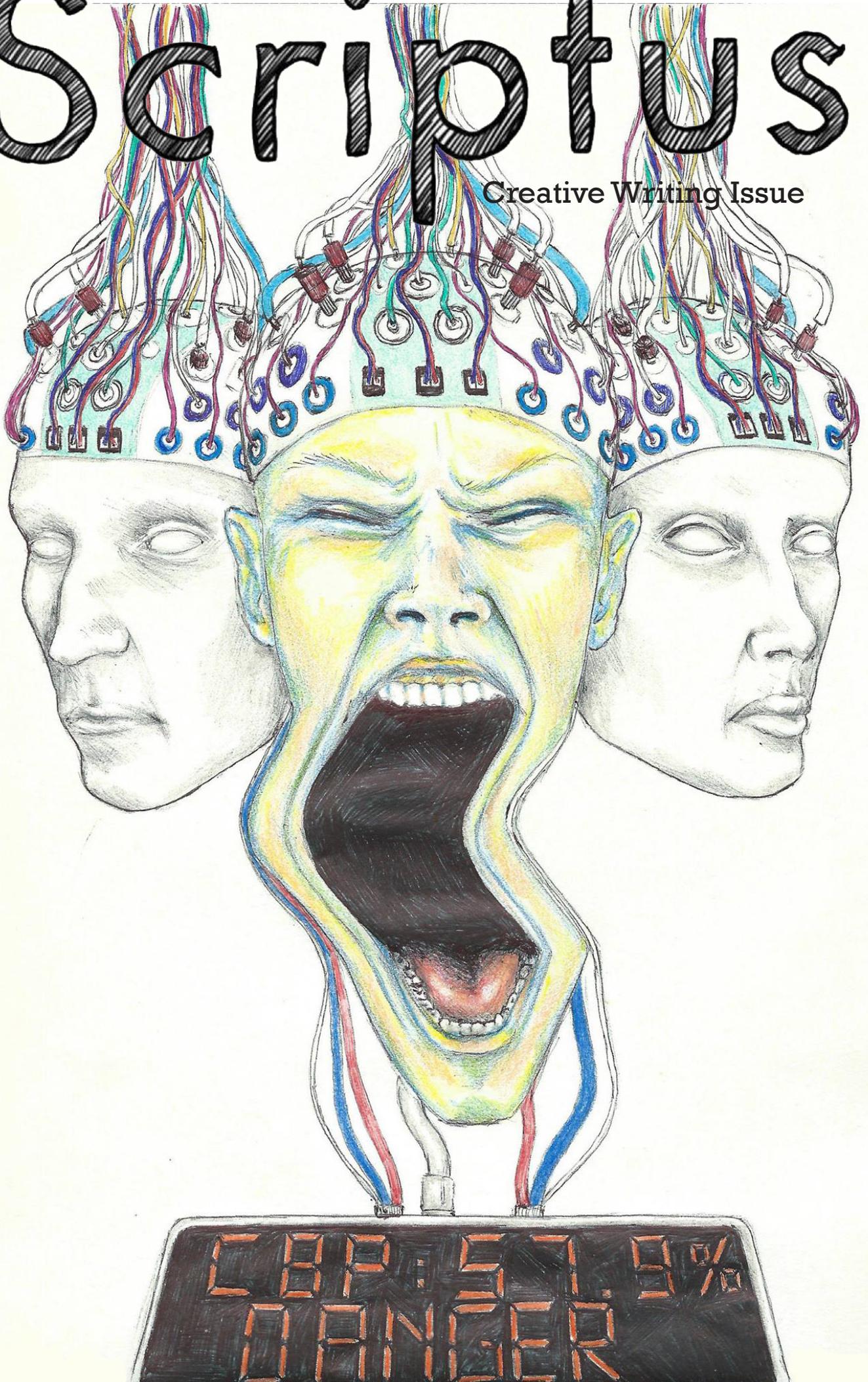


# Scriptus

Creative Writing Issue





# Foreword

Dear Readers

Ever since Scriptus began in October 2012, the most popular form of submission we receive is pieces of creative writing. Every issue, we receive at least one, if not two, stories. Sometimes we get so many that we have to promise writers that we will publish their work in the next issue. From the reception we have received from readers, we also know that creative writing is extremely well liked. That is why this month, we decided to publish an All-Creative Writing Edition, featuring a variety of stories and poems from AUC students. Some of these pieces are from writers of the Creative Writing class, some not. Most importantly though: all of them are from AUC students. From Joris Thijm's satirical spin of AUC, to Marijn Mado's absurdist tale of women falling from the sky, to Charlotte Verboom's tale of the twins, the range of pieces is extremely varied. Going on from the creative theme, we also decided that this issue would have a cover in colour, to allow the wonderful illustrator Matilda Medard more creative and artistic freedom. We hope you enjoy the cover and the creative writing as much as we do. Back to regular programming in a few weeks.

-Nick Handfield-Jones

## Changes/Updates/Statements

We will be releasing our bi-annual reader's survey soon. Make sure to visit our Facebook page to fill it out. Your responses on the survey guide how we move forward, and show us which areas need improving. Stay tuned!

We will be making an edition all about the environment very soon. Interested? Send us an email with your ideas for articles/illustrations/stories etc. at [scriptus@aucsa.nl](mailto:scriptus@aucsa.nl) (And of course, we accept all forms of submission at anytime)

## Scriptus Board

Josefine Emilie Andersen (PR manager)  
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Leonie van der Kolk (Designer)  
Marissa Koopman (Designer)  
Tekla Tevdorashvili (Secretary)

## List of Contributors

Matilda Medard  
Joris Alberdingk Thijm  
Ewoud Labordus  
Laura Galante  
Tekla Tevdorashvili  
Anonymous  
Charlotte Verboom  
Iterdei  
Marijn Mado  
Yin Hsieh



**Scriptus**  
scriptus@aucsa.nl



*Disclaimer:*  
Scriptus is written, edited and designed entirely by the students of Amsterdam University College. The news magazine does not reflect or express the official views of AUC. Comments, questions and criticisms are welcome at [scriptus@aucsa.nl](mailto:scriptus@aucsa.nl).

# Brave New College

*By Joris Alberdingk Thijm*

**A rust-colored building of only three stories, with facades on all four sides that resembled gabled roofs. Over the main entrance the words, AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, and, on a flag next to it, its motto: Excellence, Community, & Productivity in a Floating City. (Global warming had submerged the area previously known as ‘The Netherlands’).**

It was the year 125 A.M.—‘After Marijk.’ Amsterdam University College (often abbreviated to ‘AUC’) prepared a hyper-intelligent caste of youngsters for managerial positions in the World Corporation. This corporation managed the entire world with the generation of Output as its core objective. The students of AUC lived in private rooms in which they were supplied with their needs: water, food, internet, and electricity, such that they would never have to leave it for activities that did not contribute to the generation of Output. In exchange for the provision of these resources, students had to hand in their critical brainpower (CBP) every morning. This way, CBP wouldn’t interfere with the highly efficient Productive Brain Power (PBP), which allowed the students to produce large amounts of Output. Students handed in their CBP by putting a CBP-sucking helmet on their head, which had a cable that went into the roof of the room, and would eventually reach a central brainpower tank in the office of the Dean of AUC. The Dean would then, together with the rest of AUC’s management and the Thought Control Committee (TCC)—an elected student committee—determine what the brain power should be spent on, with the goal of generating as much Output as possible. Once a month, a Community Assembly (CA) was held, in which the student body voted on the allocation of CBP proposed by the management and the TCC. CBP was a lower grade type of brainpower than productive brainpower (PBP) in terms of its Output-conversion-rate (OCR) and therefore could only be spent on small issues, such as the organization of Community Parties, Community Excursions, and the composition of Community Pamphlets. PBP, on the other hand, was better left in the student brain, where it had a higher OCR than in an artificial converter.

