

r u m b l e

the micro fiction ezine



best of anthology 2004 to 2006

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R i c e

by Christian Bell

Leslie had microscopic dreams. She spent most of her waking hours looking into microscopes. Miniscule life forms, clandestine forces that owned the world. In her dreams she lived in a rice grain. A virus was her lover.

She stopped him before intercourse. What if I got the virus, she asked. He said, that's what I'm planning on! Awake, she was tiny--four feet ten, ninety pounds. The smallest researcher on Antarctica. Discoverer of a hydra-looking alien organism. Her voice squeaked when she handed her superior the sample, said, I found this buried in the ice. The words: you're never to speak of this. The world's end passed from her hands.

She scurried back to her rice grain, waited for her lover.

The Absent Husband

by Luis C. Berriozabal

"Have you seen the absent husband?" Patti points to where he stands, where she sees him, but he is not there. It has been noted that Patti was never married. But perhaps she was and nobody knows. She has her secrets and was abandoned for obvious reasons. Patti is hard to get along with. She has problems controlling her anger. The absent husband skipped town and never looked back. Perhaps he is a bigamist in Salt Lake City, Utah. He has found someone he could carry on a conversation with without fighting.

Patti talks to the absent husband and wags her finger at him, "You're no good," she shouts. She blames him for keeping her in this place. She doesn't believe that anyone else can't see him. Patti believes this is a terrible place for treating her as if she was mad. She often cries and curses at staff and the absent husband. Perhaps she was never really married at all and this spouse is but a delusion, a hallucination of the eyes. There is no convincing her of other possibilities. Still, Patti takes her pills religiously.

"Nerve pills, give me my nerve pills," she demands. Patti is small, but strong and loud. Last night it took a burly nurse to pull her off of her roommate, a much younger and seemingly robust woman. She believed the absent husband and the roommate were having an affair late at night when they thought she was sleeping. This morning Patti is anxious and as fidgety as ever. She is tearful and vexed. She does not believe the absent husband could be so cruel. Patti won't talk to him this morning.

Patti told the staff she would not acknowledge the absent husband any

longer. She will pretend what the doctors, nurses, and social workers want her to believe: that the absent husband is a delusion and not real. Patti could see him, but she said she would try her best not to acknowledge his existence. Despite his pleas for forgiveness and the roommate being moved to another room, Patti said she will believe in lies. She will believe the absent husband is not really there. She will take her nerve pills and die of love, she says.

Excerpt from Najimi 3

by Wayne Sullins

The smell of burnt plastic and old laundry hung in the air. When I pulled up my underwear I discovered they were wet from the beer I had spilled on the bed. Still I left them on, savoring the cold, damp sensation. At the window, smoking a cigarette, stood the impenetrable Masao. There wasn't a kind bone in that man's body but he made me laugh, especially after he'd had a few beers. Turning popular songs into exercises in pornography.

The noise in the street—a new candidate for the Diet blasting his empty rhetoric at ear-splitting volume—had worn my nerves so thin I thought I was going to snap. Two butts remained in the tray near the TV, both from cigarettes I had rolled from previous butts. I picked up the longest one and blew off the ashes.

Then Masao came and planted himself in front of me, looking down with that idiot's grin he wore whenever he wanted to play. I'd had enough, I told him, suggesting we take a walk. The moment I felt the ring on his left hand strike my temple, the noise outside stopped.

I understood—the cigarette would have to wait.

When You Were Lost

by J.L. Laughlin

There was no sky. No setting sun or twilight blue. No vanishing shadows to usher in that night, just brown and gray. You were five years old, maybe six, but too young for words. The playground was lonely. The wood chips, scattered by little shoes, covered the ground beneath the playthings, the silver things like slides and rings and bars, and there were pecan colored logs that built a tower, a four-walled fortress that rose above the other structures.

I'm a princess. You played this game all day with the other kids until their mothers took them away. A new game had to be invented. *I hide from the monster.* Down the stairs you ran, skipping steps, until you reached the core of the wooden toy. There, a room boarded with planks is where you pressed your face against the wood, peeking through a hole to see the softball field where the all-day tournament was being played across the street. You could see the bright lights shinning down on the field, now empty, the games over, and the cars were leaving the parking lot, red tail lights glowing. You listened for a voice to call your name and say "let's go," but you hear nothing. *Mom? Dad?* You pressed your body against the wood, looking through that hole and tears filled your eyes. You sat in a pile of woodchips; they poked your legs with their jagged edges. Would it have been better if they just hit you? A pain you could see. When did they find you that night? Or were you never lost, instead you were "in the way."

