

VEIL



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Editors' note,

We are claiming stake to our portion of the Internet. This excellent collection of fiction wrote its charter, set sail, and settled in thoughts for the gorilla press's fourth issue, Veil. Crafted from a word, built in a scale of time, and founded on these pages.

Thank you to all our contributors, and

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VEIL

VOL. 1 ISSUE 4

[7] MAXINE & ALBERT

~ JOHN PANZER

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A BITTER
MELISSA HAKLITCH

One.

THIS IS NOT A STORY ABOUT TWO PEOPLE WHO FELL OUT OF LOVE. It is not a story about two people who were never in love. It is not a story about two people at all. In fact, the two people are merely stand-ins for larger things. Things so large, metaphors and words couldn't contain them. Neither could the front porch on which this story takes place. But every story needs a setting, and this is a familiar one. A front porch is familiar. Some are shady and wooden, with dripping glasses of lemonade in the summertime, and others are open views of the ocean, misty mornings and salty hair afternoons. The front porch, in itself, is a metaphor for things too large for creaking slats to hold.

The way the air feels as the sun goes down and the skin glows from the afternoon sweat, everything bitter and tanned. The way it sounds when dishes and forks crash and clang on their way to the floor, thrown in

haste. The way the dirt clings to feet after watering flowerbeds in the early morning. All of these things are familiar, now. The color of the twilighted sky, the shape of the spoon, and the type of plant is varied each time, with each muttering on the breath.

If it is true, the movements will progress accordingly: each leaf billowing down in order of appearance, each hushed word stroked out longingly, each door slammed after an argument, a hand floating out of a car window where high and low pressure converge just right, at that very moment, to give sway and flex to a desiring palm faced up toward the sky, wanting so badly to be a part of cumulus instead of carbon.

And so, it must be true, then, that you always hurt the one you love.

Two.

The front porch on which this story takes place is not wooden or salty, but cement. There are white roses shielding it from the street, and a long lawn growing from under its feet reaching for the mailbox. Two Adirondack chairs sit, facing each other on this porch. In the two Adirondack chairs, sit a man and a woman facing each other. There is a conflict in the way they sit. Her knee pulled to her chest, his arms crossed. She picks the petals from a white rose, pushes her thumb into a thorn. He watches her self-mutilation, biting the inside of his cheek in a silent torment of his own. The air is humid, as it should be in a moment of conflict such as this.

Mosquitoes make their appearance after the sprinklers quit dusting the long blades of grass and hover over the man and woman, waiting to lunge like alligators and pierce the skin, devour their blood, live another day. The woman plucks a petal and places it on her tongue. Strips it of its silk. She winds her hair into a braid, lets it go, unraveling. He watches her. The way her collarbone flexes under her shirt, her elbows appearing and submerging, her nose taking in the perfume of evening. How he has always only wanted her. How at one time, she only wanted him. He shifts in the chair creaking beneath him. He wants to bite her arm again, pull her flesh under his teeth, and press his tongue against her.

He wants to remember what it was like to pull her chair out at a dinner table, and what it was like to pull off her shoes in the dark. He wants to remember how her eyes closed when he told her he loved her, and how when they opened she didn't need words. But it is impossible to remember something in a way that never was. Because while he was biting and longing, she was cringing and enduring. Because years of misinterpretation and silence led them to this front porch with so much swept beneath.

Three.

She kept reaching toward the sky, her hand reflecting the light or the moon. No clouds answered her questioning, and it became a weight, shifting through her. This is not a story about two people who fell out of love. This is not a story about two people who were never in love. This is what it means to sit quiet next to a window, wanting only to fall out of it, and land broken ribbed and fractured, ground into that which you grew from. This is how it feels to be the pavement underfoot, people breaking your back one crack at a time. This is crying in the confessional, asking to be heard not forgiven. This is carrying the clouds, answering for them on your own. This is never going to break or fall apart.

Four.

