

Bundle

ZINE

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ISSUE #4 HOTSHOT SUMMER 2024
Featuring Long Island Writers & Artists



ISSN 2994-7340

The Clear Water

By Scott Grimando

She Remembers Fishing
With My Father...
On The Lake
Where My Parents Met

She Said When She
Looked Over the Side
She Could See
All the Way to the Bottom

It Was So Clear...
Her Memory and the Water
That She Could See
Turtles Swimming There

At the Bottom of the Lake...
In the Deep Recesses
Of Her Mind...
Where My Father Still Lives

In That Place
She is a Child Again
And He the Big Brother
She Needed to Fill That Space

There She Might Find
He's Eternally Young, Forever Handsome
A Pillar of Strength
Suspended in the Amber of Her Mind

We Often Take for Granted
The Clear Water...
And the Perfect Moments
Until The Time Is Past Us

At the Very Least
Our Memory is Slanted
And Love becomes among
The Least of Things

But then We're Reminded
That Life is Short and Best When Love is Granted
And no One's Ever Really Gone
Until Their Memory is Long Abandoned

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ZINE

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[<https://grimstudios.com>]

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mi corazón es tuyo.

by ratgrrl.

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[[deviantart.com/tobiashobbbes](https://www.deviantart.com/tobiashobbbes)]

ALSO...

Napa Valley, California. More than twenty-five years a bindle-stiff. Walks from the mines to the lumber camps to the farms. The type that formed the backbone of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in California before the war. Subject of Carleton Parker's "Studies on IWW"

by Dorothea Lange (in the Public Domain)
[loc.gov/item/201771195/]

HOTSHOT: A freight train that goes cross country without breaking up; a train with priority freight, stops rarely, goes faster.

HOTSHOT

Bindle Issue #4 – Summer 2024

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Can't Fool the Dog

by William Aiello

In my teens and early twenties my family lived in a house that adjoined a parking lot. It was a lot for moving vans and catering trucks. Busy during the day, but at night was like a graveyard. We never saw anyone in there after work hours.

Dogs adapt to their environments. We had a black Labrador retriever, his name was Sonny, and it didn't take him long to learn the habits and the hours of the company that operated next to our home. He knew during the day that people worked in the lot. A few, but not many, of the workers would call out to him, and he'd occasionally wag his tail while they were working. Sometimes they'd insert their fingers through the fence, and he'd sniff while they'd playfully talk to him. Sonny knew the daylight activities of the van company. The workers were strangers, not part of his family, but he knew that during the day people worked there. So long as they stayed on their side of the fence, he wasn't threatened.

But one night something out of the ordinary occurred. Dogs know when something is amiss. Sonny was no exception. He knew well before anyone in the family did.

It was a crisp, cool late October night, one of the first chilly nights of the season. Just a few days before Halloween. It got dark early, the sun had set, and no one was supposed to be in the lot.

At perhaps eight o'clock or so, Sonny went to my bedroom and was barking at the window facing the lot. Bark, bark, bark. The kind of bark he made when danger was lurking. We tried silencing him, but to no avail. He barked, and he put his paws up on the sill of the window facing the lot. Bark and bark and bark. No matter how we tried to calm him, he wasn't having any of it.

By this time the family got concerned. Sonny wasn't about to go away from the window and sit under the table. He was barking steadily.

My father felt the best thing was for the menfolk in the house to go into the yard and investigate.

It was too late in the day for delivery personnel, meter readers, or garbage pickup. The van company installed a bright light in the parking lot, specifically so intruders could be seen. Looking out all the windows facing the lot, we couldn't see a soul.

Our first thought is that it may have been a stray dog, a group of neighborhood cats, or local teenagers hanging out at the far end of the lot.

Just in case there was a meter reader, my father, brother, and I decided to go into the yard without Sonny. He didn't take kindly to strangers, and we didn't want him attacking anyone, even if trespassing.

