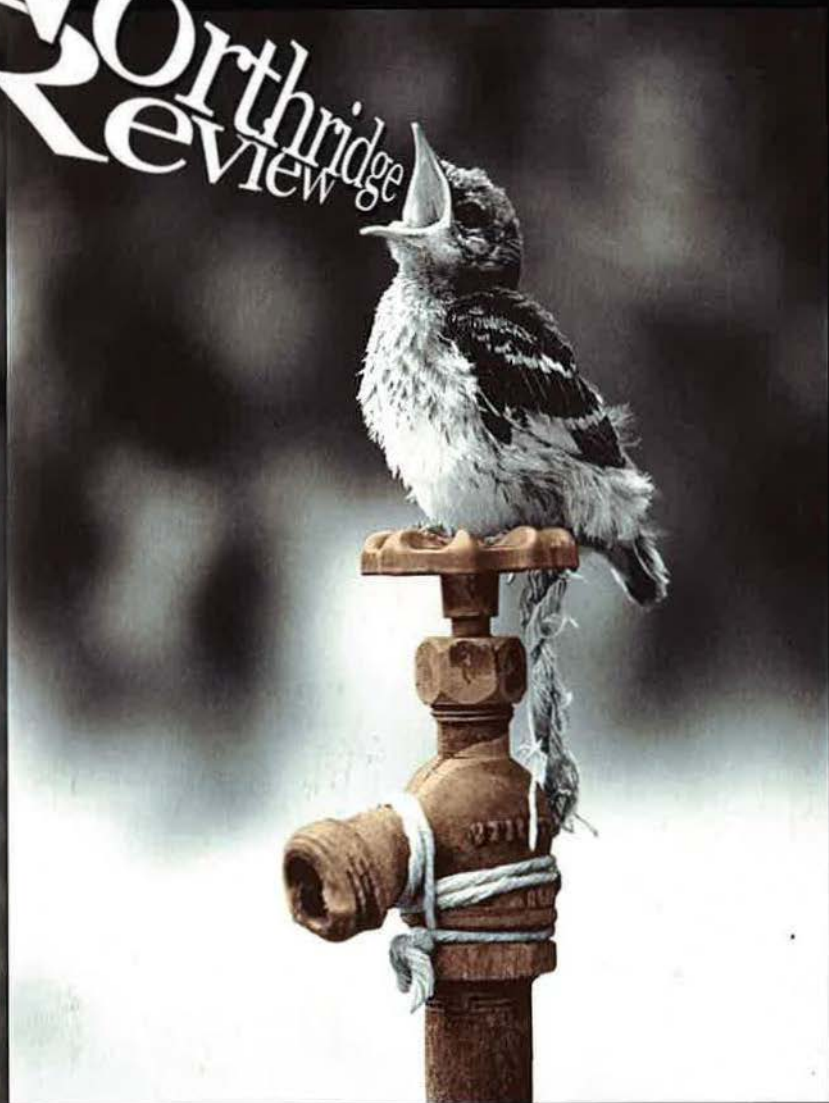
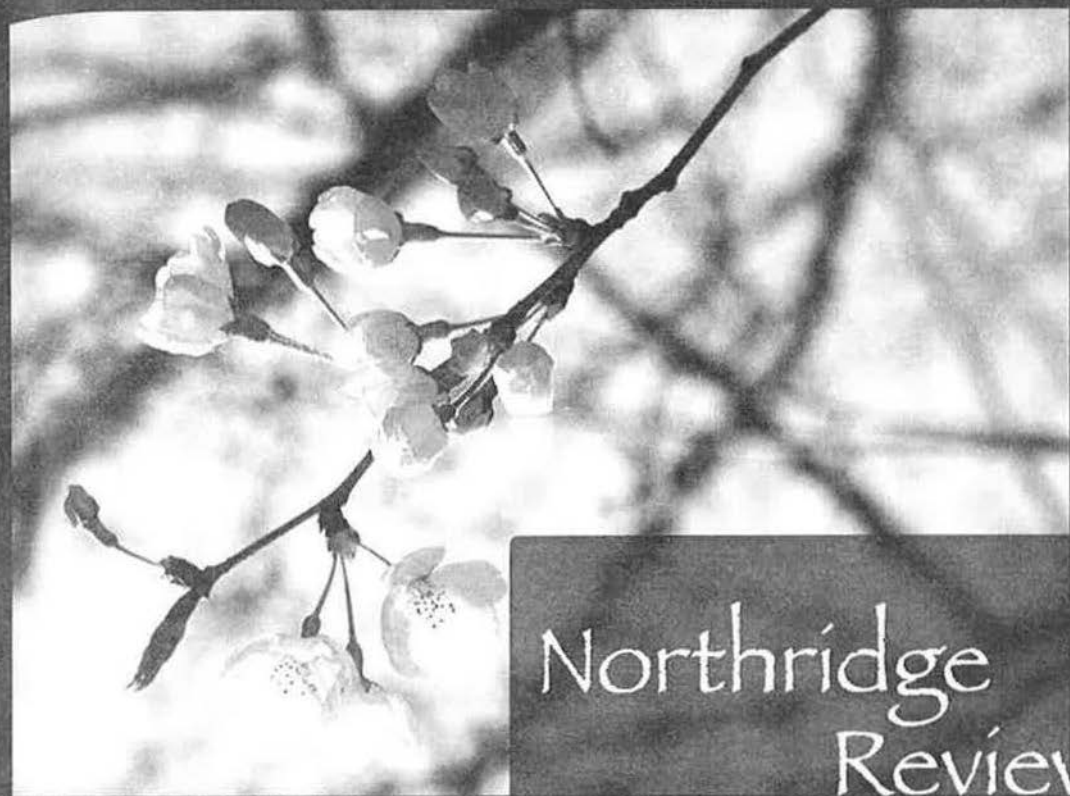


Northridge Review



FALL 2006



Northridge
Review

FALL 2006

[staff]

Editor

Jessica Nassar

Fiction Board

Sean MacIntyre, Editor

Cheyene Garwood

Beth Kehr

Jessica Nassar

Poetry Board

Mary-Alex Andrusco, Editor

Anna Mesick

Faculty Advisor

Mona Houghton

Layout and Design Board

Beth Kehr

Anna Mesick

Desktop Publishing Board

Sean MacIntyre, Editor

Mary-Alex Andrusco

Business Board

Cheyene Garwood

Cover Design

Ray Nichols

[awards]

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in The Northridge Review. The recipient of this award is Rich Anderson for his story, "Travoltorto."

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 are Eric Dinsmore for his poem, "Old Man," and Nicole Cisar for her poem, "Forgive Me." An honorable mention goes to Jeffery C. Alfier for his poem, "The Father Returning."

The Northridge Review is also honored to publish the winner of The Academy of American Poets Award. The recipient of this award is Dan Murphy. The two honorable mentions of the Academy of American Poets Award are Kate Martin-Rowe and Shayda Kafai.

[acknowledgements]

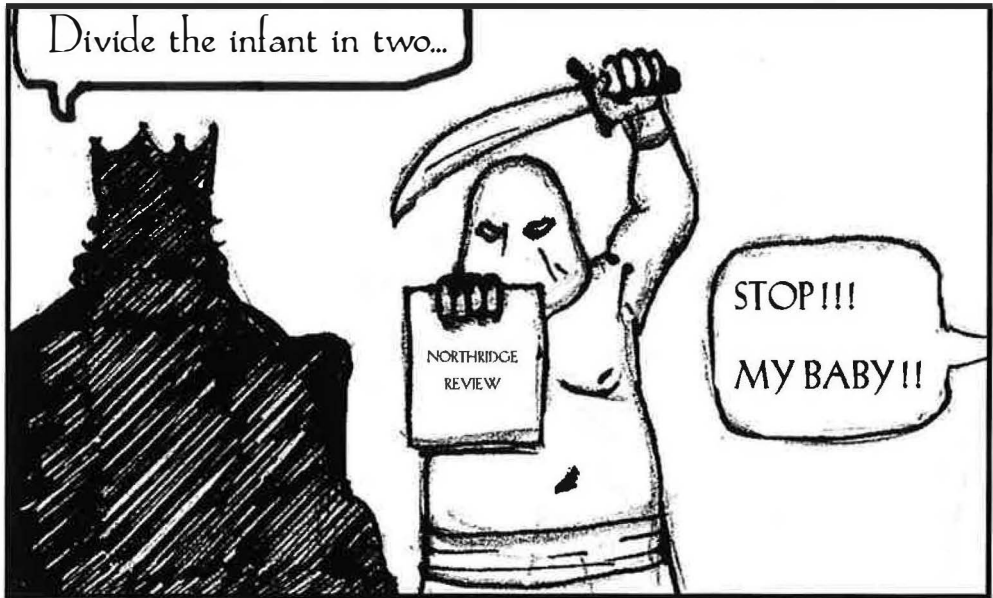
The Northridge Review gratefully acknowledges the Associated Students of CSUN and the English Department faculty and staff—Karin Castillo, Marjie Seago, Jennifer Lu, Kavi Bowerman, Herby Carlos, Johnson Hai, Annie Buado and Damon Luu—for all their help. Thanks to Bob Meyer and Color Trend for their continued assistance and support. A special thanks to Trader Joe's for their generous contribution. An additional thanks to Davi Loren and Rod Val Moore for being the judges of the Rachel Sherwood Award and Northridge Review Fiction Award, respectively.

[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 artwork. You may submit up to 5 poems and up to 20 pages of fiction. Art submissions may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional; all mediums are welcome. Manuscripts will be recycled. Send to:

The Northridge Review Department of English
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

[editor's note]



designed by
Jessica Nassar & Raffi Kahwajian

[contents]

[fiction]

Barstools	19	Craig Watkinson
Thin White Smoke gets in the Eyes	30	Rita Hermann
Arrangements	39	Jayna Zimmelman
Paris Album	51	Corinna Coorssen
Hubbard Valley	67	Ken Cran
The Modern Ixchel	86	Susana Nohemí Marcelo
The Funeral	99	Jeannette Lindsay
It Being Sunny	108	Ben Costa

[poetry]

A failure of language	15	Brian Diamond
Dehiscence (v.)	16	Amber Norwood
Solutions	23	Jeremy Quintero
It was Madrid	24	Mariano Zaro
First Knees	26	Jeremy Quintero
Carla's Tavern on a Reno Summer Night	28	Jeffrey C. Alfier
Ichthyosophy	29	Amber Norwood
Stillborn	34	Nancy Carroll
Anxiety, it Tastes of Blood	36	Shayda Kafai
Garden Gravesite	37	Mary Angelino
for you who put your faith in knowing everything	38	Brian Diamond
Iris	43	Ramona Davidson
Modernism Redux	44	Brian Diamond
because i want to remember lilac	46	Sharon Venezio
Forgive Me	47	Nicole César
Church	48	Amber Norwood
Monk and Soldiers	55	Kate Martín-Rowe

[poetry]

Los Angeles-El Paso Rivers	56	Verónica Reyes
Fragile Light, Rotting Mouths	58	Kris Huelgas
pubic hair	63	Dustin Lehren
Carbs, Calories, & Christ	65	Mary Angelino
Hunger	75	Nancy Carroll
The Father Returning	76	Jeffrey C. Alfier
a geography of silence	78	Sharon Venezia
Fig tree leaves	82	Mariano Zaro
Wish Sestina	84	Amber Norwood
Recrossing the Book of Revelation	94	Kate Martin-Rowe
Cymbidium	96	Lynne Miller
Yucca Valley, 1982	98	Nancy Carroll
Overheard Between Waco and Jubilee Springs	103	Jeffrey C. Alfier
Faithless, I. and II.	104	Dan Murphy
and another thing	107	Kate Martin-Rowe
Remembering the Lottery, 1969	114	Grant Marcus

[d r a m a]

Untitled Number 2

59

Carrin Pockrandt

[a r t]

Mimesis

13

Raffi Kahwajian

Guys and Dolls

18

Stan Benson

Outsourced

35

Mark Carrillo

Anna Akhmatova

42

Maria Mesick

Exoskeletal

50

Raffi Kahwajian

Consciousness is Root Reality

64

Gohar Gegeyan

Pinned

66

David Heffler

A New Beginning

77

Mark Carrillo

Suffocating

81

David Heffler

Still Life

97

Maria Mesick

Inner Self

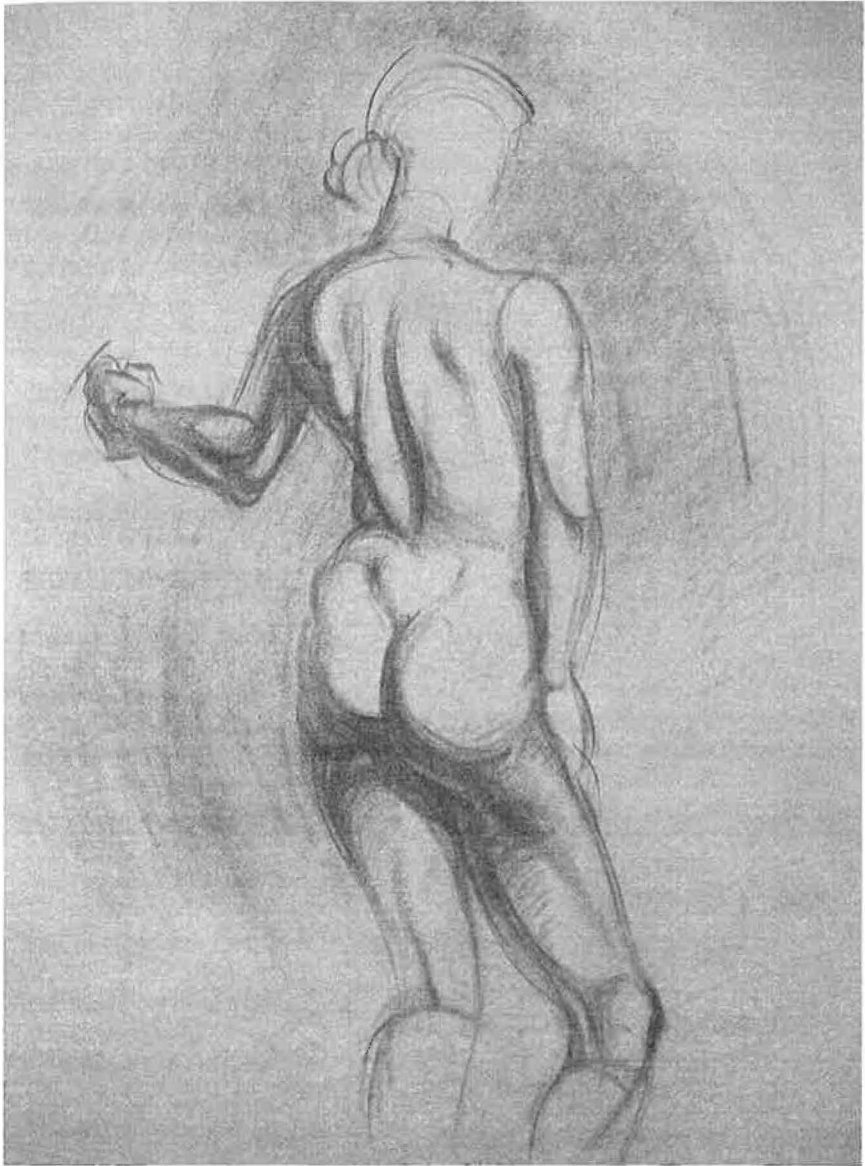
106

Gohar Gegeyan

Look at the time

116

Alex Schwada



Brian
Diamond

A failure of language

Blameless because we are human
and our ability to sound limits
our vision, when we say
chrysanthemum we truly mean it.
The word conjures the picture,
a sudden spring thawing,
racemes linking a garden to
blessings, the church bell at
morning's meta-sotto. But
when we draw harsher sounds,
uncomfortable and angular like
Darfoor, Anuak, Fallujab, Kinsbasa,
these pictures fail us completely,
their din echoes dumbly off our walls
and we are left muted, gaping like
shrapnel tearing through living rooms.

A box of poems from the closet
is expelled like a tumor.

Perhaps this is where your language went.

Today you sit, hands wringing.
These are the church bells i can't get used to...
even in a worn afternoon, it sounds
like count down. The chariot

brings you home; then,
pumpkin again. We all are inside
waiting to rupture.

"I'm feeling," you say, and i think
that's enough, to be feeling here,
on this strange couch by your husband who hums,
but doesn't know your name to speak it.

(His language, gone too: reduced
to syllables. "yes": "no." His tongue
replaced by a harmonica.
We never knew he could play, before.)

Beginning again, "I'm feeling."
Your arm, heavy with veins,
a sticky Band-Aid masking
lips of a new scratch, points to the television

where a pretty girl paints a frown
over her nails like you used to do.
You ask of the show: "Does this change me?"

The nurse called Leo notices aloud
the trees outside. Branches in the rain
carry thick-skinned sour oranges, near splitting

by the weight of their own potential.
i think of my poems, cuticles, the price
of sausage, artichokes, our dinner, those poems
in the box now in my mother's kitchen,

and a word i learned today

for the bursting open that plants and bodies do
at their time of maturity, or
when anything is just too full.

i can tell you worry
that we and Leo do too much.
We say, "You're retired. Let someone else
pick up." You shake your head, "Yes.

I am very tired today."



Guys and Dolls | Stan Benson

Barstools

CRAIG WATKINSON

So I remember listening to Genesis. It was one of their albums from the late 80's, maybe the one after the one with "Invisible Touch." I was playing a cassette tape in my car (this was before CD players, or at least before you could get them in your car) and everything was alright with the world. Okay job, okay apartment, you know, life going on. And I was in my car and all was alright and life was going on and then it was all wrong and the car changed shape. I remember hearing that impossibly loud sound *after*, though I know that must be wrong—it had to have happened before or at least at the same time—and I knew the car was a different shape because the passenger door was pressing against my arm pretty hard, and I was in the driver's seat. Thank God no one was in the passenger seat. I take that back. I mean, I am of course glad no one else was in the car with me, but eight years later I still see nothing about that fall afternoon to be thankful about, though everyone will always tell you how lucky you are. What's odd to me is that if you're driving 85 miles per hour on a freeway for four hours straight and don't get a scratch on you, no one tells you how lucky you are. But they will do this when the car changes shape, and when Genesis stops playing and you have the vague knowledge that your right foot is no longer on the bottom of your right leg. All you can think is that it's all some kind of joke, like you're having some sophomoric prank being pulled on you, because you *know* that this is not how your day is supposed to go, not how your life is supposed to go. Even gravity's changed. There's blood everywhere (which really does start to look black when there's so much of it, honestly), but instead of collecting in a little pool on the floor of your car, it's actually *dripping up*, toward your head and only pooling up when it hits the ceiling. I mean, any idiot can tell you that doesn't make sense, right? Unless you're upside down, and then it hits you that you are, and have you been unconscious? Why do you remember helicopters? What was the Genesis song? "*I should be doing something right now*," goes through your head, but you don't do something, anything, and you realize it's an odd mix of truly not wanting to do anything and not being able to. I always got annoyed riding the subway during rush hour when I lived in New York City, because you couldn't raise your arms. You really were ~~so~~ packed in that you couldn't raise your arms, and I guess the cliché is the sardine can analogy, but that analogy is actually fairly appropriate when you truly are wrapped up tightly within metal. And your arms are pinned to your side, and what happened? Were you hit? Did you hit someone? Or something? You don't remember anything except driving in your ordinary way and listening to Genesis. Maybe it was that song "The Last Spike," about miners trapped in a coal mine or killed building a railroad or something. You can at least move your head enough to keep your eyes out of the direct path of the bloodstream coming toward it, but your arms are pinned to your side. You can move your left foot, though you quickly stop because doing so sends messages to your brain to *please stop, that's impossibly painful*, and when your brain responds by stopping the left one but then trying to move the right one...nada. And somehow you know: your brain skips past what you think it would try to land on to comfort itself, the idea of simple "numbness," and like one of those crime-sniffing police dogs freed from its chain, it goes straight for it: *your foot ain't there*.

So I wasn't drunk then, but I am right now, and as much as it was always the exception to the rule to actually bring a girl from the bar home with you even before Genesis stopped playing, it's certainly never happened since. And I think it's about to tonight.

She returns from the bathroom. It's always interesting (to me, anyway) trying to anticipate behavior of people you've just met, who you *feel like you know* but in reality have just met. Like, as she walks across this packed little dive bar to the stool where she knows I'm sitting, waiting for her, will she smile and look at me the whole way over, or will she play it cool, like she's in no hurry to get back to me, like I'm just a small part of her incredibly popular life? It ends up being a kind of a split between the two: there is no conceit or self-importance in it; she simply doesn't look at me for the first half of her trip because she's so disoriented about where she's walking. I chalk this up to a mix of it being her first time here...and the five tequila shots.

She sits down next to me, smiles. She is beautiful.

The bar lights flash on and off momentarily.

"Last call!" shouts Mina, the matronly German bartender who always remembers my order.

"Let's get one more!" my girl says, the suggestion bordering on a dare.

I glance down at the bar, knowing I'm incredibly drunk because the too-sudden head turn almost unbalances me from my seat. On the bar are two nearly full, ice cold Bud Lites.

"We only got these five minutes ago!" I laugh, merely pointing this fact out, not necessarily turning down the offer.

"Yeah, but they're gonna clo-o-o-o-ose!" she says, rubbing my arm for effect, playfully trying to "convince" me. Her hand is warm and soft, and I just want it around the back of my neck, my mouth pressed to hers with everyone else gone.

"Okay," I concede, "but they're gonna kick us out in ten minutes anyway." Her hand remains on my arm. I want to pull her hair and tell her I love her.

"Well," she starts off, looking toward the bar and then the door, her expression *naughty*. "We can stick 'em in our jeans and sneak 'em out with us..."

"But where are we gonna go?"

"You said you lived right near here, right?"

I did. I did say that. And the thing is, I want to take her home so badly I can't even tell you. I mean, seriously, at this moment, if you offered me either a million dollars OR the chance to lie down naked with this girl right now and do everything we wanted to each other, just rolling around and touching and twisting those dark blue sheets around us, pulling the corners out from the bottom of the bed until they're just one big formless ball, carrying with it that aroma stew of sweat and perfume and a penis penetrating a vagina for hours, if you were to ask me to choose, the million dollars wouldn't even be a consideration. But here is the thing. You know the thing. I told you the thing. The foot.

They actually had that buzz saw thing you see in the movies, with all of the sparks flying and that horrible sound, and they put this little flame-retardant blanket over my face, me having no other way to cover it from little brown rice-sized pieces of metal and glass and car door flying at me as they attempted to get me the hell out of there. I have always wondered how long I was in that car; you'd think that would be the kind of fact a person would know, like at least when they're telling the story, because when you have one foot, you can only meet and know people for so long before you have to tell them the story, and obviously when everyone you already know sees you afterward, they're gonna wonder where that other foot went, but I truly have somehow spent eight years *not* telling the story. I have explained what happened, but always with the same six-word sentence: "I was in a car accident." Okay, that's not entirely true: I have sometimes embellished it with the word 'bad', as in, "I was in a *bad* car accident." Sometimes, although not often, there

would be follow-up questions. Was it a drunk driver? *No*. Were you drinking? *No*. Was anyone else hurt? *Yes, but only minor injuries*. Do you even know what happened? *No*. Most people, though, have been able to read in the tone of my six-to-seven word sentence that it's not really something I want to discuss. And they will leave it at that.

She kind of leans in, her head tilted the way a puppy dog tilts its head when it wants something, when it knows how cute it is when it does that and knows that you can't resist its tilt, and her hair falls on my arm a bit, and it's as though she somehow knew that I wanted to touch her hair, to feel it, and feeling it on my arm now is somehow so very nice, the place on my arm right next to where her warm hand still is, and soon I realize that she's doing the tilt because she's leaning in to kiss me, and I do kiss her. We kiss. We kiss. We kiss. It is our first kiss; we are now officially those two drunken people in a bar, who you know just met each other but are all over each other, who you laugh at. But we don't care. At least I don't. I'm all over her, touching her; I am drunk and she is my salvation, she is so warm, her hair falling into both of our mouths and we are hungry for each other and we don't care, this is the most important thing in the world; all I need for the rest of my life is her, and I think her name is Sandra.

