



BIRANEL THOAMS

Perp, Santa Fe New Mexico

THOAMS

A 3 Legged Short Story

Perp walks head held low limping toward the shade of our car avoiding the broken feet of piñatas strewn among the sand dunes. There is no thing pretty about it. Not today. I admit, Perp was inmate at mental hospital where I found him homeless wondering the canals of Venice California punch-drunk eating from rusted cans. Now we are a stone south, in Mexicali near the bivy sacs and abandoned gold mines turned fortified bunkers with ordinance, radar installations and laser guidance systems with subatomic triggers from Los Alamos surrounding us. I wanted to see dentist. My tooth ached. I did not have an appointment. Walk-ins welcome in Mexicali. But my papers were not in order. I had no papers. It used to be free range. This was our shared insanity, Perp and mine, the love for free range. I was turned back with a handful of narcotics. Perp was waiting for me in the shade of our

car with a mini sombrero tucked under his chin.

I bent down and removed the boot I had made for him from a hollowed out rabbit foot key chain that I had placed several springs from the ends of my pens inside. I even dyed the rabbit foot to a matching color and snipped off the key ring. He didn't like wearing it inside. I am currently working on a new foot for Steve but having trouble with the mechanics, finding the right spring tension.

In Yuma Arizona there is a fuel station that pumps one hundred ten octane racing fuel. It is on a hill around the corner from a motorcycle shop overlooking the highway. I filled the tank. The hot tar fumes softening under the sun reminded me of a martini aroma. This is what I was thinking as I looked down at the letters ORSCHE on the rear grill at the red light. P. It was my first thought. There, out along the roads of the artillery range proving grounds, north of the pauper rocks laid out by local generations shining in the moonlight desert. Where people write words in stones across the hectares of dry dunes. Yuma Arizona does not look much like Santa Fe New Mexico except for the territorial prison and moving sun and night constellations. Yuma Arizona does not have the statues of other parts of Arizona. The cacti scarecrow armed behemoths. Santa Fe New Mexico

statute states all dwellings shall not be different from one of fourteen shades of brown and shall not be higher than the Round House Capital which is 3 stories high. Perp did not appreciate Yuma. He is mostly color blind anyway. It is a 10 hour drive home.

I write this sitting in a wheelbarrow in my back yard. I lined it with 4 inch foam yesterday. A hammock on wheels. It is not my back yard. I rent. A compound, very old adobe. Of walls and neighbors these casas three hundred years old. As the fog lifts this morning I can see the left-footless victim of a pueblo revolt trip up a dirt incline to the red clay dens in the hills with a pail to harvest for the pottery wheel. Steve struggles up the incline. Every morning. In these little caves carved out in the hill sides waits the best clay. Dark red and thick heavy moist. The caves are carved out deeper and deeper by centuries of theft. Theft of red clay. It is Steve's turn. It is free range around these parts. Did I mention that? All mediums are welcome to be used. He has a shovel in one hand he uses as a cane for his missing left foot. A pail in the other. He burns silver in his spare time. Steve, you see, was dying a vodka gout. He is a quiet neighbor.

I listen for the bell from the Assisi a few blocks away in the Plaza where the pueblo indians spread their blankets. It is Sunday morning. It is how I know it is a Sun-

day, or Wednesday. The church bell ringing. It is an eight o'clock mass. Like a benign ache in my tooth jaw. I walk down my dirt driveway past the mud walls to look for water. I do this every morning same as Steve hiking to his cave for fresh clay to spin. I hear Short and Thin open his door and move vigilantly down his rickety steps. He beats his wife. Slaps her round a bit. Fisted too. I helped him stop. I didn't care an ounce of ginger for him. I taught her to slip the slap and give the look. I will steal every bone in your face while you sleep look, if ever again. After all, it turned out to be my business. My neighbor. Perp helped more than I did, truth be told where credit rests. I wanted to help her as much as trip him to a witch ditch. I didn't give it much thought. It was like getting out of bed in the morning or sitting in my wheelbarrow in the afternoon or at night. Some thing that needed to be repaired and once fixed enjoy the day and evening. So Perp and I fixed that but we hadn't yet figured out how to fix Steve's missing left foot. Misplaced it in Korea. Just couldn't find it. Displaced at the ankle joint. But he likes to tell the story of the pueblo revolt so we listen how the Spaniards chopped off the left foot of every able bodied man and boy a hobbled warning punishment. Not so long ago. Near Española New Mexico you can find many foot bones if you look

for them. We listen to Steve, Perp and I, tell this story at least once a month while the three of us sit on his porch at night and drink iced agave and beer. Perp likes chilled cream in his cup.

She began cooking again soon after I moved in. After we practiced her look and Pig-Thin and I had our morning conversations down by the river bank looking for water. She missed it, she said, the cooking, but no one to cook and eat with, she smiled and then she shrugged just a little bit. Perp was always hungry. It worked out for a while. But Short-Thin's impotent screamings in his skull sometimes found an escape from the scoundrel. Or had, for a time. And then, the look. She doesn't mind. Or didn't, not now, she shrugs. She mostly still shrugs about most things. Endearing, her shrugs. And smiles. Such tiny shoulders serving a breast plate like all the yogis in town. I knew both, the slaps and shrugs. She was learnt, the first time she moved my hand around her carotids and nodded her head slightly. She minds now. He stopped the back hands since we became neighbors. Very shortly after Short and Thin began having our early morning talks down on the dry river bed. At first he wanted me to stop drilling. Tried to bull his way. He still doesn't see the irony in this.

