

THE WEST 4TH

Opinion. Poetry. Fiction.

july 2025 / 1, no. 3



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august 2025 / 1, no. 4

From the Editor

July 17, 2025

Hello Dear Readers,

I don't have much to say this month. Life has carried on its classic soul-crushing and hope-giving pattern. I am joyous and crumpled in one instant. But seriously, folks. It's been a great summer so far, and largely due to you all.

We have some AMAZING pieces in here this issue. Some poems, like Parker's, just cut you right to the core, and some poems, like Jack Keegan's, can actually make you laugh out loud, which I didn't know poetry could do. There are also some very good short fiction pieces as well, more grounded in reality than previous submissions have been, but precious and worthwhile nonetheless.

I also included an excerpt of one of my history papers from recently. So if you find yourself on the john, reading this, and you're suddenly, to your horror, out of TP, feel free to use my writing as a philosophical substitute. I hope my readers won't be offended that I included my own work in the short fiction section. It just so happens that we were a bit short on long-form submissions this issue, so I figured I would fill the gap.

Anyways. The West 4th lives on and is as captivating as ever. I hope you all enjoy this issue. And get to work on your pieces for August!!!!

For all things thought up and written down.

Sincerely,
Jack Kontarinis
Editor

our POETS and BARD, SCRIBBLERS and SCHOLARS

LORD ORD
CHRISTINE EGAN
AMANDA EGAN
DREW KOLENIK
PARKER OTTO
MARSHALL LAUX
PEARL KONTARINIS
TESS KONTARINIS
AVT COMICS
JACK KEEGAN
GIOVANNI SAFARELLA
EVAN STARK
JIMMY CLIMBS
CAMERON SALO
ASHTON HERRES
ALEX WOLF
JACKIE BECK
ASHTON HERRES
AMRO IBRAHIM
BRETT KOPPELMAN
BRADFORD TOM

Cover artwork by Tess Kontarinis

OPINION

Thoughts on Life and Death after a Solo Cross Country Motorcycle Trip

Jimmy Climbs

When I started to put together a loose plan for this trip, I wanted to accomplish two things:

1. I wanted to go to as many new states as possible, and
2. See as many friends as I could along the way

To me this trip was a celebration of life. It was an opportunity to answer all those suggestions like, "Hey man, if you're ever passin through, stop by!" and so I did. A celebration of life should never be reserved for the end of someone's life. Each day that your callused feet touch soil is a reason to put a party hat on and celebrate.

And full of life this trip was. Not only was it an opportunity to see people I knew... it was an opportunity to see people's faces for the first time. Shoot, even as I write this, I'm still sending e-mails back n forth with Tom and Jim, two dudes I'd met one fateful night in Carborro, North Carolina.

When I'd gotten to Nevada, I go to hold one of my oldest friends' daughter. Then I crossed the Nevada/California border and got to hold yet another sweet cherub, my buddies' daughter, and my god daughter, Sunny. What a way to sort of bookend this trip... well that's what I thought anyways... Fast forward to 9 days after I placed my hand on the Point Loma Lighthouse in San Diego.

I stood in the doorway of a Roman Catholic church, somewhere outside of Anchorage, Alaska. I was there for my college friend Dustin's memorial, who'd passed earlier this year.

I distinctly remember the simultaneous beauty and tragedy of that moment. I looked into the church hall and threw the pews, where the early morning Alaskan light wept through the pores of the stained window glass. There are so many people here that have either never met or haven't seen each other in years. On one hand it's sort of sad that it took death to bring all these people together. On the other, it's beautiful... because they are in fact TOGETHER.

When I was leaving that very memorial, I had all this to ponder. I'd finished a solo motorcycle trip and felt like I was filled to the brim with life, yet here I was having been in the aftermath of death itself. Perhaps THAT'S what it's all about. Just as you can't have the light without the dark... you can't have life without the looming presence of death.

So that was one of the thoughts I'd gathered following a rather turbulent month or so; The importance of life and celebrating it alongside its eventual counterpart, death. One of the other lessons of note after this trip? The masterful art of perception.

This trip was basically set up for some sort of minor catastrophe, or rather, a series of em. 50 plus year old motorcycle mixed with 5,000 miles or so. WHAT. COULD. POSSIBLY. GO. WRONG?

Even knowing this, I did get somewhat frustrated with my circumstances, albeit self-imposed. Continually getting caught in rainstorm after rainstorm, the looming possibility of getting pulled over with expired tags, to name a couple.

There were plenty of opportunities to give up... and I'm not saying this like, "Hey ya'll look at me and what I did. Ain't I so tough?" I say it because it helped shave my perception of well, perception.

This little bubble I was living in, within my teal motorcycle helmet, felt sort of laughable. I got to the point where I thought to myself, 'Is this all you got?' Once you get to that point, everything else seems like a walk in the park. A sort of realization that you can do anything...

In some ways, it gave me this strong feeling that I shouldn't care. This very feeling would sort of seep into every day worries, not just this isolated trip. I'm a tragic over thinker at times, an utterly hopeless blabbering romantic, a worrier of finances... but who really cares? Is it going to kill me? No? Then okay, it'll be fine. Most things won't kill you, and shit, even if they did? You get to say that you gave this game of life hell. You looked the cruel mistress of Life and her sickly partner, Death, in the face, and you laughed. I'm not afraid of you you know? You don't scare me anymore.

I'm not saying this with the intent of telling people to piss everything away, but rather, to highlight that the seemingly tragic events of life are generally the most laughable. Life's serious, sure, but does it always have to be?

Terrible shit will always happen, that's a guarantee. So you might as well stroll through the park, even if the playground your walking through is engulfed in flames, and smile.

COLUMNS

Matcha Drinkers

Brett Koppelman

I live in a pretentious neighborhood filled with yuppies and matcha. The Marina District is overflowing with mostly twenty-four to thirty-one year old white people. If they have a dog, it's some sort of doodle. If they have a kid, you will see them with their nanny every day at the park. If they have skin, it's white.

When I tell people what neighborhood I live in I immediately embark on the defensive. I promise, I'm not a douchebag, I say. Yet, this initial vibe check people perform I find difficult to get past at points, especially after I have orated my defense three separate times during the evening and have lost interest in asserting myself.

I moved to California from out of state completely oblivious of the feel, energy, flavor of the different neighborhoods of San Francisco. Now that I have been here for around two years I have naturally picked up on the sometimes subtle sometimes loud differences a few blocks can make in the people, stores, energy. If I were to do it again, my decision likely would have differed. However, now it's my home.

I have no intention or desire to defend my white washed neighborhood that could be the postcard for gentrification, nor do I believe my neighborhood deserves defending. To quote the great Doug Martsch: "I don't like this air, but that doesn't mean I'll stop breathing it". The question I have found myself asking recently is whether or not this immediate judgement by my peers based on my living coordinates is valid. The conclusion that I have come to is that it is not.

I believe that people enjoy defining themselves by things that society has deemed as cool, chill, or sick despite the fact that these definitions originated long before them by people who were, probably, more cool, chill, and sick than they are. This city, and your city, in majority is filled with people raised in comfort and surrounded by opportunity.

