

n o



t o k e n s

ISSUE 1

# no tokens

FEBRUARY 2014

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T Kira Madden  
Editor-in-chief

# Ram

Rowan Hisayo Buchanan

We, Franny and me, were out stealing sheep. Our first time. The Scottish midnight sky glowed screen-death blue. It was late June and we were far enough North that it never got dark. This was forty-some years ago, when they still had blue screens of death, video cassettes and video cassette rental stores. Franny was just beginning to show.

The sheep began to move, sweeping over the hill.

“We’re doing it wrong,” I told Franny.

“How then?”

“Like on TV. The way the lions do it, surround them.”

At that time, I watched a lot of TV but the two channels our set picked up didn’t give me much choice of programming. In the days when I worked construction, I’d never have watched that shit—fat women trying to become thin women, fat men trying to become thin women, lions tearing the fuck out of a buffalo. In those days, it was just the game with the lads at the pub.

I’d built half the next-door village. The crew moved on but I stayed for Franny. I’d like to say she was too good for me, but she wasn’t.

“We’re not lions,” Franny said. “Anyway, how’re two of us supposed to surround sixty shitting sheep?”

One sheep moaned and the others huffed in return.

We lived in a building called Garden Cottage, but it had no garden and our only plants were dead in their plastic pots. ‘Cottage’ was also misleading—cottage implies a thatched roof and creeping roses. Water crept up the walls, wine stained the shag carpet, and the window latches were broken.

Still, in the long summer night, her red hair sparked and my coat flapped around her pale thighs and all that seemed like a good idea again.

This was her plan: She wanted to make a baby blanket for the kid. She worked at the cashmere factory, so she knew it took a sheep to make a scarf. We’d need at least five. I honestly didn’t think we’d catch one. But I was tired of the TV.

What had given Franny the idea was that there’d been several sheep raids in the paper, supposedly to run onto the Halal black market. I reckoned the farmers read the same papers and would be on alert. Up in the Highlands it wasn’t like down south, where farms might as well be factories. Here the farmers worked the four or five small plots that wrapped their houses. There was a chance they’d wake up, take a shit, see us and call the cops.

Still, I spent all night calling out long and low into the dark. Making the noises that I thought sheep might make if they were in love, calling to them, singing into their moon-white eyes. Until finally Franny was willing to give up, so that we made love beside the sheep shit which had been my goal all along. The slick wind kept the bugs off our skin.

On our way back, sweat freezing behind our ears, we saw him, caught in the barbed-wire fence. His back leg bent in on itself. His dreadlocked wool was blood-soggy, nothing to wrap a baby in. He was screaming like a gull, or a jet plane or something that

could lift off from where he was skewered. I looked at Franny; she'd grown up around these parts. She knelt by his flank, stroking him, singing to him. I don't remember the words, but the song had the drift and roll of hay in the wind. In that moment, I loved her in a way I hadn't even with my nose pressed into the sod, and my dick pressed into her.

"Hold him down," she said. "Wrap your hands around his mouth." His breath was hot and sticky, hissing through his teeth.

"Now, twist."

"Why?"

"He's in pain. You think the farmer's going to put his leg in a cast? He's not a pet." She sounded exasperated, but there were no trees on the streets where I grew up.

"Twist, harder, put your back into it."

I wasn't weak; even as a foreman I did my share of the sweat. But I was a lifter, a chucker, not a killer. The sheep's head stuck, and his breath sped. The sun had begun to rise, all pink and green in the east. Franny's freckles were beginning to wink on, like a city waking up. So I put my back into it and the sheep's head drooped limp and heavy.

We left him where he fell; she bought the baby a blanket at the Tesco. Lately, the ram has come back to me. I see his breath in the smoking exhaust of the car, hear his screams through the TV coverage of foreign wars; his shaking has made its way into my hands, and his fear clouds the doctor's office mirror. Mother and son left me long ago, but sometimes, when I close my eyes, I hear her singing.

# Cloudman

Jennifer Moss

Looky here, looky here—it's Cloudman,  
sleeping so sweet. We hear him grinding his jaw,  
kicking the sheets, we see him stretch above us  
real slow and thin, a yawn, Cloudman's pretty  
pink pink throat. Then he's up: fast and thick  
and steely-eyed. We don't trust him,  
not one bit.

