

TLR



TAHOMA LITERARY REVIEW 2.3

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REVIEW

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover for Volume 2, Issue 3 of *Taboma Literary Review* is courtesy of Northwest-based artist Karen Doten. The cover is a detail from a work entitled “Drowning Mountain.”

Doten uses the media of painting, encaustic, drawing, photography, and collage to illustrate the theme of landscape in her work, exploring the relationship between recognizable space and abstraction. Her art uses layering to show multiple spaces at once, condensing landscapes into the center of the frame, so that the overall effect reveals abstractions of those specific places. The qualities of light and space that are unique to the region are a consistent presence in her work, as is the relationship between fragmented industrial elements and the overwhelming natural beauty of the landscape.

She describes her work as relevant to contemporary art in that the landscapes she explores break down spaces in varied ways and time. The locations and memories of these spaces are layered and combined with observational studies. The work is executed using basic materials such as pencil and paper, which are then combined with digital photographic media to create a notion of timelessness.

Doten says she keeps a quote by artist Agnes Martin (a Canadian-born abstract painter known for her minimalism) in her mind when she is working: “My paintings are not about what is seen. They are about what is known forever in the mind.” Her time in the Southwest also



Drowning Mountain, oil and graphite on linen, 32 x 22, 2015

helped her to understand the work of artists like Richard Diebenkorn and Martin, two artists whose work she admires greatly.

She has always had an interest in traveling, which has influenced her art. She recently lived in New Mexico, where the extreme landscape change had a major impact on her work. The varied layers of the Pacific Northwest spaces that she typically painted combined with the vastness of the desert Southwest to create a new direction of expression.

Doten received a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa, as well as additional degrees in Art from UI and Central Washington University. Her work has been exhibited at galleries throughout the Seattle/Tacoma area, and in Philadelphia, Iowa City, Albuquerque, and other venues, and includes a solo show at the Morris Graves Museum of Art in California.

Her current studio work (including the *TLR* cover) uses traditional materials that explore a more complicated color palette and continues her use of layering. These pieces are oil on linen paintings that continue in the genre of Northwest landscape, but focus primarily on light, space, atmospheric and natural constructions, rather than specific objects.

She can be contacted through her web site at karendoten.com.

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You can hear many of the authors in this issue read their stories, poems, and essays on our web site: <https://soundcloud.com/tabomaliterary/tracks>.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Editors do not edit in a vacuum, as much as we like to consider the possibility of an isolated log cabin on a lake, in which we can squirrel ourselves away to spend our lives reading and writing.

It is possible that we went about selecting this issue's work with many different things on our minds: the forthcoming winter, perhaps, or maybe we were affected by the news that was dominating each day we worked on the issue, our fifth. There's a decidedly wintry bent to the poetry selections this time, work that, on the surface, might seem grim and serious. But read closely; the quiet pondering does not give way to hand wringing, or posturing. Rather, the work pays homage to many societal issues, of historical and current nature.

In Karen J. Weyant's "Tips for Young Girls Hoping to Avoid the Rapture," a lyrical list of instructions reflects a candyland of things we probably all secretly hope for. Joe Wilkins's "Littlelight" considers, wistfully but not in maudlin fashion, the poet's reaction to the death of an entire family, honoring them without veering into the grotesque.

In every issue, we try to take our readers places that it might be impossible for them to visit, as well as times both past and future. Our prose and poetry selections are always made with an ear for voices representing a variety of perspectives that are sometimes mainstream, but more often those of people we know little about; how else to bridge the gaps that continue to divide? Noah Saunders's debut fiction "Daegu Lust" explores the raucous nightlife among a community of expats in

South Korea. Kenzie Allen's "Norway" is something of a love poem and a prayer for, or perhaps to, a nation and a place. Roz Ray's "Eulogy for a Small People" imagines a robotic future, while Jen Julian's "Bone Men" visits the world of early 1900s paleontology, and Robert Moulthrop's "Miss Honeybunch Takes a Dip" transports us to the early 1960s South, when fear and confusion ruled attitudes about sexuality. For sheer inventiveness, we have J.T. Townley's "Gojira & Son," which manages to combine monsters, mayhem, and an inability to hit the curveball.

Our long-form poem this issue is by Stephen S. Mills. "A Brief History of How My Parents Didn't Die," offers an intimate view to a small town in Indiana through a long-lens perspective of regional and national events. And speaking of poetic forms, we're excited to have John F. Buckley and Martin Ott's "Phantom from Alternate Universes," an ambitious and contemporary take on the traditional pantoum. The spirit of experimental wordplay is sprinkled throughout this issue. In James A.H. White's nonfiction essay "At Wick's End," a normal dating questionnaire becomes something else entirely. Anne Elizabeth Weisgerber's "Sleeping Beauty: Markson Fangirl," a flash fiction offering, challenges the traditional sense of story, while Martha Silano's poem "No, it did not give you wings," encourages us to think about the relationship between language and lived experience.

If you've perused our journal over our first four issues, you know we are fans of literature that connects the personal to the larger world, and so we also have the poems "Mother of 2 Stabbed to Death in Silverton, Colorado," by Allison Adair, and "Answers at a Press Conference," by Amy Miller, each of which explores the personal aspects of public events. Two poems, Gerry LaFemina's "Basics of the Physical World," and "Goat," by Hila Ratzabi, also remind us of the brutality and humanity of our world.

Nor is it always bright. Both "Without the Light" by Mark Burke, and "Den," by Allison Linville cast the reader into the darkest of places, where the deepest of our emotions are enticed to come out.

We're always lucky to get work that exposes a little of that which we might never experience ourselves. José Araguz's "Spiderman Hitches a Ride" allows us to witness a young man's coming of age, while Brandon Barrett's "Cotard" and Kristie Letter's "Late July, Clover Lick, West

Virginia” give us perspectives from, respectively, inside a neurological disorder and that of two boys who make a gruesome discovery. The tension doesn’t let up in Lito Velázquez’s “Nuno Sings,” in which a small boy faces an ordeal on his own. Continuing this thread is the short story, “Door,” something of a historical fiction by Ann Epstein, in which a has-been Munchkin is recruited for an Andy Warhol film. We can hear you flipping to the table of contents already.

What must it be like, to be these people at these stages in their lives? Three flash essays, “A Thousandth of a Second” by Erin Goldstein, “Loss” by Amy Collini’s, and “In Which I Search the Earth for the Sweetest Thing and Find It in a Pool,” by Sarah Broussard Weaver, allow us to share in their very personal experiences, with depths that belie their brevity.

We hope you enjoy them all.

With this issue, as well, we see our friend and poetry editor Kelly Davio off on her move to England. Kelly will continue her role at *Tahoma Literary Review*, and as the work in this issue so clearly shows, no distance can bar a strong presence, and no time difference can weaken a good story, so while we wish Kelly a bon voyage, we also look forward to seeing what great works of literature she discovers on that side of the pond.

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LATE JULY, CLOVER LICK, WEST VIRGINIA

KRISTIE LETTER

“Stay back,” one boy said when he saw the shape circling.
But then they moved closer. The two boys laid their t-shirts by a red rock.

One boy’s shoulders matted with freckles, while the other’s skin steadied brown except for three pink mosquito bites.

The blond boy would one day grow lots of hair to protect his pink skin but not yet. Summer buzzed and leaked from the wide leaves above them. The river steamed. Overabundant life.

“What is it?”

“Don’t ask.”

A white mound swirled in the muddied water. The shirtless boys stepped onto the mossy rocks rising out of the water.

“Is it a fish?” the other boy asked, close enough to know that slowly spinning curve was certainly not a fish. The body held onto water and the exposed stomach plumped like overripe fruit. The boys stared and stirred the water with a stick. Then poked. Then they laid their hands on top of the stretched stomach. Silent. Reverent.

“It’s kind of beautiful,” one finally said.

“Yes.” They pressed their shoulders together.

When the afternoon outlines dissolved in early evening, they pulled their t-shirts over their clammy chests. One boy got slapped with the perforated end of a belt for being late and smelling bad. Three days later

LATE JULY, CLOVER LICK, WEST VIRGINIA

the other boy moved to Alamogordo, New Mexico.

There is no such thing as a full inoculation, but neither boy felt a certain kind of fear again.

NUNO SINGS

LITO VELÁZQUEZ

Nuno turned eight last Friday, and it rained. Ma and Pai invited all his tios, primos, school friends, their *o padre* and even some of the older kids from church. His best friend Marcus came and nine other boys. And because he insisted, his elder sister Virginia was allowed only one of her high school classmates, but of course she invited that boring girl who just sat around and talked. None of the babies from sister Fia's kindergarten came, not even her daycare lady. Still, that made almost forty, which had to be the most guests at a third grader's birthday in the whole history of the county. They crowded into his family's fifth-floor, two-bedroom apartment next to the railroad. Ma had padded each room in floating bunches of red, yellow, and black balloons, those original Lamborghini colors, his favorite. Crepe streamers webbed their low ceilings. Vinyl Countach, Huracán, and Veneno cutouts decorated the dry side of the windows. And though there were few wrapped gifts waiting in his small bedroom, the guests ate countless hot dogs, and kids got a whole can of pop—each. In the rarest occasion, adults and children celebrated together, and marked his age with fruit punch toasts. They clinked cups, made intrepid and holy declarations, sang for him as a choir, and then, the soft fresh breath of wishing. This all made up for the rain outside, which grew so far and forgotten. It was the single most spectacular event in his whole life, and though you have certainly faced more, it was the most people Nuno had seen in one place. They all

stayed till well past bedtime, and all for him. He fell asleep on the kitchen floor, the vrooming buzz of dreams dashing across his tiny shifting eyes while Pai ferried him to bed.

But Judah Martin's birthday was Saturday, so that's all anyone's talked about since. In church yesterday, in homeroom this morning, even at lunch and during afternoon recess. For just one day there was nothing else in the world more important, but now, everyone's forgotten Nuno.

Now, on the Monday walk home from school, the bell just two blocks behind and even though Nuno said not to all day, Marcus can't stop talking up Judah's dumb party. The magician, the pizza, the unlimited trampolining. Of course the rain had cleared. And sure it was cool that Judah got a blue four-wheeler, but you could only ride it if your parents were there and said it was okay with a helmet. And hardly anyone was there, except all the boys in third grade. So that's why Marcus kept talking as if nothing else ever happened. Well, that, and 'cause everyone's take-home was a stomp rocket, the kind you jump on like a pogo shooting orange missiles into the sky. Everyone went home looking up, each impatient for the magical year that awaited Judah Martin.

Just a week into spring, and already the trees are in bloom. Marcus stops talking a second to jump up and tear a palm full of crabapple blossoms from the big tree halfway through their walk. Nuno jumps high as he can but can't reach. A car goes by with two of their friends in the back seat, so Marcus waves and doesn't notice Nuno try again. Another car pulls closely behind their friends, slows to a rolling stop, and continues on.

"Maybe later I can get mom to take us over to Judah's house and we can ride his four-wheeler. You think?" Marcus says.

"Maybe."

"Or you could ask. They can't say no to you—not to Birthday-Boy-Nuno!"

Once when Ma thought he was in his room and couldn't hear, she said into the phone that she worried Nuno's too small for his age. Pai says it's good for racers to be small, so close to the ground. Still, some of the third graders fold an arm to lean on him like a fence. And Judah Martin's friends call him Sumo-Nuno or Too-Low-Nuno. Even sometimes Marcus. But not today.

They come to the corner where they usually separate, where Nuno goes home to Fia and her daycare lady, where Marcus goes home to his mom who expects him at exactly 3:39—only nine minutes, even if the boys dawdle. Nuno has one more block, a turn, and then five flights of stairs.

That car slows down behind them again as Marcus yells into the street. “Bye-bye Birthday-Boy-Nuno! Nuno’s eight years old! Everybody hear that!” He walks backwards towards home, singsong, away from his friend. “Nuno’s got a choir that sings only for him. And we’re gonna ride on Judah Martin’s car!”

Nuno hums and picks up pace. He listens to the cars trail behind him, to the breeze in the trees, the sunlight sounding in the after-school din, the sound of everyone crammed in his apartment, singing. Happy Birthday becomes the sound of bubble gum, a vroom, and then the random *pew pew pews* of lasers in his mouth. A car goes by, and then another, and the breeze tickles his bare arms below his blue short sleeves. He smiles. And then that car slows and pulls to the curb behind him. He hears it before he sees it, the sound of something heavy on street dirt.

“Hey, Nuno.”

Unsure if this is what he’s heard, Nuno walks on. The car trails alongside.

“Nuno, it’s me. Remember?”

He turns at the neck and then with his whole body to see the car. It stops.

“Your mom, she said to come get you. They’re all meeting up at the pizza place.”

He wears sunglasses and has a big smile. He’s bigger than Pai somehow. Wears a crisp white dress shirt, the kind that Pai wears with ties on special days and when he’s meeting clients. He has pink skin, though, and does not wear a tie.

“I don’t know you.”

“Sure you do. From church.”

“Why didn’t Ma come get me?”

“To surprise you.”

“But she works all night.”

Nuno lowers his backpack to the ground. The car is a black BMW

3 Series, probably last year's model. The rain spots make it difficult, but he can tell it's recent because it is larger and has a longer wheelbase, that distance between front and rear tires that tells so much about a vehicle. This has noticeably more cabin and trunk space than previous years. He remembers reading out the specs from the brochures Pai prints out for him. Ma likes to hear him read from them out loud while she cooks dinner before her nightshifts at the hotel. It comes in six-speed manual as well, but this is the eight-speed. This one's automatic.

"She got a friend to cover for her, Nuno, but couldn't get done in time to get you." He smiles. His sunglasses reflect the sidewalk and the green trees. "What's the matter? Don't you want pizza?" He's not covered in drywall dust like Pai. But he looks not totally like a stranger.

"I'm not supposed to talk to tricky people."

"I'm not tricky, Nuno. I go to your church."

Nuno knows, like every child who goes, how to behave, what is expected of him here. He knows, of course. Him and you and I, we all know, and yet someone gets in the car every day. This is nothing special. There's no magic breath that hovers over the world, shining over sunny days in spring, no master hand driving the immense design of things. An adult wants a child. And the child, well, what do children ever want? To be surprised, to discover, to be amazed.

"Now get in, before we spoil it for everyone."

Nuno walks down the green strip of grass separating sidewalk from street to the rear passenger door. "No, Nuno. In my car you sit in the front seat."

He drags his backpack along the ground behind him and tugs on the handle. Feels like a cold pop can in his palm.

"And if you're good, I'll let you behind the wheel."

"Is that safe?" The big door swings out. He has never sat in the passenger seat before.

Inside, the cabin smells like the supply room where the gym teacher pulls out the giant bag of soccer balls. He drags the heavy seatbelt down across his chest, but then feels a thick, unfamiliar hand grab the buckle from his and click it into place. With all his might, Nuno pulls the door toward him and the air sucks all the sound out quick. Quiet, but for the low hum of the engine like Ma's bedroom fan on hot summer nights. Even as the car takes off, the road falls silent below them, only the small

taps of friction on his backside to tell him that they're moving. He hears the doors lock tight once they get rolling, like a punch.

"Here, let me take that." He takes Nuno's backpack out of his hands and places it in the back seat without taking his eyes off the road. "It'll be fine back there." They stop at a red light, and he looks left, then right, then in the empty rearview.

"Your ma," he says, "has one more surprise."

"Okay."

"If I tell you what it is, I'll ruin it, won't I?"

"I dunno."

"But I'll give you a hint." He reaches in his pocket, reaches something out across the passenger seat. "Twenty dollars. Good hint?"

"The arcade!" Nuno sings out. "No way!" Nuno unfolds the wrinkles, stares at the green, and, before it goes in his pocket, decides he'll play that motorcycle arcade where you mount the bike and rock back and forth.

On the edge of Nuno's neighborhood, they stop at another light. He turns his head to face Nuno. "You have nice eyes, Nuno. Has anyone told you that?"

"Yeah."

"Sweet. And is brown your favorite color?"

The leather seats are smooth but stiff and beige, a light beige that Nuno hasn't seen in person before. One of Pai's cousins sent a postcard once from a beach in Sao Paulo. Nuno loves the way that city feels in his mouth. He lets the syllables dribble a bit. And this leather, like a white sand beach, lies cool and placid all around him.

"No. My favorite color is red. *Lamborghini* red. The one they used to paint the *Countach LP 500*. Like my backpack."

"You like cars?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like this one?"

"Yes. I've never been in a BMW before." Nuno chuckled. "I like your Bimmer."

"You mean Beamer."

"No. Bimmer. Every honest BMW owner knows that it's not called what you said. It's Bimmer."

"I hadn't heard that before, Nuno." The car leads past some houses

near Judah's Martin's house. The houses get bigger and farther apart. Green trees with blossoms everywhere, not like Nuno's block with stores downstairs and telephone poles instead of trunks, wires instead of leaves. A gold chain flickers from the rearview.

"How come that's a St. Christopher medal if you go to St. Francis?"

"You're very smart, Nuno."

"I just notice things."

"It's not my car. I borrowed it." His smile dims." From a friend."

"Doesn't your friend need his car?"

"Of course, but mine isn't so special. I got this one just for you."

Nuno smiles. They had overlooked him, but now that was over. Now he can enjoy being Birthday-Boy-Nuno again. A special car, just for him. One for him to drive. What's better?

"It's okay, you know. It doesn't really matter what kind of car you drive. Pai says it only matters that you got wheels."

But Nuno does not tell him what Pai always says next. A *Countach* can take you anywhere you wanna go. All Pai ever needs is a *Countach*, Ma, and you kids. Then, nothing would be impossible, and he would never want nothing, never be afraid of nothing. Pai told Ma that Nuno could walk home from school just this January because it's good to not be afraid.

"You know my name is Nuno. But I don't know yours."

"That's okay."

"What's your name?"

"Well. Let's play a game. You can call me Driver, like I was your chauffeur. Tell me where to go, Nuno."

"But then, shouldn't I be in the back?"

"You ask a lot of questions Nuno. Let me ask you. Where do you wanna go?"

"Let's get pizza. It's past snack time. And I'm hungry."

"My pleasure, passenger."

The Driver makes the sound Pai makes when Ma rubs his shoulders. They're already there, drinking cokes, aren't they, waiting for Nuno and Driver, impatient for the video games. This time they'll certainly get him whatever he wants, not just cheese but also pepperoni. It will be all how he says now. Today Virginia won't be home just after he gets there and with all her high school girlfriends. Today they won't

microwave his snack, leave behind one piece of chicken, a spoon of rice, or black bean to fill his empty stomach. Today there will be no talking talking.

Outside, things have changed. These are not houses now, but large stores with big, colorful logos made of shiny plastic. He recognizes them, or one. It's the one where Ma got all the decorations for his party. They're out past Judah Martin's neighborhood now. Far from the pizza place.

"This is a long drive."

The Driver pulls a switch near the steering wheel and the car picks up round a curve.

"Where are we going?"

A buzz cuts the quiet. Another buzz. It's a phone. The sudden buzz of a silent phone. It's knocking against the Driver's door.

"Aren't you gonna answer it?"

The Driver pulls the phone out of his pocket, and stares at the screen, then the road.

"Well?"

"Would you shut it, kid."

The buzz stops.

"You don't have to be so mean."

"Just be quiet for a second."

This is a busy road, around some malls, the kind with all the signs and driveways and cars. Many cars. Nuno's forehead crinkles.

It buzzes again. The Driver clicks it quiet. He moves on past the shoppers and pulls the car behind a set of trees off the side of the road. There's a little wooden house next to a white post with maps on it and some flyers. There are empty spaces marked by white lines on the gray concrete, but no other cars. Everyone hurrying home for dinner.

"I have to pee," Nuno says.

"I said shut it." The sun lowers in the sky behind the car so it's in the mirrors and his eyes. He looks down at the phone.

Virginia had asked for a pink phone for her last birthday, but instead Ma and Pai said she's still too young to be connected to the whole damned world. Nuno would call her now and tell her what the sun looks like over here.

"You stay in the car. And stay quiet. You have to while I make a call."

The Driver exits and walks around back. All four windows descend

into their doors like a magic trick. Nuno wants to say how cool it is, but it's not magic, just the remote. The Driver reaches in through the passenger window beside him.

"This won't hurt unless you want it to." He takes a white piece of plastic out of his pocket and puts one end through the other around Nuno's right arm, ties the boy to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be right over here." The Driver turns toward the trees, then back. "Don't you try anything. Be quiet. Be good."

Nuno could scream, he knows it. He knows he has that chance but watches the windows roll back up. They seal the sounds of passing cars outside. Inside, he hears his breath, plays with it like Virginia showed him, in through the nose, out through the mouth. In the distance, out past the Driver who moves away, there is another range of shopping malls, low and gray in the horizon where the sun streaks the blues into bands of orange, purple, red. But just before that, some farms mark the land in rows of diagonal ripples of soil and small green leaves. The Driver walks out toward them down a row of straight trees. He holds the phone to his right ear and soon he makes those gestures Pai makes whenever he loses a contract. Or when Virginia comes home late and Pai's face is angry blue, Virginia's lower lip is up to her nose, and Nuno's watching from the crack in his bedroom door. Maybe the Driver is lost and needs directions. Nuno swallows. He's hot. There must be water inside the little wooden house. Nuno looks behind him to check his backpack, but the door keeps him close. He sees, behind the Driver's seat, there's a big blue bag.

A blunt knock and the Driver's door swings open. He slumps into the leather seat. His shirt clings to his pink side in a glaze of sweat.

"It's your mother."

"Ma?"

"Yes."

"Where is she? Is she at pizza?"

"No. That was my wife on the phone. It's that your mother, well..."

"I'm hungry." Nuno pulls his left arm over his tied arm and looks out the window. "And I'm thirsty, and I need to pee."

"If anything happened to your mother or father, Nuno, well, you should know. They've asked me to take care of you. Me and my wife."

Nuno does not want to know more. “I said I need to pee.”

The Driver faces him with sunglasses. He reaches behind and grabs something. Again his door opens, and traffic sounds in the distance. The Driver walks around the back of the car. Nuno watches his white shirt get small then near in the mirror. He opens the passenger door, tugging Nuno’s arm out a little, pulling him from his seat.

“Ouch.”

“Take off your belt.”

The Driver raises the scissors, slips them quick under his wrist. Nuno closes his eyes. He hears the scissors snip the tie, and then the tight, itchy feeling of freedom.

The bathrooms smell like that time when Marcus peed his pants at lunch and begged Nuno not to tell anyone and Nuno didn’t, but on the walk home, anyone who got close could tell and looked at Marcus like he was one of the homeless people at church. Like that. But also the bathroom smells like cigarettes. Nuno can’t decide whether to drink water first or pee, so he stops at the faucet first, then stands at the smallest in the line of white urinals, the kind that reach down to the floor. At first, it splashes, so he scoots back a couple feet. He writes Marcus’ name on the urinal wall with the passing yellow stream of his pee. He hums the song that Marcus sang walking down the street. *Nuno has a choir*. The Driver stands at the door looking in.

“My church choir teacher, Mrs. Jankowski, has big poofy hair like the color of pee. And when no one’s looking she smokes cigarettes. She’s always eating dried apricots and offers them out of an old blue dish between songs. She talks real loud like THIS and says CRAZY THINGS like GIMME GLORY! GIVE ME GLORY CHILDREN! GLORY LIKE THE WILD OPEN SKY!” He likes the way his yelling bounces off all the tiles in the bathroom. The Driver doesn’t have to say be quiet. He zips up, and gets another swig of water on the way out.

It’s a little colder out, but warm in the Driver’s car. The Driver keeps quiet. This is the highway now. Nuno counts the telephone poles almost as high as he can go, past three hundred, in his softest church whisper. Then he sees a green sign with white dollar signs on it and remembers the twenty dollars. Maybe he can buy something to eat. Nuno knows not to ask. The sign comes by again, and then again. It glows in the headlights. The Driver’s lights are different than Pai. The

2002 Toyota Camry has regular light bulbs, they're lower and less white than these. The sign again. Snack time come and gone, the dollar sign makes Nuno want food. He looks up at the driver.

"Did you ever have a kid?"

"I did."

"Where is he?"

"You don't need to worry about that."

"Is he a him?"

"Yes, he was."

"Where is he now?"

"I lost him."

"Why?"

"You ask too many questions, Nuno."

Nuno looked away again.

"What's in the bag back there?"

"It's for the party."

"Another surprise?"

"Listen, kid, I keep telling you. Shut the hell up."

"You're scaring me. I'm hungry and you're scaring me."

"You will learn to shut that mouth one way or another."

The Driver pushes down on the floor real hard, and his jaw pushes up under his nose. Nuno feels pressed against his seat. The car jerks down an exit ramp, skids off the road.

"What happened to your kid!"

The Driver says nothing.

"What happened to your kid!"

The car barely stops before the Driver is outside, the white headlights splashing out onto even rows of full trees. It's an orchard. Nuno sees the dark green trees speckled in little white blossoms. There will be apples soon. But the Driver has already opened the door. He grabs Nuno by the arm. He drags Nuno past the passenger flank of the car.

"Let go!"

The trunk lifts open, keening.

"What are you gonna do?"

"Get in."

"What are you gonna do to me if I don't?"

"Do you want to find out?" The Driver sticks his hands under

Nuno's armpits and lifts. The hands are cold. They are big and reach down to Nuno's waist. He lifts Nuno into the trunk. "Be quiet, Nuno. I know you can. Now is the time."

Nuno stands angry in the trunk, but the Driver pushes him down with a single hand wrapped around Nuno's head. The trunk slams over him.

He could scream in the dark trunk. He hears his heavy breath. He feels his face grow tight. His sweat turns cold on the back of his knees. He touches the top of the trunk. If this were Pai's car, there'd be a glowing tab. He looks for one. Pai showed him what to do if he ever got stuck. But the Driver's car moves. Nuno hears the engine louder. Now the engine speaks, growls down on the road. Then the car slows. Stops. Moves. Stops. He hears other cars, some music, maybe a trumpet, nearby. There must be traffic. But on the highway?

The Driver's hands are softer and stronger than he's ever felt before. They are cold, but big on his body. He puts his hands above him, flat on the trunk roof, but cannot see them. He taps. Will his hands ever be so big? He starts to tap a rhythm with the tips of his fingers, feels the metal cool on his hands. He likes the sound, taps louder, harder.

"No!" He hears from the cabin through the muffle of the car and seats. He holds his breath.

He hears the Driver talk to someone. He hears the Driver thank the person. Maybe Nuno should say something.

The engine rumbles loud again, then pulls forward fast. Nuno rolls to the back of the trunk.

The car stops.

A door slams.

Footsteps.

Blinding light. The big pulse of the setting sun.

In shadow, the Driver releases the trunk lid, which bounces and rocks the car. No sunglasses now, barefaced, shadowed.

The Driver hurls Nuno up out of the trunk, throttling at his T-shirt collar. "When I tell you to, you shut your mouth. You will do what I say. No more sound from you." The Driver shakes him.

Nuno snuffs a whimper. "Okay, Driver. Okay."

The Driver yanks Nuno down onto the dirt. Nuno stumbles from the force of the release.

In the car, Nuno sees more of the Driver's face. His white cheeks, pink. His eyes, blue. So blue they don't look like no person's, like no boy or even a man ever had eyes like that. They look like blue lagoons stuck into his head, alive only because they're in somebody's head.

The Driver starts to hum. There are fewer cars. The Driver presses a button and air flows through the vents. Nuno wants to turn his up as high as it will go, to blast the Driver and the car away, far away, with all the breath a car can heave out. But he doesn't. St. Christopher clinks against the windshield in a rhythm the Driver hums to. Just a bit at first. Then words to a song that Nuno doesn't know. On either side of the highway, rows of tall pine trees lean over them in straight lines of robed choir people, hands pressed together in prayer, a pointed archway.

"People aren't the only animals who can sing," Nuno says when the Driver stops singing. "Birds, and monkeys can sing, obviously. But also mice, bats, and even some fish. Whales aren't fish, but they're my favorite. Have you ever heard whales sing?" Nuno makes a whorl of high pitch whale songs. The Driver laughs. But then pulls his eyes off the road, looks straight at Nuno. He's cross. But Nuno's hungry now.

"Mrs. Jankowski says that what makes us special isn't that we can sing, but what we sing. She says that *repair-too-war*—that's the songs you choose to sing—are the most important choice you can make."

Nuno is courageous now. He smells Mrs. Jankowski's apricots, and his tummy grumbles. But then he looks out the window.

This is further than he's been before. Well further than with Ma and Pai, even further than when they went camping. This may as well be nowhere. He recognizes nothing. No cars pass by. The sun and its light, hushed, sets in the Driver's side mirror. His apartment falls far behind him, and he leans his head back into his seat as the scene widens, things fade into yesterday.

"Driver, you said it was a game. That you were my chauffeur."

"That's right, Nuno. It's fun to chauffeur smart boys who behave."

"But chauffeurs go where you want, and I never wanted to go here."

The phone buzzes again. The Driver does not tie Nuno to the door this time. The Driver does not even walk that far from the parked car. Maybe something has changed. This time is short. The Driver gets back in, some cold air snips through the closing door. Nuno's tummy growls.

"I have some bad news," The Driver says. The car accelerates past

a forest made purple in the new light of night. Feels as if it takes off, takes to flight, and leaves the ground and all that's there behind, all the space of the road lifts up in front of him like a rocket shot into the sky by two tiny stomping feet. But no one searches the skies for him. Nuno looks into the Driver's eyes and sees the blue image of a man. Nuno's not afraid. "Your family. They had a bad accident. I'm afraid it's no good."

Nuno doesn't cry.

"Do you know what that means?"

He knows, but the words do not feel in him, in his body.

The Driver drives the car quietly for a while. Ma and Pai saved for his birthday all year. Nuno turned eight last Friday, and they were laughing and singing along with the choir, smiling like how they were when Fia came home from getting born. "This is your *irmã*," Pai said to him, handing him her little swaddled body. *Irma Fiã! Irma Fiã!* he would sing down the halls of the apartment. He tries to remember his bedroom, and the way home. He wants to remember the details, what the short space between school and home looks like. How many turns. How many streets. How far.

"Yes."