Daddy had a gold statue, and he put it on the coffee table. There was a party, and you stayed up late, eating beer nuts. Mommy had a stinky drink, and she put you on the futon. She forgot to give you a blanket. You slept bare-legged. Is that why you still don't cover your body?

Halter tops, v-cut shirts, and tummy fat hanging over your jeans. You left with the first man to put a wedding band on your finger. He taught you not to hide because he expressed his feelings, mostly anger. You learned to fight, but you never showed them the battle scars he gave you—they're still leaving you alone. They travel. Spent a month in Montana. Big sky country.

The Separate Light

by Paul Lynch

Sunlight slips through the holes in my curtains, ragged and torn as they are. I stay silent some mornings, lay in bed and judge the movements of the world outside from the sanctuary I know so well. The walls in my room are painted haphazardly, streaks of unfinished colour on grim white with photos stuck with cellotape here and there. I don't have the energy to create movements if I know my work is to go unnoticed. My mother pretty much leaves me alone, but that's another story for another time, perhaps.

From my window, I see the town in the light it doesn't wish to be seen—the rows of grey houses and tired, empty warehouses. An era of work at an end and a loss as to where to go from here. My dad worked here before he died, in a factory down the way. He never told me about his job, and I never asked. I just looked into the empty eyes of his dreams unfulfilled and knew it couldn't be the life for me.

I slip out of bed and run my hands through my hair, eyes half closed. I take a lighter and burn the edges of my frayed pants before I put them on. Loose straps hang down from the knees, and a small tear lies on the pocket 'round the back. And I count to ten before leaving the bed, an old habit that I just can't lose.

I open the curtains before I leave the room, stepping over unwashed clothes and worn out shoes. I press play on my walkman, and an old jazz tape I found lying around my mother's room spools into existence. I pull up my hood as I leave the house. A car drags past me fast with billowing clouds of smoke drifting up from the exhaust. I watch as particles mix in the air around me and drift into nothing.

Lighting a cigarette like fine art, slowly and carefully, the flame licking the tobacco's edges, dead leaves turning an orange glow within my grasp.

It was the winter I rode the subway, my face looking into the glass and the city passing me by with every movement I didn't make. Machinery combining with some unnatural force to create movement, velocity, speed. Fusion of elements, the darkness of the tunnels through which we pass awoken by the cold light of sun on a winter's day.

The icy layer cracked beneath my feet as I stepped from the train on those bitter winter nights, the laces on my shoes undone and tattered beneath my feet. I liked to watch the city illuminated, random lights on random floors in those huge monolithic buildings that seemed to crack the clouds, shattering the fragile white pockets of freedom that hang above us in manners that I could never even pretend to comprehend in the days of lockers and school buses and cartoons on Saturday mornings when nothing seemed to matter but the days and the nights, the gentle passing of time.

The Idea of Egypt

by Spencer Dew

Tough and lucky rich girls, the sisters claimed to be following a raw broccoli diet, consisting mainly of cigarettes and a bottle of dry red wine the younger of them had brought up on the train from Barcelona. All that was scrapped by late morning, when they sat in the hotel's dining room complaining about the hashish gum on their fingertips, devouring Nutella with knives, giggling about the situation comedies of their childhoods, flipping through the guidebooks for some place with reliable American-style Chinese.

Their brother, for his part, walked around with his hands in his jacket pockets, surveying, keeping his chin up, his face in a frown designed to appear intellectual. He quoted, with varying accuracy, Jefferson and Morrison and Guy de Maupassant, made some garbled attempts at Baudelaire. Later, drunk on some cheap cherry liqueur he had mistaken for something famous and natively French, he traded twenty Euros to an Estonian in a dirty wig who siphoned his sperm in a dirty, curtained room.

The grand tour as education, not vacation. At the counter of a zinc bar, under framed reproductions of posters featuring similar zinc bars, one sister, the younger, decided to become a lesbian. She announced that she wanted to adopt a less fortunate baby, one with a puckered face and a meditative disposition.

