In an exploration of some of the possible relations between words and images, writers are asked to react to photos whose origins are obscure to them. The only guideline is that the text be somehow related to the images.
This morning I am surprised to find two empty seats on the normally packed train. Only when I am seated do I understand why no one else has taken them. I feel guilty noticing, and this makes me more determined not to show the rest of the carriage that, even if I did, it does not concern me as much as it did them. The man sitting across from me, holding his nose and fanning his face with his hand, bothers me. Has he no compassion for the fate of a fellow human being? Yes, the smell emitted was an acidic one, and grabbed you by the throat until it threatened to choke you, but then surely the smell would become more tolerable as you acclimatized to it, as would your eyes adjusting to a change in the light? It is obvious that she has been living outdoors for a great many days, and underneath the layers of plastic sheeting she is shivering and condensation has begun to gather. At the far end of the carriage a pair of police officers make progress, moving in our direction, inspecting passengers’ tickets. For the most part, the metro system here runs on an honesty system; people can come and go, apart from during peak times, without anybody checking their tickets.

I cannot imagine the police officers shaking her awake, but when one of them asks her if she has a ticket and she responds negatively, he tells her that she will have to get off here. Even though the train is going as far as Atlantic City, I suspect that the woman, like me, is heading downtown where, a short walk from the old fashion splendor of Union Square station, many of the city’s homeless congregate at Skid Row. When the train pulls into the next station, the police officers approach her again. “Come on, you’ve got to get off here.” His colleague stands between the doors to prevent the train from leaving. She slowly pulls herself up. The look of relief on the man sat opposite me when he removes his hand from his nose makes me feel sick. I have heard people reminisce that Skid Row is not what it used to be, as if it were a rock band that has grown too successful, that when they first moved to Los Angeles it was bigger, poorer, scarier, better and that now it is just a pale imitation of itself. Later that morning, when I look out at those waiting to be served in the dining room from the kitchen, I wonder if anybody has told any of them this and, if they have, does it make being hungry, addicted, or homeless any easier? I think about the woman on the train that day and how I should have said something, made my opinion known: there is a place for her in here.

Matthias Connor is an English writer also known as “Wolf Boy.” Through his Poppy Books imprint, Matt tells stories of life’s long negotiation through the eyes of the put-upon, the lonely, the cynical and the drifting, while finding his own way to a voice that can see the important details in the world, find reasons to live, and determine right from wrong.

John Divola (1949) lives and works in Los Angeles. Since 1988 he has been Professor of Art at the University of California, Riverside. His work has been featured in more than sixty solo and 200 group exhibitions in the United States and abroad.
“The iPhone?” I question him. “No, but even if it was
well that must be where you work right?” Florien
flop houses, pawn shops, fading advertisements, drug
deals, liquor stores, missions, beggars, preachers and
lines of people trying to stay out of the afternoon
sun. We pass Pershing Square. A woman recognize
is struggling with a suitcase on the sidewalk. A man
who appears to be with her is sprawled comatose
on his back. Two police officers are standing over him.
She is trying to reason whilst trying to get away. Fur-
ther along a large man is cleaning his sneakers with
a toothbrush whilst his girlfriend films him on her
phone.

Turning onto the freeway, Florien asks me have I seen
her? The story has been on the radio all morning.
That after being found guilty of shoplifting Lindsay
Lohan has been sentenced to 360 hours community
service at an unnamed women’s centre on Skid Row.
“Tell me more about the story,” I say. Florien
agrees. I say, it sounds like the same story, since it is
the only women’s center on Skid Row. No one had
mentioned it before, as Florien points out, the sentence
has only been passed this morning. So I would not have
known anyway.

Florien has already explained that we will be looking
for a beach. The client has briefed Florien that they
are looking for a beach with texture; beautiful, but in
a natural, understated manner; as if he or she is
dressed up, only in the sense that he or she looks like
they are not. Some days Florien is asked to cast for
derelict warehouses, or loft apartments, or Japanese
ornamental ponds, or dry lakebeds, or small -storey
houses in a specific pink.

I ask him who the client is. He cannot tell me and
refers to them as “Rain Drop,” which is what he has
been instructed to do. I push him further, as I know he
wants to talk to me because unlike the rest of the clients
he works for (and gladly tells me the names of), he
knows I will recognize the name of this one.

“The Phone?” I question him. “No, but even if it was
I couldn’t tell you” 10 minutes later, he tells me
(“iPhones”), and we are able to resume our day with-
out any further problems between us. We turn
off the freeway. We pull up at a Trader Joe’s and
buy cakes and sticky donuts and eat them in the car.

Before I ever set foot on Zuma beach, I had heard
the sound of this same ocean and seen the sun setting
over it, night after night, reading books by and about
people who once stood here, or listening to the music
also born here.

In the book The White Album Joan Didion moves to
Malibu from New York, and is woken up at 2 a.m. by
the wake of the Manson killings she saw as coming to
characterize the end of the sixties, in search of a new,
more peaceful life.

