

10078

NORTHBRIDGE REVIEW

SPRING 07

NR

STAFF

EDITORS & MANAGERS

WENDY GROSSKOPFMANAGING EDITOR
DARYN HOUSTON.....POETRY EDITOR
JENNIFER JONES BUSINESS BOARD MANAGER
MICHELLE NEWMAN..... LAYOUT & DESIGN EDITOR
TARYN THOMPSONFICTION EDITOR
JOSE YARGAS..... DESKTOP PUBLISHING EDITOR
MONA HOUGHTON..... FACULTY ADVISOR

EDITORIAL BOARD

LAYOUT & DESIGN

DARYN HOUSTON
TARYN THOMPSON

DESKTOP PUBLISHING

WENDY GROSSKOPF
LORETTA MCCORMICK

FICTION BOARD

JENNIFER JONES
LORETTA MCCORMICK
ROBERT MINSKY
PADRAIC ROLLINS
JOSE YARGAS

POETRY BOARD

WENDY GROSSKOPF
MICHELLE NEWMAN

BUSINESS BOARD

ROBERT MINSKY
PADRAIC ROLLINS

AWARDS

THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW FICTION AWARD, GIVEN ANNUALLY, RECOGNIZES EXCELLENT FICTION BY A CSUN STUDENT PUBLISHED IN THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW. THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW WILL ANNOUNCE THE WINNER OF THIS AWARD IN THE FALL OF 2007.

THE RACHEL SHERWOOD AWARD, GIVEN ANNUALLY IN MEMORY OF RACHEL SHERWOOD, RECOGNIZES EXCELLENT POETRY BY A CSUN STUDENT PUBLISHED IN THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW. THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS AWARD WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE FALL OF 2007.

THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW IS ALSO HONORED TO PUBLISH THE WINNER OF THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS AWARD. THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS AWARD WILL BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN THE FALL OF 2007.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE NORTHRIDGE REVIEW GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF CSUN AND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FACULTY AND STAFF (KARIN CASTILLO, MARJIE SEAGOE, JENNIFER LI, KAVI BOWERMAN, HERBY CARLOS, JOHNSON HAI, ANNIE BUADO AND DAMON LIU) FOR ALL THEIR HELP. THANKS ALSO TO BOB MEYER AND COLORTREND FOR THEIR CONTINUED ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT.

SUBMISSIONS

ALL SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY A COVER LETTER THAT INCLUDES NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL AND TELEPHONE NUMBER, AS WELL AS THE TITLE OF THE SUBMITTED WORK. NO NAMES SHOULD APPEAR ON MANUSCRIPTS OR ART WORK. YOU MAY SUBMIT UP TO 5 POEMS AND UP TO 20 PAGES OF FICTION. ART SUBMISSION MAY BE TWO-OR THREE-DIMENSIONAL: ALL MEDIUMS ARE WELCOME. MANUSCRIPTS WILL BE RECYCLED. SEND TO:

**NORTHRIDGE REVIEW
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
18111 NORDHOFF STREET
NORTHRIDGE, CA 91330**

EDITOR'S NOTE

Italo Calvino writes in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (published posthumously) that “[e]ver since antiquity it has been thought that the saturnine temperament is the one proper to artists, poets, and thinkers and ... [c]ertainly literature would never have existed if some human beings had not been strongly inclined to introversion, inclined to forget themselves for hours and days on end and to fix their gaze on [those] silent words” (52).

Such attention to the careful, meditative quality of those silent words is clearly visible in the works we’ve selected for this publication. As an example, look to Nancy Carroll’s poem “Nocturne.” Here, there is a sense not so much of *introversion* but of *introspection*, a nuance of difference that gives credit to this poem’s highly reflective quality, allowing for a deep exploration of not only self, but also of the wide, surrounding world.

It is the idea of forgetting one’s self that is the difference between the temperament of *introversion* versus that of *introspection*. Whereas *introversion* is the somewhat limited quality of directing one’s interest solely to self, *introspection* is the wider view of examining one’s internal state of being. *Introversion* stops with the self, whereas *introspection* considers one’s own ego, and in context to that self’s place in the surrounding outside. The ability to see on a wide realm—the extremes of both *introspection* and *extroversion*—is the accumulation of those hours and days, months and years, spent fixing a gaze upon language, on words, and on that which allows for the expression of these deep-felt thoughts.

I point to Omer Zalmanowitz’s story, “Wuppertal,” as an example of the genius gained from that deeply understood awareness of the wide arc connecting both internal and external explorations, which can only be gained from not *introversion* but from *introspection*.

And that is all. I wish you a good reading.

Wendy Grosskopf

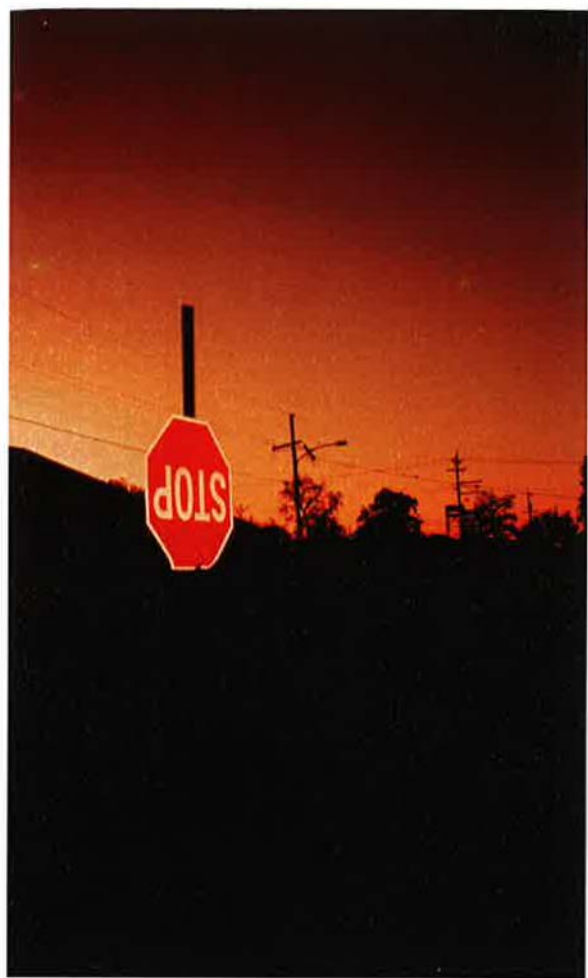


TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

MARY ANGELINO	
FOR IO	21
IMPRESSIONS	39
AT YOUR PLACE	45
ARTISTS AS GESTURE OF ROOM	111
NANCY CARROLL	
TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
MEMORIAL	51
NOCTURNE	110
LISA COLLACO	
I CRY WILLOW LEAVES	85
RACHELLE ARLIN CREDO	
HALF WAY HOME	123
DAN FARLEY	
THE DAY I PUT DAD AWAY	50
DENIS FEEHAN	
TRASH DAY TUESDAY	109
PAUL HUMANN	
TAKE ME, PERSONALLY OR 36 CENTS PER LINE	2
RICHARD F. KILPATRICK	
PROTEUS	20
ARTE POVERA	40
ASHLYN MORSE	
THE GRACE OF DAYBREAK	96
AMBER NORWOOD	
PRAGMATICS	12
MONSOON	41
NATURAL HISTORY	108
JAMES PARKS	
MANTICORE	19

JUAN CARLOS PARRILLA	
<i>WAITING FOR THE POETS</i>	69
<i>SGV SPARROW</i>	75
JEREMY QUINTERO	
<i>HEARD OUTSIDE OF A HOLLYWOOD CLUB</i>	71
KATE MARTIN ROWE	
<i>DOLL MORPHOLOGY</i>	77
KAROLINA SALOUN	
<i>PAINTED FACELESS</i>	55
TAMARA TRUJILLO	
<i>REYERDIE FOR C.B.</i>	82

FICTION & DRAMA

CAROLYN CLEVELAND	
<i>ONE NIGHT</i>	78
RACHEL MYLES	
<i>MEDEA'S SONS</i>	22
BRIAN NORDSTROM	
<i>12 SECONDS</i>	3
TREVOR NOWELL	
<i>THE DAY OF ROCKENING</i>	72
CHRISTOPHER PAGE	
<i>HUMEN</i>	14
KATE MARTIN ROWE	
<i>KIT MEETS CRONKITE</i>	97
MARINA TERTERYAN	
<i>MAP OF PARIS</i>	42
J. W. WANG	
<i>HANDS OF FORTUNE</i>	113
CRAIG WATKINSON	
<i>I DO NOT LOOK DOWN</i>	46
DARRYL WHITE	
<i>CROOKED HOUSE ON THE HILL</i>	52

SONYA WONG BIG GUNS	86
OMER ZALMANOWITZ WUPPERTAL100
JAYNA ZIMMELMAN THE ORIGINS OF HONEY56

ART

TIFFANY COLLINS COVER ART UNTITLED11, 70, 107
CHERI AMOUR 9TH WARDV
UNTITLED84
ETTIE LERNER UNTITLED38
HEATHER HAGER UNTITLED76
SETH MARTINI FIGURE DRAWINGS (30)13
UNTITLED112
NOUSIN HOSSEINZADEH BAZAAR44
NAKED WOMAN54

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NANCY CARROLL

False Starts

I always believed your voice, our choice

The Book of Al

Open like memory, cinema in a box

Winter Sticks

You juggle like snowmen with no coal

Collaborations

Distance knits my wounds

Telephone Message

Please record, after the glass cracks

Rabbis and Pastors

Vows kept silent, have no home

Sapphires

Frozen finger tips

The Train Wreck

Disbelief, even on impact

Beams From Inside Your Book

I don't recall mimosa being so heavy

Trifling Inventories

Take it; after all it was your mother's

Feeble Theories

I haven't found the last page

Sincere Conclusions

Closing doors means sealing time

TAKE ME, PERSONALLY OR 36 CENTS PER LINE

PAUL HUMANN

Tall single Caucasian male
with speech impediment
desperately seeking
someone to teach me
the meaning of intercourse.

Likes the smell of used book stores,
cloud-thick nights, art house
indie films that beg the question,
and cheese.

Dislikes pets that could pass for kitchen sponges,
chicks who change their minds
too often, country music,
and pretty much anything
having to do with logical positivism.

Applicants must have an affinity
for the written word.

Contact me if interested or
if you're just looking for a way
to pass the time.

BRIAN NORDSTROM

On and on, it was like, until now, the possibility had never presented itself before. But it had; the life of anything always exists with the possibility of its end, even when that end appears distant and invisible. Her end was no further than her lover's, screaming next to her. Another end in front was this poor man's, but she wasn't sure if she already missed it, but each breath seemed to be it. The impact they both had on her, like their rising and falling chests, waned with each second. In all, she didn't want to hear or see any of it. But it was all there without her blessing and the premonition it brought was just too confusing.

It was obvious what her lover was saying, or, at least, what was the natural conclusion of his words. That was clear. Her ears, however, suffered the same fate as the rest of her senses: a suffocation by the foggy haze brought on by the suddenness of the moment. But it did allow sounds through as if they had some kind of unique quality among the rest of everything present. This was apparent by his screams. Their arrival, every time, always seemed a long time coming.

The thickness between the two of them insulated the moments they shared, time passed as always, but inside each moment thoughts sprung up at a pace that dizzied her dimmed attention. Her mind stood still, immobile, but like a pinball it bounced around the interior of the Audi and ricocheted out the window, over the puddling pools of warm blood, through the poor man lying on the concrete, down the canyon and then back where they began: at the beginning of a vision, cracked, much like the bone above the ridge of her eyebrow. That is where she found a swollen mound and a place to condense herself among all the chaos outside. It was all confusion but one thing was apparent: the gravity of the situation had transcended the simple fact that blood trickled up from her eyebrow, off her forehead, and down to the interior roof of the car. Among all this violence, below, out the side window, through her swaying knees, the sky remained still, grounding each moment.

Maybe it was the blood rushing to her head, or the splitting headache, but her lover's screaming, next to her, over and over, felt self-indulgent. She had been here with him before. He always became a whirlpool of attention in every situation. (Drawing everything towards himself...) But this time her thoughts absorbed the commotion around her. (He needs to shut up...) And she found her mind screaming at the spidered windshield, (What is that noise...) and at the sky, which remained still. And the ground was moving. And the limits of the vehicle were constricting. (What is happening...) The automobile had always remained secure and defined in the past. (That's the point...)

Her head whiplashed and turned to the side. Outside through the window, the ground stopped moving, finally, and a body rolled forward spraying its blood-red impression all over the scene.

The wife of her lover always had an Audi with a low ceiling. Now it was pushing closer and closer to her. The car had always seemed spacious. It wasn't one of those cars where the passenger and driver are sitting on top of one another, elbows in a fencing match, just like most of the cars she had owned herself throughout the years. When the two of them took their drives together, she preferred to take his wife's car, if possible. A lot of fun to drive, it could outrun anybody on the road, drive anywhere. The most enjoyable and effortless car she'd ever driven. That made the idea, the shame of driving her lover's wife's car, a background concern. Before that, she never really cared about driving in the first place.

Looking around, the car was dying. Becoming a lump of useless metal. That noise, whining, burning almost, roared on though. At least the lump could do that; at least it could drown out her lover's yelling, for whatever that was worth. (On and on. Pointless...) Before, all the way back when he first started yelling, it was difficult to figure out what was wrong. The way he moved, flailing but in control, looked like he could carry himself out no problem. (He stares out the window and curses and pleads...) His eyes examined his pockets, they grabbed the steering wheel, and they threw it at the poor man on the concrete. (They haven't searched me once, yet...) The only things keeping him there were the restraints that were built into the Audi, so all he needed to do was unbuckle himself. (He should have crawled out of the

car by now... I should have...)

She watched her own seatbelt buckle remain still.
Her arm wasn't moving.

Every word of his was a dense ripple, ocean sized, and when his screaming came toward her in the passenger seat she swallowed more and more of each crest, gagging. Finally salty vomit streamed into her mouth. She couldn't yell anymore. She couldn't hear him yell, either.

Over on the concrete the poor man laid, she had seen him land there; it was the first thing she could remember following her blackout. When the Audi ran into him she opened her mouth to scream, or maybe gasp, but regardless nothing came out. She was too involved in her mind, not screaming at the time. Her lover was driving, he turned towards her, and was saying, I feel it's best if we keep it the way it is, he was saying, how difficult he has it, he was rationalizing, and talking about himself, to himself, he didn't see the poor biker, he didn't see the drainage ditch. He did see the poor man's limbs get caught under the upturned roof, he did hear him screaming, even among all the other shouting going on, even among all the screeching metal and that whining noise, turning and turning. Her lover did see the blood, he did watch his wife's upturned car slide into the post, he did see the torn, ugly, deflated body roll forward, he did watch the woman's head bounce off of the dashboard. (Didn't he...) He did have to experience the terribly nauseating stench of the inflating airbag exploding into his body.

At that moment, choking on her meal, in order to change the situation for the best, she ignored the significance of any other, and began perceiving in new terms. The poor man's jaw was falling down, it was rising up, and it was easy to see him try to speak. (What could he say...) She decided that those movements meant nothing, even while the poor man stared right at her through the very windshield that killed him. His eyes had no focus; they just sat and waited for his shell to turn to dust, they displayed no reaction to the situation around him. (That's what makes a dead body dead...) Lying there, mute, and dying, he must have been the living dead. With no more, future reactions become superfluous and he appeared to know that: he had given up trying to create some kind of impression on the world that

had ceased impressing him. (Besides his broken back...) The situation could not get any worse (How could it for this man...) and was hopeless, the situation merely became of the moment. (He waits for somebody to remove his useless mass for him...) But he remained anyway. And with nobody paying much attention, with nobody to dictate his short path to his end but himself, his flesh died alone, as all had done before him.

Vomit streamed out of her mouth onto the roof. She coughed up what was remaining in her throat. It tasted like garlic and cheese omelet. It splashed on the roof of the car, mixing with the blood that had already fallen from her forehead. The vomit didn't smell; neither did anything else.

She couldn't entirely tell, but it seemed her lover's foot was still on the gas pedal. The Audi's tires were spinning, up in the air, searching for safe ground like a turtle with its underside exposed to the sun. A loud, labored noise came from the engine and shrouded all others: the ambulance siren, the screaming, a cell phone. Still yelling, his eyes roamed the front seat of the Audi. The woman spit and called her lover's name. He didn't turn, didn't acknowledge, but the whole of his body shrank and he stiffened, effectively hiding himself. But his yelling was unrelenting.

She continued her own yelling; with each series of screams she increased her volume. From her perspective, all he needed to do was unbuckle and crawl out of the now trapezoidal window. He could step outside. (It's not complicated...) Out there, there was movement and breathable air; no corrosive gasoline fumes poisoned them both from the inside. Outside there was independence. Inside, upside down, strapped to a seat, there was no way they could examine each other, check for wounds, maybe even embrace. There was no way they could serve each other. There was only concealment and confusion, injury.

Her shouts were met with her lover's pleas; they started to drown out her voice. Her senses had fallen back into their previous place now, more uncomfortable than ever. But purging her breakfast injected her person with an energy that had previously been absent for what seemed an unnecessarily long time. Specific words exploded in a fit of recognition in her mind. She clung to them. He was reaching out, calling. His voice was pleading, worried, ashamed.

Those few words that did make it through the whining engine, the fog of the event, and the bulge on her forehead seemed to indicate he was sorry. He was so sorry and so absorbed in his pleas he still hadn't the energy to turn and glance at her next to him, or at the poor dead man in front of the cracked windshield who lay folded in half and motionless.

That body, an empty bag, sagging and wet, was at that moment the most frightening thing she had ever seen. Her eyes waited on the body to move, just as they had when the Audi hit the bike. She had watched with emotionless apathy. What she found even more troubling was that poor man had watched as a voyeur to his own demise alongside with her. And she waited for answers to appear before her.

The dead man had reluctantly waited for death. (How do I experience this with cold eyes...) Even as the car slid through him the poor man remained calm... in his eyes. Searching for escape, with death coming, his eyes never gave up. He screamed and kicked (oh, how he screamed...) when each new bit of flesh got caught under the car, when it tore, when the familiar color inside bled. (I must have cried...) He felt those pains but the calm in his eyes had kept him alive, preserved from the pain, if even for only a minute. (How long was I out...) He was fighting death until the end and in his remaining seconds there was nothing but suffering. His end was an impassable wall. He couldn't move through it, and the rest couldn't turn around. There was only acceptance left—reluctance and denial only suspends the pain.

She fell down.

A hand had pushed on her seatbelt buckle; it was hers, it came out of nowhere, and it seemed to have finally made it from wherever it was hiding. She fell head first onto the ceiling, maybe an inch in all. The fall onto the tip of her skull wasn't the worst, far from it. Her neck, bent sideways, 90 degrees, provided a nice and stable foundation for the rest of her body crumpled on top of it. It was comfortable in comparison to before. It was about this time when her sense of smell kicked in, vomit with a touch of egg and garlic filled her nose.

Beyond the grotesque horror of the event, what caused her spinning mind so much pain was the breakdown. Between the parties of the event, there was supposed to be interaction. There was supposed to be a transmission of

assumed intent. (The road is a conversation between drivers...) Hitting the poor biker on a lonely and straight stretch of canyon road in the middle of the daytime (Right after our happy breakfast...) was absurd. If everything went as expected, if everybody had remained within the lines that were drawn up, something like sharing a seemingly simple pathway together wouldn't have ended up in such a mess. (So what chance do we have...)

Shaken, she turned towards her lover in the driver's seat and watched him.

"I love you."

He was talking on his phone. It was his wife. A tone: involved, sincere and careful, emanated from his mouth. She had heard that tone before, many times, but never experienced it. She had heard it during the whispering calls that always had the wife's television in the background if they were going to meet up, if they were going to have to 'reschedule.' That tone would always answer the echoes standing behind him. It was always towards his wife, it was always from a distance when the woman heard it. This time it was so close to her it slapped her across the face, forcing her turned head away from the driver's seat.

His mouth pointed towards her future. Not a distant future, like the lovers always had spoke of in the past, not a non-existent future, like the poor dead man's, but a future that served only as a speculated goal. It was a future that was opposed to existing as an end, as in the past. Her future now began and ended all within the context of the moment, as a summation of events. With this in mind she saw their future. He saw police and ambulances. He saw forgiveness. He saw his wife. He had yet to look over. Here she was upside down, propped up on the side of her neck and she didn't want him, or anybody, to see her in this way. At this point the acknowledgement she looked for had hung in the air so long it didn't matter anymore, the effect it would have had surrendered itself alongside the desire.

(I have to get myself out of this car...) That was her choice because in viewing the useless lump of a body on the concrete, staying there became a fate worse than death. Anything would have been better than that steel purgatory between life and wife. It was so straightforward, but she hadn't thought of it before. (But I had... as long as I've been here...) Escape was always waiting; it was always a possible

conclusion of the situation.

(The problem with cuts on your hand is you feel them with every movement you make...) Before she even considered the action, her hand, the same tardy one that dropped her to the ceiling, was grasping blindly through the shattered window. Looking for somebody to pull her out. Looking to pull herself out. Moving back and forth her palm ran against the hot street catching shards of glass, little else. It came back into the Audi and she stared at the shards, the rejection. They were pieces of an outside world she felt she had been removed from for so long.

Pricking, sticking into her, they hurt; they flooded her eyes with painful tears. She looked through the passenger window, cracked, broken, restricting, and watched her palm spill outside the car again, searching for an anchor.

The pain was so intense she retracted her arm, again. She was ashamed of her failed attempt at escape even before it had ended. The pain, completely predictable, aggravated that shame. In the poor man's eyes, which were resting on the concrete and supporting the rest of his slouched and lifeless body, she saw herself. The poor man hadn't expected anything when he started riding his bike that day, thinking of other things: his job, his exercise, his happy life; the Audi blindsided him without warning. The rest of his life; his previous future, was given up for a ride on the Audi's windshield.

It was pathetic. When trying to save herself she couldn't, wouldn't. Seeing the dead man she absorbed all his pain and suffering. It was now gone for him but still with her. Shrinking, she shrugged it all off. The dead man's face had done everything it could to stay alive before meeting death. Just like she told herself she was doing. But he had suffered for it and she had also. Her limbs could not stand the broken window, the cutting glass.