\*

*Looky here looky here* he's saying all the while  
as we crouch and listen to radio talk cutting out  
and watch the lake go shivery shaky under  
Cloudman's glare. Boy, when he says "Jump," it does.

\*

I believe you, Cloudman, tell me anything you want.

Your childhood:

you had a buck knife

a bull's eye

a .22

your parents were good  
 everybody liked you  
 you didn't need a best friend  
 once you strung up a kid who crossed you and  
     threatened him with fire  
 you enjoyed teaching right from wrong  
 and changing people's lives.

\*

Cloudman's not the same man twice, has dreams  
 flowing in and out he follows then forgets.  
 In one dream he's a rabbit sitting bright-eyed in a hat,  
 in another he's a flock of sheep, still others  
 are more troublesome like when  
 he turns into a friend you know from somewhere  
 but can't quite place and then you see her face is blank  
 except for a dark bloody hole which is a mouth  
 with all the teeth kicked out.

\*

Reasons to be wary of Cloudman:

He's a smasher and laughter a lover and leaver  
     a loafer a loner  
 a wheeler-dealer a slapper a crawler a crier a  
     screwdriver a liar a yeller  
 a nay-sayer a pusher an up-stager a proclaimer  
     a disdainer  
 a ranter a rager a skulker a spitter a wormer

a fiddler a sulker  
 a judger a back-stabber gum-flapper  
 high-roller drifter downer drowner.

\*

Sometimes his smell is heavy, full of metal  
 and he covers our eyes so we can't see out,  
 he is very quiet  
 but we feel his breath on our necks  
 then he whispers:  
*just look straight ahead and shut your mouth.*

\*

There were a couple years I thought of hardly anything  
 but you, Cloudman, and wasn't that a ride alright, a mighty,  
 secret pleasure always pressing from the inside out  
 like it was just about to break me open to the whole wide  
     curly world.

I watched you speed and storm and strut and glide from  
     my window  
 all day long, I dreamed of you at night, traced your face  
     across the moon.

My dad told me more than once,  
*get your head outta your ass,*  
 but it felt like God had put this precious egg in me,  
 right in the blood of my own heart,  
 and it hatched a little bird, hungry in its nest,  
 but then it got too big, you see, it grew feathers and sharp claws,

it stretched and pecked and squawked, then thrashed  
like it would simply die in there, it needed you so bad,  
and no matter what I told it, how you would spit it out,  
birdbrain wouldn't listen.

Well, it was long ago when that bird flew the coop, so to speak.  
Yes, you and I, we had a little rough and tumble time,  
I guess you'd say.  
But here's my question still, Cloudman: why'd I ever feel  
that way?

\*

Cloudman calls his song "The Smoke My Little Prayer Gives  
Off or A Tune in the Flies," turns up his palms  
and stomps his boots all over the night (the rhythm's off).  
The lyrics of his song aren't real clear  
but some of them we make out:  
"I'm just a big-hearted snaggletooth,  
I'll tell you the truth,  
you're living on the wrong side of an idea, lady,  
you gotta believe your body, baby."  
It's nothing new, and everything outside  
is dancing, dancing, dancing, the trees holler,  
grass bows down,  
echoes and shadows throw around the devil.  
Tell you what:  
I think I'll sit this one out.

\*

Why we love Cloudman:

Cloudman on a bright day: so light he's through  
the roof in love  
with the sun the sky the stars the moon Cloudman  
flashing his strong white teeth invites us in that  
shining smile  
he talks about his thoughts how much we mean  
to him interesting  
exciting electrifying mesmerizing we've never  
seen such a face as his  
the expression won't stay in one place so  
fascinating we could  
stare all day and we can nearly forget those  
cutting things he's said  
the things he's ruined we're sure we'll love him  
always and it's all been for the best.

\*

Sitting way up in the sky all alone in that *Thinker's* pose,  
Cloudman looks like the loneliest form we've ever seen,  
an old gray toothless guy hugging his sorrows close to him,  
staring out to *yonder*, wondering *why*.  
He gets so down at the mouth and hangdog.  
Can you see his eyes? They're filling up with tears  
as if he's listening to a song from long ago  
and he knows his heart's a living thing.  
And we have to go inside when Cloudman "lets it out" —  
it's much too painful to witness, and really,  
it's none of our business.



