

Your Story¹

...thinking about Moebius strips and short stories. Looping day in, day out, weekday to weekday to week ending too briefly into weekday as the future grinds down to the present, then the past before slipping away to be forgotten, or, occasionally, remembered later on—perhaps in a story².

Waiting for the light to change at the intersection of 18th and Sass³, the rising sun falls into cloudy shadow--sky backed in red like spilled blood soon to be sopped by cottonball clouds, he considers such a story: a spiderweb, made of itself, endlessly rebounding within its own dimensions. A chaos of gummy strings spinning in concert, disconcert, into themselves, into nothing. *A Garden of Forking Paths*, weaving the past, his past into channels, pouring beads together, pooling them, breaking them, reclassifying them as they siphon into deeper and deeper layers of the network. Using the additional spindles to maintain structure, he taps into enough of that oily black memory to hearken an autobiography.

It's *not an autobiography*, though; at least not directly.

“But why should I go through the trouble to reveal truth in fiction? Why not just *make it all up?*” he asks the lonely street.

The light changes, an Iron City Scrap truck grinds gears choking out black smoke rolling through the crosswalk before him. He stops, looks skyward. The first snowflakes of the season twirl and float groundward.

“But a *not an autobiography*, a something that takes liberties in each hand by the fistful,

1 Tell it until it sticks.

2 Stories, an age old trap for fading memories, hang like cobwebs hoping to catch drops of the past. Too much of the past and their silky spindles snap under the weight of truth. But under the right conditions, after much careful work, the memories bead small, bright, and shimmering in the midmorning sun, connected by a network of graceful threads.

3 18th & Sassafras Streets: a rundown strip of concrete wasteland bordering Little Italy of Erie. In addition to six churches between 26th and 9th streets, there's a scummy convenience store, and a lot of empty space peppered with junked cars with matching junked buildings and dog shit lined sidewalks all the way down to the Sassafras bridge at 14th St (which doesn't actually connect to Sass, but it's there if you imagine hard enough.).

will bridge the necessity for the stories contained within. This *is* fiction; I *am* this fiction.”

He pauses, looking at each fleeting flake, and then to the clouds above, “The *I* of this *not an autobiography* is like each of you flakes. You spin downward from your cloud, floating in your own way to your terrestrial audience, taking with you a bit of your creator—the cloud. Eventually, you'll pile, grow, until a host of you whips into a blinding white gale, screaming individually, collectively 'I!' A multitude of one, and when you've howled your last, melt, return next season with renewed energy as the Moebius crests another loop.

“So, now. Collect yourself. Collect your experiences. Collect every walk down to Dobbin's Landing⁴, every return trip, every conversation. Collect all the repetitious thoughts in your head. Of those thoughts, expand them, contrast them with themselves; explore alternatives that have not, cannot happen. Collect yourself, and once you've completed that, expand and collect your[other]self; then collect your[other]self's your[other]self. Collect these thoughts, memories, and non-memories. Collect them; write them—not for Compulsion's nagging need to categorize everything; not because Obsession told you so, but because they are you, and they are trapped inside you. Let them free. Let them free now because we are in an age where Mainstream Media wants you to be cookie-cutter consistent like Compulsion's very particular smile—dimpling on the left, showing only a little bit of teeth, and tilting her head *just so*.”

He continues walking, thinking, speaking, “Think of memory as liquid, stored in barrels, and shelved in a warehouse somewhere. This. Walking to work is one such memory. Climb out of this barrel, and dive down the next and the next and the next. Ignore all of your nagging urges; leave your fear of Paranoia behind you, far from your perception. Experience your[new]self in all the glory of your[true]self, or any of your[other]selves. This world can be as

⁴ The pinnacle of Erie life. Got nothing to do tonight? Drive up and down State Street, loop around Dobbin's Landing, and then, as you pull away from the dock, flare your engine, lay some rubber, and show the city how cool you are in your '94 matte black Civic.

real as you want it to be; escape inside whenever you need. It will always be here for you, waiting.”