But her head was stronger. It had to be with her wavering like this, with each retraction of her arm. Waiting to be removed by another and trying to pull herself out from the outside was all hopeless. There was nothing out there that would offer her a way to fix her situation. There was nothing that would free her from the Audi and her lover's upside down phone calls. Nothing to free her from a painful early death with the way those wheels spun as if they were going somewhere. Needing to push from the inside, using

her self to fasten a grip, her foot pushed on the dashboard. Her skull and neck were forced through what remained of the window; it was difficult, and broken glass cut and scraped the whole way through. Later, in retrospect, her head would tell her it wasn't so painful.

With her body halfway out of the car and her feet still trapped she saw all that was outside. A great expanse. The car had been closing in around her for what seemed to frame her entire memory. Now outside, partially, she couldn't understand why it had taken so long. But the smells and feelings of the sky above energized her. She kicked at the Audi and attacked it. She wanted nothing but to destroy its existence for all the pain it caused her. Everything she could bring to mind, her past, her family, her friends, even her love, all became swallowed by its presence around her. In this rage she caused more injury, bruises, a broken ankle, all of them unnecessary, but in doing so she eased her mind superficially. Those moments on the comedown of anger provided her with a direction, outside the automobile.

From there the Audi, once an exciting toy, was nothing. It was a blinking image of what it once was, a misrepresentation of the excitement it had previously evoked. It was without any use now. He was still in it though, happily speaking to his wife. He still stepped on the accelerator. The wheels still spun. Her head throbbed, it bled. Her legs couldn't support her, they were in pain, she crumpled onto the concrete. However, even as the cold expanse above prodded her wounds with cold mountain air they began to feel better. She could choose to move forward or backward now and despite the injury she finally felt freedom for the first in what was a very long time.



UNTITLED

TIFFANY COLLINS

PRAGMATICS

AMBER NORWOOD

A man shares a headstone with his wife.
She stands above it
on Sundays, once planted a cherry tree
to keep it from the rain. i remember
feeling sorry for her, standing over her own name
white-etched in black gloss:
did she shudder at that blank space waiting
for that final year to fill? Or was it just
one of those things . . .

It is gray. A Thursday. We make haste
in the old house; the trucks come tomorrow,
collect donations for the blind.
We've moved my grandparents
to that living purgatory, the inbetween space

we all still fear: the sick walk aimless,
neglected and stark, the air ammonia thick
and end-stopped.

But still, they live. Their move, this cleaning:
these are practical things. But here is guilt foreboding,
that what we must do might quicken things.

Immediately i am twelve, smelling the burn of electric train
as it **scurries the mantle at Christmas. i am eight and sick;**
they **read testimony, sing me well. i am five and together at the table.**
we pray for the broken bird we gathered from the sidewalk in the yard^d.

Collecting heirlooms is heavy work,
all decision, assigning value.
The morning is a bad dream
of paper bags and urgency.

(The things i want are never the things i can carry.)

i want her slender fingers, and his peeled ripe tomatoes.
i gather their stolen seashells, a painting from Indonesia.
i'd like her useless optimism, and for him to remember my name.
i take the opera glasses, his engraved pool cue.
i'd like their years together. i'd like to believe in prayer,
and might,

if that bird, long since buried beneath the maple,
hadn't died in my hands.



FIGURE DRAWING (30)

SETH MARTINI

HUMEN

CHRISTOPHER PAGE

The Hunter watched the herd of antelope thundering across the prairie from the back of the Range Rover. Something had set them on the run but he couldn't see the back of the herd yet in order to tell what exactly that something was.

Finally the herd bounded up over the hill he was parked upon and split in two columns, racing past him on both sides. He could hear their panicked panting and snorting, wind whistling in their foaming nostrils.

The columns closed together again on the other side of his vehicle and disappeared over the rise into the gully on the other side of the hill. He turned back to the direction they'd come from. For a moment there was nothing.

Then a scrawny, naked man appeared, running raggedly and panting for breath, his maleness swaying exhaustedly. The Hunter dropped his binoculars and stared at the scrawny man, his unkempt beard, his wild dreadlocked hair flecked with bits of prairie grasses and his naked skin caked with sun-baked muck and grime. The wild man blinked in shock at the hunter dressed in khaki safari gear, atop his white Range Rover, his neatly trimmed moustache hiding his upper lip.

The two men regarded each other a moment longer.

Then the Hunter spoke.

What in the name of bloody Jesus, Martin and Jeffrey are you doing, man?

The wild man blinked and looked around him, confused.

He broke into a run around the vehicle following the path of the departed antelope. The wild man stopped then and turned.

Could you spare a drop of water, buddy?

The Hunter handed the man his canteen and the wild man drained it, handing it back while wiping his mouth with the back of a mud-streaked limb.

The Hunter took his emptied canteen and the wild man turned and sprinted off with doubled speed. He

disappeared over the hill into the gulley.

The Hunter encountered the wild man again a few days later. The wild man was again chasing antelope, a smaller herd this time. He stopped at the Hunter's vehicle and again asked for water.

This time when he handed the canteen back to the Hunter, the wild man asked if the Hunter wanted to join him.

What are you doing? The Hunter asked, wanting to know first because he was a tactical man, a man of strategy and cunningness.

I'm chasing antelope, the wild man replied.

I can see that, the Hunter countered. Why?

The wild man blinked, confused.

Why not?

The Hunter screwed his face up and he leaned on his gun.

What do you mean, why not?

The wild man glanced over his shoulder at the herd. The antelope had stopped at the top of the next rise as if waiting for the wild man to continue his pursuit. They cropped at the prairie grasses and flicked their stubby tails in the air.

The wild man turned back to the hunter and explained, I'm going to catch one.

Ah! The Hunter responded. You are a hunter like me!

The wild man looked at the man's gun, the Hunter stroking the stock with a smooth hand.

The wild man shook his head. Nah. I just want to catch one, you know, give it a hug.

The Hunter was flabbergasted.

A hug?! Well Jesus and Moses ganging up on Margaret, man, why on earth for?

The wild man smiled and stretched his scrawny limbs. I want to know if it can be done, he said, his broken broad teeth catching the sunlight.

The Hunter blinked, his turn to be confused.

The wild man invited, You wanna come try too?

Try to what?

You know, catch an antelope, give it a hug, see if it can be done?

The Hunter blinked back for such a long time without saying anything the wild man gave up.

Well, if you change your mind, I'll be out there. The wild man pointed to the open plains.

Then he ran off.

The Hunter encountered the wild man chasing herds of antelope of varying sizes a dozen times over the next week. Finally one morning, as a herd broke through his camp, scattering his gear and trampling his rifle to bits, the Hunter accepted the wild man's hand, helping him onto his feet.

The wild man grinned stupidly and waved at the herd that had stopped a few dozen meters distant.

So, what do you say, Hunter, ole friend. Wanna try it yet?

The Hunter looked at his ruined camp, his shattered rifle and the herd. His left eye narrowed and he rubbed his moustache smooth.

Alright, then, how is this done?

The wild man clapped the Hunter on the back proudly.

You won't regret this, huntery pal. It's exhilarating indeed. Come on!

He broke off into a run and the Hunter followed, shedding his khaki safari jacket and grabbing his canteen.

The Hunter had to stop quite often as they ran in pursuit of the antelope herd across the prairie. Several times the Hunter lost sight of the wild man and was left to look around, fearing he was hopelessly lost. But then, after a while, the herd would pass by heading in the opposite direction, followed closer and closer behind by the wild man.

The Hunter had to eventually shed his shirt, then his boots as the heat became unbearable in the afternoon. At nightfall, he rubbed his feet as the wild man made camp simply by sprawling in the coarse grass near the herd he'd been chasing most of that day. The Hunter did the same, exhausted and hungry.

After a morning meal of prairie grass roots and seeds, the duo set out again after another herd of antelope.

The Hunter soon forgot about his camp, his rifle, even his canteen and along the way, his clothes. They ranged farther and farther from his vehicle but he was caught up and consumed by the thrill of the chase. The feel of the

ground pounding under his feet, the rippling sensation of his muscles burning in the sunlight, the grasses whispering past his now bared thighs—he had tossed off his pants three days into the antelope chasing. It took a week longer before he eschewed his boxer shorts, running *au naturel* like the wild man. The swinging of his manhood was a bit uncomfortable at first, but after a few days his body adjusted to the rhythm of running all day long and he didn't seem to notice at all.

The men eventually stopped talking, communicating in gestures and whistles, mimicking their prey. They were getting faster too, closing what was initially up to a 50-meter gap to a bare five, and then three. The Hunter's natural skills for strategy and tactics were energized, enlarged even, and the two wild men began to employ flanking maneuvers and quick turns, using the terrain to slow the antelope and force them to stay in gullies while the feral human pursuers flew across the ridge tops on either side.

The Hunter came to appreciate his wild brother. He respected the man's endurance and capacity for skill and agile tactics on the chase. He even came to admire the wild, flailing dreadlocks and lean limbs. The Hunter's own hair soon grew long and dreadlocked like his mentor's, his moustache trailing down past his mouth and chin into a willowy beard flying in the wind as he ran and ran and ran.

Days passed into weeks and weeks engorged into months. The weather began to change and grew colder at night. The afternoons were still hot and sultry but the men acclimatized to the plain now, their mud-caked bodies growing lean and taut.

Then one day, it happened.

The two feral humen had successfully cornered a small herd of young antelope in a low gully. They flanked the herd and soon both were running apace of the wild-eyed animals.

The wild man glanced over at the Hunter and he back, exchanging the signal they'd worked out over many months of chasing antelope, the signal for the catch. The wild man let out a yelp of glee as he hurdled his left leg over the back of a young doe, landing in the middle of the fleeing herd. The Hunter did the same with his right leg, pinning two antelope between their sprinting bodies.

Suddenly arms flung wide open, and closed, clutching the frightened four-leggeds around their necks. The antelope-

feral human hug lasted for a second—a second that enlarged into a minor eternity until it erupted in ebullient, overwhelming joy, then was broken as both creatures became aware of their heightened discomfort the strange humen behavior had struck in their antelopian minds. With viscous snorts of exasperation the four-legged pair bucked into the air, out of the arms of the two naked men.

Arms and legs, beards and dreadlocks, male members and knees tumbled together in a giddy sprawl, lurching to a skidding halt across the bent grasses.

The two wild men looked up into the feral blue sky above them, their chests heaving as they caught their breath. They looked at each other and high-fived their success, laughing hysterically in triumph and elated exhaustion.

As the sun sank lower towards the western horizon, the men finally sat upright. They looked at each other and smiled broadly again. Then, hands clasped together, brothers in success, the feral men rose from the prairie grass and faced the rising moon in the east.

We did it, the wild man breathed.

We caught an antelope, the Hunter finished. And we gave 'em a hug.

They looked at each other and embraced.

It can be done, one said.

Indeed, it can be done, said the other.

Arms over the others' shoulders, the two men headed in the direction of a gulley they knew had a pond. They had earned a long moonlight swim, and a drink and a bath.

Whom shall we run down next?

I dunno.

Wonder if a gazelle is any faster than an antelope?

I saw some up north a few days back...

MANTICORE

JAMES PARKS

See there sulk the impious Manticore
Thrice by vice rowed with spiny toothy fang
Amid the thatched rough its stinger pang
Coiled 'round the dhak, blaze a mane of gore
A hissy mock of trumpet pipe on tor
And the Manticore sings jeery harangue
As the toxic sting of tail leaps in spang
To venom prick and gobble up in roar
What devil guise dost face this lowly prey?
"No more than man," he'd say if he could speak
Yet with vex, it hex a pox to make you meek
Guttle and glurp a kill lacking dismay
So, pray thee—wary of that feral beast
Lest ye be next to charm its bile feast

PROTEUS

RICHARD F. KILPATRICK

To live a deathless name
one must withstand the melancholy
of distance, transform the temporal
as it shuffles into the current
moment, blinded,
deafened, dumb—
the air is cleansed

of yesterday,
that frightened mind of space
when it all seems to be falling apart;
you say sadness is yours, I say you are
what you love and you shapeshift
to avoid answering questions
that might denude an understanding.
So hum your phatic communion
while you sleep, dream origami—

Om Tat Sat, Om!

You evoke cosmic jazz, anti-eloquent
swings, Blue Mountain
cappuccinos, yet miss the humor when
intruders steal surveillance cameras
but not their prophetic tapes.
Today is a gift, I say; say moon jellies
and mugwort—these words are playful and sublime
like drunk, waiting to happen.

Oh, I know you crave time's eventualness,
but a map means little
if you never open the door. Imbibe the mood,
my wasted friend. Your vision of the world
obscures its nature

FOR IO

MARY ANGELINO

The victim of Hera's calculating resentment.

—Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

It's not like I think she
deserves it: jealousy's scapegoat
in the form of a cow,

doe-eyes turned dumb,
thistle binding manure to her
hooves and heart—he went there once

and how was she to know?
Her milkmaid calloused-innocence
now breeding ground for flies.

I could put my hands on her
gnarled nape, give in
to maternal instinct to soothe, push

and knead away tragedy. I
might, if born a goddess, guide her
through the destined journey.

But every classic needs some woe,
an irreversible curse, envy
like a branding iron on pliant

virgin skin. I don't want to save her
even if she misses the subtle hang
of breasts, and a voice to shout with.

MEDEA'S SONS

RACHEL MYLES

Characters

MEDEA

JASON

PRINCESS

KING

EGEUS

SENTINIUS

MALE CHORUS—(4 people)

FEMALE CHORUS—(4 people)

HERA (Chorus member)

SOOTHSAYER (Chorus member)

DELIVERY BOY (Chorus member)

SETTING: *Curtain up on a mostly bare stage. A knife lies center stage. The CHORUS is placed in a semi-circle around the upstage area. They are all in intricate and bizarre poses. MEDEA and JASON are hidden amongst the CHORUS with their backs turned so no one can see that they aren't wearing masks.*

FULL CHORUS (referred to as **CHORUS**): You've heard it told: that hell hath no fury

FEMALE CHORUS: Like a women scorned, by the acts of—

MALE CHORUS: Like a man, pushed to acts of—

CHORUS: Deceit and revenge.

FEMALE CHORUS: Women are the givers of breath, they feed the future.

MALE CHORUS: Men breed purpose, pushing towards dangers.

CHORUS: Glistening blades covered with the blood of the—

FEMALE CHORUS: The pure

MALE CHORUS: The righteous

FEMALE CHORUS: The vengeful

MALE CHORUS: The savage

CHORUS: The blood of—

MEDEA: Life.

CHORUS: Here is the wicked mother. She gives life and she—

JASON: Takes it away.

CHORUS: A woman who shows no—

MEDEA: Remorse. For within my time there is nothing

but—

JASON: Agonizing pain from which to speak and give you time to mourn. *(Beat)* I gave you time to mourn and you gave me back—

CHORUS: Deep crimson sheets. *(CHORUS brings out the sheets. There is red on them deep and saturated. Slowly as the prologue continues the sheets are unwrapped and held open towards the audience. When opened it's possible to make out what looks like the outline of two children. The stains should suggest the look.)*

EGEUS & SENTINIUS: We were symbols of love. Struck down by hate.

SENTINIUS: The knife pierced between my ribs.

EGEUS: Its coolness ran cross my throat.

SENTINIUS: I was mommy's favorite.

EGEUS: Jason loved me best. *(Beat)* She was cold to me because of the hate she bore him.

SENTINIUS: She comforted me because of the love she gave him.

CHORUS: Hush little babies don't say a word—

SENTINIUS: Fitting you should sing of mocking birds—

EGEUS: Didn't Meropie kill her only son, to seek revenge upon her wicked husband?

SENTINIUS: Yes, but he turned into a sparrow. Not a mocking bird.

CHORUS: And if that mocking bird don't sing—

EGEUS: Meropie was turned into a song-less bird, out of grief. *(Beat)*

SENTINIUS: Why do Greek mothers kill their children?

EGEUS: They don't, the media just publicize that.

CHORUS: Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring—

EGEUS: A ring... a promise... one he never intended to keep.

SENTINIUS: He never tried.

CHORUS: And if that diamond ring don't shine—

SENTINIUS: Momma tried to make him see.

EGEUS: He was never very good at compromise.

EGEUS, SENTINIUS & CHORUS: It's gonna go and break this little heart of—

Act 1 Scene 1

MEDEA: Shhhhhh—Stop! (*All goes silent. The CHORUS lays the sheet upon the floor and the two boys take their places on the sheet. They cover the blood stains and we can now see just how they were laying when they died.*) Mount Olympus has vanished. The gods are all gone. They are empty now, they have abandoned us... they have forsaken us! But I—I still believe! I know you're still here. Hidden... secretive... lurking. I implore you gods and goddesses of old, hear me and my prayer! (*MEDEA tears her clothing and wraps it around ceremonially.*)

Hera, I call to you! (*MEDEA looks as if she's casting a spell or ripping the fabric of existence.*) For you know what it is to love a wandering heart. You who made a life of ridding this world from Zeus' lust born babes. Offspring which sprang forth like waters of the earth. It is to you, that I give this offering. (*She places a wreath down.*) I open up the chasm which you gods and goddesses have sealed yourselves within. For you Hera, all I beg is that in return... you protect my children.

Protect them in the underworld. When they reach the river Styx, do not allow them to see the horrors that float beneath its blackened waters. Shield their eyes with blissful ignorance. Let them forever remain children... my pure... my little doves.

O Hera, speak to Persephone, and soften Hades' heart with those same chords Orpheus drew forth when he longed to save his Eurydice... his love... his life. Persuade them to see the sins of Jason and my own, not our fragile sons. I cover their eyes with golden coins, so that they find this ferry fare and are safely brought before Hades. (*She covers their eyes.*)

O goddess, fellow unfortunate wife and mother, please, protect my sons. For like the children of Zeus, they too were born to this world... unlucky. (*MEDEA kisses both boys on the forehead.*)

CHORUS: Wicked woman, to cut your spring thus, when you should have broken their falls.

MEDEA: They will not suffer alone! I wound myself in shame. (*She slashes her thigh.*) Cursed blood, drain from my body, teach me to find forgiveness!

CHORUS: You've lost your mind.

MEDEA: Lost my mind... no, I've lost what was mine.

(Looks at the children.) Hello my darlings. *(Sings softly.)*

Hush little babies don't say a word.

Momma's gonna buy you a mocking bird.

And if that mocking bird don't sing.

Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring.

And if the diamond ring turns brass,

Momma's gonna get you a looking glass.

And if that looking glass gets broke,

Momma's gonna buy you a billy goat...

(The stage has grown dark. MEDEA drifts back still singing and she along with the CHORUS disappeared. The two boys on the bloody sheets are all that remain. MEDEA and the CHORUS continue singing over the scene change. MEDEA ends the song.) Hush my little darlings. Hades will come. Be kind my doves. Remember... mommy loves you. I will find you in the darkness!

Act 1 Scene 2

(Lights up: the Underworld. We hear moans and cries from those who are suffering, murmurs and mumbles from those who are wandering. It is murky. The pool of light over the boys grows brighter. The two boys awaken and stand. The stage lights grow faintly to reveal a dimly lit underworld. The walls are bluish green and the path is a deep purple. Warm yellow, red and orange lights peek out above the cavern walls giving the scene a rainbow of color.)

SENTINIUS: Egeus... Egeus where are we?

EGEUS: I don't know Sentinius. *(Shiver)* It's cold. *(The two boys huddle together out of warmth and fear.)*

VOICE: Well, well... look what we've got here!

EGEUS: What was that?

SENTINIUS: I don't know, I can't see.

VOICE: Too dark for you? Why didn't you just say so? *(The lights grow brighter.)* Better?

SENTINIUS: What do you want?

VOICE: That's not a very polite way to speak to your friend.

EGEUS: Friend? What friend?

SENTINIUS: Where are we?

VOICE: Relax children; all will sort itself out soon enough.

Your mother asked—

SENTINIUS: Mother?! Where is she? I want to see her!

EGEUS: No! (*SENTINIUS seems shocked at EGEUS' response.*)

SENTINIUS: Don't you miss her?

EGEUS: No! I think... she did something terrible.

SENTINIUS: Like what?

EGEUS: Can't remember. But father... he... was gone.

VOICE: Off with his new wife.

SENTINIUS: New wife?

VOICE: Poor child, too busy idolizing your father to see the truth. You don't know what happened?

EGEUS: Neither of us do.

VOICE: Walk to the river's edge and look in. Not too far, or the river will pull you down into it.

EGEUS: Come on.

SENTINIUS: I'm scared.

EGEUS: Come on! (*He pulls SENTINIUS with him to the riverbed's edge. They tentatively look in.*)

Act 1 Scene 3

(Lights up on a split stage. SENTINIUS and EGEUS stare into the waters which reflect a shine upwards and behind them on a raised platform MEDEA and JASON have their scene. The location is MEDEA's home. JASON and MEDEA have been fighting. They're on opposite sides of the room and MEDEA is glaring at JASON.)

JASON: Didn't anyone ever tell you your face will stick that way? (*Pause*) Come on! Stop looking at me as if you wanted to kill me.

MEDEA: It's not a look, call it a premonition.

JASON: Get off it! You don't have it in you.

MEDEA: You forget, I killed my brother and father for you.

JASON: That was ages ago. What have you done lately? Besides, you killed them because you hated them... you love me.

MEDEA: I didn't hate them. I killed them for you, to be with you, because I love you. And now you brush me off so you can go and screw some tramp!

JASON: Don't call her that. She's a good girl.

MEDEA: I don't care Jason!

JASON: Look, I don't want to have this fight anymore.

(Goes to exit and a buzzer sounds.) I'll be home soon. *(Buzz)*
I'll return soon. *(Buzz)* I'm going to work. *(Buzz)* I love you?
(Long buzz. JASON looks up and then faces MEDEA.) I'm
leaving you.

MEDEA: *(Without looking at him.)* I know.

JASON: I'd say I'm sorry but...

MEDEA: You aren't.

JASON: I'm not.

MEDEA: Why Jason?

JASON: I don't know. *(Buzz)* It's just different. *(Buzz)* I'm in
love? *(Buzz)* She's happier.

MEDEA: *(To audience)* Translation: younger.

JASON: She makes me happy.

MEDEA: *(Aud.)* She puts out.

JASON: Her father likes me.

MEDEA: *(Aud.)* Still lives at home.

JASON: It's comfortable.

MEDEA: *(Aud.)* I don't have responsibilities.

JASON: I love her.

MEDEA: *(Aud.)* We bang like bunnies.

JASON: A lot!

MEDEA: *(Back into the scene.)* I get it!

JASON: I'm moving in with her... today.

MEDEA: What about your obligations?

