning? Did you even record them?"

She looks at the credit card machine. They keep a list taped under it, notes in the margins, sloppy stars indicating continuations in other free space—the upper right corner, a gap between lines halfway down. She prints a new version every two weeks.

I collect garbage.

"'If I were to print her, I'd have to use a light roller'? What does that mean? That's not a record. And what do you mean, 'He could be his own font—a little inconsistent, a bit slanted'? Alice, we're *documenting* a phenomenon. How do I add 'light roller' and 'his own font' to the trends? How do I map those out? They don't say anything about these people."

She shrugs.

"Letters don't lie," she says.

"What does that mean?"

"Pretzel's taking the shower caps," she says. "He's been wearing them when he makes his rounds."

"Alice."

"He has quite a mop up there—I bet he was leaving hairs in the rooms."

"Alice."

The coffee is cold and her bun looks stale.

"I'm selling the press," she says. *I am a gardener.*

"No, you're not."

"I am," she says. "I mean, I did. It's sold. Remember that guy Lionel who has the stamp shop? He's going to join the two. You know—wed obscurity to the obsolete—stamps and handset prints. He'll get to make all my grandfathers' buddies' estate sale signs *and* the fringe kids' graduation announcements *and* still get to make custom pelican stamps for the scrapbookers."

"Alice."

"He'll still print the lists for you," she says. "I got him to agree to it. And the pages of the book too."

"What are you doing?" he asks and it's then that he touches her, brings his hand to her face, cupping it like she's been wanting him to, like she's been waiting for since the Sally night.

She puts her hand over his.

"Are you attracted to Pretzel?" she asks.

"God, no. He has breasts—haven't you noticed those?"

"So it's the breasts, then."

He looks at her, watching as she takes his hand and sets it on the Royal Seven logo over her left breast.

"They're not so bad," she says.

"Alice."

She squeezes his hand, which presses against her. She can almost imagine him doing it on his own.

"I'm sorry, Alice," he says.

She holds his hand there, moving it in slow, barely discernible circles, willing him to take it up.

"Alice," he says again.

I am a roofer.

"Why aren't I close enough?" she asks him, pushing his hand into her body.

She sees his eyes look toward the door. The early risers will start trickling in soon. He should get the house coffee going, pull the mini-muffins from the fridge.

"Alice," he says, and he's easing his hand out from under hers. Her chest feels empty—the weight of his hand already recorded on the registry. She feels herself gripping his fingers, pulling them to her. She is only vaguely aware that it has become a struggle.

And then Pretzel is in the doorway to the back, looking at them with his pancake eyes.

"You guys playing tugboat?" he asks.

Dustin and Alice turn their faces toward him.

"You know," Pretzel says, "whoever tugs the hardest wins?" He smiles showing his crooked teeth, then hooks the fingers of each hand on the tips

of each other, holding them in front of his sad, lonesome breasts, pulling with what seems like all his might.

Alice and Dustin watch as Pretzel pulls.

Finally, he lets out a big breath, fluttering his lips, yanking his hands apart.

"I can never tell which side wins," he says, shrugging. "Want me to judge for you guys?"

Alice looks down at hers and Dustin's hands, looser now, sagging between their bodies, and she hears herself say, "Yeah, Pretzel, you judge. You tell us who tugs harder."

The Long & Short of Third to First
Elizabeth Kate Switaj

take this
this poem
paper this
news this
lie this
stack of
twigs this
lights easy
into smoke
fast as
I vanish

all dead
by 28
lifting head
birth day
humming to
mama's songs
tone deaf
for making
our own

they live without creation can't be said to live they they They do
not deserve freedom (from elegance give them choice what can they
do take away and they don't see live at least to eighty three no
one shoots them inoffensive kissed more skin knees than you or me

someone has to
keep the incandescents
changed to halogen
over my grave
or someone will
spray paint over
writ in water
someone has to
be them ` be they

and we volunteer

The Binding of Your Words

Elizabeth Kate Switaj

sew me into your book by hair
I will stand I will march
I will carry your title
past sleepers know it's wrong
sleepers fell from drinking out
memories of their own binding

sew me into your book by toes
I'll push up until I can hold
your book above my head
parade on hands to show
how you ripped everything hard off my soles
(and no one will know how I feel
but know who bled to death the same

do not let him hear)
sew whole side into your body no, your binding
left or right then none will hear but see
how my lips droop
and drag my ankle
across your words
and see the reviews praise
your radical revisions of print

From *White Kitty*

C. R. E. Wells

SEPTEMBER 16, 2003.
COLUMBUS, OHIO.

