



Painting Houses

By

Noah Garcia

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... At the heart of, “Painting Houses,” by Noah Garcia, lies an idea of fleeting youth, the fears of becoming an adult, and the need to keep the innocence of childhood in the face of a world that is oftentimes harsh, brutal, and unforgiving. Our protagonists are a group of boys doing what most boys do in college: play videogames, drink beer, smoke pot, try to bang anything that walks and, in failing, still brag about the banging, learn to become themselves in a place other than their hometown, scrimp and save as much pocket change as they can from their parents to continue their lifestyle, and buy questionable furniture from police auctions without any guise of practicality or knowledge. Ultimately, what “Painting Houses” does is to tap into a feeling of fear that everyone goes through at some point – as we grow older, how do we move gracefully into adulthood without losing ourselves or, perhaps an even bigger fear, avoiding how to follow in our parents footsteps (even if those footsteps allowed you to be who and where you are). There is a timelessness present in Garcia’s work, a sense of life that everyone, at some point, has gone through and can relate to, a nostalgia full of the vibrance of youth and the terror of realizing that it will soon be time “grow up” as they say. One day we may all grow up, but today doesn’t have to be that day. Enjoy.*

Senior Editor CHARLES writes... This is the author’s first published story. Reading it, I sensed a curious and attractive similarity to Thomas Pynchon’s story ‘Entropy’. And I mean, for like, an emerging writer, that’s gotta be a compliment. Yeah, the dude can write.

QUALITY QUOTABLES *(for the love of language...)*

Nobody drove a truck, and Sal had the biggest car, a RAV4. Tony drove his mom’s Sebring and his drunk Uncle Mike was his mechanic in chief, so the Sebring wasn’t in great shape. Ant whipped a beat-up Accord, and Tony pushed an old Ford Taurus. So the RAV4 it was. The boys brought bungee cables, and the officials gave them a waiver to sign.

“So they’re not liable for the fuckin’ AIDS,” Ant said.

After the waivers, each of them grabbed a side and hauled it back to the car.

Fifteen minutes later, Tony and Sal were screaming at each other with half of the couch sticking out of the hatchback.

“GOD DAMN IT TONE. IT DON’T FIT.”

“LET’S BE FUCKIN’ CREATIVE HERE. WE CAN GET IT.”

“FUCK YOU!” Sal pushed Tony and they went to the ground in a mess of limbs and ‘fuck’ and ‘shit’.

Ant and G looked on as they tussled.

“You tryna get Wendy’s after this?” Ant asked.

“Yerrrrr. Fo’ for fo’.”

After fifteen more agonizing minutes, Sal pulled into the lot by their building. The dorm building opened in 1968, the most recent construction on campus besides the recently built brand new house for the president. It was two floors of ‘blocks’ – like a prison. Each block was a square hallway with doors at each corner leading to a pod of four people. Between rooms it was just linoleum, fluorescent lights, and “A CUBE” stenciled on the wall in bright red industrial block letters. The cubes connected via a brief hallway, and the layout was exactly the same for each one. It was trippy, felt liminal.

“Jesus. She sounds like she’s having a stroke,” Sal said.

“Hella fake,” G said.

Ant laughed. “Yeah, you’d know.”

“No, really. Is this weird? I feel like this is getting weird. You’re really gonna go to sleep easy tonight? In *that* bed? The one they’re fucking on as we speak?”

“Doesn’t bother me. Gang shit. I’ll wash my sheets and go to bed fifty bucks richer. Bada bing.”

Ant was flabbergasted. “YO, YOU LET THEM FUCK ON YOUR SHEETS?”

“Well I’m not gonna make them fuck on the bare mattress. The fifty bucks is for quality assurance.”

“You’re fucking disgusting, bro. Might as well go in there and join ‘em. Plus you should’ve gotten at least a hundred bucks out of him.”

“Man’s roommate never leaves. He needs to fuck and he can’t exactly ask the guy to take a hike for sexy time. There was an emerging market, and I filled it.”

“Heh. Filled it.”

“Imagine being down so bad you pay \$50 to a bed pimp in order to fuck your own girlfriend,”

“As The Game once said, *‘the things motherfuckers do when pussy sittin’ on they face...’*”.

