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# submissions.

All submissions should be accompanied by a cover letter that includes Name, Address, E-mail and Telephone Number as well as the Title of the submitted work. No names should appear on manuscripts or art work. You may submit up to 5 poems and up to 20 pages of fiction. Art submission may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional; all mediums are welcome. Manuscripts will be recycled.

Send to:

**The Northridge Review Department of English  
California State University, Northridge  
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*The Northridge Review Fiction Award*, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*. *The Northridge Review* will announce the winner of this award in the Fall 2006 issue.

*The Rachel Sherwood Award*, given annually in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student published in *The Northridge Review*. The recipient of this award will be published in the Fall 2006 issue of *The Northridge Review*.

*The Northridge Review* is also honored to publish the winner of *The Academy of American Poets Award*. The recipient of this award will be acknowledged in the Fall 2006 issue.

awards.

a

note

note  
from

from  
the

the  
editors

editors.

**WARNING**



**STAY BACK  
FROM THE  
EDGE**

**FOOTING  
IS HAZARDOUS**





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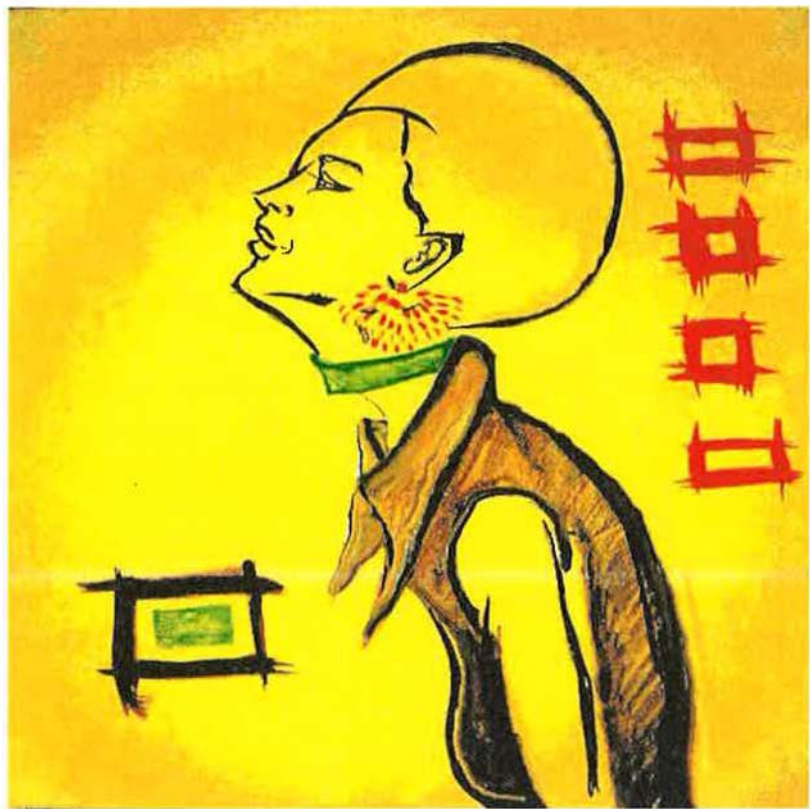
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Black Girl  
Heather Kenney

## Dustin Lehren

The phone rings. I see my Dad's point that gay marriage is wrong, but I'm still going to give him my liberal slant. "Okay, it's wrong," I tell him over the phone, "but sometimes you just need a blow job done right." He tells me I need to find church.

An Armenian lady cuts in front of me at the bank. Some people need to be saved; and they need it in writing. I decide to say something for once, "Excuse me, the line starts back *there*." She ignores me. At the back of the line, they give me a disappointed look. I try again, "Did you know you just cut in front of me?" I watch her eyes slowly fire up and then she shouts, "I was here before, I not go back to the end of the line. Why you give me hard time for not being from this country?" With nothing better, I respond, "I just asked you a question." Still not backing down she says, "For what, for what, you have problem, you have problem?" People are staring and I desperately want her to shut up and go away. I'm spared when the bank teller calls for the next in line. I look back again, to a couple standing behind me. The guy tells me, "I'd give you even odds." I say, "I'd never take that bet. Look at her, she's the size of a bull." We all snicker. When I look up, the lady is staring right at us with her fire eyes. We all shut up. Whatever. I need to find a roommate. The teller calls for the next in line and the lady turns to leave. Before I can get to the teller, the lady stops me. Without saying anything, the lady spits in my face—this is hot.

I have these dreams of getting blowjobs. I'm then caught red handed by my dad and he punishes me—by participating. I asked my Mom about these dreams, maybe I was molested as a child? She says, "No. You're just a fucking faggot."

I need to find a roommate quick. My ex-girlfriend moved out a while ago and she's finally coming back for her stuff piled in a living room closet. She moved back to the suburbs. She gets here and tells me she really misses the place. I ask her what she's doing this weekend. She's going to the river with her boss, she says. I ask her if she's *fucking* her boss. No, she says. I look at her—at her eyes. She tells me, she's seeing someone.

The doorbell rings. All I know is it's a she—and she is a foreign exchange student. "Hello...I talk to you earlier," she says behind the metal screen door. She comes in and we walk past my ex, still putting stuff in boxes and giving me this *look*. I show the Japanese girl the empty room. "There's 24-hour laundry access downstairs," I tell the foreign exchange student. We walk downstairs and I show her the laundry room. "Where do I park my car?" she asks. I tell her there's only one spot for both of us. "I not have my own spot?" she asks. I tell her we can share. "How many cars

you have?" she asks. I tell her only one. "Oh? How you say? Wife? Is your wife live here?" she asks. No, that's not my wife, I tell her. "Your wife no drive?" she asks. No, she doesn't live here, I tell her. "Huh?" I tell her that she used to be my girlfriend and that we broke up. I tell her that she left to live back in the suburbs. I tell her that she never liked it in the city. I tell her that she left because she felt I would never have the courage to leave her. I tell her that she left me as a favor. I tell her I thought that was a horrible favor. I tell her... "Sorry, uhh? my English very bad," she interrupts. It doesn't matter, I'm over it, I tell her. "So your girlfriend park here too?" she asks. "NO!" I say. "Sorry. Sorry. English very bad. Not wife, but girlfriend?" she asks. "We are broken up!" I say. I get a blank look. Separated. Blank look. Split. Blank look. Divorced. Blank look. Not together. Blank look. I desperately try to talk—but nothing comes out. The foreign exchange student is nodding, anticipating, waiting for my next word. I try to breath—but instead a small whimper comes out. "No understand," she says. I break down and cry into her shoulders. "How much rent?" she asks.

I hate this woman and I have an erection. We have the best sex I've ever had—it was the lowest I've ever been. Afterwards I ask her again if she's fucking her boss and again she tells me no and leaves with her boxes. The next morning, I wake up and go pee and it burns really bad.

I meet this woman that practices post-modern therapy. I ask her what it is and she tells me that it's the deconstructing of the individual and reshaping personal narratives to go against, what Foucault calls, *negative power*. I've been told that her husband was a successful Hollywood writer and that he shot himself in the head. I IMDB him and it says that he shot himself in the head—due to marital problems. She meets me at work and we go out for lunch. She asks how my day's been going. I say, "Horrible—I feel like shooting myself in the head." She looks at me and laughs and I don't know what to do for the next few moments. In Koreatown the Sul-Lung-Tahng smelled like old dog. I try it anyways. It was good. I buy her lunch. It feels good to spend money. I swipe my credit card and I'm given a pen that doesn't write.

It's been awhile since I've had sex with a girl and now, after many drinks, there's two in my bed. *Girl one* is Korean with fake boobs, she asks me to fuck *girl two*, her white friend. I go down on her friend. "No, I said to fuck." I ignore her and keep my head between her friend's legs. Fuck? I think about the word *fuck* and how women don't have the ability—to fuck, but only—to be fucked. "Fuck. Are you going to fuck her or not?" she asks. I wonder, as my jaw begins to get tired, if that's what she's trying to do, by commanding me to *fuck* she is actually the one doing the *fucking*; having the power to find and stick it in whatever hole and with one thrust become whole. "You got coke dick or something?" To shut her up, I put my head between *her* legs. "I'm bored," she tells me. I stand up and I'm completely limp. "I'm going home," she tells me. She puts on her clothes and walks out. I shut the door behind her, making sure not to wake up my roommate

and I return to the less chatty and more receptive friend—only to find her passed out. I try to find a place on the crowded bed so I can go to sleep. The friend wakes up and grabs me, she tells me, “I want you to fuck me,” and then she passes out again.

The phone rings. After twelve years my Dad’s getting a divorce. He’s worried about the dog. He’s hired a dog-sitter for when he goes to work. He’s trading in his three-year-old SportTrac for a new SportTrac. He likes to drive the dog around in the SportTrac.

# the tattooed small of your back

---

Jeremy Quintero

lights and glamour dot the city,  
living gods destroy the  
coastline, pale and fevered  
in media res amongst botox  
injections, ads for Gucci  
smoke off building corners like  
cigarettes and the sky  
begins its obligatory cremation.

new connections now.  
*this is my success story.* is it  
success when you bow  
before what you attempt  
to gain?  
where are the teeth marks  
in your pillow?

a funeral for the living  
gods of America. couples in  
high rises watch, bored and  
lifeless—a valley of bones.  
bottle of hand lotion beside  
their beds. late for pilates,  
kabbalah lattes and the search  
for meaning.



# Gregor took a Shelling

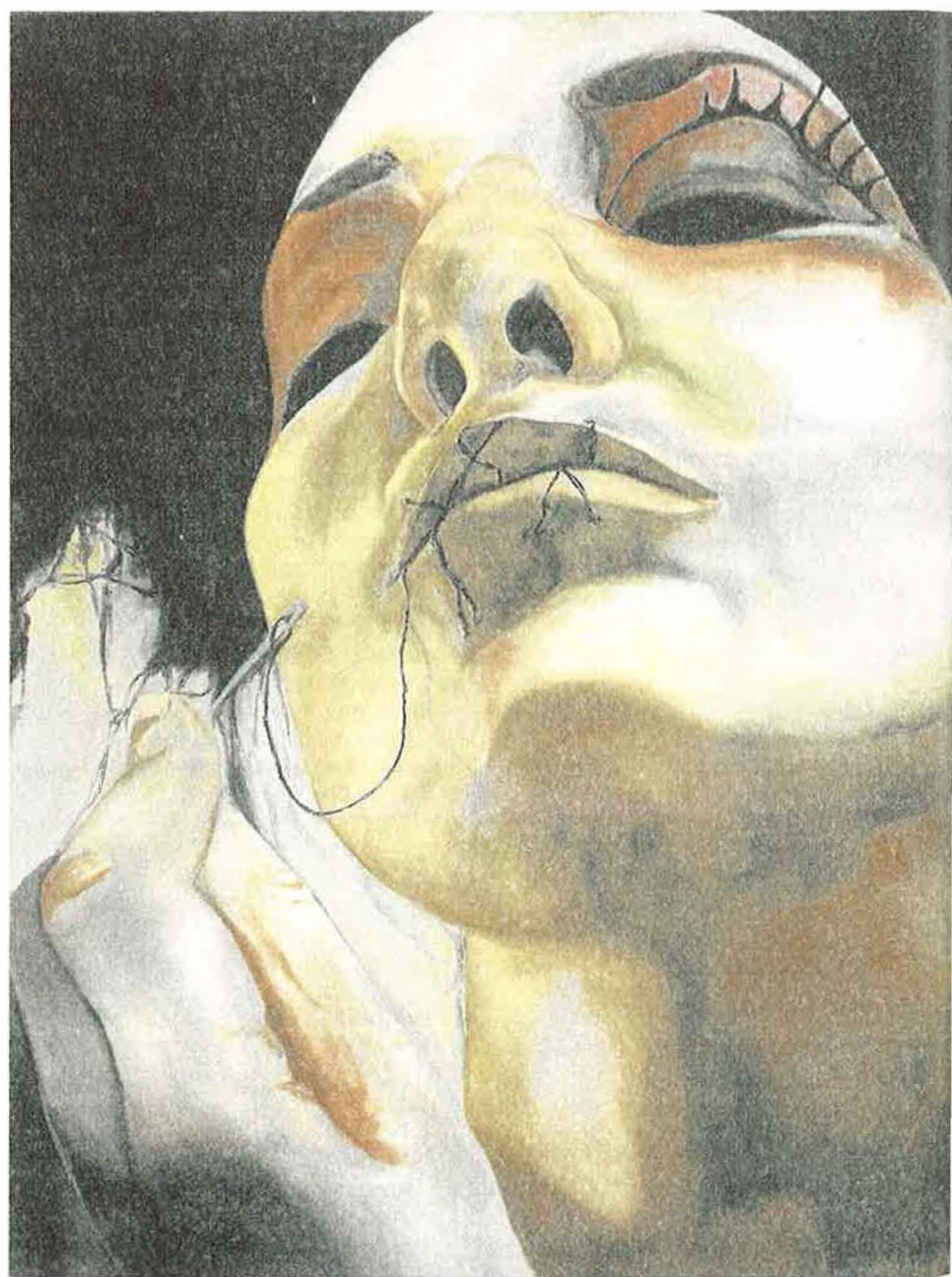
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Evin Wolverton

Gregor took a shelling  
In the tight blue sliver between Heaven and the  
Himalayas  
Got slapped down like a high-floating birdie  
Smearred across Mongolian sandstone  
And baked in the desert sun  
Rubble and mush soufflé.

They mummified him in ribbons  
Voodoo push-pinned his carcass with  
Stars, bars, silver, and Sousa  
Then dropped him from the flagpole into baptismal  
formaldehyde  
Shouting, "Encore! Encore!" (Which he obliged)

How, now, shall I be rewarded  
As wife-widow, Woodrow Wilson,  
For sharing my bed with a zombie?



Words are Labels  
Gohar Gegeyan

# The Dancer

Jim Allardice

Her father would call out, "Dance for me, Jenny," and she would dance. Each Friday night, the small ball of gray at the end of the sofa—her mother—would read her Danielle Steel, and her father would watch her spin across the living room carpet, her pony-tailed red hair and her pink ribbon—freshly pressed—sailing behind her. Her tutu would bounce to the melodies of *Family Matters* and *Night Court* that drifted out from the TV, and the re-glued glitter on her leotard—last year's birthday present, now too tight—would sparkle in the light of the lamp above her father's La-Z-Boy recliner. Even his cigarette smoke, funneled up by the lampshade, would shimmer to the beat of her dance.

"Do you see my little girl, Ellen? Do you see her?" he would shout as Jenny flung herself across the room in wild pirouettes before crumpling to the floor before him. "Jenny's going to be a great ballerina."

Without looking up from her book, her mother would point out, "That would take a lot of lessons. More than we can afford on your salary."

But the two of them would ignore her, and Jenny would again whirl across the floor. Finally, hot and exhausted and a little tipsy, she would curtsy. Her father would laugh and break into applause. A smile from her would open his wallet, and he would toss her a dollar. With a gleeful plié, she would bend down and pick up her allowance.

"You're going to be great some day, Jenny, and I'm going to come and see you dance," he would say, and she would smile again.

Her mother would close her book and say, "This is all very cute, but it's far past your bedtime, young lady."

Her slumping shoulders would pray, "Daddy?" and of course he would accede. "Jesus, Ellen. It's not a school night...besides, it's only nine." Then, her mother would know it was really her bedtime.

As her mother would pad out of the room, her father howled, "Encore, encore." And so, bounding off the sofa and leaping from a kitchen chair, she would dance for him. The TV would become her barre as she stretched her leg out behind her—her run-lined nylon tights stretching, almost ripping—and she would hold a shaky arabesque for the longest time. Then, right in front of him, she would twirl on her toes until they ached and her plastic tiara flew off and she could feel her red face pulsing. Then, she would crash into her father's lap, and he would give her a big kiss.

There, in the lap of his slick-worn jeans, tucked in his sweet-smelling

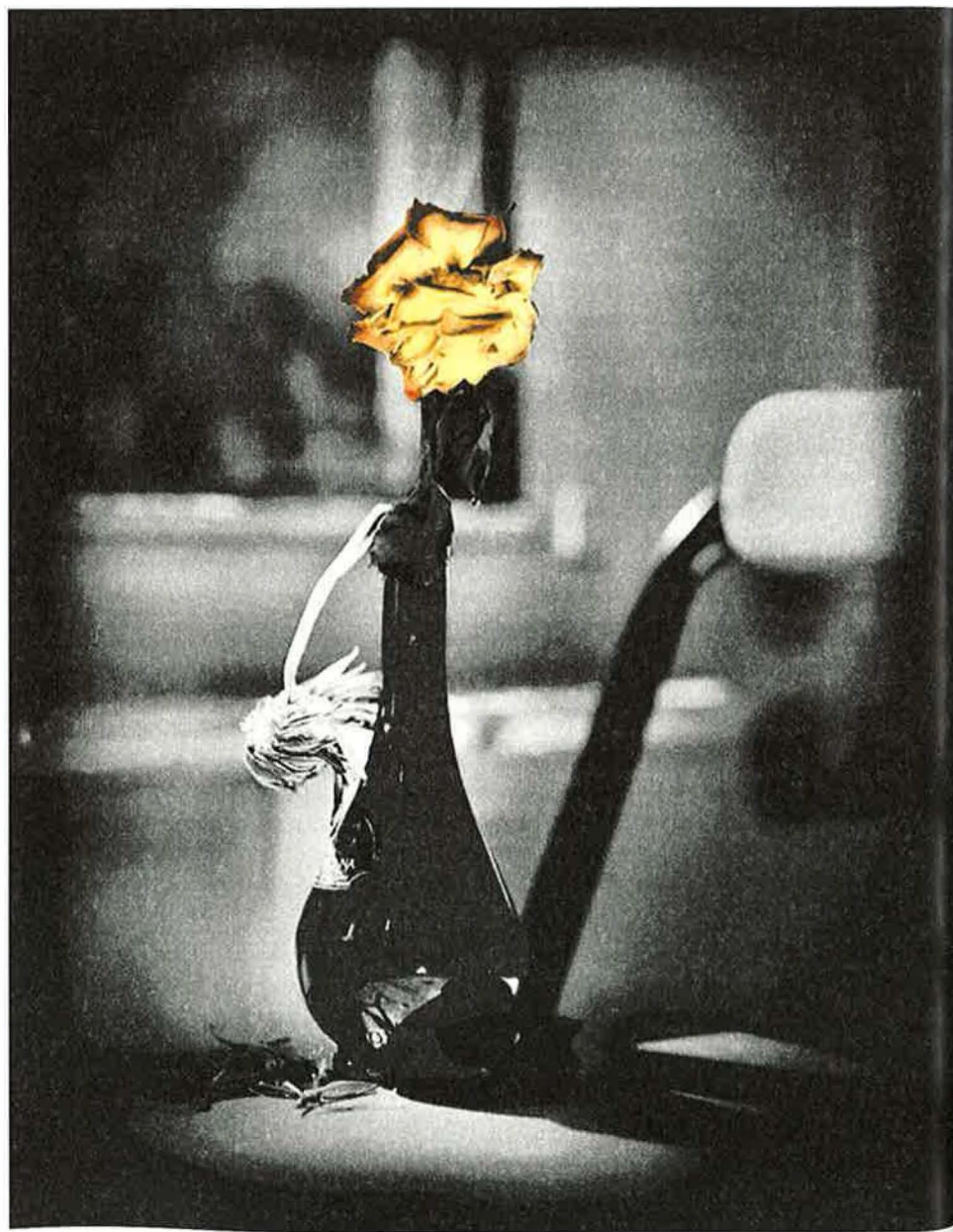
flannel shirt, she would watch TV. His warm hand, pressing against her tights, would hold her tight. His aftershave would intoxicate her; she would plead with him for a sip of his beer, and of course, he would give in. His fingers would flutter across her stomach, tickling a laugh out of her that would invite a laugh from him. She would beg him to stop, but of course he wouldn't, and he would tickle her until she almost peed in her pants. The fuzzy tattoo on his arm would ripple as they howled at Carol Burnett and Johnny Carson. Finally, after one more sip of his beer, she would drift off.