I have neighbors. One is Short and Thin like the

emaciated cows that roam this free range with pot bel-
lied gut filled with grass weed. We don't like fences in these parts. People get shot for fences. To live this way was more welcome surprise than I thought it would be. Free range. I was a marginot kid from Iowa herding fifty head of black angus from the highway deep ditch across the crick and back into the broken fence and mending the fence with my father, a post driller and a few rusty hook nails my mother straightened out to reuse during the depression. They were antiques. The large balled bull was always the one that wanted to stay out and roam. Was it yesterday or my generation ago I honestly now do not know.

“sah-boss-sah-boss-sah-boss”

It wasn't his name but it seemed to work. His real name was Genesis. Perp doesn't understand fences. Doesn't try. He ignores Short and Thin. For the most part. Helps me keep an eye on him but won't spend too much calorie on it. Marisol lives with Pig-Thin. Steve lives in the back in the third cottage all a lone. The fourth building used to be for horses but the roof is gone and no one stays much there now. Perp naps there, keeping practice, his reflexes and instinct and walk and invisible. I think all the buildings once had horses in them.

We live in pinion-poled mud houses. All connected

to the mud-walled perimeter. I coated diamond walls in the interior of mine. Walls like crème brûlée. I didn't let Steve paint my casa even though it was his caretaker job. I did it myself. Me and Perp. I like listening to his pottery wheel from the banco on my portal, my porche delantero under the canales and vigas and corbels, latillas and lintels I refurbished. I carpentered with a rusty hand saw, an old hammer, bale twine and a dull hand wood planer with a red plastic knob I bought from Jackalope's. Perp and I had a small bonfire with the scrap. Steve brought over beer and we sat on stumps and dirt and watched the fire. I would fix Marisol's ricketed steps but Perp wants to see Short and Thin break through the wood. And fall. So we do not. Perp and I explained this to Marisol one night and she shrugged.

Short and Thin is a dog's nickname. His natural perfume a rank and informal. A lot of beans they say in these parts. Black or the creamier brown. I think it is just the lard though. He aspirates a burnt lard perspiration. I am certain of it. I am certain of it when I think about it. But he is Short and Thin. Pig-Thin. He stinks like his thoughts. A thought bubble follows above his head full of stink and fume. He thinks I want to know him. Needs me to want to know him. Or that I might stop drilling. He doesn't know lonely. He is waiting to die. Admits it.

But, until then, he wants me to stop drilling but won't exactly say.

He watches for me every morning on the banks of the Santa Fe River as I stand between the two pinions across from our gravel and dirt driveway. He used to come out looking for Marisol every morning but she always leaves at sunrise now. Before he is up. It does not matter. He snuffs and snorts this and that. My smoking. My eye color. The nocturnal noises. Perp. Senor Blue Eyes she calls me smiling with a slight shrug and all lips smile. Egging me with her eyes. In front of him.

This morning I mention to him the scrambled eggs and green chile and white cheddar and warm flour tortillas as we look for water. She ages chopped green chile in her freezer for me to ferment a flavor. Freezing makes it better. Hotter. She hadn't aged green chile frozen for years until I moved in. Stick butter hashed potatoes. Gooey cheddar shreds and pork sausage bits. Onions diced. All wrapped in the warm flour tortilla she pounds fresh and drowned in green chile juice. A sprinkle of black beans. Lettuce. Short and Thin's common law rolls and folds me every morning. Marisol. Sometimes with bacon or chorizo. Sometimes both. Feeds me twice a day. Perp eats with us too. He is all ways hungry. She thinks I am too thin. Perp too fat. She stopped heating soup cans for

Pig-Thin when I rented the compound next door. He is capable of that. Sometimes Steve eats with us. Our little flat roofed horse fortress painted one of fourteen shades of brown two stories high per city ordinance with pinion rafters. Pig-Thin eats from cans now.

Every morning he tries to make a conversation down by the river bank where I look for water. Did I tell you that? Sneaks up like unwanted invitation to a wedding or funeral. Mumbles something beside me. Like I don't know he is there. I can not hear him. Just the verbs and a few nouns. Really just the consonants. He has no vowels in his life. I hear pig snorts near. The rest, underwater echo. Just another rock or old stump eroding along the dry bank. Like his porch steps. This is as good a revenge he can do. He knows I do not mind. But still he tries to make me mind.

I watch the turkey vultures make drum circle. It is the eighth consecutive cloudless morning. I know this because I count the ringing bells. Sunday air mass. Air so clean and thin it still gives me head aches if I smoke too much. Oxygen adrenaline. I never speak Spanish to him. I might miss the mutterings made under his breath. They used to interest me. So I don't speak Spanish to him. Sometimes he swears at me in Spanish. Calls me a Spanish name. He doesn't know I speak Spanish. Neither

does his wife. I enjoy what she some times lets escape her mouth in Spanish when her eye balls roll back. Pig-Thin listens across the compound at night.

There is something he needs to tell me down by the river morning. Some seed he can't quite germ or root. But I have my own needs. So I do not tell him I can not hear him. The thin slices of tinnitus. I do not want to hear him. So I do not. Like a barking far away or a windy feral tumbleweed. Just noise from another room. It passes. He has done no thing to me. Except look for water every morning with me. Part of the landscape. Part of my morning. Interrupt the color of a sunrise. A ribbed stray dog. A lobo or a hog. Soon he sighs and forfeits again. I hand him one of my cigarettes and light it for him. Every morning at seven thousand feet above sea level. Milkweeds and blue corn sky. Thin air. Greens and browns and purples. Cars hiss by and we smoke.

"I went to a veda," he says.