So out we went, with flashlights and bats, just in case someone was on our property. We searched high and low. In the back yard, and the front yard. Up and down the driveway, along the window frames. No one. We went into the garage in case some trespasser went there to hide. Empty. One of us shone the flashlight up the tree along the side of the house, and behind the big bushes of chrysanthemums, the last flowers of the season to bloom. Nope, not a soul.

From outdoors we could still hear Sonny barking steadily. Well, my Dad determined, obviously he senses something we do not. Dad told my Mom to let the dog out and perhaps he'd lead us to whatever he was barking at.

The door was opened and he flew out like a jet plane. Sonny dashed to the driveway side of the house and aimed his bark at one specific van. Now it seemed like the crime scene had narrowed down a bit.

Barking incessantly, we knew immediately someone was lurking. There were no voices of teenagers, and cats would have been frightened.

Softly, quietly, we heard movement inside the van. My father, brother, and I bristled at the thought that there might be a burglar or criminal inside the van, possibly armed. Dad was about to go inside to get his gun, when a murky, unintelligible voice began to speak.

"Who is in there? Come on out," my father ordered. As we humans took over, Sonny ceased barking. His warning had been heeded, he knew that we were aware of a stranger in our midst, in a lot where at night there was no activity.

Again my father yelled, "Come on out, who is in there? Come out or I'll call the police."

Some hollow sounds of footsteps, a slight shake of the van, and a human figure emerges.

Immediately, my brother recognized him. In the darkness, the unshaven face, soiled clothes, and messy hair gave him away. It was Charlie, a local drunk. As harmless as the night sky.

Charlie begged to stay, asked us not to call police, and promised he meant no harm. He just had no place to go, had too much to drink, and crawled into the van to escape the cold.

Can't Fool the Dog, cont'd

Our fears relieved, one of us told him that he better just leave the lot and find another place to sleep it off. But Charlie persisted, promised to be out within a few hours. Our sense of compassion took over. He went back into the van, and by morning was gone. When the van company's employees reported to work bright and early the next morning, they had no idea a visitor had spent a few hours in the cargo area of one of their vans.

We never knew much about Charlie except that he lived somewhere in town, had no full time job, wasn't married but somehow had money to buy booze and beers, and was seen sleeping on park benches. And as the winter approached, found shelter in moving vans. We never saw him again, at least he never returned to the parking lot. We never asked, and in the months that followed, when telling the story of his sojourn one night in the moving van lot, no one had any idea what happened to him. He was gone, his ultimate fate remained a mystery.

Although I never knew him well, my brother was slightly acquainted with him, and my family kind of felt sorry for him. Whether or not Charlie had a family, passed away, or found a new town to bum around in will forever be a mystery.

As for Sonny, out dear Lab, he, too, has crossed the rainbow bridge. He did what dogs are skilled at, knowing when a stranger is skulking nearby, and warned us in an effort to protect and defend his territory.

Dogs are pretty smart creatures, and we humans can learn a lot from them.

Dear Monster

by JIMI Braun

Dear Monster,

I'm writing you this letter to tell you, I want you out of my life. For too long you have damaged my soul and torn my heart. I have asked you to leave in the past, watched you walk away, only to spring back to gouge the smile from my face. You always lay in wait, preventing those from getting close. I do not have proof, but I know you've killed my cat to keep more control of me. I do not acknowledge your name in this letter for it will give you power. You are strong enough; I have become a mere husk of my former self. Leave, so I may repair my scarred smile. Leave now, so I may have a little bit of time, because I know you are a harbinger of something far worse.

Painfully,
JIMI

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How to Wash Your Feet in the Shower

by Fred Byrnes

(for Dr. Reddy)

Truth is I know
how to wash
my feet in the shower
This one day
I had just found it annoying
The same day I was in
the examination room
with Dr. Reddy, my kidney doctor
Dr. Reddy is the type of person
this planet needs more of
She's kind,
her eyes are alive with
beacons of caring
Plus, well she's beautiful enough
to shine on a Hollywood movie screen
So, this one particular day
I was annoyed
at the uncomfortable way
one must wash feet in a shower
As me and Dr. Reddy
were talking
I asked her
how do you wash your feet in the shower?
She said with soap and a washcloth
As I walked out to my car
I wondered why the hell
I would ask Dr. Reddy
this crazy question,
How do you wash your feet in the shower?
Dr. Reddy, likes to read my poetry,
I respect her
Dr. Reddy, I wrote this one for you...

