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JASMINE SAWERS
SARAH BATISTA PEREIRA
Yael GRUNSEIT
CHRISTOPHER FULLER

THE ANCHORED WORLD

BY JASMINE SAWERS

Every night before bed, Ma runs Samsara through a battery of Thai tongue twisters.

Samsara stumbles through the squawking maze of “Who sells chicken eggs?” Ma wrings a nipple for every inverted word, every warbling tone, but Samsara sings like Mariah Carey through “the big monster chases the little monster,” and for that Ma kisses the sting from Samsara’s chest.

“Remember,” Ma says, walking her fingers slow down Samsara’s belly. “Yak yai always gets yak lek.”

The big monster always gets the little monster.

In Grammy’s stories, giants are slain because the heroes are so quick and clever, and the giants are so slow and stupid. A giant might die by plummeting from a beanstalk, or three might die at once, tricked into clobbering each other with hands big as boulders. The earth always shakes when their bodies fall.

In Khun Yai’s stories, the yaks disguise themselves as beautiful women who ensnare human men or adopt human daughters. They can pretend for a long time, but at the first scent of betrayal, the yaks unhinge their jaws and devour those who love them before the phra-aek arrives to save the day.

Samsara’s ma is very beautiful. This was her first clue. The second is the flicker of Ma’s disguise, which only Samsara can see.

“My mom is a yak,” Samsara tells the teacher, who scolds her for speaking gibberish instead of English. “My mom is a yak,” she tells the neighbor, who reminds her to listen to her mama. “My mom is a yak,” she tells the mailman, who waves as he passes from her house to the next. “My mom is a yak,” she tells her best friend Teeny Tina’s mom, Leslie, who shoos them into the yard.

Only Teeny Tina believes her.

“How do you kill a yuck?” Teeny Tina asks.

“Same as any monster,” Samsara says. “With your wits.”

But Samsara knows Jack had an axe. The valiant little tailor had a slingshot. Rotasen had his magic staff. By the looks of Teeny Tina, who peers at her with one eye puckered like the butt end of a lemon, she’s heard the stories, too.

“Maybe something sharp and heavy,” Samsara adds.

“Jakey Doyle down the street’s got a sword I bet we can borrow,” Teeny Tina says.

This is how a plastic sword, chewed by Whistler the beagle and every Doyle kid in town, comes to hide under Samsara’s pillow.

After her bath, Ma bundles Samsara in a towel and deposits her in bed. Samsara gropes for the sword, but Ma sits on her hand and slaps it away before gathering her into the hills and hollows of her body. Ma strokes her wet hair, rubs her clean earlobe.

“Who sells chicken eggs?” Ma sing-songs.

Samsara’s rabbit heart sends the words out in a garbled stutter: “Who eggs near far?”

There: a pinch and a wrench. No phra-aeek would ever cry, so Samsara swallows past the bloom of pain.

“Who sells chicken eggs?”

“Who — who — eggs — far!”

“You haven’t been practicing,” Ma says, and plunges a finger into Samsara’s belly button. “Who sells chicken eggs?”

In the stories, the rock or mallet or sword always strikes true. The yak tries to take the phra-aeek down with it, but the phra-aeek prevails. In the anchored world of Samsara’s bed, Ma shifts and grunts and says, “What’s this?” She releases Samsara to rummage underneath herself. The sword emerges from beneath Samsara’s pillows like Excalibur from the lake.

The bed quakes. Behind her mask, Ma’s eyes flash.

“Yak yai!” Samsara cries. Her fists do not fly into her mother’s nose; her feet do not launch into her mother’s chest. With the only body part that works, she spits the tongue twister at her mother the wrong way around: the little monster chases away the big monster.

As if the big monster isn’t gnashing teeth and empty gullet. As if the little monster isn’t one perfect mouthful.

Jasmine Sawers is a Kundiman fellow whose fiction appears in such journals as Ploughshares, AAWW’s The Margins, SmokeLong Quarterly, and more. Sawers serves as associate fiction editor for Fairy Tale Review and debuts a collection through Rose Metal Press in 2022. Originally from Buffalo, Sawers now lives and pets dogs outside St. Louis.



PLEASE UNDERSTAND: THE PEOPLE BEFORE ME WERE BRINGING THE PROPERTY VALUE DOWN

BY SARAH BATISTA PEREIRA

First there was the hair on the floor.