Passing under the Sassafras bridge, passing out of sight, his thoughts echo onward, growing and building; this *not an autobiography* has begun. But the process is far from fully realized; the Moebius begins to twist as his mind descends into the

“Contents Within,”

say the labels, comma included. White stickers on black fifty-five gallon drums. Nothing else save scratch n' dent identify the drums from each other. The labels on every drum within sight remain blank save for their title and grammatical pause, an infinitely redundant hanging clause stacking well above your head. The dark drums, cool and slick against your hand and arm, remind you of the barrel room in the Pirate's Cove at Waldameer⁵—narrow twisting alleys stacked eight, ten feet high with barrels; barrels vibrating from the PANG PANG WHUMwhumWHUM of children's fists against hollow steel walls in the black-lit blackness.

Disorienting, and disoriented, alone and lonely in the bowels of the warehouse, feel the sickly sweet breath of Paranoia whispering in your ear. “Look up. Hear that? The *clicking*? The clacking? Soon, they'll be upon you. Soon.”

Paranoia recedes, taking its fetid stench; your eyes squint skywards towards the uniform grey above. Dimly in the dull gloomy fluorescence, above the stacked barrels, you can make out faint red framework of the warehouse. Silence. The *clicking* and clacking has stopped. Did you hear it in the first place? Was it another of Paranoia's lies to keep you down here alone in the depths?

⁵ An amusement park crouching on the hill overlooking the Peninsula. Staple attractions to all Erie residents include the two funhouses: the cart-powered Whacky Shack, and the Pirate's Cove, immortalized in the collective mind of Erie by the trio of chanting headless pirates: “I ain't got no body. **I ain't got noooo Body.** *I ain't got no body either!*”

Look back, ahead. The Creepy Crawlies in your stomach want to know, “Are you lost now, even in the light of the warehouse? Do you know where to go?” They grow and multiply as you find yourself unable to answer.

Where are you? You're *inside*. You remember once imagining. Imagining before you realized that you didn't have to imagine⁶—Imagining that it was all made up of dusty filing cabinets, some open, some locked, some dented, rusty, covered in cobwebs and shoved in the corner by the broom. You imagined all of it would be confined behind a door—the kind with the crackled glass that you can't see through, the kind with big black letters on the glass saying “Memory Dept.” Perhaps a sign hanging from the doorknob in red, “KEEP OUT!.” But now you know that memory is liquid—an oily slick itching to seep out of every bounding element. You saw the old barrels, toppled, leaking, rotted from corrosion, adding to the sludgy grime of the floor like spilled mercury mixed with dust and dirt. Lusterless, thick, toxic. No. There is no quaint 1950's style Department of Memory Storage here, just a warehouse, massive, dim, and filled with row after oily row of black barrels.

Alone in the dim, stumble-slide through mucky isles. Stop. A sound in the distance. Listen. One. Two. Three seconds. Nothing. Peel your eyes against the gloom. Swallow hard; keep the Creepy Crawlies down.

Splash. Splish. Splash. Quick legs, clicking claws, gnashing teeth, yellow eyes, rank breath. You feel it closing the distance; Paranoia looming always behind you, warning you of your impending death, “You'll die here. Alone. Surrounded by memories of a person that no one remembers.”

The Creepy Crawlies bubble upwards, pour out of your throat, screaming with you, screaming for you, spilling onto the floor. Your spine shivers as they take their warmth with

⁶ Before you were trapped by the memories in this warehouse.

them. Turn. Look. Nothing. But from behind you,

Splash. Splish. Splash. “You'll suffocate in your own thoughts; no one will listen to them. You're already forgotten.”

Crunch. Crunch. Your feet snap, crackle, pop the Creepy Crawlies on the ground, as you bury your fear and face Paranoia. Turn. Nothing. It has left with its weight, waiting for another day to splish and splash from behind, lurking, until you let your guard down; watching with its jaundiced eyes, poisoned tongue poised with words to defeat you, teeth ready to gnash, rend and gnaw when you collapse.

