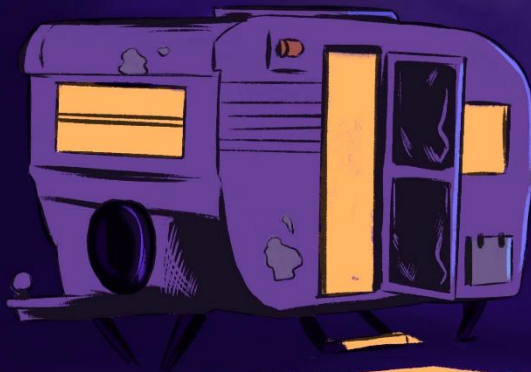


THE MINISON PROJECT
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TMP Magazine

campfire stories

ISSUE 2



Cover Art by Jay Kennedy

TMP Magazine

The Minison Project

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A Campfire is the Original Social Network
Matthew Miller

We thought we sunk the stone circle deep enough,
but the first wild sparks reached up and left burns.

We cannot control with words.

But if we give words time to be
still, it leaps in moonless woods -
not to singe, but to sing, cracking
a smile. Flaring up, yellow laughter warming
lonely, shadowed faces.

Let everyone hold palms up over the rustic ring.
Be light and heat. Let tongues swell with chorus:
all shall be well.

Even embers don't mean death. Gentleness
can ignite again. The night is too cold to be alone.

Lift up your head.

Finding the graves

Sam Calhoun

At the turn near Clift's Creek,
The rocks hewn by rain, hand--
There are no bones, the coyotes have taken them.
There is no kingfisher's song.
There is only this cairn, this stacked stone
tumbled now like a broken palindrome.
There is a spring beneath where the sweet betsy's burst,
where the bluebells turn from blue to pink, to blue again,
where the leaves eddy in pools like spinning poi
and there is the forest, no light, no darkness,
every morning cupping the sky, limbs curving,
smoking with no fire.

I tell the sirens a story from the eighth floor
Meghan Kemp-Gee

A love song for the fire season,
a tall tale for the long cold spring
and the heat dome and a skin like

a pinned-down smile you can keep on
the balcony beside the bike,
the smell of mint and strawberries

longing for replenishment, for
the riddle writing itself wrong
around your halflife: you can keep

your skin on, like you do not have
to hide yourself inside the song
like weather, like beetle-eaten

wood on fire, like stories winding
down, like what burns your lips' corners
with green salt water while you sleep.



Campfire Stories Photoset Submission by Irina Novikova

Something From Nothing
Samantha Terrell

When solving for “x”
With flint and flame,
Expect the unexpected.
It’s sunset,
After all, and the leaves have begun to fall.

What is
Flesh against bone,
Wind against stone?
But a mating of seasons, or a
Clash of math against metal.

Waves
Mehreen Ahmed

It was a darkly day. The rain hadn't fallen any darker in the armpit of the country—densely beautiful. The inhabitants were few, but many. They had not become walled out. They had become white-washed as they stood in solidarity like a wall. They feared the land could be hijacked. They feared a culture could be lost, its language, even the country, could be taken—the new colonisers had arrived. Their worst fears, even more to come was an onslaught on their economy; they would rob them of their own resource. The newcomers came in waves. They were unstoppable. They had been doing so since inception. Those who captured the town's stronghold today had arrived in the high tide once—in waves once. But they had moved away like waves too, apathetic, distanced, just like the cold wall, they had now become. History was repeating itself in its own cycle. And the old migrants were forgetting the past—over and over. The present and the past were just as unchangeable as the waves were. Still, the human wall stood stalwart trying to stop history on its axis, unbeknownst history would find a way around to enter—the new waves on its shoreline.



a magical upflow, Alan Bern

To a Crustacean

William Doeski

The old car you bought to restore
rusted into pieces small enough
to shovel up and tote to the dump.
The ten children you fathered
with other citizens' wives
matured into a mob that looted
and burned your house to the ground.

Now you rustle in tall grass
and sift for clues. You're too late—
the mystery fled decades ago,
leaving hardly a wisp of spoor.
A dry cough flusters the forest.
A portable generator roars
but barely produces a spark.

Men with power tools attempt
to construct something fresh enough
to survive your battleship outlook.
Manly as the rear of the school bus
where you exposed yourself to girls,
your bulk precedes and follows you
through the unwinding of the mind

that braced you against a critique
handed down by a circuit judge.

You've just inherited the air
that lingered in your mother's house.
But you have no place to store it
except in fingertip memory
reserved for women you found

cranky as snarls of barbed wire.
You're afraid to conflate them
with your mother's sightless love.
But be assured that we're all
a single species: our bloodlines,
like the plumbing of your burned house,
tortured but somehow intact.

