







## Phantom Circus

Salvatore Difalco

O clown envy! O bears on bicycles!

Almost free my worries  
quicken all hardships  
quash each deep fear  
ensure black tedium dies in the grass.

Peaceful, content, unstated  
the weariness-clouds, thorn-pricked,

I still need: else I have no tears  
for you to wet your beak.

## Oh, hio

Jess Whetsel

i.

Before daybreak stretches over  
floorboards, crawls into our bed,  
luxuriates on my naked pillow;  
before you wake in the empty dawn,  
I am gone.

I drive through fields, rolling hills  
of corn and sunflowers and wheat,  
tall grasses rippling in the wind.  
The cerulean sky sinks down to earth,  
settles upon the river of tar, sprawls  
before me like an upside-down ocean.  
I cup my hands and drink the air,  
syrupy-thick, honey dripping  
from the clouds, pine notes  
wafting down the tree-freckled  
mountains that rise up ahead.  
I let your name become a memory.

ii.

I return to you,  
an unfaithful lover  
creeping back into  
your darkened house.  
Your name is a sigh  
as it escapes my lips,  
a reluctant whisper.

Against my will, I am called  
back to your familiar embrace.  
You know me, know how often  
I have strayed, though you do not  
keep count. We lay, moonlight  
lapping at the foot of our bed.  
I close my eyes and all I see  
are sea-blue skies, shadows  
of cumulus clouds speckling  
green mountain sides.

## Enticement

Moineau Shin Binon

Molding vowels with molars, timesteads crumble pavement sunk to riverbeds and self-referential love parasols one race. Fusion polaroids a rarity charging through pupils, exoticism a landmark borne still – begging for whiteness. Asian erasure, a diaspora of genetics.

I have tired the etymology of my name: the WAWA pattern refigured as WWWW, your botched pronunciation pulses the boiling blood in my chest, but I have bled into soil and bloomed sugar cane groves, jailing bars spelled *DO NOT CROSS*, as if you could slice a flaming knife down my body and let them eat cake.





# “DON’T CALL ME...”

Nick Linda Ndaba aka OThatWetFeeling

She said, as I listened through my cellphone, using my airtime. Once the woman I touched, once the woman I loved and now, the woman I wish I hadn't called, coz I need to get to the shop for some more airtime, since I wasted it on turning my Monday into a hangover, from that "Tequila Sunrise".

I never believed in getting involved in people's affairs, because one: It complicates things, two: someone ends up with either a blue eye, a broken rib, or shattered heart, and three: Threesomes are tough, especially when it involves two of the fairer sex (yes, that's you ladies). However, even when I try to keep my distance, I'm still in her way. I'm the condom and she's trying to make a baby. Put simply, she has a boyfriend and my little puerile escapade to seduce her lost and inner burlesque sexuality, has become something more of a problem.

I never had a problem being blown off, it's similar to a one night stand produced by heavy consumption of alcohol, you simply do not want to see one another the morning after. The predicament is being blown off by the Tequila Queen herself. My soul which was once, if not always,

lit up by her erotic and pleasurable Tequila Sunrise had/has left me in the desert to fend off the vultures myself. She still laughed at my lame jokes, she still smiled...the kind of smile you can hear over the phone, more clear than watching HD porno's, she still left me with that "morning glory" tingly sensation she always gave me.

I felt as though I was those wretched femme fatales on porn castings. Beautiful contessas, coming in at their own time and screwed during an interview, with a light, "Don't call us, we'll call you..." line and never being called after being fucked for nothing.

It kind of makes sense. She wants this guy. She loves this guy. If I was in her shoes, I would leave myself to die in the desert, with lonely nights of Playboy issues and the expert's choice in pornographic content.

I said my goodbyes when I heard my phone bleep, with more of my sarcastic and lame jokes. She laughed and the call ended, my soul went cold, like a new born baby who's been man birthed on this planet. My smile disappeared and the casual grin returned. A few, "fuck this shit, I don't care"s and I was on my way, again.

What is the truth about it all?







## **A Crystal Ball of a Flower**

Jack Cariad Leon

*Bei der Übersetzung dieses alten Mythos ging etwas verloren.*

The face of a goddess  
forms in the blossoms  
like a fortune in tea leaves.



Crossroads

The folklore favorite

can awaken memories

A New Way To Restore Ancient

PROTECTION

how we remember, how we forget, and how we forget to remember

The easiest way to show you're dialed in to this season's vibe is to

to inspire people to think

Leading Through Change & Transition

spark when it

continues to fascinate

the Storm

NEEDED TO SOLVE A PROBLEM.