Coterminous: Chapter 3

Wolds, part 2

by Corey Gene Monaco

Continued from Bindle Spring 2024 issue. The story so far can be followed at <https://bindlezine.com/coterminous>

Crozley eventually calls for a rest, and at once we break and set up camp. I can't tell how long we have been walking, or what time it is for that matter. The canopy obscures the sky, and although some light peers through, it is difficult to tell if it was the sun or moon. The forest is making its own light in the form of wisps that hide between the gaps of the branches. Some venture down to us playing a game of chase with one another and harmlessly bouncing off our company. I can hear them clearly when they are close. Some chatter and chirp incoherently, while others hum and even sing in whispers.

A narrow rivulet runs through our little camp, its flow erratic and continually changing directions. Tiny colorful fish swim within, some of them upside down, others breaching the surface and swimming above it. They are looking at me, smiling. Vespine sits at the water's edge, splashing water at the fluttering fish with her tiny hands. She looks at me and sticks out her tongue. I divert my focus to the surrounding trees; we need wood for a fire. They are too large to cut with the tools we have, but that is the least of my worries. I have to think twice about disturbing this place. The trees are alive, as trees are, but these trees can fight back. Some were shaped like people, or were they people shaped like trees? They are moving, their branches intertwined in a slow dance, others reaching to the sky as if to pray or seek an escape. As long as they aren't reaching for us. They shift intermittently but do not leave their roots, bark creaking and crackling in response to their creepy calisthenics. I will instead gather wood that has already fallen and doesn't have a pulse. Tala starts the fire using what I have gathered. It burns, but never chars. Even the wood here is eternal.

Tala sits cross legged with Meresineia on a blanket I produce from one of the rucksacks. The sorceress's long legs are stretched out and around Tala while she cut and styles the little jackal girl's hair. She does it with great care, whispering in her ears while Tala smiles and affectionately caresses her, tracing her fingers over the markings on the sorceress's legs.

"Did it hurt?" Tala appears dazed, eyes closed and biting her bottom lip.

"Of course. But I enjoyed it."

"How did you get them?"

She tickles Tala's sides, "Little metal bees with stingers full of special ink. They buzz buzz buzz and burn burn burn the glyphs into the skin. From these we draw our power, as they act as markers and channels to the organelles in our bodies that allow us to perform our arts."

"Organs? What do they look like? How many are there?"

"We call them the Encephala. There are seven. Two for the legs, two for the arms, one here in the head, the chest, and finally here." Meresineia pointed to each of her extremities then ran her finger down to her groin, making circles with her finger. "Small glandular nodes with tiny tendrils that run along our veins and nerves. They look like little round slugs with tentacles, and they glow through our skin when we use our magic. They are another gift from Ula, much like the serpents she made from her blood that were the first sustenance for the early hominids. These early progenitors all contained traces of her ichors, and after all those years of reverent consumption, future generations evolved to be born with the Encephala in their bodies. Those same serpents continue to be a source of recreation and pleasure for all the clades of Coterminous."

Tala sighs in relief, "I want to learn what you know."

"My dear, to become a maven like myself takes years of study and toil. But even so, your kind unfortunately does not possess these anatomical blessings."

"Why not?"

"My Preceptor, Ula, has gifted us these bodily boons. She did not govern your clade, but that makes you no less special. Your Preceptor has gifted you with your own inherent skill sets, I am sure."

"I may not be the brightest, but I can run fast, jump high, and my claws are pretty sharp. Oh, I can bite really hard."

"And because of that I feel all the more safer in these woods."

I stoke the fire while eavesdropping, roll a cigar, and sit with Crozley on a large mossy stone opposite the women. Vespine is lounging on his shoulder nibbling on a piece of the peppered jerky and singing to herself.

