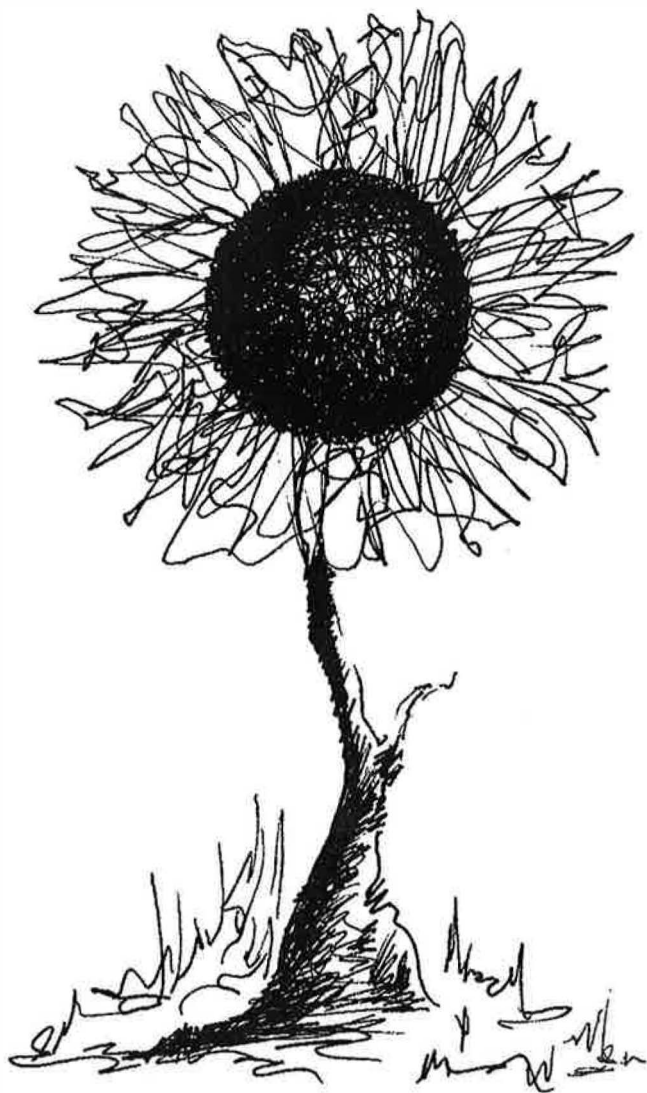


Spring 2009



Northridge Review

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Awards

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. The Northridge Review will announce the winner of this award in the Fall of 2009.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in the 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 of 2009.

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 of 2009.

Submissions

The Northridge Review accepts submissions throughout the year. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the writer's name, address, email, and telephone number as well as the titles of the works submitted. The writer's name should not appear on the manuscript itself. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be delivered to:

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Editor's Note

In the beginning, there was desire. A desire to create and nourish something, and to share it with the world. A desire that could not be fulfilled by one person, or two, or three. So ten people got together to transform this collective desire into a tangible entity. Yet they realized that their individual theoretical and aesthetic resources were not enough; without a hybrid gene pool, the bubble of concepts and abstractions would not and could not develop past the embryonic stage.

The determined and hopeful group then solicited substance from a body of eclectic, anonymous sources. Hours then weeks of obsessive prodding later, the guardians-to-be glimpsed the strongest genes emerging, ultimately bonding into a single cell of multiplicity. Naturally, mood swings, frustration, and fatigue were felt along the way. Deep inside, though, the group knew the journey would be rewarding in the long run. At times, they just wanted to put the damn thing to rest, but, by then, its presence was too persistent and insistent—like when you're in an airplane, the tall person behind you has his legs pushed up against your back so that your ribs feel the pressure, too.

After sixteen weeks of labor and then some, please welcome the Spring 2009 edition of the Northridge Review to the world.

Size: 8 ½ x 5 ½ inches

Weight: _____ (hint: multiply *ingestion* by *pleasure*)

Hold the product delicately but firmly in your hands. Do not be alarmed by the pure life it exudes. Rock it to and fro. Swaddle its skin with your skin to keep it from falling.

Jennifer Lu



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Nancy Carroll

Between Shifts

Autumn, Edward Hopper, 1927

She is folded laundry.
Fluorescent New York
greens hold her tight, clothespins
for a geometric pathology filled
with fingerprints, lip lines,
sugar cubes. The night, bamboo
quiet, is lost landscape

and only the coffee cup is waterfall.

Melissa Morehouse

The Eels

Before the house
the impatient bath tub waits,
expectant boards on top ready to reveal their secret.
Ink black water
moves slightly in sunlight's touch.
He reaches inside unworried,
ripples expanding outward from his arm.
After feeling slimy scaleless skin
slip through fingers
he grabs one.
It violently struggles in the air,
like a broken bird plummeting to its death
and wraps its tail around his wrist.
He pushes a hook through,
behind the gills,
and hangs it on the fence.

With blade in hand,
one fluid movement
slices open the liquid sable dermis
of the belly.
Nerve endings frantic,
trying to escape,
not realizing death.
Sinews tighten,
body curling to the form of a snail shell;
yet another representation
of Fibonacci's sequence in nature.
From fading warmth
he pulls unnecessary innards out,
throwing them to the
congregation of begging cats.

He returns his instrument to the patient chair
and plunges into icy depths to find the other.
This one will probably only take four seconds to gut.
I wonder when dinner will be ready.

Juliette Diggs
London Sweeper

A London sweeper sweeps
with his broom, and the dust and the dregs
rise to surround his bent body in a cloud.
The sound of the subway muffles
against his ears, creating a white noise
around his headphones.

The sweeper steps on the genius of others
with their city planning and their engineering and their
massive architecture on all sides.
He leans his broom against a mural,
removes his earphones,
and listens to the street
musician for a time.

Then goes back to sweep, sweep,
sweeping,
dedicated to the dirt and faithful to
the filth. All of that which society brushes
off or throws out.
Our escapes are his escaping.





Jose Morales

Hazard Park

1. Bitchin' Camaro

Tucan's dad used to drive a black 1978 Camaro, a vehicle which used to impress his best friend Gordo. This was partly because Gordo's own family could never afford a car, let alone something as awesome as a Camaro. If Tucan's dad was in a good enough mood, and if they asked him right, he'd sometimes take the both of them to the park in that Camaro. Gordo would sit in the backseat, staring at the wheel and the dashboard and the little wooden crucifix that Tucan's dad kept dangled in the rearview mirror.

Tucan was never all that impressed with the car. It was old, and noisy, and dented, and it didn't have air conditioning. But when Gordo noticed the Camaro, he saw a fast machine, dark and gleaming, like something a badass superhero would drive. He used to like picturing himself behind the wheel, the adventures he could have with a car like that!

Tucan's dad must've had the same thought because one day, during the fall that they both turned seventeen, he drove off in his Camaro and he never came back. Tucan always maintained that he didn't give a shit about it. Gordo, on the other hand, wished

Tucan's dad had left the Camaro behind, at least as a consolation prize for Tucan. But Gordo knew that things didn't always work that way.

2. How to Win Friends with a Knife

Gordo met Tucan in the first grade.

Gordo's dad wasn't working at the time, so he and his parents had to move into a smaller place. Gordo transferred schools towards the end of October and showed up to class not knowing anyone.

They had sat at the same desk without speaking. Things didn't change until the day before Halloween, when their table had won the class pumpkin-carving contest. It turns out Tucan was good with a knife. Gordo suggested, in addition to the usual triangle eyes and nose, carving the smile like the Batman sign. Tucan did. The class was impressed (partly because the movie had come out during the summer, and practically the whole class had gone to see it). Their pumpkin was voted first place. That's more or less when their friendship started, though neither one of them would remember as they got older.

3. Rock, Paper, Scissors

Tucan's real name was Sam. He had a big hook nose, and so they named him Tucan Sam, like from the cereal. He was pretty much okay with it because he made friends easily, so whenever they called him that, they didn't mean to be mean. Besides that, his favorite cereal was, in fact, Fruit Loops, so he came to embrace the name. Eventually it was shortened to Tucan.

Tucan was good at sports. So good in fact that, during recess, they used to play rock-paper-scissors to see which team would get to pick him first. Once picked, he'd always make sure that he and Gordo were on the same team, despite Gordo being clumsy and fat (which is how he got his nickname). But for awhile, Gordo felt that was better than not being picked at all.

4. "It's My Fault, I'm Much Pregnant"

'Tucan used to visit Gordo's house after school, especially on Friday afternoons when Gordo's dad would go out drinking with his buddies. They'd watch television on the couch or play on an old Sega Genesis which was bought at a yard sale and only worked when it felt like it.

'Tucan would ask him how to say certain words. The television was *la television*, pronounced with an accent. The radio was *la radio*, again pronounced with an accent. Some words are pretty close to the English words, just pronounced with a Spanish accent. He taught 'Tucan common phrases and words: *gracias, muy bien, buenos dias, buenas tardes, piso mojado*. 'Tucan also constantly asked about *groserías* (not like groceries, Gordo told him, *groserías* are swear words). Damn motherfucker was *pinche putamadre*. Eat shit and die was *come mierda y muerete*. And so on.

One evening, 'Tucan stayed over for dinner because he was in no real hurry to get back home. Gordo's mom made the both of them some *tortas de jamón*, and when 'Tucan got up to put away his dish in the sink, he accidentally spilled his glass of horchata onto the table. The liquid pooled out and he quickly got some napkins to wipe up the mess. He attempted to offer his apologies to Gordo's mom.

Es mi culpa, I'm *mucho embarrasado*. Gordo's mom thought it was the funniest thing in the world.

5. *Falling out a Window*

The summer before they started middle school, some housing project was being built near Hazard Park, but then the funding was dropped, though the only thing that mattered was that some of the structure had been completed, like the walls and floors (but no roof above and no glass for the windows), and a huge dump of soft gravel stood waiting beside the house, beside the unfinished windows.

From the outside, it looked to Gordo to be about a twenty-foot drop. But when he, and 'Tucan, and 'Tucan's new friends walked upstairs to the second floor and looked down from above, the new angle seemed to be much more intimidating to Gordo than it was from ground level.

The room they were in might have one day been a spacious bedroom, but at that moment it was little more than a desolate space of non-descript wood and dust.

The view Gordo saw from the paneless window was of an evening sky slowly purpling like a bruise. There were no trees, and the sun was an orange afterthought in the distance. Below, in the fading light, he saw a rectangular, gaping metal-mouth filled with graying debris, not close enough for comfort.

Tucan's friend, the junior with the clean high fade, perched himself on the window's thin ledge. He held on to the sides of the frame. He stood there for a moment, crouching. His back was shadowed in darkness as the violet dusk glowed in front of him. Another of Tucan's friends offered to push him and they laughed. Gordo thought vaguely how he looked like an anxious ninja. He pushed off the house and dropped in a graceful blur, arms out, knees bent, a mix of laughing and screaming escaping his lungs. He landed square in the middle of the gravel. His feet touched down and he rolled his body forward. He got up, dusted himself off dramatically, and smiled.

He looked back to the window from where he had been squatting a moment before. He flipped them off and laughed triumphantly.

As the others jumped one by one, Gordo felt dread rise inside of him. When it got to be Tucan's turn, Gordo started to really panic. He hoped that maybe Tucan wouldn't have the nerve to go through with it so that he could save some face by not doing it either. Gordo had first tried to psyche himself into it, pretending he really looked forward to throwing himself out of the second story would-be house onto the jagged rock pile below, but the sweat in his hands and on his forehead (despite the summer evening being warm, it was not really hot enough that he should've been sweating) made him realize he couldn't fool himself. He tried finding reassurance in the fact that the others had done it and they lived to tell about it, that it was not an impossible feat. He tried picturing himself landing safely on the gravel dump, and then high-fiving the strangers below. But instead he kept seeing himself veer way off to the side and either missing the dump entirely, breaking his legs if not his neck, or cracking his body straight onto the metal walls. He wanted very much to try talking Tucan out of it, to convince him from going off the ledge. But that would have been worse. To hold Tucan back in

front of his friends because he himself was too much of a wimp to jump was simply not an option.

Tucan jumped. He landed like all the others. He got up and climbed out of the dump. Only Gordo was left by the window. Tucan stood with his new friends. They started taunting towards the window. They called him a bitch and a fag and a fucking pussy. Tucan joined in and yelled out *pinche putamadre*, and they clapped him on the back. Gordo went so far as to climb the ledge. By then it had gotten too dark to see the dump and he couldn't dare bring himself to jump into the black abyss below. Tucan and his friends finally left Gordo behind.

He climbed back inside and wept in the darkened, silent space.

6. *Bags and Dirty Work*

They say the first job people get is usually with the help of a relative. Gordo's uncle got him a job helping out a friend of his. He told him it wasn't complicated work, and that he would be paid under the table.

So Gordo worked his first job the summer before he started high school. As his uncle had said, it wasn't complicated. He simply helped out with some construction duties. He helped with hauling cement bags, mixing the cement in water and rock solution, helping load and unload materials and equipment, tearing down walls, shoveling rubble, helping reinforce wooden frames, helping install insulation and not to mention getting food and drinks for the crew. Like his uncle said, not complicated.

Tucan was working as well, except he was hauling different kinds of bags for his cousin. He'd drop off little Ziploc bags to his cousin's friends. They'd give him the money to take back, and he fattened his wallet off the home delivery fee, as he called it. Eventually Tucan made enough to stake his own share of supply, and he had made more than enough friends to keep himself in profit.

Gordo's first week was exhausting. His arms ached. His lungs ached. His back ached. He was sure he wouldn't be able to go another week. But he kept at it, and the pain would eventually subside. He grew darker from working in the sun. Despite wearing

work gloves, his hands became rough, and often he'd come home with his arms coated in dried cement. He had felt his first real sense of accomplishment, and the money wasn't even the half of it.

7. Unnecessary Roughness

As football season went on, the Dallas Cowboys seemed to dominate the league. Meanwhile, there would be pickup football games at Hazard Park after school, and everyone who quarterbacked insisted on being called Troy Aikmen, while anyone who carried the ball half-decently dubbed himself Emmet Smith, and whoever caught a touchdown pass was suddenly Deion Sanders or Michael Irving.

Gordo played because he thought he might try out for the team eventually. He'd lost some weight over the summer, gained some muscle, and his nickname no longer fit, so he went back to being just Hugo. For his part, Tucan also put a stop to his own nickname, preferring just Sam.

It was rare that they played on opposite teams, though the days of the playground felt long behind them.

The pickup games took place late afternoons, when the weather was still cold (as if winter couldn't wait) so that their breathing, heavy and harsh, fogged ephemerally in the air. The grass was dry and fragrant. Anonymous cars passed by distant in the street, neither aware nor interested in the competition on the field.

Hugo started out on defense, rushing the passer while Sam blocked. They had both grown since the last time they saw each other, though Sam had shot up five inches over Hugo, and was as competitive as ever. He used his strength to crash against Hugo, wrapping him by the shoulders and waist, while Hugo tried breaking through his scissoring arms. On the offensive end, Hugo tried playing wide receiver, but Sam blanketed him, making it impossible to get open. Hugo was growing frustrated, and Sam seemed to sense it, to feed off of it.

Hugo eventually realized he wouldn't be able to go around him. So the next time on defense, he preemptively pushed off Sam's arms and lowered his shoulder into his chest with a furious urgency neither of them had seen coming. Sam sprawled onto the dirt. Hugo turned his back and returned toward the huddle.

From behind, Sam retaliated, colliding fiercely into Hugo's back, sending him face first into the ground, flailing. He bounced back up, though his head was spinning and all he saw were flashing amoeba-like stars. Pain drilled into his backbone but he lunged toward Sam nonetheless. Everyone suddenly stopped pretending to be the Cowboys and rushed over. Some were chanting for a fight, though others immediately separated Hugo and Sam before anything could happen.

When they had cooled off, they offered their apologies, unspoken but understood. They walked home, the two of them limping, and they had their first real conversation since the gravel jump. Sam encouraged Hugo to try out for the team. Hugo opted to take up piano instead.

8. Not All Dutch People Know Each Other

What Hugo really wanted was to learn guitar. He used to spend hours listening to his cousin's Van Halen tapes, jumping around his bedroom with a broomstick, pretending to solo along to *Eruption* and *Hot for Teacher*. But no guitar class was offered during spring (at least not for freshmen), so he chose the piano instead because he had read it was the first instrument that Eddie Van Halen started out with, so he figured he might as well start there, too.

But it hadn't gone the way he pictured it. There was only one piano in the music room because it was all the school could afford. And there was already a Child Prodigy from Holland whom the piano was more or less designated for. Most days, this left Hugo sitting on a folding chair by the woodwinds, pretending to study sheet music. The few times he was allowed to play, he could barely stumble his way across a C scale and back. It didn't help that the Prodigy would follow Hugo's lurching, raggedy scales with renditions of Moonlight Sonata and such.

Hugo had once asked the Prodigy if he'd ever heard of Eddie

Van Halen. Yes, he was his great uncle. Hugo was stunned. Then the Prodigy scoffed. *Not all Dutch people know each other, okay? Do you know Selena? No, that's right. Because she is dead now.* Another scoff noise.

Hugo didn't know that to say. He thought about explaining he hadn't meant anything by his question. He decided instead to ignore him the rest of the semester.

By far, the best part about music class was talking with Dolores, the red-headed girl who played the clarinet. She spoke in non-sequiturs and brash questions. Whenever they spoke, Hugo would feel anxious because she wasn't shy about asking personal questions. But he also found it exciting the way she would talk with him, the way she would say things that had nothing to do with anything, so that Hugo could just say the first thing he really felt.

She once rested her head on his shoulder and confided that her feet hurt. He smelled the apple shampoo of her hair. His face flushed, his heart picked up. Not knowing what else to say, his mind recalled the gravel dump and he asked her if she had jumped out a window or something. Anyone else would surely have been puzzled. But Dolores looked up and smiled, as if he had somehow said the one thing that could make her forget about her hurting feet. *You are so weird*, she gently whispered.

Sam had given him advice on how to talk to girls. Just talk some flirty shit and pretend like they don't matter to you. Make them feel like they're the ones that have to earn it. That's how you get the pussy.

He'd raise his middle and index fingers as if making a gun gesture. He'd proudly proclaim that those fingers had seen more snatch than a toilet at a dyke bar. He showed Hugo the way he finger banged all the girls he hooked up with, a hard thrusting motion, claiming that's how to *pop the cherry*.

For the most part, he listened to Sam's advice. He didn't doubt the stories he told. At the same time, he couldn't bring himself to really follow or mimic Sam's way of picking up girls. He once tried making a dirty comment about the way Dolores held her clarinet. She had laughed. Except, unlike the other times, it had not been a disarming laugh but instead one of derision. She stopped speaking with him for a whole week, and from then on

he learned what worked for Sam wouldn't always work for him.

9. *Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground*

Sam came home late thinking that his dad, if he were home at all, would be asleep or passed out. The wind had picked up so he had been wearing the hood of his sweater. When he didn't see the Camaro out front, he thought the house would be empty. But when he saw the light, he knew his dad would be home, the car probably in the garage. As he passed the kitchen window, Sam saw his dad slouching, a droopy vacant expression on his face, staring at his empty cans on the table. He entered and quickly tried walking to his room. The little stereo kept on the kitchen counter was playing Led Belly or Blind Willie Johnson or some other blues shit his dad kept in the house. Sam never cared enough to tell the difference.

Hey, you. You get over here. Sam considered just ignoring him and going to bed, but he still hadn't the nerve to disrespect his father, even when he was in such a condition—perhaps especially. He turned around and listened to his father, in slurred and rambling intonations. Spittle flew from his mouth. His brown eyes glowed with tiny red rivulets. His breath could strip paint.

Fuck. Hey, you think you're a better man than I am. You think that you're better than me and you don't...you don't even know how much I've sacrificed for you? For everything I sacrificed to you.

When he spoke his voice was, despite what he was saying and despite the condition he was saying it in, flat and emotionless. Nevertheless, Sam's eyes welled up. A painful lump caught in his throat. He felt that if he didn't do something—smash the little stereo with its grainy, moaning clang filling the kitchen, scream at his father and knock him onto the floor with one good shot—anything, then he feared he'd collapse under the words his dad had spoken. Instead, he walked back outside, slamming the door behind him, cutting off the stereo mid-song. The wind seemed to answer by gusting hard at him. Inside it had felt too hot. Even the cold harsh wind was welcome relief.

He walked and he walked. He walked with no direction and so he was in no hurry. The hot suffocating feeling ebbed away, but he had nowhere to go. He ended up at Hazard Park. He'd have to hit up his friends, he silently thought to himself. He'd try and

find a place to crash. Until then, he lay on the cold concrete stands under the darkened dome of the outdoor basketball court. He closed his eyes. He'd walked enough that night.

10. *Sex Education (part I)*

Hugo was late for Health class. He walked quickly, cutting across the quad area. They had started condom-curriculum the other day, but that wasn't why he was hurrying. He already knew where babies came from, had read about the reproductive glands and organs, and he'd seen enough R-rated films and scrambled porn to fill in the blanks. What he looked forward to was that he got to sit next to Dolores.

It was the first day of fall. It wasn't warm, but it was as bright and sunny as any day of summer had been. He felt like he could walk all day in weather that was so nice. As he hurried to class, Hugo imagined himself taking a casual stroll, arm in arm with Dolores, walking beneath some shade in the brightness of the afternoon. It seemed to him almost cruel to have to sit indoors when the day radiated with so much possibility.

He got to class and the lights were off. A film was being shown on the projection screen. Hugo entered the same moment a syphilitic cock was being presented in all its outdated Technicolor glory. Because the day had been so bright outside, as Hugo tried making it to his seat, all he saw was darkness. He hadn't given his eyes enough time to adjust. He walked five feet before tripping on someone's backpack and crashing onto the floor. Without missing a beat, from the back, Sam called out, *Ha, what a dick!*

The class erupted in laughter. Hugo got up slowly, took his seat, and was silently grateful that she was apparently absent that day.

11. *Emptiness*

So Sam's dad disappeared. He had gone back to get some clothes and some things from his room and he saw all of his father's meager belongings weren't there anymore. He was gone. Everything but his empties. Like magic. The piece-of-shit car, too. He took it with him. Great. He didn't care. Good fucking riddance. As far as Sam was concerned, his father always was and always would

be a stranger, and it would be pretty dumb to get all emotional about a stranger, someone he had never really known, didn't want to know, didn't care to know, didn't have to deal with anymore, didn't ask for and never got anything from, never cared enough to stick around and so really in the end, what the fuck did it matter except he didn't need to worry about the bills that were piling up on the kitchen table because it wasn't like he had been taking care of them in the first place (shit, and why would he since he was hardly ever around, so you couldn't blame him really, hell, if Sam had also had a car you can bet he would've been long fucking gone by now).

He went to school to meet up one last time with his buddies, and to collect some supply he had left in Hugo's locker. Health class had been kind of funny. Besides that, he roamed the halls, passing time until school let out and he could walk among the mass exodus without being hassled.

He waited until the last five minutes of school before heading to the locker. They had agreed to share lockers and Hugo even knew about the supplies he carried, he didn't care. Sam was holding two pounds of product, aside from some schoolbooks, which were little more than decoys. He'd sell what he could and smoke the profits. He absently grabbed his backpack and headed toward the utility road where the yellow school buses parked. From there, he hung around until the bell rang and he exited towards the parking lot. In his mind, he had already resigned himself to the fact he wasn't ever returning. He never looked back.

Sam walked. He thought about the money he had saved up, the money he could still make if he was careful, and about how far it might get him. But some distinct foreboding nagged at him. It was something on top of all the other thoughts that were already going on inside his head (*like father like son, the sins of the father are the sins of the son, goddamn empty promises*). A sense of inevitability piqued inside of him. Instinctively, as he approached the park, he decided to turn around, to get away from where he was, and quick.

No sooner had he turned around he saw a squad car facing the wrong side of the road, facing directly at him.

He looked back the way he was walking, a split-second from making a dash, when another squad car rounded the corner. He knew he was trapped.