In the next room, because of the paper-thin walls, the sounds of their friend Roy having sex bled through clearly. The aggressive creaking of the bed accompanied his home girlfriend evidently having a supernatural experience. His school girlfriend was a lot quieter when they fucked and wasn’t so stuck up, so the boys considered telling Home Girlfriend about School Girlfriend to shoo her for good.

The four of them huddled in their cramped common area; these suites used to be designed for two, but the college got real hard up for cash in the ‘90s and converted the walk-in closets into more rooms. The place barely scraped by and survived the audit that year. Now some thirty years later, Ant and G lived in the closets, and Tony and Sal each inhabited the bedrooms. There were so many Anthonys at the school that each one received a different nickname. There was A, Tone, Anto, and these two, Tony and

Ant. Nobody was mistaking this place for Fordham. Nobody was even mistaking this place for Lehman.

Finally, the noise died down. The boys waited for Roy to come out, but five minutes went by with no movement. Tony got up and banged on the door.

“CUDDLE TIME IS EXTRA. \$20 FOR THIRTY MINUTES.”

“FINE,” Roy yelled. “YOU LIKE BEING A FUCKIN’ PIMP, HUH?”

Tony clapped his hands. “20 more! Shit, I got a passive income going.”

Tracy walked in holding her laptop and sat down between Sal and Tony.

“Ayyyee, back already? How ya doin’?” Sal got up and gave her a brief side-hug.

Tracy leaned back, looked up from her laptop, and took a deep breath.

“Stressed. My sister is driving my parents insane. She’s gotten arrested twice in the last two weeks. Fucking 16 years old.” Tracy’s accent was identical to Robert Pattinson’s in *Good Time*.

“Damn. What’d she do?”

“Got hella fucked up at Bowl 360 in Elmhurst, made a scene, got an MIP. Who the hell drinks while they’re bowling?”

“I wonder what her score was.”

“I scored 190 once at the one on Gun Hill, and I was pretty drunk,” G said.

“MIP don’t come off your record as a Young Offender. She’s fucked,” Sal said.

“Tell me about it. Of all weeks. Been writing my final papers on the train with a busted laptop like a weirdo.”

The left half of her screen was shattered and pixelated. She typed furiously, as they all should have been – it was finals week. Instead, Ant and G kicked it on the

couch playing Call of Duty for the twentieth time that day while Tony and Sal looked on in rapt fascination. The two gamers were self described FLIDS – Fucking Long Island Douchebags, while Tony and Sal grew up next door to one another in Throggs Neck right by the water.

Tony looked over at Tracy's paper based on a research article entitled *Adaptive Education Theory: Pedagogical Precedent for Teaching Healthy Racial and Gender Attitudes in the Classroom*. Since only half the screen was available, she flipped from article, back to paper, back to article. The other half lit up in an irritating glitchy color gradient.

"Trace, doesn't that give you a headache?"

"\$1500 to fix it is more of a headache." She looked around the room. "The biggest brains in New York are at it again."

"Yezzir," Ant said.

"Tony, you don't have work to do?"

"Physical education doesn't do any work. I literally just practice handling the big multicolor tent thing in class. We'll graduate with the same degree though." Tony blew her a kiss. Tony and Tracy were both education majors. Technically, P.E. coaches are teachers too.

"Sometimes all a guy needs is to play dodgeball for the rest of his life," G said. "I actually do have a project due in Personal Finance. A research thing, I dunno. I paid the Korean kid to do it."

"Beats painting houses," said Ant.

"That what your pops do?" Tracy asked.

“Yep. I ain’t painting no fuckin’ houses, no way.”

“What are you gonna do instead?”

Ant shrugged. “I ain’t painting no fuckin’ houses.”

Sal nodded. “I feel that. My dad’s a carpenter and I ain’t Jesus.”

“He’s actually a carpenter?” Ant asked.

“Oh, nah, he’s a bus driver. I thought it was a cool metaphor though.”

Tracy turned to look at Sal. “What are *you* gonna do instead?”

“I dunno, law school seems fun. Brooklyn Law would be cool. Yo G, how’s your 2.4 treating you?”

“Go fuck yaself. I’m proud of my 2.4,” G said.

“What’s your major again?” Sal asked, knowing full well what it was.

“Communications.”

“What’s your capstone project?”

“Communicating and shit.”

“Word.”

The couch facing the TV, the centerpiece of the room, had its own messy history. Around the start of the school year Tony saw an ad for a police auction, and soon they

lined up with others in an empty lot in Mamaroneck to bid on the belongings of New York's unsuccessful criminals.

