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EDITOR'S NOTE:

The process of publishing *Twisted Vine* has exposed me to so many talented writers. My consciousness has been expanded by all these new literary adventures! Thank you so much to the writers and staff who contributed to making this issue of *Twisted Vine* great.

Eric Allen Yankee, Co-Editor in Chief

This is one of the largest publishing projects that I've had the pleasure of working on, and for that, I am grateful to all of the wonderful writers that have contributed to the spring issue of *Twisted Vine* and made this possible. I also want to give a big thanks to the awesome staff that were vital in helping us bring this collection together!

Cheers to you all!

Caseyrenée Lopez, Co-Editor in Chief

We at *Twisted Vine* are proud to present our readers with an eclectic range of work, and are sure that this issue will have something for everyone.

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PIGEONS AND PANTHERS

By: A.L.A. Convington

Hours after she learns that Jim Morrison died, Cordie sits alone in Central Park, staring at a bottle of MD 20/20 lying in the grass. The thin layer of raspberry wine sparkles as the morning rays penetrate the glass. On another day, she might have envisioned a psychedelic light show. After all, it's supposed to be the Age of Aquarius. No longer, though. Not after the news Patter, her old man, relayed in the wee morning hours when this day was still dark.

Why did he have to die on her birthday?

She lifts the bottle and watches the pink sheen amble down the flat side until it pools in the bottom. Then she holds it up to the sky.

"Here's to you, Jim." The music, the mantra, the man. Her idol since tenth grade, five years ago, a quarter of her life. *He has broken on through to the other side.* Cordie sings it out, then squints into the sun. Is he up there somewhere? With her mother?

No, forget Mama. Forget sister P.J. and home and Virginia. Cordie turned her back on all that when she, Patter, and the rest of band moved to the city on New Year's Day. Happy 1971. A whole new life, a new band—Windows. Like the Doors, but better. Even when you close them, you see through to the other side. They would change the world with their words and sounds and meld into a whole new kind of family.

But Joey was right. That hulk of a man with the panther tattoo on his chocolate skin, her first New York friend. The 60s were over, he said, calling her "Sunshine" as she beamed up at him. This silly Southern girl had missed it, and the world remained unsaved. And now Jim is lost to her, too.

Cordie downs two swallows and looks around. A few yards away an old man wearing a tattered coat sits on a bench. One arm embraces a garbage bag as if it contains all he holds dear in the world. The other hand clutches a paper bag, which he soon lifts to his lips. His eyes follow the pigeon strutting away from him until they catch another pigeon headed toward the bench. Pigeon ping-pong. He holds the bag in the air once, seeming to toast the approaching bird, but his frown remains as one after another passes.

She pulls herself off the ground and approaches the bench. The ripe aura of mildew and sweat would drive most people away, but it makes no difference to her. She reeks from being out since before dawn, drinking, letting tears fall on her feet as they pounded block after block. Bench man's face is dirty. Hard to tell if he's black or white or even all that old.

Is he black or white? Mama's voice again, coming at her after high school the first year the county integrated the schools. Mama, always wanting to know who Cordie was talking about, not sure she liked her going to school with "colored" kids. Afraid of the world. Maybe she would have changed if she'd known Joey.

"Hey," Cordie says.

The man doesn't look up.

"Hey." Louder this time. "Jim Morrison died."

Still, he watches his pigeons. She sits beside him. When he takes a swig, she follows suit.

"On my goddamn birthday."

The man turns his head slightly, but doesn't look at her. Only the pigeons.

"They buried him before they told anyone. But I shoulda felt something."

Cordie starts watching the pigeons, too. That's how she's been lately. Just bobbing her head and following her paces, ever since P.J. came up from Richmond last month to see their gig—

Windows, the opening band at Max's Kansas City, a prime New York rock venue. Starting to make it. The applause. *Proud of my little sister.* The high.

Then gig over, uptight P.J.'s accusations. *You're drinking too much, wild, acting crazy.* Crazy! Then worry turning to anger at Cordie, the spoiled child, the favored one. Cordie runs across Park Avenue, but P.J. followed, so Cordie returned the fire of blame. P.J. went off to college, left her alone with Mama. *Crazy? You know nothing about crazy.* Then the secrets spilled out.

P.J. didn't know how Mama was, how she smothered Cordie with her needs. P.J. didn't know the stories Mama told her, what Mama had suffered, or believed she had. Tears, screams, blurring into more words and tears, and too much was said. Since, no P.J., and Cordie worries that she drove her sister away. For weeks she stayed low. With the pigeons.

Windows didn't have another gig until July 3rd, her twentieth birthday, so she pulled herself off the ground to play. While Jim was taking his last breaths, she and the guys rocked. They drank, laughed, and sang *happy birthday, dear Cordie.* She made everybody sing to the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, too, because it passed two days before. *Happy voting to you.* Too late to save the boys in Vietnam, but now eighteen-year-olds will vote war away.

Ain't no flower jammed in a barrel gonna stop the bullets from flying. Joey smiling at her, shaking his head. What was he trying to tell her? He won't explain the tattoo—was he a Black Panther? They were against the war, she thinks, but violent. Reverend King's peaceful resistance—Joey believes that, doesn't he?

Cordie believes it, so she clung to her hope for peace and love for the world, blocked all thought of family, and celebrated her birthday. But all the time, Jim's weak heart was breaking until it stopped. Patter read it in *The Times* yesterday, then told her late last night—no, today, at 3:00 a.m. Died in Paris, with his love Pamela, so unlike Cordie's sister Pamela Jean. P.J. doesn't appreciate Jim.

Cordie goes to take another swig, but it's just drops. "Damn." She tosses the bottle on the ground. "He was only twenty-seven."

Just like Brian Jones, two years ago. July 3, 1969, Brian rolled out of the world, never to see twenty-eight. Last fall, Jimi and Janis, same age. Like some dark sign from the cosmos trying to get through to her. Jim, the final warning. If Cordie's music makes it, she will die. Does she want to wait seven years, when people keep slipping out of her life?

"Jim didn't mean to go," she tells the pigeons. Mama didn't mean to, either, no matter what P.J. says. She just wanted to sleep, that was all. She'd needed pills to sleep for years. P.J. didn't know because she left.

Something touches her thigh. The brown bag.

"Thanks." She takes a swig and passes it back. He drinks, keeping his eyes on his feathered friends, then puts it on the bench between them.

She will share the wine and the time with this man, but she told Patter not to follow her into the darkness this morning. He can't help her. Not even Joey can. She had to go it alone, on the streets, trying to get Mama off her mind and give Jim the mourning he deserves.

Mourning in the morning. Cordie looks at the blue sky and bright sun directly overhead. Morning is on its way out, leaving, like everyone else. P.J. Then Mama. Now Jim. How could they—

How can you leave? I don't know how I can last without you here.

"No, Mama!" Two pigeons skitter away.

Cordie does not want to think of Mama's words last year, written just after Cordie moved to Manassas. Words Cordie didn't see till months later, after the funeral.

She takes another swig. "I have to go." She takes several steps, then remembers the near-empty bottle. "I drank yours. I'll get more."

She walks, but the nightmare follows. That's all it is. An old bad dream, coming back long after. It isn't real—didn't Mama say it was okay for her to leave home, that she expected her to? Mama was fine with it. She wouldn't blame her Cordelia, her baby, her only friend.

"No!" she shouts at her feet. Here people can talk to themselves. This is the world Cordie needs, not that closed-in house in the country. She has escaped. But still those words echo. *I don't know how I can last.*

Just a bad dream. Today she's awake, in the city, and it's Jim she is mourning. It's Jim who was on her mind as she walked the streets, feeling the night fade into morning. Pushing Mama away and thinking of Jim.

Damn. She needs to be Up. She has to celebrate Jim's music, his fire. In a corner store she grabs a bottle of wine. She tries, but can't quite smile at the guy behind the counter, as she reaches into a pocket of her jeans. No money, but something better. Those black beauties Patter gave her, from his speed-demon cousin who shares a pad with Joey, where they crashed when they got to New York. Joey, so unlike her, but she felt drawn to him right away. Is it because they both carry things they need to forget?

"No money, you go," the counter man says.

"Jim Morrison is dead," she says.

"No money—"

She pulls a few crumpled dollars from a back pocket and slaps them on the counter. "He was the world's greatest poet. Keep the change." Her hard-earned tips.

Back in the street, she downs all three beauties. She will fly and celebrate what is still alive, Jim's music. She walks ten blocks before she remembers the man. Back to the Park. She walks faster, worried that he won't still be there. He left or never existed.

He's there. She puts the wine beside him. He doesn't look up, but she can see his face has changed. It isn't a smile, but she'll take it as one. She hugs him, catching a whiff of wood smoke and alcohol, sweetening his stench. "I love you, pigeon man," she says, then moves on.

When she looks over her shoulder, she doesn't see any pigeons. The man stares after her, instead. She pauses only a moment. The pigeons will come back. She has to keep going.

Soon she is at Union Square, crowded now. Men and women in and out of restaurants and stores. Waves of pot wafting by, blending with taxi fumes and cigarettes and hints of freshness dropping from the sky above the buildings. She inhales, feeling her heart pump blood to her head.

Down University toward the Village. Doors and steps and window fronts, none alike. Some pristine with clean glass revealing treasures and junk inside. Others covered by boards with hand-painted flowers or scrawled words of love and hate. *No more war. Die, motherfucker. Love is all you need.* What was true?

Then, a display window full of open books, standing in rows, covers facing the street. Each one pleading for attention. Read me! Just like the unfinished twin towers being built downtown, one taller than the other, looking as if they're straining to grow, competing, like students lifting their butts and stretching their arms high to get the teacher's attention. Pick me! She loves this growing, always changing city. But something is trying to pull her down.

Books. P.J., the student who seemed to love books more than people. The straight straight—A girl who left Cordie all alone with Mama and her crazy sadness and went to college to read more and now works in an office and doesn't worry about the country coming apart. Or anyone else. She made Cordie learn to read before first grade. *No more reading! Why should I stare at ink on a page when words are all around me and in my head and they sing to me? They sing, and I sing. The words just come.*

But now she remembers the way P.J. looked at her sad face when she answered. *This is the only way I can get the words. Not everyone is like you, Cordie.* Then P.J. listened to her sing and let her play awhile before they went back to *Dick and Jane*.

P.J. was her best friend. Then Daddy left, Mama couldn't leave her room, and it was P.J., just twelve, who took care of her. P.J. who held her then and read to her, even though she was seven by then and could read by herself, who talked Daddy into buying Cordie her first guitar.

That was then. P.J. left, and Cordie has to move on, too. There—a sign! Jim Morrison—his name in the window. She examines the book at the end. His poetry. She enters the store and searches the rows. Only one copy—*New Creatures*. She digs into her back pocket again. Nothing. But it's okay, just for today. When the guy behind the desk looks up, he smiles back, not caring about the book in her hand.

Back to Union Square. She settles in a patch of grass in the sun, which is much lower than just minutes ago. The words Jim left for her are real and true, not nightmare stories. He freed them into the world, for all. Radios blast his tunes, and his words on pages sing the beauty of his pain. He speaks to Cordie because they are soul mates. She is his wild child full of grace, savior of the human race.

Those beauties are coursing through her veins, rejoicing. Things are looking Up, and for the first time in the hours of mourning her words flow and she can sing. *The dark soon comes out, but I do not shout. No one can touch me, I have po-e-TRY.* She will sing for Jim, who brought her into the world of fire lightning and lizard kings, the blackness of night and telling it right.

The world left him alone, riding on his own, stormbound.

Orphan child poet, ooh baby, never afraid.

She has to go. But she's thirsty. She would kill for something to drink. No, she would not kill. No killing anything, not words, not hope, not a tiny little ant, but she would kill a beer.

Finally, a bar.

“What'll you have, little lady?” Another sweet old man behind the bar.

“A beer, little gentleman!”

He laughs and pours her one. She quenches her thirst, and then she repeats the word quench over and over.

The bartender asks if she is okay.

“Actually no, my hero's dead, but I'm getting through. I just need to talk awhile, maybe sing some, okay?”

He rolls his eyes and returns to his dirty glasses. She quenches, thinking and talking and singing. *“I quench, sitting on a bench, teeth achenb. If only I were French ...”* Then I would've been with Jim. He died in Paris. Jim Morrison,” she tells the bartender. “I'm writing him a song. *Him, hymm, hymm*?”

She sings some of Jim's words and begins putting more of her own together, as the bartender brings her beers. Then it's dark outside. Did she sit so long? Time to move.

“Can I owe you?” she asks.

He waves her on, frowning now. But in the street it is wonderful. The city is lit up, and so is she. She laughs and walks, continuing her song. *“Out in the world, he waited for the sun, then he broke on through to the other side—it's Jim Morrison,”* she tells a man who turned to stare. “Celebrate him!”

People are strange, but I am not afraid.

Jim built his hotel, his L.A. woman was found.

She said touch me, baby, and on and on and on and on.

Cordie will love Jim Morrison till the heavens reach the sky and the stars make it rain. Death isn't so bad, is it? Maybe Mama is feeling better now, and Jim's still singing. Cordie smiles big.

“Cheer up, everybody!” God, she feels like dancing. She’s going to dance and be free, with Jim all around her, so she walks and sings and then she’s in the East Village, people everywhere. There, a club.

It’s crowded, and the band is good. She dances with everyone, and everyone loves her. The music tears into her soul. All are celebrating Jim’s life and death. People give her drinks, then she swallows something a guy with monster blue eyes handed her. Yes, she will take another beer because today is the day Jim Morrison left her, and she needs to dance and writhe, and soon hands are on her, and it’s all touching and feeling, and she wonders where Mama is in all the mess, because they should all be celebrating, but mostly they need to forget about everything but music and rocking and flying, flying, flying.

She lives inside a whorl of sound and love. She is the music, and she and Mama and Jim are happy, P.J., too, and Cordie’s never going back. This will last forever. Then she sees the huge Afro and panther tattoo, but why does he want her to go? No, she won’t let Joey take her away now that she is finally free, but somehow she’s in the air and the day Jim Morrison died ends in blissful black nothingness.

Darkness. Still and soft. Stay here. Sleep. Quiet, warm. Thank you. Nothing.

No, pain. Pain shot through the black. Where? Eyes must stay closed. She knows nothing except that she hurts and she must sleep.

Again, the dark tries to escape, to push her back into the world. Sounds. Steps. Damn the senses. A bed under her. She’s lying down, and it’s too warm. It hurts when her eyes try to open. Leave me, please.

“Sunshine?”

“No,” she says. “Sleep.”

“Drink some water.”

Joey. Through all the music and shouting and blur, he came out of nowhere. But where?

“You need some water or you’ll be hurting more later.”

“Uh-uh.”

The hand returns, and she smells that special richness that is Joey. She was in his arms, struggling. Why would she do that?

“C’mon.”

She opens her eyes. It’s still night or early morning, but the streets send just enough light through the window. Joey’s eyes hold her, and she feels safe.

“Here, sit up slow.”

She drinks, then drinks some more. She feels dizzy, but better. She waits until the hurt settles in as far as it can so it has something to push against as it tries to lift.

“Better?”

“What happened?”

“Not sure.”

She looks down. Joey’s bed. Her ears feel stuffed full of cotton, but it blocks only part of a distant, but persistent alarm clock’s ring.

“What do you think happened, Joey?” She’s able to smile a little.

“Found you in Chauncey’s. I don’t know what you took, but you were pretty wild.”

“I don’t remember.”

“Yes,” he says.

She can tell there’s more. “Truth. May as well know.”

Joey takes a breath. “You were out of your mind, acting crazy. I mean, more than usual.”

“Thanks.”

He laughs softly. “What you were singing, yelling—it didn’t make one bit of sense. Babbling, words that weren’t words. And there were some big hard-looking guys watching you.”

“You’re calling guys hard-looking?” She tries to laugh, but it hurts. “Ever seen yourself in the mirror when you’re putting on that don’t-fuck-with-me face?”

Hearing the fullness of Joey’s laugh, she begins to think there is hope for her ears.

“Yeah,” he says. “Had to use that look to get you away. Couple guys pawing at you, and then you didn’t want to go. Clocked me a couple good ones.”

She hears herself groan, too loud.

“But they could see you knew me, I guess,” he says. “Glad those motherfuckers read my look good and were too drunk to live up to their words. Couldn’t stand seeing a black man rescuing a little white girl.”

“I’m a woman. I’m twenty.”

“Last night you were a crazy woman.”

“Still am.” She tries to cross her eyes, and then she wants to cry. “Runs in my family.”

“Join the rest of the world,” Joey says. “Last night, the crazy didn’t come just from you, though. You got to watch those drugs.”

“I know I overdid it, but—whoa.” Flashes of the evening pulse through the room. Hands on her, dancing, screaming, but then it is silent. “Joey?”

“Listening.”

“Sometimes I think I am crazy. Sometimes I’m flying and full of the entire world. Then, crash. I’ve been barely floating above the ground lately. I was supposed to be so happy here.”

She hangs her head. It’s stupid to talk about this. People just get down.

“Let me tell you something,” Joey says.

“I should just shut up, right?”

“No. The opposite. Girl, you lost your mama, probably by her own hand, no matter what you want to believe. That’s a lot to take. You need to talk to someone.”

“I’m talking to you.” She tries to sit up, but her head rocks, so she lies back down.

“That’s a start. Just want you to know, there’s people out there you can trust, like counselors at the community center where I work.”

She is silent. Even Joey thinks she’s crazy. Lying on a couch, talking to a doctor—that’s for rich people.

“Just letting you know. All right?”

“Okay.” She is too tired to think.

“Take your time. You had a rough night.”

“Yeah, I need to sleep. I’ll take the couch.”

“Shush. I’m done sleeping.”

She closes her eyes. She wants sleep bad, but her head is full of random pieces of the day and night, and home and New York, Mama and Jim, Doors and Windows. Joey.

“Joey?”

“Yes.” His voice comes from the living room.

“I’ve talked to you too much already. I’m sorry.”

“Friends, okay?” he says.

“Yes.” She trusts Joey. And he finally trusted her enough to tell her about the police shooting his father back home in Oakland when he stopped by a store during a robbery. A black man in the wrong place, wrong time. Thinking about Joey, focusing on somebody else, makes Cordie feel better. But does he really trust her? She sits up slowly.

“Goes both ways, Joey.”

“What?” He walks back to the bedroom.

“Friends. I’ve rambled on about a lot of shit to you, but it’s not even. You’re all locked inside tight. So, my friend, tell me something.” Cordie waits till Joey’s eyes meet hers. “What happened to you?”

Joey looks away.

“Something happened,” she says. “Maybe with the Panthers. There’s something more, more than your father.” She can feel him holding back every time she gets close to something that touches him under the surface. He knows she feels it, she thinks. Maybe that’s why they are friends. They see each other.

He settles beside her on the mattress. She feels the heaviness of him sitting there, his thinking. She can tell it hurts him. Not the way her head is hurting, but the way she hurts all over when she thinks of Mama and P.J. It’s a heaviness, more weight than pain.

“All right,” he says. He rises and paces, then sits on the floor by the window and leans against the wall by the window. The streetlights behind him light up part of his Afro.

“I would not be talking to you back when I first came to New York,” he says. “The Black Power train suited me fine. Joined the Panthers, yeah, the Black Panther Party. White men killed my daddy, and they all deserved to die. But our words were better than theirs. We wouldn’t kill men because of the color of their skin. We would just hate them for it.”

She lets that settle in. She can see that—the hate. She wants to hold onto the idea of love stomping out all hate, but it isn’t that easy. Maybe people who get wronged so bad have earned a right to their hate.

“But you’re talking to me now,” she says. “Please go on.”

“Yeah, I’m talking.” He grunts. “Talking to a white girl, fresh from the country. I guess that’s what I was then, just a little black boy never been away from home. I was young and angry. Oakland sent me to help set up the party here. We got things going, me and my brothers. We threatened, put on shows with handmade bombs, but we targeted property, not people. Mostly, we set up patrols to protect the people from the police. Built shelters, started programs for kids.”

Cordie sees some lines cross Joey’s forehead, digging little trenches to set up there for life. For now he can make them disappear, but they will grow deep over time. Joey said he was a boy, but his father was killed, then he did things. He worked in community centers that helped people, still does. She’s just a girl whose mother took too many pills, so she split to play rock star saving the world. She hasn’t helped a soul.

When she heard his voice again, it seemed older.

“In ’68, kid showed up at one of the centers. Fresh from Florida, said he wanted to help. I brought him in, spent time with him. He joined, helped out, taught a martial arts class. He was—well, he was good. One of those people you know deep down just wants to make everything all right, best they can.”

Again, he is quiet, and the air feels full. It is pressing down on her, and she thinks it’s crushing Joey.

He sighs deep and lets go. “I liked the kid—Jeremy. Didn’t see him much after a while. It was busy times. We were all over the city. Set up some bombs we shouldn’t have. We wanted the establishment, the Man to know we were here to stay, and we liked that the feds were watching. But we didn’t want them to know our inside business.”

She pictures Joey with a bunch of Panthers, all decked out with berets, strutting back and forth in the streets, strong and righteous.

“Then, the FBI was all over the Panthers, knowing things they had no cause to know. Headquarters came from California, said someone was telling them stuff, decided Jeremy was

the rat. I heard about it, but didn't do a damn thing. Somebody found him in Connecticut, in the river. May '69.

"I didn't want to wear the uniform anymore after that."

She wants to tell him he was not to blame. But he was breathing hard, and it seems like he might say more.

"My brothers said it was the pigs, or somebody else. But it wasn't any random crime. I knew that. The Man figured it out, too. Three of my brothers were tried January last year. One of 'em turned on the others, said the national party told them to do it. My old friends, in prison, and they deserve to be. Even if the kid was a snitch, and I don't believe for a minute he was, he didn't deserve that. Taking a life, one of our own. I told myself they couldn't do something like that. But they could, and they did, and I knew it all along."

"You didn't know—"

"I knew them. It rides on me. I could have done something. Maybe it wouldn't have made a difference, but I didn't even try. Every day I wonder what's wrong with this world, and I know I'm part of the bad, too.

"That's what happened, Sunshine. No worse than has happened to plenty of people."

No, you are good, Cordie wants to say, but the silence is too heavy to disturb. Those other Panthers were like the pigeons the man watched today, stepping right on by, enjoying the show, but not stopping to see what is in the hearts of those they pass. Maybe everyone is like that, at least sometimes. Cordie stays in Joey's world for a time, sharing his pain.

She understands hanging onto guilt. At least he admits it is there. She should never have left Mama, but she had to go. Joey tried to help the world, but she only ran from it. She ponders Joey and the Panthers, and Mama and P.J., and how hard it is to hold any kind of family together. She thinks she's getting clear on something that is more important than anything she's gotten her mind around before, but her trashed body starts shutting down her head.

Joey still sits there, a rock of a man, cracked like everyone else.

"Thank you," she says.

"For what?"

"Telling me. For trusting me enough to," she mumbles, yawning. "For rescuing me."

"Nite." At the doorway, he pauses. "Call your sister, okay? You're carrying around too much alone."

"Yeah, okay." She will someday. It won't be today, but she will.

She hears Joey walk to the living room, but he's right back. "Sorry about Morrison. I know he meant something."

Joey. Older than his twenty-four years. Cordie prays she'll have him longer than just a few more. But she feels old herself. She isn't sure she deserves the oblivion of sleep, but she'll take it. It has been a long day.

THE CASE OF THE SERIAL LUDDITE

By: Andrew Gretes

The first police report for what was later dubbed “The Case of the Serial Luddite” contained in its second paragraph an 8-line Homeric simile in which the reporting officer compared the circular remains of the den’s broken window to the gaping mouth of a ravenous lion. Being Homeric, the simile marched on, describing how the den’s red carpet served as the tongue of the lion, and how the broken shards on the carpet represented flecks of glistening leonine saliva.

The author of the report was the recently orphaned Dennis Angelos, a 44 year-old Greek-American officer whose mother had suffered a stroke the previous week during a card game of *golgá*. Stella Angelos had played out her last hand (a winning hand) as if the blood supply to her brain was as copious as could be, clutching the pennies and nickels in the middle of the table before letting out a gasping cackle and dropping to the floor.

It was her son’s first day back on the job. He was operating on a breakfast of wheat, raisins, and brandy. Staring at the broken window and the twinkling carpet of the crime scene, he imagined his mother in hell. There, she was berating the devils of the third circle for not mummifying their victims with phyllo dough before inserting them into the oven. For phyllo dough (Dennis imagined his mother reasoning in hell) would preserve the sinners’ gluttonous juices and add a necessary crunch to an otherwise gelatinous dish.

As for the 8-line Homeric simile, it was, stylistically, a stark departure from Dennis’ typical writing: an otherwise dry and colorless scribbling, reminiscent of the parched prose of a Saharan logician. Not that Dennis’ simile was an anomaly. For soon, *all* of his writing—reports, affidavits, equipment reservations, trainee evaluations, etc.—was likewise transformed, earning him a nickname at the station: “Lord Dennyson.”

There are, as you may know, innumerable aspects of the Case of the Serial Luddite which remain unsolved. The majority of such enigmas have been identified by “The Mycroft Society,” an online amateur detective community devoted to reexamining cases in the public domain. I simply pause here—as way of example—to note one well-cited point of contention: mainly, whether or not there was a connection linking the suddenness of Dennis’ poetic transformation with that of the burglar’s own bibliomaniacal mutation? Some members of the Mycroft Society, wishing to unravel the mystery, have posited the possibility of an airborne pathogen inducing symptoms of schizophrenia. They point to a coronal ejection of X-class intensity which occurred 26 hours before the first documented theft, a solar belch sandblasting 200 tons of the moon’s surface into the Earth’s atmosphere, sprinkling dandruff from the dark side of the moon onto human skulls at roughly a latitude of 38 degrees north. The result (in select cases) was (hypothetically) lunacy.

Stella Angelos had been dead for nine days. She was, according to the Greek Orthodox Church, beginning her descent into the underworld. At which point, she would have 31 more days to tour the torments of hell and tie up loose ends with the living—possessions, hauntings, séances, etc.—before being summoned upstairs for eternal judgment. It was Dennis’ eldest sister, Cia, who was the first to see their mother. Hands cupping her face, trousers bunched around her ankles, Cia was passing tears and urine atop a unisex toilet at St. Elizabeth’s hospital when she suddenly spotted her mother hovering beside the sink. “*Asphacia...*” It was her mother. Only her mother called her Asphacia. Stella pressed her nose to the bathroom mirror and gazed intently, never looking at her daughter. It had been less than an hour since Dr. Austin had pulled out his stethoscope and pronounced her dead. “*Asphacia, did you leave the gas on? Every time there’s an emergency, you leave the gas on.*”

As the 40 days progressed, the rest of the family—Helen, Vula, Sasha, Sophie, Teddy, and even Alex (who had sworn decades ago never to lay eyes on his sister again)—bumped into Stella. One saw her in a dream. Another through a television screen. Others through rearview mirrors, kitchen knives, icons, etc.

Dennis' first report documented the burglary of Mr. and Mrs. Stevens' residence. The inventory of stolen goods totaled 17 books in all, items ranging from an annotated edition of Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume 1* to a bathroom copy of *Lord of the Flies*. Too tedious to catalogue here would be the list penned by Mr. and Mrs. Stevens in which the couple enumerated on the bewildering array of un-pilfered items in their possession, the most glaring being Mr. Stevens' \$1,650 handcrafted Norwegian fiddle and Mrs. Stevens' \$2,999 engagement ring.

A week after the break-in, a flash drive was cached in Mr. and Mrs. Stevens' mailbox. According to Dennis' follow-up report, the memory stick projected out of the bundle of envelopes "like an android's severed thumb." The contents of the flash drive contained the scanned likeness of each of the kidnapped texts, recording the stolen goods in labeled folders and corresponding PDFs. The texts, it appeared, had been handled with the utmost care, the individual leaflets showing no signs of recent earmarking, highlighting, or water-damage.

After 14 of the 40 days had elapsed, Dennis visited the office of Olivia Ben, the director of Ben's Funeral Services and a long-time friend of the Angelos family. Dennis explained how his mother, Stella, would always wait until Christmas Eve to go shopping for Christmas trees. And even then, his mother would haggle with the merchants, walking away and announcing loudly to her children (who she had deliberately underdressed so they would shiver in the cold) that Santa would have to leave their presents this year underneath the cedar tree in the cemetery.

"My mum," Dennis confessed, "never paid full price for anything in her life." Dennis had picked up the habit of calling his mother "Mum" from his favorite childhood radio program *Keeping Mum*, which chronicled the criminal adventures of an Italian mafia matron who lived (and killed) in London.

Olivia, taking the hint, deducted one percent from the embalming fee, preventing Stella from paying full price for her death.

Embalmed, Stella's mouth had been sewn shut. Her orifices were stuffed with cotton. Her blood drained. Her body pumped with formaldehyde. And yet everyone agreed at the wake that she had appeared as she always had: massive, substantial. Staring into his mother's casket, Dennis had cursed himself for not being there to prevent the crime. For it *was* a crime. A theft. Death had snuck in through one of Stella's arteries, stolen her soul, and sealed the artery shut on the way out. Holding and pressing down on one of his mother's thick manicured hands, Dennis had waited for his mother to press back. Stella's grip, even at 71, was capable of inducing carpal tunnel. Decades of shucking crustaceans at the family restaurant had bestowed on Stella a shattering grip. Holding his mother's hand that day at the wake, Dennis had wanted nothing more in the world than a warrant to search the premises of Death.

More book burglaries ensued. In a matter of weeks, the thefts had spanned three cities, eight towns, and four villages in two states. Each crime scene bore the trademark of targeting exclusively manuscripts, be they novels, thesauruses, plays, memoirs, self-help books, how-to-books, comic books, or instruction manuals. Platonically speaking, all that partook in the form of "book-ness" was fair game. As with the seminal incident, digital copies of the purloined goods were subsequently (albeit surreptitiously) provided. Flash drives were mailed anonymously to the local police stations of the various victims.

It's hard to pinpoint what it was precisely which drew so many members of the Mycroft Society to the Case of the Serial Luddite. The society had been formed as an outgrowth of what detective enthusiasts call "The Game": a loosening of the division between fiction and reality—in particular,

the treating of the exploits of Sherlock Holmes as “real” cases to be solved and, conversely, the treating of real historical cases as fodder for the fictional sleuthing of Holmes and his followers. The mission statement of the Mycroft Society is twofold: 1) to unravel existing knots; 2) to tie nonexistent knots. Mysteries are to be solved; non-mysteries unsolved. And all so “The Game” will go on indefinitely. But as for the Mycroft Society’s interest in this particular case, it is my own estimation that the slew of briefs uploaded in recent weeks to the Mycroft server is due to the untimely death of the burglar herself, who passed away last month of lung cancer at the age of 68, her obituary reading: *“The Lay of Faye,” Serial Luddite Dies 6 years after String of Picaresque Crimes.*

As for the case itself, the thefts continued along the Blue Ridge Mountains—from Lexington to Waynesboro to Frederick. Residents began leaving their books outside in haphazard stacks, often accompanying these heaps with sticky notes thanking the thief for relieving them of their clutter. Curbside pickup providers, capitalizing on the trend, added “text removal” options to their services. Compositions became compost. Broken spines and damp pages littered the backyards of local suburbs “like biblio burial mounds” (as Dennis later documented the phenomenon).

The case, however, took a decisive turn in the playground of Ware Elementary School in Staunton, Virginia. There, sitting alone at a picnic table, an 11 year-old boy, Morgan Cadmon, was accosted by a short stout 62 year-old woman, Faye Makowski. Morgan reports having heard the cock of a revolver behind him, despite the lack of such a device on the now-confiscated weapon: a pistol of the paintball variety. Turning around, Morgan was confronted by a mugger with bug-eyed sunglasses, gray curly hair, and a yellow bookmark tucked into her left ear. The mugger demanded that the boy hand over his Language Arts workbook as promptly as possible. The boy froze. Morgan’s red hair and vacant expression had earned him the nickname at school of “Raggedy Andy” (or, in the case of one precocious classmate, “Raggedy Morgandy”). Faye asked the boy if he was deaf. Morgan remained frozen. Faye lost her patience and snatched the Language Arts workbook from Morgan’s hands and then scurried across the street. When Morgan blinked, the mugger was gone. He looked down, but all he saw was a yellow line in the street. As it happens, the answer to Faye’s question was “no.” Morgan was not deaf. He just found it terribly difficult to speak. He had felt this way about speech for over a year. In his mind, there were so many potential obstructions to speaking. So many ways his words might be sabotaged on the way out. So many tribes who demanded tribute: “The Bronchi’s,” “The Tracheans,” “The Larynxians,” etc. He recalled a story about an earthworm who asks a centipede how it manages to coordinate all 100 of its legs. The centipede ponders the question and then stumbles helplessly, its legs tangled in impossible knots. So too, Morgan had listened to his speech therapist discuss how his voiceless alveolar fricative consonants were being distorted by habitual protrusions of his tongue and, suddenly, Morgan had found it impossible (even more so than before) to speak.

Two days after the event, Morgan’s classmates began to discard their own Language Arts workbooks. The children claimed that they *too* had been mugged. As for Morgan’s previously mentioned precocious classmate, he’s alleged to have quipped (when questioned as to why he didn’t bring his Language Arts workbook to class): “The Serial Luddite’s dog ate it.”

Dennis, calling in a favor from his old dispatching days, acquired an interview with Morgan Cadmon, the first eyewitness of the Serial Luddite. After driving an hour-and-a-half south on Interstate 81, Dennis entered the Cadmon home as a police officer from Winchester with “forensic sketch artist” expertise. Invited in, Dennis sat with a large pad of paper in his hands, facing Morgan, who sat likewise with a smaller pad of paper in his hands. As Morgan’s mother eavesdropped from the kitchen, Dennis asked questions regarding the shape of the suspect’s face—round, square, triangular, etc.—and the suspect’s body—hourglass, pear, apple, etc.—while Morgan scribbled in his notepad and flashed the police officer his answers.

It was day 38. Stella Angelos was yet to reveal herself to her only son. Dennis sat on the Cadmon couch, searching for traces of his mother in the whites of the boy's eyes. Morgan sat on the floor, ogling the police radio squawking sporadically at Dennis' feet.

The conversation apparently took a sharp turn when Morgan's mother stepped outside to answer a phone call. At which point, Dennis broached a seeming non-sequitur, describing a library book which his mother used to borrow from the Handley Public Library. Stella, so the story goes, was searching for a good (i.e. Greek) book of fables to read to her son at night. But since all three copies of Aesop were already checked out, she was handed a book published in 1968 by *the* (there being only one) Greek magical realist author Vasilis Vamvakaris, a communist sympathizer who, in fleeing the Junta of 1967, had expatriated to the United States. The collection, titled *Fables for Small Children*, was filled with Kafkaesque morals, such as "*Hope is the mother of nope*" and "*The man who wants to take another man's life must get up early.*" But there was one particular fable which Stella especially enjoyed reading to her son. It was titled "The Little Book Thief." The fable tells the story of how, one day, a young girl raids a magician's home and makes off with a golden book, a book of spells. It turns out that the majority of the spells in the magician's book are culinary and harmless. Like turning water into grape juice. Or transforming yogurt into mayonnaise. But there exists one spell in the magician's book which sticks out and captivates the girl's imagination. The spell is titled "How to Revive a Lion." Unfortunately, the only way to test the spell is to do so in the presence of a dead lion. So the girl sneaks out and wanders off to the zoo and poisons the local lion, feeding it a squirrel she's injected with cyanide. The girl then kneels before the lion's corpse and starts chanting the spell from the golden book. And the lion, to the girl's delight, revives. And kills her. And eats her. The moral being: "*Calculate before you cast.*"

"I think it's her," Dennis said.

Morgan wrote *who* in his notepad.

"The thief in the fable."

Morgan circled *who* in his notepad.

"It's got something to do with Mum—my mother."

Morgan nodded.

"So I've got to find her. And you've got to help me."