\*

A little poem composed by Cloudman:

For My Own Good

For my own good  
I resemble a ghost  
(timeless,  
but hardly  
there).

\*

Cloudman puts us right to sleep these days of high humidity,  
so sleepy we don't even watch TV to hear the  
    weatherman's remarks;  
half the time he's wrong anyway, and we can see it for ourselves:  
the horses hanging their heads below the oaks,  
dogs and cats splayed on the kitchen floor,  
even the chickens look a little like they're moving through a  
    film of milk,  
or something thick that slows them down.  
When we close our eyes we start to feel a *part* of things,  
like *this* and *that* don't mean too much, like *here* and *there*  
    don't count,  
like the vines that grow outside, winding up the trees, are  
    our own veins,  
crows flapping are our lungs, like we're the muck where  
    hogs stretch out

and we're the hogs themselves, like a thousand little Cloudmen  
float around inside of us, and we're inside of them.

\*

Cloudman licks us all over  
like a mother cat who just gave birth  
and we wake up:  
—*Is it time?*  
—*It is time.*

# Celia, 1978

Anne-E. Wood

Too many families live in this town. Look out our kitchen window—plastic sleds left on the sidewalks, a child's mitten blowing down the drive. Every passing car is a station wagon. I can't buy milk at the ShopRite without the wheels of a stroller crushing my toes. The schools are full, the skating rink's crowded with puffy moms, the diners are packed with morbid teenagers who drink coffee and smoke cloves and complain about the crusty rock'n'roll on the jukebox. The dads all line up at the bagel shop on Sundays and talk about football. Everyone complains about Carter and the gas prices and the crime in the city and the weather.

It snowed again today. They closed the library and sent me home.

I pick up the chess pieces strewn in the living room and unclog the basement toilet.

I bake a ham.

February. It will be my birthday next month. I will be old, but everyone will tell me no, it's not true, thirty-three isn't old, just look at your skin, and the kids will be older soon and you have your whole life ahead of you. I want to be seventeen. Or I want to be ancient already, calm and wise with my Sanka and spider veins and memories of hard times.

The neighbors are having a party and I told them I'd go, but I won't. I want to see Benjamin as he walks up the driveway. I won't talk to him much at first. I'll let Walter berate him about money. At night, when this house is asleep, I'll take him down to the basement, or we'll walk out to the woods. I know what he'll look like— younger than he is, tougher than he is. Will I look like a mother? Will he be surprised at how fat I got? He was just a kid then, kicking down the back stairs in his torn-up jeans, cocky-smiling when he saw me with Walter in the grass. He hated everything I had to teach him— how to hold the pot in your lungs, how to make a woman come, how you should never suddenly pull out from inside her. She'll feel you not there for years.

Noah falls skating in his house slippers on the driveway ice and cuts his lip. While I'm nursing him in the living room, Dahlia runs away. She'll be thirteen in two weeks. I'm not worried, no one's going to murder her in this sleepy town, but she's grounded and she's not supposed to leave the house. She knows which buses go to the mall, which ones go to the city, but I know she wouldn't dare. I know she's at that creek in the woods, hanging her head, probably smoking. No one's going to kill her but me.

Our Volvo conks out every time there's an errand. It only works when there's nowhere to go. I try for twenty minutes, freezing in the driver's seat, turning the ignition key again and again, but nothing. I stroke and kiss the steering wheel. *Blue*, I say. *Come on, show mama you love her*. I give up after a while, decide to walk, and take a shortcut through the yard of the abandoned house—the grey Victorian where nobody's lived for years. Kids go there to drink their parents' liquor. I hear them sometimes, late at night. The windows are hollowed, the roof might collapse any moment. Weeds and dandelions cover the lawn in summer; in winter, the

snow reaches the front door.

I find her at dusk at the creek in the woods, where she always goes. She's making snowballs and throwing them at a tree. I watch her for a moment, my oldest. Her hair would be a lion's mane if it weren't such a rat's nest.

She throws another snowball at her tennis shoes this time. The wind blows, shaking the trees.