The two sat on the front porch in their chairs facing each other, swatting mosquitos, not speaking. This is only a moment for them. This is only a moment out of many between them. And yet, it will be one that changes the rest. Because a decision is being made, silently. Both of these people are remembering what it was like to hold the one they loved the most. The one they gave themselves to entirely, without the veils of hurt and past. Unfortunately for this man and woman, they are not remembering each other. They are sitting close enough to each other to see the wrinkles and sun that seeped into cracks long ago, close enough to see wisps of hair curled on a forearm, the time that has passed between them. Finally, she speaks, "I'm sorry," and tosses the stem of a white rose on

the ground. He looks at the grass, at the driveway, at the stem. "I know," he gets up and walks into the house. She stays sitting, wanting to force a reaction of water and salt, of a pumping heart, or twitching eyelid. He comes out of the house, the screen door hitting the frame with a quiver. He twists the cap off the bottle, and tosses it into the roses. "I'm going to leave tomorrow morning," he wipes the condensation on his pants. She nods, fingering another thorn. "You can keep everything, I'll just take what I need," he takes a drink. She nods, presses harder against the woody point. Still, she can't wince at the pain. The scraggly tree on the lawn shed its leaves with the wind that shook them to a new home. Each descended in the order they should, at the perfect ratio of moon tides. And she wished she could fall like they did, land in another lifetime with tall blades of grass and damp mornings, bugs crawling over her back on their pilgrimage home.

Five.

There is a sadness in some people that cannot be fixed with sugar and honey. Sometimes, it runs too deep for even pain to reach. She was told once that she was a lemon. A lemon that he made into lemonade, with a lot of sugar. Too much sugar. He realized he had a perfect glass of lemonade already. And that he only wanted her to be a lemon again. But it was too late. No matter how hard he tried, she couldn't be a lemon again. And he had to walk away, and watch someone else pick up the glass.

Six.

I spent most of my life trying to pull strands from the clouds, wanting to pad my pillows and smooth my hair with them. I wanted so badly to be above them. To look down at the hills and lakes like tide pools clouded with the denseness of evaporation. I wanted to stomp on the water and balanced tip-toed on the land, hovering through time, changing only with the wind. To walk barefoot through evergreens plucking thin green needles from between my toes. To smell the rain on

its way, or just departed. To pull weeds at their root, brushing dirt from stringy fibers digging downward, resilient. To touch the smooth scales of fish caught accidentally, hook in mouth bleeding. I longed for these things. Longed to feel the pain of living, the quiet of knowing you are alive.

We met in college under a pepper tree, smoking cigarettes, him eating a plum. He offered me a bite, but I declined. Everyday we would meet under the tree, and he would offer me a bite of a plum. Each time I would decline. We would argue the validity of science and religion, the purpose of poetry, the Beatles and Pink Floyd. He would call me in the middle of the night, drunk, explaining political theories and I would teach him Spanish. “Está muerto,” I told him one night. He told me he was sorry, told me he missed me already, and that I got him crying in real life, again. He wrote me a poem about being a boat, never able to know what was below my shore. He told me I was a lemon.

Seven.

This is not a story about two people who fell out of love. This is not a story about two people at all. This is the bitter of lemons and seas unexplored. This is drunk phone calls and perfectly round plums. This is the shade of a pepper tree and Camel Turkish Blends. This is a man with an unmentioned wife, and a woman with a glass chest. This is a string of metaphors for bigger things. This is not a story about two people who never were in love. This is not a story.

Eight.


She sits on the front porch, swinging her legs, no one to watch her pushing thorns into her thumb. Her sadness dripped and pooled down her wrist to her elbows, appearing and submerging. She poked thorns into the holes, plugging the red.

Nine.

He drove the highway, his hand out the window carrying the sky. Pushing it down and following it home. This is a cardboard box wilting in the sun, sweating away sad things, and leaving them at roadside fruit stands and bathrooms. This is a draining of words left unspoken and fingernails unclipped. This is never understanding why she thought she was a lemon. This is residue from those before him. From those who squeezed her into juice, sweetened her, and then left. This is leaving the one you loved most, silent and sad, sitting on a front porch with thorns in her fingers that stop it from draining and turning into pain. This is hurting the one you love.

