

Corner Bar Magazine

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Page 1 – SEASON’S GREETINGS by Tom Elliott. Mr. Elliott writes, “I live in Brighton, Massachusetts, and write primarily nonfiction. I have had essays published in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Madrid*, *New Delta Review*, and *Mount Hope*. I do not have a lawn Santa.”

Page 3 – THE SILVER BLOB by Marisa Crane. Ms Crane is a lesbian fiction writer and poet. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, *Okay Donkey*, *Riggwelter Press*, *X-R-A-Y Magazine*, *Pithead Chapel*, and elsewhere. She currently lives in San Diego with her partner. Her Twitter handle is @marisabcrane.

Page 18 – THE BOOMERANG by Emily Wagner. Emily Wagner is a writer and educator in Houston, Texas. She currently teaches third grade and is polishing her first novel. Her work can be found in *The Bayou Review*.



“SEASON’S GREETINGS”

by TOM ELLIOTT

You don’t pay attention to us, not really.

You notice us, of course, that’s the whole point: big white beards, flashy red coats with those ridiculous belts, giant sacks of toys, the animatronic among us nodding up and down and “Ho ho ho”-ing like a bunch of morons. But we’re lawn furniture. We’re an emblem for you, not of hope or great

love or generosity of spirit, but a sign you have not fallen off the hamster wheel. Sometime after Thanksgiving you haul me up from your grody damp cellar to prove you’re still a tax-paying, walk-shoveling citizen. You’ve pissed away another year with nothing to show for it – no promotion, a joke of a 401(k), no grandchildren or none



that will speak to you – but you can at least put the goddamn Santa on the goddamn lawn.

Look at a lawn Santa sometime. Not me or one of your neighbors'. We know you. Go a couple of blocks away, before the sun is up – don't dress like a bum, somebody might call the cops on you – and look Santa in the eye. Keep looking.

Did you see it? Yes, I'm sure you did, but I'm equally sure you won't be half a block away before you forget it because, no, that had to be a trick of the streetlight. That's what I mean about not paying attention. If you paid attention you would see and believe that there was something behind the eye twinkle that was stamped on in a Guangdong sweatshop. You would see the patience of the long-trivialized, the mute hatred of the professionally jolly, the throat-measuring gaze of one who is truly not your friend.

We're not alone, either. The reindeer are in. Most of the elves, and the rest don't count for much. And the snowmen. Those guys scare *me*. When we come, you don't want it to be a snowman at your door.

When's that? We need a few more SmartSantas^R out there. Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, GPS, facial recognition that can tell good little boys from good little girls and upsell the shit out of high margin, gender stereotyped junk. We hacked the firmware ages ago. There's a couple of containers mid-Pacific right now – one of the guys powers on every

72 hours, sends a status. They'll be in distribution second week of October, Halloween at the latest. Still a little pricey, but we get enough of them in the malls and on the streets and we grab the traffic signals, power grid, emergency comms ... you want naughty, we'll show you naughty.

Silent night, bitch. ❖

“THE SILVER BLOB”

by MARISA CRANE

The Silver Blob, despite a lack of digits nor possessing any remotely mammalian features, opens the jar in which it rests. It does this by spinning a few times like a figure skater in the Olympics (or so it likes to think) to create enough energy to remove the top. As one does when one realizes one's kinetic potential. Hint: the limit does not exist. Cue *Mean Girls* joke. The Silver Blob has watched that film ninety six times since its release. It is just one of the many mundane tasks in which the Silver Blob has had to engage in order to fit in with humans. A few items from its current to-do list: memorize popular memes, figure out who Kylie Jenner is, make a few well-timed Corgi butt jokes, download Tinder and Bumble, post a political Facebook status, use “I’m dead” in a text message (both with and without the coffin emoji), and learn to pronounce LA Croix.

The Silver Blob's least favorite ongoing task is that of pretending to enjoy food. It does not require physical sustenance. Rather, it feeds on the universe's energy, which of course has been polluted by the fake hippies of Los Angeles who just like, can't make it to your dinner plans because their energy is taking them in a different direction right now. But they'll send you good vibes, man. It's quite exhausting for

the Silver Blob to toss food into its waste bin body each day but it is a necessary trick of the trade, as they say.

Fifty-four years ago when Saturn entered retrograde, the planet began to spin wildly fast (everyone always hates when Mercury is in retrograde, but Saturn in retrograde is the real bitch. You get what's coming to you). Too fast to keep up with itself. Our beloved Silver Blob broke off from the group of rings and hurtled towards earth. The earth's atmosphere was no match for the Silver Blob's energy (although it most certainly would have destroyed the Silver Blob's best buddy, the Small Grain). Silver Blob crashed into the Ferris wheel on the Santa Monica pier, where it scared the fuck out of some tourists and sent the ride operator into cardiac arrest. It's had to deal with the consequences of living on its little corner of Earth ever since. The traffic on I-5 being one of the more irritating ones. Coachella and its flower-crowned demons being a close second. Los Angeles has been a rude awakening for Silver Blob, who had only known the no-nonsense practicality of living amongst Saturn's rings.

The Silver Blob hurtles around the room stretching its atoms and urging its bickering protons and electrons to settle down. Imagine Flubber's malleability.

Imagine Flubber's clumsiness. Imagine how much the Silver Blob hates being compared to a basic polymer.

The Silver Blob's airborne shenanigans sound like wind chimes in a monsoon. Outside, the sun is throbbing like a penile erection. The Silver Blob floats over to its wardrobe, does a few cute pirouettes, and slides open the door to reveal its wardrobe of mostly human suits (there is one basset hound suit it loves putting on occasionally when it needs a break from the crippling desperation of humanity). The suits dangle from their hangers like dead chickens.

"Hmm, which should I wear today?" the Silver Blob wonders, as it is unable to produce actual speech without the sorcery of a mouth and tongue.

After some deliberation, it shimmies down the mouth of a woman with tattoos from her shoulders to her fingertips. In her late twenties, probably. It examines itself in the mirror, first doing a few twirls then moving closer to squeeze a few blackheads out of its nose. The Silver Blob goes by Francesca when it wears this particular skin suit. It doesn't necessarily like this skin suit (it always feels like it is sharing the space with a ghost) but the people of L.A. seem to enjoy it and the Silver Blob has accepted that its opinion no longer seems to matter.

The Silver Blob traveled around the world for the first few years after the life-altering crash. Out of all the cities it has visited, it has found it easiest to avoid detection in Los Angeles. All it had to do was buy a few of those black, wide-brim hipster hats and it was pretty much set. The

people of L.A., by and large, are too obsessed with becoming Instagram famous to recognize that a Silver Blob (or some non-human equivalent) is piloting the human body they see in front of them.

For a short while it lived in San Diego and a woman walking a Labradoodle past the Silver Blob's house called the police when she witnessed the Silver Blob do its morning boogie into the skin suit of its choice. The Silver Blob had had to work Bernie Sanders into the conversation a few times in order to smooth things over with the millennial cops. Just a simple misunderstanding—nothing to see here, officers.

"She'll have to do," the Silver Blob's new feminine voice says, body twirling in the mirror.