The removal of CBP greatly improved the efficiency of the students in generating Output because any CBP left in a student’s brain, in combination with their emotions, would cause them to care about injustice and other irrelevant issues, or would make them ponder the meaning of it all and therefore lower their productivity. However, technology had not yet reached the level at which one hundred percent of the CBP could be extracted from the human brain. As such, a small portion of CBP would always be left in a student’s brain, which could lead to emotional outbursts under certain circumstances, which were highly inefficient, and therefore had to be avoided at all cost. This is where Community Parties and Community Excursions came into the picture: these provided an outlet for residual CBP. During these events, special drugs were taken that facilitated the process of suppressing any CBP-linked emotional outbursts. But the suppression of these outbursts created a buildup of kinetic energy inside the students, which would often lead to violent

behavior towards objects: windows and bottles were regularly smashed, and at a rare instance, furniture thrown out of a fifth floor window. Pictures of such behavior were then taken by vigilant students and uploaded to the students' social network group, where many other students would denounce the counterproductive behavior in strong wording. This ritual, called the Online Hate Ritual (OHR), served the purpose of emphasizing AUC's core values and the students' common thinking and purpose, thereby strengthening their sense of community, partially negating the negative effects of any leftover CBP.

Despite this highly efficient organization, a number of disturbing events had shaken AUC lately. First, mysterious writings which seemed to satirically criticize the system had appeared on the otherwise sterile walls of the dorms. Second, a student had asked what the purpose of Output was during a CA, which had left the chair of the TCC blushing and stuttering—

“Well, the use of Output is that... umm ... well, Output is just good. Don't you get it?”

And finally, as the straw that broke the camel's back, there was the visit from the CEO of the Western European division of the World Corporation. He had come to lecture about the history of efficient education and its key figures.

“As you all know, Louise Gunning and Dymph van den Boom, may the Output be with them, whose portraits have been integrated into the walls of this great college, were two of the most important pioneers on efficient education around 125 years ago. However, they made an unfortunate mistake: they did not take into account the effects of Critical Brainpower in the student brain. Students did not understand the great innovations that these visionaries wanted to introduce, and as a result, their emotions started to react with their CBP—which, as you all know, was not yet being collected at the time. These students then needed an outlet for their CBP-emotion complex, which they found in protests and occupations that damaged the reputations of the great pioneers Louise and Dymph—may the Output be with them. But given the miserable level of technology at the time, which did not allow for the collection of CBP from the human brain, we cannot really blame these magnificent university managers.”

“Yes, we can blame them!” a student from the audience shouted all of a sudden. “And we can blame you! The wealth of the World Corporation, from which we, as privileged upper caste students, benefit, is built on the blood and the tears of lower-caste laborers, who are forced to work under abysmal conditions!”

This was the cue for a number of other students to stand up and collectively read the names of some of the affected workers they had come into contact with, and the harm they had experienced at work. The CEO of the Western European Division of the World Corporation was not used to such a degree of civil disobedience; he went red and muttered something about reconvening at a different moment. The students that had not been part of the protest also had no idea what to do and decided to leave.

Each of the abovementioned issues, and especially the latter, had sparked some of the fier-

est Online Hate Rituals ever seen, in which the behavior of the perpetrators was vigorously denounced and harsh punishment was demanded—

“These drawings invade our personal space! Output is obviously the absolute purpose of life, do not question it! Do not confront us with these issues that are not relevant to us! This is not the right place nor the right time nor the right platform nor the right universe for bringing up these problems! Do not decide for us what to think! We are so privileged with the CBP collection scheme which allows us to not waste precious mental energy on these inconvenient issues; do not ruin this privilege! They should put all of you on Productive Probation], because if you do not learn to conform now, reality will slap you back into your place much harder later on in your life!”

Meanwhile, the management was driven to utter desperation—

“There are strong indications that some students’ CBP-levels are above the technology’s built-in average residual. Are they not handing in all of their CBP? How could the system have failed? How much more irrelevance can the students bear before their productivity falls to uneconomical levels?”

But suddenly the Course Content Manager realized something. There was a certain sociology course which had been receiving suspicious evaluations for a few years now: some students found it vague and unproductive, whereas others were unusually enthusiastic and said that the course had changed their world view. The manager then found out that many of the students who had participated in the recent irregularities had taken this course at some point during their AUC career. The manager shared this information with the Dean. All of these students and the teacher of the course, Dr. Weber, were then invited for a conversation with the Dean.

“Dear teacher and students. You have been found guilty of inciting Unproductive Thought in your fellow students. This cannot be tolerated, and is unfitting for future managers, whose one and only purpose in life should be to increase the generation of Output by the Citizens of the World Corporation. As for you, Mr. Weber, do you not realize that the purpose of sociology is to find out how groups of people can be controlled and coerced into generating Output? You seem to be propagating the exact opposite. All of you shall receive the Binding Negative Study and Teaching Advice (BNSTA) to move to Novaya Zemlya and stay there forever.”

Novaya Zemlya, the northeasternmost European island which belonged to the area previously known as Russia, had obtained a more pleasant temperature thanks to global warming, and had been designated by the World Corporation as a colony for subversive thinkers. These thinkers lived on the island in self-sustaining communities, where they did their own organic farming and philosophized about a future world in which humanity would be able to live in harmony, on equal, non-hierarchical footing, and could realize their full creative potential. Some students descended into hysterical crying upon being confronted with this terrible fate—

“What?! But there is no internet on Novaya Zemlya! How will we survive?”

—begging the Dean to allow them to continue studying at AUC or at least continue their lives in the Floating City. Some other students and Dr. Weber gave their Binding Negative Study and Teaching Advice a thought and decided that it wasn’t that bad after all.

# A Woodman So Small

*By Ewoud Labordus*

I am not sure she knew me. This paranoid thought that she did lingers in my head. But I think she didn't. We only know for certain if she started talking about me, couldn't we? I take care of that on every occasion: making sure that I look different every time I watch her, and listen to her.

Today is no different. I know where to find her on Wednesday in the afternoon. Humans are strangely predictable. Before I started doing this, with other women of course, I thought that every single soul had a say in determining where to spend time, and with whom.

Not a single one ever knew it was me. The face that welcomes them, the face that pours their drinks, the face that opens a door gentlemanly, the face that belongs to me.

Now through with the generalities, I want to get started with my business. Today is an unfinished. I want to tell the story of that day it went wrong.

She came in through the wooden door with glass inlay. I could not see clearly through the fog but the colour of her coat was the only clue I needed. She rather stumbled in, to correct myself. She had only been here a couple of times before, and this was the first time it coincided with cold weather; she was glad to find herself in a cosy coffee place like this.

I glanced up from my reading, watching the barista intently as he greeted her, making her the coffee she always asked for: "... yes, a cappuccino with some cream on top, please."

With a low voice, he responded: "Sure thing. What's your name?"

She did not hear because she was fumbling around in her bag, looking for her gloves.

"Are you looking for these?" a man at the door asks. He is still wearing his coat, even though he arrived half an hour ago. He has a beard. I shaved mine off, leaving a moustache only.

"Yes, thank you," she said while moving towards his table.

As she passed mine, I had to avert my sight, continuing to pretend to read.

*...but in many forests, a small woodman would appear. He would cause trouble to poor travelers, following them around, sneaking up on them but never revealing himself.*

"...yeah, but born in Boston. I played for the local team for three years. Are you familiar with soccer?"

I could not believe she was already talking to some stranger, covered deeply in his woollen coat, with a dark blue scarf around his neck.

"...in fact, you might know this other guy, Billie Long is his name. He went there a few winters ago."

Although I had done this for a long time, I had never so much focused on the others surrounding my subject. This man, however, seemed familiar. He had a tone to his voice I remembered from somewhere. I continued reading, but the background noises pulled me out of the story.

