from THE BOOK OF FREAKS

by Jamie Iredell

AFTER DETOX + + + +

This is the man who gets a job at a place like Performance Exhaust, after he tells the owner-a skinny Vietnamese named Wang-that he's worked imports all his life, his father a Volkswagen man, his grandfather Mercedes. Wang asks him to look at the automatic transmission on a 94 Sentra. The man laughs, andno surprise here-Wang hires him.

The schedule is a day shift: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. At first everything goes according to plan. Our man stumbles in mornings and breathes open the garage doors. His own breath escapes like the fog that sits over the tiny valley where the shop sits. Our man goes to work, a car at a time, overhauling engines, transmission rebuilds. Wang wanders in around 10, a Kool dangling from the corner of his mouth, his cell phone hooked onto his belt and constantly beeping that annoying Nextel beep. Wang gets his hands under an open hood and removes a hose. The shop stays open till 9 p.m. and Wang does all the work after our boy leaves at 5.

One day, Wang's Nextel goes off and he starts jabbering in his Viet-lingo, then he laughs and jigs around some more in that fucked talk. He lights a fresh Kool. Our man who is fresh out of detox is replacing a blown head gasket on a '64 Lincoln, a beauty, suicide doors and everything. Wang steps away, ching-chonging as he goes. Our man keeps at the Lincoln, but does not finish, as a middle-aged couple's Ford jalopies into the lot, spewing steam and smoke like a dragon. Wang never returns. At 5 our hero closes the shop doors and goes home.

Next morning, Wang waits for detox-man in the office. The man has never seen Wang there this early. "You lazy American," Wang says. "I leave shop, and you close up, now customer angry." He points at the unfinished Lincoln. Detox-man says that he worked from 8 to 5, that that was his shift. Wang says he'll pay overtime.

Wang stops coming to the shop in the mornings. Every other day he wanders in around lunchtime, scans the lot of vehicles waiting to be repaired. "Hey lazy white," Wang says. "You work faster, I pay." Then he disappears again, kissing his Nextel.

At lunch detox-man walks across the street to the sports bar. At first he orders chicken wings and Cokes. Then he replaces the Coke with Budweiser. Then he replaces the

chicken wings with whiskey.

car-littered lot. He stamps his tiny oriental foot. When detox-man says he needs help to get everything done on time Wang's eves grow into tea saucers and his mouth into a does not. Yet fret not: the American doesn't care. If you do donut hole. "Oh, you drunk! You drunk! I smell the booze!" not understand American now, you soon will.

Wang goes to the office to write up detox-man's last check. Our hero grabs the keys to the Lincoln, which he's now finished and has stashed around the side of the shop. Wang hands over detox-man's check. "You very bad, drunk lazy American," Wang says. Detox-man says thanks, thanks for the job. Wang waves him off like he might wave at mos-referred to as men. Boys can be characterized by their quitoes. The smoke from his Kool scatters into tiny thun-

When detox-man drives away, the windows down, the radio playing on the classic rock station (the Eagles), he thinks about moving. He thinks he should go to his room and get his clothes and just drive off. Then, on the freeway on-ramp, he thinks: screw the clothes.

AMERICANS + + + + +

If you visit the United States of America, you're greeted by a Haitian, your passport's examined by a Jamaican, your baggage tossed from an aluminum belly by Mexicans. No one ever says that they're American. Ask any of them and they're Irish or Inuit or Ivory Coastian. Almost all of them are Puerto Ricans. Because of this global attitude, Americans think they own everything, especially America, and by that they mean Earth. across the strawberry fields to Meridian Road, where—in a Americans will tell you that your country has terrible Mexican food. They especially dislike Mexico's Mexican food. Americans reek of petroleum and dream of opening McDonald's franchises on distant planets, which is why all

patty and frankfurters. And even the frankfurters—they'll tell After lunch Wang's smoking a Kool in the middle of the you—are better than Frankfurtian frankfurters. The problem with Americans is their annoying politeness: they say, Have some cholesterol, does your daughter speak American? Your daughter