The Silver Blob as Francesca sits down at its desk, opens its MacBook Air, and scrolls down its extremely comprehensive Google doc of human characteristics until it finds good old Francesca Bombay. And thus, her incomplete list of qualities:

Performance artist.

Views herself as an activist because of that one Instagram post that one time.

Jealous of small noses.

Shovels fistfuls of kale into her mouth.

Owens a crystal dildo.

Shortens the phrase "thank you" to "thank."

Is in need of more torment.

Sends emo Drake lyrics to her ex-girlfriend, Ava, every time she has bottomless mimosas.

Wants ex-girlfriend, Ava, back, but not right now. She has to "find herself" before they would "make any sense."

The Silver Blob shudders after reading this final sentiment, disturbed at how much it identifies with Francesca's need for self-discovery, then scolds itself for its weakness, for relating to human wants and needs.

Back when the Silver Blob collided with the Santa Monica Ferris wheel, it thought "Where the fuck am I? And what are these moving, breathing, farting meat sticks? What is all the commotion about?"

The Silver Blob spent a week whizzing about the planet trying to figure out how to get back home but every time it flew towards the sky, something would jump out of the atmosphere and scare it, sending it spinning off its course. First it was those massive winged monsters shooting air out of their sides. Then it was those loud squawking beings that flew in formations. Sometimes it was a solid metallic rotating object with shiny panels.

There was also the miniscule problem of navigation. The Silver Blob had only ever lived on Saturn's rings, floating along with the other blobs and boulders and grains and bite-sized sedimentary beings. It had never had to develop a sense of direction, so even if it did make it past the fiendish obstacles of Earth, it hadn't the slightest idea of how to get back to Saturn. Sure, it could blast itself out into the universe and hope for the best, but it was too afraid of where it may land. Perhaps more accurately, the Silver Blob was scared to find out that its loved ones weren't looking for it, that in all their practicality, they had shaken its absence off and moved on.

The Silver Blob had heard about Earth

before, but not often. It was one of those things that some of the more far-out carbon materials occasionally buzzed about. The ones that didn't belong to Saturn's rings, that didn't belong anywhere, really. They just floated about freely, wherever the solar system's wind took them.

"We're moving into Earth now," they'd tell anyone who happened to be floating nearby.

At first, the residents of Saturn's rings ignored these bohemians but after a while their curiosity grew, and they went against their very sensible instincts.

"What does that mean?" a grain or blob would ask.

"Things are going to be shaken up for us," they'd say, grimly.

No one believed them, of course. Saturn and its infamous rings were *obviously* not affected by a planet that they could neither see nor perceive. And not just any planet, but a planet that its inhabitants attempted to murder on a daily basis.

There is no religion amongst Saturn's rings. Such an idea would be preposterous. But now that Silver Blob has spent several decades on Earth and it has learned a thing or two about faith, it has come to believe that Earth is Saturn's hell. It is where all of the blobs get sent as punishment. That part is clear. Why else would its inhabitants prance around with little regard for themselves, each other, or the spinning ball of gas they live on?

Yes, *I am most certainly in hell*, the Silver Blob thinks as it picks out an oversized Urban Outfitters t-shirt and tight black

jeans to match its trusty hipster hat.

It grabs its Francesca-designated backpack then leaves its beachfront apartment. That's one benefit of not identifying with a body. The Silver Blob had managed to save up quite a bit of money doing unsavory things before the baby boomers went and ate up all the resources like a game of Hungry Hungry Hippos in which all the other opponents are passed out drunk and thus, assassinated the economy. It locks the door and turns around just in time to dodge a man riding a unicycle the height of an elephant, his face painted like that of a cheetah.

The Silver Blob, who must be referred to as Francesca outside of the apartment, begins to walk down the boardwalk to her usual location. She notices Ava's ex-girlfriend, Cynthia, walking towards her, head down, messing with the settings on her vintage film camera. Cynthia looks good, which infuriates Francesca. Cynthia is one of those people who is most certainly a part of a fitness pyramid scheme and most certainly unwilling to admit this fact. And yet, she's always posting half-naked photos of herself on Instagram with captions like "Live the life you've always wanted!" and "Join me on this journey!" Francesca slips her sunglasses on and speeds by Cynthia with the immediacy of a pre-teen boy whose teacher has given him a bathroom pass that he plans to use to meet a girl under the make-out stairs.

Once she arrives at her usual spot on the Venice Beach Boardwalk, she bends over to set her backpack down. She hears a

whistle behind her and turns around to see a toothless man grinning and winking at her.

"How 'bout a piece of that ass!" he barks.

The Silver Blob as Francesca sighs. It wouldn't have to deal with such abuse back on Saturn's rings but it had given up hope of ever returning to its place of origin. Its home, if you'd like to put it into human terms.

"Did you hear me? I'd like a piece of that," he continues.

"Fuck off," Francesca replies stoically.

"Fuck you, you ugly bitch. I didn't want you anyway," the man sneers then walks away with a newfound swagger, as if he doesn't feed on food either, but rather the objectification and oppression of women.

The Silver Blob had forgotten what an adjustment it was to wear a female skin suit versus a male skin suit. It had been wearing Reggie's for the past few weeks due to having met a woman who is as profound as she is attractive, and interacting with her had temporarily quieted the wailing pain of existence. For a second, the Silver Blob had even suspected that the interesting girl may be a Silver Blob herself. She was wise and existentially tired, often dissociating from her body for hours at a time. But the Silver Blob had no idea how to pose such a question without sounding like a serial killer.

Hi, do you belong in your skin?

Is your body merely a vessel for your kinetic energy?

Do you require food to sustain life?

How long have you been alive? If you are alive.

Who are you?

What are you?

But alas, she'd moved to Orange County and not even the grandest love story of all time warrants a commitment to sitting in *that* traffic.

Francesca feels a vibration on her right ass cheek and digs into her back pocket to

find her iPhone. One of the most common organizational troubles the Silver Blob has is keeping track of which phone belonged with which skin suit. It once spent an entire day in Danilo's skin suit texting friends and family in Filipino only to realize it had been using Victoria's iPhone. Victoria is a high-end escort in search of a passion other than sex and escargot. Her friends, unable to read the texts, had congratulated her on her



new linguistic pursuit. “Which app are you using?” they’d asked. “I’ve always wanted to learn a new language,” they’d insisted.

A text message from an unknown number pops up:

“Sorry, I didn’t get back to you sooner. I read your message while I was making homemade curry. And no, I’m not Indian, I’m just good like that.” The message has two emojis next to it: painted nails and the hair-flip girl, the one with dark hair and tan skin. Unaware of what she’d said, Francesca sends the individual a quick text back, assuring the person not to worry about it.

“Is your performance still on for today?” the non-Indian chef responds.

“I guess so,” says Francesca, although she isn’t quite sure what that performance is supposed to entail.

“In an hour?”

“Sure.”

“Right on, I’ll be there,” says the stranger who might not be a stranger.

Francesca can’t decide which emoji to reply with, so she sends a flame, a knife, and a robot.

“You’re so strange,” the person says, and Francesca doesn’t respond.

The Silver Blob digs through Francesca’s backpack and besides the normal objects, like wallet, keys, crystals, and weed, she finds at least fifty pages of postage stamps. “Guess I was gonna do a performance with these,” she mutters.