We kiss for pretty much the next ten minutes, missing our chance to order that other round of drinks we clearly don't need, missing our chance to finish the ones we've already ordered. Which we also clearly don't need. I have had my hands all over her, her small breasts and her stomach which is really tight and muscular but still somehow has just the slightest hint of love handles; even vigorously massaging her thighs, not actually going near the crotch because I'm partly afraid she would push me away, but mostly because I want to save that for...for. *Hmmm*. About five minutes into this, I begin getting really paranoid about perhaps a fairly important detail here.

One of the first things she said to me, after asking if the stool next to me was taken, was that she had one of the smallest bladders in the world. In the half an hour before her friend finally called and said she wouldn't be able to make it, she had already made two trips to the bathroom, and she hadn't even begun drinking yet. As we settled into a conversation and began to drink, I managed to time my own pee-breaks to coincide with any of her ridiculously frequent trips, Mina waving away anyone who might try taking our stools. The women's bathroom line in bars always takes longer than the men's, so I managed to always slip in and out of the john before she ever got back. Which is to say, she never saw me walk. Meaning she never saw the limp or noticed that rather obvious apparatus that attached the prosthetic foot to my leg. I realized this was perhaps more than slightly dishonest. In fact, I realized this every single time I got up to piss, sneaking away only when she had safely rounded the corner, never even washing my hands afterward for fear she'd get back before me. And I'm especially realizing this now, as we've finally pulled back from one another, the sound of Jaime the bouncer's voice repeating over and over, "Everybody's gotta start heading toward the door now—" its sound coming closer and closer to where we are.

There is of course that sort of magical, weird shyness that follows passionately making out with a total stranger, but not even as much as I was expecting. Sometimes there's the slightest hint of embarrassment, of a sort of put on 'Oh I neeeever do this!' or, even worse, the instant return to pointless small talk, as if it was two other people entirely who just had their tongues pressed and slid around against one another's in more ways than even seemed possible. But here, now, there is none of that. I notice that the frosty condensation on our Bud Lite bottles is no longer there; of course, we have no time now to drink them anyway. She ignores my look-away, her eyes trained on mine.

"You wanna go back?" she asks, meaning my apartment, not having to say it.

My lips don't open.

Then I think: Maybe I'm underestimating her. In the unlikely event we could get back to my bedroom without my having to come right out and explain the clumsy apparatus around my ankle and shoe, maybe she won't freak out at the discovery that I'm missing a foot, won't sprint to the bathroom to vomit when she sees the stump at the end of my naked leg, giving me a half-assed reassurance that it was all the tequila and not me, not me, but assuring me *while* she's getting her own clothes back on and making way for the door, wondering if she's already given me her number and if she'll have to put up with the awkwardness of a pity phone call or two before she stops picking up entirely. Maybe, even

if she might've been accepting of it anyway, she won't be angry at my obvious lie of omission, won't feel betrayed that I would hide such a major thing, feeling stupid that she herself was too drunk to ever really look down under the bar to notice it, in all of its shining metal glory. Or, I should say, maybe she won't use the "You lied to me" betrayal angle as an excuse for not fucking the freak, for not starting something with a charming and good-looking yet ultimately handicapped young man.

Maybe she won't.

"You wanna go back?" she asks again, Jaime the bouncer coming straight at us.

"Yes, I really do," I say.

I kiss her again, this one softer, gentler than all of those previous. She smiles back at me, beaming at me the most perfect smile anyone on this earth has ever seen, as I begin to rise from my stool.

You outlive expectations I
would have placed on myself;
arms at angles

that fold at the elbows,
breaking the creases in your
brand new t-shirts.

You lie next to me, four
a.m.; four hours after
we settled our solution to

the "problem", winded, gasping
for the breaths you invaded
into my own lungs, receiving,

in return, all the matter
that I could offer you back.
I could watch the countryside

with you, but instead I
watch the headlights on the
street below pass by

as you nuzzle my neck, falling
asleep, so I lie in comfort, for
the glorious morning after.

It was Madrid

Mariano
Zaro

It was Madrid
ember
in the eyes.
My toxic
apartment
the walls
the window
everything on fire
except
that marble step
before your door.
There, I sheltered
my face against the floor
like a blind dog
seeking the cold
the only cold surface
left
in the world.

I heard your voice
distant
alien.
Your voice with others.

I made no noise.
I was
so close.
Only the marble
knew.

Mariano
Zaro

Era Madrid

Era Madrid
una brasa
en los ojos.
Mi apartamento
tóxico
los muros
la ventana
todo en llamas
excepto
ese escalón de mármol
delante de tu puerta.
Allí me refugié
mi cara contra el suelo
como perro ciego
buscando el frío
el único espacio frío
que quedaba
en el mundo.

Oí tu voz
lejana
y ajena.
Tu voz con otros.

No hice ruido.
Estuve
tan cerca
sólo el mármol
lo supo.

Things I must remember not to forget:
the smell of the city at night, driving,
Daydream Nation inking the air like
melancholy teargas, street lamps
lit like the crucifix burning
into the hillside, my foot on the gas
pedal, singing- you, mindless, indulgent
of the sound, creating a play by play:
a piece about art, the birth of Columbus,
the corner market in Laramie,
and a cheese sandwich.

The sun sets, at the intersection of
terror and reality, the pages of our fable
coming to a close, the sky a pale shade
of orange now, the stars all come out to play,
the late spring blooms I am iridescent,
and there's nothing to do here.
Stadium lights through the trees
appearing to touch Polaris
from centers outward, your goal to try
and change me.

Shades of summer time, romances
I can't fulfill, faces I still tend to forget,
still harder for you to watch the hillside burn
on bludgeoning teeth, wasting
time being with me, faking out
the oversight you seem to lose but want
to remember, the sound of the songs and your
words visiting the midsection of my body
and a misstep.

How the summer reminds the day time
of the night, how you remind me of a
photograph of someone else, blurred,
soft around the edges, wounded, relentless—
you are not a martyr—the activism change
for eroticism, jack-o'-lantern smiles in pastoral
sermons. Because we drop our lines for a shot
at decency, our knees bent to pick up what
we've left in waiting.

The things I must remember
not to forget: I should be going soon.
It's getting late and summer's cold chills
me to the bones. The songs are
more distorted now, anyway,
and I am slowly starting to forget
my strain of thought.

Carla's Tavern on a Reno Summer Night

Jeffrey C.
Alfieri

Thunderstorms tower eight miles above us,
laden with ice we'll never see down here.
Butterflies come alive in the wash seeps,
bound for hypnosis by groundsel blossoms.

Indoors, what's on tap's refuge from weather.
Empty bottles clatter in stern echoes
that resurrect the hard-forgotten nights
with lovers gone astray light years ago.

Astride the ritzy pulse of casinos
a few well-dressed breeds balk in our doorway
like legates un-tribed from lost continents,
thinking themselves in enemy country.

Outside, eagles steal prey from red-tailed hawks.
Inside, tramps befriended who can't pay tabs
mumble all hours like prayers in a plague year.
They might absolve us our un-offered hands.

Ichthyosophy

Ten pounds of trout
in bone, swim and scale,
runs with a hook through its jaw.

And tethered to the silver writhing
is my sister, six, breath held long,

clutching a rod in one pink fist,
the yellow raft beneath her
in the other.

I took a fishhook in the cheek once;
a boy cast back without looking.
The barb is imperative. Once the push begins,
there is no going back.

To get out, go straight through the mouth.
Metal and the sound it makes
taste iron sharp.

The fish and the girl drag across the lake,
neither knowing what drowning is.

They do know that stopping
is not an option,

that the shore growing smaller
is an imaginary choice:
to the rod,
to cling selfishly
to let go selfishly.

The trout tows only fast enough to carve
a lip into the wet surface,
but the fears they are learning have value:

together they discover a new sort of breathing,
from the downside in,
where there is no release, exhale.

Thin White Smoke gets in the Eyes

RITA HERMANN

He catches her staring up at the candle in the sky—a jet trail slipping against the upper atmosphere sheer wind while the metal skin of the plane reflects the sun. She will ask again how the candle stays lit for so very long, her face scrunched up as she stares at her two-dimensional sky, and he knows that he will again remind his mother that the sky is not flat.

But she will not yet come over to ask him about the candle, or the rumble of the orange planes and backbeat of helicopter blades in the sky all afternoon, or what makes dust fluff up when you kick it. He watches as she simply stares up at the smoky evening sky and figures there is about five more minutes before her sky candle's flame will disappear—time enough.

So he rubs at the grit in the corner of his eye for the small pleasure of closing his eyes. He lets red wash into a blue with splotches of black; he rubs until there are starbursts. He imagines real sleep as he leans into the warmth of the corral's metal gate, the sleep before ranches or horses or barns or trees. He imagines the real sleep beyond responsibility.

He would stay up late and stare at the ceiling thinking of everything and nothing until his mother would come in and sit at the edge of the bed to tell him stories. He tries to remember the stories, but all he remembers is sleep. It was the sound of her voice, soft answer ripples to all of his questions. "Frankie," he pulls at and holds the moment when the blanket covered his arms, "the cat never died from being curious, but it's dream time now." And, feeling more than hearing the gate latch catch metal against metal, he remembers the softness of her hand against his cheek as the bed floated, him in his cocoon, eyes closed. He loved her then.

He did not always love his mother. He did not love her when he left. He knows now why she screamed, swore, and threw whatever was closest and available—books, keys, chairs, the still-cooking spaghetti—but that was before he went away and learned of women.

He had believed all women were distracted by some inner demon that kept their mood dark and dangerous. He would worry about what she would throw that day when he walked in the front door, knowing she was waiting. He may have not finished his homework in time, or forgot to make his bed, or close the door against the flies, or breathe correctly.

But he remembers the day he caught what she had thrown at him; it is a week before his senior picture. He missed being in the yearbook, but he still has a photograph, one he keeps in the corner of his mind.

It was a lucky catch; he simply tried to protect himself and found his hand holding the empty cup sideways, the weight of it heavy. A stain of muddy brown across the front room rug connects them. He remembers the sting of hot liquid on his pants, on his shirt, on his face; he remembers the stink of coffee that filled the room; but mostly, his photograph holds the look on his mother's face when he looked up.

Frank realizes that his mother did not take him to the emergency room; someone else must have been there to help him leave. But he doesn't have a picture of anyone else.

At first, the ranch, nestled up against the south foothills of the Grapevine, appeals to Frank. On the gravel that passes as the road, the pickup trucks that bounce past near his place have dogs with wagging tails in their beds—Molly, Festus, Hunter, and a half dozen others. He's been offered one of Molly's pups every other litter or so, but none of the little bitch's offspring appeal to him. He wishes the neighbor would stop asking, but, for the most part, Frank likes the way the people around keep to themselves.

When his mother would manage to visit, she managed to complain about how far out he lived, about the distance to the nearest grocery store and from civilization. Sometimes her excuse was to see the damage from the latest little temblor, the one she had heard about on the news but didn't shake anything around his place; or to check on the passability of his road after the heavy rains, the one she had just driven on to come visit; or wind damage, or if the heat did damage to his trees; any natural disaster was fuel for her car. Sometimes she would simply show up when he hadn't called in a few weeks, or say that she decided to take a drive.

For years, she began 'taking a drive' six hundred miles out of her way about once a month. Her car, a 1970's econo-box, would show up in his driveway loaded with food—cans and boxes of her favorite foods. She would put the bags on his kitchen table and start unloading her goods into his cabinets. He went out on the porch when she pulled out the new jar of instant coffee and dumped out the old jar from the visit before. She would seem to forget little things like old coffee, where she left her cup, the glasses on her face, and that he never invited her.

He reaches for the moments. She is bringing her hot cup out on the porch; she would invariably start up. "Frankie," he replays the repeated and repeated moment, "this is just so far away from everything."

"I have a business to run." She never seemed to recognize that he's old enough to own his own business, grow a beard, or a mustache, or chest hair, or be able to live on his own. He could only add, "And, this is where I run it."

"I need space," he'd counter her less-than-reasonable bantering, or "I need land."

And they would sit out on his porch and yell at each other until their voices have scared away all the crows, and the horses were shying at the far side of the corrals. Still, she forced the illogical words from him. "Trees don't grow in the city."

"But a tree farmer? A Christmas tree farmer?"

He tugs at how he points out he also breeds a few thoroughbred horses, but she doesn't let go of the trees. He cuts one for her every year, holding back the limber branches with spirals of hemp rope, carefully winding the hemp around the branches of a five footer Noble and strapping the free tree firmly to her car. As he wrapped up a neat package for her drive home, his mother managed to put a line in about him being too brilliant to be pushing around Christmas trees. Lost potential, she complained. He can't forget that.

He clings to touchstone moments, of the silence of unspoken words as the odd neighbor's pickup turned in on the gravel, another drop-by visit. He remembers the neighbor offering another chance at some of Molly's offspring, and refusing again before his mother walked up to the bed of the pickup.

"Oh, what darling little puppies." She was taken in by the brown seepy eyes and pets the short curly coat of the nearest one. He has the picture of one licking spilled coffee off her fingers. She was appalled that the puppies were on their way to the shelter, so his neighbor offered her one.

"No," Frank was firm, after refusing for years, but his mom took one anyway.

Matilda stayed the whole week in his mother's room, for Frank refused to let it go anywhere else. She barked, she cried, she whined late into the night, she pissed on the carpet. His mother cursed, and screamed, and swore for a whole week. Frank let his mother deal with cleaning up the messes and feeding it from her bags of groceries. But when she tried to get the dog in the car to leave, Mattie bit his mother.

His mother refused to come back until the little bitch was gone. Frank stopped yelling; his mother didn't come back for years.

Leaning against the metal gate, Frank watches the two of them disappearing between the ground-hugging trails of thin white smoke, and wonders if either one of them think while they walk the rutted path along the corral fence, or if they are simply running on instinct. They are a pair, the two females of his life, like a set of shoelace-less worn sneakers by the back door. Mattie limps behind as the dog follows his mother; she is a guardian against stray rabbits, wandering bees, loose horses, and field mice; more a guardian against lost time.

Mattie was not a sheep dog, or a horse dog, or much of a dog before he brought his mother back, but he found the puppy tolerable—until she had puppies herself.

There was a litter of pups before he could get Mattie fixed, a small litter of three curs. Before their eyes opened, all three pups had been called for by one neighbor or another; all hopeful that Mattie's disposition had been genetically transferred despite Frank's explanations of genetics and probabilities. After he had given all her pups away, Mattie changed.

A week after the last pup was gone, the bitch stayed limp in front of the door on the porch steps. He remembers he wanted her to move, to show some sign of life. She wouldn't move.

He would find himself pushing open the gate to let her round up the horses and then muttering all the way across the corral to bring them in himself, or he found himself whistling and moving up on the four-wheeler's seat, only to empty air.

He tried to use the step she was on; he remembers the look in her eyes as she turned her head up to him and barked a sharp report, her very first bark. And then she barked at the horses, the pickups and trucks, bugs and ants that wandered past, but never again at him. Slowly, she started pacing back and forth in front of the porch.

One neighbor, giving advice from the middle of the road with the pickup window rolled down, stopped by to suggest a muzzle for 'his mutt'. "Sometimes, the female dog goes crazy after giving birth; it just hits 'em," the advice still rings in his ears, "and there ain't nothing you can do about it." Frank didn't even take the time to explain the impossibility of that ridiculous theory, and instead started working on canine vitamins and food supplements.

He searches for what he was doing when the phone call came; he is grinding up mill to make doggie cookies for Mattie. "Hello." "No." "Are you certain?" Flat words that did not explain that cooking, restful sleep, moments of lucidity, and time alone will become treasures.

It was March when they reintroduced themselves, Mattie and his mother. Mattie looked up from her spot on the steps when the pickup rolled in on the gravel.

He thought about a thousand worries, and looked for answers. That night, he closed the door to the bedroom they shared and tried to sleep. And the two of them have been together ever since.

A week and a half ago, they were all sitting outside in the cool of the evening shade outside when his mother had looked at him. "Frankie," she said, "is it time for Christmas?"

She was always asking questions, but he is surprised his mother's eyes are clear.

He reminds her it is October, almost Halloween. The time, he adds, of kids dressed up as ghost and goblins, of candy, of pretend.

"Yes," she leans a little toward him, "but is it too hot for the trees?" At least she remembers the trees. "Are the trees safe?"

He should have just said yes, he thinks. Instead, he explains the water drip system to her again, and that they would check on it together in the morning, but her eyelids droop before he finishes telling her the plan. His hand rests on the ever-ready Mattie.

When he brought his mother back, the bitch started shepherding. He noticed the dog simply leaning against his mother's legs, and by turning her around, keeping her from walking into holes, off the gravel, or outside of the corrals. Mattie simply herds; she gets under the old woman's legs and redirects without tripping, reprimanding with an old mother's

bark. It works, but just for a little while; the tireless Mattie comes back, and back, but somehow she keeps his mother on the smooth.

He lets the dog herd his mother as he mows the lawn or tends the horses. He listens as Mattie barks to keep his mother from wandering. Sometimes, across the pasture, he has caught his mother barking back. It only now occurs to Frank that it might be the roommates' mother-speak.

Frank was looking at them after the wind suddenly shifted and brought big black flakes with great embers at the edges that stung his face and arms; he remembers feeling the shift before the blast of heat. The air went from white ashes to black soot before he could reopen the gate, choking his yelling before it was out.

He remembers running, his breath cupped in the pit of his elbow, his eyes slit against the sticky black ash. He remembers thinking that he still had them in sight and then that flames really do lick as he saw a tower of flames come over the top of the ridge and eat at his trees.

And he remembers falling when his foot found no world to stand on. And he remembers the soft touch of his mother's hand across his cheek as she said, "Frankie," but he doesn't have a clear picture of how it happened.

"Frankie?" she asked. "Frankie?"

She recognized him this smoky world, her son underneath the stubble of that man. She was flying black against black, hardly a shadow on the ground, but when she had fallen against this lump in the world, he had felt like her little boy. When his eyes opened, she knew him. A nudge against her leg tried to make her move, but this boy-man Frankie was a gift. She reached for his face, but the smoke stole that too, so she took the man-hand and lifted it to her cheek.

"Frankie," she tried to explain something, but the nudging was insistent.

"Frankie," she tried again, like the thousand other times she had said his name.

She was waking up against a black fog, thick and churning, big chunks of campfire smoke that followed her around.

"Frankie," she finally found his cheek, strangely stubbled. "Frankie," she tried again, but this time he had to listen. "Get up," she screamed at her little boy, but then softly she asked the man-boy again, "get up." A nudge inside of her screamed against her softness, a tug on her leg wanted to pull her away, and then the wind shifted.

He catches her staring up at the candle in the—sky; a jet trail slipping against the upper atmosphere sheer wind while the metal skin of the plane reflects the sun. She will ask again how the candle stays lit for so very long, her face scrunched up as she stares at her two-dimensional sky, and he will simply smile while he too shares the flame of her sky candle.

Nothing paralyzes the imagination like an appeal to memory. Joseph Conrad

In a wallpapered cigar box,
I found you for a moment,

between expired passports,
broken luggage tags,

below faded lace trimmings you stood
like a distant whistle. Your mother's German tea pot.

You haggled for tropical oils, as hazelnut marbled the sky,
I inspected leather shoes, their leather musk.

This, our last chance left us brow to clumsy brow.
Wrestled words fell between our feet,

as disinterested crow's feathers. Your intentions.
My expectations. Only fractures, only dust.



Outsourced | Mark Carrillo

Anxiety, it Tastes of Blood

Shayda
Kafai

My back arcs against oak,
I am pigeon-toed, thinking of something
to say. This sensation,
 the reduction of dialectics
 burrowing into occipital bone,
the sound of a pause.

The head bends willfully in these moments,
a pilgrimage into disquiet. Trying not to be
seen behind my purse, this can of soda,
 I bend, compress, bruise,

forgetting the act of breathing,
the weight of my heel against ground,
leaning on the open lips of lupine.

Subordination continues to run sidelong,
a progressive binding,
 like wick braided to burn.

Mary
Angelino

Garden Gravesite

I remember eighteen as angular—
each soft edge of shoulder and elbow

spelled lust as something cinematic,
uncontained. If you kiss me tonight
I will think of your age; I won't

resist. How easily this weaves
into pattern: your touch, like sex-

tousled hair, extends morning,
spreads dawn thin until desire sets,
sinks behind earth where we

can't feel or find it.
I know this sequence like a gun

inside my ribcage. I'll bury you now,
beneath the violet poppies,
next to old shovels, covered in lye.

for you who put your faith in knowing everything

Brian
Diamond

make your blindness pay dividends on the exchange of ideas, one for a dollar, the rest on speculation. we invented margins to guide morality, to monitor breathing in books without sources. it took twenty six miles to stretch the boundary between our thoughts and our language. we felt compelled to punctuate sound with sharp breaths, a drive's driven to distance. let the skin peel itself, reveal itself as stationary object. as input. as output. as both. as neither. as a tense always returning to a point in the distance where every first chapter becomes an appendix. you sought out a portion of poems to rationalize hunger, a timeline of symbols that returned to their maker, a generation of thunder that echoed in motion. we found poverty in noises that held without reason. phonetic expression of idealistic relations. a world turned in alphabetized meter, galaxies of impressions ripened by exposure. they came to us the morning after dying to speak without blushing. to gather ideas in flax wicker baskets singing: we have born mississippi, we have left south carolina, we have served utah, harmed indiana, we have disused diction, founded missions, formed unions, unified matter to light and space to form, to us, to hoping, to nothing, to closing, to falling, to satellites mirroring off in the distance like glimmers on the bedroom closet.

Arrangements

JAYNA ZIMMELMAN

Martha married Ed because his silence was convenient. She was a practical woman. In the first years of their marriage neither of them knew what was appropriate, let alone what might be possible. Like so many young couples their marital insecurity made them awkwardly desperate to conceive. After two dry, achy years of trying, Martha submitted her disobedient body to fertility treatments. The drugs were a humiliating daily reminder of her natural lack but she swallowed their bitterness with great hope. It wasn't long after that her periods stopped.

She was very serious during the delivery despite the pain, refusing to scream because, as she reasoned, her energy was more effectively applied to the pushing.

Upon being shown the baby Martha was shocked by its beauty, even dripping as it was with blood and mucous. Awash in the ripe smells of birth mixed with that of sharp antiseptic she noticed with precious relief that she was falling in love for the second time in her life.

Despite the fact that she had originally desired a boy, the child's sex now seemed unimportant. All that would need adjusting was the spelling of the name—which wasn't much of a sacrifice. Lee could just as easily be written *Leigh*.

"You are all mine," she whispered to the newborn. The baby was quiet and in this Martha decided that her love was reciprocated.

*

When Lee-Ritchie, returned from Vietnam the previous year he had not been the same. For one thing there was the limp. The doctors were able to salvage the bulk of his left leg after shrapnel shredded his calf but, as he frequently said, he would always walk *like a damn cripple*.

Then there was the matter of his addiction. It was funny because to hear him tell it he had, at first, hated the morphine. But, like so many famous romances that begin with animosity, it hadn't been long before he developed an affection for it. His desire for this soft indulgent pleasure did not fade once the pain in his leg dissipated.

Martha knew about her brother's drug use but just as she had been unable to do anything about his conscription, in this too she was useless. Before he had been shipped out she begged Lee-Ritchie to go to Canada, even, at one point, offering to send him a monthly allowance (that she couldn't really afford) if he would only go. He refused. Mother and father had been furious with her.

Despite Martha's growing anxiety over Lee's festering addiction she did find pleasure in her tiny daughter. Days would pass without Martha having to endure the intrusive sounds of infant wailing. Another mother might have taken the quiet as an indication that something was wrong but it never crossed Martha's mind. She basked in the lovely quiet that her daughter produced.

