

miniMAG

issue55

crash the car





Molly Brodak

Hark Herald

in detroit, life is worth living
oh i just can't
know such things
any more
2x2 up into
the ark
my heart just can't
beat that hard
i will not love
dishonesty
just can't know that
there's really no one home
if lost, please return,
no reward.

Death Cab Cutie

Howie Good

The light had already turned red when the driver sped through it. “Stop!” I screamed. “Let me out!” Instead, the driver jammed the accelerator to the floor, hurling me back against the seat. When they lifted convicted Soviet spy Ethel Rosenberg out of the electric chair after three high-voltage charges, they were astonished to discover that her heart was still beating and so had to strap her back in. I was suddenly struggling for breath. In the rearview mirror, I caught a glimpse of the driver smiling, his few remaining teeth stained and corroded, like the indecipherable remnants of old weathered tombstones.

Sudden Widespread Panic

Howie Good

I took off running when the black SUV with smoked windows turned the corner into our street, a goddess with the head of a vulture at the wheel. As I ran, many of the houses and buildings I went past stood wide open as though they'd been abandoned in a panic. I didn't stop running until I was a mile, maybe more, away. Months later, I'm still not necessarily where I should be or versed in the language of hexes, parables, and prophetic dreams spoken there. As for the rest – the actual living – it can't be taught. It can only be learned.

数量

又岚

下班的时间

谁会喜欢堵车和排队

拥挤把身体挤向身体

骑自行车的女人

享受一只香烟

左手控制着回家的方向

城市的人很多

城外也不例外

算上自然界的动物

生命的数量

是地球每一天的安全感



Traffic Hierarchy in China

D. C. Nobes

The scooters top the list.
They seem to go
wherever they want
whenever they want,
even sneaking up behind you
quietly, to park on the path
startling you as they pass.
The bicycles seem to be next,
along with two-stroke engine trucks
that struggle to go if they stop
fully loaded with anything
from bricks to bagfuls.
They honk loudly, brazenly,
as they struggle through the red light.

And then anyone turning,
turning whichever way
from whichever way.
The buses and taxis follow
or follow-through
ignoring lights
horns blaring
to cruise on through.
The cars and trucks
of course are there
always taking care
to avoid hitting
whatever is in the way.

And

then

come pedestrians.
Well down the list.
Look both ways before crossing
even a one-way street.
March collectively
on the pedestrian crossings
there to help guide people
to a place where they can congregate
and wait for a break
because all vehicles
ignore the stripes.
Lowest in the hierarchy.



The Modern Icarus

Imelda Wei Ding Lo

The modern Icarus sighs as he decides to cut himself off from the world once again. Instead of flying to the sun to see how close he can get, he cuts himself off to prove that he doesn't need anyone, only himself.

Will he win? Or will he succumb to his deepest desire to love and be loved?

Being lonely is easier, he reasons as he grits his teeth and continues to live like a hermit. He works part-time as a bookkeeper for a dingy grocery store that no one's heard of. According to Sam, it'll close in a few months.

Loneliness is easier because it doesn't require effort, he mouths as he continues counting inventory. *And I'm sick of investing in others only to get nothing. People only want comfort – they also only want others to make them comfortable. Sure, there might be exceptions to the rule, but they take too much effort to find. So, it's just better to be alone, and wait for things to drop into my lap.*

And so, he continues to live like this – a prideful, spiteful hermit. Let's see how long he can withstand this self-imposed isolation.

THE HOLY MARTYRDOM OF ALBINUS OF ISAAC ABBEY

D.G

In the year of our Lord two thousand and fifteen, on a bleak December afternoon, the researchers of Isaac Abbey Research Station were sitting down for dinner when they heard a desperate knocking at the entrance. Albinus, the mild-mannered but gifted glaciologist, went to investigate and what he found slumped in the snow was a starving young man – shrivelled and husk-like. Taking pity on the soul, Albinus hurried him into the warm outpost where the researchers fed and clothed the stranger. In return, the young man made the truth known immediately: he was a wanted killer - escaped from prison and on the run from the authorities for 3 months.

