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This Novel World

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Peter Thacker

This Novel World

*Dedicated to the young man walking
and reading post-modern style*

He Kindles down the pavement
Curb tripping, sidestepping reality
Head in a virtual cloud

The older the book, the lighter the page
The quicker the step, the closer the climax
A necessity: to walk, to read

No dichotomy
Fantastical street-mingling
King Arthur and East Burnside
Teching a walk, teching a read
In this novel world

Peter Thacker teaches at the University of Portland.

a breeze ripples the corn rows. He stops his pickup on the town side of the bridge and gets out, sees only the usual skid marks, gravel sparked with broken glass, brown stains on the weeds. His cattle stand watching him from under an oak near the pine grove. He takes a fresh salt block from the pickup and climbs through the barbed wire fence.

His shadow, three times as tall as he, leads him through shepherd's purse and faded shooting stars to the swaying shadows cast by the oak leaves. Crows scatter out of the treetop as he approaches, and he looks up through the hand-like leaves to see blue, a violet blue, not like the sky. A gauzy violet blue. A dress. A hand tipped with red nails. A delicate arm. Long black hair framing a still face.

She's hanging over a branch, caught exactly at the waist. Johnny studies the violet dress fluttering around

her stillness. He looks at her face again. Purple stains under the eyes. Her bruised right arm hangs down. The other rests on a higher branch.

He hears gravel crunch as a car stops. "Hey, Johnny! Too early for acorns!" Howard leans out of his Buick. Johnny points to the salt block and walks quickly toward the road.

"Geez! That wreck's one for the books!" Howard calls out as Johnny swings his leg over the barbed wire. "Must have been going ninety at least."

"Sure looks that way, Howard."

"They say they was coming from St. Paul." Howard pushes his cap up and frowns as Johnny climbs to the road. "What do you make of the gun they found, Johnny? They say blood was from one end of the car to the other and there was drugs in the trunk."

Johnny shakes his head as he starts the pickup. "Can't make nothing out of it, Howard. Excepting they were on their way to somewhere else." He waves and pulls off.

As dusk approaches, he shuts the gate on Shep and goes to the tool shed for a ladder. Then he takes a shovel from the pickup and walks toward the road. Shep bats his tail along the wire fence as he trots beside him. "No, you ain't coming now," Johnny says. He looks north and south. No cars. He steals across the bridge, throws the shovel into the pine grove, and crawls through the fence. He pulls the ladder after him, then runs to the tree, and climbs up to lift the woman from the branch.

Her dress ruffles in a violet stream down his back as he carries her to the center of the pine grove. When he's dug the grave, he lays her in it with her moonlit face toward his house. If she can see, she might glance up when wind brushes through the pine needles. If she can stand, she might look for him in the fields. He will look back, nod, let her know he sees her. He picks up a shovelful of earth and pauses. "I don't care," he begins. "I don't care what you done. Here's a place."

When he's buried her, Johnny waits for a car to pass over the bridge, then slips across. Back inside, he opens a kitchen drawer, removes the ledger, goes outside once more and shoves it deep in the brush pile. He will light the pile in the morning, make sure this time it burns to the ground.