This is almost how it happened:

In his dream, Charles never took the cats to the shelter. Tara returned and started hugging and petting the cats, and everything felt more perfect than ever. Was she better again? Then they went to bed, which was romantic and even erotic, but upon waking he could not remember sex. Only caressing, kissing. In the dream, she dozed quickly as he hugged her tightly. Why did she feel so different? Had she always been this fragile? Was it her illness? He was afraid she was going to break. He opened his dream-eyes and peered at the face of the body he embraced. It was not her. It was the girl who kissed him the day before. Kim. Or was it the Kim who worked at the factory? To him they were now the same: the hair, the nose, the skin—he could no longer distinguish the differences between them. Perhaps he could no longer remember the Kim he used to know. Soon he woke up and was holding Tara's pillow, wet with drool.

It was 4:50 in the morning. He could no longer sleep for more than five hours a night. After his dreams (which were becoming more vivid and haunting) he was groggy but restless. He put on his flannel pajama bottoms (the ones Tara got for him for his birthday last year, with the "cute little penguins" on them) before going downstairs. Besides Tara, the cats were also absent this morning. If he was not already up at this hour, Chewy often would wake him. At first he acted hungry, so Charles would get up and

fill their dishes. Soon Charles began to feed the cats enough at night to keep them satisfied till six or seven, but Chewy still woke Charles before five. Charles must have made Chewy feel secure now that Tara was gone. He was a nice cat. Is a nice cat. He'll make a fine pet. But not for me.

As he came off the bottom step, he felt a prick in his right foot. He sat down, lifted his bare foot over his knee, and dislodged a small piece of ceramic. Damn it. From the plate. God. That was two months ago. Still pieces lying around. Broom doesn't work. Wear thick socks. The wound started to bleed, so he tiptoed up the stairs to put a band-aid over the wound, tossing the ceramic shard into the bathroom trashcan. She's everywhere. When you most want to forget her. Need to rid myself. The awful reminders. This house has absorbed her. Sell it. You need to.

Soon he returned downstairs and started the coffee. Ordinarily he made himself one cup every morning, thinking that if he made it strong enough, it was all the caffeine he would need. Tara didn't drink coffee, but he bought a large coffee maker anyway for when they had company. They rarely did. Everything was so still this early, and usually he found the mornings refreshing. Today the quiet made him lonely. Less birds twittered as the days grew shorter. While scooping the coffee into the filter, he decided to make a full pot. Just sit in front of the TV. Drink coffee. That kind of morning. Till seven or so. Then hop in the shower. That's what you need. Coffee and sitting. Good plan. Turn the TV on. Watch whatever, anything.

He watched an exercise program with women lifting weights. Not the most entertaining. Not for the reasons intended. She looks Hawaiian. What is it about them? Life's easy there. Too carefree on their islands. Need a Michigan winter. That should teach them. At least an Ohio one. Life for the

rest of us. Bad things like winter. Long and cold. Happens every year. Sad, huh? Should bring tears to your eyes. Send us care packages. Rum and hot chocolate. That's what we need. Great for Christmastime. Winter's coming. Please use FedEx. They deliver from Hawaii? Air Express. Damn. A few months away. Move south? Then summer's too hot. What do they say? I prefer to be cold. You can always put more clothes on. A joke but true. When do I have to shovel? Usually January. That's better than— Man. Hot bodies they have. Really show them off, don't they? You can tell. You got it? You flaunt it. On Ricki all the time, the flaunting girls. Debate always raging, girls spitting into microphones, prancing across the stage. They disagreed, the girls who didn't have it. Some still flaunted it, flapping their dimpled flab. She still on somewhere? Whoa. That's a good angle. Who invented the leg curl machine? Pure genius. A man. Had to be. To get the women to do them while we watch. Great idea, buddy. Naked leg curls. I'm a free man, right? Can look at them however I want. Sculptures electric, moving. But lifeless, mindless. No guilt from Tara. She's the guilty one. Paid to get their pictures taken. They know what they're wearing, the angles. Money in return, probably hundreds of thousands a year. Fitness modeling. Soft porn almost. Think that makes them sluts? But everyone's happy, right? No guilt. No exploitation. Or it's you who are exploited. Women controlling you again. You weak bastard. Just a dream-world. Mental spinout. Drunk on tight butts. You should get off yours. Do something. Pinch yourself. More revolting by the minute. You're getting old. What's your excuse today? You cut your foot. Women trying to teach exercise, you think about their female bodies. Think they'd like that? Oh yeah. Probably do. Don't they all? When we want them. Why else wear those things? Why else get on those machines