*"One year the tallest ... on the field have the chance ... to return to the forest ... to prove their worth ... to slay the woodman ... for the team's pride ."*

I heard tension, but could not pin down its source. Some of the irritation seemed to be directed to me, from behind me.

"William, that's no excuse! I don't give a damn about the bloody rats. Feed them to your snake ... Or whoever! Get over here ... Right now!"

I turned round. A blond woman was sat there, holding her cup in one hand, and her phone next to it, slightly shaking. I turned back when she moved her head. I had the feeling she knew who I was. I might have been spotted, but I tried to keep my calm and went back to reading.

*Great sacrifices were made for the well-being of the warriors. The tribe's woman had forbidden them to come back alive without its head. A major feast was held, on the eve of departure. Some of the young but unwise said that they themselves should have been sent, not ever the tall ones only.*

Some of the crinkled and bearded reminded the rest of previous attempts, but were shushed by the tribe's woman.

This was starting to get uncomfortable. I was feeling real tight and hot in this woollen jacket. Too many things were rousing my ears. Too much rumble, I was getting sick.

"How about you? Have you been here often?"

"Well, yes. But the last time was a long while ago."

I was certain about one thing: the hunt could not continue. I had to leave. Standing up slowly, while the human sounds surrounding me rose in tempo, tone, and intensity. It was a cackling mad house. I went for the bathroom next to the door and jumped inside the stall.

The door opened again. I was being followed.

"Is this the place she meant? This is a shithole if I coulda been drinking in the Canteen."

Another voice, peculiar. It had the same tone, but a new vibration: not so old as to crack but still with confidence of youth to it. The man it belonged to was at the urinals. He bowed down, a long way for him, picking up a postcard.

*"I sit in public and pretend to READ but I'm actually eavesdropping on YOUR conversation ... Nasty thing for a postcard."*

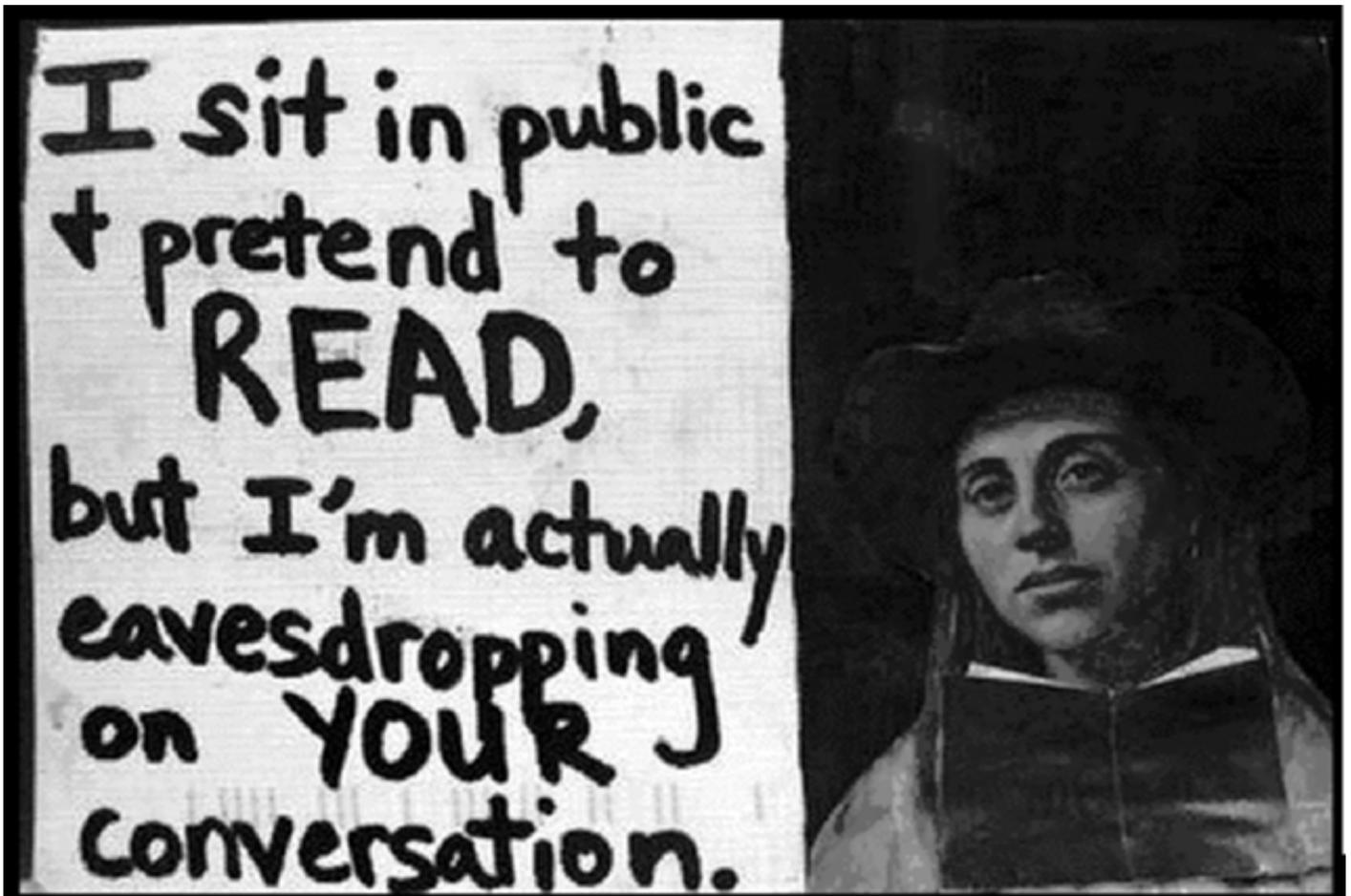
It was so loud. The suspense running through. He was coming for my head. Were these the last pumps of blood, delivering the messages I was sending myself?

"The bugger must be here!"

This door was opening in five, four, three, two...

"Gotcha now!"

*To catch a woodman so small, it was a challenge for us all.*





Ladies and gentlemen! The moment has arrived for the biggest, most amazing event of the year. They'll be writing this one down in the history books, so come closer. Yes, you in the front, can you tell me what I'm pointing at? You don't know, you say? You cannot put it into your own words? That's precisely what I'm getting at. Don't be alarmed, boys and girls, there is nothing to be scared of. If anything, you should be ecstatic! Please, do not all shout at once. Keep your questions for the end. Remain calm, for I hereby introduce you to...the keyboard!

I know what you're thinking...it is neither a key nor a board. But that doesn't matter! No, it does not mutate into a multifunctional, telepathic android that transforms photons into wine. It definitely holds no holographic feature and neither does it walk on its hind wheels. Then what does a keyboard actually do?

Well, the keyboard does have a function key, but we rarely press that one. As for its actual function, let me show you. Now, watch. Pay close attention. Observe the screen as I lightly press upon these buttons. Why all these letters, you ask? Very keen observation from the young lady in the back, even though I just said to leave questions until the end. Anyway, ladies and gentlemen, believe it or not, words are in fact composed of these letters, and if you observe carefully, a combination of these buttons will produce one. Endless, infinite combinations are possible! Isn't that something? Only 26 letters, 10 numbers, and a myriad of arrangements to be explored with both. Don't even get me started on the SHIFT key. That's a real beauty, trust me. Imagine the possibilities! Let your imagination run wild with this innovative device. Let your thoughts transform into the written word. Never again allow your ideas to float away unrecorded. Be inspired by what you see in front of you and watch as combinations of keys come together in seamless narratives, just at the touch of a button! Or should I say, several buttons!