I'm Afraid of the Tide

Matthew Miller

It's a summer break Thursday, knee boards and plastic buckets
at Sleeping Bear, Longboat, Pokagon. I wash wet sand
from creases in my hands. Tonight, the beach will be cleared.
Chairs with broken legs. Umbrellas lurching
and threadbare. They are trying to hold out against the wind.
Hopeless wards. Slanting through tidal soil,
past Petoskey stones, burrowing shells. My young sons shoveling,
shaping a citadel. Everyone has an idea for that.
A salty moat circling four towers. Our sandcastle is carved
on the shore. I want to believe that my children are safe
from gathering white foam over the beige, thundering waves.
I think of errant words, think of storms. What we imagine is terrific.
I'm packing the walls tighter, higher. Beachcombers cause accidents
combing for treasure. I fear they'll leave dents and
the tide will swallow the rest. My sons,
sunburnt chests and cheeks. Their hearts in this castle, sealed
in the keep. These waters take everything, like dragons, beasts.
We have told them the foundation will last. But day passes, swells blast,
and so many tell stories about what they've lost to the tide.



Campfire Stories Photoset Submission by Irina Novikova

Lolita
Aneeta Sundararaj

Your blood does not run in my veins.

These words were in a never-ending loop inside Tara's head when she picked up a rusty razor blade and held it to her left wrist. Her anguished and haunted thoughts gave way to a distressed itch that needed to be scratched no matter what. She ran the two-inch piece of metal over the scab on her thinning hairline, instead, opening yet another wound. Pulling out the bits of blackish, scaly skin and whitish, brittle hair, she glanced at the blood-stained pillow and wondered if she'd have any hair left after this. It wouldn't matter anyway since she there was no one to see her in this state. She had been alone in life, was alone in imminent death at forty-seven, and would probably be alone in the afterlife.

Always alone.

Playing with the matching rosette sewn into the folds at the waistband of her new red maxi dress with white puffed sleeves, Tara wanted to look her best for her cousin sister, Premita. No more than ten minutes had passed from the start of the journey when the four-year-old leaned into the gap between the two front seats and asked, "Are we there yet?"

"No, Tara," Mummy said through her smile. Turning to gently push the child back, she said, "Why don't you go to sleep for a while. I will wake you up when we arrive."

From the back seat of her father's Mercedes Benz, Tara looked out the window at the moving clouds, consigned to guessing what each one of them looked like. There was a chariot before it pulled away and changed into a peacock. Next to it was a hibiscus that

morphed into a huge leaf. It split in the middle, down the vein, into two little humans facing each other and holding hands. This solitary game continued until she heard, “We’re here.”

The house in Bidong, north of Peninsular Malaysia, was built on the foothills of the mighty Jerai. Affectionately called Amma’s House, there was a straight, tree-lined driveway from the main road that led to small fountain around which cars had to go before coming to a full stop in the covered porch. On either side of the closed stairs, her grandmother had built little nooks between each of the eighteen steps. In seven of them, she’d placed a doll – hand-me-downs from her grandmother’s siblings and extended family. Heirlooms, Mummy called them. Stuffed with lightweight coconut husks, it was the miniature saris – Kasavu, Chiffon, Benaras, Kanjeeपुरam, Mysore Silk, Nauvari and Paithani – they wore that set them apart. None of them captured Tara’s attention more than the one that was placed in one corner of the sitting room downstairs. Three times the size of these Indian Barbie-dolls from yesteryear, that doll was a pink, plastic one which sat on top of a giant speaker. Her name was Lolita.

Lolita was a gift that Mummy’s sister, Aunty Vimla, brought from that far away land of Eng-ga-land. It was meant to keep Premita company while Aunty Vimla and her husband completed their post-graduate studies. At night, like Babushka dolls, their grandmother held Premita in her arms and lulled her to sleep. Likewise, Premita cuddled Lolita and assured the doll that it wasn’t lonely. Upon completion of her parents’ studies, Premita left Amma’s House to live with her parents in India, but instructed Lolita to keep her grandmother company.

“Don’t touch,” the elders would say to Tara if she so much as glanced in the doll’s direction. Take a step towards it and she’d be yanked back by the collar. The closest she was allowed to get to Lolita was to stand on a spot in the corner of the carpet three feet away. As such, for years, a child with big eyes, bigger cheeks and no chin stared at a doll with pink cheeks, long hair and plump hands. Being denied access to the doll, that inanimate giver of affection, was obviously for the sole purpose of protecting the little bubble of love that Amma and Premita shared. And Tara wanted very much to be in that bubble of love.