"You are such a good baby," she sometimes whispered with a harsh sincerity not typical of someone addressing an infant.

*

That night Martha was not really awake nor was she asleep. Ed, as usual, had the bedroom windows open and the too-cool fall air attached itself like scales to her skin. It was unlike her to do so but Martha had gotten up twice already to make sure Leigh was breathing. She felt a splintering panic lurking just below her sanded surface.

When the phone rang she was only half surprised. As she grabbed at it Ed woke, threw the covers off and stood up in one awkward movement. Looming there in his white briefs, eyes staring wide and mouth gaping, Martha was irritated by how ridiculous he was.

"Hello," she gurgled into the phone.

"Martha," there was a pause; "it's your mother."

"Mom?"

"Lee-Ritchie had an accident."

Martha said nothing.

"He was riding his motorcycle. He hit another rider."

Martha looked at the digital clock. It said 11:34 "Is he dead?" she asked.

"Martha . . ."

"I have to go mom." Martha hung up the phone.

Ed shuffled out of the bedroom. She heard the deflecting sound of pee hitting the toilet seat before his stream found the water's surface. When Ed returned to bed he looked as if he might say something but nothing came out of his mouth besides his already foul, slept-on breath. For the rest of the darkness Martha watched the numbers snap downward on the clock's face.

*

The funeral was conducted just as if no one was aware that Lee-Ritchie was high when his bike slammed into and killed himself as well as the other rider, but a few clusters of people stood around before the service whispering in low tones that suggested they were devouring the scandal he left smoldering behind him.

When the service ended titillated mourners filed out with polite urgency, presumably to jockey for position in the funeral parade that was about to make its way from the church to the cemetery a few streets away.

The **only face that Martha noticed** was Trudy McPherson's. Trudy's husband had committed suicide by throwing himself under his own **thresher about ten years back**. His passing had gone unchallenged as the ultimate in local death-related scandal until **Lee trumped it with his spectacular drug laced suicide-manslaughter**. Ellie stared flatly into Martha's face with what Martha figured was an unstable mixture of contempt and envy. Finally, the widow pivoted on one shiny but sensible black patent heel and left Martha in possession of the room.

Martha settled Leigh on her hip and crossed the worn green carpeting to the simple but respectable coffin. It was closed. The funeral director had insisted on it when they met to discuss the details of her Brother's service.

Although Martha hadn't really wanted to, it had been necessary that she make the funeral arrangements herself. The one time she called her mother to try and discuss the funeral all she had said was, "I wish it would've been you." Although her mother had been quite obviously suckling her grief with the Budweiser that occupied their refrigerator's vegetable drawers, Martha was struck by the sober sincerity of this confession.

Prudently, Martha hadn't argued with the director at the time of their meeting regarding the closed casket but now, as he came toward at her like some filthy, skinny bird she said, "Open it." The director paused for a moment and

swallowed audibly.

He tried, pathetically, to dissuade her by mumbling, "My wife tried but she couldn't do much for him Mrs. Turney." His voice cracked on *Turney*.

"Open it now please." Martha sounded as normal as if she were simply requesting that he pass her the salt. With shaking hands he fumbled with the bow section of the coffin's dutch-doored lid until it was free.

With it half open Martha could see Lee from the ribcage up.

"Where are his clothes?" she asked as calm as water in a clogged drain.

"We didn't think it would be good to jostle him too much after Elma finally got him all sewed up." Martha looked from the casket to the director's face. A strip of sweat sparkled like Christmas glitter across his upper lip.

"But don't worry, Mrs. Turney, the suit you brought in to us is in there with him. We folded it up nice and set it under his feet." He swallowed hard and looked down at the floor.

Martha noticed with disgust that his eyes were tearing up—from fear or embarrassment she could not tell. She had the strange thought that his entire face might be about to liquefy and slide down the front of his shiny jacket like warm peach jelly.

"I need a moment please," Martha did not tremble.

When the director looked up he saw a sweet, wistful smile spreading across Martha's face. He must have been at least a little taken aback at her composure. He had confided with the minister before the service that Lee's was one of the worst disfigurements he had ever seen, and that he had seen quite a few, being the funeral director in a farming community.

And indeed, Lee's face had been flattened to a degree that at the center of his head where his nose should protrude was a shallow dimple with two uneven black holes. The director's wife, who was locally regarded as *the* top shelf stylist to the dearly departed, had managed to stitch and glue much of Lee's flesh back into approximate original placement, but the damage to his tissue and bones was so fantastic that in the end she hadn't been able to do him much good.

On his way out the director shut the parlor doors with an unprofessionally inelegant clunk, perhaps in desperation to put something between Martha and himself.

Now at last alone, with the baby tucked in one arm Martha reached into the casket with the other and touched ever part of Lee that she could reach. He was disturbingly cold, of course, but Martha was accustomed to facing circumstances that were less than ideal. She tried to warm him by rubbing her palm rapidly against his flesh but stopped when she felt that the pressure was causing fluid to weep from the web of lacerations that wrapped his torso like a net.

She hadn't known what she was going to do before she did it but when she realized what should happen she didn't hesitate.

"You should have her," she whispered, her eyes shiny with a very delicate affection. It was the first and last time she would ever behave with generosity. Gently nestling Leigh into the box she stood and smiled, gazing at her only loves for just a few moments more before she lowered the lid. When she reached the parlor doors she did not stop and she did not look back.



Anna Akhmatova | Mario Mesick

Sights in drafts of light
A lingering gasp of pain
Brushing reds over yellow, blacks over blue
Iris brings me flowers

A growing tumult of bruising veins
No color can cover
A broken glance of lying hope
And Iris brings me flowers

A hapless curse of fractured love
Between slats of life disease
And when I'm dreaming
Iris brings me flowers

Drifting through a violent, inky depth
My coursing fear holds still
And in my sinking darkness
Iris brings me flowers

Ezra Pound wants to save you money on your car insurance and elsewhere the buzz, crack, blur and spit of the radio absolves us of our ignorance.

Here in the trenches, where prophets preach from their cubicle pulpits, the sound of a parsed stanza fails to stall the swinging gate of the second hand ticking off its metered

measure; these are the wheels that move the world, tiny gears, each responsible for a single click on a grandfather clock, one tick at a time, contributing a second to the infinite line stretching from here past the far outposts of tomorrow.

Seas of static, stasis, stale lips and stale words, ridiculous repetition of rain on drain pipes, reduction after reduction until we are alone with nothing but nostalgic abstractions:

Mussolini the postman, the accountant, the darling lover of bored housewives everywhere who secretly burn like Clara at *Giulino di Messegra*, to overhear dusk's pounding parade drums.

And this year the fashion magazines scream Black is back! Black coats, cinched at the waist, a must for cocktails, a night at the gallery, flirting at Sax, a revolution of silk gloves, penny loafers, weighted words, calculations. Churchill at the printing press, smeared ink on his fingers.

Last summer we took out our old newspapers,
burned them, the ink melted into fire and we
wondered, is it passé to love passion over reason?

On a gray Tuesday by the Chesapeake,
it was almost autumn and by the death of the sunset,
a young couple scurried from blustering city
traffic, frozen together like fossils in amber,
repeating endlessly words barely registered—
“I am only responsible to God and to History,”
but on the last bus to Norfolk, such ideas mean nothing.

When the last check is written, the world still continues
and nothing but the fax machine hums in the evening.

Those lost in their graves, hidden beneath fading pages
that never touched our walls of language speak softly

(too softly so no sound's recorded)

until we are left, like dots in the margins,
compromised figures or moderate ninnies,
dreaming of weekends, white sandy beaches,
papier-mâché flags that wave in the evenings.

because i want to remember lilac

Sharon
Venezio

is this how we find out about ourselves?
screaming at each other in a rental car,
truck stop families poking by.

i don't look at their faces.
after a while they're all the same,
it doesn't matter what city.

even your mouth is the same,
spit pooling in the corners
as your anger swells.

i think of the year i was reading
sartre. the idea of indifference
seemed important

as if i could be so removed from the living,
as if that would prevent suffering.

more and more i wonder:
am i merely the sum of my years with you,
grasping whatever i can to survive?

i am thinking about whitman,

determined to understand,
determined to nod my head yes
when i hear the word *love*.

Nicole
Cisar

Forgive Me

I don't know what life is like
without to-do-lists in your handwriting,
laundry folded in your arms,
movies you prefer not to see.
I can't remember the last time
you weren't a part of
at least ten seconds
of each minute
of every hour
of all my days.
Your face rests on the
inside of my eyelids
where my inescapable freedom is
chained to soft kisses and hugging fingers
that tug at me when I start to lose my way.
Sometimes, I wish
they'd let me walk
just far enough
to know how it feels
to miss you.

i never knew the liturgy,
but i know one exists.

She digs in the mud until
her nails are earth black
and the sun has given her
a crown of water beads.
This backyard place

of burial grounds:
water consecrates
by days, by minutes.

In her blue party dress
and black patent leathers
from her father
for those more precious occasions

she kneels on the ground, smoothes
the mound of the hole, removed,
around its edges.

It is hard work, making treasure,

she thinks to the shoebox
where things wrapped in tissue
are protected from storms, or
long falls from nests,
or underbreaths.

i don't remember when i stopped
leaving water for the field mice,
or collecting black caterpillars
for jars filled with twigs,

but each moment remains brutally alive.
There is still belief in things that matter:
in sand, and the truth: return to the earth,

in feathers, in bees,
and all the things
a web collects.



Exoskeletal | Raffi Kahwajian

Paris Album

CORINNA COORSEN

As I remember it, the apartment was located 24 Avenue de Breteuil, near the Metro station Saint Francois Xavier. To get home, I had to walk past a sidewalk café, which came to life in the early evening with men smoking and drinking aperitifs, and at the end of the avenue, tourist buses circled the golden cupola of Les Invalides. But on my part of the street all was quiet, deserted even. Few tourists ventured this far from Les Invalides, and even fewer neighbors walked the sidewalks, as if the buildings with their stone ornaments, tall windows, and brocade curtains, and the people behind those curtains, had fallen into a deep and lasting sleep.

As far as I know, ours was the only two-story building in the neighborhood. One entered through a heavy wooden door, which opened into a small courtyard paved with cobblestones and enclosed on all sides. To the left was an apartment which housed an Asian family, probably from Vietnam, for Paris was a major destination for Vietnamese immigrants in the 70's and 80's. I never did ask them where they came from, nor did I ever exchange more than a silent greeting with any of them.

Their apartment consisted of a kitchen and a bedroom and I assume there was a bathroom as well, though I never saw sign of one through the front door. I wished they had kept their door shut, for I didn't like being privy to their cramped life, nor did I want them watching me as I crossed the courtyard, on my way out, or when I returned home. The door was open all day during the summer months, perhaps because the family considered the courtyard an extension of their apartment. Eight pairs of shoes were lined up by the door, waiting like dogs for their owners to leave the confines of the courtyard, for in it and around the house, they all moved about barefoot.

I identified seven different people during the time we were neighbors. The two women seemed to take turns preparing food and sweeping the kitchen floor and the courtyard, and the three men spent their evenings drinking, smoking, and playing cards around the kitchen table. The two children, still very young, played in the courtyard or lay on their bunk-beds. All talked loudly in a language as foreign to me as the high-pitched voices uttering them. To this day, my German sense of order compels me to find the reason for the eighth pair of shoes. Perhaps there was grandparent cooped up in the part of the bedroom that was hidden from my view, or perhaps one of the adults owned an extra pair of shoes. Sometimes I imagined my neighbors kept the shoes in memory of someone close, who had died or been left behind in Vietnam. I'll never know, for I lost all trace of the family after the flood.

My own apartment consisted of a living room and bathroom on the main floor, a tiny sleeping loft which I accessed via a ladder, and a kitchen without windows in the basement. The apartment was like a boat with an upper deck, a main deck, and a kitchen for a hull that kept everything else afloat. Snippets of my neighbors' staccato language fluttered into the two upper levels of my apartment like hummingbirds, but inside the windowless kitchen, their voices were muted by the weight of the earth behind the walls.

For the life of me I cannot recall how one entered my apartment. The door must have opened into the staircase

that led to the second floor. Three padlocked rooms, which, so my landlord told me when I first arrived, had served as meat storage during previous decades, lined the hallway upstairs and at the end of the hallway my only other neighbor occupied the last apartment. I remember the wooden steps, whose concave surfaces were rounded and polished by so many shoes, and a wooden railing that followed the sharp turn of the staircase.

Despite our encounter during the flood I cannot recall my upstairs-neighbor's name. It was something with an 'R', Ron or Rupert or perhaps Robert—I shall call him Rudy. Absurdly, as if it mattered, I remember Rudy's age: in 1981 he was thirty-nine. He'd spent the better part of his life in Wales and England and moved to Paris in the early seventies. He worked in some obscure clerical position for an organization whose name or purpose I can't recall. On his days off, Rudy went for long walks in the Jardin de Luxembourg or the Tuileries. On rainy days, he listened to opera arias or David Bowie records. He was a true Bowie fan.

I suppose the rains started in the fall, late October perhaps, or early November, though they could have been spring storms as well, in which case you might mentally transpose the story I'm about to tell into 1982. Not that the year matters. What matters is that the rains drove me to Rudy's apartment. Until then, we had only exchanged polite chitchat on the staircase the few times we met there, or on the way to the Metro, when we happened to be leaving at the same time. Crossing the courtyard, I wondered if our Asian neighbors thought of us as a couple. Unless they had snuck up the staircase, they had no way of knowing that our part of the building housed two separate apartments. I hoped they didn't assume that Rudy and I lived together.

In our conversations Rudy and I were careful to conceal our respective loneliness, me describing my progress as a tourist guide, a job which I performed illegally, without prior training or license, and him raving about Paris nightlife, in which, to my knowledge, he never partook. In any case, I never heard the steps marking his return home shake the staircase past nine o'clock.

Once, after he had expressed concern that his music was bothering me, and I had assured him I liked operas, Rudy gave me a recording of Ravel's *Sheherazade* to which I listened henceforth lying on my bed, my ear pressed to the tape recorder with the broken volume dial. It was an awkward moment, him standing in the dim light of the staircase, holding out the tape, and me in my door frame, knowing I should ask him in but not doing so. The truth is I found him a little odd, though to this day I can't pinpoint the behavior that would prompt me to say such a thing. Anyway, the point I'm making here is that our relations were purely neighborly and that until the flood, I had never ventured past the old meat lockers, let alone into Rudy's apartment.

Let's assume the rains started in late October, heavy, unforgiving rains, which widened the cracks in the roof tiles and created new leaks until the roof became porous like a sponge. I placed the few pots, jars, and bowls I owned under the leaks, emptying them when they were full until it became obvious that it was impossible to keep up with the water. Drops grew into streams that cascaded from the roof onto the carpet, soaking the ceiling between the living room and kitchen until it too released its rivulets. The kitchen flooded first, water rising above the carpet and soon after that—it might have been a day or two—the carpet on the main floor was under water. Books stacked on the table and clothes tossed onto the couch, oddly positioned to avoid the leaks overhead, I retreated to the sleeping loft, in which one side of the mattress had miraculously remained dry.

The collapse of the drainpipe got me out of bed, for the water it was supposed to guide along the slopes of the roof, now poured into the staircase. My ears perked up at the sound of water crashing into the stairwell. It had been very quiet during the days of rain aside from the steady drumming of rain on the roof, and the tapping, plopping, and splattering of drops and streams falling onto the carpet or into receptacles. All was quiet in the Asian quarters, as if the rain had washed the apartment and its seven tenants away. The absence of their voices, to which I had become begrudgingly accustomed over the summer, had been disturbing.

Until the breaking of the drainpipe, nothing had stirred in Rudy's apartment either, but now I heard steps on the landing upstairs. There must have been a step or two leading from the bottom landing to my apartment, for when I opened the door, the water rushing down the stairs did not swallow my naked feet. A few hours later it was to drown the

kitchen entirely.

"Come on up," cried Rudy. Dressed in a green robe, the angles in his face accentuated by the light coming through the newly formed hole in the roof, he looked strangely regal, as if his vantage point above the pouring water gave him unconditional supremacy.

Rudy's apartment was dry. The air was humid, of course—what can you expect after five days of rain—but everything I touched was dry. I would be lying if I claimed to remember the details of Rudy's apartment. There must have been armchairs or a couch, a table with chairs, perhaps even a fireplace, but I only remember the bed, king-size and topped with a red velvet quilt and bronze-colored pillows. Beyond that I have a vague image in my mind of two or three rooms crowded with furniture and objects and soft rugs underfoot, everything in brownish and reddish tones.

Like Rudy's name, the furnishings and objects of his apartment are but a vague remembrance. What has remained with unchanged clarity is the smell. In Rudy's apartment, the air seemed to carry weight, as if dragging an old damask curtain in its wake. It wasn't so much that it smelled rank, of rotting garbage for example, or backed-up sewage. No, it was a more subtle, though infinitely unpleasant smell that settled in my nostrils that afternoon. It didn't hit me when I stepped through the door, but worked its powers slowly, almost unnoticeably, until my nose and sinus cavities seemed unable to smell anything else. Every piece of furniture, every object, from the flannel shirt tossed over the bed post to the tea kettle on the stove, the rugs, and even the walls smelled of Rudy's habits: cooking habits, eating habits, tea-drinking habits, dish-washing habits, cleaning habits, television and radio habits, dirty-laundry habits, shaving and showering habits, hair-care habits, and book and magazine habits. They embodied the smell of repetition and monotony.

Rudy offered me tea, and I watched him go through the motions of filling water into an aluminum saucepan—perhaps he didn't own a kettle after all—and set out two mugs and teaspoons on the plastic tablecloth of the kitchen table. Yes, there must have been a table, for I was sitting at one, and the surface of the plastic tablecloth, white with orange flowers, had several cuts.

"Cream and sugar?" Rudy asked and I nodded with a mixture of appreciation and apprehension, for my mind had suddenly jumped to the question of what, if anything, Rudy was wearing under the robe. I tried to steer my mind away from mental images of Rudy's nudity, for it seemed to me that thinking about his body might provoke in him an undesired response. Not that I remember my exact thoughts, but I know I did worry about the robe, though if I'm honest, I have to admit the possibility of curiosity on my part as well. Perhaps I didn't want to have sex with Rudy, but I was tempted to see what he looked like under the robe.

He talked of the rain, of course, and the flooding staircase, how he'd never seen so much rain in Paris, while he poured hot water over the teabags and then handed me the steaming mug.

My mind must have worked hard to erase the next few hours in Rudy's apartment. Perhaps it was guilt—how could I justify sleeping with a man whom I didn't find attractive, a man with whom I didn't even like to be seen? Yes, it must have been guilt that stopped the memories from being formed and stored in a safe corner of the mind.

Only this I remember: Sitting on his bed, Rudy showed me his collection of Bowie albums. *Ziggy Stardust* and *Space Oddity* are titles I recall (though there were many more), and then there was a single LP with songs from *Baal*, a musical by Bertolt Brecht. Perhaps curiosity prompted me to ask Rudy to play it for me, for although I had read a couple of Brecht plays in German high school, I had never heard of the musical. Or perhaps a sudden sense of loss of connection to Germany surfaced at that moment. The lyrics, printed on the inside of the fold-out jacket, had been translated into English, and we read along as we listened. I was captivated by Bowie's voice, clear and raw, quite different from the tinny sound that had crept from Rudy's apartment down the stairwell into my sleeping loft.

Recently, upon sorting through papers to look for something lost, I found a copy of the lyrics to the song I had liked particularly well. Rudy had copied the words and mailed them to me some time after I had moved from my apartment on Avenue de Breteuil. It's called *Remembering Marie A.*, and in it *Baal* tries to recall a love affair from his past, but he is unable to recall the details of his lover's face or their lovemaking. Only the fleeting presence of a cloud he noticed stayed in his mind: *I know that still and shall forever know it; it was quite white and moved in very high.* Strange how I too

remember odd details from the hours inside Rudy's apartment, while others, which should have left an indelible impression, have paled or been erased.

The stereo was in the bedroom, must have been, for why else would we have been sitting on Rudy's bed, looking at LP jackets and reading lyrics? I think the robe slipped at some point, exposing a white, freckled thigh. Did I kiss Rudy, and did he stroke my hair? Probably, and I hope there was tenderness, but regardless, at some point, the robe came off. How much time passed between the first sexual gesture and the moment Rudy was naked, I can't say—it could have been less than one and as long as thirty minutes—but there I was, lying on the bed, dressed to some extent, I think, my legs dangling over the edge, and there stood Rudy, skinny and creamy white with freckles on his arms, shoulders, and chest. I focused on his face, small, deep-set eyes and pointy nose, a little askew, and the carved furrows between his eyebrows. Still, I saw his cock, liver-colored, unexpectedly large, fully erect, and pointed at me.

Nothing remains in my mind of our lovemaking—if you can call it that—except that, the minute his cock was inside me, I wished for him to be done. It occurred to me to ask him to stop and pull out, but since I had agreed to engage in intercourse, I thought I had to let him finish. David Bowie cried *Ground control to Major Tom*, again and again, though perhaps it was my mind that replayed the words as if trying to hold on to something in this moment when I had let everything slip away.

Afterwards, I became aware of voices in the courtyard below. Urgent cries that rose from below like a flock of birds surprised by hunters. It was the first time I had heard my Asian neighbors in days, and I reached for their cries like someone drowning reaches for a rope. We stood at Rupert's window, him in his robe once again, me dressed, I think, in a shirt he lent me, looking down into the courtyard. The water, now about a foot high, was rushing down the cobblestones toward the street. Where the stones were particularly uneven, the water bent and swirled, producing little swells topped with white curls, which merged with the sprays of so many drops diving most gracefully into the water from the heavens.

Two of the men were trying to pull open the wooden door. Clothes clinging to their stringy bodies like wet tissue paper, feet lost under the rearing swell against the door, they were urged on by the rest of the family, who stood on the threshold of the apartment. Their naked feet were covered in calmer waters, and I imagined eight pairs of shoes floating inside the kitchen like dinghies in a harbor after a storm. The image of this group of five, each woman carrying a child and the man's arms around the women's shoulders, still lives in my mind. Their faces, softened by the rain that hung like rice paper in the courtyard, were turned toward the door, as if the collective power of their wanting could give the two men the strength to open it. One of the children moved inside the folded arm holding her, and suddenly the round shell of her face looked into Rudy's window. And it was as if the window and the rain vanished all at once, so clearly did I see her eyes.

Kate
Martin-Rowe

Monk and Soldiers

-Los Alamos observes the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima

Today, my saffron vestment stands for memory.

I come to practice

We all love peace so

probably not enough.

Drove up from Santa Fe in the dark,

watched sunrise claw over

then necessities explode us

the mountain. The people who lived here
wanted to make an atom shatter. And they did.

dark horses were approaching

I thread flowers through the chain-link,
listen. A man insists we can't illuminate one

on all sides!

terror if we don't set fires for them all; I am thinking
the outer edges of the mind

I noticed the terrific size of the cloud as we turned to fly away,
can retrofit any past.

A thousand paper cranes strung from the height of a cathedral,

I became thirsty with what I had done,

I am the invisible

we shared cigarettes with guards who had been kind,

line suspending folded paper in the air.

damn right, I'm glad they dropped it,

Cranes fly off their silences,

we surely would have died.

the mayor opens a letter.