BOYS + + + + +

This is the common moniker in English for males in the growth periods from newborn to young man. After this period boys are typically extreme emotional swings, their propensity to violence, and their desperate attempts for attention. The following is an account, penned by one of our compilers: There was a little boy who dwelt in a housing development called Oak Hills, on a drive also called Oak Hills, and one day he got mad at his mother. This was because his mother had taken his stupid sister's side in that fight in the game of Candyland. The boy decided to run away. Before he ran away he slipped on his Superman Underoos, and stuffed his High Sierra backpack with his Batman Underoos and a pair of socks, and other details that would normally be left out. He came to a spot on the edge of the strawberry fields where he liked to sit with his brother and watch the turkey buzzards circle overhead. So he crawled up the embankment to where they'd rubbed the wild grasses flat with their asses, and he took off his backpack. He stared into the sky, and over few years—another boy with whom this boy, our protagonist, would play football, would die in a fiery crash, the bumpers and fenders of his Mustang wrapped around an oak. Over there on Meridian Road the boy could see cars



since 1999

Atlanta-based Jamie Iredell's "Book of Freaks," due out this fall from Future Tense, will be Iredell's second tome in as many years. Check out his Prose. Poems. A Novel. (Orange Alert 2009)

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chicago, nashville, the2ndhand.com .. | new writing | august 2010 sidling by at safe and reasonable speeds. The boy looked again into the sky and this time a cloud floated past. The cloud was little, and did not look like anything other than a cloud, but the boy determined to keep watching the cloud in manufacturers: Cadillac and Mercedes. No self-respecting the hope that it might eventually look like his dog. He kept watching the cloud until the cloud was just over Fremont Peak. Then the boy became distracted by Fremont Peak, and York, and favorite verbs, like "to have." Haves will say, Have where they pick up the guitar and subsequently attempt to the radio tower way up at its peak part, near where the boy and his Tiger Scout troop had camped the summer before. They'd played night tag with flashlights up there on the peak. It was fun. By now the boy was feeling a little hungry. He swept up his backpack again and again looked at the sky. Now the cloud that had looked like a cloud looked just a lit- Mercedes. The verb "to cut," however, in certain contexts, is brother, I haven't any change, they are, at the same time, found tle bit like an evil face, a face that the boy knew the world needed eradicated. So the boy slung his webs to the oaks around him and he pulled himself into the air. He swung from oak tree to oak tree until he reached the trail. Then he lowered himself to the ground again. There he ran into two vampires who tried to bite him, But he knew they would try to bite him because intuition told him so. So he told the vampires that they couldn't bite him. The vampires looked at each other and said, "OK. Do you want to come live with us?" The boy thought for a minute, then he said, "OK." And he went and lived with the vampires and their families. After a little while, the boy went back home to his family because the vampires only ate blood, so the boy was always hungry. His mother was happy to see him, and she said she would never take his sister's side in Candyland ever again. Later the Boy would play football, and this kid he played with would die in a car wreck on Meridian Road. But the boy did not know the other boy that well and when it happened the boy did not cry.

DICEPHALIC PARAPAGUS + A form of conjoined twins that is com-

monly found in the United States of America. In one example, when first born came a stereo, wailing, squelching, blasting static, the doctor felt an arm, a head. The room filled with squeals of white noise. Nurses scampered, heels clacking the children off from the birthing room. Do you want to hold them? Their mother blubbered, knowing one day she'd shower them with love in the shape of water from the shower in her bathroom. And so they came: one body, two heads, the boy and the stereo. And the mother said, My god what a gift what a miracle my god I will love you.

They learned to coordinate movement: the boy leaning toward an open window, the stereo squelching out and signaling for a signal. There was a hint of man shoulders, squared, of a tape deck, a CD carousel. Sure, people stared and took photos. The television stations came in droves, demanding that they owed the world their story, because televisions cannot exist without stories.

Their tiny town, with the tiny market, with the tiny BP, on the tiny corner, across from their tiny school, accustomed itself to the boy and the stereo, how they played basketball, drove their car while other kids played their stations on their own stereos.

By senior year a change stormed through, the stereo pumping out rap, the boy screaming for punk rock, Skynyrd, Golgotha, anything with guitars! The stereo bassed it up and the hip-hop blasted out. The doctor said separation was impossible: separate hearts and lungs, distinct wiring, but a shared liver and intestines.