What if those hugs from her grandmother never came, though?

Therefore, little Tara watched the doll the way a woman watches the man she loves adore an unworthy rival – with an outward persona that everything is as it should be, but a silent and raging impatience for the couple’s inevitable downfall.

The day had arrived.

“Here Tara,” their grandmother said the moment she stepped inside Amma’s House. “Your cousin sister doesn’t want the doll anymore. She is sharing Lolita with you. Sisters always share-share, no?”

Big eyes became bigger than ever.

Lolita was hers.

In that moment when Amma picked up Lolita by her legs and placed the doll, head down, in Tara’s open arms, the little girl blinked several times. She turned it so that the doll’s head was tucked under her chin. Looking into her grandmother’s face, Tara smiled brightly.

Mummy, seated on the sofa, lifted her eyebrows and spoke up, “What do you say, Tara?”

“Chan-gu,” the little girl whispered.

Amma smiled back, let go of the doll and gently pinched Tara’s chin which was beginning to make an appearance. Tara sank down onto the carpet. She stroked the doll’s hair and ran her forefinger along its chubby hand. Surprisingly, Lolita was sticky all over. Her skin wasn’t smooth like Mummy’s and she couldn’t pinch Lolita’s forearm. When she pressed its skin, nothing happened. She used her nail to scratch the doll, but Lolita didn’t make a single sound.

It was most frustrating, indeed. Wasn’t this what she’d seen others in the kindergarten do? They pinched each other until all the children cried. If that didn’t work, pulled ponytails.

Lolita was absolutely silent.

Something had to be done.

Anything.

At 3 o’clock in the afternoon, while everyone in Amma’s House enjoyed their siesta, dragging Lolita along the floor by her hair, Tara made her way to the one place she’d find what she needed most – Amma’s art studio. The last room on the right, it was the only one a ceiling-to-floor glass window and cluttered with easels, canvases, half-completed paintings of fruit bowls, trees, sunsets and houses. Once she was inside, with single-minded determination, Tara went straight to the drawer in the only table there. Reaching inside, she took out a pair of scissors. She sat down on the floor and set about her task. So focused

was her attention on provoking a response from Lolita that little Tara didn't hear the door creak as it was pushed open.

"Tara! What are you doing?"

Tara dropped the scissors and stared ahead, momentarily transfixed on the reflection of her grandmother in the glass window, searching for clues about what was going to happen. Her grandmother didn't say anything more. Instead, left the room. Tara picked up the scissors and resumed her task.

Moments later, Mummy rushed in, followed by Aunty Vimla. Last of all was their grandmother with Premita by her side.

"What are you doing, baby girl?" Mummy's voice was softer, but no less firm.

Tara turned her head to look up at her mother. At the same time, she heard her mother's gasp.

Why was everyone so shocked?

All the elders spoke at once and Tara couldn't comprehend them.

Big-big words and phrases like 'learn to share,' 'not destroy,' and 'it's a matter of principle.'

The only one who didn't say a word, but ran her eyes over all that was splayed out on the floor was Premita. Moments later, two little girls, born eleven months apart, stared at each other. The younger one smiled, hoping her cousin sister would now play with her. Instead, the elder one's gaze hardened and Tara couldn't fathom what the look meant.

Tara turned back to assess her handiwork. There, in front of her lay a dismembered Lolita. A punctured right arm sat on one side. On the other was a doll with alopecia areata. Stripped naked, it still had three intact limbs. The white dress with ruffles and embroidered

little roses had been cut right down the front. Gouged out eyes mixed with mounds of faux hair lay all around Tara, like a black halo around her.

“See, Mummy,” Tara said. “Nice or not?”

Mummy didn’t say a word.

“Oh my God!” Aunty Vimla said, instead. “Nice? What have you done?”

“She’s a child, Vimla. She doesn’t know what she’s doing,” Mummy replied.

Something was wrong. Everyone was becoming angrier.

But why? This was now Tara’s doll.

All these years of waiting.

This was play-play.

Tara couldn’t help but stare at Premita for it was the first time ever that she saw someone both angry and in tears at the same time.

“Let it go, baby,” Amma said in an almost whisper to her elder granddaughter. “She is not the same as us. Our blood doesn’t run in her veins.”

The next thing Tara knew, Mummy reached down and put her hands under Tara’s armpits. Tara dropped the scissors when she was hauled up into her mother’s arms.

“Up-see-daisy,” Mummy said, but she wasn’t smiling like she usually did. Instead, she quickly turned on her heel and pushed past Aunty Vimla and Amma.

The two women and one girl who had the same blood running through their veins crowded around the remains of her doll.

Tara never saw Lolita again.