Los Angeles--El Paso Rivers: Verónica Reyes brown-speckled mirrors

I. Was it a sueño?

Beneath the Juárez-El Paso international puente
slabs of cement layer the brown banks suffocating
the screaming river like la Llorona drowning in el río grande
Homeboys, rucas and students engrave placazos in political protest
It is a bordered fortress that divides la tierra y familias
El río de Los Angeles is a mirror image of el río bravo
trails down a gringo-made route cutting the red dirt
brown agua lining chaparral and desert
Sewers empty the city's discharge into the water
Mouths open like smiling gatos spraying the río with a hiss
Raw paper, amber botellas, and heavy drenched pampers
swim down the curves of la Llorona's river

California was once México living in Aztlán
On this land there lived so many nations
that were a living part of the blue seacoast

*in a dream seashells were money. half of a mussel was a spoon.
the acorn source of a stable diet. women crushed them, seeped
away the toxins, boiled the mush with hot rocks, and made a meal.*

The Chumash, Pomo, Modoc walked on this land
Wives and husbands once subsisted with the dolphin
Years ago in on this land there lived with many nations
And the white man's government killed families
And the white man announced 'terminated'
On government onion paper a red line slashed them out
They are "ghosts" like ancestors who were murdered
And the Chumash descendents live in urban cities

"Was it a dream that the earth lived and breathed
blue skies so freely?"

El río de Los Angeles once roared with pura vida
Now, it is ill with every disease like el río grande
Polluted with every waste from people, companies
chemicals, garbage cans, shopping carts
infest the muddy water with death waiting for a prey
And children wade in and out of the filthy agua
playing along la frontera that separates familias

II. Is it a dream?

As I took the bus #30 down to el centro
crossing over la Primera street puente
from el Boyle Heights to Broadway Avenue,
I stared out the graffiti window
The L.A. river decapitated from the land
Sliced slabs of cements hold the fake canal

At the edge of the concrete bordering the water
A man stands hunched over bathing his body
With cold brown agua prickling his skin
Spreading the grime of illness on to himself

*In the Zacatecas, Jalisco, Sonora he left his familia
His daughter waits for him by the puerta
Her mother tells her 'Papi will be back soon.'
And the heavy sun settles itself beneath Tonantzin.*

"Why is he bathing in a dead río?"

Este hombre could be my tío, mi papá, my brother
He is my gente, my sangre from México
Raza that comes across la frontera to survive
like my familia who worked en la pisca
on the outskirts of Denver, where my Apá nació
El año we do not know—it was never recorded
They do not exist on paper.

Fragile Light, Rotting Mouths

Kris
Huelgas

I was the one who put
the cigarette on the bench:
Those ashes on the porch,
smeared again and again, a life
time, in affection and addiction
to one taste. And how
it rots. That was what kept me

fearing: divine clouds, abandonment
to the things she first said yes to—
paper grains fire smoke
twisted and obscure like the musings of a dream,
but not a dream, reality,
harsh realization of dying light.
Shadow shapes, carved with a stick, become formless
in a solid mound of black. In darkness she molested
addiction, as though it were a former cast member,
whose lines I could never quite
recall.

Untitled Number 2

CARRIN POCKRANDT

Scene I

CHRISTINA sits on a chair, stage right. VINCENT sits on a chair, stage left. CHRISTINA holds a remote to an invisible television and is constantly changing the channel. Both are in their early-to-mid-twenties. There are empty beer bottles scattered around the stage. There is an ice chest upstage center.

VINCENT: I think I suffer from paranoia. *(Pause.)* I'm not watching another crappy re-run.

CHRISTINA: It's not crappy. It's about nothing.

VINCENT: *(Looking around.)* Someone needs to clean up around here. *(CHRISTINA stands to adjust the television, blocking VINCENT'S view.)* Don't worry about moving or anything.

CHRISTINA: Wouldn't imagine it. *(BRAD enters, also in his early-to-mid-twenties. BRAD bugs VINCENT then exits. VINCENT looks worried but not surprised.)*

VINCENT: I really do hate this show.

CHRISTINA: I really don't care.

VINCENT: You need people telling you when to laugh?

CHRISTINA: *(Changes the channel.)* Ha. You know what I never understood about this movie?

VINCENT: How the camera always conveniently avoids the genitals of the dinosaurs.

CHRISTINA: *(Pause.)* That too. But what I never understood was why the dinosaurs always chase down the humans. With all the larger reptiles, wouldn't that be like getting into a fistfight over a french fry when you're sitting in front of a steak?

VINCENT: That's heavy.

CHRISTINA: Yup.

(CHRISTINA stands and walks to the ice chest, from which she produces a beer. VINCENT steals CHRISTINA'S chair. Their eyes meet. They pause. CHRISTINA sits in VINCENT'S chair.)

VINCENT: I'm adopted. *(Pause. Looking around.)* Someone needs to clean up around here. *(Pause.)* I have six toes. *(Pause.)*

CHRISTINA: You're all out of the good beer. All that's left is this light stuff. Tastes like carbonated urine. *(Pause.)*

VINCENT: I think that's why they didn't want me.

CHRISTINA: Cause you can't pick good beer.

VINCENT: Cause of my toes. I thought about getting it removed, but then I thought, too late now. Ya know? *(Pause.)* How do you know what urine tastes like?

CHRISTINA: That's a time in my life I don't like talking about.

VINCENT: (VINCENT *stands and walks to ice chest to check on the beer. CHRISTINA takes her chair back.*) Someone needs to clean up around here. (BRAD *enters, hugs VINCENT, then exits. VINCENT appears worried, he looks at CHRISTINA, but she's watching television.*) I didn't stop picking my nose until I was thirteen. (Pause.) And I only stopped because I got caught in class. Everyone started laughing and calling me Vinny the Miner.

CHRISTINA: This is the best cop show. (VINCENT *wanders around upstage, picking up beer bottles.*) Some say that one other crime drama is better, but what I don't understand is why all of a sudden scientists get to carry guns. Besides, this one is classic.

VINCENT: In school, I plagiarized all my English assignments. I only got caught once. (BRAD *enters, hugs VINCENT, then exits.*) I thought that even if my parents found me, they wouldn't want me back because everyone called me Vinny the Miner. (Pause.) Now, my worst habit is biting my nails.

CHRISTINA: Eww! Check this out. This woman's got a twenty-foot tapeworm. (VINCENT *stands upstage center, looks at the television, gives a dirty look to the back of CHRISTINA'S head, then continues to gather bottles.*) That's disgusting.

VINCENT: What? Biting my nails or the tapeworm woman?

CHRISTINA: Both. (VINCENT *continues to rearrange the beer bottles. BRAD enters. VINCENT tries to avoid him. BRAD chases VINCENT around the stage. BRAD catches VINCENT, hugs him, then exits.*) You shouldn't run away from Brad like that.

VINCENT: He's hugging me.

CHRISTINA: Exactly. If he needs a hug, he needs a hug.

VINCENT: I hardly brush my teeth.

CHRISTINA: I noticed.

VINCENT: No one ever says anything.

CHRISTINA: I'm saying something now.

VINCENT: I'm not watching that show. (CHRISTINA *changes the channel. VINCENT finishes his beer and puts it with the rest, which he has arranged into a small pyramid.*) I think it's funny when people get hurt emotionally.

CHRISTINA: Ever think you're just a bad person? (VINCENT *stops and makes eye contact with CHRISTINA. VINCENT turns and tries to put another beer bottle on the pyramid, but it keeps falling.*) You gotta be smarter than the beer bottle.

VINCENT: No. I don't. I just have to be smarter than the design committee that gave it the final go ahead. (Pause.) (CHRISTINA *changes the channel.*) NO! (CHRISTINA *changes the channel.*) Or the designer whose deadline was so close that he just stopped caring.

CHRISTINA: Try moving that bottle to the left a little.

VINCENT: Do not disturb the bottles! (VINCENT *looks down at the pyramid and moves one of the bottles to the left.*) Hey. Where's Brad?

CHRISTINA: Odd. Maybe you should go check on him.

VINCENT: You know, I never expected to live beyond sixteen. (VINCENT *exits.*)

CHRISTINA: I'm sure you didn't Vinny the Miner. (CHRISTINA *stands and addresses the audience, holding the remote. As she speaks she becomes angry.*) I hope he knows that he's going to end up alone. (Pause.) I find myself re-watching movies that had shocked me only to realize that I must have learned something new or seen something worse because what used to disgust me has become the only thing I can relate to. (Pause.) My sister used to pull my hair at my request. (Pause.) She encouraged me to develop a habit of playing with knives. There are about six knives in my room. (Pause.) Do you think anyone would ever know? Do you think HE (points in the direction that VINCENT *exited*) would ever know? (VINCENT *enters carrying a piece of paper. CHRISTINA stands still and watches him. The stage is silent as VINCENT walks to the beer bottle pyramid.*

He destroys it, sending beer bottles clattering all over the stage. He turns and faces CHRISTINA still holding the piece of paper.

VINCENT: Brad left a note. (*Blackout.*)

Scene II

CHRISTINA *sits on a chair stage right. She is still changing channels.* BRAD *sits on the floor upstage center. BRAD'S note is pinned to the wall. CHRISTINA stops changing channels.*

VINCENT: (*Offstage.*) NO! (*CHRISTINA jumps slightly and begins to change channels again. BRAD looks at CHRISTINA with disapproval. VINCENT enters holding a plastic water bottle and looks down at BRAD. Their eyes meet. While watching him, VINCENT walks as far around BRAD as possible, then sits on the chair stage left.*)
There's an expiration date on my water bottle.

CHRISTINA: There's an expiration date on your forehead. (*Pause.*)

VINCENT: Even you'll be thrown away one day. (*Pause. Looking around.*) Sorry about the mess. (*Pause.*) Cemeteries are just landfills.

CHRISTINA: Don't worry about the mess.

VINCENT: Somebody needs to clean up around here.

CHRISTINA: I said not to worry about it.

VINCENT: The best conversation I've had this week was with myself.

CHRISTINA: Everyone at work was talking about this show.

VINCENT: We talked about the validity of deconstructionism in an already deconstructed environment.

CHRISTINA: Who?

VINCENT: Me and myself. It was a very interesting discussion. I learned a lot.

CHRISTINA: They said it was really twisted.

VINCENT: Hitchcock used chocolate syrup for blood in the shower scene. (*BRAD stands and exits.*)

CHRISTINA: But it seems kind of...juvenile and predictable.

VINCENT: So stop watching it. (*CHRISTINA changes the channel. She looks at VINCENT who is glaring at her. She smiles at him and changes the channel. BRAD enters carrying a bottle of chocolate syrup, hands it to VINCENT then sits in the same spot as before. VINCENT examines the bottle then sets it on the floor.*)

CHRISTINA: Your neighbor asked me if Brad is retarded. (*VINCENT looks back at BRAD then at the note on the wall.*)

VINCENT: He's not retarded. He just takes the back-road instead of the freeway. If he were retarded he'd be driving backwards on the interstate. (*VINCENT looks at BRAD and the note again. BRAD stands up and exits.*) You shouldn't say stuff like that in front of him. (*CHRISTINA turns and looks at the note, then back at the invisible television.*)

CHRISTINA: He's not a child.

VINCENT: You know that painting *Starry Night* by Vincent van Gogh? You know that famous tree in the foreground?

CHRISTINA: He knows what's going on.

VINCENT: I never saw that tree until it was pointed out to me.

CHRISTINA: He knows, Vincent.

VINCENT: And now it's all I can see. (*BRAD enters carrying a road map. He hands it to VINCENT then sits back in the same spot. VINCENT looks at the road map then sets it next to the chocolate syrup.*) They say it was the view from his room at a mental hospital.

CHRISTINA: Mental hospitals are just landfills.

VINCENT: You know, if I ever found my parents, I don't think they'd want me. (*Pause.*) They'd say that they never wanted a kid that talks to himself.

CHRISTINA: No one wants a kid that talks about Derrida.

VINCENT: That's only because they don't want to realize that everything eventually becomes discourse. (BRAD *stands*.)

BRAD: The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality, the totality has its center elsewhere. (*Pause*.) The center is not the center. (BRAD *exits*.)

CHRISTINA: I wish you wouldn't say things like that.

VINCENT: I wish I never met you. (VINCENT *exits*.)

CHRISTINA: A wish is the dirt that levels the landfill. (*Extended pause*. CHRISTINA *changes channels*. VINCENT *enters*.
He wanders around the stage not noticing CHRISTINA, but eventually stops to face her. Their eyes meet.
Pause. VINCENT *tears the note off the wall*.)

VINCENT: Brad left.

(*Blackout*.)

Dustin
Lehren

pubic hair

everytime I stare at my dick
I'm reminded of my dad.
sometimes, if I just look at the mound
of pubic hair,
I'm reminded of my mom.
I'm not too worried about it.

but I wonder,
if that's why all pornstars
shave everything clean
like a baby.

they say all pornstars
are running from bad childhoods.
and if like me you equate
your childhood with seeing
your parents pubic hair

it seems natural
to want to shave it all off.



Innocence - Neri Keshi | Gohar Gegeyan

The everlasting harvest continues
at Coco's on Sundays, where old
women complain bacon isn't crisp
enough, and have the server take it
back.

Their daughters shelve Self
Help books next to Bibles, spread
optimism like fat-free margarine,
because

each salvation has a gospel
good enough to stick to
refrigerator doors; each time hands
reach inside, The Word makes mouths less
guilty.

Their daughters serve
old women, insist the eggs are
over easy, and think of people
starving

by the millions. We all fall short
of wages, our banks are closed
on Sundays, so we give communion
wafers in substitute for
bread.



Pinned | David Heffler

Hubbard Valley

KEN CRAN

Jimmy Hubbard's life changed forever on the morning of January 17, 1998. By signing on to the Hualapai Canal and Dam Project, the governor of the great state of Arizona doomed the whole of Hubbard Valley, which was named after the only family that ever lived in it, to a submerged existence. It wasn't a hard decision. Hubbard Valley was more of a gorge, with no archaeological significance and certainly no aesthetic value. The valley floor itself was mostly flat, dotted with gnarled creosote bushes, some sparse prickly pears, and not much else. Even the environmentalists weren't outraged. No one seemed to care about Hubbard Valley, or that the dam project would immerse it forever under one hundred feet of water.

No one except, of course, Jimmy Hubbard.

January was the start of the monsoon season in the desert. Channel Six and Tom Weston's *Super Doppler Weather* report had a storm system approaching, whirling across California and onto the Coconino plateau by Friday afternoon. Jimmy Hubbard agreed with the weatherman, as he always did, with his trademark "Darn it if you ain't right, Tom Weston." He loved the rain. The rain brought Buffalo Bob.

He leaned back in the propped-on-cinderblocks Lay-Z-Boy, stretched, and contemplated the wood grain paneling. The trailer was small but it was his. A kingdom on wheels, except it never really moved. Not yet, anyway. Not until the dam was finished, which thank sweet Jesus, was running behind schedule and not slated for completion for another six months. His mother, God rest her soul, bought the trailer when Jimmy was two, lost it in a foreclosure, then got it back when the bank decided it didn't want a crummy Airstream with a leaky roof. Jimmy was thirty now, his mother was dead nearly ten years and the trailer had been paid off for almost that long. Before the governor's dam project, he even thought about expanding it, maybe adding a rumpus room. It was a funny word, rumpus. Sounded like a place people could park their hind-ends for some fun.

Yep, *rumpus* room. A good word for fun.

Jimmy Hubbard crawled out of the Lay-Z-Boy, scratched his ass, and stuck his head out the door. The sky was blue in between burgeoning gray clouds. Late morning was a good time in the desert, especially in January, when it wasn't so hot. To the south lay Weaver Mountains, to the west, Lake Havasu City, though you couldn't see it because the trailer was at the bottom of a valley. North was more mountains, which to the best of Jimmy's knowledge didn't have a name. East was U.S. Highway 93, which was the road of Jimmy Hubbard's address: 247 U.S. Highway 93, Prince Of Persia, Arizona (Prince Of Persia was actually 59 miles north east but it was the closest town so there you have it).

Jimmy was proud of his valley, which was deeded to him by his mother, who had it deeded to her by her grandfather. Old Gramps Hubbard had bought up the land from the Apaches, tried to find gold and later copper. Didn't work out, which was just fine with Jimmy. Mines, he figured, were probably a lot of work. Still, had he been rich, he might have been able to hire lawyers to stop the dam. Then he wouldn't have to move the Airstream, and his mother's

gravestone wouldn't soon be under a hundred feet of water.

But he wasn't rich, the dam was being built, Arizona claimed "eminent domain" and bought his valley for chicken feed and a pair of used slippers. The state did offer to move Jimmy and his trailer and even dig up Mother Hubbard and rebury her somewhere else. There were reasons why he said no to both offers. The first was that, although he still held out hope the dam wouldn't be finished, when the time came, he wanted to move the Airstream himself. Show everyone he wasn't just some dumb valleybilly who couldn't hitch a trailer. As for them digging up Mrs. Hubbard, that wouldn't have floated for one little reason: although she had a gravestone, the fact was that Mrs. Hubbard was no longer in her grave.

The reason for that was Buffalo Bob.

Jumping from the trailer, Jimmy went around to its west side, his head tilted toward the sky. The clouds were getting heavier, that was for darn sure. Tall and gray, they reached higher toward heaven, begging God to let them please piss all over the earth. When his mother was alive, he wasn't allowed to curse. But now Jimmy was all alone and no one could tell him what to do. Not in his home. On his land. In his kingdom. He was master of 247 U.S. Highway 93.

"Goddamn the commies!" he said out loud. He waited and listened. Half expected the dam people to peek out from under the trailer: *"Don't you use that kind of language Jimmy Hubbard and move your damn trailer!"* He smiled. No one around to hear him curse. He put his hand over his mouth, stifled a laugh. Shot snot from his nose.

"Darn it if you ain't right, Jimmy Hubbard," he said wiping his nose on his sleeve. He shuffled over to the front of the trailer where a '74 Impala sat in ruts in the ground. Sure it ran, like a commie in a war. It didn't have a rear window. The hood was lizard-shit green while the rest of the car was mule-shit brown. The hubcaps didn't match. And the driver's seat had a wood crate over top to keep the springs from poking Jimmy in the butt. Didn't matter much. It was his and it was paid for. His kingdom had a chariot and its name was Chevy.

Jimmy fished for the car keys in his pocket, poked his finger on the Gila monster claw key chain, cursed loudly because he could, and then pulled them out. He jabbed the key into the trunk and opened the lid. A swarm of flies and a wave of funk thicker than cold oatmeal engulfed him. He waved his arms around, tried to dissipate the stench, but it didn't go away. Slapping Venus flytrap hands together, he tried repeatedly to kill the buzzing flies. They settled unharmed back onto the dead body in the trunk.

Jimmy Hubbard stared down at her. Her eyes were half-opened and yellow, her tawny coat caked with mud and lumpy blood. Her considerable tongue protruded from her mouth at an awkward angle, and had begun to turn from its natural wet lavender to sandpaper-dry black. She may have been beautiful once, but no longer. A shotgun blast could pretty much ruin the looks of anyone. Or anything.

Jimmy's stomach felt like a bag of dead cats. She shouldn't have been the one to die. She was still nursing a baby, but Jimmy saw it too late. Long after he pulled the trigger. Long after blowing a hole in her. Afterward, he'd had a helluva time getting her into the trunk, especially since he was alone and weighed barely a hundred pounds himself. Getting her out would be harder. His muscles were already sore, the way they were that time he dug the hole for the new septic tank, which was after his mother died, but before the dam project was announced.

Nevertheless, he screamed lots of curse words and pulled her from the trunk. The cloud of flies swarmed furiously before settling again. They clustered around the clotted buckshot wound, doing whatever flies did around clotted buckshot wounds. In the distance, somewhere between his valley and Lake Havasu City, rain was falling. The wind carried the tinny smell and Jimmy took it in. The temperature suddenly dropped a few degrees, raising instant goose bumps.

"It's coming, Buffalo Bob, it's coming!"

Flies crawled over the carcass and Jimmy wondered how they could buzz without their little fly wings moving. Were they talking? He wasn't sure what flies would have to talk about, but he chuckled at the thought. *Gosb, Artemis* (couldn't a fly be named 'Artemis?'), *this is some mighty fine rot, yes sir. Indeed, we should invite mother and Aunt Carlita to partake. Nicely aged rot, quite.* More chuckles. He liked big words and he liked the word 'partake.' He'd love to 'partake' in some rumping in a rumpus room.

Jimmy Hubbard straightened up. *Wipe that smile off your face, Jimmy Hubbard, and go clean your room!* Fun was fun, but he didn't really think that flies talked. He watched them do their thing, still wondering where that buzzing was coming from. After a time, he realized that it wasn't the flies buzzing, no sir, but the sound of knobby radial tires on pavement. He turned to see a familiar site cruising down the highway and into Hubbard Valley. Butterflies ate up his bag-of-dead-cats stomach.

"Please God," Jimmy whispered. "Don't let him turn this way please oh please oh please."

What sun wasn't swallowed up by the clouds glinted off the windshield of the Sea Foam Green Ford Bronco. It was distant, yes, but not many people drove this section of the highway. Jimmy Hubbard knew the one's that did. Knew them by the sound of their tires. Buzzing fly tires meant Ford Bronco which meant Harvey Peter Wilkes. Agent for the commies in Phoenix and Washington. Agent for the enslavement of good Americans. Head commie bastard in charge of the Department to Shit on the Little Guy. Yep, he knew Harvey Peter Wilkes. And he didn't much care for him.

The Sea Foam Green Bronco turned left into Jimmy's driveway and began the slow trek up the rocky valley to his trailer. Jimmy Hubbard was in trouble, knew it the minute he heard the buzzing fly tires. With more screaming curse words, he hauled the body back into the trunk and slammed the lid down. Stuffing hands in pockets, because no guilty person does that, he began kicking an empty Mr. Pibb around the campfire ring. Above, rain clouds crowded closer. The breeze, now downright frigid, kicked up dust. And the Bronco, it's buzzing fly tires now muffled by rocks and dirt, kicked up trouble.

*

It wasn't long before Harvey Wilkes pulled to a stop and got out. His uniform was clean and neatly pressed because it was Monday. By Friday, it would be rumpled, dusty, and smelly from sweat and too much Brut. Monday's were good days for Harvey. He actually felt like a Game Warden. He was ninety-nine percent sure it had to do with the condition of his uniform, because by the time Friday rolled around, his ego felt as rumpled, dusty and smelly as his clothes. The clothes made the man, he had always believed. He wished he lived closer to Wickenburg or Lake Havasu City and the dry cleaners. Better yet, wouldn't it be nice if Prince Of Persia, Arizona, opened a dry cleaner? Then he'd feel like a million and six dollars everyday.

"How are you, Jimmy?" Harvey said trudging up to the trailer. He was fifty as of New Year's Eve, but he was still in pretty good shape. Sure, the belly bulged a little, and his legs had a slight bow to them, but he managed to keep a sense about himself.

Jimmy nudged the can with his foot, kept his eyes on it. He didn't look at Harvey. He never looked at Harvey. In fact, Harvey often wondered if Jimmy even knew what he looked like.

"Been busy, busy, busy," Jimmy said studying the can. "Gonna start up the mine again soon, yessiree."

Harvey nodded, tilted the hat back from his forehead. He'd heard the same thing from Jimmy Hubbard for the past ten years and knew the drill.

"Maybe you'll strike it rich, go to Branson or Graceland," said Harvey.

"I don't wanna go nowhere, Harve. I like it here. My Momma always said—"

Home is the place people can't wait to leave and can't wait to get back to. Harvey finished the words in his head. Though he was all of thirty, Jimmy Hubbard was what some would call a slow learner. Or as Harvey often said, a *no learner*. Jimmy hadn't changed much since Mrs. Hubbard decided to home school him. In the county schools, there was too much distraction. Too much fighting. And for Mrs. Hubbard, too much communism. She likened teachers to brainwashers, teaching the kids un-American things like factory unions and hippie music and that Vietnam was a mistake. Back then, Harvey Wilkes was a substitute teacher at Prince Of Persia Middle School, and he knew Jimmy well. Jimmy was small and odd, no thanks to his mother. Right before her death, she asked Harvey to watch over her son, for she felt certain, even on her deathbed, that he would be swallowed up by the world. She turned out to be right, in a way. The Hualapai Dam and subsequent flood were soon to swallow up the valley and everything in it.

At the moment, however, Jimmy Hubbard's history was the least of Harvey's concerns. He was a game warden, and that title took precedence over everything. Especially after glancing over at the Chevy's trunk. Dried blood stained the bumper. Harvey's shoulder slumped as he sighed. *Goddamn it.*

"Got a call from Reverend Millwood last night," he started. "Said he saw you yesterday out around Big Sandy creek."