In an attempt to put my point more clearly I will give an example. In San Francisco, the Mission District is a historically Mexican neighborhood where the art scene has always thrived. Now, countless Mexican families have been displaced by twenty somethings from LA with consulting jobs. Yet, if you live in the Mission, you are considered cool, chill, or sick, regardless of the likely fact that you spend the majority of your free time scrolling reels or rewatching *The Office*.

My criticism of these people may be harsh and inaccurate in a majority of circumstances, I have not met all people. The point I am trying to make is that people should not be granted validity nor ruled out as individuals based on the neighborhood they live in. Just because you are wearing an oversized shirt or baggy jeans, does not mean you are an interesting person. Spend time with people. Ask them questions. Judge people based on the content of their character, the words that come out of their mouths, and their mechanisms for passing time - not on their bandana phase that you

Kindness As A Virtuous Burden

Lord Ord

Why does it feel so good to be kind? Why is it so easily and frequently taken advantage of? In New York, where people have a reputation for being rude, I have instead found kindness everywhere. From bus drivers to barbers, bosses to bookworms. The streets are filled with people willing to help out. Then there is the inverse. There are also many who would like to use others' kindness for their own benefit. Who inhabit the same streets as everyone else. The craziest part? We have both of those traits living inside of each and every one of us. What matters is what you personally decide to act on and how you choose to perceive the world around you.

Maybe we are in a simulation. Maybe not. Either way, the human mind is capable of influencing its surroundings at an almost magical level. Everything that we have created was originally conceived by the mind. If we are all capable of imagination and creation, we are all capable of kindness. There is magic in that as well. Think about it: does it feel good to help others feel good? It does for me. And I hope that for you as well, dear reader. That sort of feeling is not evoked through other means. And it is spoken or acted into existence. I would classify that as magic. Magic-adjacent at the very least. So if we are indeed in a simulation, and certainly if not, please do not take this lightly. Each and every one of us is capable of great achievements, of pushing boundaries, of being manipulative, and of course of being kind.

Now, the term "virtuous burden" comes into effect. Kindness can be viewed as a weakness for some to use against others. And for those who prefer to approach with kindness, you may find that it becomes exhausting over time. It takes a lot of energy to be kind. But I can assure you that it takes even more to be cruel. So persevere at all costs. Continue to be kind. Do not let yourself or others fall victim to the temptation of mistreatment of your fellow people. I beg you.

I've always said that humans and the world in general would be quite a bit nicer (and probably further along) if we all practiced something that hopefully all of you know at this point: common decency. What is common decency? It's holding the door open for someone else, pulling up a chair, not cutting off others on the highway, letting your friends and loved ones go first, etc. These basic acts of politeness and respect, although not necessarily kindness, are so easy to act out but are usually overlooked. Basically, if we were all a little less selfish, the world would be a better place. Crazy concept I know.

While I sit here and write this, hunched over the counter at a burrito spot, high and hungover as all hell, and cramming this all out so as to make the submission deadline, I wonder if any of what I am saying will land with anyone. I hope it does. I hope someone passes on this message: be kind.

POETRY

Tile

Alex Wolf

Making light of the darkness in your heart
Tell the creatures on the bathroom floor, they've gotta go away
for now
I wish you'd stuck around that night to see the way I drowned
inside myself
Picture perfect and gonna get you down the way it always
seems to
Got a lot still left to lose but I never trust anything that came
out of a bottle you opened

Up and down
your throat back out
your tongue roll
around inside of your mouth
I'm gonna get you--
And I feel crazy
Nonsensical
I'm a ghostlight
I'm a runaway train

Trying to find peace in the vampire city
Streets you can't sink into
Kind of place that eats your fucking soul
All these strangers round with eyes
Can never seem to get comfortable inside my own skin
Going quiet beneath pressure
Always trying to sound profound
Everybody's buying life
Everybody's renting luxury
A concrete lockdown
Beauty so calculated it barely has a point at all

And everywhere I go, I am a stranger
Everywhere I am I'm someone else
Walking the streets she used to call an almost home
Strung out and hung up on some imaginary Jesus freak--
Those stars in the picture aren't real
they're just the ones that danced upon your skin

I'll drink as much as you'll give me
I don't know what to do with my hands
I don't know what to do with my mouth

Baby can't you see?
I'm barely solid
Barely solid even to myself
Can you see me?
Can you see me?
Can you see me?

untitled

Evan Stark

You told me to remind you what love is
You told me to stare inside of you
The way I used to
As you threw pieces of yourself at me like darts
And told me to put you back together
So that you could feel again
And I held them in my hands
Like fractured pieces of glass that punctured my skin
Your brokenness hurt me
I watched you lose yourself
And I didn't know what to do
I watched as you tore yourself apart
And begged people to notice you were alive
That you were only human
You never asked to be understood
Only felt
And you tried and tried
But you'd rather die than love
Whatever happened to saving ourselves

I needed you to stay
But I understand why you couldn't
You were an open wound
Walking around exposed to the world
And the world being the way it is
People being how they are
You saw how cruel it all can be
The curse of seeing everything a little too clearly
There was a freedom your soul longed for
But couldn't find
So you flew to the other side of the moon
Where it's cold
And your blood moved still in your veins
And the skin you could never know froze
Down to the bone
And the world couldn't touch you anymore.

untitled

Jack Keegan

Writing is a means of expressing experience and ideology, nothing more
It is a means of expression
Nice ornamentation
No pre-analytic assumption
Sex and violence
Instagram commenter in real life
YOU ARE FRIENDS WITH PORN COMMENTORS
Radio and TV, broadcasts, loudspeakers, newspaper, magazines, leaflets
Communication media
It's perpetuating Sex and the Single Girl

I Got Robbed By Jeff Bezos

Amro Ibrahim

I just was brushin my teeth when I heard a buzzin at the door
The Amazon man looked hot red and heavy
I unlocked and thought it was that
He tells me in the buzzer to get down
Gotta get my package I said

Face to face with this man
I smelt desperation in the air
The money he got is not enough
And he's got blood in his eyes
And he's been Working since dawn

And that's when he took out his gun
Called me prick and said I was done
Took my wallet told me to take it up with the boss
And now I guess it's my loss

And that's when he took out his gun
called me a prick
Said take out my wallet or that'll be it
I said how could you
He said take up from the boss
Then he walked to the next apartment and continued the
day
The smell still lingers in my halls

The next day I gave em a ring
Called up customer support
They said talk to the police
but I thought it'd be easier in house
After some verbal tusslin', I got his manager to bring my
wallet back

He was nice and cordial, knocked real polite
At my front door he said here's the wallet
I took a look and he brought just wallet
I said where are my cards you bitch
He said I took them I said you can't do that
He said he already did
What the fuck am I suppose to do at the foot of these giants

And that's when he took out his gun
Called me dick and said I was done
Told me to give my guitars,
Said how'd you know I got em?
Said his boss just knowstold me to take it up with him
And now I guess it's my loss

And that's when he took out his gun
called me a dick
Said take out all my guitars
How'd you know I got em
He said the boss just knows, take it up with him
Then he skipped on out of the apartment, in the van he went
And the smell still lingers in my walls

Enough was enough and I was in a rut
Trying to get my property back
Finally had to call the police
They assured me they'd get my shit to be released
Off the phone I spat in a bucket
Gotta clean my mouth talking to pig fuckers