They found the cheapest items under the BIOHAZARD designation, and spotted this once-proud beige satin-type couch, retail price of probably four grand. No Mattress Mack shit. And it wasn't too far from retail – the previous owner bought it just two short weeks prior.

There wasn't usually furniture up for sale as a biohazard; those were mostly cars that people had blown their brains out in. This couch was just too sweet to go to waste. Similarly, though, the biohazard part was that the couch was covered in blood. Allegedly, someone had been murdered in it.

Sal was vehemently against the bloody couch idea and slumped back in his chair, resigned to their decision. "God damn it. I'm outvoted."

It was, above all, democratic between them. If they were split 2-2, they called in Tracy as the tiebreaker. But this was a decisive 3-1.

Shoppers approached items in little groups as each auction got underway. It was a sad little mini-auction; the paddles were just wooden spoons. The bidding started and G proudly raised his wooden spoon, gleaming with the joy of a bargain.

"We're gonna snag this jawn for eighty bucks!" he said.

"What if it's AIDS blood?" asked Ant.

"It's not fuckin' AIDS blood. Dumbass."

The boys swiveled each way to find nobody huddled with them in front of the couch. It was, after all, one of the most garishly horrifying items there.

The bald man running the auction ceremonially said “And the winner. Paddle #21.”

“WOOO. Unopposed, motherfucker! Call me Putin, bitch!” bellowed G. A few people gawked at the brazen, ballsy purchase of a mysterious bloody high-end couch.

Trying to stay calm, Sal became a mental gymnastics gold medalist. “I mean, I’d rather it be a happy story, but at least our couch has a story. People will line up to take flicks on it for Halloween. They’d pay \$5 to do that.”

They approached the bald auctioneer, and Sal asked, wincing, “Was this death...peaceful? Violent?”

“Do ya really wanna know, son?”

“Lay it on me.”

He smiled and his skin drooped from his cheeks like a basset hound’s ears.

“Violent. Golf club blunt force trauma.”

“Yo, that’s sick,” G said.

“Hard as fuck,” said Ant.

Sal shuddered and vowed to never sit on the bloody side. “This thing is fuckin’ huge.”

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“You tryna get Wendy’s after this?” Ant asked.

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Tony and Sal got it settled and both sprang up.

“We all want this couch, ya filthy animals,” G said. “Let’s do it.”

The four of them worked up a sweat pushing. Eventually, after the front headrests came off, the couch slid in far enough to keep the hatchback closed with bungee cables. They had to put the front seats at an acute angle, sharp enough so Sal could barely see over the steering wheel.

He hunched over in the driver’s seat. “The angle’s all off. It’ll be like driving a fuckin’ bobsled. Fuck this couch.”

“What, you can’t drive a bobsled?” G asked.

“No. They do that shit in the Olympics, bro.”

“You’ll get to be an Olympian today. C’mon, it’s 3-1.”

“Fuck me. Fine.”

After flattening the backseat, G and Ant took their positions behind the front seats, anchoring couch to car. Sal's driving started wobbly, but he pulled onto the Hutch with relative ease due west back toward the Bronx. Sal slowly accelerated to forty, fifty, sixty.

"Alright, alright, I got the hang of this."

About halfway there, in Bronxville, the stretch of several bewildering blind merge lanes awaited them. The abrupt merge spit the driver out at a forty five degree angle onto the highway, no space, no actual merge lane, no time to speed up. It's a two lane highway, and it doesn't make a lick of sense. Sal had a history with these perilous exits; he totaled his dad's Impala in high school at this very one.

They sped closer and closer to the exit, almost completely hidden by trees. Sal occupied the left lane, but a sleek, hulking black G wagon lurched in front of them, looping in a wide arc across both lanes trying to merge from a dead stop. Sal hit the brakes and the couch rattled and pushed against the hatchback hard.

The bungee cables broke, and as the car jerked back upon a full stop, the couch slid like a stick of butter and landed facedown diagonally in the exact center of the two lanes. The G wagon sped off, oblivious.

Upon seeing the couch exit the trunk and hit the ground, Sal began to say a Hail Mary under his breath. Ant and G sprung into action. Ant ran to the outside edge in the left lane just as a BMW sedan came speeding over the horizon.