But what's that, you say? What do these symbols mean? Oh my! Why, this is the common English alphabet! Well inscribed and made legible white on black! One letter per key. Now well-organized in neat, legible rows within easy reach of every finger on the hand. Now that is something I call marvelous. Oh, but what do you mean, what's the point of writing? Now, let me tell you something rather important; just because you can speak and give audio commands does not mean you won't need to review those messages in the written word. No, don't leave now, ladies and gentlemen, this is not all! You will not believe it until you try it! So what, you do not recognize the alphabet? You'll grasp it quickly, no worries. It is not that difficult after all. And what greater satisfaction than using the alphabet in the most productive way possible? Effortless typing and the instant creation of messages! No...no...typing is what you do when you press the keys. The buttons, so to speak. Well...yes, it is manual, but! I mean yes...it is necessary to use your hands, that's the gist of a keyboard. It doesn't record as you think, that's, uh...that's a thought recorder's job, we're talking written word by computer work. Come on, boys and girls! Believe me when I say, the future is not thought, it's written! Digitally!

Sir, please don't point that laser knife at me. You are all missing a great opportunity here! Just try it! No? OK fine! You know what? Go! Leave! Prosper in your ignorance. You'll regret it when your recorders will shut down and you'll leave nothing behind. Nothing! Just you wait and see. A thought can be silenced. The written word lives on.

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"What do you mean, 'The application Word quit unexpectedly'? No! I would bloody not like to submit a report!"

I wake up.  
Go to work.  
Work a bit.  
Come back home.  
Rest.  
Go to University.  
Go back home and,  
Sleep.

*By Tekla Tevdorashvili*  
*Illustration by Yin Hsieh*

That was my daily routine, before she came to my life. Who is she, you ask? She is the person we all need.

It was one of those dull days, and I was late for work. My boss saw me and called me in. She told me that I'd lost my job. How fun is that. Well, I guess it doesn't really matter, I hated it anyways. I hated my whole life.

I went home. Slept for a while. Since I didn't have any classes, I decided to take a walk. I was walking to nowhere, no destination in mind. I was brooding alone with my music. Later, after what felt like a thousand years, I realized that I was quite far from home and I wasn't really familiar with the environment around me. Very odd street with no name or people. Normally I would feel scared in this situation, but there was this smell of bergamot and eucalyptus which ameliorated everything. I didn't understand where it came from, but after the stressful day I finally felt relieved. I was in the middle of nowhere. There was no sign of nature, just small lonely buildings, so I assumed I was still somewhere in the city.

There was a little, old, abandoned café with a dirty sign that said "Cosmic". It looked very mysterious, but I think, it would have been really cozy in its time. The café was covered with Chinese Trumpet Creeper. The flowers were a mixture of orange and red with a yellowish heart and dark, green leaves. They were in bloom and made the place magical. It looked exotic on grunge walls. Windows were dusty, but when I looked closer, I could still see the old vase with withered lilies on the small table near the window. Two chairs on sides and a coat; grey, classic coat, which was as mysterious as rest of the place for me. The edges of window's wooden frames were ingrained; different names, different signs, it felt like a one big image presenting time and space by different people's ideas. For a moment I thought I was somewhere out of the world, in different dimension. I sat there on the pavement for half an hour, just stared at the wall of the café. I was lost. Then, from seemingly nowhere, I felt the warmth in the cloudy weather, and I knew that another body was right next to me. I looked to my right and saw a girl sitting beside me. Zephyr carried her scent. It smelled like melted chocolate with cinnamon. Her eyes were no similar to any other, they were greyish green, as if they were colourless but still it was a palette of the soul. As she exhaled the air through her mouth, I looked at her lips, big pale trembling lips that somehow reminded me of a fluffy cloud. She look mysterious, as mysterious as the café - "Cosmic". She didn't look back. We sat there for about an hour before she spoke:

-Do you like the Creeper? - her voice was full of secrets that I was willing to explore.

-Sorry?

-Do you like the Trumpet Creeper? - she said, playing gently with her thick, long, blonde hair.

-Oh, yes. right. Yes, it's stunning.

- Do you see anything else in there?

-Is there something else to see?

-Maybe ...

-What exactly should I see?

-Something different than Creeper...

-Like a flower?

And she smiled.

I was looking at the café's wall and searching for the meaning. It felt like I was in the labyrinth of the giant Chinese Trumpet Creepers, searching for the way out. After some time, I broke the silence.

-Is it that tiger lily? - and I point at the edge of the Creeper, where I could see a different flower, still the same bright orange, but with entirely different petals.

She smiled again. I stood up and went to the wall.

-It is a tiger lily, isn't it?

-Yes - she said calmly.

-Why is it there? I mean how?

-I have no idea.

I was standing there, in front of the café, trying to find out where it came from, but nothing. And when I looked back, she was gone.

I went home and booted up my computer. I searched for every possible definition of tiger lily. One article said that it symbolizes courage and productivity, another said it stood for hope. There was also one article that explained its use as a medical treatment in ancient Asia.

There was one weird meaning I found. It said that tiger lily was a message and that the message was "I dare you to love me," but I still didn't understand why would I find them among the Trumpet Creepers. After reading millions of online opinions about it, I thought I would give up. It was already midnight. So I put away the laptop and went to bed. I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about the meaning of Tiger Lily. After the long, peaceful hours of night, the sun started to rise. I fell asleep at 7 in the morning.

I had a dream that it was me who planted tiger lily there amongst the Trumpet Creepers, and that I was the one trying to create the meaning out of it.

When I woke up, I analyzed the meaning my way.

From that day on, I fell in love with myself and realized it wasn't my life that I hated, but the way I lived. So I decided to change it.

# The Boy Who Built Me an Empire

By Anonymous

*"How did it come to this?" I muttered to myself under the breath of a cigarette. "It's shit, but it's also fucking amazing! I guess I know why. Then again..."* The night had all but gone. The bloody sun was already peeking over the buildings. Everyone's day had just begun except for my own. A steady stream of people bustled in Daliesque in mapping just where I had been.

*"I would lay awake at night watching the lights flicker in my window as cars passed. Each had somewhere to be, hours and days would pass me by, and I struggled to find a life beyond the movement of those flickering lights in my window. "Give it time," I thought to myself "time helps..."* I took a drag of the cigarette, letting it settle in my lungs for a brief moment.

*"At least I thought it did."* I continued, *"It wasn't until you walked into my life that you convinced me otherwise. Sitting on that tattered carcass of a couch, you stopped time. It wasn't one of those at-first-sight things. Fuck, it wasn't even that I was lonely in this jungle of debauchery. It was just that in that infinitely small instant, you made me feel as if the world stopped for you. The moment the*

*shadow of a smile wavered upon your lips, you turned that emotionally barren hallway wasteland into a vibrant empire, because that is who you are. I know that! I believe it as if it were my own religion. And I know that is why I like you, I saw in you everything I never was, and still struggle to be. You are every book I've ever read; you are every part of every daydream. You are a long-forgotten nostalgic melody; your very existence gives me hope..."* I droned on, unaware that the stream of people had quadrupled, everyone goose-stepping their way to work, class, or some other endpoint.

*"Ever since that night, no cars drive by, no lights flicker, I mean, they must do but they no longer consume me. Instead I stand waiting for that flash of light that bursts out of your open door, signaling your return. All in the hope I'd get just a few minutes to talk to you, to once more walk the streets of that empire you inspire."* I dribbled, stopping for a moment while a woman walked past in silent confusion. Perhaps the idea of talking to oneself is still reserved for those in the loony bin. No matter, I just carried on, seeking solace in hearing my thoughts aloud.