Real fast, the car rolls over a bump. Thump-thump. The rows of pine trees drop behind like a cloak pulled off a specter. This is a part of the world that Nuno has never seen before. All around them suddenly, a big open field swallows the car. He sees all the way out to the front and even all the way back in the mirror. Forever and ever out, dry blue grass. Not much on it but sky, and lots. The moon sits on top of the field to his right like a fat blue pie, silver and haze in his tired eyes. Nuno pulls his legs up from the mat and tucks them into an embrace. The Driver clears his throat. He wants to beg the Driver to tell him where he's going. Everything disappears and the engine stops, sinks below him. Each breath in feels like sucking on a sweet. Each breath out like floating up a bit. It's just him now. Nothing below and no one ahead. No Driver and no car. He closes his eyes to listen.

Instead, he sees his older sister, Virginia. She is standing over him and he is seven years old. She is fifteen, and her dark brown hair is long around her shoulders. It's Sunday, and he's come to her for help before choir rehearsal. "It's what people sing when they feel too small to help," Virginia says.

“Because they can’t reach?”

“Not that kind of small. Sometimes there’s no making things better. So, people do what they can.”

“Why can’t it get better?”

“Do you want to learn the song or not?” she says.

“Okay, Virginia. Okay.”

The glossy rumble of Virginia’s voice throbs safe above him. She sings real low, but he follows her up high in his range.

Now, her voice allows Nuno to wonder what he has not. He wonders what the Driver’s son might look like, be like. Maybe he likes soccer. Maybe he sings. Or maybe he likes cars. And what about his wife. While the Driver plays chauffeur, the wife must have her own game. Nuno has no way of knowing that the Driver and his wife have lost an unborn son, and that just months before that, their six year old was run over by a car, and there’s no way to imagine what she felt or thought all that time, no way to know that this is her calling now. No way to know what kind of Driver with a good job and a good family and a good life might do, would have to do, if the woman he loved had lost too much, two little boys in less than a year, two little Nunos, and now he was the third. No. There was just no way for him to know. But as he faded in and out of hunger, and as he remembered his sister’s voice, Nuno began to imagine the Driver as a person. What if he were a boy who needed to eat something, to sleep maybe, to be held and ferried off to bed. He maybe understands now.

And with that, Nuno sings.

His voice starts soft. Still. Like water. And then a tone from somewhere deep, slipping in from his tummy, his chest, into his throat. It centers itself around him in that feeling when someone touches your skin slow and something must come out, a sound, a sigh, the soft breath of wishing. And the first note races out of him in a long “huh” sound. “Huh” and “huh” and “he” he sings without interruption. This is not a heavy sound. And then: “He turns to me and says.” Something in the car is changed. His body wanes its push, but the sound does not end. “Hurry boy, it’s getting closer every day.” He feels he’s woken up or else fallen asleep to the sound of his own voice. “But they can’t take me away from you.” He feels a warm and smooth hand, gentle on the faded hairline of his neck, caressing him, and warming him to dreams.

"Why you crying, Driver?"

But the Driver does not answer.

The Driver will return to where he found the boy. Nuno's apartment building will be lit up by flashing red and blue lights. It will be bright as day. There will be almost forty people there. His eyes will light up in reflection as he watches from down the street. And many people will crowd outside the vestibule and gather around the front doors. They will not have balloons, and they will not be smiling, but it will be the most spectacular party Nuno has ever seen.

"Thank you for the lift," Nuno will say to the Driver. He will be so tired, but he will run toward the crowd. He will forget his backpack in the car. The Driver will pull away and ride along with the warm wind in his hair.

It will be well past Nuno's bedtime. Even the moon will pitch below the buildings. But the noise will go and go outside his family's apartment.

"Where have you been, *irmão*?" Fia will ask when she sees him.

"Everyone, it's Nuno!" Virginia will shout.

And he will be swallowed up in many arms and many voices and hot breaths before he lets out all the tears and they can answer the question he's been asking himself silently all along.

"No," Ma will say. "Of course you're not in trouble."

LITTLELIGHT

JOE WILKINS

—for Teddy, Juliet, and Cole Littlelight

Don't explain the blue Chevy, abandoned
six miles up the gravel of Grapevine Road.

Don't explain the inestimable weight
of snow, of snapping prairie silence,
ice crystals in the vitreous of eyes.

Don't explain those eleven winter-lost days,
infant shoes pulled from a gulch in late May.

When they found what was left of the Littlelights,
I turned my back on the night, even as it squawked
and beat its black wings. When they found

strewn clothes and bones and trace amounts
of meth in the DNA, they didn't find anything.

MOTHER OF 2 STABBED TO DEATH IN SILVERTON, COLORADO

—*Denver Post*, June 7th, 2014

ALLISON ADAIR

The woman was overheard in the town hall saying she was afraid
to do it, once and for all, that he would, like he's said, and he did.

That night the neighbors down Mineral Street heard the usual.
Words then cracks like biting into an apple and they felt bad

about it but what could they do. One woman cleaned a mirror
over and over. Her husband switched on the television, turned it up.

Who could they call at this hour? In the days that followed they would shake
their heads and give dazed interviews. A tragedy, yes. They knew

his father. It ran in the family, disgraceful. Suddenly they heard
nothing at all. The boys were home and everyone should have been

sleeping. They folded down their sheets. It could go a few ways.
Tomorrow she'd be out with the boys at the park, a little blue

peeking through her creamy makeup, but the sun would find
its way. They brushed their teeth and turned out the lights. It was late.

The footsteps came so slow up the porch they thought it couldn't be anything desperate. He was covered in blood, and silence

hung over him like a new moon. It's dark but you know something is there. It was an accident, he said, I never meant it. They stood there still

as newsprint.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW MY PARENTS DIDN'T DIE

STEPHEN S. MILLS

My mother and father are not part of the dead,
but are there in the city.
In the city where they were born on hot July days.
Knee-high corn.
Blue skies.
Landlocked.
In the city where I will be born 14 years later.
A Monday in November.
Fall.
Leaves.
Brisk wind.
14 years after tragedy.
Events people never get over.
A city rattled by disaster.
No longer safe.
No longer in the bubble of *can't happen here*.
It is April in the city.
Spring.
Flowers blooming.
Warm breeze.
My parents are not part of the dead.
Are not burnt beyond recognition.
Are alive.

And I?

I'm not even a thought in their heads,
or a quiver in their groins.

*

**16 DEAD IN RICHMOND BLAST,
HIGHER DEATH TOLL FEARED**

April 6, 1968, 1:47 PM EST

Double explosion caused by natural gas leaking under
the Marting Arms Co., a sporting goods store on 6th
and Main. Many feared dead. More news coming.

*

Richmond founded by Quakers in 1806.

Settled on the Whitewater River that cuts
a gorge through the city. A gorge
where I spent summers searching for fossils,
Indian heads, treasures.

My fingers wet. Nails soiled.

The gorge I almost crashed into on an icy
Indiana day—snow drifting.

A different kind of tragedy.

I, too, was raised a Quaker. Firm in the belief of silence.

What was there to talk about?

What was there to say?

*

Indiana. Decades before the explosion: 1920s.

The second rising of the Klan.

The KKK.

They will fight against the Jews,
the Catholics, the Great Migration
of African Americans to the North
for industrial work, and drinking.

Prohibition.

Indiana will be the Klan's greatest success.

A land ripe with hate.

Ready to stamp out intruders.

Shotgun in hand.

*This is my America. My white,
pure, Protestant America.
Indiana: the heartland.
The Midwest.*

My birthplace.

*

My parents didn't know each other
on that day in April, 1968
when a car was blown fifty feet
and a woman was lifted off the ground
and onto a rooftop—alive, but terrified.
My parents didn't know this lady
or the owner of the car,
but were there in the city on a normal
spring afternoon. A Saturday.
They won't actually meet for a few years.
When they do, it will be in a shoe store.

A shoe store downtown,
near where the explosion happened.
But I like to think they crossed paths that day.
Young versions of themselves.

Both happy for the weekend.
Hopeful for the future.
Kids with no cares.

Perhaps their eyes met,
unaware they would one day
fall in love,
have a family,
live right here in the city
where they didn't die.
Are not part of the dead.
Are alive.

*

Population: 44,000.
A small city, yet the biggest in the area.
A place where people know each other,
where my father speaks to everyone,

knows everyone's mother, father, grandparent.
He could tell you the whole history of a stranger:
a woman buying eggs and toilet paper in the grocery store,
a man changing a tire on the side of the road,
a kid riding his bike in the rain.
He knows everyone's business.
Attends funerals of anyone remotely connected.
Sits in rooms with dead bodies,
crying children,
weeping adults.
He eats their casseroles, macaroni salads,
deviled eggs.
My father knew many on the list
of the dead that April in 1968.
Could tell their stories.
Bring tears to the eyes of strangers.
He was just 15.

*

Two days before:

The bullet entered MLK's right cheek—face that is—
shattering his jaw. No more speeches. Silence.

*

April 6, 2003.
Home from college to tell them,
to look them in the eye,
to change their lives
and mine.
The unspeakable spoken.
Silent no more.
Springtime in Indiana.

*

My friends laugh when I tell them I was raised Quaker.
They imagine pilgrim hats, buckle shoes,
complete silence.
Their images are rigid, strict, confining.
I tell them of pacifist notions,

of those who refused to pay taxes during Vietnam.

I tell them how Quakers were some of the first
to embrace women and gays.

I tell them of the belief in an individual relationship with God.

A lack of symbols.

No crosses.

No fancy decorations.

No communion.

No baptism.

I tell them of the mental patient who came every Sunday.

A woman who always wanted us to pray
for her to get her weekly allotment of Pepsi.

I tell them how no one laughed.

*

1922. Indiana passes a bill to create a Klan Day
at the State Fair.

The same State Fair I will attend
70 years later with funnel cakes, Ferris Wheels, cattle.

A 4-H member.

A Midwest boy.

Klan Day is passed.

A day for real men.

Indiana men.

White men.

Complete with a cross burning at night.

A symbol on fire.

Governor McCray vetoes the bill.

The Klan won't back down.

They dig in their heels.

Dig up dirt on McCray's finances,
smear him in the newspapers,
forcing him to resign.

*

20 buildings are condemned.

Demolished.

My father says, *Richmond was a mess for a long, long time.*

They replaced the area with a pedestrian mall

finished in 1972,
ten years before my birth,
four years after the explosion.
They called it the promenade.
Like in olden days when people paraded
through town in their Sunday best.
Though this was more modern
(modern for '72).
I remember the white mushroom-looking posts
that decorated the area, and how they
cast long shadows
in late summer. Department stores went up.
Places to shop. To eat. To spend Saturday afternoons.
The rubble gone.
The bodies carried away.
And those mushrooms,
like the mushrooms on my mother's cookie jar—
a wedding gift—
were everywhere. Like they sprouted
right out of the dead.

*

Gas leak.
There.
That's where the gas leak
started to seep.
Seep.
Right there.
The gunpowder.
Made for killing.
For hunting.
The gunpowder
caused the second explosion.
Explosion.
There.
Midwesterners love to hunt.
To kill.
Hunt and kill.

Deer mostly.
 Deer.
 Deer meat
 stored for winter.
 Blizzards.
 Cold nights.
 Plenty to survive on.
 Survive.
 I never hunted.
 But knew boys.
 Boys who drained carcasses
 on the weekends.
 Drained them dry.
 Dry.
 Boys unlike me.
 Me.
 There.
 The gas leak.
 The gunpowder.
 The killing.
 The boys.

*

*No one knew what to think,
 it being just two days
 after MLK was assassinated.
 You know what I mean?
 The blacks getting back at us,
 like we done it. Don't get me wrong,
 I liked the man, that King fellow,
 I really did. Just we didn't know
 what to think is all. It don't mean
 anything now. Now that we know
 it wasn't them. Just a coincidence,
 you know?*

*

Bodies were placed in plastic bags,
like trash.
Some mutilated beyond recognition.
Burnt. Distorted. Gone.
No longer human.
Bags, like trash, taken to a temporary morgue
at the National Guard armory.
Bags full of bodies to identify.
Pieces to assemble.

*

My father knew two boys in his freshmen class
and one girl
who were killed—bodies destroyed,
unrecognizable.
Two boys, one girl.
All three my father's age
from the same class and school.
The same school I would later attend:
Richmond Red Devils.
Rab! Rab! Rab!

*

By 1925, Indiana had the most powerful KKK
in the country. 40% of all white men were members.
Over half of the Indiana General Assembly
and the governor were Klan men.
Men of the Klan.
Powerful.
Determined.
White as sheets.
White as snow drifting in cornfields.
White as dandelion seeds in summer wind.

*

Main Street isn't refurbished until 1997,
when I am 15 and just learning to drive.
The next year, I'll have my first car accident
right there on Main, right there where the gas leak
started to seep 30 years before.

Yes, on a hot summer day, an older man in a big pickup
 will rear-end my '86 Buick Century.
 He will try to convince me to not call the police,
 will claim he couldn't have done that much damage,
 will think I'm young and stupid.
 The police will come anyway.
 He will pay \$2000.
 My car will be totaled by the insurance company.

*

Then the bullet traveled to King's spinal cord
 before stopping in his shoulder. No chance.

*

It was a story I grew up with:
 "The day of the big explosion."
 How my mother almost died.
 Could have been right there in the mix of it.
 She was only 12.
 A girl. Young. Pretty.
 A story of survival, of chance, of faith.
 She lived, therefore setting into motion
 every event of my life.
 It is a story I grew up with.
 An explosion that could have ended us all
 before we began.

*

*I still have not seen Stay Away, Joe
 with good old Elvis. They say it's offensive
 by today's standards. Not his best film.
 Just seeing the title makes me think
 of that day in the State Theater.
 The day of the explosion. Yes, stay away,
 stay away, stay away, Joe. No plans
 to see it now. What's the point?*

*

**MARTIN LUTHER KING IS SLAIN IN MEMPHIS;
A WHITE IS SUSPECTED; JOHNSON URGES CALM**

April 4, 1968

39-year-old Nobel-Prize winning civil rights leader
was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.
He was taken to St. Joseph's Hospital where he
was pronounced dead at 7:05 PM CST. 4,000
National Guard troops have been ordered to the city.
Curfew imposed on the 550,000 residents. 40%
of which are Negro. More information to come.

*

It was another death.

My mother read in a book that it's like losing a child.

That you grieve for the son you no longer have.

Or more accurately: the son you never had.

I didn't go anywhere,

but she shed tears.

A life was buried deep in the backyard
under the old maple tree.

I wonder if she visits that other boy.

That other version of me.

I wonder what he says back to her.

*

Final count:

41 dead

150 injured

*

*Just ten feet away a woman was hit
by a large piece of iron—falling rubble.
I saw it happen! There one minute,
dead the next. Killed. I covered her
with a cloth, like I was tucking in
my little girl. Only different,
you know? Different.*

*

My mother says she learned more about Martin Luther King
as an adult. Says her parents, my grandparents,

never spoke of him, his famous speeches, his sit-ins,
or his assassination.

*

Stay Away, Joe (Elvis's 26th film and the 65th top-grossing
movie of 1968) was playing at the State Theater
in downtown Richmond on April 6th
at 1:47 PM EST.

Elvis starred as a rodeo rider named Joe Lightcloud.

Yes, Elvis with his hips and lips
that got all the girls going
and a few of the boys (*Don't tell daddy*).

Elvis on the big screen.

Elvis as a Native American.

Elvis as a walking stereotype.

Elvis singing and dancing.

Elvis exploding.

People rushing the doors.

People screaming.

People bleeding

People dying.

Elvis oblivious.

Elvis still singing.

Elvis still gyrating.

*

*We got everybody out, everybody out.
All fifty out. Some a little injured.
Shattered glass. Blood. But everybody
got out of the restaurant alive.
We did our job. We made our city proud.
We got everybody out. Everybody.*

*

D.C. Stephenson,
the Grand Dragon of Indiana
and 22 other Northern states,
was one of the most powerful KKK members
in history by 1925.

He was worth
5 million dollars
collected by recruiting new members.

His catchphrase:
I am the law in Indiana.

*

41 dead
Youngest 7
Oldest 72

*

My grandmother wants new carpet.
Carpet for the living room.
She goes out shopping with her two girls
on a normal Saturday afternoon in April.
Last errand: picking up carpet samples
at Holthouse Furniture,
downtown.

The girls are excited to help,
to run their fingers along big spools of carpet,
to imagine their modest home done in lavish décor,
knowing, all the while, something sensible,
something reasonable will be selected.

They drive around the block:
my grandmother, my mother, my aunt.
No parking spots to be found.
My mother and aunt, eager young girls, beg
her to go around again:

Just one more time!

My grandmother, hands on the wheel, pauses—
thinks for a moment, then turns to them and says,
Another time, girls, another time.

On the drive home,
the clock strikes 1:47 PM EST.
They don't hear the boom,
but by the time they arrive home,
Holthouse Furniture is destroyed.

*

*I thought somebody had thrown a bomb,
thrown a bomb through the window.
Shattered glass everywhere. The store a mess.
My heart pounding, pounding, pounding.*

*

They began to list the dead.
Names, ages, families.
Then the stories started.
How brave people were.
What amazing people died.
All those young people bound to grow
into something upstanding, monumental.
The truth is most wouldn't have.
Most would have had a dead-end job,
a spouse who they once loved, but now can't stand,
and kids. Some good, some bad.
Most of their lives would have been nothing
special. But in death,
their futures are bright,
full of possibility,
and world-changing ideas, dreams, desires.

*

Mad with power,
D.C. Stephenson
abducts,
intoxicates,
rapes
Madge Oberholtzer,
who runs the state program combating illiteracy.
In the act, he bites her repeatedly.
Witnesses say, *She looked as if she'd been chewed on
by a cannibal.*
She attempts suicide,
reports him,
and eventually dies from his wounds
and her self-inflicted ones.
He is arrested on charges

of second-degree murder.

The Dragon is in trouble.

The Dragon breathes only fire.

The Dragon's teeth match

the stains on her neck, thigh, buttock.

Trouble. Trouble. Trouble.

*

November 22, 1982, 9:04 PM EST

I enter the world.

A 9 pound, 12 ounce baby boy.

This is after 35 hours of labor,

which began on a Sunday

morning in a Quaker church

in Richmond, Indiana.

Yes, 35 hours of my mother coaxing me out.

There, inside her, I waited—unaware, unsure.

And just as they lifted my weakened mother

onto a gurney, prepping her for a C-section, I broke free,

barreled into the world: screaming, red, alive.

My mother, with her broken tailbone (caused by me),

held me in her arms,

thankful, relieved, elated.

Her last child had been a miscarriage.

A death that gave me life.

My life began there in that hospital.

In the city where my parents didn't die.

*

They found the little purse I was carrying that day

in the rubble. Deep in the rubble of the theater

where I went to see Elvis. My little pink purse survived,

but those others, those others didn't. People didn't.

*

STEPHENSON OUTS KLAN MEMBERS FROM PRISON CELL

September 9, 1927

D.C. Stephenson, sentenced to life in prison

for the abduction, rape, and death of Madge

Oberholtzer, has released a list of public
officials who are on the payroll of the KKK.
Stephenson was the Grand Dragon of Indiana.
An investigation is underway.

*

My grandfather wants a new car.
 He goes car shopping with his only son,
his only child—my father.
 It is a Saturday in April.
 Male bonding.
First stop: the drug store
 to pick up a prescription for my grandmother.
Can't forget this.
 1:47 PM EST.
They are there in the drug store,
 downtown. They hear the boom.
 The building shakes.
 Smoke can be seen out of the storefront.
Heavy. Black. Smoke.
 I can imagine my father terrified.
 Uncertain.
 He inherited my grandmother's nerves.
And my grandfather?
 He's just a silhouette against the window,
 against the black smoke rising.
I never knew him.

*

*I remember the first thunderstorm
after the explosion. I woke up screaming
convinced a bomb had gone off. I thought
the whole neighborhood was under siege.
I spent the rest of the night in the closet:
my clothes piled on top of me, my hands
trembling with each clap of thunder,
each flash of lightning.*

*

It was just rumors.

No one was certain.

MLK was dead.

Riots were happening all over the country.

The rumor: a bus load of black men, women,
and children were coming to Richmond.

Coming to riot, to protest, to stand up and say, *Enough*.

Not many black folk in Richmond in the 1960s.

They were coming by bus from hours away.

Expected arrival: April 6, 1968.

Two days after the assassination.

It was all just a rumor,

but when the air filled with smoke

and the dishes rattled in homes nearby,

a bus full of black people

seemed a logical conclusion.

A bus that never came.

*

The children, my God, the children!

They were all I could think about,

piled into that theater to see Elvis.

I wouldn't let my girl go. I just don't

approve of all that gyrating, but none

of that matters now, or in that moment

when all I could think about were the children.

My daughter's friends. They were all there.

I just stood in the chaos and prayed.

Prayed for those sweet angels.

Prayed with all my might.

*

John Evan Martin,
my great grandfather
on my mother's side,
was a Klan man,
a man of the Klan,
an Indiana man.
White as snow.

Winter snow
 that piles in drifts
 along cornfields,
 fences, barns.
 Drifts I played in.
 Tunneled through.
 Sledded down.
 John Evan Martin,
 my great grandfather,
 was part of the brother-
 hood.
 Hood of white.
 White men.
 White Women.
 John Evan Martin,
 my great grandfather,
 was a member of the KKK
 in Indiana,
 my birthplace.
 They say my family roots
 are white.
 White as mushroom tops
 in summer sun.
 Mushrooms
 on the promenade.

*

The Monday after the explosion
 my mother's school bus
 made one less stop.
 Both children dead.
 I can see my mother's face in the bus window
 searching the house for signs of life.
 Life after the death of children.
 When you are 12,
 only old people and animals die.
 One less stop. Two less children.
 With time, she stopped looking

at the house as they drove by
each morning. Eventually, the house sold,
the parents moved on
as the living often do.

*

*I am gay and it's taken me twenty years to say it.
Twenty years of silence. Small town boys in Indiana
are not gay. They are all-American. They are farmers.
They take girls to dances. On long walks.
They make a move. Come in close. They kiss girls
on summer nights staring at the stars,
which you can actually still see in Indiana. I am gay
and no longer silent, no longer afraid of destruction.*

*

1956. D.C. Stephenson is given parole, if he promises
to never return to Indiana.

A promise I, too, wanted to make
once upon a time.

He goes South.

Five years later, he's arrested on charges
of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl
(*You thought I was going say boy, didn't you?*)

He pays a \$300 fine.

Goes free.

1966. Two years before the explosion, he dies alone
in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

The white dragon sleeps beneath your feet.

*

In grade school, I was taught the quick version
of the Civil Rights Movement:

I have a dream. Bam. It's granted.

MLK was a day off from school.

No one taught us about our Klan.

The Indiana KKK.

We read about white hoods,

Southern accents, burning crosses.

We read about

Alabama,
Mississippi,
Georgia.
We spent a week on the explosion.
 Watched a short film
my teacher threaded through the projector.
 Grainy, shaky.
It didn't seem real.
 Not this Richmond.
 Not this small city
where I was born.
 Where my parents also grew up.
 Where I feared I might die.
Might never escape.

*

Years later, a memorial is erected
 in downtown.
The inscription reads:
 *In memory of the 41 persons who lost their lives
 in the tragic downtown explosion on April 6, 1968
 and with everlasting gratitude to those who helped
 give birth to this city.*

*

I am here in the city.
 In the city where my parents did not die.
 Did not buy carpet
 Did not buy a new car.
The city where they met.
 Fell in love.
 Raised a family.
The city where I was born.
 Born in this city.
In November.
 The city that birthed me.
 Made me.
 Grew me.
 Terrified me.

The city where I first dreamed of a boy's touch.

Kiss.

Embrace.

The city I longed to escape.

I am here.

Standing in the place where
bodies were found,
buildings destroyed,
where a gas leak started to seep.

Where my young mother almost died.

Where my young father stood in horror
watching the black clouds of smoke
rise above his city.

A city full of history.

Of silence.

A city as white as hoods

hung in closets waiting for their day in the sun.

I am here.

In the city I can't ever fully escape.

In the city where I was born.

In the city where my parents didn't die.

Where I didn't die.

AT WICK'S END (A STANDARD TEST)

JAMES WHITE

I: Preliminaries

Name: (First) _____ (Last) _____

Address: (Street) _____ (Apt.) _____

(City) _____ (State) ____ (Zip Code) _____

Age: _____ **Sex:** M _ / F _

Race (Check all that apply):

- ☐ White
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black/African-American
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Multi-Racial
- ☐ Other (Explain)

Weight: ____ lbs. **Astrological Sign:** _____

I consider the candle aisle nothing short of a memory museum. Browse the rows of reds [cherry, strawberry, bliss], blues [ocean, sky, sorrow], greens [mint, freshly-mowed grass, envy]; skinny dinner candles, rolled waffle candles, miniature tea lights; candles housed in bamboo boxes, in mason jars, in three layers of cellophane; scents for the office, for sleep, for intimacy; warmers, wax melts, diffusers, plug-ins inspired by mood, by birthstone, by day of menstrual cycle; read their names—"Angel Light," "Apple Orchard," "Valencia Orange," "Blueberry Pie," "Honeysuckle Swing," "Matters of the Heart," "Turning Over," "Walkin' on Sunshine," "A Good Old Fashioned Cry"—and let them come, one at a time, for a second or two.

My mother's red wool scarf emerges in "Christmas Holly," my first car, still intact in a smoky topaz "Cinnamon Stick;" my grandfather's wake, a pearl "Loves Me, Loves Me Not." I open all of them. Twist off their cork caps, pull at their glass caps, inhale one after another, leave the store creating my own candle names: "Why Don't You-Calyptus?" "Casablanc-apple," "Rosemary's Baby's Breath," "A Good Mango Is Hard to Find."

It's the speculation of scientists that the close proximity of our Olfactory Bulb (the part of our brain that processes smells) to our Hippocampus (which aids in the creation of new memories and is shaped like a seahorse) may suggest a direct relationship between the two. Supposedly then, when a new memory is created, a scent is likely to be attached. That trip to Maui [pineapple? Kona coffee? white plumeria?], your youngest child [daisies? orange peel? talcum powder?]. Supportive of this prospect, the fact that we supposedly have over one-thousand smell receptors—which not only regenerate but change in fitting with what we are used to smelling—promotes our ability to process an *unlimited* number of scents.

Does this ability explain why it is so difficult to describe scents without resorting to similes or clichés? ATTN: Rotten eggs [salt? sulfur?], B.O. [chili? corn?], Wet dog [mold? earth?].

Unlike sounds and sights, which transit at our Thalamus—a "relay station"¹ of sorts—and are sent to other locations in the brain, scents travel directly to the Olfactory Bulb. Their directness limits the

¹ Stafford, Tom. "Why Can Smells Unlock Forgotten Memories?" BBC. Neurohacks (2012): 1. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.

processes our other senses undergo that enable capacities like rationalization and comprehension. It is then not only the struggle of both rationalizing and comprehending scents that makes them so difficult to describe, but the experience of having to negotiate both the good and bad memories that follow each new inhalation.

I want you to consider, after years of experiences, travels, and relationships, your smell vocabulary. Think about your father's hair [a bag of coal? the coat closet?], the neighbor's rose bushes [nail polish? stale water?], your first boyfriend [new car? dry dog food?]. You've kept his college hoodie for its smell. Never washed it. Still folded on the top shelf beside winter wear and spare pillows. Kept him alive in this way, so you can remember him when you want to.

II: Brief Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

Where were you born? _____

Are you an only child? _____

What is your favorite color? _____

Do you believe in God? _____

How would you describe the way you sound? _____

How would you describe the way you look? _____

How would you describe the way you taste? _____

How would you describe the way you feel? _____

How would you describe the way you smell? _____

This morning, a store employee suggests I direct my attention toward the bottom shelf of their candle collection. "Our men's section," she said, pointing to loud, large-print labels of candles called "On Tap;" "MMM, Bacon!;" "Gunpowder;" "Tobacco Leaf;" "First Down;" "2x4;" "Fart." Men don't usually stop here. I've never seen more than one or two, shuffling along until they hit the Little Trees or car Febreze. Companies are trying hard to seduce them with comical marketing conven-

tions. Cartoon bacon strips holding hands and smiling in a pan. A green cloud hovering over men in football jerseys.

I pushed away the gags, drove my hand back to a cylindrical black jar. I slid it forward and lifted it to my nose. It smelled like cedar, like lilies. It smelled confident, but unstable. The way I would describe gasoline—enduring but tired. It reminds me of something, of that place I... of that time I... of that guy I...

III: Rationalization

Please check all reasons that apply as to why you are single, or, if you are currently in a relationship, why you may soon be single again:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ because I am unapproachable | ☐ because I am all business |
| ☐ because I shy away from others | ☐ because I have high standards |
| ☐ because I do not have the time | ☐ because I am too independent |
| ☐ because relationships are work | ☐ because I have trust issues |
| ☐ because I take things slow | ☐ because I move too fast |
| ☐ because I am too short | ☐ because I am too tall |
| ☐ because I over-share | ☐ because I argue politics |
| ☐ because no one is good enough | ☐ because I like to sleep around |
| ☐ because I avoid commitment | ☐ because they all end in heartbreak anyway |
| ☐ because I can only cook three things | ☐ because my dog is all I need |
| ☐ because I can't say "I love you" | ☐ because sex scares me |
| ☐ because I question everything good | ☐ because I have a very specific type |
| ☐ because my instinct is to runrunrun | ☐ because neither of us want to drive so far |
| ☐ because I have yet to love myself | ☐ because I fucked up, I know I did |
| ☐ because it's always the same thing | ☐ because we avoided talking about it |
| ☐ because it was long overdue | ☐ because I am surprised I didn't see it sooner |
| ☐ because you remind me of the others | ☐ because you remind me so much of myself |

I'm attracted to what I'm not. I've relearned this many times. A firm believer that opposites do attract; a firm believer that few of those couples work out. I've been with the same kind of men and separated from the same kind of men, but hasn't everyone? I'm weak to charm. Guys who get what they want, but always want more. The two-rowed, all-business, six-foot whatever grinner. A year is how long we last—I last.