As though watching TV, she would see him pick up the heavy, drooping body both of them believed to be his daughter and carry it into her bedroom and to her bed. Slipping the ballet slippers off her tiny bound feet, he would expose the crimson nail polish she had stolen from her mother's bathroom cabinet. The stiff tutu would slide off her waist. He would gently pull at the pink ribbon; her ponytail would fall apart, and he would stroke her auburn hair. He would say—every Friday night he would say—“Sweet dreams, Jenny, sweet dreams,” and his warm cheek would kiss her quivering cheek. His hand would glide across her stomach, almost tickling her. The pushed-away Care Bears would bounce onto the floor, and the discarded old leotard would fall from the trembling bed, and like the blown-glass ballerinas on a shelf above the bed, she would look down upon the two of them. Each time, she would try to reach out to the little girl, but she would always be too far away.

Far away, still dancing, she hangs Chagall-like in a firm arabesque above everyone; her thigh tightens, her calf strains, yet she holds it. Someone calls out—she can barely hear him over the room-rattling music—“Dance for me, Jenny.” She swings her leg around the pole, and she pulls them right out of their seats. A quick pirouette, then another and another. She spots herself in the mirror; it flies by her; again she spots herself, and the lights, punching holes in the blackness, swirl around her. When she stops, her now-blond hair sails across her face and cascades down her breasts as the room whirls around her. The pole, her barre, steadies her. Their heads bob with each plié, each one timed to the thundering drumbeat. She steps into fifth position. Weightless and motionless, she has them waiting for her next move. A cool indigo sun rises up her back; a blue snake slithers along her arm and across her shoulder, and she holds her position. Beyond the lights, she can only see dark shapes and blurry faces, clapping and laughing and shouting. The lightness of her arms pretends to invite them in, only to turn away and disappear behind the pole. She reappears, and someone else calls out, “Dance for me, Jenny,” and she takes off. She furiously pirouettes again and again and again so fast their smoke can't

touch her cold, prickly skin. Their mouths drop, and their eyes follow her.

She is at the edge now, and she mimes a smile and makes them open their clammy wallets and throw her their money. She smiles again, and their hands reach out to her, but she pulls away. She dances away from her bed, and like a firefly, she spins across the bedroom and out of the window.



Untitled 1  
Brittany Bruer

# That night at the diner...

---

Mary Angelino

I wished you  
had a porous touch  
so all the goodness would spill  
and fill your plate,  
stain the tablecloth  
ambrosia red,  
making lovely  
florid paths  
to my hands  
in passing.

that night

diner...

# Older Brother

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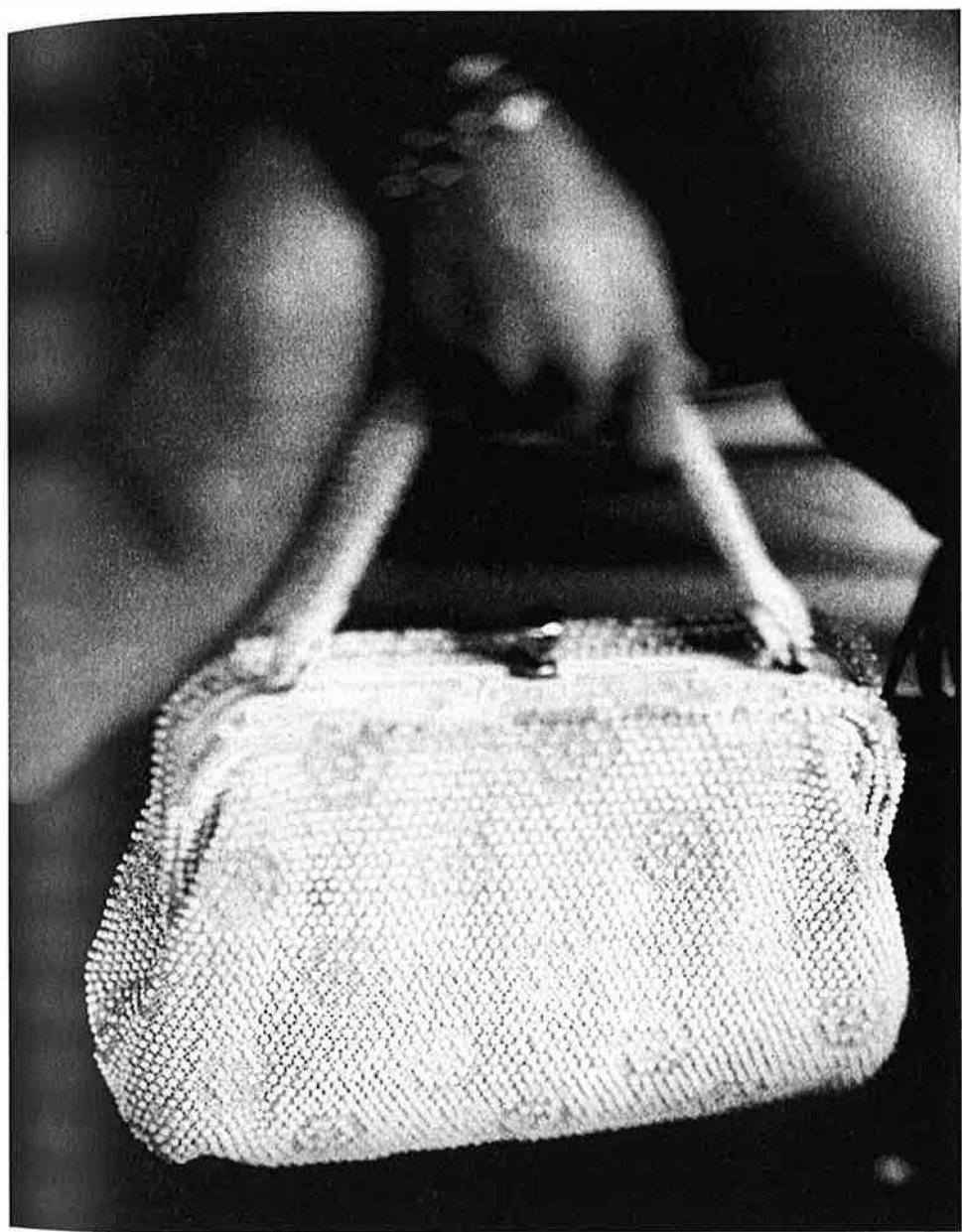
Lynn Elishaw

She lifts her pant leg like a nylon,  
like a woman.  
Shin smoothed nude  
clenching crumples  
with one ruffle for every memory today,  
stiff and rough in her hands.

Skin-scrapes evened out from youth  
where hair grew over to be shaven,  
a leg now smooth,  
a leg now feminine,

except for the clumsy sock,  
ankle-gathered and  
stolen from a drawer  
to relive naughty-little-girl days  
when he wasn't married  
and would chase after her.





Untitled II  
Brittany Bruer

# Wing Walker

---

Amber Norwood

She was born light,  
new-century perfect  
with ten fingers and equilibrium  
to grow, become woman,

and by virtue of her hand to one flying gypsy,

become the show:  
a wander from wingtip to wingtip.

Body luck is a rabbit's foot,  
a lady's slender legs,

wishbone or balance  
in good shoes and a dress  
made for dancing the Charleston  
at eight-hundred feet.

A body ripe sweet  
for the faithful and curious,  
young aviators who say yes,  
you belong up here,

(her arms outstretched, thin as composure)

and teach her  
that love is a stunt—  
reckless as walking on air.

She knows the same story differently:  
we all hold our breath sometimes  
between bow lips in a drawn smile.

# The Quieting Man

EddieJoe Ivan Cherbony

Today, the quieting man came home. In the living room, on the couch, a young boy and girl sat side-by-side. They didn't move when they saw him, or speak, and it was clear his sudden appearance had changed everything. They stared at a discarded shirt on the floor—they couldn't bring themselves to do much else—and wondered what tiny things lived under it by now. It belonged to their mother, whom they hadn't seen in a while, and she had left the shirt on the floor their last morning together.

The sight of it reminded them of that one time, five years ago, when they still lived in the house on Grape Street and the little girl left her shirt on the living room floor—just overnight. When they went to pick it up they noticed something moving underneath. In fact, it was many, many somethings, and from the way the shirt squirmed they could tell they were very small—so small, in fact, a thousand could fit into the girl's cupped hands, and she was only three then.

The boy had always been braver. He pinched the shirt at the corner of the sleeve and lifted quickly, standing back and keeping his little sister safe behind his free arm. But she still screeched when she saw that underneath, and still holding on to the shirt, was a family of roaches. Without introduction, or any real formalities, the roaches started to scatter over the carpet, and up her brother's arm, streaking in every direction at once, running blind, all their maniac legs working against each other. But the scariest part was their color: stark white, most of them, or light gray at their darkest. She knew roaches were usually black, and that black is usually scarier than white, but the white of these roaches, and the translucent shells, and the way they all looked like chips of dead sea animals, made them much scarier. She didn't know why they were white. It could have been because they were still babies, or because they were a special kind of roach that hated the sun, and the entire outside world, and found a perfect haven away from the elements under her shirt. In a way she didn't much care. Before long she and her brother were running right along side the brother and sister roaches. They were all blind, it seemed, and had maniac legs, and streaked in every direction at once. They were afraid of each other at first, but now it was something else, and after a while of scattering over the carpet it became clear that the boy and girl and roaches were all running from the same thing.

The small girl thought of all this, still staring at her mother's shirt. It didn't squirm like hers did on that day, so she figured there wasn't anything living

## The Quieting Man

underneath it, and thought, maybe, after all this time, she might be able to pick it up off the carpet. But not now. She appeared to be in a daze since the quieting man stepped foot back into the apartment. She hadn't moved, or mumbled, or twitched. She simply stared. It was constant, probably the most constant stare ever stared by a girl her age, and her eyes reddened, and long tears laid out on the edge of her bottom lids.

It didn't seem those eyes had noticed anything except the quieting man and the shirt, but they did. They saw what happened with the two daffodils. They saw when her brother moved to his table by the window and sat just there for an amazing amount of time before he pulled out his paper and pen. She remained in this state for quite a while until she thought it was finally time to do something...anything. The first thing that came to mind was blinking, of course, but the mere thought made her slightly ill. Her red eyes were on fire and she knew they would burn her lids if she blinked, and that they would melt together, and that she would never be able to open them again. But *on the other hand*, she thought, *that would be just fine*, and thought, *to sleep behind lids I know will never open would be just fine*. And so she closed her eyes, and though it took a long time for the image of the shirt to fade away, when it did she fell fast asleep sitting up on the couch.

Today, the quieting man came home. Upon hearing, two daffodils decided to climb onto their mother's sill, one of their favorite places, and jump out the window. They fell twelve stories, shedding a piece of themselves each inch of the way, so that when they hit the ground there was still much of them left floating through the air. Their mother got a good look at their faces before they jumped and saw they were still very young. This made her sad; it made her turn her back to the window, content on spending the rest of her days living in that last moment with her sons, though never actually facing it.

At his table the boy watched as they jumped and became inspired. What a sight, the two children flowers, standing one on each side of the mother, jumping out the window as if they meant to turn into birds just then. And their mother left alone on the sill, instantly missing them. What a beautiful sight. It reminded him of the last time he saw his mother, stepping toward the window first to look out at the sky, then turning toward the door without saying a word. Her face in the sun, and her hair especially, looked so new, as if they had been made just that morning. In fact, in his every memory of her she seems, somehow, to have been just born—not as a baby, but as a grown woman, a brand-new adult, an infant mother. At his table, looking out the window, he tried to think back to the time when he was her baby, but in his mind she is always younger than him. *What about that day*, he thought, *the day I was born*. But he couldn't remember that far back anymore. All he could

do was watch the mother daffodil turned away from the sky and think of his mother's face, and especially her hair, and think, *what a beautiful sight.*

He loved sitting at the table and writing, but today he couldn't begin. Beginning is the hardest thing to do when all you want to do is finish. He tried to concentrate on the tabletop and bring to mind all the other times he was able to create something special. This table had been good to him. It was the only thing he owned in the world. Though he didn't make the table with his own hands, or buy it with his own money, it was always considered his. The day his mother brought it home and positioned it by the window near the kitchen, he knew what she meant. She was his biggest fan and wished she could give him a room of his own, with a beautiful view, to do his work. But since they came to this apartment he and his sister have had to share a room, and he never complained, but she could tell he needed more.

She wanted him to be happy again and write the type of poetry he used to write. When she thought of his new poetry she vomited, just a little, each time into her cupped hands. He is gifted, she knew this, but why is he always melting his eyes together in his new poetry? Why are his arms, always, only half-foot stubs, wiggling from his shoulders, when she leans to hug him? Why are his feet buried in stone while his body thrashes to be free? Why is his chest split open, his heart a dying or dead animal, and his mouth, always, missing? She wished she could do something for him but she was too young when she married, and in many ways did not know how to behave like an adult, even for her children.

Awake now, the small girl felt rejuvenated and very positive, especially since her eyes didn't melt together after all. She felt she had spent too much time motionless on the couch, and didn't want to waste another second. With a hop she rose and walked into the bathroom to comb her hair. Her every movement suggested she was late for something. Each night at this time she would go out for a walk through the city streets, and tonight her walk was more important than usual, since she wanted to find the two daffodils.

The bathroom was across from the living room in clear view of the window and her brother. When she was about to close the door she caught sight of him sitting at the table and decided instead to keep it open.

He wasn't writing or even moving very much. He just sat there. Had he walked to the window and looked over he would have seen that starting from the sill and continuing down to an inch above the ground, a widening column of tiny daffodil pieces shifted in the air. They formed long, uncontrolled strands that streamed beautifully in every direction at once, and, for the most part, in the same manner his sister's hair streamed as she combed it out in front of the mirror. She had grown up quite a bit in this apartment,

but for the most part she was still a small thing—very young—and something about the way her hands looked moving through her hair made her even younger.

Like the column of daffodil pieces, her hair seemed alive, or the home of something living. It swayed at every moment about her neck and shoulders, even when she wasn't touching it. At one point she paused in mid-stroke to listen to a noise in the kitchen—it was the quieting man finding a place to sleep. She remained motionless for a long time, a minute at least, plenty of time for the hair to settle, and yet just before she resumed her combing, a few strands loosed themselves from the rest, lifted away from her shoulder, and wrapped themselves around her little lobe. It was evident then that either something was caught in her hair—maybe a breeze or a family of small animals—or her hair had lungs and was breathing. Either way it was amazing. More amazing than the way the hair as a whole looked much older than the girl herself. More amazing than the good chance that it was not her own hair, but her mother's, that grew out of her head.

While she combed it in the bathroom mirror she wondered if she would ever see the poor little flowers again. Her eyes kept shifting to the window, then back to the mirror. Back and forth she split her attention between the two, combing with rhythmic down-strokes, never stopping except to listen to the sounds coming from the kitchen. Soon the window began to take on the mirror's appearance, and the mirror the window's. Outside, past the mother daffodil, when the city darkened, the mirror too darkened. As the minutes passed they became more and more alike, and at some point, it was hard to tell exactly when, the window, like the mirror, started to reflect the image of the little girl combing her hair. The two images were almost identical, except, when the girl looked at the mirror she saw her image standing in the bathroom, and when she looked at the window she saw her image standing outside in the city.

She wanted to know what that was like. She was ready, she thought, to know what that was like. The longing hit her so hard it nearly crippled her heart. She needed to understand that person looking back at her, not the one standing where she stood, but the one on the outside.

Without finishing her hair she grabbed her bag, slung it over her shoulder, and walked toward the door. She thought of calling out to her brother as she normally did, but remembered the quieting man in the kitchen. Also, he was still sitting at his table, and appeared to be hard at work, though he hadn't picked up his pen.

"I'm going out for my walk," she whispered to herself, hoping her brother would look up just then. But he didn't, so she opened the door and stepped out.

After many hours it became evident that the stems and petals and stamens and roots and pollen and pistils and seeds were not descending as would be expected, but were becoming a part of the atmosphere outside the window.

The column was becoming the air, or was changing the air itself—or perhaps they both were becoming something else, one same substance—who could tell? All that was evident was that everything had become connected, so that when the column shifted, the air shifted, and the whole fiber of the world outside the apartment building shifted along with them. Then, in the midst of this shifting, it happened: from the flowers and air and silk and wind, but mainly from nothing, a small bird was suddenly formed. It darted away from the column for a second, as if shot from a cannon, and spreading its wings, swung back around toward the building and began flying in circles around the twelfth floor.

Outside the sun was setting and inside, in the kitchen, in the corner near the refrigerator, the quieting man sat down for the night. At the small table the young boy hunched over a sheet of paper. There was something unpleasant in his face, something unpleasant in the way he looked out the window, past the mother daffodil whose face too was unpleasant, like he hated her, and the things she had seen, or the way she had seen them. He turned back to the sheet of paper. At first it is blank, and then it is a poem.

#### Untitled

Today, the Quieting Man came  
home.

He likes nothing about this. At only six words it still says too much. To look at it hurts. He diverts his eyes and notices something fly by his window. His insides turn, his stomach clenches, and he knows that if he steals so much as a glance at the sheet of paper he will vomit all over his new poem.

"I'm finished. I'm..." he stops himself. He knows that because he has that one sentence he may never be able to write again. What can follow such a thing: a sentence that, without meaning to, and without trying, tells an entire life story? Both of his hands move toward the paper and come to rest on top of it. They begin to work at the same pace, with the same motion, as if they were one hand duplicated in a mirror, crushing the paper between their palms. When it is a ball he tosses it out the window, and it would have fallen the twelve stories to the ground if not for a small bird who was, just at that moment, flying by. It catches the ball of poetry with its tiny claws and continues its flight around the building.

The boy looks into the kitchen from his chair and sees the quieting man squatting beside the refrigerator. He is holding his feet as if they could, at any moment, walk off without his consent. Watching him do the simplest things is painful: like the way he breathes, only in exhales, pushing air out of his lungs with short grunts every two or three seconds. For the boy, seeing the man after all this time, and he on the verge of being a man himself, is like seeing someone completely new. His forehead seems to snarl now, and his hairline recedes with the strength of a mad bird. And his best feature, his eyes, look like slices in his face put there long after the rest of his gentler features had developed. Looking at him is like reading a history. Each section of his face tells a story. He is a man that lived a long time without

maliciousness or vice in his heart, who lived a long time in innocence, but then suddenly, naturally, growths of wickedness budded about his face, and at last his eyes grew orange with sickness beneath their slits, like two round infections, or a pair of seeing boils. The only thing that frightens the boy more than his insanity is the un-decaying goodness he sees within him. He is a kind, humble man. A hurt, needy, innocent, child of a man. And in him, behind his face, within his eyes, the boy sees himself, and is frightened.

He thinks of his sister. It was a sunny afternoon the last time she saw the quieting man. She was too small to understand, but he was two years older than her and knew what was going on, and had decided to be very bitter about the situation. He wouldn't even walk over to the van and say goodbye. But she did, and still loved her daddy, and didn't want him to go.

Her eyes twinkled and were new. This made it hard to tell, but something was dying within her. The boy remembers he found her very odd at that moment because, while that something was dead, in her eyes an innocence continued to glow—almost in retaliation. It was the innocence of someone who had been around a lot of vile things, but had not understood a single one of them.

Like the time he burst into the room and began to hit her...and hit her...and grinning all the while. And she cried that day when she saw what her daddy's hands were doing to her mother. And she cried that day when she walked by the couch (how afraid she must have been to walk by the couch) but she had to see. And there she laid with her head way back and an ice pack on her nose.

