## Cynthesis

## By Eric Oster

Our small backyard intersects a sidewalk of cracked pavement. Ants mine discarded cigarettes for left over tobacco to take to their queen. She has developed quite a nicotine addiction, and devours the tobacco, before ordering her servants to retrieve more.
/'?:
The cat has just walked across the keyboard, and it appears she is imploring me to "lob more."
A red ball, like a torch extinguished by a pastel sky, falls into the hands of a small child.
I first saw Cynthia while stumbling through the Plastico Mall. Through my drunken haze I saw the incandescence cast upon her by the fluorescent light overhead. I instantly was enraptured by her wooden stare, her vacant smile.
When I was a child I had a photographic memory, and I tried desperately then to retrieve the long lost skill. I was able to keep a faint imprint of the nape of her neck in my mind, but it was myopic, a blurred photograph.
I don't know what compelled me to visit the Plastico Mall that day; some sort of inebriated whim. Usually malls fill me with a deep, diving depression, hollowing out a hole in my stomach (so crowded, yet so alone). When I returned the next day, however, it was solely to stare straightly into Cynthia's stoic eyes. I sat down on a most uncomfortable bench, and watched her work.
For Cynthia I would return to the mall daily and endure the monotonous motion and noxious scents of the pubescent mall rats endlessly passing by. I would not emerge from my bench to get closer, though I felt Cynthia's magnetic pull. Sometimes when no one was looking I would scrape myself (momentarily) against the mahogany bench';; Cjk while burning my gaze into the timbers of Cynthia's cheeks.
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More lox.

I should never have fed Cynthia smoked salmon. There is a knock at my door, and when I reluctantly get up I see it is Tom.

"You still working on that story?"

"Yes..." (Would you please go away...)

Over a bottle of wine we have a casual conversation but the story keeps entering my mind, like an itch I desperately need to scratch. I stare at the coffee table in the center of the room. It is a large circular log, with a split down the middle, and various books (fiction) scattered on it. After a while I drift away from the conversation. I want this story to live up to its potential; the hazy impression I have of it now. But nothing works like that. It's like watching cars pass by on the highway (in the passenger seat). Before you put your glasses on everything is just one vibrant blur, but with corrected vision everything is solid and mundane.

Over the course of my visitations to the Plastico Mall I noticed a teenage boy dressed in black, with dark painted fingernails and a spiked dog collar around his neck. He went to the mall almost every day, usually to hang out at Touchy Subject (a clothing store where such degenerate youths shopped). Expecting him to return, I went into the bookstore one day and purchased him a collection of Sartre's short works. I ran into him a few days later, and he was startled and confused to be given literature by some strange solitary man, but he promised me that he'd read it. The next time I saw him he was dressed in jeans and a plain white t-shirt.

Once an elderly woman sat down next to me on the bench. She smiled like an idiot, put down her bags and stretched out her arms. "Well helloooooooooooooooooooooooo," she said (the Long Island sound). "I'm in town visiting my daughter, and I just love this mall. And so do my grandkids." I kept starting at Cynthia, though my thoughts of her were splintered by this garrulous woman. Eventually she realized I wasn't listening to her. She glanced over at me and then her lip curled down, her eyes widened and she hurtled away. 8dju .............,

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beltlife

Cynthia has an interesting writing style (mostly punctuation). She's more of a poet than I am.

And written on his belt "Life!" If only he knew If only he knew I would return to that bench for months (for Cynthia). Eventually I realized I could not continue. I needed more to satiate my dolorous desires. Though my days (after work) were spent with my gaze fixed on Cynthia, I still had to endure solitary nights. And the curve of her cheek (no bones) haunted my dreams.

I'm back to writing, and the pacing that for me precipitates the act of writing itself. My phone rings, but I ignore it. I realize I prefer thinking through the mind of my narrator to my own thoughts.

Last night I dreamt Paula and I were at a beach, gleaming sand sifted by an autumn wind. In the distance a man stood glaring. I don't remember what we said, but as the conversation went on it felt more and more like I was pleading. For a minute I looked away, and when I turned around Paula was agilely tiptoeing in the direction of the glaring man, a minute blur of sand emerging from her feet. I decided that chasing her would be futile and in a minute she had wisped away, and all I saw was the trail of sand she left behind. I decided I wanted to fly so I stretched out my arms and released all my weight, only to find myself limited to drifting about a foot above the sand. Had I wanted to I could have dragged my wrists.

I took off my glasses and stared at Cynthia through a myopic haze. After hours spent contemplating how to spend more time with Cynthia, I decided I had to kidnap her. I could tie her to a chair and stare at her for hours, occasionally changing the way she positioned her arms or the tilt of her head. She could sit across from me when I ate, and in the morning I could place her near the window, waving, so when I returned at night she'd be there to greet me.

I decided the only way to steal Cynthia would be to get a part time job at her clothing store. As I emerged from my bench to walk to her store my knees buckled and I swayed from side to side. I approached the front desk and asked for an application, which I filled out on the spot, my glance darting back periodically to Cynthia. Later the next day I was told to come back for an interview. T4ta

Rf

ffhtulip

Sir, your daughter is a tulip. Until yesterday I'd never seen one cry. I feared she might break.

After a few days, a manager from the clothing store came out to my bench to say that he regretted to inform me that my application had not been accepted. I insisted that he tell me why, and after a long pause he stammered something about me being "psychologically unstable."