*You're not wearing a warm enough coat, I say. That's not a coat at all. You're going to get ice in those shoes.*

I hand her my scarf, but she won't take it. She pulls the hood of her black sweatshirt over her head, covering those eyes.

*You look like the Grim Reaper, I say.*

*Maybe I am.*

*Is it my time?*

*It depends. Have you been good?*

*I've tried.*

*Try harder, she says.*

She pulls a stone out of her pocket and cleans it with snow. She started her period yesterday. She didn't tell me about it. I saw a spot of blood on the toilet seat and it wasn't mine. I didn't ask her. Instead, we had a fight about her failing math. She's wearing Walter's shirt right now. She'll be a middle-aged woman with tangled hair, one of those crones you see on the street, who carry too many bags.

*Do you know how long you've been gone?*

*Five thousand years?*

*What do you do out here?*

*I just want to be alone.*

*Can't you be alone in your room?*

*I like the cold, she says. I like the trees.*

Read the rest of *Celia*, 1978 in  
No Tokens Issue 1

# The Cuckold and the Penal System

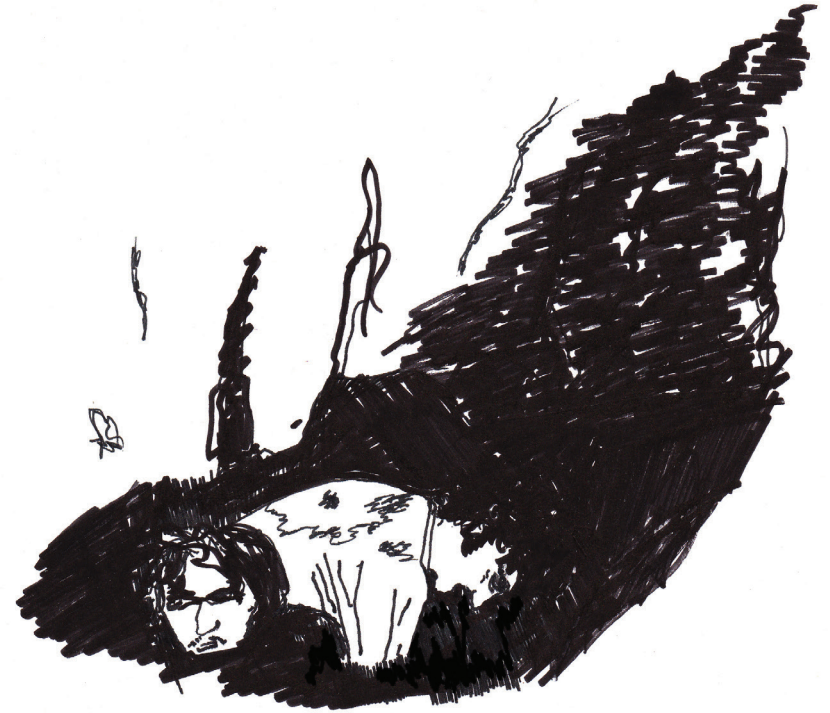
Jeffrey McDaniel

E.A. Bethea

If there was a police line-up  
and your shoulder, the only witness,  
would it be able to select my hand  
from all the other hands?

Dracula in the Window	86
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Terrible Mistake	88
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Angel Cream	90
Carrying You through the Paris Sewers	91