"I'm ok, baby," her mother said, but her eyes were very red and seemed to be bleeding, and her nose was navy and gray and a piece of it was missing. "Don't cry...don't cry," and the little girl tried to stop—if she could only stop—but something in the mother's eyes, something about the way she looked at her daughter, made it impossible. She was hurt in ways her daughter could never know, and hurt most by the thought that one day those innocent eyes would grow dim with understanding and begin to hate, and begin to hate in every direction, and to hate her father, and to hate her life, and to hate having to hear her mother say over and over, "don't cry, my love, don't cry."

But there was nothing she could do to keep herself from saying it, "don't cry, please, don't cry." Until finally she reached out to her little girl and, closing her eyes first, the girl fell into her mother's arms.

Today, the quieting man came home. Upon hearing, two daffodils decided to climb onto their mother's sill, one of their favorite places, and jump out the window. In the background a little bird, who had previously been told not to, was drawing upon the sky. Vandalism would have been the technical term, but every angel and bird who saw the drawing called it art. It was a picture of a man with his arms outstretched, holding a large wing in each hand, and in such a way that it was clear he meant to show them to the



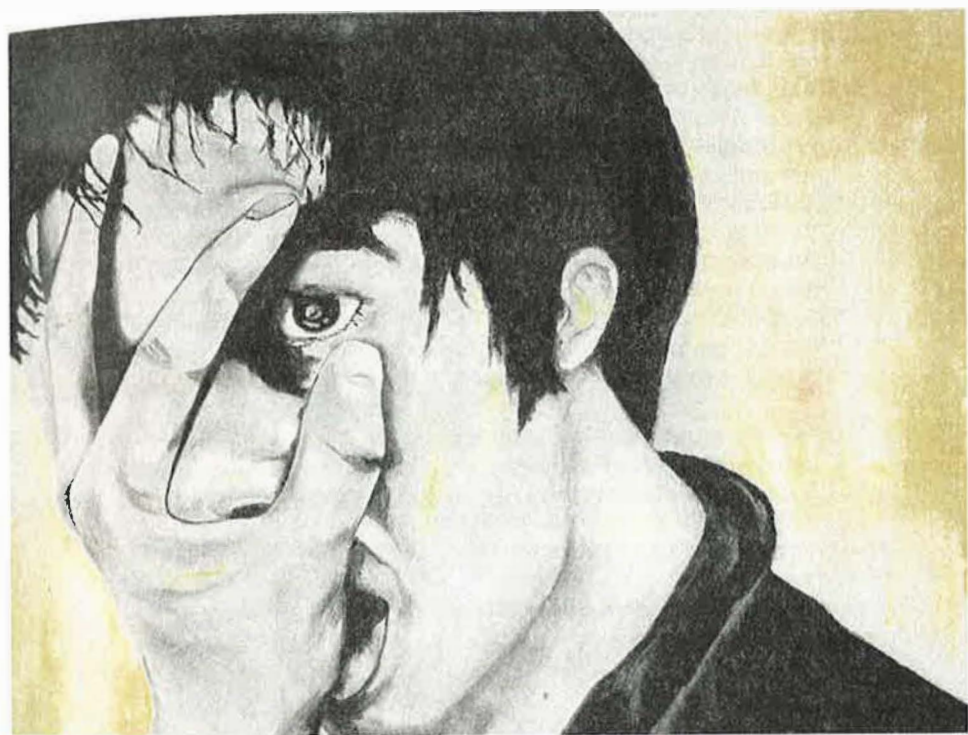
world. He stood in the sky with legs shoulder-width apart, bear-chested, and wearing a loose cloth around his hips. Everything about him—his face, his body, his feet—was mute, everything except his forehead; that could only be described as violent. A receding hairline flared from its sharp point and spread itself over his head like attacking wings. But that was not all: the shape and size of it were too much for the man. It was a forehead with all the qualities of a mighty stone. It weighed down on the rest of his quiet self, threatening to smash him completely.

The bird used blues and grays for it, reds for his hair, greens for his limbs, and yellows just about everywhere else. It even invented two new colors with which it painted the man's eyes and lips. Yet the motley mixture of colors matched perfectly, and were more hues than colors, and not very striking. No one noticed the bird's attention to detail in its drawing of the man. No one noticed the way his chin was just low enough to account for the slight part of his lips, or how the muscles in his arms were not flexed due to the lightness of the wings. Instead they noticed, and not in any grotesque sense, that the wings still had the appearance of being freshly ripped off his back. They noticed that if he were a real man he would be crying: that there would no doubt be a frown on his face and tears dropping from his eyes. But he was not a real man, and he was quiet in the sky—in such a way that only a work of art could be quiet—not as something that had been quieted, but as something that never had, nor ever would, utter a single sound.

The boy worked at his table and didn't notice what was happening in the sky. Having contemplated painting, and sculpting, and music, and needlework, and all the rest, he picked up his pen and began to write. He promised himself he would never write again, but he couldn't help it. Not that he was inspired from within, but rather something else was working upon him at that moment. Something that didn't care about his promise. Something that had its own mind and was going to use him with or without his permission. And so he wrote, with quite an awkward look upon his face the whole time, like a bud flowing into a world it has decided not to like. But still he wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and words filled the empty pages faster than they ever had before. They filled the pages, one after the other, and it was hard for him to actually read what the words said because as he wrote each word connected with the next, and each sentence connected with the other sentences, until it was not words on the page at all but images. Images of petals and roots and pistils and anthers and pollen and stamens. Images of brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and seeds, so many seeds, scattering over the page. He wrote and his face began to loosen and cry, and his tears watered the pages and soon baby daffodils began to grow out of them. He wanted to never stop crying, and never stop writing, and for the words to never stop connecting with the other words, and for the images to never stop turning into flowers. Soon the whole table was filled with daffodils. They overflowed from the page, burying his hands so that he could no longer see what they were

doing. Soon the whole floor was covered, and the boy continued to write and cry and flowers continued to form, and soon the flowers were at his waist, then his neck, and then he was completely buried. And when there was nothing left of him, only the flowers that had been his images, that had been his words, and when the entire apartment was filled with the flowers, a voice could be heard coming from the sky. It was the drawn angel and he was calling out to the daffodils. Hearing his voice they began to jump from the window in pairs, but instead of falling the twelve stories each of them, at the exact moment they jumped, turned into tiny birds. All the flowers continued to jump from the window, turning into birds, until the room was empty once again and the sky was filled.

Putting down his pen the boy stepped to the window. When he saw what he had done he placed his hands on the sill, one on each side of the mother daffodil, to keep himself from falling. He stood there a long time, forgetting all about the quieting man, just he and the mother daffodil, staring at the sky.



Did he figure it out  
Gohar Gegeyan

# Existential Adultery

---

Jeremy Quintero

At breakfast words barely  
leave your lips how  
you never seem bothered  
Play pretend watch the folds  
in the napkins attempt  
to swallow you.

Your hilarious take on  
the death of romance— a word  
I despise. No connection  
available. A New Year's  
commitment will soon  
fail me. I cannot  
fathom another year of dead  
wages and you'll say it  
twice before I finally  
learn it.  
Laugh track—  
where are you when we need you?

We wore our Jackie O's every—  
where we went. Now you  
look like a photocopy  
of yourself Xeroxed so many times  
ink is now smudged and  
run out  
Your body begins and ends  
like a sentence  
fragment

Sound has a way of winning  
your emotions like Darwinism  
for mental senses  
Forced to use  
words to desecrate  
actions. At breakfast  
your undying hymn of praise

# Olive Writes to Popeye

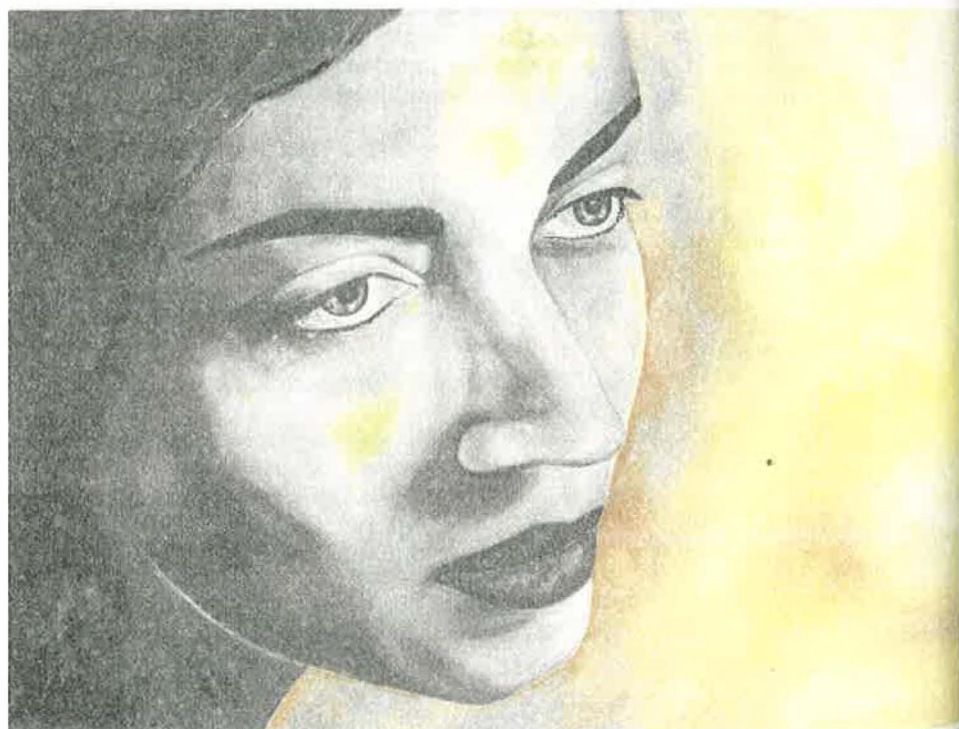
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Summer DeWitt

Dearest Popeye:

You let lumps of vile sewage  
ooze down your throat: liquid courage.  
I refuse the bitter cud for fear  
of involuntary regurgitation. God forbid  
a leaf, molten yet grainy against my tongue,  
slides its way between my two front teeth  
remaining there longer than I can hold my breath.  
Desecration to my palate, cooked Spinach  
is exiled from my house,  
along with you and your false Odes praising  
sinister vegetable compost.  
I implore you,  
pierce the green eye between us.

Olive



Supreme Happiness  
Bohar Gegeyan

# La Danse a la Maginot

Robert Michael Kane

## CHARACTERS

She - early 20's

He - late 50's

## TIME

5 minutes ago if this were Tuesday next week

## PLACE

No Wo-MAN's Land or a ballroom if it were outdoors without a floor or a ball but with an ugly fence and a good possibility of a few landmines instead

*Stage bare except for a fence: two posts strung with two lines of barbwire. The posts are about three feet high and seven feet apart; the fence is set at a diagonal, a few feet right of center*

*Very peaceful. Suddenly, offstage, scream from a man. Long pause. Bubbly laugh from a woman. Pause. Suddenly, a young woman darts on stage, running full out. Quick as a bunny, without breaking her stride, she slides under the wire to the other side of the fence, pops back onto her feet, and bounces up and down in triumph several times. Beat. Middle-aged man jogs on in pursuit, panting hard as if he's about to have a stroke. Just short of the fence, he allows himself to slowly collapse onto the ground and lies there waiting for his great gasps to subside*

**SHE:** [*Laughing. To the audience*] I was walking in the mall and this lady, she was fat, she looks at me. Gives me the 'slow eye' up and down, she says, under her breath, "Use what you got." And I turn around, and I laugh right in her face. I say, "You got too much."

**HE:** [*To the ground*] It was tied up. Five hundred and six to twenty-three, I think it was. Jarrou was out on a foul. They went into overtime. Hanson bungled the free throw. I don't know where Verrell's head was. Parson was in for a lay up, flattened out in the frame and laid down on the rebound. [*To the audience*] I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it.

**SHE:** So in the store they had these earrings with these hangy things like my girlfriend likes and the girl said to get her what she likes but a little different, so [*Takes out earrings from her pocket and puts them on*] these are nice, huh?

**HE:** Last night, the Badgers were in town. In the second inning, third from the right, a little dribbler off San Pernosa nearly cost us six runs. His ERA has gone up while his MRO has leveled out. Luckily, Gerrelli finally woke up out there in center. You know, I don't think the Pincers have won a home game since June...or July...or last year sometime in August. Top of the sixth, Benito hiccoughs and, rounding third, Johnson plays hot potato. Tio throws the ball away, and we're up one zip.

**SHE:** You know what would be fun? "Buns of Titanium." That is the activity. If it's an intimate group, that would be more fun than "Pin the Tail," but, if we invite Myra, I don't think they enjoy doing that. They don't enjoy watching videos, I don't think—in a month or so, I should have a job.—We could order pizza. I'll make pumkin pie. The 31st is on a Monday. Is that more appropriate? And then they could come in costume if they wanted to.

**HE:** The doctor says I have to watch my prostate. Been eating too much guar gum, he says. So he says, "Watch it," and I said, "What's there to see?" Besides I like guar gum. It makes me feel younger.

**SHE:** The lecture was on Cixous and the feministic approach to Pandora's Box. It was about how women let all the good things out of their vaginas that men label bad just to make women feel bad so that the men would feel good, but which men really are greedy to grab up and use to their advantage. I think she said that hope represented the penis. Or that's what men say it is. That's right. After its withdrawn from the vagina, hope's all shriveled up. But in reality hope is the most dangerous thing in the box. It's good to let it out. Like bad gas. When it's gone, it leaves a hole. You can breathe again.

*HE flops over on his back*

**HE:** It's only because of the kids. Marge has really let herself go. I'm still a young man. I have my future to consider. Next week I plan to go to the gym. I got a great deal on this membership about six months ago. I'm eager to try it. My youngest is thirty-six and the oldest is forty-two. They'll be ready to fly the coop any day now. I



don't think Marge is ready for that. Then we'll be stuck with each other, just the two of us.

*SHE leaps and twirls back and forth over the fence several times as if it were a tennis net. HE props up his head and studies her*

**SHE:** [*Sings*]

I love you forever,  
You are all of me,  
So while we're together  
Why am I in misery?  
You said you would love me  
Till next year at noon,  
But now you are leaving  
You're leaving twelve months too soon.  
You've broken the contract,  
Oh darling don't go,  
I've lost one of my contacts  
On the bathroom tile floor.  
You've broken the contract,  
I think I will die,  
Inside I'm gonna snap,  
Just leave me, just try.  
You've broken the contract  
You've broken the contract  
Ooh  
You've broken the contract.

**HE:** [*At her rather than to her*] I've got a brand new Cherokee pickup with 4-wheel drive, a super 8 with mag wheels, CD player, and a Naugahyde real imitation leather interior. Sweet.

*Humming "Broken the Contract," SHE pulls out lipstick from her fanny pack, and, using the audience as a mirror, spreads it on thick*

**HE:** I got a wall-to-wall entertainment center, with a ninety-six inch screen, quad speakers, DVD, IPOD, internet hookup with a Pentium 15 processor and joystick, lava lamp, and mirrored ceiling over the pool table. When the kids leave, I'll knock out a wall and expand the bar.

*SHE continues to apply make-up until she looks something like Bozo the Clown, but without the bright-colored wig. HE sits up, really taking notice*

**HE:** I got a quarter acre of land up in the Adirondacks that I hope to pave over with asphalt next summer. Once a power line is run up there, I can park my Winnebago. Be my little getaway. My little love shack in the Adirondack. Whoa! They plan to vote on the measure in the next month or two. Nothing like getting back to nature, eh?

*SHE takes out an orange wig and puts it on*

**HE:** [*Addressing her directly*] I also got a really big dick.

*SHE suddenly looks bored and lies on the ground listlessly*

**HE:** [*Beginning to panic, he gets up on his knees. Pleading*] I also got a high paying job in Silicon Valley counting silicon beans. I'm thinking about going back to medical school and become a gynecologist. What? I'm not too old. It's gonna happen. I can do that. I have three bank accounts and the one that has money in it has a lot. I got stock in Burro Imports and a five hundred thousand million dollar insurance policy. Plus, I wear a tie to work. Everyday.

*SHE becomes increasingly rejuvenated during his speech. The tie statement really captures her attention. SHE rolls over to the fence and daintily runs her fingers along the barbwire*

**HE:** [*Relaxing a little, attempting to be charming*] Do you come here often?

**SHE:** [*Pulling away, playing with her orange wig*] Some. Depends.

**HE:** [*Walking up to the fence on his knees*] Do you want a drink?

**SHE:** I'd rather have dinner.

**HE:** Okay.

**SHE:** Then a drink after...Maybe.

*SHE and HE slowly stand up*

**HE:** What do you say to the Bloody Carcass Steakhouse? I got twofers.

**SHE:** Pass.

**HE:** That's good. I don't eat meat. Too many carbs. How about the Batterfry Drive-In?

*SHE starts to take off her wig*

**HE:** I know! There's a great place down on Rodeo Drive, Panchito's Sushi Palace.

*SHE smiles, puts her wig back on*

**SHE:** Do they have cheese?

**HE:** I'm sure they do. It's Japanese and Mexican, so they import everything.

**SHE:** I love cheese.

*SHE dreamily drifts around the fence up left*

**HE:** [*Drifting down right of the fence following her*] You know what's good? They serve these mega shrimp in Worcestershire sauce. You're gonna love it.

**SHE:** Hmm. I wonder.

**HE:** You have beautiful eyes, do you know that? What color are they? Blue? Turquoise? Violet? I love turquoise.

**SHE:** Brown.

**HE:** They're really nice. Kind of brown and brown-like.

**SHE:** I don't like my eyes.

**HE:** Why not?

**SHE:** I wish they were green. Like the foam of the sea.

**HE:** No. Really? Brown's my favorite color. They're beautiful.

**SHE:** I'm going to have an iris transplant. I made an appointment for next week.

**HE:** No. Why? You don't want to do that.

**SHE:** Sea foam. When men look into my eyes, they'll feel like going sailing.

**HE:** But I like you just the way you are. What's wrong with brown?

*SHE stops. HE stops. They're both back on their respective sides of the fence*

**SHE:** You don't have cheese do you? I could really do with a piece of cheese.

**HE:** Brown's the color of...many things. Many things that are nice are the color of brown.

**SHE:** Maybe a nice Gouda. Or Provolone. Ooh! You know what would be nice?

**HE:** I have socks that are brown. Six pairs.

**SHE:** Would you like to be intimate with me?

**HE:** What?!

**SHE:** I'm thinking that if I wear the green blouse with the scalloped collar on Tuesday with my fawn colored skirt, that would make for a great look.

**HE:** No, that other thing. Let's go back to that. The other thing.

**SHE:** Shoes.

**HE:** No, what was it that you said? I'm sure you mentioned something about something else.

**SHE:** But what shoes would I wear? I have no shoes to wear!

**HE:** But you have shoes, you're wearing a pair right now.

**SHE:** They don't go with the look.

**HE:** I'm sure you have others. Can we get back to what you were saying about—

**SHE:** —They're old, and they're out of style. And, they don't go!

**HE:** You're being stupid.

*SHE gives him a hard look*

**HE:** About the shoes...I mean.

**SHE:** What!?

**HE:** I mean, not stupid as in dumb; I meant silly, not stupid. I really didn't mean stupid at all.

**SHE:** I have to go.

**HE:** No, please.

**SHE:** My Economics class meets in half hour.

**HE:** You're smart. Really smart.

**SHE:** And traffic's a B. I. T. C. H.

**HE:** I'm the dumb ass. I mean I'm really stupid. You want to talk about stupid? Man—[*Makes a goofy face*] ding!

**SHE:** Bye.

**HE:** Miss Jones!

**SHE:** My name's Oligarullo.

**HE:** Miss Oligarullo.

**SHE:** Ms.

**HE:** Ms. Take a letter.

*SHE hesitates*

**HE:** [*Insistent*] Take a letter.

**SHE:** Yes, Mr. Johnson.

*SHE takes a small notepad and pencil from her fanny pack*

**HE:** Uh...Mr. Theodolopalonius?

**SHE:** Yes, Mr. Theodolopalonius.

**HE:** Dear Margaret...

**SHE:** Dear...Mar...ga...ret.

**HE:** You can keep the furs and the lingerie. I can always buy more for myself.

**SHE:** Lin...ger...ie...

**HE:** Sell the house and the ten-speed if you want, but the Winnebago and the Jag are mine.

**SHE:** Win...ne...ba...go....

**HE:** I get the kids...

*SHE stops writing*

**HE:** YOU get the kids, but don't expect a dime out of me, you old, fat, ugly, bloodsucking leech!

*HE starts to climb through the two strands of barbwire*

**SHE:** [*Writing with satisfaction*] Blood...suck...ing leech.

**HE:** I love you still, but it's over. I gave you the best years of my life, and I want them back. P.S....

*HE gets stuck on the wire halfway through*

**SHE:** B...S...

**HE:** Don't cry. There isn't another woman. —Bertha is just—

**SHE:** —Leilani—

**HE:** —Leilani...that's nice!...Leilani—that's very nice—is just a friend. I'm just tired of your mewling, puking, whiny ways. So don't feel bad. Sick your lawyer on me and I'll give it to you good. Greg.