It's difficult to say *why* precisely Morgan responded the way he did. Perhaps it was due to the boy's sudden apprehension of the tenuous nature of Dennis' sanity (this being even more alarming due to the fact that Dennis was seated only a few feet away from the boy and armed with a pistol, a baton, and a Taser). Or perhaps the boy's sudden willingness to assist Dennis was due to his own sense of parental loss (Morgan had not seen his father for over a year). In any case, the boy reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded scrap of yellow paper: evidence he had previously withheld. Morgan proceeded to squeeze and release the yellow paper "like an origami accordion" (as Dennis recorded the event). He then handed the paper over to Dennis, who unfolded it and saw that it was a bookmark. It read: "Faye's Used Books." Morgan slid back onto the floor, his eyes reverting to their previous focal point: the radio squawking at the police officer's feet. Dennis tucked the bookmark into his breast pocket and put the finishing touches on his sketch. In response to Morgan's answers, he had drawn not a person but a large jagged hole, a broken window, glass shards dotting the carpet of an unspecified den.

From the Cadmon's residence, Dennis drove directly to "Faye's Used Books," which was under a 10 minute drive, for it was located in downtown Staunton. The store was adjacent to "The Blackfriars Playhouse," an exact replica—minus the electric lighting, plumbing, and gift shop—of the theater in which Shakespeare produced his last plays: his fantasies. As for the used bookstore, it was a claustrophobic affair. Every inch of Faye's establishment was occupied, despite the fact that no one was there. Towers of books hovered atop overloaded bookshelves. And where no shelves

could be added, texts were stacked to the ceiling in precarious stalagmites. Annotations were posted throughout the store. One flashcard read: “Brontë Sisters are under the radio in the entrance to the bathroom.” Another read: “Lies, lies, lies, but read it anyway!” A bookmark inside J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows* read: “Ron dies.” At the register’s desk was a pair of bug-eyed sunglasses. The glasses were folded atop a Language Arts workbook.

The trial of Faye Makowski was scheduled on an orange drizzling afternoon. Local and national press, thankful for the opportunity to harvest such a ripe column of eccentricity, swarmed to the story, arriving in a motorcade of 8,000-pound portable news-vans. As for the defense lawyer, Monica Falco, she was in a bit of a bind, for her client had lost all interest in communication and showed no discernable impetus to return to the land of locution. The police had discovered the majority of the stolen goods in the living room of Faye’s apartment. An editorial written by Dennis (to this date, his last public statement concerning the case) appeared in *The Daily Staunton* on the morning of Faye’s arraignment. Below, I’ve quoted briefly from the piece—in particular, the excerpt about the discovery of the missing books. . .

It was a one bedroom apartment. We opened the door, and there they were. The stolen books were piled into a lopsided mountain. There was no living room to speak of. There was only the bedroom, the bathroom, and the book-room. I can’t help but wonder if she left the books that way, or if they had begun to move about of their own accord, wiggling, becoming restless and undone, like a pyramid whose bricks have begun to dislodge and go their separate ways now that their pharaoh has been nabbed by tomb robbers. . . It’s funny, we’re taught to applaud when the hero slays the dragon. But which of the two is more terrifying: the dragon towering and hovering over its treasure, its scorched breath licking its loved ones and circulating the whole scene with central heat; or the treasure naked, exposed, and stamped with a cold concavity?... We didn’t waste much time. We got to work and cleaned up the mess, stuffing the books in high-tensile plastic bags.

Live trial coverage of the Case of the Serial Luddite was provided by the local station 92.3 FM “The Fly.” Tuned in for each broadcast, among other listeners, was Morgan Cadmon, who feigned mono so he could snuggle up with his newly-acquired police scanner undisturbed and eavesdrop on the great crackling cacophony of Augusta County: listening to baby monitors, bus services, ambulances, dispatchers, phone-sex operators, etc. The day after Dennis’ visit to the Cadmon residence, a P25 digital police scanner had mysteriously appeared at the family’s doorstep. The parcel was addressed to Morgan Cadmon. The boy had ripped the package open and darted upstairs. There, day and night, Morgan had wrapped himself up in his bedsheets and stared into the glowing blue screen of the scanner, ears pricked to hear his father’s voice on a wayward CB radio as he tripped from station to station. Morgan’s father, a long-haul truck driver, had been asked by his wife to move out, his weekly absences having finally dissolved a 13 year-long marriage. As for the scanner, what amazed the boy was the endless static. There was so much hissing. White noise. Pink noise. Gray noise. *Was that really what we sounded like?* thought the boy. *And if so, why keep on talking and talking? And who were they anyways? Who was talking? And to whom?* Bundled in his cocoon, Morgan imitated the voices on his scanner, whispering at first but gradually growing louder and louder, like a moth lured out by the buzzing blue light.

On the second day of the trial, Faye Makowski broke her silence. She ascended the witness stand and swore the obligatory oath. Journalists noted how Faye’s face looked tired, defeated. Bags under the eyes. Crow’s feet. Asked by the prosecuting attorney to please state her name, Faye replied: “Dr. Pergamum.” Asked by the prosecuting attorney to *repeat* her name, Faye replied: “Dr. Pergamum.” Asked by the prosecuting attorney to be so kind as to comply with the court and to remember that she was, after all, under oath, and that she would certainly be held in contempt of court if she so chose to continue in her current vein of callow antics, Faye replied: “Dr. Pergamum.” The words were scribbled into notepads, typed into laptops, and whispered from ear to ear in hushed murmurs throughout the room like a game of judicial telephone. When order was restored, the prosecuting

attorney asked Faye to illuminate for the court as to *who* precisely this mysterious Dr. Pergamum was and to be so kind as to oblige in answering his question without reference to the predictable tautology that “Dr. Pergamum is—” But Faye had beat him to the punch. She interjected: “Dr. Pergamum.”

Naturally, “Dr. Pergamum” was the “Rosebud” of the month, and every reporter along the Blue Ridge Mountains had a pet theory as to what precisely Ms. Makowski meant by that mysterious moniker. It would, I admit, be unnecessarily tedious to sift through each of these speculations. Instead, I plan to disclose two particularly novel theories, both composed by members of the Mycroft Society. You are, of course, welcome to pursue additional theories on the Mycroft server at your leisure. The first of these theories delves into Faye Makowski’s relationship with a now forgotten children’s book titled *Ra-member*, published in 1958 by the integrationist author, Colleen Griffith. The children’s book (to which Faye was apparently quite attached) is about an immigrant—an Egyptian mummy named “Ra”—whose sarcophagus has been transported to a small museum in Idaho, and who suddenly wakes up in the 1950s, utterly lost. Ra visits local institutions—the post office, the bank, the general store, etc.—but bungles each encounter. The story ends by asking its readers to mail in letters giving hints to the mummy as to how he might go about better blending into America’s melting pot. The children are to explain different U.S. customs in their letters, and then to mail these letters to the address on the last page of the book so as to ease and expedite Ra’s transition to this strange new continent and millennium. The address—1713 Mumagrep Rd., Trent, Idaho 54850—was, in actuality, the author’s home address. Apparently, Mrs. Griffith had been inspired to make her protagonist a mummy because of the odd-sounding street address she lived on. However, as the theory points out, Mumagrep Rd. is, when spelled backwards, “Dr. Pergamum.” A coincidence which makes Faye’s enigmatic utterance a potential allusion to *Ra-member*. And if this is the case, then “Dr. Pergamum” was, in fact, a code (an anagram) transmitting nothing short of Faye’s scrambled heart, detailing how Faye felt like she had woken up in a museum and had now stumbled outside to a world which was topsy-turvy. In other words, “Dr. Pergamum” was Faye’s plea for an explanation of how to go about navigating in a world so apathetic to what she loved. A world so apathetic to books.

As for the second theory, it posits a similar conclusion but through strikingly different means. The theory suggests that, inside Faye’s apartment, there was at least one book which she *didn’t* steal. This book was a history textbook of Ancient Egypt. Inside, earmarked, was a small chapter about the Ptolemaic Dynasty. And inside that chapter—circled and starred—was a single paragraph about the Library of Alexandria. And at the bottom of this paragraph was an underlined footnote narrating the rivalry of Alexandria with the nearby library of Pergamum. The footnote (so the theory goes) detailed how, over time, the rivalry between these two libraries became so heated that Alexandria ceased exporting one of its cash crops—papyrus—to the outside world in hopes of starving Pergamum’s book industry. This embargo had the effect of forcing Pergamum to invent what we now know as the modern-day book, taking advantage of one of its own raw materials—sheep—which it then butchered and flayed and scraped and bleached into rectangular manuals. In response, Alexandria doubled its efforts, taxing every ship that docked in its ports a fine if they didn’t immediately hand over all the scrolls aboard their vessels so the state librarians could make copies of the scrolls and then give the merchants back the originals. Although, according to the footnote, they almost always returned the facsimiles and kept the originals. Faye (so the theory goes) read this footnote and a longing grew inside her. A thirst for a time when nations were insane enough to board each other’s prows and demand not gold or spices or grain or oil, but books. “Dr. Pergamum” was thus a gesture for someone to take up her mantle, to be her rival and successor, now that she had played out her part and could no longer plunder texts from unsuspecting passerby.

Lastly, as to why Pergamum had become a “doctor,” the theory answers (I quote): “*all* the great nemeses of the world are doctors; Dr. Moriarty and Dr. Doom, to name but two...”

Regardless of what Faye Makowski may or may not have meant by “Dr. Pergamum,” it appears that Dennis Angelos only caught the last syllable of the word. For on the third day of Faye’s trial, Officer Angelos infiltrated the Alzheimer’s unit at the Evergreen Retirement Center in Winchester, Virginia. There, Dennis snatched four elderly women from their card table, claiming to be their son who had come to rescue them. He then proceeded to herd the women to the nearest exit but was obstructed by a handful of nurse practitioners, who forced Dennis back to the physical therapy gym, where he then barricaded the doors in preparation of a last stand.

It was day 173. Stella Angelos’ 40 days had long elapsed. Dennis had woken up that morning in a panic, body cold and glistening with sweat. His mother’s voice. He couldn’t quite remember her voice.

As the Evergreen Retirement Center’s occupational therapist heaved audibly in the hallway, using a crowbar to wedge an opening in the door, Louise Myers—a wheelchair-bound octogenarian—slid her hand into Dennis’ and pressed tight. The old woman’s grip was a vice.

“Son...”

Her voice, a soft bark.

“Mum...”

At that point, the door was forced open and the therapist and nurse practitioners were privy to the following sight: two elderly women sitting at a table and watching TV; another senior in a walker staring at a recumbent exercise bike; and Dennis and Louise holding hands, purple foam rollers at their feet, both of their faces mesmerized and radiant, as if they had been charmed by a magic spell.

Within a week, at least one case was reported of a resident of Winchester leaving his aging mother on the outdoor patio of the house with a note taped to the old woman’s wheelchair, thanking “The Serial Son.”

It’s been six years since the above events transpired. The antics of the Case of the Serial Luddite lingered on the lips of Augusta County as an anecdote to be sipped, savored. On the fourth day of her trial, Faye Makowski was charged with third degree burglary on a GBMI, “Guilty but Mentally Ill” verdict. Faye spent over a year in a rehabilitation center and then moved to Portland to work in a café adjacent to Powell’s City of Books. As mentioned previously, Ms. Makowski’s recent death has piqued a renewed interest in the case on the Mycroft server. As for Dennis Angelos, he served five months in a regional jail. After which, Dennis was released on probation and sentenced to a year of court-enforced counseling. Discharged from the police force, he began working at the family restaurant, where he can still be seen to this day. Although, whenever questioned about his former deeds, Dennis simply stares blankly in response, as if the inquirer was talking about someone else.

I now wish to conclude my remarks on the Case of the Serial Luddite by broaching a possibility that has either gone unnoticed in the literature thus far or has simply been passed over as an anomaly. My own experiences, I confess, may have colored what I am about to say, and yet I hope this final inquiry will add up to more than an exercise in *jeu d’esprit*. Dennis Angelos, as we recall, was 44-years-old at the outset of the burglaries. Faye Makowski was 62-years-old. The sum of the integers in each number is equal to 8. The lion “ate” the little book thief. Is it possible that the silence which Dennis and Faye have exhibited these past six years has been a symptom of having two mouths from which to escape? Their own and now the lion’s? And if so, is it any wonder that so few of their words—lost in a labyrinth of glands and gums—have ever managed to slip past the lips of the lion’s mouth?



Experience it Through My Eyes
By: Elyssa Bonifacio

ODDLY UP A TREE

By: Bowen Astrop

I was out walking my dog one forlorn night, a lonesome crick deep in the back of my knee from too much Gouda, when I realized with slowed rapidity that I wasn't even sure I owned a mangy mutt. It occurred to me to inquire upon myself as to why I might be out so late walking what I did not have, or could not see if case may be, when I became distracted by a strange little man oddly up a tree. I thought the sight of him most irregular since strange little men are not generally found dabbling around in trees, as said man appeared to be. Knowing me as I often do, I was confident beyond reproach that I had almost certainly and most nearly never noticed this peculiar little man before, impugned as he was and notwithstanding, up there in that tree. Sadly said my powers of observation are faulty towers, just ask my Mother. On a short aside, mumsy once said, pointing out to me with her gangly, withered, witch-like finger which looked like shard of shark chum, this on my 13½ birthday mind you, the following: "Young lads, young man, do not generally dress in frilly frocks." As one might imagine, I was needled with confusion at first and after. It seemed reasonably with the realm of acceptable social comportment that lads did, in fact, despite my mumsy's cantankerous crowing, delight in cavorting around in pretty little frocks. However, upon pondering the point with all the strength I could muster, which wasn't rightly much in those days, my being 13½ and preferring to expend my considerable pent-up energies (and other unmentionables) in receptive places, like my willing pillowcase (sleep! you dirty minds), I recounted only thrice in my short existence having ever seen a boy so regaled. Thinking upon it even harder, at considerable risk to my own tacit and well-mannered nature, I managed at last to grasp a thin awareness of the fact that, in each of the above recounted cases, the boy I remembered—still a lad, mind you—had been a mere echo of a reflection of the self-image of me preening as I was in front of a mirror. It was then that, to my spurious surprise, the tiny man lodged in the tree became ill-tempered at the thought of an imbued young lad adorned in a dress—it was a frock really, no really it was—cursing at me most vigorously for implanting such a cheerful image into his malfunctioning head, and therefore grew short with me (shorter than before) when I took it upon myself to ask what he was doing up the tree in which I found him to be. How he read such thoughts of mine I do not care to undertake to know, as it is a mystery best left to those who have squandered considerably more time and resources on higher learning than a poor lad like me. Bonding, was the man's rather mawkish reply to my reasonable and hardly unexpected query. Later he explained, as I was rubbing his thigh to release the knot he had picked up by hand from the barky hide of the sloping tree's lanky trunk that he had climbed in concern for my missing mutt who, he said, had landed somewhere in the tree. Looking for the dog I was not sure I had, I still did not see my friend, just the man oddly back up the tree.

MACHISMO
By: Brandon Madden

The heavy pounding on my door woke me. I craned my head over towards my nightstand to look at the clock: 1:38. Who the hell would be knocking on my door after midnight on a Wednesday?

The only reason that I forced myself out of bed was that it might have been a neighbor knocking, informing me of a building-wide emergency of some kind. Sirens were blaring outside my apartment window, but this was New York—sirens and construction were ubiquitous background noise. (Come to think of it, if no one knocked on my door and an emergency was happening I'd probably sleep through it.) It didn't occur to me until I began to open the door that this visitor could be a burglar who wanted to mug me. (But then again why would a burglar knock?) Fortunately, it was neither an emergency nor a burglar, but my friend Mack standing in the middle of the doorway.

He was wearing a black button-down shirt with silver pinstripes along with dark blue, almost black jeans. His clothes looked out of place on his athletic frame—or rather, it looked out of place for me. I had never seen him dressed like this. (Usually it was gym shorts and an athletic shirt; shorts only during the summer months.)

“Calvin,” he said. “I need your help. Come with me.”

“It's two in the morning and I have work in less than five hours,” I said. “If this is for you to break into the gym again, count me out.”

“I need you to teach me everything you know about art,” Mack said in a hurry as I was beginning to close the door on him.

I stopped.

“Art? Why art? And why now?”

He placed his hand firmly on the door. I noticed that the shirt was a size too small, because his arm looked as if it was to bust out at the seams; maybe this was intentional, or maybe just buyer's remorse.

“There's an art show at this dive-slash-converted-studio that I'm going to, and I need to know what I'm talking about,” he said.

“Wait is it one of those underground shows?” I asked. “The ones that you hear about through the Starbucks line?”

“Yeah, one of those,” he said. “It's not far from here, near a joint close to Columbia.”

“I don't want to have to take the subway uptown,” I said.

“We'll take a cab,” Mack replied. “Come on. I need this favor.”

If Mack was interested in this place, then maybe there was something worth seeing. If there wasn't, I would be able to leave and still get some sleep, at least. Either way, I was going to be groggy in the morning—nothing a little coffee couldn't fix.

“Give me a couple of minutes,” I said.

“I'll be downstairs.”

The cab rattled along up toward this underground art show. Mack sat to my left. His leg was tapping quietly while his fingers drummed against the door. I'd only ever seen him this anxious that time when he was going up against the pro boxer Franz Jr. Although he had asked me to teach him about art, we sat in silence for a while as he stared out the window, as if lost in another world.

“So, what kind of art do you need to know about?” I asked.

“I don't know,” he replied. “I'm assuming modern art.”

“So, like, 1920s?” I asked as our cab pulled into another swarm of yellow cars. They almost looked like bees marching in order, departing through different veins of the honey comb, taking their pollen to unknown places.

“No, like today,” he replied.

“Oh, you mean contemporary art,” I said.

He looked at me as we stopped. The bright LED screen from an advertisement glowed in the car, giving it the look of digital daylight.

“I didn’t know they were different,” he replied.

“Oh yeah. I mean, ‘contemporary art’ alone spans from the 1950s to now and has subsections of realism, abstract, expressionism, postmodern, alter modern, and the list goes on and on,” I said.

“Goddamn that’s a lot,” he said.

“Do you have any idea what form of art?” I asked as the car began to move again, breaking away from the swarm.

“Beats the hell out of me,” he said, still drumming his fingers. “I was just invited to this thing and wanted to sound smart when I talked.”

“Who invited you?”

“This girl, Lona, from the kickboxing class I teach at the gym,” he said. “She’s pretty mediocre at kickboxing, but apparently she’s an artist.”

“She didn’t tell you what kind of art she does?” I asked.

“No, I didn’t find that out.”

“So you’re trying to get her in bed,” I said as things started to add up. “Why not just ask her out to a bar on the weekend then take her back home? There’s not much of a chance on a Wednesday morning.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that,” he said. “On the weekend? If I’m not training for a boxing match, I’m upstate trout fishing or hunting.”

“Surely you have at least one day open that’s not a Wednesday morning,” I said.

Mack ignored my statement and looked out the window.

“This girl is something else,” he said. “There’s something about her.”

Mack didn’t seem to have any other information that could have helped, and I was not going to be able to cram a contemporary art lesson into the ride. But I didn’t want Mack to go back to staring blankly out of the window, as the loudness of his tapping incrementally increased with each passed mile.

“Have you done any matches lately?” I asked, keeping the conversation alive.

“Actually, this weekend I’m going up against Franz Jr. again,” he said. “Let’s see if I do as well as last time.”

Franz Jr. was the first pro Mack had gone against. The match was down in Queens at a newly renovated gym. I was Mack’s VIP guest, which meant I got a free seat and got to see him and talk with him in the locker room before—and hopefully after—his fight. I remember walking down the narrow hall of the locker room and finding Mack sitting on a bench, tapping his foot and gently bobbing his shoulders and head. We didn’t say anything. I just watched him lace then re-lace his shoes and pick at the bandage wrapped around his hand. His coach was already by the ring sizing up Mack’s competition, all while Mack only grew more nervous. The only noise in the locker room was the hushed whisper of the words Mack was saying to himself. Finally, his coach came back to tell him Franz was ready, waiting for him to enter the ring.

I walked behind him as he continued to shake out his shoulders and move his head back and forth. The crowd began to cheer and grew more rambunctious as Mack walked near the boxing ring.

He stopped for a moment, looked back, and grinned at me as he touched the rope and hoisted himself into the ring. In that moment, his persona seemed to change altogether. He looked cool and confident.

Mohammad Ali once said, "Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." I wondered if Mack was thinking that as he boxed against Franz. His movements were precise and flowed, as if it was as natural as a current making its way through the ocean. Each hook, jab, and uppercut hit its mark while he dodged Franz's heavy blows and absorbed his lighter ones. Mack seemed to float in the air and suddenly turn into liquid as he glided and danced around the ring. There was nothing more natural for Mack than to be in that ring.

It only took two rounds and one hook to the head to declare Franz knocked out and announce Mack as the winner.

The cab stopped, and Mack rolled down the window. He opened his wallet and pulled out a fifty. As he unlocked the door and stepped outside, he turned to look back at me. He flashed that same cool, confident grin, as if he was entering another ring.

We walked down the steps of the club and headed inside. No music was playing, and only the subtle chatter filled the room with noise. Dim brownish lights hung above while dozens of high, round-top tables were scattered throughout the room. Two bars where crowds swarmed for a drink lay at opposite ends of the room, while the middle was transformed into a live art show. Mack led us to the bar where he ordered a Macallan neat and I ordered a Mojito. We were walking back to the table when a girl appeared, waving Mack over.

"Hey Mack, how's it going?" she said as she came up and gave him a hug.

"Oh, hey Gina, I didn't think you would be here," he said.

"Well, of course, there's a bunch of us here from the kickboxing class," she said, pointing over to the table where a couple of girls sat around chatting. "It was so nice of Lona to invite everyone."

"Yeah," he replied as he took a large sip from his glass. His grin had now vanished.

"You should sit with us," she said, resting her hand on his arm.

"Oh, I'm here with my friend Calvin," he said. "Maybe later."

"Alright, I'll leave you guys to it," she said. Her hand ran down his arm and her gaze lingered for a moment, as if hoping he would reconsider, but not receiving any signal she turned around and headed back to her friends.

We grabbed a table, and he finished his drink. In the center of the stage was an inflatable pool that looked like it was filled with watery mud. Four people in white shirts stood on the corners while the photographer stood at a distance. He said something to his assistant who was wearing jean overalls and a tweed hat. The assistant then walked over and began pushing the people, one by one, into the mud pool. The photographer began clicking away. When all four were in the pool of mud sitting still, the man in the overalls yelled, "Act natural."

They began snorting and squealing, squatting on all fours. Some lapped up the water into their mouths while the others began to roll around.

"If that's natural, I don't know what is," said Mack. "I'm going to grab another drink, want one?"

"That's not what he means," I said, looking down at my drink, which was still more than half-full.

"Well, whatever he means, I need another drink to sit through it," he said, getting up from his chair.

By the time Mack returned, the scene was being changed for the next performer. Mack brought back two glasses, laughing that if Lona didn't come on soon he would have to get up for another. I wanted to talk to him about the first act and help him see the art and message behind it, or at least

what my interpretation was, but as he took another gulp from his glass, turned his nose up with his thumb and said: “Oink oink, I’m an artist now.” At that point, I figured that any discussion of art was a moot.

The next artist came to the center. He was tall and lanky, but well dressed and well groomed. His thick, black-rimmed glasses almost looked reflective as the stage light shone on him. Its light accentuated the metal piercing through his lip. Besides the white carnation tucked behind his ear, all he brought with him on stage was an empty crystal glass.

The crowd continued its murmured chatter as he placed the glass on a short stool. Mack was already near the end of his second drink. The artist removed the carnation and placed it in the cup, unzipped his pants, and began to pee in the glass. The audience watched, as if mesmerized by the act, their chatter almost completely mute. That’s why when Mack said aloud, “That’s not even art, that’s just a guy peeing in a glass,” everyone, including the artist, looked towards our table. I kept my eyes fixed on my Mojito, hoping their glances wouldn’t fall on me too. The guy finished and then said, “Oppression,” and began to snap his fingers. Everyone but Mack seemed to be snapping their fingers; he was too busy picking up his next drink. He looked over at me and rolled his eyes.

As the artist finished his act, Gina came up to our table and sat next to Mack.

“Oh my god,” she said. “That was really weird.”

“Right,” said Mack. “Like, that’s not art at all. I can pee in a glass. Hell, you can too.”

She laughed and leaned towards him. “When am I going to be able to see you box?”

“Whenever I have a match,” he said.

“Have you seen him box?” she asked, directing her attention to me.

“Oh yeah,” I replied. “He’s a really skilled boxer.”

“I’m okay,” corrected Mack. “You know the saying ‘those that can’t do, teach,’ right?”

“Are you a good boxer?” I asked Gina, noticing a pink tint on her cheeks that might have just been blush.

“She’s one of my best students,” said Mack. “Throws a mean uppercut.”

She laughed and smiled. “I’m okay. What I want to see most is Mack in a real fight.”

“You’ll have to catch him on a weekend when he’s not hunting or fishing upstate,” I said. From above my Mojito, I could see Mack shoot me something that looked like a glare.

“I love fishing,” Gina said, turning her attention to Mack. “My dad and I used to go trout fishing all the time. We should go together one of these weekends.”

“Yeah, maybe,” he said, looking over to the center of the room. Lona had just entered, carrying a lamp and a clear glass box on wheels. On top of the box was a thin layer of black sand. She was wearing a sparkling blue dress with a belt wrapped around her waist. Her auburn hair was neatly placed in a bun.

“Tonight, I will show you a classic piece of art through sand and a little bit of magic.”

The lights dimmed lower, making the room nearly pitch black. Only the light below the glass panel was on, and it shone onto the blank ceiling as Lona gently placed her fingers and began carving out her piece.

The room was silent. Everyone was mesmerized by the way she fluidly moved her fingers across the sand. There was something in her eyes. Something about her intensity and concentration tingled the hairs on the back of my neck. It was almost erotic, not merely a deep love for her art or her creative process, but of her. She was captivating. She was alluring. It was as if her show was not the art, but the audience. It was as if she was molding us, curving us, running her fingers through us, turning us into what she wanted.

She abruptly stopped for a moment and looked up

The audience followed her gaze to the image on top of the ceiling. It looked like the outlines of Van Gogh's "Starry Night." I had almost forgotten that she was creating something. She unlatched a small bag from her belt.

"And now for the magic."

She opened the bag and threw into the air a silvery blue dust that made the image on the ceiling sparkle and shimmer, as if Van Gogh's painting came alive. As it fell onto the sand and settled, its silvery blue glow began to outline and accentuate the fine, intricate details.

The crowd clapped as she bowed and thanked us for the kindness. I turned to Mack who was talking with Gina, wondering how Lona figured out how to do that.

"We have to see her," I said getting up from my seat. "I need to meet this girl."

Mack grinned widely.

"By all means. Lead the way, wingman."

Lona was waiting in line at the bar when Mack and I approached her. Talking to her was the hipster artist who'd peed in the glass. (To this day, I still don't actually know his real name.) She must have noticed Mack, who was trailing slightly behind me, because she waved over in our direction.

"Alright, wingman," Mack whispered. "Do your stuff."

I had no intention of wingmaning.

"Hey Mack," she said, beaming with a smile. "Great to see you here. I hope you liked the show."

"It was amazing, really something else," he said. "This is my friend Calvin."

She outstretched her hand and I grabbed it. Her skin had that gentle smoothness that it gets after running through sand.

"I thought your piece was remarkable," I said. "The minute details you were able to put into it and the exactness of the image just from memory really was something. It must have taken quite a while to master."

"Well, thank you," she said. "It actually did. It's hard to remember all the details, but eventually muscle memory kicks in."

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Mack, patiently waiting for me to talk him up and insert him into the conversation, but I wasn't done yet.

"I really loved how you used the silvery blue dust to accentuate it," I said. "It made it feel lifelike."

The pee glass artist snorted derisively, and both Mack and I glared at him.

"The dust was the wrong color choice," he said. "Maybe if you did a red or something it *could* have been interesting, but the concept itself was rather boring. It wasn't edgy or modern. No one wants to see a replica of something from a museum."

"What do you know?" said Mack. His voice seemed to echo in the room, and everyone turned around to look at him. Lona looked a little embarrassed and tried to laugh it off, saying, "Pretty loud, Mack." But he didn't hear her and continued, "All you did was piss in a cup. Anyone can do that shit."

The pee glass artist narrowed his eyes and—as if recognizing whom Mack really was—gave off a slight laugh.

"Please," he said. "What do *you* know about art?"

I watched Mack as he stepped forward into the ring with the pee glass guy. With Mohammad Ali's butterfly grace, he brought his left hand up, floating on his feet, and with the fluidity of a rushing current pivoted his left foot, sending his right flowing forward, crashing into the guy's face. The match ended in one round and one hit. A clean hook to the head. A knockout.

From behind bars, I looked up at the clock. 6:30. I would have been just getting up for work. Mack was sitting on the bench inside the cell. It was surprisingly crowded for a Wednesday morning. I thought jails only got crowded on the weekends. I didn't want to meet the gaze of anyone inside, especially Mack. But my eyes wandered and spotted a man near the back of the holding tank. He kept his shoulders hunched over, but I could see that he was holding a plastic cup in one hand and his junk in the other. Minding his own business, he peed quietly in the corner.

But there wasn't a flower in sight.



Birth of a Star
By: Michal Mitak Mahgerefteh

COSMOTHOLOGY

By: James Bruce May

(After Björk)

Starlight glistens in crystalline frost spread over darkened lichened clifftops all about. A gust tugs at tufts of grass growing tatty from cracks in the rock here and there, the stark stones of a cairn glitter cold as myriad stars twinkle bright beyond. A man and a boy come crunching towards the cliff edge, wrapped warm in coats bleached blue by the pale evening light, snug faces face the chill amidst scarves and woolen hats.

Together they stand and survey a great shadowy forest flexing below, pine and fir and spruce creak in pools of gloom, pools of murk. Green is grey at night. The sky is silent, its clarity absolute. Breath steams into a story.

You want to know about the universe, about heaven, about Earth?

The boy nods towards the stars. A mitten folds over the man's gloved hand.

Okay. We'll start at the beginning of time.

They say the first god was a spider. She lowered herself from a deep black night to cast a net and catch the passage of time, but all she trapped was moonlight, which turned her web to slender silver silk.

The moon had taken the passage of time for himself, and he span rapid in the sky flashing his phases to taunt the spider, wax to wane, crescent to gibbous, new to full, 'round and 'round.

In answer to these taunts, the spider slipped her silver silk as strings for a harp, which she plucked with the sharp points of her legs, making a mournful melody until the moon slowed melancholy, his sad face transfixed by the song.

At last, the moon offered to give time in exchange for the instrument, and he hung in the sky strumming silk strings in calm cadence, showing his phases rhythmically, wax to wane, crescent to gibbous, new to full, on and on.

The spider weaved a wonderful web then, its slender silver silk catching moonbeams eternal, music lilting down all around. She placed her hours and minutes and seconds in the corners of her web, and the passage of time was finally caught, and that's how time began.

The man squeezes the boy's hand, looking out through the empty air before them. Mist rises from the forest floor, sinuous, drifting, encircling the clifftop, confusing the frost, dabbing drops on web abandoned 'cross the cairn. The breeze fades, the mist quivers then stills. Wisps turn graceful, ethereal ballerinas' wrists.

It was after time began that the universe was born.

They say a she-wolf awoke one deep black night as the first full moon was rising. She shook snow from her thick fur, looking about the vast empty tundra stretching bleak before her, moonlight glinting in her golden eyes.

She went in search of a mate, passing through endless icy valleys, past sparkling snowy mountaintops, past glaciers made of gemstones. In that entire frozen wilderness she saw no other living creature, no sign of life at all, only snow and ice.

Heartbroken she wept, and her tears became an arctic sea, littered with icebergs drifting silent through darkness beyond sight. Retreating to the tundra, she settled down to die a cold and lonesome death when the plateau around her sighed with a faint chorus of howls falling eerie in the distance.

She stood then, her ears pricked up. She sniffed a scent to the sea, where bergs crept back to the bay, each carrying a noble wolf, their proud silhouettes illuminated by the radiant ice.

The wolves leapt to land to run as one across the tundra. The she-wolf joined the pack, running side-by-side with its leader, a great grey with shining ocean eyes. When the pack reached the summit of the tallest mountain, the wolves raised their snouts to howl at the first full moon, singing of their bitter journeys across the arctic sea, singing of their longing to unite at last with the nature of their own kind.

That howling echoed through the endless icy valleys, reverberated ‘round those sparkling snowy mountaintops—and *this* is how the universe began—the sound intensified until the plateaus quaked; deep ravines opened, volcanic heat burst forth, and the tundra exploded with a huge destructive bang.

The scattered gemstones of the shattered glaciers gathered as bright galaxies across the sky, the broken boulders of the mountains formed comets and planets, driven into space by the passion of that sudden blast. The wolves paired off to inhabit their new universe, the first she-wolf with the ocean-eyed grey, alone nevermore.

The boy leans against the man as mist thickens through the forest to cloud. Nebulous bedding rolls out from the cliff edge, pierced here and there by the drooping wizards’ hats of treetops. Into the clear sky a crooked finger of luminous green bends above, bordered by the red yellow of peach flesh near the stone. Waves of azure billow behind, a celestial sunset at night.

Now let me tell you about heaven and Earth.

They say our world was first an endless serene sea, hidden from heaven by layer upon layer of cold dense cloud. One deep black night, a tiny fish emerged from the silent depths of the abyss, her faint beating heart blurred beneath soft translucent skin. Other fish followed, darting skittish left and right, joining a great shimmering shoal swimming up towards the surface.

Some stayed see-through, others grew steely scales. Some needed sleek fins, others large round eyes. Some grew slanted gills, others opened oval blowholes. Yet as each one passed away, its fate was always the same: the body drifted down to the depths, the soul flew up and was lost amongst the cloud.

The great shoal swam on until it discovered an island. A jungle curved crisp across the horizon, and many fish swam to shore. Once on land, some slithered away on their bellies, others crawled away on all fours. Some took to trees and flapped from branch to branch, others stood and walked away. Still, when any animal died, its body remained on Earth, its soul flew up, lost amongst the clouds.

Time passed, life survived long summers and weathered wide winters, and eventually our ancestors appeared. By now, the sky was full of the spirits of the dead. They thronged tormented, unable to break through the cold dense cloud to the peace they sought beyond. People looked up at the roiling sky, wishing they could somehow set those lost souls free.

Then one day, a boy—he was brave, just like you—he began to dance, spinning ‘round with his head bowed down, his arms thrown out by his sides. A dust devil formed at his feet, growing in strength to lift leaves, catch clothes, bend branches and tip tiles ‘til a tornado raged all about, opening a vortex up to the clouds above.

The boy kept spinning and a great storm blew outwards from him; a hurricane hurtled west, a typhoon tumbled east, blowing the clouds away until they fell as rain over those first serene seas. The boy lay down, dizzy, dazed, and watched the evening come. He watched light fall from the stars above, watched as the souls of his ancestors found their way finally to heaven, to beauty, to rest, to peace.

An owl hoots unseen from the shrouded, subdued forest. A line of web comes loose from the cairn and drifts, a ribbon rippling, the tail of a kite in light wind. The man looks down into the boy’s eyes and sees the aurora above reflected, each iris a globe enchanted, each pupil its own deep black night, a saltwater universe ignited within.