*“It was those conversations that progressed deep into the morning that profoundly made me feel. You, who spoke – not in your native tongue – but in a language you had yet to master. It was you who resolutely chose to limit yourself. You poured your heart across your tongue and let your emotions spill out in limited capacity. You didn’t speak in your native language; it would crush your spirit, that glorious energy you commanded. No, no – nativity is cruel and unforgiving, it is life, something that molds you, it seeps into every part of your being. Speak and you’d feel it in your bones. So you powered on in quiet defiance, stringing a story in eloquent breaks and shortcomings. But in the little act of defiance, with those fucking words carefully placed as soldiers in marching of on your voice, you started the conquest of my mind once more. Each and every sentence a new frontier, and you, on that throne of a desk chair was the cause of it all.”* I sighed, and the cigarette was done. And as the embers died letting the light subside, I thought about that night. That night.

*“You turned off the lights,”* I continued from where thought became word, *“as I drew the drapes, extinguishing the stars. And in the darkness we lay head to shoulder, the slow steady beat of your heart drumming incessantly into my ears, a thousand soldiers’ feet stepping in time. You took my arm and wrapped it around you, and held me so close I thought you’d pull it off. Damn, how much I wanted to tell you how much you mean to me! Even in that twilight zone between day and slumber, you conquered my dreams as you had my thoughts. Trampling any reservations I once held, any pain I felt, you showed me that it was possible. Everything was possible. Your empire, that mindscape that you expanded, far and wide enough to never see the setting sun. Always, forever, and infinitely, even in sleep your energy permeated my eyelids blinding me in its presence.”* I winced, as I was startled back to reality by the realization that you were no longer here. Not gone for good, I hoped, but for now, even your return is inconceivable. Inconceivable, yet I rest easy in the knowledge that you are paving the roads of your kingdom, stretching them farther than you ever have before. And it only makes me proud. Proud that you are growing. Proud that you are changing. Proud that you are happy. Proud to call you the emperor of my heart.

# The Two Button-like Tiny Hills on an Island and Round Shaped Things That I Like to Call Boobs

*By Charlotte Verboom*

*Illustration by Yin Hsieh*

To all the girls who feel insecure about their bodies and uncomfortable being naked.

To all the boys who don't know how it is to struggle with the adventures of having 'two of the seven wonders of the world'.

To all the people who like boobs  
or hate boobs.

To all the women who have boobs  
and who don't have boobs.

## Buttons

I looked down at my shirt. Two tiny pyramid-like buttons at chest level were pressed against the Coolcat fabric I was wearing, pushing the material as if they wanted to escape never-ever-gonna-happen land before it was too late. I was twelve years old when I hit my chest on the kitchen table and screamed because it was the first time it hurt. I gently touched the tiny buttons with my finger, called for the woman of the house and showed the two misshaped growths on my chest while my face was covered in salty water that couldn't be stopped coming out of my eyes.

The woman didn't take time to touch the growths. She only looked at them with a satisfied facial expression and said: "you've become a real woman now, just like me". She grabbed both of her boobs, which were more than her hands could hold, and squeezed them so hard that her fingers left white marks on the skin of her well-filled décolleté. This was the first moment I realized that a Barbie-boob fantasy could become reality.



At gym-time we always had to gather in one big line before we were allowed by the teacher to enter the building. Once inside, boys would go to the right, and girls would take the left dressing room. Inside the dressing room groups of girls grouped together to make sure they would have a spot next to their friends and before you could even notice, the room was filled up with giggling, gossiping, and boasting girls.

There was always this one group of girls who would wear the nicest and coolest- looking gym clothes that made you look like you borrowed your dad's t-shirt. But the most exciting thing about changing for gym-time was the moment where everyone could see who was wearing a bra and who was not. Not one of those sport tops or any kind of top at all, but an actual bra with an actual underwire.

The first day I was wearing my bra, which had been feeling uncomfortable all day, as if my diaphragm was tied up between an iron rope and when I breathed heavily I felt it moving on my chest, I was excited about what my friends would say once they saw my new, bright yellow piece of underclothing decorated with pink and blue dots. And although, the colorful bra covered not more than just the two buttons on my chest, I felt awkwardly hopeful.

I slowly started to lose the buttons of the orange blouse I was wearing when a group of girls screamed, started laughing, and were pointing at the biggest girl in the class. She was wearing a bra, the same yellow bra with pink and blue dots as me. It was a damned ugly bra. The big girl cried and left the dressing room. I grabbed the oversized daddy-look-a-like t-shirt out of my bag and pulled it over my blouse. No one would ever see my bra.

## A tiny hill on an Island

We were lying on his bed, with his hands under my shirt. I was fourteen and met this guy a few weeks before at the park, where my best friend and I secretly drank a bottle of Smirnoff Ice all by ourselves. The guy had just turned 17- I have always liked older boys. We had a date before, we hung out at the schoolyard of my old primary school, and drank cans of energy drink. The guy smoked a cigarette, and I had fallen for his smile.

Now we were on his bed, and at that moment I was shirtless while covering my bra with my arms as smoothly as possible. The guy told me not to feel ashamed and assured me they looked too big for that bra anyway, but I did not want to tell him I was wearing a push-up bra and that my actual breasts look like tiny hills on an island. Dutch

hills compared to Norwegian mountains, with a damned swollen nipple on it.  
That bra never got off.

It was still the beginning of having-a-hill-experience, but it did not elapse unnoticed. Once at family dinner my aunt confronted me with the development of my tiny hills. She asked whether I was already growing out bras, just like the daughter of one of her friends. She convinced us that those girl's breasts were growing like cabbage on a rich soil of chest and that her mother got desperate due to the expenses of bra after bra. I looked down at my shirt and thought about the reality that this was only the second bra I had ever bought in my life. At least I would not make my mom a desperate bra consumer.

I did not answer the question of my aunt. Instead, I smiled and asked for some more tea. The awkward silence that had aroused at the table was consuming; it had always been a painful conversation for my family to talk about mothers when I was around. The woman of the house cleared her throat and whispered in my ear that my time would come. She sweeps her blond locks of her chest just to make me feel entangled one more time by the giant bust she pressed forward.

I was still fourteen, and convinced myself that I still had a chance.

### Round shapes

I pulled the strap of the bikini to lift up the round shape on my chest. A dark shadow line appeared around the cleavage and I smiled at my round-looking boob in the mirror. I was sixteen and my breasts had just transformed themselves from tiny hills to round-shaped-looking things that were no bigger than a squeezed orange cut in half.

Bikini season was the time of the year where you would have to show all your high school classmates what you got under the piece of fabric, but compared to the Superbra you were wearing a few weeks ago, this was often a form of social suicide. Going to the beach to hang out with your friends made me realize it was nothing more than just me and my flimsy bikini top.

We sat on the beach. What a beautiful day it had been. I bent over my friend to grab the sack of pistachios that we had brought, but while bending over my bikini top moved along down with gravity. My breasts, not meaty enough to fill up their container, allowed for a small gap to appear between my chest and top. Just enough to be able to see the full round creation and just enough to have my friend throw a pistachio nut in it.

The guys from my class laughed as if they had just seen Ronaldo scoring in his own goal. My face turned deep red, and as an automatic reaction I pressed my arms against my chest to cover the round shapes and turned away.

That pistachio nut lived in my top for the rest of the day.

Back home I stood under the shower, crying. The whole season I had tried to show off in different v-neck and tank top shirts to impress my friends and boys with the little slit between the two round shapes that finally were created. I had been so proud of my new slit that I had it catch every crumble of any cookie I was eating on purpose.

would never wear that bikini ever again.

Google was my best friend in hard times like these. There existed a trillion tips and tricks to make your shapes look bigger. I tried several make-up tutorials that advised to shape the roundings through applying different colors of blush and bronzer around the inner split part of the rounds. I never got the trick, and always ended up with brown smudges all over my chest. Someone even asked me once if I was suffering from a skin disease.

Another trick I tried was the boob-work-out session. But after pressing my hand palms repeatedly together for an hour as if I was making fart jokes with my hands in a very uncomfortable angular arm position, I gave up and experienced cramps in my chest the rest of the day.

I was sixteen and my Barbie-boob fantasy seemed to be hopeless.