**SHE:** Greg?

*HE finally tugs free of the wire: Sound of a rip.*

*HE stands upright, covering the seat of his trousers with his downstage hand*

**HE:** What? Something wrong with Greg?

**SHE:** I've never gone out with a Greg before.

**HE:** Well...that's not a problem is it?

**SHE:** I don't know.

**HE:** Hey! New experience.

**SHE:** Whenever I think about going out with men, it's never with a Greg.

**HE:** I didn't choose it. My parents are to blame.

**SHE:** But there must have been something about you that said "Greg" to them when you were lying there in the hospital bassinet.

**HE:** I can change your perception of Gregs. Just give me a chance.

**SHE:** I don't know. I've never felt like having a Greg in my life before. I'm not sure it fits.

**HE:** My middle name is Horatio.

**SHE:** I'm sorry. I don't know if I can do this.

**HE:** What if I say I love you? I could mean it. I know I could...if...you give me time. [*Pause*] And I've already written THE letter. [*Takes her notepad and holds it up to her as he takes her tenderly in his arms*] That says something doesn't it?

*SHE kisses him. Takes the notepad back*

**SHE:** I'll mail it for you on my way out.

*SHE eases herself out of his arms, eases through the two strands of barbwire, and casually exits*

**END.**

# Hansel & Gretel's Breadcrumbs

---

Olga Vaynkof

You can only hope they'll be there  
if you decide to return.  
And you might—to trample  
green plastic watering cans,  
Wish it could be flowers blooming  
into Not a chances, demons waking  
in the pastel linoleum.  
If you didn't plant them, who did?

Back to crumb 69,  
when 69 meant nothing  
but the time in space  
you could have been  
however many years  
and personalities it took  
to hold a decent conversation  
in public and without fear.

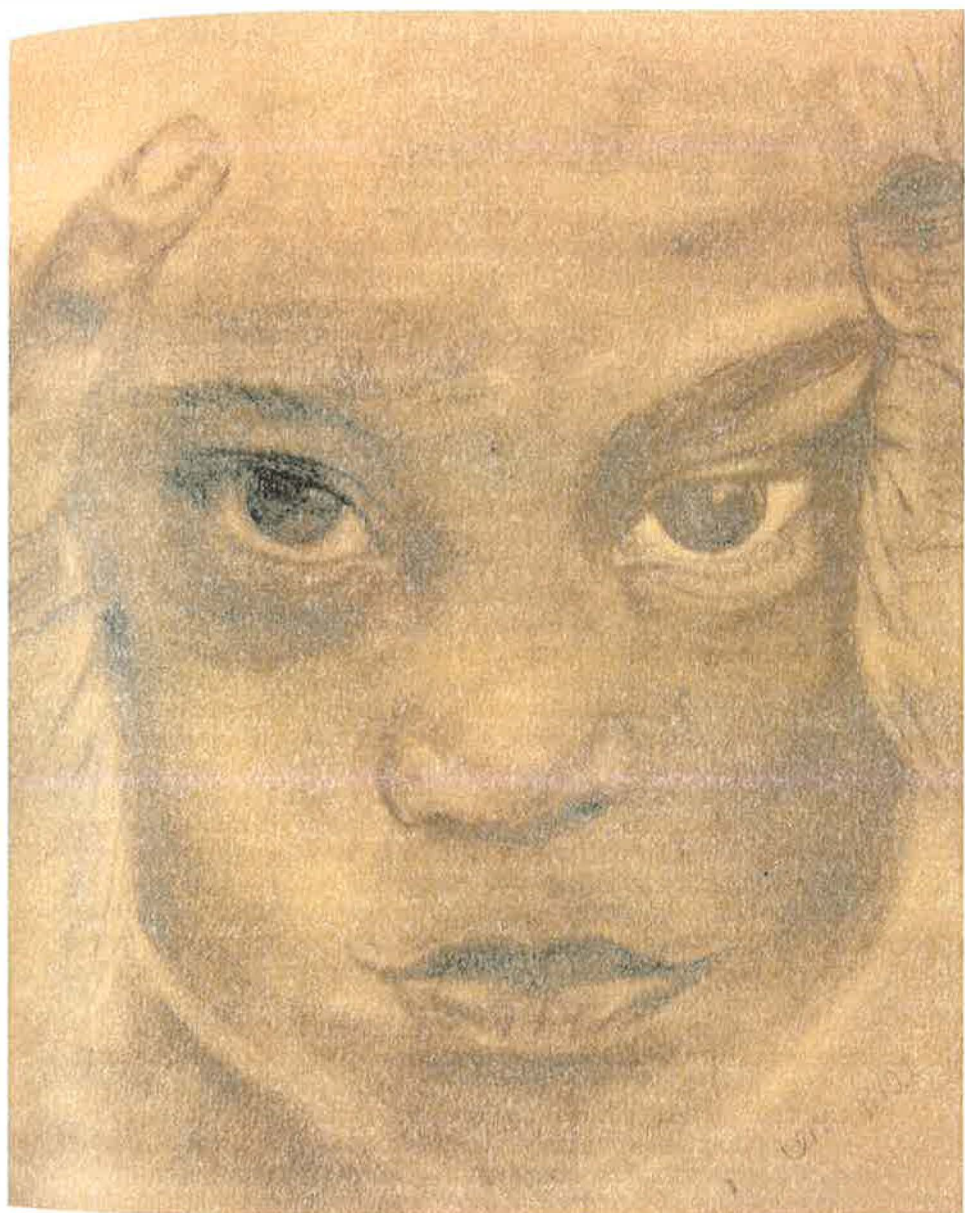
Back at crumb 12, if you fell apart,  
you could have pulled yourself together:  
putting your eyes where your ears are,  
you'd never have to look both ways  
when you crossed again.  
Who had time to look

till now—now that the hinge is rusted  
and crow's feet ate all unattended sweets?  
Those who didn't think to protect them,  
sit, alone, at crumb 12,995  
with only 5 crumbs to go,  
at the Aesthetic Eye Ear Institute  
because they married money over love  
and now want to watch reruns  
while doing what was deemed preposterous  
back at crumb 9—

then, emerge,  
thin and yelling:

"THIEVES!  
MY CRUMBS! MY CRUMBS!"





Le Garçon Noir  
Emilie May McEwan



# Archeology on the Green

Natalia Jaster

He loved to get his hands dirty. The flowers puckered beneath his fingers, plants and shrubs swayed toward him as if they could pick up his scent.

The sun blazed like a golden apple while cirrus clouds arched into the spine of the sky and curled in wispy streaks. It was as if God had taken a pen and used his talent in calligraphy to indicate the forty thousand foot mark above his head. It was a delicate afternoon, too delicate to sustain his disappointment, too delicate to block out the memory of the letter, which had arrived yesterday.

It had begun as a part-time job four years ago, when he was a freshman at UC Irvine and entering into the biology program. The job description in the student career center had said some minor knowledge about plants and flowers was helpful, but that the responsibilities were straightforward: planting, watering, trimming, pulling weeds, mowing. The hours coincided with his classes and the pay was decent. The house was five miles from the dorms. He'd copied the phone number onto his wrist with a sharpie pen and made the call.

The Bijous were a nice family: a wife, a husband, and two girls.

He liked them very much.

After the interview, they'd invited him to stay for dinner (salmon with dill and steamed squash). Mr. and Mrs. Bijou had been polite and jovial and ate slowly. The younger daughter, a toddler, had stared at him as if he were a giraffe. The older sister (junior high, he guessed) ignored everyone and poked at her food.

Presently kneeling in the backyard, he arranged the yellow fiddlenecks and fire poppies in a circular pattern that reminded him of a mosaic he'd seen at an art museum. Dirt outlined his fingernails as he sprinkled soil over the roots and then used pressure to keep the stems in place. Mrs. Bijou preferred wildflowers and perennials. Annuals, she'd once said, were too monotonous.

Monotonous—that's how he felt today. For the first time in four years, he wanted to up and leave, to quit. He was graduating with a bachelor's of science in two months and he was miserable. The letter from Northwestern, the "we have reviewed and considered," the "unfortunately," the "best wishes in your success," and the "sincerely, so and so," trudged through his mind like the end credits to a bad movie. The master's program in biology, the emphasis on botany, the future had sunk into the soil beneath his fingers, and all he could see was more of the same. More of the same wildflowers and perennials.

He shifted a California poppy and noticed something blue twitching within the floral patch. He plucked it from the dirt, identified it, and grimaced.

"Getting hot out here, isn't it?" Mrs. Bijou's voice drifted from above.

Lifting his head and squinting beneath the sun, he glanced at the woman's friendly face, the same friendly face, the four-years-and-counting friendly face. He held out the blue linen ribbon. "I think this belongs to Truce. I found it in the dirt."

Mrs. Bijou winced and took the ribbon.

She didn't say thank you, which surprised him.

Dumping Truce's ribbon on the kitchen countertop, Mrs. Bijou checked the casserole baking in the oven then rubbed her shoulders and glanced up at the ceiling, ears lifting to the sound of her husband's footsteps creaking across the second floor like a squeaky pump. It was Saturday. He would be finished soon and he would come downstairs for lunch. Then the day would begin.

She checked the timer, pressed her lips together—twenty more minutes—and wrenched open the utensil drawer and pulled out a chopping knife. Snatching a cutting board, she sliced carrots into meticulous orange buttons, enough to litter the Formica countertop. When she was finished, she checked the timer again. Her eyes flashed against the numbers. She went in pursuit of the potatoes.

"Mommy, Oscar the Grouch ate my crayons." Her pudgy six year-old sprinted into the kitchen. "He ate my crayons, mommy!"

"I'm sure he'll puke them up for you if you ask, honey," mommy said.

Ready to demand that mommy go after the Grouch and punish him for scarfing up her coloring stuff, the little girl opened her mouth, but then she shut it abruptly when she noticed the way mommy was skinning the potatoes. The way they shook beneath the peeler, the way the veins in her wrists popped to life. The poor things were locked in her fists, and it looked as though she was squeezing them to death. Her face was all wrinkly and pouty. Her lips quivered. She looked like she was about to cry.

The little girl pulled her gaze away and surveyed the carrots on the countertop, then located the blue ribbon resting near them. If Oscar gave her some new crayons, she would be able to draw mommy a picture and make her feel better. Eyes gleaming, the little girl swiped her older sister's ribbon, ran down the hall, dashed up the stairs, and flew into her bedroom.

"Oscar," she shouted into the empty space. "I have a trade. Show yourself, you green-gizzard." She waited for the Grouch to appear, for steam to rise from the carpet like it had before, but he did not come. Mayhem flooded her voice: "You owe me new crayons and I want them now!"

"Now see here, Whitney." Her father strode into the room. "Enough of that—"

"But daddy, I have to trade Truce's hair thing or else I won't get my crayons."

Daddy frowned. "How many times have we told you not to touch your sister's stuff?" He grabbed the ribbon and shut her door.

Mr. Bijou walked into the study, tossed his eldest daughter's ribbon onto

his desk, thrust himself into the leather chair, and stared at his laptop. His report for Monday's meeting sucked; the marketing outline was weak and the promotional slogans he'd sweated over were uncreative and bland. They would never promote him at this rate.

He cocked his head, listening to Whitney carp to herself in her room, his wife chopping lord knew how many vegetables in the kitchen downstairs. He pressed a fist to his mouth and eyed his cell phone. Did he have time to make a phone call? His wife got upset when he wasn't punctual for lunch, though she never bothered scowling at the kids when they were late to the table.

He glanced at his watch, dialed, and then lowered his voice intimately. "Sweetheart, it's me. Are you busy—"

"Dad."

Mr. Bijou jumped and caught his eldest daughter standing in the doorway, with a backpack slumped over her shoulder. He pressed the phone against his chest to block out the hum of his mistress's voice. "Spying?" he joked nervously.

Truce Bijou watched her pathetic father curled up in his chair. He was too transparent to spy on.

"Two minutes till lunch—mom's message."

Her father nodded. He plucked a strip of blue from his desk and handed it out to her. "You really should keep an eye on your stuff. You know how Whitney takes everything she sees."

Truce scowled at the ribbon. It was her lucky charm. It had helped her ace all her classes last year, she wore it when she snagged her first kiss, and it had been nestled in her pocket the day she auditioned for "She Stoops to Conquer." How did Whitney get a hold of it? The little minx wasn't supposed to find it.

Truce grabbed the ribbon and tramped out into the hallway, leaving her father to his fancy. She paused outside her room and tossed her backpack onto her bed; the weight of three library books caused the mattress to jiggle. She tied the ribbon around her wrist, delicately, patiently, and then headed downstairs where she escaped to the backyard.

He would be there, and she would try again.

# Scab Theatre

---

Eric Jones

He named his sutures  
three at time  
Larry, Moe,  
Curly the escapist  
squirming from the dead  
skin of his elbow  
like a gopher from  
a buried backdoor.

He lusted for Daisy  
bruised cousin  
to the Duke brothers  
who revealed just enough  
tissue to insight fists  
between Simon, Alvin. Theodore  
the pundit penned self-  
mastery, mailed his theories

across wounded plains  
to Mr. T, critic in gold  
chains enough to sink  
MacGyver's cup-winning  
schooner: hand crafted  
from toothpicks, dog hair  
and a paperclip.

This ornamentation, faded  
and trying, makes the life  
he sucks through a straw  
more like lemonade everyday,  
thins the milkshake for  
which he once worked  
so hard to taste.

# America Dreaming

S. Damiani

He stands in the kitchen, with a spoonful of ice cream. His warm laughter flows over us. She stands at the sink washing dishes...complaining. A clot of ice cream flies across the room and down the back of her neck. Everyone laughs until their stomachs ache. Outside the persimmons ripen. The crows squabble in the branches. The squirrels hold their ground, fruit in hand. In the fading evening light their shadows tussle amidst a hundred orange suns.

She pulls the brochure from the desk drawer. It is the sixth one that month. It promises happily ever after. She smiles between her worry lines. They started saving when we were babies. We sit at dad's desk, the one he bought when he started college. When we were kids, Danny carved "I hate Jeannie" in the side with his first Swiss Army knife. I stuck a wad of gum over it. Inside I hid a diary behind dad's bag of licorice. Neat rows of papers nest in the desk drawers—marriage certificates, birth certificates, retirement account ledgers, vacation brochures, pictures of their dream home on a California beach, hand prints on craft paper with crayon squiggle signatures.

Once upon a time there were terrorists. Now there is a war in Iraq. No one in our neighborhood wants war. We live in a blue state. Perhaps we are wrong. The war is long and then longer. Where are the wounded? Who are the dead? They promise tomorrow; it will be over tomorrow. Tax rebates come in the mail. We are as numb as the dead. Then they need more. They need soldiers. They give us \$200 for our sons and daughters, \$200 for our husbands and brothers. And, then, they need more. They call the house. They send a letter. It promises happily ever after. His motorcycle is in the garage when it arrives. He is sitting on it, playing with the key, torturing the throttle.

His Phantom 1500 stands in the garage like carved ice. It looks fast and muscular and impatient. The shelves are filled with Harley repair manuals. His hands are greasy. On the wall is a poster of a woman with long blond hair and bare breasts sitting on a motorcycle. Ella and I look like scarecrows when we ride on the back. He tells us a dream. Mom doesn't know. It is so hard to hear. The motorcycle screams in our hearts. We practice swearing. He swats us with his gloved hand. We can't see his face behind

the helmet. Is he laughing? The tattoo on his neck is strained. He asks, "what will we do without him?" We don't know.

There's ice on the ground. We slip on the front step. Mom is happy and tired. Dad is carving the turkey. He shows up in uniform. Ella drops the phone. The tea kettle screams. Mom is bending over the sink. I'm reading a book in the dark. She throws the damp dish towel in his face. He promises everything; to save his money, to return to college, to open up that Harley shop, to come home. The turkey is overcooked, the gravy is salty. We are silly at the table and the silences between are long. Dad walks outside. We hear the dog yelp and a voice that sounds like it is drowning.

#### Day Dream

The phone rings, the voice on the other end is laughing. He won't be home right away. He's riding his motorcycle around Europe first...they're big on bikes in Germany. Their women are beautiful. He might marry one, open up a chop shop, raise five kids and learn the local lingo. He'll bring her home pregnant. Mom will like that. She who has waited longer than all of us. I don't wait for the 'goodbye.' Here is ice cream sliding down the back of my neck and laughter that doesn't end. He is home, he is home alive, and his wife is pregnant. He has five children, mom is laughing. Dad is whistling *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. He is alive.

#### Dream

Danny, his face whole again, each half matching the other, takes a gun and turns to the talking heads of the leaders and without further ado, pulls the trigger. The stunned crowd takes in one painful breath and then applauds.

#### The Nightmare

We line up against the chain link fence. Ella sits, tired of waiting; the asphalt smears dirt on her red, white and blue cotton skirt. The soldiers arrive. Mother's knees buckle, dad holds her up. He stares hard into the metal net that traps us; avoiding the lineup of coffins. The planes scream for us. The boxes stand on the tarmac forever. We lean, smashed up against the fence. So many join us. The jet winds blow hot, the winter air is cold. The soldiers arrive. Six soldiers for each dead one. The coffins on the tarmac are identical. He is waiting for us inside. The time wears on and on. Protesters chant and bully. The press arrives. The president arrives, smiling and waving. The jets scream for us.



# Parade Routes

---

Nancy Carroll

“War is hell!”

A man sitting in a green folding chair wearing a blue denim shirt with little American flags sewn on the sleeves shouted at the marching band as it passed.

“War is hell,” he shouted again as the Arabian horses with their royally clothed riders trotted by.

“War is hell,” he shrieked as a small troop of Girl Scouts holding a bright blue banner marched on.

So the entire morning went. He shouted, and the parade kept a steady pace forward. When the last float had driven past, he slowly stood up, picked up his folding chair and then turning to the entire crowd, he screamed, “War is hell!”

Everyone still remaining in the stands cried in unison, “Go to hell!” Picking up a wooden yardstick that was lying on the ground, he shoved it into the soft grassy soil.

“I did,” he muttered, “I did.”