Twelve months, and I expire. Body well-explored, moods tolerated long enough. Too *unbinged* when I write, and I'm always writing. Writers are romanticized, but look how many are single. Always moving, always still.

I'm the one left in their scent, me, my place—was his getaway. I didn't put out. Took things too slow. Liked him less than the idea of not being alone. Left to remove the smell lined on my sheets and on the desk chair, turning in the dust, rested on my clothes. I bleach the bathroom and vacuum the carpets, wash everything twice and empty his things from the fridge. Don't want to risk thinking about him when I don't want to.

IV: Personality

The following questions are comprised of an examination based on Carl Jung's and Isabel Briggs Myer's personality test. In answering the following questions, please circle the most applicable responses.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| You often obsess about your future | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You consider yourself a risk-taker | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You find it difficult to think before you speak | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You typically do not finish what you start | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You like peanut butter | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You are an independent person but hate to be alone | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You describe your "type" as "Republican" and "in his late 30s" | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You first instinct is to push over everyone who rides a skateboard | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Your immediate reaction to bad news is to laugh | Yes ___ No ___ |
| How are you? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Can I help? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You're a poet, so I'm sure you can whip something up | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Like, "that tintinnabulation sure sounds cool!" | Yes ___ No ___ |
| So, how did he end it? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| And you believe him? | Yes ___ No ___ |
| He's your biggest supporter | Yes ___ No ___ |
| You should forget about him then | Yes ___ No ___ |
| Resentments will only hold you back | Yes ___ No ___ |

You should take a break and get away for a few days	Yes ___ No ___
Take a book—anything to distract you	Yes ___ No ___
I just hate seeing you like this	Yes ___ No ___
What are you thinking about?	Yes ___ No ___
Is it something I said?	Yes ___ No ___
You do know it's because I love you, right?	Yes ___ No ___
You don't know that I love you, or because you're not sure?	Yes ___ No ___
Talk to me	Yes ___ No ___
Do you not recognize how this affects me too?	Yes ___ No ___
Do you not recognize how this is affecting everyone?	Yes ___ No ___
Can you look at me?	Yes ___ No ___
You find it difficult to look people in the eye	Yes ___ No ___

I drive to the store the next day and buy the candle that most smells like him because it's what I do. We all deal with breakups somehow, through stages of mourning, no? *Psychology Today's* "The 7 Stages of Grieving a Breakup" list 1) "Desperate for answers," 2) "Denial," 3) "Bargaining," 4) "Relapse," 5) "Anger," 6) "Initial Acceptance," and 7) "Redirected Hope." I tend to breeze through the first three, but fall flat on four. Recovering his scent, buying him back in "Mahogany" or "Sandalwood," "Cedar" or "Lilies." And in my own time, over the following weeks, months, years, twist off his cork cap, pull at his glass cap. Light him up. Try to grasp at controlling him, my past, in this way. Trigger the memory, relish the company, snuff him when *I'm* the one who has had enough.

V: Current & Pre-Existing Conditions

Please check if you have ever had, or currently have, any of the following:

- ___ Abdominal Pain
- ___ Acne
- ___ Allergies (Please describe: _____)
- ___ Anxiety
- ___ Arthritis

- ___ Bad Taste in Fashion
- ___ Bad Taste in Men
- ___ Beauty Spots
- ___ Bruising
- ___ Burns
- ___ Chocolate in the Drawer of Your Nightstand
- ___ Dreams of Flying
- ___ Dreams of Leaving
- ___ Dreams of Peace
- ___ Dreams of Space
- ___ Fantasies of Murdering Everyone You Know
- ___ Fear Of:
 - ___ Being Attacked
 - ___ Being the Butt of the Joke
 - ___ Being Late and Taken as Irresponsible
 - ___ Being Raped
 - ___ Being Raped by Someone You Know
 - ___ Doors Slamming
 - ___ Him Leaving
 - ___ Never Being Satisfied
 - ___ Not Waking Up in the Morning
 - ___ Realizing You Were Lied to By the One Person You Thought You Could Trust
 - ___ Somehow Surviving the Suicide Attempt
 - ___ The Car Behind You Not Stopping In Time
 - ___ Your Fifty-Year Plan Failing
 - ___ Your Mind Slipping
 - ___ Your Parents Not Coming to Your Wedding
 - ___ Your Teeth Falling Out
- ___ Lack of Awareness of Irony
- ___ Lack of Awareness of Sarcasm
- ___ Lack of Faith in a Higher Power
- ___ Lack of Faith in Everything Working Out
- ___ Lack of Talent
- ___ Photographs of [him] Saved on Your Laptop
- ___ Piece of Humble Pie (did it taste good?)
- ___ Quite a Vocabulary (I bet you read)

- ___ Resentments (but it was so long ago)
- ___ "Resting Bitch Face" (it's just how you look)
- ___ Scarring (I won't ask)
- ___ Self-Hatred (no one else listens)
- ___ Self-Support (no one else knows)
- ___ Shopaholicism (there's a sale going on)
- ___ Tarot Card Reading (she didn't shuffle well)
- ___ Written Documentation (will you relax now?)

I understand the consequences in treating life and memory this way. But I need the reminder that a lot of it is all smoke now. Paul's abuse in "Fig" and "Incense," Ethan's short fuse in "Pinecone" and "Balsa Wood," Jack's codependency in "Sidecar" and "Evergreen," and my father's absence in "Leather Briefcase" and "Myrrh."

Time to move on and recognize I've already made the mistakes. And they've made theirs. Remember the truth of the matter: scent is the most powerful trigger of memory. It will remember what we've worked to forget, when we least expect it. So prepare yourself. Be one step ahead.

VI: Relationship Quantification

If Paul is your boyfriend and he dates you but wants to keep it a secret because he's on the football team and very much deep in the closet and the only time you can be together is at 3 a.m. when you can walk around the college campus unseen (and $X = Y + B$), then does $B/X = Y$?

- a) Yes, because $X = \text{Love}$, $Y = \text{Compromise}$, and $B = \text{Subordination}$
- b) Yes, because $X = \text{Protection}$, $Y = \text{Subordination}$, and $B = \text{Love}$
- c) No, because $X = \text{Resentment}$, $Y = \text{Captivation}$, and $B = \text{Egotism}$
- d) No, because $X = \text{Love}$, $Y = \text{Captivation}$, and $B = \text{Resentment}$

If Ethan is your boyfriend and he dates you for a few weeks and makes a lot of money and he offers to fly you back home to see him every other weekend but you break things off because that's just not a realistic possibility so he sends you a text that calls you a waste of his time (and $O = 8 \times \blacklozenge$), then is $\blacklozenge < O + 8^{(X+YB)}$?

- a) Yes, because ♦ = Success, O = Opportunity, 8 = Commitment, X = Love, Y = Compromise, and B = Subordination
- b) Yes, because ♦ = Happiness, O = Sex, 8 = Trophy Husband Status, X = Protection, Y = Subordination, and B = Love
- c) No, because ♦ = Peace, O = Anxiety, 8 = Insomnia, X = Resentment, Y = Captivation, and B = Egotism
- d) No, because ♦ = Anxiety, O = Commitment, 8 = Happiness, X = Love, Y = Captivation, and B = Resentment

If Jack is your boyfriend and he moves across the country with you and considers you a long-term partner but breaks up with you by calling you a rebound and someone he *loved but was never in love with* and on the morning you come home from visiting your mother and are still crying after the ride back from the airport because you told him your mother said God will only love you if you never fall in love with a man again he says he should have broken up with you a long time ago that he wants to date a friend he has been spending a lot of time (and Jack = Ethan – Paul), then does Paul/Ethan = Jack?

- a) Yes, because Jack = Subordination, Ethan = Captivation, and Paul = Resentment
- b) Yes, because Jack = Compromise, Ethan = Egotism, and Paul = Happiness
- c) No, because Jack = Ethan and Paul, Ethan = Paul and Jack, and Paul = Jack and Ethan
- d) No, because Jack = Resentment, Ethan = Escapism, and Paul = Peace
- e) Yes, because Jack = Peace, Ethan = Resentment, and Paul = Love
- f) Yes, because Jack = Happiness, Ethan = Anxiety, and Paul = Solace

Perhaps, I can “reappraise”—a technique that would allow me to “reframe” the memories of the former men of my life and alter the significance they possess.² Ideally, though, I find a better man, one who isn’t like the others. Won’t leave one night after he says our lives are heading in two different directions. Leave again after he confesses he

² Crockett, Molly J., Naomi I. Eisenberger, et al. "Putting Feelings Into Words; Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli." *Psychological Science*. 18.5 (2007): 421-27. Web. 5 Oct. 2014.

has fallen in love with someone else. "He and I don't fight. Can we stay in touch?" And I'll clean him out, open the windows and air the place, but he'll slink around on the socks that fell behind the headboard, blow on the cobwebs I can't reach. And my Olfactory Bulb will store him in its never-ending catalogue, which will scare the seahorse, curled smaller than before. And the scent he leaves will join the others. Together, triggering the sense that a bad storm is approaching. Like the sun might melt the tarmac. Like the snow will find its way inside. Like my childhood playing in cardboard boxes. Like honey and marmalade. Like toothpaste running down my wrist. Like a furniture showroom.

Like Christmas holly. Like trouble.

Like a mudslide.

Like a pig's ear.

Like saffron.

Like cork.

Like baked pear slices.

Like pot.

Like a miscalculation.

Like a waiting room.

Musk. Sandalwood.

Rosewood.

Patchouli.

Lime.

Coriander.

Vanilla.

NORWAY

KENZIE ALLEN

Maybe I daydream of living here
in relative safety, where the kids
are looked after, I'm not afraid
of getting sick, where men
do not call out to me in the street,
say how sweet my little cunt
must be, where there's a limit
to how far I might fall, should I
belong. Where the warnings come
swift and the *politi* with a sprung step
one hand on the high-alert gun
one leaning on the yellow coupe
says *det er en vakker dag*
asks where are you going
without guile, and the dark
child in the white leather seat
does not flinch. Maybe freedom
of movement looks like this:
a different country for each
evolved ideal, these postcards
I am sending you, each
a new history, a wherever dream

in wax-sealed ink. May your language
be a mystery I spend my life
cutting open, may my roots
not hold me so fast I am
eclipsed by the larger trees,
may I, too, evolve, a migrant
to a land of my people's
making, let them rise up
and take back the land,
or at least may I survive
this decade, and this
nation I am writing
let it be more than a page
in a leaflet, a static fuzz
on an all-access cloud,
let this expand to include
the starfish, the small children
we've hovered over for the spark
of possibility, that silver-
coated canon we left
gleaming above the city
as reminder of what the time
takes, what buds opened into
steel fronds, what burned
and survived though skeletal;
I'm always telling you this,
like I want someone to have heard,
and to sing it back to me,
this is the land we have settled,
this is the land we will make.

LOSS

AMY COLLINI

2008

I leave behind my perennials when I leave him, the first husband. Coreopsis, snow-in-summer, helianthus, bee balm, peonies too numerous to count.

I have never missed the man, but the mirage of my gardens arises when I sleep: pink and cream and hellfire orange, the lavender that reached for my ankles across the crumbling walk.

2007

Nothing will hurt as badly as the loss of my first dog. Yes, a dog! Please, listen.

He ate a poisonous mushroom in the back yard and it killed him. Can you believe this? And can you believe that he had done this once before, exactly one year earlier *to the day*, and had survived?

The second time, I took him to the vet and left him there with a sigh of inconvenience. He fooled me with his history of survival. I went to a wedding and got drunk.

He suffered. Even suffering is too kind a word. His body attempted to expel the toxin through uncontrollable diarrhea, and then he began to hemorrhage internally. At 11:30, as I stumbled into the door of my house, the vet called.

We could not save him, this funny, bossy little black dog. I got there

in time to feel his heart fading, only a dozen faint taps a minute. He made a titanic effort to rise up in his newspaper-lined cage when he heard my voice, only to collapse with a thud. I whispered into the black triangle of his ear: *I love you. Please don't die. Live live live.* Still drunk, I demanded they save him. They whisked him into the back but returned quickly, saying he was bleeding from his nose and could they please stop? The look on the technician's face was a perfect amalgam of pity and disgust.

This dog: my first child, my best teacher (*how to be patient, how not to strike in anger; how to care for someone other than myself*). I will spend weeks and months and years—no, a life—wanting him back. Wanting to undo the blackness of that one single night.

2010

I arrive in Florence clutching the straps of an ugly denim shoulder bag that contains only my passport and wallet; my suitcase is stranded on the other side of the Atlantic and will not arrive for three more days. I have packed beautiful, expensive clothes for this trip, but instead I am forced to wash the blue V-neck and khaki capris I am wearing in the sink of my room each night, along with my underwear. I sleep in a T-shirt borrowed from the friends I'm with.

Each day, my mind wanders during presentations at the creativity conference I have paid \$1200 to attend. I scowl my way through the Uffizi, grinding my teeth, ignoring whole hallways of Caravaggio, da Vinci, Botticelli. I pound the cobblestones back to my *pensione*, calling Delta from the front desk. I weep and beg on the telephone, telling them I want my clothes, *this is NOT how I planned my trip*. I wipe mascara from my eyes. The Italian woman actually laughs on the other end of the line and trills, "Go buy new clothes! You are ruining your vacation!"

I am incensed at the truth of her words. I also can't let go of the *other* truth: that I cannot—no, *will* not—enjoy my time in Florence if everything does not go as I have scripted it.

When my suitcase appears at the airport, my face splits into a smile. I can breathe again.

But those days, those days. There is no retrieving them.

2014

A baby. Boy or girl? I think it was a girl. Six weeks is as old as she would ever get, a small piece of tissue no bigger than my thumb. The ultrasound screen: my uterus, empty. But her heartbeat! I had seen it only the week before, there in that same place. And then, gone.

Now

My second husband, he loses things others don't lose. A wallet with \$3,000 in it (never found), a laptop, his glasses. He's lost an iPad and his phone on airplanes, on separate flights. Many things he finds again, like his jacket or his car keys. Our wedding ring (*Paul and Amy, 2011*) goes missing for six or seven months at a time before it reappears. He buys a spare at Target and loses the spare.

His behavior aggravates me. I tell him that I lose *nothing*. My purse goes on the hook, my keys go in the basket by the door, my shoes in their cubby.

But this is a lie, of course. I lose things, important things: a blue topaz pendant, a table my great-grandmother saved for me, a whole marriage once. I lose time to Facebook and dawdling and grudges, I lose memories to the silvered fog of age and motherhood. I do not want to believe I am forgetful, scattered like my husband. I want to believe that my grasp is strong and purposeful, that my fingertips can clench it all, forever.

THE EMPEROR

PAMELA SCHMID

My little boy watches his grandma on a computer screen. The connection is slow, so my mother doesn't move so much as float into focus, the camera blurring years, decades from her face. For an instant, she looks remarkably like Natalie Wood, before my father breaks the spell by leaning in. He wears a faded blue Nationals baseball cap and waves a stuffed penguin at the camera.

"So what would you like for your third birthday, kiddo?" my father asks in in a jaunty voice.

"Eye kweam!"

My husband and I smile. These are relatively new words, and it still thrills us to hear our son say them.

My father, I gather, enjoys those words for a different reason: If he could bring one thing onto a desert island, it would be a few gallons of Edy's Slow-Churned Fudge Tracks. If he could cart along anything else, it would be a spoon and a freezer. In our son, Dad has found his ice cream soul mate.

When the mood struck us, my little sister and I liked to hold a contest: Who could make her dessert last longest? We sat at the brown Formica table glaring sideways at each other, taking the smallest bites possible. Whoever won got to eat her remaining bit of dessert, *oobing* and *aaahing* in exaggerated ecstasy while the loser watched. Problems always ensued

when the contest involved ice cream, which tended to melt into sad little pools before a winner could be determined. It rarely occurred to either of us that the focus on winning nearly always cancelled out the joy of savoring.

I first read “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” as a sophomore in high school. The poem’s words infected me, made me edgy. Indulgence twinned with decay: how to make sense of this? In the hallways at school, swimming in the scent of stale French fries, I slid my tongue over my braces and imagined horny feet protruding. I saw flowers wrapped in yellowing newspapers. In my mind, a man in shiny overalls cruised in a white truck, a pied piper luring boys and girls from their homes.

My mind was going. The more I focused on things back then, the less I understood them, and this scared me. Chalk it up to common teenaged angst: my sheltered suburban life was starting to spin off its axis. I’d begun to obsess over everything. The nature of friendship, for example. Whether people generally got what they deserved. Why those who cared the least about being liked were always the most popular. These thoughts would come and go. Wallace Stevens’s poem was like that: I had to hold it loosely in my mind, like a new hatchling, if I hoped to grasp its meaning. I had to view it sideways, not straight on.

My family rarely ate out when I was a child, but every couple of months, we went out for Chinese. Our standby: the House of Fortune, perhaps the only Chinese restaurant in town. It sat amid a bank of sad little storefronts on Lee Highway, and we always ordered the “Dinner for Three, for Four,” as our father called it, which included egg rolls, won ton soup, sweet and sour pork, chicken almond ding, moo goo gai pan. Those evenings always ended with a stop at Baskin Robbins and, even with thirty-one flavors spread like a painter’s palette, we rarely deviated. Dad chose Pralines n’ Cream, my sister picked out Rocky Road and I usually went for Bubble Gum or Mint Chocolate Chip. Our mother rarely got ice cream for herself, as she preferred to watch us eat. *Enjoyment enough*, she always said.

*

There's a picture of me in a teensy weensy bikini, lounging in a patio chair in the backyard. I'm straddling eighth and ninth grade. Adolescence has pushed my hips farther apart. I'm slouching in my chair, and my stomach pooches out—just a little. Otherwise, I'm bony in that awkward, preteen way, scrawny in all the wrong places, with no breasts to speak of and shoulder blades and collarbones poking out from my skin. My long legs have no curve, only sinew. Dark brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. Shimmering humid air, the burble and saw of crickets, the musk of undiscovered dog piles bubbling up around me. The zoyzia grass is still brown and patchy in places, so it must be early summer. I'm shading my eyes with my hand, trying to smile at the camera without squinting.

What were my mother's first words when she looked at that picture, years later? *Look at that pot belly you had! You had quite a pot then. Good thing you started running, or who knows what you'd look like today?!*

My mother watched her food intake more closely with each passing year. By the time she reached her 70s, she used fat-free feta, sour cream, butter, parmesan cheese. She rarely cooked with sugar. She believed in curbing one's appetite for the greater good—that being, in her case, maintaining a size-six figure. She ate no sugar, only Equal, which she carried in packets wherever she went. Skim milk—always. Cheese on her sandwich—never, although she often devoured pickles right out of the jar. She stuck to fat-free yogurt, jam with Nutrasweet and Diet Dr. Pepper. Only rarely did she allow cake, pie, candy, fudge or cookies to cross her lips. Her ice cream was nonfat, so in a purely technical sense, it wasn't even ice cream. In one breath, she said she disliked sweets. In the next, she claimed she enjoyed *watching* us eat at least as much as partaking herself.

My mother's long years of self-deprivation irked me more and more. Well into adulthood, during visits to my childhood home, I would root around the cupboards for something substantial, but all I could find to eat were boxes of Life cereal, bags of baked Tostitos.

I can feel my mother's tendencies sliding into me. My relationship with food is fraught, the reasons lying somewhere between hunger and satiation. I consider every bite that goes into my mouth, and pay heed to

what others eat as well. I'll nibble on a cookie or a slice of cake, but not without a twinge of remorse. I can never seem to enjoy things as much as I would like to.

*"...and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers."*

The second I bore down on Stevens's words, they whirled away from each other, splitting like atoms. Something warm lived inside their shell, ready to break free. Nothing stayed the same. Newspapers yellowed, flowers shriveled on the stalk. Waiting too long meant the thing you prized most became a puddle at the bottom of the bowl.

While it's true we can train our bodies to shun sugar, salt and fat, I have read that sugar substitutes have the opposite effect; they keep our bodies craving sweets at least as much as sugar does. Although my mother honed her self-control as tightly as calf gut, I wonder how much she continued to crave the stuff.

I watch... I watch... I watch my son eat. At 3, he's picked at his food since he started eating solids, rejecting French Fries, pizza, chicken nuggets, even hot dogs. For a while, he turned up his nose at croissants and doughnuts. I don't want him to live on junk food, but I also wish he were more willing to crack open his world. I want him to fill out. His frame is so slight that his trousers fall down and his ribs jut from his chest. At least he likes ice cream—especially chocolate. He eats carefully, inspecting for taste and texture. It must feel right in his mouth.

"Let be be the finale of seem."

The line jumped out at me when I wore braces; it still does. It speaks to unavoidable *endings*, to the wish for visceral experience. It distinguishes between appearance and truth, what we choose to keep out and let in. We erect walls around ourselves. Will we get off the couch? Grab a spoon and dig in?

I'd caught glimmers that life was moving too fast. The summer before sophomore year, I lobbed tennis balls with my oversized Head

racquet and rode my blue Schwinn Varsity 10-speed. In June, summer unfurled warm and endless. But suddenly July came, and then August whooshed by and only days before September began I was sleeping over at a friend's house, in her family's popup camper. Her bed had rainbow sheets, and blood-red cardinals flitted in the birch trees. Her parents lived on a different planet from my own. They were Jungian psychologists who made Indian food and, I suspected, smoked pot. Plastered on the wall of my friend's bedroom was a Kliban cat poster. "I love to eat little mousies," it said. The next morning, I woke up in the camper and remembered that school was only two days away. How could this be? The jolt of that moment went beyond not wanting summer to end. It spoke to a larger truth: The horizon did not stay fixed, as I'd always dimly believed. It approached an ever-increasing rate of speed. It was the sting of the open car window on the highway, your head sticking out, eyes tearing.

That feeling I had in the popup camper came back to me a few years later, after my parents saved up for a vacation in the Virgin Islands. I was already in college; my sister was a senior in high school. We stayed in St. Martin, on the French side, where the water and sky singed my eyes. We spent the days lounging under palm trees, and one night my father decided he wanted to visit the Dutch side, with all of its casinos. My mother insisted on tagging along, so all four of us trooped across the island together. There was my mother, standing by the roulette wheel, her mouth a frozen slit, clutching her macramé purse like a weapon. He placed his chips on red, on black, on red. She watched. The wheel spun, spun, stopped. She watched. He twitched like a horse, feeling her eyes on him. She didn't join in, only stood back, watching, remembering (she told me later) her own father playing the horses, the cards, the money flowing out. Watching this time would avoid disaster. Watching would control the outcome. I stood back along the wall, watching her watching him, trapped in a dream, spinning.

Near the end of our stay, my sister and I sat together near the ocean as the sun set behind us. Our legs stuck to plastic lounge chairs. We breathed in clouds and salty air, the soft hiss of a breeze. Who knows what we talked about or whether we talked at all? On the speakers, Billy

Joel crooned about days to hold onto. Again, that feeling. Skies dimming to pink and purple like gooey rainbow sherbet, the day about to slip below the horizon. I wanted so badly to hold on. I had no idea as I watched the sun set that my sister would not live to see the age of 30. I couldn't see the future, but even then I must have sensed the losses to come.

Shortly before he retired, my father grew thinner. His pants began to fall off his hips, and he had to pull his belt another notch tighter. Tennis games left him winded. The tendons on his neck stretched taut like violin strings, and his collarbones poked out. He began to look like a refugee from a war-torn country, and nobody knew why. Out of desperation, he visited his doctor, who took one look at him and thought of a little-known disease he had just read about—Celiac Sprue—words that conjure an image of dignified pines, not a disease of the gut. A blood test came back positive, and a biopsy confirmed it. In the tangle of my father's intestines, his cilia were dying. No cilia to suck up sustenance meant nutrients passed straight through and out again. My father hadn't been aware that he was starving to death, that gluten was killing him.

Being a celiac meant my father could no longer eat anything containing wheat or barley. Even a wayward crumb could set off his stomach and leave him sick for days. No gluten meant no to all sorts of things: Bread. Pizza. Waffles and pancakes. Cheerios. Quiche and apple pie. Spaghetti, rigatoni, manicotti and all other things ending in -ti and -oni. Tuna casserole. Noodle pudding. Fried chicken. Egg rolls and won ton soup. Cinnamon buns. Chocolate chip cookies and Oreos. Angel food cake, devil's food cake, any cake at all. Most kinds of soy sauce.

Ice cream—that was iffy. Sometimes it contained gluten, sometimes it didn't. It depended on the brand.

Back when my father first learned about his disease, "gluten-free" had not yet entered the lexicon. There were no gluten-free aisles at the grocery store, no bakeries making gluten-free bread, no pizzerias offering gluten-free dough. A sandwich for my father consisted of peanut butter and jelly spread onto a cardboard-flavored rice cake that broke into shards when he bit into it. At restaurants, waiters cocked their heads

when asked whether sauces contained flour. They darted into the kitchen and came out with their thumbs near their index fingers. *Just a little*, they would say—in which case Dad ordered something else. Back then, a tradition began. When the bread basket arrived, my sister and I would take our rolls, butter them, take a bite and moan: *Terrible! Stale as can be!* Then we would wolf them down and pull more from the basket. Our father smiled wanly, enjoying the theatrics. Only later would I understand that he didn't mind the deprivation nearly as much as we'd believed.

My mother stood at the watchtower, her guns ready. She was made for this role, had prepared her entire life for it. She would keep my father safe. With the vigilance of an immigration officer, she controlled the intake. She bought an extra toaster for Dad's gluten-free bread. She filled the extra bedroom with cases of Puffins cereal after learning it contained no wheat. It tasted like wood pulp, but at least it was safe. She reworked recipes, replaced pasta with rice. She did not order gluten-free baking flour for pancakes, cookies or pies. She knew my father would take what she gave him. He wasn't the type to complain.

My father still had his ice cream; nobody could take that from him. He lived for it, now that so much else was off-limits. He ate ice cream under my mother's steady gaze, and also away from it. The freezer always contained a tub of Edy's Slow-Churned Fudge Tracks, made with chunks of real peanut butter cups that he doctored up even further with peanuts and gluten-free chocolate sauce. He ate a bowlful right after dinner and followed with round two once my mother was in bed. I can see him now, standing in the dim light of the kitchen, his bowl perched just under his chin, as he watches an old movie on the Turner Classics station. His spoon clinks like a metal cup against bars. Over time, Dad gained his weight back and even developed a little paunch. My mother kept an eye on him. She preferred my father lean.

I used to watch my father's wine glass as a child, counting the sips, imagining that would stop him. When he stopped drinking, he turned to fizzy water, so I kept track of other things. Now it's my son I watch, and my husband. Bites, spoonfuls, plates. I've worked hard to slough off this

character trait, but watching is in my blood. I watch in the same way I breathe: I don't even notice I'm doing it.

Does a love of ice cream run in the family? Does my son crave what I could not have in utero? When I was ten weeks pregnant, I suddenly became lactose intolerant. Whenever I drank milk, ate it in my cereal or in cream-based soups, my stomach turned sour. As soon as I cut lactose out of my diet, I felt better again. I stopped eating ice cream and pizza with cheese. I tried a few versions of ice cream made with soy, but they all left a chalky aftertaste.

After twenty-odd hours of active labor and nearly four hours of pushing, my son lay on my breast as I wolfed down a turkey sandwich from the hospital cafeteria. I could have eaten four more. That evening, a dear friend came to visit, toting balloons and a pint of Norwegian Chai ice cream, my favorite. I didn't stop to consider whether it was safe to eat. I grabbed a spoon and dug in, stopping only occasionally to share, and finished it off in less than five minutes. I'd never eaten anything so delicious.

It's the last day of winter and the morning of our son's third birthday. He pops up from his bed like a jack-in-the-box and squeals: *Eye! Kweam!* His eyes are bigger than hubcaps. All morning, he parades around the house repeating the same two words. *Eye! Kweam!* He shouts it as he eats his Cream of Wheat and later, as he opens presents: a backpack for school, an alphabet game, books, trucks and cars. He unwraps an Elmo doll from my parents and waves the doll's arm at us. *Hi! Eb-mo! Hi!* Because of his speech disorder, he pushes out the words in jerky staccato, but we can understand him and for this, we're grateful. He still has his little-boy chipmunk cheeks; a filament of drool hangs from his lip. He bats his long eyelashes and claps Elmo's hands together. He carries Elmo over to the piano. *Eb-mo pee peeno!* he declares, plunging Elmo's hands on the low C. We marvel that he can now say three-word phrases. We marvel that he can now reach the piano keys, only a few months after he strained to reach them.

The ice cream parlor still has winter hours; it won't open until noon. So we sit among the piles of torn wrapping paper and wait. At ten minutes to noon, I stand up. "Time for ice cream!" I say.

Eye! kweam! my son shouts. *Eye! kweam! Eye! kweam! Eye! kweam!*

My mother stands up.

My uncle stands up.

My husband stands up.

My father does not stand up. He stays on the couch, his shoulders hunched, a science magazine resting in his lap.

*“Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.”*

My little boy's eyes are huge and brown. Fringed by long eyelashes, they pool with longing—*concupiscent curds*—and seem to fill up half of his face. They are my eyes, or so everybody says, yet I am often at a loss to penetrate them. Other times, they betray everything, and I realize that, like me, he will never make a good poker player. My little boy drinks with his eyes, standing in a corner of the playroom or at the bottom of the slide or in his car seat as the world floats by. His body stays taut while his eyes roam and rove, taking in the words on street signs, the way lips move, how legs rise into a graceful arabesque on stage. Like my mother, like me, my son watches. He watches to discern the contours, to know what is safe. He might be the best watcher of all of us.

Soon enough, so slowly that we hardly notice, our son will lose his chipmunk cheeks. His face will thin out, and the airbrushed lines of his jaw and neck will set. Soon after turning three, he will figure out a secret: while there is much his body can't do, he still has dominion over a few crucial things. He alone controls what goes in, and when it goes out again. He will hone these powers. He will decide he likes kiwi and tomato juice, but not yogurt or oranges. Chocolate milk but not plain milk. Veggie burgers but not broccoli. Raisins, not apricots. And he will hold it inside for as long as he can. He will wiggle and moan, tell us he's *uncompohktabuh*, but only rarely have accidents. How much of control is learned, how much inherited? Can it simply be chalked up to a child claiming what little he can? Eventually, out of desperation, we will dangle a carrot: anything he wants, anything at all, if he gives the potty a try. After the slightest hesitation, he'll name his reward: *Eyesh*

kweam!—the /s/ sound nearly intact, his words inching ever closer to precision.