He says the word as if he needs a helmet trying to make an extra point. I tell him I have a degree from Pierce Elementary School. I pick a few nuts from the pinion tree. He pretends to ignore me. We look for water. There is a dampness to the earth in the crevice but I do not see a trickle this morning. I pick a few more pinion nuts. Split the shells with my finger nails. Tamp an ash. This is al-

ways the sign for him to go. I watch Marisol walk over with a carafe of iced orange juice, a carton of cream and a pot of coffee on a tray and sit on my porch and watch us. She waits for me. She goes inside to retrieve two glasses filled with ice and three empty cups for coffee and sugar and cream. I will tell her she makes good coffee. She does. She will smile and shrug and tell me I make good coffee too. I do. Perp sits and waits with her. He waits for his cream. Quiet. Perp doesn't beg. That is obvious. Just making sure. She sighs mmhmm-hmmhmm often when happy and I ask her if that is Spanish and she says Si and smiles then shrugs and drops more ice shards in to my glass from the bucket. She knows I like ice and helps me. Meanwhile, I stand down by the river bank tossing pinion nuts into the dry river bed.

I will kill him. I am certain he thinks this. Make it stop. I do not mind him. I hope he lives a long old life until his bones are paper. Outlives us all. I am sure he will. Most times I can not hear him. Many times I do not see him standing next to me. I feel him. I pick another pinion nut.

"I have water rights," he says.

I have the heart to tell him the well I am drilling hit one thousand two hundred forty-eight feet last week. But I do not. I found this well at four hundred twenty

feet. Most need to be at least 900 feet now. It was part of my lease. Less rent if I drill deeper. Add value. Just do not let the water police catch you. They have guns and enjoy their overstocked bullets. I do not need less rent but when I heard the first slap I decided to drill. Perp heard it too and approved. I have not drilled a well since I was seven years old. Work is important. So, I agree. More water. I pay the crew a little extra to drill at night. When it is cooler. And, a little more secret. Perp and I give them beer. I do not care about the policia del agua. Or is it the agua policia? I would be disagreeable with them. I am certain. I have never heard of the water police. I want to meet them. Or not. Would they write me a ticket? Put me in jail? Sentence me to territorial prison for water? Such a career. I wondered for a moment these things and decided it wouldn't be so bad to meet them. I made acquaintance with people in town just in case. The Bacas.

Drilling at night, I can sit and watch under the stars and satellites. Supervise from my wheelbarrow. Men drilling for water in a quiet Santa Fe New Mexico night. Steve sits on his porch at night too. Pig-Thin shines his flashlight and the well drillers say muchas gracias. He thinks about slapping them. Huevos, I whisper to him without looking at him and he thinks I said something about shining the light over there so he shines the light

over there. He shines the light from face to face as if he is spotting howling lobos in the night. He shone the light in Perp's yellow eyes once and the crew said mucho gracias and went about the rigging and beer. He tried to blind Perp. Perp can take care of himself. So I do not slap him. Perp just stared at him through the beam of light like a rock star who cannot play an instrument with nothing else to do during a solo. Thinks he is a cool cat. Doesn't look away. Perp however knows he is a cool cat. Not my cat. His own cat. Pig-Thin left when Marisol brought dinners to my porch. Red chile carnitas on Wednesdays. Perp likes spicy pork. Pig-Thin did not come back again at night. Neither did she. Not until sunrise. There is a rooster in the wild flowers. Free range chicken. A cock-el-do-ya-do down the avenue.

Pig-Thin could not call Sheriff. Agua Policia. They are in the phone book. On the first Santa Fe New Mexico yellow page in bold. To do so, to call, meant a defeat. Just in case, I made friends with the Vigils in town too. In the plaza one Sunday. It is good to know people. The lay of the land. Defensible positions in pueblo and apache lands. Not just in case, but simply why not. A local. Besides, they were almost finished drilling. One hundred and ninety-two feet a night. A good night. She asked him with a look if he wanted an ice water too when

she came out and gave me a glass but she was not holding another glass. That first night of drilling. Pig-Thin instead turned and walked home. Left and right up the driveway his flashlight making noise along the ground. She squished mud in her hands and between her fingers. I washed them for her when I washed her feet. I wash her feet with cool well water from the aquifer every night.

"I have water rights," he repeats in the morning. I close my hand over two pinion nuts and one pinion nut in my other hand. This, our second morning ritual standing down on the river bank. The first, I cannot hear him. I hold my closed hands out to him. Do you know the difference of a pinion? I open my palms. He turns and walks away muttering 'veda! 'veda! 'veda! Most mornings now he walks away whispering before I open my punch-line hands smoking my cigarette.

Short and Thin is a roadrunner. He is Pig-Thin. Perp nicked him that first night. His pale skin near a translucent green see-through shade. We can see his hairy discolored bones under his dirty loose hanging clothes. His driveway is as flat as the one we all walk but he traverses left and right in a jerk a stop and a hop. He is perpetually off balance. He cannot be one hundred twenty pounds. Seventy pounds of gut. His bones must be chalk. His wife outweighs him by five pounds. I told her she was a

perfect nine stones and she smiled and shrugged. I teach her Craic at night.

In the morning he smells like licorice and pig-sweat down by the river bed. I stay looking for a trickle in the dry bank. His waif leaves the air and she waves to me from my porch. I see him one more time each day. While I nap with a pillow in my wheelbarrow. He removes the lid to look inside his dry rain barrel loudly enough to wake me and then watches her bring me an evening tray. He looks in his dry rain barrel every day. It is a nice barrel. An old one. It never leaks because it is all ways dry. He has water rights. He will join me in the morning next looking for water again along the river bank near downtown plaza. I spend the rest of the morning with Marisol adjusting her sun dress straps and drinking ice water. Perp licks cream, strolls and sleeps.