And the boys, despite their obvious musical differences, did not want to separate. Together and separate, they said, the stereo blasting "Lean on Me," together and separate, the boy said, popping the collar of their Polo knit.

HAVES, THE + + + +Haves can be found in most nations across

planet Earth. There are some exceptions, primarily among the populations of sub-Saharan Africa. Despite their geographic variety, Haves share certain particular characteristics. The Haves voted for the other guy, they'll have you know. They always do. In nations where voting is more drama than nonfiction (note: this occurs in all nations) Haves are known to side with the other guy ide-

ologically, but put their money and their mouths into factories that manufacture digital polling machines. Haves are found saddling the rear seats of vehicles from the following exactly the same as Hey bro, can I get a ride? Not all Have Nots Have will be driven in anything Japanese—not even Japanese Haves. Haves have favorite cities, such as New you been to New York City? They don't have restaurants in your city like they have in New York City. Have you seen the new Cadillac? I have. Haves never confuse the verb "to have" with the verb "to halve". You'll never find them saying, Let's halve this hot dog, or We should halve this among the Haves' favorites. Especially when it comes to one cell-phoning their Have parents while said Have parents or the other of guys for whom they may or may not choose to vote. It all depends on who plans to cut taxes, or to cut welfare to the Have Nots, or to cut commercial time down during the Super Bowl. In this way, Haves are a perpetual contradiction, a living paradox, and so Haves have been and numbers on all the other of Earth's continents. The true remain enigmatic studies for Science.

HAVE NOTS, THE + + +Have Nots are not usually seen, but smelled. Follow a path of reeking patchouli and one finds—huddled on a streetside curb, smoking a grapeflavored bidi cigarette, right hand open and pleading for change or "buds," left hand strumming back a wayward

from FUN CAMP

a work in progress by Gabe Durham

Let's Hear It for the Perma-Staff | These guys were here for the Jews the weeks before us, they're here for Fun Camp, and they'll be here next week, when we've all gone home to caption camp scrapbooks and the junior achievers show up to swap business cards, practice faking shame over international foibles, and generally treat this place like a convention center. So, briefly: Nurse Nadine here'll fix you up like a pro while honoring her belief in the Healing Power of Improvisational Storytelling. No examples just now please, Nadine. Save it for the wounded. Chefs Grogg, Puddy, and Marimba will be dishing up all your high-protein fun fuel this week. Be sure and thank them-food staff have powers you just hope to God you're nice enough to keep them from using. That said, Grogg's a talker, so engage at your own risk. Same goes for Ole Sammy here, on paper a groundskeeper, but in practice a cool drink-sipper who perches in the shade dispensing salty wisdom. This guy's sage as hell and has maybe even been in some wars? Sam? Sam's shaking his head. But just know, the perma-staff's got their own thing going so they won't be onmessage like myself, Dave, Bernadette, and your counselors, so when they speak, be respectful and polite but be prepared to dismiss whatever they advocate as apocryphal. Likewise, they've asked that we not try to convert them this year, even while smiling, even when they could sorely use our message. We'll soon find out if they mean it.

The Quiet Cabin | All around in the post-rain everywhere, such rich material for the counselor of letters: Tetherball as metaphor for marriage, flooding lake as the unconscious, the muddy soccer field as the state of our two-party system, incabin dampness as desire, camper restlessness as childhood, trees as forest, leaves as trees, tried as true, muddy shoes as nature vs. nurture, grazing deer as splendorous awe, catch as catch can, town candy as contraband, the fact that my campers have informally joined other cabins as history repeating itself, the sight of Sandra running in the rain as desire, thin cotton clinging to Sandra's chilled tan skin as desire, camp as fun, fun as camp, my exclusion as popularity contest, popularity contest as loneliness, loneliness as crippling loneliness, "as" as projection, projection as a comfort, but less and less, these days.