Ten.

The day they met under the pepper tree, smoking cigarettes, him eating a plum, she told him to be patient. On the phone in the dark, she told him it would be fine. In his car at night, his hands in her hair, faces close, he told her he was sorry. She told him she could have loved him, and she told him goodbye.



MELISSA HAKLITCH is a Southern California poet who received her BA in Literature and Writing from Cal State San Marcos, and will receive her MFA in poetry in June from Cal State San Bernardino. She has been published in *Funeral Parade Magazine*, and is co-editor of “Blankets and other poems: An Anthology for the people of Japan”, as well as “Operation: Lifted Flowers” a collaboration of three voices.

MAXINE & ALBERT
JOHN PANZER

ALBERT WAS NATURALLY LEFT-HANDED, BUT HIS PARENTS SLAPPED IT out of him. They did not want him to endure the cruelty that comes with being different in his village. The unintended consequence was his legendary clumsiness as a reluctant right-handed person.

Our first vacation together as boyfriends – he reached over to hold my hand on the airplane and knocked the orange juice off his tray table and into my lap. I flew five hours looking and feeling like I had peed my pants. At the grocery store he would reach for something, knock it off the shelf, and as he picked it up and went to replace it – knock two more off. The more he struggled in panicked embarrassment to get everything back on the shelf the more he fumbled items to the floor. I would start laughing, and this is what I loved about him – he could chuckle at his own clumsiness. He wasn't ashamed of being gay, or his clumsiness, or our humanness.

He loved McDonald's food which was great because they have plastic

booths, tile floors and a yellow bucket with a mop always around. He's got a cheeseburger in one hand – a soda in the other and one of them is destined for the floor.

He is thirty-seven years old and only allowed to drink out of a toddler's "sippy cup," at my house. You know the one I mean; with the lid and the little spout on it. I bought it for him at the dollar store two months and two carpet cleanings into our relationship. An uninitiated host would hand him a glass of red wine to the gasping horror of us all.

"Two hands, honey," I would call across the room. We would all laugh and I would go to him. With everyone watching he would raise that clumsy right hand gently to my face and take both our eyes into his soul with our loving smiles for each other.

Albert has a Macaw. Her name is Maxine. She is electric green and yellow in curiously sharp focus. She is like a two-year-old in that she demands a lot of attention. What I love about Maxine is her ability to mimic inflection.

When Albert comes home, Maxine greets him with "hello." If he doesn't respond right away – she repeats herself, "hello." If you still wait, she will come out with this demand for attention, raised in a gay household, bitchy-inflected, head bobbing, "HELL-LOW!"

Maxine and Albert love each other. They have their little games of affection: They head-butt each other, they play hide and seek; Albert will go hide and Maxine will waddle around looking for him. Albert extends his arm toward her, she raises a foot and steps onto him – she will take his nose in her powerful beak but never hurts him – she could snap that nose off in a second.

Maxine was hatched at a breeder, has always been around people and loves our attention. Her wings are kept clipped - she has never flown. When she sees or hears anyone she will go through the three hello's – "hello,"... "hello,"... "HELL-LOW," then when you go to her, she raises her paw/leg/claw/foot thing, which means come get me - she wants to step onto you.

Albert decided he was going to let her wings grow out and teach her to fly. Once her wings got long enough, he took her on his arm, across the room from her cage and said, "Maxine, you can fly," and kind of launched her toward her cage, and she flaps her wings enough to cruise

over to the top of it.

I'm trying to develop a relationship with Maxine but she and I are vying for attention from the same man, and I'm losing. To a Female. Macaw. She and I go through our hello's, she likes to motor around on my arm, and I enjoy her, but I don't have the patience to participate in her flight training. When I take her across the room and say, "Maxine, you can fly," and try to launch her, she flaps her wings to balance herself, but holds onto my arm. She won't fly. I end up saying, "whatever," and take her back to her cage. This has happened enough times now that when Albert takes her to launch and says, "Maxine, you can fly," she stays on his arm and says, "whatever," so now Albert is annoyed with me.

