

Sybil's Garage

Volume 1 Issue 1

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Sybil's Garage would not be possible without the help and support from the following people (in no particular order):

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Table of Contents

Fiction

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----|
| Marathon | <i>Fred Cataldo</i> | 1 |
| The Crowded Room | <i>Matt Kressel</i> | 12 |
| In the Great City | <i>Devin J. Poore</i> | 16 |

Truth

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----|
| A Conversation with Kris Dikeman | <i>Matt Kressel</i> | 4 |
| Artwork | <i>David Crane</i> | 9 |
| Dear Mr. President | <i>Karen Ludke</i> | 10 |

The Crowded Room

Matt Kressel

To the sound of *Neil Young's "Greendale"*

Jason didn't want to go inside. He had heard that the room was cold—too cold—even though people supposedly stuffed themselves from wall to wall. He had heard that inside the room people bickered, sweat, and breathed down your neck. But Jason knew there was only one way to get to the other side.

The door to the room was pink, and Jason turned the warm knob. It opened and he looked inside. A man with a white scarf draped over his mouth blocked the view of the room beyond. He yanked Jason into the room by his arms, and the door closed behind him.

"Welcome," the man said hoarsely, as if he welcomed everyone in this way and his voice was tired. He pulled down the scarf to show cracked, dry lips. "I hope you enjoy your stay."

Dizzy and disoriented, Jason tried to get his bearings as the man stepped aside. A thousand people thronged shoulder to shoulder inside the room, endlessly moving like twenty rivers rushing together. And the room wasn't cold like he'd been told. It was hot, inhumanely hot, and Jason started to get sick.

He turned back toward the door.

"You can't leave this way," the man said. "The only way out is through the other side." As he said this, Jason watched the man's clothing become drenched with blood. Jason stared in horror as the door behind him, like ripples upon a lake, smoothed into the white wall and was gone.

Nauseous, Jason turned, knowing he had to go through the crowd.

Voices buzzed and thrummed as he squeezed through a dozen people. Bumped, prodded, and pushed, Jason tried to calm himself, to breathe.

"This way!" a middle-aged woman said, grabbing his hand from out of nowhere and leading him in no particular direction. There was so much movement that Jason could no longer see the walls.

"Where are we going?" he shouted to her. "Where are you taking me?"

"To safety," she said as she turned to him and smiled with huge, gem like eyes. For a moment, Jason's heart melted. She gave him a drink, because



it was hot, and she gave him something to eat, because he was hungry. He let her lead him because it felt good to be taken by someone with direction, someone who cared about his well being.

Minutes – perhaps hours – passed as they wandered through the crowd. Jason felt as if the woman was leading him in no particular direction, turning this way and that, always changing her mind in mid-stride.

“Do you know where you’re going?” Jason said. “Do you know the way out?”

“The way out?” she said. “Why on Earth would you ever want to leave? You’re safe here with me, son.”

Jason let go of her hand. She tried to grab him, but he fled, and her sparkling eyes were soon lost in the crowd.

He began to sweat, his own smell mingling with the scent of a thousand other sweaty humans. He had lost all sense of direction now, too.

Which way? Which way? he thought, trying not to panic.

He came upon a boy, sitting upon the floor with his face in his hands. He was crying and nearly trampled upon as the stampede of feet continually thronged by.

“Mommy!” he cried. “Where’s my mommy?”

Jason stooped low so the boy could hear him. “Did you lose your mother?” he asked.

The boy looked up to Jason with bleary, bloodshot eyes. “Yes! Do you know where she is?”

“No,” Jason said. “But if you take my hand, we can look for her together.”

Willingly, the boy stood up and took Jason’s hand. They walked through the crowd together. Many times, the hurried bumps from passing people knocked their hands apart. But quickly each time, Jason snatched it up again. A fat man slammed into Jason, knocking him down, but rather than pause to help him up, the heavy man walked on. When Jason stood up, the boy was gone. Jason wanted to call out for him, but he realized he didn’t even know the boy’s name.

Searching frantically for the boy, Jason came upon a frail woman who groped blindly along the floor.

“What’s wrong?” Jason said to her.

“I’ve lost my glasses,” the woman said. “I’m blind without them. They’re probably crushed and shattered by now. Oh, I’ll never find the door without them!”

Jason leaned down to help her when someone tapped him on the shoulder. He spun around. He peered into the eyes of a young woman of about Jason’s age. They swirled like a summer’s swimming pool, instantly hypnotizing him, and he forgot all about the lost boy, about the blind woman, about everything except her eyes.

The young woman leaned in to kiss him and he fell into bliss.

"Will you follow me to the ends of the Earth?" she said.

"Of course! Of course!" Jason said, ignoring the tickling sense at the back of his mind that he was losing something important.

"Then let's go!" she sang.

She led him on, over and under shoulders of a million people. Jason felt wonderful, complete. He found all he ever needed in the eyes of this woman. Every so often she would lean in to kiss him, her tongue pressing deep into his mouth and sending him into ecstasy.

They passed a group of arguing people.

"This side is mine!" a woman shouted angrily. "Cross it and I'll hit you with my fist!"

Another woman pointed to a line drawn in blood upon the crowded floor. "You have too much space!" she cried. "Give some back, you thief!"

"Never! You lying wench!"

The women threw punches at each other.

A man stepped between to separate them, shouting, "You two are fools! This line is arbitrary! Meaningless!"

"What do you know about meaning?" one woman said, fuming. "This line was drawn with the blood of our children!" With her words, both women turned their combined rage toward the man and swung at him.

Jason had little time to pay attention to the argument as the hypnotic-eyed girl pulled him quickly past the scene. Suddenly, she stopped and tapped a man on his shoulder. The man's eyes glassed over as he looked into hers, and he smiled ear to ear.

"Will you follow me to the ends of the Earth?" she said.

"Of course! Of course!" the man said, taking her arm and shuffling away.

"Wait!" Jason screamed after her. But she fled into the crowd and was gone just as quickly as she had come.

Jason stood frozen, feeling totally miserable and lost, surrounded by rivers of moving people. He wandered aimlessly for a time. In a flash he remembered the lost boy and the frail woman with the glasses, both forsaken for temporary pleasure, and Jason felt doubly worse.

He came upon a bare white wall. People groped along it, looking for cracks, hints of a doorway out of the maddening room. An old man leaned against the wall, his body almost still. His wrinkled face grimaced with each labored breath.

"Are you okay?" Jason asked.

The man gasped for air. "Just waiting for death to overtake me," he said. "Any moment now."

“But the door must be around here somewhere. If we just follow the wall around, we can get out of the room and find you some help.”

The old man smiled, showing his missing teeth. “My boy, you don’t get it, do you?” he said. “You’re already out.”

“What?” Jason said, looking around to see that it was true. The old man was right. Throngs of people squeezed against a transparent wall behind them. The people groped and searched madly for an exit, seemingly unaware that Jason and the old man stood just a few feet away on the other side.

“But I can’t leave yet!” Jason cried. “There was this little boy who lost his mother, and this frail blind woman! And there was a girl who could make you fall in love with her just by looking into her eyes! There was so much more! It happened so fast! Too fast! I want to go back in.”

“My boy,” the old man said, “You can’t go back. You see, you can easily choose when you want to go inside the room, but you can never choose – not really – when the room wants you to leave.” §G





Sybil?