"FUCK SHIT FUCK FUCK," Ant said.

In one motion akin to flipping a tire, Ant pushed upwards and lifted the end of the couch, pulling it with a swift jerk out of the left lane. He used the momentum to fall

forward and crossed over to the right lane just as the BMW, brakes squealing, flew by. G and Ant then hurriedly lifted the couch up into the hatchback and pushed it in like a tackling sled. The hatchback still remained open.

G jumped into the back and found a grip on the inside of the hatchback. He pulled it down on top of the couch. "I can hold it in from here."

Ant jumped up on top of the cushion closest to the driver's seat, squatting to fit his head just below the ceiling. He weighed it down like a seesaw, and Tony wedged in between Ant and the front seat, pulling backward and keeping the couch from flying out the back.

It held firm, like a lever – the force down and the force backward just barely kept it horizontal and secure. G held the hatchback closed over the tip of the couch and stabilized the back half. All of this took about fifteen seconds, and Tony signaled Sal to step on it, lightly.

"Easy Sal, easy," said Tony.

The lever held firm and the four of them fell silent for the remainder of the drive, straining every last muscle to keep the blood-soaked couch safe.

After fifteen more agonizing minutes, Sal pulled into the lot by their building. The dorm building opened in 1968, the most recent construction on campus besides the recently built brand new house for the president. It was two floors of 'blocks' – like a prison. Each block was a square hallway with doors at each corner leading to a pod of four people. Between rooms it was just linoleum, fluorescent lights, and "A CUBE" stenciled on the wall in bright red industrial block letters. The cubes connected via a

brief hallway, and the layout was exactly the same for each one. It was trippy, felt liminal.

Sal took the keys out of the ignition and the four boys sat silently for a moment before lifting the couch up like pallbearers would a casket and marching it inside.

After positioning it in front of the TV, the four of them sat down. They squeezed in, but it only fit three of them, and Sal lost the race, so he posted up on the non-bloody armrest. After sitting in silence for a few seconds, G started laughing.

“Yo, that was fuckin’ crazy.”

The tension dissolved.

“Ant, that was clutch as fuck,” Tony said.

“They say I got the clutch gene. Jeter-esque.”

“Jeeetahhhh,” G said.

“That was fuckin’ Bruce Banner-esque,” said Sal. He leaned back and finally relaxed his shoulders. “You said it, G. Fuckin’ crazy.”

“I actually saw my whole life flash. My wife’s gonna be a smokeshow. Like a sexy goth Sydney Sweeney with a nose ring,” Ant said wistfully. “Perfect tits.”

“Well. I need a beer,” Tony said, and he took two in each hand out of the fridge. He distributed the beers while Sal grabbed the remote and pulled up *It’s Always Sunny*. The other three wordlessly agreed and got quiet for a while, laughing softly every few minutes.

Sal searched on his phone for methods of cleaning blood out of satin.

“So there’s not a ton of precedent. People don’t usually get murdered on satin, I guess.”

“Yo, lowkey I wouldn’t mind if we cleaned it. Prob has some brain flecks still in it,” G said as he slapped the top of the bloodiest cushion. The dried blood was more brown than red.

“We could use bleach. It’s already beige,” G said as he leaned forward and intently rolled a joint on the coffee table.

Nobody knew any better to refrain from using bleach to clean a couch, so later that day they lugged the couch back outside onto the concrete. They’d come prepared with a gallon of Clorox and a toilet brush for each of them.

“So...what do we do? Just pour it on?” Ant asked.

“Guess so,” said G, and they got to pouring and scrubbing.

After a while the bleach reconstituted the blood smell so a mixed metallic and chemical odor radiated off the satin. A campus safety car passed by on its patrol and screeched to a halt. Carl, the longest tenured campus safety officer and a frenemy of the boys, approached, incredulous, and pinched his nose. Carl was retired NYPD who worked at the college to supplement his pension.

“What the fu – are you making fuckin’ mustard gas?”

“Caaaarlllll. What up, beast!” G said as he slid in front of the bloody side, but the charm didn’t go over well.

“DID Y’ALL FUCKIN’ MURDER SOMEONE?”

“Police auction. We didn’t murder the dude, but yeah, someone got murdered on this thing.”

Carl took a second to process, looking to the couch then at the bleach then at each boy clutching a toilet scrubber with a wide-eyed expression of disbelief, like *are you serious?*

“We have the papers for it. Got a copy of the receipt,” Sal said, and forked it over to Carl.