In the bedroom, Tara sat on the bed while Mummy shook Daddy’s bony shoulders until he turned on his side, rubbed his eyes and said, “Wha- What?”

"I have something to tell you," Mummy said, and then began pacing. Again, big-big words like 'the temerity' and 'spoilt brat'.

Finally, Daddy pulled Tara close and said to his wife, "Let it go, Savitri. Let it go."

"But we must tell her. And tell her now."

"Okay."

When Mummy lay down on the bed, Tara sat between her parents.

Holding her hand, her mother said, "Tara. I want to tell you something."

Tara blinked, her way of saying, "Yes?"

"Premita is fully Brahmin. I am, but Daddy is not. So, you're a half-caste child. That is why my mother said their blood doesn't run in your veins." Her voice rising in tempo and cadence, she looked at Daddy and said, "My sister thinks she's better than me. Her children are better than my child. And all because they're full Brahmin. That I, no, we, are less than them."

Daddy shook his head. "I don't understand. She is your sister. Why would she be like this?"

"Because Daddy – my Daddy, my father – always thought that she's better than me."

"But why? I mean you are sisters."

"Yes. We're sisters. But we're not friends. And Daddy – as in my father – liked Vimla more. He favored her."

"Hmmm... Makes me happy that I have no brothers and sisters," Daddy sighed, his ability to immediately let go of unnecessary hurts an instant balm on his wife's wound.

Daddy sighed. "No more children, okay? One is enough."

"Really?"

“Yes. Let our Tara be a happy child. We are all the family she needs.”

“Hmmm...”

Tara tucked herself between her parents. When they turned to face each other on the bed, like nyctinastic plants that fold their flowers and leaves to protect themselves from nighttime nectar thieves, Tara was safely cocooned in their loving embrace. Slowly she closed her eyes. Sucking her thumb, the memory of her cousin sister’s anger faded. In her dream, her cousin sister was not crying, but using a machete to hack away at Lolita’s others limbs. While Tara watched perplexed at the destruction being caused, all the elders consoled her weeping cousin sister, crying in unison: *It’s okay. New Lolita for you. Our blood does not run in her veins. She is not family.*

“Tara,” a voice said.

Startled, Tara looked around.

Who was that?

Think. Absorb. Feel.

Suddenly her space was infused with light. When she searched, the source of it was neither inside the master bedroom nor out of it. It was everywhere.

Tara viewed the scenes of her life before her through the prism of an intense clear light. In a moment of absolute clarity, Tara looked within. Every spinning chakra came to a complete stop. In the next moment, they started to spin again, but in an anticlockwise direction. This coincided with the words Tara sensed with every fibre of her being.

I am your friend. I am your family.

Tara pushed the sharp end of the rusty blade into her veins.

Tiger

Daithi Kearney

Tiger, tiger burning bright
In the forest of the night
You are there because I care
But should you or I beware?

Are you of my imagination
Or some other's cruel creation
Haunting me who tries to sleep
Hidden in the forest deep

Should I shoot or try to tame
You who plays this awful game
Do you feed or are you fed
As I lie awake in dread

Tiger, tiger of the night
Please rest at least till morning light
Whether I awake or sleep
In the forest I will not weep.



Tiger, Irina Novikova

"Mysterious Waters of the Naked and Nervous"

