

EAR RAT MAGAZINE

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“RIPPED OFF”

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Melted Zine, *Ear Rat*

Letter from the Editor

by Mike V.

When I was nine, maybe ten years old, my mom & dad would take me up to the high school to watch my sister play softball. This was a regular occurrence for many years. One particular time I went, I ventured away from the softball field to explore more of the high school. I made it over to the tennis courts and watched two dudes playing against one another. After a few minutes they called me over, and told me that if I would run and get the balls for them, they'd pay me 25 cents for every ball.

I don't remember how many I wrangled for the rest of the day. I know it was more than 80, because when I got to \$20 for my running tally, I jumped into the air and sang an invented song:

Twenty dollars, twenty dollars,

All for me!

Pay me twenty dollars,

Poop and Pee!

My sister's softball game ended and all the families and players were walking towards the tennis courts. My mom called out my name and pointed towards the parking lot, indicating it was time to go. I walked up to the tennis guy closest to me and said "okay, I need to leave now. You owe me X dollars and 25 cents, please!"

"Oh, yeah we don't have it on us. We'll pay you later."

I never got paid, obviously. The dudes laughed in my face. Like, literally, they just started cracking up as I stood there unsure of what to do about getting my hard-earned money. I was standing like eight feet from one of them. I was a little kid, they were less little. This is the way the world works, or at least how it did back then, when a "high schooler" was akin to some kind of God-being who could crush you under his thumb if he be so inclined.

I felt so cheated and angry and and and what the fuck? You said you'd pay me, and then you didn't? Huh?! I made a vow that day to claim my debt that these two owed me. I'm still out here, tracking them down, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. My life is a void of nothingness, consumed entirely by a debt that was stitched in time twenty five cents at a time.

I will find you, I will make you pay.

* * *

The theme of this issue of Ear Rat Magazine is "Ripped Off." We have stories, pictures, and...well no we just have stories and pictures.

But they're good, like really good. I wouldn't lie to you.

- Mike V.

The Rip-off

by bikerbuddy

I dreamed about my mother early in December and I had that familiar moment upon waking of clarity dissolving into reality. There was nothing significant about the dream, except that I had a sense that it had signified something; that something had changed. But my insight faded on the instant I was distracted. It left me feeling bothered. Besides, I felt foolish for believing that a dream could mean anything, even allowing for the moments of waking when my mind was still being driven by dream logic. I called my mother with a sense of foreboding at an appropriate hour later in the morning and was glad to hear she was okay.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked as I tried to end the conversation. I assured her there wasn't, but I think I left her with a sense that something was the matter.

And there was. Something had changed in the universe, like a terrible beauty born, and I couldn't articulate it.

Like most people, I'd been feeling a bit low over the last few months. The pandemic was getting to people everywhere, even on the cusp of a vaccine roll-out. Even here in Australia where we've had things so much better than most of the world. In truth, I was more bothered by the whole US election and what I was seeing unfold with Trump's false claims that the Democrats had somehow ripped him off. This is even before January 6. Lies and deceit both-

er me. Somehow, in the weird value systems of my upbringing, I'd grown an out-sized sense of idealism: a belief in things.

But believing in the wrong things was a trap I had feared as I grew up. Like believing the Dream: that on a cos-

mic scale, my unconscious fantasies might signify. As though my mother's weird superstitiousness had taken root in my brain at an early age without me knowing, and only now was it manifesting, leaving me to fight a rear-guard action to defend my reason. My mother thought she believed in God and smiting, conflating the tenets of a religion, which she barely understood, with the superstitions of her own childhood. Pictures of St Bernadette in the Grotto hung either side of her bed, but at dinner she also threw salt over her left shoulder if it was spilt. Crossed knives on a plate were the harbinger of an argument which my mother would try to dispatch by smacking them hastily to the floor,

accompanied by an inarticulate ejaculation, a response more likely than not to precipitate the argument she was attempting to avert. No shoes on the table. It wasn't that they were unclean. There was something portentous about that too. Don't ask me to explain. And I was warned so many times about crossing my eyes or pulling a face, especially in the Summer heat when the rotation of the fan was likely to catch me unawares on its return arc across the lounge room, that I was destined to be an experimenter, a pseudo-scientist, putting my mother's assertions to the test, debunking whenever the opportunity presented. In short, I was a pain in the arse.

