

miniMAG

issue45
rodents in watercolor



Scales, a movement of the sun

Ian

I like to make fish
in the bottom of the river

pebble toothed monsters
hungry water bodies

shaped by my submerged hands
glottal ground current breaths

thrashing against my grip, loose
skin pulled to the nearest shore

and endless, open salt-thirst
mouths of bodies adrift





photomontage by H.S. Tobias

The Rat Race

H.S. Tobias

Every first Sunday of the month did Birdy, Bart and Joel gather at one of their shoddy lit garages or at the local tavern to play bets. Blackjack, Baccarat, Craps and Slap a Cat. They'd play until their pockets were turned inside out, with empty stomachs. What had been a pastime with buddies transfigured into addiction; at home and at work these men had dice, cards and coins in mind. Sometimes they'd play with other men who quit when ahead of the game. And not too long ago did they run out of games to play, did they start to make up their own. Games where only one could win. Birdy, more than the rest, lost. He felt cursed by a bad streak. He thought his pockets must've been lined up with holes. As he walked home, back from playing, the street pavement was lined up with holes. Manholes went uncovered and from them vermin sprout. He feared something would sprout out of his own. So much did holes bother Birdy, he began betting more money to

heighten his chances of winning. And still, every Sunday he walked home with empty pockets. All the extra money did was have him play for longer and walk home later at night, darker, darker. One night, the most he'd ever bet until that one night was seventy dollars. That night he bet one hundred and thirty dollars and returned home so tired, so dark he tripped on a hole and four teeth knocked off. If he were a kid that would've been a quarter per tooth with the fairy and he'd have one dollar more than he had now, to stave off the plague. Teeth don't grow back at the age of thirty- eight.

It was morning. Birdy sat at the television, one eye on the PBS rat maze documentary and the other at his baby blue, speckled in bird poo mailbox. Then, the mailman arrived and Birdy sprung from his seat with the excitement of a child on Christmas morning after Santa's shift was over. It arrived! it arrived! His eight hundred and sixty-three-dollar check had arrived. Without even socks to cover his happy dancing feet did Birdy shilly-shally across the barren, glassshard and oodles-of-pebble yard.

Birdy sat at the television, with envelopes in hand. Shaking, rapidly flipping through adverts, coupons and job offers better than his own. Birdy worked as a school janitor, no shame in it but the shame he felt. Thought he should feel it. Thought it would go away when he won it big, somehow. And with the leaving of shame arrive fortune and even a beautiful marriage. With flattering children all come riding within a golden carriage. They'd sing that dreams come true, and if Birdy smiled wouldn't they smile too?

Some envelopes had quips like "The Beach Boys and the BeeGees are having a party in your pockets, WALKMAN!" "Buckets so BIG, chicken so TASTY it's not fingerlicking good, it's elbow sucking DELICIOUS," "We are EXTERMINATE! Rodents and cockroaches have met their fate!" And, voila! His hard-earned money. Now, Birdy had been watching the lab coat talking heads all morning that Saturday. Had he any children they would have been watching cartoons, he'd be preparing breakfast or fixing the crawling in the pipes, but he would not have come up with his latest game: The Rat Race, title of the documentary he'd been watching. The television scientists had been training a rat's senses to solve mazes. They argued that, more than sight and memory, a rat's sense of smell was the most efficient way a rat

could solve the mazes; rats could even detect changes in weather before they happened. They argued as well, that if a rat were to lose its sight, its sense of smell would develop to make up for its blindness and the rat would be even more effective at solving mazes. As a side note to their experiments, the scientists found that the rats with better solving capabilities were treated as dominant members of their colonies, as if they returned from the maze champions.

Birdy ran to the hardware store for a hundred dollars of wood, then built a small rat maze in his yard. Marvelous. Birdy puffed his chest, his lip curled. Tee-hee, he sneered. Birdy walked to the nearest payphone and did call Bart and Joel.

“I’ve a new game, Rat Race, we’re racing rats and yerr gonna need to find a rat and some cheese, gouda or some nefarious smelling cheese.”

“What? Why? No.”

“We’re racing rats, how about, you put down a hundred or two on it. I’m putting down six hundred dollars, no, seven hundred dollars on mine rat.”

“You’re serious? You’ll pay seven hundred? To the winner? Birdy, is your head ok?”

“I’m feeling my luck, c’mon. Bring a rat tomorrow, my place. Don’t forget the cheese.”

“Very well, Birdy.”