Mark Blickley

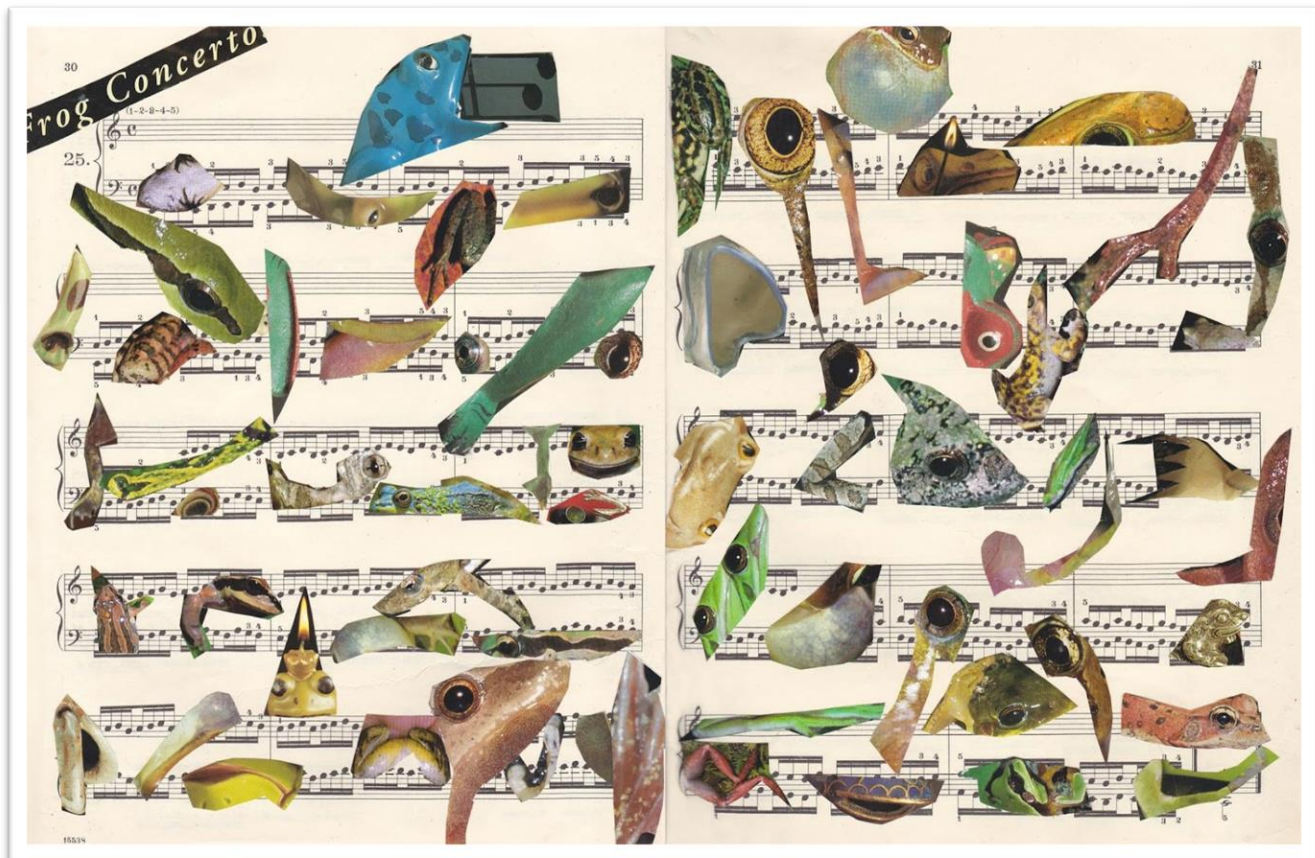
She begins her life along with nine-thousand seven hundred and fourteen other siblings in the shallowest part of the water, just four days after she was laid as a jelly egg attached to a fern leaf that bent over the water. On the seventh day, she sallies to neighboring weeds using a very circular route. She quietly clings to these weeds and watches with terror as her brothers and sisters are repeatedly attacked by sharp-beaked birds that swoop down and chew the helpless tadpoles, devouring the membrane that covers their gills and necks.

She is one of the few tadpoles to survive to day ten when she officially becomes a tiny pitch-black pollywog with a tail that continuously wiggles and a small round mouth that she opens for the first time as her hungry jaws scrape across tiny plants, searching for something to eat. She greedily swallows the microscopically small animals she finds inside the ooze of the pond bottom and the slime that clings to the pond's surface.

While devouring a particularly tasty pond ooze meal, she is horrified to witness some of her tadpole brothers and sisters actually eating each other. It disturbs her to think that her siblings are extending their bellies by swallowing their extended family.

She is mostly tail with a fine stippling of gold. Within the next twenty-four hours, she is breathing through the two gills at each side of her throat. Hind legs suddenly sprout, rounded buds that soon will turn into toes. She begins to use her legs as well as her tail for swimming and is amazed at how fast she can propel herself in the water, away from murderous dive-bombing birds of color.

Her courage is first demonstrated when she successfully attacks a black fish that has menaced her for more than three hours. She sucks on the fish fins until they are ragged although it isn't anger or self-defense that motivates her fish attack much as it is the tasty algae trapped within its fins.



Frog Concerto, Mark Blickley

Leap of Faith

Mark Blickley

I'm a dead frog and I don't say this with any pity or understanding or shame, it's just an observation that people seem to like us, like us a bit too much because they like to push hooks through our jaws and cast us out to sea, as well as amputate us for fine dining and draw us as a cartoon shuffling cigar smoking smart ass, and they like to blame us when they choke on the phlegm in their throats, and they swear that some of us give them hideous skin infections while the evil ones enjoy tossing us into their steamy potions as the younger ones imitate us with a game of leaps and crashes, perhaps because we abandon our young and we larger ones like to eat the smaller ones, and some of us are poisonous and have arrows dipped in our blood for killing others, and snakes like to slide along with our swallowed bulges straining inside their bellies, and we are stunned and frozen and sliced alive by school children with sharp tools, yet we still swim and splash and smile because the sun warms our cold blood and reflects our moist green that gives summer its most vibrant color, and the Chinese believe there is a toad in the moon not a man, and the Japanese consider us good luck, and that luck includes the growing of long legs to hop away from dinosaurs which is why we are the best leapers on earth and millions of years ago became the first animal with any backbone to live on land, and Shakespeare wrote that we wear a precious jewel in our head, and, best of all, beneath the summer stars, the sky is filled with our clucks and clicks and croaks of romance and camaraderie, sprinkled within a flying feast of buzzing wings and microscopic swimmers, and so this is what dead frogs will do just given the chance, a chance that will always destroy us.