I did a sweep right when I got the place — I always take a look-see when I move somewhere new, especially with these new buildings. The outside's always spic and span. These luxury condos, that's how they sell themselves: Shops on the bottom floor, a gym, a few restaurants. But on the inside, you can see the cut corners. The dust bunnies under the baseboard, the watermarks in the showers, the paint drips on the glass. So you see, first day, first thing, there was me. Chatting up the manager. Getting the keys early. Going right up, to see what I'm working with, and what I had to with was —

Well. Please understand: I'm a woman. I have hair. So I can get it, as the kids say. My first college apartment, it was me and a girlfriend of mine who had these long Rapunzel locks, and every other weekend when it was my turn to clean, I had to crawl around the floor on my hands and knees. Spin my hand down on the cheapo carpet just to unspool all the combing and hair-teasing from the fibers.

A healthy girl with a good head of hair's always going to lose a few strands. The people before me, they probably had the same problem.

But these were not a few strands.

Because when I open the door, it's just ... *hair*. Beautiful hardwood floors, buried in fistfuls and fistfuls, all looking freshly yanked off a hundred heads.

You couldn't even make out the pattern of the parquet anymore.

I marched straight down to the manager, of course. Gave him a piece of my mind. Please understand: I'm not supposed to know anything about the people before me. They were lovely people probably, but building staff are supposed to take care of that kind of thing. Ease the transition.

The manager agreed. He cleaned, he told me. He didn't realize. He would send his people back up but believe him, trust him, it wouldn't happen again.

Next day, I came back to drop off some boxes: Hair. Twice as much and growing by the second. Like a jet-black sea washing all over my beautiful floors.

I sent my own people to clean after that, of course — some *lovely* people a friend recommended. I put in new floors: very nice, very Scandinavian-looking. I'd heard on a podcast that it helped to assert a new style, to make the place really your own, and I thought that was such a brilliant idea. Sure, I was living out of boxes in a hotel for months. But anytime I frowned over it, I remembered what my mother always said: *Wait to find the proper place for a thing; that's how you make a house a home. A thing in the wrong place always gets lost, it knows it's not where it's meant to be. But a thing in the right place stays forever.*

It was two or three months before I could move in. Four before all the boxes were gone. But I did it. It happened. No hair, just floors, and finally I was where I meant to be.

That was when the teeth began.

They were usually in the freezer. Sometimes in my cheat snack cupboard. The people before me must have had children, or at least a taste for sweets, because they were always sat in a pile in the back of the freezer bin. Always right where I keep my sorbet. Sometimes there'd be bite marks when I'd go looking for a treat. Little dips where little hands had just dug right in. I had to throw all those tubs away.

And the toenails! Like I said, I have quite a lot of hair of my own. It always makes my shower a mess so a girlfriend got me this little scoop she bought in Kyoto? Just this little wooden hand, on a long cedar stick, with the fingers curling in to make a hook. Doesn't work on carpets unfortunately, but you can dip it in the shower drain. You swirl it around, to catch the hair, and that's how I would find them — because God, it'd get the nails too. You'd pull everything out and they'd be tangled in the strands: Little yellow-white crescent moons, all ripped ragged and tossed down to clog the pipes.

It was nonstop after that. I'd go to the closet and the doors would be open wide, a mountain of filthy laundry that wasn't mine flooding out. One of my people would clean the windows four, five times a day, and she'd be crying all the while because it just didn't matter how hard she wiped. The second the glass dried, the prints would come again: Fingerprints, nose prints, even grubby little slobber marks.

They had *dogs*, the people before me. And cats! Piss bubbled up between my new Scandinavian boards. Scratch marks raged at my door. I couldn't even go into the spare office without dry-heaving.

Please understand: I don't mean to be unkind. But if you can't afford a Litter Genie? You can't afford a cat.

I got desperate after that. I recognize the problem. They're putting up these buildings faster than I can blink — how could I not. There's so much untapped potential in these urban areas. Everyone wants to live here and only a few people are meant to, so you tear down an old building. Put up a new one. You put people in their places, but you don't think about it — not enough to make it last. But I'm not supposed to know who the people before me were. And the building manager was useless, and the cleaning wasn't helping, and I couldn't even *buy* sorbet anymore because the teeth were chewing their way inside the box now, with all this spit and globules and *blood* —

And, well: What else could I do?