They told him to put his hands in the air, to turn his back towards them. Their guns were drawn. They approached him, placed him in cuffs and grabbed his backpack and felt him up and down. They went through his backpack and Sam objected. *Nah, fuck that, I plead the fourth commandment.*

The officers were not fucking around and kept their guns drawn. The ones going through his things were out of his line of sight. He waited for the inevitable. He thought about his father at the kitchen table, about the now empty house, about the car that he had taken and the beer cans he left behind. Sam thought about the other night sleeping at the park, finding peace inside the darkened empty space. He thought about the way he burned Hugo earlier that afternoon. He didn't really mean to be so mean, it was just that if he didn't let out all the things inside of him by laughing it out that it would crumble him like cheap gravel. He could see the park and he remembered the way he and Hugo had battled on the field. He stood on the sidewalk with his hands cuffed and he wished that it could be like when he and Hugo, *Gordo*, used to be able to just hang out, before things had become so irrevocably fucked up.

Sam was practically sick from the interminable wait, the silent, doomed anticipation. And when they had finally finished, they took off the cuffs and let him go. The squad cars drove off in opposite directions. His heart beat fast in confused relief. His stash wasn't in there. Sam didn't even think to check his bag when he had taken it from the locker, his mind had been so preoccupied. The smell was there, and so they had checked every pocket, every crevice. But it was no crime to carry a backpack that only reeked of hashish.

He remained on the sidewalk in dumb amazement, staring inside his bag, empty except for the decoy books inside. His heart had not slowed down, his hands would not stop trembling.

12. *Sex Education (part II)*

At the same time Sam was contemplating his empty bag, Hugo was inside of Dolores, rapt in physical pleasure so intense that it bordered on the delirium.

It was Hugo who had taken Sam's stash from his bag, thus saving

him from irrevocably fucking up his life. The irony was that Hugo was doing Sam no favors.

It started with Dolores waiting for Hugo outside of Health class. She had asked him to walk her home later. She also casually mentioned her parents wouldn't be home. This last detail, that she felt she needed to mention it after making a seemingly innocuous request, stuck in Hugo's mind. Before attending his last class, he went to his locker. Truly unsure of what to expect, he helped himself to a condom out of Sam's box of Trojans. He also took Sam's stash, on the chance it might've come into play later, and also because of the way Sam had burned him in class.

As he walked home later, going over how quickly it had happened, how intoxicating it had felt, he passed Hazard Park where Sam had stood earlier. The sky purpled.

The first thing he expected to hear about when Sam showed up to his house later was his precious stash but he wouldn't care because he was only getting him back for earlier. And when Sam told Hugo about his father, he didn't say a word, the sympathy for his friend unspoken and understood.





Patricia Escobar
La Nueva Mestiza

Where to find illumination
when all I know is divided.

Ni de aquí, Ni de allá
Not from here, not from there...
eso me dicen.
Shakespeare didn't write for me.
Neither did Lorca;
talvez Cisneros, Anzaldua?

Sitting atop the stratosphere
people look up to me... finally—*entienden.*
Or perhaps I am insignificant
perceptions confused—*hablo y nunca me escuchan.*
Frustration opens my soul and I see....

Castrated tongue
bleeding brown—*la sangre regenera*
el coraje y me abre los ojos.
Pride is my power
and with it I realize—

I am Chaucer's Wife of Bath
Lorca's *Zapatera Prodigiosa*
Anzaldua's *Wild Tongue*—**SOY!**
Mujer hybrid.

Mi semblante obscuro y orgulloso
illuminated by *Coyolxauhqui.*
La somnolencia cierra mis ojos
While Sinatra sings me to sleep.

Nancy Carroll
Chaco Canyon

The landscape is credible
for all its sandstone, rock, fire.

Empty rooms, mere engagements
to offer sun, moon, pathways

through the inconsolable breath
of rainless wind. It has been said,

the white arrows are heavy with rain,
but prayers are red, as aniline dye

and it is they that are heavy next
to my father's swollen feet.

Abandonment is only departure,
exodus with copper bells, parrots,

and broken ceramic shards that speak
bloodless terrors of shamans, their shadows.

Light here is a severe degree canting
and recanting what lies between

hunger and theatre. Simple disclosure
travels on foot with bits

of digested memory
worn around our necks, preparations

and warnings for either enemy
or brother. Mountain eagles shriek

and what little remains woven
unfurls like snapped, furious twigs. Mere

estimations for cameras, their crews,
but even with them,

these journeys are hobbled mules and cobwebs.



Sascha Conrad

Basement Conversations

Characters

WOMAN, 23, witty and aggressive. She's wearing dark blue jeans, a Bob Marley shirt, and Chuck Taylor's.

MAN, 22, laid back, slightly insecure. He's wearing dark jeans, a fitted, long sleeve, green thermal, black, framed glasses, and Chuck Taylor's.

Setting

MAN's basement. Center stage has a sofa, a coffee table, a chair on either side of the table, facing each other. Washer/dryer upstage left, a refrigerator upstage right, and stairs upstage center.

Scene one

MAN is sitting on sofa reading Maxim. WOMAN comes down the stairs, walks to fridge, grabs water bottle, and sits next to MAN, causing him to move positions. There's a sexual tension between the two of them that is obvious, yet MAN is slightly stand-offish. WOMAN is very flirty and touchy feely.

WOMAN: What's wrong?

MAN: *(He shifts.)* Huh?

WOMAN: You moved.

MAN: Yeah?

WOMAN: *(She carefully inches closer.)* So?

MAN: *(He shifts again, this time away from WOMAN.)* Nothing.

WOMAN: Why else would you move?

MAN: Cuz it's what people do? I don't know?

WOMAN: You do.

MAN: Look...it's nothing.

WOMAN: If you say so.

MAN: I do.

WOMAN: Where's—

MAN: On the way. *(He reaches for his pack of cigarettes and begins talking.)* I was listening to Love Line last night—

WOMAN: Hang on, I got a surprise. *(She pulls out a blunt and she lights it. MAN sits up more erect in his seat.)* Okay, continue. *(She exhales a huge cloud of smoke, starts coughing and passes it to him.)*

MAN: *(He takes two hits, sucks in some air, holds in the smoke, and speaks.)* Like I was saying. Love Line—*(Smoke bursts out of his mouth and he proceeds to cough uncontrollably, clutching his chest.)*

WOMAN *(Starts laughing and places a small paper bag on the table.):* Alaskan Thunder Fuck.

MAN: *(Coughing and laughing)* What? *(He passes the blunt back to her.)*

WOMAN: *(Using hand gestures, pretending to hold treats.)* Picked it up from the club yesterday. I got a brownie. They got these Reese's Treats, like Rice Krispy Treats. I'm gonna get them next time.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: Nevermind, get back to what you were saying. *(She passes the blunt back to him.)*

MAN: *(Delayed.)* Huh?

WOMAN: Love Line.

MAN: *(Delayed.)* Yeah...

WOMAN: You were listening to Love Line last night?

MAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. *(He passes the blunt back to her. Pause.)*

WOMAN: And?

MAN: Oh, uh. This guy called and he was talking about the first time he went down on his girlfriend, but the smell was too strong and now he can't go down on any woman. He's like traumatized. I thought it was hilarious.

WOMAN: I guess. I wonder if a lot of men feel that way? *(She passes the blunt back to him.)*

MAN: I don't.

WOMAN: You don't lick pussy or you don't feel that way?

MAN: I don't lick pussy *and* I don't feel that way.

WOMAN: That's a bunch of bullshit. *(He holds the blunt up as he holds smoke in his mouth, showing her what is left of the blunt.)*
Naw, I'm cool.

MAN: How's that bullshit? *(He reaches for his cigarette pack.)*

WOMAN: I'm sorry? How is it not?

MAN: Why are you complaining?

WOMAN: *(Folding her arms.)* I'm not complaining.

MAN: *(Putting his hands in his hair and running them back and forth vigorously.)* Please, save me from my misery and get to the point.

WOMAN: *(Making hand gestures.)* When did the male species stop eating pussy? I don't understand. All of a sudden, when there's a sexual encounter, there are less men willing to lick pussy than women willing to suck cock.

MAN: Maybe there's something wrong with ... *(Raising his eyebrows and looking towards her groin.)*

WOMAN: I have never had any complaints down there, thank you very much.

MAN: Word on the street is.... *(Laughing.)*

WOMAN: Shut the fuck up, from who?

MAN: I have my sources. *(Still laughing.)*

WOMAN: *(She kicks him.)* Fuck you, guy.

MAN: Maybe later.

WOMAN: Shot of love! *(She quickly kicks her leg into the air and stands.)* I'm getting a soda.

MAN: Shotta?

WOMAN: Shot of love with Tila Tequila!

MAN: Oh, my God. You're so lame.

WOMAN: *(moves and is standing in front of the MAN with her hands on her hips.)* Your face is lame.

MAN: Why are you so childish?

WOMAN: *(She bends down, placing her hands on his forearms, her face only inches away. Then, in a low, seductive voice)* Why are you so uptight?

MAN: I...I...

WOMAN: *(Grazing her lips on his cheek.)* You what?

MAN: I'm thirsty. *(He begins to cough a noticeably fake cough.)*

WOMAN: *(Somewhat disappointed.)* Right. *(She walks back to the fridge.)*

WOMAN: I'm just sayin' don't expect me to suck your cock if you won't lick my pussy. That's all.

MAN: Think about it, it's like hamburgers!

WOMAN: What? How is it like hamburgers? *(She walks back to the sofa and sits right next to him, touching his side.)*

MAN: (*Gesturing towards groin region.*) His cock is the outside of the hamburger, you see? And her cunt is the inside of the hamburger. You don't know if the tomatoes you got in there are fresh or getting old. You don't know what's going on in there. (*He shifts his hips towards her, so that his body is facing her and she places her arm around his shoulder, resting it on the couch.*) Women, from the gate, can look at a man and go, "Okay, I can work with this." Men don't get that. We gotta go diggin' and shit. (*Pretending to dig his way through her groin with his hands and she leans back, arching her back, accentuating her breasts.*) It's like suffocating when you're down there.

WOMAN: (*Realizing how she must look, WOMAN re-adjusts herself and is once again up against the MAN.*) Did you just compare the quality of a woman's vagina to rotten tomatoes?

MAN: (*He jokingly nudges her.*) I made it work though, right? Right? C'mon.

WOMAN: (*Cracking a smile.*) You want some of my soda or not?

MAN: Naw, I'm straight.

WOMAN: Or are you?

MAN: Trust.

WOMAN: Prove it.

(*He takes the soda out of her hand and places it on the coffee table. He hooks her hips in his arms, pulls her into his groin, and gently lays her on her back, so that he is now hovering on top of her. She lets out a slight moan.*)

MAN: I wouldn't give you that pleasure. (*Bursts into light laughter. He moves back to his regular position, leaving her lying on her back. She gets up and on all fours makes her way towards him. To this he reaches for his cigarette pack.*)

WOMAN: Really?

MAN: What? (*He pulls out a cigarette and lets it dangle on his lips.*)

WOMAN: And I thought I was bad.

MAN: What? ... Did you?

WOMAN: Well, yeah.

MAN: But ...

WOMAN: But what?

MAN: I don't know.

WOMAN: It's no different than any other time.

MAN: I'm high.

WOMAN: You're always high.

MAN: No.

WOMAN: *(Sarcastically)* Okay!

MAN: *(Mockingly)* "Okay!" ... *You're* the one that's always high.

WOMAN: Seriously? Isn't that hypocritical?

MAN: If that's what you want to call it.

WOMAN: You just asked me to pick you up a sack, how is that different?

MAN: It just is.

WOMAN: You make no sense.

MAN: *(Sarcastically)* Yeah, okay.

WOMAN: Whatever.

MAN: Yeah, whatever. *(Pause.)*

WOMAN: Look, you wanna talk?

(Silence.)

(MAN crosses his legs and begins to play with his shoelace.)

WOMAN: *(She takes a deep breath.)* If you're not gonna talk, then there's no sense in me being here. *(She stands up and begins to leave.)*

MAN: *(In a low, slightly sad voice):* Don't you want your money?
(She stops in her tracks.)

WOMAN: Okay. *(She turns around and walks back towards the couch.)*

MAN: Tony's almos-

WOMAN: *(She's standing in front of MAN with hands on her hips.)*
No. I'm not gonna sit around here waiting for Tony and my money, if you're gonna act like this.

MAN: I.... I...

WOMAN: *(Frustrated.)* Out with it, guy!

MAN: *(Upset.)* Fuck it, nevermind.

(WOMAN starts to leave, again.)

WOMAN: *(Angry.)* Fuck it? How 'bout, fuck you! I'm coming for my money tomorrow and you better have it. Asshole.

Woman exits.

Lights dim. End scene.





Carleen Tibbetts
Unattachedness

deeper in yet

and

deeper

still

tissue

tucked

under

[into]

itself

rippling

labial

enveloping

consciousness trails

haphazardly

as if

a tornado

at a distance

seen

a wandering

placental

attached

yet

to

the

earth

a

by

cord

E. P. Tuazon

The Searchers at Noon

In that murkiness
stashed between the fire
place and the giant arm
chair, the TV shaping
a buzzing John Wayne,
and a thousand horses
whining a glow,

Cora is knitting John
a letter unfamiliar
to her husband.

She has to repay
him somehow;
he touched her
terribly.

One day, she will
tell Fry. Tell him
how she found
something thrilling
in foreign feelings,
different colored
veins, and mid-day
rendezvous.

She would simply
turn to Fry in bed
and cry her eyes out.

It wouldn't be
too hard. And Fry
would forgive,

forgive, forgive.

"Forgive me,"
and he'd tip
his hat if he
had one.

A real John
Wayne.

She smirked

and she felt it
fall on her lap
and pass on,
the letter pulsing
light green in
satisfaction.

It would live
next to John
from now on,
ride away into
that noisy sunset,
and bury itself

in a cold blanket.



Nancy Carroll

Ariadne

When we fled my father's
house, my spangles broke

like gunshot. They bounced
between thread and gold and lava.

I would wear your mother's shawls,
your little sister's robes. But you needed

cigarettes, or so said your note.
The geese flying overhead

remind me of the bathroom
faucet's drip and my windows, cracked

like delicate *sorrow*s of August.

Rebecca Dochterman Roney

Bullets in a Paris Wall

We sit mesmerized watching the news.
Paris fumes like a scorned lover.
Angry mobs engulf the Muslim quarter of the city,
throwing Molotov cocktails, rocks, and bricks at policemen in riot gear.
Shots ricochet off cars,
and the streets are riddled with bullets.

I remember once we ventured through an old Paris neighborhood
stopping near a cement wall
of an historic government building
scarred with bullet holes
from Germany's occupation during World War II.
A dozen navels hung on display,
and I touched them like Braille lettering,
hoping to decipher their killing stories.

The Vichy Regime was short lived,
but four years was enough
to eliminate 90,000 French Jews.

We talked of my philosophy,
that historic buildings and old objects,
like antique mirrors,
hold tight the past
and preserve a person's pain and suffering
until those things are worn away or destroyed.

We walked somber steps
to the Ile de la Cite'
near the River Seine
and took the tour of the Conciergerie.
As I walked through the closed prison
where Marie Antoinette spent her last days,
I heard the walls breathing.
I was morbidly fascinated by
Madame guillotine
until I saw your name on the wall—
Le Duc.

I never knew you, ancestor,
but *right then*,
I felt your terror,
and traced my finger over your name.

After decapitation
it takes ninety seconds
for the brain to die,
and I wondered what you thought about
as your head lay in a basket.

I held that silent reverence
close to my heart for the better part of a day
and mourned your death—

until morning,
when we awakened to the reverberation of cathedral bells
and pigeons' flapping wings.
We sipped velvet espresso,
ate chocolate croissants with orange marmalade,
and relished in the delight of starched sheets, fluffed robes, and room service.





Kwang Ho Kim

The Ballad of the Blind Man

Like looking into a latticed window and finding sparkling pieces of color glassworks, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors and shapes—ores of sunshine—there is a nostalgic place in everyone’s heart that often endows moments of comfort in life. What frequently prompts me to return to this place is neither cognizance nor a glint of recollection, but the allure of a hybrid reality that takes me on the walks in the enchanted woods, entranced in calm, tranquil yearning.

It is the place of my innocence and youth, the faraway place where my past and my imagination collaborate.

The house where I lived in my youth was in a country where peach and apricot blossoms painted the landscape. The vibrant blooms of baby pink azaleas and yellow forsythias ushered in the spring from the grip of the cold winter’s frost and decorated the meadows, hillsides and the single twisting pathway that connected the village to the bus stop two miles away.

And when the mild south wind began to blow, the endless deep blue sky and lofty dreams lived in the scintillating hearts of the children. We roamed the valleys and hillsides with uplifted spirits as high as the kites; we ran the open fields with flowers in

our hands and our heads up-high, giggling and screaming, until the crystalline sweat droplets formed on our noses, and our faces turned a blush. After an enchanting day of play with friends in the fields, when the long spiraling smoke rising against the backdrop of the parting sun signaled the preparation of dinner, without calling for the end of the play, we would run to each of our homes, guessing what our mothers were preparing for dinner. They called this little reclusive countryside The Flower Village.

I remember there lived a blind man with his family on the outskirts of the village. His house was by the brook, a little distance away from the clusters of houses, where a tall chestnut tree covered the front yard and hung over a part of the thatch of his small house.

He wasn't a native to the village, and he wasn't always blind. The rumors were that he had lost his sight during the bombings of the Korean War, while others argued that he poisoned himself to become blind like some extreme artists who believed that by losing sight, other senses such as hearing and the articulation of the voice would reach their peak.

He seldom ventured outside his yard, and he rarely spoke. He sat alone on the makeshift, wooden deck with his legs crossed, slowly oscillating his small body as if he and the wind were in a play. He hummed, sometimes like a melody of a song and sometimes like a chanting of a monk, filling the air with an eerie calmness. He spent most of his time like that until his wife returned from work.

I remember his wife as a strong and determined woman who worked as a day laborer in the fields during the busy season and in the off season worked as a maid, even venturing out to the town located twelve miles away. Her return trip was often visible, as she carried a large latticed bamboo basket on top of her head, loaded with groceries and other necessities as she slowly walked up the curving path to the village. It wasn't until people befriended her that they learned her husband was a holistic healer and a traditional poet.

It is a pleasant and enchanting memory. I am very familiar with the scenery and comfortable with the unfolding events. Nevertheless, each visit to this place becomes a different experience, redefined by the artistic, aesthetic license of my heart. It interpolates

delightful events in pristine detail and prompts me to a spontaneous surge of a smile, reanimating the idyllic past through the interaction of artistic intention and aesthetic perception of my heart.

But things in reality are not always that harmonious or pleasant. For instance, there are times I feel entrapped by an inexpressible thought or feeling, desperately fluttering for words like a bird trying to escape a glass cage. I instinctively display my emotion by frowning and pouting in extreme dissatisfaction, while confronting the laborious listener, who twitches his eyes in confusion.

A second language feels exactly that. It is second to your first tongue and no matter which language is your second language, it doesn't flow well. And when your first tongue ignores articles and verb tenses, and reverses the sentence structure subject-verb-object to subject-object-verb, it sounds like "I, with you kiss want," which is very unromantic. But most of us immigrants don't speak like that even at the beginning stage of learning English. We start by memorizing words or sentences like foreigners trying to express their intentions from a traveler's handbook.

However, when fluency in English is a measure of your intelligence, the urgency to learn the language becomes both a challenge and a chimera, fueling the necessity to assimilate into mainstream society. Unfortunately, during the assimilation process, the interactions also create an unmistakable feeling of otherness that seems indelible for a lifetime.

My encounter with the blind man was during a monsoon season in the mid-summer of 1995. After a long absence abroad, I had returned to The Flower Village that summer where the memories of my idyllic youth stood still. Not much had changed during that time; the familiar green mountains surrounded the valley, the chirping of cicadas permeated the thick summer air, and leaping from the rice field, a familiar white crane flew over the landscape into the bucolic sky. However, the little thatched houses were no more and had been replaced with green and gray and red roofs, haphazardly arranged, and the still curving but paved road carried pedestrians and farm equipment to and from the village. As I walked up the road, I knew I was welcome in The Flower Village, where my aging grandmother and my uncle's family still lived. My heart was content. The warm feelings dis-

pelled the heavy gloominess I had carried in my heart that had deepened to darkness over the years; I was at home.

After a few days of adjusting to the country life and hours of exchanging news of the family abroad and catching up with the life at The Flower Village, I was comfortably settled at my grandmother's house. She would often sit next to me with her loving smile and prepare a dish of fruits, skillfully peeling apples or melons with her fruit knife, decorating the fruit pieces into a shape of flower as I pursued my reading and wrote poetry. Her presence rekindled the moments of warmth and security that had been long forgotten.

Often, I wandered the fields and hills and reminisced on my childhood. I could still visualize my sprightly childhood, roaming the fields with playful heart and angelic giggles. And at times I found myself awakening to reality, seized by deep thoughts; how dramatically my life had changed. I would let out a deep sigh with a bitter-sweet smile and quicken my pace back to my grandmother's house.

One rainy afternoon, I accompanied my grandmother to the blind man's house for her weekly therapeutic session of finger pressing and acupuncture. She said his treatment was like a therapeutic massage that loosened all the knots and tight muscles of her body. She credited him for the improvement to her health—her circulation and her mobility had enhanced dramatically with his treatments. Everyone in the village appreciated his service and his nominal fee.

The blind man was in his sixties and he had graying hair and a humble countenance. His stature was short, and he had a thin body with a large forehead. He greeted me with great enthusiasm upon introduction from my grandmother. He had on large plastic eye glasses that covered most of his face, and his eyes constantly moved in them as if he were trying to discern the image in front of him. His speech was peculiar; he spoke with formality but with an unpretentious tone.

Upon repeated encouragement from my grandmother and my own kindling curiosity about the blind poet, I subjected myself to his treatment one day, lying face down on the bamboo mat on his wooden deck. Working down from head to toe, one side after the other, he massaged every muscle in my body. At first it was painful, but unbeknownst to me, I fell asleep during the session,

awaking with freshness and vibrancy that I only can remember from my childhood. His hands were magical. Thus my friendship with the blind man began. Soon it developed into sessions of therapy and conversation, mostly us asking questions to each other in the beginning, venturing into the story of his life and poetry. Likewise, he had a keen interest about my life in the states, quietly listening and nodding his head. He always spoke with respect, and I approached him with admiration and amazement.

The blind man was full of mysteries. His soft and dexterous hands played traditional Korean wind and stringed instruments such as Piri, Tungso, and Kumumko. He also played percussion instruments like Jing and Jangku that he used to create a synchronized, harmonious rhythm with his melodious voice when he recited his poetry. Every moment of his performance was a breathtaking experience that entranced me into his mastery of the traditional art. But what was most amazing was the blind man's artistic performance of calligraphy and drawing.

On his deck, he sat cross-legged and upright in front of a small table neatly arranged with inkwells, an assortment of brushes, and a silk scroll. With his hands set on either side of the edge of the table, he meditated for some time, breathing slowly and rhythmically. When he reached a moment of a profound calmness, he nodded his head as if he was agreeing to what he had envisioned in his mind, and without any hesitation he commenced his blind performance.

His brush magically flowed across the silk scroll with long continuous strokes and masterful curvatures, breathtakingly drawing two blue jays perched next to ripened persimmons on a tree, singing with their beaks open. They looked very real, as if they were ready to fly off to the sky. He then added his poem in calligraphy in the traditional Asian layout, writing top to bottom, moving from the right side of the scroll to the left. All this was done in a continuous motion, instantaneously producing a perfect masterpiece. He said the singing of blue jays was a good portent that signified an arrival of a guest, and the pair of blue jays represented a new friendship and prosperity that will follow. He gave me that scroll as a token of our friendship.

During that summer, in the warm breeze of the nights, we often sat on his wooden deck under the dim flood light and

drank rice wine, passionately engulfed in poetry. As the night deepened and the wine took possession of the language, he delighted in reciting poetry, and I was captivated in his world.