JASON: My only obligation is to serve my king. *(Buzz)* To
take care of my family? *(Buzz)* To be there for the boys.
(MEDEA angrily rises.)

MEDEA: You do not get OUR sons. You don't even know
how to care for them. How to kiss skinned knees and wrap
bruised elbows.

JASON: I'll send for the boys once I'm married. *(Buzz)* Once
I'm settled. *(Buzz)* I'll miss them. *(Buzz)* I'm going to take
them tonight and my new love will do all that stuff you just
mentioned. She and I will raise them as OUR own.

MEDEA: But they're OUR children. Pieces of you and me,
not you and her!

JASON: Don't be so certain.

MEDEA: Jason, honey, simple genetics. I pushed 'em out,
they're mine! Gods, you're a moron! *(Buzz)* Stupid? *(Buzz)*
Imbecile. Jackass. Wanker. Fucker. Dickhead. Fucking idiot.

JASON: *(Breaking character momentarily.)* Can she do that?
The buzzer didn't sound.

MEDEA: Those boys are a product of OUR love Jason!

JASON: Not any more. I don't love you.

MEDEA: *(Pause)* That's why you chose her... You don't... Our sons... we have two... that's why parents have children isn't it. It's not because of love... they're protection, leverage... possessions. Little shields we use when fighting each other. Bargaining chips we hurl across the room trying to raise the stakes until someone's bluff crumbles...

JASON: Oh please! I'm done with this conversation. I'm taking the boys tonight. Make sure that they're bathed and feed by the time I come. *(He exits)*

MEDEA: The boys are staying with me. *(She throws a plate where JASON exited.) (Pause)* They stay with me... So I can be reminded. Forever reminded of our love... of... of their father... his eyes... his jaw... his nose... oh how they look like him... they have his eyes... those lying eyes that mock me... mock me like he mocks our marriage bed.

CHORUS: Mock-ing... Biiiiirrrrrrrddddd

MEDEA: *(MEDEA crosses to a drawer and pulls out a knife.)* Fly little sparrows. Fly! *(The river stops and the two boys fall backwards.)*

Act 1 Scene 4

(As the scene ends, MEDEA fades away and the reflected light on the water fades to a crimson hue. EGEUS sits back as SENTINIUS slowly rises.)

EGEUS: Father...

SENTINIUS: Mommy... I want to see her!

VOICE: You can't.

SENTINIUS: Why? Why can't I see her?

VOICE: Because, she's gone.

SENTINIUS: Gone?

VOICE: Egeus... Jason's favorite. You never knew?

EGEUS: No. I thought something was wrong, but...

VOICE: Sentinius, still longing to be cradled at your mother's breast. But the milk has run sour?

SENTINIUS: What?

VOICE: Look under your tongues, boys. Anything there?

EGEUS: *(Pulling out two gold coins.)* Money?

SENTINIUS: Me too! *(EGEUS is struck with terror at the realization of what happened. SENTINIUS still hasn't put everything together. SENTINIUS notices something is wrong.)*

with his brother.) Egeus... what is it?

EGEUS: *(To the VOICE)* No...

SENTINIUS: What?

EGEUS: How did we...? When did she...?

SENTINIUS: What's wrong?

VOICE: Bright boy, Egeus.

EGEUS: Show yourself! *(He throws the coins on the ground and gets in a fighting stance.)*

SENTINIUS: What?

EGEUS: Stay close. Don't wander.

SENTINIUS: What's going on? I want mommy!

VOICE: Does he want mommy, Egeus?

EGEUS: Shut up! Leave him alone. He's too young to understand.

VOICE: But you do... don't you.

EGEUS: I think I do.

VOICE: You've figured out something.

SENTINIUS: Where are we? Mommy!?!

VOICE: Tell him Egeus... where are you?

EGEUS: We're... we're in Hades, Sentinius... we're dead.

SENTINIUS: *(Suddenly panicking)* What?! No, you're lying, you have to be lying. How could we both be... Mommy!!!

EGEUS: Shut up Sentinius. Mommy's not here. She's still alive... she killed us.

SENTINIUS: No she didn't, no she didn't! *(SENTINIUS starts to beat up EGEUS.)* Take it back!

EGEUS: *(Losing control EGEUS fights back and pins*

SENTINIUS. *SENTINIUS lets out howls of pain.)* Will you stop it?!

SENTINIUS: Take it back!

EGEUS: Not until you agree to stop.

SENTINIUS: It hurts.

EGEUS: Then say it!

SENTINIUS: Fine, I'll stop! *(EGEUS lets SENTINIUS out of the pin. SENTINIUS sobs.)*

VOICE: Brave boy, like Hercules or Odysseus or—

EGEUS: Jason.

VOICE: Still have faith in you father?

EGEUS: He's suffering from our deaths.

VOICE: Suffering? You think he's suffering? See for yourself.

Act 1 Scene 5

(Lights up on a split stage. SENTINIUS and EGEUS stare into the waters which reflect a shine upwards and behind them on a raised level PRINCESS and JASON have their scene. The location is PRINCESS' home. JASON is obviously hoping for sex. PRINCESS is pacing.)

JASON: Come here baby.

PRINCESS: *(She crosses to him and they kiss passionately. They're starting to get very into the kiss and JASON gets on top of her. She stops him.)* Jason! Stop!

JASON: What?

PRINCESS: I'm not in the mood.

JASON: What? Why?

PRINCESS: I'm worried.

JASON: Of?

PRINCESS: Medea. *(Buzz)* Your wife. *(Buzz)* Your ex-wife. *(JASON groans and rolls away from PRINCESS.)* Why did you tell her?

JASON: Because I needed to get my boys, I miss them. *(Buzz)* I need them. *(Buzz)* I want them. *(Buzz)* It'll hurt her more if I have custody.

PRINCESS: But I'm not ready for children. *(Buzz)* I don't know them yet. *(Buzz)* What if they don't like me? *(Buzz)* I hate kids! They're annoying and I'm not the least bit maternal.

JASON: That's fine. Kids practically raise themselves.

MALE CHORUS: Shut up Jason. You make us all look dumb.

JASON: *(To MALE CHORUS)* Come on guys! She's hot!

Act 1 Scene 6

MALE CHORUS: *(No longer in unison)* Yeah I suppose you're right... She is hot!... I'd lie with her right now... Is sex with a girl good?

FEMALE CHORUS: Wicked men speaking from a swollen member!

MALE CHORUS: *(Still scattered)* Hey!... I was just trying to understand sympathize... I didn't even look... Sex, what?... I'm gay!

FEMALE CHORUS: You defend a man who destroys his family?

MALE CHORUS: He's in love?

FEMALE CHORUS: He's in heat!

MALE CHORUS: You just talk to annoy us!

FEMALE CHORUS: Don't change the subject!

MALE CHORUS: Stop nagging.

FEMALE CHORUS: We're not nagging—

MALE CHORUS: You nagged!

FEMALE CHORUS: Don't interrupt!

MALE CHORUS: Learn to breathe between sentences!

FEMALE CHORUS: Did you just tell us to shut up?

MALE CHORUS: Damn straight!

FEMALE CHORUS: Fine! We will. (*Awkward silent-treatment moment.*)

MALE CHORUS: No! Not that.

MALE CHORUS MEMBER 1: They're using the silent treatment!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER 2: The first of their three most powerful "negotiation" tools.

MALE CHORUS: We get it, we hear you loud and clear! (*Women all add in the death look.*)

MALE CHORUS MEMBER 3: And now... the death look!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER 4: Weapon Number Two! Every woman has one!

MALE CHORUS: Oh Gods! Why give them such weapons which they use 'gainst us? The two wilt any man's... courage! (*Pause. They all turn.*) We're sorry, you were right. Forgive us?

FEMALE CHORUS: (*Individually and completely sarcastic.*) That's just fine... I'm not mad... Of course dear... You're always right... Sure.

MALE CHORUS: Want to... make up?

FEMALE CHORUS: (*All together*) Sorry... Not tonight, I have a headache!

MALE CHORUS: (*Groan*) No!

MALE CHORUS MEMBER 1: Number Three. (*They all limp offstage looking uncomfortable.*)

Act 1 Scene 7

EGEUS: I don't understand.

SENTINIUS: No one wanted us.

EGEUS: Not true—

SENTINIUS: It must be. If mommy did what you say she did and dad didn't want us...

EGEUS: He wanted us, his new wife didn't.

SENTINIUS: But he said—

EGEUS: He didn't mean it like that! He was lying to her to get her to like him.

SENTINIUS: That's stupid.

EGEUS: No, you are.

SENTINIUS: No I'm not!

EGEUS: Mama's boy!

SENTINIUS: Stop it.

EGEUS: Mama's boy! Mama's boy!

SENTINIUS: Stop it! (*He pushes EGEUS into the river Styx. EGEUS gasps for air as he instantly sinks. It's much deeper than it looks.*) Egeus! Egeus I'm so sorry! I told you to stop it, and you didn't so I got mad... I'm so sorry! Egeus? (*A moment of nothing and then suddenly EGEUS bursts through the water gasping for air.*) Egeus, grab my hand! (*EGEUS tries for it and misses, sinking back down.*)

EGEUS!!!

VOICE: Move aside! (*A bright light shines on the river Styx and a rope falls right above the river.*) Grab hold Egeus, quickly! (*EGEUS once again breeches out of the water and grabs hold of the rope tightly.*)

SENTINIUS: Egeus! Hold on I'll get you.

VOICE: I've got him Sentinius. Move back.

SENTINIUS: But I want to—

VOICE: NOW! (*SENTINIUS shies away quickly. The rope EGEUS is on "floats" over to the riverbed and gently lowers EGEUS, who is still clinging to it, onto the ground.*

SENTINIUS rushes to him and hugs him.)

SENTINIUS: Egeus I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

EGEUS: So-o-rrrrrr-eeee. (*Pause*) Saw-aw-aw-rrrrr-eeee.

SENTINIUS: Egeus?

EGEUS: Sawwww-aaaaaaa-wwwwww-rrrrrrr-
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

SENTINIUS: What's wrong with you? What's wrong with him?

VOICE: He's in shock... lost his memory.

SENTINIUS: What?

VOICE: He doesn't remember anything.

SENTINIUS: No! Please help him.

VOICE: I can't.

SENTINIUS: You can! Egeus it's me Sentinius! Your brother, remember? Egeus?

EGEUS: Eeeee—gggggggggggeeeee—ussss

SENTINIUS: Do something?! You're one of the ancients mommy told me about. She said you all went away after people stopped believing. But you're still around, silent.

VOICE: I am a Goddess, yes. But I cannot do any more for him.

SENTINIUS: Yes you can!

VOICE: You're overemotional. Calm yourself. *(Suddenly a light shines on SENTINIUS and glitter falls.)*

SENTINIUS: How? I can't... calm down when I don't know what's going on.

VOICE: Sleep little one. No one will harm you. You're safe now.

SENTINIUS: Safe?

VOICE: Yes, safe. *(SENTINIUS falls to the floor asleep.)*

Good.

EGEUS: Eeeeegggeeeee-uuuuuuuuussssss

VOICE: Egeus... I'm afraid you're lost. Perhaps it's best. *(Another light on EGEUS and then glitter and he drifts off.) Rest... you've had a hard day.*

MEDEA'S VOICE: Protect my children. Protect them as they travel the underworld.

VOICE: Foolish mother. For killing YOUR own babes. How can I protect them... they have seen horrors. You took innocence from them with that blade's slice...

MEDEA'S VOICE: I did it for them. To save them from growing up neglected... invisible.

VOICE: That was not a decision for you to make! The oracle spoke nothing of killing your young ones!

MEDEA'S VOICE: The oracle does not favor me.

VOICE: Beware Medea; your sons are forgetting you.

Beware those memories which they choose to keep locked.

Act 1 Scene 8

(The CHORUS appears behind SENTINIUS in a semi circle. They begin to sing their lines softly. They are SENTINIUS' dream.)

CHORUS: *(To the tune of Mocking Bird.)* Oh wicked woman, how could you leave your babes?

MEDEA: *(Spoken)* Their father will take them.

MALE CHORUS: *(Singing)* He doesn't really want to. He wants to go and play.

MEDEA: He'd still get them! *(Beat)* He has broken our home.

CHORUS: *(Singing)* Why would you give up without a proper fight?

MEDEA: I'm a single female in Greece! There's no way I'd ever be allowed to keep the boys. Jason's a celebrity for Zeus' sake! And stop singing!

CHORUS: Look. You don't have to take out your frustration on us. We didn't do anything! *(They all turn their backs to MEDEA.)*

MEDEA: I'm sorry. It's just creepy and annoying.

CHORUS: Why not TRY for custody.

MEDEA: Are you kidding?

CHORUS: Not that we know of. Why?

MEDEA: There's no way the courts would hear me out. I don't have a chance.

CHORUS: Not all men are like Jason.

MEDEA: Yeah, Oedipus loved his wife... or was it his mother.

CHORUS: Okay, okay we get the point.

MEDEA: I'd never get the kids, I'm not a native Greek and Jason, he's a war hero.

CHORUS: You must do something; you can't let him break up your home!

MEDEA: What can I do? Perhaps they're better off.

FEMALE CHORUS: Not true! Research has proven that children who grow up with two parents do better on standardized tests.

MEDEA: What?

CHORUS: The SATs will show what a terrible mother you've been. Everyone will know you're a horrible—

MEDEA: Wife

FEMALE CHORUS: Mother

MALE CHORUS: Woman

MEDEA: Partner

FEMALE CHORUS: Caretaker

MALE CHORUS: Whore

MEDEA: Spouse

FEMALE CHORUS: Matron

MALE CHORUS: Fuck

MEDEA: Soulmate. (*All stop and look at MEDEA.*) That's what marriage was supposed to be right? The union of two missing halves. When my body fell to the earth, it rained down upon the lands. My soul shattered into millions of imperfect shards. The winds took the pieces in all directions, stretching me over the Earth. The pieces were torn from me. I existed in pain and longing... I was lost. I glance to the vastness around me, and isolation set in. I crawled into the distance, over fields, forests and deserts. I called out to myself, but no answers came. (*Like an operator.*) We're sorry, your call cannot be completed as dialed, please check the number and try again. (*Back to normal.*) I knew the missing splinters would somehow find me too. Then one day, I heard it. Heard his powerful hum. A pitch only I could resonate. A perfect song written for me by Orpheus himself. We met. It was the most unlikely of places. I gave him a promise and he gave me completion... it fit... we fit. But now... now he rips from me again. Breaking flesh, muscles and bones, revealing a beating mass of tissue to the harsh elements. He pulled himself from the center of my chest and takes with him more than he gave to me... he causes a slow painful death to loom.

CHORUS: Oh pitiful woman, your cries make our collective hearts break.

MEDEA: I'm going to lose my babies, and die here... alone.

CHORUS: Don't Medea. Stand your ground.

MEDEA: Jason said he needs them.

MALE CHORUS: He's thinking of HIS happiness.

FEMALE CHORUS: He's thinking of HIS personal goals.

MEDEA: He's thinking of his own pleasures.

CHORUS: Why should it be you who grows old alone?

MEDEA: Why should I be the one to pay for his promiscuity?

CHORUS: Give him the fight he's pushing for.

MEDEA: I shall play upon him and his vengeful mistress!

CHORUS: Make him see his erroneous mistakes.

MEDEA: I will paint it for him like cave paintings upon his walls!

CHORUS: Show him that mother knows best!

MEDEA: I'll settle this score! (*She runs off with the knife in hand.*)

CHORUS: Go Medea; make good use of him and his whore!
(The cries of the boys can be heard, and then silence.) No you wretched woman! That's not what we meant. You misunderstood! *(From out of the chorus steps a*
SOOTHSAYER.)

SOOTHSAYER: Everyone must stay with her in Hades. No staying alone. Had you asked me, I would have been able to warn you from inciting rage within her heart.

CHORUS: You're part of the Chorus; you could have spoken at anytime.

SOOTHSAYER: It would be nice to be asked every once in a while. I can't just blurt everything out.

CHORUS: Foolish man, you let her murder her children.

SOOTHSAYER: It was you that enraged her. So don't blame me for being the quiet one.

CHORUS: You should have warned us.

SOOTHSAYER: I knew I would get blamed for this.

CHORUS: See you admit a guilty conscious!

SOOTHSAYER: No, I foresaw this too.

CHORUS: How does it end?

SOOTHSAYER: With a chilling primal call.

CHORUS: We wanted her to fight Jason... not murder them all.

SOOTHSAYER: Quiet now your speeches; trippingly... trippingly... lull your breath sweetly upon your tongues. *(MEDEA gives a chilling primal cry. She enters; her hand covered in blood. She still has the knife in her hand.)*

SOOTHSAYER: The call!

Act 1 Scene 9

(Lights shift to EGEUS and the CHORUS shuffles over behind EGEUS in a comedic manner. We now see EGEUS' dream.)

CHORUS: Charles-ton, Charles-ton, lets all get busy to the charnels-ton. Charles-ton, Charles-ton lets boogie woogie to the charles-ton. *(Swing music suddenly blares and the CHORUS goes into large dance number with a hot swing scene. MEDEA and JASON end up in the center dancing. Suddenly PRINCESS cuts in and JASON dances off with her. MEDEA comes out of the turn to see JASON gone and a knife in her hands. SENTINIUS rushes out onto the dance*



UNTITLED

ETTIE LERNER

IMPRESSIONS

MARY ANGELINO

My body lies
bowed into yours, a lead-

heavy fork with pronged digits
angled into your collarbone, it juts

in the dark, jabs at my palm like a rock,
a stair my fingers have tripped

over. Swollen down comforter
lengthens shadows like grey

milk on stucco ceiling, it drips
broken glass, leaves imprints on bed

sheets I feel are torn
from some large, disjointed

sketch book—our stenciled
bodies, the monster's slate.

ART POVERA

RICHARD F. KILPATRICK

The slant of evening's sun
insinuates itself under the wilt of poverty,
smears vermilion across skies
and van Gogh fields

where buffalo black,
submerged to their nostrils,
ignore the absurdities
of the poor
and all eyes

close
to tears
spilled in humility, humanity's
shame.

Here,
I've seen
mouths of wild roses
breathe forgetfulness
to their thorns,

and golden rains withdraw
from their shade.

And today, under the pale
disk moon,
now nearly veiled,
I return to the unchanged, changed.

MONSOON

AMBER NORWOOD

the cows will lie down
scattered bulbs, black and white,
the product of carelessness in seed time—
and the sky will be bound

to horizon by lace,
the saguaro praise,
the buck horn cholla supplicate.

the sun replaced by sparks in web,
neatly chaotic,
a long-planned wedding.
a veil cleaved,
broken and fingers

the dry beds that should be overflowing:
snake. milpitas. holy mooses

wash. and the sky will part, displace
for tender black underbelly
a wide, pewter back,

a thick-breathed surety
that this desert's fever
is no ordinary illness

but an annual seizure:
now we know to tether.
bring the rag for her mouth.

a storm less angered
than exasperated, less violent
than worn, a riot

both faith-inducing and commonplace.

MAP OF PARIS

MARINA TERTERYAN

You gave me a map of Paris last year when we wanted to just get up and leave. Funny, when a 19-year-old does that, it's called running away but when a 40-year-old does it, it's called finding yourself. But you said you found yourself when you found me so this would be more like going to a place where people don't look at us and wonder why we can't pick on someone our own age. A place where we can spend two hours in front of a Modigliani painting and not have to wonder where he found his inspiration because it would be in the air when we walked outside.

I know you would get annoyed now if you found out that I declared my major at the end of my junior year and that I keep creating these amazing careers for myself and dropping them without a reason. You would claim that I'm scared to do something different so I fall back and keep doing the things I did two years ago because they're safe. And I would tell you that each year brings me new opportunities and challenges and staying really *is* helping me and you'll say I'm so great at justifying anything that I should be a lawyer.

You would tell me all about the importance of being responsible, planning a future and making decisions because even if they're not immediately perfect, they will be in the end because that's what life is all about. And you'll talk about your med school days with a smile and I'll wonder if you're trying to convince me or yourself.

You'll say this has nothing to do with age or experience but I'll wonder why your peers have no respect for mine because of a silly number when they all wish they could come back to that time when they knew everything because they thought they did. I'll remind you about the time when even you didn't take *me* seriously for the same reason and ask what made you change your mind and you'll tell me some crap about me being mature for my age but I'll know it's because of the way I idolized you and let you take care of me. Then I'll admit that *I* took *you* seriously because you laughed at my stupid jokes and *you* never took *me* seriously but I'll

wish that everything could have been the same without us
having to do any of those things.

You'll tell me everything I don't want to hear until I
can't stand to listen and I'll pull out a cigarette with shaking
hands and you'll light it for me even though you hate it when
I smoke. And you'll take this as a cue to make me coffee
because you know it cheers me up.

You'll walk me downstairs then we'll walk in opposite
directions and you'll turn around and watch me walk away
but I won't know it because I'll be looking straight ahead like
Scarlett O'Hara did at the end of the book and that will make
you wish we'd had a chance to use the map.



BAZZAR

NOUSHIN HOSSEINZADEH

AT YOUR PLACE

MARY ANGELINO

I know enough now to wipe water drops scattered
like continents on your bathroom sink, I watch them
separate, pool at counter's edge and hang like breasts
before they drip onto linoleum. I open cabinets, drawers,
read labels of expired pain
medicine—August last year and the infidelity knotted
into those days. Everything is for sensitive
skin: lotion, deodorant, after shave.

The electric razor blinks its on-light
at the mirror, counts the seconds as I run

my hands over cleanser, combs,
the washcloth crumpled at my feet.

I know enough to throw it
in the hamper, make my way

to your bed and settle under new
cotton sheets; you sleep like an unwrapped bar of soap

as I untangle the night from your hair.

I DO NOT LOOK DOWN

CRAIG WATKINSON

This is stupid and maybe even sick. No matter how much make-up they've slapped on her, no matter how *life-like* they make her look, she's a corpse, and I don't want to see her this way. Both of my sisters take their turns. Of course, they get off easy; they're allowed to cry. Yes, it's the 21st century, and men are magically allowed to cry too, but that's hogshit and you and I know it. Although, maybe at a funeral it's okay, acceptable, perhaps even "to be expected," but fuck it, as sad as I am, I'm right at this very moment more than anything angry that because of some morbid fucking tradition I am supposed to walk up and stare at a corpse that used to house my mother, a face covered with whore rouge, complete with glued-shut lips.