My mouth waters. It is Sunday evening. No well work today. Water well drilling is done with valves and meters and rigs and bits and gear teeth and cables and gas generator. Pipes spot welded. Tonight she will walk over and say hola! She will be in a sundress. She will be holding a tray in her hands with lumps wrapped in warm foil. They will be moist pulled pork tamales soaked in red chiles. I will open my eyes and say aluminum? like an Englishman. I will smile. She will grin and shrug and

move her hair from her eyes and take my hand and help me out of the wheelbarrow. We walk to my casa. We step through the open door and she tells me I should keep my door closed to rattlesnakes and scorpions and ants and cicadas. I ask her if it is time for the cicadas and she says maybe and shrugs. Instead I put coffee grounds along the door threshold for her. Her dark hair glistens like the mica shine of my walls. I unwrap a dozen pork tamales soaked in red chile while she gets two forks out of a drawer. She never stays a little too long. Until sunrise. I fill glasses with ice and water. We drink a few fingers of agave then sit on my portal and smoke danger and look for meteors and satellites while Perp sleeps in her lap then rises to hunt the night. His purrs embarrass him sometimes. It is his only self conscious thought. I adjust her sun dress straps. I gave her a trunk full of sundresses when I moved in next door. She dragged it back to her casa. Size 2/4. I pump the well handle and I wash her feet and let the pattern of her sundress recall a silent memory. She wears a sun dress every morning and every night when she strolls over with a plate.

“Sí, no he usado éste aún,” she says.

I do not remember his name. Her name is Marisol. Did I tell you that? She is thirty years old. She will be a grandmother in four months. Perp and I went camping

north of Tesuque for three weeks after she told me she was born north of Tesuque. We camped next to a wine orchard. I wish she would speak Spanish to me more often. I want to remember. She speaks Spanish to me when I wash her feet. And when her eyes roll. After I wash her feet every night I shave her warm every night. Because she lets me. I use a natural mint arnica oil on her body afterward. I make it myself out of Osha root that grows on a mountain near Taos. And arnica and mint. She does not secretly wish I would kill Pig-Thin. Neither of us ever speaks of him. Why would we? He is my morning dry river bank. My wheelbarrow alarm clock. I have a deep well now. To her, he is some other daily invasion. An occupation against sovereignty. She dreamily wishes other men she meets would kill Pig-Thin. Hit him with a truck. Hit him with a rock. The men bagging at Trader Joe's. The men drinking from their aluminum beer cans at stoplights in el caminos. The men in neon Low Riders driving to the North Pole. She does not want him dead. Just happy thoughts that entertain her day. She notices she thinks of him less and less. She wears her new sundresses at funerals and wakes. She will be fine once she begins to raise her grand child. I will kill for her chiles and sundress straps and grand mal throat and hola! but not Pig-Thin. No. She knows this and I wash her feet.

We share a few fingers more of agave and smoke more danger and look for satellites.

Marisol visits every morning and every night with a plate and foil and says hola! We sit and talk and look at one another. Her fourteen shades of brown. My three of blue. We look at the powdering purples and chalking yellows and reds and fading greens of the east and west mesas disappearing into the night haze with the valley and the mountains in the high desert as we spin away from the sun. Perp nudges her with his pawless stump and she slips the rabbit foot on and we walk up the hill along the trails of the Santa Fe Institute at night and look at the city lights from Hyde Park and watch satellites pass across the sky. She gathers pine cones for a fire. She elbows my ribs. She makes luminaria and we light them.

I will tell you about Perp after I tell you about the river.

The Santa Fe River runs dry through town eleven months of a year. South of the Plaza and filled there with beer cans and teeth from two saloons. You can tell where it is by vegetation growing along the banks. Pale green. The banks are deep. There used to be more water. More snow. But it is all being tapped and the fish eggs die. There are young and old cottonwoods and benches along the bank. Teenage locals climb and sit in the cottonwoods.

They call themselves Plaza Rats. The local infirms sit on the benches. They wait for water. They are not the fattened cottonwoods near Santo Domingo Pueblo where George cuts a tree down once a year during deer season using the hide to make pow wow corn harvest festival drums from the cottonwood. Not even as fat as in the Rio Valley of Albuquerque or Belen or Las Lunas. But green and shade enough. Easy to climb. Even the infirms can not remember when water flowed through in the summer months. It was before the railroad.

The Santa Fe River banks bring color to the high desert like on canyon route six six six. Shade. Shadow. Bright neon against the browns. Rest from the sun for feeding reptiles and the rare amphibians. A few days in April there is water running. You have to be quick. Sometimes May. Mountain run off from Sangre de Cristo and Colorado Rockies. Some of the locals bottle it and freeze it for summer. It is diverted under ground by Army Corps of Engineers near Cochiti Golf Resort and channeled east and west a round Albuquerque so that the Belen and Las Lunas block basements and chile fields are flash flooded every year leaving a spring mildew.

Marisol pronounces Cochiti like an Apache when she looks at the calendar to tell me next full moon. I want to camp at White Sands soon. Next full moon. For the

locals it is a necessary camp site even though it is unlawful. Like drill depth. But I will drive there and camp. Me and Perp and I. Gypsum white glow and full moon and count meteors and watch satellites go by. Light a bag of charcoal. Perp will look for scorpions to box not so interested in shooting stars and satellites as he used to be. October is best time. We'll go in October when the combines in the Middle West are running harvest.