You have to imagine the call went that way, because the next day Bart, Bart Jr., Joel and Joel Jr. showed up at Birdy’s. Birdy and Bart happened upon their rats by dumpsters. Bart’s rat had a chewed ear, just like him, so he named it Jr. Joel had the decency of getting a prim, combed and fluffed rat from a pet shop. Joel paid for his rat, so it’s either his offspring or a meal. He named it Jr.

Birdy came from within his home, holding a bottle of liquid detergent, hands soaked and dancing his steps while whistling the famous trumpet fanfare they play at horse races.

“Welcome to the Rat Race!”

“Have you been drinking that?” Joel asked.

“It’s for my rat, little on the, err, windshield and they get going real nice!”

“No way you’re paying seven hundred,” said Bart.

Birdy dried his hands on his jean’s backside, then retrieved from his pocket the seven hundred dollars. He shook the wad at them, to show he had the money.

“Listen man, he wants us to bet about a hundred or two. That’s a lot to lose, what if he’s tricking us?” Bart whispered to Joel.

“I don’t know, I think he’s lost it. Look at him, something’s not right with him. We should call it quits.” Joel answered.

“It’s not worth it, Birdy. We’re going home!” Bart exclaimed.

Birdy signaled with his hands for them to stop; he scurried in and carried out a cardboard box.

Then did he twinkle his fingers and as if a magician’s act, pulled out from the box a pale-eyed rat. And presented it to Bart and Joel.

“A blind, is it blind? A blind rat? Birdy, what the hell is wrong with you?” Joel scoffed. Shaking his head, he left Birdy’s lawn and drove away.

“So uh, is the bet still on? Racing some rats?” Bart asked, barely holding back an impossible grin. “Yerr on, man,” said Birdy.

The race began. Birdy’s rat, like a soldier in a minefield, scrutinized every inch of maze wall it ran into and made its snail paced way through the maze. Every time its paws would touch a shard of glass, or a fragment of bird poop it would study its smell. The rat lingered longer than the rats on the television; Birdy was not happy. Birdy had just now realized that his rat’s guiding star was well in his tawdry, gimcrack,

open air lawn. The many times he pissed on this lawn, all the trash bags he lazily dragged across it tore and left a humid snail trail of bathroom sludge. Those pretty, pampered television rats in their white foam, clear and well-ventilated mazes had it easy. And did Birdy bet seven hundred dollars on this rat. This rat that sniffed urine and thought of rat soda, Ratorade and Rat-Cola; but licked the ground and tasted dirt.

Bart Jr. claimed the cheese, and Bart fell on his knees crying tears of joy. Birdy stood there, not an inch of child-like excitement remained in his body and he realized Santa Claus is not real and if he is real he works as a tax collector.

Bart claimed his prize, closed his eyes and sniffed the money, then drove away.

Birdy stood there, looking down at the poor rat's pale eyes. Not a blink, quivering, showing it had no teeth. If that rat were a kid, that would've been a quarter per tooth with the fairy and he'd have... well, something.



Free

Amit Parmessur

We met, burnt. You took
the tree of my shade lightly.
When my leaves shed me,
it left you heavy with guilt.
We'll heal in flourishing lands.

broken-apart moon by boredom
a mixed salad

*

winter hanging from a noose
enjoy playing guitar

*

the winter coat hanging in the wardrobe
peace

*

the single daisy in the vase
charms

*

It's fun to play with who we are
don't you think?

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni

LAODICE THROUGH ELECTRA

Alex Prestia

other views:

Laodice Through Hecuba	Issue04
Laodice Through the Immigration Officer	Issue19
Laodice Through Telemachus.	Issue31

“Lao-Lao, oh my god, thank you for coming.”

“Hey Electra, sorry I’m late, I had trouble finding this place.”

“Don’t even worry, this bar is so random. But, see the bartender? I’ve been dropping hints. Anyways, I wanted to catch up, how’s my favorite Trojan been? Did you hear what happened in Professor Nestor’s class? That old guy is so creepy, Hermione’s such a slut for playing him along like that. And, last week at the chariot race tailgate, she was totally making out with Teucer and then Diomed and- the rest I don’t care about but this one made me so pissed- Ajax. Like, she knows me and Ajax hook up sometimes. She’s so trashy. What? No, eww, not Ajax son of Oileus; son of Teleus. Oh my god, I would never. He’s ancient. You’re so cute with stuff like that. Let’s take a shot. So, like, I heard you and Telemachus are getting pretty close recently, how’s that?” *You don’t know anything. And I just keep you around because you’re the fun foreign friend. Can you imagine if you were an Argive? I’d hate you for taking him from me. We’d play some funny little game where we pretend to be friends but really go behind each others’ backs. But it doesn’t matter. You aren’t. So you aren’t really a threat. I mean sure, Tele may take a pass at you. Maybe date for a year or two. But he’s not going to marry you, or stay with you, or make it long-distance once you’re gone. You’re just the foreigner. You’re the fancy but impractical purse that I carry around when it suits my outfit.*