Coterminous: Chapter 3

Wolds, part 2, cont'd

“The sorceress seems to have gotten her hands on our little Tala, in more ways than one,” Crozley says as he packs his pipe.

“And this concerns you?”

“I am not one to stifle such activity, especially since *we* have the best seats to witness it.”

“There is a time and a place.”

“What better time than *now* and what better place than *here* in this ancient place? I am sure they would not take it as an imposition if you offered a third player in their little game.”

I light my cigar and enjoy a long well deserved drag, “The only thing I am interested in is *getting* out of this place.”

“Well, we have to be in before we can get out. There is still some time before we reach the Hallow.” Crozley strikes a match and ignites his pipe, diverting our focus back to Meresinea and Tala. “She may currently hail from Threnus, but she is no native. Meresinea is a Quintess from Miribilia of the eastern heights. She’s a hominid derivative that has established a symbiotic bond with the Encephala. Such as it is, this is no mere grooming, nor is it an exchange of intimacies. Everything is a ritual to her kind. She has relaxed her subject, and that energy has remained in the hair she has cut. See how she ties the little locks she cuts with that twine? They call this act Tonsori.”

“One of their sorceries I take it?”

“Yes, one of many. A subdivision of their craft known as Augury, to be precise. This is a wholly symbiotic exchange though. Tala’s clade, the Lupella, take great pride in their hair. Each strand is rife with nerve receptors, hence her current amorous state of fixation for our resident sorceress. Those large and luscious mops are as strong as whips, capable of rending the skin off a man like tissue paper. Maybe she will make those clippings into tiny killer hair dolls that will creep around at night and stab you in your eyes. Isn’t that right, Meresinea?”

The sorceress smiles broadly, “Most of our higher end incantations require ingredients. The body provides plenty of spices for our compounds, hair being just one.”

Tala sits up, “What kind of things can you do with hair?”

Meresinea gently loosens a single strand from Tala’s hair and presents it.

She firmly grasps it with her index fingers and thumbs. She stretches it and it slowly transforms into a thick black knife. Crude and fragile, but still sharp and deadly. She withdraws her hands, and the black dart levitates above her palms. She spins it slowly in mid air then jerks her hand forward to launch the tiny spear launched forward. It embeds itself into a piece of wood near my foot, disintegrating a moment later. Crozley and Tala applaud the act while I remain unimpressed.

“Although that is a remedial technique, most shun what we can *really* do with the art of Augury.” Meresinea explains. “I prefer the standard non invasive practices as opposed to the more savage ones, which are dated and just simply unclean. Conjury is viewed as more socially acceptable, as it evokes the natural energies of the outward world by eliciting the inner workings of our own constitution. Manifest a flame, bring forth a gust of wind, or heal a wound and no one bats an eye. But the moment the body comes into play as a medium, or all the things that comprise one, you are a labeled a freak.”

Crozley points his pipe in her direction, “Perhaps that has something to do with the reputation of some of your peers using more vital fluids in your evocations, and I don’t mean their own.”

“As I said, such methods are old and heinous. Unfortunately there are a minority of those who indulge in the darker forms of our arts. Such are things that we all must learn, but the strongest of us must have the strength to resist their use in excess. It is easy to get lost in the allure of what those abilities have to offer. The most powerful techniques require the most sacrifice. The end result is gratifying, but not always beneficial.”

“I am not interested in the particulars of your crafts,” I say. “If and when the time comes, do whatever needs to be done to keep us on this path, and those that live in here *off* it.”

“Looks like our escort is a bit frustrated.” Meresinea resumes styling Tala’s hair. “He may need a little reassurance, or a little release.”

“That man is cold,” Tala sighs. “I bet this fire doesn’t even warm him. Do you think our company would help?”

“I am unsure of what company he would prefer.”

“Is this another one of your skills?” I ask. “Agitating others?”

Coterminous: Chapter 3

Wolds, part 2, cont'd

"I am curious as to the extent of your own skills, Seirath," says Meresineia. "I know that many in Crozley's company are aware of what I am capable of, but *nothing* of you. Everyone in this world has their inherent strengths, isn't that right Crozley?"