Roy | I've got no peroxide for that hurt. If he doesn't love you back, girlfriend: a story. Roy, a baby, was named for a real man, cowboy Rogers. But all Roy did was give horse baths in a swimming pool. He stared out on the delta and beyond, to his sad soul. A director one day passed him. "You have become a man now!" the director whispered in surprise. Roy: "But I have no money." That day, in an agent office. "I have your man." "Nobody wants a cowboy star." Roy got on-horse. "Something in mind?" He had the look all right. At his film, a non-white man gave him his first crack of cocaine and Roy was never the same. In his mind, he bathed horses of the rain-

dreadlock-the Have Not. Have Nots can also be recognized by their particular call, which sounds eerily like and are true Have Nots, but are actually Haves in disguise. Sometimes Haves wish that they were actually Have Nots. For example, some Haves find their way to college campuses foil esteemless females with their wooing cadences about water, or waterfalls, or rivers, or lakes, and the dreamy shores thereupon. These imposters are not actually Have Nots, but Haves that have been seduced by the romantic legend surrounding Have Nots. While these Haves say to you, Sorry, meander a Mercedes or Cadillac around a metropolis peopled primarily by those in between the Haves and Have Nots (see "Human, A"). True Have Nots are in fact quite a rarity in North America and Europe, but can be found in vast Have Nots of a subcontinent such as India can also be found puffing a bidi, but as opposed to dreadlocks, what little hair they may have may be turbaned under a turban. The Have Nots of Sub-Saharan Africa are in pursuit of potable water, as opposed to the North American faux Have Not, who is in constant search of the next jam band. All artificial Have Nots are fans of jam bands.

bow. His Mom forgave him for forgetting her address, watching his reruns and happily singing his song out and proud. Roy's dad said sorry for leaving then. Roy got dry. Roy went to schools and told his tales of caution. Always when he told them, children laughed and obeyed his commands.

All These Hurts | Dried burnt macaroni cheese on a pot that big means it's time to break out the steel wool, Puddy. Keep swishing it like that in circles. Now pour that orangey water out and see how you're doing. Long way to go. I worry over sanitation exactly as much as I worry over the Large Hedron Collider whose future self stopped it from making a Big Bang, and over a God who kicked idolatry down the list of don'ts to make room for Higgs particles, and over the seasonal question, "Is my love life just an experiment testing the potential correlation between hair nets and invisibility? On how low a girl's got to wear her top to get a little attention in this getup?" All these hurts on all these timelines add up to a Twilight Zone where everybody knows the forthcoming twist and discusses it openly, but will gasp with true feeling when it comes. I believe this and when I really think about it, I cover my neck with my hands. But then the other 90 percent of the time, I revert to the adage that goes, "Has anyone known true loss but those who've opened an avocado to find it's a couple days past ripe?" I wish I was rich enough to look on the back of meats for traces of chronic discomfort. I wish I'd live long enough to see how far past our own globe we can get. I wish I got to laugh at the sun with mean, real confidence for not noticing how long we've been growing apart, for not having enough mass to explode as a supernova. How much? How much do I worry about what? Oh. Infrequently but desperately. What if a kid got struck down from mystery microbes in our chili-mac, Puddy? You'd kill yourself. We all would.

Early Riser | I worry I've begun to regard you with a kneejerk irony. Each time I lock my truths away in the interest of keeping the hive humming, I forget a crucial something and Holly tells me what I can do with that smirk I'm wearing. When words fail, I ask my record to intercede. The sacrifices made, as a camper, to achieve six-time cabin inspection award, while fostering a then-rare brand of fun. The solemnity with which I took my charge as an eight-time Boys Counselor, modeling and molding as your ordinances saw fit: pranks and streaks, water balloon raids, bra-stealing bonanzas, And now, with Holly at my side, the revisions made to the handbook that reflect each promise I ever made to myself. I never loved playing Steal the Bacon with ten-pound sacks of flour. I never loved Greased Watermelon Relay. O Fun Camp, when did my brain invert my face? When I at last remember how to lower the edges of my mouth, it's already bedtime.

Gabe Durham, Keyhole Magazine's new editor, lives and writes in Nashville. "Fun Camp" he describes as a series of short monologues from "in and around an eccentric pseudo-religious summer camp." Why camp? "It's just nice for the weirdos to get a little time away from the world now and then. And when we do, we make interesting specimens."