“Biohazard. Fuckin’ biohazard. Unbelievable.”

“Great deal, right? This thing is sweet!” G said.

“Move it. Now. Where the fuck you think you get off, leaving this outside on my damn campus?”

None of the boys knew what to say.

“Hey, how’s your grandson’s baseball season going?” Sal asked with an uncomfortable smile.

“Shut up. Move. It.”

“Yessir.”

Carl shook his head and muttered under his breath as he got back in his patrol car and the four of them turned back to the couch and breathed in the fumes they created.

“Damn. This thing do be smelling like shit,” Ant said.

G sat down on the bloody side and breathed in deeply through his nose. “This shit’ll prolly get you mad high if you smell it enough.”

“We need a hiding spot.”

Tony snapped his fingers. “He won’t look up high. Think about it. You think he’s climbing five flights of stairs to check the roof? He’s five flights away from a stroke.”

“We’d have to carry it all the way up,” G said.

“You’re gonna end up being a mover anyway. Good practice,” Tony said.

“OK, guido motherfucker. You’re gonna be slinging dough till you die.”

“Pussy.”

They both took a side at the same time and Tony and Sal fell in on the ends.

They strained and grunted pulling it up the stairs, and once they reached the roof, Sal kicked the door open. It was supposed to be locked, but Carl *really* never got up there.

They set the couch down in the corner, so nobody could see it from ground level. Spent and sweaty, they returned to their room.

While they walked, Sal stopped abruptly. “Wait, ain’t it supposed to rain tonight?”

Tony put his head in his hands. “Fuckin’ A. Let it rain. It’s like a washing machine. First the soap, then the soak.”

This logic seemed airtight, so the boys shrugged it off. The next day, after a driving thunderstorm, they headed back up to finish their fucked-up laundry cycle. The blood was a lighter shade, and it merely tinted one side of the couch, reduced from a deeply soaked red-brown to a worn light brown-pink. It still smelled, but it was a bearable sickly sweet slightly bleach-y smell. It was also still wet, so they gave it a day to bake in the sun, then returned it to their room. The satin came back cracked and torn.

Ant looked down and shook his head. “How’d we manage to fuck this couch up worse than a murder did?”

Ant and G were still adjacent on the blood and bleach and rainwater stained couch, engrossed in their game as Tracy typed incessantly. Tony watched a trailer for the new Tom Holland movie on his phone as he pulled his hoodie strings up and down. “Yo, this shit looks craaaaazy.”

Ant agreed. “Deadass, the actor of this millennium and shit.”

“*Marone*. I will not tolerate the Christian Bale slander,” Sal said. “*Dark Knight* and *Dark Knight Rises*. Consecutively.”

“Only a superhero dick rider like you would think those are his two best movies,” Tony said. “*American Psycho* and *The Machinist* blow them shits out of the water.”

“Nahhh, Machinist was trash. The whole draw of the movie was ‘*Look, Christian Bale is skinny! No, like, so skinny!*’ Half of it is him crying shirtless.”

“Y’all both dumbasses. The right answer is Florence Pugh,” Ant said.

Sal and Tony looked at each other with bewilderment.

“What fuckin’ Florence Pugh movies have you seen Ant?”

“I seen *Midsommar*. Was a banger.”

“She’s so fuckin’ fine,” Sal said.

“IMDB freaks. All’a ya,” G said absentmindedly as he knocked off Ant’s melon with a sniper rifle. “For threeeeeee! Pay attention bitch!”

“G, bro, you have Google alerts on for Lebron. AND you DMd him happy birthday last year. I’m the weird one, sure. Fuck outta here.” Tony kicked one of the empty beer cans off the table.

“Why y’all do this Call of Beer shit?” Sal asked. “Like what’s the winner get?”

“Pride.”

“What kinda pride? As in who likes Billy Joel the most? Who’s been arrested by Suffolk County PD the most?”

“This is an expert-level drinking game, brother. If you don’t understand it, you ain’t playing it.” G slugged the rest of his beer, burped, and slid the empty can onto the chipped Facebook Marketplace wood coffee table with the other thirty.

Ant whistled, looking down at his phone waiting to respawn after G mucked his ass yet again. “I seen this mugshot on the bird app. Shawty fine as fuck and got booked for *vehicular manslaughter* at the Ramada Inn in Yonkers.”