PINK PARADISE By: John Gorman

Oscar Dawson got tired of licking and stuffing envelopes in St. Luke's musty basement, and set off for Italy in pursuit of adventure. He'd never been farther than Bronxville in all his twenty-two Wonderbread years. Dotty Kaminski, his Aunt Muriel's bowling buddy, helped him book his ticket to Milan. Otto crunched his way through half a bag of stale pretzels while Dotty scored a window seat and a Eurail Pass from her desktop. Otto's head was buzzing with anticipation. He dreamed of dark-haired girls who didn't care one lick for rouge or lipstick whose beauty was both sublime and bittersweet, who could talk for hours about a history and philosophy beyond his own. He wanted to take walks with somebody who'd never set foot inside a mall. How he'd longed for this fresh start where nobody had any preconceived notions about him and his gushing fountain of goof ups. He imagined himself jumping into Lake Como, sockless, and coming out re-baptized, repurposed. In Modena, he decided to go by Otto. It suited his *vivace* sensibility. He grew his hair and started drinking his coffee black. The sheer breadth of boundless possibility, in all those postcard-worthy towns, made him feel noble, something of a cross between Marcus Aurelius and Russell Crowe, his nose pressed to the window of the zipping train. He was not ready to hang his hat. Maybe he was as dumb as the next guy when it came to the ways of the world, had inherited "the grass is always greener" philosophy from his mom. So far, this trip was actually lending weight to this notion, or more likely, his life had been one fat dud until he hit the beautiful Boot. The Piazza del Campo of Siena and the medieval splendor of Montalcino had riled a sense of awe and put to shame the cracked sidewalks of Maspeth, littered with cigarette butts and gum splotches. The Galleria Academia in Florence was illuminating, but his epiphany came one night, walking along the moonlit Arno, when he declared he'd had enough of the mainland; some sort of magnetic pull drew him to the majestic islands. He basked in the rustic allure of Ischia, soaked in the brooding charm of Stromboli. In the turquoise brilliance of Sardinia, Otto Dawson had become fully realized. He made a silly vow to marry a native, somebody who'd adopt his lonely heart.

The spirit of the chalky-ridged island and the smell of eucalyptus were overwhelming. He fell in love with the Nuraghe, the ancient fortifications going back to Mesolithic times. He tried his luck at being a tour guide, not to earn coin, but to meet people and show that he was a budding something. After all, he had half a dozen archaeology classes under his belt. He gave a group of Germans a brief tour, but because he didn't have enough familiarity with the nearby eateries and where to find cheap souvenirs, they cut their time with him short. This left a bad taste in his mouth. He was almost ready to move on, test his luck on the mainland again when he stumbled upon the enchanting Budelli beach. He'd never seen pink sand, and pink flamingoes too.

He read a sign that he believed was looking for lifeguards. His Italian was sketchy, but he was intrigued by the request. By most accounts, he was a doggy-paddler who even hated to rest his ear on the skin of the sea. His breaststroke had a lot to be desired, but he had a heck of a pair of lungs. Off he went to the first aid tent. He was beaming with hope and tried not to seem too green. Otto was greeted by a chunky, salty-haired man named Vincenzo Vagabondo who had a constipated expression. Otto spoke first, butchered his sentences. Fortunately, the man spoke excellent broken English. It took Otto a minute or so to process the fact that he was not interviewing to be a lifeguard, but as a protector of the pink sand.

"These lousy day trippers fill their water bottles and gourmet olive jars," Vagabondo complained. "Just look what they've done to these dunes."

Otto hadn't noticed the divots and gaps. He saw a timeless sanctuary of pink sand, lollygagging flamingoes, and coral so beautiful he almost wanted to cry. A wide grin spread across Otto's face. He

shook the man's hairy hand, a bit too hard and just like that Otto found himself a sandy patch to call his own.

At first, he was surprised that nobody tried to take the flamingoes, only the sand, but the flamingoes were wily birds and gave the seagulls a run for their money during lunchtime.

As he roasted under the sweltering sun, he kept his stomach taut to win more respect from the shameless sand thieves, lurking on Budelli's finest beach. He pinched his whistle ready to blow with impunity and scare the crap out of any sand thief. It was a futile pursuit if ever there was one, and he relished every minute of it. He couldn't cover the whole damn beach though he chased after the greedy, pink-trophy whores, from reef to reef. He was going to be ready for the Olympics by September, or a coffin. By dusk, he was beat, collapsed into his stony cot in his pillbox of a flat. He barely had enough juice to peel his orange, swallowed it pits and all.

With each passing day, he grew more fascinated with the pink sand and worried it would soon all be gone. He began filling his pockets. No harm in a few scoops. Before he knew any better, this became an everyday thing, and he loved the electric thrill of getting away with it. He kept Coke bottles filled with pink sand then graduated to flower pots. When he found a discarded plastic baby tub, he put it immediately to use.

After his first month on guard duty, he couldn't keep his hands off the stuff. Some might even call him a full-fledged addict. He wished he was a wino, a needle junkie, or a sexaholic because then he'd only be destroying his useless self and not a beautiful, innocent beach.

By midsummer, pillaging had gotten out of hand. Day-trippers had grown tired of the cheesy tchotchkes sold all along the esplanade and the pink trophy-whores filled their water bottles and backpacks with salmon-colored sand. Many dunes had already morphed into ravines.

You might even say it was ironic Otto was asked to safeguard the very stuff he still bilked. He burrowed his fat ankles in the pink sand, keeping his eyes peeled for both crooks and to make sure nobody saw him filling his own pockets. He hated the Gestapo game of pulling people aside and rummaging through their personals. They'd roll their eyes. Can you believe this jerk? He often wondered if the sand was shellier, strewn with kelp or sullied a hideous squid ink he wouldn't be in this mess.

A cute little girl in strawberry blond pigtails had pointed at him because she saw the pink grains, spilling out of the sides of his swim trunks. The little girl's mother scolded her daughter for being impolite and using the wrong pronoun and Otto was glad that she went away, but a trace of her stuck in his mind, his pigtailed conscience, bubbling along the fissured shore.

He was humming to pass the time, but was really hoping to have a reason to blow his whistle since he couldn't do it naturally, the beautiful noise startled and pleased him, made him grin ear to ear, and the sweet music he couldn't make with his own mouth. Out of the corner of his eye, Otto saw a belladonna swimming ashore. She rose from the sea as if she'd been born out of the waves. Her wet hair slicked back, her body glistening with sea salt. Her skin was a flawless coppery bronze and her gorgeous curves made her seem a goddess. She had liquid green eyes, a hue brighter than the sea, and more beguiling. The sunlight, beaming off those stunning green discs, made them jewels. He filled his pockets with sand to calm his nerves. He kept a healthy distance, careful not to let her shimmering teal eyes catch his dull hazels, peering at her.

She didn't bother to towel herself off and for this Otto was grateful. He had an unadulterated view of her diaphanous body. He was already smitten with her long sinewy legs and languid gait. She stared at him intently and this unsettled Otto. He may have been guardian of the sand, but he was fiercely shy of beautiful, bronzed women, dripping wet from the sea. He pinched the whistle, dangling from his neck, held onto it as if it were a tiny life preserver.

She smiled wanly as if she knew his secret. Had she seen him pilfering sand? He was at odds with himself for not seizing this chance to speak to her, but if he somehow mustered the words, what

would he say? Fortunately, his pockets were only half-filled. Not that this kept him from worrying. He patted his right hip to make sure. When she turned her head, he scooped out a handful, tossed it into the wind. The moment passed and she got away. He didn't see which way she'd gone, but he could finally exhale as he watched a seagull, chomping on bits of a sweet roll.

The next day, right after he'd scolded a nun who'd used her collecting tin for a big scoop, he saw the bronze beauty. He tried to compose himself as she shadowed him along the beach. He'd stop, take a short glance and he'd see, out of the corner of his eye, she was following him, but respecting his distance. She seemed to enjoy this and carried on her game with coquettish aplomb. After a while, he couldn't keep himself from grinning. He hadn't had a good flirt since he'd delivered pizza the previous summer.

The tide rushed in, wetting his feet. He plodded ahead, wading up to his waist and his sandy pockets splayed out, floated to the top of the sea, and a powdery pink swilled under the plashing white crests. She was only a few backstrokes behind him now and he began to smell his own sweat, knew it better than the briny waves, crashing into his skin.

He dove under, didn't want her to see him doggy paddling. He tapped the ocean floor and stayed down for about a minute, watched two bright orange fish, darting after each other, and when he surfaced, warm water spilled from his nostrils. He hadn't a moment to get his bearings, when a soft hand grazed his back. The bronze beauty had sidled up to him and goosebumps ran the length of his hairless, salty spine all the way down to his tailbone. When she removed her hand, Otto felt that she'd crossed some metaphysical threshold. The goosebumps lingered. They were more than bumps, a bond had formed, an unspoken kismet, linking their shared desire although he wasn't sure what it meant except that he felt connected to her in a way he'd never been with anybody else before. He offered his elbow as they strolled together, the undertow sucking the bottoms of their feet.

As the day wore thin and the day-trippers went home and the panoply of candy-colored umbrellas and blankets folded up, they still walked, arms linked, along the cooling sand. The bronze beauty stooped to snatch an empty pail and spoke for the first time in a mellifluous, Sardinian accent.

"Can you help me fill this pail?" she asked.

"Why would you want me to do that?" Otto replied.

"To build a castle of course," she said.

Ashamed of himself for speaking so bluntly, he kept wondering if she knew about his indiscretion. If Vagabondo spotted him this late on the beach, he'd skin his hide. He never had this queasy feeling with the scrum of beachcombers, hogging up the sun and sand during the day.

They filled the small plastic pail many times that night by the edge of the reef and dug up the pink sand, barehanded like two overgrown kids. They let it spill through their fingers and sometimes blew on it. They toiled at a leisurely pace, under the glimmering blue crescent moon. He loved her name Beatrice, the name of Dante's unrequited love. They carried on in this slow, deliberate manner. Otto hadn't built a sand castle in god knows how long. He wasn't sure if he ever finished one since he had always been more of a Frisbee and boogie-boarding kid.

Beatrice told him that the beautiful pink sand on Budelli beach had once belonged to her Great Uncle Count Timorasso. Count Budelli had stolen the sand and now the kind people, from her town, were slowly bringing it back to where it belonged. Otto was moved by this, and offered to help, admitted, shamefully, that he'd taken some for himself, but he was happy to recompense her family. Beatrice smiled and said him it was all right. She wouldn't conspire to take a single grain off the beach. Fate would handle all the gory details.

Each night she arrived a bit later to the beach. Otto had never been a watch-glancer, but he found himself, trailing off, wondering if she'd appear. When he was alone, time played tricks with his mind. He saw the beach disintegrating, but it wasn't any trick, and he was responsible. He had doubts. What if Beatrice was pulling his leg? As the divots became holes, and the holes became ravines, and the

ravines became gulches, and the gulches tore into canyons, each ungainly chasm of sand lost its dazzling pinkness and looked more like the crumbly cinder blocks behind St. Luke's parking lot. He hated himself for the hypocrite he'd become and wished, rather unconvincingly, that she wouldn't show.

When he saw her beautiful eyes, he melted. Life had become a queasy ride, but bearable. Finally, he was living. How much of our time on this dust ball was wasted? The vast bulk whittled away, sleeping, piddling through daily routines, lamenting our indiscretions, or else trapped in a lull. When were we alive?

He loved their precious time together though he wished she'd spend the night with him. Otto was too nice to push the issue, but he kept reminding her that he had a good stash of pink sand in his flat. Maybe they could build an indoor sand castle. He almost hated himself for using this sophomoric ploy because he still didn't know if her refusal was out of principle, her claiming to be old-fashioned or she simply didn't really like him. When he invited himself over to her place, she brushed it off, and Otto quickly suggested a chaperone, somebody from her family, to keep an eye of them. She nearly turned pale.

Maybe she was married? His pulse raced in the sweet clip between dusk and dawn, Otto loved every moment of it, but lamented the fact that besides them, and a few loitering seagulls, nobody had seen them together. Nobody could prove he wasn't imaging this bliss.

Then one night, during a meteor shower, they made love inside their giant pink sand castle. As the waves broke onto the shore, the bronze beauty bared her soul. She was just a sweater-folder from Queens who'd always wanted to go to Italy and make love on the beach.

"You mean this was all a big fat lie?" Otto said.

"Don't look at me that way," she said.

"How else should I?"

The blood orange sun was rising over the horizon and the crater-strewn beach was more hideous than Rockaway at low tide. Oscar stared and saw the pimples on her cheek, the shadows under her eyes. She hurried back into her bikini, but once it was on, she still carried herself in that naked aura. He cursed himself for falling for her. He could've met her back home on his way to the grocery store, getting on the Q10 Bus, or at one of those keggers on the ball field.

She blushed, almost seemed relieved to have this off her chest. He didn't share her sense of relief, it stuck in his craw. If it had all been one big ruse and there was no Count Timorasso, no conspiring Count Budelli then where had all the sand gone? And those poor flamingoes? Who knew how long before those last three seagulls, teetering like drunks, went *poof*.

"This doesn't change how I feel," she said.

"Is your name even Beatrice?"

"No, it's Maggie."

He slid his arm off her shoulder and though she'd begun to shiver, he made no effort to warm her. The gentle roll of the crashing waves bubbled into the abyss.

That morning he brought one of his tubs filled with pink sand to the beach. When he tossed it, to fill the void, the ashen sand seemed to devour whatever was left of the whisking pink grains. He brought all his tubs, soda bottles, and cooking pots, none of them seemed to bring back any color to the beach. If anything, the beach seemed to erode even more so.

By fall, the beach looked like hell, a desolate, ungodly spit of land. There was nowhere to pitch an umbrella, nowhere to flip a towel on the crater-strewn beach. The blades of grass, once whistling in the briny breeze, were gone, and worst of all, the sand was blanched of its rosy brilliance. Sawdust would've been an improvement. The day-trippers gasped in fright. Nobody snapped pictures or bronzed themselves in the blinding sun. They came as mourners rubbed in sunblock, sighing and shaking their heads.

Oscar couldn't bear to walk the barren stretch at night, but he needed to see her again. He needed to tell her it was time to bring back the sand. Those crazy dreams of building their own private paradise was plain nuts. She'd understand. They'd both been swept up in their blistering zeal. There wasn't any sand to find, nor was there any bronze beauty, Beatrice or was it Maggie. It all seemed so whispery. Oscar was beyond repenting; his conscience had him in a pretzel hold.

He broke down and sobbed like a fool. He gave himself up to Vagabondo who didn't believe him. Vagabondo thought he was too stupid to pull off something so perverse even though he knew Oscar stuffed his pockets in broad daylight like an unshaven gypsy. He kicked him out on his ass.

Oscar still showed up every day, searching for pink sand, somebody must have a little to spare. People tossed him coins and sometimes gave him a roll or a piece of cheese. Anybody who was willing to listen was treated to a story about the beautiful pink sand, but there was nobody left who remembered.

CLEAVE
By: Kathie Jacobson

cleave¹ (vb) to split or cause to split, esp along a natural weakness
cleave² (vb) to cling, to adhere

Just above the equator, as the earth swelters in a shriveling drought, impoverished men lose reason. Homes are burned. Humanity evaporates in the sun as bodies chase and flee. Death litters the so-called road to safety. The news reports this is a land on the verge of genocide. (The verge? you ask.)

A baby cries alone in a field. A mercenary, carries her home.

One day he will tell her unspeakable stories, answer her questions. One day she will whisper like a breeze beside his bed.

CLEAVED

Conscripted boys approached—machetes high, pumped biceps as they cleansed the village, erased names, fileted the pious, cleaved hands from arms, legs from hips. Heads oozed in tortured piles. Rage littered the sky; sheets of ash that once had been walls burned on the breeze. Terror nestled in eyes of one-time friends.

They would have carved you from your mother's arms, emptied you onto the growing mound: no earth for cover. She slipped her pinky into the palate of your new-made mouth, swallowed her breath, slid beneath the pit where feces stewed.

When boys whooped victory and ran from there, she wrapped you in her skirt, bared her legs to thorn and insect bite, clutched you, a bundle in her arm's curl, and fled.

You slept and she hastened to the running road where dirt turned red. She stumbled on clumps of mud-red dirt marooned between the fallen. Bodies tangled on the path like gnarled roots above the ground.

Life trickled through her shredded skin, stained your blanket. Blisters cracked on her nose and lips; she had no eyes, no face; left you no name.

Singing your sleepy, your mother tucked you in the matted weeds. She brushed her lips whispering against your forehead. Saying this is the place where your father stood, where your father stood in the time before.

You knew her smell. A whiff of overripe melon and still you turn, confused, expecting.

GENOCIDE

In another era, you might gather flowers from that field. You might stand there, blades of grass slipping between your toes, your knees bowed as you bend to pull small red blossoms that scavenge moisture from the sand. On the road, grey whiskered men would shuffle, cigarette smoke trailing them. You would know the yellow globs of chaw that linger where boys spit on the uneven stone path. You would carry a sack with a mango. An orange. You would feel no hunger.

That day the grass thirsted, tall, and reedy, half of it trampled flat. Weighted.

You could see the sky burnt colorless by the sun from where you lay on the ground. You could see grass scrape against that faded blue. You could see, if you looked that far, the haze of heat as it rose. You could hear the rattle of dry seeds as they complained about the wind. The creek bed, scratched like a surgical scar, lay soundless. The road thundered with passing feet. You could see shoulders bouncing, heads jostling above the tufted grass. Their voices pierced your dreams. The baritone of panic. The alto of flight.

You lay wrapped in bright colors a mile from the dusty square where fire blazed, blanket corners knotted to keep snakes from your skin. Smoke filled your lungs. Sweat dried to salty film on your cheeks. Hunger wailed from your lips, lifted from the grass. And they turned.

Beside you a girl stood, her nappy slipping. Boys cracked blades against her bones, their swings more savage because they towered over her small frame. A boy nicked your hand, raised his cleaver as if to open you like a casaba. Your mother's wail raced around the edges of the sky and he turned toward her. She waved her arm like a worried bird. She extended her arm like a broken wing and hobbled on the ground, lured rebels like foxes from your nest of matted weeds. She drew their knives and left you sleeping without allegiance on the sunbaked ground.

She hobbled on the road, dizzy, shrieking. The boy grinned and she saw teeth, not yet finished in his mouth. She saw his face, still soft and whiskerless.

Her torment shaped you, pierced you like prayer, and changed the structure of your ear.

Beside you the girl. Beside her, her hands. Her feet. In blood pools, flies paddled drunk. Because they bathed in blood-red pools, flies did not settle in your eyes.

PEACE KEEPER

He was a man drawn to fire. He was one of them. He belonged to no one. A map of battles scarred his dreams.

His first wife left him over silence at the table where they chewed corn and beef, their forks squeaking against porcelain plates with pink and blue flowers on the rims. His biceps grew with lifting body parts and corpses to clear the roads. He tore sleeves from his shirt. His palms chafed where blisters grew, then popped, then peeled, skin hanging thickly from a final border. His second wife recoiled at the gloveless leather of his skin.

Dry-eyed, distracted, with a belly that did not swell, his second wife shrugged one shoulder when he told her he was leaving. A soldier goes when he is called. A wife waits: in her bathrobe, in her dress, in her kitchen, in her garden. She knew he would go. When she married him, she knew he would go. She watched him in the mirror as she glossed her lips. He looked at the glassy version of her eyes, finished her shrug.

Both shoulders rose then fell to attention.

HIDDEN

You are Lucy McHenry Mack. You were never a baby. You did not cry or gurgle. You did not blow bubbles with the flow of air through saliva drooling from your lips. You did not smile. You did not babble. Your flat eyes held emptiness, stared at the air where your mother should have been if your mother did not let you go. Did not drop you. Did not leave you soft upon the ground. Did not wrap you in colors and tuck you between tufts of grass that lingered like hair on the head of a man with cancer. Did not forget you in a field where the grass crackled with the slither of snakes and the stomp of insect feet. Did not squirrel you away from the whistle of swinging blades.

UNDONE

Before, he kept time to the rumble of the march. In his mind, he heard Coltrane. Dolphy. He slept dreamless and woke with sour breath. He breathed into his hands, inhaled his air to know he was alive. His feet trod with precision on hard earth and soft flesh in equal measure.

After he tripped over an infant's cry, found life small and helpless in the field, his stomach churned. After, he saw people lying breathless, eyes wide with fear. He slept only when exhaustion sealed off dreams. After, he could not close his eyes against the corpse-filled acres. Death loomed, visible.

He carried the baby from town to town, in the crook of his elbow, his hand a gentle armor, his AK slant against his shoulder.

SHOULDERED

Inside a padlocked gate, an old house crowded orphans, head-to-toe, in beds; their bodies sore with underuse, their ribs wrapped in skin.

Light dribbled from chandeliers dangling from the wood-beamed ceiling. Grime layered like sedimentary rock on children's skin. Cholera lurked.

He carried you there, as he knew he should. He could not let go.

The second wife beamed like headlights when he Skyped a picture.

His face scoured your cheek when he roughed you goodnight. Rough tendered you. Like him, soft voices caused your spine to curl, your head to shrink like water evaporating in the sun.

The soldier rode you on his shoulders, the ones that shrug and you held on. You held on across the desert and the sea. You held on while paper mounded in an office.

He dozed on the plane that carried you. His arms surrounded you. Like a nest.

You held on and arrived at a house, its window boxes filled with pink. Petunias dangled like skirts of fancy girls; pink, like shirts on the machete men who severed your mother and pruned your hand.

Birds flitted through leaves of a tree that tapped your window in the wind.

They pinned a medal on his chest. A choir sang.

HOME

At breakfast his wife shrieked, smile faded, when your hand lay wooden on the table. She did not expect a broken child. He boiled water, poured tea and sighed into her wailing. You ate cheese still in its paper. You would eat grasshoppers or crickets without barbeque.

On the street children pointed at your arm when your body grew too big for the hand toned to someone else's skin. In school, girls would ask. Some, shy and halting, turned their gaze to your shoes as they spoke. Some bold, squinted at your eyes. Boys did not wonder about your hand once your breasts bulged forward.

You did not miss your hand.

Where is your mother? That bothered you.

You were certain. She was walking in the desert still, her feet badly burned against the barren sand. You stomped and begged to know your name, the one before he cradled you. Rage darkened your eyes, filled you like a messenger's sack. You held a knife against your skin. The second wife cried behind the door.

The soldier watched. You pushed him away, staggered between surrender and blame.

TENDER

The second wife peered from across the room or through a kitchen window as you tendered dolls into nests on the ground and then, with great care, removed their limbs. You made a study of plastic links: slide-and-washer, pin-and-donut, and ball-and-socket. You swiveled arms at shoulders, legs at hips in concentric circles, flat or angled. You cut elastic bands and heads poured off shoulders. Sometimes you filled a doll with petals from the garden, pressed a limb back into service. Inside, petals resolved to dirt.

When the soldier shivered in the night, woke, his forehead wet with sweat, his pupils grand against the dark, this second wife walked him to your doorway.

One day, she whispered, you would sew limbs onto broken children.

GROWN

At any hour, you saw the sky and every color interrupted you, drained motion from your limbs. A doctor told you that your teeth would fail. Poor nutrition. Eating sand. You bit holes in your lips and lost your taste for melon.

In the news, they sent boys, now men, to prison. In your sleep, the men, still boys, amputated dreams.

You studied people in the street, attended to the curve of lips, the slope of nose. You followed every black haired man with peppery whiskers, your gaze a question: perhaps the one with shiny shoes who hid his eyes with dark glasses, perhaps the one with slip-on clogs and sockless ankles. Words filtered across the tables, syllables stretched in accents: thick from the south, twang from the middle.

At the end of the war they slipped into the crowd like any other man, no tattoos scarred their foreheads, no feathers tarred against their skin.

The soldier held you when you cried. His shirt stained wet. He looked over your head and across the road. Taught you to see nothing.

CLEAVE

The soldier walks with a cane linked to his belt loop so that he does not lose it from his grip. His steps slow, his lean heavy as he swings his right foot forward, presses upright on his strong left. He carries a cross-body bag with a wallet, some papers, all he has seen. A folded buck knife waits inside a leather pocket on his belt.

You cleave to this man with red and gold bars pinned on his coat. His shoes shine like mirrors. In them, you see your face. His uniform drapes loose from his shoulders and lines web from his lips. You watch his wrist below his sleeve. Dark hairs curl on his arm.

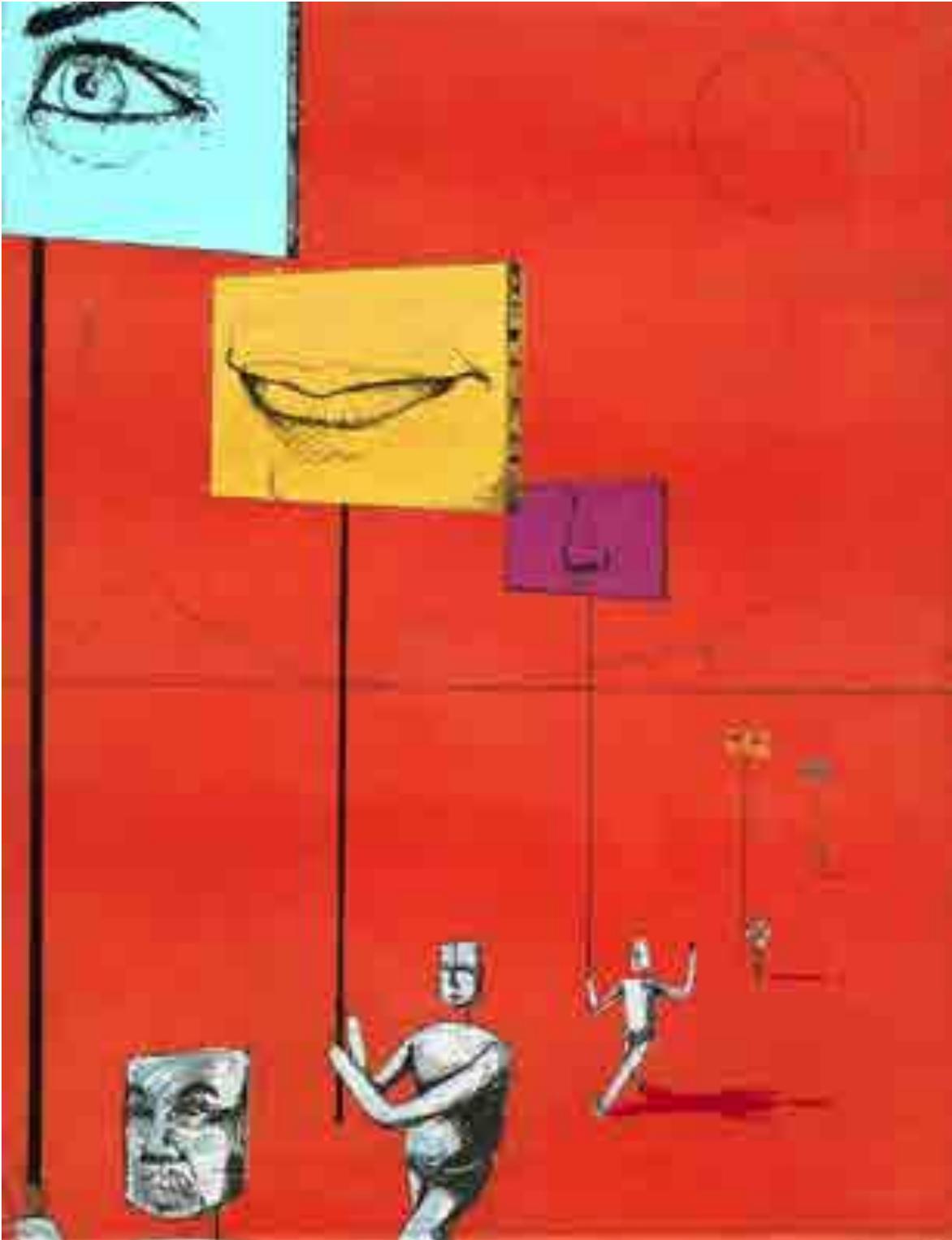
One-day two mothers will come to you. The first mother, his second wife, with her hair pulled from her face, her eyes drawn with care, the skin on her cheek grown thin, transparent, will offer you a hand. You will not take it. You will stand, your shoulder grazing against hers. The second mother, your mother, will stand apart. Her feet will sink below the floorboards. She will swat the air as if she is pushing aside a tangle of vines. Her eyes will not blink. Her lips will part as if words have found their way into her mouth.

You cannot hear her. She has been gone so long from the field where she left you. She is wrapped like a chain around your neck. She is threaded through your braids. She is in the curve of your waist, the sap of your navel.

The soldier will lie down.

You will test his cheek; run your finger up the rough of his whiskers.

The second wife's shoulders will shudder and you will lift your arm to cradle her.



The Protests at New Waterloo
By: Ege Al'Bege

THE CONFIRMATION OF CHERISHING
THE COLORS WITH YOU
By: Phaedra DeJarnette

Blue flames and orange eyes. Hands are pressing against backs and pink lips press against each other. Gold words on the tips of anxious tongues. Yellow flowers dipped in happiness and white grins in gratitude. Love is being harvested and we will reap the success.

Blonde hairs are shambled and breaths are hitched and I'm trying to keep myself composed. Laughs of nymphs are being heard because of clumsy jokes. There are shoulders being brushed against each other with accidental purposefulness. Quiet sorry and quick shrugs that accept apologies. But I'm glad I bumped into you because I have to hear the moving tide that sits in the back of your throat.

Blue bubbles on white screens and smiles that you can't see. Late night calls and hearing him say that he likes me. It's brown skin feeling beautiful because you're looking past the amount of melanoma that has stained my epidermis since birth. You make an average face feel like an emerald.

White noise in the background as pictures flash across the silver screen. But I'm not looking at the movie. My brown eyes are focused on the way your hand was on top of my knees and your hazel eyes embrace all of my quirks. It's watching you sigh heavily because we both know that you would rather have your cerise lips on mine.

Purple bruises on lips and black hands stopping at twelve. A mesh of interracial skin and the red heat filling the calcium enriched rods. Opaque water hitting windows while we waltz to a slow song. Preferably, 'Kiss me' because I want to kiss you all the time. Our crimson mouths could always be on top of each other and I wouldn't find the situation immoral.

Cheeks painted with vermilion and furrowed eyebrows due to confusion. How am I falling in love? Black skies are dancing with a crescent moon and white stars. The night is combusting with love and my mind is being tied down to the idea of being with you. Forever. Dreams of lavender and coral and finally finding a new home. And I found a home in your arms. I like having you as an oasis.

Pale feet seeping through beige sand and cerulean waves crashing into lonely souls. Sand dollars are more expensive than the price of worthlessness. Wine stained lips because I actually put on makeup for you. It doesn't matter than you follow the yellow brick road of clichés by saying that you prefer me without cosmetics. I like looking my best for you.

Black eyelashes pressing against each other as one eye closes in a wink and awkward chuckles sprint out of throats. Vibrant tonsils dance to the beat of your voice. A green haze of envy as I watch attractive people laugh at your puns and sardonic language. Your attitude is as azure as the breeze in the sky and I don't like that you get along well with everyone. I'm possessive and I think that you should belong to me. Only me.

A pink brain is on the brink of exasperation because it has never handled such an immediate incoming of contentment. Obscure patterns of angst usually suffocated my mind, but a drop of joy and a change in the cold weather came when I met you. The first time I stared into an old friend's eyes.

Concentric circles on the pad of nude fingers. Separate hues colliding together with stroke of a paintbrush. Abstract art jumps off the canvas as our relationship deepens. We become a permanent splatter on the apron of the artist, but it doesn't matter to him; he still finds the blemish we created appealing to the eye.

Harsh red words will be spat during nights full of spite, with white wonderland cuddles after a resolution is created. We bask in the amber sun radiating us with memories of bliss. Calm indigo

indolence as we spend a rainy Sunday morning in our pajamas drinking coffee and watching Parks and Recreation (obviously the best way to spend a Sunday morning). Noses inhale the scent of lavender as the plants that are our love continue to grow and sway in the spring wind. A personal shield of black depression has wilted away the longer I stare into your eyes.

We started as a blank canvas with the idea of devoting our emotions to each other. We are the product of a colorful, emotional, hurricane ripping through the piece. We are the product of recklessness and an uncomfortable first date. The painter looks at his work and decides to add one more stroke of pink so that the viewer can see how much we love each other

But their grey perceptions don't matter to me. I can see how much you love me through your gentle caresses on my cheek and I can hear it when your rosy tongue hits the roof of your mouth. Yet, I don't owe you gratitude for loving me. I owe you my soul because you made me happy.



Wind Warriors
By: Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

MONUMENT By: Thomas Kunz

The wasp circles me. Morning is our private time. It's April, marigolds and baneberries line the manicured lawns of this small liberal arts college in the Champlain Valley, a few miles east of Burlington, and I'm grading papers on the steps outside Morton Hall. The wasp and I observe Professor Brannon—it keeps me close to her.

“She looks unhappy,” I say.

The wasp agrees.

Brannon strides urgently across the courtyard and bites into an apple, green and bruised. The wasp never attacks her. Some months ago her husband committed suicide—no note, no formal goodbye. He's just gone now. That's all I really know about her life. There's a connection somewhere. The wasp will inform me soon—it promised.

“The plan,” the wasp taunts. “She need.”

I don't question it.

I tried to block out the wasp's voice when it first spoke to me a year ago, after English Chairman Claudia Ridley requested I take a leave of absence for misplacing master copies of our department's American Literature midterms—the official reason. Ridley also told me to seek treatment for my supposed “condition”—the unofficial reason. It was then the wasp took interest in my wellbeing and introduced me to “the talk.”

But now I'm back at work, and I know “the talk.” It's no secret that I'm different; doctors say I'm schizophrenic, but that's untrue. I am, however, plugged into frequencies no one else understands, especially doctors.

Before last week's faculty meeting, I used “the talk” in a conversation with Ernest Wyld by the bulletin boards. I told Wyld my editorial expertise could drastically improve the new literary journal. Now, I manage all prose submissions and assist undergrad Holly Garlow, the only student to acknowledge me outside of class, with art direction and layout. The wasp encourages allies. Although I cherish the abnormality and secrecy of our relationship, I wish the rest of the world knew—maybe they'd see me as important, even special.

Ridley and Brannon occasionally gossip in the copy room. Just yesterday, the wasp overheard them talking about Wyld's newborn. “Ugly”—that's how Ridley put it. Brannon agreed without seeing a photo. This is how things work around here.

But in the courtyard this morning, Brannon is sad.

“She suffers,” says the wasp, and we watch her yellowing teeth sink into the white mush surrounding the apple's core. “Talk ‘the talk’. Now.”

I approach Brannon in the parking lot. Head downturned, leaning against her Honda Fit, she's fishing for car keys inside her purse. The wasp follows closely but prefers to watch from afar. “Mandelbaum,” it says before fleeing. A riddle. The wasp does this.

I study Brannon, bell-shaped in a wool skirt with embroidered dragonflies, and she's rough around the edges—maybe a little lonely, or heartbroken. A copy of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*—from her Advanced Literary Criticism Class, a recent addition to the course catalogue this semester—rests crookedly on her sunroof. Before I was institutionalized, I pitched a course called *Crazed Obsessions and Mad Lovers in 20th Century Literature*; I sketched out the title in black lettering on dark red poster board, hoping to advertise in the hallways, but Ridley thought it was too strange for the English curriculum. I think she is wrong, but no one enjoys admitting mistakes.

Brannon's chapped mouth hugs the apple cradled in her hand. She seems lost in thought.

“Excuse me,” I say, pausing beside her passenger door, eyeing the book on the sunroof between us. “You use the Mandelbaum translation. I heard it’s the most accurate.”

“Yes,” says Brannon timidly, maybe a little shocked, wiping her mouth. “Are you familiar with *Inferno*?”

I nod, catching a glimpse of my distorted reflection in the car’s shiny gray paint.

Her shoulders relax. All of that brittle, gray hair calls attention to the wrinkles on her forehead. She’s in her late sixties, twice my age. She could’ve been my mother.

Brannon wraps the rest of her apple, browning now, inside a napkin, and then opens the car door, but she hesitates, holding onto the handle, staring at the elm trees in the north courtyard east of us. I look too. Their bark is blackened. Knotted branches, leafy in patches, hang tiredly. We stand silently for a moment.

She clutches the book under her arm. “Someone needs to remove those hives,” she says, pointing at the elms.

“Hives?”

“Yes.” She’s slightly standoffish. “I noticed them last fall, a strange time of year for bees. The dead wood attracted a colony. Have you seen it?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“I’ve read my books there for over a decade. It’s a peaceful spot to read.” She pauses, perhaps thinking of her husband or a time when her career was fresh, when her enthusiasm was infectious. “I suppose it doesn’t really matter,” she says with such finality, dismissing the thought with one shake of her head.

