**Cabinet on the Curb**

Patrick Malka

For the last six months, Edgar had been making a living finding, restoring, and reselling wood furniture through his online shop, Misfit Pines. After losing his job in a large-scale, high-end furniture manufacture, it was the best way he knew to pay his bills, tiding him over until he found regular employment and health insurance again. But this in-between hustle proved gratifying in a way he hadn't expected. Low overhead costs since he already owned all the tools he needed, his landlord let him use a corner of the limited garage space in exchange for some renovations, and if he continued to advertise the goal of his work as sentimental and environmentally friendly, the customers kept coming, allowing him, somehow, to survive where many were struggling.

Sometimes Edgar patrolled the yard sales and put down a bit of money, hoping to turn a profit at a later date but he much preferred the saving of an abandoned piece. Shelving left outside failing businesses, chairs piled next to dumpsters, side tables, cribs, dressers, even coat racks, all moving day rejects.

Edgar felt especially lucky when he came across the cabinet on the curb.

It was a gorgeous cabinet, eye level to his six feet and made from what looked like maple. The cabinet doors though were framed with slats of some other kind of wood, darker, maybe walnut, and an intricate mother of pearl inlay design in the center of each door. What it represented was hard to tell. At the inner edge of the cabinet doors were two symmetrically positioned, heavily corroded pull handles. Everything about this cabinet screamed antiquity and years of use. The intricate design, the congealed strata of grease and dirt layered around the handles, the chipped bottom of the short, claw footed legs, even the deep tracks and knots in the wood betrayed a more ancient history of life, death and the dishonest symbiosis of greedy creatures from centuries ago.

The cabinet sat at the end of a long driveway to what appeared to be an empty house, the front of which looked like how a child draws a two-story home: centered door with windows on either side on both the ground and first floor, an A-framed tar shingled roof with a small, triangular attic window. There were no curtains, so the emptiness of the house as well as it’s early signs of abandonment and dilapidation were on full display. Not unusual for the neighbourhood either. The cabinet seemed to be fair game.

Edgar pulled open the doors to inspect the interior. What he saw gave him an immediate sense of unease. On two shelves, were four large Mason jars with tightly screwed on, rusty lids. Each had a sepia toned label with a single phrase describing its former contents: *Arguments between sky and eroding peaks*, *Spores that grow in cracks of sidewalk and bone*, *What’s left of one hundred heart beats*, *The sounds of a settling home*. They appeared empty but, looking at how tightly sealed each jar was, Edgar wasn't so sure.

Even worse were the messages scratched into the wood of the cabinet's interior.

On the left-hand door: *The fire weakened dreams of faulty structures, cringe at the evidence of fracture.*

Edgar looked up and saw that the door to the house was now noticeably open. He was certain it wasn't before.

On the right-hand door: *The slowest cellular separation anxiety woes, meticulously arranged in neat taxonomic rows.*

Edgar was startled by the slamming of the front door.

Under the bottom set of jars: *I want an ink-soaked final printing, the burning eyes who’ve lasted this long without blinking.*

Edgar looked up again. Shadows, black on dark, glided across each window of the house.

Deeply slashed behind the upper set of jars: *I want to not want for any single thing, profane leather coated extravagance. How is this all that is left?*

Edgar closed the doors. He consciously thought to himself, don’t look up, there's no point, there's nothing there. But he did. All was still, except the flames dancing along the sill of the attic window. His instinct was to run past the cabinet, to shout for help, but was frozen at the sight of three people, standing at the door. They couldn't have been, but there they were—beautiful and loving and huddled close. Their clothes were blackened and flaking from them in some places, melted directly to their skin in others. They smiled, their teeth exposed behind hardened, receded lips, their faces like deeply cracked tree bark, nodding to Edgar as if to say, “Take it; it's all yours.” Edgar looked to the sky, anything to look away from them. The flames were gone from the attic. He looked back down to the door; they were gone too. The house looked empty and still again.

Edgar, breathing hard, took a step back towards the cabinet. He reached for his car keys, unlocked the back, and wondered how he would fit the cabinet in his van.