MAKE SURE IT'S  
A JELLY AND NOT  
AN ANGEL CREAM



CARRYING YOU THROUGH  
THE PARIS SEWERS

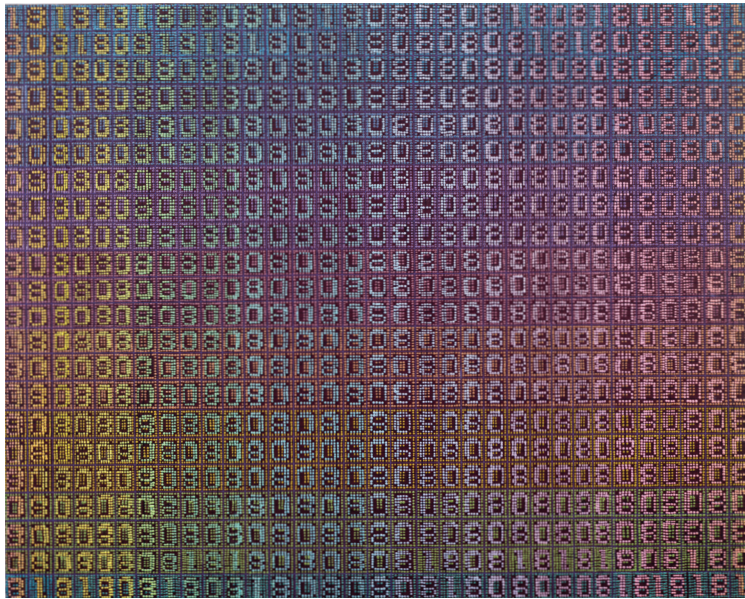
# Xylor Jane

See the rest of *E.A Bethea's* work in  
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"Puff" NR#22 29X31" 2012	97
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All works are oil, pencil, and ink, on panel





# Pencils

See the rest of *Xylor Jane's* work in  
No Tokens Issue 1

Alexandra Sadinoff  
*for* BANJO and CALEB

Now that I'm on the school bus, I can say it: All day I've been good. I didn't write anything on my desk during Geometry, or anywhere in the bathroom, or on the bleachers in Gym. I made one little mark smaller than a lemon pit in Science Lab, but it was just pencil. My sister is a pencil. On one end she is writing herself into this world and on the other end of herself she is poised to erase. The only thing pencil about me is the mark on my cheek from fifth grade. My friend was walking back from the sharpener with her pencil point facing out. I was minding no one else's business, just returning to my desk with a cold piece of chalk concealed in my fist. I was looking back at my slanted long division on the board—remainder three—and not looking out for sharps. My friend got in trouble. Ice is what I got. During recess she sat crying. I took the ice cube away from my cheek and told her how she had it worse, getting yelled at, and no recess for a week, and feeling sorry, meanwhile I was feeling the ice shrink inside my fist, and I said I wished things had gone very differently, like that I wished I'd stuck a pencil into *her* cheek. By the time she stopped crying all I had was lead in my skin and little to show for it besides a wet palm and some drips on the asphalt straight below, as if I'd been holding a tiny rainstorm in my fist. But now it's eighteen—



no, *nineteen* hours and I haven't touched a single pen. Oh God. Please. Open my lips, for there is screaming in my blood, gripless, slipping, skidding into roadblocks and vein walls. Open my lips. Shut tight the eyelids of my hand.

Pencil skirt. Pencil of sunlight. Penicillin.

What I would really like is to give my sister these colored pencils that come in a tin and you can wet the tip to make them act like paint. They've got decent paper for her, but crayons give her the chills, and every marker in Pediatric is hoarse, like someone losing her voice. I would have given her my markers, but after yesterday Mom confiscated them from me along with my pens. She hid them—poorly—in the planter by the front door and then I confiscated them right back. When she found them under my pillow she made me put them out on the street corner, next to the garbage can, and by this morning they were gone. I *am* sorry about yesterday. I don't even think the nurses cared or the doctors cared, but Mom did care, and I felt bad that my sister felt bad, because it wasn't her fault, not at all. She knows I like to draw and write just anywhere I please, and I should have known better than to write on her skin, all up and down her shins and the backs of her arms and the arches of her feet which made her giggle and the letters smudge. It doesn't matter that she asked me to, just like she used to ask me to show her stuff, like how to blow a bubble with sugarless gum, and how to zig-zag her bike up a steep hill and fly it down a steep hill, and blah, blah, blah, et cetera, but, God, I think you understand. I think you are the kind of God who understands drawing on your little sister's legs and writing messages to her blood inside. And I think we both know it is not anything from the outside, not ink on her skin, which is going to get her. I do not believe for certain that writing notes

and warnings to the disease in her blood will make it go away, but my sister does, and it's *her* blood and *her* disease.