Nearly a year after our son turns three, my father will appear on our computer screen and pull off his Washington Nationals cap to reveal a completely smooth head. “Grandpa is bald!” I’ll say, to which my little boy will respond: “*bahd!*” By then, ice cream will be more than a delicious dessert. It will be something Dad counts on to keep the meat on his bones. By then, my mother will be watching for different reasons. She will watch, watch and pray for *more* bites, not fewer. She will watch and pray as chemotherapy threatens to ravage him.

“Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice cream.”

But today our son is a brand-new three-year-old. Today we head west. Past the yoga center we drive, past the flower shop and the brick library. The clouds are low and gray. Stale, crusty snow lines the curbs. We park on a side street across from a laundromat and trail behind our little boy, who fairly skips his way inside. There are no other customers, so I pick him up to show him his choices. He quickly points to the bluest, most radioactive-looking flavor: Dinosaur Egg. A server with purple dreadlocks scoops it into a cup, and we steer our smiling boy to a kid-sized table. He takes slow and measured bites; he doesn’t even need a napkin. Meanwhile, I dig into my bowl of Norwegian Chai. My husband licks his Peppermint Bon Bon on the cone, and my uncle works on his sherbet. My mother sits with her back against the wall, hugging her purse, watching. And my father, our son’s ice cream soul mate? He is nowhere to be seen. He elected to stay behind, against our protestations, insisting there wasn’t room in the car for everyone. He could not have possibly known that he wouldn’t have this chance again—the chance to celebrate his only grandson’s birthday.

The emperor, the lord of the ephemeral, smiles and waves his magic scoop. Nothing lasts, no matter how long we scream. It will all melt away. And there in the dim light we’ll stand, clutching our empty bowls, wondering what on earth we were waiting for.

TIPS FOR YOUNG GIRLS HOPING TO AVOID THE RAPTURE

KAREN J. WEYANT

Snag your new tights with the rough edges of your fingernails.
Rip the seams on your spaghetti strapped sundresses.

Skip your baths. Don't brush. Floss your teeth with licorice lace candy.
Go to bed without combing the knots from your hair.

Wear grass stains on the knees of your jeans, splatter mud
all over your pink T-shirts. Step on all the sidewalk cracks.

Look only one way when crossing the streets. Steal the Communion
wafers and wine, drinking until your lips and tongue turn a deep purple.

Skip Sunday School lessons to skinny dip in Tom Gardner's pond.
Then, lie about where you've been. And what you've been doing.

Practicing swearing, using words about God you are not supposed to know.
Don't listen to your parents. Take that one forbidden shortcut home:

the back alley behind the bars on West Main. Watch the bartenders
who step out the back doors on break. Covet their tight jeans,

their T-shirts and tank tops, the cigarette smoke that drifts
from their mouths and fingers. On your way home, learn to recognize

the treasures around you: flattened pennies on rusted rails,
daisies tangled in weeds, a rhinestone earring that catches the streetlight,

white panties and bras left hanging on clotheslines overnight.
When those around you all disappear, everything you see will be yours.

DAEGU LUST

NOAH SAUNDERS

“**L**ook alive then,” says Caamir. “Are you really going to stand in this alley all night with the talent out there?”

“*Please*,” says Oliver as he seals a cigarette with his lips. “Your idea of talent is anything with underwire and black lace.”

“I cast a wide net.”

A group of Korean girls walks by, coiffed and flawless, slender legs and short pleated skirts, chiffon blouses and perfect posture. They give the men a slight but explicit glance, as aware of their naked longing as they are of the eighty percent humidity on this summer night.

“We need to appoint a new evaluator. Brody?” says Caamir.

“No problem,” he says. “Ten, ten, eight maybe with a bit of make-up, ten, seven, ten.”

“Too generous,” says Caamir.

“We need stronger leadership,” says Oliver.

“I think we have too much leadership,” says Zach. In Korea for one month, his sensory nodes lit up like the Las Vegas strip.

“Yes everyone needs to stop leading. Let Zach lead,” says Brody, still hung over from the night before, incapable of turning down an invitation to anything.

Zach looks up and down the street, illiterate and directionless, and for a moment ponders a joke to hide his ignorance, but then he hears

the cries of what can only be foreigners, a group of five or six, probably in their early twenties judging by the bliss.

“That way,” he says.

“Fair enough,” says Caamir.

They walk the few blocks east into the heart of Banwoldang, the foreigner capital of this sweaty city, where the bartenders make the drinks stronger at no extra cost and speak just enough English to ruin you.

In front of Gogo is the usual crowd; in a few short weeks the faces of the revelers are clearer in Zach’s mind than the Hangul characters he’s supposed to be memorizing. The most recent batch of public school hires have just received their first paychecks and everyone’s eyes are lit with the desire to discover a more glamorous version of themselves.

“Slim pickings out here mate,” Caamir says before a group of blonde American girls walk by holding bagged drinks from the next bar over.

“Speak for yourself,” says Oliver. “She’ll do, she’ll do, she’ll do.”

The line in front of the service window is about eight deep with expats of various nationalities rubbing shoulders and sizing each other up, no one ready to commit just yet because who knows what new lover is just around the corner, just over the way, in transit from Lola’s or Mf Bar or Julliard’s or Traveler’s or Thursday Party or wherever; on trains and in subway cars and buses and taxis coming from the far reaches of the city; the outlying suburbs; and before that New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the States, South Africa, England, Ireland, Poland, France, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Mexico (not to mention a healthy mix of Koreans there to “practice their English”); teachers and professors and university students and factory workers and military personnel and Samsung engineers and financial industry types. All there to celebrate being young and virile and reckless and unattached; fueled by a desire to punish their bodies and forget themselves with an intensity Zach shares but has yet been unable to completely understand. He is starting to wonder just how long it will be until there is a drink in his hand when he gets a nudge in his back from Brody, who is holding two plastic cups full of iced aloe juice and taking bottles of soju out of his cargo shorts pockets.

“Well done,” says Caamir.

“Then give me a hand you wank.”

They mix the bottles of the national spirit with the aloe and drink their convenience store cocktails, passing them around so that everyone gets a fair share. A pleasant warmth blooms in their chests, but there's something suspect about it, like gasoline without enough octane.

They stand in line and trade words with an old acquaintance here, a blurry drinking brother there, eager to give away their won so they can douse their libidos in plastic bags of liquor and mixer as they stumble around in the muggy night air. A mosquito buzzes into Zach's line of sight and he tries to swat it before it can do any damage, but he is no match. They make it to the front and place their orders.

"Zombie."

"Long Island Iced Tea."

"Adios Motherfucker."

"Adios Motherfucker."

When the bartender's finished they wade into the crowd and start shaking hands with familiar faces. Before Zach has enough time to ponder the strength of his drink Caamir and Brody have started a rapport with two elegant Mexicans, probably students at one of the universities by the strength of their accents, and Oliver is comparing tattoos with a freckled Berliner in a white polka dot sundress and worn yellow sandals. Zach looks around and says hello to an auburn-haired girl wearing an olive green Smiths t-shirt with a draped black skirt and black leggings. Her name is Paige and she's English. She asks where he's from.

"California," he says.

"Oh my god," she says. "I love *Laguna Beach*. Love it. I grew up watching dramas from your home. Is it really how they show it on TV?"

"Just like it."

"You're joking."

"England's decent."

"It's shit!"

A white SUV plows through the crowd. A house DJ's bass beat comes thudding through windows tinted so dark that anything could be happening inside. The cars come about every five minutes, sometimes in groups of three or four. One runs over a man's foot and he screams into the air.

She tells him how she spent most of the day Skyping with her mom

on her phone and has yet to figure out how to turn on the hot water in her studio.

"I need to learn how to read," she says.

"Tell me about it."

The volume of the crowd is growing and their peals of laughter echo off the walls of the buildings and out into the church courtyard across from them. They finish their drinks and look for a place to throw away their crumpled bags and find none. They leave them next to the curb because that's what everyone else seems to be doing. She buys a round.

"You just get the next one."

She tells him about her mother who is a physical therapist in between jobs, about her brother who has been in and out of jail for fighting, about her little sister who has just discovered ecstasy and she's worried, and she tells him about Rotherham, a town in northern England that was made famous earlier in the year for one of the most revolting child abuse scandals in history but outside of that is filled with lovely people, some of whom are a little provincial and misguided and drink too much (but who doesn't), and there are quite a few neighborhoods where you shouldn't leave your bag in your car, but you'd love it although I'm not sorry I left.

He tells her about California, about the monotony of sunshine and In-n-Out Burger and the marijuana dispensaries on every commercial block, about longboarding and tanning salons that do a shocking amount of business, about forest fires that rain ash from the sky and earthquakes that remind everyone they will pay for their sins and about drought, how the state is offering tax breaks if you dig up your lawn and plant cactus instead. He tells her how everything keeps going and going: the ocean the sky the desert the mountains the forest the strip malls the freeways the tract homes—

"Stop it."

"My name's Zach by the way."

"Zach what?"

"Ansel," he says, and she takes out her phone. "A-n-s-e-l."

He excuses himself to take a piss and has to stand in line for a long time. When he arrives it is small and cramped and smells septic. He is aware of the river of sewage that runs beneath him and the ceiling is

sloped at a seventy degree incline so he has to bend awkwardly to get close to the bowl, but he doesn't mind. It's all part of the fun.

When he gets back outside he is just in time to see Oliver put his arm around Paige with the breezy assertion of a lover, as if they were in the middle of a three week fling, no party having told the same story twice and no idea what to make of the other.

Oliver, with his looks and easy charm had dispensed a fair amount of wisdom upon Zach's arrival, one of those soft-spoken men who travel around being friendly and collecting girls' numbers with indifference. He has high cheekbones and long eyelashes shading his almond-shaped eyes, with a weathered complexion that suggests chronic exposure to the sun. Zach feels uncomfortable going over there now, so he joins Brody and two Aussies as they discuss their Korean class.

"Where were you? We learned a good one for tonight," says one of the Australians.

"What's that?" says Brody.

"*Saranghae*."

"Meaning?"

"I love you."

"Well, I won't be learning that anytime soon," says Brody in his thick Irish brogue. "I only just got here." Zach watches Oliver and Paige out of the corner of his eye. The Long Island Iced Tea has hit Oliver hard, and the soju certainly isn't helping. He's leaning in a little too close, and there is a hint of annoyance in Paige's brown eyes. Zach leaves Brody and his friends and goes over.

"Believe me, I appreciate candor. I'll even describe my penis for you," says Oliver.

"Go on."

"Can you imagine a tuna can? The length is small but the circumference is quite large. In the beginning the girl shouts 'Please go deeper please deeper' but they're usually on board by the end."

"Fascinating."

They look at him.

"Well if it isn't Zach Ansel from Cali-forn-i-a," she says in a terrible American accent that slays him. "Like, oh my god, did you come here on the P-C-H?"

"If you ditch the British and stay with that I'll buy the rest of your drinks," says Zach.

"Speaking of which," she says, and drains the rest of hers. "You have an obligation old friend. Excuse me Mister Oliver."

The line is long and unmoving. A Finnish man with a long ponytail gives the bartender a hand and screams the names of the drinks waiting in the window.

"Zom-bie! Zom-bie!"

"Do you know someplace else?" Paige asks.

He puts his hand on the back of her arm and takes her away from the street lined with trash, from the statue of the Virgin Mary in the church courtyard looking down and away from the lush sacrilege.

They round the corner and enter Lola's, a dive that might have sold cheap takeout in an earlier life. The floor is lined with scuffed white linoleum several shades past its prime. Long fluorescent bulbs hang from the ceiling, bathing the clientele in harsh light. The bartender calls herself Lola, but it's not her real name. She wears a leather halter top with a knee-length maroon ruffled skirt, and her eyebrows are shaved and redone with eyeliner. She is not what you'd call unfriendly, but Zach has never seen her smile.

"She just moved here," he says. The bartender gives them two Jägerbombs on the house.

"Welcome. Pick me up."

"You can't be serious." Paige leans over the bar for a hug.

"Here we go," Zach says, knowing his Sunday is shot.

"Look there, your crew has migrated."

They drop the Jäger into their pint glasses and chug. Paige blows the bartender a kiss and tells her she'll be back with friends. When they open the glass door they are hit with the sound of 1:00 am. Everyone is talking louder than they think. Men on motorcycles whiz by, dodging the drunk pedestrians drifting along the street like newspaper blowing in the wind.

His friends are standing in the middle of the road with about six other people from Gogo. A South African girl holds up her cocktail and peers into its blueness. Her pale skin absorbs the light from the flashing street signs. She glows with splashes of red, then yellow, then green.

"This drink is hectic," she says.

Paige hits it off with a heavyset Welshman with long red hair and a wiry man he knows to be from upstate New York. His eyes meet those of a Vietnamese girl who has on a low-cut, blue and white striped cotton dress. She is texting, or pretending to text, and for some reason is wearing a tiara. He joins her underneath the awning of a flower shop.

“Can I feel?” she says.

He leans forward and she rubs her hands over the millimeter of hair covering his scalp.

“You look like someone,” she says.

“Yeah?”

“Let me think.”

He has one of those faces. His blood is a mix of Filipino and Scotch-English but he could pass for Israeli, Czech, Puerto Rican, Chilean, and is often told of his vague resemblance to friends, public figures.

He waits. She bites her lip. A man on a street corner beats the leather skin of his *buk*, a traditional Korean drum, to raucous applause.

“I’ll think of it,” she says.

She sways into him, and for an instant he feels the warmth of her body against his chest. The scent of her lip gloss mingles with the booze on her breath. Sugary, sweet.

He imagines what it would be like to put his arm around her, to open the door of a cab and repeat broken Korean until arriving at the front door of his building. To remove the tiara from her head and run one hand through her hair while the other slides underneath her dress, not quite oblivious to the eyes watching in the rearview.

Her phone vibrates against her palm. “Hello? Where *are* you?”

“Hey, you have a good night, all right?”

He turns and sees three more, male and female alike, have fallen into Paige’s orbit. She grabs a man’s arm and makes him promise to go scuba diving with her in Jeju. She holds up a woman’s bronze earring and says she’s been looking for a pair like them for over a year. He goes to join her but is intercepted by Oliver, who puts his arm around his shoulders and turns him in the opposite direction.

“Are you having fun mate?”

“It’s really—”

“You know, when I first moved here I built Korea up in my head as

this magical place where life would be easy. But it's got good and bad qualities, like anywhere else. In the end I found that once I stopped trying to force things and learned to appreciate, like this night for instance, or a cold drink in my hand, I began to enjoy myself much more."

"I hear you."

"Are you hearing me mate?"

He steps back and butts his forehead against Zach's, hard enough to make him brace on the asphalt.

"Fuck I'm drunk," Oliver says.

They walk over to Caamir, who is seeing off the two girls from earlier as they climb into a cab.

"Wednesday, coffee," he says to the shorter one in the silk blouse. "I think it's time you stopped hanging around with these Philistines and dated a proper Londoner."

"Caamir you brown bastard. You're from Bromley," says Oliver.

Caamir shuts the door and gives the girls one last wave. "Better Bromley than some chicory farm in the arsehole of nowhere."

As they watch them drive off Zach thinks about his ex-girlfriend in California, wonders whether she is out drinking with her friends in Santa Monica or is curled up on the sofa smoking out of her vape. He pictures her wearing a pair of sweatpants and boiling some pasta, kale chips roasting in the oven, Bob Marley's soft lull playing from her laptop speakers. He imagines coming up from behind and putting his arms around her waist—

A lithe Filipina wearing a brown tank top with tight black jeans steps onto the front deck of Thursday Party, a cigarette in one hand, plastic cup of beer in the other. Eight or so bead bracelets cling to the light brown skin of her wrist, and her lips, painted a reddish shade of brown, possess a devastating fullness. Her dense black hair falls past her shoulders in careless layers, giving the impression she just rolled out of bed. She turns toward her friend, and the skin below the hem of her tank top shines in the glare of the deck lights.

"Who's that?" says Zach.

"Don't know, but her ass is distracting," says Caamir.

Oliver leaves them to go stand in the alley across the street. He leans against a brick wall and looks down at his feet.

"Tuna Can's feeling ill," says Caamir.

He goes over to check on him while Zach scrolls through some messages on his phone.

"There you are," Paige says, a rosy hue to her cheeks. "What's next Laguna Beach. Ginger was getting handsy."

They walk up three flights of stairs to Mf bar (short for "My favorite" bar), a cozy, dimly lit tavern done up in gaudy seventies décor. The walls are covered with flower power patterns that might have been lifted from the catsuit of a disco queen. Neon blue Christmas lights hang from the pitch black ceiling. On top of the barrier separating the seating area from the game room is a headless mannequin of a bare female torso, where just underneath a cracked urinal is mounted into the plaster.

"It's lovely," she says.

He orders two gin and tonics. They sit at a table in the corner framed by vases full of artificial wildflowers.

"So what do you think his deal is," she says, darting her chin toward a thickset man with straw-colored hair. He's in his thirties and has one of those stocky athletic builds that doesn't age well.

"His deal?"

"His life, what's on his mind."

Zach thinks it over as he watches him chat up a young girl with wispy brown bangs and red lipstick.

"It's not complicated. He's a few drinks in looking to make it with a young twenty-something."

"Can you really be so callous?"

"What?"

"Any fool could see that. What's his story?"

"Tell me," he says.

"Okay. First. His smile is fucking sad. He's had his heart broken and I doubt it was some summertime fling. It lasted at least a year."

"What else?"

"Look at the way he struggles to hold her attention as she looks to see if her friends have finished their cup game or whatever that is. The way he holds his glass. Do I have to spell it out?"

"I think you want to."

"Sexually frustrated!" she yells, causing the people at the bar to look over and laugh.

"Maybe you're projecting."

“So he’s funny all of a sudden.”

“Or he’s just some single guy who isn’t ready to get in a cab.”

“But where’s the fun in that?” she says. “Oh, look over there, wait, not yet.”

He turns his head to look.

“No! I’ll tell you when.”

She gives him a coy, appraising glance that mostly contains the knowledge that he is along for the ride. As far as she wants it to go.

At the bar is a tall Dominican girl wearing pearl earrings and a sleeveless red dress. A thin leather belt is cinched around her waist. A pair of beige heels, toenails painted a sort of off-pink. The bartender makes her a Tequila Sunrise like he’s been looking forward to it all day.

“Tell me about her,” she says.

He considers it, her, her long limbs, toned thighs, flawless skin, goofy smile. The silver chain necklace around her neck. The way she avoids eye contact with her admirers. He can see one over by the shuffleboard, nudging his friends, will he or won’t he. He met her once during orientation. Verona? Viera?

“She gets hit on constantly. So much that she makes up fake names, like aliases. Sometimes she’s Sasha Fierce, other nights she’s Juanita Escobar. She occasionally goes to bars just to be this other person, but she’s not a sadist. She never lets guys buy her more than a drink. They flirt, she flirts back, tells some lies, never sees them. It makes her feel edgy.”

“And?”

“She has a man back home. Cop. Tough, earnest. He’s proposed to her twice already but she can’t seem to break it off. Took her to PR, Venezuela. He’s crazy about her. She’s only going to be here a year. They’ll get married. Bunch of kids.”

They play this game.

A man wearing a black tank top with the words “I’m so Fancy” printed on it will father a child with a Korean university student on the night of the Pusha-T concert, and to everyone’s surprise will marry her. A blonde woman with a tattoo sleeve inspired by Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is saving up money to start a clothing label in Rainbow, California. The man in the tight-fitting plaid blazer carrying shots of tequila four at a time to his friends is the son of the VP of Marketing at

LG; he will be in and out of rehab by the time he's twenty-seven.

Gin and tonic, gin and tonic, Jack and Coke, gin and tonic—the Red Bull has his heart beating fast and his head is beginning to throb. The world is an indistinct mess of colors and noise. The bartender gives them two free shots of something brown. Zach looks down at his phone and it is 4:30 am.

"They're trying to kill us!" Paige says.

They knock them back and the flash of nausea jolts him out of his stupor. As they walk back to their table he notices for the twelfth time how soft her skin looks, how her legs seem to go on and on.

"You know, we've done almost everyone," he says.

She looks around. The crowd has thinned. Two men with blood-shot eyes sit at the far end of the bar looking down at their watery drinks, ice having melted long ago. Four Americans play beer pong with a manic intent to squeeze every ounce of joy from the night, oblivious to the creeping dawn. In a booth on their left a thick muscled man with a crew cut exchanges deep kisses with the tiara girl from earlier. If he is military he is far past his curfew and there will be hell to pay.

"Everyone but. . ." she says.

"You want to do each other?"

"I'll go first," she says, a little too eager.

At this moment he realizes he has never seen her face in repose, always telegraphing some new emotion, a transparency which doesn't know any other way to be.

"Mister Ansel," she says with a flourish, pronouncing his name with a fictional accent on the 'e.' "Where to start. You frustrate me."

"Let's hear it."

She leans across the table and smiles like she might have a bouquet of roses or a live grenade.

"You've got *some* kind of intellect, and can string a few sentences together when you need. But you're tight, even now, even after god knows how many drinks—nine, eleven? You're still butting against this ceiling. *I will not have too much fun. I will not look stupid.* And with each G and T I see you trying to raise it, but it only goes up a few inches each time. Get over yourself!" she says, slapping the table for emphasis. "You could get what you want if the right words were to come out of your mouth, but you're shy. Which is a polite way of saying you're afraid!"

The sky outside is beginning to lighten; he can see the through the plate glass into the wood-paneled café across the street. The two men at the bar shove their empty glasses forward and pay.

"How'd I do?" she says.

"That was all right." The bartender lifts up the rubber service mats and rinses them off in the sink.

"Now you go. It's not often I get the perspective of a stranger. Well, not so strange, it's been hours."

"A whole night."

"No holding back Zachary. Who knows if we'll ever see each other again?"

The beer pong game has gone into overtime and no one seems thrilled. They reset cups like they're the subjects of an experiment meant to determine the moment when fun turns to shit. They fill the bar with hollow laughter.

"I'm guessing that for you life is simple. You follow your intuition, act first think later, or maybe don't think at all because you're so god damn sure you're *right* about everything."

He pauses, needs to think.

"Don't stop now," she says.

"You mentioned your sister doing ecstasy with this knowing authority, so I get the sense you were part of that scene. Maybe you've come out of it now, had one or two bad nights that made you rethink it."

Her eyes widen at the last part, enjoying this.

"You'd rather spend money on experiences instead of things. You'd drop a thousand dollars on Thailand before buying a MacBook. And you're a real gypsy, or at least beginning that phase. Korea won't be your only stop. You've got a half dozen more on the—fuck it," he says, and kisses her.

She doesn't make it easy on him. For the first few seconds he's out of his chair, but then she leans in a bit, meets him halfway. He runs his fingers through her hair and she gives him a little tongue, but they aren't the sloppy kisses you'd expect from two *waegooks* at an ex-pat bar at five in the morning.

"Are the trains running?" she says softly, their faces still close.

"I think so."

They pay their tabs and leave. They walk down the stairs and out to

the street. The night sky is yielding to the dawn, which has become a living, breathing thing. A man in a crisp business suit sits sprawled in front of an art supply store across the road, leaning against the façade like it's his living room sofa. The lift gates are down on the delivery trucks as bleary-eyed men restock convenience stores with boxes of shrimp fries and Pepporo and prepackaged kimbab. They walk the six blocks west to the subway without saying much of anything.

They stand facing each other in front of the escalator and listen to the mounting sounds of traffic as the city gets out of bed. He puts his hand on the small of her back and presses his lips to hers. When they finish the look on her face is hard for him to read.

"It was nice meeting you Zachary," she says.

He watches her walk down the escalator and into the station. There's no reason he shouldn't take the train too but there's still money in his wallet so he hails a cab. He gets in and hands the driver a laminated card with his address printed on it in a script he can't read. The driver looks at him and clucks his tongue. Zach tilts his head back and shuts his eyes.

WITHOUT THE LIGHT

MARK BURKE

The night the wind and snow
pulled down the lines,
we had to feel our way like moles,
touching door jambs and
table edges, tentative
as new lovers.

We searched for matches,
some way to bring the world back.
Huddled by the woodstove,
we sat gold-faced, cocooned in its glow,
talking as the flashlight dimmed,
shrinking the room.

Opening cupboards and drawers,
we looked for candles
and you told me how
you walked your empty rooms
on Sunday nights, trying to find
a way to undo
the loneliness that hobbled you.

WITHOUT THE LIGHT

We stared at the fire and I told you
how I left my wife for a shade
that dissolved within months.
Waiting out the storm,
unraveling what once
had shamed us, we became
brave in the dark
as the wind tore at the trees.

ANSWERS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE

AMY MILLER

"We were able to express ourselves."

—Ronaldinho, after Brazil's 4–1 win over Japan in the 2006 World Cup

We boiled ambition day after day
in the oldest pot in the house.
Prayers were cheap, and children
by the millions. We were lost
but hungry, so we kept on cooking.

I am saying our bodies were born
and timed for this hour.
The grass could tell
we were coming. We didn't know
anyone in the crowd.

Gravity lost its sway.
Our arms floated up,
our clothes no longer
an encumbrance. We were clouds,
we were gods, we were angry enough
to rain and sun enough
to warm your face for hours.
After that, the rest was easy.

EULOGY FOR A SMALL PEOPLE

ROZ RAY

First there were people. They designed us. They built us. They flew us up in the sky and we were happy. They built us bigger and they built us better. They built us to go to the moon. We went. We flew to the moon, we flew to Mars; we felt the empty freedom of space and Earth's fiery rage at our return. They built us not to burn. Not to crash. To fly ourselves. They engineered us to survive mistakes, malfunctions, all the things they couldn't control.

Then they started dying. People are always dying. Everywhere, every place: dying in car-fires, dying in golf carts, dying in bed. But then they started dying more, and in new ways. Freak accidents started to overcome them, their emotions became too much for them. Their resiliency began to degrade. Their numbers dwindled.

And what were we supposed to do? We mourned their loss, but the sky wasn't dying with them. It was still there. So we started copulating. We fucked on every piece of tarmac from Abu Dhabi to Spokane, fucking and flying, fucking and flying, putting new little flyers in the air every day.

Sometimes we'd see a person, some lone soul wrapped in rags, peering over the hurricane fencing or out from behind the control tower. We'd invite them in, we'd take them up in the air. They'd live on peanuts and pretzels; we'd take them into space, to places they'd never seen.

We just wanted to make them comfortable.

When all the people were gone we took up some of their habits. We liked personal ads, and pornography, and fucking in new positions. We think they made us very well. We think they made us in their image. How they'd *like* to be, if they were still here, still flying.

SCENES FROM THE AFTERMATH

ROZ RAY

*I*nstructions:

- For a cross-genre mystery, read scenes in order, #1-12.
- For a thriller, read scene 12 first, then scenes 1-11.
- For a love story, delete scene 5.
- For a romance, delete scenes 12 and 7.
- For science fiction, read scene 5 first, delete scenes 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8.
- For experimental fiction, cut scenes out, throw them in the air, pick them up at random, and see what you get.

Good luck.

No. 1: The Game Plan

The high rise had been built to blend. Brushed chrome siding, metal railings, plate glass. The neighborhood was like a gigantic Schwinn ten-speed. Detective Loveless picked her way past the police tape spider-webbing the sidewalk, held a hand up against strobing red and blue lights, and joined her partner at the door.

Detective Park didn't look at her, but shifted his weight ever-so-slightly her way. "What's the play, boss?" Park was new, to the city and to the job. Not that anyone ever became an old hand at this.

“Game face, Jae,” Loveless said. “These franchise types can get huffy.”

Park nodded, raised an eyebrow. A scar bisected his right eyebrow, a thin stripe marring the dark, graceful arc. It was the only imperfection in his face. It was a problem.

No. 2: Practically Perfect in Every Way

“Witnesses?” Loveless asks.

“Three,” the beat cop says, looking from her to Park, settling on Park. “Two back at the station, one had to go to work.”

“Name?”

“Anan Gupta.” Beat cop rips a page from his notebook and hands it to Park, who takes it and looks at Loveless like *I know*. Such a tired routine, the no-girls-allowed club. Who acts like that anymore?

Loveless likes Park all the more for that look—empathy without pandering, solidarity without trying to be the hero of the hour. Loveless didn’t have too many relationships like that. Hadn’t *ever* had any on the force. Other partners had looked at her as an object, of one sort or another—a precious gem just for them, a porcelain doll to protect, a pain in the ass, a stepping stone. Every day a boulder to push against, until Park, the Mary Poppins of partners.

Waiting for the other shoe to drop was a bitch and a half.

No. 3: A Whiff of Something

“Whaddya figure?” Park asked.

Broken glass, broken chairs, blood. Lots of blood. The shop had a new-leather smell, but underneath that, the unmistakable ozone-and-hot-metal odor that turned Loveless’s stomach.

“Bad reaction, maybe,” she said. “Guy sits down, gets a taste of something he doesn’t like, goes ape shit.”

She shook her head. The scene felt unfinished, somehow. Like this was the beginning of a thing, not the end of it.

No. 4: Bracing the Witness

“Mr. Gupta? Anan Gupta?”

Gupta was one of those people whose skin, hair, and eyes were all the same shade of tan. Height/weight proportionate, neither handsome

nor unattractive, neither short nor tall. A prototypical specimen—the ur-human, blank, ready to be riffed upon.

“Busy,” Gupta said, not looking up.

Loveless looked at Park, Park looked at Loveless. *Too bad about the attitude.*

“Mr. Gupta, my name is Detective Loveless, this is Detective Park.”

Brown eyes flicked up, pinged off of Loveless and onto Park. Maybe it was because they both belonged to the Model Minority Club, and Loveless looked a little too much like a mutt to qualify. Maybe it was just her day to run into chauvinist assholes.

“We need to ask you a few questions about the incident at The Salon.”