A knock knock knock at my door
And it's three faces I recognize
The Amazon worker, the manager worker, and the big big boss
Jeffrey Jeffrey Jeffrey Jeff Bezos
Flapping his ears down he said he was real sorry
Got his boys to apologize to me
They did so with a grin
Bezos asked if he could do anything
I said I just wanted my stuff back

And that's when he took out his gun
called me a hick
Said get out of your apartment this is a stick
My names on the lease, I said
He said not anymore and dropped his new lease on the floor
Now That I'm without a home now
The smell lingers on me

Nothing New

Pearl Kontarinis

We only connect over songs we've listened to
For years and years
Nothing new or out of the blue
We reminisce instead of making new memories
Scared to experiment
Terrified to see how we act now
Ill chime in and say a word or two
You laugh which makes the night feel like a success
But nothing different
Nothings new
Absolutely nothing
Is out of the blue

Ill sit outside the house i've known for years and years
See the people i once knew
Only i don't remember their names
And they don't remember mine
We will make eye contact but nothing more
How can anyone live
This life of bore

untitled

Jack Keegan

I broke my bowl piece
I pissed my bed
I broke my belt
Grandma has been in the garage for days
Don't betray the process of doing these things
Everyone's "just trying to be nice"

untitled

Cameron Salo

"I yearned for America and it yearned to see me
Come dance with me my love
On broken tracks to the heartland that lead through the Main Streets of a thousand inland harbors in the darkness
There lights like beacons for the traveler
Like ships that seek the shore
The dew forming on the grasslands of backyards and mailbox's
From Phoenix to Er
From the dust plains of apple pie to the shorelines of key lime
To the lands of colored hair to the deep wilderness filled with bears
And all the sunsets and sunrises to unfold
Not yet seen in your eyes

How you look at them is how I look to you
We shall see Big Sur with green rolling hills of your eye to the snow capped mountains of the Rockies white as your skin
My love America is you and you are her
Perfectly thrown together with many parts and ways
Quilted together with many fabrics of the real and surreal
How you wear heels is how the mighty saguaro cactus stands in the immersible sands
How one longs to feel your hands in warmth is how those long ago traveled in tan covered caverns in this land to catch a
glimpse of the promise land
The American Dream and the American beauty are the same as you in morning wrapped in white linen sheets.
And the freckles of your beauty shimmering like the northern lights and unforeseen Alaskan sights"

Old Sneakers

Amanda Egan

Today I passed a shop's display of mint condition sneakers-
sparkly stars sewn on the heels, (all the women have them).
And as I started up my stride,
a tug came from the street.
My laces had become untied, and caught beneath my feet.
With a laugh I bent down towards my wrinkly leather "Clark's."
Dirty laces double-knotted, I continued on my walk.

Endure, laugh, run, swim, jump across each hurdle, traverse each crevasse
Remember the words that "this too shall pass"
Keep your head on your shoulders, don't let them take your name
And always take it easy but take it all the same

Self Portrait at 25

Drew Kolenik

Instead of the mirror
I look back into the collage
of magazine cut-outs
making a ransom note face
of mixed idols and icons.

Water evaporates from my back
taking heat along with it—this is what I know to be cold.

Life happens in the quotidian.
The girl with red hair whose smile could kill you
spots a dove in the pigeons and quite frankly I do the same,
like a black tie, the pizza party never really goes out of style.

Take It

Parker Otto

You cannot be hungry if you don't starve
You will not survive if you cannot carve
A notch in the books is what you crave
Yet the risks, the aches may snuff out the brave
I was the same age as you were before
And I know of your doubts of the years that come more
You must be tough, grow a hard shell on your skin
Yet remember the kindness inherent within
Remember the words that "this too shall pass"
Keep your head on your shoulders, don't let them take your name
And always take it easy but take it all the same

untitled

Jack Keegan

its been 3
and a half years
Since I first had
sex

~~its been 3~~

Is my life better than
it was 3 yrs ago
Each round can inflict
more harm on the
human body than
a typical handgun
im just here so i
dont get fined
but i will
do a skittles commercial

From the Other Side of the Wall

Alex Wolf

My head is my bedroom in a smaller way,
and today I am inside with the door shut.

Slipping; I can hear systems shutting down.

Having ears is a tricky thing.
In this way, I understand God.

The floor is cold
and I am trapped,
trying to get untrapped.
Pouring out of myself, into myself,
Closing my ears, but no good—
the ceaseless agonies of the World get through the cracks.

Real World slipping.
System shutting down, less violently now.
(This is good; November will ache enough as it is, I have no
time to clean up an avalanche)
There is a crack in reality, and on the other side, a bedroom
door.
Stepping through the door into Time.
Through the closet,
I find myself a child again,
Under the dining room table.

Only my hands remain now,
This is why they must hold so tightly.
My fists are all that tethers me when I go to my bedroom.
So the fists will stay for now, I'm afraid.
For now, forever.

So, my hands are in the Real World,
and I place the rest of my body in a padded room where
nothing can touch me,
not even the truth.

I am in my head,
which is my bedroom in a smaller way,
because the World is very loud today,
and my tongue is not working
So I cannot ask it to be quiet.

Sometimes God is here, but not today.
Only Atlas, outside, holding back the World.

The sun is barely rising.
Echoes of red
and pulse
and slick things on bathroom walls.
(Wrong timeline)

I am hiding in my head.
My head.
My head is my bedroom
Small bedroom
Bedroom in a smaller way.
My head is my bedroom
and I only breathe with the door shut.

God is not here today.
No men allowed in my bedroom.

There is my skin, and everything contained,
and I do not think I will call you today, Mom, I'm sorry.
Maybe later, I can be a body again.
Not a person. Not today.
Today I am hiding.
Today I am staying inside.
Today I am in my bedroom in a small way.

Not turned off. Just quiet.
No one locked me in, I closed the door all on my own.
This is nice. Like power, almost.