Much argument ensued between the scientists over whether to let the outlaw stay at the base. Some wanted to send him out into the tundra and lock the doors. Others still wanted to call the authorities immediately. But when Albinus looked at the sad young man he felt a great wave of compassion, as if confronted with a child. How cruel and merciless it would be to throw such a scared creature out into the freezing night, or to the State to be brutalized until dead. He simply couldn't abide by it, criminal or not. Since he had been at the base for many years and was well respected among his peers Albinus' decision

was accepted as final: Brumm – this was the criminal’s name - would be taken in for one week and given food and lodging.

No sooner was the decision made than more noise came from outside. This time a choir of police snowmobiles and strongmen in boots and a rube with a megaphone in one hand and stroking his silver weapon with the other demanding that the felon come out and surrender to arrest. But Albinus, immovable in his compassion, stood tall from the window and told the policemen:

“And what’s the man guilty of? As far as I’m concerned, he’s guilty only of being hungry, and of wanting a roof over his head! On top of that, I won’t have this research base turned into a warzone! It might stand on Canadian soil, but it’s an *international* co-operative station, yes? Well since that’s the case, you can’t exert your authority here. As long as this young man stays within these walls, he’s immune to arrest!”

Indeed, there was nothing the police could do to reach Brumm, who was as astonished at the turn of events as the cops and after a moment began hurling profanities down at his pursuers.

For many days the police camp stood vanguard outside the sanctuary, ready for the culprit to step outside, but no such thing happened. By the 3rd week, they had thinned to a band. By the month, a single surveillance camera. The criminal Brumm, on the other hand, slept soundly in a small storage room, converted into a bedroom by the will of a mattress and table stove. He seldom left this room, save to go to the communal bathroom or to nab midnight snacks. On the other researchers’ insistence food was brought to his room on a tray and retrieved after dinner. Rarely did Brumm and the other scientists communicate. Still, Albinus’ certainty in his decision did not falter – in fact, it grew. One night the scientist learnt that Brumm had an interest in nature. So he took the man to a cloister in the centre of the station where stood an indoor greenhouse. Surrounded by ultraviolet lights from above, the impressive garden was coloured with vegetables, herbs, flowers, beautiful as a meadow in spring.

“We like to be as self-sufficient as possible” explained the learned scientist. “Plus it’s good for the environment. Sustainable.”

So the outlaw got to work, tilling the dirt and pulling the weeds. At first, he found the job monotonous, but soon he began taking great pride in his flowers and many an evening he could be found picking off a mite that sullied the garden's handsomeness. It even began taking on his own characteristics - Brumm felt an affinity for the intrusive plantains which sprouted about in the furrows:

"My ma used to pick these ones especially when I was a kid" he'd say to the garden's overseer - a Norwegian botanist named Kris. He wore large wool jumpers to hide his pot belly. "If I had a rash she'd stick a leaf on it and I was clean as a whistle the next day."

"Oh your mother was right, alright." replied the learned botanist. "It's the terpenoid, see. It's an anti-inflammatory compound in the leaf. And the flavonoids too. One of the things they do is help heal wounds."

"And that whatchamacallit too. I forget - those pink bell-ends. Me gran would have tea with those and it totally cured her epilepsy."

"Foxglove?" said Kris of Isaac Abbey. "Yeah, that too has a chemical basis. I think it was a few years ago that research discovered digoxigenin in the flowers. Helps with heart disease too!"

"And bistort? Does that have chemicals too? As kids when we played, we had this tongue twister - how'd it go again...? Something about bistort besting bellyaches?"

And the botanist replied sternly, almost offended, "No. That's just some old wives' tale." and quickly turned away to his tilling while muttering under his breath about medieval witch doctors and blood-letting and how stupid people swallow plants based on nursery rhymes instead of getting vaccinated.