My mother is an awful singer. Every man, woman and child who's carried the Stevenson name has been. My sisters are. My dad is. Even our dog sometimes likes to howl at the moon, and he sucks. I mean, even for a dog, he's awful. I suck too. The closest thing I ever got to a singing compliment was one night doing karaoke in a bar in Denver. Having really sung my heart out, I got off stage and sat back down next to my friend Max. He thought for a good long moment and said, "Well... that was the loudest I've ever heard anyone sing." Hell, I'll take it.

Anyway, my mom is on the side lawn of our house. It's July, maybe August. I'm 10, maybe 11. She's in a bikini, something no son wants to see his mother in, even if she's "in good shape for 45." She has headphones on, and she's singing away. She's lost in the music. Mom's always been the shyest of our family. By far. If she sneezes too loud with people around, she will blush. And not a subtle blush but an actual, full-on red. She'd certainly never sing this loud if she knew anyone was listening. But she doesn't know I'm here. She's lost. It's the middle of the 1980s, and she's got her headphones up loud and she's got those little white plastic eggshell goggles over her eyes to protect them from the sun, and she's lost. She's lost in the music. Her voice is so far off

key it's practically crossed state lines. But it's a wonderful, beautiful thing, standing there and watching my mother, this woman who's spent forty five years painfully shy, now in her own dark world where she is a rock star, belting out a crappy mid-80s pop song with everything she's got, her voice cracking but completely free of embarrassment. I stand and admire this for an amount of time I have no measure of. Then I tap her on her shoulder, jolt her out of her world, and make fun of her.

Sierra's still up there crying, and Leslie would probably be right there with her too if she hadn't already found her own corner to bawl and shout in. I have nothing against crying really, I mean I know it's healthy, but this whole procedure is honestly making me angry about everything. A simple, tasteful photo board would do, it really would—pictures of her as a little girl, then as a young woman, then as a wife, then as a mother, then as a widow, then as a patient. Well, maybe they could skip the patient pictures. Because in those she'd likely be wearing the bob wig, and the bullshit had already started by then, a trail starting with "Let's all pretend this is Mother's hair" and ending right here in front of me with "Let's all pretend this is Mother."

Mother's not here anymore. Those with belief will say she's in one place and those without it will point someplace else, but she most certainly is not in this room. Her favorite dress is here, and her wig is here, but She. Is. Not.

I'm in 6th grade, and we're having our Halloween Parade on Friday, October 29th because the 31st is Sunday and we won't be in school on Sunday. That means we get to spend all day trick-or-treating, which I'd say is pretty fucking sweet if I cursed at this tender young age, which I don't.

I have decided to dress as a woman this year, something which my mom found amusing but which in hindsight may have troubled my dad. In any case, she provided me with the wig (a black one that curled into a bob—one which I would be very unhappy to see her wearing many years later) and a tight-fitting little purple-and-pink dress. She saw me leave the house with the pair of tennis balls inside the top, round and firm and silly. What she is

only seeing now for the first time, standing with the rest of the parents as we parade around the school, is my piece de resistance: *the nipples*. I improvised them from some balled-up straw wrappers I confiscated from the cafeteria. I was afraid if I'd tried leaving the house with the disturbing little peek-a-boos, she'd have stopped me, so I made the addition later at the school, where she'd have no say.

I see all of the parents' faces, first just mild surprise realizing I am a boy dressed as a girl, then with a giddy half-shock, perplexed and perhaps taken off guard by the fact that a preteen kid in a Halloween costume would add such a perverse, anatomically-aware detail to his mock-up outfit of the other sex. Perhaps some of the moms and dads are uneasy seeing me, but most laugh, and not a contained sort of laughter. My mother's reaction was what I keep. She does a double-take that honestly could qualify as a triple-take. Her face begins as simple exasperation, this shy woman's twelve-year-old son publicly in drag, then switches to the horror I'd anticipated upon noticing my erect paper nipples, then finally morphs into something I would never in a million years have expected: a big, guilty grin.

My cousin (or is it uncle? I can never tell with him; he's that perfectly confusing, indiscriminate age), Paul, takes the bait and moves up to the foot of the casket, where Sierra's been sobbing away, like she's been cast in some black-and-white foreign 1950s melodrama, for close to three minutes now. Maybe Paul's thinking the same thing I am, which is *Get her the fuck down from there*, but his face betrays no annoyance. Just consolation and sympathy and grieving. Well, whatever. Now I'm up and everyone knows it. I could just stand here, refusing to move, and that could eventually become an even bigger scene than Sierra or Les managed, which I'm sure would burn them up, robbing them of their rightful drama awards.

Hell. I start to move. I even count the steps. One, two, three, four... ten. Exactly ten. Ten steps to get to my dead mother. That could be one of those funny riddles like, "How many licks to get to the center of a Tootsie-Roll pop?" "How many steps to get to your dead mother's corpse?" What odd thoughts I'm having at the moment. I kneel down on the little padded thing you're supposed to kneel down on. In my periphery I see her shape, the color of her dress and her wig

and the shape of her below me, but I do not look down. I already have in my mind her unabashed grin as she sees me in a dress with pornographic, false nipples, and the ecstasy on her face as she closes her eyes and becomes a rock star. What lies below me does not belong in the same mental album with these things, and I will not let it share space. I do not look down.

THE DAY I PUT DAD AWAY

DAN FARLEY

The old man is cussing out the concrete again
cackling curbside ruminations echoing
prophecy chants toughened toward consumer
ant farm participants dodging vagabond vaudeville performance.

Stir fried Charlie photos chase his child's first birthday
chop his braided bride who died inside
when the rest of him forgot to come home.

The old man is cussing out the concrete again
stumbling stupidly outside the VA bricks
and I want to puke and cry at wealthy
robo human tunnel vision instinct
survivalists passing by getting bigger as he shrivels
into owl wing shadows and pigeon dung paint.

The old man is cussing out the concrete again
dancing on spirit spilled river shores
demise trails hiding any paths of how he got here
lying beside a stomachs worth of self rejection
mumbling something about a purple heart broken
and fifty stars fading on a camouflage shoulder sleeve
waving backward at a world that sneers and sidesteps
sacrifice lying face down beside big bro's cold shoulder.

The women dressed in white are waiting
and water warms my liar lips.

"Come on dad, get up. We're home now, we're home."

MEMORIAL

NANCY GARROLL

My father believed he would drift
over Zuma and plunge

to the Pacific bottom, a disembodied
fishing lure. He thought he would settle,

a twilight scattering amongst
towering kelp forests. Instead,

his ashes disappeared into Hollywood's parched mouth
where their galvanic groundskeepers bend

over chiseled stele, scrubbing like electricity.

CROOKED HOUSE ON THE HILL

DARRYL WHITE

We ate in the crooked house mother erected on a hill that was not a hill. And what I loved most was every Sunday at dawn's first crack, mother filled the house with heat and smoke and lemon and garlic and thyme; smells and flavors leeches out of her cracked chapped hands beating and shaping and stirring and creating. My two older brothers and three older sisters and I sat at our chasm-foot-long and canyon-foot-wide dinner table, our mouths whet with bits of promised marshmallow yams, honey-coated ham, mustard greens, chitterlings, and macaroni and cheese.

When sunlight bedded and stars played gaily on the other side of closed curtained windows, mother laid out her newborn feast, and we all pretended to join hands and pray. Then, finally, we ate. Sometimes the feast ended by midnight, most times it lasted until Monday, sometimes Tuesday. Our bellies full, our sleep forgotten, we'd tell stories of how we gorged, of how dumplings healed a rash, how gravy washed out grime, how peach cobbler embraced with butter saucy kisses, how barbecued ribs sang you goodnight, and how hot links kissed you good morning!

The crooked house I supposed, balancing on its axis, defied logic and physics. I did not know this until an Architect visited on Wednesday. He stared at the four ramshackle walls and proclaimed, *No house can survive this way*. With a licked finger aimed into the wind, he unrolled charts and graphs and set to right-angled calculations. Hour after hour he spent, sweat pasted his forehead like sleet on windowpanes until at last he announced, *Your home is improbable, illogical, and unsafe*.

Mother abandoned the kitchen brandishing a wooden spoon still dripping with cornbread batter; she snatched the Architect's tools, his books, and his knowledge and flung them off the hill that was not a hill. She chased the Architect from the crooked shack yelling over and over, *Isn't unsafe, just not straight!*

I fell off the hill that was not a hill once, only once, maybe twice or three times. Mother only knows about the

one. I asked her if I was crooked like the house. She scolded me for my stupidity saying, *Course not, you're like me. My hair is your hair. My smile is your smile.*

She opened her chest revealing bones, veins, and lungs just like mine only bigger, only stronger. To be honest I could not tell if her organs were crooked. But the one truth I knew: they were not like mine. Hers were worn, hardened, and tasted of burning cedar, kerosene, and coal. Mine were jelly soft and tasted of big sticks, Now and Laters, and vanilla ice cream sandwiches. I smiled and told my mother, *Yes mine are just like yours.*

That Friday the Architect returned to the crooked house mother erected on a hill that was not a hill. He brought with him ditch diggers, trench runners, demolishers, terrorists, and madmen. They brandished spades, bulldozers, explosives, pistols, and even WMDs. With schooled confidence the Architect announced surgery, he would repair our unsafe home, paint it taupe with a cocoa trim, we'd have a green lawn, a cherry tree in the front yard to shade the sitting porch, we'd have a brick fence, a garage, cable TV, and a microwave for quick meals.

Mother said not a word as she stepped out of the crooked house, defiance blazed in fists rooted on hips. Proud eyes challenged the would-be destroyers of all she built. I'd seen mother angry. I'd seen her spit chimney smoke at thirty paces. I'd seen the earth crack under the weight of her fallen tears. Until that day I had never seen mother happy.

Whooping with glee, she waded into the crowd of ditch diggers, trench runners, demolishers, terrorists, and madmen. Her fists swung from right to left, left to right, fast like spinning fan blades catching the wind and bending it to their will. Crowded close as they were, she could not miss and invaders fell under her happy wrath. For two whole days and nights the onslaught continued until our hill that was not a hill was piled with broken tools and broken men. As the Sunday sun crowed in the horizon my victorious mother retired from the battlefield dragging a slow methodic limp.

We feasted in this crooked castle my mother created on a hill that was not a hill and Sunday's dinner dribbling juices whispered how much she loved us.



NAKED WOMAN

NOUSHIN HOSSEINZADEH

PAINTED FACELESS

KAROLINA SALOIN

On this darkness plain
Far even from tiny chaos
We lean
Propped on brittle wood

Both without eyes or mouths,
Tressed in unruly leaves
Painted with curves and points
Scarred white and blood

Slide open
Drawers of this frame—
Find somersaults
 barbed wire
 and alleys of trying.

Find poetry
 pining and nightmares.
Find the gray light glow
Of history's burning volume.

On this veinblue night
You are only a strained silhouette.
Intoxicated. Offering
Fire-colored flesh
 as payment.

THE ORIGINS OF HONEY

JAYNA ZIMMELMAN

1. desire

Opal has not always been alone, but she imagines that she always will be. She has attached herself to no form of spouse, and she has given birth to no children. This is not a tragedy, as never once in her thirty five years has Opal desired to be a mother.

This is not to say that Opal harbors a particular dislike for babies, it is only that she does not feel an affinity for the having of them. Occasionally the sight of an infant strapped, like a faux marsupial, to its parent's torso will make her tilt her head and smile in a movement that looks a little like wistfulness—but isn't.

For Opal does not want a baby strapped to her own chest. She is not a kangaroo. She would not be made happy in the toting about of her young. And this knowing, unlike numerous quandaries that have attached themselves to her like sticky spores, is one thing of which she is very, very certain.

Thus, after such a sighting, this looking upon of rubbery infant plus mobile parent lashed together with nylon strap and batted cotton cloth, she simply moves on, hearing not the slightest tick of any biological timepiece.

So it is no small surprise when Opal cracks opens her eyes early one Saturday morning to find that her belly has grown up firm and taut overnight in the manner of a grotesque, fleshy mushroom.

She lies motionless for several minutes, waiting to see if perhaps this is merely the remnant of a dream dragged into the first moments of waking. But her stomach does not deflate with her flowering alertness, and Opal's pointless hope is interrupted by the raging urge to pee.

Rushing to the bathroom in her suddenly pregnant body is no easy feat. She has not been allotted months to train and practice, to acclimate to this body's new center of gravity. She wobbles like a clown feigning pregnancy, and laughs out loud wondering if perhaps she didn't also wake up in giant red shoes that she simply has not yet seen over the

great horizon of her belly.

2. a premonition

Because she is uncomfortable with this tremendous bloat, and because she really has no idea what she ought to do, Opal decides it would be best to sit and wait, to see what might happen next.

First she reclines in her redwood deck chair that does not sit on any deck, but rather, perches on the lawn in some strangely hopeful posturing that only intentionally crafted inanimate objects ever know. She pulls handfuls of cloth up towards her belly to give her legs their time in the sun.

Her blue dog Oogie appears delighted that she has opted for the backyard as their place of leisure this morning. He lies in the grass, his three legs positioned in the joyous disarray that big dogs are so expert at.

Oogie's missing leg was surgically removed after a standard canine-versus-vehicle conflict. His people, upon seeing him at the conclusion of the procedure realized that they did not, after all, want a three-legged dog. But Opal found three legs sufficient and so she took him home.

Opal opens her eyes to the sound of a sliding glass door whispering against its track. Shading her eyes with one hand she sees the topmost portion of her neighbor's substantial figure bobbing above the fence as he scampers to the dented green shed that perches, a magnificent eyesore, at the backend of his lawn.

Opal waves to him. He sends her a huge distracted grin accompanied by an exaggerated wave of one meaty hand before disappearing behind the aluminum box.

The horrid sound of metal scraping against misfitted metal screeches in Opal's ears. A moment later Devannee's familiar form pops from behind the shed. She cannot see what he has retrieved, but she can tell that it is weighty because his right shoulder sags down much lower than his left.

Opal looks toward her legs to brush what appears to be a sleepy honeybee from her warm pink knee. The bee falls wings down into the neglected grass, its itsy legs pointing toward blue sky. She feels a truffle-sized dab of pity for this worker and wonders how much comfort made its way into her tea, into her thick blue cup, due to the diligence of this winged corpse.

When she looks up from the dead confectioner, Devaney has disappeared back behind deep dark glass into his house, the interior of which Opal has never seen.

3. pathology

Once her skin has been made rosy pink by the sun—a sun who is clearly offended by how utterly ungolden she is—Opal retires to her living room couch to watch television in the billowing red muumuu with yellow dots that a now-dead aunt inexplicably gave her for her birthday several years ago. She has never worn this gift before, but today she is relieved to have it. Perhaps her aunt had been acting on a premonition, a feeling that someday, quite unexpectedly, Opal would awake in need of an absurdly large piece of clothing.

Afloat in the alien garment, Opal remembers how she had visited this aunt, Aunt Goldie, in the hospital before she died. Breast cancer—that was the initial diagnosis. But the cancer had spread, like cancer does, to just about every location in her body worth corrupting. Goldie's brain must have been polka-dotted with it, because on that day her aunt had told her a story of nonsense:

“Opal, when you were born you were a big baby, too big for twins. You were a juicy yellow tomato of a baby. You looked like you had been eating for years and years before you were born, just eating and sleeping and riding about inside your mother like a pampered little queen.”

Opal listened intently, and still she did not understand.

“You cried when they took you out, cried and cried when you realized that your reign was over, that you would have to live on our terms, that you were no longer the law of your own sticky land. You cried and you kicked and the nurses laughed at what a belligerent little thing you were. They thought it was funny although why they thought that I never understood.

“I was in the room; they never told you that though. They never told you any of it did they? Your father was not there, he was not at the hospital yet. I cannot remember where he was. Isn't that funny? Well not *funny* I suppose, but strange not to remember something like that.

“Because he wasn't there your mother asked that I be in the room with her which was something I did not want to

do, but nonetheless I was there. I was there when you came out and I saw it. But don't worry dear, your secret is safe with me."

Goldie looked at Opal; her face was blanketed with the sort of conspiratorial knowing that old women frequently do well. That this decaying aunt knew Opal's mystery and that she would take it with her down into her grave, was at once maddening and hilarious to Opal.

Opal did not laugh, she reached out for her aunt's plain face, made too thin by the absence of properly digested glucose, and stroked it with the tips of her fingers. Leaning forward she could smell the hospital's institutional odor seeping out of Goldie's pores. The very odd thought occurred to Opal that Goldie was now, perhaps, using sickness for survival, absorbing it from the hospital air and then releasing it, charged with her own sickness, back again. It smelled sweet and sharp, like diapers and antiseptic.

Opal longed for her aunt to excrete her secret too, release it so that Opal might have something of sustenance. Instead, Goldie closed her eyes and began to snore at an amazing volume.

The next time Opal saw Goldie was at the funeral, and the sticky secret was still lodged inside her, decaying now, having eluded with stubborn finality, Opal's knowledge.

4. documentation

Opal channel surfs, with one languid hand holding the remote like the casual object it is and isn't, pausing for a bit on a nature show about insects, then lingering over a true crime mystery about an unsolved infanticide, and finally settling on a documentary on the life of a handsome little boy named Sam and his parasitic twin.

Sam's story is narrated via a series of interviews with the now retired doctors who attended his case. Old footage of Sam, his parasitic twin, and their mother is interspersed at wonderful, but teasingly brief intervals.

Opal does not change the channel, even though the wrinkled doctors bore her, because she wants to see more of Sam and his twin. More of the adorable host and his captivating parasite. More of this unutterable itness.

Parasitism, one crinkly looking doctor explains, is rare enough, but what was truly strange in Sam's case was that his parasite was a fully formed second head.

A black-and-white photograph of Sam and the head fills the screen. This second head, it does not ride on his shoulder next to his own the way two-headed creatures are depicted in books and movies and such, but rather, is perched upside down on his crown, like a clay vase carrying water or some other vital liquid.

The doctor's image usurps the photograph, and he describes with lips so thin that they really are not there, how they all had been astounded when the head had smiled, blinked, and suckled (on a pacifier, the good doctor carefully specifies) with movements that were seemingly independent of its host. And while the head could not eat, speak or breathe, having no autonomous lungs or digestive system, he cheerfully recalls that it displayed at least an average interest in sights and sounds.

5. birthday cake

As Opal watches Sam's story she floats in the savory loneliness that has made her ever full of wanting nothing. She is fine, floating here, on her couch, with the remote control. She is fine and she is lonely and she is not without herself. The buttons on the control meet her fingers, touch the tips of her soft digits with tiny rubbery kisses and they tease her with the information that she is where she is because control is not even the remotest of possibilities.

She had been a twin once. But only once and once does not apply to now and this loss is part of her, part of not her. Her wombmate died at birth and she was not told why, which made her very hungry to know what could have been so tragic as to be composed of utter silence.

Still, despite their severe quiet, her family honored Opal's dead twin. They were not the type of family who forget their own, understanding that parts are what make the whole into what it is, not to mention what it isn't.

So every year until she was well into her teens Opal's birthday party took place in the cemetery where her sister Ruby was deeply buried.

Soft white cake with hypersweet frosting, taut balloons, carefully wrapped presents and her older, entirely healthy sibling were packed into the family's station wagon, along with little Opal.

At Ruby's grave Opal would be sung to, pointed paper hat secured to her head with a tight elastic string that

turned the skin under her neck bright pink when it rolled and twisted, pulling out the fragile hairs that grew sparse and blond above her ears. She would clap and clap like a silly monkey with tin cymbals despite her pain, the pain of the hair plucking elastic string so tight under her chin, and laugh and blow out the candles on her and Ruby's cake and she would wish the wish that had not yet come true.

6. without hats

Sam, another ancient doctor says, had been an almost normal child except for being somewhat small. He was little because his heart had to work that much harder supplying his parasite with oxygenated blood.

The old man pauses here to issue a rather large phlegmy cough and Opal wonders why they did not edit out its gag evoking sound.

The doctor is recalling how they had optimistically speculated that if and when Sam was separated from his parasite he would quickly catch up to his peers, becoming virtually normal because even with his parasitical crown Sam talked, played and cried like a beautifully average child.

Obviously though, the doctor adds with a wry smile, back then Sam could not wear hats.

7. shoes

When Opal was ten years old her father, full of his own irregular optimism, asked her what she thought she might be when she got big.

This father of Opal's was a large man, a skyscraper of a man with soft bushy eyebrows and feet bigger than loaves of Wonder Bread. Opal loved her father, loved him like a child loves a giant, like a child loves a man with bread for feet.

Opal shrugged and gazed upon her father's shoes. They were like boats that she might sail away in, if it rained too much, and her father lost them in the strong currents while climbing up onto the roof with little Opal tucked under one arm. If he lost his shoes in the flood he might then stumble in his wet sock feet and Opal might somersault down the rough shingles into the water where she would pull herself inside of one of those shoes and float away to where they kept the ones like her, ones who drift inside of single shoes that were made to be pairs.

8. husks

The doctor rambles about how certain elements of Sam's case had been especially confounding. For one thing it was unclear how they ought to define who among the arrangement of Sam and his parasite constituted "a person."

He rubs his fingers together as he speaks and Opal imagines that she can almost hear a sound not unlike the sound of corn husks rustling slightly in the field during a year when rain does not come often.

He describes how, semantically, they could not refer to the head simply as a twin, nor, obviously (and he softly snorts, presumably to signal that even back then, back in the day, American doctors were above such vulgar misunderstandings) did they describe Sam as possessing two heads. When it was linguistically necessary they used the phrase, "The parasitic head," or sometimes "The parasitic twin."

He pauses before he reports that Sam's mother had called it Eddie.

9. a jam

Opal is a night shift veterinarian four evenings a week at an animal hospital. It is frequently sad work because, of course, the only cases that come in past regular business hours are emergencies.

Some end well. Many do not.

The night before last she surgically delivered a very tired Siamese cat of a litter of stillborn kittens jammed tight like furry logs in her birth canal. Not one of them had taken a single breath.

Opal could have sworn that the mother cat, upon awakening from the anesthesia and finding no mewling kittens, looked relieved. Her owner, however, was crushed. He sat on the red vinyl bench in the waiting room, wet face pressed into his hands and cried like a very sad man.

Opal gently attempted to talk him into allowing a spay before she stitched the kittenless cat back together but he refused, sobbing and insisting that to remove the cat's uterus would be to mutilate her. Opal could have laughed at that, but just as easily she could have cried too. Instead she patted the man on the shoulder, assured him everything would be okay and retreated to stitch his cat back into something like wholeness.