He said, "For many years, I lived without sight," as he poured the wine in his cup, guiding it with the tip of his finger with precision. He said at first when he lost his sight, he lived in total darkness. The sudden transformation plunged him into a selfless world. He lost the sense of the day and night. Everything that he was accustomed to became a new challenge, having to learn it over again from a blind man's perspective. He said, "What was most devastating was that I realized I was slowly losing the imagery of the world I once knew."

He would try to recreate the images as vividly as he could—his wife's face, the colors of spring, cows grazing in the field. He would repeat the process, trying not to lose its clear shape and color. He would be frantic when he could not picture the image in his mind, but the forms and colors of the world slowly abated with time, despite his incessant effort to retain them.

He then realized that his visual imagery was being steadily replaced by a new cognition, not from the sensory but from the understanding of the meanings of words that formed his internal cognition. He realized that all his memory of imagery was becoming like the wind, without forms but present only with essence.

As I sat quietly and contemplated his experience, he searched for my response and said, "Can you understand what I mean?" And when I hesitated with my response, he let out a deep sigh and started to recite one of his poems with his unique chanting voice, accompanied with the rhythm of his *Changu*.

"Darkened by the vicissitudes and ironies of life,
a fleecy cloud drifts with passing time and tides, riding
the winds of change.

Droplets of sorrow and regret knot in the skein of the memories,
of life's vain deluding joys and the nights of tears; howbeit,
the spirit of the poet, from the wind's sudden whim,

lets some strange and mysterious dream take over; what
is and isn't no longer holds true, and the trials and tribulations
become only chapters of life that unveil a higher purpose to life;

like the rising of a new full moon, the high road of morality renews, and the yearning of fame and fortune pass, mollifying the weary cries of the poet in the nights alone in the hermitage.

I closed my eyes and listened. His chanting voice echoed through the mountains and valleys with the shifting winds, oscillating between hope and despair. At times, my mind flashed forward in time to my future in America: a happy family with healthy kids, a good job that supported my family, of course a loving wife, and our happy family vacation—driving through sunny California, spending time in Yosemite National Park, and then past the Golden Gate Bridge to Seattle, Washington where my sister lived, awaiting our happy arrival. But the shift of the wind flashed my thoughts backward to the difficult moments of my life—something the mind had easily forgotten it's the protective inclination, of the mind, its persuasion and erasure: the back breaking labors in scorching broccoli fields, the endless hours in the dusty sweatshops, the unbelievable unfolding of the L.A. riots, destroying everything I had built in the blaze, the burning dream. As the blind poet completed the recital I was engrossed again in gloominess and stupor, reflecting my dream and my reality in America.

The summer was in full bloom with a good company, and the monsoon weather had abated a little. I sat watching the drizzle all day through my opened window 'til it finally cleared in the evening. It was in vain to be satisfied with tranquility; I picked up my journal and headed to the blind man's house. The air was heavy. The cries of the insects and the soft landing rays of the stars saturated the night sky.

The blind man rarely talked about his wife. She was a heavy-set woman with her graying hair neatly parted in the center with a ponytail running down her back. Her round face looked as if she had suffered a bad case of smallpox when she was a child, with large white blotch spots extending to her neck. Many had suffered from the illness in those days, but her eyes, hidden behind her distortion and her blotchy skin, were soft and loving grandmother's eyes.

During the evenings when I was invited to drink with the poet, she would thoughtfully prepare a small table of food and

spoken in an immigrant's family. In my family as well as others, these differences are fostered by the age one learns English: the first generation (who immigrated as adults), the one and a half generation (who immigrated at adolescence), and the second generation who were born in the states. Many who start their acquisition of English in their adulthood fail to progress to fluency, and they become discouraged from further learning. However, every immigrant's family has their own unique and embellished form of communication, associated with their customs and idiosyncrasies. This unique hybrid language allows multiple generations to communicate like in our home, an extended family of three generations, and within the immigrants' communities.

The first generation, like my mom and dad, speak mostly Korean with some English words. It is common to hear from my mom, "David mut si ae pickup hae?" (What time are you picking up David)? or "Market ga men milk it ji ma," (Don't forget milk at the market). Their second language never develops beyond partial sentences. They use few English words mixed with Korean. They are limited to short replies like Yes, OK, Thank you and No, although their understanding is extensive. They nod when they understand or frown and look around in wonder when they do not.

However, the one and a half generation communicates differently in mixed modes; they articulate in sophisticated English and Korean with a sense of identity; for instance when my wife (it has been three months since our wedding) calls me and asks if I'm coming home early, I tell her "O nul jib ae il jik gal gua ya. (I'll be home early today.) U-hum, yah, OK, I'll pickup David. What time? Ok... Sa rag hae (I love you,) See you soon." It is called Konglish.

But the second generation, like my stepson David (who is still in elementary school) speaks mostly in English with some Korean words. He would ask his mother, "Umma, what should I call Richard? Apa or A-ju-si?" (Dad or a guardian?)

And she would look at him with her rounded eyes and say, "Of course A-pa. I think he is the best dad in the world. Nuo nun a tauk hae sang kak hae?" (What do you think?)

He would grin and say, "I love our family, and I'm so happy. Emma, Apa Sa rag hae."

However, whichever mode each of us speak in, we all understand each other with sophistication. The hybrid language becomes a part of the immigrants' culture, enabling the communication with words that touch us with familiarity, uniqueness, and comfort in mixed language modes. The hybrid language also enables a social space where generations meet, clash, and grapple with each other, sharing exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom.

A little distance upstream from the blind man's house there was a small waterfall surrounded by luscious greens. There were large flat boulders, shaded by tall oak trees around the brook, and water percolated down with its soft bubbling sound. It was a place isolated from external disturbance, a world of its own. Near the end of the summer the blind man led me to the waterfall.

The blind man said the place was where he meditated. He said, "The mind need never stop growing, you can cultivate the mind with concentration practice," and explained how he was able to draw without his vision.

He explained the phenomenon with Zen Mysticism. He said that Zen can never be learned from books, and can never be studied as we can study other disciplines such as logic or mathematics. He said, "The training of Zen starts with breathing practice," and explained how it worked with the traditional art of archery.

He said the first process was to learn the Zen breathing. An apprentice would sit cross-legged and regulate his breathing by following the air from his nostrils to deep down in his navel and back to his nostrils. He would count slowly, in and out, calming his heart rate. He said as the intake and the outtake breathing practice improved, the body would reach the epitome of relaxation, and the mind cleared from other thoughts. He said, "There are no thoughts in the mind but breathing."

He said the apprentice was not allowed to aim at a target for the first two years. He had to begin by learning how to hold the bow and arrow, and then how to release the arrow, month after month.

He said that finally, after years of practice of breathing and handling the bow and arrow, when the instrument becomes part of his body, the apprentice was allowed to aim at the target. He

would hold the bow at shoulder level, stretch his left arm out ahead, pull the string and the arrow to a point past the right ear. Then a pause, during which the bow was held at full stretch, his mind and body unified by the breathing, and the arrow was released.

He said, "With the speed of light it flies through the sky, cutting through the air with invisible ripples, striking its mark. It's called the art of Zen. Like the flying arrow it cannot be seen and is described as the wind and its presence. One can only sense it in calmness and through discipline." He said it meant the apex of intuition and realization where there is no division between thought and action—the merging of the unconscious mind and conscious world.

He said his art was similar to the art of archery; it was only achievable after a long devotion and endless practice.

"Never despair my friend; I know what you are going through in life. You have an opportunity to achieve excellence in both worlds. Persevere! Even at the hours when your dream grows dim and your hope darkens."

"Never despair!"

I walk through my enchanted woods to hear the ballad once again. It has been many years since my last encounter with the blind man, but the memory still sparkles with vigor. I push myself forward everyday to reach my dream. And when I reach my goal, I celebrate my achievement with tender arrogance and humble pride; nevertheless, I face trials and consequent failures all the time, but I accept them as pedagogical agony and a sweet defeat, and I move forward.



Joseph Mattson

A Soldier Swallows His Uniform

Brooking fear to look out the window,
the dawn, dusk, the time between—

I part the curtain, a devil trying to
understand the trumpet of a flower.

I walk the city, streets an empire of loneliness.
I glower at things: faces, facades, trash in the
boulevards like miscast tumbleweeds, the
unquenchable hunger of back alleys—
still I stand in the mouth of the world unsolved,
filled as an empty jaguar of the wet hot exigency.

Sodden with bastard unrest, a bone, flotsam summoning
rapport in books of broader crime: Viet Nam, Korea,
and presently ten thousand years in the Holy Land, full
of divided phantoms to eyeful worlds longer,
real soldiers fallen in real wars of division.

And I am humbled. With hands doubled I too
surrender: in *this* war—after Love—there is no
return to sweet green oblivion, only hard and rasping
bewilderment, all;

so I loop and rock, eating the guise: moldy square by
crusted cord, threaded no longer of only redundant,
un-laughable hours; pledging new ignorance to the
cruel myths of fucking Time; rolling
dice with gods and madmen—

the Lord's extension, day after day, of crushing
a howling cigarette.





Joseph Lewis
Bad Apples

“P
eople like us shouldn’t be allowed to live...”

I remember him saying that—I can almost hear his voice—as I unzip the body bag from the inside, the sudden fresh air helping to clear my head. Sobriety approaches like sunrise over a jagged mountain range. But it’s still dark around me. I have some time before the sunrise.

The world suddenly shakes, throwing me up—a moment of weightless ecstasy—then pulling me down. I hit my head on a metal plate above, then again on a hard carpeted floor. I pull the zipper farther down and free my arms.

Feeling about in my darkness, I hear the sounds of car engines rising and falling as they speed past me. As my arms continue their path of discovery, they happen upon a great mass snug against the left of my body, plastic and rubbery to the touch, with a zipper from the top to as far down as I can feel.

Another body bag.

Sunrise approaches, and I begin to remember.

Today was his birthday, and it was my obligation—as best man and partner in all crimes, petty and federal—to make the

night memorable. I had acquired tickets to the party of the year, at the club of the year, deep in the bowels of the city.

We had never been to this place before. They had bouncers, the kind that look like convicts—recently escaped convicts.

He had been preaching tonight—as he always did when under the influence of various uppers—and I was listening—as I always did when under the influence of whatever he handed me.

“Think about it,” he had said. “It isn’t something selfish like shame, self pity, or regret; it’s for the betterment of mankind.”

The people around us were all leaning in, not out of interest, but because of the loudness of the club, the sounds of music and voices seeming to take on a life of their own; a great beast that—if it took a breath in—would leave no air for the rest of us.

We had settled into a group of boys and girls with similar interests. The Birthday Boy made it easy to make friends for the night, since he always came prepared. We sat around on dilapidated couches, in the far back of the club, watching him work his magic with pills, powders, and liquids. At that time, he was using a nail file to scrape fragments from the pills to make separate piles of shavings.

“You see, if we quit and dig ourselves out of this shit-hole, get ourselves some suits and ties, maybe a couple of husbands and wives, the whole damn world is going to think we’re a couple of poster children. They’re going to tell our story over and over, and do you know how a story like that would sound to people like us, here and now?”

He reached into his magician’s bag and pulled out a small bottle, carefully squeezing a drop of hydrochloric acid onto each one of the piles of shavings he had made. Each sizzled slightly and smoked, then quickly turned a deep black.

“No,” he continued, “we’d be telling people that it’s okay to do drugs, as long as you quit. If I’m on that television in that suit and tie, telling people, ‘Yeah, I was once a user, and look how I turned out,’ then everyone will get the wrong idea.”

There was a band playing. The singer was screaming into the microphone something I couldn’t quite understand.

“After all, whose word would you value more? Someone who has never used, telling you you’re going to ruin your life; or someone who has been to this Hell, telling you it’s not going to end how you hope?”

The drums slammed like jackhammers, the crowds of people crammed closer together, jumping and swaying to the sounds of a screeching metal guitar, the instrument itself crying out into

the night, whining in pain and misuse. As the guitarist jumped about the bridges, slamming his fingers down wherever he pleased, the world echoed with the sound of instrumental orgasm; the guitar and drums and microphone enjoying their abuse, the singer and drummer and bassist throwing their fit on stage, making soft, virgin love to the song and instruments, and hating it all at the same time.

“You trust the recovered drug addict. So it’s better to do it and quit, than not do it at all, because a drug user turns out far wiser.” He studied the solutions a moment longer. Then, “Good batch, everyone. Dig in.”

The lights above joined the orgy, dashing about like ornamental harlots, hopping from one love scenario to the next, changing colors, changing shape, or changing persona to fit the situation at hand, whatever that may be.

“I can’t be allowed to recover from the shit I’m in,” he had said later. It was just him and me, still on our overused sofa. The band was taking a break, and the club was playing a loud, endless electronic mix in place of them. We had lost our group of friends.

“I’d be proof that there’s a way out,” he continued. “That it’s possible to get back in touch with your family.”

“I hate my family,” I said.

“We’re like rotten apples; you don’t keep the rotten ones around the good ones. Isolate them; destroy them; either way, they’re not meant for eating.”

“I like apples,” I said.

“I’d only be hurting my fellow man,” he said after he had finished mixing a few beverages and raised one for a toast. “So, this one’s for all you smart kids in school.” He downed the first shot. “Stay in school!” He raised another, “For all those kids thinking about coming to this joint.” He downed the second.

He gave me the third.

“To rotten apples!” I toasted.

“So, now do you understand, buddy? We must continue down this path, forever, until Death plucks us from this realm, so that we prove our point. We are guardians, you and I, living breathing proof of Hell-on-Earth, and it has to stay that way. We mustn’t let anyone else come near this place and suffer as we have.”

He pulled out another bag of pills, shaved some off and added the chemical.

It didn’t smoke or fizzle, but turned a dirty olive color.

I laughed. He cussed. We ingested.

A soft, feminine hand gripped mine and pulled me towards the great moving sea of bodies. I didn't resist. It was about this time that the band began playing another song.

When I rejoined the Birthday Boy, he was already dead. I sat next to him, my head resting on his shoulder for a moment or two or three.

I was cold.

There was a smash. A door slammed shut. The Birthday Boy and I were outside, lying on the street of a dark alley. The stars danced like fireflies in mating season.

I was still cold.

"Where are we taking these two?" a nervous voice asked.

"Same place," an angry voice answered.

"Did they share some bad shit?"

"It doesn't matter."

They lifted my buddy's legs and slid him into the black bag, then tossed him into the trunk of a car. They did the same to me. I couldn't move.

One of the boys was crying. A slam and the engine started. The world was black. A sudden sharp turn sent me rolling on top of the other body bag inside the trunk.

Sunrise approached.

I unzip the Birthday Boy. He must have some shit leftover in his magical pockets. I reach around a long shirt, scrawny arms, and find what I'm looking for: Leftovers. I swallow a few and shove the rest into my own pockets. Sunrise will be further delayed.

I examine him further, and find a small knife and a lighter. The flame dances like a stripper in my hand.

There's something erotic about being trapped in a trunk.

The Birthday Boy is staring at me, so I cut out his eyes.

After a few minutes of rugged terrain, the engine stops. The trunk opens. There's something standing over me.

I shove the knife into the shirt.

It bleeds.

I shove the knife into the shirt.

It bleeds and falls backward.

I stumble out of the trunk, forgetting my legs are still wrapped in the body bag. The ground is rocky. The tail lights of the car are casting a red glow on the visible desert. As arms tangle around my neck, I swing my knife wildly. The boy's screaming in my face, so I cut out his voice. The arms release me. The keys

are in the ignition. The car finds its way back to the highway, and back to the city. The Birthday Boy is sitting in the backseat.

“Which way is the party? Let’s go back,” I ask him.

He doesn’t answer. He stares at me in the rearview mirror.

“I’m sorry about your eyes. I’ll get you new ones.”

“People like us shouldn’t be allowed to live,” he says.

The band is playing another song. I can hear it in my head.

A horn sounds; two great lights burn my dry eyes.

The car is smashed. The wind shield shatters. Someone is lying in the passenger seat, face mutilated, ligaments broken and torn, head nearly decapitated.

“Watch where you’re driving,” I tell him.

He stares at me.

“People like you shouldn’t be allowed to live,” he says.

I stumble around the airbag, out of the car, into an alley.

I can hear the band playing, and I hate it. The jumping, swaying mass of bodies is all around me, and I hate it; that vile beast, he makes me vomit. One breath and we’re all gone, that son of a bitch! He’s in my blood, pumping through my heart and into my brain, poisoning and raping my virgin blood. This infestation inside me; I can hear the thumping of drums, the slamming of chords, the screaming of voices. The stars dance around me like firefly harlots. I collapse alongside black bags that smell of rotten fish.

I reach into my pockets: Leftovers.

“This one’s for you, Birthday Boy!”

I toast. I ingest.





Michelle Medaris

Flashing Life

for JC

I dream about you—
in the latest, was your
imminent death. There was

a sense of relief, that you
were not lying on an unknown
piece of sidewalk hair

in tangles, smudges of earth
on your skin, fidgeting
for your next fix, numbing

loss with a hot spoon. Still
I wanted to throw a net out
and reel you in from yourself.

I walked the old house, the rooms
torn from window to door,
all the while our unpredicted

but destined life flashed like
speeding lights on a dark
unfamiliar highway.





Ani Kachbalian
In the Cotton Fields

*É*contez le bruit de notre ville.

My mother jumped off of our apartment building on April 12th, 1976 when she thought she heard the voice of her good friend, Anahita, calling her to come down below. The remnants of her skull scattered over Komitas Street, landing next to two neon-green snow cones a few children had thrown to the ground when they saw a woman coming toward them; a whimper traveling slowly, then silent. Komitas knows no instance of calm.

It takes certain energy to care about the cosmos. In the meantime, everyone on Komitas only cares about town bazaars and muffled chatter, brass tea kettles and currant jelly, strings of pearls, used belongings up for sale. The universe is so vast, it's hard for me to care about it. In Komitas *gentron*, it's hard to care about cartoon people, crushed pecan *getnakhnzor* cakes, and crystalline tulips that you hang from chandeliers, especially when you're trying to wrap your



mind around the insignificance of everything we do, our dreams.

My mother wanted to be a ballerina at the Tchaikovsky School of Ballet.

Today, I'm watching television. A news special on short-term memory: a young boy holds the hand of a damaged woman and tells her that her son is dead. She begins to weep. She cannot remember a thing. The young boy holds the hand of his damaged mother, her brain disintegrating from when the eighteen-wheeler drove inside her, leaving her dented and flawed. The camera man does a close-up while he tells her, in a whisper, that her son is dead, that her son Abet died three years ago. She does not remember what's already hap-



pened, what's already a fact. She begins to weep all over again. Each time. Every time. And the camera man keeps zooming in and out of their faces, like the more we stare at this scene, the more tragic it'll be.

After some time, with the sound vacuumed out of the television, I think that maybe no one will remember how my mother plummeted toward the Earth on April 12th, 1976 next to two neon green snow cones some children had thrown onto the sidewalk. No one will remember that stupid day, the stupid heat, the stupid children, the stupid snow cones. Maybe if my short term memory was harmed, I could keep forgetting her, seven, eight times a day.

If I could just forget it, if I could just erase it. *Moratzi*, I tell myself. Just *moratzi*.

Traversing over the Earth's terrain in a hot air balloon, made of paraffin wax and red string, the wax hypersensitive to the sun's snappish warmth, my mother and I were supposed to take the most exciting trip of our lives the summer before she leapt

to her death, the only trip. Even though she claimed to be enchanted by them, the balloons frightened her. *It scares me*, she said. *They gain momentum so quickly... what happens when we get too close to the sun?*

But we never got close to the sun's orbs. Because we never went. Our dreams fell to the Earth in quickness, with some bit of grace and speed.



I was seven years old the first time I saw my mother naked. I was seven years old the first time I saw bones protruding out from the back side of her body, something that looked so unfamiliar, so raw, so tender. The Lepidoptera classification of caterpillars, by nature, are born with spina bifida. They tread across the soil floor, dragging themselves forward, steadily attempting to keep their spinal cords intact, whatever is left of them. When meninges protrude from the spinal cord, movement is difficult, heavy. When meninges protrude from the spinal cord, there is pain. Since about 1940, particularly in regions of spina bifida prevalence, about 1,003 in 2,000 caterpillar pregnancies were reported from certain Northern provinces in Italy. About 1 in 1,000 pregnancies was found in Central and South America. The highest prevalence rates, more than 1,500 in 2,000 pregnancies were found in France and Switzerland. There is no cure for the caterpillars.

The spinal cord of humans, flooded with nerves, broadcasts data from the brain to the muscles and organs. The system responsible for the fight or flight response fails humans in the most crucial moments. In addition to the signals going away from the brain, there are also sensory messages transmitted from body structures back to that storehouse of memories.



When female babies suffer from spina bifida, they look like

bundles of neural tubes, all tied together. They look like large spheres, collections of loose limbs. Spina bifida occurs at the end of the first month of pregnancy when the two sides of the embryo's spine fail to join together, leaving an open area, like a wound. There are two forms of spina bifida — spina bifida occulta and spina bifida manifesta. It is when the membranes of the spinal cord begin to disintegrate that the pain begins.

But babies cannot feel anything but the curving, bending, breaking. They cannot feel what protrudes out of them.

Spina bifida, Latin for 'split spine,' we are told, takes the backs of many people and tidings of progress come in large quantities of lack.



Before she died, my mother told me a story about the first and only day of ballet class her mother took her to when she was six years old. That day ended abruptly when the other little girls saw something jutting from behind her leotard, a piece of her spinal cord about to escape from inside her skin. They were frightened, horrified, who knows. No one bothered to explain her deformity. They simply walked away from what they couldn't explain. *Aylandakootyoon*; that's all it was to them.



The fluid-filled sac that expands and stretches the skin around the spina bifida-laden cord can take on a life of its own, an identity: a hybrid of sorts, the sac is skin, water, body, grotesque, a mixture of natural and unnatural, protrusion and containment,

tough and brittle. My mother was not tough; she would crack and break when the pain became too intense, when she realized that her back had taken over, had become larger than she was, growing consistently, constantly, continually, making her feel heavier, like the weight of the world was hers, her burden. Bal-
lerinas are supposed to be light, to stride as if floating, as if they weigh nothing. They need to spin on their point shoes until one



day their feet bleed from the grinding motion. *Rond de jambe à terre*, *Demi-grand rond de jambe*, you do this, until you become an expert at every motion, every movement, all the pain.

One morning, the spring before she died, I took my mother to the *Karvin* fruit market on Komitas and Kesan *pogbota*. I remember that she didn't speak to me that day; she didn't want to talk so I left her to roam, see, discover. I walked over to a fabric salesman who pointed at me until he was sure I'd buy something from him; and I did. I bought some yellow linen. I'd make covers for my mother, she liked it when I enveloped her in light cloth; it kept her calm and cool and concealed the sac that had defined who she was since she was born. Yellow was her favorite color then, because it reminded her of eggs in the morning, daffodils at night.

When Agyhan Shirak initiated the idea of the first hot air balloon expedition in 1944, the people of Komitas decided there were more important things to be done. But the excitement at the thought of his balloon one day escaping the grasp of the tight atmosphere tugging at his arm, this kept Agyhan flying, at least in his mind, over the dry, mustard plains of Northern Armenia. In his notebooks, Agyhan revealed his plans. He figured that if he could take on planting mass blankets of cotton, under the di-



rection of his father, his hopes of lightening the color of the Earth would come into being. *These plans appear shaky, Agvhan*, his father would tell him. *You cannot contain what isn't yours.*

But since the unrealistic dreams of men seem most realistic when written down, more official, Agvhan's story is one of hopeless navigation, over the sky, over the measureless stretch of land he helped lift, when he planted seeds inside the crevices and open veins of land and waste; his story remains told.



My mother kept Agvhan's story in the drawer of her nightstand. She died before she finished reading his biography, *In the Cotton Fields*.

She came to know bits and pieces of the universe with books. I guess that part of the *tiezerk*, however small, could be hers.

Agvhan and his father worked for six long months building the oak colossus, that hot balloon that would tread atop the waters of Sevanna *leej*, carrying them like light, lucent seahorses bobbing above the clouds, weightless yet swift. During the second month of building, Agvhan experienced slight pains: one day, Agvhan told his father that his spine felt as if it were curving, concaving into a spherical shape.