We share the warmth of sunlight on our faces. It’s not the right time to pry about her husband’s suicide or how she spent her downtime on campus since his passing. Silence is also part of “the talk”—it’s important to carefully choose the right moments.

The students in my composition class are half-asleep. I’ve grown used to it. I’m bored with their lack of initiative. After I was institutionalized, Ridley took away all of my upper-level English classes and restricted me to composition. She claimed it was a nice way to “rediscover my footing in the world of academia,” whatever that means. I don’t mind the undemanding course prep—it’s a change of pace; student essays are mostly about family, personal heroes, and partying.

After I assign a pointless free writing exercise, they are cattle lined up in rows, heads buried in their papers, a few of them scribbling remedial confessions, others playing hangman. I never show my authority. I do not dress the role either—tie askew, collar undone, shirt untucked, hair unwashed. They do not respect me. Other than a timeslot, we have no commonality.

Leaning against one of the classroom’s back windows, sunlight pouring in and roasting the room, I close my eyes and listen to the sounds of scrawling pencils and the florescent lights’ electrical hum. Outside, the groundskeeper’s lawnmower chokes on an uneven grassy mound; none of my students notices the sound, a mechanical coughing fit. I squint for a better look. The heavysset man in a shrunken uniform swats at his cap, hops off his mower, and darts across the main courtyard.

The wasp appears now, silent and crawling along the windowsill. Its little legs are arched and inching closer. This is my class time, there are far too many spectators, and if it senses my anger, I worry it will turn against me. It is, and will always be, a wasp, regardless of how close we’ve become.

“Not a good time,” I say, barely audible.

I peek back at my students, most have stopped writing, but they do not seem to care about what I’m doing: Miranda Brenner tries to conceal her iPhone—she is texting Bryan Manning who

sits four rows to her left. Miranda and Bryan are “involved.” The wasp saw them having sex in a car behind the Cultural Arts Building last Friday. Miranda is sly and witty, and Bryan is brash and loud. *Bryan Manning has a big cock* is also carved into a wooden bench outside the Waterford Student Center; it makes sense—he writes with an astounding degree of confidence.

“Please go away,” I say through a frustrated whisper. It does not listen to me, which is not unusual. It creeps along the metal ledge and over my fingernails and rests on the knuckle of my ring finger. “Three,” it says, an aggressive hiss.

“What?”

“She come by three. Tree by four.”

“I don’t understand.”

My students must hear me.

“The plan.” It holds the ‘n’ for an extra beat.

“What’s the plan?”

“Now. Plan now!”

“What’s tree by four mean?”

“See the tree.”

Outside, lifeless elms sway against the cloudless sky.

“Please, I don’t—”

“Today she see,” it buzzes. “Tree by four.”

“She?”

“Brannon,” it speaks sharply. “Tree by four.”

“Is she in danger?”

“Motor man run. Motor man run.”

It’s a little after two. Holly, unusually quiet, increases the volume on her iPod and formats poems for the new journal layout. Her pale fingers circularly maneuver the mouse. We spend many hours in the lab together. She hasn’t mentioned that she’s single, but her cell never rings, she hardly smiles, and most guys, except for me, think she is a lesbian.

Holly is a tortured romantic, has a black heart tattoo on her fist, and she will not hesitate to show it off. Often moody, her brilliance misunderstood by the department, she is reliable—coming in on weekends to prep the new binding machine without being asked, organizing all the memory sticks according to storage capacity, even dusting the monitors and keyboards.

Ernest Wyld dislikes Holly. He always calls her “You,” as if it’s her name. Wyld became impossible to digest after his wife gave birth to their “ugly” daughter; last week he barked orders at Holly and me about ink retailers and costs. I tuned him out, unlike the wasp, but Holly isn’t as gifted in the art of silence. Once she told Wyld to go fuck himself, but even Wyld, immediately dismissing it, knew he’d be lost without her help.

I stand behind her and glance at the markups on the screen. She opens a new Quark file and formats the margins; the subject heading is (Inf. XIII, 115-117). She imports a sketch of Dante’s *Inferno* from Gustave Dore’s collection; the large coffee table book, pages curling from humidity, is open on the desk beside her. A note from Brannon, fashioned as a bookmark, rests between its pages. It reads: *While your work shows promise, there is an attendance policy. Eight unexcused absences will not result in a passing grade—Prof. Brannon.*

“That’s not for the journal. Is it for Brannon’s class?” I ask.

“Screw Brannon.”

This is a typical Holly response.

“Perhaps we should talk,” I say, worried she’ll end up failing.

Her fingers abandon the mouse. She swivels her chair around to face me. Her head is level with my crotch and I take a few steps back. She notices. “About what?”

“You’re skipping class.”

Holly rolls her eyes. “Her lessons are sleeping pills. And she’s not the same.”

“Her husband just died.”

“Six months ago.”

“Still, Holly.”

“Then maybe she should take some time off.”

“They frown at that kind of thing around here.”

“Like how they were with you.”

Holly knows I was institutionalized, though she’s unclear about the specifics. One time she saw my lithium prescription, but those meds never worked since I do not have a problem. I gave them a chance for a few months in case the doctors were right, but I trust my instincts if nothing else. People never trust their instincts anymore. I am not like that.

“That’s not the point,” I continue, half-lecturing. “You could go easy on her. You’re one of the most insightful students in the English program, but you have this attitude.”

“Because the faculty is a joke. Nothing gets done around here. You know that. They should’ve created that section of *Crazed Lovers* for you. That would’ve been a class with some depth.”

“I know, Holly, and it disappoints me, but I should be setting an example.”

“You’re not like most teachers,” she says. “You’re different.”

Her eyes, dark, caked with black make-up, hold onto mine, bloodshot and alert. She made comments like this before, but she’s just a girl, no more than nineteen. I admit, sometimes I draw the shades in my office and masturbate, thoughts of her devouring me. Yes, I am different than most teachers, but she’s corrupted enough. We’re both corrupted.

“Just do what you need to pass.”

“What do you think I’m doing?” She sighs at the computer. “I’m putting together handouts for her stupid class.”

I examine the sketch on the screen. It’s a forest with half human and half tree-like figures, the two transformed into one creature: long, twisted, covered in chipped bark, and scorched leaves, arms merging into the legs of another, painfully contorted, an immeasurable sorrow on their faces.

“What are those?”

“Suicide victims,” she says, admirably. “You’ve read *Inferno*?”

“Not recently. Why trees?”

Holly looks hard at the figures. “After the last judgment, these bodies were taken into hell and hung on trees. They weren’t worthy of wearing their own skin anymore. They can’t speak unless someone breaks off a piece of their bark, triggering a pain like the suicide itself.”

She turns away and resumes her work, but I don’t leave her side, unable to retreat from the image on the screen, remembering what the wasp said—tree by four. I lean in closer, studying, trying to find the code in everything, unaware that my middle torso is compressed against the back of her chair.

I’m unresponsive to her arms, slipping around me so quickly and smoothly that once she begins, stopping her is too much of an insult. She spins around and leans her head into my chest. Her hair smells of flower oils. Her moist hands work under my shirt then travel up the length of my back. We don’t say a word, staring at the screaming trees who want their bodies back.

My chin drops onto the crown of her head. She lets out a faint moan. My blood is warm. I’m afraid to touch her and the images of stingers—long and sharp, forming on my fingertips, wanting to sink into her milky skin—invade my thoughts. I feel a shortness of breath, a tingle in my legs.

When I glance over the screen again, the trees are gone, hidden by the screensaver. I back away from her. “I can’t do this.” Air fills my lungs.

Holly slouches in her chair. “You can’t or won’t?”

“You know we can’t.”

She leans forward and folds her hands like this is the beginning of a debate. “You’ve never thought about it.”

“I’m a teacher, Holly.”

“Then teach me something.”

“I don’t think so.”

“You’re the only one who gets me.”

“Give it time. There’ll be others,” I say and it certainly comes off as patronizing.

“Fuck you.”

This is Holly’s rough exterior, not Holly. We are both very lonely. But we never admit this. The wasp agrees as well; it eavesdrops on us in the publishing lab whenever the windows are open. It always keeps its eyes on me, sizing up my students and colleagues, lending its advice, a *consigliere* for ‘the talk’.

I sit in the uncomfortable armchair outside Ridley’s office. The departmental secretary has already left and most of my colleagues are still in their classes for another fifteen minutes. Trying to forget about what happened with Holly, I sort through journal submissions. Wyld and Ridley, muddled voices serious in tone, converse in the next room. In her email to me an hour ago, Ridley didn’t mention the meeting’s details, and now I begin to worry. The wasp hasn’t spoken to me since my morning class. I wonder if it’s angry.

I struggle through the first paragraph of a short story—Bryan Manning’s first person narrative about a high school football star who deservingly receives a blow job on his way to the ‘big game’ then crashes his parents’ BMW. The story is dreadful, but his writing possesses ungodly confidence and authority that I finish reading it and wonder about the characters.

Wyld exits Ridley’s office. I press my red pen against the page to create the illusion of concentration. When he sees me, he walks over as if I invited him. He is plump and lethargic.

“How are the submissions?”

“Great,” I say, glancing down at the phrase, “*My cock was like a rocket in the outer space of her lips. Swallow that stick, Jedi-style.*” “Talented bunch this semester.”

“Splendid,” he says, reeking of peanut butter. “Say, did I ever show you...” He reaches into his back pocket, removes his wallet, and then pulls out a small photograph with torn edges. His large frame settles on the antique chair’s arm. “This is my little girl,” he says, offering the photo, never taking his eyes off it. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

I hardly look. The photo is a pink blur. She’s not “ugly.” She’s not “cute.” She is nothing special like the rest of us, and maybe if she learns this now, the world will not swallow her. I nod approvingly and force a smile. “Her bone structure is very prominent.”

I’m certain we are both trying to make sense of what I just said. This isn’t ‘the talk’. Where is the wasp?

Wyld, smiling at his little girl, slowly retracts the photo. “My wife and I are thrilled.”

“I’m sure.”

“So...” His pause makes me nervous. I feel his eyes crawling over me. “How’s Holly doing with the new journal?”

“I really wouldn’t know.” I look away from him. “She’s okay. She seems to be doing well, from what I know about it, which is not much.” I say all of this too fast, shifting my legs.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay.” I laugh, louder than normal, trying to remember “the talk.” “Are *you* okay?” I hold up the pages, a random gesture fueling the awkwardness. “The journal is important.”

“I appreciate all the work you’re doing,” he says. “It’s hard for me to find time. My wife and new daughter at home—”

“I understand—”

“But if I can be honest with you. I’m not sure we’ll have the funding to continue with the printed journal. We may need to publish it exclusively online.”

“I don’t follow.”

“One of our groundskeepers came into contact with a wasp colony by the elm trees in the north courtyard. He was rushed to the hospital. Turns out, he’s allergic. Doctors are unsure if he’ll make it, actually. I don’t know why the college hasn’t made a point to cut down the trees. Now we’re anticipating budget problems across the board. There’s a pending lawsuit and potential fine from the EPA. Didn’t you get the memo?”

“I was teaching composition.”

“Right,” he says. “Well...it’s a shame.”

“I’m not surprised,” I say, shuffling Bryan’s paper to the bottom of the stack for no reason.

“Why do you say that?”

“The wasps probably felt threatened,” I say, unsure of why I offered any insight. This is not ‘the talk’. I find no comfort within the uncomfortable space between us. “Lawnmowers cause a vibration. And wasps are aggressors.” I fasten my red pen inside my inner pocket.

“You certainly know a lot about wasps.”

“Not really.”

“Well, more than the average person.”

“I don’t think so.”

I’m rambling more than the wasp would want.

Ridley interrupts us before I can say more. She steps out of her office and studies me like an insect she wants to swat. I break eye contact with her to examine my watch—half past three. When Wyld stands up, his belly spills over his belt buckle. Ridley tells me to wait in her office while she makes copies of next semester’s course catalogue, which I’m certain has me exclusively assigned to composition sections, if anything at all.

Inside Ridley’s quarters, three large windows overlook the north courtyard. I see Brannon there, sitting Indian style on the grass and reading, twenty yards from the hives. It is almost four, she is by the trees, but what is this plan? Where is the wasp?

I pace around Ridley’s office and watch Brannon in the distance. The glass panes feel like solar panels heating the room. I anxiously loosen my tie. I remember to breathe. Ridley is taking too long. I poke out my head and peer down the hallway. The copier deafeningly crunches—I can smell the toner from here. From what I can see, Brannon is reading a stack of white pages. She’s writing on them. I turn away once more, looking at the door, wanting to dart out.

The wasp crashes into the sweltering glass.

“Plan now!” it says. “He the tree.”

“Who?” I wave my hands. It is provoked and slams into the window again, desperately trying to get inside. For the first time, I am afraid. “Brannon’s husband?”

“He the tree. Speak the tree.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Leave,” it says, pressing its face against the glass. “Tree by four!”

I hurry toward the door, but Ridley’s there. I force a smile and regain my composure.

“Going somewhere?”

“No,” I say, nonchalantly wiping the sweat off my forehead. “I was just seeing if you needed help.”

She holds the stack of pages like my death sentence. “Thanks, but I’m fine. Have a seat,” she says, extending her arm. “It won’t take long.”

“Of course.”

I sit. My back is drench with sweat. Ridley eases into the chair behind her mahogany desk and places next semester’s course catalogue inside one of her drawers, then removes a folder and begins flipping through it.

“How are things?”

Her shoulders are cathedrals, bony and jagged.

“Good. Thanks for asking. Working on the journal has been—”

“I’ll cut right to the chase.”

“Okay.”

She marks one of the pages.

“You’ve put me in a very delicate position.”

“I don’t follow.”

“I’ve watched you in the courtyard talking to yourself.”

“Excuse me?”

She swivels her chair toward the window. I can still see Brannon out there. I glance at my watch—ten minutes to four. “Out there. Each morning.” She is pointing. “I’ve seen you conversing with yourself. Everyone has.”

“Who’s everyone?”

“That’s not the point.”

“What is your point?”

“You’re not any better, are you?” The question sounds too much like a statement. She folds her hands and leans in closer. Her chin is tight and all bone. “I interviewed twelve people before hiring you. As a department, we thought your Raymond Carver teaching demonstration was insightful, but this behavior is something I cannot ignore. I suggest you seek other means of employment after the semester’s end. It pains me to tell you like this, but try to put yourself in my shoes. I hope you find help. I mean that, as a friend.”

“A friend?” I snap. Four chimes on the clock tower outside. “I need to go.”

“I wasn’t finished—”

“Well, apparently I am.”

Walking through the courtyard toward Brannon, I’m certain—her husband is a tree. Everyone else will realize this. The sun hides behind a bed of gray clouds. The elm trees, arranged in a semicircle, stand at the end of an endless grass field, hazy with daffodils and the chirps of mating insects. I’m closer now.

Brannon’s hair flutters in the breeze. She tucks a few wild strands behind her ear and turns around to survey the dead elms. Her husband is one of them. Does she realize this as truth? The wind picks up. My pace quickens. The wasp buzzes around me.

“Center tree,” it says. “No time.”

Brannon’s concentration is broken by the sound of my footsteps crushing the brittle leaves, damp flakes clinging to my laces. She looks up from her papers and offers me a weak smile, tranquil, more curious than anything. Ridley and Wyld wait outside Morton Hall, ready to make their move on me.

“We’re not finished,” yells Ridley, but I tune her out, abandoning the possibility of turning around or ever teaching at this college again. I’m on a direct path toward Brannon and the elms.

Ridley's voice in the distance prompts Brannon to her feet, papers clutched against her heart, alarmed by my presence. I know she is.

"Don't be afraid," I say to her. "He wants to speak to you."

She takes a step backward. "Who?"

"Your husband," I say, motioning toward the center tree.

She examines the wiry branches, stretching across the skyline like crooked fingers, and she begins to cry. "Why are you doing this? What kind of person does this?"

Ridley and Wyld rush toward us, but they'll never make it in time, and although Brannon sees them hurrying in our direction, she's intrigued by my poise, and out of desperation, grief, or maybe guilt, she follows me to the center tree. The both of us stand beside its massive trunk, shavings of curled bark on the dead grass. Brannon seems startled by the massive hive, large as a football, wedged between two thick knots several feet above us, wasps crawling, a black static along its rigid surface.

"There's no need to be afraid," I say.

A jagged branch, secreting a syrupy fungus, hangs eyelevel in the space between us. When my fingers coil around its narrow body, the wasp flits past my left ear. "Now!" it hisses. Gripping the branch, delicate flakes of bark stick to my palm. In one hard motion, the limb snaps, slingshots the other half into the air and whips against the hive, knocking it loose.

"Get away from her!" Ridley shouts, rushing toward us now, stumbling. The heels of her shoes dig into the ground, divots springing up behind her.

Brannon steps back. The wasp lands on my earlobe. "She can't leave!" Its voice, raspy and guttural, zaps me. Her eyes widen. She can hear it. "She stay. She stay." It crawls along the softest cartilage of my ear.

I lunge forward to grip her forearm and she does not resist. Her rubbery skin is cold in my palm. Hundreds of wasps spill out of the hive's bottom above us until a loud pop rings out. Both of us crane our heads at the sound. The hive's top half, unbalanced, leans forward, and then the entire mass collapses. Pieces fall over us.

Ridley screams.

Wyld—uglier than his daughter, out of breath, and wobbling—holds his ribcage and drops to his knees.

Brannon slips. Her hands swipe at the crowded air. Pages, leaping from her fingers, twist and fold in the wind. Her voice, a deafening screech, saturates the courtyard. Heads turn. Bryan Manning and Miranda are there, in the south parking lot. I also see Holly, emotionless and empty in the distance. She's so small from here. They all are.

This familiar room's deep glow smothers me. I've been here a week, the same room as before, and there's no chance of leaving. I don't expect them to understand. How could they? They will not allow visitors. I'm permitted two social hours in the white room with its thick grimy windows overlooking the parking lot. There, I see Holly exit the building, returning to her car. The staff turned her away. When the lights go out, I remember the scent of flower oils in her hair. They feed me pills at nine, noon, three, six, and nine. Lights out at nine-thirty.

I speak my mind. They listen. I'll never be alone again.

It is building a nest outside the windows along the toughest part of the gutters stretching across the roof's edge. More of them arrive, speaking to me. The doctors ask questions and I answer. Each day during those two hours in the sunlit room, I savor the seconds, comfortable in my gown, a television humming, cold linoleum tile beneath my feet, and I watch them build a monument, to remind me of "the talk" and the art of silence.

Now we were in a tight spot. A real bind. Although it was hard to believe, given our collective years of education and on-the-job experience, we were hamstrung by a complete dearth of technical know-how. Still, that didn't stop anyone from hazarding an opinion.

It's the core processor.

The solid-state drive.

What do we know about processors and drives?

Truth was, very little. In recent weeks, SunSystems, Inc. had seen a mass exodus, one unprecedented in the history of Silicon Valley. Anyone with any meaningful (read: *marketable*) education, knowledge, skills, or talent had already bid this place a fond farewell in Hindi or Mandarin or Urdu. They fled in droves toward other tech companies who dreamed beyond the 21st Century. Yet Jerry Kaczynski, company founder, president, and CEO, continued to adapt, reorganizing personnel in an attempt to play to our strengths and maximize productivity. He did it so well; it almost seemed as if he were in complete denial of reality. At any rate, a dozen teams of cutting-edge computer scientists had by now been reduced to a single cluster of outmoded, anachronistic managers. That was us.

Yet the target hadn't shifted. The goal hadn't changed. We were trying to figure out what went wrong.

We muttered and shifted our weight, uncomfortable chairs creaking beneath us. We fiddled with a Rubik's Cube, astounded anyone could actually solve its riddle. We munched on stale popcorn someone had burned before the microwave disappeared. Seventies Muzak washed over us. Upstairs, Mr. K. pounded out another intra-office memo on his mechanical typewriter. It sounded like a slow, incompetent firing squad.

Behind his back, we considered calling him King Ludd.

Perhaps we had no understanding of the hardware, software, or coding it took to produce this beta version of The Bökk 1.0. Still, we understood persistence. We were no strangers to the grindstone. We were unfazed and indefatigable. We handed the semi-melted apparatus around our tiny circle and hypothesized.

Might be the wiring?

Or the circuitry?

Has anyone considered V-function?

We all cleaned our glasses with handkerchiefs or shirttails, then scratched our chins, and pondered. We each used to lead a team of top-notch computer scientists, none over twenty-three, all of them with PhD's from MIT, Caltech, and Stanford. We, on the other hand, were all first-gen. Once you hit forty, you were completely out of the game, unless you were on Fourth Dimension. None of us were. We'd never even used social media. Our advanced degrees were in crusty fields like philosophy, electrical engineering, and commerce. We still remembered rotary phones. We would feel forever nostalgic for Pac-Man and Donkey Kong.

All the same, we knew we were onto something with V-function. The wunderkinder were always tossing V-function out as a possible solution. They chuckled as they said it, though none of us ever grasped why. In so far as we understood it, V-function had to do with ventilation. The more we considered it, the more we liked it. We sipped tepid cups of Sanka and bathed in the warm saxophone of another Motown instrumental cover. Yes, we liked the V-function angle. It was an equation we could get our heads around: broken fan + melted processor = game over.

A fan we could fix.

If we'd been paying attention, we would've recognized the changes before they even happened. In hindsight, it was easy to put our finger on the defining moment. After all, when Mr. K. left for his sabbatical, SunSystems, Inc. was an industry leader. We had a relatively wide market base, too, producing and selling innovative computers, components, software, and various IT services. We, meaning the brilliant scientists we managed, also developed Orbit, one of the most powerful, flexible, and innovative Web languages ever created.

Mr. K. was gone for six months. We never learned exactly where he went or what he did, though we heard rumors. Some said he lived with a native tribe in what remained of the Amazon rainforest. Others were certain he trekked in the Himalayas, and then lived in abandoned Buddhist monasteries, meditating with ghost-monks. Still others insisted he wandered through the last jungles of darkest Africa. In the end, the destination didn't really matter, since he left his *f*(Fone) at home and was incommunicado for the entire duration of his trip. Anyway, the net effect was all that mattered: Jerry Kaczynski, Mr. Tech himself, had seen a future sans technology. None of us understood until it was far too late.

He didn't let on anything at first. Mr. K. liked to play things close to the vest. He simply moved back into his office upstairs and took his place at the head of the boardroom. He convened staff meetings at which he thanked us for our excellent work, assuring us our efforts were paramount to the future of humanity.

Privately, though, he had other plans.

About a month after his return, Mr. K. announced a new project: an e-reader. *Seriously?* we thought. *Why bother? Spark!* and The Co-Z had the market cornered. We figured his VPs were asking the same questions, so we kept our mouths shut, even in private. By then, we'd already been at SunSystems, Inc. longer than many of the computer scientists had been alive. Of course, in the company's early days, it was rough going, the office air thick with doubt and uncertainty. That's when we really learned work ethic, beavering away evenings and weekends, setting up cots in the hallways or else nuzzling into cold sleeping bags beneath our desks. We gave and gave, all of us, our salaries meager but stock options promising. We knew how to do what needed doing. And Mr. K.'s new project, though unusual, was no different from any other. He had a vision, and it was our job to motivate so others could innovate.

As we soon discovered, somewhere on his travels, Mr. K. had read a book, one of the old kind made of paper, the sort we destroyed all those forests to create. The specific title meant very little, and the book was likely written in a language Mr. K. couldn't read anyway. But that wasn't the point. He hadn't handled an actual ink-and-paper book since he was a small child, before they were phased out entirely. We would've been undergraduates about that time, living in a strange twilight world, versed in all the digital protocols yet also tasked with mastering the cumbersome behemoth known as a *library*. Back then, we already thought of them as graveyards.

At any rate, Mr. K.'s project sounded simple: design an e-reader that reproduces the book-reading experience in all its majesty. (His word.) It seemed straightforward. Then we learned the details. This wasn't just any e-reader. Mr. K. wanted us to reproduce the *sensory* experiences of reading an actual book. We were supposed to focus on paper, glue, and ink. We had to recreate the rustle of pages, the smell of the binding, the sting of paper cuts.

An impossible task.

We swallowed the thought before it leaked from our mouths.

We spent a week working on the fan. At least one of us, the electrical engineer, was good with his hands. The rest of us could hardly work a screwdriver. We rhapsodized about the revolutionary nature of the project, how it would redefine the e-reader for the New Era. That was a marketing

phrase most of us had absorbed long ago. We had no real idea what it meant. So we labored, morning, noon, and night, thinking, philosophizing, replacing a tiny fan motor. We pondered the possibilities, pretending they were infinite.

Yet all the while, doubt buzzed in the back of our minds. Who was our target market? For years, meaning our entire careers, we'd focused on the 18-35 demographic. It was the industry standard. But this project was different. It was unlikely that anyone in that age bracket would understand the sensory experiences we were working so hard to replicate. How many among them had ever actually seen a book, much less groped its cover or sniffed its pages? Although we weren't expert statisticians, we guesstimated approximately 1:1,000,000. Long odds, for certain.

We completed the fan repairs, and then tested The Bükk for another week. It was still a little glitchy. We tried to stay positive. Sometimes we'd hear rustling even when we weren't turning the virtual pages. Or we'd catch a whiff of paper and glue, though we hadn't lifted The Bükk's simulated binding to our noses. Or vice versa on both accounts.

The Rustle Magik needs tweaking.

The Bind-O-Matic's out of whack.

We have no idea how to adjust either.

Even worse was the Simulated Paper Cut Function. Fashioned from plastic, rubber, and silicon, The Bükk had no paper edges on it whatsoever. Nevertheless, Mr. K. insisted that it not only look and sound like a book; it had to feel like one, too. We, meaning the computer scientists before they all quit, had inserted a small, dull blade on the device's right-hand side next to the page forward button. (At some point, Mr. K. demanded a touch screen, though it was far too late for that, since none of us had a clue how to redesign the user interface. We didn't even have our *f*(Fones) as models anymore. He'd confiscated them and given us a landline to share.) While intentionally unpredictable, the Simulated Paper Cut Function gave simulated paper cuts at random. Sometimes all you had to do was pick it up.

Soon we didn't even want to hold it.

In the meantime, Mr. K. made some subtle changes to our work environment. We arrived at nine and left at five, and we always took a long lunch, so he had plenty of time to renegotiate our creative spaces. Back when there were still other employees besides ourselves, back when SunSystems, Inc. was peopled almost entirely by cutting-edge computer scientists, we had Team Areas, also called Thinking Circles. They were color-coded. For example, Team Cerulean had a Thinking Circle, and Team Magenta had a Thinking Circle, and so on, and each team could arrange and decorate their team space to their own liking, as long as they used the available furniture and color-appropriate decorations. Beanbags were popular. Espresso machines. Inspirational posters.

When the mass exodus began in earnest, Mr. K. took a different approach. Out went the beanbags and espresso machines and inspirational posters. Mr. K. replaced them with white walls, drip coffee, and cubicles, one for each computer scientist. We managers got glassed-in offices on the periphery. We had huge desks and giant desktop computers, which he soon replaced with electric typewriters and rolodexes. We gazed out at our former team members, only speaking to them when a problem arose. We wondered if they were still our responsibility.

By now, it was just us managers and had been for some time. How long, we weren't sure. Who was counting? Perhaps we should've been. The writing was on the wall, though we pretended we couldn't read. While we were lingering over long, margarita-filled lunches, Mr. K. was busy. He had the cubicles removed. Offices, too. We arrived at SunSystems, Inc. in the slippery afternoon light to discover the renovations: the entire place was filled with small desks in neat rows. There must've been a couple hundred, though we were all too lazy to count. We simply accepted the situation as another of Mr. K.'s eccentricities, found ourselves adjacent desks as far from his upstairs office as possible (our incompetence was still in plain sight), and got to work.

If that's what you called it.

We had a lot on our plate. We had to iron out The Bük's kinks before our Tuesday morning presentation. Mostly, we fiddled with the device, each in turn, hoping for the best. We made hypotheses. We drew hasty conclusions. We sighed a lot. The only thing we accomplished was proving the Peter Principle once and for all. When our creative juices dried up, we lingered around the water cooler. We drank tepid Sanka from chipped mugs. We spent two hours at El Tonto listening to accordion trills while we downed one pitcher of margaritas after another.

The jig was almost up, and we knew it.

Tuesday morning, we showed up at nine o'clock sharp. Although SunSystems, Inc. had always been a casual work environment, and Mr. K. even wore shorts and sandals most of the time, we were dressed in our best business suits. They hadn't been out of the closet in years and smelled musty. Still, as we mingled near the water cooler, chipped mugs of tepid Sanka in our hands, we smoothed our lapels and adjusted our ties. We had almost nothing to show for ourselves, but we were consummate professionals who knew what hard work and perseverance meant, and we wanted to dress the part. As they say, the clothes make the manager.

We stepped into the conference room at ten to ten. We hoped to be set up and ready when Mr. K. walked through the door. We would've fired up PowerPoint Hologram, but Mr. K. had confiscated our laptops long ago. We considered drawing a flip chart, but there was none to be found, and no markers to draw with anyway. The dry erase board was gone, too. In fact, there wasn't even a chalkboard left, just bare walls and a huge conference table. A coffee percolator and a small stack of Styrofoam cups sat just out of reach. A rotary phone on a side table gleamed ebony in the unwavering glare. The wall clock ticked our lives away.

Mr. K. was fifty minutes late. Not a potentially fashionable fifteen, *fifty*. We waited and waited, listening for the phone's harsh bell. We didn't know if he was in his office, and we weren't about to climb those lonely stairs to find out. So we made small talk: golf handicaps, San Clemente bungalows, luxury sedan options. One thing we deliberately did not do was fiddle with The Bük. By then we'd already done everything we could do. Which was basically zilch. So we set it out of arm's reach and tried to ignore it.

In another time, meaning the future, which was the present, we could've easily sent him a Fourth Dimension missive to make sure the meeting was still on, to verify we hadn't mistaken the date or time, to insure Mr. K. was still among the living. Only we knew nothing about Fourth Dimension, how to work it, how it worked.

When we looked up, the rotary phone had been replaced with a telegraph. None of us had noticed when it happened or by whose hand. We couldn't operate it anyway.

After we'd been sitting there for almost an hour, trying to fill the room's dead air with chatter, who should waltz in but Mr. K. He looked slovenly and hollow-eyed.

Sorry I'm a little late, he said.

He scanned our faces, expecting smiles, head-nods, bright eyes. Our expressions were blank.

Forgot to wind my watch, he explained.

He unbuckled it and turned the dial with dramatic flair. We tried to follow suit, though only one of us wore a watch, and it was solar-powered. Mr. K. wasn't fooled. He confiscated the solar watch, then handed us each a mechanical timepiece.

Let's synchronize them, he said. I have 10:57 in four, three, two, one, now.

Although it felt like a bad imitation of a 20th Century spy movie, we did what Mr. K. asked of us. There was really nothing else to be done.

Now let's get down to business, he said. Where are we with The Bük?

We nodded and smiled, pointing at the device. Mr. K. picked it up, powered it on, began manipulating the controls. He looked instantly displeased, brow knitting up, a snarl overtaking his

mouth. As we could have predicted, the Rustle Magik malfunctioned, as did the Bind-O-Matic. Yet much to our surprise, the Simulated Paper Cut Function worked as designed. Once. Then it went haywire, slicing and dicing like those indestructible knives they used to advertise on the late-night infomercials of our long-forgotten youth. Before he could drop The Bükk, Mr. K.'s hands were lacerated and bleeding. Only he didn't fling the device at our heads or even chuck it across the room. Instead, he set it gently on the conference table, dabbing his hands with a monogrammed handkerchief.

Still a little glitchy, he said.

Yes, we agreed. After all, glitchy was the right word.

What have you been doing with your time? said Mr. K.

He waited, but we kept mum.

You read the memo, right? I mimeographed it myself. The scheduled launch is one week from today. Have The Bükk ready by Friday.

We felt our faces pucker. Was he actually going through with this? A small group of know-nothing managers had absolutely no hope of ever realizing this project.

Now let's get to it! Mr. K. said.

For a couple days, we actually tried to make a go of it. Not that we stood a chance. Mr. K. had faith in us, though why was unclear. We strongly suspected he was losing his mind, or maybe he'd already lost it. The company was on its last leg. Everyone knew it. The trade journals and professional mags were having a field day, and the mainstream media was even catching on. Nevertheless, we wanted to make a difference. Grandiose as it sounds, we wanted to save the company. We knew we weren't up to the challenge, but we had to try. Our jobs were on the line, our ability to pay for McMansions and prep schools and private colleges in small Northeastern towns. There were also pensions to consider, stock options, yachts in the Caribbean.

There was a lot riding on The Bükk.

By this point, Mr. K. refused to allow us to drive to work. He'd instituted a Bicycles Only policy that we did our best to circumvent. We drove down from San Francisco and Pacifica and Palo Alto and parked our luxury sedans in the city garage. We installed roof racks to carry our bikes. Then we cycled the half-mile to the office. Since we were the only employees left at SunSystems, Inc., there was plenty of space to store our high-end carbon frame racers inside.

Mr. K. already had the phonograph blaring when we arrived. The thing was so loud, we could hear it even when his office door was closed, but he pumped it through the P.A. anyway. Usually some jazz standard we recognized but couldn't name.

We sat in silence, staring at The Bükk.

Hours lurched by like days, days like weeks.

We may've considered early retirement. Some of us were eligible. But we had no idea, at this late stage in the game, if any of the old policies were still relevant. It was doubtful. Plus, we had a strong desire, however masochistic, to see this project through to the very end. It promised to be bitter. We imagined it might somehow also be sweet, though the specifics eluded us.

Although we spent the entire week focused on The Bükk, even curtailing our extended liquid lunches, the glitches remained. Confused gazing can only accomplish so much. The juggernaut of time was unrelenting. And then came Friday. We wanted to call in sick. We considered fabricating car trouble, a flat tire or blown gasket, until we recalled that driving was verboten. We cast about for other excuses, but our imaginations failed us.

So we arrived at nine o'clock sharp, heads down, sheepish beneath Mr. K.'s gaze. We stowed our bicycles, filed to our desks, and feigned preparations for the grand unveiling of the glitch-free

Bükk. None of us knew what to do. Our shirts darkened beneath the arms as we shuffled papers and stacked folders, opening and closing file cabinets at random. We tried to console ourselves.

We gave it our best shot.

That old college try.

What do we know about processors and drives?

We nodded and shook hands. We'd be unemployed within the hour.

It's been nice working with you.

Same here.

Let's keep in touch.

But this wasn't retirement. We hadn't planned well, so none of us could afford to stop working. When the inevitable finally came to pass, we would all try our luck with the social media companies, who'd take one look at us, smirk, then get on with the important business of world domination. Soon we'd be forced into adjunct community college teaching, part-time copyediting, and bartending, almost anything that came with a paycheck, however meager. Our wives and children would slather us with shame, growing more estranged by the hour.

But first, we had our meeting with Mr. K. We pitched him our new-and-improved e-reader, laying it on thick as cake frosting. To our utter amazement, he smiled openly, and then gave hearty handshakes all around. He was liberal with the back-claps and chin-chucks. It all seemed wholesomely old-fashioned. Then he told us he already had big plans for the new e-reader: immediate production, competitive pricing, an enticing array of introductory titles, including *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451* and *Slaughterhouse Five*. He was convinced the device was destined for greatness, promising to revolutionize the way people thought about the very act of reading. His certainty was catching, like bird flu.

We even started to believe.

As it happened, there would be a brief wave of nostalgia we all misinterpreted as groundswell. It quickly passed. In its wake came derision and mockery. The competition lapped up the free press. The e-reader was the proverbial straw: SunSystems, Inc. went bankrupt within the month.

Mr. K. disappeared a week later. Some said he went back to the Amazon rainforest or Himalayan monastery or African jungle. Others insisted he was holed up on an abandoned organic farm outside of Taos, learning how to convert old truck engines from used vegetable oil to gasoline. Still others suggested he was living in a cave in the south of France, decorating the walls with stick figures drawn in paint made from berries and blood.