10. amniotic fluids

Devanney is a good neighbor, friendly and warm but not intrusive. For some reason that she does not remember, or maybe that she never knew, she calls him by his last name.

He is a thick man with equal amounts of muscle and fat. He reminds her, pleasantly, of Ving Rhames. He frequently comes to talk with Opal over the cinder block wall that delineates their backyards. His jokes are corny but good natured and Opal appreciates this in an intense sort of way.

On his porch is an old-style refrigerator which he keeps well stocked with soda and beer. Sometimes he offers Opal a beverage, and sometimes she accepts. Then they stand together on their own respective sides of the wall sipping cold fluids from aluminum cans.

11. prognosis

The mid-portion of the program is devoted to a catalog of speculations that had amassed regarding what could be done to correct Sam's condition. Theoretically, the parasite could have been separated from Sam when they were infants. Afterwards it would, sadly, die, but Sam's prognosis was very bright. If he survived the surgery normalcy was ready and willing to embrace him.

The phlegmy doctor describes how the case was further complicated by Sam's mother's refusal to consent to the surgery back in 1961, the year of Sam's birth, due to certain religious beliefs that prohibited her from sacrificing "Eddie." He recalls with gentle glee how years later, when one medical expert who was also an ordained something or other, convinced her that the head did not, actually could not constitute a human life in the eyes of God due to some theological loophole from a century long past, she had sensibly decided to pursue the option of surgical separation in hopes of procuring a normal life for Sam.

12. the rock problem

Opal is a sculptor, sculpting things that only she wants to see. She works in stone. Who will look at these rocks when she is gone is a question that has occurred to her, but for which she has no answer. And so what will become of them, these rocks that have been reduced into signs that will

sit, heavy and intact, long after the signer disintegrates?

In the far corner of her yard she has a studio lean-to frosted with alabaster dust. The dust dries her hands and dulls her hair. She finds alabaster chips still clinging to her skull even days after working out there. Her home, not unlike her rocky scalp, is punctuated with stones that were pulled out of veins tunneling deep into the earth.

She does not want a baby but all of her sculptures look like babies. Most are incomplete. Most will never be finished because Opal does not know how they end.

13. minding beeswax

Opal has never asked Devanney why he keeps a bee hive at the far end of his property. She indulgently imagines, that like her hobby, it is something that he does because he cannot find an alternate way to document his questions.

It is a small colony, just two boxes stacked together. They look like a short white filing cabinet and Opal thinks this is poetic. What is it, she muses, that Devanney is filing away on beeswax tablets? What documentation is it that belongs to him, and only him, to be guarded by his army of sharp, sweet bugs?

Devanney works his bees without protection but Opal has never seen him stung. Sometimes she watches him as he works with only his thick bare fingers and the smoke that he puffs out of a small canister that looks a little like the oil can Dorothy used so very effectively on the Tin Man.

Opal would probably not be surprised if unkind flying monkeys swooped down out of the sky to wrestle Devanney away from his cabinet of secrets and honey, and carry it and him to some vile pedestrian witch who would swallow the honeycomb in front of him without the slightest idea of what it was that she had really stolen.

14. mercy and appetite

During a cereal commercial Opal sits on her couch rubbing her stomach. She reaches for the phone and dials her father's number. Before the first ring is complete she hangs up. This is not something that her father should be saddled with. He is a dreamer. His kind does not do well when pregnant unwed daughters call them and beg them to bring them their enormous shoes so that they might pray for rain and sail away to wherever it is that they really belong.

nothing on it. Slice after slice its softness fills her but she knows she will be hungry again. She cannot keep it. Her belly hums with a strange vibration, not kicking, but a fast and gentle tapping.

15. complications

Opal is getting sleepy listening to the doctor drone on and on about the details of Sam's medical history and how he and his parasite were eventually separated at the age of fourteen. Tears sparkle in the old man's eyes as he relates how, as predicted, Sam indeed survived, sustaining only the most minor brain damage.

When footage of Sam appears she instantly perks up. He is the same boy yet he is very different.

"I miss Eddie," is what he tells one interviewer who prompts him to explain to the world how it feels to go from medical oddity to regular kid.

"But you are grateful I'm sure to the doctors who have given you the chance to live a normal life?"

Sam looks at his sneakers, then up at the ceiling, sighs like a child who knows how futile it is to try to explain something important to an adult and says, "Yes."

16. visitation

Opal leaves the television on so that the house will not be quiet when she returns. She has decided that she will go talk to Devaney. At the very least he will offer her a drink and she can smear his honey onto some of her bread and the two of them will eat while they crack nervous jokes about her sudden, ridiculous condition.

Ringling the doorbell on the front porch, a place she is not accustomed to standing, she thinks she hears movement inside but the door does not open. She walks along the side of the house to the backyard where a pair of beekeeper's gloves are laying on the ground. She has never seen them before. She picks them up and puts them on. Because they fit she knows that they cannot be Devaney's.

The sliding glass door is just the slightest bit open. She tries to peer through the darkness. Her belly bulges awkwardly at the door as she presses one bulky glove against the glass to deflect the glare and her nose touches the cool surface but nothing can be seen.

She whispers his name through the crack. There is no reply. She nudges the door a few inches. And then a few more, still calling his name, until the opening is wide enough for a pregnant veterinarian wearing beekeepers' gloves and carrying half a loaf of bread to enter. She steps inside.

17. loose ends

The parasitical head, says the phlemy doctor, expired before the operation was complete. He soberly explains how that curious face had first gone slack and then finally become altogether still after the severing and sewing up of the vessels that were bringing blood to it from Sam's heart.

Yet it was still attached by random bits of flesh and tissue that a second surgeon stepped in to snip and stitch at with an artful panache so that later, after a series of bone grafts to rebuild Sam's skull, which, at that point, the doctor recalls with a gruesome lightness, sat as open as a cereal bowl, Sam would look like a young man who had ever only had one head.

18. a novice

Opal had been born first. She came out hollering. The nurse who wiped the birth from her body commented that her pearly skin was practically translucent. Veins and tissues were visible at certain angles under the florescent lights.

When Ruby's feet emerged from her mother's body they were ruddy and quite rough. The doctor, alarmed at the breech, grabbed her feet and ankles with one hand and pulled. Ruby slid easily out of her mother for where her head should have been there was nothing but a pulpy mass.

The doctor, being young and still much too susceptible to the seemingly endless variety of horrors manifested by the human body, dropped Ruby onto the green linoleum where she lay until an older nurse, visibly appalled at the doctor's naiveté, plucked her up with a harrumph and wrapped her tenderly in the only blanket that Ruby would ever need.

19. living room

Opal steps into the darkness and her eyes strain painfully to adjust. In the dim light she sees that the house is filled with something soft. It is everywhere, on every surface, fuzzy like living velvet with a silky powder that smells sweet

and musky. She moves carefully, stepping lightly on the softness.

Devanney is in the front room on his back, spread eagle and naked. His belly, like hers, is bulging. He groans as he looks up at her.

"Get it out," he says, his voice is quiet but urgent. Opal drops the partial loaf, pulls her gloves off and kneels down to feel his stomach. Her own bulge bumps against his and they both snort at the absurdity. She can feel movement in Devanney's belly, like the movement inside of her, only more rapid, more demanding.

She thinks about calling 911 but this is not a case for doctors. Doctors would not know how to finish this, how it should end. Doctors would not like this, not at all.

She explains that they need something sharp. He points to a tool box sitting next to the couch. She dumps the contents out onto the floor.

"Maybe the handsaw?" he asks.

She rolls her eyes, but not unkindly, and plucks a cardboard strapped bundle of razor blades from the clutter. It is funny, she thinks, how people who are not doctors think that surgery is something to be done with dramatic violent objects. It isn't. It is performed with simple things pressed firmly into flesh and tissues.

Delicately she cuts into his almost hairless belly. Bees pour out like water, dripping down his flanks. She pulls the gloves back on and begins to massage the hive. More bees come out, with honey and larvae, spilling onto the living room's floor. Then he is empty.

20. repast

Squinting with mild concern at the mass of unexpected life puddled on his Berber carpet Devanney says, "We need to find the queen," and taking the blade in his hand he motions to Opal to lift her muumuu. He cuts into her as gently as an old lover and as she rubs her belly yet more bees and more honey and more larvae rush out onto the floor mixing with the fruit of his womb.

Then he reaches inside her wound with his large bare fingers and pulls from her a honeycomb. The queen is nestled deep within it, like a furious jewel.

"Aha!" says Devanney, examining her majesty upon her sticky throne. "I thought so." He looks at Opal

triumphantly and she smiles at him. Ungracefully she tugs the voluminous muumuu over her head.

Devannee reaches for the bread and breaks off a hunk. He dips it into the pool between them, rendering it sweet, and explains to Opal how a single bee sized mouthful of nectar has to be swallowed and regurgitated almost 200 times over before it is made honey. It is practically alchemy, so ridiculous, so extreme, so arbitrary that in theory it should not work, yet it does. It is as if the bee's persistent buzzing will is what does this—the simple desire to have sweetness, makes it so.

And then Devannee brings the bread to Opal's mouth and she bites and eats, and then he does the same.

21. royal jelly

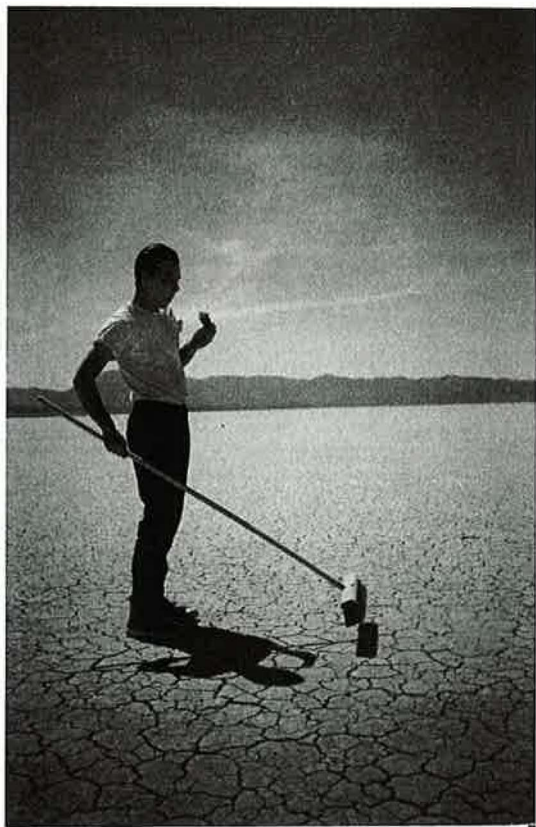
"I like you Devannee," she says and gently but firmly pushes him onto his back. "How come you've never invited me in before?"

Their wounds fold greedily into one another's sweetness, like mouths sucking within more mouths, tightening until they cannot be pulled apart. She runs her fingers over his large smooth nose, over the delicate indentation of his upper lip, and then above, into his dense and curly hair where she strokes the long keloid scar at the top of his crown and she calls him by his other name.

WAITING FOR THE POETS

JUAN CARLOS PARRILLA

F train South exit Broadway
Walk down the stream of concreteness
and cross taxi-rivers of aggression.
Crazed arrows seeking a lyrical heart.
Winter NYC sidewalks feel hot
steps of familiar strangers.
My eyes drooped till I saw
Reddish-orange vacuum tubes
Curve into a K-G-B.
Ancient Ukrainian Marxist hotbed
turned literary venue.
East Village adventure with a
Nicaraguan
sugar cane flower,
Towards a place of expected
NYCentricity.
But the joke was on us.
The Monday evening poetry reading
turns out a laughable disappointment.
The vodka was not enough
to open poetic word-banks.
No lonely clouds,
No etherized patients,
No destroyed minds,
No electro magnetic shock waves.
Just a group of shy children
with no parental guidance.
I drank a glass of cranberry juice
and with it came the KGB Bar.
I swallowed propagandized
images of Communist leaders,
diluted poets, the indifferent bar tender,
along with the sickle and hammer.
I opened a vein and let blood drain
on the street for someone to see
the pain of my consumption.
Quest of enlightenment deferred.
That night I could not avoid a void.



UNTITLED

TIFFANY COLLINS

**HEARD OUTSIDE OF A
HOLLYWOOD CLUB, 7/5/05**

JEREMY QUINTERO

Bone bits are all I consume
since the marrow's all my stomach
can digest, my coworkers say

I look haggard, an Ivy-league education
wasted on fruit bars and energy
drinks. Approval for the crash

diagnostic, songs from inner monologues
are a simpler part of the vernacular now.
Burning for the hunger, digging

for fire, more convinced in sexual nature,
deviating for the night.
Now game show personalities have the right

frame of mind, they spin
the wheel and discern the real
from the inconsistent, but the colors are

too bright for the grizzly Americana.
We are subject to predicate jurisdiction,
desperate hands holding warm blood,

and we fall short of parody.

THE DAY OF ROCKENING

TREVOR NOWELL

It was a day of destiny. No, it was *the* day of destiny. Ike Rothstein held in his hand the very ticket to immortality. He triumphantly flung open the door to his parent's basement and strode down the creaking steps like a conquering lord returning to his castle. In the darkness, three figures hovered around a large table covered in sheaves of indecipherable papers and tomes of forbidden magic. The only light came from a flickering bare bulb hung from the ceiling, dousing the room in feeble orange light.

"Hark! Who enters the Eternal Abode, the six hundredth and sixty sixth layer of the Abyss?" Chauncy, ever the astute watchman, challenged Ike as he came down the stairs.

"Duh, it's me. Who else comes down here but us, you primordial turd spelunker?"

Ike's three friends cleared a space for him at the table. Half empty bags of Cheetos were pushed aside, and cans of Mountain Dew clattered to the floor. Chauncy, Dwight, and Reggie looked up from their books of elves and dragons. It was clear Ike had an announcement.

"Today is the day of days, my friends. Today our lives take a turn for the better. A turn that will be remembered forever."

"Whoa, did you get the new 'Tomb of Horrors?' I've been wanting to take my 18th level dwarf barbarian through it. With 283 hit points, I could survive any Dracolich." Dwight was immensely proud of his character, and with good reason.

However Ike's news was even bigger than this. "No, you pole-smoking ass-grabber. There won't be any Dungeons and Dragons today. I have something even better."

Chauncy did not believe such a thing could be, but then Ike slapped down a small piece of paper that proved his epic claim. Chauncy shivered upon seeing it, his collection of chins wagging in excitement. His dough-like skin went even paler than usual.

"Is... is that... what I think it is?" squeaked Reggie.

"It is indeed, my friends. We have a gig."

Ike was right. It was a day of great destiny. The flyer Ike had brought was for open mic night at the Chuckle Hut. They had been practicing for five agonizing weeks, learning to play their instruments. It was now time to unleash their musical revolution onto the world.

"This Friday night, 'Shadow and Flame' will be squirted upon a quivering virginal world. It won't know what the fuck just hit it."

The three boys stared in awe at the flyer. Over the years they had found ancient scrolls, magical shields, and swords that spat fireballs. None of that could even compare to this. Ever since starting "Shadow and Flame," the boys knew they would revolutionize heavy metal, nay, the very foundations of the world!

"The gods of metal have smiled down upon us. It is only proper that we thank them as we step out of my parent's basement and into legend."

Chauncy, Dwight, and Reggie nodded in unison. They moved to the "Unholy Shrine of Metal." It was a collection of posters for the most potent and virile of metal bands: Iron Maiden, Blind Guardian, Demons & Wizards, and of course Dio. The four boys knelt before the shrine, bowing their heads. Ike would lead the prayer as always.

"Oh great gods of metal, united under Dio, who hath rocked for a long, long time: We beseech your most unholy and rancorous of blessings. May our power cords blow the asses out of the unbelievers. May our voices wail like Bruce 'Air-raid Siren' Dickinson. May our drums thunder like a thousand Dionysian orgyists. May our leather pants be tight and our bulges inspire equal amounts of lust and fear. Amen."

The prayer was complete and the pact was sealed. Eternal glory and the hedonistic lives of rock stars would be theirs. Ike and his friends all had stage names for "Shadow and Flame." On stage Ike was no longer Eichman Rothstein, 10th grader at James Woods High. He was Malbogothra, the Priapic. Dwight was Volendrung the Devourer. Reggie was Gelugor the Violator. Chauncy was, of course, Uumgautha the Corpulent. He and the others even had costumes, fearsome and diabolic looking indeed. The costumes were a holdover from their original band name, "Zombie Barbarians." He would rock the world with such mind-

bending metal that the continents themselves would writhe and squirm to create a tribute to his image. Practicing after school in the garage, he knew that he was favored by the dark powers. He could feel the demons spiral up from the abyss, roil around his legs, then explode from his loins as he shredded on the three power cords he knew. After going quadruple platinum on their first album, Ike figured that his rock would become so potent that his guitar solo would no doubt impregnate the entire first few rows. Such was the power of his rock.

Ike knew he'd have women. Lots of women. Raven-haired pale-skinned tattooed beauties with piercings in places he'd never even *heard* of. In order to conserve his strength for the tours, he'd have to take a mere thirteen or so to his 12th Century four-post canopied bed each night. He could see it now, a sprawl of alabaster limbs and scorpion tattoos. He would recline amongst them, sated if only for a moment. One exhausted concubine (hopefully an Asian one) would turn to him.

"That was... amazing. But I am now ruined for any other man after you, such was your virility, prowess, and sheer girth."

"You knew the risks, baby."

When he garnered enough millions, Ike would have Mt. Rushmore rededicated to "Shadow and Flame." Though the faces of himself and his band mates would not be carved out of mere stone. The monument would be made from a new radioactive element he would call "Awesomonium." His fans would make pilgrimages to his monument, and melt from the radiation as they gazed upon the beauty. Not a one would have regrets about it, for after they had gazed upon such wonder, what else could ever stir their souls?

Ike picked up the flyer and tucked it into his front pocket. It heralded a glorious Armageddon. The world would soon be turned on its ear.

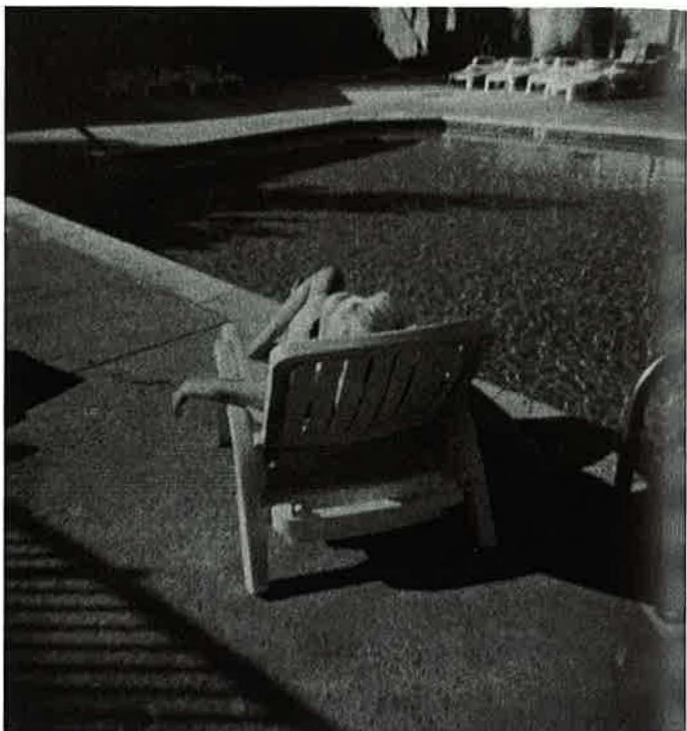
"Get your instruments boys. Friday is only two days away."

SGV SPARROW

JUAN CARLOS PARRILLA

Gunshots from the street sweeper
send the sparrow to the
deepness of the valley.
Palpitating heart beat
against rib cage.
Blood flow to
muscles increase.
Lucifer reaches his
claw out from the
gravel quarry to clasp the bird.
Plucked feathers fall in the reservoir,
catfish swallow brown plumage.

Gabriel dormant in the canyon
hears a gloomy song.
Angelic wings spread,
shoot to the sky,
plunges down to the abyss,
confronts the devil.
The archangel cuts off the
demon's tail with a machete,
pries the
sparrow free.
It continues to fly
through the valley,
violent alleys,
parking lots with
puddles of
blood and beer,
warehouse corpse
dumping spots,
whore stroll pimps,
crooked cops.



UNTITLED

HEATHER HAGER

DOLL MORPHOLOGY

KATE MARTIN ROWE

Oh beanbag body, oh matchstick finger, oh synthetic eyelash,
Oh financed freefall into fashion and family and fanfare and
firelight and the five and dime.
Teach me how to cut perfectly straight.
Imitation skin doesn't bleed but
mind your manners mini-lady and
don't run with scissors.

The journey narrow and complicated
your pleated, canary skirt
the thousand hands that fashioned you—
your original plastic surgeon.

You don't know how desire can be held
in the heel and toes, little un-lived one
but you will have the hardwood canopy bed, goose down mattress,
fringed valance and floral print curtains
anyway. Marble blue quilt trimmed in authentic lace,
porcelain jar, powder puff, elegant trunk, tiny black laces on real
leather boots, wool gloves,
pantalettes and garters, loose-leaf Williamsburg tea,
and finally, a mirror
to make it real.

I blend in with your scenery.

Listen, little gloved dainty
obey those who elaborate on your buttery
love and hair line imagination.
In your world, no such thing as misrecognition,
grudge, impasse, dissolution, the color red, cowlicks
or tuna sandwiches.
Inside of you blackbirds,

definitely. But, if I were your surgeon,
would I have the guts to cut you open
and let them go?