When we were like seven, Telemachus' mom and my mom kept trying to force us together. I guess she saw some opportunity because his dad had been gone for so long, but it's also just this weird thing moms do where they like wedding their children together as some sort of bff bonding. At least once a month we'd get in our van and head over to Tele's house. There me, some brothers of mine, him, and the kids of the farmers that worked his father's fields would run through the grand courtyard the rest of the house is centered around. Normal kid stuff. We were told never to go into the main feast hall, but whenever our mom's said that they looked directly at me. I don't know. Whatever.

Anyways, we'd pretend that one of us was secretly a Trojan spy (yeah, I know that's not pc now, but we were like little kids, it's whatever) and break into smaller groups to find clues. Tele always chose who the spy was at the end of the game, and the rest of us would jump on the unlucky spy and clobber him for a bit. And Tele never picked himself as the spy, or me, but whatever, we were just kids.

So this one time, most of the boys were sneaking around the kitchen, because Tele claimed he had secret intel that one of the new cooks was a usurper-in-waiting. Normally, I'd switch between spygames with the boys and playing with the other girls near our mother's in the weaving room. But that day Hermione said my mom must have sewn my toga because it looked too old-fashioned and... anyways, like that's not the point, fuck Hermione; anyways I was playing with the boys and they sort of tried to sneak around the kitchen and the kitchen workers didn't want to yell at the lil' princes so they just kind of put up with it. Tele grabbed my arm out of nowhere and yelled to the other boys that he was going on a special secret mission.

And the next thing I know we're in Odysseus and Penelope's bedroom. And, yeah, everyone's heard stories about the tree and how Odysseus cut it down, and how wide the trunk was, and then decided, right then and there, that this was his house, and Penelope was his wife, and how he fashioned it -right where he cut it down- into their marital bed, and everyone talks about it all the time to the point where that damn bed has become a cliché, or whatever—but like, I've been in the room: it's fucking gorgeous. Like breathtaking.

And sort of naturally we started moving towards the bed: Tele and me.

And next thing I knew he'd thrown me on the bed and was asking if I was compromised.

OK, I mean, he definitely didn't use the word "compromised" as an eight year old, but in his head we were still playing that spygame and that's basically what he asked me. I'm just laying there and he's leaning over me and he says I've been poisoned by the real Troj-- spy, sorry, and I needed to go to sleep and I close my eyes and he says only one thing can wake me up. He kisses me.

He kissed me right there. On their bed. That was my first kiss.

And we're like seven years old, or whatever, and I'm just trying to tell you, Laolao, that I've been his first, and I'll be his last, and whatever you are, you Trojan hussy, is only temporary.



Slipping and Splashing by Laurie Edelman

Slipping and Splashing

Nolcha Fox

they run between raindrops
to stand under awnings
and wave down bright taxis.
Their shivers reflected
in windows and puddles,
they all flee the city,
wet rats from a ship.

The Book of Quiet Mermaids Doing Poppers

Nicholas Michael Ravnikar

We harvest our years like waves of mutant sea crabs in a wasted land
as the tide is coming on, hurrying up to the last second of the final minute
when the crabs of our lives are washed away.

The alpha king crab grows gradually and eschews a crown,
certain that not every fight is for either evil or honor.

They cling to one another in a chain of attack, each set of pincers vying for a leg, a shell, an
eye stalk.

I would give them my lips to kiss with if I could.

I would give them all of my prized possessions.

Nothing stands but scars of their battles — flesh wounds and bruises after a sword fight —
punctuation fallen into the lap of a fail figurative epic simile within a metaphor
overextended.

“But what’s the ‘meta’ for?” you ask?

Come & look at my pornographic matryoshka dolls and speculate with me on their
pronunciation.

Let us watch Jack and Jill go to the sea and tumble in the sand
and return with crabs in their pants holding each other’s hand.

Everyone’s puberty time is different despite the aesthetic similarities.

I hope you can appreciate these mysterious truths of nature.