The three of us are having a picnic in Golden Gate Park. Albert decides its time for Maxine to fly outside. We stand about fifteen feet apart, and with Maxine on his right arm – which we know to be a bit clumsy – he kind of shot-puts her at me, which startles her into a full wing span dive bomb toward me. I put my hands up more to protect myself more than catch her – and she flies straight up eighty feet into a redwood tree.

She's pacing nervously on a branch looking down at us; she's never been up that high before. Finally she settles down, and raises a foot – come get me. We try yelling, "Maxine you can, fly," and stands there with one paw raised. Come get me.

It's getting dark, and we're getting exasperated. She won't fly down; she's even tried climbing down, but can't reach the branch below her. Albert says we should just go home – She'll roost, macaws won't fly at night, she'll be there in the morning.

First light day two. Sure enough – there she is, in the same spot, eighty feet up. We bring her cage, we bring her toys, we bring her food, we bring her water, and we tell her she can fly. Her head bobs around – she just raises her foot – come get me.

I feel awful, I apologize to Albert and tell him if I had just stayed still, she would have flown to me, and he insists half-heartedly that it's his clumsy fault. He finds no comfort in my arms when we're home these nights, which is soul crushing for me, because being in bed with Albert is my favorite thing ever. In the morning, as he first stretches awake and with his eyes still closed, he intuitively reaches out to find me, pulls me across the bed with those big arms of his, wraps himself around me, and

promptly falls asleep again. He's 6', 170 – I can't breathe like this, but I lay there as long as I can with tears rolling down my face, with how naked smooth electric warm powerful comforting masculine intimate loving this is with him.

He is bottom, but he loves being taller and stronger than me. He likes to hug me up off my feet and raise me up to him face-to-face to kiss me. Then he swings my legs back and forth off the ground. As a man, it's a little humiliating, and at the same time – it's really nice. Who doesn't want to be held like this? He doesn't do these things anymore, and I wonder what I could have done for him to make him feel the way I feel when he's holding me.

Three days. We're losing our minds. We're pacing under the redwood mumbling, "three days, three days." For three days, I've been thinking I should go up and get her but the lowest branch is twenty feet off the ground, she is eighty feet up and I'm scared. But I've had it. I can feel Albert slipping away from me, and now I'm tired of being here. I go buy a rope, tie a stick to one end and after a few tries – I manage to javelin it over the low branch. My last act of kindness love redemption faith for Albert is going to be to get Maxine down. Just as I start climbing up the rope, a huge cherry picker diesel's it's way around the corner and over to us; a man climbs down out of it who turns out to be the head arborist at Golden Gate Park. He asks me what the hell I'm doing in his tree. Albert and I explain the situation and point out Maxine above.

The arborist asks Albert, "If I get you up there, will she come to you?"

Albert looks too terrified to answer, so I jump in with, "I think she will come to me."

The arborist straps and safety cables me into the basket of the cherry picker - and to the machine-like whir of hydraulic cylinders - extends the basket up into the sky eighty feet and maneuvers me in between branches toward Maxine. I gently hold out my arm to her and she steps on.

She looks at me and says, "three days, HELL-LOW!"

I said, "you're eighty feet in the air, Maxine, you can fly," to which she replied,

"whatever."

* * *



JOHN PANZER wants you to know that he writes with a heart in smithereens: his literary career is just a ploy to get back the man he loved and lost. A formerly homeless, recovering addict from the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin, John is now a junior at UC Berkeley and an active participant in the Occupy Movement. His poetry and creative non-fiction chronicles his Occupy activities, the challenges and joys of two men trying to love each other, as well as recounting the humor and heartbreaking misery of Tenderloin life. John was first published in January 2012 in Quiet Lightning's SPARKLE + bLINK and he is a regular contributor at both Saturday Night Special and The Grinder reading series. This October, John will be a featured reader at LitQuake's Lit Crawl as member of the Tenderloin Reading Series event.

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