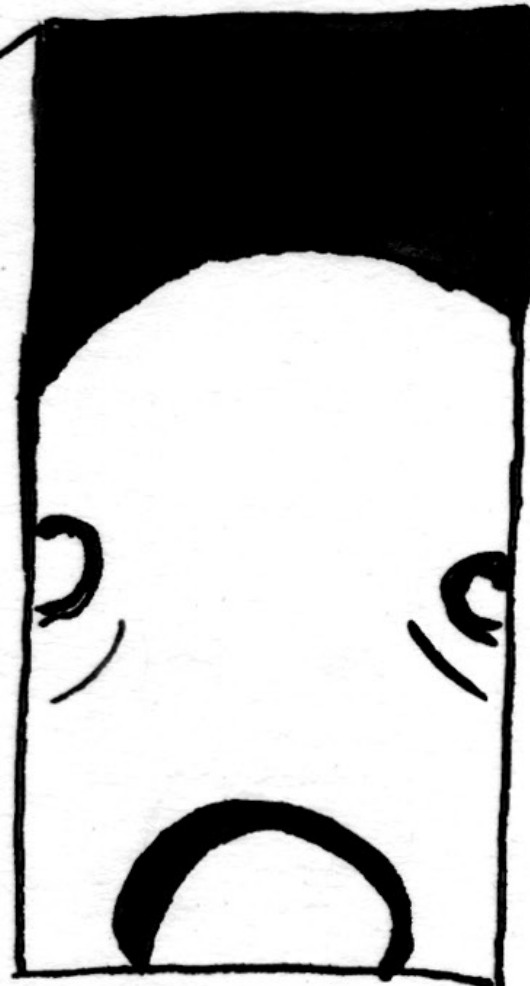
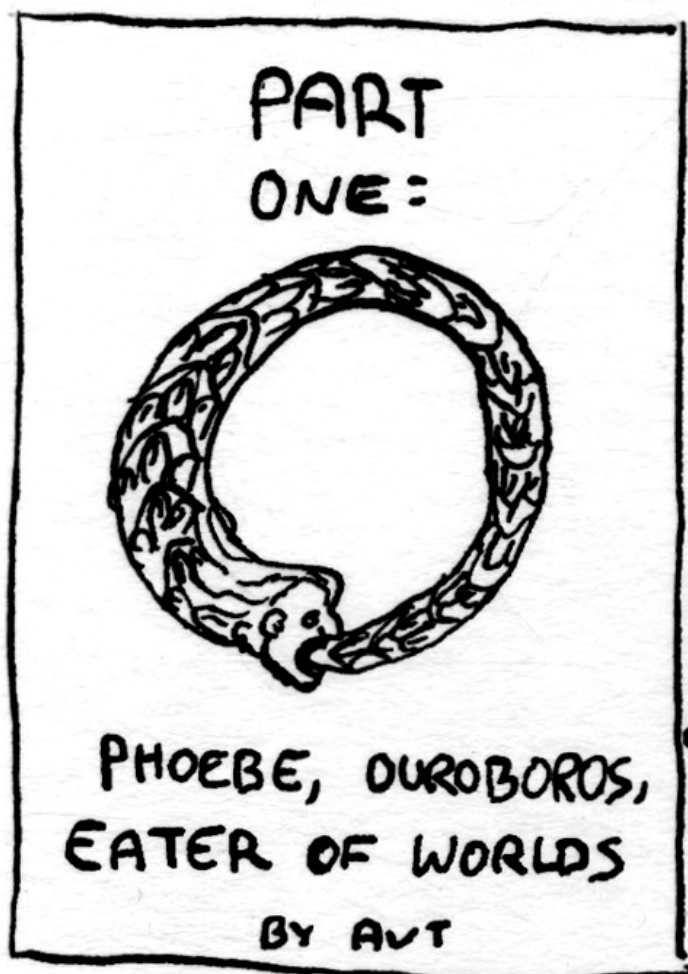
I am hiding inside my head, and I am not alone.
She is in the corner, rearranging bodies that don't exist and
do not need to.
I do not lie and tell her it is safe outside.
My tongue is not working.
I do not have to lie today.
Sometimes, when I knock softly on the bedroom door,
I am not lying.
But today, I am in here, too.

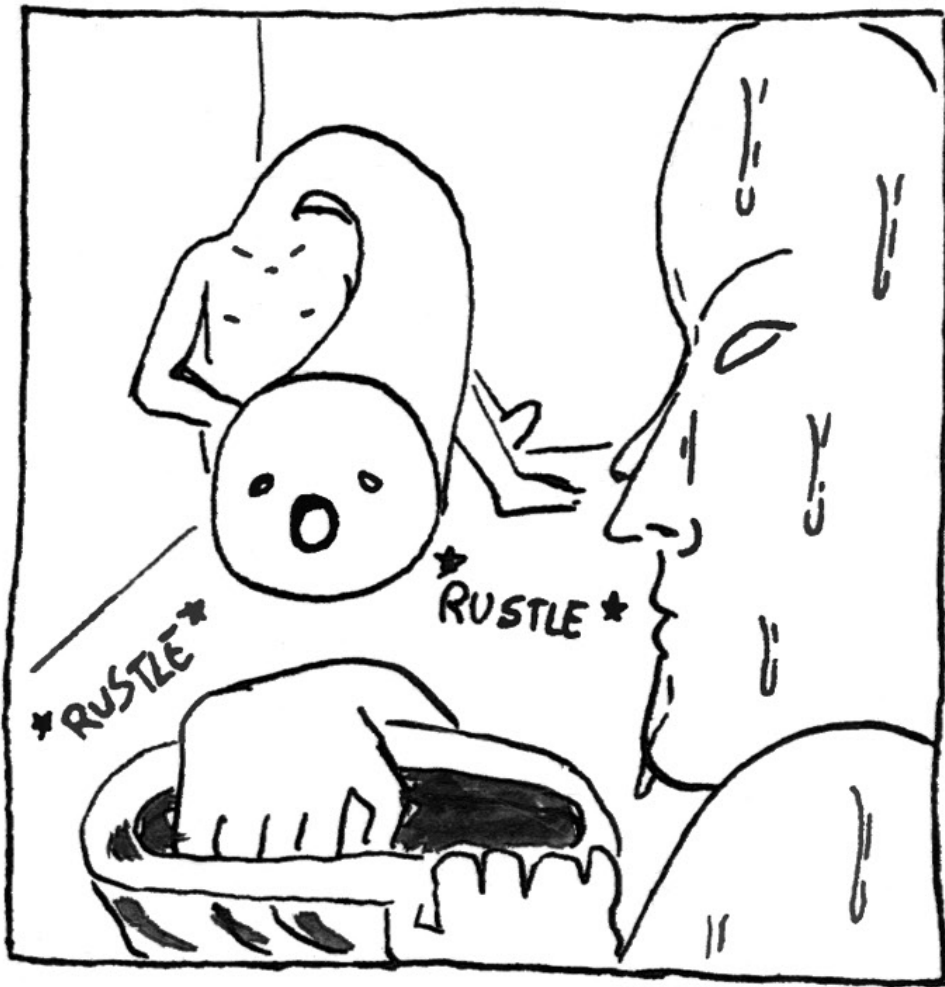
Can't explain today,
No talking out loud in this bedroom, I'm afraid.
Maybe tomorrow my tongue will work.
There are things inside that move,
And I am not trying to keep them in place.
Just watching.
Watching the moving things inside my head.
Watching with eyes shut.
Alarming, how people live in the World, just like that.
Not me; I am in my bedroom in a smaller way, and the door
is shut, and nothing can touch me.