and—

Beside the point. Don't want to get horny. What else is on? This old fart's perfect. The opposite of pretty. Saw this last week. The good doctor. Yes, coral calcium is the solution to all our health problems, isn't it, Bob? Why yes, Dr. Bighead or whatever your name is, it certainly is the cat's meow. Yessirree, meeeooowww, coral calcium is the shit, or as the kids say, shiznit. Do you know why, Bob? No, why is coral calcium so absolutely great, the fucking bomb sent from heaven, I mean, compared to the calcium in, say, milk for instance? Calcium is an alkaline substance—do you know what alkaline means? No, what is alkaline, Dr. Bighead? I think I've heard of alkaline batteries but I don't know what the word means. Does it have something to do with batteries, Dr. Bighead? Alkaline substances have a pH greater than seven, while acidic substances have a pH less than seven, but we won't go too far into that. After all, this is not science class and most people just don't give a rat's ass about what makes the world go around and most people are really too stupid to understand it all anyway, including you, Bob. Anyway, calcium neutralizes the acid in the blood, hence making an environment not congenial to the development of malignant tumors. Cancer. Calcium is malignant to malignancy itself! Wrap your puny brain around that one, Bob! Can you believe this amazing discovery, that the prevention of cancer is in this simple mineral—as long as it is consumed in the form we are selling at bloated prices? I think it's practically the key to immortality and will be seen as such someday. Mark my words. Do you know why milk does not cut it, Bob? Of course I don't, Dr. Bighead. My mother always told me to drink milk. Three glasses a day. Three fucking glasses a day, she said, and it gave me the runs but I

downed them anyway because if I didn't she would tell my dad and he would beat the living shit out of me when he got home. Well, that's a different issue altogether, Bob, but just another reason to buy our coral calcium. You see, milk does not cut it because the bioavailability—by the way, doesn't my use of the word *bioavailability* prove to you viewers at home that I'm really intelligent, I mean, compared to you? Back to the point. The bioavailability of the calcium in milk is not high enough to neutralize the blood. One, two, three, four—do you realize that word is eight syllables long? Eight fucking syllables! How many eight-syllable words do you know, Bob? Anyway, what other common substance is found in milk? Lactic acid! You hear that? Acid. Can you believe that shit? How can you make your blood less acidic by adding acid to it, by lowering its pH rather than raising it? Makes no sense now, does it? Think. Put on your thinking cap, Bob. Do you have it on now? How can acid neutralize acid? This is not a trick question. The answer is quite—

Then there was a crushing sound so loud and sudden Charles thought something hit his house. What the hell? That the truck? The garbage truck often came at this hour to empty the dumpsters on his block. Those dumpsters. Can be pretty loud, banged hard back to the asphalt like that. Startled me in the past. Nothing hit the house. Calm down, Charles. Would have felt more vibrations, don't you think? Like an earthquake. A wall caved in. He peeked through the blinds to the street. Pretty peaceful. So quiet. He listened closely and heard a hum. Must be the truck. Makes noises like that. Hope no one got hurt. Man, that was loud. Must have dropped it or something. Maybe it broke in half. How is that possible? Can't imagine it. It could have happened. Dark out there. How do they lift them? Forklift

up and over. Hydraulics.

The hum continued—it was the sound of a running engine. He also heard wheels spinning. Stuck on something? That's a new one. Weird if so. Not muddy outside. No snow yet. Not down here. Not even fall. Soon though. Next week.

He walked through the living room to look through the windows facing the alley. What the— He now saw what was making the noise: an SUV was stuck, or appeared to be stuck, in the alley. Stuck back there. Really? That's it. That's— Wonder how? He could not see clearly past his pine tree and so could not view the back half of the vehicle, but he saw its headlights and its jostling as the driver tried to free it. Where? Utility pole. Right in front of it. Ran into it? Really fucked up. It would be. They need help. Maybe. My yard. Do something? What though? How could they? Don't understand it. A boulder there. It's not very large. Really just a rock. A few fists big. What's the use of an SUV if it can't— Can't tell. Too dark. Need to fix these lights. Too dim, aren't they? 5:04 a.m. Really? Not a nice time to go outside. Never know. Someone could mug you. In the city. Stuff happens. People are rotten. Too many criminals. Not most people, though. How can you tell? In the world. Lots of evil. Lots of mean and— God— Weird. What the hell are they stuck on? Not the rock. On the fence? They ran over it. Jesus. Looks like it. No. You're crazy. Can't believe it. What the hell? Just my luck. Assholes. Ruining my property. Enough shit already. Can't they learn to drive? Drunk. Stoned. So fucked up. In my yard. Not in my yard. Move back to the country. OK. You will? Back there? How could I? Tensions in his jaw grew and his stomach churned. Oh, but what about the garage? Close, aren't they? Shit. Replace the fence.