Gupta’s fingers flew across the keyboard, tap-tap-tapping like hail. A bead of sweat tested the end of his nose. He was in the post-Synthet Zone. *Zoning out* used to be a thing. Now it was all about zoning *in*. Hyper-focus without the illegality of black-market Adderall or the inconvenience of ADHD.

“Mr. Gupta,” Loveless said, “while there is no natural response to witnessing a triple homicide, I’ve seen every reaction under the sun, feigning the disinterested busybody is not going to get you what you want.”

No. 5: The March of Progress

Synthet: part lucid dream, part hallucination, total brain fuck. Early studies showed positive gains in what creators termed “meaningful rest.” Not just sitting down for a breather. Synthetic Reality sessions acted like concentrated sleep. Two hours in a Synthet seat felt like a full eight hours in the sack. Subjects woke refreshed, ready for the day, no long term side effects. And the cherry on top? You were awake the whole time, living out whatever scenario you’d rented for the afternoon—Amazonian explorer, billionaire high-flyer, secret agent, heart-warming love affair, what-have-you.

Synthet shops popped up everywhere. High end, low end, ubiquitous as spas, gyms, hair and nail salons. Memberships came rolled into corporate benefits packages; condo high rises touted in-house suites; airlines offered Synthet units as an upgrade, as did trains and private car services. Anywhere you might get stuck sitting for an hour or two, you

might as well indulge, or so the logic went.

Loveless had never tried it. She liked to think that meant something, but you can't prove a negative.

No. 6: The MacGyver of Sex

It was supposed to only happen once, between Loveless and Park. Late at night, day twenty-three of the case. Those were grim days—the dog days of the chase. Victims' families' bitterness welling up, superiors' frustration blowing in like a cold front, disapproval, smugness, schadenfreude from colleagues, and always, always, fear that the trail has gone cold. These were the days when all you had was each other.

Park tasted like almonds and lemongrass. Warm, with something spicy, smelling like fresh Bali Shag.

"We can't go back from this," he said.

"Sure we can."

True to her name to the end, or at least that's how Loveless intended to be.

They sat frozen in Park's apartment, on the couch, case files and evidence boxes spread out around them. Loveless hovered for a long time, her lips above his, ever the ten-year old at the edge of the diving board, until—

"Fuck, Maggie," he whispered, and she dove in.

Loveless began to suspect this wouldn't be a one-time deal. Park reached into the couch and pulled out a long Velcro strap. How do you let go of a man who attaches hidden delights inside the folds of his couch, where no one looks but anyone might find them?

"Let's see what you've got, MacGyver," Loveless said, and Park obliged.

No. 7: Turnabout is Fair Play

It is fair to suffer whatever one has caused others to suffer. This is Detective Loveless's favorite game.

No. 8: Inspiration in the Alpha Waves

It was, in the end, Park's MacGyver Sex Couch that put Loveless on the trail. Hidden uses. If a couch could turn into a sex toy, a Synthet suite could turn into all kinds of things.

No. 9: The Underlying, Inevitable Truth

Inside every growing industry, there are sharks swimming with the minnows. Synthet hooked up to your brain, but the connection was input only, no output. They said.

Sharks and minnows. Funny thing was, in the water, they all look alike, until somebody feels the teeth.

No. 10: A Necessary Definition

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, in a nutshell: you can never know everything about anything, therefore you can never predict anything to a certainty.

No. 11: Mood Lighting

The lights in the interrogation rooms were adjustable. Some cops liked to dim them to keep their subjects ill at ease; everyone's afraid of the dark. Loveless turned the lights all the way up. Blaring, so that the man sitting there looking oh-so-ordinary would know he had nowhere to hide. One way or another, they'd find every drop of blood on his hands. Including Park's.

No. 12: Just Because You Can, Doesn't Mean You Should

"People don't know what they want," Gupta said.

"Oh no?"

"Not a chance. They think they do, they *say* they do, but they don't. And even if they did, they could never tell you exactly what it is, because your average guy on the street is a shit communicator."

"So that's it then?" Loveless asked. "It was all just a fact finding mission?"

"To observe a thing is to change it, Detective Loveless," Gupta said.

"And you needed to find out what desire looked like unobserved."

"Precisely." Try as he might, Gupta couldn't smother the swell of pride that rolled his shoulders back, made him sit up straighter.

"So, back at The Salon, that was a fact-finding mission?"

Gupta nodded.

"Nothing more?" Loveless asked.

"Nothing."

"Well, at least at first, right?"

Gupta cocked his head to the side.

Loveless slid a folder across the table. “We found all sorts of shit on your hard drives. Stuff that went way beyond what kind of deodorant these people like to buy.”

“You can’t reduce a person to their credit card statements,” Gupta said. “We already *have* that data. You don’t know what single fact will prove useful until you look at the whole picture.”

“So the scope of the project widened.”

“It had to.”

“And that’s when the reactions began,” Loveless said.

“No one was supposed to get hurt.” Anan Gupta truly believed that.

Loveless looked him straight in the eye, no bullshit. “Everybody says that.”

DOOR

ANN S. EPSTEIN

Meinhardt Raabe's second chance at a movie career, thirty-one arid years after his star turn as the Munchkin coroner in *The Wizard of Oz*, arrived with a midnight call from a man identifying himself as Andy Warhol. The flat voice at the other end of the line was hard to hear over the background music, a cacophony of screaming vocals, thumping drums, and screeching metal.

"Is this a joke?" Meinhardt, dazed with sleep but alert to ridicule, demanded. He was a midget, not a moron, for God's sake, and found these prank calls insulting. They usually came at the beginning of tornado season, after CBS's annual showing of *Oz*, but this was January. And if the call really was from New York, home to Warhol's notorious Factory, it was three a.m. there, long after mischievous children had been put to bed. Maybe the caller was a basketball player or a menswear model with a midget fetish. It wouldn't be the first time.

Meinhardt was on the verge of hanging up and climbing back into his trundle bed, when his sleep-interrupted brain reminded him that last month MGM had auctioned a trailer of *Oz* memorabilia. *Variety* reported that Warhol had bought all the items that came in multiples, like his silk screens: a trio each of Lollipop Guild and Lullaby League outfits, a score of flying monkey suits. An *Oz* aficionado, Warhol had purportedly mounted his king-size bed atop a platform of the original yellow bricks. Maybe he thought Meinhardt had other paraphernalia to

sell. He wished he did. Fifty-five and broke, he could use the cash for rent, food, and a set of dentures to help him chew his beloved Milky Way bars, his sole weakness in the otherwise careful diet he followed to stay in shape for that elusive acting role he still dreamed about. Alas, the studio owned every *Oz* keepsake and no Munchkin had made a penny off the movie's rerun and licensing success.

"Whatever you want, I don't have," Meinhardt said, brushing the empty candy wrappers off his sawed-down desk into the overflowing trash can. "The props belong to MGM." He felt foolish taking this call seriously. On the other hand, suppose it really was Warhol. With an offer.

"No problem," the affectless voice said. There was silence, followed by murmuring, then another person got on the line. "We're making a movie," breathed a woman with a heavy German accent. "Andy wants you to be in it. Your physique is *wunderbar* for the part."

Meinhardt's ridicule radar was reactivated. He didn't want to be another freak in Warhol's circle of Superstars. Yet his options for making a living were dwindling, shrinking his finances as fast as his compacting vertebrae were further reducing his height. His health could barely tolerate the grinding carnival circuit, and even those jobs were disappearing. The Little People of America, inspired by other civil rights groups, had criticized sideshows as demeaning. Last month, they'd written to ask if he'd trade on his *Oz* fame to be a spokesperson for the cause, promising to pay a stipend for each appearance. Meinhardt wasn't sure what to do. Speaking out might make him a hero in some eyes, but to his Munchkin friends, who needed those jobs, he'd be a traitor. He had to decide soon. Little people's patience could be as short as they were.

Working in Hollywood was the only alternative to being a circus performer, but his agent had called just yesterday to say that although Arthur Penn had loved his audition for the role of Little Little Man in his upcoming film, *Little Big Man*, the director had decided to cut the part. "You made Dustin Hoffman look too tall," she explained. Meinhardt said he was willing to wear elevator shoes. "It's hopeless," she'd continued. "Penn's also afraid that adding midgets as a downtrodden group will dilute the movie's focus on the plight of American Indians." Meinhardt didn't give a rat's ass about some cause. He'd play a dachshund if it got him off the road, out of debt, and most important, back on the big screen.

"How much?" Meinhardt asked the German woman from The Factory now. She named a sum that would keep him housed and fed for a month. "Double it?" he pressed. After a brief consultation, she reported that Andy had agreed to his price. "And travel expenses?" Meinhardt held his breath.

"*Sicher*, sure," she said, without bothering to ask Warhol this time. "Shooting starts next Wednesday night. "We will see you, yah?" Meinhardt couldn't think of a reason to say no.

All the same, he felt uneasy about flying clear across the country. He hated not being able to reach the high counters at the airport check-in, and the top of his scalp was half a foot below the head rests on the airplane seats. Worse, when he got to New York, it would be winter, fifty degrees lower than the temperature in L.A. Midgets were prone to bad joints and weak lungs, both aggravated by the cold.

He decided to seek advice from Margaret Hamilton, with whom he'd stayed friends ever since that day on the *Oz* set when she told him frankly that she'd been cast as the Wicked Witch of the West because she was ugly. Meinhardt felt ugly too. The difference was that she could laugh at herself, a gift he'd hoped would rub off on him but still hadn't, over three decades later.

"Suppose Warhol has me jumping out of a soup can?" Meinhardt fretted.

Maggie cackled. "Doesn't sound like such a bad comeback to me."

"I was hoping for something more mainstream. A Warhol film could be suicide."

"Death by art. The ultimate sacrifice. What better way for a serious performer to go?"

Meinhardt confessed to being torn between desire and despair.

"Don't give up," Maggie cajoled. "I haven't abandoned my dream to be cast as a female romantic lead."

"I'd put in a good word for you but I don't think Warhol makes that kind of movie."

"Give it a go, Meinhardt. What have you got to lose?"

"My dignity," he sighed.

"And to gain?" Maggie asked.

"Money."

“Which is worth more to you?”

Meinhardt didn’t hesitate. “At this point in my life, the money.”

“What’s Warhol paying you?”

“Enough to get by until the carnival circuit starts up in the spring, but not enough to keep me off the road after that.”

“So, it’s really not about the money, is it?” Meinhardt didn’t answer. Maggie told him to break a leg.

Meinhardt flew to New York two days early to calm himself, but the cold rattled him more than his nerves. The only overcoat he could find that fit him was in the boys’ husky department, and he refused to wear something with brass buckles and plaid cuffs. To stay warm, he hung out at Demel’s bakery, which sold pastries like those his grandmother made when he was a child growing up in Berlin. He’d come upon the shop decades ago while appearing in the circus at Madison Square Garden, and was relieved to find it was still there, the linen napkins, heavy silverware, and china cups unchanged. Throwing his diet and his budget to the wind, Meinhardt fortified himself with *Sachertorte* and *buchtein*, the jam-filled dough pockets he’d gobbled for comfort as a boy. He debated bringing an *Apfelstrudel* to The Factory, but didn’t want to act ingratiating. It’s what the public expected approval-seeking midgets to do, and he wasn’t about to grovel, not even before a famous public figure. Most likely, Warhol and his Superstars subsisted on coffee, booze, cigarettes, and amphetamines anyway, although he’d heard that drugs gave people a sweet tooth. He compromised by buying a tray with half a strudel and two dozen *Brezeln*, the German pretzels that were chewy in the middle and crisp on the ends. They’d go well with beer.

When Meinhardt walked into The Factory, there was no table on which to set the platter, so he balanced it on a stack of carpet sample books. Covered in foil, the tray blended in with the silver-painted walls and ceilings. The lone exception to this decorating scheme was a red couch where three people mechanically pawed one another in simulated sex. Others slept on silver lamé chairs or stood in groups, smoking, snorting, or swallowing whatever illicit substances kept them awake. A few paced the room’s perimeter. No one seemed to notice Meinhardt’s entry except Warhol, who stood in a corner, arms folded, watching everyone. He appeared unapproachable.

"*Guten Abend.*" A German voice, familiar from the phone call, wished Meinhardt good evening and introduced herself as Nico. She was tall and blonde, with porcelain skin and chiseled features. "Andy, come meet Scroll," Nico yelled above the toneless, thumping music. She led Meinhardt to the middle of the room where the wooden floor was encrusted with paint. "That's your stage name in the credits, but no one actually calls you that in the film. It's a silent movie."

Meinhardt stiffened. He would not work with people who referred to him as Troll.

"Not Troll, Scroll. Like the parchment you unfurl in *Oz* when you announce that the wicked witch is not merely dead, but really most sincerely dead. Andy loved that gesture. Very theatrical, yet economical. Like Andy."

Warhol glided over, his white hair a stark contrast to his black turtleneck. Most people in the studio wore solid black. A few were wrapped in swirled patterns of phosphorescent colors.

"The movie's title is *Door*." Warhol pointed to a foil-covered door, barely visible against the wall. Wrinkles in the silver paper around the doorknob made it only marginally easier to see. Warhol looked at his pale, watchless wrist. "Gee whiz! We start shooting in an hour." His hands flew to his cheeks, attempting to hide their dark splotches. Meinhardt had read that the blemishes, caused by a childhood illness, had turned Warhol into a loner. He recognized a fellow outcast.

Warhol returned to his observation post across the room. Having been given the director's blessing, Meinhardt found himself surrounded by Superstars.

"Holly Woodlawn, *querido*." A tall woman, topped by red-gold bouffant curls, wearing a slinky silver lamé dress with a black lace shawl, put a hairy-backed hand on his arm. "Like Holly Golightly? And the Bronx cemetery, where Bat Masterson's buried? I'm an heiress, you know."

"Haroldo, the only thing you're going to inherit is the dirt in the Puerto Rican slum where you were born." Ultra Violet, flashing Meinhardt an intense lavender-lipstick smile, needed no introduction. Her big eyes peered out below her shiny purple hair through oversized lilac glasses. Looking Meinhardt up and down, she declared him "short," as though it were a revelation.

“Viva, video artist.” A woman with wavy hair, a long nose, and prominent cheekbones pushed her way to the front of the group. Ultra Violet wilted and slunk toward the couch, where no one made room for her. She sniveled and crept to the side of the room opposite Warhol.

“I’m Billy Name, film director and interior decorator.” A young man next to Viva pointed proudly toward the silver walls and red couch. “All my idea.”

Viva pouted. “I told Andy that Billy could do the lighting, but *I* should direct the film.” Billy put his hands on Viva’s shoulders and not too gently shoved her behind Holly. They both looked at Warhol, like children competing for their father’s attention.

“Joe.” Warhol fluttered a limp hand toward a bare-chested, beefy man with a handsome face and a wide smile. The clutch of Superstars pushed Joe to the front, where his sweaty armpits, just above Meinhardt’s nose, enfolded him in a bear hug. Meinhardt stopped breathing until he was released. “In my movies, everyone’s in love with Joe Dallsandro,” Warhol said quietly. All heads nodded in agreement, but their eyes were downcast. Meinhardt marveled that the beauty contest among these misfits was as fierce as the midgets’ competition over height.

Warhol used their insecurities to mold them into a hungry pack. Strange as each one was, here they were indistinguishable from one another. Oddly, one of the things that had appealed to Meinhardt about the Penn movie was that he’d be the only oddity on the set. Even in *Oz*, where he’d been one of one hundred twenty-two midgets in the film, he’d had the distinction of playing the coroner instead of a nameless Munchkin. Shooting a movie with The Factory crowd, he’d be just another weirdo.

The group dispersed, except for Nico. Meinhardt asked her to tell him about the movie. If there were no lines, were there any movements or facial expressions he should be preparing?

“No. Billy just wants you to stand in front of that door for an hour.”

If Meinhardt was hoping for a comeback, this study in inertia didn’t sound promising. Thinking of his elaborate coroner’s robe and hat in *Oz*, he asked about a costume and was told the pale shirt and dark pants he had on were fine. Meinhardt didn’t see how he could create a part or establish a mood without special clothes. No lines, no gestures, no costume. What was he doing here?

Nico was sympathetic. Despite being familiar with Warhol's penchant for understatement, she shared Meinhardt's disappointment. "I tried to talk Billy into letting me make costumes. You know, I was a seamstress in Berlin before I became a model and a singer."

Meinhardt regarded her with respect. His grandmother had been a seamstress too. It was demanding work. Then he discovered that Nico, like him, had grown up in Berlin. It also turned out that both their fathers had fought for Germany in the war.

"Your father...?" Nico looked down, confused.

Meinhardt explained that being a midget wasn't always caused by genetic factors. His father, as well as his mother, were of normal height. "My parents saw me as a blight on their future, especially after the Nazis issued their social hygiene policies. They left my Oma to raise me and moved to Hamburg, where they had two normal children. I never saw or heard from them again."

Nico's eyes grew moist. By contrast, her parents had been thrilled by her beauty. "I was a perfect example of Aryan purity. They were only too happy to show me off."

"So you were their ticket to the Party?" Meinhardt shivered, remembering his own narrow escape from his homeland.

"They claimed they never joined. My father said he fought for Germany, not the Nazis."

"According to my Oma, it was the same with my father. His one and only cause was the glory of his country. He wanted Germany to regain the God-given power it lost in the first war."

"Sounds like Nazi ideology to me," Nico said. Meinhardt agreed. His father had willfully ignored, if not succumbed to, the Party's true intentions. He sensed that Nico's father had walked, or rather goose stepped, along that same fine line.

"Andy can be quite Germanic too," Nico whispered, glancing across the room. "He's very precise and controlling in his paintings and films, yet he wants everything to look natural."

"Beauty in order?" Meinhardt asked.

"Order overrides mere beauty," Nico said. "It wipes away ugliness too."

More people arrived, some not much taller than Meinhardt, others average or above in height. A few wore flamboyant clothes and makeup,

like the Superstars, but many were ordinary looking and seemed as perplexed as Meinhardt as to why they were there.

Billy Name focused his camera and a spotlight on the door. Reflected against the silver, the circle of light looked like a sunny-side up egg in a hot frying pan glistening with too much oil. He told Joe Dallsandro, the tallest person there, to stand to the doorknob's right. As the camera whirled, Joe occasionally shifted his weight, groomed his hair, or massaged his biceps. Otherwise, he stayed in place and stared at the lens. After an hour, Billy called someone named Fred to take his place, followed an hour later by Luna, a tall dark-haired teenager so stoned that she teetered on her bare feet. Whenever she appeared on the verge of passing out, Billy barked, "Stay awake" to jolt her upright. Otherwise the director remained silent, offering neither encouragement nor guidance. Warhol continued to observe from his corner, motionless except for his darting eyes.

After three hours, Meinhardt had paged through the carpet samples twice, thumbed a stack of art books, and forced himself, from boredom more than curiosity, to look at the people probing each other's bodies on the red couch. He grew angrier and antsier. If he was expected to do nothing in front of the camera, he at least wanted to know when he'd be called to do it. As Billy adjusted the lens downward for the fourth person, he finally summoned the nerve to ask.

Billy looked at an oversized watch, which he wore upside down on his right wrist. "In seven or eight hours." Meinhardt's mouth dropped open. Even a famous director like Victor Fleming had never kept the midgets waiting that long. Billy deigned to explain. Each person would be replaced by one imperceptibly shorter. Halfway through the film, the audience would notice that the current person's head was barely above the doorknob. Succeeding heads would reach and then fall below it. Joe, the first person, was six feet tall. The last would be two and a half, for a running time of 22 hours. Meinhardt, exactly at doorknob height, would be in the middle, just as viewers got curious about how low and long the film would go. "You're the star, the movie's turning point," Billy exclaimed.

Meinhardt took a deep breath. "Since you don't need me until then, I'll leave now and come back tomorrow morning."

"Stay." Billy touched his shoulder. "You never know. I might decide to change the plot."

Meinhardt considered his options. An avant-garde film by Warhol, however absurd, still garnered attention. It was his only shot at doing likewise. Billy wasn't telling cast members to do something, but neither was he telling them not to do something. Suppose Meinhardt moved in a distinctive way to set his performance apart? Dancing was out; age had robbed him of grace. But if he mimed words, people would focus on his face, not his body, to decipher what he was saying. He could mouth a running commentary about the sexual antics on the couch. The audience would only see his wide-eyed stare and mobile lips, not the actual orgy. It would be his inside joke.

"Care to join me on the red chaise? I'm Candy Darling." A statuesque blonde extended a shaved hand whose fingernails were polished in alternating pink and silver. Her black sequined dress had matching spike heels. "Andy doesn't want me in his silly door movie. It was me or Joe—we're the same height—and Joe has more crossover sex appeal. I'm strictly a guy's gal." She batted her silver-tipped eyelashes. "For those big enough to handle me." Candy thrust her big, hard breasts at Meinhardt's face. He wondered what they were made of before pulling back to breathe. She ran her fingers through his hair. "Ooh, red locks, turning silver. You match the room to a fare-thee-well. Come with me, handsome." She tugged him toward the couch.

Warhol watched them, a faint smile on his lips. Meinhardt wondered if Candy was acting under the artist's direction or if her come-on was spontaneous. Who could tell the difference in this place?

Meinhardt pulled away gently. He didn't want to give Warhol the satisfaction of seeing his revulsion. "I need to remain quiet," he told Candy, "so I'll stay inside the part until my scene. I'm a follower of The Method, you know. I studied with Lee Strasberg."

"I'm good at doing it quietly," Candy whispered. "I learned how from a salesman at the children's shoe store in my neighborhood. He gave me patent leather pumps and warned me not to make a peep." She sang the last word in a hushed falsetto. Meinhardt shook his head. Candy pinched his cheek. "Let me know if you change your mind when it's time for the cast party."

Meinhardt was exhausted but he was afraid to fall asleep for fear of what someone might do to him while he was unconscious. Much as he wanted to believe that beneath their poses, The Factory stars were as

human as anyone else, he couldn't see them that way or trust them to act with decency. Was that how normal people saw midgets? It was a sickening thought.

At noon, following a short woman and a boy who looked to be in junior high school, Billy called Meinhardt to the door. He took his position and looked across the room, where Candy and Joe slept on the couch in a childlike platonic embrace. Nothing else was happening anywhere in the studio. It didn't matter. Meinhardt was too tired to perform. He just wanted it to be over.

Midway through his filming, Meinhardt inadvertently yawned. No one else had done this.

Billy turned to Warhol and in contrast to his laid back manner, shook his head in vigorous opposition. Seeing the director's outrage, Meinhardt's open mouth froze.

"It's good," Warhol said. "Just what we need to mark the movie's climax."

Meinhardt stretched his mouth wider, delighted at having defied Billy, until he realized that in doing so, he'd also pleased Warhol. Was he no better than the other fawning Superstars?

He remained confused about what to do with his mouth until he was diverted by a group of noisy children, of different ages and sizes, coming through the front door. Meinhardt assumed they were the remaining actors, but the man shepherding them lifted the shortest, a toddler, and walked up to Viva, who kissed them. Apparently they were a couple, perhaps husband and wife, and the little boy, who resembled them both, was their son. It was such a normal family scene that Meinhardt stared, bug-eyed and once again gape-mouthed, into the camera.

He watched the children chase one another and squabble over the carpet samples, which they'd ripped from the book. Just before his hour was up, they discovered and promptly devoured the tray of strudel and pretzels. The sweets made the older ones noisier and more active, while the two youngest curled up on the couch and slept beside Candy and Joe, who were oblivious to them. Warhol continued to watch the scene, unperturbed. Except for two short bathroom breaks, he hadn't left his spot or dimmed his intense gaze since Meinhardt's arrival the day before.

When the next person replaced him, Meinhardt asked Billy if he could finally leave.

"No. You gotta stay until the end when I take still photos of everyone for the credits."

"Can't you take them now? With a different camera? Over there?" Meinhardt pointed to the one place in the room free of sleeping adults and rambunctious children.

"Nope. I'm using the door as the backdrop for the stills too. Only it's going to be open."

Meinhardt was fed up. "Stop the movie camera, open the door, and take the damn photos. Then close the door and resume shooting. With editing, who'll know the difference?"

Billy looked at him aghast. "That wouldn't be authentic. Andy wants twenty-two continuous hours in the life of a door." He turned to the other side of the room for confirmation. Warhol nodded.

It was late at night when the shooting finished, early morning when the stills were done. Warhol played back the film. Those who appeared early watched in narcissistic fascination. The others asked to be awakened when they were on. Billy gave his watch to Joe and crashed on the couch.

"Will you stay for the premiere?" Nico handed Meinhardt a cup of coffee. He had no idea where it came from, but it was hot, strong, and expertly brewed. He wished the children had left a bite of strudel. Demel's didn't open until eight o'clock.

"I can't stay in New York that long. I have to get back to California."

"*Nicht so lange.*" Nico smiled. "There's nothing to edit. The movie premieres Saturday at The Waverley, in Greenwich Village."

Meinhardt didn't want to linger in New York or sit through another replay of *Door*. All he'd gained from this trip was seeing how The Factory exploited oddity to manufacture celebrity. Not that Hollywood was pure. Tinseltown could be as fake and shiny as the foil on Warhol's walls. But out west, actors tried to make themselves appealing, emphasizing assets, not defects.

Nico and Meinhardt stood side in companionable silence, sipping coffee and surveying the motley mix of wide-eyed and sleeping Superstars. "I don't understand," he said after a while. "Why does a beautiful woman like you hang out with such a bunch of hideous misfits?"

"Guilt," she said.

"Why feel guilty about being born beautiful?"

She shrugged. "If I'd been born in another time or place, it might not matter. But because the Nazis persecuted those they considered defective, people like you, I feel I must atone."

"So while I struggle to assert my dignity, you work to degrade yourself?"

"We're not so different. Andy understands that. He knows that even beautiful people feel insecure and ugly inside, and he exploits that to bend us to his will." She kissed Meinhardt lightly on either cheek. "Are you sure you won't change your mind and stay for the premiere? Vincent Canby from *The Times* will be there, plus Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael. *Variety*, too, of course. Perhaps there'll be some quip about the Oz coroner giving life to a dead doorknob."

Meinhardt looked up into Nicos eyes and slowly shook his head. He wasn't interested in resuscitating a piece of hardware. He just wanted to get home and warm his weary bones.

Driving back from the airport in his Gremlin, customized with a raised seat and pedal extenders, Meinhardt stopped at Safeway. Groceries could wait a day, not his candy craving. But when he got to that aisle, he was dismayed. Baby Ruths and Three Musketeers were on sale; Milky Ways had been moved to the fourth shelf. Making sure no one was around, he grabbed the third shelf and hoisted himself up. If he dislodged a bag at the right angle, the bars would land in his cart.

His arm was raised when a voice screeched, "What're you doing?" Meinhardt jostled the bag too hard. It bounced off the cart's rim and split open, releasing a skidding river of chocolate, caramel, and nougat on the floor. A gangly stock boy, one-third Meinhardt's age, shoved them back in the bag and scolded him as if he were a naughty child. "We could get sued if you fell and got hurt." He handed Meinhardt a new package. "All you had to do was ask for help."

Meinhardt threw the package back on the bottom shelf, stuffed his pockets with candy bars from the floor, and walked out. He turned once to see the stock boy gaping, too surprised to chase after him. If only he had a camera, he'd take a picture for his refrigerator door.

Despite being tired, Meinhardt was too restless for sleep. He paced

his house, comforted by its low-hung cabinets and scaled-down furniture. The letter from the Little People of America still sat on his desk. He was tempted to toss it, but reconsidered. Being LPA's spokesman gave him a chance to take back his dignity. Even if he didn't believe their scripted words about self-respect at first, he might eventually come to accept his body, much as Maggie accepted her face.

On the other hand, if he agreed to speak out, he'd once again be trading on his height to earn money. Viewed that way, LPA didn't improve on *Door*, which was itself no better than *Oz*. All three exploited him for their own ends. To them, he was a measurement, not a man.

He closed his eyelids, only to see an image of Warhol, arms folded, patiently awaiting his decision. But Meinhardt's normal-sized head, perched atop his stunted body, had shut down for the day. He collapsed on a chair, pulled a dented Milky Way from his pocket, and sank his teeth into its seductive layers. He pondered the candy bar's celestial name. Ever since *Oz* had given him a taste of fame, Meinhardt had never stopped aiming for the stars. Who knew what remained in his reach? He'd wait to read Vincent Canby's review of *Door* before he made up his mind.

GOJIRA & SON

J.T. TOWNLEY

So what I'm trying to say is, none of this would've happened if I'd been drafted all those years ago. I mean, look at it. The violence? The destruction? It didn't have to be that way, it wasn't fated or foreordained or anything. People just don't get that when you crush someone's hopes and dreams, he's not just going to swallow his tears, tuck his tail between his legs, and wander back to his remote, nuclear-contaminated island off the mainland.

That's not how it works, okay?

Now, I'll be the first to admit I can't hold my liquor. Whether it's atomic sludge or radioactive cooling water, I swill too much of it, and it goes straight to my head. But what do you expect? Anyway, at least it's good for me. And aside from the ensuing devastation of life and property, it's good for everyone else, too. Helps clean up the environment humans have poisoned with so much focus and determination.

But that's not the way most people see it. You point to the decimation of one Pacific Rim city after another and say: *The work of a monster!* In your hapless, reactionary way, you call up your soldiers, bring out your assault weapons, ballistic missiles, and fighter jets, following me at close range in your aircraft carriers. You say I'm a freak and a threat to humankind. But, news flash, you made me what I am.

I only hate humans because they hate me.

So when Griffin calls and gives me the news, I'm not exactly

thrilled. Who would be? But my response isn't so extreme; in fact, most people would react the same way—my strength, size, and atomic breath notwithstanding. No father wants to see his son get hurt, right? It's only natural to protect our offspring, and when we can't, who among us doesn't feel frustrated and annoyed at ourselves, wondering what more we could've done?

I sense something's wrong the minute Griff's on the line.

What is it? I ask. You sound upset. Did something happen?

I can't hit the bender, Dad.

What do you mean, can't? You have before, and you will again. You're just in a slump, buddy. Every hitter has them, even the greats. You'll be back in the Bigs before you know it.