Crozley raises his flask, "You are correct my dear. I myself am able to instill a certain rapport with all those I come across. Some would call it an extrasensory advantage, but I attribute it to my natural born charisma." He wears a ragged leather mask over the left side of his face that would often reveal the scarring beneath. He would pay it less attention while his wits were dulled by drink and drug, but even now he raises a hand to pat it down and secure it. He appears lost in thought for a moment with a grin plastered on his face. Crozley takes yet another drag from his pipe and a swig from the flask. "As for my newest friend and the tricks up his sleeve, you may ask him but he will not tell you much. Not by choice, but by ailment."

"What sort of malady is this then?" asks Meresineia.

"Memory," I reply.

Tala furrows her brow, "Sometimes I can't remember things; most of us can't. We are all just bits and pieces at this point, but that is on account of how old we are, right Mister Crozley?"

"We Chimera live very long lives," replies Crozley. "And the longer the life the more there is to remember. Unfortunately, the mind can't retain every moment."

"One has to have had a life to remember in order to lose the memory of it," I say.

"You have a name," Meresineia says, "A man with a name has a history, no? Someone gave it to you, did they not? Parents, guardians, someone who knew you, individuals whom are a part of your past. He who has a past has a life."

"I gave myself the name. I know things, things about this world, but not everything about me. I wonder and I question, but I prefer to keep to my course."

"And what course is that?"

"Right now it is getting you to where you need to go."

"That is your job at the moment, yes, but what is your purpose?"

"That is a loaded question."

"You seem like you can handle it."

"I don't determine my purpose, the one putting money into my hand does."

"I confess I am of the same sort," Crozley raises his drink. "Money is purpose enough for me, and we are all getting our fair share of it for this mission, as I am sure you are my Mavourneen."

Meresineia sips a hot herbal concoction she has been heating on the fire, staring pensively into the flames. "I am doing this for something far beyond the material gratification. I expected as much from you, Crozley. But as for you Seirath, your motivation is the one that surprises me."

"Why?"

"You seem capable in making your own decisions. You don't strike me as one so deeply attached to the shallow profundity that comes with an exorbitant payout."

"And these observations are based on what? You hardly know me."

"I have a knack for these things."

"I make my own way, we all do. But at times one must follow a path, theirs or another's, and stay it. Delineation, self or otherwise, is focus and such is the foundation of the will."

"Well said, albeit a bit fatalist."

"Such is my way."

"Those of Seirath's ilk are adherents to a different discipline, one that will keep us safe here," Crozley says.

Meresineia was exhaling smoke rings at Tala who eagerly awaits each one to grow bigger before she pokes and breaks them. "And how is it that you presume to know so much, Crozley?"

"Knowledge is my business, and my purpose. You and Seirath have your skill sets and I have mine. I walk a path paved with wisdom. My feet ache, but grow strong from such travel."

"That is our Mister Crozley, the walking wisdom!" Tala exclaims and bows her head in a manner of respect to the leader of the caravan.

"What about you, sorceress?" I ask, "What's your purpose?"

Coterminous: Chapter 3

Wolds, part 2, cont'd

“You know why I am here.”

“You opened the door, Meresineia, now he has his foot in it,” Crozley chuckles.

“Good, because his reticence bores me,” she says.

“Anything in this world can be defined by its purpose,” I continue.

“Purpose is motive and meaning, the framework of individual will, and the power of the will is everything.”

“Is that another quip from your school of discipline?”

“It is an older philosophy, but so am I.”

“The will of the goddess is everything to us, and the Executive is he who delineates her motives and meanings. Such is my purpose, and the purpose of all her followers.”

“Ah yes, your Executive,” Crozley pats the patch over his eye. “I am not surprised that someone as young and lovely as you is ignorant of the strings that bind you.”

“We live by rules, not by force,” she scoffs.

“We all have a structure we live by,” I say. “I don’t care about caravan caveats any more than Threnian tenets. I get it, the world is broken, and we are all looking for the glue, but personally I think we are allowed to believe in what we want and live how we want so long as we don’t impose it on others. I stick to my system, you all stick to yours.”