I asked round. Discovered I had a girlfriend who'd run into this issue before. She and her husband have a place in Philadelphia, in a very up and coming sort of neighborhood. The people before her had been very attached, so she told me had she had found someone who took care of these things. Gave me their number, an email, a few references — and they were very good. No nonsense; I always appreciate that. They had a lot of information straight off the bat; just weren't sure which of the previous tenants might be causing the problem. There were two families that had lived roughly where my apartment is now, they said. The old building was shorter, so the spacing was off. But they'd both been close.

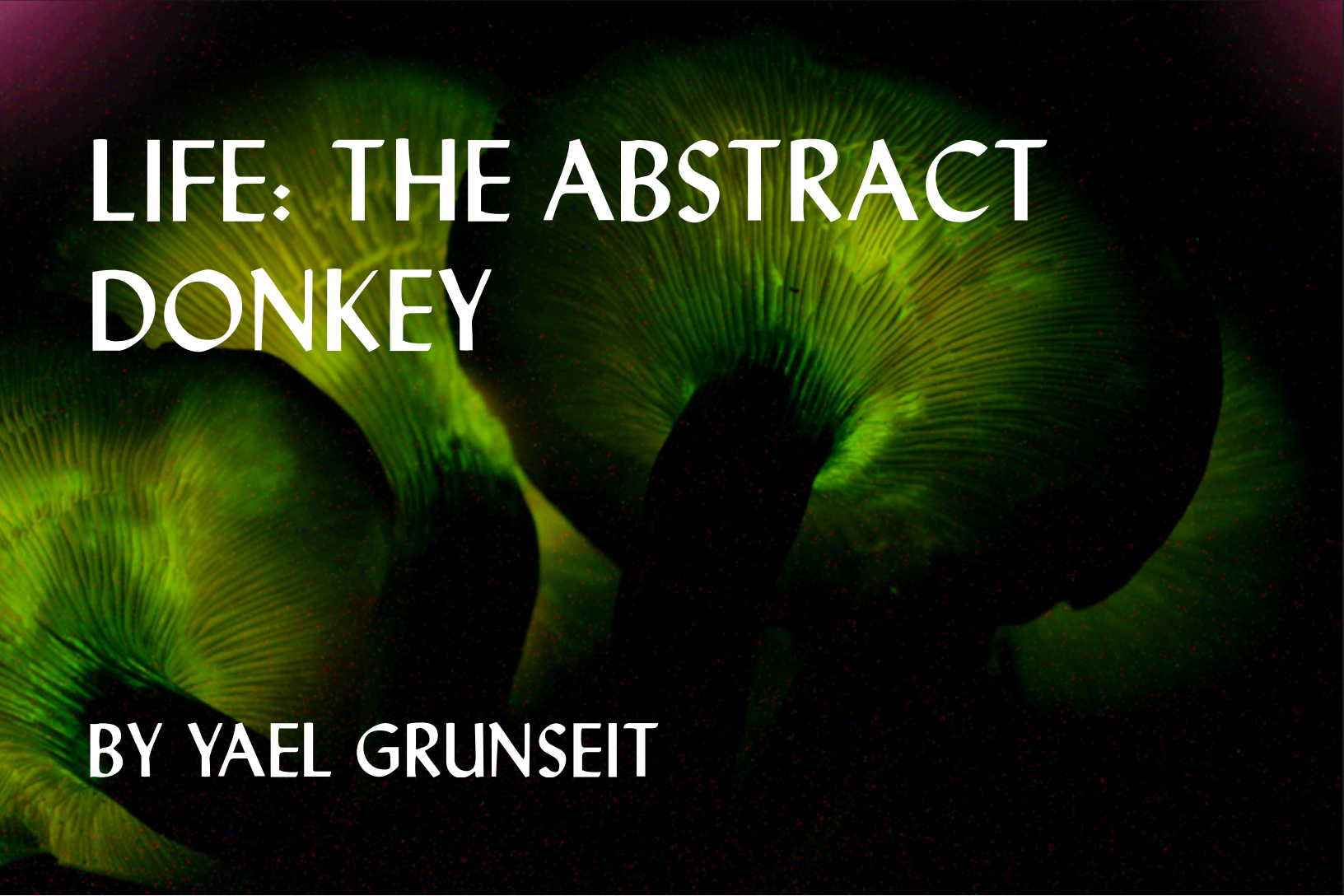
I said, well which had animals. They said, one still has two cats. I said it was that one, and wired them the money. After that they said in a few months the problem would go away.

And I have to admit: it did.

