

saw and would swear by later when telling the other nurses about it; discomfited at populating a stranger's gaze, the translator removed hands from pockets, wiped one downwards across his beard and mouth, then rolling out of a slight sway walked to the double glass doors, pushed one open, and left. The man sitting beside her lifted the cards again off the table, apologized. He was sorry, he said, he was old, as if she needed reminding, and sometimes old things happened to him. He would drop into a daze and not realize it. When he snapped free of it, it'd often take him a minute to remember why he was

sitting there, what he was doing. All of which was to say he was sorry, could she remind him whose turn was it to discard? If it was his, and the game lasted another round, he just might have a chance at winning. She had to think about it. It was her turn. She was sorry to disappoint him, but as her hand stood, she thought they might reach another round, no problem. Not a problem, he told her. It was his first round. No expectations. He hadn't earned the right to disappointment yet. *Häviäminen on oppimista*. Losing was learning.

Alex TRETBAR

Bad Speed

When there was a lot of money around, Slim would turn gray, and I would agree with him that yes, he looked like an alien. He would abduct himself from a nimbus of Sterno heat, probing and probing until a kind of answer was reckoned up from the question of his body. And when he inevitably came back down, he tucked himself into that body.

Slim believed in aliens. Told me about them during our nights in the warrens and sewers of Portland. He became most rabid when speaking about the Grays. Claimed to have waylaid one in a vast and ancient waterworks under the northwest quadrant of the city. When the Gray refused to answer his questions in English, he bashed its head in with a blackjack. To his horror, wires and sheafs of motherboard spilled out. "That explained everything," Slim said darkly.

Slim believed in a scientific spirit, thought himself a ghost when his sores wept ectoplasm, an android when he survived a three-story fall. When he spoke he spoke twice. There was an undervoice, an astral body pitched many base-

ments below. When I listened I listened twice, and I heard myself listening.

His stories moved into my mind, shared rent with the bad speed going around that summer. Ghosts became synonymous with aliens. Death became synonymous with a life distant and suspected but yet unproven. Deep in Washington Park one night, I encountered a woman with a robe of chainmail and bramble. We were traveling in opposite directions, and I stepped aside to make room for her on the narrow path. Her staff was a wonder of mechanical ingenuity. I thought about going to rehab.

But there was so much money around, and I was enjoying the stories—mine and Slim's. In most corners of this empire, people flock to money when they smell it. That was not the case with those around us. Friends stayed away when Slim and I had money. Money rode us into the sunset. Rode us through hell and holler. At dawn we loaded black powder into six shooters. We aimed them at our necks and sang for joy.