Cheap wire. How much by the yard? Insurance will cover it. Supposed to, anyway. The garage too. Isn't it?

He saw the silhouette of a tall thin man get out of the passenger's side and slam the door. A man. Not woman-shaped. Too straight and stick-like. Wearing a jacket. What it looks like. Too dark. Leather? Can't tell. Cold this morning. A little. The silhouette appeared to push against the front of the vehicle while the driver floored the accelerator. Trying to run away. Assholes. Rotten. Trying to get away with it? Fleeing the scene of an accident. A crime. Criminals. Damaged something. Mine. Not nice people out this morning. Shoot them, damn them all.

The driver let off the accelerator. The words "OK, now!" were heard, and the driver floored it again for a few seconds. There was another break, then the word "Now!" and he floored it again. There seemed to be no progress.

He saw the thin jacketed man kneel down to examine something, then he stood and started stomping on it. Has to be the fence. Soon a woman stepped out. What the fuck? Is she naked? Can't tell. Lights are too dim. A prostitute? Damn the dark. It's no good. Something's going on. Something very— In my yard. Have to fix the lights. Call the city. Tell them to get their asses—

"Hey!" he heard the man shout. "Get back inside, you dumb bitch!"

"Take me home!" She was crying hysterically. "Home, now!"

"We can't right now. Just get back in—we gotta get out of here. We're gonna take you home, I swear."

"Take me home now!"

"Christ, bitch, will you shut up? Does it look like we can? Swear to

God I'll break your neck."

She kept walking near the pole, her hands folded over her chest, then she would return back behind the tree. After a minute or so, Charles thought she must have gone back inside the vehicle because he could not hear her sobbing. Call the cops. Have to. My God. Isn't right. He picked up the phone, then hesitated. Come on. What if it's nothing? What if they just got stuck? On that rock. It could have happened. It's not that small. Definitely a boulder. Boulders can do that. She's not naked. Probably not. Really can't tell. None of my business. It doesn't matter. They must be stuck. On the little boulder. Sitting out by the alley. Probably going home. On their way from work. Look like decent people. Tired. Work the night shift. You understand. You used to work nights. They're all right. Want to get out of here. You would too. The alley's so dark. Not nice people out. It's a lot of stress. That causes harsh language. You should know that. Has to be a bitch. Running over a rock. Getting stuck in some alley. Being so mean about it. That's not a great idea. So what? Can you judge them? When were you angry? When's the last time? Didn't you say things? Of course. You did. You hypocrite. All people are people. We're all human after all. One big family. Humanity. Adam and Eve, right?

Put the phone back. Cops probably won't arrive. Not in time. Not that something's wrong. Cops slow everywhere you go. No matter where you live. True here too. Has to be. It'll be fine. Or maybe call if it gets out of hand. Do I have binoculars? Write something down. The license plate, vehicle model. Descriptions, just in case. Insurance purposes. Probably all an optical illusion. Watch a little longer. Get a feel for it. Don't be so fucking rash. Don't make decisions. Probably good people. Maybe I'll help?

Could be dangerous.

What if they're good?

Planning to flee.

Just working the night shift.

Ruined my property.

Calm down.

What about the garage?

Just stuck on the boulder.

It's not big enough.

Who knows the situation?

The assholes. If they're—

It's dangerous. Mind your own business. Pray they just go away.

He saw the girl one more time, just barely, walking in front of the vehicle and the bent utility pole. Bent. Holy shit. It really is. Must be a light-colored blouse. Looks like skin from here, doesn't it? Dim yellow lights. When they hit that way. You can't tell. Pink or something. Thin, tight. You saw those at Target with Tara. Yeah, and Tara said—

"Let me go! Please, let me go!"

"Fine. That's fine. You wanna leave? You wanna leave in your condition? Then leave—just get the fuck out of here."

