The Voice Fiction Edition

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Eric Newgate was the best marble player in the third grade. On March twenty third he began lunch with single saltine, and kept trading until he ended up with a pack of Black and Decker Oreos. This feat would never be repeated. In the last nine days, Eric had tried watermelon, riding without his training wheels, and receiving a cookie shot. You name it, he’d try it. Except broccoli, he knew better.

Eric was a closet astronomer. He wasn’t worried that kids would make fun of him, but where Eric lived it was too bright at night to see the stars. So be put some glow-in-the-dark stars in his closet instead. Those stars were his, a private cosmos that looked into the softly glowing plastic heavens.

His date gave him a card for Valentine’s Day. She had written on it: “You have to be careful my love. Do not love too much or it will hurt.”

This was how you fell in love. This is how your head drifts away and to. This is open road for the wanderer. This is how your date gives him the finger. This is how you fall in love. This is how you sip your lea, in lillie sip, sips. This is how you drink your

Jungle
By Donald Budge

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At the end of the day Ziozo sat in front of his father. Eric discovered animals that looked like they came from another world. Giraffes with preposterously long necks. Camels with one mysterious hump, and others with two. Larger than life elephants triumphantly spraying water out of their trunk. Rushing to his computer, Eric looked up lemurs and quetzals, baboons to ocelots, and their wet woody rainforest homes.

Eric learned two things at school yesterday: that one human year is seven dog years, and that someone smart said that time is relative. These facts made perfect sense to Eric, and explained why school days were 6784 Eric years, and days off were half of an Eric minute.

Eric’s report cards often contained the phrase: “Has a fifth grade reading level, but has trouble focusing.”

He scaled mountains in his mind during math, and fought alongside Blackbeard’s pirates in holograms.

“Pay attention,” Ms. Goodman yelled as she led Admiral ¾×2¼ and the entire multiplication table to board Blackbeard’s ship, defeating him and Eric’s imagination.

Ms. Goodman only danced when no one was watching and taught the third grade when people did. She had had four moderately serious boyfriends, all named Michael.

“I miss Michael,” she said to her friend Molly, who was currently dating Michael #2.

“Which one?”

Anna Goodman taught third grade English like she had sex. “Lazily,” “Forgettable,” she wrote on the green chalk board for the day’s vocabulary.

Earlier that morning Anne got pulled over for speeding, despite driving exactly the speed limit for the past seven years, even in school zones at night. So she wasn’t in the mood for any funny business.

But this day was 72 degrees and sunny. The kind of day where Eric could become king of the hill, or kick a whisper in kickball. Eric and third graders everywhere were determined to get outside, and people like Anna Goodman would try to keep them in. Eric was wearing his lucky spaceship undershirt. Failure was not an option. This was their Waterloo. No, their Gettysburg, and at four dollars a gallon it would be inside space.

Closing his eyes and dreaming of stars, the classroom was transported deep into the spiral arms of the Milky Way. Desks floated in a space around Ms. Goodman like wooden planets, as she wrote vocabulary words on a green alphabet chart circling the room, it waited for Eric to make his move. Eric

The space hooligan flies past me, and before I can radio Dustin he has

The hooligan is climbing back into space using a belt mounted jet pack, towards the waiting orbit car, where I can see his friends pumping their fists and slapping each others shoulders, and laughing.

I was off, and I do it for my own satisfaction. Few spacemen abstain from talking to themselves. We are the best company around.

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This is the rope your father tied to a crab-apple tree. This is the knot you tied for

This was how you learned to speak. This was how you learned to read.

This was how you played the oboe. This was how you cursed with boys.

This is middle school. This is your seat on the bus. This is the cute but epileptic blonde sitting next to you. This is how she shakes her hips, This is how you stare into your tiny nose.

This was where you took swimming lessons. This was how far out you could go. This was how far down you could dive. This is the spot you saw a
mommy turtle laying her eggs and he was a pretty good shot with these things. We spacemen have competitions, every so often, sending broken equipment slowly spinning into space and we send tools hurtling after it, to be picked up by the magnetic fields of scrap-metalers that we call beforehand.

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I didn't know what I was doing," you say. And your parents' authoritative stances quivers. "That church was confusing I... be some Frost, my father whistled, low and secret, as if saving something up. Some Once
In
A
L ; f e
Time
Fro s t.