By now the alarm is sounding in my skin. Nineteen hours and twelve minutes since I've touched a pen. No one on our entire school bus has ever tried the red handle—*this* red handle. EMERGENCY USE ONLY is what it says. *ONLY*, as if an emergency is so rare. In kindergarten Emergency meant that if you didn't get to the bathroom *now* you could land in a puddle of your very own. I made my pencil hard to reach. I buried it in the bottom of my backpack, under my textbooks and notebooks and library book. The book I checked out is full of Greek ruins and I'm going to bring it to my sister tonight. She likes ancient things and she likes books. She especially likes library books, which is very pencil of her, indeed. My fingers are shaking like salt and the way I see it, God, I have two choices: the red handle or my pencil. If this isn't an emergency, what is it? My palm is on the cool red metal, but as I press, we ride over a pothole or a rock or a rocking chair and everything shifts. The corner of my library book digs into my spine. I know it's my library book because it's sharper than a textbook. I take out the book and let it fall open to whatever page it wants. What it wants is page thirteen, fourteen, a picture of the Erechtheion temple on the Athenian acropolis. It has columns shaped like women, caryatids, supporting the roof with their head. They are dressed in long gowns with lots of drapery, and elaborate hairdos, and they just stand there with one knee bent, as if they are not holding up anything other than themselves. On the next page is a close-up of one damaged caryatid with two broken arms, and below it: *Figure 2-A. She probably held a sacrificial vessel in one of her missing hands.*

Before I know it my pencil is in my hand. The pencil tip is

touching the caryatid's left arm where it is fractured. The pencil line is thick and dark on the glossy paper.

I draw a sacrificial vessel.

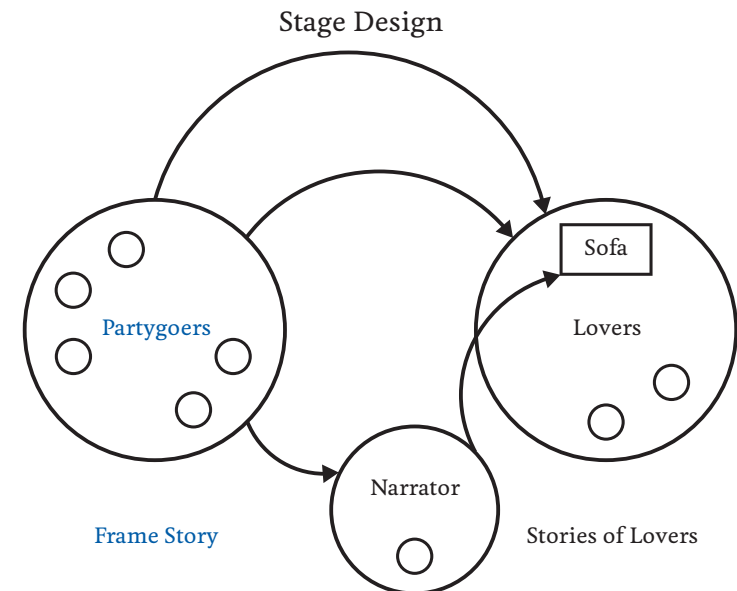
I erase it.

I draw a hand. I draw it empty.

# The Sofa: A Musical

Rick Moody

Being an adaptation of Crébillon's *Le Sopha, conte moral* of 1752, updated and reset in a landscape of Northern Californian digital manufacture, begun in 2006, or so, and never completed by the author, consisting, like the novel, of a frame story (in blue), and basic placement of possible songs (in italics), which songs were meant to be written by the author and Hannah Marcus, but which have not, as yet, been written. Maybe someday a novel will be composed that performs this work without the songs...



*Dramatis personae:*

## Stage Right, Frame Story:

Bryce Keegan, CEO of Congruity Inc., 55  
 Louise White Keegan, life of party, his wife, 48  
 Darren Colby, software developer and new age adventurer, 41  
 Assorted hangers-on and California computer-genius party-goers, etc.

## Stage Left, Stories of Lovers

Felice, a successful obstetrician from Menlo Park, 39  
 Brady, her husband, 42  
 Jeremy Hodges, alcoholic poet, and Felice's lover, 49  
 Polecat, punk rock surfer, and Felice's lover, 31  
 Mindy Skerritt, Exotic dancer, 29  
 Trevor Morris, hedge fund CFO  
 Pierce Francesco, dissipated jazz musician  
 Michel, drug dealer  
 Luke, born again guy  
 Yvonne and Peter, unhappy intellectuals  
 Merrill, real estate agent, 38  
 Elton, action film director, 47  
 Sanjay, member of Elton's entourage  
 Cynthia, young, penurious layout designer, 23  
 Justin, a singer in a band, 19