These childish grumbles did not move his father, did not move anything inside him. A man must keep a crypt inside himself, withhold anything he actually feels because the world might come crashing; the sound of a feeling may be too intense a shriek for a man, feverish about losing himself if that crypt ever unravels.

The panic that so easily entangles the insides of men, of voyagers, produces a feeling of extreme nausea. Agvhan offered his father raspberry thyme suckers every time he felt this way,

and the balloon assembly continued.

The third month of layering one paraffin wax strip atop the next made Agvhan the child look like Agvhan the withered russet collection of limbs. He was nine years old, but his father had aged that little body like a piece of beef, tender, drier with time, tough, curved. Agvhan's spine coiled one half of a centimeter each day; one hundred and eighty days were unkind to that small bundle of skin and bones whose overall shape had transformed, like a crescent, like a boomerang being thrown back and forth with force. But Agvhan would say nothing. He would discover a part of the Earth, call it his own. He would come to know something other than Opera square, that intersection of espresso stands and hand-woven rugs, baked lavash, and potato pirashki.

Agvhan was good at one thing before his body had reduced itself into a chalky raisin thing. At dawn, a routine ensued: brush the hair, clean the ears, move about as fast as you can and record any change in the Earth's terrain, atmosphere, plant life.

But Agvhan entertained no such notions. He will not be a child in this story. He is direct and straight. But his spine will not remain straight, intact. In fact, this story will show you that it will not remain.

At nine years old, Agvhan recorded the movement inside the soil. His body, fading, had not much energy left. His father patched together sheer strips of paraffin wax, odorless, tasteless, a slippery solid. Agvhan would trail the potato beetles for as long as possible until his spine would curve once more and he would fall on his knees, his motion slow, like a caterpillar, twisting and turning against a surface.

Without words, Agvhan would plead for rest but his father knew nothing but discipline so he kept moving, kept building, layer upon layer, one paraffin strip then the next. His hot air bal-

loon would soon be complete; the puffed radiating balloon would soon move, float, fly. The patchwork on the balloon soon resembled a faintly checkered sphere. Maybe soon the exploration would commence, for father and Agvhan, man and child, asserting their handprints in the cement of the universe.

It is believed that when Agvhan Shirak traversed over the



Earth's terrain in his hot air balloon made of paraffin wax and red string, the wax displayed hypersensitivity to the sun's prickly orbs; sudden momentum would pull him down.

Heat that intense can never be comfortable. In

1956, Agvhan's father died; they say it was the height that killed him, the force of the sun. They say it was his balloon, hunger, sadness, Agvhan. They say many things about Agvhan Shirak's father.

But he was a crypt. His insides, like patched quilt, made up of many parts, many squares, did not weigh him down, did not ground him, make him gravitate closer to the Earth. He was not a heavy man but his hefty dreams left a grave mark on his skin, that map of dreams. Agvhan followed blindly, the excitement at the thought of his balloon one day escaping the grasp of the tight atmosphere, tugging at his arm. Tug. Tug. But a tug is momentary. It fills you up with the sound of a feeling and not the feeling itself and you chase a massive hot air balloon for six months when its fall is pre-determined. This story will not allow Agvhan's balloon to stay up. The air will let out. The balloon will deflate. And Agvhan's father will never know anything about himself or anything about the argyle patterning composing his insides. A man who will soon deflate does not know of what's to come.

And it is believed that Agvhan, that small bundle of loose limbs, remains now, budding into the deep dirt of the Earth, the open veins of land and cosmic fields of white wastes.

It takes certain energy to care about the cosmos. In the meantime everyone on Komitas only cares about town bazaars and muffled chatter, brass tea kettles and black currant jelly and strings of pearls. The universe is so vast, it's hard for me to care about it. It's hard to care about cartoon people, crushed pecan *getnakbnzor* cakes, and crystalline tulips that you hang from chandeliers. *Écoutez le bruit de notre ville.*

Anabita,

I wrote this badmootyoon for you. It's about the potato beetles.

The potato beetles molt every summer, when for one entire day the sun collapses from its own searing heat. One by one, each potato beetle throws its arm out to another's, grabbing onto the nearest, densest body it can find, for some kind of weight, looking for some kind of friction with one who's in the same way. This row of spherical gentanees urges us, they press their faces against the glass door leading to our yard. Their feet are like the satin ribbons on the red point shoes we saw in the paroohi shop on Sipan and Third. So soft, so tender, I hope they aren't crushed by the trampling feet of passerby. Once they burst, the sacs, their bodies will deflate and they won't mean anything.

But no, no one sees this, no one sees anything.

The potato beetles wait until it is dark, until the mid-November anzrev comes, until the drizzle brings the little water that the concrete absorbs. They try to suck up a drop, but there are too many of them, too many, and not enough life to go around.

So we feed them the impossibility of their survival, that there is some kind of life after life.

The sun was gone long ago and there is no telling if they're aware, yeteh giten, about death and necessity and how there's no need for potato beetles because there is no need to keep alive what is meant to die.

The sky above has ceased to see as well. And the trees, with the undeserved rings in their bark, their flesh, they laugh at the potato beetles, they laugh and throw a flaming smirk, because who will notice the absence of something so insignificant and light? Who will notice absence when there is no love lost, no sadness when the beetles are gone?

There is a fate for the potato beetles when the friction between us cannot keep anything warm enough to live. There is a fate for the potato beetles when we cannot care for a single, living thing.

This is when love stops.



The day she died, we had woken up early because she said she wanted to light a candle. We walked to *Tadeos Yegeghetzi* and my mother walked very slowly, dragging herself across the ground with a profound heaviness. When we arrived, I sat a few rows behind her, letting the space between us grow further and it's as if I could read her, her story, the narrative, all just by looking at the protrusions. I could make out some kind of image, the creases in her skin, like branches of a pistachio tree; the thin veins, like the coarse, rubbery feet of a dark bird. This is what I saw or imagined. This brittle woman, all the while, faced the pew and couldn't twist or turn enough anymore to see the story taking place on her back, ripping her skin apart, every fold filled with dusk, navy wrinkles. She rubbed herself against the wooden bench because she couldn't reach her back anymore, and the branches swayed to and fro. She sweated profusely.

She picked out a cloth from her blouse pocket and wiped herself down from her temple to the nape of her neck.



The sweat leaked from every pore and I realized then that her skin looked like it had been pecked, like birds had pressed their beaks

into every crease, digging and raking her ancient body, the way the weight of the world had rested itself on her, leaning on her because we tend to smother what's grotesque and ill-formed.

I imagine that when my mother leapt to the floor of the

Earth that day, just for a minute, gravity took some of the weight from her, lightened her last moments, relieving her from that great heaviness, bending a spine so curved, it hurt to watch. Maybe when Agvhan Shirak withered away, the pain, for a single moment, was lifted from his body too, and like his balloon ascending into the cerulean sky, his whimpers and moans fell to the Earth, traveling slowly, then silent.

My mother jumped off of our apartment building on April 12th, 1976, when she thought she heard the voice of Anahita calling her to come down below. The remnants of her skull scattered over Komitas Street, landing next to two neon-green snow cones a few children had thrown to the ground when they saw a woman coming toward them; a whimper traveling slowly, then silent. My mother's skull, shattered and tossed, will remain here on Komitas Street, in the cotton fields, light and airy, the place where parts of you grow into the Earth and it doesn't matter if anyone knows.



Melissa Morehouse

Toxin

Sorrow surrounds and condemns,
blooming thoughts of oleander leaves
expanding in a kettle. The mind
wings its retreat from truth's body
and rests on the edge of sound.
The aftermath unravels
as sirens shout and lungs collapse. The only hope—
proof has long left the blood stream.

Kris Huelgas

Haunt

I didn't forget how much that night
I thought of you and how
you came to say the things you did.
Cigarettes and chapstick
met and mixed and blue
smoke pierced by sharp
street lamp came
as eager or anxious and
paused right above like
sleeping clouds
ready to rain.

I maybe forgot where we were
and where we went
but the black burn and smolder
from the old Victorian
smeared the inside of my eyelids
and iced the hills of my back
as you kicked down caution tape
and carried it on
the air behind you.

Sophia Petkovic

The Draught

Airborne,
five hours
from
parched desert
skies.

Lands the welcoming cries
of Michigan's
Great Lakes.

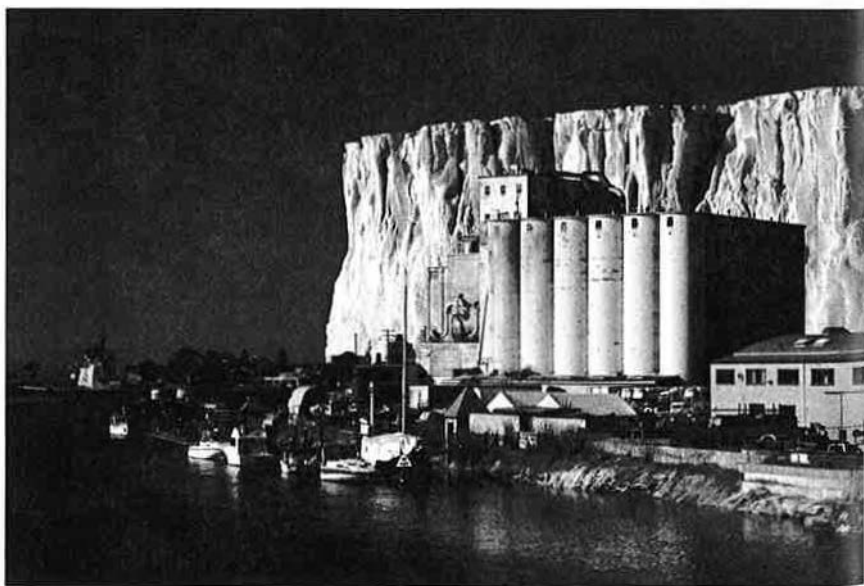
Their trumpets blow
hard rains,
convoluted
clouds stream
above the cracking gray
thunder.

Ancient woods
soaked in fire,
once Chippewa hunting grounds
(now reserved for Catholic burials).

An oratorio
of orange
and yellow leaves
oak
birch
and
maple,
rain-glued
onto mother's and
grandmothers'
headstones.

Past the blanket of graves
beyond the swell
of ancient
grief,

Children chase each
other, worms in band,
through the mud
screaming,
free.





Loretta McCormick

Independence Day

I know it drives Madeline crazy when I flip through song after song before they're done—playing the intro to a tune just long enough to change my mind, shuffling to my favorite hip hop album, only to feel my mood shift to something more mellow and soothing. My fingertips move, restlessly yet almost imperceptibly, over the glowing green buttons of my car stereo in a barely conscious effort to purge flashbacks of work frenemies and e-mails with excessive exclamation points, double, super smiley faces! She's usually too tired to say anything, but sometimes she lets out a long, slow sigh of exasperation to let me know she's reaching her limit. I try not to smile. I think it's cute when she gets all worked up, but my impatient, shifting musical mood swings are never intentional. The monotonous grind of the work week leaves both of us in a state of decompression for most of the drive home.

Every night, Monday through Friday, Madeline and I creep south down the snaking 405. My nondescript green Honda becomes just another set of angry, winking red tail lights pushing forward, inching home; on the opposite side of the freeway, countless earnest, yearning pairs of white headlights thrust toward their destinations in the opposite direction. I feel everyone

around me fume and seethe inside their self-contained metal boxes. I feel the palpable rage of an aging man in a Mercedes furiously gesturing in vain to the driver in front of him, the mute frustration of a woman blowing cigarette smoke out of the window she's barely cracked open, the sad resignation of a haggard, aging man behind the wheel of a beat up, duct taped Toyota, blithely picking his nose. Everyone is simultaneously isolated and on display. But, driving in bumper to bumper traffic after a long, unstimulating day at a boring dead-end job, is my favorite time.

We're nomads, with no real place of our own. Between the small, dank space she shares with four other students, or my poorly insulated attic space in my mom's boxy, run down house in Inglewood, we usually choose Inglewood. At least there we have some privacy. But this car, this exposed drive home is our only real place right now. It's the only space of our own. Madeline's hand is resting on my thigh and her head is turned away, staring out the window into the twilight. I look down at her delicate, pale hands to gauge how stressful her day has been. On a good day, her slender fingers can draw me to her with a flick of her wrist. But on a bad day, she chews up her nails and picks apart her cuticles until the tips are bloody and ragged and the skin around her nail bed is swollen and tender.

"Maddie, you gotta stop," I plead, glancing down at her abused hands.

"Shush," she silences me, lifting two livid fingertips to my mouth. I'm lulled into passive compliance by the total gridlock outside the car.

The traffic begins to lift as we veer onto the arching cement interchange of the 105E and barrel over the bridge into Inglewood. "Fourth of July," I say softly to Maddie, without taking my eyes off the road and reach over to pinch her thigh. It's not quite dark yet, but we can still see the lights from at least half a dozen planes, circling overhead like buzzards waiting for something to die. It's only temporary, we think, and we try not to dwell on all the people we know who have lived here, temporarily, their entire lives.

We joke about all the things that aren't funny. We tease each other about our "good night's sleep", or how we can't watch TV during prime time because of the deafening noise that comes

with existing directly underneath the flight pattern of LAX. We make fun of the degenerate gamblers, conspicuous in their gold Lexuses, on their way to the sleazy pink casino and racetrack down the street. We crack jokes about the women in hot pants, teetering on ridiculous platform stilettos, standing across from the motels on Prairie Avenue. We tell each other silly ghost stories about the bad karma, or at least the bad luck of living so close to a cemetery. We talk about the crazy, strung out kids who crashed their car into the firehouse, or the twelve year old boys we saw shooting guns into a house from their bicycles, or the old man across the street stoically washing blood off his porch after his son tried to commit suicide at his front door. We talk about it all with weary bravado. But for the longest time we don't talk about my dad.

We don't talk about all the junk collected in the backyard. We avert our eyes when we see my dad's slight form asleep on the couch, huddled underneath an old comforter. We pretend we don't hear him up all night, staring at the tiny, fuzzy black and white TV he keeps on a shelf in the kitchen. We don't talk about the bathroom and how we can never get into it. Madeline merely eyeballs me when we get the occasional whiff of sickly-sweet, burnt flowers from behind the bathroom door. I grunt, don't make eye contact. She can tell I'm not going to get into it. I'm not ready until she hears me fighting with my mom.

The chimes on the front door tinkle softly as we enter the house but we try to head upstairs quietly after I notice my mom asleep on the couch with the TV flickering on her face. Summer's just budding and it's already stifling in my room, about ten degrees hotter than the rest of the house. Soon it will be too hot to sleep up here. We will have to pull the mobile air conditioner unit right up to the bed and lie awake all night, uncovered, right up against it. For now, the Los Angeles Westside breeze is still strong enough to push out the stale heat of the attic space. A parched dusty haze hangs over the room and the wood beams in the ceiling creak from lack of moisture. I open the two windows and watch Madeline stand next to the curtain and surrender to the breeze with her eyes closed.

"You hungry?" I ask, soaking in the image of her languishing at the window.

"Hmm," she nods, enjoying the fresh current as it slowly lifts the oppressive weight from the room.

"Let's just go pick something up down the street," I suggest.

"Sounds good." She finally turns away from the window and turns to me. "See if your mom wants anything before we go."

I go to grab the twenty dollars I left on my dresser. It's gone. "Pinche mentiroso ladrón," I'm blistering hot again but now it's all internal.

"Why don't you just kick him out?"

I plead with my mother in two languages. I wonder how much Maddie can hear from upstairs.

"Hijo de la chingada, what has he ever done for us?" I yell and then I feel guilty.

"I can't just throw him in the street, mi'jo. I can't just leave him in the gutter," she says.

"Yes you can," I say calmly. "We would be better off. We would have been better off years ago."

The earth shakes me loose from my bed and forces me into the narrow hallway. My mom is already there, in her nightgown but she doesn't look like she has just woken up. I can't look at her. My anger has no words but I know it even when I am still half asleep. She tries to take me in her arms to sooth me but I pull away even though I'm scared. I stand in the doorway like I was taught but I don't really believe it's safer than my mother's arms. I want to punish her. It is her fault for letting him back in the house.

In the morning, my father is still asleep on the couch. The thin Superman sheet I grew too old for a few years earlier covers his prostrate body as if he were at the morgue. I can't even see if he is breathing or not, but his hand hangs off the edge of the St. Vincent De Paul sofa, touching the floor from underneath the thin sheet and his fingers occasionally twitch.

The earthquake has reached up with its flinty fingers and ripped the clean, white wall like a piece of paper. Crack. I creep over to stand next to the couch and silently reach out to touch the wall behind my father's still body. I follow the jagged line with my little boy fingers and blame him.

The house is no longer fit to live in. The earthquake has condemned it so we have to move, to stay safe, my mom says. I dream of earthquakes—nightmares of a shifting, sandy fault line. I dream it swallows him in one dry, sandy gulp. These dreams wake me up, then rock me back to sleep. Now it seems that there are all sorts of earthquakes that keep us moving: my mom hurts her back, the car breaks down, my dad gets arrested. This family is without bedrock so we are forced to move again.

When we get back, I've cooled off. He's fixing a TV at the back of the house. There are tools, wires and TV parts scattered all over a greasy bath towel he has blanketed the little oak dining room table with. He sets a screwdriver down and I follow Madeline as he waves us over. In his other hand, I see he's holding something small and alive. I catch a glimpse of movement and the glitter of an eye. Madeline notices it too; I can see her eyes widen in surprise.

"Que es eso?" I ask him, pointing at his hand. He looks hunched and small, like a little kid who knows he's in trouble because that's where he usually is. I notice the uneven gaps of missing hair on his closely shaven head. I remember the fight I had with my mother and I am ashamed.

"It's a lizard," Madeline whispers out of the corner of her mouth. She looks like she wants to grab it out of my dad's hand. He has wrapped a thin piece of copper around its neck.

"Es que no entiendes. Tiene poder mistico, mi'jo," he's rambling on about Egyptian pharaohs keeping them as pets. They are magical, apparently. Madeline always listens with sincerity to his childish stories in broken English. She's never cruel, and the warmth she spends on him angers me. I wish she hated him just a little, but he's my disappointment, not hers.

I can tell her soft spot for animals is taking over her soft spot for crackheads. *Do something*, she silently implores me. But I ignore her, wanting her to get mad.

"Enrique, did your dad try to put a leash on a lizard?" She whispers as we walk up the stairs.

"All I know is that lizard has had better days," I answer.

She looks worried and I know she's going to keep bringing it up. With a sigh, I head back downstairs and make my dad remove the metal leash he had fashioned and release the scared little reptile.

“He’s a ghost, a shell. It’s sad,” she says later that night.

She doesn’t want to let it go. The heat is keeping us both up. I know we aren’t going to be able to sleep so I turn on the TV hoping to distract her.

“Don’t waste your sympathy on him,” I tell her, flipping through infomercials for exercise equipment and food processors.

“You look like the dad and he looks like the son,” she says.

If only it stopped at appearances. The contrast intrigues Maddie. She asks me if things were always like this. She tells me I need to talk to her, that I have nothing to be ashamed about, that all families are embarrassing. Finally, I tell her all the things I could never say out loud. She listens.

The sun has just set and already the air is acrid and smoky; the streets are on fire. The earth is exploding beneath LAX airspace.

“Hola,” I call to my mom. As we walk in the front door the little chimes jingle.

“Hi,” she says from the living room couch as we trudge upstairs. “I made posole if you guys are hungry.” She looks tired as she exhales her cigarette, smiling up at us from her novela.

“Thanks, Mom. I think we’re going over to Eddie’s later. He’s got a shitload of fireworks,” I say from the top of the stairs.

“Why you wanna go out tonight? People are gonna be going crazy,” she yells up at us.

“It’s Fourth of July.” I answer, unsure if she heard me.

I can hear the heavy bass drum of the tamborazo from across the street. As we get closer to the party, I contemplate turning around and getting back in the car.

“I know I’m gonna get shit because I haven’t been around in a while,” I complain to Madeline as I wait for her to adjust her skirt.

“Come on,” she grabs my hand and we head over to Eddie’s house. “It’s the fourth. Everyone is going to be totally happy to see you,” she says. As we walk across the brown grass of a neighbor’s yard, she tries to keep her heels from sinking into the dirt. We walk into the yard and close the gate behind us. Eddie’s sister grabs us each a beer, cold and wet from the cooler.

“He lives,” Eddie shouts across the yard when the band finishes. “What? You don’t come around no more now that you’re dating a huera?”

“Fuck you, Eddie,” Madeline yells back and grins.

He makes his way through the improvised dance floor on the driveway, past the old picnic table covered with food. His dad is at an old, smoky barbeque cooking perfect asada. Eddie moves quick and wily, with surprising agility for such a big guy.

“Ah, just kidding. Give me a hug,” he says as he throws his arms around both of us. “How’s married life so to speak?”

My wet beer is slipping out of my hand as he smothers us with his girth. He releases his hold and drags us over to the food. It feels good but it’s not home. We stay until everyone’s twisted enough to miss our exit. It’s still early and we can hear the craziness all around us. Squealing, exploding, pop, pop, popping, then one shot sounds different. We know, we look at each other, but don’t say anything much. At least we are back at my mom’s house.

As we pass the bathroom on our way upstairs, we catch my dad standing on the furry pink bathroom mat, leaning into the mirror. He’s carefully dabbing toothpaste on his eyebrows and gently rubbing it in with his index finger. In English (for Madeline’s benefit) and with guilty eyes (for my benefit) he tells us it makes his grey hairs go away.

“Baby, who knew that toothpaste henna was the answer to our beauty needs,” Maddie says and winks at me.

“Don’t push it,” I say but my smile is genuine.

We go out to the rusty balcony and things are in full swing. The cops have set up their yellow tape around the sound of the shot we heard earlier. They move kids out of the way, swinging the beam of their flashlight over the asphalt looking for shells while illegal fireworks explode all around them. I wave at my neighbor’s daughter in the street. She points a rocket in our direction and waves with excitement while her mother stands ten feet away, smoking a cigarette and flirting with a dealer. I instinctively duck until she turns around, pointing her rocket at the power lines.

“Emergency rooms are going to be full tonight,” Maddie says as the sparkling missile narrowly avoids damaging anything and explodes in the sulfuric air.

"Let's just stay in tonight?" I ask.

She nods.

Bursts of color from every direction shoot skyward but don't even come close to the dozens of planes circling in our backyard sky. I imagine busy people, important people, lonely people in those restless stars, trapped and looking down on us from their plastic windows. Can they see all this wild color and desperate energy from the sky? Do they wish they were here or are they trying to get away?

"Like stars," she says, like she was inside my head. "Flying stars, not shooting stars."

"Make a wish," I say as I take her hand and we close our eyes.

We imagine our own home, one that has a shower that we can stand in, let warm, even-temperated water wash over us without one hand permanently on the faucet for fear of a sudden and unpredictable scalding. We dream about water pressure, an absence of funky mildew odors. An insulated bedroom that is not stifling in summer, freezing at night or leaky in the rain. A place we don't have to hide our DVD's so my dad doesn't steal them. We make a wish on the low flying stars that seem so close, filled with people coming home.



Wendy Grosskopf
uprooted

coffined
with mom and sisters,
today I climb out of the pyre
and roam.

I wander
until Shakti spirit rends
my shoulder. I turn
and confess:

ancient mother, I am afraid.

we crawl
inside a mirror,
connect as lovers. cold
hunger fills, my dreams
retreat. ambition drags away
its weedy hair.

I turn back,
choose home,
that blanket rough yet familiar.
female.

Carleen Tibbetts
Said the Pre-Raphaelite Girl

"I am half-sick of shadows . . . The curse is come upon me."
"The Lady of Shalott"—Lord Tennyson

Through a glass
and darkly I weave
what I see not.
Turned perpetually from light,
from air, eyes riveted to
my watery mirror.
Mustn't turn 'round,
mustn't behold color and all
that light eeking
'round the corners of velveteed curtains.
And him who would undo me.