Paranoia banished momentarily, turn to your[new]self⁷; scan the barrels, feel their cool inviting grasp. Place a naked ear to the metal. Can you hear the past contained within? Listen. Move. Listen. It slows as it ages, settles, decomposes. Move.

Deeper in, you find a ladder scaling into the gloom above. Climb. Listen. Newer and faster, the memories churn. Muted by their containers, they remain obscured from your growing interest.

On top, an endless plane of barrel lids stretch out before you, each inviting you to pop the lid and experience the aforementioned “Contents Within.” Also, dimly, you see a hatch, a portal,

7 **Name:** David Michael Laskevitch

Height/Weight: 5'11" / 209 lbs **Hair/Eyes:** Brown, shoulder length, thinning / Brown, nearsighted

Handedness: Left (but Right eyed, for purposes of throwing knives and other skills that require aiming).

Distinctive markings: Big forehead, oft referred to as a “Cro-magnon forehead”—currently advancing into the hairline. Large birthmark on Right kneecap, in youth often jokingly referred to a dirt spot. Fanciful allotment of other, smaller birthmarks. Beard. Facial hair grows heavier on the Right side. Uncommonly high arches on feet. Relatively small hands. Mild acne.

Ethnic background: 4th Generation American: Slovak (Laskevitch [originally Letchkovich])

Vocation: Official title: Resource Management Analyst for a Major Telecommunications company. However, in reality: Programmer, one-man helpdesk, goon, and Corporate Wageslave.

Odd Facts: 2nd Degree Brown Belt in Goshin Do Karate, avid gamer (tabletop RPGs—the pen and paper kind)—spent adolescence creating fantasy worlds and adventures therein. Had a medieval wedding. Didn't speak to his father for over twelve years as a result of a five year long divorce procession during childhood. Post-fatherly reunion: still unsure what *really* happened.

Musical Influences (Top 5 Present to Past): Currently: Emilie Simon, Radiohead, The Dresden Dolls, Dot Allison, and Collide. Late 90s-2005: Nine Inch Nails, Stabbing Westward, K's Choice, Wolfsheim, and Tori Amos. Early/Mid 90s: Stone Temple Pilots, The Spin Doctors, Duran Duran, and Garbage. 80s: The Beach boys and His parents' music (Neil Young, Phil Collins, Rod Stewart, The Beatles).

an escape, leading you to a choice:

Do you Escape? (Escape [p6] / Remain [p13])

Escape

Climb out, through. Climb.

Out, through: blue sky with a billowing line of cumulonimbus marching south—out of harm's way. Northward, the lake (hidden by the Peninsula⁸ and bay). Out, through, faintly, seagulls (lakegulls?), traffic, other little birdies (assorted), and motorboats filter into your ears. Smell (not sea air—you're in Erie⁹, remember?) GAF's¹⁰ shingle stink billowing from the squat red brick shamble below. It reminds you of Hammermill's (now closed and half torn down) paper stench from years ago, but with less tar (perhaps more nicotine?). Toss the Surgeon General in the trash; you're on your last.

Look back (one last time [again]). You can return (inside [Remain p13]) if you want.

Going forward—outward, away, down (ladder), away, down (street). Find yourself concrete bound (intersection, crosswalk, crossing), approaching the bay and its tepid green-brown wavelets. Transition onto the short wooden boardwalk, back to concrete, then onto the dock--Dobbin's Landing. Walk its length lined with named bricks—names you know indirectly. You went to school with _____. Your aunt's maiden name was _____. But you

8 Officially called Presque Isle State park, it's generally loved by outsiders. However to Erie-ites, it's a place infested with deer ticks and crummy beaches that are often closed due to too high bacteria counts.

9 As in Dreary Erie, the Mistake on the Lake, a rust spot in the rustbelt between “real” cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo. A hometown of monumental decay.