Rip-off

/ rip.ɒf /

Noun

1. Excessive charge or exorbitant price: "These prices are a rip off"
2. A cheap exploitative imitation: "That watch is a Cartier rip off"

Verb

3. An act of stealing or financial exploitation: "The man ripped off millions of dollars from the bank"
4. An act of satire (as in imitation) for the purposes of ridicule: "Members of the class would rip off their teacher's mannerisms"

Colloquial

5. To expel wind from the anus, usually with a good strain (also, 'to rip one off'): "Larry was known to rip one off after each and every beer"

Needless to say, I was raised with rituals based on a set of illogical beliefs.

My mother also believed that aping the actions of “her betters” would make her better. She spoke with an affected posh accent whenever her aunt, her mother’s sister who married into money, came to visit. Aunt Edna spoke about the theatre, because the theatre was posh, wasn’t it? In the presence of her aunt, in her attempts to keep up, my mother would strangle three syllables from the word — “thee-ah-tah” — like a lofty opera singer reaching for a note. As I grew, she corralled my naturally casual temperament with her pretensions to a class not our own.

Sometimes I felt sorry for her, but that didn’t stop me from ripping her off, tearing at her sad pretence because I knew if I didn’t, I’d have to keep pretending to her, and then pretend to my children when they were older, just to show I was raising them right, and so on and so on, to each generation born, until the heat death of the universe.

Over the years my mother’s vowels gained weight in her mouth, rounding out like cannon balls fomenting class warfare on invisible enemies; like barrels of oil rolled from the parapet of a castle against unworthy opponents.

Yet the memory of her attempts to improve me — my resistance and the fun I had with her — still gives me pause.

“There ain’t anything to worry about,” I assured her without thinking, as I tried to end that phone call in December.

“No, no, no. Please do not say ‘ain’t’ darling. It is so common,” she told me, and I knew I’d made a mistake. “Have a sense of who you are. Speak slowly, dear, and annunciate.”

Nothing has changed since I was young, I thought. On a weekend, she’d be pulling at my jacket, putting my hair into place. Looking me good in the eye as she prepared me for society.

“You’re old enough to represent the family’s interests now, darling,” she’d tell me.



Jean-François Millet, 1876

“I ain’t going,” I’d say. It’d be some dinner or fund raiser or a ceremony full of petty politics that Aunt Edna had encouraged her into. And my mother would roll her eyes, as though she had given birth to the working-class man.

“Why can’t you try to speak just a little bit more like Mummy?”

So, when I had the dream, I was confused because there was something different. I was equally bothered by my latent superstition, as much as my desire to discover what my insight had portended. Something had changed. Some tweak in the universe that others had missed. The Arecibo telescope had just collapsed and

it would not be picked up there. Government spy agencies were watching each other and not paying attention to what mattered, I was certain. And reality TV played on our sets like a daily dose of Soma. No one was seeing it, like the Vagon fleet hovering above Earth, but maybe if I searched hard enough, I would discover the significance of my vision.

I made myself think back to my dream; where I’d been and what I’d been doing. I’d come home after

a long night out to find I'd left the TV on and the news channel was playing, which made me groan. I groaned so forcefully that I fancied I might have burped, which made me wonder whether it was something I had heard on the TV, or if someone had put something in my drink while I was out the night before. Scott Morrison, our prime minister, was on the screen, telling us everything would be okay. And then there was the US election, with Rudy Giuliani and a woman, but my mind was already sinking into sleep. I rippled from the lounge, as though my bones had liquefied, folding beneath the glass coffee table, and that's when I slipped into my dream.

So, I'm under the coffee table with the TV going, and I decide to slide out from underneath, or at least my sleeping self does — the me inside the dream. And it's a bright sunny day after a night full of drinking and arguing, and I look about the lounge room, at the packet of chips stuck in the crease of the lounge and the PlayStation console glowing, and the darkness of the room.

I draw the curtains and everything seems normal. Like I said, it's a sun-shiny kind of day. The birds are singing, but then, so are the trees, keeping tempo with their branches, like a scene from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? I find Mum in the yard, putting out the washing, and she's wearing an apron and a dirty top with an old scarf to tie back her hair. She's smoking and dancing while she puts out the washing. And she's singing. Can you believe it!?