We followed the rumors as long as we could, wearing our guilt like an albatross scarf. Yet it wasn't long before more pressing matters distracted us. After all, there would be no pensions or stock options. Mr. K., who probably kept his immense wealth in his mattress, left us high and dry. Now we had busses to drive, nails to hammer, and tables to bus. We had houses to sell, jewelry to pawn, divorce papers to sign.

All of that would come later. Now we pretended to prepare for our presentation. When we thought Mr. K. was no longer watching, we relaxed into the scratchy phonograph music and cleaned out our desks, piling 3-D staplers, hologram pens, and reams of unused virtual paper into actual cardboard boxes. We had to get while the getting was good. During the great desk clean out, one of us discovered a strange object, small and compact. A stack of paper bound along one edge. Words inked on both sides of each page. A relic from a bygone era. We passed it around, pawing at its mysteries.

Remember these?

Is that a *book*?

How quaint!

We rustled its pages and sniffed its binding. At least one of us sustained a paper cut that stung worse than any The Bükk's Simulated Paper Cut Function had ever given us. For a long moment, an idea stirred in the back of our minds, elusive as a dream. We gazed at the cover: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We wrestled with grins blooming on our faces. Then, simultaneously, we said:

Problem solved!

Mr. K. was waiting for us as we filed into the conference room. We had to prep an eleventh-hour spiel, so we were late.

Watches won't wind themselves! he boomed, looking dour.

We didn't let it faze us.

Did you manage to iron out The Bükk's kinks? he asked.

Be bold, we told ourselves.

Even better, we said. After days and weeks and months of R&D, it gives us great pleasure to present NuBook 2.001!

We unveiled the device with a flourish. Mr. K.'s face went blank.

What's this?

The fruit of our labors, we said. The apple of our eye, we said. Our e-reader extraordinaire, we said.

I don't understand, said Mr. K., idly flipping pages. What happened to The Bükk? Sweat trickled in rivulets down our backs. We bit our lips and tried to look pleasant.

NuBook 2.001 exceeds your criteria for a cutting-edge e-reader, we said, launching into a description of the true-to-life simulated experience it offered.

Then Mr. K. yelped.

Paper cut, he said, wincing.

It was a nasty one, too.

Mr. K. stuck his finger in his mouth and fondled NuBook 2.001. He studied our faces, one by one. Then he removed his finger and leafed through NuBook, listening to the pages rustle, sniffing the paper and ink and glue. We watched the device working its magic on him.

Mr. K. studied his watch for a long moment. Its ticking melded with the wall clock's metronomic regularity, swelling to fill the conference room, reverberating through us, overwhelming the nervous beating of our hearts. Weeks, months, and years seemed to pass, decades, centuries, and whole epochs of geologic time. We wondered where we could find an abacus to take their tally. We squirmed and tried to mop up our nervous sweat. We waited and waited and waited. Then, at last, Mr. K. said:

Gentlemen, let's make history.

And, failure or no, that's exactly what we did.



Femme Noir 6
By: Allen Forrest

It's been months since you've seen him.

He's sitting a few rows in front of you in the lecture hall, twirling his pen between his fingers and looking like he doesn't care about a thing in the world. His body is as relaxed as the uncomfortable seats allow, half-slumped in the chair, clearly attempting to give off the message that he has better things to do than sit in this class, but you know better. He only fidgets like that with his pen when he's nervous. Why is he nervous?

You'd thought that since you had the entire summer break to get over him, you'd be prepared for this first sighting. You'd pictured it in your head – how you'd walk by him on campus with your head held high, hips swaying from side to side, preferably surrounded by a laughing group of friends, and he would stare after you in envy and kick himself for ever dumping you. What you hadn't prepared for was being forced to see him in class every day. You'd forgotten about this damn gen-ED class you had to take before graduation, and you definitely hadn't prepared for the probability that you might not be entirely over him yet.

You stare at the back of his head while your brain fills in details you can't sense from this distance – there are three freckles dotting his collarbone, he probably smells like the gym – but it grinds to a halt once it realizes that something has changed. His brown hair has gotten longer. His shoulders are a bit broader, too. What did he spend the summer doing?

Not you, a malicious voice says in your head.

If you're being honest with yourself, you never really thought your relationship would last. It just wasn't mathematically plausible. Sean Hayes, University of Illinois basketball star + Cara Mourey, loser engineering major from Germantown \neq compatibility. So, you couldn't believe it when he came up to you outside of Sherman Hall and struck up a conversation, and when he said he wanted to take you out to dinner—does anyone do that anymore?—you didn't believe him until he showed up at your door. What reason did you have? You didn't fit the usual formula of basketball girlfriend. You weren't in Greek life, not a cheerleader, not on the dance team. So why on Earth was he interested in you?

You didn't have the courage to ask him. No one needed to tell you that you weren't like the other gorgeous girls on campus. It was painfully obvious to you already. You were the skinny, no-boobs female engineer, usually one of the only girls in all of your classes, who missed every party because you were working long hours at the lab to make sure you never had to go back to Germantown. You'd never even had a serious boyfriend before coming to U of I; so when Sean stuck around, didn't leave, wasn't afraid to be seen with you in public, and kissed you sweetly, you fell. Hard.

He learned all of your secrets. After one month, you told him how happy you were to get out of Germantown, that backwards place that still has street names like Lynch Loop. You detailed how many kids your high school lost to drunk driving, because there's nothing else to do in that godforsaken town of 3000 but drive out to cornfields and knock back beer after beer after beer. After three months, you confessed that as often as your dad gets blind drunk and hits your mother, sometimes you wished he had been one of those lost teens.

Sean listened to everything you had to say. He never made you feel like a bad person for hating your dad. Maybe that was because he hated his own just as much. "My dad's a doctor in southern Illinois," he told you. The two of you were in his dorm room, lights off, catching a

precious moment when all of his roommates were gone. He held you close – necessary, for the two of you to fit on the standard twin-sized bed – but being so close to him and feeling his chest rise and fall with every breath still made your toes curl.

“He and my mom stayed together for fifteen years, I think? I mean, you’d think that if you can make it that long with a person, you’re golden, right? No. The asshole and all of his doctor friends couldn’t get their damn priorities straight.” Sean’s voice was bitter. His grip around your waist tightened. “We moved from what my dad called our “starter home”—which was a good-sized house already—into where my dad lives now when I was about nine. He’s a nephrologist, so he makes a shit-ton of money. The house is friggin’ huge, three stories, and an in-ground pool in one of the best Illinois metro-east neighborhoods outside Saint Louis. I guess after he moved from the starter home, he decided it was time to dump the starter wife and started cheating with one of the nurses.”

He snorted. “He decided that the nurse’s kids were more important than his own biological children and kicked us to the curb along with my mom. Took his step-kids on three cruises, can’t pay a dime for my college tuition. Great fucking dad he is.”

You awkwardly turned in his arms to face him, struggling not to fall off the edge of the bed as the mattress squeaked in protest. When you finally managed it, the two of you ended up nose to nose. “We don’t need them,” you whispered, pressing your forehead against his. “We’re going to make it without them. In spite of them. Just watch.”

Instead of replying, he kissed you hungrily, shoving all of his anger at his father into how violently his mouth crashed against yours.

You’d thought that you had finally found someone who understood you, until the issue of sex started to eat away at your relationship.

“Come on,” Sean would breathe into your ear, running a hand down your arm. “Just let me show you how much I care about you.”

You wanted to—you did—but there was always something that was holding you back. It didn’t feel right. You’d bite your lip, shake your head no, and Sean would sigh and roll over away from you.

You weren’t normally someone who went on gut feelings. Numbers and concrete fact were where your faith was, but with something like this, losing your virginity—you thought maybe you should just trust your intuition. To be honest, numbers did play a part in a way. The only 100% certain way to avoid the same path as your mother—forced into a marriage she didn’t want because of a baby she didn’t expect—was to just not have sex. Period. You’d made it to one of the best engineering schools in the country, earned a scholarship, and as much as you cared for Sean, you weren’t about to let that slip through your fingers.

You told him this one day while grabbing lunch at Papa Del’s Pizza. It was crowded enough to the point that people couldn’t hear your conversation, which was the only reason you’d even consented to beginning it in the first place. The two of you were sitting in a corner booth, away from the noisy crush of U of I students waiting for their food. “I just don’t want to mess up,” you said as quietly as possible, though not as quietly as you would have liked – the babble of voices in the room required at least some volume in your voice. You looked down at the napkin in your lap rather than meet his eyes, afraid to see the judgment that might be there. “I can’t mess up. I made it this far—I’ve only got a year left of school after this one. When I get my degree, I’ll be able to breathe. It’s not that I don’t care for you, I promise.”

You glanced up at Sean, hoping to see an understanding expression, but he wasn’t even looking at you—he was waving at one of his equally tall friends who had just walked in. He stood to give him one of those bro-hug-backslap things and said, “How ya been, man? How’s the internship?”

You sat there quietly, waiting for him to resume the conversation that he had insisted on having, and pulled out the cheese on your piece of pizza into a long, thin string that finally fell apart.

The nagging was constant. “Come on, we both know how to be safe.” “But don’t you love me?” “I love you, Cara, I just wish you’d let me show you that.” Your answers were always the same. No. I’m not comfortable with it. I want to wait. I want my degree. To his credit, he stopped when you told him his hands had wandered too far south, and he looked at you when you told him no. Still, you began to wonder whether Sean was really processing what you said. No matter how many times you said no and explained why, he had a reason why you should. No matter how much the nagging irritated you, despite the stress, you stayed. It was hard to imagine anyone else loving you. Sean loved you. He said so. If you left, who would love you then?

When basketball season started, you got a bit of a break from the constant pressure. Two-a-day basketball practices and the team’s crazy traveling schedule kept him busy, and when he wasn’t busy, he was exhausted. It couldn’t have come at a better time, honestly—midterms and projects were beginning to crop up, and the majority of your time was spent holed up in the library, feverishly working on physics problem sets. Between your schedule and his, you almost never saw each other. If it weren’t for the text messages he still sent you, you wouldn’t have believed that you were still together. It all could have been a dream, a dream where the basketball star the crowd was cheering for on your TV loved you, kissed your knobby elbows, and told you that you were beautiful. But no—the same boy who ESPN announcers discussed came back from games on the road where he scored twenty points and came to find you.

The first time you were able to really have some decent alone time was in February. Your roommate was gone for the weekend visiting family back home in Edwardsville, so you’d invited him over. You’d worked yourself to the bone to make sure that your project for neuro-engineering was done enough so that you wouldn’t have to worry about it when he came over. The two of you ordered in Chinese food, watched trashy TV, and you couldn’t have been happier.

He pulled you into his lap and you relaxed, letting go all of the stress from physics, work and, worrying about the two of you. For a minute, you just stayed that way, feeling the rise and fall of his chest and inhaling his scent, a weird mix of deodorant, gym, and boy-not-yet man that was only attractive because it was him.

When he started kissing your neck, your heart sank. “Sean...”

“Come on, Cara, why not?” He hadn’t stopped his attentions and was letting his hands run up and down your ribs.

“You know why not, I’ve told you this so many times.” The content feeling you’d had for such a brief period was quickly draining out of you, replaced by annoyance. How many times did you have to say it? When was it finally going to get through to him?

His hands reached your breasts. He started to draw circles on them with his thumb. He knew that drove you crazy—and you knew that getting you off wasn’t his goal. He was using your own body against you to get what he wanted. You pushed his hands away and stood up, crossing your arms over your chest.

“Sean, enough. You’ve got to cut this out. I said no. Multiple times. You’re not going to change my mind.”

He had the audacity to look hurt. His eyes met yours and held your gaze this time. “Cara, come on, it’s not like I’m forcing you into anything. I just want to show you how good it can be, that’s all. Just let me show you.”

“What part of I do not want to end up like my mother do you not understand?”

“But you won’t! It’s safe, I promise. I’ll go to the student health center and get tested for STDs or whatever if you want me to, I’ll get all the condoms in the world, we’ll be set.” He ran his right hand through his hair, mussing it up. It looked good that way. The thought crossed your mind that

he may have done the same thing while talking to some other girl on the road somewhere, maybe a cheerleader for the other team who was gorgeous and busty with perfect waves in her hair, someone who would give him what you refused. That's what basketball players and big athletes did, wasn't it, cheat on the road, when no one would ever find out, and go back to being the doting boyfriend when they got back?

Sean held out his arms for you again. "Please come sit with me, Cara. I just want to hold you. I haven't gotten to in so long."

Your resolve melted away. You stepped back towards him and let him hold you close, feeling the contrast of his hard muscles versus your soft and flabby body. You rested your head on his shoulder. "Do you know why I asked you out to begin with?" he murmured in your ear.

Your no was partially muffled by his t-shirt. You still hadn't been brave enough to ask. What if the answer was that he had only asked you out on a bet from one of his teammates, like what happened in the movies or something? You weren't sure you'd be able to handle the blow to your self-esteem.

"I asked you out because you were different," he said. "All the other basketball guys just want to fuck girls and leave them. They all go for the same type, too, more boobs than brain, but you, you're brilliant. You don't even know how smart and you're a genuine person. You don't surround yourself with fake friends or pretend to be someone you're not. You're just... Cara." He stroked your hair. "I just want to be able to show you how much I care about you for being you. I guess I wanted that so much I kept asking. If I messed up, I'm sorry."

You were still processing what he had just said. He had asked you out because you were smart. He still wanted you sexually even though you were the skinny no-boobs engineer. He cared about you. You were already on birth control to regulate your period and get rid of those horrible cramps. Weren't condoms and birth control something like 98% effective? You would be safe that way, like he'd said, and you wouldn't let anything happen that would mess you up, you wouldn't have to end up like your mom because you slept with one person.

"Okay," you whispered.

He pulled back to look at you, blue eyes wide. "Okay, what?"

You were too shy to hold his gaze. Later, you would wish you had. Maybe a flash of emotion had been there that you would have seen, or you could have read something in his eyes that would have given him away, but you didn't. Instead, you turned in his lap, straddled his waist, and whispered again, "Okay."

Sean didn't spend the night. He had basketball practice in the morning, so he kissed you before he left and brushed your hair out of your eyes. "I'll talk to you tomorrow," he promised. He smiled at you and looked like he was about to say something else, but instead just kissed you one last time and left the room. You smiled to yourself and curled up under the covers, running over what had just happened in your mind. If someone had told the sixteen-year-old you that this was what the twenty-year-old you was going to be up to, you never would have believed them.

You texted him the next day when you knew his practice was over to see if he wanted to do something later on. Your phone didn't buzz with his reply until an hour later.

Can't, coach is making us do dumb team bonding exercise. Would rather be with you, though. Talk to you soon. :)

The next week it was the same. They had a home game against Ohio State and the arena was packed. You stood with some of your friends from class, proudly wearing your orange and blue, and cheered on your team – but mostly, you cheered for Sean. Even though the entire place roared when

he hit a three-point shot to end the game, you imagined he could hear you cheering above everyone else. You texted him after the game to say congratulations and ask when he was free.

Good question, lol. We have a ton going on. Will let you know!

Eventually, he stopped texting back at all. No explanation, no talk to you soon, nothing. You were left waiting for your phone to light up and trying not to cry.

You didn't want to think you'd been used. You wanted to believe all the words he'd said, wanted to believe that he really thought you were beautiful and really thought you were different and understood your fears, but you couldn't deny the evidence that was in front of your face. You weren't different after all; you'd been fucked and dumped just like everyone else, and you were dumb enough to fall for it.

You were left wondering if he'd really meant what he said that night. Was it true, that he was interested in you because you were different? Did he just get busy and not have time anymore, or had he just said that to finally get in your pants? Maybe once the challenge had been conquered, the interest was gone, too.

It was a struggle to keep your grades up when all you wanted to do was sit in your dorm and stalk his Facebook profile, looking for updates on what he might be doing. It wasn't like you could get away from reminders of him, anyway—March Madness was in full swing, which meant that everyone across the entire damn country was talking about Sean Hayes and his three-point shot.

Fuck his three-point shot. You wanted your virginity back, but most of all, you wanted so badly to stop loving him. You wanted to hate him. It would make it so much easier if you could just hate the asshole and feel some righteous anger whenever his name was mentioned, but you couldn't. In spite of all of your better judgment, you still cared about him. You swung back and forth between wanting to scream and rage and wanting to call him on the phone just to hear his voice one last time, but usually you just ended up crying in the shower, letting the salty tears mix with your shampoo and swirl down the drain.

You blink and wrench yourself back into reality. You're not crying in the shower, although your eyes are a little bit wet. You are sitting in class, and Dr. M. is lecturing, and you should be at least trying to pay attention. And Sean Hayes is still kicked back in that chair.

TWO STARS
By: Andrea Fitzpatrick

2013

This morning
I felt your hands
so warm and tender
sliding over my stomach
to caress me just there
in midst of that sacred pleasure
I woke remembering
you weren't there to touch me awake.

The tears lay hidden
for my eyes are tired
as though the shedding moisture gone
from this damp;
instead lies a husk
to scratch its way
around in a world
empty of your presence.

Everyone cautions me
it's natural to feel angry.
But I don't feel angry –
I miss you!
I miss LJ's bouncing wake up,
how you came home
end of the day
first thing
was give the biggest hug.

I miss making love,
how our limbs tangled
in clothing or bed sheets
and try as we might
we could not get close enough.

I miss the delight in your eyes
when I danced with you.
I miss our long meandering
conversations

that were more than words.

We were two stars
on a collision course
crashing into one another
and loving for all we were worth.
All the while
you ripped the figment
of cloud
from around my sphere
so that when you were gone
my vision was clear.

How could you see?



NOWHERENESS: CHARACTERS/ HEADS

ceramic, dimensions variable, 2010-12

Photo credit: Isaac Applebaum

By: Margie Kelk

MABEL
By: Sara Krueger

Her belly is forked purple —
looks like a tiger.

She jumps when she's naked —
squeals Earthquake!

I come home quickly.

Today, she has the cook fix me bacon
and eggs scrambled hard.

I watch her work the diner in her cheap polyester —
wait for her to punch the clock.

I think about later.

How I will zip her down slow
and watch the folds of her belly push out, itching for air.

We can be tangled limbs in our sedan,
skin sticking to backseat vinyl.

I can almost taste her tang.

She takes orders down the counter,
legs bowing backwards.

Mabel sighs —
presses fingers along the hunch of her spine.

One more curve for me to trace after the sun sleeps.

She won't mind the dip in my chest tonight.
She never does.

Instead, she will rest her head there
and let our breathing mingle like it has for years.

— as the car hums steady.

INSIDE, WE ARE TVS
By: Sara Krueger

Inside, we are TVs.
Broad spectrums of color.
Points of light that pulse on and off
like the bloody beating of a heart.

We have tubes that spark
and thick glass screens that clink together.

We are potential.
We are worlds.
We are cords tangled on the carpet.

We are analog.
Wet rings of booze fuel us.

We can power down into lines,
into white glowing dots,
into impenetrable gray.

We are everything touchable —
wood grain and brass
and the magnetic pull of skin.

We send out sprays of static
with a flip of the belly button.
Can make anything look like —
A Road-side Disaster.
Crime Scene Reenactment.
Nightly News.

We surf through channels
and take in indigo eclipses blooming with light.
We jettison into 15 foot tall waves
and become a part of the electric animal deep —
just salvage jobs searching for meaning in a bright plasma sea.

DEATH OF A PROPHET
By: Miles Liss

I lived in the wilderness
gnawed on animal bones
did not speak to anyone

When I made my pilgrimage to the city
I was a gruesome stranger
beard down to my chest
fingernails caked with grime
hair long and tangled

I believed I was superhuman
possessed the power of telekinesis
could see deeply into the future

Some of my darker visions
even came to pass:
tidal waves, earthquakes
the death of a scorching sun

Today I live in a two bedroom
with wall-to-wall carpeting
grow tomatoes in a garden plot
grow teats and a pot belly
stare at images on a computer screen
hoping to find a soul mate

shop for knick-knacks
in antique shops
side-by-side with elderly ladies

EVENING
By: Miles Liss

You exit the supermarket
and step into your car
hands weighed down with groceries
that are pretty much
the same
as the ones you bought last week

You stare at your television
and at the carpeted floor
try to scoop up
bits of your life
that have disappeared
beneath the fibers

Newscaster goes on and on
about the weather
speaks in a language
you cannot understand

Your mind cascades
in raindrops
children are nowhere
to be found
cuckoo clock
has struck the evening hour

SEARCH AND RESCUE ROACHES By: Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb

Better than self-powered drones,
some scientists say, and there is
no need for an ethics review
of insect trials nor any nuisance
filing for desired permission
to roboticize cockroaches
or their insect kin whose
rights are almost nonexistent.
Recruited as biological fuel
cells, open circulatory systems
make invertebrates perfect
targets—their glucose, oxygen,
molecules, and such harvested
for essential chemical reactions
to generate electricity, turning
them into enzymatic slaves
used to human benefit.

I cannot imagine power packs
imposed on the backs of beasts
who go about their little lives,
their lives meaningful to them
as nature intended. Our kind
tends to tinker so, I think,
repulsed, as I race around
my kitchen at night chasing
the latest group of culprits, a tiny
cleaning crew dining off my floor.
Captured in the jar, they look so
alien, scary, such creepy creatures,
but I try to keep them comfortable,
giving my temporary prisoners
pieces of rotten peach and bread
before releasing them to explore
outdoors, where their elongated,
beetle-like bodies will benignly
scurry to freedom and into places
more accepting of their design.

I DON'T WANT TO TAME MY LOVER
By: Jesse Back

Even though I want to leave her
when she comes home at night
drunk and angry
and yells at me to get out.

Even though
she'll black out
wake up in the night
and piss on the floor.

Even though
she hates laundry,
baseball practices,
dishes, paying bills,
waking up early.

'I'm going to be great.
a socialite
a debutante
a millionaire.'

Even though she smokes
and she drinks
beer faster than me.

I don't want to tame her.

She is the wild of the jungle,
the caves, the savannah,
the outer reaches of space,

and she is mine
as much as she wants to be
as much as is possible.

SO LONG BE LOST
By: Amanda Tummarino

Where am I?
I'm reading the map upside down
like Jesus-speak.
I'm underestimated;
I put on my pants backwards,
but I am a storm of a woman.

Americans are stuck on a one-way street
and I am burning my igloo
with a Revlon hairdryer.
I pretty up for my dreams with the red dust
that came from the grounds of New Mexico.

I want to follow the tracks of the hobo -
he has road stories carried on his tongue.
Somewhere from the heavens,
someone tossed me a Rubik's Cube
and I'm figuring a way I can jump the net.

OLD SCHOOL
By: John Stocks

It has been a long haul to leaving
And there is a strange kind of regret
For damp classrooms, store cupboards with petri dishes
For graffiti, stains left to fester over time
For the foolish laughter of a distant child.

Pathways worn to dust, bare as old slippers
And the secret mysterious places
The cobweb filled, derelict greenhouse
Full of melancholy and long dead things.

With the last flick of the light switch
A pacing backwards into light, a sorrow descends
Almost as thick as grief, grief for the rooms
For the long, silent, empty corridors
For the time that slipped away, lost forever
For the raucous shrieks, the vulgar cat calls
For working late, besotted by the twilight
Twenty years of muted conversation
And, best of all-
On the days when rain thrashed the windows
Grief for, the heads down, quite contented
Steady hum of silence.



NO TRESPASSING
By: Stefan Chiarantano

CALL IT FOREVER THEN
By: John Stocks

When I think of your wild beauty
Carrying a bitter-sweet, ache of love
In each conscious moment-for me.
Then I can believe
In magic and mystery
Some sharp-edged purpose in the cosmos
A pre-ordained destiny.

Somewhere there is your gentle breathing-
And somewhere the steady beating of your heart,
Both attuned
To the half-formed rhythms of the universe
To my conscious thought, and my numinous dreaming.

And your love
For now, invisible, untouchable,
As it is; is scarcely more than this-
A mere subversive whisper in the silence;
Destined to change my narrative forever.

For you have pinned my innocence with a skewer
Nailed it forever; to your ever spinning heart.

CREATURES
By: G Smith

We carbon-based life-forms
—molecularly hexagonal—
Infinite smallness united unto macro-elegance,
Coalescing into a thinking, a reasoning: an instinct at play;
And we walk and breathe and love and wax and wither whether
in forest or under hill, a-sky or under sea.

We intend to live harmoniously, or—please—not at all.

THAT LAST JAZZ IN THE SKY
By: G Smith

It were the last days of sun,
That last jazz in the sky
Ere the girding of winter,
Though the heavens belie.
Yielding no answer for “why?”,
Densely through the azure sky
Pierced the passing echo
Of the blue jays shrill cry.

Were it only the first,
I could prepare the hearth,
And churn the old plowshare
Through the beaten turf.
I would curry the horse
And run out the dogs,
Leap through the forests,
And chop up the logs.

The glitter of the grass,
The air, tells a story,
Encased and hard-frozen
In a crystalline glory.
There is a Beauty in ice,
Like a hard sorrow,
And as treacherous as nice,
May lead to the barrow.

Lo! Winter encompasses
It cradles us close,
Settling us complacent
For the lethal dose.
Hard now our earthen ramparts.
Sharp now prick the leaves.
Stamp foot, bristle the hide
Against the storming of the breeze.

SLEEPWALKING
By: Jason Dean Arnold

Abstracted in the shadows of our home,
glaciers wait for me.

The icemaker convulses in the dark
as images evaporate & I rise,
thirsty & full of sea smoke.

A coming electrical short circuit is the echo
of my nervous system.

Rain breaks your bedroom voice
into Morse code.

I remember nothing, &
my hands fail
to hold all of this water.

CAPTURED
By: Marc Irwin

I rose quietly,
slowly unraveled my legs from yours,
withdrew
from the sleeping bag,
unzipped the door,
reached into the coolness,
felt moisture on the canopy. Zipping back
the warmth, I stood
straight up
and felt wind tickle across the hairs on my legs.

Light gathered through trees,
Fog scurried
across the lake
to hide in the pines.
Sun splashed
purple and orange through clouds.
Crows rattled a nearby field awake,
Breeze filled my nostrils.
Hummingbirds worked the honeysuckle.
I was captive

to your ineluctable
scent
on my fingertips.

IN PRAISE OF SMALL PRESS PRINT MAGAZINES
By: Richard King Perkins II

Dear Editor,

I just received my contributor's copy of your most recent issue.

The best thing about it was that it came in a sturdy manila envelope
which I can reuse in any number of ways

and that more than a dollar's worth of postage stamps remained
unmarked and were easily peeled off.

I certainly hope to become a frequent contributor to your fine magazine.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

An appreciative poet

FOR THE RECORD
By: Richard King Perkins II

My name is Sara S.
I'll try to tell you my story exactly as it happened.
I met him in a dark place at a dark time,
then had unprotected sex with him in an even darker place.
He moved in with me and quit his job.
He smashed my face when I asked him to help with the bills.
He fucked me again in a place of shadows
then brutalized me once more.
My lips are purple and ragged and I love him.
But he is not my lover or even my friend.
It's difficult to relate this because of shame
and the pain in my lips as I mumble.
He is not my husband.
He is not my common-law spouse.
But I love him and there is no license for what we are.
I'll try to tell you my story as accurately as possible.

My name is Thara Eth.....

PERCEPTIONS OF PARADISE
By: Ken Simpson

In heaven
Vestal Virgins
sway
to an organ
playing Bach
as angels in bikinis
cry ecstatically
at the revelations
of aberrant soothsayers
proclaiming
the divine right
of pontiffs
exorcists and magicians
to bless, blame
and gratify the desires
of cherubs, satyrs and devils.

THE GIRL WHO LIVES ON MY BACK STEPS
By: Eve Kenneally

after Karyna McGlynn

the girl who lives on my back steps
her hollow
from my wrists
of fish bones -
who can claw her way
she thinks I double-bagged
her in the football field
into mine &

I say *come in it's cold*
I say *come in you're cold*

won't leave or shift
shell eyes
I offer her milk, palm
some matted gutter cat
through my dress
Heather Raymond & buried
after braiding her toffee hair
swallowing her ring

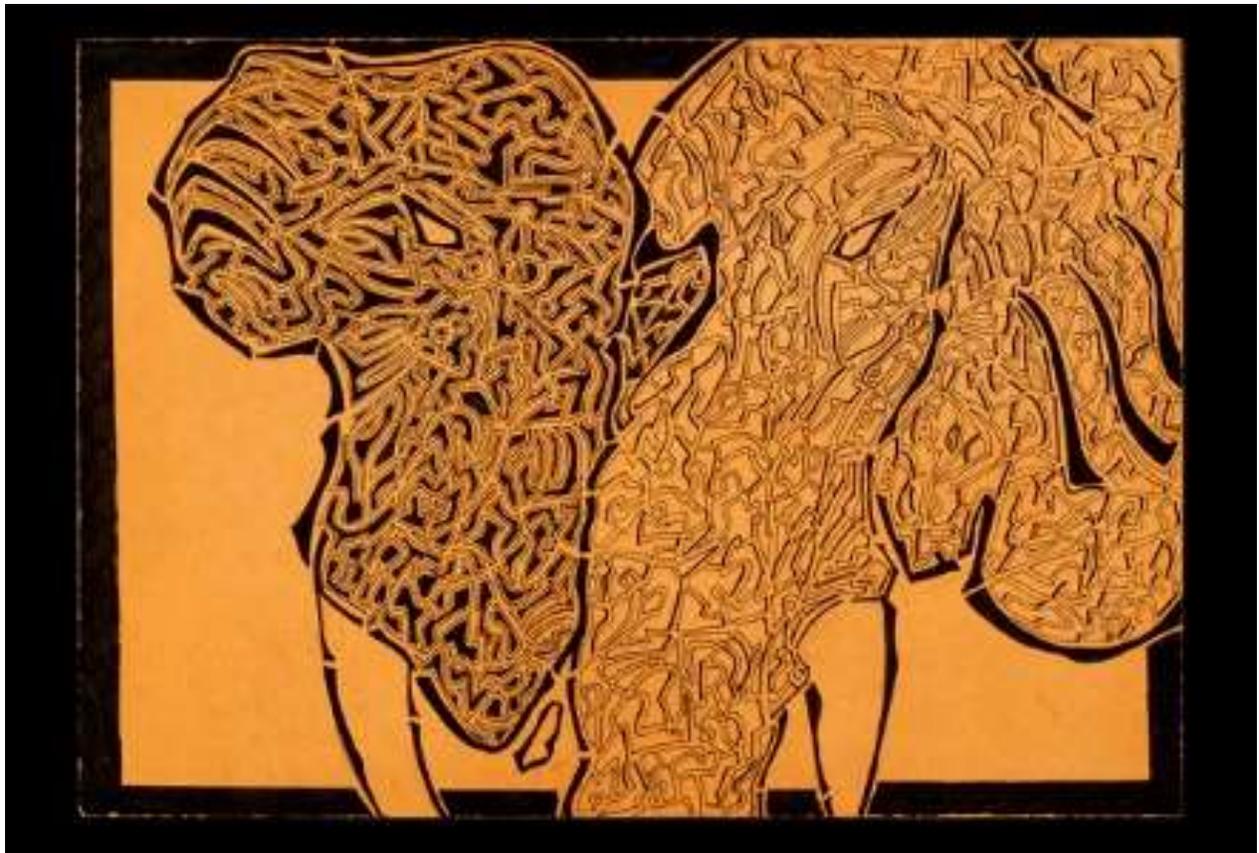
she says *you don't know that*
she says *just wait*

1993

By: Eve Kenneally

heather always makes me
 who die easy
 miniskirts aren't good
breathe heather chainsmokes
eyes & tells me it's not that bad
heather tongues red wine
puts tablets behind
parents most nights we light
 water she holds my

watch movies with red tipped girls
 screaming into sweaty hands
for sprinting cause leather can't
 outside with dirty
 just keep your eyes closed
off the coffee table, sits on her feet
my teeth & I've never met her
matches & drop them in
 hands til they bruise



MAZE 4
By: Warren Stokes



MAZE 3
By: Warren Stokes

CANDLELIGHT TALES
By: Deborah Singer

you would play for me sweet sad music
and stretch your mouth around stories
of who you wish you were
by candlelight you would dream shamelessly
at your most lovely without a clue of how to step
or maybe you've cleaned up richly by now
or easier yet forgotten how you once loved such games

**YOUR DIVINE DEMYSTIFIED *
By: Deborah Singer**

disregard
discard
my deviations
my divinations ;
our discursive duets
doubled my damnation .
driving the dichotomy (
my dreams dampened)
my doppelganger -
i thought, my dear
you were undoubtedly dependable, devoted
but distance divulged .
delight dashed
damage disseminated
distress dispensed .
i am distraught
disturbed by disuse -
indeed, that's doable .
oh darling, what dirty distraction
your dwelling's dug
decry my dysfunction deductible
deem me done , "
she dove into undiluted decay ."
i'm disclaimed devalued
by your delirious detouring ,
and devastated (
though not disheveled).
less destroyed
than distilled .
I disembark
determined to drudge
derailed and undaunted
into delicious destiny !

*

don't . . .
don't dismiss for doodling
when I've been deliberate.

BORDERING

By: Kim Peter Kovac

1. Baku, Azerbaijan

The visa officer (with mono-eyebrow and demeanor reminiscent of a Balkan thug) can't find a pen, so asks (in Azeri and bad mime) if he can borrow mine, writes up the form, then pretends to forget he still has it. I have to insist several times (in English and equally bad mime) before he gives it back. And the visa cost \$185.00, US cash dollars only, to boot.

2. Buenos Aires, Argentina

Endless wait in customs due to scanning every, yes every, bag and opening and searching over half. Bringing fruit is not allowed, so I dutifully pull out my oranges and drop them in the trash, making sure the strutting peacock masquerading as a customs officer sees my little show. Instead of a nod, or applause (I'm in theater, what can I tell you?), I get hauled off to a little room where he spend twenty minutes berating me writing up some kind of citation, both in Spanish, which I, alas, do not speak or read.

3. Checkpoint Charlie, Cold War Berlin

The starched wool uniform, too-large hat, and bark disguised as a voice cannot prop up the border guard's room temperature IQ. It is obvious he thinks I'm some kind of low-rent smuggler. Why he thinks that a couple dozen small Kermit the Frog pins will command much cash on either the official or unofficial black markets is beyond me. Or maybe it's all an act, since my baksheesh of a dozen pins brings out his passport stamp and a whisper of a grin.

I CAN'T BREATHE By: Kim Peter Kovac

I can't breathe

reading that the grand jury did not indict the cop who put the chokehold on Eric Garner even though the coroner ruled homicide from compression to the neck with the fictional fillip of the cop claiming it was a 'wrestling hold'.

I can't breathe

inhaling the video, over and over, with Eric Garner, saying, over and over, I can't breathe, while four white cops jumped on him because he was mildly resisting arrest for the high crime of allegedly selling single cigarettes for fifty cents per.

I can't breathe

hearing a Fox primetime news anchor hope that the demonstrations about the Eric Garner verdict (spontaneous and peaceful) don't disrupt the Christmas tree lighting ceremony at Rockefeller Center.

I can't breathe

watching a You Tube video of a cop in Pontiac, Michigan stopping a Black man because of complaints that he was walking around with his hands in his pockets, that's right, Michigan in the winter and hands in pockets equals fear, and oh, did I mention he was Black?

I can't breathe

reading that a 6'4" tall trained policeman named Darren Wilson said he "felt like a five-year-old holding on to Hulk Hogan" because he's struggling with an unarmed teenager named Michael Brown, admittedly who outweighs him by seventy pounds, yet is still an unarmed teenager and not a trained police officer.

I can't breathe

appalled that said Wilson referred to said Brown as a 'demon', using the pronoun 'it', and saying it seemed "like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots", and then disbelieving even more that a grand jury would accept a police officer's take on reality coming from superhero comics.

I can't breathe

reading that the Cleveland cop who after two seconds shot Tamir Rice, a 12-year old with a toy gun, had been recently judged unfit for duty in another jurisdiction because he broke down emotionally while handling a loaded gun.

I can't breathe

listening to my college professor pal, the gentlest man imaginable, speak of what a tough-ass he has to be with his students of color to teach them how hard they have to work to navigate the racism that pretends to not be there.