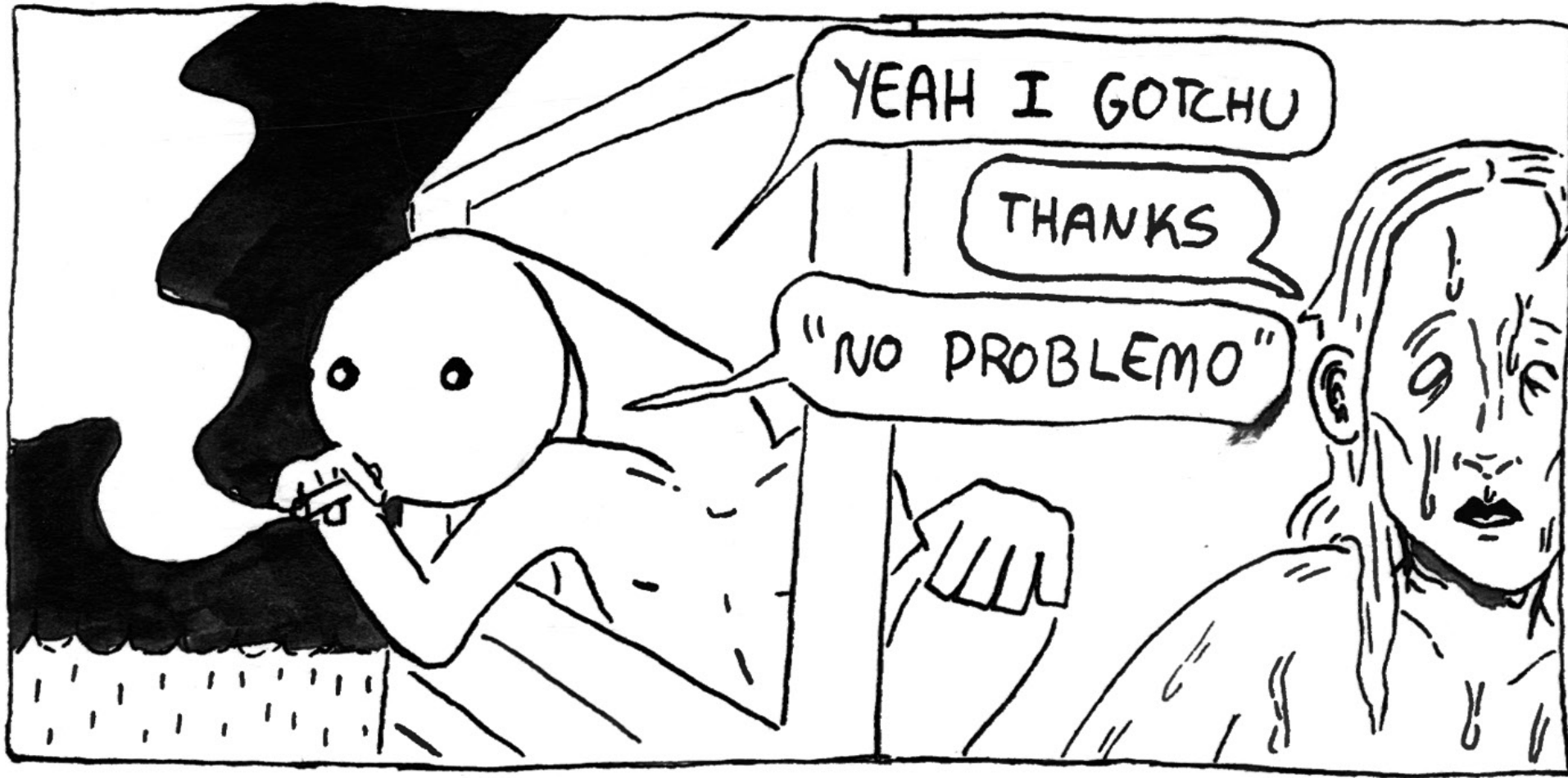
The World is not beating it's way in anymore,
So Atlas is on a smoke break.

This is by way of answer
to your soft knocking at the door.
This is to say,
I trust you.
So I am letting you inside my bedroom in a small way.

My tongue is not my tongue,
So maybe it is better if I write,
And you write,
Like conversations with God.









Charlie

By Bradford Tom

Hello, Dear Reader. I am Charlie Heartful. I began Charles Heartford Jr., but at the perfect age of fourteen - three days after my fourteenth birthday, actually - my then piano instructor sparked a revelation in my loving mind.

The revelation and the statue I erected atop it, I will describe later, but I will say this: My birth-given name was left behind, totally inapplicable. The play name, Charles, no longer fit - it was too formal. The family name, Hartford, no longer fit either - it held history. The Jr. no longer fit for I was senior, major, enormous. The name change was a rebirth, and from that point forward, I was Self-owned.

What about the piano instructor? Was he not an impregnator, a rapist, a womb? Was there no attachment to this fellow? Oh, my Dear Reader, you are too clever! Yes, he was all of those things, and my attachment is eternal. Because you asked, I will tell you what happened.

He gave birth and then vanished. I hadn't even learned the full CMaj scale. After a single lesson, he released me into the world with a dire warning for a binkie: never attach to anything or anyone. I was indebted and in awe and afraid and (please don't tattle) attached and therefore I obeyed and obey. His name was Sir Howard Glenn. He was a good man and a pervert. He died three days postpartum. "You are too full of love, too free, too pure for that foolish name of yours. You left my womb with a full heart and a silly smile - I, Sir Howard Glenn, hereby pronounce you Charlie Heartful. I taught you a CMaj chord. Practice it incessantly, but do not become attached. Next week we will turn it minor." These were the departing words of my first and final lesson. I walked out into the street and it all looked so new. I'd seen it before a hundred times, but not like this. I was amazed.

Later that day, my mother found the bite marks. My father drove out to Howard's cabin and shot him twice in the chest. That night, I dreamt of an owl. It was as big as a man, and instructed me to follow with the wave of a wing before sneaking behind a red curtain. I did not follow. I was too afraid. Of his foggy yellow eyes, I was too afraid. Of his power, I was too afraid. I awoke ashamed. I cried that morning more than the day our cat, Bingo, died of god knows what. I cried and cried and could not stop. Then later I did stop. I pulled a suitcase from the junk closet and packed it full of things - things which I felt totally unattached to. On the name tag I wrote:

Name: Charlie

Phone: NA

Emial: NA

Address: Depends

I set out in search of the owl with nothing but a suitcase, a CMaj chord, and a promise: the next time we met, my heart would be full.

On Giovanni Safarella

By Swiss

Greetings everyone, this is your dearest friend, Swiss. I have been encountering a lot of curiosity regarding who exactly Giovanni Safarella is, for he is very weird and mysterious, and so I thought that I would write a few paragraphs regarding my friend. Though, as cliché as it sounds, I might leave you with more questions than answers.

First of all, he is, politically, what I call a Utopian. Giovanni says that the only reason Utopia is impossible is because people do not want it to be possible—meaning that he already sees the world as Utopia. He analyzes the world from the heavens, and so everything in the world is very small and tangible to him, like toy soldiers. "It's that easy!" He always says about the most complicated ideas and things ever in history. And he is almost always right.

It is especially "easy to find things complicated," he said once.

What blows my mind is how many other people's minds he probably explodes on a daily basis. He simply is the most incredible (and well-read) person I have ever met, and I believe in him so deeply that I fundamentally think that he can alter the course of this world, for as he says, "it is malleable."

Giovanni, however, has defects, like everyone else. Let me tell you, that I have never met anyone so over-emotional and dramatic in my entire life. I once witnessed him cry from having killed a spider, before even having killed it, because he was scared of it and so it had had to die for him to feel comfortable. I believe he said "poor spider, I have hated you my whole life but—" and then killed it without finishing his sentence.

But the spider was pregnant and hundreds of baby spiders chaotically swarmed around and Giovanni freaked the hell out and almost fainted. He always seems to arrive to the conclusion that bad things happen to him so that good things reversely can—but only after the most over-the-top dramatizations which you have ever heard. And then, just like that, he spits out something regarding the dialectic of life or whatever and then moves on from whatever was troubling him forever.