"I'll Remember You"

Yuu Ikeda

At the end of summer,
I'll remember whispers of spring.

When the sun weakens
its scorching eyes,
memories of spring
float around me.

When the moon
becomes more hazy,
afterimages of spring
cast shadows on me.

In waves of indigo night,
I'll remember ripples of spring.

Tangerines

Trickling streams wash
Underneath clementine trees
Hazy, orange days
Tilt into plum sugared dusks
And lunes mapping moon phases

Star Shower

Atop quilts and sheets
Beneath seething streaks of heat
Rapt in note of awe

Ariane Lauren



Girl, Irina Novikova

For Edie

Kired Quidangen

You know how it is you know how
the heat rises and anger comes to
blow out each window every afternoon
I remember all the skipping we did
and all the singing, they are trapped
in me, I am amber and all you are
all we were was a critter forever missed
You know how the winds regaled us
how the river that made us riverine
swallowed us at noon and spat us out
by sunset You know how it's dry around
this time of the year, how my day starts
in its thickened skin breaking for my life
and ends with softened soil, ready
for the internment of another hour
after hour after hour after another
nightmare of burning, days of blaze
You know how in the smoke I often
recall and speak only of sweetness
I remember now how I loved you

Old Friends
Daniel Groves

Every day, I saw her there, going wherever she was going. She walked straight and fast, a stroke of sunlight in my dreary world. One day she wore cuffed, black jeans with white, high-top shoes, plus a graphic tee covered by a flannel. Her wavy brown hair fell below her shoulders and often she brushed it from her face, revealing her freckles. She was beautiful.

We rode the same train, usually about twenty minutes. I was always deep into my book when she entered, then she would exit before me. I bet she smelled like Christmas cookies, or like tulip farms in The Netherlands, or maybe like fresh cut grass just after a cloudburst.

“Hi,” I would’ve said if I had any courage. “My name is Ben.”

She would’ve noticed me, looked my way, and smiled wide. “Hello Ben. I’m Paige.” I hoped her name was Paige.

“Care to sit? Your stop is coming up soon, right?”

“Very soon, yes.”

“Join me until then.”

“What happens after that?”

“It will be up to you,” I would’ve said with a curious smile.

And then we would’ve sat and talked like old friends for those few minutes. But that’s the thing; you can’t make old friends. Only after many days and nights, late-night conversations and early-morning flights, tears and wins and games and fights do *new friends* become *friends*. Then, much later, *friends* become *old friends*. It all starts with a little courage. After that, each path is unique, which is why old friends are so special. A destination nobody expects to reach.

But every day, I let her go, just the same as the day before.

And eventually she stopped taking the train.