# Old Man

---

Eric Dinsmore

Before his stroke,  
he sang to everyone.  
Now he eats cheese  
and curses at spoons.

old

man

# Color Canopy

---

Mary Angelino

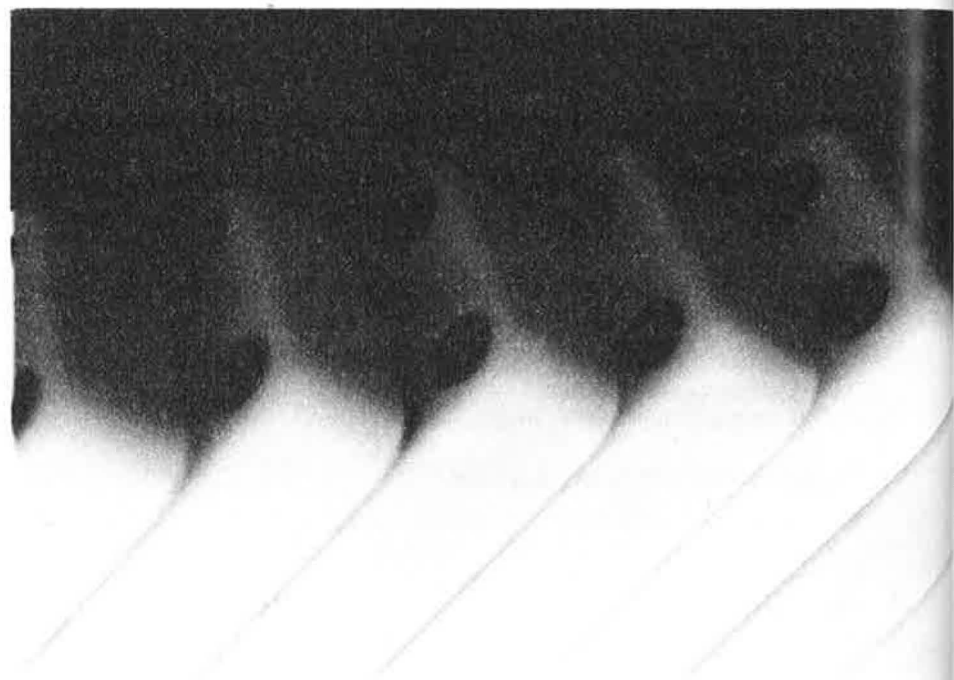
You use the words *self*  
and *manifest* together  
as if to send them into mindflight—  
A pair of colored balloons,

crowding around the bulbous  
grainy backdrop of the moon.  
We talk *regret*, angular  
as kites. When I imagine

*shame*, it's a deep forest  
green trailed by the crooked  
smile of orange string,  
whipping past treetops  
in sweeping ascension.

But enough about *ruptured*  
*love*, you say, certain  
of circular helium nature,  
pushing above all else,  
willing atmosphere to swell,

adjust beyond its given space.



The Rockettes  
Nancy Carroll

# Memory Stepping

---

Adam Steele

Like hair that falls into the face, you  
are impossible to ignore—my  
tangled inconvenience just over  
head, nine steps to the bed instead of  
seven, weak as I am to walk it  
alone. The room is larger, hollow  
as a slaughtered cow, racked and hanging.  
Or is that me? It's the raw pink that  
distracts. The unfamiliar smell (sharp)

I have grown used to. Mosquito bites  
beneath my feet make for uneasy  
pacing. The lonely worm-wood floorboards;  
infested. Memories, like maggots,  
eat away at the rotting carcass;  
grow more vivid with every step toward  
the door. A clown-like mouth mocking me  
walking the steps from it to the bed;  
you looked so graceful on your way out.

# Paper Cuts

---

Anna Mesick

The summer we were twelve, sitting side by side,  
two heads bowed down with secrets.

*Remember the paper dolls we used to make?*

Surrounded by scraps of paper, markers, colored pencils,  
scissors cutting little doll shapes, miniature clothes.

My doll, fair and tall, a diminutive version of me,  
yours a short dark shadow, clothed in colors mute.

Now, we sit side by side in a sterile visiting area

My head bows down with memories  
Your head heavy with something unknown

We ignore your left arm laced up like a shoe with  
angry red scars, hieroglyphics of long hidden pain.

*When did you know you were made of paper?*  
It folds, so easily tears, so easily burns.

A nurse watches us remember under unforgiving  
fluorescent lights. Shadows play across uneven surfaces.

I see a paper doll, crumpled. Your edges shred  
my offered hands, a hundred painful paper cuts.

## Natalia Jaster

My name is Aspeth

All I can think of is the worst gash I'd ever had. It had been my knee: five years old, running after a friend who lived in the neighborhood, and whose face has melted into the years. I can't recall what game we'd been playing that required chasing my friend. I do remember that I was fast, healthy, buoyant, immortal, and running full throttle into a collection of trash cans. I must have crashed into them hard because they rolled into the middle of the street; I went careening forward, the air holding the sounds of jump rope, the ice cream truck pulling into the street, ding-a-ling-ding, "Mommy, I want...."

Presently, I hold that moment like a snapshot tucked into the crook of a Polaroid camera. I think of how my t-shirt had fluttered, of how it rode a cushion of air, of how I didn't worry. I know now why I didn't worry.

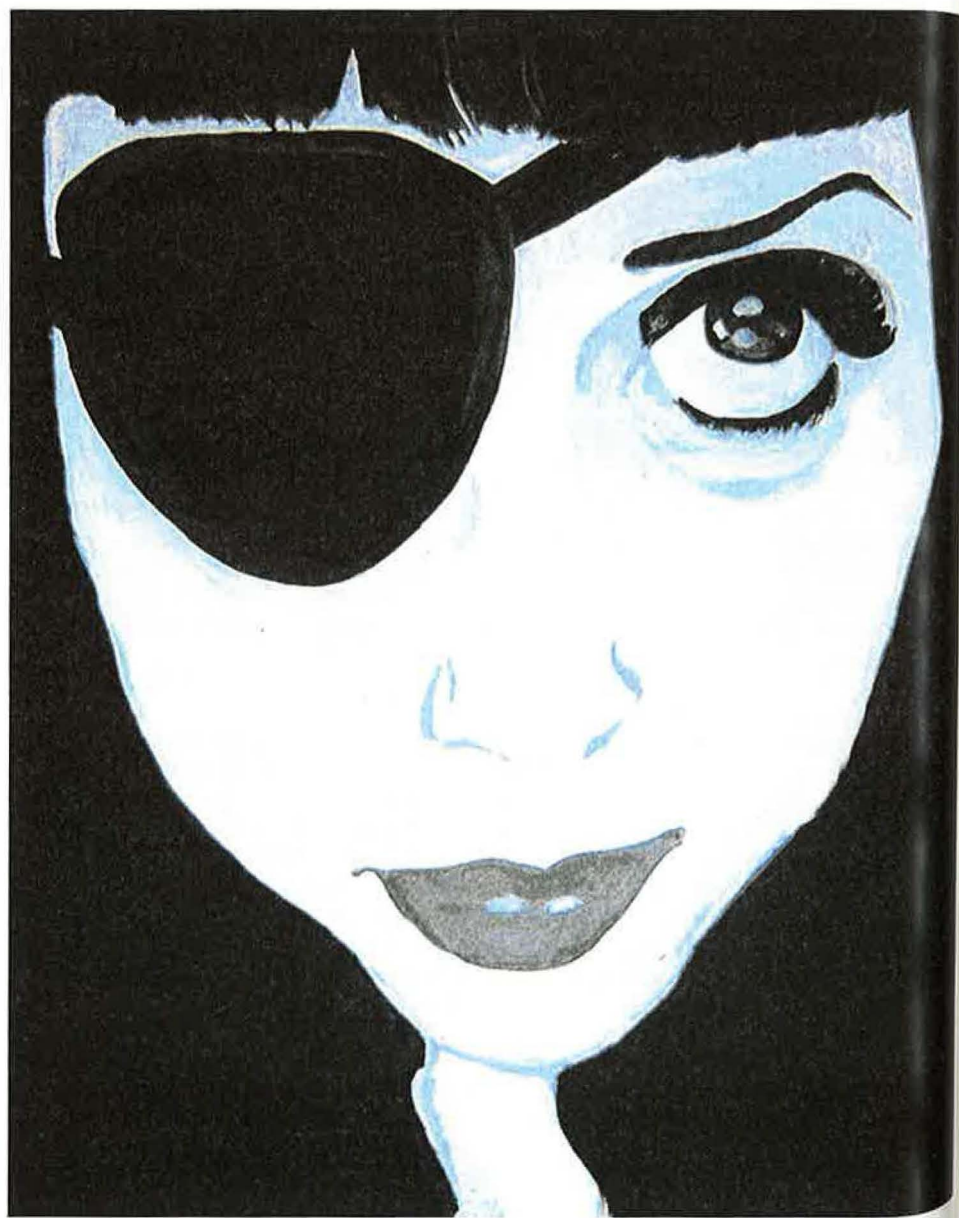
I once read a posting on the message board I visit regularly by a girl that cut herself whenever she was anxious or upset. I've never tried it, but I understand why the girl did it. The sight of a wound healing is comforting. Especially if it stays with you.

To my Mother

And so there you were. You bandaged the gash in my knee while I explained how it happened: the running, the trash cans that fell on their sides and how I tripped over them and then smacked into the concrete side walk. You gave me pizza and told me to stop crying, but crying was a pastime I looked forward to. I swiveled in my chair; my knee was sore and whenever I extended my leg to straighten it, the image of my grandfather trying to bend forward to pick up his fallen groceries sprung to mind. My laughter stopped the tears (laughter was also a pastime I looked forward to). I hadn't been taught to fear broken bones or infections or obstructions blocking the sidewalk yet. I was lucky then. You were lucky then.

My name is Aspeth

I had my first panic attack about six months after my parents split up. My mother got the house, so I got to keep my room, which, at the time, seemed like my biggest concern. My parents hadn't been getting along for a while. There wasn't any hostility, but a lot of sarcasm did get thrown from one side of the living room to the other. The attack happened in the morning; I woke up and couldn't remember what I'd dreamt about. Somehow I did know that it had been one of those really crazy puzzle-pieces dreams, and so having the peacefulness of the morning follow such a dream was paralyzing. The doctor in the emergency room hadn't found



Alisa  
Heather Kenney



anything physically wrong with me. My blood pressure was normal. He sent me off with a prescription to help me relax. 13 years old and on medication. I thought maybe I was just growing up faster than others. All adults on were on medication.

Gradually, the nights became a time to celebrate having survived the day without a scratch, and I was my joyous, energetic self. But the mornings were different. Not knowing what the day held was threatening. Something bad was bound to happen if I got out of bed. Going to school became impossible. What if the cooks in the cafeteria tried to poison me during lunch? What if my friends were not my friends? (My cousin once said you shouldn't trust anyone you haven't known at least a year, but I hadn't understood what she meant until the attacks started.) What if I threw up all over my desk in the middle of math? What if they could see it just by looking at me? I was home-schooled from the 8th grade on. I got used to it quickly—an acorn tucked in its shell.

I spend most of my free time watching movies (but not disturbing ones). I notice that fictional characters have a distinct talent for doing things that people in real life wouldn't do, particularly when the weather's bad: Gene Kelly sings in the rain; Zach Graff and Natalie Portman wear trash bags and kiss at the bottom of a dirt quarry while it rains; audience members pull their coats over their heads to shield themselves from the unexpected storm while Neve Campbell, playing a dancer who is unconcerned with her soaked state, keeps pirouetting on an outdoor stage; the woman who stands on the sidewalk and purposely drops her umbrella so that she can spread her arms wide while she tips her head back and welcomes the pouring rain. Who really does that?

When I'm not watching movies, I'm sitting on the floor in my bedroom, my back propped against the foot of my bed, reading *Oriah Mountain Dreamer* while occasionally glancing at my fish tank. Fish are the only ones who are justified in not needing umbrellas.

#### To my Psychologist

You give me an assignment. You ask me to write a list of the reasons I dislike my father. I write, "The reasons why I dislike (weak word) my father (weaker word): he's a bitch; whenever my mother said things like, 'I have Christmas songs in my head,' he'd say things like, 'Keep 'em there;' he left me and my mother for a woman who doesn't believe in symbolism and yet calls herself Marzipan; he considers any novel that's more than five-hundred pages an epic; he thinks Captain America should be an ice cream flavor; he never listens to me."

I purposely include a second list. I write, "The things my mother has taught me: people who need to spread their religion to other people are either just looking to start a war or get laid; an apple a day doesn't keep the doctor away; Bernardo Bertolucci's film 'The Dreamers' is more appropriate viewing material for young adults than 'American Pie,' if Bath and Body Works came out with a shampoo for redheads and called it 'Fancy

Ketchup,' it would probably do well in sales; with her, I'm safe."

I know what you're trying to do. You don't believe I've led an unstable life. You say it's the cause of my anxiety. That doesn't make sense. Lots of kids' parents get divorced. There are lots of things that could've triggered my anxiety. Here, I'll write a list for you since you're so fond of lists: I got bit by a dog the day before my seventh birthday; when I was ten my friend Dean (I didn't know it was him at the time; I just thought he was some maniac) strapped a jack-o-lantern to his head, and when he found me walking home from a Halloween party, howled and chased me for three blocks until revealing himself, but by then I was traumatized, convinced that it was dangerous to let an entire country of people (normal and abnormal alike) wear masks, even if only for one night in the year; I got tackled by a giant wave in Dana Point, swallowed a gallon of salt water, and got a very good idea of what it must be like to drown.

Besides, you told me in the beginning that sometimes these attacks start for no reason, that oftentimes it's hereditary...I bet you it came from my grandmother.

My name is Aspeth

Look in the thesaurus and alongside the noun shrink you'll find the verbs fall, cower, get smaller. My @\$\$ of a shrink doesn't know anything; she includes self-consciousness into her tally of sources of panic anxiety disorder, alongside an unstable childhood (false), vulnerability to hypochondria (false), and obsessive-compulsive behavior (hmm). The obsessive-compulsive thing I can believe. In 7th grade I became transfixed with library scraps, those leftover pieces of paper on which people write reference numbers to their books after retrieving them from the database. I was there looking for fairytales when I came across one of these scraps with someone's name on it: Rick. Whoever heard of a person putting their name on a scrap of paper meant only for jotting down titles and call numbers? I was fascinated, so fascinated, in fact, that by the time I left the library, I'd forgotten to check out my own books. Instead, I'd checked out Rick's. For the next two months, that's what I did: I checked out other's people's books. But I never read them.

To my Mother

I look at you across the couch while fingering the tail of my sock monkey. You don't say it, but I know you're thinking it: my inability to have serious talks with you without this old plush primate stopped being cute years ago. The monkey (I call it Socrates, which for some reason makes you jealous) used to have black buttons for eyes and a purple kerchief around its neck, but the kerchief went missing two years ago, and the black buttons have recently been replaced with burgundy ones.

I straighten my collar as if your suggestion has wrinkled it. You want me to go to the library...walk to the library. I'm too shocked to respond. If I get up and move without an agenda, like if I pace, you're gonna tell me to

sit back down. And I'll do it. You know this, and so you allow me time to swallow your words. I feel like coiling between the margins of my sock monkey's eyes.

You explain how my psychologist had okay-ed your request. When did you and that gremlin have time to get together?

To my Psychologist

You wicked, wicked, evil...aren't the lists enough? Go to hell, go to hell, go to hell! Fall, cower, get smaller!

My name is Aspeth

I wonder how long I've been silent. I pull at a loose thread hanging from Socrates' left ear. I look over my mother's shoulder and squint out the window. Across the street, the new family is hauling a china cabinet into their house through the garage. The father and son are at opposite ends of the cabinet, the mother is wringing her hands and saying something that could well be a warning: it's fragile...fragile...fragile.

I start to think of Rick, something I haven't done in a long time. After I'd found the library scrap with his name on it, I'd spent most of my twelfth year thinking about him, what he might look like. But I'm sixteen now.

I hate going outside. Other than trips to my shrink and to pick up my prescriptions with my mother, the farthest I go is down the street. I haven't had friends in years; I haven't stepped into a neighbor's house alone in centuries. I wonder if I would if someone like Rick moved in across the street.

To Rick

You're the boy across the street. Your Dad asks you to park the dolly near the tool shed. Your grip loosens on the handles when you notice me shuffling up the driveway. You wonder if my mother has made me come over; the way I'm walking seems as if I'm expecting something to drop on my head. (I am.) I glance at your lawn, taking inventory of all the bugs I know are there somewhere.

You watch me. We both hesitate, as if we've caught one another doing something embarrassing. You look like you were dropped in the wrong century. Your features are simple looking, but serenely positioned about your face, reminding me of "The Sistine Madonna" by Raphael. (My asshole father—you'll learn more about him as our friendship gets deeper—is an art history professor; he gave me an art book for my birthday this year; I didn't tell him I liked it.)

My hair is tucked into a haphazard coil at my nape, sprays of unbound hair matching my steps—it's hard to care about my appearance when I think that any moment the sky is gonna fall on my head. If I were in a support group, the people there would know how I feel; I don't expect you to.

Thanks to the radio, Rolling Stone magazine, and online shopping, I stay current with music; I've developed a fetish for Nick Cave and Kings of Convenience. I should tell you, though, I'm not normal for my age in any other way: I don't read fashion magazines cause they make me nervous; I don't pay attention to my looks because I'm too busy freaking myself out to think about things like mascara and curling irons; I've read the art book my father gave me enough times that I've memorized the title, artist, and year of each painting (I feel like one of those girls in that movie "Mona Lisa Smile," though the art they showed was more interesting than the movie) and I wonder what kind of teacher my father is because he hasn't taught me anything so far.

I make myself breathe. This is not the time or the place to get scared.

You notice I'm about to turn around, change my mind and leave. Instead of saying hello and inviting me to stay, you laugh. Your eyes, wide and gray like a silver dollar that sometimes flashes, sometimes doesn't, glaze over me. I just might laugh too, but I wonder if I've forgotten how.

You motion to the dolly. "I could use some help with this," you say. Never mind that there's nothing heavy, no furniture to cart into the house. I wordlessly follow you into the backyard where the tool shed is stationed. I wonder if you like art.

I wonder if I'll see you in the library.

To my Mother

Fine, I'll go, but I'm not walking. You're driving me there.

To my Psychologist

You're fired.

My name is Aspeth

I don't like the undersides of my hands, the way the lines squirm whenever I cup my palms, each crease shifting like floorboards beneath the weight of a shoe. There's the slope that reaches the index finger like a child's hands reaching for the sky, the Y...or at least I call it a Y, with its longest limb curving south, bowing toward the forearm. They say those lines tell you how long you're going to live, love, stay healthy. They say you can see your future in your hands. That's why I don't like them. Hands can do many things, but the more they do the worse they look. Hands are vain, they claim to be able to predict the future, and still they remain a domestic part of the body, doing domestic things. They can do anything and nothing, they are full of themselves, a bunch of lines people need some tarot card mastermind to interpret at twenty-five bucks per seating. Naughty and precious, that's what they are. And I can't stand them.

I mention this to my mother while washing the dishes and she just smirks and hands me a colander to dip into the soapy water. "Stop being ridiculous." She says this playfully. A drying rag hangs from the refrigerator door; I think of slapping my mother with it just to see how she'll react—we

do things like this to goad each other. My fingers barely graze the drying rag before I change my mind.

Ridiculous is her favorite word; it has been ever since she saw the "Prisoner of Azkaban," that scene where the students at Hogwarts eliminate their fears by waving their wands and shouting "ridiculous," thus turning their fears into things like balloons. To me, "ridiculous" sounds like a breed of lollipop. Lollipops are magnificent when you chose the right ones, the translucent ones, the ones you hold up to the window, the ones that shimmer like colored glass, a drop of frozen nail polish, ice cubes dipped in dye, glazed lips, laminated paper. But lollipops sometimes get cracks in them, especially the cheap ones at the pharmacy. I don't want to be a cheap lollipop, a ridiculous lollipop sitting in some plastic container right by the cash register. An afterthought. A last-minute grab. An impulse you'll regret.

I set the colander to soak, glance out the window and across the street where the new family lives, and then I contemplate the suds scooting down my skin, which have turned a salmon pink and are squashy from the hot water. Rick wouldn't dare hold my hand looking like this; I wouldn't even dare extend it to him if I ever got the courage to introduce myself. Hands are the first things people offer when meeting each other. Handshakes mean strangers are no longer strangers. A few more handshakes and you gravitate to hugs. I'm sure if Rick were the boy across the street, he'd hug his mother every night before the lights go out; I'm sure I'd watched them from the kitchen window each evening. They would become the reason my hands get so soggy and pruny while doing my only chore in the house.