YOU CAN WAIT FOREVER FOR

Epiphany

I learned most of what I know

Breaking Barriers:

PLOTS TO PLAN A BRIGHTER FUTURE





## Barnstorm Circus

Salvatore Difalco

O little blue pill  
I adore, that's all I regret—  
    please don't ask.  
Tell me all creatures  
    seek peace-idle ease.  
Seized by dense thoughts  
    I count stars for light  
or roam a thunderous tent.  
    I'm happier, barnstorm circus.  
I'm happy for the clowns  
    for the streaking freaks & fattened  
barkers & whatever mmm  
    whatever folds the people in half  
or keeps them from rioting.

The Ballad of Bippy and Cole

Alex Prestia

# Tier 2 Sub

That's Bippy. Bippy at the reception desk. bipbopbippy in the flesh. This is what YouCon is all about. Distracts from how painfully slow check-in is btw; I've been waiting in line for at least 15 minutes. Hotel reception was much much faster last year in Vegas: ten active desks, clerks moving with tight efficiency, row upon row of red velvet rope stanchions all empty because the line moved too fast to fill them. It was like if a DMV actually knew what it was doing. Well managed middle-aged women, all dressed exactly the same, in a rainbow of races and tightly controlled hair buns. Masters of efficiently checking in customers to their room while winking towards the casino. I should make a video comparing the DMV to a Vegas casino, that would really launch my channel. Like, I could totally explain that the casino lobby runs efficiently because every second on the floor of the casino, and not spent looking for QR codes and booking numbers from cheap apps, is money in the owners' pockets. So they run it good. Where's the incentive for the DMV worker to do quick turnarounds? Where's the incentive for this podunk Great Wolf Lodge to be quick? We're all here for YouCon, we don't really have a choice in accommodations. We're housed money. I should really really make this a video; Bippy would love a video like this, I bet. She'd probably watch it on her live stream channel, and pause every 10 seconds and be like "omg this guy is so clever, I love this channel." I'm sure she would. It's such good content. But like, how would I even get it to her? If I did spend all that time to create, edit, and then post "DMV vs Vegas: why the House always wins" (I'm so fucking good at titles), then how could I even get it to her? I can't just send a link on her livestream chat, it moves too fast. She can't magically read my thoughts, and the algorithm is too picky. Oh, if only I could get through to her, she'd love me, I know it.

There are two reception desks. Bippy's at the left one. There are about seven or eight people ahead of me. It's hard to tell because a lot of them are in groups; randos in cosplay keep walking up to the line, chatting with their friends and then going back to sit in those big armchairs near the fake fireplace on the other side of the lobby. There's just nothing efficient about any of this, the hotel already made its



money, so now whatever private-equity group that bought this chain of hotels probably advises they spend as little money per customer as possible. First way to do that: fire “extra” staff. But they’re never really extra, and the whole world slows down to a grind as skeleton crews run every business coast to coast. We’re convention guests, and now that we’ve already forked out exorbitant rates for this very specific weekend (supply vs demand ftw) our epc (earning per customer, it’s ok, Bippy, stop me whenever you need something explained. I’m always happy to slow down and clarify for you, darling.) chart is only negative. I can’t spend *more* money, but I could maybe cost them some money if I broke something, or started a fire, or something like that. But don’t even get me started on fees and penalties. I’m sure that even if I did manage to start a fire in my room, or completely ruin the sheets, they would just tack on an “Above and Beyond Cleaning Fee” to my credit card and call it a day. Maybe that’s the next move for private equity run companies: creating extra revenue by forcing customers into fee-bound errors. Imagine a Starbucks that charges you a cleaning fee if you accidentally spill your pumpkin-spice whatever, but at the same time they’ve slicked the tables with a greasy resin. Genius. Another video idea. Two, just from standing in line.

Seriously though, this line hasn’t moved at all. How incompetent can they be? And it’s not like they would ever consider hiring more staff. Or, like, train their employees in any meaningful way. It’s all so the Great Wolf Lodge of Grapevine, Texas isn’t brought under external review by their new parent company Blackstone Inc. (I know darling, I just looked it up while waiting here. No Bippy, dearest, Blackstone isn’t the same as BlackRock but they do basically the same things. Don’t feel bad, it’s a smart question). Layoffs to cut costs are more likely than firing due to malfeasance, slow-and-steady on the front lines chap, this is trench warfare and there is absolutely no reason to jump out of the bunker and go the extra mile through the machinegun fire (you’re laughing, Bippy, it’s so nice to hear you laugh. No, I don’t know when I got so darn clever, how nice of you to say that). Capitalism’s Christmas Armistice is over and an ever dwindling number of hotel receptionists are left taking cover from artillery fire behind their fake-log desks.