So come and take a ride through the countryside

We're gonna fly high, higher than we've ever done before

And I say, "Mum, what are you doing? What is that atrocious song you are carolling?" And she stops to look at me, as though I'm the only thing in this scene, the only thing in her world, in fact, that doesn't make sense. She's pregnant. I've never seen her pregnant, since I'm an only child and that's the way I like it.

And she says, "What's up?"

And I say, "What is this all about?"

And she says, "Man, I asked you first."

And I ask, "Why are you talking like me?"

And she says, "Hey, man, I made you. How come you ain't talking like me?"

And Dad, who's just returned from a business trip and has been hung out to dry on the clothes line, says, "Yeah, man, it's such a drag." And then the clothesline spins in the wind and Dad gets whipped around and around until it spins so fast that it takes off and goes into orbit, leaving a big hole in the ground. Mum and I both watch him disappear into the stratosphere. Meanwhile, the hole starts to grow until it's a fissure in the Earth. I look back across the widening gap to my mother, wondering what she will do. How she will make it back inside the house.

"Do you think you can make it back, Mum?" I ask. "Do you require my help?"

She spits on the ground, scratches her crotch and pulls her undies out of her backside. A real wedgy. "What do you reckon?" she asks. "You think I'm gonna fly across this gap with jet propulsion?"

And the thought, the very image of my mother's fart-propelled body, shooting across an impossibly widening crack — oh my God, not pregnant I think, but full of wind — awoke me.

I remember now!

I had sat up, surprising myself as I smacked my head against the underside of the coffee table. Ow! And then I listened. I must have been asleep only a few seconds, because there was the same news story playing, the one with Rudy Giuliani and that woman at the Michigan Voter Fraud Hearing, except I didn't notice it before. I mean, EVERYONE noticed it, particularly the poor woman sitting next to him. Her eyes flitted to Giuliani with synaptic speed when he made the sound. But no-one saw what it meant, how it changed the universe. That's what I'd seen!

Back in the nineteenth century a man called Joseph Pujol who went by the stage name Le Pétomane gained a reputation as a talented flatulent. He was able to fart at will. He was a star attraction at the Moulin Rouge. His audience included Edward, Prince of Wales, King Leopold II of the Belgians

and Sigmund Freud. He had an amazing audio range that encompassed tenor, baritone and bass. He could reproduce the sounds of little girls, his mother-in-law and even the sound of a bride on her wedding night. He could imitate cannons and would astonish his audience by blowing out the gas lights on the side of the stage. Apparently, he could even smoke a cigarette as part of his performance...

In short, Le Pétomane showed that farts were funny and entertaining in an age when people had been taught to believe they were not. But now I saw something else in his gastronomic performance: that belief in society was an act of necessary superstition. That abstract thoughts about government, justice and equality were the fodder of the social contract, the "consent" upon which freedom rested. If you engaged in the pretence of being better, you might just become better. Beyond that, thinking shit, as it were, was a bad diet waiting to be expelled by a bad ending. It began with Rudy's hair dye. A fart was the final antidote.

Because a fart is bare-faced truth straining to be heard.

It is contorted logic, I know, that brought me to this thought, which is probably why it had eluded me so long. But remembering it lightens my mood. For the first time in months, I feel I have had the weight of 2020 lifted from me. Rudy had executed an anti-La Pétomane moment. Whereas Le Pétomane had approached his show with all the precision of Neil Armstrong landing the Eagle in the Sea of Tranquility, Rudy had unwittingly mustered a storm as unbridled as Hurricane Dorian attempting to debunk the moon landings with a sharpie.

I ring my mother back, laughing hysterically. She understandably thinks I'm drunk. But I'm not. It's still over a month before 6 January 2021 and I don't know what is going to happen. Later I will wonder about the cyclonic whirl of the clothesline I dreamed that ripped my father into the void. Was that more significant? Was that, too, portentous? At the moment, the moment I am speaking to my mother and trying to tell her about a fart, can anyone yet know? Is there some other dream I missed?