“Damn,” Tony said. “That’s where DMX died. Overdose is better than getting run over by a crazy bitch in her ‘07 Altima at least.”

Ant leaned over and showed the picture to G and Tony. “Be honest, would you hit?” He already knew what Sal’s answer was.

“Affirmative,” said G immediately.

“If she don’t run me over with her car, hundo P,” said Tony. “She valid.”

“G, this is why you’ve had chlamydia twice. Risking your life over some pussy.” Sal shook his head. “She’s a murderer and y’all a couple Truman Capotes,” he said.

“Is that – is that a writer? BOOK JAR MOTHERFUCKER.” G paused the game and pumped his fist. “Hope it was worth it.”

Tony, G, and Ant instituted the 'book jar' after a spell where Sal hadn't shut up about books. A literature major, Sal's academic interests differed from the other three.

One day as Sal ran his mouth to Tracy about his Anti-Capitalist British Lit class, Ant exploded. "SHUT UP ABOUT FUCKING *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*. I'M GONNA HAVE A FUCKIN' ANEURYSM."

Before they came to blows over Dickens, there was a hasty 3-1 vote to institute a five dollar penalty for every time Sal mentioned something literature-related. On this occasion, Sal pulled a fiver out of his wallet and pushed it off his hand, make-it-rain style. G happily retrieved it from the floor.

"Just because you paid up and I'm curious...who is that?" Tony asked.

"This guy who wrote a book about a murder trial and fell in love with the murderer."

"He just like me, deadass," G said.

Ant finally got tired of getting bitched in Call of Duty so he pulled out an Adderall, crushed it on the table in front of him, and railed it. He jerked his head up. "WOOO. Brand new ballgame, ya herb."

They both leaned forward and focused on the game, and it became the focus of the room.

They fell silent as their game ticked down into its final minute.

Tony turned to Sal with a serious, somber look on his face. “The grocery store went well. We’re good at this, bro. We should get onto bigger and better things. I need the money and so do you.”

“The Piano’s plan isn’t ready yet. We’re still laying groundwork.”

“It ain’t some museum heist shit.”

Sal laughed. “Isabella Stewart Gardner shit.”

This got G’s attention.

“Is that a writ – BOOK JAR?”

“False alarm,” Tony said. “It’s just this museum that got knocked off for a buncha art. Documentary was pretty fire, though.”

“I could use an art heist,” Sal said. “I’m so fuckin’ broke. The firm is in shambles.”

Sal and Tony had a running joke that referred to their unstable personal financial situations in Wall Street terms. The sentiment was similar enough, whether it was \$30 million in stock or \$100 in beer.

“Same here. Interns are being fired as we speak,” said Tony.

“The shareholders meeting is gonna be brutal.”

“Oh word, I have dinner with my parents this week too.”

“Fiscal year is ending. Fuck me.”

“I’m hungry, too. Down so bad at the moment,”

Tracy shut her laptop. “I should eat. Let’s each kick in five bucks and get a taco 12-pack.”

“The Bell is ringing, baby.”

“Yuhhhh.”

Tracy, Sal, and Tony exited and made their way outside, shoes squeaking on the dreary flecked linoleum floor. They squinted to avoid the harsh fluorescent lights reflecting off the sanatorium-white cinderblock walls. Tony drummed on the wall with his knuckles. The hallway was so skinny they didn't fit in twos and had to fall into a conga line for the last bit. Tracy and Sal hit their vapes at the same time and left a cloud of blueberry mixed with mint in their wake.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *In this story, I sought to explore the psyches of those struggling to stay connected with their inner child as they grow further away from childhood and closer to an ugly, imposing world with all of its expectations and judgements. I chose to submit to Fleas on the Dog because as a young writer I admire the freedom the publication gives to the work it publishes. For the writing style, I drew inspiration from the musings of Salinger as well as the plucky style of Junot Diaz. Themes of class ascension and moral rectitude appear prominently.*

AUTHOR BIO: Noah Garcia is a Houston-based MFA student at Goddard College (VT) who writes short fiction concerning themes of father-son relationship, addiction, and generational complex trauma. He is a former NCAA student-athlete – he played baseball at Manhattanville College (NY) and graduated with a BA in Postcolonial Literature in 2021. This is his first publication.