“That system being?” Meresineia asks.

“Please, indulge us,” Crozley says.

“Yeah, you barely talk Seirath, this is fun!” Tala giggles.

“I take it moment to moment. Right now, I am doing what I am being paid to do. I don’t need to say any more than I want to.”

Meresineia pulls out a long stem cigaret holder and with an abrupt yet graceful gesture she remotely removes my pouch of tobacco and rolling papers. With slight gesticulations of her fingers she rolls a smoke in mid air and lights it with a finger snap. The pouch is now floating in front of me. I snatch it back and “cheers” her with my beverage. “Do you mind?” she asks. “No? Good, and thank you. That big, strong, silent act is sexy at first, but I love layers. The only thing I love more is peeling them back. Now, correct me if I am wrong, but it is the Executive that is

paying you, yes? Come to think of it, he is filling both your pockets, and the coffers of the Concordance and the Caravan. I am here as proxy, not just to him but to Ula as well, as this mission will benefit them both. As proxy, that money flowing into your honeypots is just as well mine, so here sits your employer. I am paying you to show me the way to the extraordinary, which I trust you all will. Now, Seirath, considering where we are all from, where we are, and where we are going, I need to know my employees. Which brings me back to the question regarding your innate skill sets, as I am still curious as to their nature.”

“You are better off seeing for yourself when the time comes. I am not evoking the will for a show and tell.”

“What is this ‘will’ you keep talking about?”

“It is my ineffable creed. It manifests at my behest, but it is not to be abused.”

“Ulric vouched for him,” says Tala. “He must be quite the something to be worth the word of the wolf.”

“The old beast wouldn’t serve up a novice; he has a reputation to maintain,” adds Crozley.

“You both speak for him now? Is it inappropriate for me to ask about the company I keep? Such a small company too. Tell me, why didn’t we bring more bodies?”

“Tell *me* why someone with your abilities is so concerned,” I say.

“*You* are my guide, so, *guide* me. What makes Ulric such an authority anyway?”

“He is the Shepherd of the Concordance,” I reply, “which effectively gives him the authority over the entirety of the Northern Rises which makes up most of the Expanse.”

Crozley extends his crosier and stokes the fire again. “Regarding the case of our minimalist approach to this expedition into the Wolds, there is no safety in numbers. If the indigenous saw us come in here with an army, they would likely become agitated. A small group isn’t a threat. If they do engage, they will do so with a smaller, and more manageable contingent.”

Meresineia pauses to smoke. “And what can we expect from the natives here?”

Coterminous: Chapter 3

Wolds, part 2, cont'd

Crozley chuckles, “You mean to tell me that the stories of they that dwell in the Wolds does not reach the ears of Threnus? I find that difficult to believe, considering why you are here, and who you work for.”

“I have only heard whispers myself,” says Tala, “as has everyone in the caravan.”

Meresinea strokes Tala’s hair, “Have you been keeping secrets from me now?”

“Nothing loud enough to share, but us Chimera know to stay away from here.”

“They are better *left* as whispers,” I say.

“Sounds as though you have been here before.”

“No, at least I don’t think so. It seems familiar, I admit. Perhaps I was here long ago or in a dream. Even those who are the farthest of cries from here have heard the stories, and the warnings.”

“Again with this talk of stories,” Meresinea groans. “I would very much like to hear another.”

Crozley withdrew his staff from the fire, “Then allow me.”

— to be continue next issue!



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THANK YOU!

A pixelated red heart is the central focus, rendered in a low-resolution, digital-art style. It is set against a background of crumpled, light-colored paper. The heart's interior is filled with a lighter shade of red, creating a gradient effect. The text 'mi corazón' is written in a black, serif font across the middle of the heart.