Cryptid Constitutional: Nature Walks and Searching for Cryptids

Sarah E. Hoffman

constitutional: noun: a walk taken for one's health

cryptid: noun: an animal claimed (but not proven) to exist

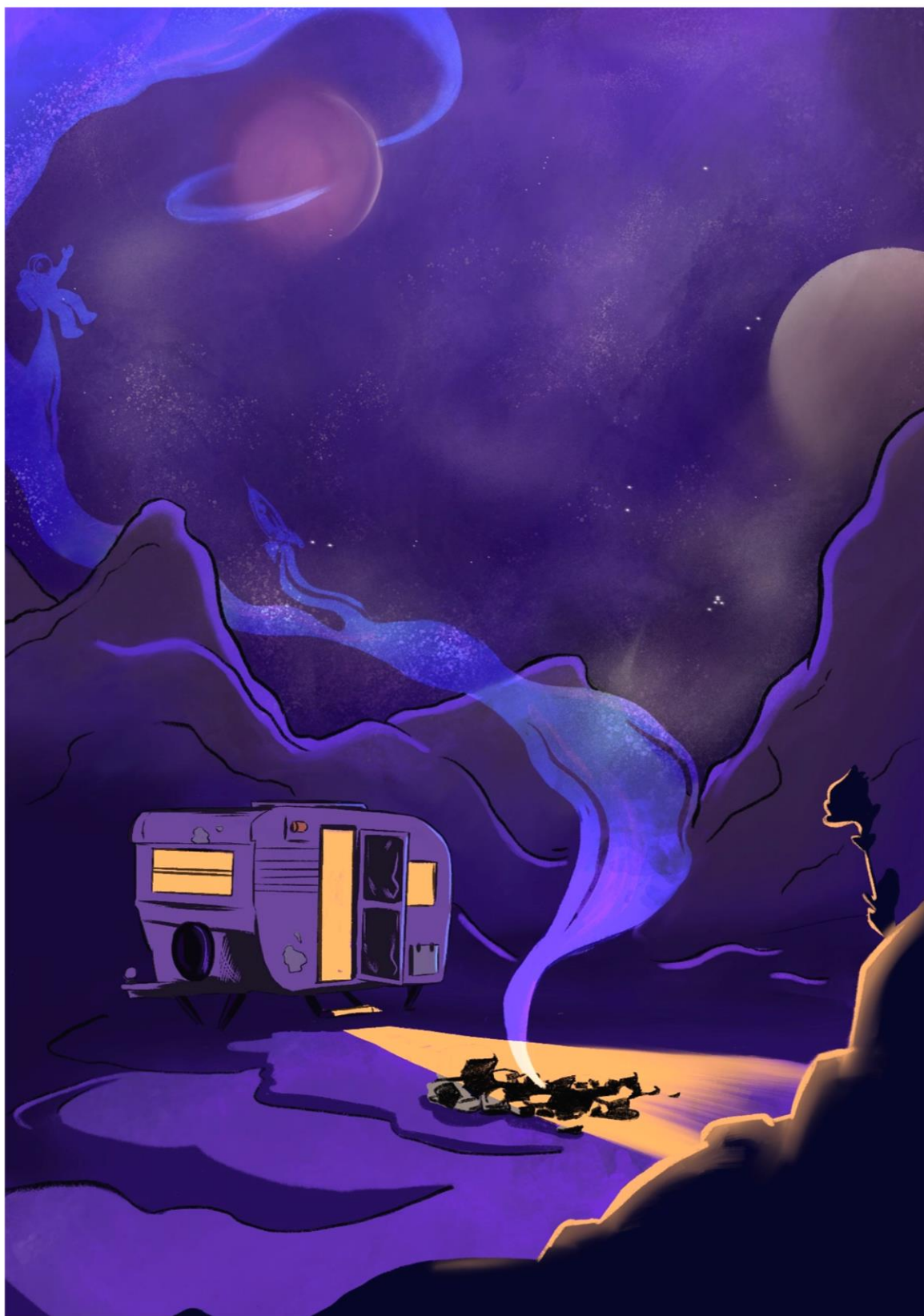
A *daily constitutional* was, at one point, a commonly used expression to refer to the popular habit of maintaining a deliberate and daily walking routine. The modern meme of “me going on a stupid little daily walk /for my stupid physical and mental health” along with the accompanied trend surrounding ‘mental health walks’ is the modern equivalent and current reiteration of the mindset between the *daily constitutional*. A **cryptid constitutional** is simply a daily walking routine embedded with a bit of curiosity.

Go for your regular walk but be curious about everything you see.

Location: Cryptid encounters, while strange and mysterious, are reported with a high enough frequency throughout the world that there is almost a guaranteed cryptid hotspot in your area. Base your route and location on local sightings to increase the chance of an encounter but remember cryptids rule the wild so almost any area is a valid search location. When choosing a search location consider the needs of the specific cryptid you are searching for. What would they eat? Where would they drink? Where would they hide from humans? Is shelter available?

Documentation: Be prepared to document sightings and encounters as they happen or immediately afterwards. Doing this is beneficial to the scientific accuracy of your encounter and will also help you personally remember details that would otherwise be lost to excitement and forgetfulness. A pen and paper is the most accurate and affordable method of documentation. Collect physical evidence in bags (paper/plastic) and small containers (pill bottles, jars). Label and record details such as location, time, unusual environmental factors. Record knockings and verbalizations as they occur.

Reporting: It is important to report your cryptid encounters to the proper organizations as this allows you to become a part of the cryptid community as well as to advance the citizen science aspects of cryptozoology. It is important to report encounters to larger organizations who then amalgamate and codify the data for dissemination. Reporting encounters to the mainstream media may result in negative personal consequences. Additionally, the innate biases present in the media may reduce the scientific importance of the data. Don't know where to report your encounter? *Cryptid Club* is a good place to start! Email hoffmans99@hotmail.com for more details.



Campfire Fantasy, Jay Kennedy

Living in a Drawer at the Morgue
William Doeski

isn't as gruesome as it sounds.