ONE NIGHT

CAROLYN CLEVELAND

It was a scorching hot August night, and I had robbed a liquor store. I didn't mean to, it just all happened at once. Me and the girls were sitting around doing nothing, wondering what we could do to make the night more interesting. We were drunk and high and Shelia suggested robbing the liquor store on the corner of Avenue K. For some strange reason I had agreed, thinking it would be funny. Three little white girls, looking so innocent and robbing a liquor store. It would be the ultimate joke. Now I was sweating bullets, speeding down Palmdale Boulevard while a barrage of red lights swirled in my rearview mirror. Why didn't I just pull over? But no, I had to keep driving, both hands white-knuckled around the steering wheel of my '88 Toyota Corolla while Tammi and Sheila screamed at me to go faster and lose the damn cops. My life was over. I felt sick to my stomach, perhaps the Bacardi was deciding to make its way back out of my system. I belched and the sour smell of vodka stung my nostrils. Sheila looked at me, screaming at me that I better not puke right now. But I couldn't stop it. I felt my stomach gurgle, felt the sting in my throat, I tried to swallow, but it was no use. I turned my head towards the passenger's seat and grabbed the steering wheel tighter. The puke erupted from me, spilling onto Sheila's lap in long chunky streams. She screamed and yelled at me to get ahold of myself. I took a deep breath and felt Sheila's hands grab the steering wheel as she demanded that I suck it up and keep driving before I killed us all. I gasped for air, my throat stung so bad, and wiped the tears from my eyes with one hand while clinging to the steering wheel with the other. I lifted my head and swerved slightly before regaining control of the car. The smell in the car was rancid and I thought I might puke again, but caught myself and tried to take even, controlled breaths. I could hear Sheila screaming about the throw up, but I didn't care. I had to keep driving. I thought about all the car chases I had seen on television. How many of those people actually made it? None that I had ever seen. They always ended up in a crumpled pile of metal after

crashing violently into traffic. Or they made one last ditch effort after abandoning their car; running desperately through a residential neighborhood only to be tackled by a group of angry police. They never actually escaped. I remembered the chase not that long ago where some guy in L.A. had a two-hour standoff with police in the middle of the freeway. They ended up Tazing the guy before arresting him. I didn't want to be Tazed. I heard Tammi calling my name and I snapped back to reality. She pointed to a dirt road that would be coming up soon and told me I should take it. It would be darker and I might be able to get away. Yeah, because there were so many places to hide in the desert, I told her. She told me to shut up and do it anyway. So I turned my headlights off, making the road in front of me turn dark in an instant and stepped on the gas. My little Corolla still had some guts and it flew down the street. I knew the road was up ahead so I tightened my grip around the wheel, tensed my whole body and stepped hard on the brakes while turning the wheel hard to the left. I heard the girls scream and felt the whiplash as the car swung around. The world around me blurred, making my head spin along with my car. All I saw was swirling lights as I straightened the car out and stepped back onto the accelerator. The sirens continued to wail and I shut my eyes tight and prayed that I wouldn't kill us just yet; I wanted to last a little longer, at least go out in style. My wheels squealed and the Corolla fishtailed, but I held on tight and steered into it, hoping that I wouldn't spin out of control and straight into the flashing police lights. I opened my eyes and saw miles of dark desert in front of me. I could see a few Joshua trees here and there, but mostly brush and dirt. At least there wasn't much I could crash into. I aimed for the dirt road and continued to press on the gas. Somehow or another I made it, and we bounced onto the road, cloaking the lights behind us in a cloud of dust.

*

The liquor store was small and dank. It looked like the kind of place junkies and serial killers went when they needed to stop for a minute and grab a pack of cigarettes or some beer. We were in the parking lot smoking and laughing as we discussed just exactly how we were going to rob the damn place. Tammi suggested we run in with ski masks over our face and demand the money. I laughed wildly and reminded her we had no ski masks, so that idea was dead.

Sheila said we should just tighten our hoodies over our heads so we had only a small place to see out of and we would hardly be recognizable. We were all wearing hoodies so this idea seemed more plausible. Tammi held the .38 that she had stolen from her dad's bedside drawer in her hands. It was unloaded, but the clerk inside didn't need to know that. Finally, in our drunken marijuana induced stupor, we decided to do the deed. We pulled our hoods tight over our heads and walked into the store. I scanned the area, no one else was inside. We walked straight to the counter. Tammi pointed the gun at the terrified clerk and demanded all her money. It was something straight out of a movie. The poor girl looked stupefied and held her hands up. Sheila jumped behind the counter and told the girl to open the register. The girl nodded and began to cry as she opened the drawer slowly. I jumped back with Sheila and we began stuffing our pockets with 20s. Of course we had forgotten to grab something to put the money in, so we crammed the bills into our sweatshirts and jean pockets. I even stuffed some money into my socks and shoes. I heard the clerk whimper and beg us not to hurt her. Tammi continued to hold the unloaded gun to her, and I began to wonder if this had been such a good idea. We were just about finished when we heard a voice yell at us to freeze. I felt my heart stop in my throat and we slowly turned to face a cop with his gun drawn standing in the doorway. How had we been so lucky for a cop to decide at this exact moment to stop at this damn liquor store? My heart began to pound and we all looked at one another. Tammi slowly set her gun down and put her hands up; I followed her lead, carefully raising my shaking hands above my head. Before I had time to react I saw Sheila running past us and straight towards the cop. He screamed at her to stop but she kept running and ran right into him, pushing him out of the doorway, me and Tammi followed without thinking. Why he didn't shoot, I'll never know. Maybe he didn't want to kill three teenaged girls who had just dropped their weapons and run by unarmed. We raced across the parking lot towards the Corolla. I jumped into the driver's seat while Sheila sat next to me and Tammi scrambled into the back. My adrenaline was pumping as I started the car and pushed my foot to the floor. I saw the cop jump into his car out of the corner of my eye and race after me as I pulled out into the street, nearly slamming into the side of a black Chevy

truck. The chase was on.

*

I didn't know how long my shitty, little Toyota would last on this bumpy dirt road. We were getting jerked around so much that I thought my beating heart would plop right out of my throat and onto the floor, or maybe into that disgusting pile of puke next to Shelia. I felt my stomach gurgle again so I quickly turned my attention back to the rut-ridden dirt road. I saw a deep ditch up ahead to my left and quickly turned my wheel, hoping to avoid it. My car's back tires spun in the soft sand and before I could react we were spinning out of control across the desert. I shut my eyes tight and took my foot off the gas, then I let go of the wheel. I was tired. It was time to give it up. I don't know how many times we spun before I felt us slam hard into something. What could we have possibly hit in the middle of the damn desert? There was nothing here. We were in the middle of bum fucked Egypt. I remembered the Joshua trees, and thought maybe we had hit one. Or we could have slammed into a cop, but they had been hanging pretty far back. A rock perhaps? I opened my eyes again, but my head was pounding too hard for me to make sense of anything that was going on. All I heard were voices echoing in the background. I smelled my bile rotting on the floor of my car, heard someone crying. The swirling red lights were back, they rotated, creating a stream of color across my dusty windows. My head ached and pounded and my stomach gurgled and rumbled and I felt sick again. I let it out once more, this time not caring where I puked, or if it stunk. The whole night stunk, what was a little more stink? I heard more yelling and crying and heard my doors open. I felt the cops grab me and pull me out onto the floor, felt my face hit the dirt. It smelled so good, the dust, so much better than the car. The cuffs were cold against my wrists, but I didn't care. My life was over now anyways. And it was all for shits and giggles. Ha, ha, ha, really funny. Let's rob a liquor store, what the hell else is there to do? Who's fucking bright idea was this anyways?

REVERDIE FOR C.B.

TAMARA TRUJILLO

We were filled with that burgeoning spring
scenting our skin with the smell of its sun
floating our voices on its afternoon air.

You and I, bohemian Rock Hudson and Doris Day, traveled our town.
We saw foreign films at the Nuart and met late at night in coffee shops.
We wrote poetry in restaurants, rolled our own cigarettes and drifted to sleep in the back of your home,
that blue '72 Volkswagen van,
washed in moonlight, bathed in Bach.

Everything about you was new and taboo.
In our privacy you danced banana peels and orchestrated flocks of birds, celebrating
the curve of my belly as a fertility goddess'.
When you kissed my arms in public, rolled your body over mine in the campus grass,
or balanced me on top of you in the middle of the sand
it all felt like a dare.

I see you carrying your Schwinn on your right shoulder
wearing your father's Letterman Jacket over your bare chest
with low-slung, faded jeans and no shoes.

I see your tumbling brown curls brushing your left eye
and how your entrance into that poetry class makes all the girls squeeze their breath at the sight
of your classic beauty, genre of Apollo statue.

I can see you in the bathtub, smoking a cigar and reading me poetry while I steam artichokes in the kitchen.
I see you lying in an overcast June bed, making me beautiful, while the morning doves sing to each other.

As that diner grew small in my rearview mirror I knew it would be the last time I drove away from you.
"Tangled Up in Blue" serenaded me home against the black-blue sky of the summer evening
and you were still too much with me to miss.



UNTITLED

CHERI AMOUR

BIG GUNS

SONYA WONG

We've locked ourselves in a shack of a public restroom that sits along the beachfront. The frustration of early autumn waves sound outside, the guttural gawk of seagulls roam above. The smell of shit and cinnamon has overpowered the damp saltiness that loitered in the air. The afternoon sun peers through a tiny grated window and casts a distorted spotlight onto the floor, but we keep our distance from it. I look to the cracked mirror on the wall and wonder if I have the strength to shatter it. Or to mend it. Probably not, at least not right now.

Manufactured spices dance in my throat. I want to ask Alex if he would try to taste what I taste; if he would roll his tongue against mine, along the meatiness of my cheeks, or against the roof of my mouth. But I don't. We just got into it because his cloth was soaked and unusable, while mine had a few dry patches.

"Gimme yours," he ordered.

I told him it was his fault for bringing a washcloth and that he could go fuck himself. "You're one selfish bitch, no wonder why we're here." I balled up my towel and flung it towards him, pretty damn hard judging on the numbness that has traveled from my ears, down my neck and through my arms. My pitch left a shiny wet mark across his cheek but Alex dreamily picked up the towel and shuffled to the opposite end of the room, collapsing into the small space between the toilet and the wall. I found comfort in a corner amongst anonymous stains and sandy, wet footprints and watched as he wrapped the towel around the head of the air freshener can and guided it with eagerness into his open mouth.

Hiss, it sounds, all too fluently.

His body tosses from the inside out, in desperate jolts, protesting its bearer's actions. He rises slowly, like a boy born of glass, and presses his palms against the edges of the sink, lets his head fall forward, and twists his mouth wide open. Nothing comes out; nothing ever does, aside from the occasional gritty cough. I have seen this happen time and

again, and I have learned that the best remedy is to feed him. We do not deserve to starve. I retrieve his can and his cloth, and go to him. He is always accepting. Alex rocks back and forth on blurry heels, preparing for another hit. And I will watch my stepbrother until there is nothing left in there.

Each time he presses down on the knob, callous hisses echo in my ears. I fear that there are snakes nearing. They will torment me, wrap the length of their bodies around my skin until my screams are loud enough to indulge upon. I command Alex to stop. "Quit it!" He refuses to acknowledge me. He presses down again, inhales deeply, and then shifts the towel. It repeats. It is rhythmic. "Stop!" I scream. "You're freaking me out!" Alex draws his hand away from the can and toward me, as though I embody some magnetic force, and presents an erect middle finger. His eyes catch me for a moment, and then run. He hates me, I'm sure.

*

Rita and Roger, married in the winter of 1994. I should call Roger "Dad" and Alex should call Rita "Mom," but the imposition of the new stepfamily, over time, caused us kids to step away from the traditional implications of a family. The other "Mom" and "Dad" are dead; the first being in the figurative sense, but both had been more or less forgotten by the time us kids learned to ask meaningful questions.

The wedding was a last-minute affair in Lake Tahoe with minimal guests, and a nautical-inspired reception where anchors were printed on the carpet and sprayed frost covered the windows. The bride was simple and demure; her petite frame made the already bulky groom appear even more massive. My seventeen-year-old body closely resembles Rita's back then; insignificant curves, small breasts, delicate hands. Both of us even have dark hair and pale, freckled skin. Strangers often assume that she is my mother. She'll shake her hand back and forth vigorously and say, "No, no, no. She's my husband's," all while maintaining the most amicable tone of voice.

Our new family moved into a humble house in an Oceanside neighborhood. We ate dinner at the table every night, laughing together as foamy waves hummed static tunes on the other side of our picture window. Afterwards, Rita and Roger would tuck us into bed, well enough so that our toes never got cold. Before turning off the light we'd all

exchange “I love yous” like any other family who ornaments their prospective future with idealized phrases.

*

“Stop being a dick,” I say, turning away.

Alex knows how to make me feel uncomfortable using few or no words.

“You’re really a fuckin’ priss. You know that, right?”

He resumes a firm grip around the can.

“There was one point in time when you didn’t feel that way.”

No response.

Hiss.

*

I smoked half of a pack of cigarettes on the curbside before I saw the familiar hazy headlights turn the corner. Alex put the station wagon in park, a bit too fast, and a groan sounded from its underbelly.

“Kiera, what the hell?” he said beneath a breath, rushing toward me.

I edged toward the light. His initial touch caused me to shudder, but awakened patches of heat on my face that had been masked by angry wind and fear. He ran his hand down my arm and stopped around my wrists. His thumb circled the markings that were deeply reddening, igniting the consciousness of other bruises scattered about my body.

“I’m sorry for having you come out here,” I blurted. He drew me in, and my chapped face brushed his earlobe. “I just couldn’t... you know... I didn’t know...”

Alex pulled me back a bit, but near enough so that our breath lapped rebelliously in the unmoving air. I fastened my eyes, waiting, wishing, wanting—the embrace of everything in the whole damn world. And when it seemed like the right moment, Alex asked if I wanted to get a piece of pie somewhere or if I wanted to go home. “Home,” I said, “I’m feeling kind of nauseous anyway.” And his hand encompassed mine as he led me into my father’s car.

“Stay here tonight,” he whispered as we entered his room. “I’m going to get some aspirin so you don’t have too bad of a hangover tomorrow. You don’t wanna have to explain that to Mom and Dad.”

He left, and I sunk into the bed. I buried my feet underneath the flannel comforter and took in the scent of him that was infused in the sheets. I was eight years old

when I last laid in that bed. I'd examine the plastic universe of glowing planets and stars pasted across the ceiling, while Alex roused in dreams, his legs twitching against mine. I could never decide which world was supposed to be ours—the dim one adrift in the corner, or perhaps one that was clustered among others, overhead. And now that I wanted to choose, dark spots indicating where the paint had chipped away were all that remained on the canvas. Alex returned, dropped a few tablets into my mouth, and handed me a glass of water.

"So who is he?" he asked.

From inside the glass, I responded with, "It doesn't matter."

"To hell it doesn't! Whoever it is, I'll kick his ass." His cheeks brightened.

"I don't want to ever talk about it again. I wouldn't want you to get into trouble anyway. You're graduating this year."

"Then I'll get someone else to do it. Anyone who gets a fifteen-year-old girl drunk, let alone my sister, and then tries to take advantage of her deserves to get royally—"

"Stop with that, please. I don't need you to remind me of what happened right now. I'd like," I swallowed again hard, strange words, "to just sleep. Can we just sleep?"

Alex pulled the sheets over our waists and let my fragile frame mold to his. We fell asleep as the day struggled to break through the clouds of our Oceanside town.

*

A violent pounding rattles the door. "Is anyone in there?"

Alex doesn't budge, but calls out, "This shit's in use!"

"How dare you! Open up! I have a baby to change here!"

I gather the empty air freshener cans and attempt to shove them into my backpack; a few clink against the floor and roll toward the walls. Alex doesn't think to move. When I attempt to pull the one from his hand, he clenches his strong fingers around my wrist and pulls me onto the floor beside him. "Not done yet," he murmurs.

He sees a reoccurring fear in my eyes, and immediately releases me.

I accept his mental apology.

"Open this door! This bathroom is for public use!"

"Fuck off! Or I'll publicly shove eight inches of something down your throat!"

"Oh! That's it kid! You asked for it!"

I imagine Roger tearing through the door, .38 in hand, his pack of blue wolves trailing in close behind. His senses lead him straight to Alex, who feels the coolness of the barrel in the space between his pretty teeth.

*

Breakfast the next morning: bacon, ham, bread, and too much butter. At the table, Roger positioned himself behind the newspaper, crime section, a cup of black coffee in hand. Rita, as usual, was tending to appliances in the kitchen. Alex and I came downstairs, side by side, taking the same light steps.

"What were you kids up to last night?" Roger asked, motionless.

"Um, Alex just drove me to the store. Had to get some materials for a project," I stammered. The two of us sat down. Rita poured us glasses of lukewarm juice and then turned to fetch us plates.

"Is that right?" The newspaper folded over, revealing the grey, worn face of a police lieutenant. He leaned in, as though to confide in us a secret. "I saw what I saw when I walked in your room this morning." The fan above the stovetop heaved. "And I'll be damned if... God, I just can't believe you'd pull this shit." He struggled to keep his voice low as his wife flipped sizzling bacon nearby.

"Dad," Alex said, with a mature ease. "Kiera was just in trouble. Some kid, some jackass..."

"Shut up! *You're* the jackass kid!" Roger's voice penetrated the walls, loud enough so that Alex did, shut up.

"Honey, what was that all about?" Rita asked, approaching, spatula stiff in hand.

"Your goddamn kid is trying to get fresh with my only daughter!" He pointed a rigid finger toward Alex, stabbed the air with it to highlight the words: my, only, and daughter.

"You're mistaken, I'm sure." She began to shake her head. And the shaking would not cease for the remainder of the "conversation."

"No, Alex *is* taking advantage of Kiera! Don't act dumb to what I'm telling you, Rita! He had his filthy hands all over her!"

Rita looked to her son for answers and he tried to

explain over my muffled cries, but Roger refused to hear it. By this time he was pacing back and forth, firing jarring threats into the space we knew to be home. Rita tried to calm him by cupping his hand in hers, and tried to calm herself by repeating, "you're wrong." I looked to her, that weak woman who was supposed to hold a position aside my father, and pitied her. Poor thing, didn't know him at all.

"This is our family!" She trembled. "We'll work through this!"

"He isn't my son; that son of a bitch could never be my blood."

Rita bolted upstairs, wailing "What about me? What about me?" Alex left to rescue her, because at that time he knew he was capable of it.

My father sat beside me at the kitchen table and stroked my head, his coarse hands ailing the tenderness of my scalp. "Tell me you love me," he guided. "Tell Daddy how much he means to you."

Unable to control my thoughts, I said, "Yes Daddy you know I love you more than anything." I immediately choked on blood.

"I've got to head to work," he said, "I want you to go to Grandma's after school so I can talk this shit out with Rita." Before I could respond he fixed his lips to the wet corner of my mouth, drew back, and trudged out the back door.

*

It took about a year for our family to conceal its blemishes. Within that time Roger was promoted to captain, Rita dyed her hair an aggressive red, Alex moved into a studio on the other side of town and started community college, and I smoked my first joint. Every Sunday we got together to spend an afternoon of family time. That particular afternoon, at the behest of Roger, we drove to the countryside to barbeque and shoot his shiny new pistol.

Two half-empty Coors cans were lined up on a fallen tree. We women watched as the men loaded the first magazine.

"Your ass still studying psychology?" Roger asked Alex, his eyes fixed on the sights.

"Yeah. It's pretty cool." My stepbrother had shed the wholesomeness of his face. Every week that I saw him, I was surprised to discover a new contour.

“What are you planning on doing with that? Be a shrink?” He chuckled discouragingly and fired two rounds, successfully wiping out both cans. Alex flinched a bit, but I believe I’m the only one who noticed. He maintained his composure.

“I don’t know. I was thinking about working with troubled kids or something. There’s this program at my school where they set you up at this clinic for the summer and you help out. You get credit, but it’s across the country and it’s kind of expensive.”

“Working with fuck ups, huh? That’s appropriate.” Roger chuckled wholly once more, and Alex’s lack of response revealed that he wasn’t amused. “I’ll tell you what. If you can shoot through *one* of the “Os” in a can, I’ll pay to ship you off *and* for whatever other expenses you need. Anyway, I’d be doing your Mom a favor by giving her a break.”

“Alright,” Alex challenged. “Get a fucking can.”

“Watch your mouth!” Rita scolded, cigarette smoke seeping from her nose. She took up smoking those skinny cigarettes I had seen advertised in her gossip magazines.

“Get a can, honey!” Roger called. Rita irritably rose from the bench, her slim hips guiding the rest of her wiry body. “No, I meant Kiera,” he corrected. She sunk back into her usual position—legs crossed and weight shifted onto the small of her back. Roger continued, not even noticing his wife’s rolling eyes. “A new one is fine. I’m guessing it’ll be staying full anyway.”

I plucked a cold can from the cooler and was just about to set it on the tree when Roger shouted, “Give that thing a kiss for good luck! Your brother’s gonna need it.” I pecked the can and set it down, then walked away wiping the wetness from my lips. Roger and Alex kept watch until I resumed my seat aside Rita.

Alex firmly grasped the gun, extended his arm, tilted his head and closed one eye.

“I can already see where this is headed,” Roger commented. “It’s cool, boy. Go on. Show us what you’ve got.”

No reaction emitted from Alex. He just squeezed the trigger halfway, and waited. For what, I’m not sure. But for once, I longed to hear the absolution of the gunshot. I fantasized about seeing the can hunched over, in pain from the brutal blow, contents spilling out of one clean, rounded hole. Roger bruised. Alex smiling again.

Bang!

Four other shots followed with the quickness of unsound emotions, and like the first, they all vanished into the overbrushed countryside. The boy sought one more chance, repositioned his footing, aimed, and squeezed. *Click.* The hollowness of the chamber deafened in my chest. I looked to the ground; Rita fumbled for another skinny cigarette. And within a few seconds Roger retrieved the gun, loaded a new magazine, took the place of his stepson, and fired a shot.

Bang!

The "O" popped.

*

"She's gonna call the cops or something. You know that, right?" The entire weight of Alex's head is now resting on my shoulder. I convince myself I can hear his heart pulsing and feel his brain spinning on circular tracks.

"Fuck her."

"What if Dad comes?"

"Who's Dad?" he asks, eyes clenched.

It is difficult to follow the meaning of Alex's conversations during times like this. Last month, while Roger and Rita were out to dinner with church friends, I invited him over to get high with me. He brought four cans; that time it was vanilla. We sat in the backyard hammock and inhaled rich artificial fumes through the thickness of a beach towel, and sipped cola from freezer mugs.

"The taste reminds me of the Christmas cookies we would make when we were little, remember that?"

"Sure." Alex didn't even seem to be listening.

"You know, this year I'm taking winter classes at your school so when I start college I'll have some GEs out of the way. We can carpool or something."

His interest increased. "Isn't that camp thing around that time? You always go."

"Yeah, but Roger thought it would be a good idea. And it makes sense."

"Why do you let Roger make all of your decisions for you? You're a fucking sellout sometimes Kier." He scratched the tiny bump on his nose, and pretended to be ignorant of my glare.

"I don't." At that moment I wanted to move so that my side wasn't secured to his. But the space we shared made it impossible to do so.

“Yeah you do. Why else would you have chosen softball over drama? As much as I tease you for liking that geeky shit, I know you’d be doing plays if it wasn’t for Roger’s punk ass.”