10 GAF Materials Corporation, a shingle/tar paper plant squatting and stinking along Erie's scenic downtown bayfront, accompanied by Erie Coke, a Wastewater treatment plant, gravel pit, ship yards, and Dobbin's Landing.

don't know them—the bricks. A vertical three foot graveyard/concrete topped bench/barrier on the dock, memorials costing donations of hundreds to be a part of the new Dobbin's along with its three story lookout, which you've never climbed at two dollars per story. Three boys run in front of you laughing, hollering, jumping to the brick wall and off again. Fishermen cast and reel, some sitting on barrels, others squatting next to tackle boxes. Casting, recasting with loaded hooks. Watch your feet; dodge, barely, a lump of zebra mussels entangled in lakeweed and fishing line—the catch of the day.

Are you alone? (If not [p7], If so [p7])

If not,

look at her, love her as she reaches out for your right hand—not the left. Right is for wives, left, whores (Does that then make you the whore?). Mesmerizing, she says. What? The waves, she says, mesmerizing. You both sit, kicking your legs over the memorial stones of ten names or so (the bricks are small). Idle kicking, idle conversation. Talk about the breeze; a hundred I love yous punctuate like semi-colons; separate and conjoin wedding plans, honeymoon plans, evening plans. When exhausted of planning, fill the mouth with ice cream¹¹ and the mutual silence of a happy couple. *Return* [p8].

If so,

walk along the water, edging the metal capped line on Dobbin's perimeter to the end. Look down: water laps six feet below, pushing against steel and concrete as if it had a chance.

¹¹ Blue Moon Flavored. It's really blue. It tastes blue too. A local favorite.

But all water wishes it had the power of a hurricane, if just once. Crack your neck. Sit, feet dangling. Think about this: What if your shoe were to fall off. Swallowed in the green. Sink, eight, ten feet. Would it join other shoes? Would they be made of cement? Is Erie big enough for that? For the Mafia? Or have we become neglected now that Allentown is 3rd largest¹²? Neglect. Would anyone help recover your sinking shoe? A fisherman perhaps? A better catch than steelhead; less work, and you still don't eat it. Scrunch your toes. Relax. It's not a flip flop.

Get up, move to the east side. Avoid the boy soliciting “Get out of Hell” Jesus Propaganda. Take the unclaimed bench. Good. It's yours. The tugs are tugging at *The Richard Reiss*. A sand scraper; pulling the massive thing out of drydock; its empty guts hunger for Erie's not so deep lake sediment mixed with zebra muscles. A bottom feeder, painted red like rust so you can't tell, it bellows and grinds into the bay; a lake monster returning to Erie's clearing green¹³. *Return* [p8].

Return

to looking at the sky. That hateful glare of setting sun reflects off water turning green to gold and later gold to red, summoning a cool cross breeze, clouds on the horizon. Shut your eyes, count the spots until memories backfill the black. Don't slip into the past; open your eyes, return to squinting; you're here for the sunset, not the past. The past is back, inside. You're not there; you're here. Now. At the end of the day.

Turning towards someone, or no one, you look into her eyes, or the skies, feel the fading heat seeping back into the invisible blackness above. Kiss, don't kiss. You're in control for the time being.

12 Allentown wrested control of 3rd largest city in Pennsylvania from Erie in 2000.

13 After a series of lake fires, zebra mussels were introduced to help chew up the pollution. Now they chew up everything, leaving the lake clear, dying, and with a future bleak as the city itself.

Time Being:

[Insert your actions]

Darkness deepens, deadening Dobbin's of denizens; consider departing yourself. Black water ripples, lazy from a long day of frothing in the wind, blowing itself up into four foot wavelets. Under calm quiet winds, a sort of restless peace settles, twitches. Along with it, a murky haze washes over your perception, like an anaglyph, the world shows through, but something else is layered over top, and without a filter, it starts to give you a headache. Stop thinking about leaving; sit. Stare at the ground for a moment if you need to.

....