Please understand: That's all I know. If I'm honest — and I'm only being honest — I hadn't thought about it until you called.

I'm very sorry about your loss, but like I said: I'm not supposed to know anything about the people before me.

Sarah Batista Pereira is an LA Film industry survivor and Brazilian-American writer, currently living and working remotely in Salem, Mass. She has lived in no luxury apartments, but has helped her mother clean many.



LIFE: THE ABSTRACT DONKEY

BY YAEL GRUNSEIT

The abstract donkey stood in my kitchen. A thick scribble of almost blinding white light coloured in her head, neck, torso and two legs. She always stood side-on and had no eyes or hooves. She grew and shrunk as she pleased, not subject to any outline. I opened the fridge and pulled out a carrot while my eyes remained fixated on her. I didn't want to look away even for a moment. I pointed the carrot towards her head, she obviously refused.

* * *

I wanted to squeeze my sweaty hands around Liv's cheeks. Slide them slowly down her smooth, thin neck which glowed pink under the vegan restaurant's dim neon lighting. Push my lips against hers so hard that my inner ears tingled and I heard a crackling fire. I wanted us to make out with absurdly explosive urgency like Sailor and Lula in *Wild at Heart*. For us to suffocate in a steam room of terminally agonising lust. If I touched Liv I would have vomited, she's dirty.

This podcast I listened to last week said that humanity has to return to more animalistic, natural sex. They said "sex should be gross and sweaty and passionate, really skin on skin, it should be primal." I can't imitate that sex when using my vibrator, can't paste someone else's wet grip on my thigh. They

said most of the world aren't really fucking anymore. We're all germaphobes because of the Internet, COVID and how rarely we pay for things with real coins.

Liv's real. She answered the Hinge prompt "my mantra is" with "it's only necessary to shower three times a week ;)." She messaged me first, I replied a few days later. Sometimes I pictured her wet armpits which made my mouth pool with the salty spit that precedes vomit. I'd calm myself by repeating, יֵי יֵי יֵי יֵי יֵי.

* * *

I wanted to pat the donkey but I was too scared. I wanted to talk but I didn't. We didn't need to talk. At first I thought she was here to celebrate my unwavering belief in her powers. Then I realised this was more of an intervention. Maybe she'd make me fast for a month or banish all my nice clothes so that I could be free from unnecessary desires. Maybe she was going to stick around, always by my side to guide me. I needed her guidance, I wanted her to tell me exactly how to live.

* * *

We left the vegan restaurant and walked back to mine. I asked about her job, Liv pulled out her phone to show me a drawing she'd photographed yesterday. A six year old at after-school care made it for her, it's them both as generic trees. The facial features were in the green part, she wanted to get her tree tattooed on her thigh. Liv's face glowed from the blue light of her phone and I confirmed my definite attraction to her. Huge green eyes, long black straight hair, freckles, round face. I have small brown eyes and I wish I had at least larger eyes, if not also green. Beautiful actresses have large eyes, excluding Laura Dern. Hers are still blue though, so I guess it's just that beautiful actresses don't have small brown eyes.

Liv's hand brushed against mine, she asked about my job. I grinned and wiped my knuckles quickly on my jeans. I told her that the annoying kids I worked with always had tantrums while I looked after them. They'd scream and cover themselves in their own sticky spit. I looked after three to five year olds at a Chabad Synagogue so that their parents could pray. "Maybe it's self-hating but I can't stand religious children." יֵי יֵי. I laughed. Liv did not but she's also not Jewish.

We entered my apartment and because none of my housemates were home I did the full nighttime check. I checked the kitchen cupboards, the dishwasher, oven and laundry, bathrooms, bedrooms and every drawer in every bedroom. As I checked I mouthed, יֵי יֵי יֵי יֵי יֵי. When I was twelve my family home was robbed, they stole my laptop and my mum's expensive jewellery. A few weeks later I started high school, began checking, got a new laptop and also my period. While I checked, Liv analysed the collages made from old Frankie magazines blue-tacked around our living room. She said my apartment looked like an Ikea display home that'd been decorated by an indie-folk band.

I checked the fridge and wondered whether her lips would feel like a stranger's if she kissed me. If it would feel spontaneous or predetermined by Hinge's algorithm. She walked towards me, swaying from left to right like her perfect body was blown up with air. I concentrated on admiring her, trying to conjure a fervid desire for someone I'd met two hours ago. Graceful and unfazed, it was polite of her not to question the checking, maybe she just didn't notice. I washed my hands, she asked to see my bedroom.