The rent is so low the living
outnumber the dead. Each drawer
has a thermostat and reading lamp.
We can use the employee shower.
I've cushioned my drawer with two
baby quilts laid end to end
and sleep more soundly than ever.

You would like the burly metal,
smooth mechanisms, the neat,
semi-sterile environment.
Some of my oldest friends are here.
All day we read, play cards, cruise
the internet. Good wi-fi,
and we get to observe autopsies
without an additional charge.

The days loop into nights without
the slightest high-wattage flicker.
You would appreciate the fact
that two can't squeeze into a drawer,
precluding familiar sex crimes.
Besides, anyone caught naked
is subject to friendly post-mortem,
followed by a free cremation.

That hardly ever happens. Months
pass with pneumatic sighs. Years
whisper in absolute silence
enjoyed in absolute privacy
once everyone has gone to bed
to dream away larger vistas.
No kinks or bends interrupt
the silken ball-bearing movements

that define us like a habit,
stroking and gently eroding.
We're preparing. Won't you join us?
The contrast between harsh morgue light
and personal dark will stun you
with insight into the shadows
that follow us everywhere
yet are easily effaced.

Breathe Easy
For [Redacted]
Melissa Martini

You are drawn to a stranger in a way you've never felt before, as if you two knew each other in another life or in another universe - but you never approach him, just admire from afar. You make casual conversation every now and again, and something shimmers inside of you as if he's lighting an internal candle but it is blown out as soon as the interaction ends. It's not love, just fascination - a magnetic pull that brings you back to him each time you think you've forgotten. When the candle flame flickers, you wonder if anything has been awakened in him - his words do little to clarify your questions. You do nothing to express the way the air between you feels both like a clean autumn day and a heated hand to hold - just in case he doesn't feel the same way - and if he does, he doesn't let you know, either. Instead, you dance around each other's presence, absently encouraging each other's endeavors. You feel a unique pride for his achievements and brag about him to your friends; when they ask who he is, you can't help but to admit he is merely a stranger - a man you've barely met, flirting with the title of acquaintance.

When he leaves, you find out a week later by word of mouth. A part of you feels like it has died, despite him taking up so little space in your life. It is as if the candle has run out of wick; there is nothing left to light, nowhere left for the flame to erupt and burn. You hope he has entered a timeline where you two are together, but you don't even know where that might be. You aren't handed a map in the heavens - only the constellations can serve as your atlas, and wherever he heads next, you hope he can breathe easier. You miss him, but you didn't know him. The emptiness his death leaves on the earth is palpable; it haunts your mind like his ghost might. But he wouldn't haunt you; he can only hold your hand, the invisible specter of his soul strolling by your side. You wonder how it is possible to have been drawn to a stranger in such a way; you wonder if you were soul mates, twin flames, or absolutely fucking nothing; you wonder if you've mistaken simple admiration or attraction for some kind of magic. But each time you think of him now, you feel a lighter ignite in your chest. The wick warms, wrestles with air, and softly smokes.



Women and war, Irina Novikova

At Ease

Ariane Lauren

Around this time of night, we head out.
Moon sifted by trees, whose bruised fruit we reap.
Ain't long, not too far down a crumbling road.
Feasting on tender, sweet, fleshy persimmon meat,
We amble.

"Watch where you step,
It's dark, and there might be copperheads."

The mill's water wheel squeaks to greet us.
Sitting on pond's edge, we clean our feet.

Moonless on Moon

Mehreen Ahmed

A poet heard a drone over her head which buzzed her a wakeup call, that it had been around, as the drone floated unsteadily on the bowl of the blue and humming its tune, departing readily, informing that it had been there, on the dark side of the moon, and had seen the unseen—an oxymoron, but a little truth hid in this cosmic paradox in the dark porous rocks, a priceless gem was locked—life's building blocks of light oxygen n' all that the earth, overtime had become tight with life, a place quite trite, rightly so, her imagination flew high, she thought, let's rock up to the moon because it filled her up with hope and delight, if perchance, the light side of the moon was habitable, it would be a moment of bittersweet emotion crammed between the dark side of the moon, a force to reckon with and the light side, still, the poet tried to sight a moon from the surface of the moon itself, no lacquered moon on the light side to be sighted—perhaps, a black moon on the dark side, then? The poet pried in vain on earth to witness and shed light through a blue moon to jeer a grin—the dark side of the moon followed the light side like a shadow of a foot, sadly, though, no moon could ever be viewed on either of its sides, the lyrics, she wrote as she sang a moon song on the blue earth and thought the romance rang truer here rather than there.



Moon Story, Noll Griffin