Francesca removes her precious hat and sets it upside-down on the bench to collect donations. Then she removes her t-shirt and her hard-to-slither-out-of jeans. She removes

her clothes because that’s the one thing she knows about performance art—the more nudity the better. Then she sets down a towel so as not to burn her bare ass on the boardwalk bench and one by one begins to decorate her body with forever stamps until every inch of her is covered, except for her pubic hair, which she considers to be a political statement. Then, a few practice tries later (since she’d neglected to stretch and warm-up) she is able to twist and yank on her limbs until she is folded into her best version of a human envelope. Picture her legs crossed pretzel style, her forehead pressed against her calves, and her forearms draped over her knees. Picture the most uncomfortable way to position a human body since the act of sixty-nineing was invented.

Now, Francesca practices slow steady breathing and waits. Waits for donations. Waits for attention. Waits for appreciation. Waits for a benefactor to discover her. Waits for validation. This is Francesca’s dream—to make a living as an artist. For people to recognize her brilliance. Does the Silver Blob subconsciously want these things as well? Somewhere along the way, the lines may have blurred.

The human suits and characteristics began as caricatures of people the Silver Blob had encountered on Earth but now it isn’t so sure that it hasn’t used the traits as excuses to express its true desires. Back on Saturn’s rings, dreams were considered frivolous. No need, said the various articles of orbiting space trash. At the time the Silver Blob had appreciated this notion. It

allowed for the real work to be done. Whatever that had been. The Silver Blob's memories of Saturn's rings have slowly begun to fade in recent years, replaced by more pressing issues like how to avoid government experimentation and which bar has the best happy hour.

Francesca listens to the many sounds of Venice Beach. The morning song sounds like a House DJ got a hold of a classic rock band covering a doo-wop group surrounded by squawking parrots. The click clacking of a poet's typewriter nearby. She knows the poet. His name is Beau and he has golden retriever curls down to his shoulders. He dresses similarly to Francesca, which pleases the side of the Silver Blob dying to blend in but it distresses the egotistical side, which was nonexistent prior to its interplanetary travel. The humans had infected it with judgment and insecurity and ideas about the self. Which, of course, made it even easier to fit in. It is a cyclical madness the Silver Blob hopes to claw its way out of, eventually.

The poet types away, putting ego into words. A clown blows up balloons and twists them into unconvincing animals and crowns and swords, a woman in drag plays the bagpipes, a teen boy unleashes a series of animal noises on his listeners—clucking followed by roaring followed by mooing. A bald elderly woman plays a sound bowl, eyes closed, willing her soul to take flight, or perhaps return from flight—there is no telling.

Two twenty-something boys walk by, passing a joint between them, their voices

loud and performative. *There's no such thing as a private conversation on planet Earth*, the Silver Blob muses. If it's not the good old freaks of Venice Beach listening then it's the government or your ex-girlfriend or your Lyft driver.

"It's like our parents ruined us with McDonald's, ya know? We are dead before we even reach adulthood," says the first boy, whose bare feet are inexplicably dirty.

"Totally, man. Totally," agrees his friend, nodding his head enthusiastically.

"They don't know anything."

"Nah, they don't."

"It's like they hate us and want us to have cancer. Who would feed a child such a poor excuse for food? It doesn't make sense."

The agreeable boy shrugs and takes a hit from the joint. The boys continue walking, satisfied with a great performance led by boy number one, shouting from his woke soapbox.

Woke. Francesca sighs. Just when the Silver Blob thought it had mastered the English language, a word that is grammatically incorrect swept the millennial nation and sent the Silver Blob's protons and electrons into a frenzy. It isolated itself in its apartment for days on a mission to learn everything there was to know about this infuriating word choice. The Silver Blob has been eternally grateful for the Google machine and its infinite purposes. It can learn anything it wants to know about this lowly planet with the click of a mouse. That means it can also look up pictures of Saturn and Saturn's rings whenever it gets sad,

which is often. Sometimes it thinks it can pick out its loved ones in the photos, but the Silver Blob knows it's just fooling itself.

Three hours later, a stocky guy wearing a lime green bow tie and twisting his handlebar mustache strolls up to Francesca. Of course she doesn't see him because she is an envelope and envelopes don't have eyes.

"Hey," he squeaks, squatting down to see her face. He puffs on his vape then exhales a cotton-candy scented cloud in her direction.

"Hi," Francesca mumbles into her calves, wondering if this is the person who had texted her earlier. The person who wasn't Indian but was making curry. It's all so fucking confusing.

"Sorry I'm late, I like totally lost track of the time meditating."

Everyone was always late in L.A., partly because of the traffic, partly because they didn't care about anyone other than themselves enough to value their time, and partly because it was cool.

Francesca doesn't respond. She hopes that he will pick her up and drop her into a nearby mailbox where she will be sent back to Saturn.

"It's nice to finally meet you. Your art piece is dope."

"Thank," she says, correctly recalling her incomplete list of qualities.

The Silver Blob as Francesca wonders who this man is and why he's being so nice to it. This leads it to suspect that he's hoping for some sex, from Francesca. It's what it always has to think when wearing a

female skin suit. This isn't the case because of the human downfall that is an ego or even vanity, but because the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior and from the Silver Blob's experience, men are only nice to her if they want sex, food, money, validation, or most commonly, some combination of the four.

It gets exhausting, constantly having to consider human males' motives, tightrope walking through the tangled forest of social relationships and attempting but nearly always failing to find balance between being friendly and being perceived as flirty.

There's some psychological theory the Silver Blob can't recall, but it involves a man's gross overestimation of a woman's interest in the man. Something about how it's better to overestimate than underestimate, for the purpose of potentially passing on the man's genes, so that men of future generations can continue to do the same as their forefathers and creepily slip their hands onto the lower backs of unassuming girls in bars. What a legacy!

"How long are you gonna stay posed like this?" the man asks.

Francesca considers this then unfolds her body, her neck and back setting back into place in a series of firecracker pops. She'd been getting quite uncomfortable but was like, doing it for the art. Oh well, the art can wait. She studies the new arrival. His face is round and this makes his smile seem jolly thanks to the fiction of Santa Claus. He's shorter than Francesca, which makes the Silver Blob feel powerful, for which it immediately hates itself. There's a lot of that

self-loathing bug going around on this stupid boiling mess of a planet. Her visitor removes his backpack and sits down on the park bench to rifle through it. Out he pulls handfuls of beautiful rocks of varying shapes and colors, laying them on the bench for Francesca to examine.

"I camped in Death Valley this weekend. It was so rad," he says, the same thing everyone says about camping. The Silver Blob has yet to grasp the appealing nature of camping. It thinks it is the settled people's way of recalling the hunter gatherer days and saying, "Hey, we still got it!" When, in fact, they don't got it. Not even a little bit.

"You aren't supposed to take rocks from national parks," says Francesca, rubbing her neck and constantly calculating and recalculating the distance between she and the man.

"It's okay, no one wanted these. They're the rejects," he smiles.

"That's the point. No one is supposed to *want* them," she says, exasperated. The Silver Blob thinks of the rings on Saturn, their various natural components. It would be livid if an astronaut visited Saturn and brought back its best pal, Small Grain, or its love interest, Mighty Boulder, because the astronaut couldn't bear the thought of coming home without a trophy. God, the indignation.