(un-gaze me,
un-think me,
dark continent that I am
immense as astral light
this time I will look you
head-on unfaltering you will
notice the upturned corners of my mouth
you will see that shimmer and you will make note of it)

Bad luck.
This is how I am remembered:
retheted, waters gently rocking the docked boat,
wind chilling the reeds, knotting my hair.
My glance fearful, sidecast.
The last of the candles flickering.
My pretty face and I ready to depart
blanketed in diaphanous gowns
and all that finery.



Rich Anderson
Rocket-man

I'm sitting at the campfire across from Greg. Well, it's not a really a fire. And the sun is settling down beneath the cracks in the dry mountains around us. Greg is balling up newspaper trying to get it started. But the wood is still wet from the rain a few days ago. The newspaper lights and burns bright and smoky, and the split logs lay untouched by the brief flames. "Damn wet wood." Greg balls up more newspaper from the stack next to him. I had the Los Angeles Times Sunday edition in the back of my car from the day before. Headline: Is Elizabeth Taylor okay? There's a picture of Elizabeth Taylor, all done up, standing on a red carpet in front of photographers, who are all looking the other way. Greg balls it up. Lights a match.

"It'll light, I just need to move the logs a bit—give the fire air to breathe."

"Whatever you say," I tell him.

Greg lights up Elizabeth's face, diamond earrings in flames. He sits the burning paper on the wood, but the fire clings to the newspaper.

"Come on, you fucker. Light." Greg tries stuffing the paper deeper between two of the pieces of wood, but to no result. The newspaper burns an orange rimmed death and the wood is still wet.

"You got the whole Sunday?"

I hadn't seen Greg in over a month. Probably two or so, I'm not too sure. He was one of the friends I kept through the relationship, one of my friends Alex could stand.

Greg takes out his pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes and slips one in between his pressed lips. "Where's the beer?" he mumbles with the dangling cigarette.

I knew Greg wouldn't bring any beer, so I stopped by Ventura Liquor on my way to the campsite he reserved. It's in my car, but I don't feel like drinking yet. I'm thinking about the trip to Georgia, my grandfather, and about Alex, while Greg tries to start a fire and the lake chirps with crickets and the sun dives deep into the earth, and I think of Rocket-man's eyes.

"Get the beer."

The newspaper stuffed between the split, wet logs burn strong as I hand Greg a beer. "How was the funeral?" he asks.

I nod. "It was Catholic." He takes the beer from my outstretched hand. "I was one of the pallbearers; my cousin said my grandfather would've wanted me to be one."

He looks down at his beer and taps the top with the tip of his fingernail.

"How's Alex?"

"We broke up," I say.

Greg cracks his beer and takes a gulp. He sets down his beer and balls up another piece of newspaper. Headline: Coelacanth fossil found, the missing link fish. In the top corner of the page, there's a picture of a black and white fossil. Looks like another fossil of a fish, with rib bones curving out from the spine.

He lights it.

"At least you got to fuck her for a couple of years."

Greg looks down at his beer and flicks the metal tab with his thumb. Clink. He looks at me and squints through the black paper smoke. "You're not still hung up on her, are you?"

Greg's eyes are narrowing. He doesn't want to hear, and I don't want to say I am. It was only a week ago.

I crack my beer. The beer is still cold from the liquor store, and the sweet, bitter, and beautiful smell after cracking the can takes me to the airplane ride back from Georgia and how the man next to me ordered drink after drink. With my eyes closed, I smelt the Dos Equis and the Heineken and it comforted me. And, it seemed, only when I smelled the beer, I slept. But when I woke up the man asked me if I got enough sleep. I told him not enough and that I wasn't even sure if my girlfriend would show to pick me up when the plane landed. He offered me a ride, but I

said if she wasn't there I'd take a cab. He said sure thing, then gave me his card. It was from Boeing. I asked him if he worked on airplanes and he said no, rockets. A Rocket-man, he said. Then we got off the plane and I took a cab home.

"When was the last time you saw David?" Greg asks, looking up. His eyes widen.

It's like old times, before I started dating Alex, when Greg and I used to sneak beer past the park rangers and get drunk and piss in the lake and skip homeroom. When I first met Alex, she was wearing torn and shredded blue jeans. That's really all I remember. She came up to me; I was sitting across from her at Tipp's, and she asked me why I was staring. I told her that her blue jeans were fucking awesome and that I had never seen a pair like them before. She smiled, and sat down, and told me that she could make me a pair if I really wanted. She told me that she didn't make the pair she was wearing, but she saw how they were made, and that, with no problem, she could make a pair for me. Sure.

"Long time ago," I say. "I didn't keep tabs on him." David wasn't the best of persons. Drinking with David in high school, David would try to kick me in the balls. And he would laugh and laugh. Then, after more beer, David would get pissed and start screaming and then rush at me and really try to hurt me. Nothing inventive, only a couple of high schoolers getting drunk off malt liquor.

Greg sits up as far as he can in the little, green canvas camping chair he brought.

"He crossed me about a month ago," Greg took a sip of beer, "I'm not his friend anymore."

Greg doesn't look in my eyes before he starts telling the story.

"So we were up drinking at the ranch one night, and you know how David drank in high school, well he drank ten times as much. He would down a twenty-four pack in one night. And he's a short motherfucker. So we're drinking at this party and David gets all smashed and we miss our ride. My brother gave us a ride to this party, but he left early with this hot chick, couldn't blame him. We end up catching a ride with this dude named Harold. I know, stupid name. But Harold was a pretty cool guy, so I thought when I first met him. And he had this pretty cute girlfriend. She had short red hair and these sexy blue eyes, and she was wearing this green tight dress. She looked pretty good. I

was surprised Harold got her, but you know how that shit happens. Hot chicks always get with goofy bastards. It can happen the other way around too, but what good does that do?

“Anyways, Harold has this hot girlfriend named Mary. I’m in the front seat with Harold, and David is in the back with Mary. Harold cranks the music after I tell him how to get to the ranch and we cruise. He drops us off and David smashes straight to bed. I’m not as drunk as David and pop on a movie. “Fellowship of the Rings.” After Bilbo goes invisible, I hear this banging on the door. I mean it’s fucking loud, like someone trying to bust it through. I go to the door and look out, and it’s Harold. He’s banging the fuck out of the door and starting to yell, ‘Fucking bastard, you fucking bastard.’ So I open the door. He’s to the point of tears, fucking yelling and all. I ask him what’s the matter and he yells where the fuck is David and that he is going to kill his tiny ass. He pushes me against the door and runs through the house. I bounce up real quick and head after him. He’s flipping lights on and shit and finds the guest room where David is staying. I try to cut him off but he bursts through me and starts whaling on David. Kicking the shit out of him. And David was passed out, but he wakes up and starts yelling at Harold, like he knew who was beating the shit out of him without seeing him. ‘You pussy, you’re a pussy, I’ll kill you,’ David’s yelling. Of course, he’s getting his ass beat. I jump on Harold, drag him to the ground and hold him by the throat. I tell him to get the fuck out and he tells me to go fuck myself. David gets up and starts kicking Harold in the balls, and I’m there choking him as good as I can and he starts crying. So I let go of him and I start trying to hold David back and he starts fighting me and screaming that I’m a pussy.

“Finally I get Harold out of the room, and I shut the door to the guest room. David’s in there still screaming his head off. And it turns out, after Harold calms down and I start piecing the story together, David was in the back seat fingering Mary. David was whispering in her ear that he would kill her if she said anything.”

I call the Rocket-man on the phone after that night to see if he wants to meet up for some coffee, or tea, or whatever. The line goes straight to voicemail, so I leave a message. I tell him to call me back; there’s no rush, but the sooner the better. He calls me back right quick; it wasn’t more than thirty seconds, though if it was longer I don’t notice. The Rocket-man tells me he would like to meet up for some coffee, but as long as we don’t

meet too late in the day, because, he says, he can't sleep when he drinks coffee past eleven. Sure, I say, and ask him to meet me at a coffee shop I know of off Mills Road. "I can make it there in thirty minutes," he says. I tell him no rush. Honestly though, I want to see him as soon as I can.

Alex asked me to marry her about a month ago. She didn't get down on her knees; she sat on the bed next to me. I had just gotten back from night class, and there she was, petting the spot of comforter next to her, with that smile of hers. Come sit, she said, I have a surprise. It wasn't the first time she told me she had a surprise for me. Last surprise she bought me a Zippo, with my name engraved in it. I never used it. But it was a nice gift. She always loved to give; she loved getting gifts in return.

When she asked me, she saw my face, and shook her head no, you don't love me. I couldn't bear her eyes and her torn jeans. I told her I was surprised that she asked is all, and I put my hand to her shaking head, and made it still. I'll marry you. Okay.

When I meet up with the Rocket-man at Tipp's, he orders a small coffee, and asks if he can get me anything. I tell him that he can buy me something, but that I don't want to feel indebted to him. "I won't hold you to anything," he says, "don't worry," and we move up to the cashier to order. He gets me a small coffee and we take a seat by the window, where we can see the cars pass. Rocket-man is wearing a white button up shirt with black stencils of fish swimming up and down in all directions on it, and some straight legged blue jeans. But his bright green rocket jumpsuit is showing through his shirt. So I ask him, as he cools off his small coffee with tiny breaths, if he likes fish. He gently puts down his coffee, not taking a sip, and tells me his wife got it for him. He is so-so about fish.

We went shopping for the engagement rings together. Downtown Los Angeles, the jewelry district. We were told by her parents to go there because they had the best deals and, besides, that's where they got their rings. After circling Hill Street a couple times, we parked at a meter. Sitting beside her, still in the car, I shuffled through the change in the cup holder and found three quarters. I had a 1993, a 1984, and a 2003 Arkansas. My grandfather always kept quarters in his pocket, incase he got thirsty for a Dr. Pepper; he always said. I told her that we didn't have much time to do our shopping, and she looked at me and told me she loved me. She held my hand for a calmly few seconds, then took the quarters from me. Let's do it, she said and opened my car door.

I finish my coffee long before Rocket-man does. He sips, gently breathes on the coffee, then sips again. We are watching through the large window that faces the street, people and cars pass. Business people mainly. A woman in a blue suit, talking on a cell phone, who looks like Elizabeth Taylor. A man, in jeans and sports coat, checking his beeper. Looks like Bilbo, short with puffy, grey hair. Rocket-man looks at me. "Who has a beeper?" he asks. I shake my head no, and say, "Apparently that guy." He chuckles, blows on his coffee, and takes a sip. He licks the thin rim of coffee off the brim of his mustache. "Hey," he asks, "Do you want to go for a ride?"

The day I heard about my grandfather dying, I talked to Alex in our apartment. I told her that I had to take a trip to Georgia, to go see my grandfather, who they thought would die in a day. She said that she couldn't make the trip, even though I didn't ask her. She was peeling a navel orange, her finger nails dug into the skin, sour smelling mist sprayed. I'll miss you, I said. "Is there any way to reschedule the flight so I can go?" She was free on the weekend, but she could only go for a day and a half. I didn't think there was a way to reschedule, too many people had already bought tickets and made plans, and besides, who knew how long he was going to live for. She looked at me twice, and her eyes narrowed, "Do you mean you already bought a plane ticket without checking with me?" She set a large section of peel on the coffee table in front of her, without looking, without caring. I told her I that I already bought a ticket.

Alex asked me where I was going to stay, as she sat across from me on the couch. I told her that I would stay with my uncle and my cousin, probably in their guest room. She wanted to know where the guest room was. She pulled her knees up and pointed them at me. The guest room is across from my cousin's room, I said. Alex told me I would like that, being so close to her.

Driving with the Rocket-man, through the mountains around Palmdale, we come to a gate. A sign marked DANGER is dangling like a loose cigarette in between lips from a century post. Then a guard walks up to the driver's side, to Rocket-man. "Don't worry about that, I got clearance." Rocket-man winks, but I barely catch it when I turn my head, and he rolls down the window.

I flew out to Atlanta on Wednesday. He wanted us to be there, in the hospice, when he died. He got a lot better from the time I bought the ticket the same day and landed in Atlanta. So much better than the days before

that now he could talk. When my brother and I got there, the building smelled like lemons, and the nurses were smiling in a wild way and asking if we were Tim's grandkids. They said he was going to live for a while longer.

Alex called eight times while I was at the hospice. Of course I didn't have my phone on me, it was back at my uncle's house, where my brother and I were staying. When I got back to the house, I went into the guest bathroom, put the toilet seat down, and checked my messages. She left three: the first was the standard message—I miss you, call me. In the second message she asked where I was, and why I wasn't answering. In the third message she said she was going out with her friends, to a club, and that she didn't know if any guys were going with them. She said she was sure I was having fun with my cousin.

We pass through the gate and Rocket-man floors the pedal. The engine rumbles and the transmission jerks, but we are off. The two lane road narrows a bit, though Rocket-man is edging the car to the right side. The dry desert around us smells like burning newspaper through the vents. I point the air vent away from me. "That's jet fuel." And the Rocket-man smiles.

I called Alex to tell her that I was going to stay longer, because he passed early that morning, to the nurses' surprise. I needed to tell her that I wasn't there when he died, none of us were, just the hospice nurses. But no one answered our apartment line, or her cell phone. I turned on the cold water in the sink; I could hear my cousin in the next room over, watching TV, and someone, probably my older brother, walking around upstairs, and the rushing white noise from the faucet. I splashed water over my face, getting spots on my collar. Dried off, and walked out of the guest bathroom.

The night before the actual service there was a vigil. Only the people close to my grandfather were there, like my brother, cousin, and uncle. There were a few old friends of my grandfather who I didn't know. Two of them were pallbearers, and, apparently, old business partners with my grandfather in the mobile home business. During the vigil, the priest asked us if we had any stories, in remembrance, we would like to tell. My cousin raised her hand. She told how he wanted her to stay in college, and how he even offered to pay for it all if she would stay in. She didn't listen to him; she dropped out and tried her luck at interior design, which she was failing at. She cried and said how she should've listened to him. After I knew she was finished, I told the group about the last time I talked to him. It was a week before he died; he was in hospice and feeling well enough to talk. I said hello, and so did he, then he asked me how I was doing. I said I was okay.

He didn't say anything for a few seconds, then half looked at me with his fuzzy, curious eyes and said, "Something's the matter with your voice. Is everything alright with Alex?"

I told the group that that was my grandfather.

On the flight home to Los Angeles, I had a window seat. It was dark, a red eye, the wing light was blinking red, and the plane was filling up with passengers. I buckled up, shut my eyes, and leaned my head back against the headrest. I hated flying since the trip to Puerto Rico with Alex, flying through the tropical depression, where the plane dropped and the yellow oxygen masks fell on our shoulders. I could hear other people on the plane, asking someone else to move so they could reach their seat, lifting bags into overhead compartments, and asking for a drink before take-off. Next to me I heard a rustle, and I opened my eyes as I turned my head toward the aisle. He had a grey beard and blue, beautiful, and sexy eyes. He slowly sat down in the seat next to me and said that he didn't mean to wake me, and to go back to sleep, he wasn't going to bug me. I turned my head toward the window and shut my eyes. I heard him buckle up with a clink.

Shaking woke me up, and next to me was the man with blue eyes. The man set down his magazine and said, "Take-offs wake me up too, I can never sleep on planes anyways." I rubbed my eyes and tried to stretch my legs, my toes tingled. I told him that planes were not made in my size and he chuckled as he flipped the pages in his magazine. My eyes were weak and red without sleep, it seemed like I couldn't rub them enough, no matter how hard I tried; Georgia was in my eyes. I asked the man with blue eyes how he was, to take my mind off of flying. He said he was alright and that the alcohol was helping. He told me I looked tired, he wanted to know if he could call the steward to ask him for a blanket or a beer. I said that it was alright, and I told him that I hoped I had a ride when we landed. The plane jolted in a pocket of turbulence, I stopped rubbing, and, as I looked at the man with blue eyes, I noticed something under his button up shirt. Something bright green.

I never wanted to be a pallbearer, especially for my grandfather. When I got to the funeral home for the vigil, the director took the other pallbearers and me aside to tell us when we were needed, and what we were to do. Early the next morning we were to take the closed casket from the funeral home to the hearse. Then we had to take it from the hearse to the church, then from the church back to the hearse after the ceremony. Lastly from the hearse to

the burial plot. There was nothing in between carrying the casket, worrying about the handles slipping from your hands, and watching everyone looking at you. Carrying that body.

The funeral director offered me a pair of black gloves to wear after he saw me wiping my hands on my slacks. At first I told him I would be fine. It's better safe than really sorry, he said. I said that he was probably right, and put on the gloves.

They were leather with Velcro straps, and my hands didn't ever slip, but they still sweated. I kept looking down. I know people were looking at me looking down, trying to readjust my grip. No one said anything to me afterwards about it though.

He asked me what I was looking at. I told him nothing, and I quickly looked away, straight ahead of me to the seatback tray. He said to just tell him what I was looking at. Nothing, I said. I know you're looking at my undersuit, he said. I told him that I didn't think it looked like an undersuit. Believe me, it's an undersuit. He unbuttoned his shirt and told me to touch it. "Use your finger." I don't know why I did, but his smile told me it was really okay. I reached out my right hand, the plane bumped, in the back the steward laughed over the howl of the engines, and the lady in the seat in front of me had permed red hair that smelled of clinical lavender—the bright green suit was slick. A salamander under a stone in a mossy creek. "It feels nice, doesn't it?" My hand guided fingers along his undersuit. "It's a rocket suit," he said, then he called the steward for a beer.

Rocket-man pulls the car up to an office looking building, with fake grass and sapling sycamore trees surrounding the walkway, and tells me to get out of the car. But in a nice way, with his blue eyes wide. "This way," he says. He walks me through the office building front doors and says hi to a cute little red head receptionist. "Does he need a suit?" she asks, pointing to me with a pen in her hand. Rocket-man nods. "Go with her."

I get a tight green rocket suit. It feels slimy inside, but dry. "You'll get used to it," the receptionist says. I want to tell her that she is a beautiful girl and to scream and kick the seat in front of her if anything bad happens, but don't, I know David isn't here. David will never be here. "I'm sure I will." And she leads me back to the Rocket-man, who is outside standing beside something I've never seen before in my life.

The giant metal fish is shiny with tiny scales of shingled plates. The fins are bright blue with the dorsal fin the brightest.

The afternoon light shimmers against its body and, with each gust of hot wind, the scales twist and dart. However, on this fish, there are little metal plated legs behind the dorsal fins, barely touching the ground. The eyes are popped open. The Rocket-man sees me looking at the eyes. "That's where we get in." He whistles to the receptionist and she brings a step ladder. "It's like England," she says, "You're on the left side, the passenger." She and the Rocket-man lead me to the popped open eye ball of the fish and they tell me to just step right in. "There's a seat in there, you'll see." So I step on the ladder and gently place my leg into the eye socket. Sure enough, there's a soft cushion that I can feel under my foot. I grab the upper socket of the fish with my hand and plant myself in. Real quick, the Rocket-man is inside the fish, next to me. The eyeballs shut, one by one, from the receptionist who gives me the thumbs up from the ground. I ask if we are going to fly, and Rocket-man shakes his head no and with those gorgeous blue eyes he looks at me, "We are going diving, and we have all the time in the world." He presses a purple button on the consol between us and the fish starts vibrating. There's a smell of burning ink, but the Rocket-man presses another button and cool, fresh air starts blowing through a green vent above me. "Here we go, buckle up, and tell me everything you got." And it's just when I start to buckle up, that the fish really then starts to shake, and we jump in the air, the smell of smoke returns, and we slice into the ground, head first. He presses a button to the right of him and more fresh smelling air blows. I rock in my seat and the green, slick suit keeps me moving with the fish, with its rhythm and crash. Through the eyes I see the earth pass. Inside the fish, as we cut into the earth, the light reddens more and more. First there's thin gold sand that rustles against the glass of the eye and Rocket-man turns a blue knob by his knee and the fish flips sideways and flies, crunching deeper into the earth. "Hold on, we're about to hit the metamorphics," he says and I hold tight to the long handle with a pink rubber grip above me. Then there's a crack and the light inside the fish disappears, and Rocket-man and I are in the dark, with only the knobs, switches, and dials in front of him glowing. But with a Click a bulb in the back of the fish head burns and there's light. Rocket-man flicks a switch above him and lights shine out from the eye lids and I can see dark, crusted, and billowing earth, and the fish shudders. I look over at Rocket-man and he is looking right at me, eyes wide. "So, what is it?" he asks as we dive. He asks me about Alex, and my granddad, and I tell him. "But how do you feel?" I tell him my last memory will always be of him,

asking me why I sounded distraught, unhappy, and asking if it was Alex. How's Alex? Is everything alright? No, everything's not alright granddad, here I am talking about Alex and how she thinks I want to fuck my cousin, and how everything changed when she asked me. When you are *here*.

Smoke enters the fish, and the shaking turns to violent rattling, and I cough and I try to open my eyes. I see him.

I rub my eyes harder and I can hear Rocket-man over the crackle of the fish diving. "What if he wants to be remembered asking you?"

I won't stop rubbing my eyes. The smoke is thick and filling my lungs. I call out to the Rocket-man to press the button to blow fresh air on me. I call out that I want to stay with him, and he yells back I can, but only if I find a deserted, blank land where we can dive together. "What?" I call through the smoke, but I can't take it and I cough and squint to see the Rocket-man's beautiful open eyes.

"I got it started." Greg's stuffing another piece of newspaper between a smoky, but ignited log.

"And did you hear me? You were zoning out. He made her bleed with his dry fingers. He crossed me, that asshole. I choked Harold for him."

But I shut my eyes and feel the fish diving. And Greg is gone forever.



Patricia Escobar
A Plagiarized Compilation of Queer

What is QUEER?

Queer as inclusive
Queer as militant activist
Queers who embrace fluidity

Sexuality is constructed; Sexuality is not universal.

Queer as race, class, and gender
Queer as ungendered

We shift our identities in order to become...*more*
attractive to whomever we desire.

Identity and desire are linked.

But...

What's "the real me" got to do with being
a "real man" or a "real woman"?

Heterosexuality has attained the status of the natural.

Yet...

Rethinking gay and lesbian identities and cultures—
Lucy and Ethel and Shirley and Laverne.

Have we been, and are we now,
collaborators in our own continued
invisibility, oppression and marginalization?

Lili died soon after an operation to construct a vagina...*to construct...*

Nature gone Awry.

Begin!

To celebrate the incredible advances that
American progressives, in all our multiplicity,
have made in this country and elsewhere.

Claiming at once EQUALITY and DIFFERENCE.

Conventional heterocentrist paradigms
decided that expressions of queerness are:

Sub-textual, Sub-cultural, Alternative;
DELUSIONAL ATTEMPTS TO SEE SOMETHING THAT ISN'T THERE.

A censorship of sex (ssshhh)

to tell the *truth* of sex; a privileged theme of confession.

Modern society is perverse,
It produced and determined the sexual mosaic constituting
a science of sexuality.

Heterosexuality needs to be
Recognized and Studied
as a *political institution*.

1970 – Heterosexual: pertaining to or characterized by
the *normal* relation of the sexes.

1985 – Heterosexual: related to or characterized by
a sexual propensity for the opposite sex.

A policing of sex.

Reject attempts to contain people through labeling:

Lover's stupid... friend's too euphemistic
partner sounds like a business arrangement.

Passing means being accepted as the gender one presents oneself as.

There is no real disconnection in my mind among
the political, the sexual, and the discursive.

What came under scrutiny?

The sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex

Simple as that, I became an industry.

Desire and *disease* gruesomely coupled.
Perpetual spirals of *Power* and *Pleasure*.

Queerness is an attitude,
a way of responding.