* * *

The donkey commanded me to eat her. Strangle her to death, really push my thumbs deep into her esophagus. Then cut up her body with a cleaver. I would need to drive to my mum's house and grab hers. Once disassembled she wanted me to fry her in a pan with olive oil, salt and pepper. She made me picture myself slobbering while gnawing on her leg, letting her greasy light drip down my chin. She instructed me to consume all of her, to let my stomach balloon and growl from fullness. She trotted a step to the left. She turned on my stove. I waited a moment, maybe she was joking, maybe it was a test. She shamed me for thinking I was like Abraham.

* * *

We both sat on the left side of my bed and faced my dusty white desk in silence. Above my desk was a colourful, cluttered collage which I liked to look at while writing short stories. Liv pointed to the ין and asked if it was an abstract donkey, "you know, from the side." I had never thought ין looked like an abstract donkey.

In Hebrew, every letter has a corresponding number. ין is eighteen because ן's eight and ך is ten. I'd been writing a story where each sentence either had two, eight, ten or eighteen words in it. The only common multiple of eight, ten and eighteen is two, it's about being restricted but craving unrestrictedness. I told Liv that ין is the Jewish symbol for life, "she makes sure that I don't die."

"Like last night I heard noises in my house, I thought maybe someone was trying to break in. I pictured ין and repeatedly mouth it. After an hour or so I fell asleep. ין can also save my life in less dramatic circumstances. Last year when we weren't in lockdown I was at a club and the bathroom was completely disgusting. There was blood on the seat, the toilet was almost overflowing with pinkish piss water and toilet paper. I had to go, so I meditated on ין and went, praying that I wouldn't get a UTI. I didn't. It's not a God thing, I don't believe in God. It's just a me thing, kind of weird I know." I said whilst looking straight ahead, acting coy. It's not 'just a me thing', I barely slept an hour last night and I got that UTI.

Liv and I sat in silence, she was probably bored. Wanting to eat her out and wanting to scrub her clean in my shower were two separate wants. They weren't intertwined in some cool kink kind of way. I thought about how I needed the sweaty, gross sex. Liv breathed in, probably about to say that she had to leave when my lips spear tackled hers. They were much thinner, colder and wetter than I expected.



THE WILD HUNT

BY CHRISTOPHER FULLER

Nelson found himself gravitating toward the games he'd liked when he was a kid — Centipede, Asteroids, even Space Invaders; but the other guys were taking turns on Donkey Kong, competing to see who would buy the next round. They called him over.

He stepped up and died on the first level. It had never been his game. He couldn't get the timing right and the titular ape hurling barrels, unlike the marauding centipede in Centipede, or the drifting boulders in Asteroids, was sentient, clever, and malicious. Rick and Zhang Wei feigned sympathy when his final Mario fizzled.

Darryl was a better sport. "Nice try," he said.

Of all the dads he'd met at his son's new school, Nelson liked Darryl best. Unfortunately, Darryl's kid was in 8th grade. Rick and Zhang Wei were not far behind. Rick's daughter, was in 6th; and Zhang Wei's twins were in 5th.

Nelson's son was a kindergartner, so when Darryl invited Nelson for a *boys' night* at the arcade bar, he felt strangely honored, like he'd been picked for the team by big kids.

They stopped when their food came but eventually got back to pumping quarters and buying rounds of IPA. Nelson had meant to calibrate his consumption but he was approaching the fuzzy line that separated buzzed and slightly drunk. The other three drank with impunity. "I should get going," he said finally.

Rick and Zhang Wei groaned.

"I have to get up early." The implication that the others, who were not stay-home Dads, who had older kids and maybe did not have to get up so early, was deliberate.

"What time does Katie kick you out of bed?" asked Darryl.

"It's Kelly," Nelson said, "We both get up around five."

“I’d like to stay home,” Rick said. “I can make Eggs Benedict.” He pursed his lips. “On second thought, it’s probably a bad idea. I’d be on the Xbox all day.”

“I don’t have an Xbox,” Nelson said.

Their server asked if they wanted another round. “Probably,” Rick said to her breasts. Darryl asked for the check.

Zhang Wei drained his glass. “Wild Hunt,” he said.

“It’s Thursday,” Darryl said.

“So?”