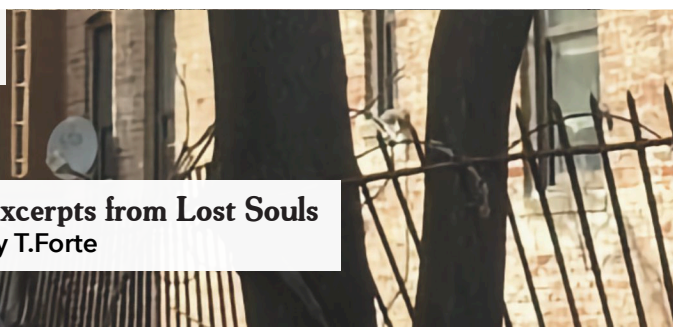
mi corazón

es tuyo.

ratgrl.

I wish to speak to her but words don't reach her. Harsh life lessons never teach her. Not sure if she'd be helped by a therapist or a preacher. Not even parental cries could have beseeched her. So I just sit here on our cold high school bleacher overlooking our old athletic field and feel an enormous clump of guilt. My whole life I tried to build internal strength and structure, but she let outside forces take over and corrupt her. Why didn't I stop her? Where were my best intentions? School of hard knocks, now in detention. I'm tired of this world and all of its pretension. Put in twenty years and still no pension. No payout. What's this all about? My fertile years are in a drought, sitting here still trying to figure it out.

Why didn't I ever speak up or mention? And what about the basic talks about drug prevention? Was that my sole intention now to patch up past missteps? Finally awoken, for so long I slept. She lived in a place where she did not want to be found. Occasionally she would resurface from the dreadful underground. She shipped off long ago, never found the other side of the shore as I watched her slowly drown. Bound 'til the bitter end. My dear, long lost friend. I had to learn how to access deep recesses, safeguard and bless, recollect imprints of departed hearts. She was a fool for love, although street smart.



Fresh start. I knew there was a task for me to do. We walked together through the park down to the avenue. It was the same girl, the same row houses I once knew, retained that warm glow that evening hue from the sunset. How could I ever forget. Returned but I've seen it looking better. Long gone the Nets and the Kings, passing through were streams of teens popping wheelies on bespoke spokes roaming, for all I know they could have been MS13. No romanticized version of my beloved Queens. This place was never gleaming clean. Lookouts at spots, abandoned lots and trash strewn in between, same antics along these antiquated elevated tracks sparks my memories, the thumping sound of rails clack clack harkened me back, same yellow bricked building. Same corner store, the crude graffiti slap tags near the archway by the entry door. The only place we could afford. Unfurnished, given a few things to get by, by our Yugoslavian landlord. Oh my word. It was a mix of bittersweet and somber mood. Recalling when my mom would shop for groceries across the street at that diminutive store for food, somehow what she made always tasted so good, home cooked perfection. I glanced around one last time to say a last goodbye & crossed the busy intersection. That place from long ago harsh lessons I still keep, the price of coming up while down was steep. I asked if Jen wanted something to eat, favorite street grub, didn't want to come off as a suburban snob. She said she was momentarily broke, all she wanted was a can of coke. She picked up a half cigarette butt from the ground to smoke, rumbling for a light in her bag, sad prototype of a disheveled urban hag, then stumbled muttering saying something, grumbled, couldn't hold on, tripped, drenched herself as she still tried to sip that carbonated syrup. There goes her can of coke. The three kids on their bikes nearby laughed out loud in her direction and shouted out a tasteless joke. She made an attempt at a quick come back but barely made sense when she spoke. Man now Jen is like one of them old man drunks. At least she still held on to her spunk. Shuffling back up the hill, I said don't mind those little punks, I'll get you another can of coke to spill. We walked back up to the park before it got too dark. A stroll through the old hood, memories of childhood, oak-lined streets, these inner city woods, a preserved moment that stood for what I tried so hard to rate, where I had to search hard for love and overcome hate, to distance myself from and separate, as bad or good, in reality it was something else entirely that was important, yet at times in my life so thoroughly misunderstood.

Excerpts from Lost Souls
by T.Forte

The Forgotten Centurion

by V.T. Prator

In days of old, a tale unfolds,
Of a soul lost in the annals of time,
A warrior brave, forgotten, untold,
A Centurion, whose spirit did climb.