After she started running down the alley, the man shouted, "Fuck!" and ran after her, then another man, shorter and stockier, got out of the vehicle and ran after them both.

God damn it. The cops now. He picked up the phone but did not dial. Don't be an idiot about it. Don't make a big deal out of nothing. But it is an accident. Call to report it. You're supposed to do that. The right

thing. Before dialing, he looked out once more and saw a flashlight shining at the scene. Flashing lights reflected off the wooden fence across the alley. They're here already.

He heard pounding on his front door. It was his next-door neighbor.

"Just wanted to tell you there was an accident. You hear it?"

"Yeah, heard it all right."

"Your fence back there is trashed. That thing just came careening down the alley, ran into the pole. Went right over that part of your fence. Didn't see if there was any damage to your garage, but didn't seem like it."

"All right, thanks for the info. Knew something was up—just didn't know what exactly."

"Just thought you should know, man."

"Thanks for coming over."

He nodded and shut the door, then went upstairs to put on some jeans and shoes. When he was dressed, he grabbed his coffee mug and walked out back to check out the damage.

As he got closer, the scene amazed him. He was baffled that anyone could have lived through the accident without injury, yet it was obvious none of them were seriously hurt. The second thing he noticed was the state of his wire fence. One entire portion of it had been nearly flattened. The vehicle's front right tire could not touch the ground because it was raised by a bent fencepost that also appeared to be catching the axle. The front fender of the black Ford Explorer was wrapped in the shape of a U around the utility pole, now bent and broken halfway up.

A policewoman rummaged through the back of the vehicle, apparently for

clues. Charles noticed a man standing nearby in the alley, a little off to the side and wearing a tan trench coat. Holding his hands deeply in his pockets, he looked to be freezing on this somewhat chilly morning. Yesterday was nice. Cold front came through. Not too cold, though. Buckeyes. Almost southerners, some of them. All deny it though. Through the yellow streetlight, he noticed a strange smile on the stranger's face.

"Good morning."

"Hey."

"What a way to wake up, huh?" The man laughed. "Just what you need in the morning."

"Yeah, really."

"Coffee. Now there's a good idea. I should go make myself some. Don't think I'll get back to sleep after this."

"Me neither."

"God, it was so loud, thought something hit my house." He shook his head.

"I had the exact same thought."

"Yeah, but it was closer to you. In your yard. It had to be really loud for you."

"It was."

They paused. "Are you insured?"

"Yeah."

"Then hey, what's insurance for, right?"

"Exactly."

"Just look at this." The man nodded his head toward the wreck. "Man alive, I can't believe anybody was able to walk away from this one."

"No kidding." Charles just stared down into his coffee. It was so dark, pitch black in the dim morning. Gotta fix these lights. Call the city. Remember to.

"Man, can't believe this thing still runs. I mean, look at it."

"Yeah, crazy."

"Something shady going on." He said this with odd glee, still wearing a smile. Nerves, maybe. "I saw a girl run that way. Didn't look like she was wearing much, if anything. Then I saw a couple guys. Called the cops right away. Looked like they were up to no good—and I think I was right."

"Yeah."

"My name's Will, by the way." He walked closer to Charles and held out his hand, which Charles shook.

"Charles."

"Nice to meet you." He paused, then said, "Say, don't you live with somebody? Your—wife? A girlfriend?"

"My wife."

"She's not sleeping, is she?"

"Maybe. She's not home right now."

"Really? Does she work nights?"

"No. She's gone. For a while. Taking a vacation."

"Oh, wait. That was a dumb thing to ask." He laughed uneasily to himself. "Unless she sleeps at work. Which I suppose might be the case."

"No, she's not working. At least I doubt it."

"Huh?"

Charles felt embarrassed now. God, what a stupid way to put it. Zip your lip. Don't worsen the situation.

The man in the trench coat broke the silence. "So, you two take separate vacations often?"

"No. This is the first time."

"Yeah. I heard separate vacations can be nice. Don't think it would have saved my marriage, though." He chuckled and grinned. Nerves, has to be.

Another pause.

"Well, it's a bit chilly out here. You're fine, just wearing a t-shirt?"

"Yeah, I'm used to it. I'm from up north."

"Oh? Cleveland? Toledo?"

"No, farther north."

"Uh oh," he said through his smirk. "Michigan?"

"Yeah." Charles tried to smile, preparing for what was next.