Nelson assumed they were talking about a video game. He looked at his watch. “Seriously, I should go.”

Darryl gave Rick and Zhang Wei a look. They nodded. He turned to Nelson.

“Indulge us.”

#

Nelson didn’t want to climb into Darryl’s white Escalade with his three new friends. He wanted to go home, sneak into bed next to Kelly, and read himself to sleep. But somehow, refusing their entreaties seemed tantamount to refusing their friendship. He caved.

They drove about forty minutes north of the city and into the skunky environs of the suburbs.

“Where are we going?”

They wouldn’t tell him. “It’s something you have to see for yourself,” Darryl said. Nelson turned to the window and saw his own sallow reflection, glum and hollow-eyed, flash in and out of sight with every street light they passed.

“I feel like I’m being kidnapped,” he said.

He had, actually, been kidnapped once. Or had it been false imprisonment? When he was five, a pair of older kids from the neighborhood, brothers, lured him to their house by fanning a wad of Monopoly money in his face. Once there, they pushed him into a closet, dumped rubber spiders on him, and shut the door. He screamed himself hoarse. No hard feelings, they said afterward and gave him half the Monopoly money.

Darryl pulled into the parking lot of a darkened strip-mall, striking the curb. *Lake-View Plaza* the sign said — Nelson wondered where the lake was. However, in lieu of the liquor stores, vape-shops, and pizza chains they’d passed along the highway, this one offered a bridal boutique, a cupcake café, and a scrap-booking supply store. The largest storefront was a yoga studio: *Goddess Wisdom Yoga & Pilates*. Darryl parked by the door.

“We came up here to do yoga?” Nelson said. The others laughed.

“That’s an emphatic *no*,” Darryl said.

“This is Darryl’s mom’s place,” Zhang Wei said. “We make use of it.”

“Your mom’s a yoga teacher?”

“His mom’s a MILF.”

“You mean GILF,” Rick said.

Darryl got out of the car. “Boundaries, gentlemen, please.”

Inside, it was, Nelson supposed, a very standard sort of Yoga studio — a large space with mirrors lining one wall, a rack full of rolled mats, a three-foot Hindu statue in the corner. Darryl neglected to turn the lights on, which Nelson found peculiar.

“Always smells like potpourri in here,” Zhang Wei said.

Rick reached down and planted his hands on the floor. “Imagine all those asses in the air. All that Lycra.”

Darryl opened a closet. “Hey dummies, somebody help me get this down.” He slid a large plastic storage container off a shelf then dropped it on the floor. “Never mind, I got it.”

“What’s this got to do with hunting?” Nelson said.

“What?” Zhang Wei said.

“You said something about hunting.”

“Oh. The Wild Hunt. You’ll see in a minute.”

Darryl cracked open the container, peeled the lid back, and pulled out what looked like a furry blanket. He handed it to Zhang Wei. A musty smell filled the room — dirty hair, feet, mold. He extracted another and gave that to Rick. A third he kept for himself, leaving one more in the container.

“Okay,” he said to Nelson. “Whatever you see here, all we ask is that you just watch — at first.”

“Please tell me what’s going on,” Nelson said, trying not to sound plaintive.

“It really is better if you just watch,” Zhang Wei said. He looked at Darryl and Rick. “Should I go first?”

It had to be some kind of sex thing. His concerns were hardly allayed when Zhang Wei proceeded to take his clothes off.

“What is this?”

Darryl held out his hands. “It’s cool, trust us.”

Once Zhang Wei was naked, he picked up the furry blanket, which turned out to be some sort of sack, like a sleeping bag, and climbed inside it. Then he lay down on the floor.

The rest of them watched.

The bag began to quiver, just a little at first, like an idling car, then the quivering intensified, became violent, like a broken washing machine.

“Hey, something’s wrong,” Nelson said.

“It’s all right,” said Darryl.

“He’s having a seizure!”

“No. He’s not.”

The bag bucked and emitted a noise that rose in pitch like the whine of an over-heating motor. A smell reminiscent of bad cheese and raw hamburger filled the room.

Then it stopped.

Blood (it sure looked like it), gleaming and black, flowed from the opening of the sack and spread across the floor.

Nelson suddenly felt like he’d just run up a flight of stairs. I’m going to pass out, he thought.

But he didn’t.

An animal climbed out of the bag. A large animal. A dog. It was Great Dane sized, maybe bigger, but it looked like a Husky or a Malamute — he didn't know the difference — and blood-drenched, like a newborn.