Look up. Stand up. The haze continues. As you look into it, it deviates from the background—deviating from “reality.” Looking southwards, you see yourself already walking towards State Street. Your friend/girlfriend/fiancée/wife walks next to that self, fading in and back out as if she isn't sure whether she exists. Her short legs flutter to keep up with your long stride...holding hands...fading...gone...back...warbling in chatter that doesn't translate properly through the haze. Fade, silent.... Return, warbling. Your other self does this too, seemingly switching between here, there, and elsewhere.

Turn back to the dock, see another you¹⁴, this one with short hair dyed black and retro horn-rim glasses, still pacing the edge, alone and staring into the black lapping water...she fades in, but a different girl¹⁵ than before, half-Japanese with one grey eye and one brown. You kiss her just the same, twirling her in the air as she fades out...resume pacing as if it never happened.

14 Johnny M. Laskevitch Jr. (a brief bio)

Age: 27

Hair: Black, dyed, shortish

Eyes: brown (glasses)

Height/Weight: 5'11" 175lbs

Sign: Sagittarius

Occupation: Network Admin at TelcoWest

Marital Status: Married to Elise—she's a fox!

Hobbies: Writing, loving his fox

Favorite Music: Emilie Simon, Collide, Deadsy, She Wants Revenge, Nine Inch Nails

15 Elise--She's a fox! Perhaps, one would venture that she is the Queen of All Foxes in disguise.

See yourself as a woman¹⁶ with black hair and tattooed sleeves alone and staring into the night...fading, then screaming, face twisted, howling in anger...fading back to staring, quiet, brooding.

Spinning slowly, see yourself splitting away, doing other things, not doing them, splitting amongst themselves, and occasionally looking back at you with that same hazy unfamiliar gaze, you're giving them now. The headache deepens, reflecting back at you from each of your brains.

Staggering,
grit your teeth and start walking. Focus on the squeak of your sneaker, and hope that it will banish the chaos. Wonder if moisture is trapped inside, or is the squeak a warning sign, like worn brakes, telling you it's time for new shoes? Wonder if your other selves are wondering the same

16 Characterized from an Email Forward (sent just before she went to Dobbin's Landing):

1. Name: Clare L.
2. Nickname: none
3. Age: Roaring 20s
4. Sign: Sagittarius
5. Favorite food: Chocolate with toffee and almonds, chocolate in general
6. Favorite Beverage: Hello Blue Monster energy drink. How are you? *glug*
7. Tattoos: 6. Geisha – left upper arm, Beginning of Fire Element Sleeve—mid/lower left arm, Tiger in bamboo – right upper arm, Water Element Sleeve—mid/lower Right arm, Kanji/Fuji/Crane –back, Crescent Moon – Back of neck
8. Piercings: 5 in each ear, labret, navel
9. Last five CDs you've listened to: NIN-”And All that it Could have Been (Still),” Collide - “Some Kind of Strange,” VNV Nation - “Future Perfect,” David Bowie - “Heathen,” Tapping the Vein - “Undone”
10. What you're currently wearing: Olive Cargo Skirt, Black square-cut vest, with lots of buckles, Black&White striped elbow length gloves (old stockings-new purpose), barefoot (because I'm inside), Assorted rings and bangles.
11. Parents still alive? Father dead. I don't speak with my mother.
12. Phobias: Snakes and creepy bugs (cockroaches, waterbugs, silverfish, centipedes, *shudder*)
13. Occupation: Dreamer, Universal Office Tech
14. Your Dream: To break free from the monotony
15. Boyfriend/Girlfriend? Neither at the moment :(
16. One thing you love: Storms
17. One thing you hate: coffee
18. What makes you Uniquely you? I have an adopted ancestor—Anna Wilson King.
19. Who will you send this to? No one I know (because it's stupid to tell stuff to people that they already know). I'll send it to the first five email addresses I find after I google “bunny death”

thing to keep from noticing the “real” you. Squelch the urge to scream by looking up. The moon, static, settles overhead straddling State Street like the great unblinking eye of some planar Cyclops. Many of you fail to take brief respite in the moon and begin howling like scared children wishing horribly for some mother, preferably non-plural to protect them from their state.