The brother stalked the bookstalls along the Seine, as he had been planning to do since adolescence, mistaking himself for the hero of certain romantic paperbacks to which he'd once masturbated.

The older sister spoke of spirals, descent, a deepening at once more wide. Armed with the rudiments of desire she hung out at trashy blue-lit clubs and waited for some therapist's case to take her home and abuse her in a way that indulged her peculiar leanings.

Stir fry. Chap stick. The younger daughter got drunker and woke with an Italian foreskin in her mouth, unhappily attached. She dreamed of inland cities, Cleveland, Buffalo. In her journal, where she secretly charted her siblings' spending, she sketched an American scene: newspaper boxes clustered at a street corner, under a bus stop sign.

A leather-bound book of aphorisms. An opera by Gertrude Stein. A monograph on puppet shows and proletariat insurgency. On the graves of certain philosophers, the brother left small stones, not because he or they were Jewish, but because it seemed at once simpler and more exotic, privately cosmopolitan, esoterically refined.

The older sister chipped her tooth on a belt buckle some oil baron's son handled too tentatively. The idea of Egypt. A libretto in hieroglyphs. The strut of dancers, slaves to the salt mines. Finding a good English-language dentist was not easy, and her rectum was bleeding, an amount that could be called copious.

There was always much explaining to be done at the Consulate. Such were their trips, these three.

Then brandy, all around. A gold filling, a stitch or two. Everyone planned to get tested when they returned. In the meantime, they wrote postcards. An obelisk. The catacombs. Every poet slays his model, said the brother, reciting. Benjamin Franklin slept here, the younger sister wrote. Foreskins are interesting in shape and texture, in their inimitable retention of taste. Please send money, wrote the older sister, then,

tonguing her new work, added, hoping for a tone of irony or nostalgia, like a line from before the wars, funds depleted, underlined twice.

C o n s p i r a c y

by Luis C. Berriozabal

Larry eyeballed and chided his on-again, off-again girlfriend, You should never call them! Wanda, how many times must I remind you that they are the conspirators? They are the ones that put these voices in my head. It's the police! I can hear their sirens. They're near. No, baby, I'm not putting my clothes back on. Let them take me away like this. I don't give a damn. These bastards just want my money! Oh, here they come. Look at what you have done.

Larry pleads with the authorities outside his apartment door, There is no trouble here officers. I just had a little disagreement with my woman. I'm fine now. I'll get back in the house when I'm good and ready. I know I'm half-dressed. I'm not blind. What are you going to do about it? No, I'm not resisting. But if you insist on taking me away, what is a poor old man to do? See what you've done woman! When I get [out...?]

Larry sits in the psychiatric emergency room, wearing light-blue pajama bottoms, black cotton socks, and shirtless. He speaks to the attending psychiatrist, No, doctor, I don't want to harm myself or anyone else. Voices? What do you think? I can hear you pretty well. Internal stimuli? English, doctor, speak English. Well, I can't answer that question with these police officers within earshot. Yes, well, they're the responsible ones for the voices in the walls. Yes, in my apartment! Yes, yes, yes. It is them that plant the voices. Larry scans the room suspiciously as the doctor leaves.

The social worker comes into the room to ask Larry questions. I live with my woman friend. No, I'm not married anymore. Kids? A couple

of them walking around, spread out all over the state. No, don't contact them. We're not on speaking terms. No, you can't have their names. Just send me home to my woman. I've got something for her. It's her fault I'm in this mess. My ex-wife? She's long gone, probably dead. Please go away. I won't sign anything. Larry asks for a cigarette, but he's told the smoking break is in forty-minutes. He begins to laugh hysterically.

*In the psychiatric ward
He writes on the wall
With a red crayon,
Twenty-five times,
I'm the Supreme Being.*

3 Models

By Phil Vas

He gave the room a final once-over. Then he answered the door. She had smallish green eyes and talked to his shoes.

"I'm the model," she said.

"And I'm the artist."

He was trying to be cute. The model only nodded.

"Come in," he said.

She entered the dim studio.

"Are these your drawings?"

"Yes."

"They're amazing."

"Don't patronize me," he said.

She stared at his shoes.

"There's a robe in the bathroom."

The model scurried into the bathroom with her backpack. Minutes later she came out wearing a pinkish terricloth robe.

"On the futon," he said.

Terricloth slid from the model's hunched shoulders. Her collar bones and hips protruded. The small green eyes seemed to apologize.