"It's like that line from Vonnegut," I tell her. "You

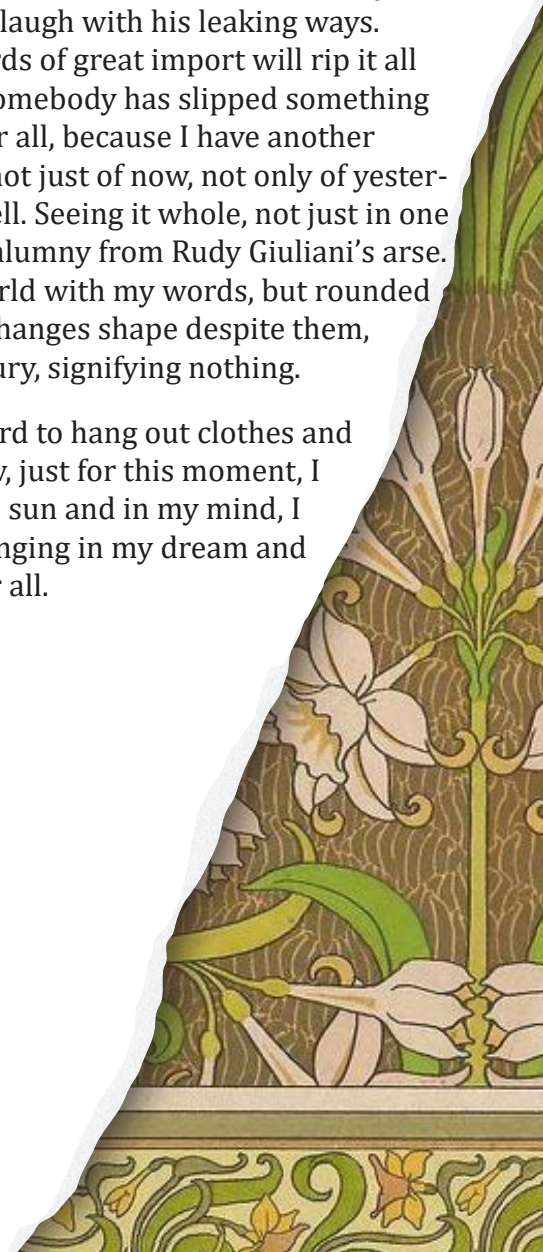
remember I read you those bits from Vonnegut?"

She doesn't remember, but I repeat it anyway: "We are here on Earth to fart around. Don't let anybody tell you any different."

I laugh. I laugh so hard that I fart as I try to speak but my mother doesn't hear it at the other end of the line and doesn't understand my fey mood. Yet it makes me feel better. But I have slipped into crudity again. I hear disapproval in my mother's tone. So, I tell her I love her and hang up. I smile. Surely everything will go well.

But something has been ripped off, something bigger than Rudy's fart, and no one can agree what exactly the truth of it is. And as my sense of foreboding grows, wondering again what I have missed, the day slips into tomorrow, and then tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, until the world spins further out of shape, no matter how much Rudy wants to make me laugh with his leaking ways. Words, words, words of great import will rip it all to pieces. Maybe somebody has slipped something into my drink, after all, because I have another vision, unbidden, not just of now, not only of yesterday but soon as well. Seeing it whole, not just in one cracking burp of calumny from Rudy Giuliani's arse. I can shape the world with my words, but rounded or flat, the world changes shape despite them, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

I go out into the yard to hang out clothes and close my eyes. Now, just for this moment, I turn my face to the sun and in my mind, I hear my mother singing in my dream and it is beautiful, after all.





Fortune Fish

Melted Zine



Trickle Tickle

Hannah FitzGerald



RIPPED OFF IN SPRING

BY DANN

As we leave the more notable holiday season behind, we must now trudge through the bleak remnants of winter and hope for Spring to give us something to live for. It isn't easy, especially if you live for the 'big three': Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

In turn, we now have the lesser three: Valentine's, St Patrick's, and Easter. Now I certainly don't want to diminish the origins of each respective holiday. Valentine of Terni was beaten, stoned, and beheaded; Patricius was sold into slavery; and the Easter Passion generally needs no further explanation. In lieu of these sordid tales, we get candy, booze, and then a second round of candy. While much had been said about the commercialization of Christmas, it's far from the only time we've been pushed to buy novelties so there would be something to do in a given month. I can sort of see how the Jewish community feels as their bloody civil war has been turned into a supposed eight days of presents and dreidel spinning, which isn't much better.