#### To my Psychologist

If you think I'm going to tell you anymore about my parents just because you're sitting there staring at me, you're deluding yourself. Silence doesn't encourage me.

So there was this time at the grocery store. I was nine. I was helping my mother load the bags into the trunk when two boys standing by the car next to ours caught my attention. They were arguing over who got the front seat. They were twins, maybe fifteen. The father waited in the driver's seat, looking amused. You didn't even want to come, one said. I didn't hear dad say I had to get in back, the other replied. I'm saying to get in the back, you dickhead, the other shouted.

I remember being jealous. I wished I had someone to fight so angrily with. My mother and I fight, but she always keeps it from getting ugly. She keeps silly string in a drawer in the front hallway. (It used to be water guns, but that was when my parents were still together. My dad hated it when the wood furniture got wet.) If our voices start to rise, she runs from wherever she is and gets the silly string; perhaps that's the reason arguing hasn't turned into a fear for me; it's almost therapeutic.

But it's rarely infuriating.

I wonder whether my parents would have tried harder if I hadn't been

an only child. I wonder if more would've been at stake if I'd had brothers and sisters.

#### To my Mother

You went to see the Philharmonic at the Disney Concert Hall a couple of nights ago. The performance was part of some "Green Umbrella" series. Later, you told me how a dozen umbrellas had hung from the ceiling, but other than that, you couldn't understand the symphony's title. You did like the umbrellas' festive color: sea-foam green. (You remarked how you don't have a sea-foam green umbrella yet.) There are some things my father and you still have in common; the symphony was something you would've gone to together. While you told me about the music, I wondered what it would have been like if you guys ran into each other at such an event. (Your interaction is limited to the weekends when he visits me, and the phone conversations wherein you discuss me.) I would not have been surprised if you said he'd been there that night. I wonder if you would've talked about the performance, compared notes.

#### To my Psychologist

And here's another thing that could've triggered the panic attacks: I was seven years old, and I hated to be alone. Not that my parents left me alone regularly, they didn't. I had all the lights on. I was watching TV when I heard a knock at the door. I was slightly alarmed by the sound. I asked who was there. But no one answered.

I asked again, and still no one answered. I got nervous. I crept back to the sofa. The knock came again. All the times my parents firmly warned me never to respond to a stranger skidded through my mind.

The knock wasn't tentative or polite. It was brusque and loud and demanded attention. Rap, rap, rap. There was only this rap, rap, rap. I started to cry. I ran to my bedroom, which looked out onto the living room, and threw myself onto the bed. I wrapped myself in the covers and stared through the doorway into the living room, watching the front door. I screamed for the creature to go away.

The knocking stopped, but it took two commercial breaks for me to untangle myself from the bed sheets and toddle into the living room. The minute I did, there was another sound at the door, but this time it was gentle. A timid voice called my name. I pressed my ear to the door and heard our neighbor's teenage daughter, pouting for me to let her in. I swung open the door and found her staring at me as if I should have expected her. She'd been asked to baby sit. Hadn't my mother told me?

I burst into tears again. My baby sitter brought me a glass of juice. It was probably some older kids from the neighborhood playing a prank, she said. I believed her. My parents cooed over me when they got home. I suppose it was easier for them to assume that it was all in my head.

You ask me why I feel safer with my mother than my father. I want to ask if you're joking. After all I've told you, you have to ask why I feel safer

with my mother? Or do you just want me to say it out loud? Or do you want to see if I contradict myself? I live with her, that's why. She doesn't get impatient with my panic attacks. She doesn't assume her presence should be enough. My father doesn't worry unless there's something tangible to worry about. He doesn't get it.

Come to think of it, neither do you.

To my Mother

At the entrance to the library, you urge me through the automatic sliding doors. It takes ten minutes. I'm only convinced this might work a split second before I bolt to the biography section and sit in a corner on the floor. You grasp my knees and tell me to inhale and exhale. It's okay, I hear. It's okay. I smell old books. People are stepping around us. I notice a scrap of paper with a reference number scribbled on it by my foot. I think of Rick. I was still an average kid the last time I was here. I don't want to spoil it.

I get so caught up in my agitation, that I don't realize I've gotten up until I'm halfway to the non-fiction section. I find more scraps of paper with numbers and titles on them. I pick them up. My pace quickens, and I know my mother is following me, not saying anything. I pick up every doodle and reference number I come across. I go from the non-fiction section to the children's section to the audio/visual section to the study tables. I don't know if people are looking at me. I can't look at them. I haven't been around so many people at once in three years. So I concentrate on the scraps of paper. Most of them I find by the computers.

When I'm done, my mother asks if I want to leave. I don't realize what I was doing until I get home: I didn't care about the scraps I'd collected, I knew Rick's name wasn't on any of them, I wasn't looking for him; I only cared to keep moving, to keep from being scared in the place where I'd discovered him. I wanted to preoccupy myself. And I did. And it worked.

To Rick

As we walk from the tool shed to your house, I think of the library episode. Not all things fail, I say to myself. My parents failed each other, but that doesn't mean I have failure in my genes...but then what if I am a failure? If you're a failure, you're more accident prone, you make more mistakes. I could very well fail you. Or what if you're like my father? What if you leave for no reason? What if my visit to the library means nothing significant? What if—it always ends for me with "what if?" And so it goes.

I collapse on your kitchen floor just between iced tea and banana nut muffins.

You are nice about it, and I lie and say that I haven't eaten anything that day. When your parents invite me to stay for dinner, my panic rekindles and I take off. I spend the rest of the evening staring at my fish tank, sucking in my cheeks and puckering my lips like the guppies. You come

over the next day to see if I'm alright; I make my mother tell you I'm asleep. You ask if you can stop by again later. I can't hear what my mother says to you because her voice lowers.

My name is Aspeth

That night, I break every umbrella in the house. Five of them: red, pink, brown, blue, and black (my mother likes to match). I bring the broken umbrellas outside and place them by the trashcans, arranging them so they resemble a flower. I sit on the sidewalk and glance at the sky. I'm certain it won't rain tonight.

But I wouldn't mind if it did.



# Somatophobia

---

Eric Jones

A muddied ballerina  
in torn stockings  
and bloodied boots  
knows the hunger  
for corporeal perfection

as

a dainty soldier  
with a tutu-ed weapon  
tied in pink ribbons  
knows the thirst  
for conciliation

They feast on  
the sundries of culture  
starving for playthings  
of the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating  
cause of  
an individual life

# Eggplant Armamentarium

---

Christine Corr

Behold the Sweater Girl! Kitten of the Nile.  
With real live rip-cord protofalsies,  
pop top peekaboo nipple caps,  
homemade in this American Chamber of Horrors.  
She'll munch a bust wafer, don a flapper flattener,  
go to any length turning tiny nubbins  
into sizable snubbins and back again.  
Apply suction and think big? No problem!  
Gynemetric configurators are no match  
for her vastly expanding vision.  
And, when Kitty's in dire deficiency, she's got  
paleoregulated amiline guaranteed to blow her  
bubbles sky high. So what if her hair falls out!  
Slap on another Mammiform, Lasticurve, Little Nemo.  
Behold the Sweater Girl,  
Cleopatra on her barge.

# Handsome Deil

Jayna Zimmelman

*You can't catch the devil with one hand.* My grandma let loose this unnerving idea one day while we were lounging on our tiny, astro-turfed patio. I remember I was perched, one skinny, pale leg propped on the edge of an aluminum lawn chair, silently picking the "Really Rosie" polish from my dirty, unclipped toenails. Grandma trumped my squirmy silence with a masterful stillness that was 68 years in the making. She moved only to raise an ancient A&W root-beer mug to her lips. It was filled that afternoon, just as it was every afternoon, with ice-cold milk and whisky.

I knew better than to ask for an explanation. Grandma never would explain any of her cryptic truisms so I was left, as usual, to my own musings. The phrase was a zinger. It got lodged in the wet, sticky folds of my mind and haunted me for reasons not entirely clear. Perhaps I thought the devil would be an exciting catch—at the very least he'd tell good stories. Or maybe I'm just somehow constituted to be seduced by slippery villains and obscene absences. After all, people masturbate to all sorts of ridiculous things don't they?

We lived alone with my mother, in a trailer—a *nice* trailer my mother was always quick to insist when required to divulge specific information about our home. The inside actually was pretty nice, clean and bright in that pre-fab plastic laminate sort of way. Grandma was unusually susceptible to the charm of sun-catchers. So, multiple interpretations of her favorite themes—unicorns, clowns and angels—dangled in every window, throwing whimsical layers of light across all sun-prone surfaces.

I wasn't nearly as well-decorated. My dull brown hair was, more often than not, shaggy with overgrowth. And although my clothes were close to cute in that glued on sparkle, quick to unravel, sold out of the back of someone's van kind of way, they also tended to highlight deficits. I could see what was required in terms of both biology and cash starting to accumulate all over the bodies of the girls I sat next to in classes. That was my first year of middle school, the first year of moving from room to room each hour like a paper-laden nomad. I knew that with every generic pair of jeans, and with each home hair cut I was somehow diminishing.

\*

To be clear, it didn't happen all at once. I was progressively obsessed by the mystery of Grandma's description of devil catching. It was a maddening puzzle. Why would I have *only* one hand available to make such a catch? What had happened to my other limb? These questions rolled loudly, like giant glass marbles down the metallic tubes of my psyche. Over time they

became a focus, a meditation of sorts. The narratives developed like moss, slowly growing across the darker, damp regions of the inside of my head. They were mine alone.

And so that is how it is that I am still fondling my grandmother's words at the start of eighth grade. I have, by now, constructed a massive catalog of personal mythologies about devils and missing hands. Frequently I envision myself as a fourteen-year-old amputee in shorts and halter top, one arm flinging out to grab Satan, the other arm an abrupt stump, swinging in wild circles as the thin, red man wiggles away from me time and again.

Developing endless scenarios in which my arm has been lost is my private passion. My first stories are set among more common mishaps, hit-and-runs, car crashes and tragic bicycle accidents.

Eventually average tragedies lose their excitement and I move on to dream of more exotic amputations. For some reason, while sitting in class I tend to favor earthquake scenes in which a variety of falling objects crush my arm beyond the point of repair, or severe it in a dramatic ripping of bone and tissue followed by terrific bloody spurtings.

At night I lie in bed and conjure catastrophic freak accidents. In one favorite, a police helicopter crashes through the fiberglass and metal sheeting of my bedroom ceiling. Its rotary blades miss my head and chest by inches, only to slice cleanly through my naked arm.

\*

I am alone at the park the day I see the woman with one hand. Although I am destined to become quite old, this is the one and only time I will fall in love at first sight.

The woman looks vaguely pissed off or, at the very least, unfriendly, but I can't help myself. I walk up to her. Head ever so slightly bowed, my eyes roll demurely upward to read her expressionless face. I swallow and say, "Hello."

When she doesn't reply, I blurt out, "What happened to your hand?"

For a moment I am afraid I'm about to be told to get lost, but the woman just sighs and says, "It fell off."

I suspect this is the answer she gives any kid who dares to ask.

Pulling a cigarette deftly with her one hand from a men's shirt pocket, the woman stares blankly at me as she lights up. Her hand looks strangely rough and strong, like she uses it to do things involving heavy, greasy tools or dirty machines. I wonder stupidly for a moment how she manages it with just one hand. It kind of makes sense though. I figure that's probably how she lost her hand in the first place. My mind quickly goes to work on a narrative about how her arm was sliced through by a rusty chainsaw, or maybe torn off and chewed up by the hungry, jagged gears of a factory machine.

I stare back. Something should be said but isn't. I notice that her hair

is shorter than any I've ever seen on a woman. It looks as if it would feel like the soft bristles of a baby's toothbrush. I am surprised by how handsome she is. Crossing my arms, I tilt my head to one side and stick my chin out. On the high-power wires overhead a cluster of crows startle, flying in all directions like ink splashing onto a new construction paper sky.

We stand still like that for a minute, neither of us speaking.

"See ya later kid," the woman says, throws her mostly unsmoked cigarette to the ground, crushes it with a scuffed boot and walks away without even a look back. My heart puckers until it feels like only the smallest of tumors, the kind you can't detect with your fingers but have to use an ultrasound to find.

At home Grandma sits on the patio. The astro-turf is faded to a limp, bleachy green. A tiny, dark brown Chihuahua with enormous ears and a protruding under-bite perches watchfully on Grandma's lap like a chocolate gargoye.

We are alone now, me and Grandma. My mother is in rehab, court-ordered. She was gone for awhile before that anyway, showing up only around the first of each month like a monotonously punctual parasite. I sit down and sigh.

"Been trying to catch that devil again?" Despite the whisky, Grandma frequently creeps me out by simultaneously seeming to know more than she should and saying much less of whatever it is she knows.

"I guess so, Grandma."

"Well, you be sure you don't get caught yourself." She winks at me conspiratorially.

"Don't worry Gram, I've still got both my hands." I raise my palms up and wiggle my fingers.

Grandma laughs like a bumpy ride in the car. She reaches over and pats my leg, which makes her little dog leap down and wag his tail in bouncy anticipation.

"Okay my Joliepolly, let's make some supper." The three of us abandon the patio for the kitchen, the thin aluminum frame of the screen door slamming jovially into place behind us.

\*

I go back to the park every day for a week and pretend, at first, that I'm not looking for her. By the end of the week I am so distraught my stomach hurts and all of my cool, adolescent pretense is gone. I doubt anyone could tell. To anyone watching me I must simply look like any other moody teenage girl lazily floating back and forth on a black rubber swing.

She had to have been moving with intentional stealth because I didn't hear her walking across the dry leaves. The moment I feel the single hand

pushing, I know who it is. Grabbing tightly at the chain link I soar higher and higher, back and forth, as light as any bird. When I am as high as I can go the pushing stops. I panic, dragging at the ground with my feet as I fly over it, kicking up little puffs of dust and making the well-rubbed surface growl with dirty friction. After a few more passes my shoes are married to the earth again. The woman is already halfway across the park, near the restrooms. I run after her.

"Hey! What's your name?" I shout.

She keeps moving until she reaches a picnic table next to the brick hut that is divided in half—one side for boys, the other for girls. She sits on the table top and plants a cigarette between her lips.

I am now self-conscious for running after her like a little kid. I try to move casually but there is no good place to put my hands.

"Deil."

"Deil? What's that short for?"

"Short for Deil." She smirks, but not unkindly. "What's your name?"

"Jolie."

"Short for anything?"

"Joleen." I wrinkle my nose when I say it, hoping Deil will forget.

Her arm is exposed. She's wearing a short-sleeve button up work shirt with a patch that says "Eddie" in red embroidered script. Her arm ends abruptly about five inches past the elbow. She leans forward on it, using the nub like a kickstand against her dark blue Dickies. Her hand expertly works the cigarette.

It takes more than half of my will power not to reach out to touch the scarred stump.

"It couldn't have just fallen off," I say defiantly to demonstrate that I'm not satisfied by the explanation she offered during our first conversation.

Deil sucks in a lungful of smoke, turns her head away and says flatly, "My mother chopped it off with a butcher knife when I was seven." Smoke comes out of her nose as she says this, which makes her look like an angry cartoon bull.

I can't tell if she's pulling my leg or not, but either way, I'm impressed. Mutilation at the hands of one's own mother is a scenario that has *never* occurred to me in all my amputation fantasies.

"Why?" I ask. It's true that I am shaking just the tiniest bit but I smile like I'm in on the joke, just in case. I wonder how old Deil thinks I am.

"Because I wasn't fast enough to get away."

Deil laughs and my stomach feels like it's trying to scramble up the back of my throat. She carefully puts her cigarette down on the table's edge so that the burning end touches nothing.

"Hey, give me five," she says and puts her hand out, flat and smooth as a concrete step.

I slap it like it's no biggie.

"Up high," Deil suggests, and lazily lifts her open palm.

I smile and smack it like I'm the world's coolest cucumber.

"Down low." Then Deil gently lifts the stump towards me while staring into my eyes and I understand for the first time what adults mean when they say lust. I think there's a good chance that I'm dreaming as I reach out to cup the beautiful stump in my palm. The instant before we touch Deil jerks it away. My heart is smashed into a limp, pulpy mess. I plead wordlessly through wet eyes.

"Too slow," Deil says and chuckles like it's nothing but a harmless joke. My heart is beating too fast and my lungs don't seem to be doing anything but flapping in an airless vacuum. I don't know where all the air has gone but it isn't here anymore.

\*

When I was four years old I swallowed a plastic bottle cap.

I was sucking on it, which wasn't unusual. Back then my obsession was with putting stuff in my mouth. My mother was constantly demanding that I spit things into her hand. Then she would hold up the offending object with rehearsed disdain and tell me, "What is it with you? Do you want to choke to death, Jolie?" I don't know where she was, but my mother wasn't around that day.

No air moved in or out of me. I remember feeling more angry than alarmed at the deprivation. I scratched at my throat, furious tears dripping over squinted, blinking lids. My father was still around then. He lifted me, shook me, pounded on me. When no bottle cap appeared he laid me on the sofa and shoved his fingers violently down my throat, his fingernails scraping the roof of my mouth. My eyes rolled upwards toward the picture window behind my head. I could see a million dust particles sparkling in slow-motion through a shaft of hazy golden light penetrating a crack in my mother's heavy velvet curtains. I remember marveling at how the swirling bits of nothing looked like someone had given them flight on purpose.

Then I saw the bloody cap. My father was panting, squeezing it between his second and third finger. The roof of my mouth bled into my throat, which, I could feel, was swelling shut. I felt floaty and warm, like I was slowly waking up from a long nap in the sun. My father pulled me upwards into his arms and held me closer than anybody else ever would.

\*

"How old are you?" Deil is serious again.

"Sixteen." I try it, figuring I've got nothing to lose.

"Sixteen huh?" She picks up her cigarette and takes a long, dubious drag. She squints at me like she isn't sure if she wants to believe me or not.

The mystery is mutual because I have no idea how old Deil is. She looks like a teenage boy but she's not a boy. How can you tell how old a woman like this is? I have no idea.

Finally she says, "You don't look sixteen."

"Yeah, I know, I look young, people always tell me that." I study Deil's face looking for belief but there is no sign to read.

"So Jolie, have you ever heard that elephants have graveyards?"

The question surprises me like an unexpected pinch. I frown, shake my head.

"It's true, I saw a show about it. The old, sick elephants go there to die but the living ones go there just to visit. They pick up the ivory with their trunks and they talk to them—they actually *talk* to the bones."

"That's cool." I'm a little bothered that the conversation has turned from me to elephants.

"Yeah, it's pretty cool. Makes me wonder about my hand bones, you know?"

It hurts a little when I swallow nothing but the dryness in my mouth. I try to look like I understand.

Deil continues, "I think it would be nice to visit my bones sometimes, touch them, talk to them. Problem is, I don't know where they are."

Deil looks at me expectantly and instantly I understand that if I'm going to pull off sixteen I've got to return this grotesque volley with nonchalance. "Well . . . what would you say to them? Your bones I mean." It isn't completely smooth but I figure it's pretty good considering I'm so nervous that it feels like I'm about to pee my pants.

Deil smiles more on her right side than on the left and scratches absently at the stump with a curled pinky finger.

"I'd tell 'em knock-knock jokes, probably." Deil's smile is gone, she is grinding her teeth slowly.

I remember I'm supposed to be home by now. Grandma might be a drinker, but she's an organized one. She likes dinner just like she likes everything else—on time.

"See you later Deil."

"Later Jolie."

I walk away, trying not to look back. When I do Deil is watching me, her handless arm dangling loosely at her side.

That night I dream of my mother looming over my bed with a butcher knife. Her thin, gaunt face is erupted with a case of terminal self-pity. It looks like a multitude of tiny bugs are eating her away from the inside out. I can't move—I'm paralyzed. I try to scream, to wake myself up, to wake Grandma up, to be anywhere but in this dream but there is no waking.