Giovanni vehemently hates things which he hates. Being slighted by a friend, for example, is at the top of his list. I have seen him cut people off for not sharing, or not having had the notion to share. He shares everything with everyone, and so he expects the people he shares everything with to reciprocate the same empathy on the rare occasions when he is in the reverse position. And even though it is sad that people do not reciprocate the same kindness to him—because he really does share everything he has with everyone...should they have to?

The answer is rhetorical. That is the thing with Giovanni. He believes in Utopia—he refuses to see the world for the ugly thing which it perhaps actually is. And so he never gives up.

Long Live Giovanni Safarella, the Utopian.

Perfect Nuclear Family

By Ashton Herres

What is the best morning routine? Most of us crack our backs while twisting to secure the dopaminergic devices; phones and disposable vapes find their way into our clutch-my generation's coffee. Somewhere between dreaming and working, we have to face ... it. Better to drown it out. I've reasoned, however, that I want to face and process what my subconscious brewed up in the night-best not to submerge it in stimulation.

While pondering alternatives to the dopamine duo, my mind is crossed by influencer morning routines, the ideal morning diet, charts that track dopamine. You know when you wake up, you're at your baseline for the day. If you spike it, it increases the likelihood of a crash, which could affect mood, energy, and productivity.

My little sister falls asleep to murder podcasts-the sadist. I wonder how healthy it is to wake up to a murder podcast. "Police correspondents unearthed the severed finger after a three-day investigation-" and so on.

Little sis seems content though, or some indiscernible equivalent. Lying flat, eyes on Sims while tales of murder echo through our shared room.

"Can you turn that down? I need to focus."

She doesn't move an inch-not even a twitch of the eye. Somehow, that was a more effective retaliation than a response.

My "focus" was a prayer/meditation combo. Not sure how to classify it, as I've never been to a church service. I've been trying it out for a few days-first thing in the morning. I channeled my focus on rays of light that landed on the door. They cut through just enough dust to appear like actual beams you could touch. I imagined myself wielding one; it followed my breath.

I would probably stab a billionaire oligarch with it if they were in my line of sight. One of the evil ones, though-isn't wielding that much capital functionally evil? Would wielding these light beams give me Zeus-like powers? Are they like bolts that I could smite people with? Wouldn't that make me a bit like a billionaire oligarch in power, since we could both smite people in their homes with hard-to-trace projectiles?

This line of thought is hubris, and I'm doing a disservice toward the sacred.

Prayer became painful when God started answering. It complicates the process when a clear voice cuts through the fog-a PA system of an internal monologue that is clearly subject to bias, yet sees itself as God's voice. Does that mean God is real, or that I'm God? Or like some fucked-up fraction of God that forgot after a few hundred thousand incarnations? I leaned into the latter and concluded my meditation.

Speaking of improperly perceiving things as God-I emerge into the living room/kitchen to mother and father arguing over a chatbot prompt to do their taxes. My parents shouldn't be married.

A memory flashes in: my grandfather gliding a pen over tax documents, cigarette in mouth on our old patio. This time, the beams of light were held up by smoke. Back when real men chose their cancer analog style with a side of physical writing. The cigarette probably felt good while he did mental calculations, balancing reason in his cortex like our ancestors have done since Eve ate the apple. Now I watched as two people bickered over how to outsource rationality to a server that's causing droughts throughout the American Southwest.

I think I feel a little sick. I reach for a banana. It looks a bit past prime, and I feel a bit let down when it emerges from its peel brown. The memory of a documentary from a few days ago persuades me to consume the rotted nanner flesh regardless.

Globally, approximately one-third of all food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted-

"HEY, where the fuck is my jacket?"

The family shifts their attention toward the intrusion of normalcy.

"Don't swear in this house!" Mom cut in.

"Did you take her backpack?" from Dad, with a disgusted head tilt.

"Her pink backpack. Yes, I needed it for drag, you dimwits-I was cosplaying as a fairy."

My retort caused the sister to continue scouring the house, and now my parents think I'm a little fruity. The only thing fruity in this house, though, is the mushy, tannish-brown banana that I still have to fight my way to finish. I can't waste it-there's so much food waste in this world. Especially meat.

220 million animals die every day from factory farming-that's nearly double the number of human lives lost during both WWI and WWII (125 million). This figure is a bit drastic as it accounts for all animals, including aquatic. Most people see fish as less than objects, though. Still-23 million land animals every day. That's like three holocausts but with pigs, cows, and chickens. And nearly a third of that is simply wasted-left to rot.

"Did you know three holocausts happen every day but for animals?" I blurt.

My parents turn to me, concerned. The silence is only interrupted by my sister tearing apart the closet looking for her backpack.

"What the fuck is wrong with you," my dad responds.

My dad and I actually share a laugh about this, but only because it was admittedly a bit out of pocket.

"No, Dad seriously-23 million land animals are killed in factory farming every day. That's like three holocausts a day," I say, followed by a snort that morphs into a sigh.

"Hey, be grateful that your society can offer you food. Some societies haven't worked that out yet-like all those places we give away our tax dollars to. They can't support their own people, so we have to help them," he replies, then continues typing.

"No no, this goes into accounts payable-" follows my mother.

"Hey, get ready everyone. We go to the tax accountant in ten, then we'll drop you off at school. Help your sister find her

bag."

I stand in silence for a moment, contemplating the purgatory that waits for me and my family at the tax accountant's office. I then go to the basket that rests near the shoe closet. Underneath a blanket lies my sister's bag.

I hand it to her.

"Thanks. Hey, how'd you find it so quick? Did you know where it was? I knew your ass was using my pink bag."

"No-heh, sometimes I notice you throw it in there when you're rushing into the house. I'm detail-oriented."

"Chat, he's autistic," she replies while turning away.

What was meant to be a simple funny jab made me consider the linguistic implications of the emergence of "chat" in our language. Its prevalence among Gen Alpha speaks to their interest in streaming culture, as well as a propensity to always feel like their lives are self-referential or always documented. The emergence of "chat" in our language is a sign of our self-imposed surveillance state-a feudal state that has resulted in people crowdsourced funding for each other with entertainment to such an egregious degree that now our youth perpetuates the word the streamer uses to acknowledge his anonymous viewer base.

Maybe I *am* a little autistic.

Suddenly, a wave of family members cascaded upon me, pushing me to throw on my shoes and hustle to the car. Suddenly, the dynamic was completely different. We sped down the highway-parents in the front seat, me and sis in the back. The parents continued to bicker in their pilot seats, discussing the inadequate state of the family vehicle, finances, and politics. Finally, as we approached some road work, their conversation landed on infrastructure collapse.

"They've been working on this road for months. Why doesn't the city just hire a private company to do this? They could have had this done ages ago."

I felt myself getting pulled into the conversation.

"I feel like this is a broader issue that has to do with the ineffective nature of automotive transit. Also, the contracting for jobs like this is private enough-that's why it's taking so long. Because there are too many middlemen trying to get a slice of the pie while the workers are incentivized to take as long as possible since there's no other work."

"He's gonna give you a socialism speech now," came from my sister's seat. Noises emerged from her phone as she scrolled on TikTok. She shifted uncomfortably.