Maintain control. Walk southwards; retrace your steps. Set a goal to escape from this—escape back inside, back to the warehouse. Simultaneously, your right hand holds her hand and your head. Reach from your head for the pressure point between left thumb and forefinger, pinching trying to lessen the throb of your headache, she squeezes your hand in hers and smiles, but then fades, only to return before you can apply enough pressure. Pressure invading, pervading all else, running on and through and through down to the squeaking...now silent...now squeaking cadence of your sneaker. Sneaking southward slowly squeaking slowly...silent slowly...staring. Staring with intent. Intending to *make it*. Making it another step, stepping into another future now present now past as you step further screaming, not screaming—somewhere in between?

your[In between]self, something shatters. Shattering, you feel your[]self, crumbling. Crumbling as yourself continues to splinter. Splintering into a thousand realities unseen, unplanned, unknown. Unrealities conflicting, coexisting, containing reality. Reality as you know it, tears, rips. Ripping, tearing, gnashed by temporal teeth, scream a multitude. Feel the eyes of others watching, staring at you. Pile yourself together before you truly become the side-show attraction you feel like you are. Piling, piling, pack it deep down inside. Pack until solid becomes liquid. Pack until you can see without wavering, until the haze is gone.

Stumble onward, homeward. Tired feet slowed to a shuffle; climb the last bit—light at the end of the _____. Eyes heavy, fingers tight—filled with settled blood. Finally. Enter the

portal in the darkness. Inside, the night air drips off your skin, steaming if you could see it. Up a flight of stairs, you've reached the door of the end. Throw the lock, step through into the light, *inside* again.

Blink. The dim grey washes over you reflecting on the lids under your feet. Nearby, a ladder descends down into the depths—down to the steel lined alleys with sludgy black floor. Before you, an open barrel from which you just came; its oily surface bubbles slowly as its presence in your mind fades. Feel foolish for a moment in thinking that you could have escaped the warehouse, when in truth, you shall forever

Remain

Suddenly, in the quiet, remember Paranoia's warning; *they* are up here. Your stomach sinks; the Creepy Crawlies start growing again. Cold sweat beads on your brow. Down below, down in the bottom, you can hear Paranoia drumming its claws upon the barrels, PANG PANG WHUMwhumWHUM, as if to say, “They're coming. They're coming to get you. Stop and listen. Do you hear it, the *clicking* and clacking?”

Shiver in the near dark. *Click clack click clack click clack.*

Louder now, a pair of *click clack click clack click clack click clack.*

Turn as the first calls out, clear, sweet, “Um. You. Please...” She's dressed in white, and *clicking* and clacking towards you with a measured and smooth cadence matching her measured and smooth appearance—at once delightful and overly meticulous. The Creepy Crawlies calm down; neither of them look or sound dangerous—another of Paranoia's lies.

Her twin pushes past, uneven in her heels and *clopping* more often than *clicking*. Her clothes are wrinkled, she isn't wearing makeup, and has no eyebrows. “Go ahead, honey, I'm

right behind you,” she says stuffing the last of a very melted chocolate bar into her mouth, “That one...over there, that's a good one. Pop it and experience!”

The other sister quickens her pace without breaking her proper cadence, “No. No. No. Dear, please close up your memories before moving onward.” She pulls out a clipboard and black marker, “You must categorize and record the contents within on that barrel's label before continuing. If you leave it open, it will become contaminated, and you will have memories overlapping each other,” she shudders, “Or worse.”

“Oh shut up, Compulsion,” says the other stepping in front again, wiping her dirty fingers on her sister's white dress. “We can do the paperwork later. It's not like any of this is going anywhere.” She picks up her pace, running towards you and the next barrel.

“Obsession!” Compulsion screams as she stops to clean her dress, “Don't run up here, you'll get your shoes caught between the barrel lids.” Obsession continues running, pointing out good barrels for you as she picks at her nonexistent eyebrows.