Perp is savage kind. He made Taos tolerable. He knew we had overstayed. A multiple nipple swollen udder clerk tried to evict us until she realized he was frightening away the vermin for his keep. Leaving the tails behind. It was a bit out of character for him but he wanted to help. He knew we were in trouble. So she warmed to him. Most do. I liked the skiing there. And hiking the steep gorge. There is water flowing fast acre feet year round at the bottom there now. And the fireplace at one hotel with that one gringa. Agave and tamales everywhere. The pueblo too.

But those are all out side of Taos New Mexico. In Taos, Zara wanted me to have dinner with her father. I wasn't hungry. I was ready to pass through when she insisted I come for dinner. Asked Perp if he would come. He said sure so I was done. Perp is always hungry. Dinner at her father's. Larry Bell. How was I supposed to

know that Perp's nemesis was going to be there? No way in knowing. Had I known I wouldn't have put him through it or at least thought twice. Now I am kidding on you. Of course, if I had known, I would have insisted Perp his therapy. I would have insisted he accompany. That Dennis Hopper was there. At dinner. The luck of it. We all agreed about time.

Perp likes to say insincerely with a cheshire smirk, luck is where opportunity meets preparation. It is how cliches are born and grow up to be mature fully functioning adult cliches, he says. Same a rumor. Weak cat believes in luck. Perp believes in cause and effect. It had taken Perp five months to recover. A sling trying to save his broken paw. Surgeries. Grafts. Never a mew of complaint. Finally, resignation and amputation. It took 6 weeks to get the pen springs just right. I made him a ballistic jell filled rabbit foot key chain boot for long hikes. Dyed it too. I made a second boot for his first birthday and a third for his second. He appreciated that a snug fit and otherwise got along well. His tail strengthened and thickened. Eleven years had passed but Perp recognized him right off. How could he not? The man who grabbed him. Tossed him into water. Broke his arm. To help a bully duck bully. Perp kept on eye on him. A close eye. A cat staring eye. Of course he didn't recognize Perp. Of

course too he had an interest in him. An unusual interest he had trouble concealing. Perp made sure.

I was expecting tacos and lettuce not clutter and an eighteen person nineteenth century dining table. There were eleven of us for dinner if you count Perp. I do. A few in khakis but mostly desert dressed. A couple of hats worn all night and vests. Roasted potatoes, lamb and wine. Large salad bowls. Low lighting in the dome and that was really what it was a studio dome. Round adobe compound. Zara didn't eat much and what she did eat she excused herself soon after. All fine humor and old stories. How was LA? New York? A buyer in Germany? An installation in Kowloon? Whoa Man! How images fade over time on celluloid. Prisms. The joy of a perfectly joined mortise and tenon and sanding wood. Bottles of wine and smoke before and during and after dinner. Perp sat quietly in his chair his rabbit foot arm on the table eating lamb and carrots and staring and waiting. The perfect guest and a polite crowd. No one asked about his prosthetic paw. Mary offered him a chair and admired his skills and wondered if I had tried horse hoove and I mentioned hoove might be a cattle disease but no I hadn't tried gelatin or horse hoof either and we agreed about thoroughbreds.

After dinner Hopper tried to pet his ears. He had

to do something, the staring was getting to him. Perp growled loud enough so that no one else could hear except me and that cat stealing cue ball of a duck Dennis Hopper. Hopper said whoa man! whoa man! and tried to laugh it off just like he had eleven years before. There was no chance he might have recognized us then the chance too small a dare and didn't. Perp sat on a buffet on his haunches and stared at that crispy cat tosser Dennis Hopper and waited. Whoa man! He tried to make light and talk about cubism and crystals and beams and film lighting but Zara knew he was feeling intimidated and told me so with a giggle. By the end of the night Zara said he had leaned over and whispered whoa man! get him the hell out man! to her more than once. I must admit the tempiqueno was excellent. Perp thought so too. Larry Bell showed me around his studio after dinner while the others opened more wine bottles. A chair he was making and a few cubes of light then he got lost in the corner talking to himself and I sat on a couch and joined the eaves dropping.

Perp is not neutered. Not quite a menace unless you invite and he will all ways RSVP. I want as many of him running around in the world as the world feels right to be. A natural selection. It was out of my hands. I found him when he was four weeks old. Along a canal street

in Venice California. Ducks were picking on him. Surrounding him. A gang of crip duck drop outs. One in particular. All adults mind you. It was not a fair fight. Perp could hardly see. His eyes still mostly puffy and mostly closed. He was blindly boxing 2 ducks while a third went for his tail. Holding his own. And that ducking Dennis Hopper snatched him. Whoa man its a duck man. I stepped into the ring. Threatened his tin warehouse home with a holy look there isn't much I'd steal for but steal every bone in your face is one of them. I didn't need to say it. But I said it with a look. He got all uppity well well well and whoa man! and well well how dare you man! Hopper got roman and looked around for a steel garbage can lid. He took a few constipated steps back then ducked and turned and in a swoop kitten perp was in the water. I think he said some thing about having rights then waddled away. I tossed a paper wrapper life preserver but it sank. It was how I had learned how to swim too. I looked quick for other flotation devices. But he was going down. I went waist deep into the canal and took him home and shared my aspirin powder with him. He didn't tell me his name for a full year. Not until we went looking for those duckitos. After he was well healed. They never went after another half blind kitten again. I am sure of it. Perp left him so he could still fly.

Kind of in the same way that Perp could still walk. The duck. Didn't blind him either. Perp was kind that way. Fair. Just. Not too excessive. Subtle. Not quite even, either side of a tad bit ahead or a tad bit behind was fine with him. And besides, as you know, I was in New Mexico a year before that cat stealing jump of a duck walk moved here. My appetite had come back. The tempiqueño was quite excellent as I said. Perp would take care of it. He can take care of himself. It was his.