### Boobs

I stood in front of the mirror, half naked, wearing just a thong. I grabbed both of my shapes with my two hands and pushed them up, squeezed in them, and with a satisfied face I said to myself: "Damn girl, you got some fine boobs."

I was twenty when I started to finally accept that the button-like, tiny hills, those roundly shaped little bouncy things were boobs. My boobs. I had never called them boobs before. Until that moment.

"Boobs."

I had always feared the expectations that boys would think that there would be actual boobs behind the bra. Boobs like double D's, shaped for the porn star industry, but I found out that boobs are just boobs, and every boob

should be called a boob: small, big, saggy, fake...

I stood in front of the mirror one more time. They looked fabulous, and I smiled.

My boyfriend and I accepted that he was not capable of motorboating, and laughed after still trying to push the boobs together, but then realized there was more hand in the way than actual meat to move his face in. I was happy with the small size, and so was he.

It was not a Barbie-boob fantasy, but at least it was someone's fantasy. Most of all, it was my fantasy.

### **Hanging teabags**

After turning thirty everything seems to start hanging in your life: The love of your life leaves you hanging for a hotter and younger girl from the gym, your boss at work creates hanging mouth corners more and more everyday, and gravity does not work in favor of the meat on the chest that slowly becomes hanging teabags.

However, the down movement of the nipples and the increasing shadow under the breasts did not bother me anymore. It didn't even bother me that every time I sat on my hands and knees in front of my man the two boobs were hanging there like drained and squeezed udders. I had no time to care about the collapsing of the two of the Seven Wonders of the World. I still have boobs and I was happy with that fact...

My mother suffered from breast cancer when I was only 5 years old. After removing both of her breasts in an early stage of the cure, my mom had felt terrible and ugly. I remember her always wearing my dad's sweaters. She refused to show the world the flat chest she never had.

The cancer was not cured and continued to spread to the lymphatic system. I remember going with my dad to the hospital and visiting my mother, who now had also lost all of her hair. The chemo was unsuccessful, and before we knew it, the cancer had infected most of her organs.

My mother died when I was only 7 years old.

### **Lumps**

I grabbed my keys from the kitchen table, I was running late. The drive to the hospital would take 23 minutes according to Google maps, but it was already a quarter past four. I jumped in my car, started the motor and drove away as if I was in a James Bond chase scene.

Once at the hospital the nurse behind the reception welcomed me and told me Dr. Miller was waiting for me. After apologizing three times for my late behavior I sat down on one of his red chairs. His red chairs always were so comfy.

"Shall I take off my shirt?" I asked.

"No, you won't have to this time." Dr. Miller replied.

He was standing in front of his bookshelf, where hundreds of books about cancer were held. Dr. Miller was my regular doctor and an expert in breast cancer treatment. He also treated my mother 25 years ago, and because of that I had to make an appointment with him twice a year for a breast check-up to make sure I did not have to suffer the same fatal future.

Dr. Miller turned and looked at me with a serious face.

"Listen Rose, I got the results of your last check up."

He grabbed a file from the table, looked at it for a minute, and then showed two negatives of my breasts.

It was silent for a while, and then he sighed:

"Rose, we found a lump...We found a lump in you right breast."

I held my breath, and for two minutes I wasn't able to breathe. I automatically touched the growths on my chest that I had called hills, shapes, boobs, and even teabags for so long, and all I could now think of was lumps...

For a moment I saw myself standing in front of the mother of the house, crying while my hands covered the tiny buttons on the chest because I would hit them over and over on the table. I thought about the two hills on an island that just managed to stay above the water every time when I was in bath. The round shapes that had to deal with a pistachio nut for a whole damned day! I thought about my boobs, my own breasts that I hated for so long but now do not want to live without.

I wondered, will they ever be more than just a pair of meaty breeding places for cancer lumps?

I was 32, and feared that my breasts, those goddamn lumps, would never be the same two button-like tiny hills on an Island and round shaped things that I liked to call boobs...

# The Three O'Clock Encounter

*By Iterdei*

*Illustration by Yin Hsieh*



I was sitting in my usual spot in the park. The bench was still a little wet from the fresh spring rain that had fallen during the night, but I did not care. I was watching them. The couple. The young couple, I should say. Every day, at exactly three o'clock in the afternoon they would undergo the exact same routine. This time was no different. The two walked towards each other when I heard the large church clock behind me striking the hour. He was walking confidently, his strides long and powerful. They were too far away for me to hear anything, but I was sure his steps made the wooden planks of the little bridge tremble underneath the rusted nails that pinned them down. She was walking with shorter steps even stumbling a little as she made her way towards him in the middle of the bridge. His spine was straight, hers was bent over as if she was carrying a large backpack on her thin shoulders.

I could barely see his face, but I think I saw his steel eyes fixed on hers. She was trembling underneath his gaze, much like the planks must have under his feet. He said something, one of his hands clenching the railing next to him. She was also holding onto it, but instead she was clutching it with both hands, trying to stay upright, I think. It looked like that. The trembling had gotten worse as the man continued speaking. She simply shook her head and looked at the water below. I could see the man's left hand manifesting itself in the form of a fist and as always I was afraid he would hit her with that. He opened his mouth once more, his eyes now almost red with anger. She shook her head once more, saying a few words towards the man's shoes. He clenched his jaw, she trembled even more.

His right hand left the metal of the bridge's railing as he frantically waved it in front of the woman's face. He was yelling, but I could not hear what he was saying. Then, suddenly, he pointed at her and yelled some more. The woman trembled against the railing, barely staying upright. She did not meet his eyes as they stared at her accusingly. She tried to say something, but was interrupted painfully. It happened. Again. That was the only thing I could hear: a loud slap resonating through the little park. I was the only one who saw. The man turned on his heels and walked away, still with great strides, but on his way back there seemed to be a little more haste in them.

The woman was left leaning into the railing, gasping as a red stain made itself apparent on her left cheek. I stared at her and our eyes met. She looked away immediately, as if staring at me would also be punished by him. As always, I wondered what was going on, but I too was too afraid to do anything about this situation. I stood up from my bench and walked away to see the exact same thing happen tomorrow once more.

# Her

*By Iterdei*

In a hundred years it could be the end,  
Of the lively blue and the vibrant green,  
You have forgotten Her limits, my old friend.

You exploit and cut until all is spent,  
Her treasures are used that are never seen,  
In a hundred years it could be the end.

You reach for heights you do not comprehend,  
She is breaking, that is how much you lean,  
You have forgotten Her limits, my old friend.

You attack what you would need to defend,  
She gets tired and gets hurt, your own queen,  
In a hundred years it could be the end.

You always act like a god and play pretend,  
She cares for you, so it is just obscene,  
You have forgotten Her limits, my old friend.

You are mortal, she eternal. Dead end.  
She has many consequences, unforeseen.  
In a hundred years it could be the end.  
You have forgotten Her limits, my old friend.

# Three Freely Given. Four Never Returned

*By Iterdei*

The first time you whispered the words after you'd made love. She stiffened next to you for a second before kissing your cheek and turning to sleep. Had it been too soon? Maybe it had been and so you resolved to not say it again for a while.

It was your one-year anniversary: the candles were carefully lit on the wooden table, the smell of a familiar lasagne blending strangely well with the sweet scent of the candles. The silky fabric around your neck felt constricting as you tied it - again. She had scolded you about not doing it right the first time she had seen you in your suit. When your fingers were still dancing over the soft fabric that you had tied around your own neck - willingly for once -, you heard the familiar rattle of keys against the door. Her phone against her ear as usual, and you could hear the voices of her parents on the other end. It was her ritual of coming home, her forehead contorted, her mouth frowning. The evening went well - at least you thought it did. The dinner was lovely - she even said so - and afterwards you sat down on your shared couch, which had been a gift from her parents, to watch that horrible romantic comedic she loved so much. You had watched it a dozen times - no exaggeration - only for her. The tremendously cliché movie now showed the two lovers falling into each other's arms, kissing, but all you saw were the tears trickling down her cheeks. You did not point it out, but instead wrapped your arm around her shoulders and pulled her in. She went still for a moment before nuzzling against your side. That was the second time you had said those words, mumbled into her hair, wondering if she could even hear them over the dramatic honey-sweet music coming from the sound system. When her hand twitched on your leg and she pulled it back in her own lap, you knew she had.