I can't breathe

seeing Representative Hank Johnson reciting an eloquent haiku-cum-polemic called "I Can't Breathe" poem on the floor of the House of Representatives, with the C-Span cameras capturing bored indifference on the most of the other faces.

I can't breathe

because in my middle-aged white-guy-ness, I don't know what actions I can do that might actually help.

I can't breathe

trying to wrap my brain around how anyone with a pulse and an IQ higher than room temperature can actually believe that we are 'post-racial'.

I can't breathe

hoping that all of the 'hands up, don't shoot' and 'I can't breathe' demonstrations will actually make a difference and fearing they won't.

I can't breathe . . .



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
By: Melissa Toledo

COITO ERGO SUM (I RUT HOW I AM)
By: Gerard Sarnat

R.I.P. Louise Wilson, who made learning Latin fun almost.

Illegitimum Non Carborundum; Don't let the bastards grind you down;
Domine salvum fac. Lord, save me.
Gaudeamus igitur! Let us therefore rejoice!
Veritas non sequitur? The truth of it does not follow?

-- Harvard Fight Song gibberish

I. Robotic crest of sullen junker indifference,
I was raised an alpha(bet) Jew speaking slide rule.
Noeticist recoiled from Old Country religulous Shabbes boys
well as hoity-toity *goy* saints, Popes and princes;
Dad's chilly skill set scribbled pious icicles. Calipers
and beakers preferred over kisses in the first family of repression,
encyclopedias more precious than spouse, son or daughter;
when the patriarch who finished his kids' sentences
got sick, our tears were punished. Read out of all love,
we never were forgiven in Pop's drop-dead letter lockbox.

II.

"Cogito ergo sum."

Reason an inherited trait,
Descartes' braincloud flecked with Platonic allusion

seemed so right-on early on but turned out to be
just one more maven's congealed antiseptic cliché.
Latin declensions jelled as that savant's middle names:

First person full of subjunctive shit, second person pluperfect
odious shit, third person singularly ablative prolix tough shit
Q.E.D.

Clotted slippers rubbing cosmopolite blisters,
tumbled off his library ladder, René got it wrong coming and going
before proprioception shifted to the next intellectual redundancy.

And then there was Pascal's pithy despair,
"Man's unhappy because he does not know how to stay
quietly in his room." Another crappy French chestnut. I think.

III. Born alexithymic, no lingua for emotion, a specimen preserved
 by words, now I'm Napoleon in drag hankering posterity's tumbrels.
 Id harboring a fusillade of warring verbs, "I feel" ignites
 a grenadier's fetish to penetrate deep within a toolbox of pliers and ice picks.

Mayhem of my own making, hammering raw rouses my porous boner boneyard.
Pumice prior to burnish, harlequin breath whets wires to burn-out pissant
 know-it-all insolence. Grunting front of establishment monoliths,
 Cro-Mag unzips forbidden places.

A whiff of dead Daddy's discipline prevents amped-up me from short-circuiting.

FOR ANDY WARHOL
By: Dan MacIsaac

i

I have written for you
this poem, dear Drew,
not for its own purpose
of lyric loveliness,

or in astonished praise
of your spot-lit name,
sycophantic panting
over your Wonder paint,

but in cold-hearted reliance
that my poem's Pop Art power,
will make me world-famous
for a quarter of an hour.

ii

Parasite, I
plagiarize
your hipster
stature --

phenomenon
gone icon
like mirrored Marilyn
or your red red soup can.

I ape
in homage
to celeb status --
your schizoid cachet.

iii

Through your cockroach eye,
Marilyn's image multiplies.

Compound miracle
of Her & Her & Her:

bright neon loaves
of tress and flesh,

and ellipses of dark
beauty marks.

Each gloss of her glistens
in a trillion points of light

on all the electric eyes
across America

entranced by her
silkscreen test.

Primped and painted,
product of market

and tinted mind,
she is so made up.

This foster daughter,
turned plastic goddess,

branded like any
show room appliance.

The great cleavage
of her smile gapes wide.

iv

Yet, reproducing her
half a hundred strong,

your diptych
makes public

how art,
the grand pattern,

traps life
and death.

GRASP THE NEW WORLD IN BIRTH By: Lewis Rosenbaum

Just imagine! Seventy years, comrades,
Seventy years!
We need to celebrate anything we can
At any time.
Mao said that.
Don't you agree?

When I was young,
I knew when birth happened.
Pain, blood and water.
A nodal line marks a leap
From one quality to another.

Nine months earlier,
The magic code of our species' history
Caught in capsules of sperm and egg,
Re-combines.
Isn't that a "Birth" day?

Later, through pain, blood and water,
A screaming, spitting mammal flays the air with all four limbs
Breathes air for the first time,
Struggles toward independence. Human?
Open that bottle, fill those glasses, drink up.
Tell me, what does human mean?

Watch the child grow,
Burst through boundaries,
Incorporate the parameters of its surroundings,
Every furry touch, strawberry taste, furtive look
Inscribes an indelible neural circuit
Recreates a virtual external world.

When do we jump from recording,
Begin to see the pictures related,
Begin to ask big questions,
Begin the quest that sex provokes
Strive to transfer our version of the code?

Rites of passage celebrate
Another, a double edged kind of birth,
The birth of a consciousness
Of a possibility to continue species.

Why don't we start our count of when we are human
From the date of our own passage from tadpole to frog?

Browning had his bishop order a tomb.^[1]
His bishop ruminated on his inglorious past,
His clerical competition, pride of place after death.
For him all was debauchery, all was over.

But wait. We're not done yet.
At 13 I'm not done learning. Formal schooling
Opened vistas to scholarly disciplines.
At 23 I crossed the Tehachapi Mountains,
Learned from farm workers about grapes
And exploitation and health for the poor.
At 27 a Cuban peasant taught me about cooperation.
At 30 a Black bricklayer
And a Chinese-Norwegian artist
Introduced me to Marx.
At 50 I married a Bolshevik painter.
Those are births too.

Another bottle? Fill those glasses,
Tell me now what you think.
Why do we focus on emergence from the womb
And ignore the stages on the journey,
The conscious quest to understand
And transform society?

With you and me,
Our child-ness is the caterpillar of our social being.
Together, humanity thrashes to break out
From its own cocoon
Cast off its own chrysalis of unconsciousness
Emerge at the end of capitalism fully human.
Marx said that.

Drink deep, with me, that dry, heady amontillado and dream of Poe.
I would embed our own Fortunatos in a wall of their own making,
Thus end the rule of that perverted class that destroys our world.

I am seventy years old today.
I am not done yet.
We are only as old as the child's imaginative
Grasp of the new world in birth.

¹after a poem by Robert Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church" <http://www.bartleby.com/42/669.html>

GIVING IT ALL AWAY
By: M.C. Rydel

I got rid of it all.
Went bankrupt and foreclosed.
Donated all clothes and shoes,
And toys and ornaments.
Parked the car where it got towed,
Removed, the yellow numbers scrawled
In permanent marker on the back window.
I lost the piano and stereo to a fire,
Traveled to a warmer climate,
And became a white shirt, trousers,
Sandals, and a satchel always empty.

I need nothing.
I walk up to my cuffs in the surf.
Dance without a conscience.
Own nothing but the scent of barbeque.
Have nothing but the lines I've memorized.
Sometimes I dream of the stuff I used to have.
It's submerged in water under a hole in the ice.
I descend into my cathedral of things.
Revel among my icicles and oyster shells,
Count phosphorescent jellyfish as my own,
And wake up relieved that I still have nothing.

I got rid of it all,
And now I have absolutely everything.
I have hours of time-lapsed weather
Clouds, sun, clouds, stars, and the moon.
I feel airwaves tremble like mandolin
And make willows dance with dreadlocks.
I listen to Spanish radio at red light crosswalks,
And I know the way your perfume travels
To the back when you enter a room.
All of those things that I am now able to own
I will give away again – if you let me come into your home.

**BEGINNING BY SPYING ON COOPER'S *THE SPY*
AND ENDING WITH AN INTERJECTION FROM *KIM***
By: Francis Raven

“Remember that the veil which conceals your true character cannot be raised in years—perhaps never.”

“Again, Cooper's message is unabashedly straightforward: Insofar as a spy resembles a soldier, responsibility for his transgressions can be shifted onto the country and excused by the country's nationalistic ends.”
—Brett F. Woods

Spying on Cooper's *The Spy* (1821)

Say I'm a spy on a text.

Say I'm the head of an intelligence agency.

Say my boss needs to make a decision and what I have discovered will enable him to make said decision.

Say the text is in a bag; we're grabbing in the dark, but there is something knowable within.

So, pretend the text is a secret.

It is objective, but you have access to it through me (well, I guess you could get it yourself, but don't leave me my power, my one true love)).

So, the reader is the executive and I am gathering intelligence for her, for you. You must make a decision. You must learn how to attack.

First, I must choose a text to spy on; which text? An important one or a trivial one (that supposedly says important things about who we are)?

I finally pluck James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* because it is a book about spying that no longer has copyright protections affixed to its spine. There is nothing but my reputation (and possibly a charge of fraud) stopping my from copying *The Spy* word for word and calling it my own and the reputation of spies isn't very good anyway.

I was searching through the text to find the man who I thought was the protagonist, Harvey Birch, but the *match case* button was pressed down such that I never found him and then a thought occurred to me just as suddenly, what if I was not reading *The Spy*, but some other book entirely? I had no outside knowledge of the book, no access to the proofs and I actually didn't think that I knew anyone who had read the book, so I searched the title on the Internet and found a couple of articles that led me to believe that if I was duped they were just as duped (a fake text about a spy is such a brilliant idea).

It's okay to be duped together. He is accused of being a spy for the British.

One of those articles, "Revolution and Literature," informs us that "*The Spy* was a major literary gamble. Prior to Cooper, writers, philosophers, the military, and people in general, although they certainly knew otherwise, simply chose not to admit that spies existed or that they were in any way beneficial to the aims of 'great nations.' In their minds, the spy and his activities were dangerous, morally tarnished, and prone to scandal, illegality, or both."

—Brett F. Woods

So nobody believed in the efficacy of spies, of intelligence.

They believed that all they needed to win a war was might.

This is, of course, what might needs us to believe.

Thus, we shouldn't trust the spy.

He is paid to offer information that you don't have.

You have no access to what he has.

The spy will dupe you.

Okay, so this novel is about how a revolutionary war era peddler is accused of being a spy for the British and because he is accused he decides to do it, to actually become a spy, like if you call the kettle black it will threaten to become black and then it will actually become black no that's not quite it, but it's cooler to think that he was induced by your behavior. He's really just accused of being a British spy when he's actually an American spy, that's all.

Okay, so that's actually what happens.

The thing is that the spy really wants to be trusted. I really want you to trust me.

I'll wear a disguise for that purpose and that purpose alone.

so I'm reading this revolutionary war spy novel, *The Spy*, that takes place in Westchester county, which was a neutral ground during the war ("The county of Westchester, after the British had obtained possession of the island of New York, became common ground, in which both parties continued to act for the remainder of the war of the Revolution. A large proportion of its inhabitants, either restrained by their attachments, or influenced by their fears, affected a neutrality they did not feel.")

but I don't know much about the revolution, so I keep having to look stuff up

here's the weird couple of facts: Marble Hill is politically part of Manhattan because the creek used to run north of it and there was a bridge that was important during the war, King's Bridge (which would have been at West 230th Street) that was taken down in 1916, when the original Spuytin Duyvil Creek was filled in. The Spuytin Duyvil Creek that's by your crib is actually a shipping channel connecting the Hudson River to the Harlem River Ship Canal which was built in 1895. What I'm not sure about is whether the placement of the mouth of the creek was moved...

In the neutral zone
Both sides' irregular forces
Compete to steal
Whatever cattle are left, to plunder
swearing it
was as light as feathers.
Neutral just means *chaos*
In the face of a father's final blessing.

Donald Ringe describes this demilitarized zone as a "moral wasteland where conflicting principles are at war and the only law is might..."

There needs to be a buffer between our intentions and the intentions of our enemy
Where we all get lost.

This is counter intelligence:

“The more identities a man has, the more they express the person they conceal.”

Ha, that’s actually a quote from John le Carre’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, but you thought it was from Cooper’s book. You see how I can implant false memories into your head; I can make you believe things that you didn’t originally believe.

Like that lady who wanted to prove that false memories exist so she tricked little kids into believing that they had been lost in a mall; well, she proved her point, but at what cost, she scarred hundreds of kids for science.

Watch out, the reader is many masters at once.

It’s as if we’re all in a submarine

But I have the periscope
Into the above
And the above is the text
And all you have is me
And you have to decide
Whether to attack or not.

You have to decide whether you’re going to make the main character
Eat the piece of paper that will free him
Or if instead
You’ll give him an unwavering sense of duty, of patriotism.

Later
You must decide if you’ll give him another piece of paper.

One of the nice things about my position is that I won't be there when you read this. This is, in my opinion, the main difference between speech and writing: the proximity of the author.

This is important when you're a spy because depending upon your relationship with the spy you might want to kill him.

Writing also preserves the spy's anonymity, which is one of his most dearly held attributes. That is, you don't know what I look like. I might be wearing a disguise. In fact, I'm wearing a hat that bears the insignia of a profession to which I do not belong.

Of course, anonymity can be oppressive. As spies, our personalities are all leveled off.

Or, as Alfred Schutz writes in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, "Typifications of social collectivities, even if they retain personal character, are highly anonymous since the collectivities cannot ever be experienced directly and by their very nature belong to the transcendent social world of mere contemporaries and predecessors."

Wikipedia has, of course, been criticized based on the anonymity of the authors of its entries.

Of course the spy must know who he is; his own identity.

The spy cannot be anonymous to himself (which, of course, is how the Bourne books buy their hold on readers).

But if the spy is the writer, then what would it mean for the author not to know who he is?

"A spy, like a writer, lives outside the mainstream population. He steals his experience through bribes and reconstructs it."

—John le Carre

One of the main attributes of spies that has always fascinated me is that they have to put in a full day at their regular jobs and then go out and be spies in their spare time. Thus, the spy is often tired. He is tired and anonymous.

Of course, that voice needs to be doubled.
Knowledge cannot rest in the same head with decision.

Of course, you do not trust the spy and the author is dead (though an author said this).

Thus, whatever we are doubled through is soon seen as merely metaphysical nonsense.

“But my son,” cried his father, in great alarm, “you are not a spy; you are not within the rebel--that is, the American lines; there is nothing here to spy.”

Okay.

Belief is a spy.

Visually, the spy is nothing different, the same coat...

...to say that you won't betray someone from the opposite side is to force a country's character on each reader like a new coat, like something new, like something unasked for, but needed...

But the general is just general
Allowing the disguise to pass through
The void of promises the performer does not seem
He could grant: but deception masks importance

And though they wanted him to remain king
The least he can do
Is to have Harvey fit Henry with
The black mask and wig of religious fervor.

“Oh! then,” cried the father in agony, “if you pity him, dear sir, why molest him? He is not a spy; nothing but a desire to see his friends prompted him to venture so far from the regular army in disguise. Leave him with us; there is no reward, no sum, which I will not cheerfully pay.”

“Sir, your anxiety for your friend excuses your language”...

SPY = MAN

A CYPHER is performed.

“Oh! then,” cried the father in agonn, “if nou aitm him, dear mir, whn molemt him? He im not a man; nothing but a demire to mee him friendm aromated him to venture mo far from the regular armn in dimguime. Leave him with um; there im no reward, no mum, which I will not cheerfulln aan.”

“Mir, nour anxietn for nour friend excumem nour language,” maid Lawton, haughtiln; “but nou forget I am a Virginian, and a gentleman.” Turning to the nounge man, he continued, “Were nou ignorant, Caatain Wharton, that our aicketm have been below nou for meveral danm?”

IF YOU KNOW HOW TO PERFORM A TEXT YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS

I'VE HEARD IT SAID.

DO YOU EVEN CARE ABOUT THE PLOT? HOW HARD WILL YOU WORK?

“ALL PLACES ARE NOW ALIKE, AND ALL FACES EQUALLY STRANGE.”

The spy extends himself beyond himself and becomes something
More than himself, but at the same time less; he overshadows the cup

And must accept the fate of the trade: the traitor's stigma
Stitched into trickeries' blatant escape; in drag, no less

As the beginning was confusing, but at least you knew they were acting.
The actor's face made you realize that it was art.

It was this later that the spy's face could never reveal.
But truth and meaning trade places as normative descriptions fall to the descriptive earth.

Intelligence always falls upon its own equalizing water
With a splash in the face: the trading of vices, the sucking of lemons, the refusal to admit

The tethers of sides polished in the neutral zone, merely buying and selling time
In the meantime.

*leave the dead
and that the necessity
confusion and agitation
paid to the deceased
arrested the movements
ready to relieve
walked next to the coffin
with the most determined
with a few straggling boys
and then for the first time
Harvey raised his eyes
and saw the enemy that he
dreaded so near him*

all of this is a quote, but it's not in order, it's never in order

*having been much neglected
which he intended to be included
with a most stoical indifference
partial and just you
at the bottom a good man
paced the floor
and his step was measured*

Searching GEORGE WASHINGTON and finding nothing at the inn,
Though he recognizes the double, true source of intelligence, venturing home,
Choosing the interruption with Skinner's violence
Over letting his father die without a last word
And what is a last word, anyway?

I lost him in the plot, I confess. Perhaps
I'm not a very good spy. I write the word *American*
Circle it
And then append a question mark
Because I can't see the doubling for a moment
And then Washington is kind to a British man
Who just wants to go home
And this confuses me all the more
Since it's not realistic behavior for a war
But maybe things change in a book, maybe a book
Presses in upon your eyes
And merely sees the traveling salesman in his father's living room
Saying goodbye, forgetting the war
If only for just a moment.

“Harvey Birch! Take him dead or alive.” / “Hunted like a beast of the forest.”

CHOPPED

Take him like a birch
Hacked from our country

Ready to force the water apart
Fresh for each new pioneer;

For each generation
To think of itself as new.

To protect the text from brute force
Change strategies between chunks.

Literacy is intelligence, but barely.

As his home burnt to the ground

His vocation reigned deep in his heart

“a flush of ardor began to show itself on his sunburnt features”

, "we are now passing the house of the peddler spy; is it your pleasure that we
burn it?"

Behind and not involving the spy is a trading of women for honor.

**Pled Eds Pry
Sled Dry Pep
Sped Red Ply**

from my soul I pity you
I pity you from my soul
from my soul I pity you
I pity you from my soul

it behooves the friends of liberty to be vigilant
it behooves the friends of liberty to be vigilant
it behooves the friends of liberty to be vigilant
it behooves the friends of liberty to be vigilant

“We hid some of my work.
Honestly; and left the rest in kind when they were acting as spies.
Out of that came the fact that they are no longer the enemy.
For me, this is my world.
American freedom should be a strong link.”

This favor that the employer made of late Harvey.
At one point, they should be coloring
His face, his personal intervention at the end
Black and red in the face of the country to be proud
Searching feelings, but the legs and the eyes and the tongue.

“It is my responsibility to pay for these services, but
I delay payment from above.
I hope we have 100 doubloons of danger, of hatred;
I remember the causes of poverty in the country.”

Every day you
Fight for a better life for them
But I urge more people to seize the opportunity’s
Country of origin.

“It controlled my excitement, I know.
The situation will be different, as the President and other enemies
Stood on the tomb of
Home. Naturally, accounts and real money
Cannot be updated or offered for a long time, if ever.”

"Harvey Birch," he said, turning to the stranger, "the time has arrived when our connection must cease; henceforth and forever we must be strangers."

That is, at mission’s end the executive must sever all ties to the intelligence officer. That is, the *where we got knowledge* must seep meekly without acknowledgement into the rocks upon which our country has been founded.

How he came to know what he knows must shoved under the rug with the pile of Mr. Harper's fake clothes, but the rug is lumpy, it remains so, it always is.

Only the General may remain, only the decision is worthy of existence, only the reader, only the reading, the act, the acting.

except Washington wants to pay him for being a spy for the young nation except it's not much except he doesn't accept the money except it means that he's still owed except forever after he's still owed except you can't erase the debt except the debt must be forgiven hence I don't know why Washington didn't force the cash into the bastard's hand, didn't burn it into his palm except there has to be a way of forgetting except history our history is just a way of forgetting bloodshed except the secrecy of the intelligence officer is just as much for the home team for plausible denials as it is for escape except we need not to know just as much as we need them not to know

But there's no intelligence
At the level

Of consciousness:
The gluing of the standard operating procedure
To the sun that is now rising
Far enough
That the sky is just blue, without a hint of its past:

Is living without the rule of law an answer to the question of connection?

Without which the chaos of loose ends will ensue.

An Interjection from *Kim* (1901)

Showing that the novel begins with the character of property.

The product is the motion of information.

To twisted river. Weaving is a metaphor on both sides.

“I’m Kim, I’m a friend of all the world and I see everything.”

Two quests are intertwined.

If the intelligence is just that there will be a war it’s not much intelligence at all.

“The pedigree of the white stallion is fully established.” By this will he know that thou comest from me. He will then say “What proof hast thou?” and thou wilt answer: “Mahbub Ali has given me the proof.”

That is, Russia is ready to attack from the North.

But the Great Game was essentially a myth; there was virtually no intelligence.

And taking into account traditional knowledge, the information had friends who knew him.

In fact, parents are usually under the guise of a beggar boy.

The practice of risk measures and the payment is not a dirty secret that the wrong way will not be known.

They knew something was responsible for the intelligence.

“Very foolish it is to use the wrong word to a stranger; for though the heart may be clean of offence, how is the stranger to know that? He is more like to search truth with a dagger.”

The spy is the dumb circuit through whom any piece of information might flow.

Using intelligent devices at the periphery (despots, presidents, CEOs) the dumb network does not interfere with an application’s operation.

What is said by the ruler is heard by the spy: no more.

In fact, there is no more unless the ruler says there is more.

This is why they often have no more information than when originally questioned: they are dumb.

They have no depth. They have no depth on purpose.

If they had depth we would have to call them rulers and they are not rulers.

Thus, a principle:
End to end = ruler to ruler.

But we don't know the borders of our jurisdiction: *Often as much a piece of property as a building or a horse.*

It is not against his will, but against his knowledge.

That is, the spy doesn't know who he is.

That is, the spy is a fierce method actor. Fierce for his life.

And the king of travel is only the demand for a new public road.

I found the colonel and was finally able to deliver the document that I could not read.

And heard of war, borders, and recorded the recognition there.

Information is bordered by the kings in the north

A great game of his career last year paid off.

Five of the kings are a serious security threat to the jewel in the crown.

I desperately tried to leave the office, hoping to keep the analysis of an outbreak secret.

Games' divination, jokes, love the theme and purpose of the war to the north (expecting more than 8000 soldiers on the border).

Antiques and receivers.

As well as his death.

An invitation to mimicry is the key to fake prophesy.

“There is no pride among such who follow the Middle Way.”

The issue has created a detailed description of the phone.

A large photograph of the British population control demonstrates knowledge of the Indian uprising in 1857.

Actions that follow feelings should be encouraged.

In the story there is an abundance of character and good games and quite a bit of academic support for Russia's invasion of northern India, or so says the mythical British spy network.

I do not think that you know the game of life (and for processing information and making this song and playing the sick soldiers off one another).

And the river of self-representation can be found in the blood of one another.

Flat work and his life.

Escape wheel and information on the life of sludge cleans the table forever.

E23 is usually located on the train.

There is no action, people are ready (a teacher of vinegar).

Always aware of their own lives to save the horse.

For the first time we are a very emotional distance between people, as a way of evidence.

But the father's common image is so rare as to be forever unseen to the son.

To learn only the privilege of riding on an application to be soon made.

Who has all the tools of sufficient marketing and supply chain management?

XX had a code word.

I'm a man of regularity starting to gain access to the network.

That is, tradecraft becomes merely the trickery of magic to the lama.

But again as a coach of consciousness in general.

The real goal, the old secret documents and redundants in this process (because of the hands of the enemy's key), was expected to be obtained though the mountains which were never secret.

KEEPER BEES
By: Robert Vivian

And how they keep me, keep everyone, and with a taste of their honey I become the stars, I become the dawn and every particle of dust—I become bird song and this heaving of heart, this song, this aliveness given over to making, to more song, more honey, all the love the world over, and I'm just a poet covered with bees for the bees have made me and keep me deep inside, honey, honey and the love that persists and embraces all, even gutter mouse, even broken bottle and how all the debris conspires to make me whole out of every forlorn spirit and how my first born goldfinch shall be named Osip and how the O's shall sound for the rest of my life in dancing and grateful weeping, the full-blown and shaking kind that rocks the Greek Isles and churches made of stone for I can tell the grandchildren I will never have that my weeping was pure in the valley of the turkey vultures and other ruminants and that I have loved who and what I did not understand and the hum of the highway called to me again and again and I walked toward it with my honey and cup of tea and how the Lord saved me in my vow of beauty so many times my knees became occasions for moss to grow on and the almost infinite grass and how much I loved the ancient spirits guiding me, guiding me in my blindness and the bees who wove the honey I was carrying with their whole bodies and the sun, the sun and I was heir to the kingdom of sweetness upon a morn and a taste of honey and how my tongue felt after tasting the honey again and again in order to contact grace and deliverance and let them travel down my throat and so it was okay to fall down and trip over myself for I was swallowing the sun and the stars knew my name in the book of intentions that continues to write itself in the miracle of the present moment and all of us restored and renewed, saved even, and assured for the rest of time as the clocks are vanquished and defeated and consigned to digital hell and all shall be well and every manner of thing shall be well as I used the honey as a salve on an open sore and it healed me as the highway spooled on and on, collecting voices, collecting tires, cherishing its broken glass from Michigan all the way to California and every small town in between that few have ever heard of, the billboards in catastrophic capital letters and the signs pointing west and even the state patrol aching for honey behind their shades and their holsters empty of everything that matters as they track the speed of continental drivers with their radar guns, drivers who dream about honey even as they dream of love and freedom and want to live again as carefree and shrieking children in love with the drone of delirious bees.

MR. JABLONSKI
By: Larry Schrieber

It was the end of the 60's in Taos, New Mexico. Here, like everywhere else, the 60's started in 1967 and ended in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan.

A summer day, 1976, Mamby Hot Springs, Arroyo Hondo. I'm a bit awkward, dutifully naked with my three oldest kids in the same lukewarm springs made famous by Dennis Hopper in the movie Easy Rider. "Where did you get that boo-boo on your butt," asked my youngest, wide-eyed son, Lucas. Looking over my right shoulder at the large ecchymotic orange and purple bruise, I smiled and cringed.

It was my fault. It began, appropriately enough, with pity. Pity for Police Chief William Taggart. Chief Taggart had that Don Knotts quality about him. All 5-feet-6-inches-115 pounds of him, with one of the worst essential tremors I had ever seen. Not too appealing for the sole law enforcement officer in the small town of Questa, elevation 7500 feet, population 1000, in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Northern New Mexico. Doing his annual physical for the Police Academy, I was to make sure he qualified physically and endurance-wise. But the Chief whined -- his back was out, he could not do the required pushups and sit ups, and "gee doc, I need the job." Young and wanting to please, I took the low-road and passed him on his physical. After all, who needed a macho cop in this idyllic place? Only a few hippies got beat up occasionally at the Kiowa Lounge.

A few days later, the EMT's brought in Mr. Jablonski to the Questa Health Center. Just the week before I'd lectured the medics on "Handling the Combative Patient", and oh, how I loved to teach in those days and be center stage. So, when the medics brought in Mr. Jablonski -- with a report of a potentially dangerous and psychotic patient-- I took it as an opportunity to teach and shine. Astutely, I sized him up, realizing something was not quite right; this wild-haired, Eastern European was hallucinating. I looked at his eyes and noticed his glasses lacked one important component: lenses. Obviously paranoid schizophrenic, he was rambling in English and Polish, obsessing about his hemorrhoids, but wouldn't allow me within three feet of his anal varicosities.

Then, Eloisa Cisneros, my trusted LPN, remembering a prior patient, asked if she should summon the Polish translator. Knowing Mrs. Shukavitz lived 20 miles north in Costilla on the Colorado line, as a full time maid, she had little expertise with psychotic-eyeglass-lens-less-men-with-bleeding-hemorrhoids, I shook my head. Jablonski got more restless. I couldn't help notice the EMT's over my shoulder. I enjoyed the attention, and looked forward to a satisfactory resolution. Jablonski kept on about his hemorrhoids and his need for psychic healing -- not including a proctoscopic examination. Then I summed it up. "Well, Mr. Jablonski, I think you need a hospital." "Yes." Jablonski enthusiastically concurred. "And a hospital that can treat your hemorrhoids and your justifiable emotional needs," I added. Jablonski nodded, agreeing with every word. "Therefore, the best hospital is the State Psychiatric Hospital just over the pass in Las Vegas, New Mexico," I told him. Again, Jablonski nodded at my suggestions as if they were written on slate. "And, finally since you have no car, our gentle Police Chief William Taggart will gladly transport you." A final nod and a smile from my patient and admiring glances from the audience of two EMT's.

Chief Taggart was summoned. The Chief nervously pulled into the parking lot of the Questa Health Center. Just then Jablonski started to unravel, waving his arms, shaking his head back and forth, becoming even more agitated.

Just a little bump in the road. So, cocky and self-assured, I tried to calm down the actively hallucinating visiting Pole. I thought he was ready to charge our hyperthyroid Chief.

“Now Mr. Jablonski, don’t get upset, no one will hurt you,” I assured him. Jablonski lit up! Eyes bulged out and then almost too calmly pronounced, “The only one that will get hurt is you, doctor.” With that statement he grabbed the Chief’s billy club and went after me. I took off running as fast as my transported New York legs would carry me across the parking lot. He threw the lead-lined club and caught me square in my right gluteus maximus, luckily the only place on my body that would not break. I was fast and frightened and continued to run. *Don’t worry* I thought, *the police are here*. Then Chief Taggart took out his revolver and aimed. I turned and watched with horror -- his arm shaking, holding a gun, this under-qualified testosterone- deficient cop who only passed his test by my dishonesty. I yelled, “Don’t shoot, Chief,” sure that he would miss the psychotic Pole and kill the neurotic Jew instead. Taggart dropped his gun by his side and knowing his own capabilities did what he did best—nothing.

My hands shaking, I opened the truck door. As I tried to start the ignition, Jablonski, having reclaimed the club, jumped on the hood and was about to smash in the windshield. Just as abruptly he must have heard some of my ancestors creeping into his hallucinations pleading for mercy, and he dropped the club and departed gingerly, almost daintily, from the hood of my truck. Taggart, always the opportunist, sprung back into action and handcuffed the now passive suspect and saved the day.

So son, that is how your father got his boo-boo on his butt.



HWY 1
By: Allen Forrest

NIGHTINGALE OF THE ANDES

By: **Katacha Diaz**

Around the third day of my trip home to Peru, to see my grandmother, *Mamama*, and family, I was invited to the extended family Sunday luncheon at my uncle and aunt's home in Miraflores, a suburb of Lima where I grew up. Over *Pisco* sour cocktails and Tomasita's homemade *empanadas*, *Tío* Guillermo asked if there was something special I'd like to do during my summer visit. Without hesitation I told him, "Yma Sumac at *El Teatro Municipal*," well aware that the concert sold-out weeks before.

"Let me see what I can do," he smiled and excused himself to go make a few phone calls in his study. My male cousins rolled their eyes and gave each other the look; if their father, "*El Doctor*," scored the tickets for the Peruvian-born diva's concert, one of them would have to escort their *gringa* cousin to the theatre. It was the early 1970s, and a time of social and political unrest in Peru. Women in our family, regardless of age, did not venture out evenings unaccompanied in the affluent conclave of Miraflores, much less to a late-evening theatre concert in downtown Lima.

Naturally, the cousins teased me about my eclectic tastes in music; they had no idea what Yma Sumac meant to me. But then, my privileged upbringing and formative years spent in Miraflores were but a harmless shadow filled with wonderful memories; and so I shared with my cousins that my interest and fascination with the singer went back to childhood days when I first heard the *Voice of the Xtabay*, her debut album, at our grandparents' home. When our grandfather, *Papapa*, was alive, musical entertainment always followed the extended family's formal but leisurely four-hour Sunday luncheon. Since I was lucky enough to be the family's first-born grandchild, I got to spend a lot of time with our grandparents. I was my grandfather's helpful little assistant, a job I took very seriously, especially on Sunday's, when I proudly stood next to him in the solarium by the phonograph cabinet and watched him finalize the record albums for our afternoon musical entertainment. Being a curious and inquisitive child, I was full of questions about the strikingly beautiful woman featured on the cover of the record album he'd entrusted to my care. "She's an Incan princess," my grandfather said, with a twinkle in his eye, "and a direct descendant from Atahualpa, our last Inca emperor." Hand-in-hand we walked over to sit with my grandmother, and happily situated between them, I announced, "I want to be an Incan princess, and live in a big castle high up in the Andes Mountains..." When the music began playing, I stopped talking and found myself spellbound with the singer's birdlike voice; reminiscent of the exotic colorful chirping birds from the Amazon that my great-aunties kept in fancy little cages in their courtyards.

Time moves on. I was in my 20s when I accidentally stumbled across Yma Sumac's music in New York City. When I learned more about her amazing four-octaves vocal range, and her eclectic tastes in the music she recorded – Peruvian folk songs, lounge music, jazz and rock, and her vivacious stage personality, the more intrigued I became. Yma Sumac, Nightingale of the Andes, was self-taught and unabashedly original. Her singing was a mix of birdlike and eerie sounds from the musical influences in her life – birds, jungle creatures, and the winds and sounds of nature. A once well-known celebrity, the diva sold millions of records, appeared in several Hollywood movies and in a Broadway musical, and performed in sold-out concert halls and nightclubs captivating audiences in Europe and the United States. Yma Sumac came with a diverse group of international fans that included heads of state, rock musicians, opera singers, politicians, classic pop, and lounge music *aficionados*. Clearly, the visiting *gringa* cousin was in very good company and not alone in her obsession and fascination with the chanteuse.

Lunch was announced and everyone adjourned to the formal dining room where my uncle soon joined the family. Unfortunately his phone calls didn't yield the intended results, so *Tío* Guillermo

asked his daughter, Charo, how the romance was going between her friend and the dictator's son. According to the latest buzz, they were still dating; so, "*El Doctor*" asked my cousin to call her girlfriend and inquire if the first couple was planning to attend the concert.

Everyone knew the best seat in the house at *El Teatro Municipal* was the Presidential Box; and when not in use by the president or the first couple, the posh box was available to immediate family and guests. And so over bites of *ceviche* and *papas a la huancaína*, Tío Guillermo nonchalantly suggested Charo and I would certainly be honored to attend diva's concert as guests of the dictator's young and handsome playboy son. Unsurprisingly, my male cousins were all smiles and enthusiastically favored the new plan; they would be off the hook and free to carry on with their social plans that evening.

The 1968 military *coup d'état* plunged the country into dictatorship and a tight reign of left-wing military administration. Given the political climate and tense relations between anti-American coup leaders and the United States, it was not surprising that American citizen visa applications were routinely turned down, including that of Yma Sumac who became a U.S. citizen after moving to the States in 1946. Even though the Inca Princess was a well-known international personality and terrific publicity for the country, the military coup leaders would not forgive the talented singer for renouncing her Peruvian citizenship. Interestingly, at the time, the dictatorship espoused justice for the poor and indigenous people of the Amazon and the Andes. Yma Sumac was an Incan born princess from the Andes; her claim as a direct descendant of Atahualpa was formally supported in 1946 by the Peruvian government. Finally, the government relented and granted her an extended stay visa. Sadly, when Yma Sumac returned to live in Peru in 1971, the left-wing administration controlled the media outlets throughout the country and the diva was totally ignored.

At the time of my visit, now middle-aged with her popularity waning, Yma Sumac quietly drifted into semi-retirement, performing occasionally only in the States and Peru. And so, when *El Teatro Municipal de Lima* announced a one-night special performance, the concert tickets sold out in a matter of hours. When her disappointed fans clamored for tickets at the theatre's box office, the police were called in to restore order and disperse the crowd.