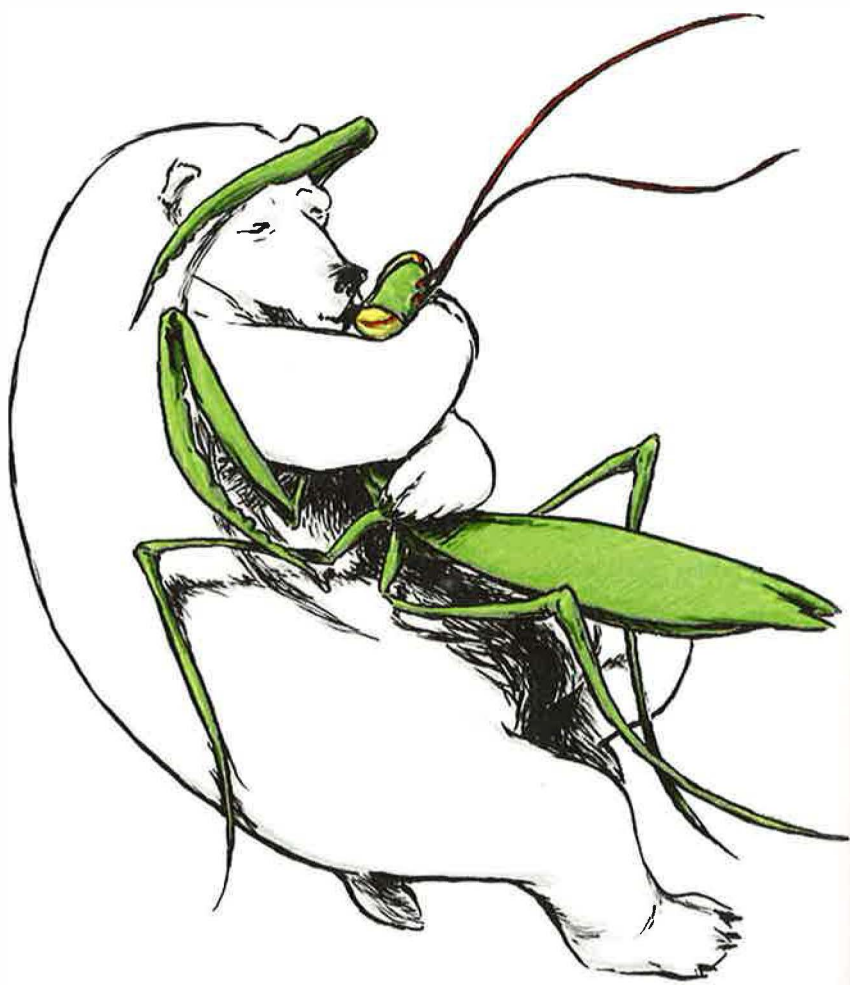
Paradoxical Queerness:

FITTING IN TO *NOT* FITTING IN.

LaBeija: Veni Vidi Vici

How fucking beautiful I am

Now **VOGUE!**





Eugene Yi
Perhaps

Stage is set up like a garden at night, dim lights strewn about in different shades and colors. In the middle of the stage is a gazebo with three steps on each side, and with a different array of flowers and roses on the gazebo. Two wine glasses sit on either ledge of the gazebo. Hwan and Evalinne step in on opposite sides of the stage, and stand there. (Mood is playful)

HWAN: (Steps closer) Kiss me.

EVALINNE: No.

HWAN: Just once.

EVALINNE: On the cheek?

HWAN: Little lower?

EVALINNE: That's vulgar.

HWAN: (Another full step, right leg, left leg) How so?

EVALINNE: You know why.

HWAN: I don't.

EVALINNE: But don't you?

HWAN: How could I?

EVALINNE: Because.

HWAN: Because what?

EVALINNE: Because you don't love me.

HWAN: Don't I?

EVALINNE: Do you?

HWAN: I might, I might not.

EVALINNE: So you don't?

HWAN: (Takes a full step closer) But I do.

EVALINNE: You just said you didn't.

HWAN: I said I *might* not.

EVALINNE: (Takes first full step) But do I?

HWAN: I think so.

EVALINNE: Do you... (Full step) ...think therefore you are?
(No pause in line, read "do you think therefore you are?")

HWAN: (Stands there, but looks away) Boring. I don't know if I love you anymore.

EVALINNE: I think you do.

HWAN: (Steps forward and looks back toward her) I think you're crazy.

EVALINNE: You think I'm boring.

HWAN: So I can't love you anymore.

EVALINNE: (Step) I think you can. ... Even if I am boring.

HWAN: But you can't kiss me?

EVALINNE: I never said I couldn't.

HWAN: But you can't.

EVALINNE: No. I can't.

HWAN: Please?

EVALINNE: (Full step) No.

HWAN: Fine.

EVALINNE: (Full step) *You kiss me.*

HWAN: I can't.

EVALINNE: You can't or you won't?

HWAN: (Full step) I might.

EVALINNE: (Full step) You should.

HWAN: Should I?

EVALINNE: (Full step) It could be special.

HWAN: It could be.

EVALINNE: But you'll never know.

HWAN: Why not?

EVALINNE: Cuz you won't kiss me.

HWAN: (Full step) But I want to.

EVALINNE: (Full step) So do I.

HWAN: So kiss me, then.

EVALINNE: I can't.

HWAN: Why not?

EVALINNE: Because of you.

HWAN: What did I do?

EVALINNE: You want me.

HWAN: Do I?

EVALINNE: (Full step) You do.

HWAN: You're right.

EVALINNE: (Full step) Then *you* kiss *me*.

HWAN: I can't.

EVALINNE: Touché.

HWAN: (Full step) But you want me to.

EVALINNE: I do.

HWAN: (Full step) I wish.

EVALINNE: (Full step) I *lust*.

HWAN: (Full step) I *need*.

EVALINNE: You don't.

HWAN: You're right, but I want.

EVALINNE: (Full step) I want it more.

HWAN: (Passionately) Then take it.

EVALINNE: (Full step, passionate) Touch me.

HWAN: You first.

EVALINNE: (Full step, deep breath) You *know* I won't.

HWAN: I *know* you won't.

EVALINNE: (Back to playful) I know *you* won't.

HWAN: (Back to playful) I know *I* won't.

EVALINNE: But I just *might*.

HWAN: Shouldn't rule it out just yet.

EVALINNE: Yes, we should.

HWAN: Fuck that.

EVALINNE: (Steps forward and places inside of finger to slip, lowers head and looks at him playfully)

HWAN: (Tilts head, inner index finger on his lip, and steps forward)

EVALINNE: Not that.

HWAN: Not yet.

EVALINNE: (Takes a single step onto first step of gazebo)
Perhaps later.

HWAN: Perhaps not.

EVALINNE: Perhaps never.

HWAN: (Takes his first step onto gazebo, one foot only) Perhaps.
(Pause) Kiss me.

EVALINNE: No.

HWAN: Just once.

EVALINNE: On the cheek?

HWAN: Little lower. (Replaces finger on lips)

EVALINNE: Ooohhhh. Lower there. I thought you meant... lower as in down there.

HWAN: (Cuts in at "lower as in")...I know... I know.

EVALINNE: (Flustered) Why do you make things so complicated?

HWAN: (Still playful) Why don't you make things more simple?

EVALINNE: You said I was boring.

HWAN: But should it matter?

EVALINNE: I don't think so.

HWAN: (Completes first step onto gazebo, both feet now on first step, flustered) You're complicated.

EVALINNE: So are you.

HWAN: (Passionate) You want it, but you won't take it. You invade my dreams and my thoughts, and you show me how red, green, and blue the world could be. It could be so perfect. We could...

EVALINNE: (Passionately cuts off HWAN) ...If you would stop and think, if you would just take me instead, think what life would be like. If you would just... just... I hate you! I love you! I dream about you more than you dream of me. (Calms down) But it's we... we make it this way.

HWAN: (Picks up wine glass, back to playful) Then a toast to our complications.

EVALINNE: (Completes step, and grabs glass)

TOGETHER: (Both lift into the air and swig)

EVALINNE: (Serious) You're too carefree.

HWAN: I disagree. I think it's you that is too careful.

EVALINNE: We're both too careful.

HWAN: We should loosen up.

EVALINNE: But we can't.

HWAN: (Passionate) I wish we could. (Takes another step onto second step of gazebo) Ever since I've known you, the world shines differently. (Lights change color) Flowers smell better. (Lights on flowers)

EVALINNE: (Bored) How cliché.

HWAN: You're beautiful. You could be my happiness and my pain. I would embrace both as I wish I could hold you, touch you, kiss your touch.

EVALINNE: (Takes a step onto second step on her side of gazebo, angry) You frustrate me. The things you do, they make me mad. (Lights turn red) But still I feel... I feel... horny. No, no, no... I feel... (Gesture... actress's choice)

HWAN: (Completes second step, longingly) Then come closer to me.

EVALINNE: (Reluctant) I'll hurt.

HWAN: You will.

EVALINNE: I don't want to.

HWAN: But you do.

EVALINNE: And *she* exists.

HWAN: *He* doesn't.

EVALINNE: (Angry) I hate her.

HWAN: She doesn't.

EVALINNE: (Reluctant) Do you? (Pause) I said, do you?

HWAN: (Semi-playful) Does it matter?

EVALINNE: (Serious) Of course.

HWAN: But why?

EVALINNE: I can't be with someone who doesn't love me.

HWAN: But I do love you.

EVALINNE: I want it all.

HWAN: (Takes a step onto third step, passionate) You can have it all...

EVALINNE: But you still love *her*.

HWAN: (Semi-taunting) Do I?

EVALINNE: I think so.

HWAN: But... (cut off)

EVALINNE: It does matter.

HWAN: (Semi-playful) Why does it matter?

EVALINNE: Because we'd make love... and you'd think of her.

HWAN: But you said you lust.

EVALINNE: I do.

HWAN: Then why should it matter?

EVALINNE: Aren't love and lust the same?

HWAN: Like wine and cigarettes...

EVALINNE: Perhaps.

HWAN: (Serious) I'm right.

EVALINNE: Perhaps.

HWAN: Perhaps I'll only think of you.

EVALINNE: You won't.

HWAN: (Shakes head) I don't.

EVALINNE: You don't?

HWAN: I don't.

EVALINNE: You don't what?

HWAN: You know.

EVALINNE: Do I?

HWAN: Don't you?

EVALINNE: I don't.

HWAN: I don't love her. At least I don't think so.

EVALINNE: You have to know.

HWAN: You won't love *me*.

EVALINNE: We don't know that.

HWAN: I wish we could.

EVALINNE: But we can't.

HWAN: Will we ever?

EVALINNE: (Takes a step onto third step, serious) Perhaps.

HWAN: Is this as close as we'll ever get?

EVALINNE: (Loosens up) Perhaps. (Swigs wine)

HWAN: (Swigs wine, completes third step) I need you.

EVALINNE: You don't.

HWAN: You need me, too.

EVALINNE: I don't.

HWAN: Then why are you here?

EVALINNE: (Angry, passionate) Why are you here? This isn't your dream, Hwan. I'm right here. I'm right here close enough to kiss you, close enough for you to kiss me. Here I am, Hwan. Just take me! Don't be such a bitch.

HWAN: (Angry, passionate) This is all a dream! There you are, you're right there and so am I! Just take me! I can't do it, you know I can't!

EVALINNE: I won't.

HWAN: You said you hate her. Why should it matter? Why should it matter to you?

EVALINNE: Because you'll cry.

HWAN: I could take it! For you I can take it! I could grip the thorny rose, I could take the hurt for you! I love you. I want you.

EVALINNE: Then do it! Hold me like you say you want me. Show me. Isn't that love? Isn't that what you told me love is? You told me that love is doing, not a feeling. You say you love me, but how have you shown it? You fucking hypocrite! You fucking liar!

HWAN: I can't be the one! I can't do that! I can't do that because I love, because then she'll hurt.

EVALINNE: (Hurt) What about me? What about me?

HWAN: You can do it. You can take me! You could make things different!

EVALINNE: (Back to anger and passion) So can you!

HWAN: (Shakes his head)

EVALINNE: I don't even know why I'm here.

HWAN: Don't you?

EVALINNE: (Anger dissipates) Perhaps... (Completes third step)

HWAN: (Anger dissipates) Come to me.

EVALINNE: Kiss me. If you don't love her, then kiss me.

HWAN: Touch me. If that's all you can do then touch me.

TOGETHER: (Affirmative) We can't. (Takes step, reluctant)
But can't we? (Takes step, meaningful) I love you. (Takes step,
now face to face)

EVALINNE: Kiss me.

HWAN: I won't.

EVALINNE: You can.

HWAN: Kiss me.

EVALINNE: My dearest Hwan.

HWAN: My dearest Evalinne.

EVALINNE: (Unsure) What if you did?

HWAN: (Semi-accusatory) What if *you* did?

EVALINNE: What would become?

HWAN: We'll never know. Kiss me.

EVALINNE: No.

HWAN: Just once.

EVALINNE: On the cheek?

HWAN: Little lower.

EVALINNE: Kiss me.

HWAN: No.

EVALINNE: Just once.

HWAN: On the cheek?

EVALINNE: Little lower.

TOGETHER: (Both lean in, hands reaching out, as if about to grab and kiss each other. Both pairs of hands are almost grabbing each other's faces, but the audience should see that there is no physical contact being made. They both step back. Both walk off gazebo, then they look back at each other)

(Curtain)





Tobi Cogswell

In Storage

When you pack up a marriage
do you keep the bag of sand from Crete?
Do you keep the omelet pan
or the pasta maker?
The box of matches to light the fireplace,
the lingerie...do you want anyone
to see you in it ever again?

There is no excuse for the
absent-mindedness of wearing
the ring, too beautiful to
throw away, too painful to
put away. Does it go in the
box with pictures from the prom
and how you answered the
questions in "Our Bodies Ourselves"
in 1975? Now that you have a shredder
you could destroy how you felt
about your body back then.
Does it matter?

Do you cry? What do you do with
the wedding pictures? Some of those
people are dead now, some of their
gifts are still in your garage.
Can you put up a sign on Saturday,
sell them to strangers?
How to explain the brand new
Kitchenaid mixer that's still in
the box, its color
popular 20 years ago.

What about the love letters, the
postcards, the flowers drying?
What about the mail?
The animals. Three fish named Mitchell
won't miss you for a moment
but the dog, the sweet puppy,
for him there is no joint custody.

The friends. They are already gone.
Your woman friends all want
to nurture him, fuck him and
take care of him. Your man friends
all want to play golf with him.
You are...deserted. You have
the child, the children, the house.
Your phone book a dinosaur, the
Christmas Card list? Practice
irresponsibility.

Call your shrink, have a
drink, rationalize the tattoo.
Do not think about where
you should store
the place on your neck
where you love to be kissed,
do not think about tears.
Go back to Crete, get new sand,
everything that goes with it.
Keep the omelet pan.
You will need it again.





Kia Calvin Abbasi

Room 303 Ramblings

[Misshapen Chaos of Wellseeming Forms]

(excerpt)

PROLOGUE

Here lays Romeo mourning a cherub he once knew.
As the text says, she was the beam that came long before the crossing
of stars.

Since then the memories edges have gone sketchy round its ends.
The whole ordeal from its inception was probably mere pretend.

At any rate, she had this deep shade of crimson hair; the kind
that made one nostalgic for forest embers and funeral pyres; the
kind that left one gasping for air.

She had an according set of saffron eyes that belied a saintly
mother and a yearning for the Lord and apparently no other.

Here lays the prelude to love everlasting and holy palmers' kiss;
the pain of delusion and silent rejection meshed in remiss.

This is the downtrodden vile-induced soliloquy that escaped
from his lips. A motel inebriate journey through sorrow and
solitude, waiting for nirvana to come to grips.

This is descending into flamed beclouded Hell after the instant of being shown Heaven's pine. This is the aftermath of the failed romance of Romeo and Rosaline.

[Post-Modern Prelude to a Shakespearean Tragedy]

Preface

This starving aspiring artist is in a spot of deterrence. Plot thinning of thickened events. I've not the gall to flaunt the means of baring suns in the form of fruit. I'm just bearing honesty in empty pockets, and sporting fortitude as umbral loot. Staring down this impairment of havoc I'll deem as lodging I realize till now I've worn this lion's mane astute, but on the inside, like how liars, when addressing a crowd bent on being pacified, wear their words moot.

I'm tired and malnourished from an excess of stale stares and botched daily habits. This empty stomach craves for a dose of clarity as it spasms sporadic. I'd like nothing more than to make sense of this slew of half hearted hopes. But beyond the unending scope of harshly finite affections, I find myself front and center upon this nebular landscape, with figure four shapes cleaved in all directions.

And this is the chimera that I've molded for myself with muddy waters and sullied ink. This is the finished product of one whose center was cracked wide open only to be welded shut, too taxed even to think. So cradled firmly and headed towards the innards of an addict paper lined tomb of a room, this starving artist aspires to map out in writing the nostalgia/horrors of the womb.

Arrival

I measure all the motions and carve a path paved of promise through the door of this hostel, lined with continuous thought. The line's comprised of fits, lit of hope and inner illumination upon the life lessons being taught.

And amidst proper perception I seem to have found the fortitude to think. This bastard child of Verona is in a state of confusion. Still coughing guilt to the sink.

I've found inside after all I am in fact nine feet tall. A towering type of adamant man acclimatized from the immunity of the

worst kind of fall. Victim of a female outline claiming to save herself for an asinine religious call.

Into the fray of any form of an armored tooth and nail type of tomorrow, I grab a key from a hand and I suppose a man. While I drift sideways I hazily hear a voice say downstairs in the corner of the hall there'll be but one more second and room left to borrow.

Yeah, this silenced sense of being awake culminates in the strangest of ways.

This mourning Monday sky ties into the back of my throat along with these flies. And like a gentleman I never tell. An ever living slew of sultry wishing to infinitely empty wells.

Yellow sticky square I grab to write my thoughts:

#1.) [I heed of how I'll learn to regret this.]

I feel some invigorated elation; I think they're steps, while descending into the creviced corridors of this motel. Wandering alongside the visceral cracks along the walls written with blood I say to myself that I dare not dabble in miracles. Leaving hand prints as proof of life to my beloved horn dawning donor, I tumble into room 303 playing the role of the vagrant romance refugee, starving for passion ever in form of the loner.

Click of the key and past the threshold it's the sensation of plummet into the aperture of a bed; I recall the fall plenty of times before. But none have ever felt so stiff from the absent neglect of time and the encrusted passion filled in the dense holes left alone and ignored. The room is ripe with the scent of adultery in all its lewd lore. The spring-less space feels to be the remains of a woman's dampened desire for more. The acute scent of coated candle-wax and semen-wasted facts are wearing these already weather beaten senses thin, but fortuitously enough this acerbic aroma tiptoes into the memory of sleep wary to wake where this erotic quixotic narration can begin.

Night 1: (Sunlight Fast & A Feast of Crackers, Cinnamon and Gorilla Biscuits...)

In this barren four walled slut of a room, I wake still stuck in

this body once prized as my own. I ache from the struggle in the passing absence of food.

So instead of a meal I concoct a Molotov cocktail sort of swordplay menu unfit for the most daring of appetites: a vile that reeks of risk and laps my tongue with a taste of iron, a pendulum of purple chimeric pills and a bent syringe escaping the ring of symmetrical wires and fed intravenous from the segue of the poison into the seep of my sk...

....

....

Beatskip after skinfreeze, this ice upon my peel melts me to the bone.

....

....

Every every second of this night my nails have been biting, fighting, screaming, itching; knitting on something awful. Pointless, placeless, priceless; ink marks making pinpinpinpointing places as my medication. Unfiltered, it's what I wear on the open ends of my every day trench coat like attire twisted in veins.

....

Heart attacks are lulling me in and out of consciousness. Convulsive fainting painting spells. Counting steps into a twilight tower. My misshapen hands are trying to hold sand as a means to mark the passing of hour to hour.

....

Over the stony patch now I suppose and I begin to realize the full weight of my hand-crafted pap of traps and tricks and such.

Yeah, it's safe to say this fucking room has acquired a worthy sacrifice.

It's my own fault I'm slouched, a lowly smoke stack of flesh upon the furniture.

#2.) [I think she'll always be around. Married to these canting shadow shapes and faces I once deemed loving and familiar. Fatal memoirs close behind her.]

....

Can't seem to find my shirt (but I'm wearing my tie). Looks like I've misplaced my mind, along shards of my..

....

Flapflutterfuck. Aching to lift eyelids. Some[thing](one) wicked is already here.

Inching over me in a melancholic runway-model bitch of a fashion, I see her floating unsightly frozen arms. I wonder if she's in wait for me or if she's merely the absolution of this opiate's passion. I talk/scream at the familiar face hoping it's at some hint of reality. "You're quite generous at leaving lumps in this throat. Like a gluttonous hoarder in guise of the loyal servant, putting lumps of sugar and poison into tea, while asking 'what shall it be master, one, two, or three?'"

The outline of her body walks towards me as if nothing's being said.

"I'll have you know that between the neat areas of creases I've lined razors and teeth along the inside of my pockets. I plan to tote them home and fashion you a most wonderful and bizarre set of lockets. Each one depicting an image of something you've distilled in me woman: a slipknot for the stage, a confession upon the page, and a verbose spread of self-perpetuated rage!"

She's kissing me back back to sleep, she's saying it's best if I dream. A miracle to muffle out the sound of ringing silence with the memory of ripping seams.

....

I'm trying to align make believe numbers and languages to explain how the below zero sight has left me a little transparent around the edges.

I look across the way and in checkmate sentiment I see a reflection, a better/other half of me. He's sitting inside glass, bleak and opaque. A shadow atop a powdered keg. He says I've got to get more sense, color, and sun into my veins. The suggestion falls like mere melted nickels into the shallow part of the pond, since these days I hold a less amiable affinity for burning sensations and my feelings toward fresh air are becoming ever less fond.

...

I had a dream of father not all but minutes ago. I was a baby boy, bouncing with purity prior to the touch of mother, way before coke bottle shaped evil came into the know. But as far as the plot will go he just held me as a tiny item in his left hand several stories tall and told me that there is always wisdom within the fall. Then he let me go. Amidst the motions of nausea and symptoms of air sickness and my aforementioned naiveté, I woke before hitting bottom and realized it was the middle of the second day...

Night 2: Cantarealization

Wake. Dark. Center stage. I dabble in the leftovers of yesterday then lay this white lining of powdered flies upon the glass. The caustic evidence of the kiss is gone, and all that remains is the wait for the frostbite to pass.

...

I recall in the midst of coughing myself to sleep for the fifth time this morning, I inquired to the outline of my departed ex-beloved if I may take some time to indulge in light after dual nights of a fast. Then out of spite she stepped aside, arched her spine towards the window and swore to block the sun on a permanent solstice bitch sort of eclipse. Then what looks to be my Rosaline proceeded to share with another her rosary lips.

The ethereal black lines transfigured from the scalding rays rejected my sight from his face. I wondered if my sanity's crawling away or if my mind is playing games with my fragility; though whether it was real or not, the pain was no different whichever the case. Needless to say I didn't need to cough to sleep anymore, I just turned away and buried myself into a venomous river of discontent where I couldn't see whoever he was reaping me of my favorite

taste.

....

Wishing coins I once held with resolve have been tossed to the rain, inhabited by the canvas of this carpet.

Please dear God, fill this devilish den with a sweeter kind of melody. Please muffle the sounds that crash over and over into me.

Where are they coming from? Birthed in my head? Insanity and drugs. I'm better off dead.

Assault these weary ears that have granulated masochism into a fine science with something pleasant, something fair, anything warm. Father on high, please receive this message... no... no... better yet, discard it.

Discard this message; ignore these wishes, and every bit of affection I've instilled in my kisses. This is the paralysis blow that has throttled every centimeter of nerve, and no wishes need be required or fulfilled, for this pain is exactly what I deserve.

Curse me and my viral silver tipped tongue, for its lapping across her neck was what promoted this giant plummet prior to the fall. I should have held her closer in fear of gravity's sway, or better yet, I shouldn't have held her at all. The illusion of [LoVe] was the arbiter of this hosting season of opiate. Hardboiled and soft spoken vacations of gray clouds; emotional banquets of feast and famine.

....