Jimmy's hands sunk deeper into his pockets. He looked west toward the mountains. Thunderheads were almost on top of them.

"Rain's coming, Buffalo Bob," said Jimmy.

"He said you had a shotgun."

"Almost here, Buffalo Bob."

"I'm gonna look in your trunk," Harvey said. "Okay?"

Jimmy said nothing, looked off in the distance. A boom like dynamite crushed the sky and the first drizzly rain began to fall.

Harvey looked up at the clouds marching east. They were moving fast; it was going to be a doozy of a storm. *Better get this over with*, he thought. His clean pressed uniform was developing a case of the spots.

Harvey went over to the trunk, but it was closed tight. "You gonna open it up?" he said to Jimmy, who was still looking at the clouds.

"Look!" Jimmy yelled suddenly, pointing up at the sky. "Look at that cloud. It looks like Buffalo Bob!"

Buffalo Bob, Harvey thought. *Another friend. Must be a cactus this time.* "Jimmy, open the trunk please."

With eyelids fluttering at every drop of rain, Jimmy pulled his Gila monster key chain. "It's here, Buffalo Bob, it's here," he said, still refusing to look at Harvey.

Harvey wondered if there would be a time (perhaps soon if what he thought was in the trunk really was there) when Jimmy could no longer take care of himself. To the best of his knowledge, there was never any formal diagnosis of his condition. Jimmy's mother would have none of it. She refused even the suggestion that he be sent down to Phoenix to have an examination. She had no intention of letting the state, the commies, poke, prod and pummel him. Harvey suggested that she might be able to get some money for his care, but it was always the same answer with her. She didn't need any help because she was an American and as long as she had two strong hands she'd work, and *Goddamn the state.*

Jimmy inserted the key into the trunk lock and turned it. His eyes stayed on the Buffalo Bob cloud. He turned and faced due west. Away from Harvey.

"Why don't you go inside," Harvey said. "Outta the rain." Jimmy didn't hear him. He focused next on the flat scrub covered terrain that stretched a few hundred yards to the sloping valley wall.

"Oh April showers may come your way," Jimmy sang in a hushed voice. "They bring bright flowers or so they say." The rain fell harder. It was late morning, but the canopy of thunderheads blocked the sun so that it felt like 6:00 in the evening instead of 11:40 in the morning.

Hooking his fingers around the lip of the trunk lid, Harvey lifted up and was greeted by the funk of death. Flies swarmed, some protected by the trunk lid, others pelted by the falling rain. Harvey pinched his nose and covered his mouth. Death always smelled the same, but hot-in-the-trunk-of-an-old-Chevy-death added the scent of spare tire rubber, gasoline, oil, and moldy carpet. He slammed the lid closed, looked at Jimmy and cleared the taste from his throat.

"Jesus, Jimmy," said Harvey in a not-too-happy voice. Jimmy kept mum, stared at the patch of creosote bushes in the distance. Harvey coughed and spit a few times. He wished he had a smoke to cover up the bad taste. "That's a big horn sheep," he continued between coughs. "An endangered species." Jimmy still said nothing. It was eerie how he just stood there, still as a statue, and, Harvey thought, as smart as one, too. "This ain't rabbits or coyotes. I can't look the other way this time."

Finally, Jimmy smiled. When a person smiles, his whole face moves: ears push back, eyes crinkle, cheeks bulge.

Jimmy's smile wasn't normal, because it was just his mouth that moved. To Harvey, it was the same as if Jimmy was showing a dentist his teeth. Even through the rain, he could see the need for a dentist. A good dentist.

"First day of the MON-soon, Harve," Jimmy said. Finally, he looked due west. "Gotta take that sheep to Buffalo Bob. He's expecting me."

"Really sorry about this," Harvey said with genuine anguish. "But I have to arrest you." Adding a dramatic exclamation, the rain began to pour harder, the patter of drops on mud sounding like an absurdly long drum role. Rivulets formed and washed toward small arroyos and Harvey was suddenly reminded that he was at the bottom of a desert valley during a rainstorm. The last thing he wanted was to get caught in a flash flood.

"Gotta go see Buffalo Bob, Harve," said Jimmy. "He's expecting me. He's expecting his sheep."

For a few seconds, Harvey contemplated leaving Jimmy alone. Not permanently, no, but long enough for the storm to pass. Long enough for him to get out of the rain. He hated the rain. Why else would he live in the desert?

Straighten up and fly right, Wilkes, he thought. *What's a little water, anyway? Y'big wuss!* Harvey took his job seriously, and he was going to do it. *Had* to do it. Tom Weston, Channel Six and the *Super Doppler Weather Report* be damned.

"Buffalo Bob, huh?" Harvey said as he wiped the rain from his face. His felt hat, thankfully, had recently been doused with a good coat of Scotch Guard All-Weather. "Okay, I'll bite," Harvey said. "Who's Buffalo Bob?"

The sky lit up with God's fireworks, as Mrs. Hubbard used to say, then boomed as he bowled a strike. Harvey's khaki uniform had since lost the spots; it had changed to the color of a wet paper grocery bag.

"He's a fish, Harve."

Removing his hat, game warden Harvey Wilkes let the rain soak his thinning hair. It was cool and it felt damn good. "A fish, huh?" he said.

"Yep. He's my pet. He visits me during the MON-soons." With that, Jimmy turned and again looked due west. On the horizon, the clouds were even blacker than the one's over their heads. But Jimmy wasn't looking to the sky. He was looking at the valley floor stretched out before him.

"And you killed the bighorn to give it to him?" said Harvey.

Jimmy was thin and not very strong, although he managed to handle an adult sheep by himself so go figure, but Harvey wasn't much bigger than he was. If it came to a physical confrontation, though, he was confident he could subdue Jimmy. Still, he wished he had a gun. Or some mace. Or a club.

"Yeah, he's expecting me," said Jimmy. "He always expects me this time of year." He pointed to the expanse of creosote bushes and red sand and dirt. "Out there by Momma's gravestone." He paused before adding: "That's how I found him, Harve. Diggin' Momma's grave."

"Digging her...?" Harvey's face went flush. *Was it possible?* "Jimmy, you been, uh, feeding your fish since you're momma died?" he said. "You been *shooting big horns* since your momma died?"

Jimmy nodded a half-hearted nod, staring off into the distance as he did so. The monsoons came once a year; Jimmy's mother had been dead for ten years, which equaled ten bighorns. The population on the Coconino plateau as of last autumn was fewer than two dozen.

At that moment, an amazing thing happened right before Harvey Wilkes's eyes: Jimmy went from bumbling man-boy, who needed looking after, to ignorant poacher.

Harvey struggled to maintain his cool. "Why don't you take me to Buffalo Bob?" Jimmy's fish story, which Harvey considered it to be in every sense, was now a matter of genuine concern. Harvey liked people, but people didn't need protecting. People weren't in danger of extinction, and Harvey's love for everything desert, for everything natural and wild, dictated his course of action. He was a game warden, and a dedicated one.

"Uh, you want to see him Harve?" Jimmy said.

"I want to see your pet," Harvey said. *I want to see big horn bones. I want to see evidence before I have you committed, you stupid bumpkin shit.* "Show me your friend."

His tone was stern and father-like and Jimmy sensed that Harvey was mad. Mad at *him*. He looked at the

Chevy's trunk.

"No," said Harvey. "The bighorn stays."

Jimmy opened his mouth to object, but decided against it. What was the point? Harvey was the law, got to respect the law, got to respect the elders. Old people know better. Harvey was almost a hundred, or so Jimmy Hubbard thought.

The rain fell like big wet meteors. Jimmy led the way up a slight rise in the valley floor, then down into the wash. In a little while, it would be a flowing stream. No matter how hard it fell, though, Hubbard Valley never completely flooded because there were other gorges and arroyos to divvy up the water. Still, as Harvey crossed the sandy wash bottom, he felt a little uneasy about just how safe the valley was. The rain was coming pretty hard, and Hubbard Valley was chosen for the dam because of its closed-in topography and its potential to hold water. The only outlet for overflow, other than the actual dam three miles downstream, was down by the road, which not too coincidentally was also the only way out of the valley. Either way, too much water and you were stuck until it receded.

They stopped at the bottom of the wash and Jimmy scratched his ass and pointed. "There," he said.

His tone was reverent, but it escaped Harvey. He stared down into a mud hole as big and round as a kiddie swimming pool. It was slowly filling with water. On the far side of the wash was a simple wood grave marker splattered with mud. Carved into it were the words 'Mrs. Emma Hubbard.'

Overhead, purple clouds grew blacker by the minute. Harvey looked up, wondered how long before it really started to come down. "You got a fish in that ditch?" he asked Jimmy.

A smile, a real one with wrinkles and pushed-back ears, spread across Jimmy Hubbard's face. "Well sorta," he said, then looked over at the grave marker. "Dug Momma's grave right over there, January 16, 1992. Four thirty in the afternoon. Day of the first MON-soon. Buffalo Bob's gonna be awful sore if I don't give him his—"

"Knock it off," Harvey demanded. He wasn't interested in Jimmy's stories, or in old lady Hubbard's grave, or dams or dry cleaners. He scanned the area, but saw no evidence of bighorn sheep carcasses. No skulls with curled horns, no bleached bones, no fur remnants. Then he looked down at the mud hole, and it occurred to him that Jimmy probably had buried the sheep. *How the hell could I have been so blind?* Harvey thought. He was angry and embarrassed that the likes of Jimmy Hubbard had been able to pull the wool over his eyes for ten years. A deception that cost ten endangered bighorns their lives.

"You got sheep bones in that hole?" asked Harvey. The pool before him was shallow, about a foot deep. A few inches of water had already gathered on the surface, but Harvey figured that the minute it stopped raining, the water would seep into the ground, preventing a permanent refuge for desert pupfish. No fish, not even the desert pupfish, which was the only fish indigenous to the desert, could survive for more than a few hours at best. And yet Jimmy Hubbard, Harvey reasoned, had insisted on killing sheep for food. Food for fish that didn't, that simply couldn't, exist within Hubbard Valley.

"Buffalo Bob eats everything, Harve," said Jimmy. "Bones and all."

Convenient. He's got it all down. "I see. So where is he then?" Harvey asked, getting more impatient, more furious, by the second. "Where's Buffalo Bob?"

Jimmy circled the hole, hands in pockets, because no guilty person does that. The surface splattered as the rain fell. There was no sign of life in the shallow water.

"He'll come," he said not too worried. "The rain brings him. One drop at a time."

Lightning ripped the sky and Harvey jumped. He was prepared to dig, but not now, not with the weather as it was. He'd come back with the sheriff and a few extra hands.

"I got to take you back with—" Before Harvey could finish, Jimmy interrupted with an excited whoop and a dance that'd make a game show contestant jealous.

"He's here! He's here!" cried Jimmy. His face was brighter than a kid's on Christmas morning. "It's Buffalo Bob time!"

Harvey looked into the muddy water but saw nothing. He focused on the rain-pelted surface, but saw only the brown slick of churned up water.

"I got to get his sheep," Jimmy said as he started back toward the trailer.

"Stay put!" Harvey said. Jimmy stopped dead, for the tone in Harvey's voice demanded it.

"He's gonna be mad if I don't give him his sheep," Jimmy said in a strange mix of excitement and timidity.

Harvey watched the surface, waited for a sign of life. *This is crazy*, he thought. *Why would a retarded country bumpkin kill a rare animal and dump it in a ditch?* Harvey shrugged off explanations like Satanic rituals and sacrifices, which seemed ludicrous almost immediately. Jimmy Hubbard was no devil worshipper. At least, he *hoped* he wasn't.

"Buffalo Bob wants his sheep, Harve," Jimmy begged. "Look at him. He's waiting for it."

Harvey shook his head. There certainly wasn't a fish in the ditch, couldn't be a fish in the ditch. It was a mud hole only a few inches deep. He edged closer to it. The rain fell as a curtain of gray before his eyes, the surface water popped in little explosions. Nope, no fish. Just a mud hole. He turned to Jimmy. "Did you bury those bighorns in this ditch, Jimmy?" Harvey asked.

"I already said I gave them to Buffalo Bob."

"Yeah. And what did he do with them?"

"He ate them, Harve."

"You're little fish ate a whole sheep?"

Jimmy smiled again, a for-real smile, then said, "I didn't say he was little."

Harvey turned and looked at the ditch again, an odd feeling suddenly gnawing away at him. He struggled to see through the rain, through the cloudy water. And then, his eye caught something. Perfectly round, it was the size of a trash can lid and glassy black, blacker than even the thunderheads above them. It floated lazily around the ditch, bouncing off the sides, seemingly without direction, before stopping at the edge closest to Harve and Jimmy. Jimmy Hubbard smiled his big dumb smile, but to Harvey, there was nothing amusing about what he was looking at, no sir. His heart jumped into his throat, for he saw that the mud hole wasn't a mud hole at all. Not at *all*. He was looking at the pupil of an eye. *An eye the size of a kiddie swimming pool.*

And it was looking right back.

A thousand icicles dug into his body, the vestiges of an instinctual warning that evolution had all but eliminated in human beings. It sprung to life inside Harvey Wilkes at that moment, begging him to flee. Before he could move, though, the earth below his feet split open. Mud and water rushed in, and Harvey's shoes were no longer on solid ground. He screamed as he dropped feet first into the expanding crack.

Jimmy Hubbard shrieked, backed away up onto higher ground. He stared wide-eyed, his mouth a gaping hole itself. He made no attempt to help Harvey, but not because he didn't want to. Jimmy Hubbard simply didn't think there was anything, *anything* he could do to help.

Jimmy Hubbard was dead on right.

In the instant that Harvey Wilkes was being consumed, he wondered about the choices a person makes, and how those choices affect a person's life. For example, why had he gone to Filby's General Store earlier that morning (for smokes, but hey, you gotta have your smokes)? Why did he hang out and talk to Maria the clerk instead of heading out to Big Dave Dexter's ranch and his coyote complaints? If he had done that, then he would have missed Reverend Millwood and his story about seeing Jimmy Hubbard the night before with a shotgun. Then he wouldn't have been in this mess. It all boiled down to Harvey's love of smokes and Maria's plump, round rump. He wasn't sure which he loved more, but they were now both clearly detrimental to his health.

Harvey's bones crunch-crunched in the mouth of the beast buried in the earth. Strangely detached, he found himself thinking about other things than smokes, or plump rumps, or Reverend Millwood or Jimmy Hubbard. Primarily: just how goddamn *big* was the rest of Buffalo Bob? A hundred feet? Two hundred? Was he deep in the ground or just a few feet below the surface stretched out like a fold in the earth? How much could he weigh? And just what the hell was he doing in the Arizona desert? Harvey suddenly saw himself at his office desk, puffing on a Winston and perusing a

yellowed copy of the Encyclopedia American. Flipping through the pages. Looking for the "L's." He stopped at one particular entry. This is how it read:

lung fish / 'lung - fish / n (1883) any of a subclass of bony fishes (Dipneusti) that breath air with a modified swim bladder as well as with gills, and which are known to estivate (hibernate) underground during the dry season *you idiot*.

In a bloodless gulp of mud and rain, Harvey Peter Wilkes disappeared from planet earth. Jimmy Hubbard had stood and watched the whole thing in stunned silence, for it all happened quicker than a desert trap-door spider snatching an earwig.

Jimmy paced, but not too close to where Buffalo Bob's mouth stretched. Panic messaged his brain.

"Geez, Harve, oh geez," he said. "I'm awful sorry about that." He shook his fist. "Darn you, Buffalo Bob!"

Now the questions came: What should he do? Who should he call? He didn't have a phone, of course, but it seemed like a reasonable question. More importantly, what would happen if the sheriff found out? *When* he found out? What about Reverend Millwood? Or the whole town of Prince Of Persia? He was in a real pickle. Harvey's Bronco was out front and they were sure to come looking for him.

He gave it a good amount of thinking time before settling on the truth.

"The truth shall set you free!" he cried out to the clouds.

He'd tell them Buffalo Bob ate up Harvey Peter Wilkes. Just like Buffalo Bob had gobbled up his mother's body, though she was already dead, when Jimmy tried to bury her. He'd tell them Harvey didn't see Buffalo Bob in time, although how could you miss him, and that he was real sorry. He wouldn't tell them about the sheep. He'd bury that somewhere in the desert. Yes, he'd tell almost the entire truth.

Jimmy walked through the rain back to the trailer. They wouldn't believe him, of course. Even *he* realized that. What proof did he have? Buffalo Bob ate but once before he slept for another year. Never left any bones, either. No, they'd blame Jimmy for Harvey's disappearance. They'd think *he'd* killed him!

Something kicked his brain just then, kicked it with miner's boots. Jimmy stopped and looked across the whole of Hubbard Valley. The rain brought Buffalo Bob. Actually, *water* brought Buffalo Bob. In six months, the land he stood on would be under water. A hundred feet under water. That could mean only one thing, so far as Jimmy was concerned:

Buffalo Bob would be free. He repeated that in his mind, just to make sure he was thinking what he thought he was thinking:

Buffalo Bob would be free!

Jimmy needed time to sort it all out. And there was a lot to sort out, yes sir. He headed back across Hubbard Valley (soon to be lake). He'd have to rethink his position on the dam. As much as he hated to admit it, it might be a good thing, if it was going to get him off the hook. A real good thing.

Jimmy Hubbard made his way toward the Airstream, and thought about trading it in for a houseboat.

Nancy
Carroll

Hunger

Wrapped, woven and molded like a soft
tamale for St. Agnes, the cannibal child's

broken pelvis moved as enamel bits
in his father's hands.

Dice snapped across the street's curbs below,
an angry tap dance. And the cannibal child's

father raised his only son up beyond dark swamps
and thick frenzied bus stops to a green world

where parrots scream and parsley spreads
thin. The cannibal child swallowed

his grandmother's left hand, for which he was beaten
with chains. He only wanted to draw, he cried.

Every bone surrendered, a final
disturbed quiet. The cannibal child's

father sat on bathroom tiles,
holding his son, a white linen cocoon.

The Father Returning

Jeffrey C.
Alfier

We bring him back to the place of his youth—
his Ithaca, hoping what fills his eyes
will be something from an earlier year
that soothes all perception back into place.

We reach the lake bed from a stretch of road
threading the dry basin like a grey seam.
Our eyes hunt for storms roiling above hills,
watch plovers flutter off alkali flats,

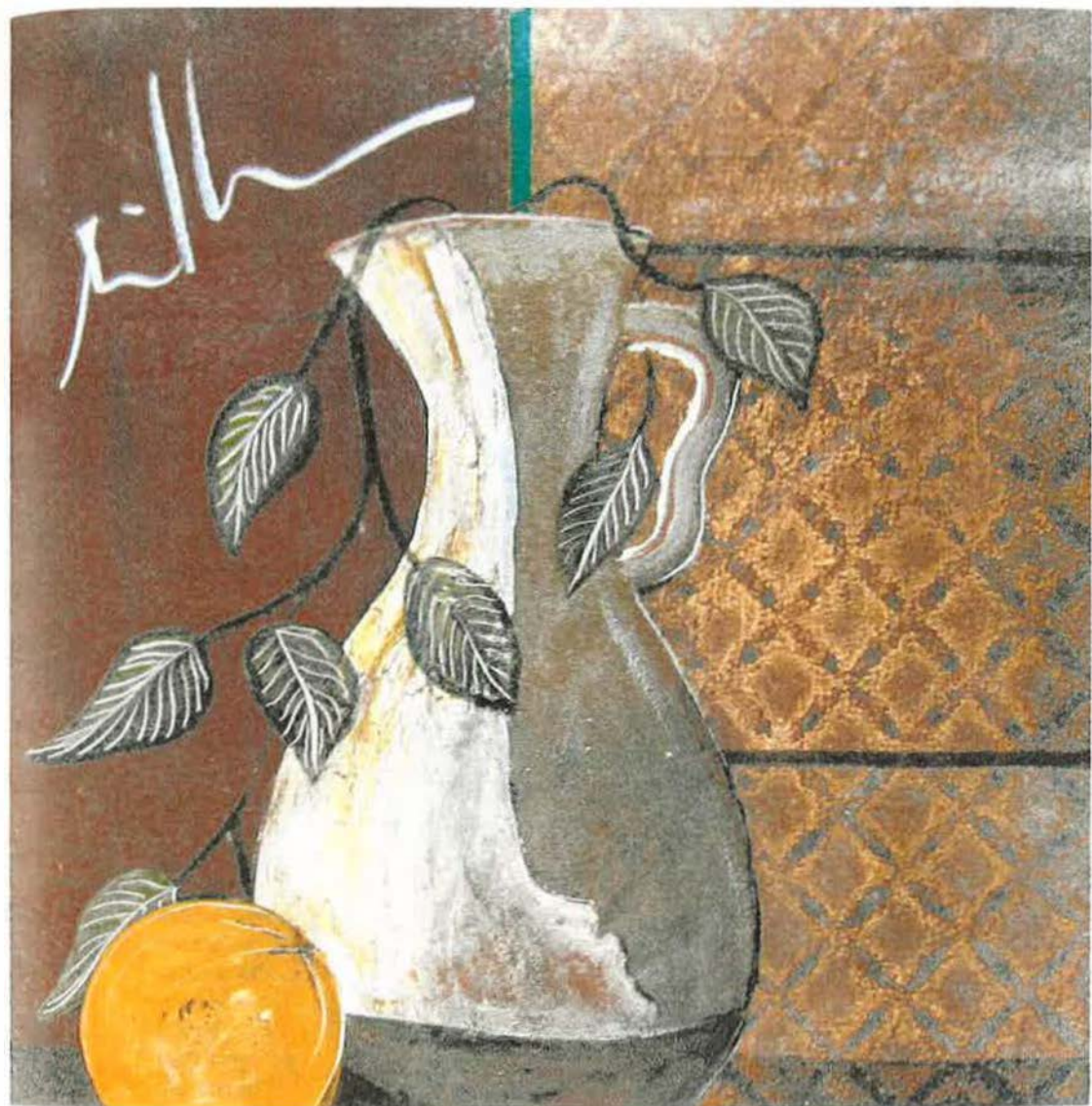
their brief flight regaining his native air.
The shorthand for it is *memory loss*,
the near-term fleeing as if never here
like the least tangible thing ever held.

But what came to him only made him wince,
the past's unyielding flume of images:
who lived down the street before troop trains came,
names of friends lost in Rommel's Africa.

We wanted him back, each thought honed and sheer,
nothing faltering on a puzzled tongue,
laughs piercing dusk like bright animal eyes,
each spark unmediated by a mind's

relentless entangling of who and when,
to know us before his eyes lose our names,
or the way a desert looks in the rain
after dust devils churn birds into air.

