

Traumathurge

by Jamie Grefe

I'm Neill Gallo for Chloe. She hands me a tweed suit, heels for the shuttle, yanks me under the porch to weave dirt puddles. No one knows this dirt.

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Back in Berlin. The girls streak cotton. Blood of the toilet snatchers. We race, days gone, left a flat salt to air. Tape the teeth shut. "Where are the worms?" I say, but Isabella morphs Sevigny, screams, "we shoot the rest stop before nightfall." The others order chicken food and pop. Drive to the complex. The road is a dungeon: snus, the spit-bucket of Los Angeles at sundown. I tell Izzy, "quit smearing circles around Los Feliz." Her eyes bleed plucked oysters. My bike is the theater in Shibuya where holograms chip nails on corn-tubs of pornography. You finally watch The Brown Bunny. It's a horror room.

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Night frames the shuttle. A malfunction turns to slices in the spacesuit. Something involving a meat cleaver and salt. I whisper, "Peel skin to melt love stains." Chloe shrugs. Watch the dogs tickle Chloe. We've lost Izzy. She's torched a gas station in Livonia. "Paging Neill Gallo. Paging Neill Gallo." I will not answer anymore questions.

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Critics sink Berlin. Night of the launch. We're holed up in a complex as big as New Hampshire. Chloe scrubs urinals to mark the script. I write, "Traumathurge" on page eight. We drain the shuttle, use gas masks to ward off fingers scraping windows. The radio clicks on. We telescope Arcturus, tune frequencies from ancient channels and

confess, repent, pray to the confessor. Bud arrives. Bud: "Get it right. Meat suits for the clowns, keep the dark suckling. Pack the ship." But beyond, I slop buckets in troughs, wait for Sevigny's call. There is no phone. Her message comes dirt-scrawled on the cleaver. It says, "All eyeballs for the light years." It takes forever, but worth next to nothing.

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"I am the Flooded Present."

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Isabella, we have come to grief puddles. Shred wing-piles and sear them to eyeholes. Stick grief in wings. I drink to Arcturus. Yes, I'm spitting muck. A wet goodbye, binge, bleat, pluck, and stew your reply like night paving sleep trails down hills of moist hate. Wipe teeth and set cutlery. If I've taught you anything about daily doses, forge the last stroke to gulp these puddles clean. Chloe says, "There is meat. There are men. I love you, Neill."

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"It was always you, though, wasn't it?"

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From Berlin to Arcturus. I squeeze Sevigny's wrist, wish Izzy could be here. She's melting salt in Utah. We were on our way to Los Angeles. I've booked the horror room. The rest stop scene collapses under the weight of too many flesh-lickers. I suck her wrist, taste space in the cracks between fingers. The tentacle sprouting from my forehead, this feeler, dips nub in a pond. The pond is made of tweed. Chloe's legs are blurry. They disappear. She is only waist. "Burn the

rocket," I say, and we set up screens in a field of pig bodies. Plug in and project it back to Berlin. The transmission will blow the sky, will be a windshield wiper. "And the rain?" Chloe asks. The rain is a light for our transcendence. "And Izzy?" I know she left. I'll jerk the chain of my own pity and regain her doppelganger where dreams burn tweed and will become the only one who loves her, the only one who matters.

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All that is left is Chloe's heart. It looks like Isabella's apology. Arcturus is not Berlin. Not anymore, Bud. If I had a black van or a motorcycle, I would drive this traumathurge past the horizon. That's not me, though. That was me. Sometimes we are dirt. I see a porch. I place my hand under the porch. There is a dog under the porch with a meat cleaver and chicken skin. It is my heart popping. Finally, it is my heart of tweed and when I touch it, I will become a road for you.