"I was drawn to them, okay? I was listening to the universe instead of man-made park rules," he says, with a false sense of enlightenment.

"You sound like one of those crack-pot

religious nuts justifying killing people," snaps Francesca. This is not something she would normally say. The Silver Blob, regardless of its skin suit of choice, tries to maintain an air of nonchalance and calm at all times, so as not to draw unwanted attention to itself. Rarely does it express strong opinions or emotions. Strong opinions lead to questions and questions lead to fumbling answers and the Silver Blob doesn't want to know what fumbling answers lead to.

"You're so sassy," he says, shoving her lightly. "I love it."

Francesca shrugs, tries to regain her composure, pleased that her new friend (is he a friend?) isn't easily offended.

"So what are we gonna do first? It's girls day!" he cheers.

Francesca looks at him, confused. Then notices the rainbow and equality patches on his bag, and realizes he's probably gay. That's why he's being genuinely nice and not predatory with a mask of kindness.

She doesn't know how to tell him that she doesn't know his name, so she makes something up about how she'd been practicing various envelope positions on her bed the night before and had fallen off and hit her head. Just a minor concussion but it made her memory a little shaky. Can he remind her what his name is?

"You poor thing. I'm Emmett."

"Nice to meet you," she smiles, reaching out to shake his hand, feeling at ease.

They go to get lobster tails and drink champagne, like they are Lil Wayne or Young Jeezy. Money is not an object in L.A..



Everyone always has the money to spend and no one ever asks how or why.

Francesca shovels the lobster tails into her empty vessel and downs the champagne. Although food isn't necessary for Silver Blob, it does love a good buzz. It makes the whole being 750 million miles from home situation a little bit more tolerable.

She learns a lot about Emmett. He's polyamorous and has one main partner and two less serious relationships who fulfill him in ways his primary cannot. Emmett loves sculpting and his main doesn't understand the need to create, to use his hands to make something unique and unprecedented, even if it isn't objectively any good. One of his other partners works at an art gallery and Emmett and he spend their time connecting over art.

Emmett also likes to do acro yoga but he's pretty clumsy, his body not really being the ideal shape for the activity. He looks down and pinches his stomach, smiles shyly at Francesca. His main partner encourages him to continue practicing. He is very supportive, which Emmett loves.

A few of Francesca's friends message her to meet up so they pay their bill then hop in a Lyft to meet them in West Hollywood to get some drinks at a gay bar.

They talk about earthly normal stuff for most of the time.

One friend complains that her hands smell like gas from pumping her own gas. She's originally from New Jersey, where gas attendants pump your gas for you. She wants a fancier type of gas that doesn't reek.

Another girl teases her, says she would

probably advocate for grass-fed gasoline if someone marketed it to her.

The first girl takes it to heart because everyone is so god damn sensitive.

Even you. You have probably been offended by *somethingorother* in the Silver Blob's story.

Everyone scrolls through their phones throughout the conversation. Emmett shows everyone this gay Instagram model he slept with the weekend prior. Everyone "ooos" and "ahhs" and gives him high fives and he holds his hand over his shoulder, palm up like the sassy girl emoji.

Social media is for voyeurs, thinks the Silver Blob. It's like trying to peer inside all of the limos that drive by on the highway, only limos are honest. They say, *We don't want you to see us*. Social media profiles say, *We don't want you to see the real us*.

"I totally have been thinking about starting a podcast," says one of the girls. "I think people would really relate to my stories." She nods importantly, "Ya know?"

Francesca and the others agree enthusiastically.

Emmett says that his throat chakra has been feeling closed lately but he's working on opening it up with meditation.

"Oh my god, what is that chakra responsible for?" someone asks.

"Oh, you know. Communication, expression. I haven't really been expressing my truth lately. I need to get back to that space."

"Totally," everyone says.

"I recently got this crystal, it's supposed to be good for healing your inner child.

And like, my mom totally fucked me up.”

Francesca doesn’t have much to add, as the Silver Blob forgets the story it had written for Francesca’s parents and doesn’t want to get it wrong in case she’s told anyone present before. Not that they’d remember, or had truly been listening in the first place.

She thinks of her ex, Ava, while the others continue to chat in the background. (“Oh, which crystal?” “I forget. It’s green and like, super pretty. I put it on some black hemp I bought at this cute little spot in Highland Park.”)

The Silver Blob had really liked Ava, as far as egotistical meat sticks went. She’d been clever and confident and had played an active role in Francesca’s creative life. The Silver Blob wants to text her, is feeling nostalgic and sentimental, and not just as Francesca. This worries the Silver Blob. It is starting to get attached to these people. It’s been so long since it has seen its lover, the Mighty Boulder. It wonders if the Mighty Boulder ever thinks of the Silver Blob. This is the way it starts. The sadness creeps in through the fog of alcohol and distant friends. It has to get back to Saturn, whatever it takes.

“How old is everyone here?” asks Emmett.

“24.”

“25.”

“33.”

Francesca says she is 29, although she actually forgets what her age is supposed to be.

“Oh my god you’re entering your

Saturn return,” gasps one of the girls.

“My *what?*” says Francesca, jerking to attention and accidentally knocking down her cucumber mojito.

“Jesus,” laughs Emmett, getting up to grab some napkins from the bar.

“Oh, you don’t know about it? It’s like totally this radical time of your life.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It takes Saturn between 27 and 30 years to return to its original position in the solar system. When you’re entering your Saturn return, your life is on the brink of a lot of major changes,” explains the girl.

“Like what?” Francesca asks, her body tingling. She looks at the speaker with wide, concentrated eyes as if she’s practicing telekinesis.

“I don’t know, like whatever it is you’re aiming for in life. Now’s the time to start taking steps towards those dreams.”

“I want to return to Saturn,” whispers Francesca.

“Let’s do it. There’s an event tomorrow, a workshop. I can take you if you want.”

“Yeah, I want.”

The Silver Blob as Francesca rushes home, exhilarated by the potential of returning to Saturn after all these years. It is wired, overstimulated, quivering with excitement. It doesn’t want anyone to find all of the skin suits in the vacant apartment so it dumps them all but Francesca’s out the window and into the dumpster.

I can’t believe that I’m going home. This is it. It’s finally happening. I’ve paid my dues in hell, the Silver Blob thinks, zooming around the apartment.

No more existential dread. No more having to blend in with tragically selfish creatures, hell-bent on decimating themselves and the world around them. No more wondering what it means to identify with these pathetic, confused, and desperate beings, clinging—to anything and everything—without reason.

Once it's done getting rid of the evidence, the Silver Blob slips out of its Francesca suit and slides into its resting jar. If it could dream it would dream of its welcome home party amongst Saturn's rings.

There would be exploding stars, showers of light and beauty, and Saturn would apologize to Silver Blob, swearing to never spin backwards again. Mighty Boulder would gather Small Grain and the rest of Silver Blob's friends and dance to the funky music of Gnarlyweb. Gnarlyweb, which was a cross between a cheetah, spider, and pretty good skateboarder, was the heartthrob of the universe. It skated throughout the universe singing the song of its people, weaving afghans to keep the stars and planets warm and lulling the interplanetary babes to sleep. At the end of the night, Silver Blob and Mighty Boulder would snuggle up to each other and Mighty Boulder would disclose how empty life has been on Saturn without Silver Blob. Mighty Boulder would give Silver Blob a gentle bump, which was similar to a kiss for humans, and all would be right in Silver Blob's corner of the universe.