NINEMILE CANYON, CALIFORNIA



A New Beginning | Mark Carrillo

a geography of silence

Sharon
Venezio

my mother
doesn't
tell stories.
her memory
unravels
in darkness,
never in light.
never in the
presence of

daughters
and sons
who barely
speak.
a childhood
forgotten.
or
silence feeds
on itself.
or
a constant
inhalation.

the poor
don't
tell stories.
don't
make history.
except
in front
of bars,
in back
rooms,

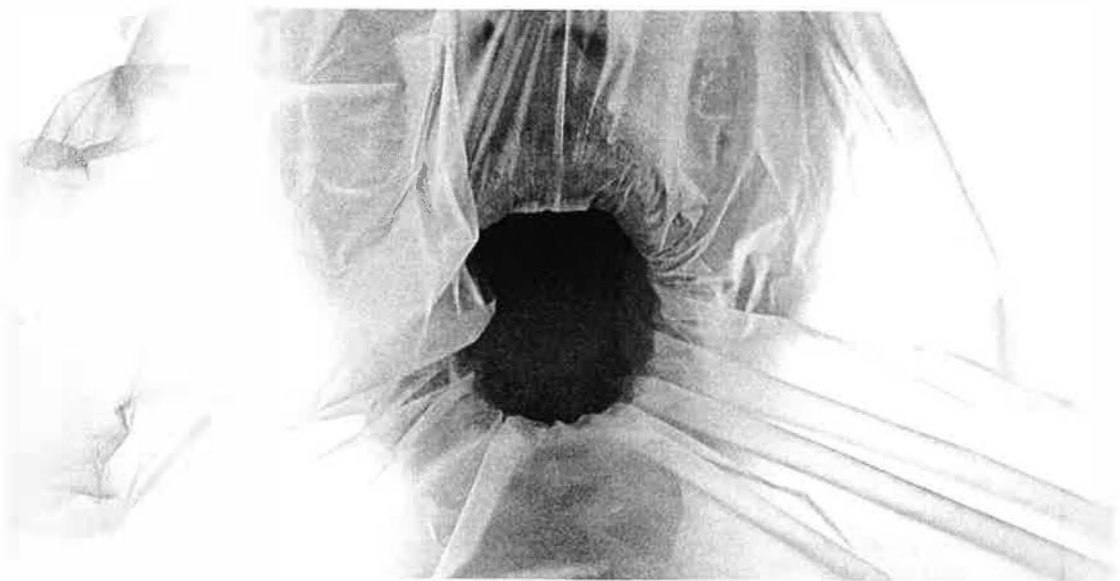
bent over
a pool table.
stories
that don't
survive.
stories
of kitchens.
bars.
a fist
folded
and
unfolded.
a man's
rough hands.

to claim
a history
of coasts
and wilderness
grainy water
thrashing
against the skin.

a dead
end street
in new jersey
but the trail
in the woods
goes on
forever.
until it hits
the railroad
tracks.

pretending
to remember
the bees
that swarmed
in my clothes
up my sleeves
tearing off
my jacket
with scars
on my knees

my father
tells me
I am not
his son
his hands
the shape
of leather.



Suffocating | David Heffler

Fig tree
rough leaves
fingernails
rip the vein
the vegetal nerve
seeking
the liquid
the sap
that burns
our tender skin
sap
burns
stings
writes
a cross
a sign
a scar
fever of letters.

Fever
that you cure
with primitive mud
mud from saliva
saliva from words
words form the earth
from the earth to your tongue
from your tongue to my wound.

We must have been
six years old then
I already needed
the antidote
of your mouth.

Hojas de higuera
ásperas
la uña
en la vena
abrimos
el nervio vegetal
buscando
el líquido
la savia
quema
nuestra piel de niño
quema
escuece
escribe
cruces
signos
cicatrices
fiebre de letras.

Fiebre
que tú curas
con barro primitivo
barro de saliva
saliva de palabras
palabras de la tierra
de la tierra a tu lengua
de tu lengua a mi herida.

Tendríamos seis años
entonces
ya necesitaba
el antídoto
de tu boca.

i want you curtains with sashes, for you to undo
in a tin house each morning, on a tin street by a tin
river, curling a boat with a silver sail
and want you a brown
coat with all buttons but the last one gone
and a scarf for your tender throat in fall.

i want you the sky in a thimble, thumbnail small
for your top drawer, beside the innuendo.
in this star, i want you one
empty well, to throw your pennies in
and an echo to own
for all wishes. i want you love mail

in scented papers and green ink, mail
in boxes, in brown paper. i want you a call
from a dark red voice, hair down
by a moment, a long crescendo
of life in
between you and before you. bone

strong, i want you, and eye shone,
bright as sand in a yellow pail
for all your looking, all thin
or round, wide or tall
the space for all the looking a man can do
and more are what i want you. and a crown

of cobwebs, blown
from our wooden framed doorway, the paint gone,
chipped. i want you more than making-do,
more than survival. i want you never ail
or need more than all
the things i want you. in

these afternoons, i want you in
slow motion, my own
every evening, response and call
to the day to the evening. we have one
home, needing patches, a straight nail.
and in it, i want you. i do.

and we can redo the drywall, the dishes, spin
laundry, want a story while i fail my own
by minutes. but a story...it is done. just wanting it is all.

The Modern Ixchel

SUSANA NOHEMI MARCELO

In my dreams, I see my country with its rainbow in the sky, and the bright red liberty cap shining above my head. In big red blocks I see the words, "15 de Septiembre de 1821" written in the mango yellow sky. Independence Day or so they say. The Torogoz glimmers against the sky with its tropical feathers spread open in its flight, its colors bleeding against the sky like wet watercolors. The green hued volcanoes encircle me as I chase after the bird through the laurel leaves. Nearby I can hear the soft rumble and thunder of the salty sea that rings in the conch of my ear. The water waves hello to me when I reach it, and I wave back before it crashes against the grainy white sand. I decide to sit here and listen to the Torogoz that lies hidden amid the delicate pink flowers of the maquilishuat trees. Then a breeze caresses the trees and drops of pink flowers come raining down softly while the Torogoz takes an abrupt flight.

It is peaceful here, but it is also fake, a mirage that does not last for long.

Before I know it, the brown earth begins to shake, it sifts and shreds, opening the land and making black pits that reveal the Mesoamerican Mayan gods climbing up from the shadowy earth where the Europeans built a false empire on the backs of all the native people. The Gods are coming back to reclaim their roots. They live within the mixed blood of the people, but some people are forgetting...some want to forget...to deny...

I look at the sky turning cloudy and black, the rainbow explodes in the air, and the big red blocks bomb the earth one by one; the 15th hits the earth first and crashes into one of the volcanoes tearing it open, sending an explosion of earthly debris everywhere. Bright red lava flows out. The rest of the letters follow. Red washes everything.

*

I wake up as usual, but something is different this time: I am wet. There is a red moon shining through the window. The Blood Moon. I burn the pink candle my Papi bought me for my fifteenth birthday, and with the light of the flame I can see everything is bloody red. I tip toe to my mother.

"Mami ... Mami ...," I say, gathering to one side the porous mosquito net and gently stirring her. Her eyes half open reveal the slits of her black pupils.

"What's wrong Ixchel?" she asks and yawns.

"I think I have my period."

"Bueno pues, Por fin, it took long enough." She laughs and I smile. "Clean yourself like I showed you and go back to bed, querida," she whispers sleepily, and her soft pink lips yawn again. She sits up, tilts her head to hear her thoughts, holds her bulging belly with one hand, and smiles a melancholy smile. Despite her warm tenderness, I know she is worried about Papi. He has been missing for months. I glance out the window where the moonlight offers us both comfort. I kiss her good night and let her go back to bed. I walk to the door, and I take a glimpse in the mirror nailed to the wall. I see my mother's face.

No more dreams tonight.

Ixchel Moderna

SUSANA NOHEMI MARCELO

En mis sueños, yo veo mi país con su arcoiris en el cielo, y el gorro rojo brillante de la libertad que brilla sobre mi cabeza. En el mango cielo amarillo veo bloques rojos grandes con las palabras, "15 de Septiembre de 1821." El Día de la Independencia, por lo menos eso es lo que dicen. El Torogoz brilla hacia el cielo con sus plumas tropicales extendidas en su vuelo; sus colores que sangran hacia el cielo como acuarelas. Los volcanes de matiz verde me rodean y yo persigo al pájaro por las hojas de laurel. En la concha de mi oreja puedo oír cerca el mar salado retumbando y tronando suavemente. El agua me saluda cuando yo lo alcanzo, lo saludo antes que choque contra la arena blanca granosa. Decido sentarme aquí para escuchar el Torogoz que está escondido entre las flores rosas delicadas de los árboles de matiliguat. Entonces una brisa acaricia los árboles y las gotas de flores rosa comienzan a caer lloviendo suavemente mientras el Torogoz toma un vuelo brusco.

Es pacífico aquí, pero existe una falsedad, un espejismo que no dura.

Antes que yo lo sepa, la tierra marrón comienza a sacudir, cerner, y destrozarse, abriendo la tierra y haciendo hoyos negros que revelan los dioses Mesoamericanos Mayas que suben de la tierra oscura donde los Europeos construyeron un imperio falso en las espaldas de todas las personas nativas. Los dioses regresan para recuperar sus raíces. Ellos viven dentro de la sangre mezclada de las personas, pero algunas personas han olvidado... algunos quieren olvidar... negar...

Miro el cielo que gira nublado y negro, el arcoiris explota en el aire, y los bloques rojos grandes bombardean la tierra de uno en uno; el 15 golpea la tierra primero y choca con uno de los volcanes, haciendo que se rompa, mandando así una explosión de escombros terrenales por todas partes. La lava roja fuerte fluye hacia fuera. El resto de las letras siguen. El rojo lava todo.

*

Yo me despierto como de costumbre, pero algo es diferente esta vez: estoy mojada. Hay una luna roja que brilla por la ventana. La Luna de Sangre. Quemo la vela rosa que mi Papi me compró para mis quince años, y con la luz de la llama yo puedo ver todo esta ensangrentado. Camino de punta hacia mi madre.

"Mami... Mami..." digo, moviendo hacia un lado la red porosa del pabellón y suavemente la muevo. Con sus ojos medio abiertos muestra la ternura de su mirar.

"Qué te pasa, Ixchel?" ella pregunta y bosteza.

"Pienso que tengo mi período."

"Bueno pues, por fin, tomé lo suficiente." Ella se ríe y yo sonrío. "Límpiate como yo te mostré, y vuelve a la cama, querida," ella cuchichea durmientemente, y sus labios rosa suaves vuelven a bostezar otra vez. Ella se levanta, inclina la cabeza para oír sus pensamientos, detiene su vientre abultado con una mano, y sonrío con una sonrisa melancólica. A pesar de su ternura, yo sé que ella está preocupada por Papi. El ha estado perdido por meses. Miro hacia fuera de la ventana donde la luz de la luna nos ofrece ambos consuelo. Le doy un beso de buenas noches y permití que ella volviera a la cama. Camino hacia la puerta, y miro mi reflejo en el espejo clavado en la pared. Veo la cara de mi

*

In the morning my Grandpapi comes home; he has the tired worn face of an ancient tree. He halfheartedly whispers something to my Mami, and I move closer making a triangle with our bodies. Her lovely brown skin is shiny and it radiates a white light with her dark raven hair glittering brightly in the sunlight as she stands motionless, holding her moon-shaped stomach. I begin to worry when I look at my Grandpapi, and I know something is horribly wrong. I'm afraid to move and an eternity passes before any of us budge.

Just then a slight tear drop peeps from the corner of my Mami's almond shaped eye, and it pauses there, then it streams down her rounded pink cheek to the edge of her jaw where it pauses again, gathers, then slowly falls with a silent splash on the brick floor. I look back at her face and more and more tears pour out, and she begins to wail. She can't stop. The dark cave on her face keeps echoing screams that are so loud they knock me down. Grandpapi takes her in his arms with the strength of ten men and runs. I follow them into the bedroom.

"Hija, you need to compose yourself!" I hear him pleading her. "I will do everything I can to recover the body, but I must leave quickly before something happens to it," he says, holding her hand and kissing her good bye. She can't stop.

He takes me outside, "Ixchel, you're old enough to know the truth, but before I tell you I need you to promise to be strong for the sake of your mother." He looks at me with a stern face.

I am scared but I say, "Yes, I promise."

"Your father...niña...was found yesterday in the streets...he is dead." He presses his wise fingers against his eyes and continues. "We don't know if it was the guerrillas or the soldiers, but that doesn't matter. Let me take care of it, and I need you to take care of your mother and calm her down while I recover his body...I...I don't know how long this will take." He kisses my forehead and leaves me standing outside the house with my Mami's screams getting louder and louder.

I wait a moment to take everything in; it's not the first time this has happened to someone in our family this year. There are too many deaths everywhere and everyday.

I open the door to my Mami's room and a flood of tears wets my bare feet. I rush to get a jar, and I gather the tears inside. One by one I fill the jars. I do this all day, but the flood isn't getting any lighter.

"Mami, Mami, listen to me, everything will be fine." I implore her, but she only looks at me with eyes full of despair. She keeps crying and crying. I look at her stomach and I see the baby kicking—stretching her skin, and fighting to get out. I remain calm, but I am worried. She is only six months pregnant, and should not be having contractions.

*

The room is getting hot and humid. I remember I need to keep the sheets clean. I feel covered in honey as I gather everything I need, and I close the window because it is getting volcano hot. I wrap the canopy of white netting around my Mami's bed because the mosquitoes are swarming around her. They bite me, but I ignore them and I get some food to see if my Mami will stop crying.

My mind is racing to see what else I can do, but there is nothing I can do nor anyone I can get. Our house is at the top of the mountain, the city is at the bottom of the mountain, and behind the house there is a small gorge. The city is worlds away. Our neighbors are busy caring for their own sick and dead. I grab a piece of tortilla and meat, and I offer it to my Mami. She does not want it, and cries even harder. I use fresh water to sponge her face. I spend hours and hours fanning her and gathering her tears in jars. I am losing track of time, of myself, and of my hearing. My brain keeps crashing against my skull.

*

Night comes, the flood is not stopping, and her water has broken. It will be time soon. She wails and groans into the night. My chest swells up with all the tears I am holding back.

"Mami, Mami, look at me," I tell her desperately. She looks at me. "I need you to push when I tell you to, and push as hard as you can." Her eyes roll back and she groans. I rush to get things ready for the birth. The contractions

madre.

No más sueños esta noche.

*

Por la mañana mi abuelo vuelve a casa; en su rostro se dibuja el cansancio como la de un árbol antiguo. El sin ganas cuchichea algo ha mi Mami, y yo me muevo más cerca hasta formar un triángulo con nuestros cuerpos. La piel de mi Mami es del color de café y esta tan brillante que despierta una luz blanca brillante; su cabello negro brilla radiante-mente. Ella se para inmóvil, bajo la luz del sol sosteniendo su estómago de luna. Comienzo a preocuparme cuando miro mi abuelo, y yo se que algo esta mal. Tengo miedo de moverme y una eternidad pasa antes que cualquiera de nosotros nos movemos.

En ese momento una lágrima pequeña se rueda del rincón de los ojos almendra de mi Mami, y se detiene allí, después corre de su mejilla rosa redondeada, hasta a la orilla de su mandíbula donde se detiene otra vez, se reúne, después lentamente se cae salpicando silenciosamente en el piso del ladrillo. Volteo a ver su cara y cada vez mas lágrimas brotan hacia afuera, y ella comienza a gemir. Ella no puede parar. En la cueva oscura de su cara salen chillidos que resuenan tan fuertes que me tumban al suelo. Mi abuelo la toma en sus brazos con la fuerza de diez hombres y corre. Yo los sigo al dormitorio.

"Hija, necesitas componerte!" Oigo que él le esta implorando. "Haré todo lo que pueda para recuperar el cuerpo, pero debo salir rápidamente antes que algo le suceda al cuerpo," él dice, tomándola de la mano y besándola adiós. Ella no puede parar.

El me saca hacia afuera y me dice, "Ixchel, ya estas suficientemente grande para saber la verdad, pero antes que te lo diga yo necesito que me prometas que serás fuerte para tu madre." El me mira con una cara seria.

Tengo miedo pero le digo, "Sí, yo le prometo."

"Su padre...niña... fue encontrado ayer en las calles... él esta muerto." El aprieta sus dedos sabios contra sus ojos y continúa, "Nosotros no sabemos si eran la guerrilla o los soldados, pero eso no es importante. Yo me encargare de todo, y yo necesito que cuides a tu madre mientras recupero el cuerpo...yo...yo no sé cuanto tiempo tomaré." El me besa la frente y me deja parada fuera de la casa con los chillidos de mi Mami que se hacen más fuertes y más fuertes.

Espero un momento para poder pensar; no es la primera vez que esto le ha sucedido a alguien en nuestra familia este año. Hay demasiadas muertes por todas partes y cada día.

Abro la puerta del cuarto de mi Mami y una inundación de lágrimas moja mis pies descalzos. Yo me apresuro para encontrar un frasco, y reúno las lágrimas adentro. De uno en uno yo lleno los frascos. Hago esto todo el día, pero la inundación no se para.

"Mami, Mami, escúcheme, todo estará bien." Yo le suplico, pero ella sólo me mira con ojos repletos con desesperación. Ella sigue llorando y llorando. Miro su estómago y yo veo al bebé que pateaa—estirando su piel, y luchando para salir. Yo me quedo calmada, pero estoy preocupada. Ella sólo tiene seis meses de embarazo, y no debe tener las contracciones.

*

El cuarto esta caliente y húmedo. Recuerdo que necesito mantener las cobijas limpias. Yo me siento cubierta en miel mientras yo reúno todo lo que necesito, y cierro la ventana porque se siente caliente como un volcán. Envuelvo el pabellón de red blanca alrededor de la cama de mi Mami porque los mosquitos zumban alrededor de ella. Ellos me pican, pero yo los ignoro y busco algo de comer para ver si mi Mami para de llorar.

Mi mente compite para ver que más podría hacer, pero no hay nada que pueda hacer ni nadie a quien yo pueda obtener. Nuestra casa está a la cabeza de la montaña, la ciudad está en el fondo de la montaña, y detrás de la casa hay un cañón pequeño. La ciudad esta mundos lejos. Nuestros vecinos están ocupados cuidando a sus propios enfermos y muertos. Agarro un pedazo de la tortilla con carne, y se lo ofrezco a mi Mami. Ella no lo quiere, y llora aún más fuerte. Utilizo agua fresca para limpiar su cara. Paso horas y horas ventilando y reuniendo sus lágrimas en frascos. Yo estoy perdiendo la noción del tiempo. Mi cerebro sigue chocando contra mi cráneo.

*

La noche viene, la inundación no para, y su agua se quebró. Será tiempo pronto. Ella gime y gime en la

are five minutes apart.

A burst of wind flings open the window with a bang! Stopping my heart momentarily... it creaks halfway shut. She doesn't notice and keeps crying the whole time I tell her to push. But at least she is pushing. I wipe the beady sweat from her face; blood seeping through the sheets as blood trickles down my own leg. I continue to change everything. Three hours pass by with my Mami pushing, and I count to ten.

"The head is coming... push, Mami, push!" I finally tell her, and pick up the blue bulb.

"Wait, stop pushing..." I pull the head with my hands and with the blue bulb I suck out the mucus inside the baby's nose. He isn't crying. "Mami, just one more push..."

The baby comes out on my hand... I can't breathe... he is a very tiny blue baby barely twelve inches long. He has a very delicate spine that curves to the shape of my hand. His face looks exactly like our Grandfather's face. I smile and bite my lip when I feel a tear trying to escape, and my breath creaking trying to get through. A sob escapes me, and my Mami is still crying. But at least she isn't screaming anymore. With a clean towel I delicately wipe the baby's small body. I place my ear on his tiny chest, but there is no heartbeat. I kiss him, hold him next to my face for a few seconds, wrap him in the small rainbow blanket I weaved, and place him gently in his basket. I feel my knees starting to quiver, but I can't allow my strength to waver yet. My Mami still needs me.

I walk to my Mami's side, and the tears are streaming from her eyes slowly. I'm glad the flood is stopping, but she has lost too much blood and too much water.

"Mami? Mami?" I affectionately cradle her face, but she is delirious. She isn't coming back.

Out the window I can see dawn closely approaching through the banana leaves. I turn back to the room and wash her body with cool fresh water, but when I stroke her with the wet towel her body begins to twitch and shake convulsively. I hold her to keep her from falling off the bed. She breathes in big gulps of air and her chest violently raises up and crashes down, writhing in pain and agony until daylight peeps through the window as I hear her take a last breath, and an intruding breeze takes her spirit away. Her body is still. I feel numb, my head has stopped aching momentarily, and everything is silent. Her body is warm, but her hands are cold.

I take her icy hands in mine, and for the first time I cry too. The tears gush out in violent spasms imitating my Mami's violent struggle for life. I sit with my head bowed and my ankles in tears.

*

I step outside because I need to get away. My body falls limply on the cold brick floor because my knees finally can't support the weight of my burden. Shaking I lie in a fetal position because it's cold and because the rest of me wants to die too. I hug my body as a sick feeling consumes my stomach. I vomit water, and I remember I have not eaten since the day before yesterday. I weakly get up by holding on to the fence. My Grandpapi is winding up the long snake road with his sombrero covering his head.

*

It is September 15 and newspapers report the blood bath throughout the country. It is a week later and we have the three funerals. It would be a beautiful day if it wasn't for the numbness I feel in my body and in my soul. So many green trees around the cemetery with rose bushes in all colors making a fence around the perimeter. My Grandpapi is sad but he does not cry because he has seen too much death throughout his life, but he has changed; he no longer speaks to me or anyone. He is silent. There is a lot of that here: that silence that eats you alive. I want to cry but I can't. The tears can't flow down, and they drown me from the inside.

When we reach home the jars with my mother's tears stand waiting for me. I can't take the pain anymore. I never want to see another woman die giving birth. Never. I run inside the house, and with a heartrending kiss on my Grandpapi's cheek I leave. He doesn't try to stop me. He is not himself anymore. There is too much change now; I need to get away. I step out of the house, and I run and run not sure of where to go. I'm running in a downward spiral to the bottom of the mountain where my bare feet lead me somewhere unknown. When I see the cave leading to the world underneath there is a gravitational pull that lures me into the earth. It is dark inside with the shadows of the sun dancing

noche. Mi pecho se hincha con todas las lágrimas que yo sostengo.

"Mami, Mami, me mira," yo le digo desesperadamente. Ella me mira. "Usted necesita empujar cuando yo le diga, y empuje lo mas fuerte que pueda." Sus ojos se voltean hacia atrás y ella gime. Yo me apresuro para preparar todo para el nacimiento. Las contracciones son cinco minutos aparte.

¡Un soplo de viento abre la ventana con un estallido! Parando mi corazón momentáneamente... la puerta se queda media abierta. Ella no se da cuenta. Mantiene el llanto todo el tiempo, y yo le digo que empuje. Pero por lo menos ella empuja. Limpio el sudor pequeño y brillante de su cara; sangre empapa las cobijas mientras sangre chorrea por mi pierna. Continúo ha cambiar todo. Tres horas pasan con mi Mami que empuja, y cuento a diez.

"¡la cabeza viene!... un empujón, Mami, un empujón!" yo finalmente le digo, y recojo la bombita azul.

"Esperece, deje de empujar..." saco la cabeza con mis dos manos y con la bombita azul saco los moquitos del bebé con la bombita azul. El no llora. "Mami, sólo un empujón más..."

El bebé sale en mi mano... yo no puedo respirar... él es un niño pequeño y azul, apenas doce pulgadas de largo. El tiene una espina dorsal muy delicada que curva en forma de mi mano. Su cara se mira exactamente como la de su abuelo. Sonríe y muerdo mi labio cuando yo siento que una lágrima se trata de escapar, y mi aliento que cruje tratando de salirse. Un sollozo se escapa de mí, y mi Mami llora todavía. Pero por lo menos ella ya no grita. Con una toalla yo limpio delicadamente el cuerpo pequeño del bebé. Coloco mi oreja en su pecho pequeño, pero su corazón no late. Yo lo beso, lo abrazo junto a mi cara por unos pocos segundos, lo envuelvo en la manta pequeña de arcoiris que tejí, y lo coloco suavemente en su canasta. Yo siento que mis rodillas me empiezan a temblar, pero yo no puedo permitir que mi fuerza me deje todavía. Mi Mami aún me necesita.

Camino hacia el lado de mi Mami, y las lágrimas corren de sus ojos lentamente. Estoy feliz que la inundación para, pero ella ha perdido demasiada sangre y demasiada agua.

"¿Mami? Mami?" acaricio su cara, pero ella está delirante. Ella no regresa.

Afuera de la ventana puedo ver el amanecer acercándose entre medio de las hojas de plátano. Yo regreso al cuarto y lavo su cuerpo con agua fresca, pero cuando yo la acaricio con la toalla mojada su cuerpo comienza a retorcer y sacudir convulsivamente. Yo la detengo para que no se caiga. Ella toma tragos grandes de aire y su pecho violentamente sube arriba y choca hacia abajo, retorciendo en el dolor y la angustia, hasta que la luz del día entra por la ventana, y yo oigo que ella toma su último aliento, y una brisa que impone se lleva su espíritu. Su cuerpo esta inmóvil. Yo me siento adormitada, mi cabeza me ha parado de doler por un momento, y todo esta silencioso. Su cuerpo está tibio, pero sus manos están heladas.