Before long, Brumm was doing all manner of tasks around the base, aiding his hosts in whatever they asked. He learnt of the immovable dedication the scientists shared to their beliefs - living scarce, cold lives, having left their families and possessions for this place. A place that to the layman seemed like a desolate tundra, but to these pilgrims it was an anomalous shrine where disciplines of all kinds intersected - from geology to molecular biology. Each day in between work Brumm joined them for dinner in the refectory where they'd fill their plates

from the station buffet, often feasting on Brumm's own beans and chives, before taking their seats at a grey long-table. Albinus, sore for the environment, never ate meat. Often they discussed the work they had done that day, the inconveniences they waded through, insights they'd gained. But most of the time they would turn on an informative video on string theory or black holes on the canteen television, and so ate peaceably and without talking. At first Brumm did not understand these videos, being unaccustomed to such technical terms. He had once been recommended a SpaceX launch, but otherwise never had an interest in space or science or thinking. But the more he watched the more he became fascinated with extra-terrestrial life and water bears and supertasks and supernovas. Brumm became a source of pride for Albinus, who saw the young man's budding curiosity and intelligence.



As winter thawed and new supplies reached the station, the resident hydrogeologist – the French Arno – amused everyone with his hobby: whiskey distillation. Many a night Brumm and Albinus and the scientists of Isaac Abbey would spend warming their bellies – in moderation of course, as there was always a long day of toil on the morning's horizon. Even Brumm, who had always been quiet, blossomed and revealed himself. Albinus learnt, for example, that Brumm was a decidedly superstitious man, prone to idioms and habits.

So he told unto Brumm: “In the scientific community there's a line of thinking that it's a demeaning thing to be a person of modern civilization yet to knock on wood when speaking of misfortune or to run and buy a lottery ticket each time one has an itchy palm. They'd say if we all gave in to superstitious belief, we'd end up right back in the Dark Ages. But I say it's only human to retain a nonsense habit here and there. The universe is chaotic and infinite. At literally any moment a meteor could strike the Earth, raising kilotons of dust into

the atmosphere, and killing us all. But you knock on wood or do your taxes on a Thursday and suddenly you've gained a drop of control. Suddenly the world's got some rules. It's an important way our brains recalibrate and make sense of the universe. Let me tell you in secret – Horatio has a habit of never touching the corner of the canteen trays. Says it brings insomnia. And I myself always avoid the pink tiles in the bathroom. But still, I find myself wondering: if rationality was accepted fully by all the unfortunate folk who refuse to believe the Earth is round and pray to a bearded man in the sky, then how far ahead would civilization be today? And so – I tell you – each time I step into that bathroom I have forced myself to stomp on that pink tile deliberately, as a test of rationality. If I were to give you advice, friend, I would suggest you try the same. Though superstition is healthy and human, perhaps the goal should be to be more than human.”

“You mentioned God.” Replied Brumm. “But, you know, I was raised Catholic. And though in my head – rationally – I know there's no such thing as a God, it still helps me to imagine that he's looking over me.”

“Lemme tell you, my parents were Christians too. They beat me with no mercy, forced me to memorize verses. At heart I was always an – well, let's not say atheist. But – agnostic. And when I read Carl Sagan's Cosmos I decided to devote myself to science.” Finally, after a moment of contemplation, he told unto Brumm, “I was real into genealogy for a while, and I found that my great-great-” he waved the implicit ‘greats’ away. “-grandfather was a monk at a Benedictine friary. Back when there were still a lot of pagans mulling about. Not just a monk in fact but an abbot – that's fairly high up, well respected. It's a fascinating thing. Living in those grey stone walls in the middle of nowhere – in total devotion to his God. What forces a man to abandon his humanity like that? If that wasn't enough, from what I know, he scribed manuscripts see, from what I know, he spent his days harassing the land's pagans, forcing them to convert. Well, anyway, one day the monastery fell ill to some medieval disease – easily preventable no doubt – and everyone died. End of story.”