Anywho, enough has been discussed about all that, and I don't care to belly-ache about corporate assimilation of celebratory days that many people wouldn't have known about otherwise. Instead I want to belly-ache about how things used to be before boring old adulthood took over and forced everyone to buy a greeting card or else risk hurt feelings and a possible passive-aggressive silent treatment.

There was once a magical time in grade school (or primary school... I'm writing for an international audience, so forgive my ignorance in regards to naming) where each holiday was given more or less

the same weight. Christmas of course got top billing, but we didn't care. Once it passed, we had little more than a month to gear up for the next.

Each was not a grand display, but we didn't need that. Reams of construction paper themed to the colors of the event at hand was sufficient. We could decorate the room with streamers and connected links. We could cut out shapes and paste them on the wall with that weird blue putty stuff. We could make cards from scratch and everyone would get one, even the weird kids.

We were lulled into a false sense that this would be the way it would always be. Every month was special and had some reason to bring us a momentary respite from our daily drudgery. When you're in your single digits, school is the most bothersome thing in your life, so any excuse to get out of work and use plastic scissors to cut out shapes from colored paper was a good thing, even if said scissors couldn't cut pre-scored tissues.

More often than not, we'd have the same routine. Decorate the classroom and have some sort of snack. Halloween would have the added benefit of costumes, Christmas would have secret Santa, and Valentine's Day we would all swap cards.

I found this one to be one of the more exciting spectacles. We'd bring in a paper lunch bag, decorate it to our heart's content, and then hang it off our chair. This was our mail box, at which point we'd make the rounds, dropping off cards that paid strict adherence to formal gender roles. This was serious business. One time my brother almost gave one of his male friends a Ninja Turtle card that said 'du-

dette'. I saved his life that day. Everyone got a card, and there was no awkward romantic ties to any of it, just pure camaraderie.

St. Patrick's and Easter didn't have a complex show, opting instead to display their themed colors, again in construction paper. It didn't matter; there was no learning that day, and we got apple juice in a tiny paper cup that I would usually spill as I tried to get things out of my desk.

Like all good things, they must come to an end; eventually grade school turned into to junior high. There were still some celebrations, but the 'big three' become more prominent, and truthfully it was really just a 'big two' in the end.

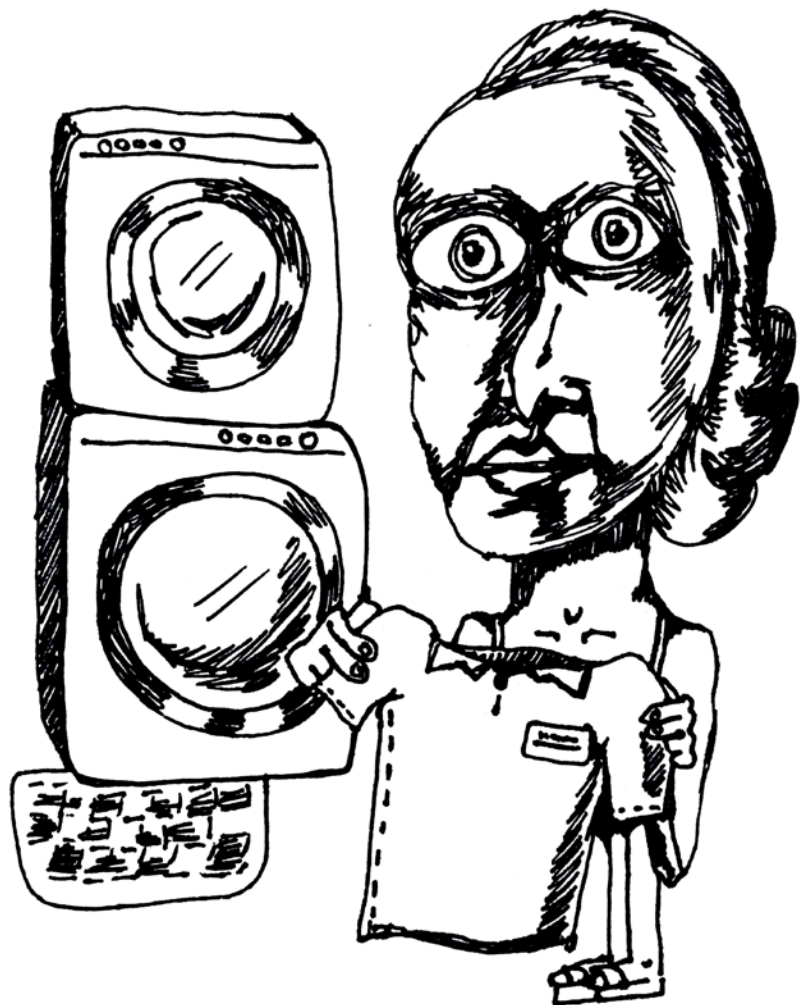
I recall the first time I felt like I was kidding myself about giving each holiday equal weight. It was probably in junior high, or just prior, during St. Patrick's Day. As with most holiday prep, the stores help you buy into the festive mood by decking out their aisles in the appropriate colors and useless items. I bought green mustaches, green hats, green kazoo-blowy-things, shamrock glasses, and a Tasmanian Devil t-shirt. That last item had a speech bubble on it that read something like, "Me Irish..." Only the old ladies at church found it funny and paraded me around to show it off.