"If you gave a damn about politics, you'd agree with me. And yes, a more egalitarian solution would probably solve this country's infrastructure problems as well as our job crisis. You know all about the job crisis, don't you, Dad?"

This was a mistake. The car devolved into war at this point. Their voices competed for space to insult me.

"Your father is hardworking, it's not his fault the state -! You're never going to get a job yourself, you lazy -! Rude remark, also you and your sister's generation don't understand sacrifice. You guys can barely adapt to change."

I began to feel heat crawl down my neck. My sister did NOT like this comment from Pops about change.

"OH YOU THINK WE DON'T KNOW CHANGE ?!"

ALL I'VE KNOWN IS CHANGE! YOU CAN'T HOLD A JOB TO SAVE YOUR LIFE. OUR EXCUSE FOR A FAMILY CAN BARELY EAT BECAUSE OF YOU, AND DON'T GET ME STARTED ON YOUR CONSTANT THREATS OF DIVORCING EACH OTHER! LIKE IT'S ME AND MY BROTHER'S FAULT FOR YOUR GUYS' INSTABILITY. WE JUST WANTED A NORMAL LIFE! BUT-BUT-YOU GUYS-" Her voice began to trail off into tears, which she promptly tried to solve by pulling up her phone.

"We know change. My generation understands change," I state.

The car screeches into a parking lot.

"Whatever, we're here. You kids get your shit together and stay in the car. You best be in a better mood when we come back or you're grounded."

They both exited and slammed the door, leaving me and my sister behind.

Mom and Dad are trapped in some semblance of the old world. It's almost nostalgic, watching them fumble within their outdated perception. The spikes of change only poke and prod their conception of reality. For me, my eyes are made of the spikes. And the seeds of change lie in my hands.

My sister began to cry. I placed my hand on her shoulder and rubbed her back. I felt stable-no anger. Chills ran up and down my spine.

"Why - does the world hurt so much?" she asked, between sobs.

"Have faith, little sis. One day, us and others like us won't have to deal with this coldness. People will care for each other instead of trying to get ahead themselves. Our families will be safe, warm places, and our kids won't have to worry about their future because they live in a society that cares about them."

"I can't see that future. All I see is-is it getting worse."

I felt my throat close a little.

"Most people like us feel that way right now. But we hold the keys to our own future-we get to build it."

"How do you trust that, though? When will it get better?" she replied.

"I don't know when ... But-it will be like a parade is coming to town! We'll celebrate that we get to be alive in the first place, and there will be trumpets, and people sharing food, and everyone like us will be dancing in the streets."

"You don't know when though?" She cracked a smirk through tears.

"Soon, I hope. I'm a bit older, you know. I share your intuition with this reality. I see how it works and what it does to people like us. But I caught a glimpse of the old world-just long enough to capture what it did right."

Drunkards, Gamblers, and Merrymakers: The English Merchant Community in Hirado, Japan, 1613 - 1623

By Jack Kontarinis

“It is said the king meaneth to muster all his souldiers in barkes per water this day & make a greate [show]. I wish yow were here to see it & eate your [part] of a [cow’s] tong to dynner. I know not what else to write, but desire the 2 bucketes [of] fresh fysh [that] went yisternight... may be returned.”

Between the 10th and 16th of December, 1614, Richard Cocks was bored out of his mind. The warehouse at Hirado, the only English factory in Japan, was nearly empty, and English ships were slow to arrive from other factories during the long winter months. Richard Wickham, a quarrelsome merchant, and William Adams, the first Englishman to set foot in Japan, were Cocks’ two best friends. But they were on board the *Sea Adventure*, bound for Siam, in an attempt to procure more vendable goods there. Cocks’ other friend and, technically, employee, William Neelson, was also at the English House, as was Cocks’ twelve year old Japanese concubine, Matinga.

With nothing much else to do than read, drink, and write, Cocks scribbled pedantically for almost a week, filling over thirty pages of letters. Some were sent to old friends back in England, like Lord Salisbury, who was a chief Court member of the English East India Company, or Sir Thomas Wilson, another influential London merchant and Cocks’ longtime patron and close confidant. Cocks wrote about stories he had heard in Japan and sent along Japanese “almanacks.” He commented on news he had heard from Europe, remarked on “sayling waggons” reportedly used in battle recently in Korea, and he spent a few pages relaying an old story he had heard from William Adams from 1604, telling of a Spanish friar in Japan who had attempted to convert some of the Dutch sailors and merchants to Catholicism by attempting, unsuccessfully, to walk on water. The monk almost drowned and was later imprisoned for his antics.

He also spent those few days to send a series of letters to Wickham and Adams. Though they had already left on the *Sea Adventure* a few days prior, their boat was being held up in a port not far from Hirado, as no fair wind had yet blown for them to sail out to sea and towards Thailand. Cocks was not only bored when he lazily scribbled (“I know not what... to write...”); he most likely missed his friends. He repeatedly asked Wickham if he could come aboard for dinner for a night. One night, he heard that Adams and Wickham had a feast on board the ship, and Cocks sent thirty loaves of bread and twenty-two sacks of rice to contribute to the festivities, asking Wickham to “comend me to all good frendes in generall.”

It is safe to assume that Cocks was feeling left out. But left out from what? Cocks, Wickham, Adams, and most of the other Englishmen living in Hirado were good friends. But they were also a part of a unique, short-lived community,

a community that had its own set of rules, practices, and worldviews. They were brought together through their service in the English East India Company, but they held their community together through a unique set of socially-binding practices that set them slightly apart from other early modern communities. Sex, alcohol, a disregard for organized religion, and yet, too, a complex set of social norms and unspoken rules of conduct, all contributed to the brief formation of the English mercantile community in Hirado. English merchants also maintained and warped certain cultural norms from England, such as those that concerned sexuality, religion, and punishment. It will be the goal of this paper, therefore, to further explore the subcultural rituals and norms that sprung up betwixt this small association of early modern Englishmen, and what, by 1623, led to their community’s gradual dissolution.

In 1599, the first investors of the English East India Company met in London to affirm their financial backing of the Company’s first voyages, with the express intent to advance the “trade of merchaundize” by “buying or barteringe... suche goodes wares jewelles or m[er]chaundize” that the East Indies and Southeast Asia might yield. Early voyages of the Company were exploratory, with two of the chief aims being the procurement of trade with China and the discovery of the Northwest Passage, a mythical sea route that would have provided a speedy entrance to China and the rest of Asia through the Arctic Ocean. The Company was also established to rival the successes of the Dutch East India Company and the Iberian merchants, backed by the Spanish crown, in the New World and in the East Indies. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) had flooded European markets with much sought-after goods from Asia, such as silk and spices. The Spanish colonies in the New World had generated an unprecedented stream of revenue for the Spanish monarchy, mainly through the export of silver. Much of Spain’s silver was funneled into China, the largest consumer of silver in the early modern world, and this, too, was of great benefit to the Spaniards, as it created significant royal revenues and guaranteed continual access to Chinese markets. Seeing such commercial success in Southeast Asia, English merchants, understandably, wanted to get involved.