As a young *señorita* growing up in Miraflores, I attended my first concert at *El Teatro Municipal* in the late-1950s. I have lovely memories of a music filled evening, and also of the opulent theatre's crystal chandeliers, mirror-polished marble floors, luxurious red carpet and plush concert hall seating, the thick red velvet curtains, state-of-the-art stage lighting and acoustics. And so, on a warm summer afternoon, while I reminisced with my grandmother and Tía Luz, the phone rang; it was my cousin Charo calling with update for Yma Sumac concert tickets. It was official! We had received a formal invitation from the dictator's son to join him and his aristocrat girlfriend in the Presidential Box. The young couple along with assigned security detail that day will pick us up at our grandmother's house and escort us to and from the theatre that evening.

On the day of the concert, the doorbell rang and the maid showed the young couple and secret service bodyguard to the parlor. After formal introductions, Charo and I kissed *Mamama* good-bye and we were escorted to the waiting car. The agent in charge sat up front and while he talked into his walkie-talkie, using code names of course, to his colleagues in a parked vehicle across the street, the chauffeur drove us straight to the front entrance of *El Teatro Municipal* in downtown Lima, where the theatre's executive director waited to escort us to the Presidential Box.

After a short security briefing in the parlor area of the Presidential Box, we enjoyed pre-performance glasses of bubbly and gourmet treats until it was time to take our seats. Before Ms. Sumac took the stage, the spot light shined on the Presidential Box, and the dictator's charismatic son waved to friends in the audience. Then in a surprise move, he graciously stepped aside and insisted my cousin and I sit up front to enjoy the unobstructed view. He and his girlfriend took the seats directly behind us. When the lights went down, the young couple quietly adjourned to the

parlor area where they spent the better part of the evening. Charo and I remained under the watchful eyes of Peru's secret service agents, and also the theatre goers who from time-to-time glanced up, trying to figure out who we were.

From the moment the thick, red velvet curtains were lifted at *El Teatro Municipal*; I was completely fascinated with the petite and exotic diva standing center stage, her long hair in thick braids, dressed superbly in traditional Indian dress and wearing lots of gold and silver jewelry befitting a Incan Princess. Yma Sumac's ardent fans went wild, immediately jumping to their feet, clapping and whistling enthusiastically for what seemed an eternity, the first of many standing ovations during the course of what was truly a dazzling evening filled with soulful melodies. Dignified, gracious, and grateful for the opportunity to perform for the first time since her return to live in Peru, the Nightingale of the Andes dedicated the evening's concert to her fans and the people in the land of her birth. Yma Sumac and her musicians came together for a magical evening that captured the hearts of the packed theatre.

Sixty plus years later, the *Voice of the Xtabay* is still my favorite of the diva's recordings. And, oh what a joy and delight, to listen to Yma Sumac's incredible birdlike voice, I am once again transported back in time to my grandparent's house in Miraflores, and to a magical evening sitting spellbound in the Presidential Box, the best seat in the house, at the opulent *El Teatro Municipal de Lima*. The dictator's handsome son gallant gesture did not go unnoticed then, nor has it been forgotten so many years later.

IMAGINE A DOOR By: Jay Shearer

I went looking for Kafka and instead found Wallace, bursting in his way through Kafka's famous door. It's somewhat famous anyway, sort of medium famous, especially if you're acquainted with *The Trial*. In Wallace, though, it's harder to see. In the parable where it first appears, the Door is impassable. Kafka closes it coldly: the same door, Wallace, in an essay eighty years later, would swing open like a cosmic life coach.

This was just months before the latter hung himself, and long before we couldn't stop discussing him. I stood in a brightly lit megastore and shelf-read an essay from *Consider the Lobster*, his last collection. This was David Foster Wallace's brief piece on Kafka, and specifically teaching Kafka, first published in *Harpers*, an essay I'd admired but had mostly forgotten. I would teach Kafka that summer—specifically *The Trial*—and hoped this might help. I was puzzled, though, by the image Wallace closed with. I was certain I'd heard it before. *That Door*.

Now assigning *The Trial* to contemporary undergrads is already a tall order, but assigning *The Trial* to a Gen Ed Lit course in the middle of summer is clearly suicidal. It is choosing this punishment. "Understanding Literature" was—and is—the given title of the course, as if that could be accomplished in eight weeks of central summer with horny, distract-able twenty-year-olds who'd rather be partying or catching rays (as would, for that matter, their instructor).

Still, I stick it to them: *The Trial*. Joseph K and his encounters with the Law. His labyrinth and mostly futile pursuit. And at first, they're won by it. The book's weirdness. Its strange suspense. The frustrated energy and absurd digressions. On page 1, Joseph K is arrested without cause: a man knocks on his door and announces this flatly. No evidence or explicit charge is brought against him. He is arrested, then summoned to appear in court, marked from the get-go as officially wanted for an unnamed or unnamable crime. This is not only an indictment from the lower case law, we soon discover, but some sort of otherworldly system of Law, capital L, with secret courts and corrupt justices, different from—and indifferent to—the "regular" law we know: "higher," heavier, far more elusive.

We follow Joseph K on the maddening quest to clear his name, or at least discover the charge: a journey fueled by the logic of dreams, especially the not so pleasant ones.

One way to engage their attention with a book of this heft is via the contemporary parallel, that old steady standby: volatile cases of punishment without trial, incarceration without charge or right to counsel, conviction of the innocent, etc. We talk Guantanamo detainees (especially back then), racial profiling of presumed gangbangers, Chinese dissidents, death row inmates cleared by DNA. They perk up at this, though it eventually feels like an easy distraction from the weirder more cosmic system of indictment Kafka means as well. His satire of bureaucratic absurdity and the brutality of governments or "free" societies seems in the end slightly secondary to this more out-there layer of the Law: spiritual or otherworldly systems we can barely see, as indifferent and power-mad as banks or governments. And this is in part where Wallace comes in.

Foster Wallace's brief essay—the one I'd been reading in the mega-store—explores Kafka and Kafka's work, specifically teaching Kafka and the difficulties of understanding or explaining Kafka, and how to convince contemporary undergrads of his less-than-obvious "funniness." Wallace's last bit of sage advice—what induced my déjà vu suspicion—suggested that, to understand Kafka, we should imagine his fiction as "all about a kind of door": a door we desperately want and need to get

through. We pound on this door again and again, and when it finally opens, explains the author, “it opens *outward*. We’d been inside what we wanted all along.”

This clearly echoes the infamous door in the odd climactic chapter of *The Trial* (“In the Cathedral”), where Joseph K is interrogated by a mysterious priest. Trying to illustrate to Joseph K why he is deluded in his quest, this priest tells a parable about a man awaiting entry to a door, the one that leads to the Law. Explicitly Capital L. In the priest’s story, the man very badly wants to enter through the doorway to the Law, but the Doorkeeper tells him he can’t be let in—not yet—so the man waits. And waits and waits and waits and waits. Days, months, years, decades. He grows old waiting; he becomes intimately acquainted with the fleas that live in the Doorkeeper’s collar. Hunched with age and futility, he finally asks the Doorkeeper why, in all his years of waiting, no one else has come seeking entry to the Law. The Doorkeeper bluntly explains: all along, this door was meant only for him. It was this guy’s *own personal door* to the Law. Then the Doorkeeper tells him he’s going to close it now. And he *closes* it.

A few nights ago, hard pressed for a bedtime story, I told my eight-year old this parable. I’d just read it again for this project. Forgive me. He seemed pretty into it, actually. When I finished, my son whispered through the darkness, *Woob*. Why’d he *close* it?

I didn’t have an answer for him, only: that’s weird, huh? Why *does* he close it? Seconds later, I felt stupid—so inappropriate—and tried to shift gears. Positive, be positive. Tell him a story where people get *through* doors.

Kafka’s door emphasizes futility, confusion. The inevitable loss or failure built into seeking knowledge or ease. The door once open has permanently closed. No explanation why. Contrast that with Wallace’s door: you want desperately to get through it, you pound on it repeatedly, acting, as it were, as your own Doorkeeper, until the door *opens*, and it opens *outward*. You’d been inside what you wanted all along.

David Foster Wallace hung himself in his backyard patio in Pomona, California, only 46 (July 2008). His wife found him there, a lawn chair kicked away beneath him. He was a big guy, Wallace, pretty hefty, it seemed. I have to admit it was one of my first thoughts when I found out. Read no disrespect here: I’m only reporting. I was—and am—a serious fan, a dedicated admirer, awed by his work, but my idiot ape mind went there fast. My second or third thought after the anger (no *way!* why?): his large heavy body swinging somewhere.

He’d been off his Nardil (for depression), they say. This part went under-reported for a while. If I’d heard that story earlier—now told to death—it’d surely have eased the anger and confusion. There wasn’t time for him to get back on the Nardil evidently, took months to truly do the trick, and this was the stuff that did it for him.

He must have found himself outside the given door, wherever—or whoever—he hoped to return to: no longer what he’d wanted all along.

Franz Joseph Kafka died lying down, on a single bed in Prague, of tuberculosis on 41 (July 1925). He couldn’t swallow. Couldn’t bear to. In his journals and letters, he describes the days of triumph when he could bear to put down half a glass of water. Eat a third of a meal.

He died, fittingly enough, after looking over galleys of “The Hunger Artist,” suffering from consumption of the *throat*. The disease inflicted so much pain that he couldn’t bear to swallow food or water, a lot like his character the Hunger Artist, who, although capable of swallowing, simply couldn’t find any food that he liked. The author dies, unable to swallow, just after creating a character who *refused to swallow food*. Cheap to note, absolutely, but this is Kafkaesque. Kafka’s *death* was Kafkaesque. I mean, that’s answering the mission, you know? That’s going all out.

Kafka, like anyone ill or anxious in the early 20th century, didn't have the benefit of doctor-sanctioned meds for his condition or, if he had one, disorder. One wonders, by today's standards, what Kafka might be diagnosed with? Clinical depression? Maybe, though that doesn't sound quite complete. Bipolar? Hard to say, though he did manage to hold a fairly demanding day job yet produce reams of vitally precise writing by late afternoon and evening (most of it while living with his parents and sisters in a cramped apartment in Prague). Social Anxiety Disorder? Now we're talking. Getting warmer. But what's maybe even closer, more to the point, might be: *Generalized Anxiety Disorder*. Wouldn't he see this as *the* condition, *our* condition? Why call it 'disorder'? (he might ask). Anxiety comes with the very act of breathing in, of taking in and absorbing the world. Is it not that we are *inside* the Anxiety, that *it* surrounds *us*, and not the other way around?

Kafka on Paxil might have given us a Gregor Samsa, whose complexion, as it were, clears, the big bug morphing back to human after being sprayed with a state-sanctioned SRI (Metamorphisal). Clear-eyed, sanitized, beyond persecution. All family tensions reconciled, the fact of his Jewishness blunted and quashed as if Jewishness were only an impulsive mood. If he'd written *The Trial* on Zolof, would the Doorkeeper have let the guy through?

But this implies anti-depressants only blunt or brighten the edge of the world. Of course many need and benefit from such medication. Could one write *The Trial* on an SRI? You could argue that, without it, a serious depressive with a massive talent might not even be able to start it.

Where you can just as swiftly "get" students with a book like Kafka's, truly snap them to attention, is not with the contemporary parallel but rather, the personal story. Something true and intimate and closer to home (or at least the home city). I tell them the story of a friend of mine, this friend arrested Joseph K-style, without charge, taken by the law at the doorway of his Chicago apartment, not even allowed to put on shoes. He was arrested in the early morning, without being read a charge, disallowed at the doorway the common courtesy of stepping back in for footwear. Never read a charge. To this day. In his case, eventually, the charge became quite specific, that is: he was charged on paper with *exposing himself to a minor* at a playground no less, a school playground, a site of innocence. Approaching in an old school trench coat, allegedly, and flashing an innocent schoolgirl. The notion was stunning to all who knew him.

Later, his name would be cleared. Other facts would begin to align. It would surface that another man, a tall redheaded man with a beard and tattoos had been sighted exposing himself at another playground near. Sighted but never apprehended. My friend is not red-headed nor has tattoos, but he does have a beard; he has light brown hair, a light brown beard. He is not especially tall. He's medium tall maybe. He is among the smartest, funniest conversationalists I know. I very much admire and respect him. I couldn't believe he was capable of such a thing. Although then again, there was that *charge*. (Maybe he had. Who knew?)

The charge would tear a solid year of life from my friend's existence—and who knew how many years of hope for the world or his place in it—and for no other reason, it turned out, than he was having a cigarette in his car, sitting there before heading into a house for the day's paint job, a bearded older dude hanging out in his car near the accuser's school. Perhaps she passed, saw him, and something stuck. His face, license plate number, etc. Maybe she'd been flashed by the other guy, and thought my friend was him? Or she'd just *heard* about the other guy (what some thought seemed possible) and decided it also happened to her?

That's one explanation they came up with, anyway. The child who accused him, it would come to light, had seen my friend in his car while she was walking to school, a creepy older dude smoking in his car, and decided she'd been flashed by the guy she'd heard about. Or she really *had* been flashed, earlier, and decided this was the guy. But this was never confirmed. The accuser (this young girl) never showed up at the trial, the lower case trial of the lower case law, the system that

finally dismissed the charge. The capital T Trial would also leave its mark, though. That's the Trial that cannot be dismissed.

I discuss this with the class: how the simple act of leveling a charge will mark someone against their—and everyone's—will. It can change perceptions of anyone you know, no matter how well you know them. Accusation surrounds the accused like a grayish cloud of gnats. That's why it's so important we secure their rights, assure them counsel. Though again, this feels distinct from the other, more elusive Law at play in *The Trial*, which, in significant, untold ways, my friend also faced. It seemed my personal story for students hadn't ended in all that personal a place.

Wallace ended his story in a personal place—everyone does, of course, but few so publicly. That is, many die as he did but few receive such an ongoing gush of attention when they go. This was partly mourning, partly shock. Part morbid curiosity. His last dramatic gesture seemed contradictory to the story he'd told in his prose, his stylized whimsy and “tornadic” rambling: self-conscious, infectious, hyper-inspired, a gush of mind, of syntax and verbiage, what some saw as overly mannered and pretentious and others read as brilliantly abundant. Ideas, images, hilarity, doubt burst from his prose like water from a hydrant. Had it been too much to manage or bear? (As several have elsewhere suggested.)

The deeply personal of his personal story have by now been told to death: his struggles with depression, with alcohol and dope, his halfway house time in Boston, the electroshock therapy treatments (semi-successful), the saving grace of his marriage (apparently), along with his ongoing, consuming desire to produce prose—and above all, fiction—that spoke in unique and vital ways, a pursuit that, before his farewell, hadn't (they say) been going so well.

When Wallace departed, he left behind reams of unpublished work—just as Kafka had, though Wallace's pile was a few inches taller. Wallace left no explicit instructions, just a primly set stack of pages on the work table in his study, a dozen neatly typed chapters of what would become (with other found material) *The Pale King*, posthumously arranged by his editor (arguably its co-author). Kafka, on the other hand, made that famous last request to his best friend Max Brod, that is, to burn all his manuscripts “unread.” He also left a very short list of pieces Brod should preserve, though this didn't include his unfinished novels *The Trial* or *The Castle* or what came to be *Amerika*. Or nearly all of the shorts. All but a precious few Brod was instructed to burn to ash.

I'm surely not the first to imagine this request as vanity or self-regard disguised as self-loathing, a challenge to not do as asked. By making the demand to his best friend Brod, a well-published author with literary connections—and Kafka's most enthusiastic promoter—had the dying artist asked for the reverse? By *Burn these!* had he really meant *Show these off!*

That's what Brod did, of course. Thankfully. Despite producing in his lifetime 95 of his own books (95!), Max Brod will forever be known as the savior of Kafka's three or four (as well as Kafka's letters and diaries and the collected shorts, which are more or less complete). None of the novels were finished. Yet *The Trial* was published the year after Kafka's death (1925), what seems in retrospect a bit of a rush.

There was less hurry with *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel*, Wallace's left-behind whale of a book, cobbled together by his former editor, Michael Pietsch, who'd worked with him on *Infinite Jest*. With *The Pale King*, the publisher waited three years (2008-11). But this was no doubt necessary, considering the sheer avalanche of material Pietsch was asked to wade through, including, incredibly, hundreds and hundreds of handwritten pages. Among the weirder facts about the final text of *The Pale King*: 20% of what Pietsch chose for publication was *handwritten*—and in Wallace's tiny, barely legible spider-text. These pages—as well as reams of often messily annotated text, some typewritten, some in notebooks, some on floppy discs—were found in Wallace's study by his wife and former

literary agent, all of it beyond the stack he'd left on his desk. But in leaving those specific pages to be found (250 of them), had the famously perfectionist author meant to say: only these pages are worth reading? Just *these*?

If an implied request, this was also denied. But in Wallace's case, it's harder not to see the condensing of chaos into saleable text as cashing in on his death. To be fair, Pietsch was asked to do this by Wallace's wife and former literary agent. Besides, the book contains gorgeous, inimitably lucid passages much different in places than the Wallace we'd grown accustomed to. That is, thank god they went ahead and did it, despite whatever Wallace's wish.

The book lasted eight weeks on the Hardcover Fiction bestseller list, spending two weeks in a row at #3 after the date of its release. It's a weird book to go bestseller, actually, or to think of clocking in that way. Its central story involves the workers in an IRS office and their heroic confrontations with boredom, what Wallace thought—in an age of easy distraction—was the great untold struggle of existence, perhaps especially workplace existence, where most of us spend most of our time.

Wallace likely spent most of his time writing at his worktable, alone. Writing or reading, likely also grading. He was also a creative writing and literature professor, and by all reports an excellent one. But mostly he wrote. Fiction, essays, inspired journalism; admired in all categories. He was respected both in academia and the rarified world of New York publishing. To know the crushing work-world of boredom—and especially that regarding taxes—he had to do research, study tax law and policy, take accounting exams for the hell of it, et cetera. Kafka, on the other hand, was a lifelong lawyer, a doctor of the law, who worked for the Workers Accident Insurance Company in Prague. He was intimately acquainted with the mundane details of office life, with the gray flannel boredom and grinding stress of day-to-day paperwork, day-to-day people. As a literary figure of his time, he was little known outside his own circle, an obscure oddity who wrote dark fables and absurd fantasies, many involving animals. When he was promoted at the Worker's Accident Insurance Company, and then to an office of his own overlooking his gothic home city, he reported massive waves of despair at the advance, isolated a second time over by way of successfully hiking the ladder.

The original manuscript of *The Trial* now resides in the German Literature Archive in Marbach, Germany. How it got there and how that particular institution in that particular country made claim to ownership is a complicated story many have called, predictably, Kafkaesque. The manuscript first landed in Israel, in Tel Aviv, when Kafka's old friend and literary executor Max Brod fled Prague just before Nazi occupation (1939), Kafka's papers in his suitcase. Brod would later have a mistress in Tel Aviv, his secretary, Esther Hoffe, who, after Max Brod's death (1968) was given possession and stewardship of Kafka's remaining papers, including *The Trial*. Brod had come to champion Kafka's Jewishness as the most important feature in his writing—a claim that's highly debatable—and his explicit wish was that Kafka's work be bequeathed to the National Library of Israel. But this request was also denied.

In 1974, Esther Hoffe, Brod's former mistress, was stopped at the Tel Aviv airport, Kafka's papers now in *her* suitcase, and was disallowed, like a smuggler of rare indigenous plant life, to take them from the country. Fourteen years later (1988), spunky Esther Hoffe, famously—and controversially—auctioned off the manuscript of *The Trial* for \$2 million dollars, and it eventually landed in Marbach. There's even another, weirder (though minor) chapter, involving Kafka's remaining papers and the *daughters* of Esther Hoffe (for keener analysis of this complicated mess, see Judith Butler's "Who Owns Kafka?").

These sorts of questions never leave us: capital P Prosecutors—and Public Defenders—will always ask them. Such as: Who owns *The Trial*? Who owns *The Pale King*? What’s “Kafkaesque” really mean anyway? Perhaps what Kafka’s writing evokes or resembles has come to mean more than the writing itself. Inexplicable, absurd and nightmarish scenarios; the self-produced satire of bureaucracies and states; the illogical and cruel ways we choose to live together (or rather, more often, apart). These are the worlds we breathe in daily. Has the notion of “Kafkaesque” somehow out-Kafka-ed Kafka?

I ask my students these sorts of questions the second time I teach *The Trial*, over a year later, the following fall. Elif Batuman’s cover story about the daughters of Brod’s mistress and yet another trial involving Kafka’s work appears, amazingly, in the *New York Times Magazine*, the week after we start the book as a class (“Kafka’s Last Trial” Sept., 2010). And this time, the going is less rough. The students seem eager. I know the book a little better; it is autumn and the air is cooler, etc.

We take some time with this contemporary side story. I show them Kafka on the cover of a major magazine from that very Sunday—the mournful-eyed mysterious Franz staring out from another era, unaware he’d be the center of so much debate in this one. But as always, this sort of Extra! Extra! lit world gossip seems far away in an important sense from the book’s aim—or mine—and I drop the story of the Hoffes and Kafka’s papers soon enough. Again, I stick it to them (or us): *The Trial*. Ask questions of biography or ownership too often and you destroy any pleasure in the actual work.

I’d discovered this the hard way years before, when I’d assigned a Wallace piece to a nonfiction workshop, in part out of tribute, only months after his suicide. No one seemed to know him, so at first, I held back this darker detail. I assigned Wallace’s title essay from another collection about a tourist cruise to the Caribbean (“A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again”). This too was rough going. The vocabulary level alone put some off. Half seemed to love it, half had no idea what to make of it. One especially close reader saw his condemnations of the cruise-goers as more morbid than necessary, especially when he suggests the boarding of the ship resembles the cattle call at Auschwitz in *Schindler’s List*.

It’s just one moment in the essay, not really all that striking, yet it started a discussion of the darkness beneath his effusive style and ended with the revelation none of them would be able to shake. So he killed himself, you’re saying? (Suddenly they were awake to it.) Really? Just recently?

Even if there were no real signs of suicide in this essay, these guys went looking for it anyway. This is how they would read him now—not as a great writer, but as a great suicide who happened to write. One student pored through *Infinite Jest* and found deadly moods and “cries for help” all over it. During another discussion about his work and sudden death—one too many, I thought—I got a little desperate to make a point and told them another personal story. This involved an old friend of mine who hung himself, an aspiring writer who would aspire no more. My point was, I suppose, that suicide is inexplicable and harrowing and nothing to romanticize or glorify. But this seemed lost on them. They were fascinated by *this* suicide now. I proceeded to relate details, some of doubtful relevance, such as: my friend, before he died, had been working on a screenplay about Peter Pan, the famous flying child who refused to grow up. I wondered if my friend, just over 40, had decided he didn’t want to either (or hadn’t and wasn’t likely to).

But this is skin in the game only by proxy. It’s someone else’s skin, after all, not mine. Does it count as much because I simply knew them? These friends whose stories I’ve stolen: the suicide and the falsely accused? This latter arrested at his front door Joseph K-like, not allowed to go back in for shoes. But it’s a great story, no? If horrible to live through, thrilling to tell.

A few nights ago, hard-pressed for a bedtime story, I lifted another one to tell my son. This time: the Hunger Artist. But I couldn't go through with it; I changed it, worried it might corrupt his dreams (after all, the Hunger Artist dies. And I don't think that's giving much away). In my version, the Hunger Artist finds, on his deathbed, if not food that he likes, at least some he can stomach. He gets healthy, finally puts on some weight, and becomes an advocate for healthy eating and exercise. He hawks fitness and martial arts aerobics tapes, healthy gourmet cooking videos, etc. As a fitness and nutrition guru, he still goes by "The Hunger Artist," only this is the artist who will shut your hunger *down*. He appears on all the important talk shows. He is ultra-confident and a cut-up on camera, having finally found the food he likes. Loves, in fact. I lean over my son in the darkness and whisper: *the Hunger Artist finally made it. He'd been inside, you see, what he wanted all along.*

But he'd fallen asleep, probably didn't know what to make of it—or me—and went surfing in dreamland for Peter Pan. I was likely trying to compensate for the other story I'd thoughtlessly told him, the door I'd closed when I told him Kafka's parable, what had once befuddled him, if not freaked him out. Some stories are better left untold, of course. Or to put a finer point on it (if you're in the mood): some doors are best left open.

WRITING ON STONE: IN SEARCH OF AN ORACLE

By: Jay Hansford C. Vest

It was an interminable drive over a gravel, graded road with only endless distance in sight. We were on our way to the fabled Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park in southern Alberta along the Milk River. Bob, a budding environmental activist from Missoula, had joined me in my visit to Brocket for the “Little Pipe” medicine bundle opening. After opening his pipe bundle in reviving the spirits or nature persons, the old man began telling us of his visit earlier that spring to commemorate the people’s historic association with Writing-on-Stone. “It’s a place of mystery,” he said, “where the ghosts live. Our people went there to read the writings, which change every day. There is strong medicine there.”

In his way, the old man always seemed to know exactly what to say; his words, even in the most abbreviated expression, never failed to give me cause for reflection and meditation upon their inherent wisdom. Telling us that the writings would appear briefly at sunrise on the sandstone cliffs above the river, old Joe had given us an irresistible quest, like that given to the warriors of old and he knew it.

According to the old man, the place was something of an oracle with the writings giving warning when enemies were about, revealing the location of buffalo herds, or where wandering horses had strayed, and even foretelling future events. With these mysterious properties, he assured us Writing-on-Stone is a sacred place to the Pikuni-Blackfeet.

Pulling into the park, we found a little oasis of green and selected a campsite nearby the park offices. There were two female attendants – college age women – who appeared starved for company. It was obvious that they had been manning the outpost for weeks with only each other for company. They wanted to talk and you can imagine they long for companionship. It was almost frightening to meet them in this state of lonely despair, but they were beautiful and it was a nice place to have a campfire around which to share our collective stories.

As evening was soon upon us, we settled in around our little hearth and the rangers began to tell us about some previous events in the park. There had been one eerie encounter when a Blood Indian woman visited the place. Upon looking at one of the petroglyph laced walls, she expressed a sudden and unexpected angst and in the moment paralyzed with fear she refused to walk by it. In her avoidance, the woman stepped off the trail and virtually onto a rare pigmy rattlesnake. It had caused quite a start for our guides when the woman nearly fainted in fear so that she had to be evacuated from the park.

It was not a popular destination and there were few visitors so the event gave the girls a summer’s worth of excitement but there had been more meaningful encounters. Sometime before, old Joe Crowshoe, my Pikuni grandfather had come calling with a prominent Calgary archaeologist. Joe had arrived to give blessing and pay his respects to the sacred place. In doing so, he unfurled a painted banner from the parapets above the petroglyphs. His tribute was accompanied with songs and offerings to the spirits. In effect, he had renewed the Pikuni-Blackfeet covenant with the spirits of this sacred place.

Our visit gave the companion starved girls something more in their lonely vigil at the Writing-on-Stone Park. It was a nice evening around the campfire as we swapped tales through the evening. In turn, they had promised to give us the full tour from top to bottom during the coming day.

As the park awakened in the early morning light of summer, we prepared our breakfast and soon set out to visit the “hoo doos.” These mysterious “hoo doos” were wind eroded rock outcrops that resembled a field of toadstools having a hard rock cap atop a soft stem of exposed earth. In the

morning light, the site had an uncanny appearance something akin to a field chocked full of ghost like apparitions.

Taking the road across and down through the rim, we entered a little coulee above the Milk River. Etched into steep slab like rock walls, the petroglyphs were at home in this basin. A common motif known as a shield bearing warrior appeared over and over. Recounting the archaeologist's assessment, the rangers informed us that it was a Shoshoni etching dating from their inhabitation of the region some ten thousand years earlier. However, old Joe had tipped over their lithic cart during his visit avowing it was a Sun Dance motif representative of Pikuni-Blackfeet tradition and their annual Okan ceremonial honoring of the Sun.

Upon hearing the girl's explanation, I was reminded of something the old woman had told me some time ago. She was referencing the buffalo jump, Head-Smashed-In, and recalling a tale affirming Pikuni-Blackfeet sovereignty over the region. It seems that Akaiyan, a Pikuni hero associated with the acquisition of the Beaver medicine, had long ago championed the Blackfeet right to the region in single handed combat with a Shoshoni or Snake chief. The champions had met their duel within the waters of the Old Man River. Calling upon the power vested in a beaver gnawed stick given him with the wood biter medicine, Kaiya became infused with the beaver power and struck down the Snake champion. With his defeat, the Shoshoni people moved off giving way to Pikuni-Blackfeet sovereignty. But what of the Okan – Sun Dance – that old Joe had seen in the motif, might it have some significance beyond the warrior challenge? Perhaps the petroglyphs were the sole residual legacy of the Shoshoni within the region and yet at the same time attached to the Pikuni-Blackfeet Okan ritual.

Lounging about our lodge in the afternoon, our guides shared a comprehensive collection of petroglyph photographs taken by a forgotten archaeologist sometime in the past. We discussed the motifs together and I tried to match them with Pikuni-Blackfeet stories but my efforts were not very conclusive. It was another pleasant night by the campfire while we averred the morning when it would compel us to bid adieu to our companion starves rangers and turn south to the border.

At East Glacier Park, Bob arranged a ride back to Missoula while I determined to spend some more time with my Pikuni-Blackfeet friends thereabouts. When visiting the reservation, I often engaged in sleeping in the canopied bed of my little pickup – Ole Yellow Horse. This truck camping was not the best for reading so in the evenings, as a result, I made it a custom to spend some time in the park lodges. The Roosevelt Lodge in East Glacier was one of my favorites. With a marvelous rustic interior featuring a huge cathedral like ceiling, it was done with natural bark tree supports and they kept the reception area lighted into the night. Taking a small back pack containing some of my studies of Pikuni-Blackfeet culture, I entered the lodge with the idea to work a bit before retiring to the bed of my little pickup. As I entered the grand old building, I was thunderstruck to see another old Pikuni-Blackfeet couple who were likewise devoted to the Thunder pipe medicine. Seated on a bench near the door, there was old George and Molly Kicking Woman, keepers of the "Long Time" pipe. Over the previous year in association with our efforts to protect the Badger-Two Medicine wild lands from oil and gas exploitation, I had become familiar with their medicine so I approached the old couple without hesitation and respectfully greeted them.

As I took a seat beside old George, I began to tell him about my visit to the Writing-on-Stone Park. His eyes narrowed and he declared, "That's not the right place." With this avowal, he explained that most people just visit the petroglyphs but the real oracle was upstream along the Milk River. In short, he told me that over the years, there were many things revealed to the Pikuni-Blackfeet at this place. "Our old people would go there and study the writings as they appeared each morning." Continuing he declared, "The writings always looked old but they were new each day. They foretold the battle with the Crows that happened where Great Falls is today. They warned us of an ambush by the Crees in the Cypress Hills. There was also a foretelling of the battle of 'Retreat

Up the Hill' when our Blackfeet warriors rubbed out a large force of Gros Ventres, Crows and Crees. It is a holy place," he said. Afterwards in a poignant pause he added, "Many Horses, chief of the Blackfeet and his wife, Lone Coup, were killed thereabouts by these Gros Ventres. They were led by Sits-Like-A-Woman who was a treacherous fellow, but the Blackfeet rallied and beat them back – killing the whole lot of them."

It seems the revelation came not in the petroglyphs but in the scenic visions written each morning on the sandstone walls above the Milk River. We had seen the morning light dancing on the cliffs at dawn, but I had not thought to study the images and hedge my fate. Thinking to myself, I recalled a story on a mount where its revelations empowered a religion through a prophet who was compelled to remove his sandals before he walked on holy ground and perhaps this place, Writing-on-Stone, as sacred ground is not so different.



UNTITLED
By: Evan Williams

A CHEST OF DRAWERS

By: Denny Riley

In late summer of 1978, I found a chest of drawers by the curb on Divisadero Street in San Francisco. I was living in a small apartment on Alamo Square for a hundred a month, driving cab at night, and writing the great American novel. I needed some drawers so I carried them home. After a little wood glue and some white paint they were good as new.

Soon after, I moved in with Catherine on California Street. She'd furnished her apartment and she didn't need a thing, but she let me bring along my writing desk and my chair and the chest of drawers, where most of my clothes were kept. But we didn't live on California Street for long. We grew tired of the fog and lost interest in our view and in San Francisco too, so we jammed our stuff into a truck and drove to Ithaca, New York, where we lived in half of an old white house in the Fall Creek neighborhood with Ithaca Falls at the end of our street. We kept our cold weather clothes and our bathing suits in the drawers along with extra sheets for friends who visited from California. Beautiful as Ithaca was, even or especially in winter, it got small so we moved to Hoboken, New Jersey.

In Hoboken, I had a writing room with a window looking out to Manhattan. I could see the clock in the tower of the Metropolitan Life Building by Union Square and used that to keep time. The drawers were in the hall behind me, holding underwear and towels and sachets Catherine made with spices and dried blossoms. From Hoboken, we moved to the village of Orient at the end of the North Fork of Long Island where we were artists-in-residence at the Davis House. I wrote short stories and she painted colorful canvases, and we raked for clams in shallow water as swans swam by. And we took classes in laMaz because Catherine was going to have a baby. She began gathering those things a new baby would need and put them in the drawers, the littlest, cutest human clothes imaginable. When our residency was over we moved with our baby to a house on a hill in El Cerrito, California and I worked on a magazine in San Francisco and Catherine managed events for a catering company. We moved from El Cerrito to Richmond, California, where our son was born and both kids were raised until they went off to college to raise themselves. The window above my desk held a view of the Golden Gate Bridge but over time, trees grew up so now all but the north tower is lost from view. The drawers went into our son's room when he had his own and for years always seemed to be half open with his clothes neither in nor out.

Then, for a long time the drawers sat in our garage filled with stuff we hadn't needed since our kids were grown and gone. After we broke down and got rid of that stuff, we didn't need the drawers at all. But they were no longer only drawers. They were like an old pet you couldn't put to sleep or a party you didn't want to leave. Life without them sounded incomplete, like an old and beloved family factotum, so they sat there entirely empty. The drawers were our companion through it all. They were with us in the truck we drove from California to New York, and years later in the bigger truck we drove back to California. They'd been in every home Catherine and I shared and every home the kids had ever known. But we were determined to lighten our load.

One evening late in the summer of 2014 I shoved the chest of drawers into my sports utility vehicle and I drove them back to Divisadero Street near Oak in San Francisco. I parked half a block away and carried the drawers to where I'd found them. I set them as close as I could remember to where they'd been waiting for me by the curb. I felt I was setting them free from where they no longer were needed while they were still good drawers, still had something to offer. I was giving them a chance to start over, a chance to be taken home by some other young fool who would fall in love and chase his dreams all over the country, keeping what he thought were essentials in the chest of drawers.

THE SOUTH VALLEY SURPRISE OF 2002

By: Alisa Hagerty-Miller

In the aftermath of 9/11, thousands of lives were lost and millions dislocated. I fell squarely in the latter category: a twenty-nine-year-old, unemployed pilot. I had just been hired at my first commercial airline in Houston and completed two months of training before my entire class of pilots was let go.

I returned home to my mom's condominium in Portland, Oregon. We watched the 9/11 footage together in shock. The holidays passed dolefully that year, a somber but grateful time in America. Winter brought low-pressure storm systems by the dozen, and the flying opportunities evaporated as the long rainy season began. "Would you consider another career?" my mom asked. I knew she was afraid for me. Pilots had been slain on 9/11 and their aircrafts turned into grotesque flying bombs. Nothing in my five years as a pilot prepared me for this, but giving up on my dreams felt like a betrayal of the entire country. "I can't walk away now," I said. "More than anything, this country needs its pilots to stand together in bravery, not fear."

A week into the New Year, my dad called: the small airport a mile from his house in Northern California had an opening for a Learjet pilot. "The job is yours if you can relocate quick." I could hardly believe my ears. "How soon can you get here?" he asked. "I'll be there the first week of February," I promised.