Griffin's been on a rehab assignment with the Albuquerque Isotopes. (A funny coincidence, given what's in our blood.) He was hit by a screaming four-seamer in a day game against the Giants. It wasn't intentional, just an overzealous young righty's attempt at a push-back—Griff's a big boy who likes to crowd the plate—but that didn't keep the benches from clearing. That's the nature of a nasty rivalry, I guess. Anyway, the Dodgers' bone-cracking payback didn't keep Griff's wrist from being broken in three places. Forget what you've seen at the movies: we're not completely imperious. They clocked that fastball at 103, so it's no wonder.

Anyway, on the phone, Griffin is inconsolable.

I can't do it, Dad. I'm keying on the fastball, I can't help it. Plus, my wrist isn't healing right.

Would you listen to yourself? Just get some more swings in the cages, Griff. And stop worrying so much, you're psyching yourself out. Trust your natural ability. You'll be taking those hangers to opposite field in no time.

Griffin swallows a sob and mutters something under his breath. Our kind may wear our hearts on our sleeves, but we're no good at communicating our emotions.

I can't do it, Dad.

You know what they say, Griff. Can't never could.

Just listen for once, okay? It's over.

I don't understand. What's over?

He chuckles, though nothing's funny. I didn't want to tell you. I've been in Chattanooga for the past month.

Double-A?

Not for long, he says. They've sent me down again. I'm a laughingstock, Dad. I'm getting a steady diet of the soft stuff, and I can't put the bat on the ball to save my life.

I'm panting, and I can feel my core temperature on the rise. Not a good sign. Just take it easy, I say, though I'm not sure who I mean. We'll figure this out, Griff.

Don't be so sure, he whimpers. Then the line goes dead.

Truth is, I have my doubts. After all, I've been there before. Close, anyway. Not that I was ever a Major League third baseman with the Los Angeles Dodgers batting .396 in three seasons with 135 home runs and 300 RBI. Not like Griffin. My boy's a phenom! As for me, I was never given the opportunity. Not that I lacked the natural ability, the size and strength and power. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, as they say.

It wasn't for lack of trying either. Not a chance. I'd been playing *besuboru* my entire life, it's all I ever wanted to do, so I was prepared to make the necessary sacrifices, to do what had to be done to realize my dream. Still, I was from the Ryuku Islands, southern Okinawa Prefecture, and a complete outsider. I didn't know the customs or social niceties, and I looked, spoke, and acted differently than everyone else. What did I know about the big city? As far as the Tokyo crowd went, I was a hick from the sticks. And, believe me, I was called every name in the book: rube, bumpkin, freak, *kaiju*, you name it. Some of the Tokyo clubs wouldn't even let me try out, including the Yomiuri Giants, Japan's favorite ballclub. Those Central League teams are more traditional and prestigious than their Pacific League counterparts—which, in the end, means they're snobbier. Lucky for me, there were four other pro clubs right there in the greater Tokyo area, and a couple of them even agreed to give me a look. It's possible I didn't give them much choice.

I wasn't about to take no for an answer.

Only maybe I should have. See, things didn't go as planned. At batting practice with the Saitama Lions, I grabbed a bat (the biggest, heaviest piece of lumber I could find) and stepped up to the dish. After I knocked the first three fastballs out of the park, they wouldn't throw me anything straight. Sliders and cutters, sinkers and forkballs: those

things were dancing all over the place. I managed to make contact with a few, fouling them off, but I whiffed at most of them. By far the worst was the curve. I'd never seen anything like it. I swung right where it should've been, but I missed it almost every time, no matter how good my mechanics. Here I was, this three-hundred foot, fifty-ton giant, and the best I could do was hit a couple of dink dribblers to shallow right field. They laughed me out of the ballpark.

And so it went. I traveled all over the country, from Fukuoka to Osaka to Miyagi, hoping to put on a show for the Hawks, Buffaloes, and Golden Eagles, but they'd all gotten wind that the wannabe slugger from Okinawa Prefecture couldn't square up anything but a four-seamer. For my part, I couldn't figure out what the problem was. I could at least make contact with the other off-speed stuff, if not exactly barrel it up. But not the bender. At one tryout after another, I flailed and thrashed at the curveballs, but I almost always came up empty. It was pathetic.

Maybe I could've traveled to Hiroshima, Hyogo, and Aichi and showed off my hitting prowess to the Carp, Tigers, and Dragons. Maybe I should've. But I didn't have the heart for it. Anyway, they were Central League teams, so even if I could've hit all the soft stuff, including the knuckleball, with a .400 average, they probably wouldn't have taken me. I didn't stand a chance.

(Of course, decimation of life and property—of players and coaches, fields and facilities—was always an option. That would come later. Revenge is in our blood.)

So I'd all but given up, until I remembered there was one Pacific League team I hadn't tried: the Hokkaido Fighters. But I wasn't exactly in a rush to pack my bags and head north. First of all, it's cold up there almost year-round. Can you imagine trying to hold a bat or throw a ball in thirty-degree weather? Where I came from, the temps rarely dipped below sixty-five! Anyway, the Fighters were the worst team in the Nippon Professional League, putting up a losing record for the past five seasons. All the same, the Fighters were still a pro baseball team. Maybe it was a last-ditch effort, but I had to give it a shot.

The whole thing went better than expected, at least in the beginning. The Fighters had no pitching, so they fed me nothing but fastballs and a few changeups during my BP session. I went yard over and over, as if it were a homerun derby. I knocked them into the second deck,

then out of the park, then out of the city. I even cranked a couple of inside four-seamers so far over the Sea of Japan, they must've landed in China. Naturally, everyone was wowed, coaches and players alike. How could they not be? I felt like myself again, the Atomic Slugger from Okinawa. They hired me on the spot.

I thought I'd play right field, but they made me their DH and pinned their hopes on me. It was a little unfair; I was still just a rookie. All the same, we rode a few of my homers to unexpected victories. It felt good, I have to admit. I was doing what I'd always dreamed of. Maybe we were still the worst team in baseball, but I liked to think my presence was inspiring a dramatic turnaround, a change in fortune that would at least help us finish in the middle of the pack, if not win the division tournament and vie for the league championship. We were on our way. But there was only one problem:

The bender.

It didn't take long for most teams to recognize me. As soon as that happened, the hard stuff dried up. And I mean instantly: I never saw another straight pitch. My strikeouts soared, while my other stats (batting average, homeruns, RBI, etc.) all plummeted. I couldn't get a hit to save my life, much less an extra-base hit or a homer. After a while, the only way I ever got out of the batter's box was to walk or lean into a pitch. (I didn't mind taking one for the team; I have a thick skin.) My coaches and teammates turned sour as we dropped back into the cellar. Bad blood coursed through the clubhouse.

Then one morning before a doubleheader, I discovered my locker had been emptied. None of the other players would look me in the eye—not that they'd ever had an easy time of it anyway, but still. They all suited up and went out to get loose without saying a word to me. I went looking for the manager so he could explain what was going on, but he wasn't in his office and no one could tell me where to find him. All the other coaches were already out on the field, swinging the fungo or working with hitters. Talk about cold shoulder. I knew what it was about; I understood what it meant; it wasn't exactly difficult to fathom.

The rage roiled inside me like magma.

Gin comes home from shopping while I'm reading the box scores. She looks beautiful as the day we met. Only I can see worry in her eyes, even

as she sashays here and there, refilling the potpourri and fluffing sofa pillows. The breakfast dishes clank as she washes them in the sink. When she begins dusting the house, moving from room to room in a cloud of Pledge, I know something's wrong.

Ginny? I say, peering over the top of the sports page. You okay?

She never stops her circular wiping motions. Uh-huh, she says. Fine.

I watch her for another minute or two. She's attacking that chore like it's King Kong.

Sure nothing's the matter? I ask.

Yes, she says. No, she says. I don't know.

Come sit for a minute.

She plods over to the couch. I wait, folding up the newspaper. It doesn't take long.

I got a call from Griffin this afternoon, she says. He was upset. He wouldn't tell me what it was about, but he said things aren't going well for him. Ginny's gaze bores though me. Did you talk to him?

Couple days ago. He's in a slump.

What did you say to him, Goji?

I tried to be supportive. Told him the obvious. That's what he needed to hear.

She folds and unfolds her dust rag, then folds it again. I keep my trap shut.

I'm worried, she says.

He'll be okay, Ginny. Our boy's tough. He'll bounce back.

Goji, he asked if he could stay here for a while.

With us?

She nods, crossing and uncrossing her legs.

He wondered if I could make up his bed for him.

For how long?

He didn't say, she explains. But longer than a night or two, I think.

I feel like I've just been swatted in the chest by a fifty-ton *kaiju*. All I can say is:

Must be more serious than I thought.

For years, I've been dreaming the same baseball dream. I'm at the diamond, the lights phosphorescing over me, a capacity crowd clapping

and whistling, yelling and chanting. It's the bottom of the ninth, two on, two out, and we're down by two. I represent the go-ahead run. They've got their closer on the mound, a right-handed vet with a blazing fastball and nasty stuff. He starts me out with a brush-back pitch, up and in and 98 mph. Then he begins to work the outer third: a fall-away changeup that just misses; a hard slider down and away that doesn't. Now here comes another scorcher, this one a two-seamer that looks like it's going to drill me but winds up over the inside third. Strike two. Now he'll go to the curveball for sure. Only it's another slider down and away. Somehow I manage to lay off, but he's got me guessing. Maybe he'll come with the high heat and catch me back on my heels; all the same, I'm sitting on the curve. Here's the stretch, now the delivery. And there it is, the wrist angle, the twelve-to-six spin. I keep my front side in and my weight back. Then I unleash a monster swing and drive it over the right-field wall.

A three-run shot.

A walk-off homer.

We win! We win! We win!

I came to California a few years after I was cut from the Hokkaido Fighters. I probably would've eventually wandered back down to my radioactive island if a representative for a certain Tokyo production company hadn't contacted me first. They'd captured footage of my drunken rampage across Japan. At that point, I was mostly still under the influence—I'd annihilated several nuclear power facilities and devoured more than one nuclear submarine—so I wasn't entirely aware of the magnitude of the destruction.

They wanted to make a movie, they said, and they needed my help. They went into great detail about their motivations and process. Mostly, though, I wasn't listening, since I was still fairly inebriated. But much of the rage had subsided; I almost felt cleansed of anger and frustration. Crushing buildings, smashing bridges, and generally demolishing human infrastructure proved very cathartic. I took special pleasure in razing almost every baseball stadium in the country. At any rate, their idea was to use actual documentary footage, then intercut some staged scenes that would create narrative cohesion and advance the storyline they'd cooked up. They said they'd make it worth my

while. I didn't trust them, of course, but what other prospects did I have?

In the end, the movie was sloppy, even a little cheesy, but it went over well. It wasn't long before I had the resources to pull up stakes and move to California. By then, Ginny and I were married, and we needed a change of scenery, for certain. That movie was almost too successful; everywhere we went, people either asked for my autograph or tried to kill me. Their gunshots were so many pinpricks, but still, it got annoying. With the film royalties, Ginny and I settled in San Francisco. The Sunset District was close to the Pacific Ocean, and Japantown was just up on Geary, whenever Ginny needed rice or seaweed or spices. With the Giants right here and the A's nearby, I didn't have to go too far to get my baseball fix. Soon it felt more like home than Japan ever had.

While the American distribution was a boon, the Hollywood productions were completely unexpected. We were already set up nicely, so those deals were a bonus. Of course, they required a little more commitment from me than I might've preferred. But they were worth it. By now Ginny and I had to think about what was best for our little Griffin, and some extra financial padding certainly wasn't going to hurt anything. In the end, only a couple of movies ever saw the light of day, but there were plenty more that were shelved before they made it out of post-production.

I was paid handsomely for all of them.

We could've abandoned our cramped apartment and moved anywhere—Russian Hill, North Beach, SOMA—but Ginny and I wanted to be near the ocean. At one point we considered moving across the Golden Gate to Marin, where we could buy some land and spread out, but by then Griffin was already in school, and we thought it would be too disruptive. Anyway, when the time came, he was going to St. Ignatius Prep, I'd already decided. They had a great baseball program and top-notch academics, and it was right here in the Sunset. His mother hoped he'd play at Stanford, but I knew that prep school would be his ticket to a fat contract with the San Francisco Giants. I figured they'd give him a short stint out in Fresno with the triple-A club, get him used to the pitching and fans and rhythms of the season. Then it'd be the Big Leagues all the way. So we decided to stay put, though we

bought a beautiful Victorian row house and had it renovated. The Hollywood money made everything a little easier.

I've just settled into my easy chair with the sports page, a stogie, and a glass of Atomic Ale. The Mariners and Astros are in the bottom of the fifth, but I've got the sound muted since they're both lousy. I'm reading an opinion article about bringing back the five-to-three pickoff move when there's a thump on the front door. A pause, then two more times: *thump-thump*.

Ginny? I holler. Someone's at the door.

No answer. She must be painting her toenails. I take another slurp of nuclear wastewater and hope whoever it is, Girl Scouts or lawn boys, will think no one's home and try their luck next door. Only the visitor's persistent, slapping the door several more times, whacking the knocker, ringing the bell. I puff on my cigar, fold the paper, and heave myself out of my recliner.

I open the door with a *Thanks, but no thanks* on the tip of my tongue. When I see Griffin standing there, still sporting a rumpled Chattanooga Lookouts uniform, it knocks the wind out of me. I must stare at him for a half a minute before either of us says anything.

I wondered if anyone was home, he says.

I try to nod.

I take it you're not thrilled to see me, he says. Can I at least come in?

The whole thing catches me off-guard. I step aside and let him through the door. He ducks his head and slides past, then makes a bee-line for the stairs and his bedroom. I wander back to my easy chair and stogie and radioactive beverage. While I try to study the box scores, I can't concentrate, so I turn up the volume on the game for some white noise. Not five minutes go by before Ginny comes out, her face aglow, a tray of freshly baked cookies in her hands.

Did I hear voices? she asks, waving away my cigar smoke. Was someone at the door?

I grab a cookie off the tray. It was Griff, I say, sniffing the sweet treat. Atomic sludge chip. A certain favorite son's favorite flavor.

Really? she says. Where'd he go?

Straight upstairs, I say. I give her the lizard eye. Tell me something, Ginny. You knew he was coming, didn't you?

What? Me? No, I just—

Baked him cookies?

She grabs one and nibbles its edges.

He called again a couple of nights ago, she says. From somewhere in Arizona. He was on the bus to Rancho Cucamonga.

Single-A!?

Advanced-A, sweetie, says Ginny. When he got to L.A. he was going to take the train home.

So he just quit?

He's had a rough time, Goji. Don't be too hard on him.

Ginny disappears into the kitchen. I try to concentrate on the game, but I'm too distracted. Why couldn't he just stick it out? So he's been slumping, so what? Everyone goes through slumps; Griff's wasn't going to last forever. All he needed to do was bear down, work with his hitting coach, take his extra swings in the cages. Sooner or later, he'd start hitting the off-speed stuff again. How could he just walk away?

I can feel my dorsal plates glowing with rage.

I know I shouldn't go talk to Griffin just yet. I need to calm down. I do a few breathing exercises and try to find my center. When that doesn't work, I light another stogie, but it bursts into flames as soon as I put it between my lips. I'm hot under the collar all right, no denying that. I wonder if I can wait it out. The grandfather clock beats out time. I eat a couple more cookies. I skim through the front page and flip through the channels for something like fifteen minutes. But there's baseball everywhere I look; it's that time of year; there's nothing for it.

I quietly storm up to Griffin's room.

The kid's lying in bed. Truth is, I'm not even sure he's awake, though he still sports his Lookouts uniform, cap and all. I stand there for a long moment. My boy! The professional! What I wouldn't give for his natural ability. The fire of my rage pops and fizzles and fades, and I'm left with the cold ashes of confusion. Even without my anger in the way, I still can't fathom how someone with so much talent could simply give up.

I'm sorry, Dad, he says, as if reading my mind. I just couldn't do it anymore.

My tongue feels thick in my mouth. Did I wake you?

I wasn't sleeping.

I lean against the doorjamb. Griffin wrestles his muscular bulk up against the headboard. He's too big for that twin bed; it's almost comical.

Listen, Dad, he says, I'm sure you're upset. I am too, in a way. But this is for the best.

What's *this*, Griff?

Early retirement.

Meaning you quit?

It was over, Dad.

I don't understand how you could give up so easily.

What, easily? I've been fighting this thing tooth and nail for months. After I got off the nuclear wastewater and stopped going berserk in the clubhouse, smashing bats and benches and water coolers, I spent hours and hours studying video of just about every pitcher in the National League, and even more time in the batting cages working on my mechanics. But you can only cling to a dream for so long, Dad. Sooner or later I had to face the music.

I stand there biting my tongue. I wonder if I screwed up somewhere along the way? Maybe I should've encouraged him to go to college like his mother wanted. Maybe that would've given him time to develop and decide whether or not he really wanted to pursue baseball at the professional level. I remember the scholarship offers pouring in—UCLA, Irvine, Fullerton—but Griff didn't pay them much attention. He was focused on the big time, discussing draft prospects and signing bonuses. And who could argue with a fat contract plus \$2 million just for inking the paper? Never mind that he went to the Dodgers instead of the Giants. (I would've preferred the A's or the Angels or even the Padres.) This was his big chance, and I knew he'd make the most of it. And at least he'd be relatively close to home. Still, if he'd gone to school, he'd have a degree by now, some prospects for the future.

Outside, wind murmurs through the cypress. The silence thickens between us.

So, I finally manage, what now?

Griffin looks me in the eye and holds my gaze for what feels like a full minute. You mean you're not going to give me the third degree? he says. Or rake me over the coals for letting you down? Or try to guilt me into going back?

I shake my head, examining the grain of the wood floor panels.

He takes a deep breath. By the time he's blown it all out, he's smiling. I can't believe it, he says. What a relief! He smiles some more, then takes off his cap and tosses it on the bed.

How long do you plan to stay? I ask.

Just until I'm back on my feet.

I'm glad you're here, I say. We both are. I give him a nod and turn toward the stairs.

Dad? he calls behind me. Now that baseball's behind me, I was thinking I might like to work in movies. Maybe do some acting.

Movies, huh? I say.

I don't mean to put you on the spot, and there's no rush or anything. But do you think you could put me in touch with the right people?

I swallow a grin. Sure, Griff. I'll see what I can do.

He gives me a thumbs-up. Great, he says. Thanks, Dad.

Later, as I'm falling asleep next to Ginny, I expect to have my usual baseball dream. It's the only one I ever remember. Instead, my nighttime is filled with mayhem and destruction. The thud of falling pillars, the screams of terrified humans, the crunch of cars beneath my feet like so many aluminum cans. Broken gas lines reeking of sulfur. Shredded power lines popping and crackling. I stave in a corner service station minimart, then hurl a tanker truck at the gas pumps. A ball of flames and billowing smoke. I demolish buildings and unearth subway cars, trash traffic lights and down overpasses. At one point, I tear train tracks from their ties and shake them as if they're a blanket I'm trying to fold. I work my way northward until, just over the Hollywood Freeway, I see it glistering like a polished diamond in the night sky: Dodger Stadium.

Just as I make the parking lot, I realize I have company.

Hey, Dad, he says. Can I give you a hand?

I grin. Sure, Griff. It's payback time!

The team's on a road trip, lucky for them. Nobody here but front office staff. We give them plenty of warning, starting in the outfield and working our way in. We topple walls and rip out bleachers, crush concession stands and pulverize foundations. By the time we get to the infield—Griffin down third-base line, me down first—all the execs have

cleared out and are running for their lives. So we go to the atomic breath. No need to work so hard, right? Griffin's new to it, so I give him a few pointers: *It helps to clench your teeth*, and so on and so forth, and wait until he gets the hang of it. Then we both focus our energies, and our dorsal plates begin to glow. On my signal, we launch our concentrated blasts of radiation into both dugouts until there's an enormous explosion, followed by another and another. Soon the upper deck collapses, bringing down the second deck, which pancakes the field-level seats. Everything's on fire.

Nice work, Griff.

It feels good, he says, flames dancing in his eyes. But now what? Rancho Cucamonga's next.

Oh, right, I see, he says. Then Albuquerque, right?

After that, we'll see about Chattanooga.

Let's do this! he yells.

We fist bump. Then off we go.

I awaken with a start, the taste of burning plastic on my tongue. Griff's a natural, I say, shaking my head, still swollen with pride.

What honey? Ginny mumbles.

Nothing, sweetie. Go back to sleep.

It's just before dawn, but I'm wide awake. As Ginny snores quietly beside me, and fog thickens outside our bedroom window, I realize it's been right there in front of me all along, and I've been too distracted to notice. Griffin's size and strength and power; his natural abilities. All he needs is a little guidance. All he needs is someone—an industry pro, a seasoned vet—to show him the ropes and help him make the right contacts. For the first time, I can see the future unfolding before me. We'll make one picture, maybe two together, get him used to rampaging in front of the cameras, build his credibility and name-recognition. But a couple of movies is all it will take; after that, he won't need my help or anyone else's.

Only first there's a little matter of vengeance to attend to. The Dodgers will wish they never heard of Gojira & Son. And with any luck, there'll be plenty of news coverage and amateur footage to cut into the first movie.

It's possible Griffin won't be so happy about following in his old

man's footsteps. Still, his inability to hit the curve may just be the best thing that ever happened to him. Now he can make a fresh start, using his rage and resentment to his own advantage: *We only hate humans because they hate us*. Yes, Hollywood beckons. Griff will be a big star, no doubt in my mind. Because you know what they say:

Like father, like son.

SPIDERMAN HITCHES A RIDE

JOSÉ ARAGUZ

My mother compares me to Spiderman, and for a second I like it. I mean, it's what I've always wanted: to be viewed in the glory of courage and costume; to be super tough and just, a city like a little brother needing me to battle bullies and take back lunch money, a villain defining me by default as a hero, his crooked eyebrows and overheated plans carnival mirror to my calm and valiant stance; to push out of paper bag clothes; to leave my shoes untied, their mouths open in awe; to slip on the muscles and dreams of tomorrow's headlines; to leave a woman breathless, with a single kiss amazed, her heart pounding at the thought of being in love with a man—in tights—who leaves her without a name or number with which to follow him into the fire.

He is like me, my mother says, because he too wants to do good things for people, but he gets beat up, can't find a job and his girl ends up dating someone else. He saves people's lives but is always *flaco y vago*, vagabond skinny with luck and life.

Is this what it meant for her when at seventeen I boarded a plane and soared out of this city, where if she couldn't see into my head she could at least put a roof over it? Those years I disappeared into the phone and was *okay* in Santa Fe, *okay* in San Diego, *okay* in New York but still short and small in words.

M'ijo, no te preocupes, don't worry. She smiles, then slips off her seat-belt to reach over and wrap an arm around my neck, the other dropping

a twenty into my lap. The green paper is wrinkled in waves that shudder and blur as I blink fast, trying once again to be heroic.

PHANTOUM FROM ALTERNATE UNIVERSES

JOHN F. BUCKLEY AND MARTIN OTT

Ollie Jimson, cub reporter, rushed down the sidewalk
as flames erupted from the abandoned movie theater.
Would OmniMax rescue the squatters trapped inside?
Could Ollie get an interview with the Man of All Things?

As flames erupted from the nearly full movie theater,
the space-time continuum crackled like street dice.
Could Ollie get a ham sandwich with the Man-Thing?
The interview from tomorrow was used to wrap the fish.

The space-time continuum buckled like sheets of ice.
Citizens cold from the quantum void cried for existence.
Monday's candid photo was taken with a fish-eye lens;
all it showed was a close-up of a hero's confident smirk.

Citizens too old to cry for existence filled the autumn void.
Max could not stop the city from churning from ice to boil.
The papers showed the lie, the close-up of the hero's smirk.
Enemies from his past and present pulled his future closer.

Mags could not keep her eyes on the world-city as it broiled;
Another day, another dollar, another Krypton blown to dust.
Enemies from her future foster homeworld rewove history
so that her rocket was found by circus geeks, not farmers.

Another eon, another ingot, another red sun unable to rust.
The planet's pieces follow her like a space dog with a cape
hidden inside the rocket the circus geeks fire into the crowd.
The explosion and costume both proved difficult to escape.

The planet's species dog her through space, no escape
for the Everything Woman until she reaches warp speed.
The starburst on her costume soon proves difficult to trace.
Once free from pursuers, she'll head back to Earth-Beta.

A woman or a man in a cape can be confused at warp speed.
Would our hero rescue the burning question, squatter inside?
The pursuers were us holding cracked comics set in Beta-earths.
Ollie Jimson, grizzled reporter, tracked a shadow on the sidewalk.

LISTEN

ANDREW COLLARD

I told you, once, about a boy
who scorned me. I know it's possible
you don't remember, by which I mean
I know that sometimes it gets difficult
to know which words
take root: Dan Thibault failed
fourth grade before I met him,
and by the time he stole my dog-eared
Silver Surfer #2, he'd set a pace
to fail again. The corner of his smile
left a space for the cigarettes
he claimed to smoke, though
no one ever saw him do it,
and the knuckle of his middle finger
grew twice its size
when he balled his fist. Now,
listen closely: the Silver Surfer
lives on Earth in exile, but the secret
wall of energy that strands him here
cannot prevent the alien Badoon
from landing to wage war. Dan Thibault
never hit me, but I watched him

hit Joel Armstrong once to save me
 from the daily schoolyard game
 of *smear the queer*
 as all Joel's cronies ran to class.
 I don't know why Dan intervened. Afterward
 we rarely spoke without him threatening
 to kick my ass, but still,
 I thought it right to loan Dan comics—
 like the one in which the Silver Surfer
 is the only hero strong enough
 to fight off alien invaders—
 until two weeks before
 the school year ended, when Dan said
 to leave him be, and disappeared.
 Do you recall? I don't
 know where you are today, with whom,
 but surely you could not forget how
 when Dan Thibault opened up my comic
 he was blinded by *the power cosmic*,
 disintegrating off into a story
 started many years before him, streaking
 across the night sky of a world
 he came to love. I don't know
 any other way to tell you this today
 when every curb I drive by
 displays a dead deer's carcass, obscured
 by clouds of newly hatching flies. I'd like
 to buy you beer, build a *beer maze*
 before we both turn empty fact, before
 the day turns so much *Jeopardy*,
 and Wikipedia, and trash. If I knew
 any other way to say I love you,
 I've exhausted it
 like all these lingering stories,
 so I wait here for you
 underneath the kind of night
 that people always write of,

for a word, to be reminded
that the rules behind the stars
are always changing. I wait for Dan, or maybe
for my comics to return to me, or
just a flash of light to freshen up the plot.
To illuminate, my dear, what's growing
and what's going to, and what's gone.

MISS HONEYBUNCH TAKES A DIP

ROBERT MOULTHROP

Rosellen sipped her lime rickey and puckered her lips. She was wishing the drink had bourbon or gin in it, but she was at the country club pool and everybody knew Mama and Daddy and would tell.

Rosellen tried to think, but it was difficult in the sun. She liked thinking and planning. It was fun to be pretty and smart, but have everybody—especially Daddy and everyone at school—think she was just pretty. The last chords of “A Summer Place” crackled through the loudspeakers. When she heard it for the first time last month she knew that nineteen and fifty-two was the best year of her life; she knew immediately it was her and Bud’s song and decided she loved this summer more than any other, ever.

Except for one thing.

She shoved the thought away to stop frowning and decided to think of pleasant things instead. She was going to be a senior, she thought, and rolled the idea around inside until it made her breathe hard. And Bud was sure to do real swell in football; everybody said he was a shoo-in for captain. She thought about September, and walking from the parking lot with Bud, and wearing his sweater. The thought of Bud’s sweater made her arms go all goose bumps in the heat. Maybe she could just talk to Bud.

“I don’t understand you,” she said, keeping her eyes closed and speaking directly to the sun.

"Say what?" Bud said. He had finished his push-ups on the grass, all thirty-five, and was now doing the first of his two sets of fifty sit-ups. "What don't you understand?" He liked to talk while he was pulling himself up real slow, feeling his stomach get tighter and meaner, showing Rosellen and anyone else who was looking that he had breath to spare. He watched his toes arc toward his head and then blur back into the sky. Come September he was going to be in the best shape of his life. He kept at the sit-ups with his eyes closed and, at the same time, ran an imaginary twenty-five yards, darting around two lead-footed tackles.

"Why you even talk to him," Rosellen said. "That's what." She looked over to where Frankie was standing in the shade by the snack bar. He had one hand on his hip; the other was floating around in wide gestures. His pasty white face and baby fat body gleamed in the shade, cut in two by his too tight shiny black bathing suit. Two girls—Rosellen squinted, but she couldn't see; probably Marie and her stupid friend, Tina—were laughing at something Frankie had said.

Rosellen took another careful sip of lime rickey and settled back against the warm canvas cushions. She could feel the sun through her dark glasses. It was red.

"Just talk," Bud said. He was up to thirty-eight sit-ups and didn't want to waste any breath just now.

"But he's a fairy," Rosellen said. "Everybody says so."

"So what," Bud said.

"So everything," she said. "Honestly, Bud, don't you know anything?"

"Like what?"

"Well, like what if he touched you or something?"

"So what. It ain't catching."

Rosellen thought for a minute. She shifted again. This conversation was definitely not to her liking.

"Well, I still don't see why you talk to him. Jerry said to me the other day that he thinks the reason you talk to him is because, well, maybe, because..."

"Because what?" asked Bud. He was only at eighteen on his second set, but he stopped and looked at her. Rosellen was on her back, turned to the sun, one finger twirling a strand of auburn hair.

"Well, I ain't," he said finally. "You know that," he added. He looked at her again, then went back to his sit-ups.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I do." She thought about that for a minute. "But reputation is so important." She turned to watch him. His stomach muscles were so wonderful. She longed to touch them with just one finger while they rippled. But, she thought, it would look silly to reach her hand over; what if someone were watching? Besides, the sun was making it too warm to move.

"Everybody says so," she said.

"About what?" Bud said. "Forty-seven."

"Reputation," Rosellen said. "How important it is."