My mother yanks the covers down. I am wearing a t-shirt and underwear but the night air is freakishly cold and my skin explodes with wax-hard goose bumps. She examines me closely, each limb, each digit, everywhere, as if trying to find the most tender piece. She raises the knife to her shoulder and asks, "Knock-knock?"



I wake up in a cold sweat, my t-shirt and blankets soaked too badly to be touched for the rest of the night. Stripping down, I pull the afghan that my grandmother crocheted for me long ago, off the rocking chair I've had since I was little, and wrap myself tightly in it.

In the morning when my grandmother finds me that way on the living room couch, she kisses me awake like she did when I was younger. Then she picks up the little dog and says, "Well Jack, looks like it's pancake time doesn't it?" and goes to work in our white, plasticized kitchen.

\*

I decide I won't go back to the park again but before three days have passed I defy the resolution. This time Deil is there already, sitting on the picnic table. She's not smoking and her stump is covered by a long-sleeve jersey.

It's later in the afternoon than is usual for this visit. I had detention for being late to class too many times and had to stay an extra forty-five minutes after the last bell had rung. The sun is setting and the fall air is just that much cooler in the late afternoon. Grandma will be wondering where I am.

We sit for awhile in silence and then I say, "It's getting late."

"I suppose it is." Deil looks like she is concentrating mildly as though she were trying to make a decision between strawberry-vanilla or rocky road. She gets up and walks over to the brick hut that is casting a long shadow in the fading light and takes a drink from the stainless steel fountain.

"Come here a second."

I do as she says. My body is tense with the anticipation of something I don't yet know. Deil pushes her sleeves up.

"Go ahead," She says in a low, papery voice.

I reach slowly, afraid the limb will be snatched away again but it isn't. My stomach feels funny, like something is itching me from the inside of my belly. I think for a moment that I'm going to be sick but this isn't sickness, it's something else completely. The stump feels warm and smooth, yet slightly spongy at its tip, like a ripe apple that's been sitting in the sun. Touching it is unlike anything I have ever done. It takes a few moments for my brain to catch up, to understand what I *know* and what is, what should be there and what isn't. I am filled with a new wet awe.

Then Deil's hand is around my neck and I feel my head bump gently against the red brick wall. She is against me, still as stone, pinning me close. My mouth gapes open for air but my throat is being carefully pressed closed.

My own hand is cupped around the stump and I squeeze it like it's the old stuffed bunny I used to sleep with. Strange pressures fill my head with

a low buzzing that sounds like two flies caught inside a glass bottle. It feels like something is pressing against the back of my eyeballs.

I can see the setting sun filtering through trees like maple syrup defying gravity in absurdly beautiful beams that slant just above the ground. Anything might pass through that light, but anything could get caught in it too. The last thing I remember before going out is the sound of Deil's voice but I can't make sense of the words. I am filled with a terrible comfort that I have known before. When I wake my hand is empty and Deil is gone. I know now, undeniably, that what my Grandmother says is true.

# Wind Straws

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Nancy Carroll

I stand inside next to my daughter,  
a green-eyed shadow clutching a mascara tube  
in one hand, and burying the thumb of the other in her mouth.  
She sleeps like coal, a yet mined treasure with thin jet wisps darting  
about her face, a gentle movement that holds her  
breath between sighs, before dreams. Pale blue bows  
on the carpet below, the words her father mumbled  
yesterday from a cell phone in Globe, Arizona.

She does not know these words are phantoms,  
anxiously drifting upward until  
their forms become wind. She can still be consoled  
with a box of crayons or piggy back rides to bed.

But I know that this grace will dissipate  
like her father's footsteps, and her daughter's  
consenting eyes will harden like sponges on an eastern  
beach.

Till that moment when memory clings like miasmal fumes,  
I will hold the quiet of this room. Over her, over me.

# Where I Carry It

---

Mary Angelino

I want to disconnect  
sorry, uncurl the s  
of my spine from cursive;

penmanship being the only place  
I hold tension  
in myself. I like the repetition

of r in *sorry*, like begging  
or standing in shock  
upside-down. But wait—I skipped o,

with its soft mouth to mediate,  
almost middle  
ground; a breath in edgewise

as y reaches its prophetic tail,  
wraps around the whole  
wide word and chokes it, like frown

stretched thin and tendons snap,  
fall down to hate  
in my hips and the empty

stare afterward.

## Marco de la Fuente

Empty today. Suits me.

She could use some work on her anecdotes. They are painful to listen to, and I am always embarrassed for her after she tells one of them and a black hole opens in the room sucking in all the sound, leaving a consuming silence of inimitable awkwardness. I am left cringing, always. It's too bad because if it weren't for her, this might be a fun fifty minutes. War, conspiracy, affairs, this is all good stuff. But today is no different, and after her first one, no doubt another story about her cat and its near death encounter with a neighbor's dachshund, I will nap.

Digital Clocks. When did they switch to digital clocks? Maybe they've always been digital clocks. I'm beginning to notice things about this room. I can't sleep and my eyes are scanning around for...well, nothing really, and the old bird hasn't the personality to get my attention or the meanness to warrant fear, poor thing. Linoleum floors, pale green, dark green trimming defines the gray walls, and the doorway. This room, maybe like all the others in this place, so mellow, with its somniferous hues. Particle board desks. No TV in this room. I wonder why. Almost all of them have TVs now.

Right in front of where the TV should be, there's that guy who wears nothing but jerseys and baseball caps. He has a sidekick who sits right behind him. They have matching caps. It's cute. It probably isn't their thing, but I want them to do a dance number like Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor from *Singin In the Rain*. In the corner, there's the jovial fat guy whom I have christened Balu, after the bear from *The Jungle Book*. I like him much better than the depressed fat guy who sits to my right because his sweaty mopiness gets me down. And since there is so much of him, the melancholy crowds the room with a moist and stifling heaviness. On his left, an equally morose brunette—a skinny, pale girl, whom I have never heard speak. They are lovers who don't know it. The match excites me until I contemplate the blanket of gloom their offspring would bring upon the world. There are four blondes in this room, dispersed almost

equidistantly among its four corners. They are a terrestrial constellation of angelic light in the way their long straight hair absorbs and redistributes the artificial luminescence of the florescent bulbs. The non-blondes, myself included, look like lonely planets doomed to a fixed orbit around these gold and pulsing stars. I am mistaken. There is a fifth blonde. A he—the hippie that never comes to class. It is funny that he's present today, at least in the physical sense. His hair too, gives off that strange ethereal light, but I don't like this idea. He is not an angel. It wouldn't be right. He is an impostor.

Writing on the board. Wonderful. That means notes. C'mon, say something clever, something funny. It's not that hard. You can do it. Where's that notebook? I don't know why I switched bags this semester. I can never seem to find anything in this one. The last one was just fine too. New beginnings. That's what it was. Spring semester.

For the first five minutes, I shall take notes with surprising diligence. I shall copy your silly list word for word. *Punic Wars, Scipio Africanus...The Great Triumvirate*...I however, have never been one for pretension and will soon abandon this façade of interest. There see, I am no longer taking notes. You cannot tell of course, because my pen is still at work. I have drawn a headless teddy bear and am now beginning on a dragon wearing a top hat. After that, I think I shall draw you, Old Bird with your giant glasses and grandma sweater. You will have wings.

Ah. Late. That's all you were, was late. I didn't think you the slacker type—I am. It was the traffic I'm sure. Wait, wait. Not so fast. No rush, she hasn't said anything you don't already know. Covering last week's work. Take your time. There, you see? How did I know that you were going to choose this seat? No, it's not because its position ensures the least possible glare from the outside. Neither is it because this places you just close enough to hear everything she says when you're paying attention, and just far enough away so she can't tell you're pretending. No. It's simply because you are a creature of habit. You have arrived early to every class except this one. Well, that might not be true. I wouldn't know because I am almost always late. Nevertheless, when I enter, there you are, in the exact same seat, third one down in that row right next to the wall, chin up, half smiling. I know. I am a creature of habit too. So forgive<sup>e</sup> me if I left my bag on this chair you are now sitting on. I wasn't being inconsiderate. Quite the contrary.

Should I? I can feel my arm rising. Why not? It'll make her day. *Caesar Augustus*. There, smiling. Can you tell that I said that with just the right amount of humility? With volume both reserved and confident, because don't you hate it when people answer and make it sound as if no one else knows the answer?

Mmm. What's that lotion you're wearing? So sweet. It thickens the air, a creamy citrus. It's like breathing candy. Oh. Flipping your hair exacerbates it. You have loosed an invisible mist, the ghost of a fruit tree garden. I wasn't prepared for that and now I want to cough. But I'll hold it in. For you, I'll hold it in. You should wear your hair down more often. So brown and so thick. Looks light and heavy at the same time. No highlights. All natural, all you. That's good. Girls are so artificial now. Just don't know what you're looking at sometimes. But this is perfect, even when you don't mean it to be, just crashing recklessly about your shoulders and over your chair's backrest. You don't know it, but one of those tresses is hanging over my left hand. You didn't mean to invade my space. It's ok. I'll turn my palms upward. The palm side of the human hand is considerably more sensitive, making it the tool of choice for tactile endeavors.

I am touching this lock of hair now. I have it in between my index finger and my thumb. You don't feel this. You're quite absorbed by the lesson, and particularly attentive today. Why? I told you, you have nothing to worry about. You didn't miss anything. I am rubbing my fingers now with your hair in between, twirling it ever so slightly, with movements so minute that no one else can see, all the while keeping my eyes to the board. Who knew I was so sneaky? I didn't.

My pen is tapping this binder's cardboard cover. All senses, eyes, nose, both hands all caught up, all engaged. Euphoric. That's the word. My ears and tongue have yet to join the party. Well, it isn't quite a party so much as a charming, impromptu get together. It's true. I can hear her lecture. Dates, names...it's all background. What's the term? Ambient noise?

I could do this forever, I think. Twirling your hair, my pen, and with a stolen glance here and there, examining the bold curls, and dark mysterious hollows of your hair, your full shoulders, neither sloping nor rigid. Breathe, breathe.

What was that? A laugh! Why she told a joke didn't she? Damn, I missed it. It couldn't have been all that funny. It got you laughing though didn't it? And what a beautiful sound you make. Not a snicker, nor a chortle, cackle or giggle. No hissing or snorting. Just a bubbling, liquid laugh of perfect length that quickens the air around you before trailing off. I think I am smiling. See, it wasn't that hard Old Bird, I knew you could do it.



# Naming Water

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Melanie Jeffrey

My mother hands me a word  
*pacify*—to make peace  
because I am still learning to speak  
like her, still believing words  
make a thing live, and that stopping  
would mean everything  
stops.

Pages of words pass me  
by—crumpled riddles  
whose Indians follow  
me still—Missionaries who held  
our heads underwater, the cemetery  
they placed on our land (because there  
is always *they*).

My mother turns words  
in her mouth like salt  
and mist and I believe her  
when she tells me blue flames  
are cold if only I'd learn to touch—  
and now my mother's voice  
is between ten thousand shades  
of truth—the way promises are made  
and repeated.

Like me, she needs to be important.

Pretty soon I am pasting  
pages against my mouth,  
sticky words, wrong words,  
words whose tinsel turns to shards  
with every lie my mother hands me.

I let these words fall,  
turn to silt in my throat  
because we've stopped speaking.

I should be out of breath by now.

# Woman Warrior

---

Anna Mesick

She is bent like a tin spoon, used  
to scoop ice cream hardened  
in a cardboard tub.

She faces earth, spine suspended, left  
arm hangs, right hand twists up her back  
in a half lotus blossom

limbs twitch, palsy convulsions,  
a spider in bathwater struggles to  
break through liquid skin to breathe.

Her gray head bobs up and down,  
arms on strings shudder. Her beige  
purse pours across the counter

a chaos of keys, striped straw, wallet,  
pill box, receipts. The cashier asks if  
she needs any help. No, thank you

says the woman. She counts to her-  
self, *one, two, three*, the steady cadence  
calms her tremors, *four, five, six, seven, eight,*

her clumsy hand frees a credit card  
from the wallet, *nine, ten*, and it drops  
as her arm sways and she stops counting.

Woman warrior walks away, dignified,  
her height folded, head stooped, eyes fixed  
on the inverted world behind her.

# The Green Chain

Jeff Bock

It's 6:00 AM sharp, and I am on again. The Green Chain is on again. There is a rumble from the depths of the wooden carcass that is the mill. It is made from wood, and makes wood, so that others may have and enjoy wood. It is an endless cycle of logs and men and gears and sweat, and it churns to life whether I am here or not every morning when the big hand and little hand are at odds with each other. I am here today at the end of the Chain. I am the one who stacks the smallest of boards: 1 by 4's. I arrange these planks on logs that have been placed precisely so that the boards I stack can become one giant mass of wood again, but different than before, tangible. We arrange and rearrange wood here. That is all. All the like boards must be stacked together, tight and assured, so that when a battle-axe driver arrives he can back-up his banged-up wheels of steel under our stack and haul it away. Dust is the only thing that escapes this place, as the truck jumbles away down the soft dirt road, shaking with sounds that are hard and metal and angry. He passes the bald man with the clipboard, who takes a pencil from behind his ear and offers it to the battle-axe driver. He clasps it in his clumpy hands, hands that weren't made for such delicate things, and grinds it into the paper, dotting the i's and crossing the t's; somewhere, someone is satisfied. With that, the rumbling metal skeleton cradling the lumber vanishes as it crosses over the train tracks, tracks that were built for men to do awesome things normal men couldn't. These are the same men who built the machines that need men to work the machines in the mill. We are not those men. We are the other men. We are stationed at a certain place, at a certain time, and strive to become a single well oiled super-machine. This is the design of a wood mill. If this doesn't happen, the work stops. I stop. The Green Chain stops. Everything stops and that's bad. Red lights and a blurting horn warn us of danger. The logs freeze in the shoots, the spinning rollers of the conveyer belt come to a halt and men start to wonder, and that's bad. The machines buzz and hiss unnaturally at us, held motionless by men with faults. The perfect machines are impatient, they have work to do and shouldn't be stopped. Everything has stopped.

Smiley leans against the big red button, arms crossed; he does not move. He looks down at Dan. Dan looks up from the bottom of his tilting stack of 2 by 8's and prods his head down the chain searching for help from me and Scottie. Scottie, with young athletic determination that makes up for his lack of precision, flips over his 2 by 4's, he doubles them up and slides them off the chain, guiding them with his thigh and his wingspan, smacking them squarely against his stack. He claps his gloves free of sawdust and looks down the line; he sees what I see: A load of a half dozen 2 by 8's that

have rolled on, right past Dan's station. Dan is the new guy from Bonners Ferry with three kids; he won't last long. No one does, except for Smiley. They either move inside, or they just don't show up at all one day. That's the only way to leave the Green Chain. Smiley could move inside, but those machines don't interest him. Smiley enjoys building a good quality stack of lumber. It means something to him. It's an honest day's work and twice as much as anything in town pays. He's out here from belt to belt, every year, from the sweaty swelter of August to the icy winds of late January. Days, weeks, months, 2 by 4's, 2 by 8's, 2 by 10's. Dan uses his elbows and fists to pound the 2 by 8's into place. He is angry and scared and glares at everyone. Smiley just watches as Scottie and I stack the 2 by 8's, each grab an end, and run them back up the chain, before people start poking their heads out of metal flaps and make shouting noises. They don't know why, but they don't like when the well-oiled machine stops. It stops the motion and starts the thinking and that's bad. Bad for business. Bad for big timber. Bad for people carrying clipboards with boxes to check and bosses to please. We like it, though. It gives us a chance to rest. Rest never comes, if machines never stop. Smiley stands against the big red button ready to push the big red button that tells the men inside to start pushing buttons again. He stares at us smiling, or is he smirking? I can't tell which. He is a non-entity. An extra-terrestrial worker bee sent to do hard labor on a remote blue-green planet. He has done bad things at some point in his life, in a distant place. He must repent. Smiley can flip a 2 by 10 with one hand and slide it down his smooth leather bib into the stack all in one slick-dick motion. That's why people on the chain call him, "The Master." He doesn't want to move inside because he enjoys it, he enjoys watching everyone else's pain on the Green Chain. I will go inside and see though one day, I will see the alien machines that are technologically superior to anything anyone in here could ever dream up. Machines that work with the precision and ruggedness of their creator's wildest imaginations. They are like insects: perfectly sculpted to do precisely what needs to get done—no more, no less. They are highly evolved and streamlined and work at a pace that is too fast for men. The machines need no hammers, no nails, no screwdrivers to do their jobs, their appendages are many and sharp and all-knowing. The men inside push colored buttons and watch in what must be dulled amazement as the machines strip the skin off the trees, thrash and roll the logs, and finally spring them into water chutes that empty into the saw room where they are cut into 2 by 4's, 2 by 8's, 2 by 10's and rolled out to the Green Chain.

Dan jumps back up on the chain, Smiley hits the big red button with his elbow. We are on again. The Green Chain is on again. Out comes the warm flush of wind from inside. In come the logs, single file up the conveyor belt, climbing into the mill, to be debarked and stripped, then ripped apart by the sharp, spinning saws that could shred a man into string jerky, but often settle for snatching fingers and the occasional arm instead. Curious

men don't work here, they have never worked here, and will never work here. It's dangerous to have a curious man here. Dan is a curious man, full of curious questions and strange answers. He wants to share his thoughts and talk about his curious questions. But no one listens to a man with gardening gloves and sneakers, because he will not be here long enough to appreciate the answers. But that is all inside, and we are all outside. Planks simply roll out of the birthing flaps in a mish mash that keeps us looking up and on our toes. We expertly scan the torrent of boards ahead, each knowing the various sizes we'll be pulling off and stacking. We have plans, and you must form a simple plan.

A whistle blows, but only the Green Chain stops, as we switch stacking stations. They do this every hour so we won't get bored of stacking the same boards. When you're at the end of the chain stacking 1 by 4's, it's easy-breezy; it's all water breaks and whistling. I'm on the 2 by 10's again, the closest to the mill. Why the closest station is the one with the biggest, heaviest boards I'll never know. It's on again. The Green Chain is on again and I'm in trouble, I'm thinking again. One after another they drop out and roll toward me, they are many and I must stop looking. I wait until they are flush with me and I pull and push and slide the boards down my thigh, over my bib and into the stacks. One, and two, and three...I grab and curse and hurl as they topple off the chain and onto the floor beside me...four, and five, and six...and more are on their way. They are all 2 by 10's...seven, and eight, and nine. They bump into each other and roll past me, and there are more. I try to grab them all like a sack of potatoes, and lug them off, but they become cross as the far ends barrel down the chain. I let go. The symmetry of it all is ruined and the men that built the perfect machines cuss and tear up their betting slips and throw them into the air. I grab what I can and chuck the boards onto the ground, hoping to smash them into sawdust. I crush my fingers, knick and clip my knees and shins and almost clock myself right off the chain in a dizzying effort to maintain balance, control. Those men in the mill are assholes. They did this on purpose. They cut all the logs into 2 by 10's on purpose. My stack is ruined, boards keep coming and going their own way. I lose it. In a fit of disgust, I slam the big red button. Everyone stops. The Green Chain stops. I feel Smiley smiling. He is loving this. I throw my gloves off and put up my dukes. I'm going to punch the shit out of those boards. Scottie and Dan jump from their stations and fetch my swiveled boards as I jump down to rearrange my stack. Everyone has stopped except us. Bottles snap open and spray cool water. Sparks dash from my eyes as I see Smiley across from me smirking. He does that, he always does that. I will show him though, I am strong and will push and pummel anything to put it back into order. I will spit, and cuss, and kick lumber around in foolish ways. Smiley stands, arms crossed, unmoving...but smiling like a halfwit. I jump out and smack the big red button; we're on again. The Green Chain is on again. Smiley stares straight ahead, arms crossed, as more 2 by 10's plop out. He is smiling at me now, enjoying this, I'm sure of it. Fuck Smiley. Why doesn't



Woods  
Tyrone Washington

he talk? He is a mute. He is a mutant. He is a pig-bellied cock-sucker in Farmer Brown overalls that will never, even over fifty lifetimes, ever, build any machine for any other man to use. He is an old white pine that doesn't know any better, just sucks up nutrients and only moves when the wind tells him he should. He is useless, besides the fact that he's "The Master" of sliding boards into simple-minded stacks. But his stacks...his stacks are so perfect...so perfect, every damn time. I wish I could slide boards like he does, but he is "The Master," and I am leaving this place soon anyway. Smiley is the only one on the chain that doesn't use gloves. He has hands made of sliver-proof skin, hands that cannot be bought or sold, only made. Made to do things others cannot. I know what he does though, I watch him. His bag of tricks is deep but I could learn them. I have been learning them. He wobbles the board on his hip at the precise moment so that it maneuvers itself into the stack; stacking itself, with graceful, effortless beauty. He hardly even touches the timber really, he just funnels it. It's poetic and meaningful and no one will ever know that he is the world champion of stacking boards into stacks. He will never receive a gold medal, or a medal of honor, or a blue ribbon. He will only wear what is necessary—his Carhartt overalls, his leather bib, his steel-toe boots, his blue handkerchief headband (only because it keeps the sweat out of his eyes)—and he'll do what he does until he does it no longer. Eventually, he'll just fall over and he'll land on the ground and roll in the dirt and face up to the sky. They'll load up his well-built frame and run him through the mill; up the conveyer belt, through the log chute, and down into the saw room. He is a brawny horse-like man that is stronger than most machines, but will not last as long. Because he is actually made of sawdust, we all are, and sawdust just disappears down into cracks never to be thought of again.