I'm not sure if it was just the cold damp weather of the depressing period of time just prior to Spring that did it, but despite the total buy-in for the celebratory aspects of the holiday, I just didn't feel it. It was becoming obvious that not everything was equal, and that childhood reverence had a firm shelf life.

Worse, the better holidays also started to lose their luster after a while. Trick or Treating faded away, relatives stopped giving you gifts, and you were expected to actually eat all the food at Thanksgiving, not hide out at the kids table until dessert.

Things improved eventually, and I found ways to make them count again with Internet countdowns and gift swaps amongst friends. Valentine's Day is more of a perilous land mine at this point, and I don't partake in the drunken debauchery of St. Patrick's. Easter has reclaimed a little of its spirit with Egg hunts (sorry, Spring Spheres for the secular crowd) and the promise of better weather.

Ultimately though, I miss the simple construction paper chains, cutouts, and snacks. We can't go back, and for that I feel just a little ripped off...



Laundry Tomorrow

Hannah FitzGerald

Contributors

Harr B. is the Art Director of Ear Rat Magazine. He draws most of his inspiration from the animals he encounters on his meandering walks around town and whatever is on TV at two in the morning.

Roger Bender is a high school student living in Southern California. He likes eating popcorn while drinking 2% Reduced Fat milk. He also has a very poor alias. Visit his website at madville.neocities.org.

bikerbuddy lives in the Blue Mountains in Australia, west of Sydney, not as far west as Broken Hill, but closer east than Broken Wind. His interests have recently turned to spirituality and he now runs courses on the power of channelling the chakra through tantric farts. He is also running social nights for amateur laparoscopy.

Dann is an IT professional/teacher/small business owner, who also has a passion for technology, macro photography, and nostalgia. Starting with his first computer, the IBM 5152, he's witnessed the rise of personal computing and the World Wide Web through all of its stages. He now splits his time between application systems at a University and smaller personal web projects ranging from large database-driven ecommunities for Oakley Sunglasses and the smaller irreverent humor on Neocities.

Hannah FitzGerald is an artist and currently an undergrad at Carnegie Mellon University. She likes all things and working people and high contrast. Her drawings are a menagerie of big-headed creeps at the moment. You can find her work at misterbananawoman.neocities.org and on Instagram @misterbananawoman.

Melted Zine is a web-based art project by Elliott Wyatt. Inspired by the spirit of escapist fantasy, the user-generated web, and the long history of cartoon-based psychedelia, the zine is a constantly changing kaleidoscope of colors, digital collages and comics. You can visit it at meltedzine.neocities.org or email meltedzine@gmail.com for commissions or collaborations.

Mike V. is the Managing Editor of Ear Rat Magazine. He eats a lot of bread and drinks a lot of coffee. When he looks up at the Moon, he wonders if you're looking up at the same Moon too.

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<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/plants-and-their-application-to-ornament-1896>

Millet, Jean-François, Illustration of a washer woman, <https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/washer-woman/>

Mink Mingle, (photo of flowers before a blue sky), <https://unsplash.com/photos/96JD67agngE>

Andre William, (photo of torn sheets of paper), <https://unsplash.com/photos/Aa-lXBVKDUM/info>



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