But if Jenny had known her hair had been turned into a nebula, she may not have held Eric's hand at recess. Or, she might have explained how nebulous she don't really "flow" into solar systems. Perhaps more troubling was the appearance of the larger than life elephants in the rainforest. 26% of third graders know that elephants live in the savannah, not the rainforest, and 8% know that their statistics are made up. But Eric always had an active imagination, and the important things that happened were very real. Anne and Michael #4 stayed married for 45,938 Erie years, but Eric and Jenny didn't work out quite the way he imagined, ending things after the incident by the monkey bars. But Eric moved on from Jenny and graduated to the fourth grade, where he found friend Derek's one-hitter and breath it out the window. You got a lot out of life by driving 10 to 15 miles over the speed limit. Anne Goodman gave the most mind-altering and preposterously excellent blowjob Michael #4 ever experienced. Three and a half weeks later, Michael #4 asked Anne to marry him during an evening at Aquitane, their favorite French bistro. Their honeymoon was a trip to the Bahamas. When they weren't furiously making love, Anne and Michael #4 spent their nights gazing at the same stars Eric would be looking at if it wasn't so bright where he lived. The same stars he saw in class with Jenny. But Eric moved on from Jenny and graduated to the fourth grade, where he became interested in the Aztecs.

Sacrilege
By Ben Gitkind

This is the moment you've been waiting for. Picture this: you are 15-years-old, a very lonely thing, blond-haired, green-eyed, and sprawled out on top of your girlfriend. She is 16-years-old, short and stacked, brown hair, brown eyes, and pale as a sheet. You stare her in the eye. You say, "OK?" and you do it like you're supposed to know how. She makes a face, a pained face, not right at all. But she says, "OK," and you keep going. You say "Oh yahhh," just like you know that you are supposed to. Or at least that's what you meant to say. It comes out more like, "Oh yah?" Not at all like you had pictured it. Not at all like you'd rehearsed.

And then there's the noise from behind you. The door opening. And over your shoulder, the look on your sister's face that will forever be imprinted in your memory. Her, standing in the doorway, 7-years-old, sprite-like with shocking blue eyes.

Now picture this: you, sitting in front of the supreme court: Mom and Dad. The girl is gone and this was no sort of Romeo and Juliet love-will-conquer-all shit; she won't talk to you for a couple years to come. Your parents use phrases like "too young," and "the implications," and "for safety's sake." Eric moved on from Jenny and graduated to the fourth grade, where he became interested in the Aztecs.

BFC
By Caitlin Scott

"Jesus and the Gratitude"s play outside Dallas in the bars. Their neon halos beaming yellow blue on bottle necks like organ pipes, hollow singing spoons gurgling lower in the depthless beer. Uncapped mouths fat with flatland wind, deep sick wheezes from the streets, huddled under junkie's lips, prayers slip in and join the butts of cigarettes like incense smoking.

"My Lord Saves", the tattoo sells bright with sweat on the bikers arm the holy sober up with soda pop, and rub their elbows in the verse. At the German clubs and the county lines their praise reverberates in tongues, Scriptures rolling and winked in muscles, face made over into a fairy arrest. The highways run out of the towns to the east and the Harley's make their pilgrimage in the deserts crowning Tuscan.

"His Highway, My King" the chemo and kickstand hot engines chorus, Case Grande after dawn and one long process past the motels, farms and exhausted Laundromats, Annual, a ride to freedom new chapters for the once wounded gangs. Anoin the born again with grease and baptize them with diesel fuel.

Hypothermia, in Two Movements
By Shelly Alminas

I. Expected

Masterful, he quieted, whose call grated, at the nearest innocent ear, til the swan hated itself, and died of disgust.

II. Unexpected

Froze alive, that was what they said my father did just after he died. (They were mistaken.) This past summer, along

The banks, a gathering: fruit and people Who wanted to be rid of said fruit. Shortly thereafter a winter came and these wants

Became Famous, observed on the day When all the fruits withered at the very same instant. I asked my father about how did it happen. The frost, he

Hymned. That first frost was a real one. The first time I ever saw them shiver back like fear. Must be some

Frost, my father whistled, low and secret, as if saving something up. Some Once

In
A Life
Time
Frost