"Tell me something," he said, "I don't recall asking for a skeleton. Did I ask for a human skeleton in my ad?"

A matchstick rose to wilting breasts. "I've been. . .sick."

"Oh, I get it. You're one of those high-strung, over-achieving anorexic girls. Like they show on the after school specials. Prom queen, cheerleader. But one look at a bon-bon. . . ."

"Shut up!" she exploded.

"No, wait. You're a sweet farm girl from the heartland. Came here to be an actress. Got mixed up with certain people. Now you do whatever it takes for that next hit. If the cheerleaders could only see you now."

The model began to weep. He turned his back as she dressed and rushed out.

The following weeks were difficult. He sat around doubting himself. His style was too traditional, too formal for the galleries. He glanced at the half-dozen framed drawings on the walls. They were Ok. But shouldn't an artist have more to show for the last ten years of his life?

Then another one answered the ad.

Upon opening the door he discovered a giant goth with blue hair and a tiny yellow lunchbox.

"Hey, I'm the-"

"The futon is over there. Robe's in the bathroom."

"I won't be needing that," she said.

The model walked over to the futon and peeled off her black skirt and torn black tights. For a moment he envied her shamelessness. Then she bent over. A tampon string dangled from her wild blue crotch. "Hey, got anything to drink?" she asked. "I like to get hammered before I pose."

"I don't," he said, "but would you like a Twinkie or an Eskimo Pie?"

"Ha, ha."

"By the way, the string. Nice touch. You remind me of a great big fat balloon."

"Hey, that's not cool!"

She pulled a lobster fork out of her tiny lunchbox and held it to his neck.

"No need to resort to violence," he said.

"I've been working a long time to get my shit together, man! And no little prick like you is gonna take that away from me! Got that?"

He nodded.

She dressed, spit on the floor and was gone.

The third was not only pretty but competent. Within minutes she was nude and taking directions on the futon.

He could not commit a line to paper.

"Jesus," he barked, "your body!"

"What's wrong?"

"It doesn't. . .translate."

"Translate?"

"Look. Go home."

"But I'm homeless," she smiled.

He put down the charcoal.

"Let me get this straight," she said. "I just took off all my clothes and now you want me to go home?"

"Yes."

"What are you, gay?"

"No."

"Impotent?"

"I'm an artist, damn it!"

She went and opened the blinds.

"So draw me. For christ's sake, do something."

He stood there as she dressed.

Gone. Without a word.

He watched through the window as she descended into the subway. He stared at his drawings for a while. Then he called the paper and cancelled his ad.

No Harm Done

by Bob Thurber

The minute things began to sour in Miami, we took what money we could lay our hands on and headed north in a Buick Skylark. Nice car, nice interior. Not new, but fully loaded. After three days and fifteen-hundred miles Rollo felt it best we ditch the car. We'd pushed our luck long enough and had run out of money for gas anyhow. So around midnight we pulled off the highway, parked in the lot of a veterinarian's office, in a handicapped spot with a sign that said unauthorized vehicles will be towed at owner's expense. We didn't know who the Skylark's owner was, but Rollo said the police would find him or her, and the insurance company would happily foot the bill for the return of the vehicle. So, all together, no harm done.

Before we abandoned her we wiped the interior clean and locked her up because we didn't know the neighborhood, or where on earth we'd landed, and then we just started walking.

Prince Charming Must Die

by H. Kim Lee

My boyfriend's friend has been dating this chick. She's friendly and attractive: tall, lean, slim waist, and long, silky hair. After two months, she has her name on the lease of "their" new apartment. He's going to get a new car, so she can drive his pimped-out truck. The latest development is that she wants a pair of new titties. I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up paying for it.

I used to get mad at girls like her. She wants a princess lifestyle, but she has a middle-income budget. So she finds some guy who makes a little or a lot more money than she does. She probably figures it's a fair trade. He gets a nice piece of arm candy, and she gets to stock up on Coach and Louis Vitton purses. You can hear the cha-ching of the cash register when she spreads her legs.

I've heard him bitch about how she's not putting enough money into their new place. How he's buying all the large items and she's just getting tablemats from Target. He's been bitching to his buddies about how much money he's spending on her. Then she appears, and suddenly it's another story. He's telling her that he wants to make a home for her. He wants to get her everything she wants and desires.