Compulsion whispers to you, “Oh dear. Look there, memory has sloshed onto the lip of the barrel; wipe it away before some is lost, then seal it back up. Protect it at all costs.”

But Obsession, isn't interested in loss; she wants gain, “Go in. Pop another barrel. Don't worry about the splatter, Compulsion will clean it for you. Dive in. Feel the memory. Feel it like you felt it the first time. Become one with your past. Go ahead. I'll be right behind you.”

“Clean it! Seal it! Protect it forever!”

“Follow the rabbit hole. Dive in. It's yours!”

“Clean! Seal! Protect!”

“Go. Go. Go!”

Again a choice: (Listen to Compulsion [p15] / Listen to Obsession [p16])

Compulsion

Heeding her screeching call for protection, you clean and seal the container, protecting it forevermore. Compulsion, smiles in her particular manner, dimpling on the left, showing only a little bit of teeth and tilting her head *just so*. But before the *just so* portion of her smile completes, Obsession howls, face blotchy and twisted, her frizzy hair whips in an unseen wind. Startled, Compulsion, starts to turn towards her sister, the *just so* of her smile dissolving into an unplanned and terrified scream as her unplanned and terrible twin flies forward arms flailing.

WHUMP. Compulsion falls, Obsession turns, feral and snarling, leaping towards you. Hating you for not taking a chance. Hating you for listening to *the proper twin*. You know there are only two ways out of this: 1) Slide down the ladder into the blackness below, where Paranoia lurks, waiting to destroy you bit by bit. 2) Fall prey to Obsession's desire and dive into the barrel.

Make your choice: (1: Flee [p15] / 2: Obsession [p16])

Flee

Fly down the ladder; slip on the slimy rungs. Fall back to the mucky sludge of the floor. Land with a splash and a squish. Land hard enough to wonder if you're hurt. Lay there long enough for the Creepy Crawlies to creep back into your mouth and crawl into your gut while you strain to catch your breath. Pull yourself out with a sucking pop, slick with ooze and dizzied by faint traces of old memories that have long ago leaked from their barrels, decaying and mixing on the floor into an abomination of boyhood:

A BOY, YOU, IN RED *camo* OVERHAULS *footy* roasts SAYING, *pajamas* a “DAVE wakes *marshmallow* IS up over THE in a BOSS,” the *fire* PEELS middle at BARK of camp FROM the and A night once WHITE to it's BIRCH. a *flaming, ghostly* you voice throw calling into from the the cool hallway. *dew grass; it pops.*

Shake your head, and wipe off as much as possible; try to regain full control. Look around as an uneasy feeling bubbles through your guts—you've crested the Moebius. This place isn't new to you, but it feels foreign and foreboding. A warehouse perhaps? Dim. Smelling musty like mold. Narrow pathways, walls made of barrels, each identically labeled: “Contents Within.”[p3]

Obsession

Squat, grip, rip. The lid flies free, wheeling like a discus in the air before warbling, flopping, crashing, rolling from the top, and then nothing for one, two seconds before CLANG as it hits bottom so far below. In front of you, bubbles rise from the ooze, inviting. Think once, start to think twice; she's right behind you. Dive. Dive down. Suppress the urge to gag. Warm and sludgy like honey. Ooze deeper. The barrel's walls are the first to fade as you enter this new scape. Looking back, light fades as a white silhouette replaces the lid. Obsession does not follow. Alone again, you sink.

Sinking, solidifying, the meat of the memory begins to flesh into substance.

Hit the ground walking. To work. Your drab grey trenchcoat matches the overcast cityscape—fat cottonball clouds hearken snow, and you're not used to the cold quite yet, but the leaves are already gone, “so get used to it, because soon enough you'll be walking to work in eight inches of snow with a wind chill of minus nine, and you'll be hoping that the daily high breaks twenty by the time you head home.”

With hands stuffed in pockets, hair whipping in the wind, and headphones pumping

music, you're thinking...[p1]