

Their Days Are Numbered XXVI

written by Guest Contributor | June 30, 2015



Their Days Are Numbered is a new year-long project authored by the collective *Entropy* community. It is a collaborative online novel written by the *Entropy* community on a weekly basis. A different author will write the next “chapter” each week, to be posted every Tuesday, following the previous post from the previous week, and following a very limited set of guidelines (that each author has one week to write the next piece after the previous week’s installment goes up, that installments should range between 150-1500 words, and that pieces should somehow incorporate a real-life occurrence, current event, news item, or other happening from that week).

Follow the entire “novel” here: [Their Days Are Numbered](#).

The twenty-sixth installment is presented this week by Joanna Ruocco.

XXVI.

Wen, I would like to tell you of the first time there was one species on earth. That species was bears. Have you heard of these bears? Like small-eyed sharks in the coats soldiers wear when they march in two lines from the barracks? Don’t worry, Wen, if you have not heard of sharks. They are like snakes with gums that don’t fit in their mouths. No matter if you have not heard of snakes. I would like to tell you, Wen, not about snakes, about bears. Long ago there were just bears on earth. If you weren’t a bear, you were shot dead by the bears. You were shot beside a canal. Then, as now, there were many canals. There were many corpses that filled the canals, all the corpses of every species but bears, then all the corpses of bears, all but the corpse of the very last bear. Wen, it is cold work in the boats pulling corpses up from the mud of the corpse-thick canal. Here, in the woods, where I’m sitting, beneath a moon I seem to see from all sides, a moon like a ball, I feel very cold, even though I am not on a boat, even though I am wearing the coat soldiers wear, even though I tied my hair in a knot just under my chin. My eyes don’t fit in their lids. My gums don’t fit in my mouth. No matter, Wen. I can still see. I can still speak. I would like to tell you of the time I met the last bear, the very last bear, before you were born, before there was once more one species on earth. He looked like a

woman. He looked like a very old woman, small eyes, gums outside of her mouth, hair tied under her chin, in her son's too big coat, and he hobbled like a very old woman alongside the canal, his head down like a very old woman looking in the water for the corpse of her son. Soldiers were marching in two lines in the other direction. My boat barely moved in the thick and still water. With my gaff, I pulled a corpse from the mud. The corpse had a sign on its neck and I could read the black letters so I read the sign to the bear. The bear said, what does it mean? I said, it means we are ending the cycle of the military era. Those bears, said the bear, those bears in two lines marching past us, they have all hurt their forelegs? I said, do you mean they are injured and upright? I pushed the corpse toward the bank and the bear lifted the corpse from the water. We did this again and again, and every corpse was again the end of the cycle. The bear said, do you mean this is forgiveness? Forgiveness is the very last crime? Wen, I remember the night you climbed out of the boat and marched away from the city. You were injured and upright. I said, take these coals, and I gave you the metal box from the floor of the boat with the six living coals hot inside it. Above, then as now, there was a moon I seemed to see from all sides, a moon like a ball. I have looked for you, Wen, but you aren't in the water. You aren't in the woods. Right now, in the woods, where I'm sitting, the ground rocks like a boat. My gums are cold as a corpse. The trees stand in straight lines. There are no trees, Wen. There are soldiers who wait in the night at attention. They are guarding the barracks. They have signs on their necks. The bear said, and these signs? They mean all is forgiven? Wen, do you remember, in the cold boat at night as corpses fell into the water, how I used to tell you all kinds of things? I told you those coals in the box on the floor of the boat, those coals are black eggs that hatch into fires. You said, I haven't heard of these eggs. I told you, no matter, the coals are black moons. You said, do you mean they reflect? I told you then about coals, how they reflect far away fires. I said, Wen, take this metal box of reflections. You took the metal box and marched away from the city. You left me floating in a boat on the empty canal. Wen, there are no more far away fires. Long ago the last fires went out. You said, do you mean all of this—it is already over? But the box is burning my forelegs. Wen, in the morning, if you march out of the barracks, don't worry if you march without looking. Don't worry if you look and don't know who I am.

Joanna Ruocco is the author of several books including *Another Governess / The Least Blacksmith* from Fiction Collective Two & most recently *Dan* from Dorothy, a Publishing Project. This year, she is the final judge for the FC2 Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Contest, which opens August 15th. [Submit!](#)