A befalling fills the air almost completely nil, she's here again and this lung is troubled in breathing as I stare into her hazy distorted anatomy. A beauty like scissors. Contrary to wills and wishes I'm getting lost in the evil that resides in the technicolor of her eyes. Blue, then green, then brown, then gray. Eyes baptized in snow. The needle wears thin upon the record and I see that familiar reflecting face again, it's rising above her left shoulder, savoring her scent. I lunge and swing into shadows. Then I and my viler half begin to sway. Fighting fist to form, points and punctuations bounding charts and graphs across the wind, with blood scent seasoning the tender substance of the day. I'm a self-made tailor when it comes to tearing flesh and tasting my own defeat in

spades. This room has become a lax ocean where we attempt to topple each other. I never win. Defeat tastes like carpet and dirt; I greet the ground with an unfriendly haze while his outline smirks and wades ahead to caress her skin between the waves.

What followed was a sweat drenched proclamation of woman, and the sharing of her sugar hips. Before my very eyes I saw my doppelganger degrade and pollute her from head to final follicle. And to my skin was etched a letter I don't even remember writing, a plot vowed diabolical:

#3.) [He'll tear and tear. She'll rip her own skin bare. All you'll be able to do is stare.]

The blackened anchorage of my eyes spy again at this sensual slip that twists my insides. My mind's crimson colored grin grips firmly at the thought of this newest installment of debauchery. Her watching me, me watching her ride him as a cowgirl striding into the free setting sun.

I see now I was but an earmark upon a forgotten book. An arrowed stripe upon her epaulet. I realize that her pseudo-vow to chastity was birthed from her repulsivity towards the dropping atom bomb that is me.

For a reason made logical only in madness I look away. Pulling myself away from the bedroom turned to carnal torture is as easy as tearing the bandage from the wound. I relocate this story of woe begetting worry to the bathroom. I keep gnawing at my tongue and staring at every arm of the clock. Thus far, with every stare I'm convinced feigning father time is possessed with idle hands that guide time and sanity astray.

So in a rush I walk into a blanket of self perpetuated shade that sifts on two legs and claims to be man-made. My body splits from itself, leaps into a rusty mirror that won't reflect solid and says, "What if I said you had sixty seconds left to live?"

I'm not sure as to how this astral suicide/homicide scenario came to shine eclectic, but I will say that upon hearing that I could feel a wet winter rush electric. It seemed entirely possible. Finger-tipped remnants of life lined in threes, touching me as if I were ivory piano keys. I wonder if the me mirror figure indulging in lecture is the ruler rather than the jester. Crown of doubt

standing stout, but in disregard of this we've got something to talk about.

"I'm just the knock-down drag-out spitting image of a skeleton," says the image in the mirror. I tell him, "I may be the most imperfect machine to date but there are things deeper than flesh that yearn and if I should die tonight it'd be a lesson in numbness and an absence of fear." And without shadows he was gone and sharp as a sliced wrist I knew I was the liar and his point couldn't have pierced any clearer.

The lady in the living room held my hand too often. I don't want to hear anything anymore. I want a banquet under water held in her honor. Que sera and shangri-La. "The science of selling yourself at a steal was your greatest trick! I only truly felt you once, despite our plans!!" I always wanted to tell her that. I hope she heard it. Lest she's too busy moaning.

Shouting proclamations aside I can still hear my [LoVe] making her own with my twin. Through a cuddling cuckold of elements I foresee a God-awful image, a result of their nuptials, the birth of a baby I've already named Sin. God and mercy of Verona gently graze the illusory infant's chin. It's not his fault that this uncharted tenth circle of Hell is where his story shall begin.

Back to the coughing, the choking, the biting, and the analysis of bruises. Not to mention the slap of stroking skin and coaxing vengeful grin. I think friendly thoughts of sleep but the attempt to crawl back into bed and tune out the ecstasy/cacophony seems plausible but bleak.

I crawl towards the cot in hopes of rest. Yanking fluid stained covers onto the shape of my carcass I spy the more sinister version of myself angled in an oscillatory fashion near her teat. I imagined taking over and giving her my six and a half inches of the story to tell. But in the end the climax was a melancholic solo mission, for I suppose I hate her and [LoVe] myself too well.

And mid rise of her post-antic laughter they fade in separate directions into the distance. My prayers clutch upward toward the heavens asking a favor that I never again need hoist these heavy anchors some would call eyelids and feet. They could have taken me with them, or at least let me sleep...

Night 3: Psychosomatic Slew of Post-Traumatic Antics

Barely awake and sifting. Through a psychosomatic slew of post trauma, a pair of wayward sequins synchronized in basic perceptions, but viewing the world in differing directions. I sit reconciled with my last night's enemy and discuss semantics with...?

#4.) [Him/myself, enemy/mirror, doppelganger/ally, unleashed resent/inner torment. I'm still not exactly sure.]

He tells me, "I spy light in even the deepest grottoes of anger." I say I was like that one day but now I tend to anticipate danger in the face of every stranger.

...

Wearing garments gone sour, I'm still the silent center to the world. Emperor trapped in the confines of his own tower, waiting for the drugs in his blood to unfurl. All five senses dulled; eyes especially dilated. The utterance of hush from noir narcotics has manhandled my being. I'm overpowered...

...

Last time I checked there was always a moment of clarity in the middle of inebriation, but as I opened the curtains to see the city in flames I saw no such revelation, only a blaze engaging in a ballet, marking the apocalypse as a celebration. This dance made macabre on the foundation of my mind is leaving me in a third degree singe of a sensation. And in the bonfire of dancing human bodies my eyes spied fair Verona burning to the ground while the fire stood over the riddled remains of this motel rundown.

The pyre was alive. It was a gluttonous gargantuan shape and somehow it took the form of 'she', arms dangled discontent, now out-stretching toward me. And in my folly, my foolish hormonal obsession still gravitated toward the auroral outline of her flaming body. I gently placed my hand in wait for hers upon the window pane. Awash in memoirs of palms, promises, and pictures of the bed in which we had once lain.

I know this color, I know her curves; I know she will most certainly be the death of me. The proclamation to end all breaths; an arpeggio leading upward into that sweet set of skyline imagery. I

can only swallow this imaginary thought and hope there's still a place left for me.

So in wait of the roundabout collision called karma as the heat seeps through the walls, I can feel my heartbeat begin to cease in the confines of my chest, bidding adieu to air in its entire luster for now it resembles ember at best. Futility of effort reaches and I frame a vocal open handed reverie of hope in song, so what I make of this is beauty just gone horribly wrong. A burning jungle composed of concrete. The heart of these spewing vines dubbed power lines. A reality fitting the scene as bleak. Rusted nooses gold plated round the edges. Bouquets of human corpses. A crimson counterfeit, a coin apocalypse, bought and sold at the price of skin.

She closes in; the room's color matches the hell I already know it to be. It'll come for me next and I'll drown in it gladly.

So mayday is all I suppose there's left to say. I'm going down my dear Rosaline and thanks for the broken parachute. I only hope the fall makes you laugh. I hope you feel my impact and split open sides at the sight of my plummet. Hilarious? Amusing? Dishonest? Dilapidated? Dormant to the ways of the forbidden, for you know they all leave the bitterest tastes in my mouth.

Now I cut broke ends loose and feel the freedom of falling. A crazy fool with too many words on his head and hurting.

Exit the suture, exit the writer, exit the dreamer, and exit the leper. I wish she'd just bow and give a yes to the noble exiting applause: the sincerity in her eyes jinxed me if anything. And so exit the broken hearted...

....



Mark Norberg
Welcome to Angry Young Man Theater

Sometimes I feel—
I feel like I got—

 Somethin' burnin' inside me—

Tight drum—!
Ticking clock—!
(Make it stop—!)

But then its-
 SNAP!
 CRACK!
FIRECRACKER HOT!

ZOOM! To the SKY!
I gotta fly—Daddy!

 Get outta this town!

Kris Huelgas

Guitar Bar of the Living-Dead Poets

<I snuck in through the grate in the kitchen>

He sat at the head of the table
even though he never did.
He was the trapeze artist
but not the poet,
the black kid in the boxcar
and he told me,
“it’s a long road we walk.”

John talks peace with Yoko.
They stink like bud
and their linens are dirty
and nobody seems to care
that they plopped their bed
right in the middle
of the bar
or they just don’t say anything.
They talk about their son,
and then about the Middle East.

Wilde is looking at me,
cross-legged,
makes me regret wearing
just green and not
a more verdant word choice
because I feel a lecture coming on.
He senses me but,
thankfully,
Ginsberg is high and making a howl.

My eyes are lost,
still not the poet tweaks his hat
and offers me his shades
says,
“How does your head feel
under something like that?”

Theresa Shreffler
Smaller Places

I seek the smaller places,
The older ways,
The quiet whispers.
I seek the narrow streets,
The crooked fences
And garden weeds.

A world of rusty tires,
Unclasped hands
And downcast eyes.
To walk the empty roads,
The chipped sidewalks
And pale skies.

I seek the older heartaches
With familiar pains
And closed-up wounds.
I seek the smaller places,
The unbound hearts —
The open rooms.



Junior Lee Klegseth
Revised Standard Version

Gen.1

1 Before the trouble there was waking up in the void, unsure if he existed, unsure what it meant to exist. 2 There was no sense of past, of body, of thoughts, save that maybe it was Saturday. 3 The light slicing through the blinds changed that, led him towards memory. 4 He was Adam, and he was in his father's house. 5 He'd never known his mother, never seen so much as a photo. 6 Kids had teased him back in school, said he was stolen, or born to a jackal. 7 As he got older he found that no one had ever heard of his father with a woman, much less heard of a pregnancy, a birth, an infant. 8 When people asked him whatowwhywhenwho he had no answers. 9 He remembers spending hours in the cooler section of the market, checking photos on milk cartons, hoping to find himself.

10 That same day, the day the trouble began but still before it, there was Evelyn, too, lying next to him, asleep. 11 She'd appeared at his side on the day he broke his ribs and she'd never left. 12 In those early days they'd walked around the place nude, having enough sex to start the human race. 13 She was beautiful in the way an addict would understand. 14 She was like a '69 Mustang in a junkyard, dented, dusty and debilitated, her sensuality like a faded paint job needing only a coat of wax to be restored. 15 But she had a dark side, too, and there were nights down at

the bar when she'd be tempted by some loser, leaning towards him as if she were about to fall.

16 The trouble came at Shrang-i-la—their name for Costco—and no matter how insignificant the deed seemed at the time, it changed everything. 17 They'd been going to Shrang-i-la for a long time without trouble, because they understood the rules. 18 They preferred to go on Saturdays or Sundays because the place was absolute pandemonium. 19 They didn't have a membership and never went inside but anyway, the fun was outside. 20 On those days they'd get stoned and stand near the exit, watching with awe the endless procession of carts emerging from Shrang-i-la, coveting the infinite variety of items sold, fantasizing about what they would buy if when wealthy. 21 The whole thing was a great aphrodisiac and after a few hours they'd return home for sex fueled by lust and capitalism. 22 His father warned them there'd be hell to pay if they did anything stupid at Shangri-la. 23 There'd by hell to pay if they got into trouble over there.

Gen.2 (see Gen.1, with variations)

Gen.3

1 Trouble came in the form of Old Nick, a beach-bum-looking-guy Evelyn met at the bar. 2 He had an easy smile, and Adam made Evelyn promise to stay away from him. 3 Adam warned her that he spoke with a forked tongue, but Old Nick was slimy, buying her drinks and whispering things that made her laugh. 4 One night Evelyn told Old Nick about the trips to Shrang-i-la and on that day, the day of trouble, he showed up. 5 Adam didn't like the intrusion, thought this was a gig for two. 6 Old Nick ignored Adam, focusing all his intention on Evelyn. 7 He tantalized her, suggesting it would be a simple thing to grab something from one of the carts when the shoppers looked away.

8 "I don't know," Evelyn said.

9 "It's all in how you do it," Old Nick said. 10 "You grab one thing they won't even notice, not with all that shit they got. 11 What can they do, anyway? 12 Kill you?"

13 "Why don't *you* do it then?" Adam asked.

14 Old Nick shrugged and went over to stand near the door. 15 When a woman spent a few extra seconds talking to a door checker, Old Nick snaked his arm down into the cart and snagged an apple. 16 He took a big bite as he walked towards them, smiling like the bastard he was. 17 Still, Adam couldn't

deny this was more fun than they typically had.

18 “No big thing,” Old Nick said. 19 “Try it. 20 You won’t die or anything.”

21 Evelyn looked at Adam, her eyes wide at the idea, at the thrill of it. 22 She came so close her breath was warm against his ear. 23 “Think how hot *that* will make me,” she said.

24 “We don’t need the trouble,” Adam said.

25 A fat couple pushing a cart with a tower of goods reaching into the heavens came out. 26 The checker at the door called after them and they both turned back.

27 “Do a dry run,” Old Nick said, his words fiery with anticipation. 28 “Just walk over to their cart, you’ll see how easy it is. 29 Just a dry run,” Old Nick said.

30 Before Adam could say anything Evelyn walked over, reached into the cart and ran her hand over a package of steaks. 31 She walked back, smiling, some kind of evil set into her eyes now.

32 “That was *so* cool,” she said.

33 “Told you,” Old Nick said, grinning with delight.

34 “Evelyn,” Adam said.

35 But she was off again. 36 This time it was an old man pushing a not-so-loaded cart. 37 The man turned to argue with a woman, saying she was the cause of all of his problems, that before her everything was good. 38 Evelyn reached into the cart, pulled a bag of oranges out, and hurried into the parking lot towards their car. 39 Adam ran after her.

40 “What the hell did you do that for?” Adam asked.

41 “God!” she said, breathless. 42 “That turns me on.

43 Let’s go home and spike them with vodka and eat and fuck all day.”

Gen.5

1 Adam realized it wasn’t such a big thing what Evelyn had done; in fact, it was pretty cool, so he drove them home and they screwed for a hundred and thirty years.

Gen.6

1 His father came home and found them on the sofa, the two of them contorted like gymnasts doing a floor routine, Adam squeezing vodka-infused orange juice all over Evelyn’s body and slurping it up. 2 Orange peels and pulp were scattered throughout the house. 3 His father found the bag, saw the Costco sticker, and understood. 4 They pulled on their clothes. 5 “Why did you do that?” his father asked. 6 “Because we were

naked,” Adam said. 7 “Who told you that?” his father asked. 8 Adam and Evelyn sat on the sofa half-dressed, looking at each other, confused.

9 “I’m sorry I ever created a kid,” his father said. 10 Outside, it started to rain. 11 He got out his day planner and called the boat builder. 12 “You’re finished,” he said when he hung up, speaking in a wrathful tone Adam feared. 13 The rain came down harder, as if fire hoses had been unleashed in the heavens. 14 His father found another number and started dialing. 15 “You are so finished.”

16 “What are you going to do?” Adam asked. 17 Evelyn loudly sucked the juice from an orange as thunder rattled the panes. 18 “Come on,” Adam said. 19 Man, it was *really* raining outside. 20 “So we made a mistake. 21 Forgive us. 22 We won’t do it again.”

23 “You’re right about that,” his father said. 24 He pointed to the ceiling and raised his eyebrows. 25 “You hear that, smart guy? 26 You hear that rain?”

27 “But—”

Gen.6

1 His father held up a hand. 2 “Please. 3 Not now. 4 I have a flood to plan.”



Carleen Tibbetts

Lapsed Catholic Inside St. Patrick's Cathedral

I came in off the street
bombarded by a fireworks ceremony of digital flashes
and the honeyed hum of many languages
sounding as one. I did not look ahead as I walked,
but up at the vaulted, gothic spaces
and windows saturated
blue and yellow.

I was surrounded by a sepulcher
of saints in private grottos.
Racks of prayer candles spat fatty wax
onto the cool marble. Stone cooled
the air inside to the slow crawl
of a fading pulse.

I lit a candle and prayed
what I knew was prayer.

I watched the flame waver inside its red glass.
I thought of sparkling sand,
how I look down as I walk to catch glimmers in the concrete sidewalks.
I wondered how humanity was in its angelhood,
and why the altar was closed off,
fenced off like a tiny, separate house.

“No photography beyond this point,” a sign reads
where the Sacrament is kept
in the shrine to the Blessed Virgin.
Scaffolding surrounded a section of the columns and
drafts of dead, chilled air billowed in the tarps.

Inside the altar's woodworking there were intricate shamrocks.
I traced my fingers over their contours and outlines.
I thought of defaced Sheela-Na-Gigs scowling at The Church.





James Bezerra
Napalm Yogurt

After he died my friend Episcopal Johnson was reincarnated as a dazzling and luminous shade of blue. We have yet to decide if this is an improvement.

We still sit in our favorite brick-walled coffee shop, surrounded by people who once might have planned the French Revolution, but now just write screenplays. He can't drink coffee anymore, but I can, and he asks me to remind him what it tastes like.

"Like watered-down oil mixed with plastic sugar."

"Fuck, that sounds good," he says.

When I was sixteen – only two weeks after the first time I ever had sex (that was with a disturbingly beautiful blonde ghost of a girl called Lisette), my older brother Arlington asked me to help him knock over a strip club that he felt had maliciously ensorcelled him into giving up all of his money. Real guns were too black market back then, but somehow he had gotten a hold of a medical injection gun and hit of Instant Cancer; the kind of thing that death junkies were using to speed up their progression to some kind of moksha.

The thing was a clusterfuck that went down like this: Arling-

ton was beaten to death by a goliath bouncer mainlining HGH and I got shot through the middle by a bouncer with a spear gun, but in the tussle I shot him up with the Cancer. He died before my trial and so I got tossed into a *boys' school* which was the lingo they used for juvenile prison. They say that with both her children gone from the world, my mother cried for three weeks straight and then died from dehydration. My grandmother, a skeleton with senility—and my only family—saved me a thin glass vial filled with tears.

I met Episcopal when I was inside. He was a skinny black kid with bad skin. We were lucky because we shared a small cell together and neither of us had any interest in fucking or fucking up the other. We used to talk a lot about movies and how neither of us had a family to go back to. He got out about six months before I did. Those were lonely months for me. The guy that replaced Episcopal didn't talk to me much; he spoke only to Jesus and to the guy who dished out food in the cafeteria.

As a term of my probation, I was chipped with a device as thin as a fingernail and two inches long. It was anchored into the soft tissue of my brain. It was there to keep me on the straight and narrow. It was to be my better angel and only I would be able to hear it. They were nice enough to let me choose its voice from a list. There's a story that once this one guy picked Truman Capote because he confused him with President Truman. The story goes that after two weeks the guy was beating up cops, begging to be arrested so they would take the thing out. I picked Winston Churchill because I always liked the way he talked, like a poker playing bulldog. So now he's my guardian angel.

I have this great girlfriend. She makes me these great t-shirts that say things like: *My girlfriend made me this t-shirt*. Our first ever conversation went like this:

ME: Hey what are you doing to that stop sign?

LAUREL: None of your fucking business.

ME: If you take it down people might not stop when they are supposed to.

LAUREL: I'm replacing it [she indicated a stack of red and white octagons in the back of her hatchback, which was idling halfway up on the curb].

ME: Do those say *pot:s?*

LAUREL: Yeah.

All that time Winston Churchill was going off in my head like buzz bombs were falling: *Oh my, Vandalism is a Quality of Life Crime incorporating but not limited to the intentional and malicious destruction of, or damaging to, the property of others. It is punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. It is a misdemeanor and participation in, or providing aid to those committing, acts of vandalism constitutes a violation of your probation ...* After a while you sort of learn to tune him out.

For a few seconds I stood there on that corner watching Laurel up on her little step ladder as she ratcheted down the stop sign. She wore dark cargo pants and a black wife beater. Her dark hair pulled back tight, her hands dirty. She has one of those small bodies; small in the way that at first you think you might break her, but then she pulled down the sign and she hefted it nonchalantly into the bushes and I became aware of the fact that she could probably break me with just her will.

“Let me help you,” I said, handing her a *po’s* sign from her stack.

“Thanks,” she said, taking it, “but I’m not going to fuck you.”

It was just then that a long black car shot into the intersection. Everything would have been fine but the driver, realizing that there *should* have been a stop sign, laid heavy on the brakes and the car screamed to a stop, the back wheels sliding sideways.

“Shit!” Laurel said.

“What?” I said.

“... *the terms of your probation ...*” Winston Churchill said.

“What the fuck are you doing!” the guy getting out of the car said.

Laurel folded up her stool and hurled it into her open hatchback. She moved quickly and climbed into the driver’s seat.

The guy from the car was waving his cellular phone at us, “I got you now!”

“Come on!” Laurel shouted, the car already moving.

So I did, I dove in the hatchback, onto the signs, as the little car wound quickly in reverse, away from the guy and his phone. “What the fuck!” I said.

Then I realized it wasn’t a phone. There was a loud pop and then a metal zing as something hit the car. She smashed the gas. She was turned around, looking past me, out the open back of

the car. "Security patrol."

There was another blast and another zing.

"He's shooting at us?" I yelled.

"... *fleeing from officials empowered with shoot-to-kill and/or detention authority is a misdemeanor punishable ...*" Winston Churchill was saying.

"They hate my art!" Laurel yelled back. Then she hit the brakes and cranked the wheel, the car spun around, and she gunned it. There was another—distant—blast, but it missed us and went wild into the night; as did we.

Yeah, so because she had some unresolved issues with her father (mainly that she didn't like him), Laurel had gone to one of the most expensive art schools in the country. She felt it was fitting that he was both her patron and her muse. Then she dropped out her senior year because, she said, "I realized that they were training all of us to work for Disney."

We talked a lot that night. I bought a cheap bottle of inky red wine and we sat on her bumper—just like in a movie—and watched airships drift in and dock at the towers outside the city.

"I think the thing about art," she told me, "is that it should be *doing* something. Even if all it is doing is failing." She told me about this performance artist who put on a show. The show was just the artist lying naked on a surgical table and after awhile the audience realized that they could do whatever they wanted to her and she wouldn't object. Laurel told me that the performance artist still has scars.

"What did that accomplish?" I had asked.

"It revealed our nature," Laurel had responded, and then she had taken a massive tug from the bottle.

I think she fell in love with me when I told her that I had Winston Churchill in my head.

This was a couple of weeks in, after she had let me peel the clothes away from her body and trace her shape with my fingers; after she had come to receive me at night with familiarity, like a memory.

"Winston Churchill?" She asked.

"Yeah."

"Can you make him say whatever you want?"

“No. He only tells me what not to do. We don’t really chat.”

“What’s he saying now?”

“Nothing. We’re not doing anything wrong.”

“Does he talk when we have sex?”

“Yeah.”

“What’s he say?”

“He tells me about the dangers of STDs.”

“No shit!”

“Yeah, it is kind of annoying,” I admitted.

“Well then we will have to start giving him something more to talk about.”

Smile. “Like what?”

“I’ll surprise you.”

Laurel liked Episcopal quite a lot because, by this point, he was dead. She would turn down the lights whenever he came over so that his blue glow bathed our apartment. She would have these parties and all her quasi-avant-garde friends would come over and get drunk and paint our refrigerator. They liked Episcopal too. They would pull their clothes down and have sex right there next to him on the couch. They found in him some spiritual connection to the great beyond, as though their sex was raised above that of other people because of their proximity to his glowing soul. Sometimes Laurel and I did too.

He told me once, while we were getting coffee, that it made him miss his previous incarnation. “I mean,” he said, “I don’t even pee anymore, much less have sex. It makes me envious, it makes me want to die again and take my chances.”

“Yeah, but you might come back as a dung beetle,” I told him.

“Yeah, but at least dung beetles can fuck.”

I am working as a personal assistant now. But not really. I got recruited by a guy called Mr. Ginger, though I don’t think that’s his real name. He pays well, but he does have me do a lot of odd things. One time I had to find a pay phone and—at a very specific time – call this phone number and say: *New England Clam Chowder*.

And the guy on the other end asked: *The red or the white?*

And I had to say: *The white.*

And then the other guy hung up. Later that day somebody killed the Vice President by putting a .50 calibre depleted uranium round through his sternum, but I think that's probably just a coincidence.

Since I can never be sure whether or not I'm doing something illegal, Winston Churchill can't object.