I do not know what I had been expecting. I had
sold every single possession of mine to come here. These
consisted mostly of books, records and CDs. Whilst
these items had spoken to me (even the t-
shirts) as a young man, of hope, ideas, character, and
fearless creation, today, the stars, the cosmos, the
more records and books I seemed to ac-
cumulate the more they feelings they had once pro-
vided in me began to dry up. From where I stood on
the beach, staring out to sea, it seemed like a futile
bid: by getting rid of my possessions I had hoped to
be reborn as the person I was before, and capture
what I had when I still thought that, by listening to
a piece of music or by reading a book, I could hear
the ocean in the distance. I hear Florien shouting after me
and I respond by walking after him in the direction
of the car. We still have other beaches to visit.

The screen rattles and the door opens. He looks me
upon after I have locked up my bike, his English accent
still intact after twenty years living here. The inside of his apartment
is crammed with paperback books and records. He
has already told me that he has originals by authors
such as Charles Willeford, Jim Thompson, David
Goodis, collectable paperbacks characterized by their
garish covers designed to arouse potential readers.
These, and hundreds of others, share space with a re-
cord collection dominated by blues, country, and soul
influences that stretches around the room. John asks
me what I want to listen to and I reply you choose. I
cannot remember what we listen to. He shows me his
own personal collection of Barbara Payton’s ghost-written memoirs. I Am
Not Ashamed, which I had asked to see after he told
me about her story whilst we were seated at the bar
in King Eddy’s.

Barbara Payton had moved to Hollywood in 1934 with
her cosmetics husband who was just fifteen when she was
described by one newspaper as the “Queen of the
Nightclubs” and her marriage ended as quickly as
the affairs had began. Making her acting debut in the
film noir Trapped, which would be her only
appearances in Hollywood, by now the doors of
fashionable restaurants, hotels and nightclubs were
ever closed to escape from hình of car, on the arm of one of the leading men, and she
was ushered in, past the civilians, the baying photog-
raphers, straight to the best suite, table, or roped-off
VIP area.

This is not a morality tale but Payton’s view of Holly-
wood was not to last.

By 1960, after a series of scandalous tabloid stories
about her personal life, the 32-year-old Payton found
herself adrift in Hollywood, ignored by her former co-
stars and the studios that had employed her; liv-
ing in a succession of boarding houses before finally
living on the street, turning tricks in waiting cars to
get by. The same doors that had once opened as she
approached now remained closed.

It was in the hard years that followed, on Sunset,
wherever between the splendor of Château Mar-
mond and Skid Row, that he hack approached Payton
about writing her biography. By now desperate, Pey-
ton agreed, but afraid that her creditors would claim
any money she negotiated to be paid in red wine.

John grew up in rural Kent before leaving for LA, via a
year-old John spent most of his days just walking
around on the Circle Line, unable to put it down. In the
school for difficult children in London. The fifteen-
year-old John spent most of his days just walking
the streets and it was during this period that he first
read The Family by Ed Sanders, the result of a grow-
ing interest in West Coast underground culture.
Playing truant from school he would ride around and
around on the Circle Line, unable to put it down. In the
evening, he returned to the family home in a quaint
Kentish village, where he would sit reading by the el-
tric fire in the sitting room whilst listening to Forever
Changes by Love.

Even before he knew what Susan Atkins looked like,
he was besotted with her, but after gazing upon the
grainy full-page shot of her in Helter Skelter, he
became hopelessly infatuated. He would stare at
that photograph for minutes on end, completely los-
ing himself in it. The smaller mugshot underneath
it he looked gore-cy “Oh God.” His arthritic hand
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True Love Stories tells the story of Jilted John’s emotional awakening, from pre-pubescent to young adult; first going steady with Sharon Smedley before it was too late.

The first time I came to Hollywood, a young woman fed me soup and diced pickles washed down with clunky tea. I have brought police helicopters circled noisily overhead, their spotlights swooping down on the neighborhood. In her bedroom, crammed with books (Denis Johnson, Rimbaud, Joan Didion, Raymond Carver) and records (Patti Smith’s, The White Album) the view overlooks huge swathes of Hollywood and too many forehead sports stories to list. I am going but I think I will get a job as a chamber maid.

I truly believed working in the bookstore was holding me back. Two years earlier workmen had commenced work on The Shard, which was to be Europe’s tallest building. Walking to and from lunch I would examine the pictures of what it would look like – its completion still seemed such a long way off. For now the bookstore was taller than it needed to be in order to rival the future skyline. The view of the city by the time of its completion. I envisioned a wholly different situation to the one I was in. It was not long before it began to first grow and then soar towards the heavens yet I was still walking past it every day. I was painfully aware that I was exactly the same person as before, only older. If they could build Europe’s tallest building, why couldn’t I?

I only smoke pot after dark when I can see my bed, or talk to someone else, or sit behind a trestle table in Chinatown, to sit behind a trestle table on the front desk, pointing at the sight of us as they do, maybe. Two years earlier workmen began to build Europe’s tallest building. A sign clearly visible when walking up the street and clicking their fingers, but it never happened. And now that this opportunity has presented itself, I cannot understand for the life of me why I would ever want to leave this place. It is the top floor of any big hotel, except that I can see my bed, or talk to someone else, or sit behind a trestle table in Chinatown. I am going but I think I will get a job as a chamber maid.

I am going but I think I will get a job as a chamber maid.

The suite is a collection of white rooms and covers much like the top floor of any big hotel, except that I can see my bed, or talk to someone else, or sit behind a trestle table in Chinatown, to sit behind a trestle table, asking her, what are you doing tonight? I tell the receptionist, I am going but I think I will get a job as a chamber maid.

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