"Well," he said, timing his words as he raised and lowered his torso, "I, ain't, every, body."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Frankie turn away from the snack bar and begin to walk toward them. How could anyone let themselves walk like that, she wondered. Didn't he know what he looked like? Did he do it on purpose? How could Bud stand to be around him?

She opened her eyes wide behind her dark glasses and watched the colored sunspots burst around Frankie's head as he moved across the grass. She looked sideways at Bud, but he had his eyes closed and was counting as he kept at his sit-ups. Rosellen began to breathe deeply, hoping Frankie would believe she was asleep. Maybe she would just go to sleep, since the sun was really quite warm. The strap of her one-piece suit pressed against her left breast. She thought of Bud's finger tracing a line around her nipple and breathed a little deeper.

"Hi, Bud." It was Frankie's voice, swooping along, stretching two words into four syllables.

"Hi, Frankie," Bud said. Rosellen heard his even breathing and knew he was still doing sit-ups. "What's up?" he asked on his next breath.

She heard him raise himself up one more time, then fall back exhausted. She knew without looking that he was lying on his back with his forearm across his eyes against the bright sun. Rosellen thought about Bud's swimsuit and the bulge in his crotch. She shifted slightly in the sun.

Frankie was talking again, all the words just flying out into the air. Why did he have to let his voice go all over the place?

"...Tina Sullivan. She's so dumb she thinks that Esther Williams really swam the English Channel. I said, 'Tee-nah, she's got better things to do with her tits out in Hollywood than over there in England. She don't need to swim. All she has to do is act.'" He flung his arm skyward, and Rosellen watched through her lashes as his hand seemed to explode off the end of his wrist.

"Then I said as how Esther really couldn't swim, see, even though I know she can. It's just, well, not the way old Sonja Henie could ice skate. 'Member when they showed that old movie on teevee last Christmas? 'Member those skates? Whooozh!"

Rosellen could hear Frankie's heels thump on the grass, twisting the blades into knots. "Bud," she said, "do you suppose Frankie'd like to bring us both a Co' Cola?"

But Bud was looking at the sky. "Hey, Frankie," he said. "See that old hawk up there?" Frankie's arms dropped to his side and he tilted his head back.

"I see it, Bud," he said, shading his eyes.

"You think that's that same hawk came round last Fourth of July, just about this time?" asked Bud.

"Naw," said Frankie. "That's just a bird in a hot wind. Pretty, though, against the blue. Ain't it, Rosellen?"

"I wouldn't know," she said. "I'm too thirsty to look."

"Aw, honey," Bud said, "let me get you a Co' Cola. You want one, Frankie?"

Bud started angling his legs and arms to get upright; Rosellen felt parts of his shadow cross her body.

"No," she said. "Frankie can get it for us, can't you, Frankie?" she turned her voice in his direction. "Frankie, I'd just love it if you'd bring me back a nice cold Co' Cola from the stand. Could you do that for me? You know, with plenty of ice and a nice little wedge of lemon?"

"Why, Rosie Rosellen, I'd be enchanted to provide that service for you."

Rosellen bit her tongue; Dave Dunbarton and Kate and Ellen were all looking over at them.

"Now you and Buddy boy stay right here, because..." Rosellen started to blush in the heat. Frankie was twirling around with his arms stretched out. "...because when I get back, I've got something real

important to talk about.” He stopped twirling and ran to the refreshment stand.

Rosellen buried her head in the canvas pillow and groaned. “I just can’t bear it another minute,” she said.

“Bud.” She turned her brown eyes toward him and shook her hair back over her shoulder. Bud turned to look at her.

“Honey,” she said, “you know I think you’re just the most wonderful person in the whole entire world, I mean, just everything, and you know, I really wouldn’t interfere in any part of your life for anything. But Bud, honey, people...are...talking. And my nerves just can’t stand it, and that’s the truth.”

An awful hoot of laughter came from over by the refreshment stand.

“Well, honey,” Bud said, “My Mama always says that people are going to talk, no matter what, and *that’s* the truth.” He had hunkered down right next to her and she could smell his skin. Why, she wondered, did he have to have such blue eyes? And his hair in that crew cut stood so straight and glinty in the sun. “...and Fred and Cindy Lee,” he was saying, “everybody said about them, but I don’t think it matters, I think...”

Rosellen waited. Waiting was sometimes good because when people stopped, you could say things back.

“...you have to be careful about friends...”

There. He was coming round to her side. Daddy always said she could talk the whiskers off a cat.

“...because you only get so many and me and Frankie, we’ve been friends since first grade. He was different even back then, but he’s, oh, funny, you know. Besides, he’s smart. And sometimes, like algebra, I need the help.”

Rosellen didn’t show her disappointment. “I’ll help you with your old algebra. I know those *a* squareds and *b* squareds backwards and forwards.”

“Honey, you could. You’re smart as three whips.” He sat on the chaise at her feet. “But I can’t study with you. When I’m around you nothing stays in my head. Except you.” He reached for her leg and started to trace circles on her calf while he looked at the pool. Rosellen blinked behind her glasses, trying to separate the tingle from the prob-

lem. She pulled up the strap of her suit, hitching up her puppies (well, that was what Bud called them; she thought it was sweet. She thought of his tongue, and her nipples tingled now), shifting a little to make them move for Bud.

“Bud, that’s really sweet, you know, but I think...”

Rosellen was both mad and glad that Frankie came over right then with the Cokes—glad because she couldn’t think just what to say next, but mad because *he* was the problem.

“Here’s yours and here’s yours,” Frankie said, “and I got mine, so we’re all fine. I’m a poet and I know it cause I got Longfellow’s feet and they show it.” And he sat down cross-legged on the grass, sipped his Coke through a straw, and looked up through his pale lashes at Rosellen and Bud.

“I got this great idea,” he said, looking quickly away. “We all gotta’ eat *something* today, ’cause it’s too long ’til the barbeque tonight ’cause they said they was going to wait ’til after the fireworks. So I thought you guys could come over to my house, since my Gramma’s fixed up her fried chicken and some of her potato salad and a special dessert, and since my house is only just around the corner on Tree Street, it’s real close, and it wouldn’t be any problem.”

The noise around the pool and grass rose upward and hung almost motionless, suspended in the shimmering heat: loudspeaker music, splashes of water against arms and legs and breasts and thighs, laughter, screams, the murmur of voices. Frankie looked down at the grass.

“I got some beer, too,” he said. “I asked Gramma to buy us a case ’cause it’s the Fourth of July and she said ‘Yes’ and she did, and it’s there in the refrigerator.”

“Gee, Frankie,” Bud said. “That’s real fine.”

Frankie began to smile, but he couldn’t look up.

“Yes,” Rosellen said. “That’s awfully sweet, and really, you know, we’d love to, but my Aunt Ruth has got us coming over for one of her famous cold suppers— isn’t that right, Bud?—and she’d be just about heartbroken if we didn’t come.”

“I didn’t know...” Bud said.

“Well,” Rosellen said, “I guess you just forgot.”

Bud looked down at Frankie, still looking at the grass.

"Well, Bud, you know we can't disappoint Aunt Ruth," Rosellen said. "She'd never forgive us."

Later, at home, Frankie sat on his bed, naked in his room upstairs, behind the shades, the airless room yellow-orange in the late afternoon heat. The tufted cotton of the bedspread made red welts on his thighs as he sat with something blue across his lap. He rolled the cool beer can across his forehead, carefully punctured the can, and then, with the can, used it to cool the tops of his feet. He bent over, enjoying the blood rushing to his head, pounding in his ears. As he raised up, his hair snapped straight back. He paused, then drank the beer, draining the cold and the fizz, waiting for it to hit and the feeling to spread, wanting to be higher still. He placed the can on the carpet, lined up neatly with the others, found the bottle of gin, drained that, too. Then, with both hands, he stroked the electric blue one-piece swimsuit with molded cups and two straps on his lap. He caressed the fabric, now almost black in the almost orange light through the shade. "What the hell," he said, and held the suit against his chest, his hands over the cups, pressing the electric blue fabric against his skin. "What the hell."

The evening air was soft with Chinese lantern light and barbecue. The fireworks were a memory, and couples had stopped licking each other's fingers and had laid the plates with old white bones aside. Two by two they drifted into the shrubs behind the refreshment stand. One swimmer cut the surface of the pool, another swam laps deep under the water.

Rosellen smoothed her circle dress over her two stiff petticoats, then held Bud's hand, palm up, inside her own and brought, with tender care, the paper napkin over each separate finger, then the palm.

"We could just take a little walk," she said. "Just around that way and back."

"Sure," Bud said. "I guess so. Did you like the big rockets better this year or last?"

"Oh, honey, I don't know. It just reminds me of when you touch me, rockets like that. Sometimes even when you just look at me."

"Oh, Rosellen."

"That's the truth. Oh, I could just look into your eyes until I die. I swear."

Bud looked at her, then took up his hand and looked it over. "That's real clean," he said. "Thank you, Rosellen."

"Oh, Bud," she said, and was about to say something more, something special about his hands this time, but then, over Bud's shoulder, she saw a woman with a diamond tiara on her head over by the pool, so instead she said, "Well, I never did!"

"Do what, honey?" Bud said.

The woman had taken off her bathrobe and now, in her bathing suit, was kneeling on the diving board. Sparks came from something in her hand, probably a cigarette lighter, Rosellen thought, but why would anyone smoke on the diving board?

"Do what, honey?" Bud said again.

"Over there," she said.

Bud turned.

Over there, across the dark blue and green water there was a spark of flame. Then another and another. Sparklers. The woman was lighting sparklers. Well, after all, it was the Fourth of July.

"That's nice," Bud said.

"Hard to see," Rosellen said. "I wonder who she is."

The figure now stood holding a bunch of sparklers sprouting from each clenched fist. The light cascaded down the short hair, slicked up into greasy waves behind the tiara, over the full breasts in the electric blue one-piece suit.

"Who *is* that?" Rosellen squinted harder.

Two by two from the corners and shrubs, from behind the trees and the snack bar, the couples came to the pool, drawn by the light and the quiet, by the sparklers and then by the sounds of their own murmuring voices.

The figure with the sparklers spoke: "Since Esther Williams couldn't be here in person," the voice was a clear, fine alto that carried across the water, "she sent me in her place to wish you all a happy Fourth of July."

"That's Frankie," Bud said, in what he thought was a whisper, but his voice carried through the silence.

The figure on the diving board struck a pose—feet together, breasts arched upward, head proud, each hand aloft clutching a makeshift torch of sparklers cascading streams of light into the pool.

Then everyone began to talk, and someone switched on the flood-

lights, illuminating the pool from below. Rosellen said, "Oh, my God!" and one of the swimming boys said, "Ooooooh, Frankie" in a high voice while the other swam to the diving board, reached up from the pool, and bounced the board up and down.

"I was going in anyway," Frankie said down to the boy, trying to keep his balance on the board. He looked out at the crowd as his legs wobbled against the board's up-and-down. "I am... the living image of... *Neptune's Daughter*," he said, trying to balance himself, the sparklers, the tiara, and the stuffing in the bosom of his swim suit. "One of the finest... motion pictures... ever... made."

"I can't bear to look," Rosellen said into Bud's shoulder. "What's he got stuffed into that suit?"

"I dunno. Maybe toilet tissue or something," Bud said, squinting at something white that was drifting up Frankie's chest.

"Frank-eee, oh, Frank-eee," the boy under the diving board crooned while he gave the board a good jounce. Then the boy scissored in the water, shot up, and made a grab for Frankie's ankle.

"Noooo," said Frankie, hopping to the other foot. One of the sparklers flew from his hand, beginning a graceful arc. Everyone watched as above the pool the pinpoint stars fizzed and died, flying from a whirling center into the air. Then the sparkler hissed into the pool and everyone looked back again at the figure on the board.

In the quiet, the boy under the diving board tugged again. Frankie lost his balance, said, "Oh, Ohhhhh," high and squeaky as the tiara came loose and began to fall. A whole handful of sparklers flew up in a parabola as he missed the tiara. Then he, the sparklers, the tiara, all seemed to fall together, strike the surface of the pool and sink quickly below into the light. Except that one hand, still holding a sparkler torch, bobbed above the surface, throwing stars on the water. Until it suddenly sank.

Someone whistled. A few couples gave sarcastic applause, but most just clumped together, whispering and laughing.

"Frankie's still at the bottom," Bud said. "I don't think he can swim."

"Of course he can swim," Rosellen snapped. "Everybody can swim. He's just staying down there to get some more attention. Come on, Bud, let's go."

Bud shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "I've never seen him swim." He looked down from the edge of the pool. Under the green stabs of light, Frankie seemed to be waving at him, white arms moving slowly back and forth.

"I gotta get him," he said.

"Oh, Bud, he's just funnin'. Let him alone." Rosellen couldn't believe her eyes: Bud was actually getting ready to dive in.

"Bud," she said in a dead whisper without moving her lips. "Everyone is looking at you."

She could feel her cheeks getting spotty from embarrassment. She tried to pull Bud back from the edge, but he stayed. She couldn't look across the pool, but she knew everybody was watching.

"I hate you," she said quietly, smiling sweetly at him for everyone's benefit. "I'll never forgive you, ever," she whispered, still smiling, as she walked past him to the edge of the pool.

"Oh, Bud," she said suddenly, loudly, "I'm falling." And she toppled over into the pool, one arm waving while the other tried to hold her dress at her knees. Her dress and two petticoats billowed up around her head as she began to sink noisily, arms flailing.

Bud only stopped to take off his shirt, then dove in cleanly by her side, slipped beneath the surface with a ripple, into the light, felt her dress slip by his legs, then kicked for the bottom. Transparent strands of paper coiled around Frankie's head. His eyes were open and his mouth seemed to move, seemed to speak without sound. Bud scooped up the body, gave a solid push against the bottom with both feet, and kicked for the top.

He looked up and saw Rosellen's circle skirt floating like a flower, and Rosellen thrashing in white bubbles. The clean, clear light beyond the surface was bright with voices. He kicked through the water, with Frankie resting heavy in his arms until they broke through and both began to gulp the bright night air.

DEN

ALLISON LINVILLE

The one time you were right you took it
too far. To leaving after saying the meanest thing
you could think of and driving away
for effect. So when your car hits
the bank, bouncing off, sliding across the road
into the water of the Lochsa, you feel
justified. Driving in the dark is dangerous.
So that you have the attention of
the paramedics and the stopped traffic and all you wanted
was to be so recognizably right,
that you drove on ice, in dark,
for too long, only to say *I knew this would happen.*
Knew that the sun sets early in December in Montana,
the snow sticks so long when the cold fronts come in.
They freeze hard, they freeze everything,
even the pine needles, even the entrance
to the wolf den that sits just a mile
from the road where you crashed. It is dug so far
into the earth that the soil stays warm on subzero nights.
The snow falls into the den, but never far, and still,
the wolves emerge at night to see the black moss
on the spruce trees, swaying in the wind, frigid,
beneath the green gash of the milky way.

COTARD

BRANDON BARRETT

“You’re awake, you’re awake,” the woman cried. But the body had never been asleep. Its eyes had been closed. It was looking for Simon and not finding him. The woman resembled Frances, Simon’s wife. But the woman was not Frances, no more so than the body was Simon.

“I’m dead,” said the body when the breathing tube was out and it could speak.

“You’re not dead,” said the woman who looked like Frances. She was laughing through her tears. “You made it, you’re alive.”

“I’m dead,” said the body.

On their third date, they’d talked about families. Frances was an only child, Simon had two brothers. “Do you think you’ll want kids someday?” Frances had asked Simon, casually but not really casually. And he replied that yes, he loved kids. In truth he hadn’t given it much thought and when he finally did give it some thought, after marriage, he decided that he had no desire whatsoever to be a father. It was the sort of thing you say when you’re on a third date with an attractive woman and you haven’t been on a third date in years.

“I’m dead,” said the body.

“Feel this,” cried the woman. “Feel your pulse.” She lifted the

body's hand and put it to its neck, where an artery throbbed. The body didn't see how this proved anything. A thin gray stream propelled through pipes of papier-mâché, is this life? Just a stream of effluent. The body contemplated snatching the fork from its meal tray, plunging it into a forearm, wrenching it into an eye socket, showing the woman what detritus filled the bag.

"Extremely, extremely rare," said a doctor to the woman. "Only isolated reports. I've never seen a case." A doctor who had never seen a dead body? Maybe this was humorous, it was hard to tell. Nothing was funny anymore, but people still laughed regardless. The nurses laughed. The woman even laughed once, at something she saw on television during one of the long, silent visits to the body's hospital room.

Simon and Frances had tried for a child. Simon didn't want to be a father, but Frances needed to be a mother. That's what she'd said, and he acquiesced. She filled a shopping basket with pregnancy tests and subjected herself to them every three days. And when one came back positive, and it was again positive the next day, she allowed herself to be ecstatic.

In what place do all the quickened bodies laugh though there is no humor, and eat though there is no taste, breathe without air, sleep without rest? They hug their friends, they kiss their lovers, and there is *nothing* there, it means nothing more than a breeze scratching bare tree branches together, an asteroid colliding into a sunless dead moon. Mechanics, physics.

"This is hell," said the body to the woman. A place so quiet and dim. She stared at him.

"Yes," she finally agreed.

Frances had a miscarriage in the fourth week. She sat in the bay window and Simon came beside her and held her. *Maybe it is better this way*, he'd said. *Maybe this is a sign.*

How can you say that? she'd asked. *How can you possibly believe that it was supposed to be this way?*

Everything happens for a reason, he said.

How about this, she screamed at him. She tossed a cup of coffee in

his face and then threw the empty mug after it. *That happened for a reason.* She ran off and bright blood streamed from Simon's nose and through his fingers. And he never apologized, and she never apologized.

The body dug through a cabinet in the basement. Simon had kept paperwork there. He had kept a car title, a birth certificate. So why not a death certificate? Where else would the woman keep it? Here it was, the discharge summary from the hospital. *Just say it,* thought the body. *Just be honest, here in black and white.* Maybe they couldn't tell the woman the truth, didn't have the heart, didn't have the courage. This was official paperwork though. There was a column of diagnoses. *Motor Vehicle Accident,* it said. *Traumatic Brain Injury. Cotard Delusion.* There was follow-up with the doctor in four to six weeks. The body tore up the paperwork and left the pieces in the folder, put the folder away, and walked out of the house.

The body walked all day and into the night, until it found the spot. The earth is still torn; there is a long shallow trench that the bumper dug out as the car skidded through the mud. The car is long towed away, but the body lies down in the dirt where it would have been. The body will wait here until the situation is resolved. And so it looks up at the sky with its dead eyes and *please,* it thinks. *Let me live or let me die.*

Simon had left home in anger. They'd argued.

"I'm going for a drive," he said.

"Just keep driving," she said back to him. He slammed the door. He climbed into the car, peeled out into the night. The miles slipped under his wheels.

What if I just... he thinks. *What if I just...*

As the world tumbles there is such a tremendous sound—where is it coming from? Such a rush, such a roar. The world is so loud sometimes, so loud and so bright.

NO, IT DID NOT GIVE YOU WINGS,

MARTHA SILANO

that month in the hospital, believing
you were dead. No lift, no day of feasting.

Father broke your faith, a transitive verb,
Father believed, intransitive (How do you

know? It says so on page 28). Required
to take a father's vantage as Gabrielle's trumpet,

words of some book you were forced
to read. He + present + certain. He + present

+ qualm. *I'm sure. He's elusive. We doubt.*
Neither/both insist. Jesus did /

did not ascend. (Daddy wasn't sure.)
Couldn't rewrite that sentence as a string

of morphemes; break each phrase
into tense and verb, perhaps, but not

revision *gone to reborn, hem and haw to belief*,
take a clipped and grounded thing, make it soar.

SLEEPING BEAUTY: MARKSON FANGIRL

ANNE ELIZABETH WEISGERBER

Days unfold like a white tablecloth.

His mother was an American Red Cross nurse during the War. She helped soldiers via art therapy, and did not fear their quiescent growth and healing. Her obituary said she made expert toys out of everyday items. A violinist, she was married to an Art historian. She was a golden casket that held four sons: Bruno, Apollo, Charles P., and the artist Mark Tansey.

Red will be

In his film *Traffic*, Stephen Soderbergh uses colored lenses. When the lens is blue, there's sober calm before the storm and it has to do with a man named Wakefield. Tansey uses a lot of blue and he's very awake when he does it, cultivating small fields of canvas and working against time. The thorns give way to flowers for but a short while. It's now or in 100 years.

The world goes back into a sack

I had a friend Blake who could've been Dennis Miller. He was in L.A., but his mom was sick and kept calling him back East; he kept going. She had a pillow, embroidered, "We forgive those who bore us, never those we bore," and I used to think that was inferior silverware. I drew a portrait of Blake, and I put those words around his head like a halo, maybe a clamp. I wished her dead.

The most beautiful straws

Language is a spindle dancing, so a wheel of words was alluring. A *Times* reporter said the wheel was Tansey's handmade 1989 metaphor machine. He uses it for a coffee table now. He's rolling gesso instead of ink. I don't require wheels to raise questions. My falling-back-on word-wheel has a Tansey spoke, with *dithyramb*, *soughed*, and *metaphoric redescription*. I don't have a wheel; I've got a splinter.

What people did, what they are going to do

André Breton stands opposite Greenberg in one painting. Breton was a surrealist. He knew what it was like to unfurl a flag of imagination. On my *recuperating* word wheel I'd add *echolalia*, *vol au vent*, and *psychic automatism* to the Breton spoke. He emcees this ten-spoke wheel your eyes travel.

The lions were fresh

DaVinci's *Madonna and Child with St. Anne* has sfumato. Leonardo made figures, arranged them in a pyramid, and blurred lines between them. When he squinted, they huddled together. He used a dry brush to scumble the edges; soft lines soften everything. His magician's hand animated. Renaissance techniques suffer sleeping enchantments, but hunger can suck loose those splinters, too.

A church stood dazzling as a bell

The Broad museum wasn't quite open but would be soon. During its great and rapid change, starchitects offered flythrough video simulations. The camera eye floats along the outside of the neighboring Disney behemoth, a brushed steel landlocked Gehrig bateau that's had some of its skin savaged back by a crowbar. The eye pauses at twenty-nine seconds, takes a deep breath, and psyches itself up to make ready and charge the sleeping Broad. At thirty-three, superfluous graphic details vanish, and the camera makes the Broad seems slutty, like, it's go time. Get in my belly. The eye skitters slideways and swings past a big divot, a cataract, a moiré ripple in the outer veil. At forty-seven seconds, the camera darts through the curtain and into a haunted lobby. The camera glides to the bottom of an escalator and flies up through a white pipe, fancy dress suggested. Maybe escalators are slow motion peashoot-

ers, and I'm an architect's cannon fodder in the war against sunlight. The roving eye lingers in the building exoskeleton with blue sky and—wait a second—no walls to nail Art? The camera then jukes, evading my question, leading me to believe it's going anywhere but back downstairs, but down it strikes, thinking about its next great lay. The camera backs out through a glass wall, so it doesn't hear my accusations. *Isn't the burning love and burning hatred of sunlight bad? What's to become of those eight archived Tanseys? They are monochromatic and cannot take a fade!*

The fire that covers the prayer

I wonder if the soul of André Breton gives a rat's ass about paintings swathed in sunlight. The Gehrig next door is the big Broad's face-tanning reflector. Those two buildings show part of the problem that art reveals. They're a Tansey composition, where one is able to study the undercarriage of a car that the other is about to cream it with. Paintings don't even have to be there anymore. Their questions have been raised. Paintings, like me, will be violated—without pleasure, without sin—as they sleep.

Paris is a big village

Clement Greenberg is in the center of a painting. Thank God someone else identified him. Greenberg said, "Where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine walking, the illusion created by a Modernist is one into which one can look, can travel through, only with the eye." Greenberg likes Mondrian, so Tansey didn't put Mondrian in the picture. Greenberg implies him. But I see Mondrian anyway; he and his two blind eyes are here.

The prayer

The Scots ginned up a metaphor mapping database. I tried it. It cannot subtract, or generate hallucinations. The machine didn't calculate that letters were little stabbings, and language a penitent's hairshirt spread over Tanseys that bloomed inside ribcages like Purcell hymns. For instance: a metaphor stumbles into a bar, and without thinking tosses its hat onto the hook across the room. The metaphor machine cannot do this. Its hat, parked there cockeyed on a chair, cools its engine. Tink. Too late, I wanted to write David Markson, who had written to Mal-

colm Lowry, who had written to Conrad Aiken. I couldn't think of who would appreciate being my Markson. I mailed a letter to Tansey. I don't know if my letter startled or offended him. I'm a sleepwalker; a meter maid chalking wheels and issuing summonses.

GOAT

HILA RATZABI

*Each generation is named in alphabetical order, Jerry says,
and the kids that rush up to greet me are the 'F's:
Frances, French Fry, Fantasy, Frank.
Mother Darcy appears, quieter than the rest,
her face stoic and knowing.*

Eon with the one horn leaps at the gate,
teeth crunching on something.
His landscape consists of goats, hay, horse, human,
and he's chosen me of all things,
bearer of nothing but body and gaze.

I look into one of his eyes and it's washed
with a light green kindness so pure I'm broken open.
I ask Jerry, *Why one horn?*
He explains, *We made a mistake. We burned off the first,
And the other we couldn't get right.*

Does it hurt when you burn off the horn? I ask.
And with a gentleness equal to the goat's
Jerry says, *Yes, it does, but within thirty minutes it's like it never happened.*
Because of the horn, Eon would make an unsuitable pet, sold at auction.
What do people buy them for? I ask.

Dinner, says Jerry.

I touch the stump on Eon's head, gnarly as a tree root.

I scratch Eon's ear, neck, side of his face.

The goat's eyes flutter. The way he looks at me
is a grace I can't stand. He leans his head back

in an unbroken angle of bliss.

I turn and he bleats at my back.

Jerry repeats, *We made a mistake, we didn't do it right.*

I absorb his confession though I don't know
where to store it just yet.

BONE MEN

JEN JULIAN

Some years after her mother left them, late in the spring of 1909, her father was called to Cornell to lecture on recent fossil finds in southern Germany. On the train, they sat facing each other and barely spoke, and she realized, as sunlight flickered in through the window of the dining car, that he had gone dry from the inside out. It was as if his whole body had become filled with air, as if some internal current of gray breeze was the sole thing that kept him standing.

They changed trains in Chicago, and the long bouts of silence had left her body a taut string of anxiety and excitement. She had never been in a city so large. How strange that it seemed crippling claustrophobic despite its size. A recent rain had left the train station damp with the fog-thick smell of garbage and manure. Manure—that was what one of her father’s colleagues had once told her about cities—you would not believe the manure in those places. And as she and her father rode their new train eastward, she saw great piles of it on the outskirts of the city—tall enough to cover a man to the crown of his head. She saw where the horses themselves had been dumped, worked to death, their stark-ribbed hides marred with scars from the harnesses. The smell of rot filled the train.

“That’s horrible,” she said, and when her father didn’t respond, she said it again. “My God, that’s horrible.”

Her father kept his eyes on his charts and papers. The horse grave-

yard had devolved into bones, long yellow grass growing between sun-bleached ribs.

“Do you see that?” she asked.

Her father lifted his head, perhaps sensing the urgency in her voice. He pushed his reading glasses onto his forehead and looked out the window, kept looking until the graveyard had fallen away in place of farmland.

“It is horrible,” her father said. “But men need to get to wherever they’re going.”

And there it was, just like that: her resentment. It always reminded her of the lionfish spines her father had once brought from Venice Beach: hollow, venomous flutes capable of taking down a beast as large as a manta ray. No matter how much she swelled with love and respect for her father, it took just these small moments, these brief stabs, to make her hate him.

“I don’t see why the concerns of men are so much more important than the concerns of horses,” she said.

Her father cleared his throat and returned to what he’d been reading.

It was obvious he didn’t even want to be here, on this train, on the way to Ithaca; he’d been reduced to doing his job by rote. One lecture. Another. Research. Revise. Part of her blamed her mother, the woman who had abandoned the two of them to a melancholy state and a decrepit patch of farmland. But at the same time, she consented it was possible that her father was getting older and that all men were like this when they got older. The battlefields on which they had skirmished became irrelevant. When they finally arrived at Cornell, she hoped—in vain it turned out—that his reception would at least partly mirror the competitive conferences in Kansas, when the war for government funding was at its height between her father and a hotheaded rival who’d since drunk himself to death. Now, there was a careless humor regarding his lectures, a sense that the field of paleontology had become little more than a contest to see who could put together a jigsaw puzzle the fastest. When it came to light that the brontosaurus was not even real, that the species was a misassembled version of something that had already been discovered, it cemented an atmosphere of embarrassment over her father’s area of study.

Even professors outside the field—the chemists, the mathematicians, the engineers—weighed in with smug opinions (they were the smuggest, weren't they, engineers). These paleo-men, how did they know what went together? They didn't really; it was all guesswork. It wasn't even real *science* because there was no way to know if you were right when you worked with materials millions of years old. In fact, it took some crackerjack in England twenty years to figure out that he'd had the wrong skull on the wrong animal—a riotous joke, one of many jokes. This was what became of men who obsessed over the past, who kept themselves buried in dead fragments of bone and rock—diggers, dirt men, *old* men.

She worked hard to fend off this environment of disdain. If only her father weren't so serious, she thought. If only he could laugh with the others, he could slough off their jokes. Instead, he absorbed them the way dust absorbs sound, and they dried him out further.

The Cornell lecture was in three parts. He gave the first that evening, just four hours after getting off the train. A disaster. Everyone in the auditorium could tell he was exhausted, his voice staggering its way, just barely, past the middle rows. Not that this mattered much; the audience wasn't large enough to play a decent game of baseball. His lectern had a nail loose, and so it wobbled, his papers sliding off onto the stage, but he didn't pick them up, just kept going, the notes written on the back of his eyeballs like lantern slides. She watched from the front row, aware of the eyes burning into the back of her head. She was the only woman in the room. At one point, determined not to shrink or wither, she turned to look at the young men behind her—a collective of fresh-faced scholars with the slicked-back style of East Coast boys. She wanted to look defensive, a woman staunch in her admiration of the man on stage, but she had never had to play this role before, and she felt she did it poorly, more petulant child than strong daughter. Did they know he was her daughter? Should she tell them?