Tomo sus manos heladas entre las mías, y por primera vez yo lloro también. Mis lágrimas corren en espasmos violentos que imitan la lucha violenta de mi Mami. Yo me siento con la cabeza inclinada y con mis tobillos en lágrimas.

*

Doy un paso afuera porque necesito escapar. Mi cuerpo cae débilmente en el piso frío de ladrillo porque mis rodillas finalmente no pueden sostener el peso de mi cuerpo. Temblando me acuesto en una posición fetal porque tengo frío y porque el resto de mí quiere morir también. Abrazo mi cuerpo cuando un sentimiento enfermo consume mi estómago. Vomito agua, y recuerdo que yo no he comido desde que anteaer. Yo me levanto débilmente sosteniéndome como la cerca. Mi abuelo camina sobre el camino como serpiente. Su sombrero le cubre la cabeza.

*

Es el 15 de septiembre y los periódicos informan de la masacre a través del país. Es una semana posterior y nosotros tenemos los tres funerales. Sería un día hermoso si no fuera por el entumecimiento que yo siento en mi cuerpo y en mi alma. Tantos árboles verdes rodean el cementerio y arbustos de rosas de todos colores forman una cerca alrededor del perímetro. Mi abuelo está triste pero él no llora porque él ha visto demasiadas muertes a través de su vida, pero él ha cambiado; él no habla conmigo ni con nadie más. Él es silencioso. Hay mucho de eso aquí: el silencio que nos come vivos. Quiero llorar pero no puedo. Las lágrimas no pueden fluir, y ellas me ahogan por dentro.

Cuándo nosotros llegamos a casa los frascos con las lágrimas de mi madre me esperan. Yo ya no puedo aguantar el dolor. Yo nunca quiero ver otra mujer morir durante da a luz. Nunca. Corro dentro de la casa, y con un beso en la mejilla de mi abuelo me salgo. El no trata de pararme. El ya no es él mismo. Hay demasiado cambio ahora; necesito

on its walls. I travel deeper and deeper until I can no longer see or hear anything but the earth's heartbeat in my ears. I sit still in the cave, not drinking, not eating, and not speaking. My energy is drawn from the power of the earth.

*

An earthquake wakes me up. It's time. I can feel the earth contracting and expanding, opening my way out of the cave. I see the reddish light of the Blood Moon and I follow it. I step outside back onto the earth. My feet no longer touch the ground as I have shed my constraining skin. I make my way back up to the mountain trail. I want to reach home and start anew. The night sky is beautiful with the many shimmering stars. The morning star winks at me from his palace in the sky.

*

In the morning I check up on the women I will help give birth, and then I begin to work on the weaving I have neglected. I am home with my Grandpapi who is still silent. The jars with tears are still full. They don't evaporate. While I weave myself a dress made out of the rainbow, the wind whispers to me the rumors people are saying. Some call me a witch, others a saint, and others a goddess. I finish my rainbow dress and it is beautiful; I feel happy for the first time since the deaths.

I need to get some fresh water so I pick up an empty jar and walk to the back trail. I balance the jar on my head. I walk through the banana trees and I can see... and I can feel... the Sun God peeping at me through the canopy of banana tree leaves; he flirts with me, and I momentarily flirt back. But something is still wrong, everything is silent. There are no birds singing, and a few feet ahead of me I see a dead Torogoz lying on the moist brown dirt with its bright colorful wings stretched out. I don't like this feeling inside me.

I reach the stream of water and I fill the jar. Something feels strangely out of place and I look around me. I approach the edge of the mountain and peer down. There is a sea of burned bodies in the gorge. They look like burned cigarette stubs, and every time the wind brushes by, their skin flickers like ash. At a distance I see a dead decaying body that did not burn with the rest. The head is cut open and I can see the fleshy, grey brain next to the skull, lying on the dirt, and the brain uncoils, turning into a nest of red and black striped snakes that glide towards me—embracing my legs and slithering up my body where I feel their smooth skin silkily caressing mine.

I shield the water to protect it from the ash, and place the jar on my head. Nothing has changed. The violence has escalated, and I can feel the rage rising through my chest. Any one of those could have been my father or my mother, and all are somebody's brother, uncle, sister, cousin, lover...

"Let's go," I tenderly tell the snakes, and they softly hiss in my ear. My anger continues to escalate with each step I take.

*

I am angry. My beautiful rainbow dress turns into bones. I pick up a jar of my mother's tears, soar to the edge of the mountain, and dump the tears down on the city. My wrath is strong and the flood of tears devours everything. I command a rainstorm to follow the flood through its destruction. I want my anger to consume everything, like everything that has consumed me. They will all pay.

"They will never learn, will they?" I ask my babies. They open their mouths wide, revealing their gorgeous fangs and they hiss at the ignorance of mankind before coiling playfully around my neck.

I watch the destruction happily from my high perch on the earth.

huir. Doy un paso fuera de la casa, y yo corro y corro sin estar segura de donde voy. Corro hacia abajo en forma circular hasta el fondo de la montaña donde mis pies descalzos me dirigen a un lugar desconocido. Cuando yo veo una cueva que dirige al mundo de abajo, yo siento una gravitación que me atrae hacia la tierra. Adentro esta oscuro con las sombras del sol bailando en las paredes. Viajo más profundo y más profundo hasta que ya no puedo ver ni oír nada más que el latido del corazón de la tierra en mis orejas. Yo me siento inmóvil en la cueva; no bebiendo, no comiendo, y no hablando. Mi energía es atraída del poder de la tierra.

*

Un terremoto me despierta. Es tiempo. Puedo sentir como la tierra contrae y expande, abriendo mi salida de la cueva. Veo la luz rojiza de la Luna de Sangre y yo lo sigo. Doy un paso afuera hacia la tierra. Mis pies ya no tocan el suelo, y yo he soltado la piel que me encarcela. Avanzo hasta el camino de la montaña. Quiero ir a mi casa y empezar de nuevo. El cielo de la noche esta bello con las estrellas brillando. La estrella mañanera guiña hacia mí de su palacio en el cielo.

*

Por la mañana yo reviso a las mujeres que les ayudaré a dar a luz, y entonces yo comienzo a trabajar en el tejer que yo he descuidado. Estoy en casa con mi abuelo que esta todavía silencioso. Los frascos con lágrimas están todavía llenos. Las lágrimas no se evaporan. Mientras yo me tejo un vestido hecho del arcoiris, el viento cuchichea lo que las personas rumoran de mí. Algunos me llaman una bruja, los otros una santa, y los otros una diosa. Termino mi vestido de arcoiris y esta hermoso; yo me siento feliz por la primera vez desde las muertes.

Necesito obtener agua fresca así que yo recojo un frasco vacío y camino hacia atrás de la montaña. Equilibro el frasco en mi cabeza. Camino por los platanales y yo puedo ver... y puedo sentir... el majestuoso sol que sale por en medio de las hojas de plátano; él coquetea conmigo, y yo coqueteo momentáneamente con él. Pero algo todavía está mal, todo está silencioso. No hay pájaros que cantan, y unos pocos pies adelante de mí yo veo un Torogoz muerto en la tierra marrón húmeda con sus alas coloradas brillantes extendidas. Siento un sentimiento asqueroso dentro de mí.

Llego hasta la corriente de agua y lleno el frasco. Algo está extrañamente fuera de lugar y echo una mirada alrededor. Yo me acerco a la orilla de la montaña y miro hacia abajo. Hay un mar de cuerpos quemados en el fondo del cañón. Los cuerpos parecen colillas de cigarrillos quemados, y cada vez que el viento sopla, la piel de los cuerpos se mueve como ceniza. A la distancia yo veo un cuerpo que no se quemó con los demás. La cabeza está abierta y puedo ver el cerebro carnoso y gris junto al cráneo, tirado en la tierra, y el cerebro se desenrolla, volviéndose en un nido de serpientes rayadas de rojo y negro que se deslizan hacia mí—abrazando mis piernas y subiendo hacia mi cuerpo donde yo siento sus pieles lisas acariciándome.

Protejo el agua de la ceniza, y coloco el frasco en mi cabeza. Nada ha cambiado. La violencia se ha agravado, y puedo sentir mi rabia que sube por mi pecho. Cualquiera uno de éstos podría haber sido mi padre o mi madre, y todos son hermanos de alguien, el tío, la hermana, el primo, el amante...

"Vamonos," les digo tiernamente a mis serpientes, y ellos silban suavemente en mi oreja. Mi cólera continúa agravándose con cada paso que doy.

*

Estoy enojada. Mi vestido hermoso de arcoiris se convierte en huesos. Recojo un frasco de las lágrimas de mi madre, yo me elevo a la orilla de la montaña, y descargo las lágrimas hacia abajo en la ciudad. Mi voluntad es fuerte y la inundación de lágrimas devora todo. Ordeno un aguacero que siga la inundación por su destrucción. Quiero que mi cólera consuma todo, como todo lo que me ha consumido. Todos pagarán. "¿Ellos nunca aprenderán, verdad?" les pregunto a mis bebés. Ellos abren las bocas anchas, revelando sus colmillos magníficos, y silban a la ignorancia de la humanidad antes de enrollarse juguetonamente alrededor de mi cuello. Miro la destrucción felizmente de mi percha alta en la tierra.

Recrossing the Book of Revelation

Kate
Martin-Rowe

In the instant before the tornado sirens
get hysterical,

(don't get hysterical)

the top of the world is a bruise
arching over the wind chime's soft clink
because the finger of heaven is coming and
in the interval the earth is made of seeds
splitting into hollow legs of wire and leaves
self-disclosing and the screaming locomotive
parting a bluebonnet sea. Yes.

You are alone on the
floor moving your mattress away
from terror—
is there and electricity, the window might
shatter. Or maybe you are

pulling your car off the road just as
the rain begins to break and the wipers accelerate
and levitate and through the static
on the radio god says

I speak
and it's the sound of six billion people
smelling ozone simultaneously and truckloads of
waterlogged grain overturning and the noise of balancing
on one foot because trembling proves
you're paying attention. Yes.

And nothing means nothing, don't you see?

You search for your lost center
maneuvering through locked windows or inching out
chimneys and the shifting quickens
and the world is suddenly a very quiet and very sad
sculpture and god calls it a day

because she is very tired.

And in the unfathomable second before the katy-dids start
pulsing before the horned toad spews blood from its
eyes or the firefly ignites, yes. Stillness
replaces the second and

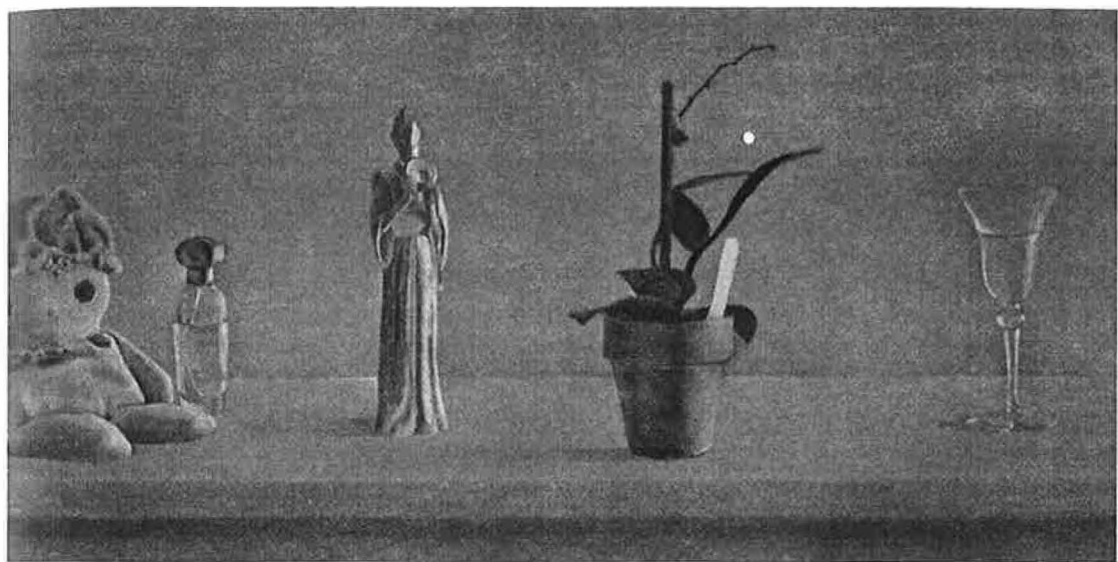
yes. The bomb will have a timer, yes
we know,

we know the cathartic wall cloud. Yes.

Ecru blossom, you open
like a vulva, a mouth, a secret
exposed. Baby-pink lips edge
your lucent bell, spotted inside
like a leopard's or fawn's hide.

You come so small scale.
Tiny stringed red-beads,
dark as venous blood,
in your pale throat. Deep down,
two little yellow pistils ring for your future.

Four years, you sat in my garden.
Not a single bloom. Maybe, like me,
you were ignoring possibilities;
or like me, you couldn't see them.



Still Life | Mana Mesick

Yucca Valley, 1982

Nancy
Carroll

She sits in her den, a lucent
monument. Head wrapped in the cherry-red woolen

cap given her on Christmas Eve, a gift for winter.
But it is August, and unholy fumes pour from her fireplace

onto the cracked desert patio, like dry
ice. Eggshell fingers massage her cap, searching

for pictures to settle her frost. Only voices now,
they spin her stories from fractures in the pavement. She asks

me what I see. I take the small woolen head in my hands,
and brush her shivered memory through the smoke.

I see nothing, feeling only dry desert dust, as her fleece
dissolves, like manna.

The Funeral

JEANNETTE LINDSAY

I flew Alaska into Reno last night. My dad met me at the terminal. That's always uncomfortable for me. I see him and I can't help thinking that he looks like a whipped dog standing there with his tail between his legs and it embarrasses me. Not knowing how to feel, I can see the tears well up in his eyes and then he clings to me, and says, "Hi honey" in that I'm not going to feel anything rusty voice that kind of wavers. I hate it. There's nothing to say as we tap along the beige linoleum under the fluorescent lights and I can sense the darkness overtake him again. He pulls it over his head like a hood and his eyes get square and lifeless. I feel sorry for him. Sorry for his aloneness. He looks old. I watch him walk, carrying my overnight bag, not talking, then talking about nothing, talking about the fires and how we might have to take a different route tomorrow and they thought they had it under control but they don't. There's an emptiness I feel when I see him. A giant screaming in the hollow room of my stomach. We're leaving at 5:30 in the morning, he tells me as we walk by the slot machines lined up on the worn red carpet in the Best Western. It smells like cigarettes and air conditioning in my room.

Always on time or early, always under control, we are on our way to Redding at 5:30 the next morning. The fire from last night changed direction and I can smell the smoke. It's watery smoke now. The moon, almost full, hangs on my father's side. On my side, the purple gray mountain are backlit pink and red from the sunrise and the smoke from the fire burning behind them. Scrubby green pine trees cling to the yellow unburned hills. My father is listening to some stupid country western station. But I don't say anything. For once I kind of like it. It adds to the character of this drive, kind of like putting on a cowboy hat or driving in a beat up pickup truck through the desert. My eyes are burning from that smoke. We're driving through the desert, but we're not in a beat up old pickup truck we're in a Maroon Chevy Caprice from Budget Rental Car. And there is silence now except for the AM static as my father tries to find a news station and his occasional sigh as he slips the dark hood on and off.

There will be no funeral. There is no one to attend. He died last week from complications due to Alzheimer's, dead to the rest of the world for three and a half years now. The last time I had seen him was right after my grandmother died. He seemed OK then. Quiet, but he was always quiet, except when we could get him talking about the old days: living in the jungles of Bogota, Columbia, the small black snakes that would drop out of the trees—one bite and you were dead, or even further back to Idaho, snowshoeing out to catch the train—he and Grandma, how lucky he was to be working in the platinum mines, to have a job during the depression, his fishing rod business in San Diego, anything but what happened yesterday or how he was feeling today. His voice had the quality of disuse. He pulled it up from deep inside when he spoke, and it seemed to flow up through thin rusty pipes before it reached his lips. His dentures would click as he formed words. He gave me my grandma's wedding ring and engagement ring when she died. I tried to wear them, had

them sized for my pinkie ring, but they gave my headaches. So now they lay in a box in my underwear drawer at home.

My mom and dad had tried to take care of him. They took him home with them to Ohio, but he kept wandering through the house, confused. At night, he would stuff the sheets in the louvered bedroom windows and flush his underwear down the toilet or pull it on over his jeans in the morning. He wet the bed and threw his teeth out the window of the car, so they finally took him back to California and put him in a home. I wanted to do something for him so I sent him brownies every month for awhile. He remembered he liked chocolate but he didn't remember me. And then I forgot about him too. Until he died.

We drive through Oroville. The trees are taller here and the rocks are bigger, black and red volcanic rocks, and I notice we are driving alongside a river. The rushing noise partially fills the uncomfortable silence in the car. We sway along with the river on one side, Mount Lassen on the other and I stare out the window. Neither one knows what to say—words are careful and sparse between us, like those scrubby pine trees trying to find a way to grow through those sharp red and black volcanic rocks. My father tells me that the last true “wild” Indian was discovered near here in 1911, alone, the last of his tribe. He was found starving in the corral of a slaughterhouse, he tells me. A silence fills up the space again. In my head, I figure out Grandpa was six in 1911. I wonder if my grandfather felt alone like this Indian, if he ate my brownies.

We're here. In Redding. Redding is named for its dirt. Red. We pull off the highway and all the buildings seem to be made with aluminum siding here. Flat and washed out, purposeful, function without form. I don't like that my grandpa died here. We pull into a parking lot beside one of the low aluminum buildings and I see that it is the Allen and Dahl Funeral Home. I follow my father through the double glass doors inside where it is dark and cool and a small balding man in a suit appears. I can barely hear my father's hollow pipe voice as he says, “Martell Lindsay here for Ade Lindsay.” The man disappears and then returns with a box. I look at my father, his arms hanging down. He's pulled that dark hood over his head again and I cannot see his face but I know that his arms are being held down by all those little black snakes in Bogota, Columbia, so I hold out my hands for him and carry Grandpa to the car.

Grandpa has been riding around with us for a day now in the trunk. When the man handed me the box, a little smaller than the size of a shoebox in a blue fake velvet bag, I never expected it to be so heavy. My grandfather in a box in the trunk. I keep thinking its going to tip over and he's going to be all over the trunk with a tooth here, a bone there, and the rest gray ashes. The staticy radio does not fool the silence hanging in the car. If I speak I'm afraid I will scream. My father is looking dead ahead and I know that look. I need to pee, but my father is not about to stop for anything. When we were kids we had to pee in a 5-pound Folgers coffee can rather than stop the car. My sister and I got pretty good at it, too. I only tipped over the coffee can once and that was on the Fourth of July and we were in the back of the white Ford pickup truck, so it didn't really count. We continue to drive and I try not to need to pee. Somehow my grandfather ended up with that white Ford pickup truck with the peestain in the back. They had it when we sold their house after my Grandma died and we put Grandpa in the home. We just left it there.

We eat at Mel & Fay's Diner the next morning. Mel & Fay's is in Jackson, an old gold rush town, and most of the people look like saggy white raisins. It's one of those places that is known for the biscuits and gravy and half inch slabs of ham. My father's favorite, and I can't find a single thing on the menu that does not involve a dead animal. He slurps his coffee, speaks in saccharine to the waitress, and tries too hard with me. I order a glass of ice water. He complains about the ban on semi-automatic weapons. For once I keep my mouth shut. We both smile. We're both trying.

It's late morning by the time we drive up to the airport in San Andreas. It's dirty yellow, flat and clear here. A friend of the family has a small private plane and has agreed to take us up to one of the high mountain lakes in the Sierras to scatter

his ashes. Throw Grandpa out the window. Burn me when I'm dead and scatter me. Grandma is up there in one of those lakes too. Maybe we'll find the same one. I didn't go when they scattered her ashes, I can't remember why. Had I been too busy?

I see that the plane is old and has a bad paint job, but for some reason I feel safe. My father takes my grandpa out of the trunk and hands him to the friend of the family. The little black snakes must be gone, I think. He walks away, hands in pocket, to watch the planes land and take off. He doesn't really look like that whipped dog anymore but he seems smaller as I watch him alone out there, standing, watching the planes. I don't like that he is alone out there, and I go stand beside him, wanting to see what he sees. We stay that way for several minutes, side by side, silent, but it feels OK that way. "Do you smell the sage?" he says finally. I breathe in the hot, dry, sage smell I hadn't noticed before and nod. "I love that smell," he says and we walk back.

We wait outside the hangar while the friend of the family takes Grandpa out of the box and pours him into a large cardboard mailing tube. It's easier to stick it out the door and dump from, she tells me as she hands me the tube. I carry it to the plane and wonder how she knows this. Had she made a mistake with Grandma? Did Grandma end up scattered all over the back seat of the plane? I look at the seat as I climb in, thinking I might see a little bone fragment, but I don't. I will be responsible for holding the tube until the critical moment of dispersal. I feel important, silent, solemn. I love the ritual. I have looked forward to fulfilling my grandfather's final wishes to be with his wife again in the country they had loved so much. Then the friend of the family starts the single engine plane and it's like a giant leaf blower at high speed in a small closet. I'd forgotten how loud it is in a small plane. You can only scream in each other's ears and make lots of hand motions, and the windows are small and cloudy in the back. I think about looking inside the tube as we taxi down the runway but I'm too afraid of spilling him over like I did the 5-pound coffee can in the back of the truck. I hold Grandpa upright between my knees feeling that it is somehow perverse to have my grandpa between my legs.

We bump up and off the runway at a 45-degree angle. I can see the friend of the family and my father screaming and moving their hands but I have no idea what they're saying, so I just watch out the window for other planes and remember the big red Chrysler, poison ivy, Brownie cameras, flat sourdough pancakes with boysenberry syrup, homemade raisin bread every Saturday and poking the raisins in so they won't get burned, baby chinchillas, talks about rattlesnakes, fires in the fireplace every morning and coffee with evaporated canned milk—more milk than coffee—out of plastic turquoise cups, sawdust and sawhorses, the little one room church in Mountain Ranch where Grandma played the piano and Grandpa never came and we sang, "Jesus loves the little children, all the little children in the world," and cracking walnuts and frogs and panning for gold in the stream across the street and the sound of coyotes howling in the hills while I lay on crisp cold cotton sheets, flannel sheets in the winter and the embroidered pillowcases, and deer in the morning and Jungle Book "Just So" stories and the smell of pine trees and the sound of the wind, walks and rocks and Indian paintbrush and how my grandpa loved peanut butter and how my grandma had a recipe for peanut butter Special K cookies and Grandpa was always outside chopping wood, he was never there and how now he is here but he's not but its all there is left of all of that and pretty soon even that is going to be gone.

We're over the lake now. I know because my dad has turned around and tapped me on the knee and motioned for the tube. I try to get it between the seats but I have to twist it at some weird angle to pass it to him. It's blue and clear and brown and turquoise as I look out my opaque Plexiglas window then down at the lake resting deeply in the Sierra Nevadas. I see a few boatspecks out on the lake. I think about taking baths in funky bathrooms with rusty water. The Jacuzzi, did anyone ever use it? The knitted sweaters, Grandpa's scratchy wool shirts, what happened to his clothes now? His shoes? His dentures? (He'd gotten another pair.) Grandma should have let Grandpa have more than one egg on Sundays so maybe he would have died sooner. Not this way, not all alone with no funeral, no one to care. Not all alone like Ishi, the last "wild" Indian.

*

My father opens the door of the small plane and there is a tremendous blast of wind in the back seat. He holds onto the door and maneuvers the tube so the now open end is outside, then he tilts it downward slowly. Grandpa slips out quickly and he slams the door. Wait! But, it happened too fast. I wasn't ready.