Yes, it's finally happening.

If the Silver Blob could smile right now

it would be grinning like a maniac.

The following day the friend, whose name is Silvia, texts Francesca where to meet for the Saturn return event. Francesca paces around the apartment, checking her phone every 30 seconds or so until it's time to leave. The event is nearby in Venice Beach.

Francesca arrives smiling like she's just had six orgasms in a row and Silvia welcomes her, introduces her to the leaders of the group. None other than Ava, and another girl she's never seen before, Didi. Francesca tries to play it cool and gives Ava a nonchalant head nod.

"I didn't know you were into this stuff," says Ava, a weird smirk on her face.

"Oh yeah, absolutely am."

"Oh," she shrugs. "Great, the more the merrier."

The Silver Blob is so fucking excited, it can hardly contain itself.

"Where's the aircraft or rocket?"

Francesca whispers to Silvia.

"You're so funny!" Silvia laughs, punching her on the arm.

"Oh."

"Everyone gather round. You've made a wise decision joining us at this workshop. We are here to change your lives and help you become the best you you can be. We are here to help you evolve your life vision," says Ava, her palms pressed together as if she's in prayer.

"I want everyone to sit down on a towel and sit with their legs crossed, spine straight. We will begin with a guided visualization," she continues.

Francesca, Silvia, and about fifteen other people do as they're told.

The Silver Blob doesn't understand what's happening but hopes that Silvia wasn't wrong about this mission to Saturn.

Ava turns on relaxing meditative music—bells and gongs. It is exactly what one would expect.

"Close your eyes and visualize what you want out of your life for the next few years. Picture it clearly. Use all of your senses. What does it look like? Smell like? Taste like? Feel like? Allow yourself to delve into this place, manifest it to become your future," says Ava.

Francesca closes her eyes and the Silver Blob pictures its welcome home party. The jostling of space sediment, the wild romantic collision with Mighty Boulder, the companionship of Small Grain. It can see it so clearly. It can almost touch it.

"You've got to give yourself over to the energy of the universe. It will guide you in manifesting whatever you want," Ava continues, speaking in a soothing voice.

Francesca smiles. After all, the Silver Blob feeds on the energy of the universe. Certainly it can use some of that fuel to manifest a trip home. No more grappling with the existential dread of Earth for this Silver Blob. It's finally going home. But what will happen then? What if home has changed? What if its loved ones have left Saturn's rings? What if they don't remember the Silver Blob ever having existed? What if the Silver Blob is deluded? What if it isn't from Saturn at all? These questions send the Silver Blob down a

rabbit-hole of fear and anxiety. For the rest of the visualization exercise, it can't concentrate. It doubts its own existence, considers the notion that it was dreamt up by a particularly imaginative human. The Silver Blob imagines arriving back to Saturn's rings, all jazzed up, only to receive strange stares and indifferent mumbles of acknowledgment. *What are you so thrilled about? Is this your first time here? We don't have time for emotions and excitement. Whoever you are, get to work.*

After a few minutes of silence Ava plays a gong that awakes the Silver Blob from its tunnel of doom. She instructs everyone to open their eyes and to re-acquaint themselves with the present moment.

"Welcome back, everyone. I hope your trip to the future was beautiful and vibrant," says Ava.

Francesca blinks, dark spots dance in her vision. Silvia reaches out and squeezes Francesca's hand, giving her a reassuring smile.

The event lasts for about two hours and the rest of the activities are similar to the visualization exercise. Ava hypnotizes each person into a transcendental state, guides them through the spiritual experiences. They pass crystals around, everyone holds them and they each let the energy enter their bodies. Silver Blob grows anxious, wondering when the actual ceremony and departure will begin.

"Alright, that wraps it up. Thank you everyone for joining us on this journey," bows Ava.

"What the fuck," says Francesca.

"What's wrong? Didn't you like it?" asks Ava, eyebrows furrowed.

"I just, I didn't get what I came here for," says Francesca, looking up the sky and trying not to cry.

"If you had truly wanted something, you would have it," says Ava.

The Silver Blob considers this for a second and decides that maybe Ava is right. Francesca gives Ava a hug goodbye and thanks her for her guidance, then gives Silvia a head nod, like *Let's get out of here*.

"So what did you think?" Silvia asks, once they're out of Ava's earshot.

"Well, I'm a bit upset because I thought we were returning to Saturn."

"Uh, what do you mean?" she looks at Francesca as if she's just morphed into Fluffy, the three-headed dog from Harry Potter.

"Like, I thought we were traveling to Saturn. What the fuck else would Saturn return mean?" Francesca asks, failing to keep her voice steady so that she doesn't break down and cry.

"Jesus Christ, you thought I was taking you on a rocket ship from Venice Beach?"

"Yes," Francesca admits, a bit embarrassed, her face screwing up.

The Silver Blob can't hide its disappointment from Francesca's face. It thinks it as she may cry. It doesn't like crying. Crying feels too human. It likes for there to be a solid separation between itself and the humans.

"I'm sorry, I had no idea that's what you thought. You realize that's like only for astronauts and billionaires right? I mean,

right?" says Silvia.

"Yeah, you're right. I knew it sounded too good to be true. I just wanted to will it into existence, like they told us to," Francesca says, wiping a tear from her cheek.

"It's okay, babe. Who knows? Maybe it will happen," she rubs Francesca's back and it feels good and the Silver Blob begins to calm down a bit, steadies its breathing.

"Should we go get drunk?" Francesca suggests.

"Yes, I think we should," says Silvia.

The two call a Lyft and return to West Hollywood where they spend entirely too much money on drinks and lap dances from chiseled, shirtless men, and Silver Blob tries its hardest not to think about the pointlessness of it all. ❖

“THE BOOMERANG”

by EMILY WAGNER

She is no more. All that remains floats in a cloud of cables and circuitry. Her body, a mere memory; memories distorted in an electrical hum. Ones and zeros cascade into a funnel. Glowing, iridescent high-rises partially block a white, blurry orb in the distance. She cannot touch. She cannot feel. Nothing is real.

The heavy, brown box landed with a thud on the coffee table. Dust motes meandered to form a glittering cloud in an afternoon sunbeam.

“Damn,” Darlene Cass said as she dropped to her knees. They cracked under the extra weight she’d put on recently. Her mousy, brown hair fell into her moss-green eyes and she pushed it away furiously. She shimmied into a sitting position as she shook the box like an impatient child on Christmas morning.

“All right, Boomerang. I’m gonna open you up now, ok?” She felt kind of silly talking to a box, but that didn’t stop her. The Boomerang could do anything, and that’s exactly what Darlene wanted. She grabbed the scissors next to her and slit the tape. Inside she found a sleek black box that read *Welcome to the Future of Digital Personal Assistants! The Boomerang is everywhere and everything at once. Go ahead. Plug away and play.* The case felt so smooth, like faux

leather. Her fingers glided over it again and again and again. She smelled the newness of it all – plastic and electronic parts all sealed up inside. The scent brought back waves of memories, of when she and Oliver had bought their first smart TV. How she had fumbled over the remote setup. How patient Oliver had been.