I always thought the smell of fresh timber was a smell that ranked as if not the finest scent around, then definitely top tier. When I smell it now, it saddens me, because it doesn't remind me of early morning freedom, and fresh wildness the way it once did. It only reminds me that I was tamed by the machines. I was tainted by those machines that those men made that didn't account for the sawdust that was going into places it shouldn't. They never thought about that, because they never thought about us. We were merely machines they hadn't built.

The sawdust is everywhere here; in my socks, in my gloves, in my underpants. I look at my hands and they are raw and pussy. Itchy. Stinky. Sweaty. Everything stops again. The Green Chain stops. Lunchtime. Scottie and I sit on a pile of freshly cut pine logs and talk of girls; who's back in town, who broke up with who, and who's easy. We scarf down our sack lunches for survival purposes and dry out our soggy boots and gloves. Sawdust and sweat, everywhere, oozes out of our bodies and seeps quietly into the ground below. Newly-fluffed pillow clouds drift by and we allow ourselves to follow them for awhile, but not too long because we must stay and they must go. We unfold our bodies onto damp

bark under the high sun. We sleep. Everything stops. I am at rest, but I smile, almost chuckle, knowing it is a pretend rest, a pretend stop. As I float away, I know there is a string wrapped around my ankle that is tied off to a well-positioned stake. I belong to this ground, this place, this mill full of machines and men—spilling my blood-sweat into sawdust and stomping on grapes like mad but never making wine. Instead we make 2 by 4's, 2 by 8's, 2 by 10's. We are held together by wood and ripped apart into sawdust...it is only our sweat that is ours. Everything will turn on again soon. The Green Chain will be on again. And I cannot leave until I'm asked to go inside or I just don't show up one day.



Adam Steele

for langston hughes

you sang america  
when white linens were washed with  
lye.

now colors tumble dry  
rather than hang  
on a line.

sheets rode the wind  
like pointed ghosts of past. stains  
pinned with pride for all  
to see. today  
she wears them privately;  
shamefully.

*try to wish them gone  
when they will not wash  
gone*

sleepily she recalls the text-  
book tragedies of which you  
wrote; half  
on your side, half  
her own. decades gone,

her hands still smell of  
lie.

stains

# Priority Express

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Anna Mesick

It's time to put our children in boxes.  
Drag them to Fed-Ex,  
some kicking and screaming  
like willow trees in a windstorm,  
some docile and fading, ready to  
curl away in their cardboard containers.

Pick out the perfect box.  
Too big?  
Too small?  
Better to buy too small.  
Save money on bubble wrap needed  
to keep the little brat from rattling,  
making noise,  
irritation.

We can help you squeeze your brat into  
the small space,  
step down with our heels and push  
bones in a crackling crescendo.  
Don't worry, it can't  
feel anything  
no pains growing  
pains in its vulnerable stems.

Say good-bye.  
Always so sad, like mail sent  
but never arrives.

One day stop waiting  
in line on the bridge,  
our boxes held in front of us  
like silently offered prayers.  
We can cross over only if  
we answer one question correctly.

One  
Simple  
Question

-What do you see?  
*Fallen stars slowly drowning in liquid priorities*

Wrong answer.

Clutching her box, the rejected crossing candidate  
shuffles to the end of the line  
where someone hands her a roll of duct tape  
and another steps forward,

-What do you see?

*Electric city lights reflected on water*



Cancer  
Eli C. Lawson

# Travoltorto

## Rich Anderson

Travoltorto is a name given to a framed drawing of John Travolta. You will come to accept this.

Travoltorto was drawn by Ashley Smith of Redlands, California. She didn't name the crayon and color pencil drawing Travoltorto, nor to this day does she know that her drawing of John Travolta has been named Travoltorto. It is probably all for the better.

Ashley: nine years old, favorite movie is *Grease*. Her mother thought the picture of J.T. was either surprisingly good or somewhat comical, due to the realistically drawn sparkly blue eyes in contrast to the awkward open smile revealing evenly spaced, Bali-esque flat teeth, so she entered it, with Ashley's consent, in a drawing contest at Dewar's Ice Cream Parlor. Favorite ice cream is bubble gum. Chipmunk cheeks filled with soggy blue gumballs. Contest entries must be from children ages ten or less. Prizes will be awarded for first, second, and third place.

This story isn't about Ashley or her mother. It's about Travoltorto.

Twig walked into the strip club with Travoltorto. He clutched the frame in his hands. Knuckles white and peeling. Held to his chest. There was thumping bass music that Twig hadn't heard before. There were a couple people at the bar, and three guys sitting at high tables. A stripper danced at the bar. Exasperation and sexual lackluster, topless and hollow, the twenty-first century courtship ritual. Dollar bills folded up, so folded and folded over that the shadowed men at the bar could touch her with their fingers. Her thong. Her hips. Her ass. Twig saw this.

Twig quickly looked down at Travoltorto. He stopped just in the doorway. Eyes glued. Those baby blues of Travoltorto. Don't look up. Don't look up. This is not what he thought it would be.

"Twig, what are you doing?" Garrett had just walked in, after paying the cover.

Travoltorto. Those pictures. Lying in the bed. Lola.

"I need to go. Let's go."

"But we just paid the cover, Twig. What the hell, that was five bucks

down the drain.”

Twig, still keeping his eyes on Travoltorta, walked out.

Garrett drove on. Twig sat beside him in the truck. White dashes passed through Twig's eyes as he stared on the freeway. There was silence between. The far mountains beyond the fields of strawberries and broccoli slowly rotated around the car on the freeway.

“That's not when he first told me the story,” Garrett, still scratching his head, tried to explain. “It was after we went to PJ's in Oxnard.”

“The strip club. Did you guys go in?” I asked.

“Twig wanted to. Said he hadn't seen tail since sometime or another. I didn't really understand his mumbles.”

Garrett picked up the hitchhiker Twig in Pasadena, where he stopped for lunch. Garrett ate Indian food. But that doesn't matter.

Twig was coming from Redlands, but before that Twig was in the desert. His beard filled out to his chest with sand and his skinny arms crusted red. His plain white t-shirt covered in black marker streaks. His pants: torn jeans. Favorite ice cream, he liked all ice cream.

*One time I bought Lola a ring with a black stone on it. Onyx I think it was. It was ninety dollars and the guy at the jewelry store said he would resize it for free. I just had to bring her finger in, he told me. It was a joke. “You can bring it on ice for all I care!”*

*Asshole. I hate jewelers.*

*I didn't have ninety extra dollars to spend. At that time I was working for my father, doing manual labor in his metal shop. He welded; I polished, packaged, and delivered to local customers in his truck. I didn't make any money. He let me crash on his sofa and he bought food for me. That was the trade. Every once and a while, if I stayed late or came in early and busted my ass all day, he gave me thirty bucks. That wasn't more than once a week, though. And I usually spent that money on cigarettes and ice cream.*

*Anyways, I bought Lola this really nice ring. Black stone and everything.*

I gave it to her the day I got it. I didn't even have it wrapped by that asshole jeweler. I just held it in my hand from the time I bought it till I saw her. I played with it and got it stuck on my pinky. It hurt like hell getting off. Can you sleep with rings on your fingers? I sure as hell can't. I always wake up in the middle of the night freaking out or something. "I'm stuck! I'm stuck!" and I yank off the rings and throw them across the room. It's like in my dream my fingers are numbing and rotting off. I always try to take off my rings before I go to sleep. Probably all for the better.

So I waited outside her house. Well her dad's house. See we were young at the time. Younger at least than now. Around nineteen. I was living with my dad, and she with her dad. Both divorced. Well, I waited with the ring. I sat on the bus bench that rested just beyond her ivy covered fence. That was the happiest time I had with the ring. You know, thinking how great it was going to be to see her face, her little almond eyes shining with happiness. "Oh I can't believe you bought me this ring! It's so beautiful! And look at that stone!" And you know, if she is that happy outside the bedroom about something like that, just imagine inside. I know, I know, you think I just got her the ring for a good fuck, huh? Well fuck you for thinking that. I really loved Lola. Love, yeah sure, I know.

So Lola got back from her job at the dance studio. She teaches these little kids to do pirouettes and shit like that. Really cool, I loved just going there and watching her with the kids. There's something about that, I mean the kids, their dancing. I will tear up just because it's so beautiful to see these kids, like ten-year-olds, express themselves, do what they think is cool. They are just there, and they are dancing. Sure they aren't graceful, leaning on comical almost, but beautiful.

Lola gets back, parks her car in her driveway, I walk over to meet her. She gets out of the car and I know she saw the ring right away because her eyes were kinda surprised to see me, like I jumped out of nowhere and flicked dust in her face. Not really knowing what to do, I tried to hand it to her. I didn't even say "Hi" or anything, I just planted the ring in her face. I don't remember the exact words she told me, but she said that I shouldn't have spent money on her. And that I should have checked with her before buying something so expensive-looking. Of course she was taken back by the gesture and all. Said thank you and all but didn't accept it. Until then I hadn't noticed the other rings on her fingers, she wore four of them. Guess 'cause I was looking down. All of them with a red or ruby stone. Her birth stone. Ruby. July. She only wears her birth stone.

"He had a framed drawing of John Travolta with him," Garrett tweaked his head, "it was the fuckin' weirdest thing. Looked like Travolta but with Down Syndrome. He called it Travoltorto." When Garrett picked up Twig in his car, he was standing on a street corner, near a donut shop. Holding the framed picture.

"So you just decided to stop?"  
"Yeah, I suppose."  
"At a strip club?"  
"At a shitty strip club."  
"With this guy you just met?"  
Garrett nodded.  
"You know," Garrett said, "maybe he said he had never seen any tail before. I don't remember."

Garrett drove Twig to Lola's house. Her dad's house, where Twig used to be called Timothy. Where Lola would lie in bed and wonder when Timothy would call her on the phone. And wonder when Timothy would ask her to do anything that resembled a date. When would he kiss her? Her dad's house, where she had the upstairs all to herself since her mother ran off to Albuquerque. She covered the empty walls with faces and people, clippings from *Newsweek*, *GQ*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, doodled on and demonized. Colin Powell with red beady eyes and devil horns, shaking the hand of the President of Djibouti, Mr. Ismail Omar Guelleh. Ralph Lauren's pretty boy model with nipple clamps and bondage mask, a penis dripping a mysterious black liquid onto his head. Tom Cruise with alien antennas and cookie crumbs on his lips. Chocolate chip. Hundreds of these pictorial witticisms posted on Lola's walls.

Timothy, before he moved away, changed his name, and started different habits, knew her dad's house well. Especially the upstairs. He and Lola would lie on her bed, quiet, with a good distance between, and he would memorize each magazine clipping that she defaced. Each memorized picture serving later, after leaving her dad's house, to bring him back, no matter where he was, to her bed. Beside Lola.

Garrett parked his car out by the bus bench. Out beyond the grasps of the overgrown ivy. The vines twisted and darted onto the bus bench. Years before, the last time Twig was here, the vines had a good yard to reach the bench. Now this bench, where he used to wait for Lola to return from wherever, had been tangled up in a plant's web.

Twig got out of the car with Travoltorto. He walked to the front door and knocked. Once. Twice. No answer. Twig turned his head to the car, Garrett's still there. But where is Lola? Her dad? That can't be her car in the driveway; she would never drive a minivan. Knock again.

Footsteps from inside. The door opens and it's not Lola or her dad. He looks like a computer repairman, minus the glasses they usually wear.  
"Hello?"

"Lola?" Twig shook his head. "I mean is Lola here?"



The computer repairman stood his ground, turned his shoulders perpendicular to the open door.

"I don't know a 'Lola.' Perhaps you have the wrong house."

"Is her dad here?"

The computer repairman began to close the door, glanced down at Travoltorto, and blinked a sigh.

"Do you know where she is?"

"No. I don't."

Door closed.

"Tell her I have a gift for her, something for her wall."

As I sat listening to Garrett tell about his experience with Twig, I couldn't help but think a lot of things. So we are on the same page, here are the actual facts, as Garrett told me, without any specifics, just as he told me: (in no particular order)

- Twig was hitchhiking in Pasadena and Garrett did pick him up and give him a ride to Ventura.
- Garrett took Twig, upon Twig's request, to Lola's dad's house. The house is surrounded by an overgrown ivy plant.
- Twig did tell Garrett a story, and only one story, which Garrett told me, in some detail, and which is in italics to differentiate.
- Twig and Garrett did stop at PJ's Adult Entertainment, and Twig did "flip-out" and stare at Travoltorto and then briskly walk out, head down.
- There was a Travoltorto. Probably still is.
- Twig was turned away from Lola's dad's old house. Garrett didn't know why or ask why.

Now for the facts that are not in the story.

- Garrett left Twig sitting on the bus bench, tangled by the ivy.
- I don't like Garrett all that much.
- Garrett always picks up hitchhikers so he can tell their stories to his friends so he can seem less boring than he actually is.
- Twig must have named the drawing Travoltorto.
- Garrett only cares about plot.

I wasn't so much confounded with the framed drawing of John Travolta as I was of Twig's reasons behind carrying it with him. What was it, what was the driving force behind it? His baggage seemed sort of like familiar baggage to me, but I couldn't pinpoint it. Travoltorto isn't just a proper

noun. Garrett's story, though interesting, lacks those branches, the branches create ivy. It's not picking him up (A), the strip club (B), then Lola's dad's house (C). So what about that? What's in between A, B, and C?

Why did Twig leave Lola for God's sake? Running off to the desert. Only returning years later to her house. I don't care that it happened. But the WHY? Make something up Garrett. Sure Timothy was probably embarrassed, ashamed, or eventually rejected because of his coyness. Some guy known for his straightforwardness ends up seducing her. She figures what the hell. Timothy isn't ever going to do anything. All he does is lie on my bed and greet me after work. I think I love him, but I have known him for years and he has never asked me out on a real date. Not once. What am I supposed to do? Wait forever? And Timothy can't blame her. Hell, he's thinking the same thing. It is her duty to make the first move. I'm taking my time, he thinks. When she wants me she will kiss me, and then we will be in a relationship. A real relationship. Not in this relationship where I can't tell her I think about her all the time, that I stay up at night and think of her eyes looking at me. Those almond eyes. She looks at me. I am actually in her room. Am I dreaming? Late at night, surrounded by night, wrapped in ivy, those many pictures, why didn't I ever tell you I loved you? Why did I move away? Now you are gone.

This is no longer Garrett's story. Or Twig's story.

Ashley didn't win first place, but she did win a pity second place. No other nine or ten-year-olds entered the contest. The manager of Dewar's, whose whole magical idea was **the drawing contest**, noticed that Ashley's portrait of John Travolta, **although the same size in comparison**, eight and a half by eleven, to the other entries **from children much younger than her** had not the same talent. Other very much younger children entered the contest. With boogery grins they entered the parlor and handed the manager copy paper replicas of Dali, Van Gogh, and Monet. *Paysage Aux Papillons. Night Café in the Place Lamartine. Impression, Sunrise.* **Whether or not the parents of these little tikes helped out in the replicas was of no concern to the manager, although he never liked cheating.** **And because he always felt a bit melancholy and heavyhearted that the smart kid in the class never received a higher grade than three by five card cheat Mr. Quarterback, he awarded the second place prize to Ashley and her portrait of John Travolta.** The second place winner is to have their picture framed and hung from the walls of Dewar's and to be awarded a twenty dollar gift certificate. **First, second, and third place winners have the option of selling their works through Dewar's.** Bubble gum ice cream, chipmunk cheeks.

Tyler Gonlag

she asked me if i smoked and i couldn't help but confess that derrida was my cigarette. afterwards i noted that she had her own warning labels and that mine should come with one upon purchase that says, "may cause nervous breakdowns." she thought my complaining was ironic, but i was too preoccupied with the ocean to ask what she meant.

she just allowed the smoke to trail from her lips, and even told me how it offered her a sense of freedom. i replied that eagles were being shot down daily and that wings could be clipped with silent urgency of motive and nobody would be there to collect the feathers except little boys in supermarket parking lots. i didn't think she heard me, though. her eyes looked overcast against the sky.

we were both thinking about one another so intently that i couldn't say i love you and she couldn't say i know. i knew that silence wasn't healthy (after all this time it's still not) and so i remarked how her habit wasn't, either. all that was offered in return was a glance of admiration and through the absent intensity we both agreed that mind reading was better left to venice regulars and married couples. she said that death was hovering above us and that she didn't want it to get in the way. romeo and juliet was out of the question so we tossed the scripts. all i heard was i love you and i know, and i learned that day how to set up camp when your lover can breathe fire.

but it was my dream to peer inside her coffin when she died, much like i longed for the day when we would walk along the sand of an emptier beach. i didn't really care about the weather; it was apparent that she was a summer kind of girl, and that was funny to me. her sullen demeanor was a part of her and on better days danced around us. i say better because, like the four questions, on all other nights she held me fastened to her siren rock. all this stupid sailor wanted was to crash on the beach, but according to all the realistic people i'd ever met, life wasn't fire. i was old enough to know, but it somehow didn't apply to me. or us. it was as if time had been removed from our agenda and immortality was as certain as sunrise, except we wouldn't sleep through it.

but there she was, always, one hand upon my neck and the other holding her cigarette. she only smoked around me because we did everything together. i mean to say that every time we snuck out and drove somewhere or slept under pier docks she would ask me to light her up, and i would be such a hypocrite if i didn't because my addiction was far worse than hers. no excuse of decency could be made in order to preserve us. it was something apart from all our habits, it was the strangest sort of bond that allowed our bodies to warm together underneath a blanket during the early hours.





jim allardice  
rich anderson  
mary angelino  
jeff bock  
brittany bruer  
nancy carroll  
eddi joe ivan cherbony  
christine corr  
s. damiani  
summer dewitt  
marco de la fuente  
eric dinsmore  
lynn elishaw  
gohar gegeyan  
tyler gonlag  
natalia jaster  
melanie jeffrey  
eric jones  
robert michael kane  
heather kenney  
eli c. lawson  
duston lehren  
emilie may mcewan  
anna mesick  
amber norwood  
jeremy quintero  
adam steele  
olga vaynkof  
tyrone washington  
evin wolverton  
jayna zimmelman