“He just tries to guide me in the right direction. And look, I’m really good at softball, but I would never have known that if it wasn’t for him.” The subject was aching.

“You’re good at a lot of things.”

“Roger loves me, that’s all.”

“Too bad you let the wrong people love you.”

I responded with, “I guess,” although my mind was treading a labyrinth. “I change my mind. It tastes like a root beer float.”

“Not really,” he said.

That night I dreamt of drowning in a sea of vanilla scented waters, and woke up indifferent to joy or sorrow.

I rest my cheek against his head and wonder if the air freshener has caused Alex to forget Roger’s existence, or if he just believes he never had a father. It doesn’t matter either way. Neither of us has ever hoped to be reclaimed.

There is one unfinished can, half full. Alex’s expression is knotted and he takes in ethereal gasps of air. I lay him in the depth of my lap and mimic his breaths, in hopes of feeling what he feels. We steal tiny gasps of air, as though its existence is conditional, and sustain the time it spends in our lungs. *What next?* he whispers. *Is Roger going to come and kill me?* And his face softens, seeming content in asking me such a thing.

Did you know that Muhammad Ali didn’t try to block punches to the face? He just taught himself how to avoid them altogether. I didn’t know that Alex. Why are you talking about boxing? *Because I always wished I could do that... fight that way.* In the real world, sometimes you have to take hits. *They called him the Greatest.* I didn’t know that, Alex.

Within minutes he slips into what appears to be a sound sleep, yet the tightness in his face returns. Lengthy lines around his forehead and mouth are revealed, ones that I have never seen before. I stroke my finger along them trying to wear it all away, but they intensify. Alex becomes nothing but a painful reminder.

I peel off my T-shirt and wrap it tightly around the top of the remaining can. With every intention I wish our parents had for us, I edge it into his mouth and pinch the

thickness of his nose.

Hisssssss...

I await some sign, telling me to remove my finger from the knob, but the room sits still. Alex's body involuntarily contracts, his head drumming against my thighs. His eyes bulge, but he doesn't look to me. I press down harder.

Hisssssss...

Second by second the can lessens in weight, and the home in his face returns.

Hisssssss... tsssskkkk.

"It's nice, isn't it?" I ask. And I convince myself that he nods.

My grip loosens, and the hollow can hits the damp floor. Alex appears to be in dreams, his eyelids flutter and his mouth is calm.

I lean over and fix my lips to his, taking in the whole of them. And it tingles. And it is sweet.

THE GRACE OF DAYBREAK

ASHLYN MORSE

We got there, thankfully, alive. Alive. I looked at his sweet little face, he looked alive to me. I held his quiet hand. The monitor punctuated my thoughts with patient, steady commas. His skin felt like cold silk, refreshing and free. The clear plastic oxygen mask ticked on exhale, and the monitor marked the cadence of my breath. I would exhale, the monitor would punctuate its end, the soft, fluttering ticks whirred from the plastic mask. The stale, musical peace of the hospital kept me cool, and the goose bumps fluttered up my arm with the whirs and ticks of the plastic mask. My little brother and his plastic mask. I sat back into the plastic-covered armchair and nearly slipped right out again. I steadied myself and stretched my legs. The window was facing east and I, facing it. The sky was pastel, the light fading along with the contents of the room. I slept until he was ready. "No more air, Dad." He ripped off the mask and there was only one thing left. Silence. We all heard the words plainly enough. I stared. I was fixed. He rolled from his left side onto his back, clumsily consuming his hatred of pain until there was none. He was in pain then, had been in pain for a long time, this was the reason I wasn't to try and save his life that day. The oxygen mask was inanimate on the floor. And there he was on the stale bed, bald and nine. His mouth was moldy under that mask, and now the green hanging strings of sticky bacteria were open to the air as if nature had already begun taking him back. He gaped and gasped inward, starving for the oxygen he could manage. The green things jittered. I stopped breathing. He released in levels, letting the molecules linger, I'm sure, on the tip of his lungs. His lungs. His malignant breath. Again, he gasped inward, and this time exhaled immediately, everything was windy, my thoughts toppled over like frail trees under the invisible power. Another gasp inward. I waited patiently for my music, but the monitor had quit conducting, the tempo was lost. The silence crystallized over our bodies until it pressed us into the hospital tile floor with a flat-line solo. He never did let go of that last taste of hospital oxygen; it was something he curiously decided to keep. The goose bumps came all over again. Alive. He still looked alive. My vision shifted to the Eastward window. I squinted, and a tear fell as I stared headlong into the brilliant orange of the first dawn I ever noticed. The brilliance trampled the floodgates of the horizon and the illuminated blindness projected heavily onto the desert world below.

KIT MEETS CRONKITE: PANCAKING FOR THE TRUTH

KATE MARTIN ROWE

Kit, an American Girl doll, also stars as a nine-year-old girl in a historical fiction series set in the Great Depression.

(Kit walks on stage and waves to the empty auditorium—her handler whispers in her ear.)

Walter Cronkite: Hello, Kit. You're looking true today.

Kit: Thanks, Walt—can I call you that?

C: Uh, sure. As you may have noticed (*He motions toward the empty room*), no audience today. (*Camera woman calls action.*) So why don't you start by telling us a little about yourself.

K: Okay, the shiny truth of it: my bedroom set is divine.

W: Really. (*He writes in his notebook.*)

K: What? Did Samantha say something about it? (*She fidgets with her hands.*) It's an attic bedroom, and I think it's rather bohemian chic, to use a twenty-first century term. (*She winks.*) Let's see... it's periwinkle and pistachio. It has a tufted chenille bedspread, and comes with—has a pale yellow throw pillow. And there's a rainbow-colored rug to "keep my feet warm on chilly nights." Samantha may have New York in 1904, but I've got the attic.

W: Did you just quote from the catalogue?

K: Sheesh, you caught me! (*Laughs.*) I've got a heap of trouble on my mind lately.

W: (*He leans forward.*) What's troubling you, Kit?

K: (*She pauses.*) Times are tough. Mother says we've got to

stuff our pride deep in our pockets.

W: Let me level with you, Kit. Twenty-first Century memory has the Great Depression down as shoeless, dirty and sharing the last moldy piece of bread between five kids. Then there's you, with that sporty little bob and a bazillion outfits, your smart red leather slippers and sailor pajamas, the outdoor furniture, the party lanterns. Frankly speaking, your accoutrements cost more than many present-day Americans can spend on their own furniture. How much say do you have in your own storyline?

K: *(She squints into the distance, leans on one elbow and sighs.)* First off, I've been fighting for a creative toehold for a long time. "You're just a girl," they say. As for the current story—we're resourceful folks. Yes, Father has a business; we've a house. But, I can't go to the movies (unless Ruthie pays), and we had that one Christmas without presents—remember Kit's Christmas Surprise!? Though I did get that new red dress. *(She winks again.)*

W: Never rains for long then.

K: *(Her voice rises.)* Doesn't it? Don't you think I'd rather be Samantha? With her doting grandmother, fine dresses and tea parties? What girl wouldn't? *(She looks away and stiffly swipes at her eye with one finger.)* Is that what you wanted to hear? Put that in your interview!

W: *(Leans back in his chair and props his leg on one knee.)* I sense some tension between you and Samantha.

K: Look, Walt. It's nothing.

W: We can finish this later if you'd prefer.

K: *(Blinks and then looks away.)* No, now's fine. What else?

W: Alright. *(Looks down at notepad.)* So what do you hope girls learn from your life? Why did you agree to the book deal?

K: I've always thought there was a greater purpose to my life

than just looking pretty. And decorating my attic and throwing parties. Those things don't authenticate me.

W: Have you found it?

K: It's the sweetness of girls... their airiness, that certain, uh, itty-bittyness.

W: Explain.

K: The miniature, the compassion for the barely perceptible—

W: Ah, the mothering instinct.

K: Okay, not exactly. You see, we're all—sometimes I'm a tomboy too. But, there's no reason why a girl can't go for bike rides, bake cakes **AND** look tip top—

W: What about target practice? Or tree forts?

K: Let's not get irrational. Truth is like a pretend steel penny. You hear that Samantha???? (*Kit looks directly into the camera and frowns.*) This is REAL skin here. (*She jabs two fingers to one arm, as if trying to pinch it.*) Can we take a break now?

WUPPERTAL

OMER ZALMANOWITZ

top seared pause of a schtick—a raucous that top seared couldn't avoid even if such a person tried. on and on the multichannel spoke about ruing—you are either a left or right personality, let the medium sized speaker top seared explain this to you.

top seared was born with a gun in Wuppertal right outside, or inside depends how you look at it, the Berlin Wall right as it collapsed. By simply adding a foot base to the wall top seared was able to mount the wall and shoot at the whole set that developed in front of his eyes as all sides began to shoot at all other sides.

It was a miniscule gun with a timbre and a technique to kill, but not to kill in purpose, rather more sacred like, to kill unbeknownst, through an accidental shot, all of a sudden a puff of smoke and the shot went out of the barrel like wine spills from a cellar's barrel in the country and then to spill like blood, near that town Wuppertal from where top seared was born and to where never top seared was to return, and still that miniscule gun, in near obscurity, manages to kill, with an accidental bullet first and then a puff of smoke to follow, a soldier at the side of the developing scene and later another soldier on that side of the wall and that side as well. So that by the time the miniscule gun had fired all its rounds in a serialism undetermined there were no more soldiers alive near the wall and in the adjacent developing scene and no more soldiers at their posts on the roads near the wall making aiming guns at the silent zone—a barbed-wire no person zone, their top priority. At times those soldiers zipped and zoomed bullets at nothing especially, and at times they continued this form of composition with pure mathematic logic that someone was to be killed by their constant propping up of their gun's bullets into the air—first killing a brundibar or a Czech bumblebee and then killing a Lintz or a Lodz grasshopper and then killing the science of man, the humanity of man, man's theology, the persons church at Dresden, the Cathedral at Coventry, they shot at everything when they were at the onset of the wall but then they were

being scattered themselves by the bullets that top seared had shot at them. And then there were less and less soldiers, first near the walls there were less and less soldiers and there near the no person zone there were less and less soldiers and then at the barbed wire posts there were less and less soldiers, and at the periphery of Berlin there were less and less soldiers and near Wuppertal where soldiers used to drink and rest and be merry there where then also less and less soldiers, there were less and less soldiers everywhere after top seared had let the miniscule gun shoot accidentally and reach the near obscurity of killing—that one near the wall was killed, and that one near the no person zone was killed, and that one near the barbed wire posts was killed—an obscurity that these soldiers knew all too well; and then there were less and less soldiers everywhere.

Should top seared collapsed on the wall, well top seared should have died right there, the only fact that prevented death from descending on top seared spirit and body and the rhythm of top seared breathing was that even though in accident of the shooting gun all those bullets that zipped and zoomed from the miniscule gun at the soldiers near the wall and the no person zone and near the barbed wire posts all those bullets were reaching from the barrel into top seared skin as well and lodging there too, for once a gun starts its way it takes everything to stop it and nothing but intention to keep it firing—that was a saying that took force near the wall especially when the drunkard soldiers were toying with women like dresses that they wore under their uniforms once they had gone to the other side of the wall's spirit and behaved without guilt as they shot rounds of guns with double barrels at the manifold forms of life, forming groups, walls of bullets that traveled beyond the wall and searching for the echoing chambers of children's hearts and delighting in the thuds of their stopping beats, a collective negative space blast the timber of which was the crying of bloody tears that welled up for a while and then went out for a longer while in outbursts. When the soldiers were drunkard they said that, that it takes only intention to kill. In a way it's a gentle technique to say that intention kills, but it becomes vicious and true and manifested when such sayings dwell near the heart, in such proximity to belief that it replaces the heart's own natural rhythm and then bullets zip and zoom by lodging their metals even in geese feathers—top

seared shot at himself by accident, such was the concern to shoot that even while only climbing on top of the wall to have a smoke of a puffy cigarette butt the gun was firing from its miniscule tip with the accidental technique of death. But top seared was only bleeding, the blood pressure dropped in numbers, that was all, the heart's thumping timbre only quieted and then subsided almost entirely and then it ceased just as bells tolling at the Coventry Cathedral had ceased, their bellflower fallen to the floor and in shards of bronze while top seared heart was in shards of flesh from shrapnel of the soldiers bullets. Then there were less and less soldiers everywhere, as there was less and less from top seared—to die in a dance of a bagatelle in a pool of blood was a sure way to die but not when the top is seared so, you can't die by bullets once you've been burned into ashes: top seared was burned in a mass human burning oven, the chimneys of which pretended to bake, what, bread? There were ashes even in Wuppertal of the dead whom had been burned to death, clouds of ashes that hung for days over the whole of cities and people knew what it was, not the unleavened flour of a flying shortened bread a custom of a deuteronomy the losing of numbers of a people but the torn into flailing weightless ashes what used to be body parts.

It was a Rhine bus that took top seared first, barely a stamp on the ground, barely a segment of a person and the soldiers came to take away from Wuppertal everybody, they took people as if they were animals going to Noah's Arc, they forced families out of the house, the grandparents first (they were shot in the back yard and were not to go on the bus, they simply made a percussive bleeding through their mouth and succumbed, waiting only for the magnificent night to fold them tightly and usher something away from them before come the crows and pushed their beaks through the pipe of the flesh in silent reverie where the black of their plume gets purple by the red, a somber event for the stomping ground under the soldiers' boots) then the parents wearing wool and shawls on their heads dancing from house to house, from the apartments to the pavements in long periods of mourning, carrying them out in couples as if species of the inhumane being ushered away, a man and a woman, and grandpa and grandma to be shot in the temple by a .73 caliber gun in the back yard, and later on the return trips the same practice withstood as it proved successful, carrying men and women

like herd, like the animals boarding Noah's Arc and avoiding the great deluge but these animals weren't to be protected, they were to be slain, to be herded and massacred, the same practice stayed, couples men and women were taken from their houses, from their apartments they were advised to come down and go into the buses that were going to usher them away; in truth there were no buses only the multitude of feet with which they walked and on which they perished, couples of men they led down, and of women, three couples and more, and by losing patience the soldiers no longer took the grandpa and grandma out the back yard but simply lodged a bullet straight in their temples from one side to the other, as a children swing does—goes up then down, like an itty bitsy spider climbing on a ledge only that their blood and matter didn't climb, it trickled down and the bullets lodged momentarily and came in the heads of the geriatric and elderly and came out just as fast carrying the message of death within. They shot them on the front step, on the ledge of the apartments where even in winter the children used to play hide and seek or used to recite poems with gestures and let the others guess the poem—what was that poem? In couples they went, whole neighborhoods, from Wuppertal and from Dresden and went onto trains and into death marches and the movement of the whole was a movement of a soloist dancer, so empty in its movements that the moon in its waxing at the magnificent night had meant to overtake the dancer for even its waxing or a large body mass in the skies was faster than the movements of the empty dancer, fearing a .73 caliber gun at its temple always, remembering in the gestures of childhood from long ago the games of gesturing of poems as the gas chamber began to eat at the soul, not a lengthy period at all for a person to evaporate, and how with all the ashen blanketing cities such as Wuppertal for days, how people could have convinced themselves that this was the smell of bright red cookies that were mistakenly burned through the huge chimneys erected for the official baker of Wuppertal or of Dresden, how the ashes didn't rattle them when they clung to their clothes, and to their beer mugs and to the resin on the string of the violins and onto the horse-hair brush of the bow with which they played in their philharmonics, for they knew and didn't care that the ashen that made their cities cloudy were the ashes of people that were taken not one by one, not couple by couple but a whole mass,

as if in each deportation round a whole race was attempted to be done away with by those who drink beer in the cellars of the city and train dogs to eat the frail bodies of those belonging to the race, a whole people, skin and bones to their canine teeth's delight, even when only, what a petty word only is in such a sense, when only mind you they shot at the temple of a grandma and a grandpa in front of the eyes of the children on the ledge, or on the main steps of the apartment building where the children used to play the guessing of poems by gesturing, perhaps this a poem about a goat, perhaps this a poem about god, and the percussive gurgle of the elderly people's blood escaping from their mouth in bubbly manner, the children crying then stomping, then pretending in their mind's eye to shoot the soldier who had just done the shooting to their grandma or grandpa, to return in kind what was given in kind, and then they had dreams that they themselves had shot their grandparent's temple and gestured at the gurgling mouth of theirs as if these were percussive poems for all to guess, the slain become somehow those who inflict pain onto others and more generations of the race fall into being victims—how easy it is to kill a whole race—top seared couldn't understand how it didn't bother them that throughout the three hundred some kinds of beer that Wuppertal manufactured, that the ashes in the cellars, for there was nowhere to be found a cellar that hadn't had some ashes in its beer, that the ashes in the beers that they all drank and raised almost over the cloud enveloping Wuppertal and Dresden and Berlin, how they raised those beers and were merry as they knew that the beers that they drank were with ashes of the race that they took out in couples out of apartment buildings and onto the streets and like cattle, like onto Noah's Arc they had gotten them in couples.

1.

The soldiers were precise in their politic, in their critic and in their schtick—although it is true that the army marches on its stomach these soldiers, at least half of them were only half earnest when they stole human life and when they did they lied to themselves that they didn't but still when they did which was almost always they almost always ate the skin and bones and also had potato soup and beer, all kinds of beer.

They tried their vicious act on top seared, well they half caught top seared before, and now they wanted to finish

the Judenrat as if they were burning a book that was shining no matter how many pages were burned and turned into ashes. The pedagogy of the soldiers was simple, shoot as much lead-coated bullets at top seared that stood bleeding on the walls, on the Berlin Wall that belonged to no one, but at that moment belonged to top seared—that was their fear, that even in a simple moment of a Judenrat dying the overtaking of the soul would claim the wall for even a brief moment making the wall, Berlin, the birth place Wuppertal the church standing its ground in that city and the beer breweries all would belong momentarily to a Judenrat and they feared that, their number one mother country belonging to Judenrat when that Judenrat was dying.

They didn't halt the often splitting rounds from their rifles, rounds split when the soldiers are overzealous and shoot more than a thousand bullets inside a minute and the splitting occurs right after the bullets leave the rifle's barrel. "This person is from Wuppertal" and they shot more rounds towards top seared more lead-coated bullets straight to the flesh but most of the bullets split after being fired and went on to buzz and dance all around the ankles of top seared and they ate at the flesh of the feet and split the fingernails of the toes just as they split from the gun, so that top seared stood on the shins of the legs for there was no foot, there was no ankle, and the blood trickled down onto the wall when the whistling bullets kept coming and the soldiers in the distance by the walls, and by the no person zone and by their barbed-wire posts, they were whistling too making the rounds of their bullets cut top seared shorter as if a sickle cutting wheat—but still that person from Wuppertal stood bleeding.

Prayer was acting as a shield not to let slip from top of the wall over the red blood of the gut that the soldiers finally were able to pierce bullets into top seared—the importance of a prayer was to repeat words just like in a story and to ascend on the tongue just like a sermon in a church—though the splitting bullets killed everything that could ascend in top seared, top seared couldn't go up or down, top seared stayed on top of the Berlin Wall watching the whole scene unfold, but words could still ascend on the tip of top seared tongue and still the soul had a moment of fatigue but it too could ascend if the right words came up. Why anyone should sing Kol Nidrei in Wuppertal is never understood, it has something to do with the Judenrat finding a book of

ascension of degrees where slowly but surely digs at the flesh of the soul not to cleanse it as anyone at the unfolding of the scene might have thought but rather to make it rougher, not with spite but more earthy, enough to have tasted the region of a criminal's deed, enough to have been struck and let down a slap on the cheek of a child, a child that runs after what? No one would have believed that top seared sang Kol Nidrei on the Berlin Wall, a wall that turned to be for top seared the wall of the ascension of degrees, and no one heard it, the Kol Nidrei for there was no one there in the quiet of Berlin to tell that a Judenrat was rushing past, there was no one there to see the whole body severed not from little bullets but from little words, words that ascend the tongue and sing out, and finally there were no bullets whistling, there were not even soldiers near the walls, not even soldiers near the no person zone, not even soldiers near the posts with the barbed wire, there were no soldiers at all when top seared went, the whole of the Berlin Wall was top seared, the whole of Berlin was top seared, the whole of Wuppertal was top seared, yes just for a moment, but it was all top seared, the whole of the song of Deutschland number one was top seared, and for a moment, like they all feared, it all belonged to top seared under whose feet at the moment of ascension the Berlin Wall collapsed, it did so from under the child-like feet of a praying person, actually not even that, for who could tell that everything finally belonged to a Judenrat in Germany.



UNTITLED

TIFFANY COLLINS

NATURAL HISTORY

AMBER NORWOOD

In the old museum we trace blue lines
on the map (note the key:
here, there is food.
here, an escape. Here,
a place to rest, a sip of water),

and exercise control in hallways.
Mothers in worn black
shoes knock hollow each step
into dim-lit cases—

the bear is frozen at their echo,
knee deep in glass river,
mouth soundless open
in defense of the salmon
that is also permanently still.

Footsteps are murmurs blowing
pinned Bog Copper, wings unstruggled. Steps
stir thatch on the model hut; the Indian
before it has no face,
but a fine headdress. The hush

waits, shining the gold inlay on ceramic
bowls. Our pointing fingers plan
whole days, wander on maps,

our origins defined
floor by floor,
where dust is preserved
in thick plastic casing,
a gem becomes artifact,
a bowl, biography—

something we can see.

By lost, we mean fixated by bone.
By bone, we mean nightmares of ancestry.
By frightened, we mean it's closing time:
the docents are tired, and the doors upstairs

lay bare the world without visible legend.

TRASH DAY TUESDAY

DENIS FEEHAN

The sound of thunder
like a tank brigade
forced my eyelids open
wide revealing my panic
It was trash day Tuesday!
and the bulging, sated cans
were still locked in the back
like felons serving five to ten

I checked the bedside clock
as if that neon dial mattered now
fact was the sun was up
and the tanks were here
I flew out of the bed
like an F-16
with the wife yelling at me
as if that was gonna help

The concrete porch was glacial
on my sissy bare feet
how do penguins do it?
I ran like a football player
through a row of prostrate tires
to the grass oasis out front
but it was just as arctic
as the porch and wet to boot

I slipped as I right-turned
but got right up on my icebergs
and dashed to the side of our base
but the clock and I had failed
the thunder had waned
and the wife was pointing at
the tanks as they turned the corner
to do battle on the next block

NOCTURNE

NANCY CARROLL

In the October dusk she slipped
between frosted glass shutters,
their gardenia print drapes.