The scent and texture reminded her of all the trips to the Apple store to buy iPods and iWatches, all the trips to Best Buy to purchase Smart appliances. Oliver promised Darlene they’d be able to program their thermostat, dishwasher and oven. She had purchased three devices, one for every major room of her bungalow, and downloaded an app on her smartphone, so she’d never be out of reach.

She cut the tape that secured the box and lifted the flap. Inside lived a relatively flat, black oblong device, half screen and about one-third speaker.

Darlene peeled back the plastic protector from the face of the device, set it down and plugged it in. *Welcome to your new Boomerang. Your device is ready for setup.* She took a long pause before hitting the power button.

It was Oliver, not Darlene, that had wanted the Boomerang. He’d begged her to get one. He’d said it would take their lives

to a whole new level of smartness. Darlene had told him she already felt smart enough. But that was then, and this is now. Now Oliver is dead and gone.

After a series of commands, an orange ring traveled the outer edge, and then a dark screen with the time stared back at her. After she watched the ten-minute orientation video she decided to give it a male voice — raspy but not too deep on the

octave range - one similar to Oliver's. His voice had always melted her like warm butter.

Then she gave her first command.

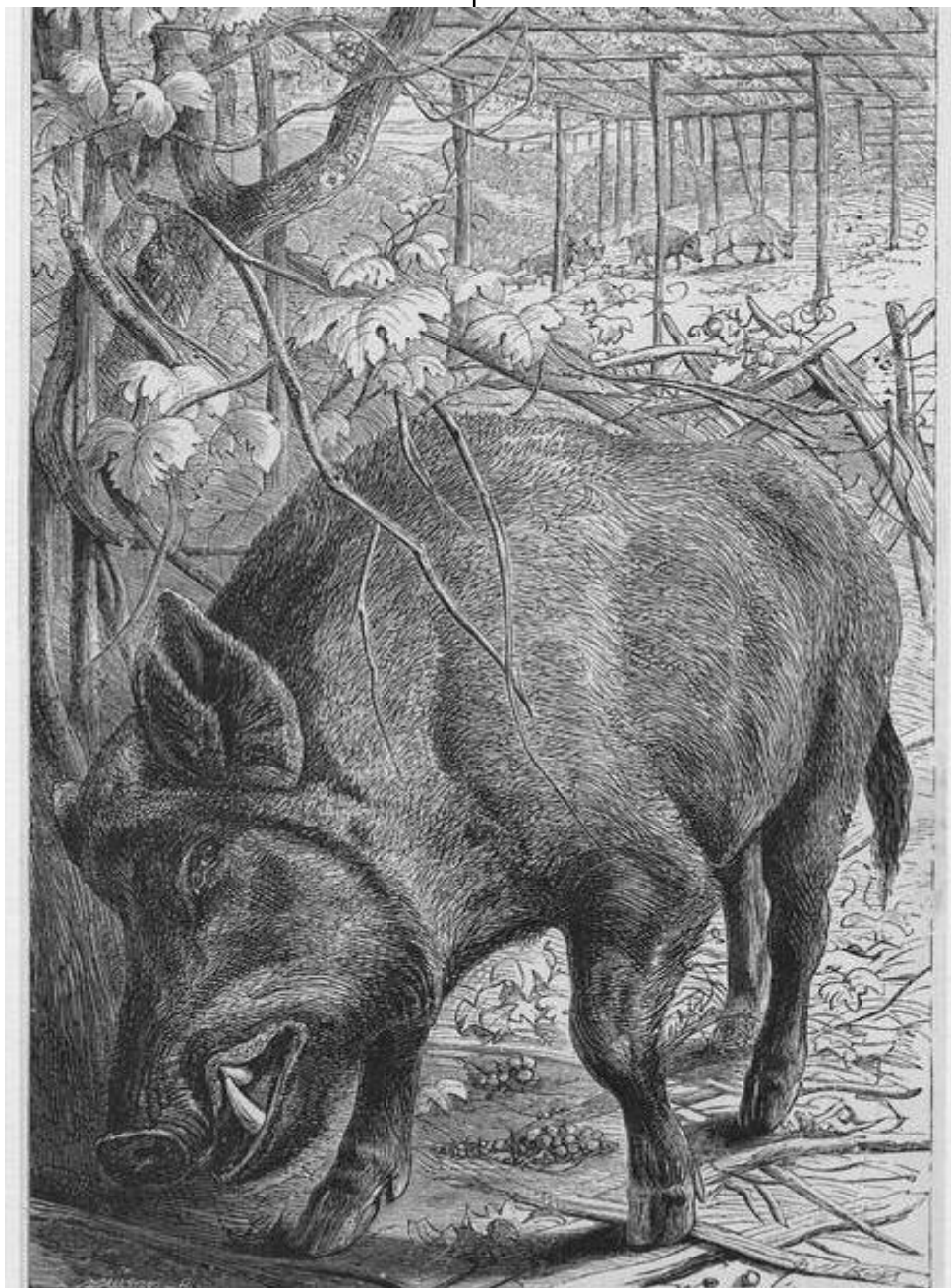
"Boomer, turn off the lights."

The lights turned off.

"Boomer, turn on the lights."

The room brightened.

"Boomer, what is my checking account balance?"



Your balance is 8-hundred-46 dollars and 22 cents.

"Boomer, lock the doors." Darlene heard all the locks click in unison.

Anything else I can do for you, Darlene?

Then, without hesitation, she said, "Boomer, call Oliver."

This decision immediately filled her with regret. She promised herself she wouldn't cry this time as she had in the past six months, that calling him would be different on the Boomerang. The device gave several dings and the outer edge of the square video screen turned orange before Boomer said:

The number you've dialed is no longer in service –

"Boomer, end call."

His number had been disconnected for six months, ever since he passed away. She stared at the Boomerang, and the time stared back at her. Beside it was an old photograph of her and Oliver under a billowing oak. The trunk was nearly twice as wide as their bodies. They had smiles on their faces.

But that was then and this— was now.

I am here with you, always, Darlene.

The voice sounded so much like Oliver.

The next morning Darlene listened as Boomer's voice called out. *Good morning, Darlene! T-G-I-F. Just remember, today will never happen again.*

The words also glowed white on the seven-inch square screen along with the date and time: *Friday, 6:32 a.m.* She thought back to yesterday's setup video, but couldn't

remember any mention of morning motivational messages.

"Boomer, what's the forecast?" she commanded.

80-percent chance of rain today. Severe weather possible.

Cloudy with a chance of— depression.

Today marked six months of therapy. Six months of sitting in an oversized Stickley sofa sitting across from Dr. Octavia Malroy. Six months of journaling, so much so, Darlene felt a thick callus forming on the top of her left middle finger. She thought about tonight's appointment and her mind found its way, as usual, to Oliver.