The animal looked at them with its yellowish eyes and shook, spraying them with gore.

Nelson hurled himself at the door. Darryl and Rick caught him.

“We know,” Rick said, close to his ear, “Take it easy.”

“I wouldn't have invited you if I thought you couldn't handle it,” Darryl said.

They forced him to sit and gave him a bottle of water from a small fridge behind the front desk.

“Look,” Rick said, “I know we sprang this on you.”

Nelson sorted through the possibilities — digital projection, animatronics. Had he been drugged? “I want to get out of here.”

“I get that,” Darryl said, “But three is not enough for a pack. We don't invite just anybody.”

Nelson looked over at the dog-wolf-whatever, licking its hind quarters.

“I don't know how you're doing it but this has got to be the greatest gaslight of all time.”

“Watch me,” Rick said. Then he took off his clothes and climbed into his own bag.

The same thing happened.

The wolf that slithered out also shook itself and sprayed the room with warm gunk. Nelson tried to kick himself to his feet but the wolf bounded over and pinned him to the floor. Then it licked his face, bathing him in hot, coppery-cheesy breath. He screamed.

“Here's the thing,” Darryl said once Nelson had quieted down. “All three of us have been through what you're experiencing now. We were all invited, we all freaked out. I pissed my pants. I'm not joking. But I can speak for Rick and Zhang Wei — this group, this *practice*, is the best thing that's ever happened to us.”

“Let me go. I won't tell anybody.”

Darryl laughed. “You're not a prisoner.” He went to the door, propped it open with the door-stop, and gestured, like a butler.

The wolves cocked their heads and looked at him.

Nelson managed to get his clothes off by himself, but had a rough time with the bag he was shaking so hard.

It was, predictably, hard to breathe in there, worse than that; it smelled like a neglected kennel. There was something else too, something not unpleasant but out of place — Firewood? Musk? Old Spice?

Then it began.

At first, a light tingling, simultaneously kindling in his body and his mind, like the beginning of an orgasm, both a sensation and a thought, but he would have been hard pressed to express what that thought was. It started just below his navel and spread logarithmically, like an exploding firework. But the sparks, the incandescent particles suffusing his limbs did not die out. They accumulated in the tips of his fingers and toes. He was growing, swelling until he thought he might burst.

Then he did.

The skin on his chest split open, his face broke apart, crumbled like an eggshell submerged in Jell-O, his tailbone pierced flesh — it hurt, but it was like someone else's pain now, not his concern.

When the stretching, tearing, and cracking stopped, when the violent shaking had diminished to a soft pulse, he could take stock of himself.

His nose, hitherto a vestigial mass of cartilage and half-dead nerves clinging to his face, had awakened. He could smell through the miasma of hot slime in the bag and into the very substance of the building: wood glue, dust, mice. His ears too — his tinnitus was gone. He could hear the crickets outside, wind in the bare branches.

A profound hunger stirred at the root of his being, and it was more than just a basic need — it was a call to subsume, to destroy without malice, to become.

He might have been in that sack for five minutes, five hours, or five days. It didn't matter. Time didn't matter, in fact, he realized that it never had, and to now be free of its relentless pull, its tenacious pressure, was its own ecstasy. He was different, very different — a being annihilated. All that remained was a core of his self, a true self denuded of all detritus. His new claws bit the floor through the sack. He could feel the power in his haunches, the strength in his jaws, the yearning to tear.

He climbed out.

And found himself surrounded by what he perceived, for a division of a second, as a forest of very tall cat-scratching posts. A second look revealed that they were legs, canine legs that glistened with viscera and terminated in colossal paws planted firmly on the floor.

He looked up.

Three wolf heads, mustard-eyed and long, loomed above. They were looking down at him, tongues dangling.

All the way up there? Why so big?

Nelson lowered his gaze to the mirrored wall opposite.

There he saw the swishing tails of three wolves, and in the midst of those wolves, a small — terrier — maybe a Yorkshire, no bigger than an underfed guinea pig, staring back with licorice eyes.

Then he understood.

The largest of the wolves (Darryl?) lowered its head and growled quietly, deep in its belly. The others took it up, a prelude.

Nelson looked to the open door.

They gave him a head start.

Christopher Fuller is a graduate of The Writers Workshop at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. His short story "When You Walk A Dog, No One Sees You" appeared in the October 2021 issue of MONO. He lives in Chicago.