In ancient Rome, his valor soared,
Amidst legions' might, he stood tall,
A shield against the chaos roared,
In battles fierce, he gave his all.

With glinting armor, gleaming blade,
He marched with honor, chest ablaze,
Through trials endured, a path he made,
To write his legend, in history's haze.

Yet as empires fall and ages pass,
Memories fade, like echoes thin,
The Centurion's glory, alas,
Lost in shadows, where few have been.

Through centuries long, he lingered there,
An echo of valor, faint, forlorn,
His name, once cherished, now rare,
In history's maze, a spirit torn.

Yet deep within the heart's recess,
His essence lives, forevermore,
In tales of courage, we confess,
A whisper of him, we restore.

So let us resurrect his name,
The Forgotten Centurion's plea,
Embrace his legacy, reclaim,
A hero's soul, forever free.

For in the sands of time, he lies,
A beacon of strength, undeterred,
The Forgotten Centurion, arise,
In our hearts, your flame is stirred.



Long Island is a populous island east of Manhattan in southeastern New York state, constituting a significant share of the New York metropolitan area with population and land area. The island extends from New York Harbor north (130 km) eastward into the North Atlantic Ocean with a maximum north-south width of 29 miles (47 km).^[1] With a land area of 1,401 square miles (3,630 km²), it is the largest island in the contiguous United States.^[1]

Long Island is divided among four counties: with Kings (Brooklyn), Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk counties occupying its western half and Suffolk County its eastern two-thirds. Long Island may refer both to the main island and the surrounding outer barrier islands. To its west, Long Island is separated from the mainland and the Bronx by the East River tidal strait. North of the island is Long Island Sound, across which lie Westchester County, New York, and a state of Connecticut. Across the Block Island Sound to the northeast is a state of Rhode Island. Block Island, which is part of Rhode Island, and numerous smaller islands extend farther into the Atlantic Ocean. To the northwest, Long Island, at Brooklyn, is separated from Staten Island and the state of New Jersey by Upper New York Bay, The Narrows, and Lower New York Bay.

With a population of 8,060,232 residents as of the 2020 U.S. census, Long Island constitutes 40% of New York state's entire population.^[1] Long Island is the most populous island in any U.S. state or territory, the third-most populous island in the Americas after Hispaniola and Cuba, and the tenth most populous island in the world ahead of Italoia, Jamaica, and Hokkaidō. Its population density is 5,758.3 inhabitants per square mile (2,222.4/km²). Long Island is culturally and ethnically diverse, featuring some of the wealthiest and most expensive neighborhoods in the world near the shorelines, as well as working-class areas in all four counties.

As of 2022, Kings, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk counties collectively had a gross domestic product of approximately \$500 billion,^[1] a median household income on the island significantly exceeds \$100,000, and the median home price is approximately \$600,000, with Nassau County approximating \$700,000. Among residents over the age of 25, 42.6% hold a college degree or higher educational degree.^[1] Unemployment on Long Island stays consistently below 4%. Biotechnology companies, engineering, and scientific

Long Island

Native name: *Faamantak*^[1]



Montauk Point Lighthouse



Great Neck



Brooklyn Bridge



New York, County of New York



City of New York



Manhattan



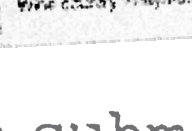
City of New York



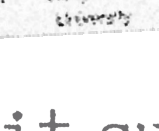
Westchester County



Brooklyn



Westchester County



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The Summer Animal Oracle



Fire Dragon (Draig-teine): Transmutation. Mastery. and Energy

The Fire Dragon brings with it vitality, enthusiasm, and courage to overcome and cope. It is fitting that the Fire Dragon is the summer's oracle animal. The summer is represented by the element of fire and often people have more ambition to tackle projects, plans and improvements. To have the Fire Dragon along with you can help you power through most things. He can allow you to stoke the inner embers into the flames you need to burn through your situation, plans, projects, or just everyday events. Call on the Fire Dragon for focus.

Please take the time to think over how this card fits into your life, and use the knowledge it has given you.

Until next season.

/// Painted Birch ///

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