Only four weeks old and Perp didn't cry at all. He was born weaned. He wouldn't eat anything. Not cat food anyway. Wet or dry. No dog food either. Only sushi grade salmon and yellow tail tuna those first few weeks. Both with gunks of wasabi. He didn't like ginger dyed. And saucers brimmed with chilled white pure cream after the sneezing subsided. He shared my philosophy regarding arteries as well. It is better to open a vein than to worry about clogging an artery. Jog? We hike places. Mountains. The only rodent he ate were in Taos New Mexico and like I said that was to help. Otherwise he preferred his breakfast and dinners served to him. He wasn't much for lunch. Just a snacker.

Perp is a good road trip. More than I can count of course. He travels light. Sleeping on the dash navigating. The old days pawing maps when we used one and

now pushing buttons on a GPS and getting lost. Mewing voice-activated. Right turn Clyde. Rides aero-planes without a crate. First boarding group, I have a child! Stewardesses have no chance but of course they didn't BP too. That's Before Perp. Camping, sleeping inside or out, he does not care. He likes rooftop sleeping too. I had no influence on that. Took to it on his own. How many times a neighbor has knocked on my door and claimed Perp assaulted their dog or car or llama or cow? I cannot say as I do not know. Keep your cow inside I say. I take him to no leash dog parks and turn him loose. He makes friends easily.

Perp does not offer services or tricks or cuteness. He offers himself. His is empty of self-consciousness. A void. Except it is true he gets a little embarrassed when he purrs. Even in front of Marisol. Like most people he isn't cute at all. He has a very long neck that pivots his head and the body of veal fetus compact furry and sinew. His rare rage is pure. Bursting from a cellular level thousands of years in the making. Spiked fur hate hunched spitting glaring engorged knife paw with a couple of extra thumbs to poke in your eye if he plows a scratch deep and gets a hold on you. A pugilist breed with fangs. If he drank a regular bukowski indeed but I weaned him from that when he found me. Thanks be had he doesn't. He would

eat his own liver and kitty would scratch your eyes out kung fu if you look at him cross eyed those hangovers. But he grew out of all that. Cat nip too the little addict. He likes most strangers. Goes with his intuition. He waits for me and follows my lead about such things. He doesn't have any fetal syndrome symptoms. His nose is a little too big for his face and he has a very cute forehead when he sleeps but I never tell him that. It makes him purr and embarrasses him and he can't remember his mother and why she weaned him so I do not remind him. The sushi gives his fur coat a glitter twin sheen. Long whiskers and eyelashes and tail. Extra long all. His balance is brilliant. Even on 3 paws and a wrist (ankle?). Bright yellow blue eyes with the perpendicular pupils widening infrared night vision. I read somewhere that perpendicular eyes meant a venomous snake and when he killed a rattle snake it turned out to be true. He has a big heart. Gentle. Simply born with no conscious weight. No belly hang. He loves to cuddle. A professional napper snoring from time to time in arms, laps, chairs, roofs, nichos and hornos. He purrs when no one else is around. Loyal. Trustworthy. Lover of all women, birds and one eyed shih tzu's. He holds no grudge against the duck species. It is a wraith if you ever cross his tail. A pet peeve. His only exception. I told you, cat hate is a garish medieval

drunken spirit. His multiple thumbs can grip rope and climb. Climb high in straw barns and trees and legs. Perp didn't start as a mouser. Dogs and weavils and snakes and poisons are better at rodent infestations. Being practical he prefers others to bring him food. We have that in common. After all a creature who knows he is cute is soon not cute at all. He had a feline leukemia once. Ava saved him using ancient Ojibwa herbs and tick blood letting. We were both most grateful to her. That is Perp and I told you I would tell you a little about him and I think that is enough. He is not a novel and this nuevo mexico does not a novel make with the annual outbreak of Hantavirus and Plague, pardonnez-moi Senorita Cisneros and Senor Anaya warm in that little virus circle.

It is time for the after dinner drink. Up at the hum. The green hum sliding over from Los Alamos. Dinner in Taos New Mexico. At the studio compound. The round bunker. The dome. Dinner with that cue ball cat sodomite who soon takes a cabernet nap just past midnight. Everyone knows he can't hold his liquor. Whispered it during dinner.

I was holding half a dozen of Larry Bell's crystal box light prisms in my hands vectoring light and colors a round the room and round ceiling at the time. If you have never seen nineteenth century round adobe 2 foot

thick wall construction in ceiling applications, it is mesmerizing you understand. I asked Zara to take a picture. I never ask for pictures but I wanted to contribute. True to form and to living in the moment. That mindful cat. Perp rises, stretches and walks. His wait is over. Cue Ball has a wine drool on. Patient impeccable timing that is him. He is sure he is a sleep. They all know, the other diners, know he can't hold his liquor. Fast asleep. He is not waking. Not a stir. Subtle. Perp silently saunters over all hip and paw sway with not a look around but to me. I shrug. The room goes quiet except for Zara's giggles because she knows. The rest simply wonder why this cat with a rabbit foot has suddenly decided to move after hours on a perch. Larry Bell lost in the corner muttering. All eyes on Perp. Perp mountaineers the couch and sets one paw then two, three atop old Cue Ball Sponge Penis Head not waking him. Night stalker stealth. That cat stealer Duck Hopper. Slowly paw step after paw step. Martial art rice paper weightless tampering his strides. A gem to watch. It is almost catlike. He turns and looks at me just to look. To make sure I do not miss it. Bragging a bit. And, then at Zara. She swears later that he smiled at her. That's why she said she giggled again. He circles the cat drowner Dennis Hopper's cue ball head and sits his cat testicles right down on his would be cat witch bald