"But you're a Buckeye fan, right?"

"Of course."

"Well, then you're all right, aren't you?"

"You bet."

"Well, I'm getting cold. Think I'll head back to my place. I live over there across the alley, kitty-corner to you."

"OK."

"Anyway, it was nice meeting you. Sorry it had to be under these circumstances, you know."

"No problem. Nice to meet you, too."

Charles lingered and paced, thinking maybe he should be around for the officer in case she needed him or wanted more information. As if to make

conversation, she pulled out a handicap hang tag and held it up for Charles to see.

"Interesting."

"Yeah, interesting."

She continued digging for a few more minutes while Charles paced and sipped his coffee. Eventually she said:

"Sir?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"You can go back inside. I'll bring you the information you need when it's ready, OK? I'll just come up to your back door and give it to you. You don't have to stand out here like this."

"Great. Thanks."

Charles walked back inside with his half-drunk coffee. His kitchen clock said it was 5:31. He warmed up his mug with more and walked slowly into the living room. Wish Tara was here. Wish she was feeling better. This would drive her crazy. More crazy. Doesn't need more stress. God, neither do I.

He pulled off his sock and peeled the band-aid from his cut.

Let her go, Charles.

Just let her go.

Contributors

Suzanne Grazyna is a third-year Theatre Arts major with poems appearing/forthcoming in [wicked alice](#), [Otoliths](#), [&c magazine](#), [Sein und Werden](#), [Danse Macabre](#), [blossombones](#), & [ECTOPLASMIC NECROPOLIS](#).

Virginia Reeves lives in Helena, Montana, with her husband & two daughters. Her fiction & poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in [Storyglossia](#), [Colors](#), & [Peeks and Valleys](#). She contributes regular theatre reviews to the [Queen City News](#) & teaches composition at Carroll College.

Elizabeth Kate Switaj ([web](#)) has a full-length book of poetry, *How to Drink a Floral Moon*, forthcoming from [Blue Lion Books](#). Her chapbook, *The Broken Sanctuary: Nature Poems*, is currently available from [Ypolita Press](#). When not writing, she edits [Crossing Rivers Into Twilight](#).

C. R. E. Wells lives in central Ohio with his wife & animals. His novel, *White Kitty*, is forthcoming from [Flaming Giblet Press](#) in Fall/Winter 2008.

Submissions & Information

grain short/grain long (<http://www.sundress.net/grainshortgrainlong/>), the online literary magazine of *Flaming Giblet Press*, is open to all types of prose, poetry, visual, & hybrid submissions. We are especially interested in works by women, Southerners, & anyone whose projects have been described as innovative, experimental, avant-garde, post-avant, eccentric, or just plain wacky. Submissions by under-represented & unknown writers/artists also encouraged.

Projects that stretch the limits of "print" are welcome, so long as they are feasible within our (alas, oh so limited) resources. We enjoy working closely with writers & artists to create aesthetically pleasing objects that best represent their visions.

You may submit up to five (5) poems, five thousand (5,000) words of prose, or images up to 2 MB. Accepted file formats include JPG, TIFF, BMP, ODT, DOC, & RTF. Other formats will be considered on an individual basis. If you have something special that doesn't quite fit these guidelines, drop us a line—maybe we can figure something out. (Hint: Make it great. The more we like your work, the more likely we are to finesse something for you.)

Please send all submissions, correspondence, etc. to [flaming.giblet \[at\] gmail \[dot\] com](mailto:flaming.giblet[at]gmail[dot]com). Selected work will also be considered for future print projects.

Our next theme will be "Collaboration / Stimulus / Response." We are looking for works that collaborate with, are stimulated by, or respond to other writers & artists. The vehicle—be it ekphrasis, tag-team writing, or plain ol' inspiration—is immaterial. We want to see what you come up with. This is a broad topic, so we hope to get a variety of interpretations.

Submissions in response to this theme will be accepted from August 31 - December 31, 2008. Be sure to check the [Flaming Giblet Press blog](#) for more information on upcoming themes, projects, & releases.

(P.S. If you're worried that your work doesn't jive with our so-called "biases," know that we read all submissions with relish—regardless of school or aesthetic. Simply put, we like good stuff.)

The cover image for this issue is a photomanipulation of Joseph Kosuth's *The First Investigation [Art as Idea as Idea]*, currently on display at the [Centre Pompidou](#). Photograph of the original taken by T.A. Noonan.

Web hosting provided by [Sundress Publications](#).