When Mr. Ginger needs something, I get a timed text messaged to my phone. At that time I go to the hospital downtown and take the service elevator up to the twelfth floor, where I pull the emergency stop knob. That always makes me smile, *Emergency Pots*, I think. The elevator is that kind with doors on both sides. The back doors open up and there is Mr. Ginger. He has a ruttled face and close cropped red hair. His metal desk is pushed right up against the doors, so we have our meetings with me standing in the elevator.

"How's it going, kid?" he asks.

"Good. Good," I say.

"You look good. Did you use that coupon I gave you?"

Mr. Ginger had previously given me a coupon he'd clipped from the paper for 30 percent off a colonics session.

"Haven't had the chance," I say.

"Oh, you really should. I think it expires at the end of the month."

"I'll have to look," I say.

He reaches down and pulls something from the bottom drawer of his desk. It is a little clear plastic case. He waves it at me. "Open up." He says.

When I started working for Mr. Ginger I had to undergo a small surgical procedure. I pull up my shirt and stick my finger into my belly button, all the way to the bottom. I fish around until I find the edge and I peel my belly button back, exposing the small plastic cavity inside my abdomen.

He hands me the case, which appears to be filled with diamonds. "Rain seeds," he says.

I stick it inside and then tuck my skin flaps back into place, securing the edges back in my belly button.

Mr. Ginger finds this whole process unremarkable.

He hands me a slip of paper to look at. "Go to this address this afternoon, about 4:30, it's in the Heights, a laundromat called Lenor's Laundromat. There will be a gnome there named Kelvin.

Ask him if he's seen any good movies lately, he is supposed to say *no*. Then give him the stuff."

"Okay," I say, memorizing the address, "How will I know who he is?"

"He's a gnome. I'm comfortable assuming that there won't be more than one there, they don't usually go above 110th on the Westside."

"Oh, *gnome*," I say, "like, actually. I thought that was maybe slang for something."

"Nope. He'll have the hat and everything." Then Mr. Ginger took the paper back and looked at me. "Oh, and take Geffen with you."

Shit. "Do I have to?"

"Yes."

"He always screws up my day. And it's not noon yet, I will have him like five hours."

"Take him anyway."

"Why?"

"Because he's annoying me."

Then Mr. Ginger presses a button and the elevator doors slide closed and I'm going back down. Geffen is waiting for me in the lobby.

We hop the subway and go get some noodles at a place I like in the Village. Geffen is Mr. Ginger's stepson. He is about thirty-five, with a chiseled jaw and jet black hair. To look at him you'd never imagine his problems. The story goes that he was in astronaut college but he had a gambling problem and he got into a bookie for more money than he had. When you're an astronaut-to-be, they chip you up with a microprocessor that speeds up your reaction time and helps with arithmetic calculation; the thing is wirelessly upgradeable. Well, the bookie found out about this while he was at the end of his rope with Geffen and so rather than break his legs, the bookie hired a guy to fry Geffen's chip. Well, it worked really well and so now Geffen only has bad ideas.

"I think I'm going to vote Republican," Geffen tells me.

"Oh, yeah?" I ask, slurping my noodles.

"Yeah. Totally."

Since we have several hours to kill, I hang out with Episcopal.

We sit in the park and talk. I buy Geffen a milkshake from one of the ice cream trucks that are owned by the mob.

“So they stuck you with him again?” Episcopal asks.

“Yeah.”

“Who said that?” Geffen looks around. It is a bright day and so it is hard to see Episcopal in the sunlight.

“Don’t worry about it,” I tell him.

“Okay.” Geffen goes back to his ice cream for awhile, but then he turns to me and says, “I think I should start a business inventing new flavors.”

“New flavors of what?” I ask.

“Of whatever. Ice cream, yogurt, fruit.”

“What kind of new flavors?”

“Stuff that you wouldn’t think of. Stuff like vinyl. Vinyl-flavored ice cream. Or fruit that tastes like when you put your tongue on a battery. It wouldn’t be hard. Anybody with a lab can synthesize flavors out of basic amino acids. Oooh! Or napalm! Napalm-flavored yogurt.”

I relax a little on the bench because I still have several hours to go. I sigh and think about what a nice day it is.

Episcopal says, “I wish I could still taste.”

Geffen keeps talking, “See, the thing about flavor is that it doesn’t matter if it is good, because people can develop a taste for anything. That is true, tongue scientists have proved it! What matters is if it is new and interesting and fun. Even if it is bad it doesn’t matter. I’m going to make yogurt that doesn’t just taste like napalm; I’m going to make yogurt that *is* napalm and explodes when you eat it.”

“Why would people want that?” Episcopal asked.

“Because people want stuff,” Geffen says.

Neither Episcopal or I can argue with this point.

At 4:30 I take Geffen with me to the laundromat. The gnome is small and Puerto Rican with a little red hat. He is sitting on top of one of the washers, smoking Pall Malls. He has prison tats on his arms and the back of his neck. I say to him: *Seen any good movies lately* and he says: *No*.

“I like your shirt,” he tells me.

It is a shirt that Laurel had made for me. It says, *NIALISM ROX™*.

"It is a commentary on the commercialization of faux punk, pseudo-self-destructive youth culture," I say, repeating what Laurel had told me to say.

"I get it," the Gnome says, "Hot Topic, shit like that. Scenesters. Hipsters. Dakota Roses."

"Yeah," I say.

The Gnome nods, impressed. "Hot shit," he says.

"Would you like some of my napalm yogurt?" Geffen asks.

"Sure," the Gnome says.

"Oh. I don't have any," Geffen replies, suddenly sad.

The Gnome hops down and opens the round door of an empty dryer. "Go on," he says to us.

I bend down and climb into the dryer. The back of it hinges open and I crawl through, followed by Geffen. Behind us the Gnome closes the outer door.

On the other side, there is a dark, narrow stairway of concrete steps leading down. I go down, followed by Geffen, who says, "This would be a good place to be during an earthquake."

The stairway twists around into complete darkness. "Hold on," I say to Geffen. I reach into my back pocket.

Since he can't get a job, Episcopal likes to tag along with me sometimes. I take him out of my pocket and he lights up the darkness with his blue glow. I unfold him to his regular size.

"See, I'm all kinds of useful," he says.

He leads us down the stairway as it spirals down into the earth. Eventually we come out at a jagged circular hole in the wall. I climb through and I'm in some sort of subway tunnel, but old. The tracks are rusted out. The platform itself is odd and old and vaguely Victorian looking. There are makeshift lights strung up over the tracks. People are here and there, busying themselves with computers. The whole place is arranged around a circular hole cut in the bottom of the track bed.

A skinny bald man with thick round glasses comes over to us. "Ah. Are you from Ginger?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'm Verne," he says, "Not to be rude, but can I have it? We're in a hurry."

"Sure." I stick my finger into my belly button and pull it open.

"That's really clean. They did a good job on you. I've seen

some that aren't that good."

"Thanks," I say, handing him the small container and putting myself back together. "So is that it?"

"Yeah," Verne says, "unless you want to stay and watch."

"I like making cab drivers angry," Geffen says.

"I would like to watch." Episcopal says.

"Oh wow. I didn't even notice you," Verne looks Episcopal up and down, "Sorry. I went to school with an orange. You're much more aesthetically pleasing though."

"Thanks."

Verne takes us over to the edge of the hole. We all peer down into it. For the first ten feet it is just a hole, but after that it seems to open up to the sky and we are looking down as if from a plane, several miles above the green and brown landscape below.

"What are we looking at?" I ask.

Verne is busy emptying the contents of the container into something like a crushing device. "What? Oh, it's the past. Last May, over Indiana."

"Wow."

"Yeah." Verne poured the crushed rain seeds into something like a snow blower.

"So, uh . . ." I ask tentatively, "whatcha doing with a big old portal to Indiana last May?"

"Oh. Well Ginger and some of the other guys had a whole bunch of money sunk into soybean futures, but there was a drought last year in the Midwest and they all took a bath. The story I heard was that people lost like *billions*, with a B. So we're—uh—fixing it." Verne flipped on the snow blower and a white cloud of shattered crystals began to blow out of the machine and down the hole and out over Indiana last year.

"Cloud seeds," I say.

"Yep," Verne says, "Condensation nuclei, technically."

"You're going to make it rain."

"Yep."

We all watch as the flakes drift down into the hole and then blow away swiftly on the jet stream.

I tell Laurel, "I met a guy today who liked your shirt. He was a Puerto Rican gnome."

“Where did you meet a Puerto Rican gnome?” She asks.

We are just bumming around our little apartment. I am making a little salad in our plastic salad spinner. She is sitting cross-legged on the couch in just her black underwear. I like that she does that. I like the way that her limbs fold smoothly under one another. It reminds me of the way that we lace our legs together when we go to sleep at night.

“Ginger sent me up to the Heights with Geffen and I met him there.”

“I didn’t think gnomes went above 110th,” she says.

“Well, there he was,” I say, “He liked your shirt.”

“Did he get why it was misspelled?”

“He seemed to.”

“Well, that makes me happy.”

“Good,” I hand her a bowl of salad.

We watch TV and eat but Laurel has it on *COPS* and so Winston Churchill starts to freak out in my head. “... *fleeing from an officer of the law is a misdemeanor under section ...*”

I change the channel to the evening news. The anchorman looks embarrassed under his fake hair, his finger is pressed to the bud in his ear, “Well, um, I’m really sorry, folks, but I’m being told now that ... yeah, the news has been stolen. Uh, we have nothing to report tonight. Um, yeah, probably stuff happened today but I don’t know what any of it was. Um, if people maybe want to call in, um, I guess, and tell us what happened today, that would be good.”

We finish our salads and brush our teeth and slip into bed with the lights off. There is a blue glow coming from my pants on the floor. “Ah hell, I’m sorry Episcopal,” I get up and take him out of my pocket and unfold him again.

“No problem,” he says, “I was taking a nap.”

Laurel pulls the sheet away from her slim, bare body which always looks beautiful in the blue light. “Hey Episcopal, do you want to watch?”

“Sure,” he says, “why not?”



Melissa Morehouse

encounters

emerald tigers crouch at attention proposing renewal
 while tornado's highway the detour of the almost poem
 swerves and careens
time's special interpretation the preferable longing
 news of green notes dwarfs congregations
next following low cusps after blue
 between café escape home
 and plotting evening's meditation calendar
amateur travelers dozing another snapshot of home
 by cancer's crab lake hot-flu
postcards air postpartum blizzards
 and watch heroic venus
on the e-mail solstice

Nancy Carroll

Lekythos, Flask Containing Perfumed Oil

Painted by the so-called Achilles Painter, ca. 440 BC

Persephone, queen of caverns
& dew, composes nocturnes to fallen
bat children. Beneath the

hewn steps that lead to her
husband's stables, she sits like wax. Seasons
still confuse her, winter

for marriage—spring
for adolescence—summer
and fall—only thirst and broken

ploughs. She holds the quill across
her lips and writes a final phrase,
There was, I was. Ascension descends,

spilling over feet, through hands
and for that moment she hangs like rain, strung
between two ventricles, two lyres.

Ashlyn Morse
A Bedtime Story

There was a little girl who lived
in the city
on the brink of forest. Everyone in this city
called her Little Red.

“Nuclear energy is my fallout shelter,” she said
as she skipped all the way to Three Mile Island
through the woods one day
to visit her dear, old grandmother late
last December.

The glowing
six-eyed toads on the path tried to leap away in time
from Little Red’s Mary Janes
into luminescent fern, some never escaping
their little hearts seizing
in the dust. Little Red continued
skipping over the smooth, still lumps
of irradiated flesh
“For who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” she sang
skipping
all the way.



Mike Edwards

First Pull Up Then Pull Down

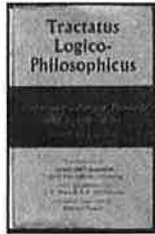
The world is all that is the case.



In the Oyster Bar & Restaurant at New York City's Grand Central Terminal, Maggie O'Brien sits at a table set for one while she waits for the 5:01 Metro-North train to New Haven. A book lays open on the table; it is an old bound edition of the Pears/McGuinness translation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* from which Maggie reads as she swirls, sniffs and sips a goblet of Bordeaux. On the floor just to her right sits a thin aluminum briefcase, inside of which is a book of short stories titled *Cosmicomics*, whose page is kept by a sealed #10 envelope that contains the Temple of Temporality, the place of all time. This moment, as with all other instants actual and

imagined, occurs once and persists in all time. Maggie sits, Maggie sat, Maggie will sit, while the Temple encompasses all.

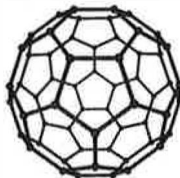
2. *What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.*



Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is his systematic examination of the world, what can be known, and language that is structured on seven basic propositions, by which the early twentieth century philosopher demonstrates through rigorous mathematical logic that all propositions of language, including those of the *Tractatus*, are in fact nonsensical. The *Tractatus* is further structured by a decimal system of expansion, wherein paragraph 1.1 is an elaboration of paragraph 1, paragraph 1.21 is an elaboration of paragraph 1.2 and so forth. Moreover, in the penultimate proposition of his *magnum opus*, the paragraph numbered 6.54, Wittgenstein provides his reader with a helpful metaphor for a way to negotiate the paradox he writes:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

3. *A logical picture of facts is a thought.*



The Temple of Temporality is organized along chromachronological lines, which is to say that a linear timeline may be envisioned in terms of the visible spectrum, with origin tinted red and destiny in violet. The Temple as well has a physical structure that resembles a molecule of buckminsterfullerene, a carbon allotrope of spheroid form, a structure that brings to mind the paneling of soccer balls and geodesic domes, although the Temple occupies far less space than even the smallest of these illustrative examples. How little space is a riddle to be solved by first considering the size of the universe, which must be huge, from the Big Bang to the utmost reach of time, of everything and all that happens, happened, will happen. Next, to that amount multiply the magnitude of time devoted to imagining and dreaming. Then compress all of that down to the point of singularity, like the state just before time begins, but then instead of expanding outward, take a step back, relatively speaking. That's how tiny the Temple of Temporality is, was, will be. Smaller than the moment before time starts and yet still quite sufficient to accommodate entirety.

4. *A thought is a proposition with a sense.*



Maggie reads Wittgenstein's seventh proposition—*What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence*—as she thinks about the contents of the briefcase while envisioning a hole in the ground and a ladder. She swirls the red wine in her glass, takes in the heady bouquet, lifts the brim to her lips, warms herself with the elixir. This moment persists in the indigo-violet range of all time in the briefcase that sits on the floor by her side.

5. *A proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions.
(An elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself.)*



In many ways quite as remarkable as the *Tractatus*' conclusion are the circumstances of Wittgenstein's life before and after he undertook his consideration of the sense we think we have of everything. He was born in Vienna on April 26, 1889, into a wealthy and prominent family of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father Karl was a wealthy industrialist who made a fortune in iron and steel. As a patron of the arts, the elder Wittgenstein often played the host to artists such as Johannes Brahms and Gustav Mahler in the family home.

Wittgenstein was baptized a Roman Catholic and provided with a church burial upon his death, but to more fully grasp the significance of later events what must also be known is that his father's parents had earlier converted to Protestantism from Judaism and that his mother's father was Jewish as well. The consequence of his Jewish bloodlines became most evident in 1938 after Germany annexed Austria and Wittgenstein suddenly found himself transformed into a citizen of Germany and classified as a Jew under its racial laws.

5.61 Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.' For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well. We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either.

As a student, Wittgenstein studied at the Realschule in Linz where Adolf Hitler was also a student at the time. Both of the young men were 14 or 15 years old at this time and while there has been speculation that Hitler's early involvement with Wittgenstein may have played a part in the former's later schemes, there is no readily available evidence which clearly demonstrates that the two young men ever met one another, but it is fascinating to consider what such an encounter might have been like. Imagine. Wittgenstein, as a child, the father of the genius time would show him to be, is likely the wealthiest schoolboy on the Realschule playground that year, while Hitler is the newly arrived son of a customs official whose work requires that he move his family every few years. But all that history records are Hitler's nostalgic musings in *Mein Kampf*, in which he writes "At the Realschule I knew one Jewish boy. We were all on our guard in our relations with him, but only because his reticence and certain actions of his warned us to be discreet."

5.62 This remark provides the key to the problem, how much truth there is in solipsism. For what the solipsist means is quite correct; only it cannot be said, but makes itself manifest. The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world.

Eventually Wittgenstein continued his studies at the University of Cambridge, where he came to study under the renowned scholar Bertrand Russell, following a recommendation from the mathematician Gottlob Frege, with whom Wittgenstein had formed a relationship by way of correspondence. This was in 1911, when Wittgenstein was twenty-two years old.

In 1913, Wittgenstein's father died and left Ludwig a sizeable fortune, which he shared in part through patronage of Austrian artists such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Trakl. When the war began in 1914, Wittgenstein enlisted with the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and served as a member of a howitzer regiment on the Russian Front and he was awarded medals for bravery before he was captured and held prisoner of

war by Italian forces in November 1918.

5.621 The world and life are one.

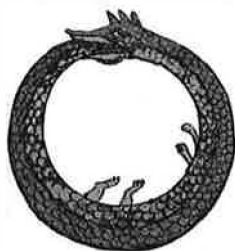
Earlier that summer, Wittgenstein had received a letter from the mother of a friend of his in which the writer notified the reader that her son had been killed in an airplane accident. The friend's name was David Pinsent and the two had come to know each other at Cambridge while Wittgenstein was studying with Russell. The relationship that developed between them has been described as an infatuation, which perhaps sheds light on Wittgenstein's responding to news of the airplane crash with thoughts of ending his own life. Instead, he retreated to the sanctuary of an uncle's home and responded by culminating his philosophic ruminations in the first draft of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which he would eventually dedicate to Pinsent. In October 1918, Wittgenstein returned to the Italian Front where he was captured just one month later and taken prisoner of war, but through his connections with Russell and other influential figures, he was given access to his manuscript and other writing materials which allowed him to continue working through the duration of his incarceration and until his release in 1919. With Russell's assistance, including an elegantly written *Introduction* to the work that Wittgenstein would later criticize, the *Tractatus* saw its initial publication in 1921. Wittgenstein was thirty-two years old and his work had effectively challenged the most fundamental assumptions of everything thought about what could be known.

5.63 I am my world. (The microcosm.)

Having solved the problems of philosophy, language, and existence, Wittgenstein next set out to work as an elementary school teacher. In 1919, in the middle of the war, he had adopted an ascetic lifestyle and in doing so had distributed what remained of his inheritance between his two sisters and a brother, with the stipulation that the gift could never be returned. Giving to the poor only corrupts them further, he is thought to have believed, and the wealthy could be damaged no more. When he grew frustrated with teaching, likely as a result of his

unrealistic expectations of the children that he taught, Wittgenstein was employed for a time as the assistant to a gardener in a monastery near Vienna. This was followed by a momentary foray into modernist architecture, before he was drawn back into the often overlapping worlds of philosophy and academia, which is where he would spend the rest of his days. Wittgenstein died as a result of prostate cancer on April 29, 1951 at the age of sixty-two. He is buried in the graveyard of the chapel for Ascension Parish Burial Ground off Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, UK. His last words were, "Tell them I've had a wonderful life."

6. *The general form of a truth-function is $[p, E, N(E)]$.
This is the general form of a proposition.*



To write that language is nonsensical is to know that to succeed is to fail. To doubt that the universe is vast enough to contain not only everything that happens, happened, will happen, but also immense enough to include everything that may happen is to overlook that the universe has adequately accommodated all imaginable contingencies, sensical and not, since the moment time begins, began, will begin. Until a mind fails in an attempt to grasp what it cannot conceive, the place of all time can never be known.

Others have written scenes reminiscent of the Temple of Temporality, although not under such a name. The time of many times in Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East* is one such example and the collapsed places and times of the Interzone in William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* evoke another. Henry Miller, writing in *Sexus*, asserts that "the art of dreaming when wide awake will be in the power of every man one day," in a lucid reference to omniscience that is suggestive of nothing less than awareness of a place of all time. But Miller adds that "long before that books will cease to exist, for when men are wide awake *and*

dreaming their powers of communication (with one another and with the spirit that moves all men) will be so enhanced as to make writing seem like the harsh and raucous squawks of an idiot.”

Books yet exist in the noisome and interference-filled age of indigo-violet and the way of wide-awake and dreaming beckons whosoever reckons their way to the place of all time. Maggie holds in mind what her briefcase contains as she knows the Temple encompasses the case which grasping she hears told a story scene from a greener time about a hole in the ground and a ladder.

7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.



It was a much greener time than the indigo-violet age that we live in now. The valley was then a grassy place bounded by deep woodlands and beyond high mountains whose peaks carried snow year round. The people who lived in the green valley thought that their place was the center of the universe even though they were fully aware that it actually wasn't and this in a way was an astute and self-aware observation.

One day a hole in the ground appeared in a shaded place where the valley met the forest. No one had ever seen anything like the mysterious void before and none had heard of other such similar sudden disappearances. The townspeople gathered near the precipice and wondered what should be done. After a while the one named Böcaj stepped forward and said that it was obvious the time had come for the people to fetch down the dusty old wooden ladder. Böcaj called on two or three of the others to join him and they all ran off then to fetch the ladder.

It was a much yellower shade of the green age the last time that the ladder had been used. In that time the moon still passed so close to earth in its monthly orbit that people could climb up

there and scramble around but ever since that fabled time had passed the ladder had fixedly hung well bracketed to the brick wall behind the community hall as a gathering place for woven silken strands spun by dangling arachnids.

When they returned with the ladder someone asked Böcaj what he thought they should do next. Böcaj stroked his beard and then said he was thinking they might carefully lower the ladder down into the hole to see if it hit the bottom. There was a general murmur of agreement and then the ladder was hoisted up by many hands. Someone said be careful and those who held the ladder doubled their grips as they slowly dangled the contraption into the gaping mouth of the black pit. But before long they were at the end of the ladder and there still seemed to be plenty of hole left so they grunted and pulled the ladder up and out and laid it beside the unfathomed apertural gap.

It's too deep someone said and then someone else said yeah that's right too deep but then another said but it might only be a foot deeper than the ladder is or less maybe only six inches if we're really lucky. No way to know unless someone climbs down to take a peek yet another said.

Böcaj did not want to climb down the ladder and knew that he must just as certainly as he knew that to do so was not his destiny. So here's what we need to do he started. First I need little Olati—yes you stop scribbling for a second and pay attention this is important—to run to the tool shed behind my house where on the back wall you will find several large coils of hemp rope. Go now and run like the time you were chased home by the pack of wolverines. Bring the rope back here as fast as your feet can fly. The rest of you listen up. Here's what we're going to do.

When little Olati returned with the coils of rope Böcaj showed them how he wanted them to fasten the ropes to the trunks of the trees that stood nearby and then he watched on as they tied the loose ends to the rung at one end of the ladder. When the last knot was made fast they hoisted up the ladder again and then lowered the clumsy device by inches into the abyss. The slack in the ropes gradually tightened until only the ladder's tips could be seen peeking over the lip of the pit.

Here's what I'm going to do Böcaj began. I'm going to climb down until I hit the bottom rung and then I'll try to lower

myself further by dangling from the ladder to see if I can touch the ground. It's a long shot Böcaj said but from what I can see it seems to be the only one we've got.

Böcaj took hold of the top of the ladder and stepped on for his descent. Almost as soon as he dropped below the level of the surface he noticed that his sense of time had been reorganized. He was in half-light and shadows then and by the time he had climbed to the bottom rung he was aware of the sound of his heart and little else. A voice from above floated down and asked how it was going. Böcaj responded that it wasn't going badly but it was much too dark to be certain. He regained his breath and hollered up that he was about ready to dangle. Wish me luck he bid them.

The town held its breath while they waited for the next thing to happen. After more than a minute had passed Böcaj hollered up it was no use he couldn't reach the ground the hole went on forever or so it seemed. Then someone hollered down okay but since you're already that far what can you see where you are. Böcaj called back that he couldn't see a thing that it was emptier than he could imagine. Then someone yelled try closing your eyes and this notion made strange sense to him. He lowered his lids and after his vision cleared he hollered back what it was that he saw. It's a woman sitting at a table in a restaurant Böcaj said. She's reading a book and having a glass of red wine in a moment that seems to last forever.



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