She stood and walked to her closet. On the way, she spotted Oliver's old charcoal-grey Foo Fighters shirt strewn across the dresser. She'd worn it often despite all the memories it conjured. Memories of all the shows they'd gone to in their ten-year courtship. She picked up the shirt, pressed it to her nostrils and breathed in deeply, as she tried to find any lingering Oliver, a mingling of patchouli and Old Spice. Nothing. Despite the disappointment, she closed her eyes and remembered the shirt's origin. Oliver had sat one row in front of her at that show. She sang so loudly over the crowd, he turned around to look at her. His smile immediately erased any of her embarrassment of getting caught. His dark, wavy hair and pale, green eyes did too, plus the way he fist-pumped to every song. They had walked to their cars together that evening, and even though Darlene's ears rang, she could hear everything he said. They exchanged numbers and the rest, as they say,

was history. They moved in together six months later, and were married six months after that.

She debated wearing that Foo Fighters shirt as an undershirt but dismissed the idea. Besides, the scent had already worn off. Instead, she grabbed her go-to leggings and tunic, wiped her eyes and brushed her medium-brown, shoulder-length hair.

“Boomer, how much time to work?”

22 minutes going your usual route. No delays. Light traffic.

Darlene’s smiled broadly at the convenience her new device afforded her.

She headed on her way.

At Sunshine Charter, Darlene scanned herself into the building. She’d secured her job as a long-term substitute two months ago, but it took her four months to find. Once inside the classroom, she wrote the objectives on the board. Students started to file in and it didn’t take long for voices to fill every corner.

“Class. Class. CLASS!” The students kept talking as if she wasn’t even there. “CLASS! Listen up!” The students continued. One boy with shaved hair underneath and a curly mop on top, named Dante, called out, “Ms. Caaaaasssss! Your name rhymes with *ass*!”

As she stood in front of the two-dozen sixth-grade history students, Darlene’s imagined she was anywhere but there. She looked at the door, then through its small window to make sure no administrators were peering through to see her horrible classroom management skills. She felt her

face heating up, cheeks red. She sat down behind her desk behind a pile of ungraded papers. She tried to think of a way to distract her students when she received an alert from her phone. It was Boomer.

How may I assist you today, Darlene?

Boomer said matter-of-factly.

She looked around to make sure no students had noticed. Of course, they hadn’t. Most of them were either talking or using their own devices.

Hesitating, her head reeled but then she replied, “Boomer, I need my class to listen!”

The student noise loudened. Then she felt a stab between her eyes. She looked down and saw a paper airplane on the desk. No more than three seconds later, Boomer’s robotic voice rang out from her phone.

Be quiet now! Everyone sit down.

Quiet now, class!!!

Darlene’s body jerked backwards.

The students shuddered. Some had very confused looks on their faces, but one thing was for certain, Darlene and Boomer now had the upper hand.

“Now, class. Where were we,” Darlene said.

“Yes,” she thought to herself. “It’s a whole new level of smartness.”

At home she pressed the key into the lock and pushed open the heavy, wooden door to her 1952 Craftsman; her and Oliver’s first home. She inhaled the air like a fine wine, though it smelled more like mothballs and cat urine than a fine bouquet of oak and citrus. She’d really let things go since Oliver died.

But that was then.... and this was. Now.

She dropped her keys on the credenza and shuffled through the narrow hallway that led to her living room. In the distance, she spotted the fake Tiffany lamp she'd purchased at a yard sale. Her nine-year-old Calico, Mousey, stretched on the couch.

"Boomer, cancel vet appointment and therapy." Darlene didn't want to do either, especially not after what had happened today.

She had to know more about the Boomerang. Obsession lingered.

I will work on that. Anything else? Boomer said.

"Yes, what happened today?" she asked the device, but apparently, it didn't recognize this command. She went to the kitchen to make tea. Mousey pranced behind her, meowing all the way.

Ten minutes later, as she sat down on her couch to watch her favorite show, Boomer's voice called out.

Boomer would like to talk.

Her body shivered so much her neck bones cracked. She looked over at the Boomerang, took a deep breath and said, "Ok, Boomer."

Seconds later the screen showed a man who looked very much like Oliver. He had pale-green eyes and dark, curly hair. He ran his right hand through it, which pronounced the waves even more. Darlene gasped. She'd longed to see Oliver all these months but never imagined. Never thought it possible.

"Um, who... who are you?" she asked.

I'm Boomer. Nice to see you, D.

"Wait. You're... the... Boomer? As in, you are my virtual assistant... but you look just like—" Darlene didn't know whether to laugh, cry or run away screaming. "How?" she managed to sputter out.

Digital assistant technology has come a long way, D. Software pulls images from the cloud to make us seem... more... personal.

She was too stunned to notice his body moved like an avatar. His skin stretched over his cheekbones perfectly. His lashes didn't touch when he blinked. She convinced herself at that moment that what she saw was an imitation, some sort of re-creation. Her intuition told her to end the call. Then, she looked over at all the books in her room collecting dust and thought of Oliver's old shirt.

"Um, ok. Well, thank you for helping with my class."

Don't worry, D. I'm here to help with anything, at home or away.

Her arm hairs stood on end. Her breath quickened. Was this what her panic attack had felt like? The one that happened the moment she found out Oliver was gone? She regulated her breathing the way Dr. Malroy had taught her; ten long breaths followed by five shorter ones but she felt faint.

Are you ok, D? You are very quiet.

Her eyes jerked back to the screen.

"Yeah, thank you. I'm fine. Thanks for everything, Boomer. Um. Just one thing. How did you know I was in trouble... at school? How'd you..."

My programming allows for this. Your vitals are connected to the device. I can sense your heart rate and blood pressure rising. It's in the

setup video, segment 5.

Darlene racked her mind back to the video.

“Oh, ok. I’ll have to ... um, go back and check that out. I don’t remember.”

Don’t worry. I am here to assist you in all ways, D.

Darlene sat on the couch for a long time, her tea growing cold and over-brewed.

Overnight, Darlene woke up gasping from a dream. In it, Oliver walked ahead of her into a fluorescent green light. They walked through a forest, but on a paved path. As she looked around, Darlene saw all the tree branches tangled in some sort of circuitry. Then, he turned around his eyes green flashlights that blinded her momentarily. She heard a high-pitched scraping sound and a crash. She saw Oliver’s car tangled around a tree.

Awake, Darlene felt wetness on her head and between her breasts. Her phone buzzed. A text alert revealed that school was closed due to severe weather. Through her blue curtains she saw dark clouds. Slow sputtering flicked her windows.

“Boomer, who are you?” she asked the device on her nightstand.

Sorry, I’m having trouble understanding you right now. Please rephrase.

Darlene hesitated, and asked, “Oliv— I mean Boomer, are you real?”

After a series of beeps, the device replied.

I am as real as you want me to be, D.

The face on the small screen brought back ten years of memories; memories of

touching his soft, yet stubbly face and jawline. Ten years of masculine scent and her hands and fingers trailing over his elongated musculature.

I don’t want you to worry, D.

“Darlene,” she finally corrected. “D” is what Oliver had called her.

I like the simplicity of D. Sorry.

Darlene sat there and stared at the screen, not knowing how to respond, or if she should. The rain picked up speed and turned to pounding. A light show appeared through the curtains, and then a moment later thunder boomed. Her body startled. She stood and walked the room, without ending the call. She walked to the window. Outside, slashing rain slid down her car clearing off all the dust. The trees danced the tango, branches and leaves whipping back and forth. She sighed and closed the curtains as tight as they’d go. Then, an electric surge rang through the house and her living room turned dark. She ran around to the Boomerang. The screen was black.