English trade networks were gradually established in Southeast Asia, and by 1613, the time of the establishment of the factory at Hirado, Japan, the EIC had established two principal factories in Bantam and Surat. Thirty other factories in the region, established by 1621, were to be subservient to the factories at Bantam and Surat. All English factories were to support each other by providing bullion, vendable wares, and other supplies for the merchants residing at each of the factories. This system of mutual support, called the “country trade,” was devised in order to lighten the logistical burden of supplying all the factories directly from London, as travel times from England to the Indies could vary, depending on the season, from nine to eighteen months. The distance from London to the factories

in Southeast Asia not only posed a problem for timely communication between the Company and its servants; it also allowed factories to develop organic, unique, and sometimes chaotic miniature communities of merchants, sailors, and locals.

One such community was formed in Hirado in 1613. The Dutch had already established a small factory there in the decade previously, and had established a strong relationship with the local family clan, the Matsuura, that controlled trade in and out of Hirado Bay. Hirado is also relatively close to the much larger city of Nagasaki, which, at the time, was the trading hub of Spanish and Portuguese merchants and hosted a large number of Jesuit missionaries and Franciscan monks. The Company was not as interested in trading Japanese goods as it was by the prospect of acquiring large amounts of Japanese silver, which then, in theory, was to be used to generate trade with the Chinese, as Chinese silk was in great demand in England and in Europe.

Richard Cocks, along with a few other merchants and a bookkeeper, were flung into Hirado from the deck of an English ship in 1613. They were instructed by the Company through John Saris, captain of the ship that brought them to Japan, in how best to procure trade with the Japanese, how to comport themselves amongst their hosts, and how to maintain effective mercantile practices so as to ensure a smooth and well-kept factory. Under Richard Cocks' skilled guidance and iron fist, the English factory at Hirado, within ten years, had fallen into serious debt and had failed to establish a sustainable trade with the Japanese (or anyone, for that matter). Cocks was summoned back to England by the Company in 1623 for his gross negligence and villainous accounting skills, but died on his voyage home.

However, Cocks, besides a bankrupted factory, left behind something of more importance for historians. 400 years after he first set foot in Hirado, a group of English and Japanese historians, journalists, diplomats and students met in Seighford, a small village thirty miles northwest of Birmingham, England, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the establishment of British-Japanese relations. Cocks' life was almost central to the celebration, termed Japan400 by the men and women that organized the event in 2013. A large plaque, dedicated to Richard Cocks, was placed on the wall of St. Chad's church in Seighford, where he was baptised in 1565. The plaque applauds Cocks' service in Japan, noting his work as a "diarist, historian and intelligencer," who had "done his majesty good service in foreign parts." His "good service" in terms of economic success is debatable, if not wholly untrue. Cocks himself would probably have never even had an inkling of the notion that his life and work would be celebrated in his birthplace 400 years after he first stepped on Japanese soil; his factory that he was charged with overseeing was closed by the Company because of its incredibly poor performance. But that wasn't the point of the celebration. Japan400 and Richard Cocks' plaque in Seighford signifies that there is much more to be understood about the English experience in Hirado from 1613 to 1623. While not noted for his economic prowess, Cocks is

remembered by some today for his key role in the English community in Hirado, not the English trade.

Richard Cocks, head of the Hirado factory, was a seasoned merchant that had worked in Spain and southern France, was well-read, and, on paper, devoutly Protestant. More importantly, though, he was, through his trade, well acquainted with the norms and rituals that merchants working outside of England were supposed to follow. The *Merchants Avizo*, an instruction book made for merchants and first published in the late 16th century, was one of the most widely circulated writings for young merchants living and working in foreign markets. Besides instructing young men on how to write efficient letters, it also dedicates a section to the importance of maintaining a strong faith, instructing that a merchant must "seeke the kingdome of GOD and the rigtheousnesse thereof," that "the godly and diligent man shall have prosperity in all his Waies; but hee that followeth pleasure and voluptuousnes, shall have much sorrow before he die."

Cocks, before working for the EIC, had apprenticed for the Clothworkers' Company of London, where, during his apprenticeship, he was also taught the importance of moral and spiritual welfare. As *The Merchants Avizo* and the guidelines of many early modern merchant guilds would suggest, merchants were supposed to, in theory, lead lives guided by industriousness, faith, and a strong moral compass that would lead them away from lives of sin. These were not merely suggestions that were given to young apprentices; young men entering under the service of their masters kept a rigid schedule and were immediately employed in a rigorous, years-long training. As Massarella has noted in his study of Cocks' years of service before reaching Hirado, apprenticeship involved "both technical training" and a strong curriculum of "general education... and moral and spiritual education" as well. The Clothworkers Company, where Cocks apprenticed as a young man, instructed masters of apprentices that they must, on holy days, instruct their pupils to "wait upon [them] to the church and there to serve God." Furthermore, masters were only to allow apprentices to visit other persons "[with] the license of their master... their masters shall give no license to no [ap]rentice to go forth to no place without he know whither he goeth, and in what company he goeth in." These strict rules over apprentices' free time were rigidly upheld in order to ensure that apprentices did not engage in unruly or sinful behavior outside of working hours.

The East India Company, in its *Lawes and Standing Orders*, published in 1621, did not stray far from *The Merchants Avizo* or the Clothworkers Company's guidelines in urging its factors in the Indies to lead virtuous lives. Concerning the behavior of its employees overseas, the Company explicitly states:

"A diligent enquire shall be made from time to time, concerning the life and conversation of all the Factors in the severall Factories of the Indies, and if any of them be found to breake the orders of the Company, to deale unjustly, or to be of an evill disposition, as a common Drunkard, a notorious Gamester or Whoremaster, or wronger of the Company by private Trade... the President... shall by the first passage, ship home such unworthy Factors..."

Through the carnage prophetic rose
a voice,

But he went unheard. And the
carnage continued.

Giovanni Safarella

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Local Things - Compiled by Jackie Beck

July 18 Mert spalty playing -Friendly Company, Mandy Valentine, and The Victory Seeds at Windjammer

July 19 : Zoë Pete Ford (solo) and Sam Obrist at Berlin

July 20 Cafe Wha: Parker : There's **Fabio's Woody Guthrie Show**.
Featured performers include Cole Quest, David Massengill, Elijah Wald, Mia Vongsavang, Coulee Slatnick, Bert Lee, Fabio Fantuzzi and a special appearance by **Woody Guthrie's daughter Nora**

Zoë Pete Ford and the kicks go on **Tour** with **Mert Spalty** and **Fletcher Gull** :

JULY 23 DAGS BAR PIPERSVILLE, PA

JULY 24 HOMEBASE WILMINGTON, DE

JULY 25 EVENINGSTAR ALEXANDRIA, VA

JULY 26 THE BOOR CLUB CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

JULY 28 SLIMS RALEIGH, NC

July 21, Sie Canela

For: Girls just want to have sun : **Hart Bar** 7-11 pm

July 23: fightscuffs, fawn ridge, and j Wolfe Gonna be good!

July 27: Fightscuffs and Huxley at Jalopy in Redhook

July 29: -The Legs to play **Berlin** @6pm

Along with vibes •Gummy • HeraHero

Wednesday August 13- Challenger Deep, Four Stroke Baron, Added Color, Vya at **The Wood Shop** at 6:30 PM

August 16: Slow Loris to take **Pete's Candy Store**, at 10pm!