head just as delicate coral light from Larry Bells' prism I am holding shines a bright spot hairy. He drops the pair in his ear for a bit holding a climbing pose. Zara framed another perfect picture and giggled like she does. Another shot squat centered on his bald head. Rubbing. Then like an artist a trapeze pose right under his nose two large peas in his nostrils and they both give a little grunt. Larry Bell turned and watched catatonic from the corner with a pencil in his hand. At a desk I think. Perp looked a round and shook his head and sprayed a wet willy in his ear with a q-tip plunger motion quite satisfied with his patience and jumped down and walked out the door and waited the night out on the hood of our car staring at the stars and fox in the yard for the rest of night. Perp isn't fond of desserts.

A week or so passed when Zara showed me the 11"x7" glossies she had exposed in her closet and asked if she should and I said yes why not it is your copyright and she dipped Perp's rabbit foot in her mascara case and signed the 11"x7" glossy and mailed it anonymously to Dennis Hopper c/o Larry Bell. I think she made copies and handed out a hundred for a Halloween and a Zozobra that year.

So look. I have been in Santa Fe for a few years now. Well, three. I am a local. Far enough away from Can-

yon Road, near enough the Plaza and the road up the aspen yellow mountain. Know a yogi at 10,000 waves and enough road trips to Sedona to call it a bipolar capitals of the Southwest tie. My neighbors know I am a little antsy. Steve and Marisol and Pig Thin. I simply keep walking into the low hanging corbels. Mi casa is three hundred years old and built for shorter persons and mules. I do not stoop so swell. I am used to sleeping on roof tops. These flat roofs far too old and ricketed. Landed balloons in water, spent four weeks with Apache Kid, hiked a thousand miles, high desert, low desert, Jemez, Alamagordo, saloons of Las Vegas, thought food, old town, new town, foothills, salt soaked Perp's calloused stump, hepatitis tattoo parlors, yoga mats and the house of glass. The most amazing colors. Fourteen shades of brown in Santa Fe all less than three stories high. If not that, if you can't see, that, then all the world is color blinding. The twice-subtle purples shades since Portugal. Yellow, spring colors, reds, greens across table top mesas, nine mile hill city lights, mountains and streams and valleys and arroyo. Watermelon granite and white chalk hoodoos. Gecko and black birds like grackle. They are thinking I will leave but I have not thought about it until they did. Like with Zara. She didn't care. Expects no thing from life. Might be an anger mixing with hope. Zara is sort of

my protege she thinks. At least that which she tells me. That is when Perp and I moved south to Santa Fe. Even though I never tell her what I do or have done. I thought she knew better. She doesn't know about my work in Los Angeles. Never asked. But me her mentor? Besides, I mean her middleweight state champion body builder form and her giggling. And all right yes of course she is a letter stained. You know that by now. Just a little off. Little missing. Some thing scooped out. Questions most people never think to ask she asks herself. Maybe I can help. But mentor? Zara was waiting for a scholarship to come through so she can attend Aveda Institute. Yogi. Body builder. Massage therapist. Shape, form and colors. Cat testicle cosmonaut photographer. It was a good time to leave. Perp thought so too.

Marisol comes over and sits with me. Cleans. Dirties up. Feasts. I wash her feet. Oil. Some times a friend stops by. Some times on enchilada night. Some times just to sit by the dry river with me. The dakini from 10,000 waves. We eat quite well. Some times she helps. Marisol some times worries about Steve and has learned from Perp to now take certain glee in ignoring the cactus stump on the stoop that she sees all ways now as a Pig-Thin. Perp saw it all coming together last week while walking a stone circle in Ojo Caliente and drinking from the lith-

ium pool.

Steve is a hippie. Lives off less than \$4000 per year. Waits for a tax refund. Not the commune type. There are many communes in New Mexico. Maybe six or seven maybe eight north up near the springs and around the Jemez. He has killed scores of Koreans in Korean dead winters. Left their small frozen bodies to thaw in the spring. Family surrounding the wounded. Himself. Long hair, a billy goat chin, tie-dye concert T-shirts and duck billed hats. He digs Grateful Dead verse and Star Trek deep space lyric. One foot is gout deformed and yellow. I play him Frank Zappa sitting a round the fire. He burns silver for beer and bong barter and lives rent free as a caretaker. He paints the casas and perimeter walls twice a year for rent and slaps his knee stoned laughing cold saying he lives near a city with a minor league baseball team called Isotopes. He is a true blue coral cool cat. A gary the friendly gargoyle. He teaches zen at the local bar with an oil can of Foster's and says hell yeah! a lot. He smokes marijuana day or night or day and will state he once had a cocaine problem. But he did not. He is teaching himself how to fabricate and burn silver. He wants a website. Perp is keeping an eye on him. Steve was scared of Perp. He says Perp isn't quite right in the head. I ask Perp if he is and he nods and lets it go. After one hundred

and twenty ounces of beer Steve will say okie that is one true blue coral cool cat.