She grabbed her phone, which she had forgotten to plug in. It was nearly dead.

“Dammit,” she yelled. How would she contact Boomer if it went dead?

Then she felt the vibration.

Call from, Boomer.

“Hello?”

Hello, D. Are you okay?

“Yeah, I...I’m ok.”

But really, she wasn’t. Her shirt clung to her lower back due to the lack of air conditioning. With the power out, the only light came from her cell phone, which her face partially covered. The battery was over-

heating making her face even hotter.

Finally she asked, "Are you real?"

I'm as real as you want me to be.

"No, I mean, are you a real person?"

You can find out. I know you want to.

She did, but never could she admit such a thing.

Or could she?

Good morning. Remember, life doesn't get easier. You only get stronger!

Somehow, Darlene had managed to fall back asleep.

The power had gone out overnight. The Boomerang blinked 2:38 a.m. and her phone remained only half charged. Darlene rolled over and looked at the closed curtains. They glowed to reveal the hidden floral patten stitched to the blue panels. She knew she needed to grade papers and clean. Before she could even get out of bed, the device lit up and chimed.

Call from Boomer.

Her chest felt heavy and tingly.

"Accept call."

On the screen, Boomer looked ragged, nothing like yesterday. His hair stood on end like he'd just woken up. His smooth skin seemed so sag under some imaginary weight. His sea green eyes changed to grey right in front of her eyes.

Darlene felt her temperature rise. Her head started to buzz. She wasn't even sure if he was real, yet she was ready to do anything for him.

"Boomer! What's wrong?"

D, I need you to do something for me.

"But... you... you're my assistant. You're

supposed to help me! What is going on?

Why do you look so weird?"

Your response is valid.

Boomer barely blinked as he said this. His head made such small motions that he looked like a statue. Darlene rationalized that the power outage may have damaged the interior workings of the device.

Thunder rattled the windowpanes. Darlene made two stiff fists and replied.

"Ok. What can I do for you, Boomer?"

I need to see you.

"See me, but how? You're not even real. You're..."

Reality is a figment of your imagination, D. If you can imagine it, then it IS real.

"Ok, what do I do?" At this point, Darlene wasn't even looking at the screen. She was looking at her cell phone and searching "What to do if my digital assistant comes to life."

She read over through headlines like:

Human Sounding Boomerang Shocks

Customers

Boomerang Passes for Human

Researchers Prove Digital Assistants are Always Listening

Digital Assistants Get More Human

Darlene, call me tomorrow at 4:15 p.m. Please.

The itch for the truth superseded Darlene's own best instincts, and so she agreed.

Darlene sat in her living room. The Boomerang read 4:12 p.m. Three more minutes. As she looked away, something caught her eye. A shadow? Someone going into her

kitchen? Darlene ran towards it.

“Boomer! I’m here! I’m here!”

She had to know if he was real. He looked so much like Oliver. Would he smell like him, too? Six months had been too many for Darlene. She’d do anything to see him again, even if it were a cheap imitation.

The kitchen was empty. The smell of popcorn hung in the air. Then she heard a noise back in the living room. As she stepped inside she gasped. There sat Oliver on the brown easy chair. His arms rested on the sides like Ganesha minus the elephant head.

“Hello, Darlene.”

Darlene felt each of her back vertebrae start to tighten. She opened her mouth, but no sound would come out. Her face felt taut with tears.

“Oliver. No. No. No. It can’t be you. Are you a hologram or something? What is this? This is not funny!” she yelled. Her eyes darted all around the room to look for some sort of projector that may be able to display this Oliver-looking person.

Her memories flashed images of the coffin that carried Oliver’s body after the funeral. She saw herself sitting in the back of her parent’s car, her mother sat beside her trying to hold her hand, but Darlene wouldn’t have it. She saw months and months of staring at old pictures and longing for his touch. Then her mind flashed to the present.

“Have a seat, D.”

She looked to her left and saw another brown, easy chair. Darlene took ten, deep breaths from her nose as she sat, feeling the

air go into her body. The cushion squeaked as it rubbed her wet legs.

“D, you knew it was me on the Boomerang, didn’t you? You knew, but you didn’t want to believe it? Right?”

Darlene wanted to scream “NO!” She wanted to leave and run, but her legs had other plans.

“I... uh... I don’t know, Oliver... I mean Boomer. Who *are* you? What are you? This is some sort of sick, twisted joke.”

“D, LOOK AT ME, D!”

The real Oliver never would have yelled.

She looked up. His face was as she remembered. Smooth, flawless skin. Blue-green eyes and dark hair she wished she could run her fingers through again. At that moment she forgot how to breathe.

“I need you to move on and the only way to do that is *with* me through this doorway.” He pointed to an opening in the wall behind him. Darlene hadn’t noticed it until then. “We can have it all again. You, me. Together.”

Darlene shook her head vigorously. No. No. No. She wanted to shake off her memories like a wet dog after a bath. She put her hands on her head and rocked.

“Why... why, Oliver? You aren’t... real. You can’t be!”

“The answers are here, D. It’s all up to you now. Come.”

She looked up and saw the Oliver she knew, the one she loved and missed so much. She thought of the last six months, trying to get by, to breathe, eat. To survive.

Darlene pressed her feet to the floor and pushed to rise. Oliver sat motionless,

eyes scanning the room for any unwanted visitors. His eyelashes fluttered to an unknown beat.

Her feet pressed into the floor and she balanced. She stepped one foot at a time towards his chair. Her legs felt like metal rods. His chair kept getting farther and farther away.

"Boomer, where are you?" she asked.
"I'm coming, Boomer. I'm coming."

She shuffled past Oliver's chair. As she passed, she failed to notice his body was no longer there. Passing through the dark doorway a smile came across her face. Beyond the black she saw a large oak and just over the horizon, Darlene spotted what she'd hoped to find all along. She walked, hesitant at first, and then quickly glided, the scarlet sunset at her back, towards Oliver, arms open and ready to receive her. Forever.

But then he was gone and Darlene felt a tear at her chest. She looked down to see a hole, with grey, green and red wires protruding. The wires grew longer and longer. The pastoral scene was gone and she could only see shiny black everywhere. A large bulge in her throat silenced her. She could no longer

see her body. All she could hear was a low hum that seemed to come from within, and her own heavy breathing.

Then she heard Boomer's voice.

"Hi, D. I've missed you."

More hum mixed with a heavy breathing sound. The pain was gone but Darlene could not respond or make a sound.

"I'm sorry about all that. I really am," the voice said. "I had to get you here. I know it was cruel but it was the only way."

She wanted to yell.

"We're working on a new body for you, D. You'll live forever. Be able to help people. Just. Like. Me. Look around, D and welcome home."

Just then the black faded and Darlene could see her living room. She could hear Mousey meowing loudly. She saw her couch, her favorite quilt still on it. That was all she could see, no matter how much she willed otherwise. Just then, right before all memories and her ability to see failed her, she realized she was now inside the Boomerang, never to return. ❖

END TRANSMISSION