Whilst lost in my reverie, Bippy has seemingly entered into a frontline battle in the very late capitalistic struggle I was so boldly describing. If only I knew the details of her troubles! How gallantly I could save the

day! Instead the next man in line, some hawkish figure wearing a Carhartt hoodie, walks forward with a friend... wait omg, it's Silicon Lee. Carhartt and Silicon Lee are tramping forward to Bippy's desk. From here I can hear nothing, but I can see he is engaging the receptionist, he is enraged by the situation, he is pointing fingers and taking names, he is a bull in a china shop and too big for this lobby (oh Bippy, how I have failed you, first by not taking control of the situation myself, and now, second, perhaps more importantly, by letting you be in the vicinity of this crude, crude man. Please forgive me for my failures, my sweet sweet Bippy. Plus, darling, don't you think he's a full-on tryhard, Carhartt isn't even workwear anymore, no? \*\*cough-coughcough\*\*).

I really did just cough out loud. I hope Mr. White Knight can hear my disapproval from here. He's saying something to the receptionist, mayhaps he didn't hear me. How uncouth. The beleaguered receptionist (for it is not her fault that the whole of the hotel industry is corrupt, she is merely a cog in the rusted machine) is typing furiously. Carhartt is practically yelling, practically making a scene. Can't we all just get along? It won't help anyways, there's no real power in the ascot-white blouse-vest combo of the receptionist's position. She can't fix the issue because the issue is probably that of Capital. It's an issue of class warfare. It's an issue as old as the human species. His blundering will achieve nothing. Here we are at this convention dedicated to art, to the one thing Capital can not suppress, but of course Money, the great beast of infinite heads, finds a way to ruin our celebration. Bippy: the artist; me: the patron. Equally important parts of the whole (yes, darling, what you do is most certainly art. Don't blush, my love, I truly do mean it). If he wasn't with Silicon Lee, I wouldn't believe for a second that Carhartt belongs here. Maybe he runs some little channel about bumpkins fishing or something. Certainly not a true artist, unlike my Bippy.

Oh! Hark to simpler days of the renaissance and patricians and real art for real Sistine purpose! Now any redneck with a truck may make "art". The crudeness of it all. Art deserves more care than a casino, but this is what we get. A hotel deserves an owner that cares about its nooks and crevices, but Blackstone is what it gets. Bippy deserves a shining white knight to whisk her and her troubles away, but Carhartt Hoodie is what she gets. Hark for better days! And now, Carhartt is

smiling and shaking his head at Silicon Lee. Bippy turns from the reception desk—my god, she is even more magnificent in real life—and she is smiling, too! Whatever foul trick Carharrt has played has worked. He’s walking away, presumably with his own room key in hand. He and Silicon Lee head towards Convention Room 2; Bippy and, oh wow! that was Cara Tarot next to her the whole time, I love YouCon, are jumping up and down excitedly and rolling their suitcases towards the elevators. Whilst lost in a deep contemplation on the beauty of Bippy’s hair, I am pushed from behind by some troglodyte. The line continues. Woe to me! If only I had been the one to save her.







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“Phantom Circus” and “Barnstorm Circus” by Salvatore Difalco  
Book: The Mountie at Niagara Falls (Anvil Press, 2010)

“Oh, hio” by Jess Whetsel  
Insta: @jesswhetselwrites  
Website: www.jesswhetsel.com  
Book: A Softer Kind of Audacity (Coming out 12/1/23)

“Don’t Call Me...” by Nick Linda Ndaba aka OThatWetFeeling  
Website: https://foolslust.blogspot.com/

“A Crystal Ball of a Flower” by Jack Cariad Leon  
Insta: @jackofallartforms  
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“Crossroads” by Audrey T. Carroll  
Twitter: @AudreyTCarroll  
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Website: https://audreytcarrollwrites.weebly.com/  
Book 1: In My Next Queer Life, I Want to Be (Kith Books, 2023)  
Book 2: Parts of Speech: A Disabled Dictionary (Alien Buddha, 2023)

“Enticement” by Moineau Shin Binon  
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“The Ballad of Bippy and Cole: Tier 2 Sub”, AI, and editing  
by Alex Prestia