This is how we discovered Marisol. Perp and me. We saw her walking down the center of an arroyo one day west of town with a copy of Uncle Walt under one arm and a yoga mat under the other. No one under 30 reads Uncle Walt for no good reason. Not unless they are interested in being held for ransom. We trailed her along the steepes of the arroyo for a bit, helping her up and out of the incline and invited her back to camp. She declined right of mind straight in a whisper so we trailed her a bit longer. She asked me not to so when we came to the fork leading back to my house I took the left and she took the right. Perp said he was going right too, blessed he did. Both trails eventually end at point C. I didn't know she was my new neighbor. Never saw her outside before. Perp trailed her for another hour, mostly due to her hair, in case she took another fork in the trail but he instead came home with her in tow. Extra cream for Perp. She thought she was returning my cat. Steve shook his head from his porch being a bit PTSD about girls when she walked up my driveway with Perp. She told me I lost my cat. I should be more careful. Perp jumped in my lap, pretending. I said thank you. Mucho gracias. Perp just nodded. I gave him his pure white chilled cream job well

done and this impressed Marisol so she sat and told me her neighborly name. We began our red night chile and green morning chile religion that night. It was weeks before she told me about the weeds in her head while I washed her feet. Might I help pull them? She told me no Pig-Thin is not her father or uncle. I looked in her back yard once and saw she had a 4'x4' dining space for a yard and a dead tomato plant in a bucket. I got her a new one. A six pack of tomatoes. She watered them and cared for them and we waited for weeks to eat them and we ate them. Did I mention her legs? Lean. Like linen paper not yet stained. Ruined me for another life. She didn't ask the first night if she could stay. She just didn't leave. I said yes. Perp was still looking hungry from our hike so we walked down to Joe's for a box of sushi and returned. She said oh great sushi to Perp and we ate red enchiladas outside and talked for hours until we saw Steve limp beer lost by. Perp walked Steve to his porch then came back and sat with Marisol. We slept in the hammock speaking greek myth to the Santa Fe New Mexico night sky.

When Pig-Thin was working on his truck that had not turned over in 2 years and would never turn again, I needed ice and I noticed Marisol has a picture of herself when she was 7 on her dresser in back of her mud casa. She has a dresser on her rear patio like I do. Like my

wheelbarrow she said. Black hair like now, pale instead of the new tan, over sized clothes not like now, skin and bones smiling under a cap with her father. They are in New York. There is tiny Marisol with a grin so wide and her dad and I can hear her shrugs. I didn't tell her this. That I saw this. I gave her a trunk full of new sun dresses. When she talks she has a tenor slow cadence of a whisper for a voice through wet cardboard soft lips that move in a slow motion. Her voice helps me sleep. We walk to the plaza every September day and I buy her a new sundress. Size 2/4.

While I am thinking of it, hey Marisol, if you are reading, get ahold of me, what were you doing in that arroyo anyway? I never asked. Thanks.

In the third year Steve's gout was bad enough the steroids would no longer help. He was spending most days on his porch. Early morning too. And, evenings. I brought in Fosters. His pail began to get lighter though his burning silver improved. Ordinarily I wouldn't, but Steve's limp slowed and he began reading the sad symbolists from his bookshelf at night on his porch. Over and over. Pages after pages turned. Wallace Stevens. E E Cummings. Sylvia Plath's Daddy. Mister Eliot and Uncle Walt. Baudelaire, Verlaine and the Rimbaud. William Carlos W. Jeffers and Frost. Webster's Fifth. With Lud-

wig van's Ninth and the Perfect Notes and the Love Song and wallala-leialala scripts escaping his open window in stereo. Dylan jazz covers into the night. The symbolists. Sitting alone in the dark on his porch with an empty five gallon pail twisting his billy goat chin in his fingers with a dusty gout foot leveraged up on the table balancing a Pabst instead of a Fosters. Ordinarily I wouldn't. But it was cloudy that night and Marisol had nothing to look at so we listened to Steve turn pages and his music through his open windows and watched his shadow for a time. Perp thought so, too.

And, Marisol saw it, too. She began talking to me about hunger. That I was not eating enough. Was I hungry? Said I can't malnourish like Steve. Reminded me I enjoyed cooking for myself and I must miss it. She never lied once. Ordinarily, I would not. But she was right. I finished Steve's boot with a few manifold springs from Pig-Thin's dead truck and set the ballistic jell inside an old size 10 boot Perp found hanging from an overpass. Marisol nodded. I told her it was okay. Perp stood by the open door. We lit candles. I washed Marisol's feet. Perp and I watched her take burritos to Steve in the morning. After a bit, we watched her walk uphill with a pail.

Steve waved and said, "Thanks."

It was third Wednesday night of the month again.

Time to speed the 48 minute drive south to Albuquerque in 27 minutes. Just for fun. My monthly can of red spray paint to empty along the sidewalks across the street from and in front of The Frontier. I spray red circles. Perfect circles. Inside the perfect circles I spray write "bob". Some circles "bob is" or "be bob" or "bob lives" or "bob knows" or "know bob." Some times a line thru "bob". One time a "dog". Perp keeps an eye out. If you lived in the student ghetto a round the University of New Mexico in 1993 or read the Daily Lobo, you would know about these vandalisms and the talk that bob is.

After coffee I bought a cinnamon roll in a bag for the dashboard. Perp was bored on the floor board and moved to sleep on the rear dash. I took off his rabbit foot key chain for him. When I started the car he instead climbed on me and fell asleep between my head and headrest across my neck and shoulders like a long mink ferret. No one was around so he purred. West was 9 Nine Mile Hill the way I came 4 years ago. South, the Cross and Waco Tanks where we climbed last year and White Sands Missile Range where we need to camp. Norte? No. East. I'd have to drive around Texas into Oklahoma and the rain and the green hills and the Indians. Maybe Kansas if I remembered the dragon Sacre Coeur of Lawrence or was it Manhattan? I have a compass on my dash. It is stuck. I

THOAMS

tap it with my finger nail and it whorls.