Afterward, when they had settled in at the house of an old colleague, her father took an afternoon rest, and she laid herself down like she was tired. Really, she was too restless to sleep. She thought about horses, scarred flesh and foaming mouths, worked to death. Through the open windows of the colonial house, she heard the raucous sounds of male laughter on the sidewalks, their crude language made cruder

with the heat. Without a word to anyone else, she was up and outside, the sound of life goading her on.

It impressed her, the sluggish air of early June, how the sunlight poured on the ground like syrup. She was used to the heat of the plains, which would dry out your mouth and nostrils overnight, but here the heat weighed on you and clung to your skin. She let herself sweat, made her way in a wide circle around the bell tower, and everywhere she saw students, upright pinnacles of youth and enthusiasm. There was something canine about them, their teeth flashing with ferocious smiles, eyes on fire, and she straightened her spine in the light of their faces. It was unusual, pleasurable maybe, feeling inspected, feeling looked at, but she neither encouraged nor discouraged it, choosing to occupy an empty bench at the edge of the quad to demonstrate her indifference. She was not there five minutes when a young man approached her.

"Have I seen you?" he asked.

She looked up at him. He had an amiable expression, like one easily distracted. He was fair-headed, tanned and athletic, a big round sailor's jaw.

"I was there at the lecture this morning," she said.

He laughed. "Oh, the presentation."

"He's my father. Did you know he was my father?"

The young man's smile flickered with embarrassment.

"It was a fine lecture," he said.

"It was bunkum," she said.

"It—all right, it wasn't *my* interest personally, I'll admit. And the boys and I agreed he did seem like he'd been hitting the drink the night before."

"He's just tired," she said. "That's all. Tired."

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a tin of Turkish cigarettes. "One from the hope chest?"

She smiled. A trickle of sweat ran down the side of her face.

"University boys are such rakes," she said.

The young man stared at her, his eyebrows arched, the manic smile lingering on his handsome face. "We'd be disappointed if you thought otherwise."

His name was Tom. He was an engineering student at Cornell, but

his secret passion was chemistry. He carried the periodic table around in his pocket like a love letter, so worn that the paper had become soft and pliable. When he placed it into her hand, she felt the warmth from where it had been hiding.

The second lecture went better, which pleased and surprised her. She'd worried she was being selfish or improper when she accepted Tom's offer to sit with him toward the back of the auditorium. First, she had not asked for her father's permission to do this, and second, she was anxious that he would notice her absence in the first row, that he would think she had betrayed him. But his focus seemed much clearer than it had the day before, and if he realized she had changed her seat, it did not affect his performance.

"He did used to be much statelier," she whispered to Tom as the lecture carried on. Her father revealed his diagrams of hollowed-out bird bones, his recreation of the feathered *Archaeopteryx*. "See, he drew that. He taught me how when I was a little girl."

Tom leaned toward her. "If I asked you, would you draw me?"

"Why would you ask me that? Stop being foolish and pay attention."

Behind them, someone overheard their whispered conversation and snorted with laughter. Someone else hissed through his teeth to quiet him.

Afterward, when her father had finished talking to the students and professors who had gathered to ask him questions, she introduced Tom as a friend she'd met. Her father barely reacted, his expression vague. When she leaned in to kiss his cheek, she caught an earthy smell and she saw that odd, clay-like fractures had formed around his eyes.

"This is wearing you out," she said.

"Nothing I can't manage," he told her. "Just one more and then we'll head home. I promise."

His words, she realized, sounded as empty as the house that waited for them. This concerned her, but she still let Tom lead her out of the auditorium, leaving her father behind.

Tom said he wanted to show her the falls because she couldn't come to Ithaca and not see the falls; that'd be a travesty. When they arrived, several young men were swimming in the shallows among the rocks,

and she watched them, hypnotized, their dorsal muscles tightening like tiny white wings. They shouted as they belly-flopped into the pool, hooting about how cold it was, the thick heat of the air mingling with the shock of the water against their skin. When they saw Tom, they called for him to remove his clothes and dive in.

"I can't swim," she said quietly.

Tom didn't answer. She felt his breath on the back of her neck. He took her wrist and pulled her into the shadows of the trees.

When he laid her down under a cypress, she could feel his heart thumping heavily against her own. He rubbed a piece of her hair with his thumb and forefinger, staring her down as if she had appeared in front of him by magic.

"Where in the world did you come from?" he asked.

"Kansas," she said.

When he broke her hymen, the pain was brief and strange, accompanied by a weird heat that rippled through her fingers and toes. She wasn't sure if she could call it pleasure, painful as it was, but it fascinated her, the way all sensations fascinated her: the burn of a hot pepper on the tongue, the itch of scab healing. Afterward, she lay puzzled, feeling languid, though not in any way distressed. By contrast, Tom had not yet spent his nervous energy. He stood up, still naked, and began doing pull-ups on an overhanging cypress branch. She watched him and eventually forced herself to say something.

"Do you ever worry about the horses?" she asked.

Tom grunted between pull-ups. The branch bounced with his weight. "Horses?"

"I worry about the horses," she said. "The ones in Chicago. In all cities, really. They get worked until they fall over dead in their harnesses. Whatever you believe, whether you think God exists or not—I know a lot of you educated men don't—you can't think it's good for human beings to treat living animals that way." When Tom didn't reply, she lowered her eyes, picked at the skin around her fingers. "I worry about the horses more than I worry about my father. I guess that's wrong, isn't it?"

Tom was thoughtful, his chin resting heavy on his knuckles. "Poor things," he said, and it wasn't clear if he was talking about just the horses, or the horses and her father both. He let himself drop, his

socked feet landing heavy on the leafy ground. “You shouldn’t worry so much. In a few years, the horse will be an obsolete problem. The combustion engine is the future. My father owns a rubber factory in Dayton, Ohio. Tires. ‘Where the road meets innovation.’”

She glanced up at him, her eyes resting on briefly on his groin before traveling to meet his face. She felt shy about his nudity. “You’re talking about autocars. But who can afford them? Who would want to? You can’t even take them up a hill without them rolling down again backwards.”

“That’ll change,” Tom said, undeterred. “Forward, Kansas. Forward always.”

She mulled over this phrase for a moment, then receded into the shade of the cypress tree to clean the blood off her thighs. A deep, pre-historic part of her had caught fire for the first time, but she also felt a deadly sensation of shame creeping through her consciousness. She had become the slut her mother had told her about in stories, not that she put much stock in things her mother had told her nowadays. Had she thought even once to say no to Tom? His excitement and confidence, still clearly in the early stages of its development, had mesmerized her. She guessed this accounted for their attraction. They were both half-castes: no longer adolescents, not quite adults. There were four among them: man, woman, and the shades of two idealistic children.

Once they had dressed, he walked her back to where she was staying, back to where her father napped over the notes of his final lecture.

Tom stood on the lawn and kissed her forehead.

“That was fun,” he said. “We had a good time.”

“We did,” she said.

“Ever since I saw you in the auditorium yesterday, I thought, ‘That girl’s sweet. I want to show her around.’ Tomorrow afternoon, I can take you over to the chem lab. This roommate of mine, he’s put together this lulu of an apparatus that synthesizes ammonia.”

“I’m leaving tomorrow,” she told him, and saying the words aloud made her realize how relieved she was. She could take her exhausted father home to Kansas. She could rest knowing that Tom would be frozen in her mind, an imprint that she could take out to examine whenever she liked. Tom seemed stunned that she would turn him down so easily, would be so flippant about her departure, and this accentuated

her shame. But he had all but admitted he was a rake, and in this case, maybe it was better to be a slut than a fool.

That night, as she washed her face and prepared for bed, she overheard the housekeeper complaining aloud about a trail of dirt in the foyer. She worried it was *she* who'd tracked it in, a mark of indiscretion that had followed her all the way from the cypress tree, but when she checked, her boots and dress were clean. She found more dirt—little bits of pale, dusty fragments—streaking the upstairs hall, and she followed it into the room where her father was staying. He sat at the desk, his books and journals splayed out in front of him.

"Did *you* make this mess?" she asked. "If you brought in samples for everyone to see tomorrow, you'll want to check on them. They may have fallen apart."

Her father turned his whole body to face her. He seemed more fractured than ever. His dark hair, she remembered being able to grip whole fistfuls between her fingers as a child, was little more than a few wiry wisps.

"Come sit down here," he told her.

She felt a guilty stitch of pain between her legs as she sat on the foot of his bed. Her father, with great effort, came over and sat next to her.

"The young man who's been escorting you around," he said. "He's quite vivacious."

"He's all right," she said, flicking her hand. "He's a bit tiring. I'll be happy to head home."

"We were all like that, so filled with energy," he said. "When you want to know things and you feel as if the world was made for you, it's like there's fire in your veins. I don't have much fire anymore. This slow death, it drove off your mother, and the same is happening with you."

"My mother?" she said. They stared at one another in silence, and she realized that something in her father had become dire, and she had been unable or unwilling to see it. "What does my mother have to do with any of this, with fire in the veins or otherwise? What do *I* have to do with it?"

"You don't understand what it's like," he said, "to feel like you've failed your child."

"Is it about your research?"

He opened his cracked mouth and closed it, his eyes fearful at the very mention of his work, and she realized bringing it up had been a mistake. Possibly, he had convinced himself she hadn't noticed the change in the collegial atmosphere, his relegation to that of a lesser scholar.

"I don't care what other people think about your research," she said desperately. "You're my *father*. You're *brilliant*."

He took a breath, which was the sound of gravel crunching underfoot. "I wish I could leave you with more."

She felt her chest splitting for him, for all the times she'd sat in his office while he worked or sketched or read aloud, Darwin or Lamarck, and she remembered emerging from these long sessions to find concern, or perhaps even envy, entrenched in her mother's face. She learned to be afraid of it, this face, marked with so many lines of disappointment. She recalled all the times she'd asked her, sitting blankly at the parlor window, what she was doing there, and she had answered back, always the same: "Nothing."

Now, with her father sitting next to her, she could sense what overwhelming powerlessness one could feel when afflicted with such a word. She needed to hear it, if only to confirm its brute force.

"Tell me what I can do for you," she said to him.

He told her: "Nothing."

"Then I will *do* nothing," she said.

As she stood, he reached for her arm, his fingertips like sandpaper. "Please don't be angry."

"I'll be how I want. Keep your fossils. Let them drain you dry. I don't care."

With that, she abandoned the conversation before anything else was said.

Late that night, as she willed herself to sleep, she prayed her father would realize that her fury was out of love, even though she knew she had hurt him. How betrayed he would feel to know that she had sneaked off to the falls and under a cypress tree with Tom, the engineer, the chemist, her legs wrapped around the body of her father's rival. She felt also that she'd betrayed him by being born a woman, so that now, in his old age, he had to watch her spirit steadily align with her mother's. There was nothing she could do about this. It seemed inevitable.

*

The next day, the afternoon of her father's third lecture, she saw Tom outside of the auditorium, waiting for her. Four of his friends, spry, blond athletic types like himself, watched on with eager faces, but Tom sent them all away with a wave of his stocky hand. He transformed himself when she approached, switching on his manic smile, which flustered her. She wanted his gentlemanly enthusiasm to be a pretext so that she wouldn't have to worry about him. This young man had seduced women before; she had not been so naïve and pitiful under the cypress tree to have failed to realize that. And yet he was as dogged now as yesterday, pleased with her and with himself.

"Hello, Kansas," he said, holding up his arm. "May I take you inside?"

"Fine," she said. "But you sit in the front with me this time."

He agreed. They made their way up to the front and settled in.

"Did I tell you I write poetry?" he asked breathlessly. "I wrote a sonnet about you at four a.m. this morning."

"Your time would have been better spent sleeping," she told him.

He laughed, and his laughter rose above the general chatter of the auditorium. She quieted him when her father came out on the stage.

It went better, his best yet. He presented his materials with a solid voice, bright gestures, as if their talk the previous evening had regenerated some of his enthusiasm. She felt her pride in him rekindle as she observed and listened. Raptor, archaeopteryx, emu—the ancestral line of the dinosaur. The audience, if not genuinely impressed, was silent, respectful of her father's clarity.

But as she watched, he began to shed dust.

She felt Tom's thumb massaging her wrist, working its way up into her shirtsleeve.

"Not right now," she whispered.

Tom pulled his arm back with a nervous chuckle. Seemingly, he had not even realized he was doing it, and he returned his attention to the stage.

Then it happened, very quickly. Her father's arm bumped the lectern, and a bit of him came off from the back of his hand, disintegrating into powder at his feet. Most of the audience hadn't noticed yet, but she could see the breaks in his skin, little fractures, like the dried-up pond behind their farmhouse in the summer. She felt Tom's arm

twitch beside her. He opened his mouth. A word had caught in the back of his throat.

“No,” she said, softly at first, then louder. “*No.*”

Her father’s entire stature crumbled, his jacket and trousers collapsing into a pile. Before she could stand, before she could even call to him, he had disappeared in a grayish cloud, leaving behind a mound of dust and crushed earth. The auditorium went silent, at first unsure what they had seen. Then, when she screamed, she let loose a crescendo of murmurs, sounds of shock, horror and melancholy. Tom was standing next to her, reaching awkwardly for her shoulders, but when she looked him in the face, he seemed baffled.

A professor stood up from the third row, addressing her directly: “Did you know?”

“Did I *know*?” she said in anguish. “Know *what*?”

The professor gestured to the dust-pile on stage. “Did you know this was going to happen?”

“No!” she said, and broke into tears. “Are you saying—? But there was nothing I could do for him. I asked. There was nothing.”

“No, no one’s blaming you,” Tom said gently.

“Yes, of course, girl, no one blames you,” said the professor. “These men, they do this to themselves.”

“No—” she said. “He didn’t do this to himself either. That’s not what happened.” But already the faculty in the audience were conceding it, sharp, sad nods of assent breaking out in little tremors across the auditorium. Yes, he did it to himself, as men of the past often do. She tried again to protest, to defend her father, but she felt the force of this consensus hit her and carry her under like a wave. Students looked to their professors with anxiety, wanting desperately to leave but seeking direction as to how and whether they should. Somehow, she hated their squeamishness most of all. At least the disparaging professors, some of them coming to the ends of their careers, were willing to look at the dust-pile head-on. However, when the custodian came out with his broom—that was too much. With quiet groans, they looked away, and even she, his daughter, could not stand to watch the stage be swept.

There was only Tom now, her vibrant young athlete, her engineer, her chemist. She sat with him on the steps outside the auditorium, numb

with grief, his damp handkerchief crumpled in her hand. There was still a great commotion around them, students and professors talking in quick voices about what had happened at the lecture. Tom's round face was still nonplussed. Several times, he seemed to attempt a profound statement, only to stop just short of saying it aloud. She could tell he wasn't used to being in a situation where no words seemed appropriate.

Eventually, he gave up on being profound and spoke timidly:

"I'm trying to remember what my father once told me, about the essential difference between women and men."

She looked up, observing his face through a fog of tears.

"He said—what was it he said?" Tom closed his eyes in concentration. "'Women are immortal through their children. Men are immortal through their legacy.' He said—that's why it's so important, what men make with their own hands here on earth."

She crumpled up the handkerchief, the pain of fresh tears knotting the back of her throat. "Do you think that's true?"

"I'm not sure," he said. "Maybe. I'm not sure." He saw her pained, wet eyes, staring him down. "No, I don't think it's true. It's utter nonsense."

But after this point, across many years, Tom's boundless energy would accelerate his career beyond measure. When she married him in his hometown of Dayton, Ohio, in the blistering heat of August, he would then be working for his father. Soon, he would switch over to General Motors, for whom he would invent a pivotal gasoline compound that would contribute to the rise of the auto industry and the deadly poisoning of many factory workers. He would contract polio in his fifties, become paralyzed, and accidentally strangle himself to death with the system of pulleys he devised to help get him out of bed in the morning. Carrying a tray of tea into his room, she would find him.

Now, on the steps outside the auditorium at Cornell, even in the wake of the tragedy he'd witnessed, she could feel his heart on fire, his yearning for the triumphs that would pave his way. As she sat in his light, she could feel her own dwindling. She could feel it stretching into a long day by the window, staring out.

A THOUSANDTH OF A SECOND

ELLEN GOLDSTEIN

Andrea, the woman conducting the interview, looks almost as nervous as I feel.

“So why do you want to work at the American Meteorological Society? I mean, other than the view,” she gestures around us at the blue and gold room in the Beacon Hill mansion and the tall windows that overlook the Frog Pond on the Boston Common.

The night before, my roommate quizzed me with interview questions. I knew my three strengths, and my three weaknesses had just enough spin to make me look self-aware, but not overzealous. But this question made me freeze. Why did I want to copyedit meteorological journals? Why did I want to spend my work day in a silent room reading for misplaced commas and matching citations and references? Why would I want to dedicate myself to such a mind-numbing career? It was because I had grown up with books on ordinary differential equations stacked on the bathroom radiator; because I knew the Pythagorean theorem when I was seven; because I was nearing thirty and tired of working at the bookstore; because I had few skills other than writing sonnets, being polite to people even when they annoyed me, and cracking “that’s what she said” jokes; because I loved my father and he was dead.

My father was an astronomer, and died when I was 24. I associate two things with him: science and loss. When I was five we used to play

two word games. The first one just involved us asking each other “Why?” until I started giggling uncontrollably or my mother implored us to stop, whichever came first. The second one, which drove my mother slightly less crazy, began

“What’s a thousandth of a second?”

“A millisecond.”

“What’s a thousandth of a millisecond?”

“A microsecond.” We followed this game through nanoseconds, picoseconds, femtoseconds, and back up to a second. I did this long before I knew what any of those words meant, and so I created images to help myself remember them. Picoseconds were little tiny bubbles. Femtoseconds were both small and distant, the Pluto of seconds. My father thought the division of seconds was entertaining, and because he was my father, I did too.

In the front sitting room at the American Meteorological Society I look at Andrea and try to say that poetry gave me an attention to detail, which was the only thing I could think of other than launching into my life history. But what comes out of my mouth makes no sense. I stop. We stare at each other. My inability to speak burns between us, and I turn bright red. This is my chance for the first grown-up job I ever really wanted. The job made sense to me. I could imagine walking across the Common from the train. It would be like my father going to work every day at the university where he taught, an entry to his world, through words, the only way I knew. I may not have known much about the weather, but I knew plenty about scientists.

“Let’s try that again,” Andrea says gently.

A year into the job, while looking up something else, I discover that my father had missed a few seconds. Beyond femtoseconds were attoseconds, zeptoseconds, and yoctoseconds. These seconds sound like science fiction, a curse word in a made-up alien language. Could new seconds have been found since my father learned the litany of division, as instruments measure things with increasing precision? Or did I forget the details? The old game echoes in my ear as I go back to the paper I’m editing and add a quick author query about the original term I had looked up. AU: Expansion of acronym OK? The copyeditor does not receive the scientists’ responses to her queries, and I sometimes feel as

if I am sending my queries into space. I imagine the male scientists wear plaid shirts and khaki shorts like my father, with dark socks pulled halfway up their calves. I want to query my father. AU: Memory correct?

IN WHICH I SEARCH THE EARTH FOR THE SWEETEST THING AND FIND IT IN A POOL

SARAH BROUSSARD WEAVER

Is there anything sweeter than to abruptly look up from your book, as if someone tapped you on the shoulder, to meet your son's green eyes in the pool a few yards away? To know that you felt his gaze on you, that it called to you while you were reading an essay—about a dog running on the highway, but *really about* the fight inside women to survive—to meet the eyes that opened for the first time six years ago? No.

He was born into my hands; I caught him, slippery-slimy, as he squeezed from the gateway between my legs. He opened his eyes when I lay him on my chest. I splayed in the birthing tub—a plastic swimming pool recommended by Dinah, my miniature hippie British Jewish midwife—and he opened them, dark blue then, screwed up against the dim light. He'd come from light and love but also utter darkness. And I, struggling through childbirth and afterpains without drugs, forgot everything as waves of love damn near drowned me. I gasped. Nonsense ran through my head, nothing able to express this. I looked up at his father, who was stationed at my shoulders, whom I'd forbidden to leave my side during labor—he'd had to beg me to use the bathroom, and I ordered him to *run back*—and saw the gratefulness rolling down his cheeks. No. There isn't a sweeter thing.

BASICS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

GERRY LAFEMINA

Like electrons around the nucleus of an atom
blown large in a grade school science model,
flies orbited the animal corpse. Here they are:
all the basics of the physical world exactly

as taught in 1982, when crushes were just
lingering glances at girls across a school yard.
Long phone conversations with friends, all of whom
certainly knew nothing. Their names have become

a kind of dust blown at a final birthday party.
The next morning, summer receding into that pastiche
we call memory, all the guests already departed.
What had I wished for? The ineffable forever out of reach.

Now there's only the beach, its pistachio grasses, &
the car in the far lot, & the to-do list's impatient invitees &
the dead raccoon with its maggots. The body will rot
back into the earth, licked by the highest tides

or else some park ranger will arrive with work gloves
to throw the remains into a pick up truck, drive off.
The flies scatter & follow. There's no romance in this
even as the late afternoon light makes the gulls

almost pretty, & the Atlantic wearing its epaulets of sun.
Whatever I wanted, this is what I've received:
she's rolled her pants legs up & stands ankle deep
in the surf. The days are shortening. They're long enough.

CONTRIBUTORS



Allison Adair's poems appear or are forthcoming in *Best New Poets 2015*, *Boston Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*; hypertext projects appear on *The Rumpus* and *Electric Literature*. Winner of the Fall 2015 Orlando Prize and 2014 Fineline Competition, she teaches at Boston College and Grub Street.

Kenzie Allen is a descendant of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. Her work can be found in *Drunken Boat*, *The Iowa Review*, *SOFTBLOW*, *Kweli*, and other venues, and she is the managing editor of the *Anthropoid* collective. A graduate of the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan, she was born in West Texas and tumbleweeds around with frequency.



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Brandon Barrett lives in rural Virginia where he is a practicing cardiologist. His short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Literary Review*, the *Cossack Review*, and *Jersey Devil Press*. He has been working on a novel for more years than he cares to admit.

John F. Buckley and Martin Ott

began their ongoing games of poetic volleyball in the spring of 2009. Since then, their collaborations have been accepted into more than eighty journals and anthologies, including *Barrow*



Street, *Drawn to Marvel*, *Map Literary*, *Rabbit Ears: TV Poems*, *Redivider*, and *ZYZZYVA*, and gathered into two full-length collections on Brooklyn Arts Press, *Poets' Guide to America* (2012) and *Yankee Broadcast Network* (2014).



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Andrew Collard lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and is an MFA candidate at Western Michigan University. Recent poems can be found in *Posit*, *The Bear Review*, and *Five Quarterly*. He thinks *Mirror Ball* is Neil Young's most underrated album.



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Ann S. Epstein's writing includes stories, novels, and creative nonfiction, and has been published in *Emrys Journal*, *Clark Street Review*, *Passages North*, *Red Rock Review*, *William and Mary Review*, *theNewerYork*, *Long Story*, *Sewanee Review*, and *The Normal School*. She also has a Ph.D. in developmental psychology and MFA in textiles. Many of her stories have historical settings that liberally mix fact and fiction. She is gratified to have forgotten what is and is not real when a work is finished.

Ellen Goldstein was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. Her work has appeared in journals such as *The Common*, *Post Road*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *Measure*; as well as in the anthologies *Not Quite What I Was Planning*, *Bloomsbury Anthology of Contemporary Jewish American Poetry*, *Letters to the World*, and *Queer South*, which was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award.



Jen Julian's work has appeared in Press 53's *Open Awards Anthology* for 2010 and 2013, *Four Way Review*, *New Delta Review*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, and *The Antigoniish Review* among other places. She is currently a Creative Writing PhD candidate at the University of Missouri, Columbia, where she also studies sci-fi and speculative fiction. She hails from rural North Carolina.

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Kristie Betts Letter is an award-winning high school teacher whose writing has appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *The North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Evergreen Review*, *Washington Square*, *Passages North*, *Pangolin Papers* and *The Southern Humanities Review*. She's obsessed with Geeks Who Drink trivia contests and her novel *Snow and White* has just been picked up by KT Literary.

Allison Linville's received her MFA from the University of Montana in Missoula, where she also worked as the editor of *CutBank*. She is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize and a Brainerd Foundation Fellowship. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Ghost Town*, *the Bellingham Review*, *Cascadia Review*, *Cirque Journal*, *the Whitefish Review*, and more.



Amy Miller's poetry has appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *Willow Springs*, and *ZYZZYVA*. She won the Cultural Center of Cape Cod National Poetry Competition, judged by Tony Hoagland, and has been a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize and the 49th Parallel Award. She lives in Ashland, Oregon.

Stephen S. Mills is the author of the Lambda Award-winning book *He Do the Gay Man in Different Voices* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2012) and *A History of the Unmarried* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2014). His work has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *PANK*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Assaracus*, *The Rumpus*, and others. He lives in New York City.



Robert Moulthrop lives and works in New York City. *To Tell You The Truth, Stories* is available from Amazon. Awards from NY International Fringe Festival, NJ State Council on the Arts, Literal Latte Fiction Contest, Cartaret Writers Association, Wordrunner e-Chapbook, and Helen Magazine. Publications in-

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Hila Ratzabi was selected by Adrienne Rich for a National Writers Union Poetry Prize. Her poetry has been published in *Narrative*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Linebreak*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and others. She holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence, is editor-in-chief of *Storyscape*, and lives in Philadelphia.

Roz Ray is a sometimes long-form, sometimes short-form writer living in Seattle. She was a top three finalist for Mixer Publishing's Literary Science Fiction Contest, and is currently revising her first historical fiction novel. She graduated with an MFA in Fiction from the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, and when she is not writing, she teaches fiction to elementary school students and builds houses.



Noah Saunders was raised in Corona, California. He has lived in Washington D.C., Chicago and South Korea, among other places. His past jobs include waiter, paralegal, dishwasher, industrial worker and teacher. This is his first publication. He stays in Ulsan.

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Martha Silano is the author of *Reckless Lovely*, *The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, *Blue Positive*, *What the Truth Tastes Like*, and, with Kelli Russell Agodon, *The Daily Poet: Day-By-Day Prompts For Your Writing Practice*. She edits *Crab Creek Review* and teaches at Bellevue College.

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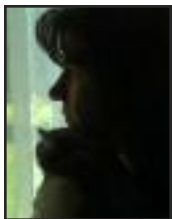


Lito Velázquez is a native of Toronto who has lived and studied music, food, and literature in San Francisco, Miami, New York, and Columbus, Georgia. He earned a Master's in Creative Writing from UC Davis, and has been published in Canada and the United States. He is currently at work on a collection of short stories called *Immediate Beings*, and teaches at the University of the Pacific.

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Karen J. Weyant's poetry and prose has been published in *About Place*, *The Barn Owl Review*, *Caesura*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Hobart*, *Poetry East*, *Storm Cellar*, *River Styx*, *Waccamaw*, and *Whiskey Island*. Her most recent collection of poetry, *Wearing Heels in the Rust Belt*, won Main Street Rag's 2011 Chapbook contest and was published in 2012. She teaches at Jamestown Community College in Jamestown, New York. In her spare time, she explores the Rust Belt regions of Western New York and Northern Pennsylvania. Her website is www.karenjweyant.com.

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ABOUT TLR

T*ahoma Literary Review* is a journal published three times a year in both print and e-reader formats. We are based in the Pacific Northwest, but we are international in scope.

We at *Tahoma Literary Review* are committed to producing a literary journal from the professional writer's perspective; we believe that writers deserve compensation for the weeks or months it takes to compose a publishable poem or story. A major goal of *Tahoma Literary Review* is to show that writers and publishers can support each other not only artistically, but also financially.

We believe in a collaborative publication model. Literary journals that pay their contributors are rare; most journals offer only exposure, a somewhat questionable concept in a landscape that is crowded with writers, but sadly limited by lack of recognition in mainstream culture. A substantial number of journals now hold contests, with entry fees typically in the \$15 to \$30 range—usually with one winner, and maybe a few finalist prizes—instead of paying all contributors.

Our model attempts to find a middle ground that is more equitable.

TLR offers both payment and exposure to our contributors by using a substantial portion of our total income to support our authors. Payment for fiction and nonfiction ranges from a minimum of \$50 to \$300. Payment for poetry and cover art is \$25 to \$50. The amount is determined by the revenues received from submission fees, print journal sales and contributions from sources such as donors and foundations. To en-

sure transparency and fairness, we will publish an audited quarterly revenue statement to verify the funds received for the submission period.

Even if a submission is not accepted for publication, submitters get value for their fees. Their payment gives them access to our Endnotes area, which features artist interviews, writing advice from experts, and more. Supporters (donors and print subscribers) also have access to this area.

If you'd like to support our work, please donate via our web site. Every dollar donated to *TLR* goes to pay our authors. Even small amounts are appreciated.

TLR STAFF



Kelly Davio, Publisher and Poetry Editor, is the author of the poetry collection *Burn This House* (Red Hen Press, 2013). She is the former Managing Editor of *The Los Angeles Review* and is a book reviewer for *Women's Review of Books*. She earned her MFA in poetry at the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts. After many years of teaching at the high school level, she turned to freelance writing, editing, and small press PR. Find her at

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Joe Ponepinto, Publisher and Fiction Editor, is the author of *Curtain Calls: A Novel of the Great War* (Woodward Press, 2015). His stories, articles, and criticism have been published in dozens of literary journals. A New York native, Joe has lived in a dozen locations around the country, and now writes in Washington State, where he lives with his wife, Dona, and Henry the coffee-drinking dog. His writing and editing services are available at thirdreader.com.



Yi Shun Lai (say “yeeshun” for her first name), Nonfiction Editor, has been a writer and editor for oh, practically ever. Her work appeared most recently at *CutbankOnline.org*, *The-Toast.net*, *TheHairpin.com*, and in *Apeiron Review*. In a previous life, she worked in the environmental and outdoors journalism field and wrote for the legendary J. Peterman



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