This could have been due to any of a number of reasons:

-My students complained frequently of my existential rants, and had the manager contacted my reference he could have found this out. I can see it now, Mr. Santos complaining that he couldn't fire me due to my tenure and mentioning the faculty party where I sat alone silently, attempting to turn his wife to stone with my stare.

-Mr. Santos was on to my objectives, and wouldn't employ me because he desired Cynthia all for himself. At closing he always closed the shutters, and I knew that afterwards when no one was looking he would caress Cynthia's face and plot his own ways to take her away from Plastico, to forever confine her to his wretched home.

-I was institutionalized for several months after my wife (who used to lock herself behind a room with a small glass pane in the door for days, leaving me to stare through that small rectangle at her sobbing silhouette) killed herself by tumbling gently out of an ancient attic window.

So I leave my house around eight, and meet some friends for a dinner party. In one on one situations, I can at least keep the conversation going (usually). In larger groups I look around the room and each face seems to steal from me something I would have said, and I just look around and around- and I have nothing to say.

A trace of light peers through the crack under the door, and I have to get up to stuff a towel in the crevice to clog it. With the fan off it's too hot. With it on it's too loud. Am I making myself clear? Can the reader really understand the narrator's absurd obsession? I need to sleep, not worry about this now. But a fly is buzzing around the room, and unless he dies I can't sleep. Maybe I'll dream up an ending to this haughty claptrap

I avoided the Plastico Mall for several days. It was a long weekend and I mainly just lay in bed, though occasionally I watered the forsythias (for Cynthia) in the backyard. Splinters of her appeared to me in everything: the bend of the bonsai's branch, the firewood I decided I could never use, the letters (of the brand) slowly burning, disappearing from my cigarette. On an afternoon walk through the woods I saw a woodpecker sawing into a tree. I attempted to bludgeon him with rocks, but he flew off after my third miss- my second way off target, killing a squirrel.

Maybe I am just wasting my time. Is there any way to have this come out the way I've imagined? There are rats in the backyard that emerge at night from a mound of beer cans speckled with crisp crimson and canary leaves. I can't help but think about the diseases and parasites infesting those rats. If one managed to sneak in the house, Cynthia would batter it back and forth between her claws, toss it up, paw it down, until eventually she'd get bored with it (long after the mouse had shed its life). I decide that to be safe, I'll place several knives in the crack of the door.

Paula calls again, the ring of the phone erasing forever the cusp of an idea. I do my best to mask the annoyance in my tone of voice, but notice it keeps leaking out, like how I can't ignore the light staining my eyes as I try to sleep. It feels like a scene from a play. On the left

side of the stage I sit at my desk, cat in lap, phone pressed against my ear. On the right side of the stage Paula's feet dangle from a radiant bed, or she is sitting on a soft beige couch.

Paula: I'm not catching you at a bad time am I?

Author: I was just...no...

Paula: I haven't heard from you in awhile.

Author: Well I've been...

Paula: Too busy to answer your phone.

Author: Sorry.

Paula: Sometimes I worry about you.

Author: There's no need for that.

Paula: It feels like you're drifting away, and how can I be sure you'll come back?

Author: I'm not sure what you mean by that.

Paula: I suppose you wouldn't.

Author: Well it is rather vague...

Paula: Do you remember coming with me to my grandmother's funeral?

Author: ... Yes, I wrote a poem about it.

Paula: Can I see it?

Author: No.

Paula: Well at least I've pulled you back a bit.

Author: I...need to get going...I'm trying to work on a story

Paula: Is it going well?

Author: I don't know how to end it. All these ideas keep floating by. It's like they're fireflies and they're all so fast, and I keep grasping at them furiously, coming up empty handed.

Paula: ...And you're drifting off again.

Author: I really have to go...

Maybe he could wait until the manager is the only person in the store and kill him so as to rescue Cynthia. Or he could dash in, cradle Cynthia in his arms and rush out, without even thinking of

the consequences. Or decide that the only thing to do is shoother, so at the least he could permanently alter he r. or just touch her, decide that is enough and retreat to the have no fsuicide (pinot grigio and a fist full of paink illers) or ...

There is a sharp shooting pain in my neck whose cause I can't place. I lie on my bed and try to dream up endings to the story, but the stress point in my neck replaces the words I want to use and I'm left with nothing. I don't leave my house for days, other than the time I went to the park with the intention of writing. I tell myself I'm isolating myself so that I can write, but mostly I just lie around all day staring at patterns of light on the wall; it's not unlike how a cat spends its time. Funny, but I can't recall hearing the phone ring, or being interrupted at all.

Erthy ghstkou

Fghjk jyskyu8

Ffgk ffgk

aswd aswd

I look at her reflection in the mirror And something from her glance jumps into mine

I decided to return to the Plastico Mall one day after dreaming that Cynthia was burning in a large pile of discarded boxes and broken chairs. That day I left work early, indifferent to any possible consequences, and drove to the mall. I noticed an increased heart rate and shortness of breath as I briskly walked in her direction. When I got to the bench, which I thought of more as her bench than mine, I was horrified to find that she had been replaced by an almost identical mannequin. I knew that it wasn't the same though because all the intensity of those eyes had been drained and there was nothing left to pull me toward this anonymous imposter. I couldn't sit; I just stood aghast, hollowed out from the inside.

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Cynthia has just run across the keyboard and out the door, which I absent mindedly left open. She walks slowly at first, and turns around to look at me, then she darts off and her sleek

black coat disappears, followed by the last part of her I see- the white tip of her tail, slowly vanishing in the distance.