I realized that I've been blaming the wrong person. She's part of the problem, but she doesn't deserve all the blame. He wants to play the victim card. He gripes to his friends about how he's putting more into the relationship. He bitches and moans about how he's doing so much and she's not doing enough. Then he goes home, pulls out the credit card, and does the same thing over and over again.

If he feels like he is being short-changed, he should grow some balls and learn how to say no. He could find himself an independent woman who

can buy her own shiny trinkets and designer shoes. Instead he stays and complains and ends up being jaded against most women.

This is the problem with the Cinderella/Prince Charming phenomenon. Some men want to be the knight in shining armor coming to take care of his princess, and some women think they deserve the easy lifestyle. I think it's time to get away from that myth. Happy endings are overrated anyway. Prince Charming was probably a mama's boy who couldn't handle a strong woman. Cinderella was probably a frigid bitch, pretty on the outside and cold on the inside. Everyone should have partied with the ugly step-sisters. They were probably the wild, kinky freaks behind closed doors.

Tucson at the Solstice

by Gordon Moyer

Where are all the lizards,
the spiny and zebra-tails,
now that it's winter—
they must be wriggled under rocks.

Look how vast the plain is!

There's dust in the ecumenical light
slanting down from the clouds
into the Avra Valley.

Their tiny hearts still must beat,
but softly.

One more night at the hospital

by Walt Hutton

Lights dim to a sickly pall.
Numbing silence, cut by troubled breathing
lies over all like a thick white blanket.

Smells of waste and sharp chemicals
while apparitions with pain-smeared faces
shuffle through the halls.

Televisions splatter dark walls with brilliant colors
no one cares
no one is watching.

Amid muffled, drained voices somewhere outside
I roll over
and think about how I can ask to leave again
tomorrow.

how we break

by Ginny Eggleston

You stare at me
eyes floating in pools
I can't look at you
You sliced up our life
Cut my eyes out
I bleed clear
glass from what is deep and fragile
soak you with
Waterblood
If only tears left scars
reminders
etched words

(our wedding glasses etched
—remember)

Marriage bones broken
us bones broken—if only I knew, YOU SAID.

-breathe-
I fucking know

I can hear bones
cracking in splinters
chewed birdpromises
bitten in half

We suck out the marrow now?

We eat the brown blood of broken bone?
Gnash glass with teeth?

Chew the pieces
Swallow s l o w

(I will)

F r e a k s

by Gary Sloboda

I stand outside the subway
as a man in a bunny suit
lopes past me down

the escalator stairs,
hops the entrance carousel
with pink ears flopping

like a little girl's laundry
tossing on a line in the wind.
Security guards chase him

with their night sticks raised
over shaven heads.
I hope he is never caught.

I wait by the edge of staircases
and the mouths of tunnels.
I run with other young men

who burn their ears with
their own songs - bleating,
sorrowful words that rise

up like summer stalks
in the mind. We leave the city
each week to taste the open air,

sleep in meadows with the smoke
of pungent joints tousling
the tendrils of our haircuts.

We drive ourselves insane
among the bees and drunken
clouds of gnats as scrub jays

dive through the tight scrawl
of thistle at the edge of woods.
The whole golden countryside

blares like an opera
beneath a blue wing.
At the end of July we

catch a ride to the coast
in the back of an old man's
wood-paneled station wagon.

We pick glass from our feet
and clap our bloody hands
to the strum of folk songs

that creak like an old ship
on the a.m. radio.
Sackcloth and wine,

blood sport and empire,
we are atheists singing

outside a boarded-up temple.

Thirty miles per hour
in this deathless car
bounding with song

and the taut sails of our stench,
the old man lowers the music
and lifts his chin to stare at us

in the rearview mirror.
Flashing his false teeth, he asks
us to pray for the thousands

of office workers that stand
in hallways, looking for the lit door
to their previous lives.

about rumble

Although there are many short or flash fiction magazines on the web, Rumble remains the only site devoted to the Micro Fiction form. It was started in 2004 by members of The New Absurdist, which can be found at www.absurdist.cc.

Rumble defines Micro Fiction as a story of 500 words or less.

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The Rumble website is located at rumble.sy2.com. The site adheres to Web Standards and is valid XHTML and CSS 2.1. Site design is by Craig Snyder.

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