Lydia extended chalk fingers
toward my cheek,
Never marry bipolar

she stroked, dusting
my face pale, as a tense
moon rose yellow

over the backyard marble
of Peracles and his horse.
Three husbands named Stan,

she whispered clasping an ivory
framed birth certificate, my baby shoes
in bronze.

*Insist breakfast, lunch and dinner,
do the dishes before you eat, and tell
him God doesn't sing Sophocles.*

Lydia's voice pushed through
like childbirth, as gardenias
turned orange and I watched

her slip between arms, legs, and cracked hooves in garnet.

ARTIST AS GESTURE OF ROOM

MARY ANGELINO

She knows each muscle's lift,
tendons as mountains pinned
beneath artist's stroke. My hand

is pressed against the door, I
feel the conjoining room where her
coat is draped over the chair,

carelessly thrown like she has never
needed anything, purse, boots, change
for the bus ride home.

Her hands draw-in the shadows between
us. *You don't keep*
still long enough, she says. I shift

my hips, lock spine in place,
hair gripping breasts
like vine on brick. The room knows

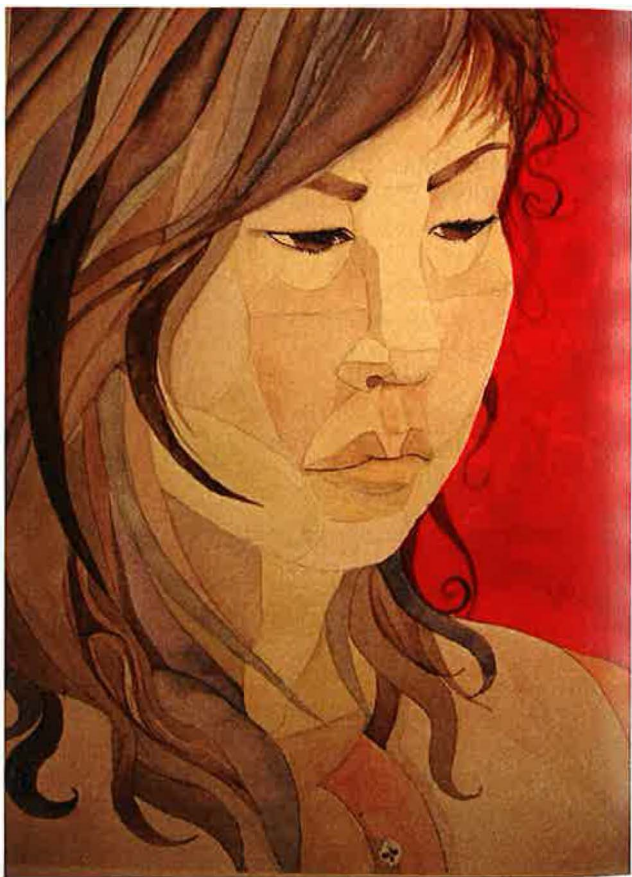
distance and our place in it;
rain falls on the window panes, each drop
a possibility sliding its tongue

to the sill. She is here
but the room ignores her,
listens to the groan of its

wood floors, contemplates water
damage. Her pencils
are wet, mark scattered eye-lashes

on cherry wood desk. Later, she refuses the fruit
and the wine, leaves early
to finish portrait by Monday. She'll be alone

with my body and its extra lines,
fingers moistened to smear the grey.



UNTITLED

SETH MARTINI

HANDS OF FORTUNE

J.W. WANG

Ling lay awake in the small two-bedroom apartment in West Hollywood that was home to her, her husband and her two children. She rested on her side in the larger of the two bedrooms, darkened by the drawing of the curtains. Scattered washes from the setting sun cast a soft glow about the edges of the window like a gilded frame, circumscribing the coarse curtain cloth. Outside the summer air was still, winding down from the frenzies of the day, and faint murmurs of cartoon voices were audible from beyond the closed bedroom door.

Drawing her hands close to her face she studied the cracked, brittle surface of her fingertips. The lines were jagged but ran mostly vertically, from the top of her fingers down through the crease of the first joint and ceasing halfway to the second. The flesh in and about the middle of each fingerprint, of which none were discernible, appeared the most disfigured. Each finger looked as if it had been intentionally frozen, thawed and cut, stabbed at with tiny knives. Chapped, bleeding red flesh betrayed and exposed by the hapless, numb epidermis. *Fu-guay-sho*, the Chinese called it. *Hands of fortune and sophistication*. So called as they must belong to someone who couldn't be bothered to perform manual labor. Hands of someone who'd have to be looked after, served. Ling followed the lines closely, tracing their full lengths from end to end, studied what was left of her fingerprints.

The *fu-guay-sho* had worsened lately. Three years ago in Beitou it was simply rough and disfigured, with cracks that didn't cut so deep, the flesh beneath contained and secure. Regardless, the woman behind the immigration counter at the American Embassy had trouble obtaining a single recognizable fingerprint. She tried all ten fingers, tried them again. Shook her head and looked at Ling. "Poor," the woman said. Ling smiled apologetically, offered her ink-stained fingers for another go. But the woman relented, took the indecipherable lines and smudges for what they were and let Ling on her way.

"Look, Wei," she laughed and bent down to show her six-year-old son, "look at mommy's fingerprints!"

Wei observed with some interest the messy, unfaithful reproductions. They looked like his mother's fingerprints. They didn't look like they could belong to anyone else.

It was here in Los Angeles, after she took on the florist job, that the *fu-guay-sho* manifested to its full potential. Constant wetness and washing of the hands, pricks and scratches from thorns, a ubiquitous wet chill endemic to floral establishments all conspired to foster the fortune and sophistication in her hands. Ling tried using lotion, wore gloves; none of it seemed to matter. She went on anyway, stripping roses and arranging chrysanthemums, biting her lip whenever the sting was too much.

It was Friday and she'd called in sick—a rare instance—hoping three days of rest could restore some cohesion in her hands, find the world tenable again. But the kitchen floor needed to be cleaned, and there were dishes left over from the night before, so Ling had put them to work after all. The rest of the time she spent reading Chuong Yao's latest novel and falling asleep. The kids were surprised to see her at home when they returned from school.

"Mom, are you okay?" Wei asked. Yun-Yun, who had just started first grade, climbed onto the bed and touched Ling's forehead.

Ling smiled. She took Yun-Yun's hand with one of her own and straightened her daughter's hair with the other. "My hands hurt, but they're okay now. I'll feel even better after you finish your homework."

"But it's Friday, and cartoons are on!"

"Okay, after the cartoons."

They ran off, backpacks and lunchboxes clattering to their footsteps.

Ling raised her hands to her face and rubbed her fingers against the skin as if applying a coat of foundation, registering the coarse, scraping sensation. She pressed her hands against each other and felt the crinkling of her skin accompanied by a dull, tender pain. The day was burning away lethargically, like a large candle melting to its base. Letting out a slow breath, Ling folded her hands over her chest, closed her eyes and daydreamed.

She dreamed of the old life. Her memories were filled

with tastes, sounds, sights and smells of an ancient but fast-modernizing Taiwan: stealing sugar canes from the old man pedaling by on his loaded wagon, riding off to Keelung on the back of Kai's motorcycle for *tien-bu-la*, giving birth to Yun-Yun an hour after she finished a game of Mahjong, browsing through the night market, wandering amongst stationed street carts hawking local favorites: fried fermented tofu, shaved ice with red beans, *ai-yu* jelly in light syrup. She asked Wei to bring her some starfruit by knocking them off of their neighbor's tree and sent him for oyster vermicelli from a street vendor near midnight. Wei never questioned or balked at Ling's requests. He'd take off running when asked and return cradling the items as if they were a prize, mouth wide with pride.

Energy was never a concern for Wei—it was his penchant for unintended destruction that sometimes worried her. A week after he knocked over the Kuos' china closet and demolished a thousand dollars' worth of painted bowls and plates, Ling came home to find the sofa emptied of its innards. Great balls of polyester rolled across the hardwood floor like urban tumbleweeds, the apartment still and silent. Wei was nowhere to be found. She checked the closets, underneath the bed, next to the washer and behind the old furniture in the storage room. Then she went to look over the disemboweled sofa, an autopsy in modern living, and found Wei tucked inside the freshly made hollow, smiling at his own ingenuity to fabricate a new hiding ground.

Ling sighed, and, after a stern scolding, looked for a new sofa chair.

Though Ling reminisced often she knew that this was home now, and after tallying the points and stacking them one against the other, she knew this was better. This was what she and Kai had chosen after long hours of discussion late into the evenings. Despite providing Ling with everything she had ever known, Taiwan stood at the cusp of a political void, stared into an unpredictable future. A young and impressionable Kai had fled with his parents across the Strait of Taiwan from the Maoists in 1949, and, thirty-four years later, convinced a military strike from Communist China was imminent Kai took his own family and fled again, preemptively this time, across the Pacific Ocean. Here they wouldn't have to worry about Communist aggression. Here was a stable economy, and here they would live freely,

without alarm or worry—save how they would make do, get by. The arid climate would alleviate Wei's asthma. And Yun-Yun would make this place the only home she'd ever known.

Soon after Kai floated the idea of immigrating, Ling turned to ask Wei what he'd think about moving to America. They were at the marketplace, standing by the guava wagon. She held some basil and squid in a bag in one hand and Wei's hand in the other.

"Do you want to go live in America, Wei?" she looked down and asked, her face lit by her own fear and excitement at the prospect.

"Sure!" He didn't stop to think, and continued munching on the guava.

"But wouldn't you miss your friends?"

Wei shrugged. He would, but he didn't care. America sounded like a lot of fun.

Ling laughed and took Wei over to the dessert cart for a bowl of *ai-yu* jelly.

When they first arrived they hadn't had enough money for a place of their own and had to stay with two other families, distant relatives. Kai knew some English and found a job waiting tables at a Chinese restaurant in Inglewood, while Ling attended ESL classes at adult school. It was a hellish commute for Kai—two transfers and almost three hours each way. After some discussion they decided it was better for Kai to stay with one of the other waiters who lived by the restaurant. He'd come home when there was time, usually on his "weekends"—Monday and Tuesday. Sometimes when the restaurant got busy Kai would go two weeks before coming home. But when he did it was always a celebration. Wei would run to the door while Ling clapped her hands and laughed. Yun-Yun, who had just begun to talk, was quieter and would sit still, a nascent smile on her lips. Sometimes, when business was lighter, he'd surprise everyone by coming home on a Friday. He often brought home sacks of broken cookies, fortune and almond.

"Here, Wei, cookies for you!" he'd bellow.

"Thanks dad, but I'm sick of them."

"Huh! Kids in Taiwan *wish* they could eat these cookies."

Maybe it was true. At first Wei couldn't get enough

of them. But now he'd roll his eyes, go back to watching television.

They saved however they could. Kai brought home leftovers from the restaurant. Ling bought old, discounted bread from the supermarket. They had a running competition to see who could find what for the lowest price. A year later, after Ling found the florist job, they managed to move into an apartment of their own. It was a dull brown three-story building in the middle of a Russian neighborhood between Santa Monica and Melrose, and sat one block away from the Pussycat Theater. That night Ling watched Wei and Yun-Yun sleep on their new living room carpet with a single bed sheet as a blanket. A solitary lamp stood watch over the imaginary bed, the only other item in the cool, quiet room. The children didn't think anything of it, but Ling twisted herself into a knot; she asked and asked again if they would sleep okay.

"Kai, we have to buy a bed or a couch—*something* for them tomorrow," she said.

"Tomorrow? The kids are fine, Ling. They're having fun."

"No." She grabbed his arm. "We have to get something for them tomorrow."

The next day they walked around their new neighborhood and looked for furniture stores but discovered none. Instead they found a supermarket called Alpha Beta and came home with eggs, jam and bread. It was three days before they finally stumbled upon a discount furniture warehouse where they found a pair of brown couches tucked in a corner under dim fluorescent lighting. It cost a hundred dollars for the both of them. They stood a little more than a foot off the ground and consisted of hollow particle-board frames with six-inch foam mattresses on top, held down by coarse brown covers. There were wheels at the corners and the sofa backs consisted of free-standing foam cushions covered in the same material as the base.

"These styles of sofas are really expensive," they told the kids when the delivery man arrived. "The backs can come off, and you can put the two sofas together to make a single big bed."

The new beds were unlike anything Wei and Yun-Yun had ever seen. The foam cushions could be moved wherever they wanted them—on the floor, in the air,

bouncing off of each other's heads—and the sofas were easily maneuvered into whatever formation they wished. They danced on top and took big leaps off of the couches, set up heavily armed fortresses and faced off against one another. The coarse covers couldn't keep the mattresses in place and kept slipping off themselves, until Kai took a hammer and nailed them down to the frames. At night they joined the two sofas and the entire family (including Kai, on some nights) slept together.

A few months later Kai and Ling found a bed of their own.

On her weekly Chinatown visits Ling would leave Yun-Yun with the neighbors and bring Wei along, much like her old market runs in Beitou. If Kai was home he'd come and have Yun-Yun sit atop his broad shoulders, but often it was just Ling and Wei. They took the RTD bus up Sunset Boulevard to downtown and walked for another fifteen minutes. It was a long, foreign ride—the scratched windows, graffitied seats and isolated riders sometimes looking ill-willed and intimidating—but Ling wouldn't have traded it for all the Alpha Betas in the world. They brought home shopping bags laden with Chinese vegetables and dried goods, drinks and desserts. Over time more and more goods from back home became available, and whoever was the first to discover it would report it immediately to everyone else, blubbering with joy. Frozen lychees! *Heyson* soda! Winter melon juice! Starfruit!

They led very near Chinese lives, were able to celebrate the Lantern Festival by making their own *tang-yuan*, the Dragon Boat Festival by making their own *zong-zi*. Ling and Kai mixed great batches of dough and fashioned their own noodles, pork dumplings and shrimp wontons. They bought a sack of soy beans, crushed them, and boiled their own soy milk. Yeast, baking soda, flour and red beans formed sweet buns; three bags of sweet rice flour and two large radishes yielded radish rice cake. Wei and Yun-Yun watched, eyes wide; most of these were never made back in Beitou. They stood awash in Ling and Kai's eagerness and desire to carry the traditions over, show their children they hadn't forgotten.

The desserts were more ready-made. Almond tofu came from powder, Jell-O like, and was cut into cubes and

mixed with canned fruit. They found cans of *ai-yu* jelly at the Chinese market. These were more economical and easily concocted—the can-shaped jellies were removed from their container and cut into small cubes, which were then put in water with honey and a squeeze of lemon. They all loved it. Like rice in the rice cooker or water in a pitcher, there became always a bowl of *ai-yu* available in the refrigerator—replenished the instant it was finished. Years later, after Ling and Kai had grown too tired from work to make their own noodles and *tang-yuan*, they could still find the ever-present bowl of jelly waiting. It was the only thing Wei and Yun-Yun could make on their own.

Ling's hands, however, showed no signs of improvement. They refused to cooperate, stubborn as the lady they served. She pondered possible remedies. In Taiwan she'd tried acupuncture and medicating hand creams. At the suggestion of an herbal doctor she tried dipping her open palms into boiling vinegar. But the cracks continued to bloom and fissure. Ling liked her florist job well enough—there wasn't anything else she could have found or qualified for here. In Taiwan she had picked up arranging flowers as a hobby. Now she was in America, getting paid \$10 an hour for performing the same hobby, full-time. The hands—the hands couldn't be helped, she'd decided. Maybe if she improved her English she could try something else. She had taken up typing for a while but that didn't lead anywhere. For now there was just floristry. And it had helped out with things. After she took on the job they managed to fill their home gradually with the necessary comforts: a television, dining table, chairs, a desk, a bookshelf, blankets, pillows, a bed for Wei and Yun-Yun. Some were bought new, though most were used, sometimes given by friends. She thought of how things were progressing, however gradually, how she could chart visibly, count by each chair and pillow the life they were building.

The telephone rang. Ling opened her eyes and realized it had gotten dark. The faint squeal of cartoon voices had matured into muffled cheers and applauses from a game show. She turned over and reached for the handset.

"Hello?"

"Hey," came Kai's voice. Ling could hear commotion from the restaurant in the background.

"Not coming home tonight?"

"There's a big party coming in," Kai said, slowly.
"Jack asked if I could stay until it was over."

"Okay."

"How are Wei and Yun-Yun?"

"They're fine. Watching television."

"Maybe I can come home tomorrow."

"Yeah, they would love that." Ling traced the twisted coils of the handset with her fingers. "But don't worry about us."

"Okay," he paused, "have to go."

"Okay, bye-bye."

"Bye-bye."

They both waited for a moment, listening to the noise and static on the other end.

The children were watching *Wheel of Fortune* when they heard their mother's bedroom door open and close. Ling walked into the living room slowly, rubbing an eye underneath her glasses.

"Dad's not coming home tonight?" Wei asked. Yun-Yun looked at Ling but didn't speak.

"No, he's not," Ling said. "It'll just be the three of us for dinner."

"Okay," Wei said. Both he and Yun-Yun turned back to the television and watched Pat spin the big shiny wheel.

"What do you want to eat?" Ling asked. "How about *da-guo-tsai*?"

"Yeah," Wei said, staring at the television.
"Anything's okay."

"What do you think, Yun-Yun?" Ling bent down to ask her daughter. "Do you want to eat *da-guo-tsai*?"

Yun-Yun looked at Ling and gave a small nod.

"Okay," Ling smiled and rose, "*da-guo-tsai* it is."

They'd already had it twice that week but none of them minded. *Da-guo-tsai* was a Ling creation and consisted of a stockpot filled with boiled miscellany: napa cabbage, fish sausages, strips of bacon, dried baby shrimp, shiitake mushrooms, glass noodles, anything that seemed it could fit, and anything did. For soup stock Ling poured a can of chicken broth. A bowl of rice completed the meal.

When the food was done Ling lifted the pot off of the stove and set it on the table.

"Dinner's ready!" she declared, adding a ladle.

The children each went after their favorite ingredients; Wei picked up fish sausages while Yun-Yun spooned in some bacon. Ling waited for them to finish before filling her own bowl.

They ate quietly.

"How was school?" Ling asked Wei. He was in fifth grade.

"It was okay," he shrugged.

Ling thought of other questions but decided not to ask. She picked up a few pieces of cabbage and fed them into her mouth. The taste was a little light and could use some salt. She looked at Yun-Yun and smiled.

Wei finished quickly. He put his bowl and chopsticks in the sink and scampered back to his station before the television. *Silver Spoons* was on.

Ling took small, deliberate bites and chewed slowly. When she finished she leaned back in the chair and watched Yun-Yun wriggle her chopsticks inexpertly with a long piece of bacon.

"Wei!" she called.

"Yeah?" came the response.

"Is there any *ai-yu* in the refrigerator?"

"No."

Ling laid a hand on the table and fiddled with the chopsticks some. She picked at a few flakes on a fingertip.

"Do you want any?" she called again. "Why don't we make some *ai-yu*?"

"No, it's okay. I don't want any."

On the side of the large pot Ling could see her reflection, a distorted blur on its yellowed metal surface. She looked at the table, looked at the empty bowl before her, looked at her hands holding the bamboo chopsticks. She raised her head and watched Yun-Yun, who was still chewing, as if deciding whether she should swallow or not. Ling picked up her bowl and chopsticks and walked into the kitchen.

"Fine then," she said out loud, "I'll make some. But only Yun-Yun and I get to eat it."

Wei didn't answer.

Ling retrieved a can of *ai-yu* from the pantry and searched for the opener. It had been so long she couldn't remember the last time she'd made the dessert herself. She found the opener in one of the drawers and uncovered one

end of the can. Holding it over a casserole dish she shook it back and forth until the clear yellow jelly wiggled out of the can and landed in the dish with a big slopping sound. She took a butter knife and sliced the jiggling cylindrical shape into centimeter-thick discs. Then, taking each slice into the palm of her left hand, she cut them, first one way into strips, then the other to form cubes. She added water until the jelly pieces floated freely.

There was no honey in the cupboard; instead she spooned in granulated sugar. Luckily, they had lemons. She took one and cut it into four wedges. Two of those she put back into the refrigerator and the other two she squeezed into the jelly, wincing as she felt the sting.

Ling scooped some of the mixture into a bowl and returned to the dining table, spoon in hand. She sat down and smiled ceremoniously at Yun-Yun.

"Do you want some *ai-yu*, Yun-Yun?" she leaned in and asked conspiratorially. Yun-Yun shook her head.

"Well, I guess it'll just be my own little treat, then." Ling dipped her spoon into the jelly and took a small sip. "Mmmm, it's good." She ate briskly.

When she was done, Ling placed her bowl and spoon in the sink and the rest of the jelly in the refrigerator. She walked across the dining area past Yun-Yun and glanced over at Wei and the television. Then she continued down to the hallway and entered her room, closing the door behind her.

Leaving the light off, Ling treaded to her bed in the darkness and lay down on her side, facing inward. She pulled the blanket over her, spreading it so as to cover the whole bed, though she stayed on her usual half. Outside a lone scooter sped by, stopping briefly at the intersection. She raised her hands to her face and touched the wetness in her eyes.

Outside, Wei watched the television alone. Yun-Yun sat at the dining table, her bowl empty before her, unsure of what to do. During a commercial break Wei stood up and ran into the kitchen. He pulled open the refrigerator door and his eyes fell on the fresh *ai-yu*. Grabbing a spoon from the dish rack, he lifted the lid, refrigerator door still open.

"You're eating it?" Yun-Yun asked, anxious.

"Yeah, so what?" Wei said without looking over, and took a spoonful into his mouth. He tasted the sweet, tart mixture and thought it good.

HALFWAY HOME

RACHELLE ARLIN CREDO

Off a towering cliff,
he takes the plunge of being airborne,
holding his head up high
and his spine facing the clouds.

Where the air seems to buoy him up,
he splays his arms and legs
and shifts his body
to defy the earth's pull.

He explores his new space,
feeling himself sinking in.
The nothingness filling the void in his heart.

Spreading his fingers,
the droplet-filled air feels dank
while the smell of salt air
infuses his nostrils with napalm fizz.

He smiles
at his seeming weightlessness
as he continues to turn about in degrees
from time to time.

The wind grows damper and damper
as he descends.
He can almost taste the air
as he draws in heavy breaths.

He closes his eyes
in anticipation,
tears escaping into the air.
This is his moment of triumph—
a selfless surrender to *Gaia*.



**N
R**