The two of you were at a family dinner, her parents were there - you had asked them beforehand. Even your brother had showed up after you told him what you were planning. She looked beautiful next to you and before you knew what your legs were doing, you had stood up. Her head turned around to you mid-sentence, her mouth falling open slightly when she saw that you were getting down on one knee. Your eyes flickered over to her parents one more time. Her father was giving you an approving nod and her mother was positively giddy with what you were doing. Her mother had hugged you tightly when you had asked them and almost shouted in your ear how happy she was that her daughter would have a good partner in her life, an appropriate partner. When you looked at her again, you knew for the first time exactly what she was thinking. You said those words again with a ring in your hand and this time she even gave you a kiss as an answer. It might not have been everything you wanted, but it had to be enough for the both of you.

# Business as Usual

*By Marijn Mado*

*Illustration by Yin Hsieh*

A shrill scream disturbs the calm sky. Before our eyes, a body hits the parked car. The big blast cracks the body's back. Its midriff tears apart. Brown guts are forced out. Blood sprays wildly into the air. The right eye pops out of his socket. An arm disjoints from the shoulder. The legs shatter the front window. Pieces of glass swing by my right side. In reflex, we jump back and duck down. My arms automatically cover my head. A faint pain in my ear. Soft panting.

Seconds pass before I manage to stand up. Mr. Ford, rising only moments earlier, is already at the car. Trembling, I move closer to glance at the body. On the car hood of the shiny turquoise Ford Fiesta lies a girl, almost a woman. Or what is left of her. I take a deep breath and look over at Mr. Ford's impassive face. I take note of the spiral of blood flowing from his hand, caused by a big chunk of glass that hit between his thumb and index finger, and offer my handkerchief to him. He accepts it and wraps it around his thumb. The sterile white cloth rapidly flows into deep red.

"So," I start awkwardly, "should we call someone?"

"Such an unfortunate business." Mr. Ford replies without taking his eyes off the scene.

I nod. "It's a mess."

He then stares at me. His voice sounds soft, almost apologetic. "I must say, in my lifetime as a car dealer, I have never offered such horrific service to a customer."

I produce a smirk. "Well, she just came falling."

On the far end of the parking lot, where the electric powered cars are displayed, an elderly lady calls Mr. Ford. He immediately paces to her and starts a conversation. I feel abandoned next to the Fiesta and the body, whose blood has now streamed down the car's hood and is dripping from the bumper on the pavement. Impatiently, I hop from foot to foot. To my surprise, Mr. Ford has now led the elderly woman to a pink electric powered micro car and begins to elaborately describe it. I walk over and ask, "Is someone from the company coming to fix this?"

"No," he answers curtly, and continues his conversation with the lady.

I step in front of him. "But this is your parking lot, and that is your car."

In the same even voice he replies, "You've signed the contract, haven't you?"

"What? Do you really think I will still take the car?" I realize I sound panicked.

Mr. Ford becomes impatient with me. "Listen, mister. Legally – and I can assure you the Public Management will agree – the Fiesta is your car and the parking is my lot, and you are currently making a mess of my parking lot with the dirt on your car. If you don't remove all of it and clean up the blood, I will sue you for damaging my property."

I look at him dumbfounded. What? No. He can't just! Yet my tongue is tied and I find myself looking pleadingly from him to the elderly lady, who is wearing a pink women's suit with matching gloves and bag. She lets out a nervous squeak upon the sight of my desperate eyes. Torn between Mr. Ford and me, she stares for a moment in the direction of the turquoise Ford Fiesta, while quietly shaking her head.

Mr. Ford breaks the silence. "You can always complain at the online service desk. Now if you'll excuse me, I want to get back to business."

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The drive to the west part of town is tedious and long, and the excitement for my new car is deeply dampened by the cold corpse in front of me. I tried to move her away from the driving panel as much as I could bare, but whenever I use the indicator to turn, her left leg tilts up slightly. As I accelerate, her hip pushes against the steering wheel and thereby pushes it to the right. My vision on the car's right flank is clouded by her hair, that, due to her twisted head, blocks my view of the right rear-view mirror.

A green light changes into red, I wonder where the yellow was, and I have to break as fast as I can.

The shock propels the body into the air, unfortunately not back to where it came from, but it lands on the middle of the car-hood and starts sliding down head-first, coming to a standstill only when the soles of her feet are resting on the bumper.

I ponder whether I can simply continue driving when the green light appears, although the gruesome vision of her head mixing with my tire makes me hesitant to do so. My heart skips a beat when a public safety officer pulls up on the perpendicular lane. As he catches sight of the body, his alarm lights turn on, and with a noisy bell ringing, he parks his car in the middle of the junction. The officer is taller than I expected as he crawls out of the car. Without glancing at the body he immediately walks up to my window.

“Please get out of the car, sir.”

My heart is pounding hard on the inside. I know the Public Safety Management can charge me hefty fines. Quickly, I get out and nervously look at my toes.

“Are you responsible for this mess on your car?”

I shake my head as fast as I can. “I had nothing to do with it. She came falling from the sky.”

“Ah,” the officer scratches his head, and continues in a strict voice. “Still, this is dangerous driving..”

I bow my head towards my toes.

“You could have damaged other cars!” He yells at me.

“I’m so sorry,” I murmur.

“Good, let that be a warning,” he barks, but then his voice softens. “Well, I can at least help you clean this.”

I light up and show a fawning smile. “That’s terribly benign.” I look hopefully towards the officer. He walks around my car, opens and inspects the trunk and then moves back to the body.

“You take the shoulders, yeah?” he urges me. “I’m dreading to touch the head.”

I obey and together we carry the body to the back where we fold her up into some sort of S-shape that fits in my trunk. I then listen to his reprimands for a while, nodding in agreement. Yes, I should have put her in my trunk in the first place. I could have better tied her up if it was too heavy for me. At last he leaves. I continue driving, and all I’m thinking is, but now my trunk is disgusting too.

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It appears to me as a deserted industrial terrain, tucked away at the edge of the city. The wide blocks of buildings rise solemnly into a grey air with hazy traces of suffocating smoke. The concrete walls lay bare; any paint has long since crumbled apart. Only underneath the main entrance canopy can I find faint traces of a greenish color. Although by now I have already parked my car and walked over to the middle building, I am strongly inclined to abandon my mission when the main door proves shut and my only clue is a chalk arrow pointing to the iron stairs going down and disappearing behind the building. Yet, instead of giving up, I remind myself of the messy figure in my car.

The service desk was crystal clear: this is the address.

Lulling my shrill anxiety, I descend the iron steps that swing down in a spiral and end in a dark back alley. Carefully, I dodge the muddy substances on the ground until I arrive at a solid door that opens remarkably easy.

Inside I encounter a counter. Behind it crouches an overweight, bearded man who is wearing a black t-shirt with two white skulls and is lost in a computer screen.

“Gooday!” I say in an odd attempt to sound cheerful. “Is this AllClearCo.?”

The man glances over his computer screen and narrows his eyes. “What do you want?”

I am taken aback by his service. “I was hoping you would help me clean my car. And a parking lot in the city center.” I frown. “And a junction, for that matter.”

“Clean what?” he asks brusquely.

“There’s a girl in my trunk,” I say, feigning composure. “Clean her. Clean the blood.”