*Frame story*

The story takes place in Northern California, the present, against a backdrop of technical hype and New Age nonsense. The setting is the Goethe Seminars, the annual brainstorming think tank, sponsored by Congruity, Inc., a heavily diversified venture capital organization. The Goethe Seminars feature the best and brightest in the entrepreneurial economy, in business and the intellectual elite. (*Overture about Goethe Seminars, and think tanks in general.*) This is the setting for the frame story. Bryce Keegan and his wife are welcoming partygoers before a seminar slated to take place in the evening. In what follows, there is this layer of narrative, and then there are stories-within-the-story, as in the Scheherazade, which are acted out on a separate part of the stage, so that the stage as a whole has two separate sections (see diagram), like rings at a circus. Sometimes the narrator narrates these stories-within-the-story, and the actors act them, other times the actors on the story-within-a-story stage say their own lines. The frame story stage can be mostly in shadow when not being used, so that you can use the same actors for party-goers in that story as in the stories-within-the-story.

*Scene One*

## LOVE AND FURNITURE

Introduction, at a cocktail party, of DARREN COLBY, teller of tales, and part-time Buddhist, who is speaking to an intimate group before a lecture at the Goethe Seminars that night. "I got it at EST, I pummeled my primal scream pillow, I meditated next

# Electricity

Sarah Levine

Read the rest of *The Sofa: A Musical* in  
No Tokens Issue 1

In summer  
when my knees  
are skinned  
and the blood  
tastes mean  
you will leave  
with the geese  
and it has become  
too hard to find a dress  
unspoiled by grief.  
Or a hound unafraid of thunder.  
Father ran ours  
into the night's proudest electricity.  
Smacked the door quiet,  
instructed the whimpers  
*Why be so afraid*  
*she's just trying*  
*to love you into the ground.*

# The Mother Cell

Joy Williams

She had been living there for a few months when an acquaintance said, I think you should meet this person... she's new... she lives over by the conservation casement, the one with the moths. She was the mother of a murderer, too, that was the connection, but Emily and, Leslie was the woman's name, didn't hit it off particularly, though they were both fiercely unjudgemental, of course. But then another mother, well into her twilight years but unaccompanied by caregivers, moved down less than three months later, around the 4th of July, the time of pie and fireworks and bunting-draped baby carriages. It was as though some mysterious word had gotten out. These things happen, like highly allergic people, people allergic to life itself practically, all gravitate to some mountain in Arizona, or a bayside town in Maine becomes the locus for lipstick lesbians overnight. Penny arrived next, followed by a few more mothers in quick succession and then the influx stopped.

Nobody had to tell them outright that they had better be model citizens. When a bear mauled a young couple out at the state park the mothers worried that the incident might be perceived as their inadvertent doing for weren't black bears shy as a rule? And this was an extremely aggressive bear and small,

hardly more than a cub, but determined and deliberate.

One mother, Francine, thought a hunter had shot the bear with a hallucinogen prior to the attack, just for fun, to see what would happen. It must get boring for them to just shoot something and have it die, Francine said. Someone shot it with a mind altering drug.

Most everything has been shot out around here years ago, another mother said. Where did this bear even come from?

Exactly, Francine said.

The eldest mother had the sugar and was so arthritic she had long enjoyed the awe of x-ray technicians. She was half-blind too and described herself as dumb as a box of nails, but she knew how to keep on living. Whereas Penny, who wasn't even forty—she'd had Edward when she was sixteen—died of lung cancer having never smoked a cigarette, even in the worst of times.

It was Penny's death that brought them together though they weren't about to take up the task of writing to her boy in prison. Penny had liked to say that there was a part in each of us that had never sinned and that was the part of Edward she addressed when she wrote to him. But as the eldest mother pointed out, that part was the same part that was never born and will never die. It was thus irrelevant. Better to address a plate with a covered bridge printed on it.

They still thought of themselves as being seven in number even though it was Penny who made them so. In general they believed that the dead remained around, fulfilling all but the most technical requirements of residency on earth and relieved of suffering the banality of the day to day. In this way they could argue, though they never did, that their children's victims weren't as bad off as generally assumed.

Read the rest of *The Mother Cell* in  
No Tokens Issue 1

## NO TOKENS

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