“Still, isn't it easier to think of life like it's a beautiful creation?”

“My friend never do I feel such awe and beauty at the world as when I look at the layers of a glacial deposit or a cell membrane or the

structure of the atom. Why believe in something that you can't see when there is so much beauty around us... Even us! What is more impressive? That we are God's pet project, or that we are millions of years' worth of trial and error - meat sculpted to perfection. Ape brains so advanced they've learnt to analyse themselves. Now mind you, if someone handed me evidence of the presence of God, I'd throw down and worship in a heartbeat. But until I'm given proof, why spend brainpower on it?"

As the seasons passed, Brumm became a known and beloved member of the research base, known for his curiosity and devotion to botany - about which he read avidly. And it seemed that the religiosity with which he was once so infected was exiled from him totally. Scientists came, and Brumm would show them the facilities and teach them of the place's routines, before they went on their way and he remained. Still not a single time did Brumm step outside Isaac Abbey. He'd wake early before sunrise and listen to podcasts, before working on his greenhouse, reading a bit, more podcast, partaking in group yoga, menial tasks around the base, and scribing his very own research paper - a treatise on nettles, one could say, before going to bed at 8pm.

In all, it can be said that even the slyest fox, upon crawling into a bear carcass, will never have the bear's character. Even after years of disguise, a man will revert to his original ways - this is true of the best and the worst of humanity. This is why one evening, as Albinus was with jumpy intrigue talking to his colleagues of simulation theory- "Of course there's no way of proving it, but it's mind-boggling isn't it? That we could all be digitized pixels in some alien's test simulation..." - Brumm had an adverse reaction to the food in front of him. Tasting it, he protested that it was cold and promptly plunged his dinner fork into Kris the Norwegian's eye, before killing the station cook, taking a cleaver from the kitchen and one by one slaughtering each of the research station's inhabitants. For no reason did the murderer's madness return - without hesitation did the guest turn to barbarian. Eventually the butcher laid his weapons even on Albinus, who had taken the criminal like a child and had raised him up and taught him the way a father might do. The day is far now since Albinus the glaciologist was felled, but in his honour the station - Albinus Abbey - still stands, a brightest beacon to researchers of all kind.



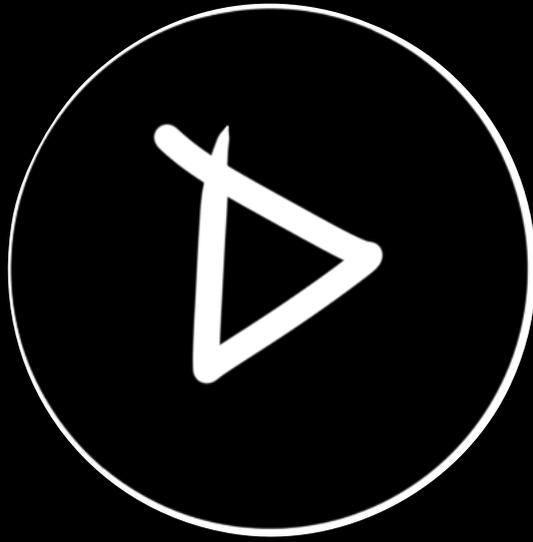
Crixus

Salvatore Difalco

Toys have endured troubles,
suffered the vicissitudes of life.

Expert, I am paid—I've still prepped,
taken the road with purpose;
I've jockeyed weary as sands
among banded venomous snakes
& breached out pain-eased lightweights.

Life not worth meaning except
as it absolves flatness & forgoes
or transfigures suffering
not the purpose of it:
say, the sword of a wooden gladiator.



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“Death Cab Cutie” and “Sudden Widespread Panic”
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Book: Swimming in Oblivion (<https://a.co/d/0v9eprW>)

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