The man’s face lights up in surprise, before his expression goes back to frowning, which by now I suspect is his standard feature.

“And the girl?” he asks, walking back to me.

“Instantly dead. Fell from the sky.”

The bearded man nods earnestly. “That’s rusted.”

His wormy fingers go through a stack of papers lying in the cardboard next to the counter, and only pause to draw out a big green map. He leafs through the map and then presents me a manual for a cleaning device, which on the technical drawing looks like a vacuum cleaner with a huge proboscis. Its functions are written in bullet-point format:

- soaking up blood from any material
- ranging from hard to soft surfaces
- suitable for collecting and conserving small body parts

Shocked, I stop reading and look at the bearded man. He snorts. “You think you’re the first one?”

“More and more!” abruptly a sharp voice comes from the storeroom.

“Shut your mouth, Elena!” the man roars. “I’m with a client!”

He turns back to me. “You buy this and this webby net. You wrap her and then she is good to be thrown out. There’s a hatch closer to town. You know the old Public Management Court? It’s right at that corner.”

I pay the man what I think is a decent fee for a human-sized net and a multifunctional proboscis. Greedily he snatches the money from my hands and stumbles to the storeroom doorpost. “Elena!” I can overhear his loud whisper. “Take this man to the back. And no talk.”

A drowsy-looking woman with huge glasses and a long woolen vest appears and moves awkwardly to the counter. She coughs a raspy cough and beckons me to follow her. Hesitantly, I do so, and enter the storage room, which is much bigger than I had anticipated. The woman starts scrambling through the boxes of mechanic devices.

“You’ been a bad boy?” she asks me, without halting her scrambling.

“What, me?”

Now she starts nagging me. “You mistreated some missy, huh?”

“No. Never.” I answer defensively.

Her eyebrows rise and freeze for split second. With one finger pointing to the air between us she slowly says, “You lie; it is the lady who led you here.”

“The girl that damaged my car? But I have never seen her before.”

“It’s all the same when talking of blame,” she replies, and then coughs for a full minute. She continues with a hoarse voice. “Worry it’s even worse, where the world will go. A wooden waterfall ceases streaming when mankind will cut her up and sell the pieces.” She shakes her head ruefully. “No wonder they come falling from the sky.”

“You’re right,” I say. Never argue with a nut.

She draws out a big box from the bottom shelf. It looks enormously heavy as she struggles to lift it, but when she hands it over it feels quite light. The drowsy woman also picks up a small box from the top shelf, on which the words ‘spider web’ are handwritten in black marker. She walks me back to the counter. When I turn around to thank her, she is intently staring at something behind me, her pupils becoming smaller and smaller as she focuses.

The footsteps of the bearded man snap her out of her trance. She hands me the spider web box rapidly and hisses, “falling isn’t a pretty sight.”

\*\*\*

As the TomTom navigates me to the old Public Management court, I turn on the radio to calm my nerves a bit. The theme tone of Commercial Radio 103FM instantly makes me feel better. Without doubt, this network has the best commercials of the entire Competition, and today’s selection does not disappoint me. Ferdi comes with new face hygiene masks, in smartphone flavor. Rawling launches a new generation of video games, virtual reality 4.0, where, with only wearing a pair of glasses, one can pretend to walk around in an exercise machine factory. That totally beats the post apocalyptical warzone setting of 3.0. Also, Xander’s new CD is coming out soon, full of electronic jazz music. Amazing.

\*\*\*

I pull up on the old Public Management Court driveway. My head is already splitting at the thought of finding a hatch in the haystack this collection of old courts is. But it appears the big business men of our time have mercy on me, for the first wall I see has a big arrow on it, below which is written “Body disposals.” I continue driving and follow the big arrows on the walls until I reach a large hatch. On a digital silver plate above the hatch are more instructions.

#### BODY DISPOSALS.

*Warning: only standard fit!*

Follow instructions carefully.

1. Open hatch and pull out shaft with hand grip.
2. Place body head-first on conveyor belt.
3. Eliminate danger of bulging limbs.
4. Choose program: Falling or Rising.
5. Press Go!

*Executed by the Public Management. Air Pollution Law, Art. 395.*

As I lift the body from the trunk and carry her to the hatch, I try not to look at her dry intestines peeking out her midriff, or her right eye hanging on her cheek, only linked to the socket by a thin, red muscle. I push her into the shaft and almost rip apart her disjointed arm when I try to mold her neatly on the conveyor belt. On the digital screen, I choose the Rising program—she has done enough falling for my taste—and press the Go! button. I take a step back and let out a sigh of relief when a low humming starts and the conveyor belt moves the body up into the hatch. The humming becomes and louder and louder, and the bass sounds rapidly changes into alto and then soprano. With a high squeaking sound, the conveyor belt rises entirely and the body is propelled into the air. It lands on top of my car. A big blast. The side window scatters. In reflex, I turn my back to the car to protect my face. Splinters of glass hit my legs. Cut through my jeans. Pierce my flesh.

Never have I been nearer to crying. I pictured my life with this car as one big party. This time, I aggressively pull her out of the car and drag her over the ground to the hatch. I fold her onto the conveyor belt, smashing her head in the process, and forcefully close the lid. Not daring to choose any program, I break the option screen with my elbow. Then I step back into the car and assure myself she’s out of sight. In a whisper, I repeat, “She’s out of sight. She’s out of sight.”

\*\*\*

After the long day, I park my new car on the driveway in front of my shed. The neighbor greets me with an animated wave and crosses the hedge to my side of the garden.

“Karl, come check this out!”

He shows me his newest purchase: a remote controlled lawnmower the size of a micro car that will systematically shave the grass daily to maintain perfect height.

Just as the neighbor is showing the quick responsiveness and fine tuning of the device, our conversation is interrupted by a severely screeching scream.

A large figure hits the lawnmower with a loud blast, instantly cracking the machinery’s depot, causing the grass to whirl through the sky. My neighbor heads for the lawnmower too quickly, trips over one of the wheels of the device that rolled loose in the blast, and cries out when he falls on the lap of the woman lying on the lawnmower. Her head is completely jammed.

On my tiptoes, I sneak back to my part of the garden. At least that isn’t my problem. I enter my house, throw the new car keys on the cabinet, and walk into my living room.

For the first time, the silence bothers me. Irritated, I close all the curtains. Darkness does not scare me. Yet the nagging feeling does not leave. I sit passively in my lounge chair for a long time, staring at the ceiling. As I ponder more and more, qualms overwhelm me. The strange woman was right, I think, falling isn’t a pretty sight.



# WE ASKED YOU

What is your favourite novel or favourite author?



Bethany Chadburn, 2nd year: "The Art of Asking by Amanda Palmer. She is a witty author who has a lot to say about life. She is really inspirational and very encompassing and nice."



Fokke Kuijten, 2nd year: "Harry Potter J.K Rowling. Everyone would want to be in that school. Wouldn't you?" (fun fact: he read them in spanish during the intensive spanish language course)



Malou Miedema, 1st year: "Nausea by Sartre. I took Big Books last semester and it started my love for literature that goes beyond a nice story. I got a different impression of what literature was through this piece."



Vladislav Petkevic, 2nd year: "Spark Notes"



Yaron Zonneveld, 3rd year: "Dead Poet Society. It's a film, but its poetic, hasliterary focus and it is inspiring"



Teus Hagen, 2nd year: "Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Any of his work is a really good recreational reading to drift away. Amazingly poetic"



Lin Batten, 3rd year: "Louis Couperus. He writes novels about romance and lovin'. He uses a lot of words to describe things...and I like it!"



Dania Elahi, 2nd year: "Khaled Hosseini: A Thousand Splendid Suns. I really liked the Book. I would reread it."



Sachith Mendis: "Stephen Hawking, Brief History of Time. It's fantastic. It made me want to become a physicist. That, and the Holy Bible, of course. "