I’m sure I have yet to write the greatest poem ever, but I’ll die before I know — in perhaps
the silence of a sea

So, if any of the dead ever stand up, praise them for good deeds — but not their callused
ragged claws alone.



MOBILE CABIN: 3

Alex Prestia

Bouncing through the mud, a girl in Texas called my ride a “cute little truck”, but I ignore that and hit the gas and feel the bump and the splash and zoom through. Mud splatters this way and that, but never into my open window, and I’m far above the muck, on top of the world, conquering nature, conquering, god it feels good.

Walking up a dyke through coastal swampland. At first it was fun to see a gator just ten feet away, or stop with my binoculars and search the water for them and call out “that’s pretty neat”, but I’ve lost track of how many gators I’ve seen, and the dyke is nearly level with the water, and they’re everywhere, and they jump off the dyke into the water before I see them, just a splash and then their bodies floating like annoyed logs towards the reeds. I never see them first. Mile three of this hike and there are four more to go. I continue marching out this loop, and come to the end, and feel brave and like I just watched a good scary movie and like god.

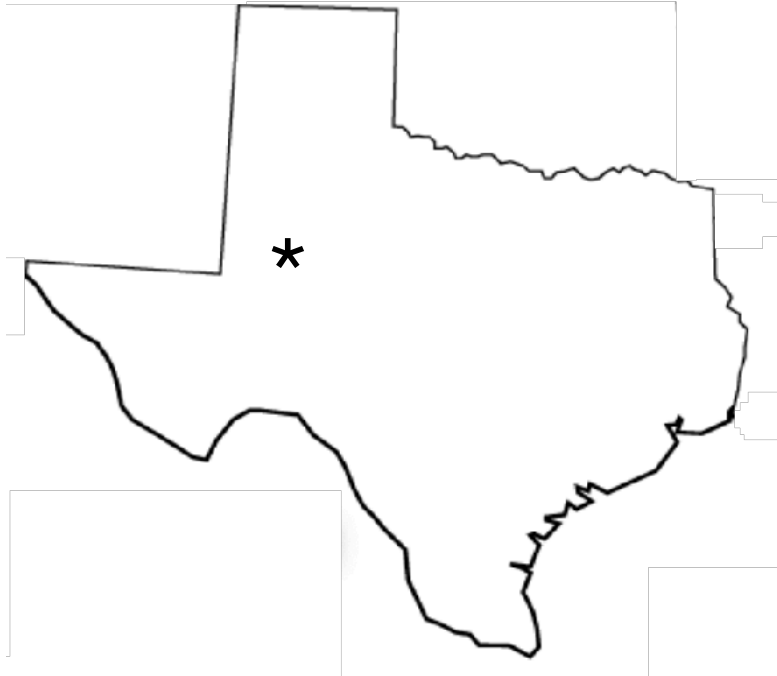
Meeting a fine lil’ Mississippi thing on tinder. She likes my makeshift bed and we ride over dirt roads. We pull off the dirt road and into the forest and explore each other in my mobile cabin. I try ice for the first time, hard to turn it down when it’s shotgunned out of the cutest tooth gap I’ve seen, but no, I’m good, thanks, once is enough. I drop her off at the family farm and pretend to hear the pump of a shotgun as I drive, fast as I can, to Vicksburg, godlike in my chariot/cabin/whatever.

Reuniting with an old friend after enough years have passed that all is forgotten about and stop at every bar near the beach and it’s all locals-

only, but he's a local, and we're drinking for winks. There's a mass migration of suburban kids who decided to become beachfront adults and drink and stop thinking about "the next move" for once and they all feel godlike and I feel it too on the back porch of a bar with a lit chinese cigarette.

Pulling up a forest road with steep drops and trees on all sides and there's a fallen tree covering the path forward, but I'm already 300 meters in and there's no room for a three-point-turn, nor a ten-point, and I realize I gotta Licorice Pizza my way out, and I'm smiling and learning to drive with my mirrors and so what I gently bump into a little tree until I reach the Alabama National Forest Road 313 and smile as a god smiles.

These stories pass, state to state, in no order, and in a fine mist even as they're happening. Standalone paragraphs and nothing more and the majority of the time is quiet, and I drive and smile and remember.



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“The Book of Quiet Mermaids Doing Poppers”
by Nicholas Michael Ravnikar
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edited, “Laodice Through “, “Mobile Cabin: 3” and ai art
by Alex Prestia
(it’s all fiction)