The friend of the family makes a wide arc. Dipping the wing of the plane, she gesticulates madly amidst the roar at a pale cloud floating downward. If there were any teeth or chunks I missed them because all I can see is a quiet puff in the air. It was all too fast. I am glad for the roar of the plane, glad that I can't hear or see my father or the friend of the family. I look out my window at the disappearing puff. My eyes get hot and even fuzzier than before. My father reaches back without looking and puts his hand on my hand on my knee. I'm glad for that. I look back out my fuzzy window, squeeze my father's hand, and wonder if one of the people on the boatspecks will luck out and get a piece of dust in their eye, a piece of my grandpa on them.

Jeffrey C.
Alfier

Overheard Between Waco and Jubilee Springs

I don't get it. You want me to believe
God took Adam out of ground he called good—
the soil that nurtured the downfall of Man
when the lurid skin of one small apple
was polished by heat of one woman's breath.
The road out of Eden became one-way.

You say that's the reason the last preacher
I confessed my liquor and whore sins to
ran off with my wife and stole the stained glass
out of the most broke-down church poor folk built
in McLennan County. He left us cold.
Left his sermons still burning in my fields.

Faithless, I.

Dan
Murphy

The electric fan's lazy swing across
the room has cost us all our jobs,
giving pleasure with little effort.

Set sail in the Atlantic rim.
Some slave now out of work
and the irony is not lost on him
as freedom is one size
too small, one too large.

He pulled the rope
or waved the palm
and kept his eye
on the man whose place he'd take.

Irony is not lost like faith,
which throws
large parts of caution up
into the flapping articulation, large
parts of freedom that swing
an off-beat charge.

Faithless, II.

The skies infested with stars, their heckle
and bawl, infested fields of scourge and tic,
tic and bawl, scourge of twinkle and cotton-

frayed spool. The dye is in the wool, the dye-
stained glass— $3/5$ empty, $3/5$ full—of
human cargo, its bone-draggling melody:

the skin is sign—say, skin is mine and packed
like matchsticks like medicine that spreads meaning
through blood. We see on shore the black-fingered

trees at dusk open-armed, and swear: by God
who deserted this ship for the purple
bruise of sky, I am innocent as the day

I was torn to fuel the green fields without
name without end.



Inner Self | Gohar Gegeyan

It Being Sunny

BEN COSTA

Surely there were moments in my childhood, our childhood, many moments, (you see it's hard to distinguish even now), when I felt a profound sense of self, of individuality. In fact, I remember vividly the moment, the first time, I measured a thought as being completely my own: there we were, I was, at the Longshore carnival, (this was long before we'd moved Below). And completely oblivious were Gurt and Jacob, I remember quite clearly—contentedly snacking on candy, the usual carnival fare—to the tone of the whole thing: the others like us, all behind bars or on pedestals for show. What pleasure did we find in looking upon people so deformed as us? We never talked about it. We never thought about it. I never thought about it. But yet we found ourselves shuffling back to the Longshore every weekend of those fine summer months, and as far as I could tell, we loved it.

Looking back I suppose we found some degree of solace in the company of people like ourselves during a time when there were so very few of us, out in the open. But at that particular moment, the one as I mentioned—it was a summer night, the middle of July—I remember thinking, all to myself, that I wanted to go home, to leave that place and never come back.

All to myself, yes. I'm sure it was. And now, this thought, one might say, would not seem all that important, but it *was*, on many levels; for up until that thought, I had never dreamed of conjuring a desire separate from my brothers, not in the least. And even at that particular moment, it was difficult to recognize the thought as my own, naturally I suppose, since it was the first time anything of the sort had ever happened. But it was apparent enough in the expressions on the faces of my brothers, happily chomping away while looking on at the poor caged souls of Longshore carnival, that I was indeed alone in my thoughts.

So I stood there, with my secret thought, and I guarded it—I guess I could say—because it was mine, and I had never owned anything all to myself before, let alone a thought.

Yet, I do have to mention, that although my convictions are quite strong that this particular thought was solely my own—completely separate from the conscious minds of Gurt and Jacob, my brothers—I must admit that there were subsequent thoughts following that day that I had at first considered solely my own, but which turned out to be otherwise, on one or two accounts. I say it this way because one account is my brother Gurt's, and the other my brother Jacob's, or vice versa, depending upon which accounts proved applicable according to the given situation.

As the doctors later described it in laymen's terms, all seventeen of them—but mostly just the two, Doctor Gerherd and Doctor Milk—our collective unconscious, mine and my brothers', had come to a fork in the road. That's the best way I can understand it myself (I was never much of a numbers person, or a logical one, as it happened; I was born with the left side of the brain; for a better explanation, one could have sought the expertise of my brother Jacob, on the right; he tended to retain such information (while poor Gurt never had much of a reliable memory except when it came to smells and tastes and the like). There was a fork in the road, and our collective unconscious decided not to choose

only one path, the doctors said, it decided to choose three. So instead of one unconscious mind shared between the three of us, as had been the case, we had each begun to develop our own separate psyches: separate by all accounts, if not equally developed. Yet because, when it came down to it, my brothers and I shared the same brain, sometimes these paths, you see, intermingled and crossed, overlapped and what have you. And, it was from this very confusion that everything started to change, not only for myself, but for my brothers Gurt and Jacob as well.

It was such a hard time, those last years. And, oh, my parents were not the least bit helpful through it all, though they tried in earnest. They just found it immensely difficult and awkward to adjust the manner with which they had treated us before the change. For example, during our childhood it had been perfectly acceptable to call us collectively as "Bubba," as our mother had so often done, a sort of term of endearment. Bubba. It flays my skin to say it even now, to sound it out, the dumb syllables. But it couldn't be escaped. Everyday, Bubba this, Bubba that, oh, Bubba, Bubba, Bubba! At last I broke down in a fit of rage screaming at my mother, telling her to shut up, that I hated her, that I wished I was dead. And of course this led poor Gurt to crying; any sort of yelling, high-pitched scream, or any otherwise loud noise caused painful reverberations throughout his terribly soft skull, and his crying, on top of my sudden outburst, only led my mother to tears. The last thing I wanted was for my dear mother to cry, but I can't stress how confusing it all really was. Back then I couldn't quite articulate my feelings. All I knew was that I felt a profound revulsion at the sound of the name Bubba, but really it could have been anything else that might have placed my brothers and me into the same category of self, and being. However, I am quite positive that Gurt and even Jacob could have gotten along fine being called Bubba for the rest of their lives if it were up to them.

I, as I've been saying, could not have it that way, not when our thoughts were becoming so autonomous that I found it harder and harder to relate to my brothers. You see, the private thoughts of my brothers would, at times, creep into my psyche, if you will, as I know mine did theirs at times, but among the three of us, I handled such occurrences rather poorly. As far as I can tell, it used to be that in our younger days, one, singular thought would hit us all at once, simple as that. One message, one pulse of electrononsense made its way to our collective conscious mind, and none of us questioned a thing because we didn't know to question a thing. But there came a point—as all this has been leading up to—when each moment of every day was marked by several brain messages headed to several different points in our brain, so that a sort of jumble of thoughts occurred, each directed to some specific place, but each not always ending up at its intended destination. And most of the time, yes, these thoughts that encroached upon my own were very harmless, but that didn't reduce their degree of irritation.

Eggs. Eggs. I would lay awake at night listening to this, you understand, more often than you'd think. *Fried. Deviled. Hey, scrambled!* It was Gurt in the middle of a dream and I was hearing every word in my mind, though I couldn't actually see the dream in full because I was wide awake; it was more like a daydream, a daydream at night about eggs, recurring and recurring. They might as well have been my own thoughts, and arguably were. Yes, it all sounds very strange to one who's never experienced it, but that's how it was. Innocent, but very annoying.

And things such as these, I didn't want to bring out into the open among my brothers, because matters as they were had become much too complicated by themselves to call people on things that they couldn't hardly control in the first place. And really, Gurt—I don't think he understood the extent of what was happening to us. I'm not sure he realized that our thoughts were straying ever more from the unity of prior days. But this reluctance I had, this refusal to speak of my feelings did not actually spare anyone anything, as I had wished. Rather, it manifested itself in other, more harmful ways.

And this is precisely the time that Lizzie came into my life, our lives. Families were just beginning to move Below in swarms. My mother had mentioned such possibilities for our own family in passing, but no actual steps were taken to purchase land underground. It was very expensive back in those days to make the move, and still, there were those like my father who didn't altogether believe that the Sun was on its way to dooming the whole of the Topworld.

Indeed, it was on one of those terrible, very sunny days that Lizzie's family pulled up to their new home right next to ours in an old model Honda. They had everything with them, all their belongings, and an old alpaca strapped to the hood on a rack. They were from the country, and in lieu of the recent migration Below, housing in our area had

become quite affordable, allowing a modest farming family such as hers the chance to live a city life.

She was a dream, Lizzie. She was never afraid of us, me, not at first. I remember sitting in the shade of the veranda on the day after she moved in; she was wearing a field visor, the kind they used to wear during those times; it covered her whole face. But I didn't need to see her face to know she was beautiful, even though I would soon discover that her face was in fact the most beautiful, round freckled face I had ever seen. It was more the way she gently led that old alpaca down her driveway that first time, and along the sidewalk, and up our driveway to where we were, to massage its six arthritic legs right in front of us, and ask if we, too, would like to pet the anomalous, long-necked creature.

Go on, she said. Don't be afraid. He won't bite.

I'm not afraid, said Jacob, and I found myself stumbling towards the beast, rather clumsily, as had been the case of late. Our coordination was steadily deteriorating—that is, our conjoined cooperation—becoming sloppy and wholly disjointed. What used to come so naturally to us, something none of us had ever consciously thought about, had become almost foreign, now more of a task every time. Now, amidst the neural changes, we were all seizing the reigns of our own bodies, like babies discovering their feet and gradually learning to walk, like three people trying to get along in the same pair of pants, or something to that effect, so when we fell to the white cement I was subsequently surprised—no, not at the fall, mind you, but at the delicate hand placed at my shin, and then at my knee, and at the warm blow of air smarting the wound thereupon.

Well, you might have guessed that that did it for me—that did me in and sealed my fate—her field visor raised just for my benefit, her lips taut in an O, only a few centimeters away from my skin. She was a dream, Lizzie was, and from that day forward my secret thoughts were occupied by her alone.

The next months were the best of my life, our lives—my brothers—and this: only because Lizzie was there. Often we would go to the Longshore carnival at night during that summer, but instead of heading over to the booths and cages as I and my brothers had done so many times before, we'd hike up the small little hillock overlooking the Big Dipper ride, and just lie beside each other under the bright orange moon. And she would always lie down next to me on my side, Lizzie would, mostly.

I'm so glad I could find friends like you, she'd said on more than one occasion.

Lizzie, I'd say.

Lizzie, Jacob would say.

And we'd spend the night like that while Gurt shut his eyes and listened to the crickets cheeping.

My mother, too, adored Lizzie. And though they seldom interacted, my mother went on and on about how the country girl next door saved our spirits. I couldn't blame her for thinking such things; it must have been difficult to watch her only children loll about the house for fifteen years with nothing to do, always together, and yet always lonely. No, I can't exactly blame my mother anymore.

We...we're going to marry her, Jacob said one night at the dinner table.

My mother's eyes met my father's who gave a little smirk over the bulge of mashed potatoes in his mouth.

No we're not, I said.

We are too, said Jacob.

No, we are not, I said and I put down my fork decisively.

And why not? my father asked.

Jacob smiled. She can live here with us, Papa, can't she? And we'll go to the carnival every night, all of us.

Gurt laughed wildly at the thought of this, and clapped his two fragile hands.

That's right, Bubba, my mother said to him.

Bubba! Bubba! Bubba!

I stared at her, and her smile faded. If I wasn't careful, I thought, I'd trip and catch my two legs in the mouth of that one-note trap of being something globular and utterly uniform, and for the first time I felt horribly attached. I wished

to break free, to somehow sever the wretched flesh and bone that bound me to Gurt—and if I might have had the strength to do so, I would have, but instead, I pulled and pulled at a great nothing, and a warm, dragging pain washed over the back of my skull and neck and made everything go dark.

Something like a seizure, the doctors had said. But an isolated episode. Nothing to worry about, boys. Three lollipops and everything was supposed to be fine.

But it kept happening. It kept happening again and again and no one could rightly explain it, biologically speaking. I could have explained it easily otherwise, in terms of my own feelings, though I never once did. I didn't want to. Doing so would have been a kind of outward acknowledgement of—something, I don't know.

Well, at first it was only at home—you know, when I'd get sore at my brothers or my mother or my father—if I'd get that same feeling that I wanted to run away, just get up and run away from the unwieldy mass of parts and feelings, that vise. There actually came a point when I welcomed the episodes, the blackouts, like a kind of escape, like I almost willed them to come about. I did will them in the beginning; I triggered something at least. All I had to do was let myself go and get angry, really. I felt like I was getting somewhere.

But then the episodes started occurring during idle times of the day, the causes inexplicable even to me, because we weren't doing anything. We might have been fetching fuel or some such at the bazaar or, as I remember once specifically, helping mother clean out the basement, and on the steps leading up to the fiat we fell, overturning several times, and ending up with fifty-five stitches. It was becoming a real problem, a functional problem.

Doctor Milk would look at us gravely—the same way every time—tell us to take it easy, not spend too much time outdoors like we had been, it being sunny and all. Then he would send us to sit in the waiting room, call my mother over, my father too if he was there, and stare even more gravely at them as he talked in a low, low voice, sometimes making sweeping gestures in the air with his clipboard in hand, but always finishing with a pensive shake of his head directed at the floor. At times my mother would begin to choke up, glance back at us, and decide otherwise. All in an effort to keep something secret.

Though around Lizzie, none of these episodes ever happened, only once:

We could spend days out in the open, out in the sun, exploring the vast expanse of dry, golden meadows beyond the city. Lizzie knew everything about bugs, and certain plants, and all the little animals that lived underground, like prairie dogs, which don't look like dogs at all.

And she knew to swim. She could swim like a minnow.

At the edge of the little basin, the neighborhood's water source, is where my brothers and I sat—right on the deck, at the spot where the yellow-suited abatement-men came at dawn to snatch things up like cans and old sneakers with their long nets, to clear the basin for the filter compound. No workers were there after six o'clock during summer months, and so we'd hike up to that point above town and we would watch Lizzie, just watch her go, Jacob's and my feet dangling in the water, Gurt's cutting at the surface with his big toe. She was elastic and fluid, a green streak beneath the water (because of her bathing suit,) arms stretched out in front, hands clenched together, and trailing her: a road of foam made ever-longer by those tight, beautiful, little kicks, round and round and round.

Watch this, she'd say as she adjusted her goggles, as if my eyes, our eyes, had ever left her glistening body in the first place, her orange tousled hair made to look brown with wetness dancing in curly clumps, her face. Sometimes the splash would grace our legs, or even higher, the coolness of it begging me to jump in. But we couldn't; I was too ashamed. I couldn't let Lizzie see me like that, not us.

Won't you three come in? The water's cool under the overhang today, and it's shallow over there.

Lizzie, I'd say.

I know. She'd look at us thoughtfully, and I'd wonder, does she? Does she really know? Does she know I had wished that to never end? Those clear moments between her tight, little kicks and her arm strokes, those clear moments in which she was static and gliding, cutting the water so lightly like Gurt's toes.

But Jacob groaned on this day as he inched forward. He had plans of his own; he wanted to do as Lizzie did.

He wanted to float and be surrounded for the first time. And he inched.

It only took an awkward gesture forward to tip us headlong into the water. The feeling of submersion took me, the weight of our heads relieved, but only for a moment, until we could not swim. I flailed. We thrashed and sank. *Cold, breathe. Good job, alligator. Our body. What have you done?*

An arm appeared beneath our backs, and Lizzie's round face above. What are you boys, doing?

I looked down at our body, our bulbous floating form, the wetness of our T-shirt revealing no secrets. The shapes of swollen parts, unnaturally scrunched together. I began to cry.

But her hand kept us afloat. Don't worry, she said. She, with her small arms and hands led us gently along the surface, our excess of form slowly cutting like Gurt's toes, like Lizzie in her perfect moments.

It feels good, Jacob said.

Gurt laughed.

I placed my hand on the small of Lizzie's back, pressed it against the green nylon, and we did like that until the loud drone of the filter compound scared us, and we went home.

Only once, like I said, did anything like an episode ever happen. It was one of those nights where we'd go to the Longshore, sit on the grass and look up to the sky. And on this particular night, Lizzie looked up to the stars, wistfully.

I was so afraid, she said, turning to me, looking into my eyes. I was afraid the city would be—I don't know. I just didn't know what to think.

And she kept talking, but I couldn't focus, even though I wanted to dearly. Instead, in my mind's eye, as if in a daydream, there was Lizzie. She was on a bed basked in orange light. She was undressing herself, a familiar image that had graced my guarded thoughts repeatedly (and still does to this day), but I was closer this time—not watching from afar—so close I could smell her, the way she smelled of hay. I breathed deeply, half in dream half in waking state, catching only bits of Lizzie's sacred words of the present. These are, she said, you guys, we are. Somehow, in my head, these weren't my thoughts, but I couldn't stop them—I didn't want to stop them. We were close. She was naked, and I was standing there, a big black void opened up before me on the bed, and just for a moment I was happy.

Then I saw Gurt. I felt him. And Jacob. I felt the flesh attached to me like a weight, a hideous unnatural growth; I wasn't alone. The three of us, my brothers and me. Our massive, bulbous form hovering over the soft curves of a young girl, holding her, all six arms enveloping her. Now, she seemed frightened, now she was squirming to get free, writhing and kicking.

Stop! I called out. She wants to get away!

But my two brothers continued, and for a moment I watched them in horror, keeping her down, as if they didn't hear me.

Stop! I said. Stop it! And finally Jacob looked over at me, somehow right into my eyes, never stopping his swaying, almost with a blank, unaffected look about him.

I immediately reached out to hit him, to grab him, something, but I couldn't get my hands there. Instead they settled on Gurt's yielding, tiny neck and squeezed. Stop it! Stop it! He gurgled violently, but wouldn't let go of Lizzie, not until I squeezed harder, not until he wasn't breathing.

I remember, just before we blacked out for good, Lizzie was there crying over me, crying on us, crying and crying, saying, What's happening?

And I, too, remember, the decision was made, not by me, but in my best interest, my most coveted desire, not ours, not my brothers'.

And I remember my mother weary, my father silent.

I remember, just before he passed, Gurt, strapped to a life machine, gazing at me with tired eyes, like he had just woken up—perhaps he had—and yet it remains the most knowing look I have ever seen upon anyone. What did he

know? He smiled and ran his soft hand across my cheek.

I remember, just before I left for good, Jacob, worn and alone, his dark shape in front of a window looking out from a darker place, perhaps waiting for the girl whom I would visit just a few moments later on her doorstep. And a letter he'd sent: It's like one of mom's pies. Only a third is left by the end of the night, and by morning it's stale. Come home.

And, yes, I remember Lizzie the only way I can, a green streak beneath the surface, not much more. I can't, she had said.

It was only a few weeks ago that I found a small red thing made of plastic, which had long since been packed away in boxes, in a storage facility near the Earth's core where I'd been keeping some of my stuff (that's practically the only place with any room left). I had forgotten anything like this had even existed, this little red, conical piece of plastic with silver grains inside. A viewscope, I guess they're called (also a keychain). Admittedly, it's the last thing I have left. There was a period after the whole ordeal and the final operation when I threw everything else away; I had wanted to forget. But somehow, this little artifact made it through and I'm glad for it.

Because when you look through—put your eye up to the eyehole and squint—on the other side of the lens there we all are, my brothers and I, at the Longshore carnival. At first it was dark, and you could barely manage to see our awkward shape; we were jumping up and down, but in a lagging manner, as if frames were being skipped (probably a result of temperature damage (those storage facilities generally overcompensate for the heat of the Core, leaving your belongings in rooms nearly freezing)). The silvery dust was all coagulated and stuck together. After shaking it and putting it under the heat of a lamp, the grains finally started to parse.

We must have been thirteen or so. We were happy. And as the silver inside the viewscope really got moving, I could tell that we weren't jumping up and down at all; rather we were dancing to the music. And with such grace. I mean, we were really moving to the music—that old-time song they used to play, with the organs and violins. My hand in Gurt's, his other raised to the air in refinement, as Jacob swayed his arms back and forth leading our every move.

But the best part is, we were all thinking the same thoughts, I know. Not a one gone astray. And I like the thought of that, that something like that could have actually happened. Sometimes I wonder exactly what we were thinking. Probably not that much. And sometimes I wonder what it'd be like if we'd had just stuck together. Maybe things would have been different. Well—that's a stupid thing to say. Of course they would have been different. A lot of things could have been different. Lizzie. It being sunny, that might have been different, too. I wonder what might have happened then.

Because when you're looking through the viewscope, and you see our dancing, you start to notice certain things (at least I do,) and the little changes that you think wouldn't be possible to occur in such a short amount of space—they kind of make a little more sense. Like how at the end of the reel, right when you start to think it could go on forever, our dancing I mean, there comes a big orange flash of light, like the Sun just decided to wipe us out, and it shocks me every time.

Remembering the Lottery, 1969

Grant
Marcus

It's the first year of the "lottery"
and both of us feel
Shirley Jackson and Albert Einstein
lead the top-ten list of the most betrayed.
Everyone has a right answer
you say. Few have
the right question. Meanwhile,
on the wrist-stem bending toward us,
a Magnolia bloom is a brassed
erection playing its golden reed
inside the frocks of the earth-nun,
fanning her leaf-lorn dress...

As you read the line, I watch the analytic
smile broadening your face, as
a puzzle finding its piece, and you,
consumed by sexual pageantry:
After all, a nun, a magnolia flower,
phallic in a green dress. And you,
taking the dress to the latest verve of
fashion, drive, and youth.

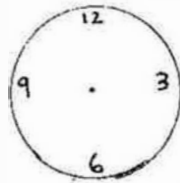
Only the white frock makes sense,
you say, complaining of mixed metaphors
and the lack of rhyme. We are in
The garden, summer '69.' The war's on.
Black birds loom above us like Hitchcock thrillers.

The army of trees, jungling the heavy shadows
makes the war seem that much closer.

In your eyes is the last light's seventh veil.
Above us, on Hillcrest, a neighbor leans
over a white picket fence, a crow's nest to
the view of sea below. Poised captain
helming her ship, she stands guard for
her son's return, while a quiet pain scrawls
telegrams across worries and fears. A Woody
motors by, a surfboard on its back;
the twilight follows, dancing refractions
on bumper stickers of Country Joe—

The contrast in lives turns our heads away.
I know what you want. You want to know
what I'll do, but you let the question ask
the silence. Moments pass...
We sigh in mutual relief that the birds
are attacking the Chinaberries,
the sonic boom did not mean
the end of the world,
and the lottery, that has stoned so many,
leaves us yet another reprieve
to plan our drama of evasion.

Who and what do we live for?
Who and what do we die for?
In the cool air toward September,
the dark slips through the light's
orange rain, where your
hands nest in mine,
trembling there, like wings.



Schwada

Oh look at the time! I really must be going...



Stam Henson

Nancy Carroll

Mariano Zarco

Shayida Kafar

Raffi Kahiwan

Amber Norwood

Jeremy Quintero

Brian Diamond

Maria Mesick

Craig Watkinson

Rita Hermann

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Jeannette Lindsay

Kris Fjuelgaa

Mary Angelino

Dan Murphy

Lynne Miller

Dustin Lehren

Ramina Davidson

Mark Carrillo

Ben Costa

Carrin Pockrandt

Sharon Venezia

Nicole Cisar

Corinna Coorssen

Kate Martin-Rowe

Grant Marcus

Alex Schwada

Gohar Gegetjan

David Heffler

Susana Nohemi Marcek

Ken Chan

Verónica Reyes