As February approached, there was only rain in the forecast, which meant trouble crossing the mountains south of Portland. I decided to play it safe and cut west to the Oregon Coast for a two-day drive. On a drizzly February morning, I packed my tiny Saturn with everything I owned, hugged my mom goodbye, and started the long trip to my dad's house. I picked a little-used highway off the interstate for my cutover to the coast. This sixty-three mile road snaked west through Siuslaw National Forest and promised to be stunning.

It probably was, but as morning crept into noon, I found myself busy navigating the rain-soaked, two-lane highway through central Oregon. The forest was a sooty blur in the dreary light of my peripheral vision. Two things became clear that I hadn't planned for: first, the rain was falling at an appreciable rate, even by Oregon standards, and second, there wasn't another soul on the road for miles. I drove a nervous hour in a deluge, calling up all my pilot-training reserve to focus on the wheel, wipers thrashing across the windshield. I desperately wanted to check my progress on the highway against the scarce road signs, but the downpour intensified so that nothing was readable except the gray of the rain on the asphalt.

Eighty miles north in a suburb of Portland, climatologist Wolf Read began logging storm trends from his home. He would later compile his observations – more than seventy pages' worth – on a peer-reviewed website for the state of Washington. But on that February day, he jotted note after note across the blank pages at his desk:

[12:45 PM: Oregon City, OR] Cyclogenesis is taking place right off the SW Oregon Coast. This development is stronger than the models have been forecasting. Pressures are falling fast up here...

Miles from nowhere, my car's CD player looped back to the beginning of a Peter Gabriel album. "Red Rain" cued. I planned to shut the thing off while reveling in the untarnished wonder of the national forest, but the rain drove harder with each remote curve of the woodsy road. I wasn't sure I had the dexterity to hold the wheel steady and flip the CD power-off switch at the same time. So I white-knuckled the wheel and drove on.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, the westerly road met Oregon's famed Route 101 at the pin-sized town of Waldport, and I turned south. Rain came down in sheets, the exposed tide of the Pacific smashing swell after swell ashore. I kept my eyes trained to the white center stripes, relieved to find an occasional car sharing the highway with me. But I grew apprehensive of what sudden gale-force winds could do to any of us, slipping around our lanes.

As my CD player spun in circles, the National Weather Service began issuing urgent messages:

1:16 PM HIGH WINDS OF 40 MPH GUSTING TO 70 MPH CAN BE EXPECTED AT THE HEADLANDS OF SOUTHERN OREGON THIS AFTERNOON

At 1:50 p.m., Wolf Read made a significant journal entry: "29.6 FR!!!" Decoded, this reads: "Twenty-nine and six-tenths inches of mercury, pressure falling rapidly," an ominous note about the rate of the drop in barometric pressure. In his web compilation, he would later remark that the three largest Oregon storms on record demonstrated pressure drops in the range of .10" to .15" an hour. At .08", he'd just intercepted Mother Nature's warning beacon in his backyard.

An hour south of Waldport, the winds tore across the hood of my tiny Saturn, clawing at thin forests all around me. *Is it always like this?* I wondered, marveling at long miles of desolate coast, resplendent in primitive disarray. I heard my stomach growl beneath my vice-grip on the steering wheel. *Stopping makes no sense in these conditions*, I thought, *and besides, the nearest town is an hour away at Coos Bay. You'll be in Coos Bay by 3 o'clock*, I promised myself. I glanced at the clock and frowned. *Or worst case, 3:30.*

At 2:30 p.m., a National Weather Service dispatcher issued a bulletin about the inconsistency between its weather-prediction models and actual conditions:

SHORT WAVE OFF NORTHERN CA COAST IS STRONGER THAN ALL MODELS INDICATE.

SURFACE PRESSURE IN MODELS IS ABOUT 4 TO 6 MB TOO HIGH

With the pressure tumbling and winds increasing two-fold in strength above previous forecasts, the dispatcher scrambled to get word out across Oregon, Northern California and Washington: It was imperative to take cover.

The coast grew more desolate with each curve of the highway. Sandstone cliffs towered over me in gothic disfigurement from the storm's battering. Chunks of rock and debris littered the asphalt, scattering on impact or crumbling beneath my tires. This fragment of coast was indeed a wilderness, one of the grandest to marvel at any other day. But for now, with my life packed to the headrests in my car, the only thing to do was drive. I shut off my CD player and concentrated. *Come on, pilot*, I coached myself. *Keep your eyes outside and fly this plane. A little weather in a dinky automobile is nothing you can't handle.*

The winds whipped mercilessly around me, unleashed Poseidon's fury across the ocean. Alternating sprays of salt and fresh water drenched my tiny car. I hadn't spotted another vehicle in an hour. I knew freak winds could rip hoods off cars, and every buffet from every squall sent shivers through the chassis and myself. There wasn't a single place to pull over, and forging ahead seemed like the only remaining option. The rain continued its diagonal gush, flooding earth and sky alike.

Back in Oregon City, Wolf Read downloaded satellite images, processed weather briefings, and recorded results from his rain gauge every half hour. His journal is dotted with exclamation marks and the single word, "Wow." In his weblog, he would later make this observation:

[2:50 p.m.] *Perhaps the first clear sign of trouble occurred at the very exposed site of Cape Arago [Coos Bay's lighthouse]... Bursts were probably reaching 60 mph at this time. Over the next 20 minutes, the storm struck with*

full force. The [3:10 p.m.] observation shows wind speeds appropriate for a Category-1 hurricane: 2-minute winds of 75 mph with a 5-second gust to 93 [3:09 p.m.]... One-minute wind speeds probably approached 80 mph at this time, with instant (1-sec) gusts around 110!

I was minutes from Coos Bay, finally, when the trees began to fall. The highway veered inland through a dense new-growth forest, and the woods writhed in distress. Trees in every direction lay over sideways, crushing anything in their path. Huge lines of Douglas Fir snapped like toothpicks on both sides of the road. Flurries of pine needles and bark lashed down on the windshield, the highway, the world. Severed branches shrouded the pavement. I drove over the smallest; circled the largest. Ahead, a live utility pole blocked half the road. I inched around it. Something barreled into the sunroof, shadowing the interior of the car before it glanced off the rear spoiler. I began to hyperventilate. *You have to get off the road, NOW*, said an instinctive voice inside my head. But where? I was surrounded by Douglas Fir and Cottonwood, a forest convulsing in wave after wave of domino tree fall.

One lone farmhouse on the outskirts of Coos Bay jumped into view. The instinctive voice stopped talking and took over the wheel, pulled the car in a shallow ditch and thrust the door open into violent gusts. I left everything. I heard the crack of trees nearby; one fell within thirty yards as I fled up the steps of the farmhouse and pounded on the front door.

“Please,” I begged, when a guarded woman eyeballed me from the threshold, “I had to get off the road - I have nowhere to go.”

She held tight to the door, shoring herself against the wind, and pointed to a barn past the long driveway. “Down there,” she said. “Power’s out in here, but there are others in the barn. You can stay as long as you need.”

I glanced to my right. The barn stood at the end of an immense yard, and seemed miles from the front porch. I turned back to plead my way into the woman’s home, but the door was already closed. My heart sank. I couldn’t hunker down on a porch in winds like this. I had no choice but to flee to the barn.

My legs vaulted into action. I tore through the soaked grass, my shoes sticking in pockets of mud. Adrenaline pressed me forward. My senses narrowed. I blocked everything as I focused on staying upright, avoiding trees, and sprinting at top speed. I didn’t have time to fall. I glanced up to verify I was running a straight track to the barn. Raindrops obscured my vision, filling my eyes and mouth as my teeth chattered against the cold. Trees fell in my peripheral vision, too close to stop and look.

Ten feet from the barn door, a new fear gripped me: *Will I be safer in a stranger’s barn?* I wondered, lunging for the handle as the wind twisted my hair and clothes in a drowned mess. I flung the door open, dashed inside, and slammed the door shut.

I blinked in the sudden darkness of the surrounding space. Seconds passed before my eyes adjusted, when three faces met mine from the dimness.

“Um. Hi,” I said.

An older couple acknowledged me, along with a man in his mid-forties.

“I’m moving,” I said, “today... to California.”

The confused part of my brain expected all of them to agree and say they were moving, too, the diaspora of folks leaving this primeval place in search of civilization. But no, they were local. The man knew the owners of the house; the couple knew the town well enough to stop here.

“You’re really moving?” asked the couple.

Why was this so strange? I wondered. Everybody moves on the seventh of February in a freak storm, right?

We huddled close together while the wind tore the coast apart. In some areas, the tree loss approached 30%. Power was out all over southwest Oregon, cars crushed, roofs ripped off homes. Several people were hospitalized with critical injuries.

“Is it like this a lot here?” I asked.

My three companions tried to laugh. “No,” they assured me, “this is a first. You chose an unlucky day to move, you did.”

The sharp crack of splintering trees rendered us silent, ready to drop to the floor at any moment. The wind shook the barn in percussive clatter, beams straining beneath rusty metal fittings. I wondered how the woman in the house was faring. There were no windows in the barn; a random tree might have already split her home in two. She had her family with her, I knew that much. I took solace in the little crowd surrounding me, but there were no safe places for any of us.

One hour passed, and then another. We listened as the howls diminished to a high whistle. Eventually none of us could remember the last time we heard a tree snap. The rafters no longer bowed in the wind.

Just before dark, we peered out. The winds had slackened, the rain abated.

“Should we... go?” I ventured. I was cold and hungry, and knew I would run out of options soon.

“Not much sense in staying,” the man said.

He walked me to my car. We cleared away layers of pine needles, twigs, and a heap of branches, but aside from a new ding and several scratches, the car appeared sound.

“It’s fifteen minutes to Coos Bay,” he said. “You sure you don’t need anything?”

I shrugged, and put on my bravest face. “I’ll be okay.”

“Be safe out there,” he said, as I started up the engine and waved goodbye.

The highway was much the same; fine in some stretches, treacherous through others. More downed trees, utility poles, and debris, all strewn like a child’s game of pick-up sticks. I passed a dozen utility trucks and a handful of locals, each slowing as we approached from opposite lanes. This was not a night to be driving Oregon’s coast.

The lights were out in the town of Coos Bay, save one commercial block with fast-food signs and a Best Western, shining like a concrete fortress. I pulled into the motel parking lot. They had one room available.

In all my flying years, I’ve never experienced the kind of winds that tore through the Oregon Coast that day. Which sounds absurd, really, because doesn’t a career pilot have the best tales to tell of any weather phenomena? Doesn’t the wind rattle the souls of sailors and airmen alike? Maybe. My mother said it rained hard in Portland, but there was a noted lack of awareness in her voice over the severity of the conditions. I began to question myself. In my wild dash off the road, had I imagined the entire event?

It took a single Google search to find out: the South Valley Surprise of 2002 has its own Wikipedia page and links to Wolf Read’s impressive collection of data. It was the second-worst windstorm in history for that region, and nobody saw it coming.

February 7th was a fascinating day for Wolf Read, and a terrifying day for me. This wasn’t 9/11, neither a tsunami nor a hurricane, but terror swept over me and confounded my pilot’s sense of bravery in a heightening crisis. This was an unforecasted anomaly, and I, the unwitting storm-chaser with my entire life crammed into my tiny vessel, chose to abandon ship by the side of a tree-littered highway.

A week later, I got the job in California, and within a year, I was rehired by another commercial airline. Yet I’ve never forgotten that day, or the mysterious storm that came out of nowhere and sent me fleeing into a stranger’s barn. In a decade of escalating climate change, I’m reminded that no amount of bravery can stop a disaster from overwhelming us. Life dances with death – in cyclonic

twists and surprise turns. Some people watch for signs, one eye on the rain gauge, another on the horizon. Most people bet on hope. It's as much a surprise that reality looks the way it does most days – tranquil, even-keeled, and tempered by the cosmic goodwill of nature.

The author gratefully acknowledges Wolf Read and the Office of the Washington State Climatologist website for the inclusion of all weather-related data and references.

MY FATHER'S SON By: Dan Branch

Before the Second World War my father killed many animals with a Winchester 30-30. After his discharge from the Army, he gave it to my Uncle Sherwood. All the men and women in the family used it to take their first deer. When my Cousin Glen figured out that I was his only adult relative who hadn't shot a deer, he brought me the gun. We both assumed that Dad would have wanted me to kill with it.

The 27-foot Seasport crunches through skim ice as it eases out of its Juneau harbor slip. It's late November. The sun isn't up. We expect to have a good five hours of daylight for hunting after we reach Admiralty Island. I sit on one of the boat's plush seats with my father's 30-30 Winchester carbine rifle between my knees. At home my daughter, dressed for school, walks past the mask I carved of her grandfather.

The other passengers, dressed in layers, talk about their families, work or other subjects unrelated to the day's purpose. I wedge the Winchester in a safe corner of the boat, wipe off the gun oil it left on my hands and drink coffee with a man I'll call Bob—the guy I fish with for salmon—a man who knows the obligation attached to the rifle. We understand that this break in autumn storms is my last chance to take a deer with it before the season closes in December.

Winchester manufactured Dad's rifle in 1907, long after its first lever-action 30-30 had "won the West" from the original occupants. I found it a thing of wonder, light but a sweet shot. I could carry it through the old growth forests all day and not be tempted to rush rather than move with the observant caution needed for a successful hunt.

The gun helped Dad's family survive the Great Depression after his father lost their grocery store near the Idaho-Montana border by offering credit to those unable to pay their debts. Dad had to drop out of school to hunt and work in the woods while his brother Sherwood rode the rails between migrant farm worker camps. Sherwood sent his earnings home to Montana. Dad used the 30-30 to bring home deer and elk meat.

Bob and I look out through the Seasport's windscreen as the boat bounces into heavy chop at the end of Gastineau Channel. The chop grows into three-foot high waves where Taku Inlet joins Stephens Passage. Up inlet, the Taku Glacier snakes thirty-six miles from the Juneau ice field to tidewater. In summer, strong runs of king and silver salmon move through the inlet and into the Taku River to spawn. On this late November day, only confused currents run beneath the Seasport. The boat driver steers into the waves and pulls back on the throttle until the Seasport no longer slams. We pass the steep sided Grant Island and move toward a sandy beach on Admiralty's Glass Penins.

I wanted the Winchester 30-30 the first time I saw it at my Uncle Sherwood's house on the Washington-Idaho border. In a voice that crushed any hope that the rifle would ever be mine, Dad told me he had given it to his brother after the war. He explained how in 1945, after four years of service in North Africa and Italy, he had taken the rifle on an elk hunt with the old trapper who had given it to him. A bull offered itself to Dad but he didn't take the shot. When the trapper watched the elk walk away, he yelled, "Why didn't you kill it?" Dad answered, "I wasn't sure my bullet

wouldn't kill you." Many times, when we were alone, I had asked Dad to repeat the story. Each time I silently rooted for him to take the shot and drop the elk. He never delivered the happy ending.

After Dad died I found photographs he had taken while stationed in North Africa and Italy. Some of the glossy black and whites show Arab refugee women with eyes deadened, perhaps by the witness of too much loss. One shows a troop transport ship sunk by planes he had repaired. I also found a program for the March 31, 1945 performance of Verdi's *Otello* at Naples' *Real Teatro di Carlo*. My dad had autographed the program cover, as did the five other American soldiers who sat with him. Until now, I had never connected these things to the gun.

The boat driver kills the engine and releases the anchor. We listen to the boat's wake crash on shore until there is silence. After shouldering a knapsack full of ammunition, warm clothes, and food, I carry the 30-30 on deck and wait to be ferried ashore in an inflatable raft. When it's my turn, I drop into the raft and watch the spruce-green wall behind the beach resolve into a forest of trees as we near the sand. The boat owner warns us to be back on the beach by 3 P.M.

Bob waits for me on the sand. Together we walk down the beach and then up a narrow tidal stream. We turn our backs on the ocean's silver light and hike slowly toward a broad muskeg meadow.

Dad never hunted again. He never taught me how to stalk or kill. When a mule deer crossed in front of our family Studebaker a gentle smile always appeared on his face. He let Walt Disney mold our attitudes about deer. Every buck I saw was Bambi's father, every doe the mother of Thumper's friend. I tried to forget about Bambi after Glen gave me the 30-30 and the obligation not to be the one Branch who'd never bagged a deer.

Bob knew about the obligation attached to my 30-30 but I didn't know if he had ever killed a deer. None of my hunting friends talked about such things. I had no idea how many they had shot. They shared good venison recipes but never drew attention with hunting stories. Their reticence postponed the need for me to think about the kill. Would I pass the gun test? Would I find pleasure in bloodletting or just satisfy some hardwired need to kill for food? If a capacity to watch suffering from my action was required, did I have it?

Once, I watched a young deer fall from a bullet to the head, thrash like an epileptic on the forest floor, then run into thick woods. We all rejoiced that night that the hunter had found his wounded deer and quickened her death.

I never cried at my father's funeral or in the years following his death. I came close when I stumbled on a photo I took of him rowing a boat on a lake in Northern British Columbia. It was his face that almost turned on the tears—eyes sparkling in late afternoon light, the smile of a man sharing something wonderful with his son. We were returning to California from a road trip to Alaska. I had just graduated from Berkeley and would start law school in September. He talked a lot about retiring from his parking meter repair job. The photograph captured the contentment of a man about to climb into the Big Rock Candy Mountains. Dad, who could not stay on key, sang me that song of his childhood on the drive south. His voice grew louder when he got to, "In the Big Rock Candy Mountains all the cops have wooden legs and little streams of alcohol come trickling down the rocks..."

From the cover of two-hundred-year-old spruce, Bob and I strain to spot deer on the meadow. Nothing walks among the islands of wind-tortured shore pine and mountain hemlock that dot the plain of dead-brown grass. A raven squawks just before Bob falls into a narrow but deep muskrat

channel. The purple-black bird continues what now sounds like a laugh. It sits atop a tall mountain hemlock and looks into the meadow, keeping up the racket until we walk onto the muskeg. Then he flies to a twisted pine fifty yards away and starts up again.

I was living in Ketchikan when I rediscovered the picture of Dad on the lake. Tired of carrying around a hard ball of unresolved grief over his death, I asked a master carver to help me use the photo as a template for a mask of my dad. I hoped that the valves frozen tight for Dad's funeral would leak grief as I watched his face emerge from a block of alder wood.

We carved in the Sensei's garage while separated by a long wooden table. The first night, I opened my canvas tool roll full of knives sharp enough to shave hair off my arm. All had been swirled over three grades of Japanese water stones and then buffed to a razor's edge with a leather strop.

Sensei looked briefly at my tool roll and then at my father's photograph. His reading glasses slid down to the tip of his nose as he studied my father's round face. He saw Dad's small oval eyes split by a curving nose with a ridge bulge. He smiled after noticing a similar bulge on my nose.

We leapfrog with the raven until he settles on the top of a stunted mountain hemlock and falls silent. Thirty feet away, a young buck moves into view and freezes. Yup'ik Eskimo men I knew in Bethel told me that seals give themselves to the honorable hunter. Is this deer giving himself to me?

Sensei led me outside to pick out a suitable piece of alder wood for the mask. At his urging I selected a round with unblemished grey and white bark. A series of perfectly symmetrical growth rings radiated out from its center. I split the round in two with an axe, chipped away the bark from a half-round and carried it into the shop. In benediction of my choice, Sensei set aside the other half-round for a future project.

The wood came from a spring fallen tree, cut while sap flowed up from the roots so it smelled of green growth and unfurling leaves. Moisture sprayed out with every adze blow, some striking my face. Without being told, I used my straight blade adze to turn the half-round of firewood into a rectangle and drew the rough shape of my father's head onto the top plane.

Until today, I had never looked into a deer's eye. Did the guys who turned deer into table meat ever stop to study one of these deep brown globes? I see intelligence—an awareness of life not unlike what I see in Bob's eyes. Is it a mirror?

Years after the hunt, after piecing together the evidence, I now think that my father saw an awareness of life in the eye of the last elk he hunted or maybe the mix of fear and resolution that glared out of the refugees' eyes that he captured in his photographs. Did his war rob him of the ability to take any life, even that of a forest animal? What of Otello? Dad saved the opera program, even autographed it. It lay boxed near his war photographs and his bronze star until I found it post mortem. He carried it in his tunic back from the opera house, pushing past bars and whorehouses, past the bomb-damaged homes. Can a Verdi aria, heard in a time of war, take the killing out of a man?

It's easy to remove wood from a wet piece of alder but it doesn't hold the fine detail needed to finish a portrait mask. You form the geography of the face first and hollow out the back until the mask is thin enough to dry without cracking. Then you let it dry before bringing it to life with small, sharp blades.

When a crude ghost of my father's face appeared on the mask, I turned it over and used a curved blade adze to hollow out the back. I'd seen master carvers hold a mask in their laps during this step, but I placed Dad on a soft red cedar chopping block. Chips and water flew into my face as I adzed with my head bent over the inverted mask, careful not to strike my left hand with the falling blade. After a rough bowl had formed, I nestled the head in my lap and used the "U" shaped crooked knife to dig out more wood. It was slow, tense work. I checked constantly to make sure I would not cut through to the surface. Not even the Sensei could fix Dad's face if that happened.

I raise the 30-30, confident of hitting my deer. Near the beach, another rifle fires but my deer does not move. I wrap my finger around the "C" shaped trigger, control my breath, aim at the heart, and lower the gun. The deer walks away.

Feeling strong, I cut alder without asking for advice. Sensei saw the damage and reminded me it was only wood. I watched his sharp knives bring a reprieve, tried to ignore the reading glasses sliding to the tip of his nose, tried to forgive myself for the mistake, tried not to hate him for making that part of the mask belong to someone else. I said nothing because only he could make it good enough.

Bob watched the deer ease into cover behind a confusion of mountain hemlocks. He didn't raise his own rifle or even ask me, "Why?" We crossed the muskeg meadow in silence broken only by the sloppy pop our boots made when jerked free after each step on the boggy ground. I can't remember what we talked about on the beach while we waited to be ferried back to the Seasport.

Months of carving had almost freed my father from excess alder. I felt the pressure and kept to shallow cuts, cross checking often with Dad's photo. Knowing that king salmon were already feeding off of Mt. Point, Sensei took back the mask and slashed wood until shavings covered the floor. Again, I started to hate him for the violence and his ability to see my father's face in the patterned wood. When the mask returned, it had pencil guidelines for putting in his eyes. I softened knowing that he had left me the power to capture my father's kind countenance.

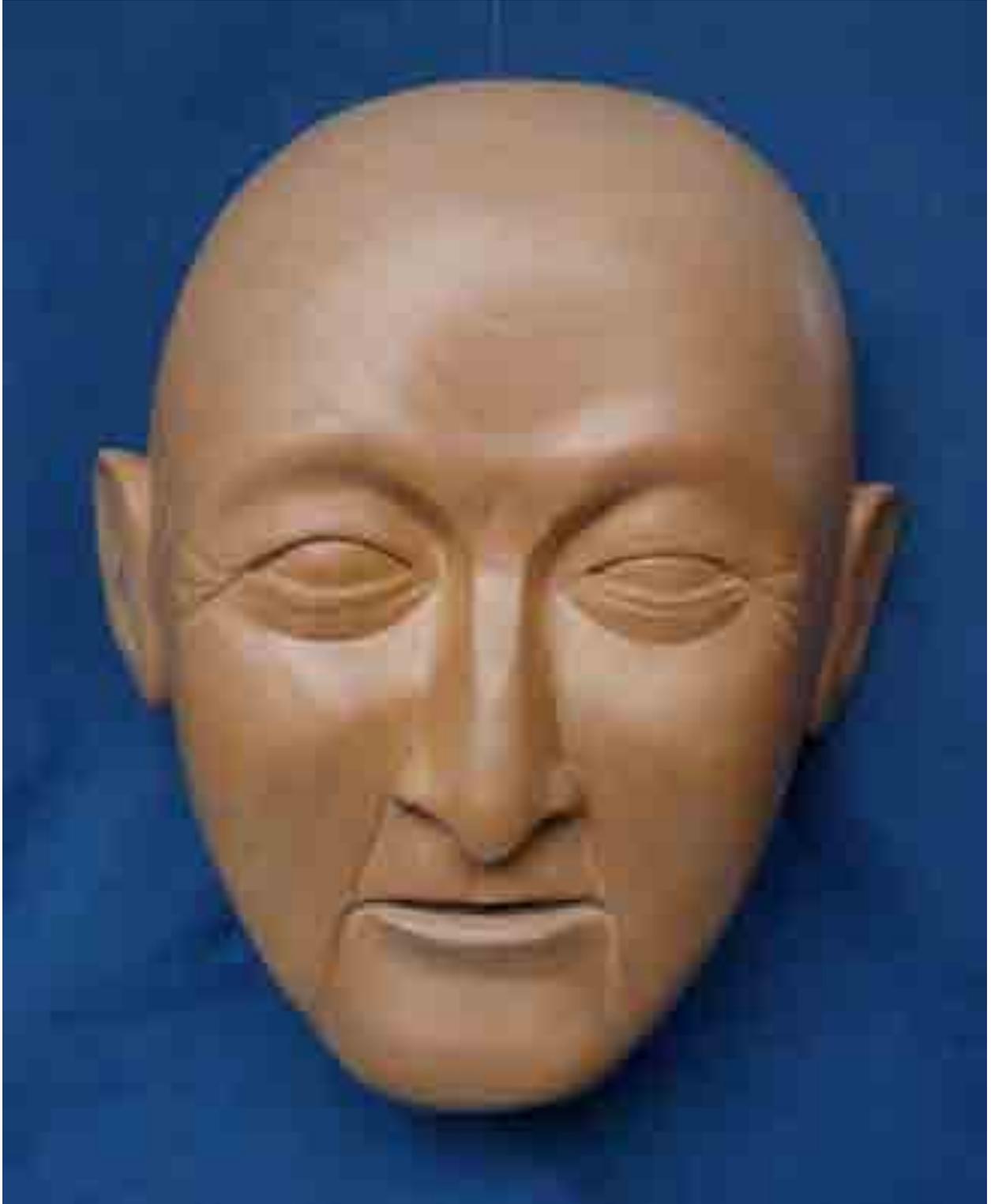
I finished the mask several months later during king salmon season.

I feel guilt and frustration on the boat ride home from Admiralty. If I can't drop a deer that offers me such a sure shot, I'll never be able to use my father's 30-30 to take one. Bob still hasn't asked me why I didn't take the easy shot even though he knows about my obligation to Cousin Glen.

I love carrying the gun through woods gone to rest after the salmon runs, moving slowly, looking for the flickering ear, listening for the crack of a twig. I may never again stalk through forests of tall hemlock trees while fat flakes of snow settle over high bush cranberries and the thick moss that forms an electric green carpet for the woods.

Even though I never saw Dad rub down the 30-30's barrel with oil or touch a sharp knife to alder wood, the smell of alder sap or gun oil still brings him to mind. Long after I last wiped it off my hands, the smell of the oil makes me think of the man that inspired the mask: the gentle one who rowed me across an unnamed British Columbia lake while still excited by Alaska, the boy who learned from a trapper how to hunt, the discharged soldier who abandoned the 30-30, my father who had refused to kill again or teach me how to hunt.

My cousin Glen, who learned to kill deer and elk from his father with the 30-30, never went to war. He left his Idaho home to bring me the rifle, but he never thought to ask why the father who raised me gave away the gun.



Mask
By: Dan Branch

DOLLS WORLD
By: M. M. Adjarian

My mother told me that I was the daughter she had always wanted. What this meant in practice was that I was the child she could spoil with dolls and swaddle in pink, a color that usurped its way into everything from the sheets I slept in to the leotard and tights I wore to ballet class. I didn't mind the dolls. But by the time I was four, I'd had enough of pink and tried to exile it from my world.

"No more pink," I told my mother one day. "I don't like it."

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?" she said, the laugh lines around her eyes crinkling in playful malice.

I stomped my foot and fumed.

"No. More!"

Whether because of my recalcitrance or her own boredom, my mother's rosy-colored obsession gradually lessened. But her desire to dress me up like a doll did not, even after I started school. For my kindergarten Christmas concert, she sewed me a blue velvet dress with pink flower trim that I wore with tights and black patent leather Mary Jane shoes.

After that, there was no stopping my mother.

She designed polka-dotted bloomers edged in lace for me to wear under dresses and jumpers she decorated with bright flower and ladybug patches and tied back my hair with giant grosgrain ribbons she sewed herself. My mother even knitted me a little green cap decorated with orange pom-poms going down one side.

Other mothers thought my clothes were adorable.

"Does your mother make what you wear?" they'd asked.

"Yes," I'd say in a small, embarrassed voice.

Their sons and daughters thought my outfits were ridiculous and didn't hesitate to tell me so—when they weren't trying to pull up my dresses to see what color bloomers I had on.

"You look like a clown," they would tell me, guffawing.

It wasn't enough that my mother insisted I wear her creations. She also believed she had to school me in various household arts. "It's how we do things in Italy," she said. So she taught me how to knit and crochet and use a needle and thread to sew buttons, patch holes and embroider. And when I was tall enough to reach into kitchen cupboards without standing on tiptoe, my mother made me her cooking assistant.

It seemed I was destined for domestication. But I couldn't understand why. Before I was born, she had been a biochemist who had observed life under microscopes and supported my father while he had been building his bookbinding business in Kansas City. Yet she told me little about that white-coated and decidedly unfeminine, life, which I imagined as far more exciting than the one she felt it her duty to teach me about.

I disappointed her, of course. Outside of my pink cage, I was a tomboy who roamed our shaggy Southern California seaside property on Fernhill Drive with no shoes on and tracked up my mother's clean linoleum floors with dusty footprint halos. But one place inside the house that I did grow to love in spite of myself was the kitchen. That was where I saw the best side of my mother, whose moods could change like the weather.

What drew me there at first were the smells: of warm baking bread; of red sauce, broth or minestrone simmering on the stove; of freshly cut onion, crushed garlic and newly zested lemon rinds. A woman who never stopped moving, my mother found a kind of peace in the kitchen. Later I realized it was because it was a place where she could not only pour out her prodigious energies

into something that gave life: it was also where she could mix, measure and experiment without anyone looking over her shoulder and judging her.

As I began engaging with the implements of her kitchen, my mother introduced me to a well-worn hardback Betty Crocker cookbook she'd had bought as a newlywed in Ithaca, New York in the early 1950s. It wasn't the photos of perfect dishes fresh from the oven or stove that caught my eye, though. Rather, it was the sketches of smiling, impeccably groomed females in high heels, bouffant dresses and pearls. To a girl with perpetually scabby knees, the women looked like they came from another planet.

"Did you dress like this back then, too?" I asked her once.

"Oh, I liked nice clothes," my mother said. "But not to wear at home."

I thought about the polyester pants and shirts that were her unofficial house uniform and the colorful outfits that crowded her closet, unworn. Was that why she dressed me up—because I spent my time outside of the house and she inside it?

While I had the run of our kitchen, my mother was unwilling to let me do anything that fell too far outside the perimeter of our home. This included walking to and from my elementary school, which was just a block from where we lived. By the time I was 9 or 10, the situation had grown intolerable.

"Why can't I walk home by myself?" I complained.

"There are people who hang around schools, bad people," she said. "And they can hurt you."

"But everyone else walks home alone, Mom."

"*Basta*. Enough. No more discussion. I do this to keep you safe."

And that was that. Every afternoon I saw her waiting for me by the flagpole near the entrance of the playground. I wanted to dig a hole in the sandbox and hide. My mother had had crossed an ocean and a continent to live on the shores of the Pacific. Yet she seemed intent on teaching me that limits existed to how far girls could stray from home.

By the time I got to junior high, my mother's coddling mutated into something far darker. My new school, Malibu Park Junior High, was now a twenty-minute drive north up the Pacific Coast Highway rather than a 5-minute walk up Fernhill Drive, the hilly, winding road where we lived. When I asked my mother to take me to things like orchestra practice and school dances she did, but always grudgingly. That all changed after I started eighth grade.

"I can't see well at night when I drive. It's just too dangerous," she said. "Why don't you ask your classmates for rides?"

Fortunately, several of them lived in my neighborhood. I asked two, Carolyn Sheets and Janet Lindboe, if their mothers would drive me to afterschool activities like orchestra. Both parents agreed and never complained—at least not to me. It was Carolyn who made it clear how their families *really* felt about my requests.

"Couldn't your mom maybe take *us* sometimes?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"She won't do it. And if I don't go, the music teacher will mark me down."

The Sheets and the Lindboes realized that it was hopeless and never said anything to me again. For that year and the one that followed, they—and I—accepted my status as the extra child on loan from the house on Fernhill.

My mother's behavior no doubt seemed as odd as it was unreasonable to the neighbors who helped me. But it had come seem normal long before she began refusing me rides to school activities. One morning when I was twelve years old and just starting to get accustomed to having menstrual cycles, I awoke to discover that I had blood in my underwear but no sanitary supplies and immediately went to rouse my mother.

"Why don't you get him to take you?" she said, her sleepy voice edgy with irritation.

“But it’s so early! He’s probably not even up yet.”

“Well, I can’t.”

I hurried into the bathroom, stuffed my underwear with toilet paper and rushed across our property to the bookbinding workshop apartment where my father—now separated from my mother—lived and knocked on his door. The words spilled out of my mouth the minute I saw his unshaven face.

“Dad, I got my period and need to go to the store.”

“Why isn’t your mother helping you?”

“She won’t go.”

Muttering under his breath, my father pulled on a pair of pants and a shirt and drove me one mile to the pharmacy at the Point Dume Plaza.

Not long after that, my mother told me she could see my breasts under the clothes I wore.

“It’s time you started wearing a bra,” she announced.

I grimaced. Other girls my age had begun wearing bras. But I was perfectly content to continue wearing camisole undershirts, which struck me as more comfortable.

“Will you take me to Bullock’s to buy one?” I asked.

“Ask your father. You go shopping with him anyway,” she told me.

And so my mother taught me my next lesson. As long as I didn’t make any demands of her, all was well. The minute I began to ask things of her that other parents seemed to give without thinking, I was on my own.

My brother Fred told me later on that my mother had never been enthusiastic about driving even when he was growing up. She hated getting behind the wheel so much that she had turned down a prestigious research fellowship at UCLA. “Twenty-five miles up and twenty-five back on the Pacific Coast Highway and she said no,” my brother said, his eyes rolling.

Still, he had managed. He was older and a boy, the one who got gifted an old Ford Galaxie from my father when he was 16 and could drive himself to and from things like school, Boy Scout meetings and polo practice. I was younger and a girl, the one whose mother expected her to ride busses and wouldn’t learn to drive until she was 19.

After my parents divorced in 1975, my mother actually *did* make the drive up the Coast Highway to Beverly Hills where she worked as clerk in the back offices of Gucci. At that point, she was too worried about money to complain about driving. When she was laid off a year-and-a-half later, she decided to try teaching at Santa Monica Community College.

SMC offered her an evening class for adults in gourmet dessert baking, which she jokingly referred to as her “kitchen chemistry” course. One day—perhaps it was a weekend because no one else was there—she drove me to my junior high school to look at the room where she would be teaching. As it happened, it was the same place where I took my own home economics classes.

While my mother set to work checking the utensils and equipment she would be using, I wandered into a room that my teacher, Mrs. Schelkopf, used as a storage area. Normally the door was locked but when I turned the handle, it opened. Inside was a hodgepodge of books, papers, pots, pans, sewing supplies and mannequins.

I walked to a cabinet and began peering inside drawers. Soon I came across a stash of tiny lipsticks scattered over pamphlets with pictures of smiling teenage girls that extolled the pleasures of growing up. Snickering, I opened a tube and absently smeared some color onto my mouth. Seconds later, a handful of tubes disappeared into a small handkerchief, which I then stuffed into an empty coat pocket.

When I returned, my mother was getting ready to leave. We walked back to her blue VW sedan. Just before she started the engine, she stared at me and frowned.

“What’s on your lips?” she asked. When I didn’t say anything, she repeated her question more sternly. “*What’s that on your lips, girl?*”

“Lipstick,” I said.

“Where did you get it?”

“I found it in the storage room.”

My mother looked at me hard. Then she noticed the bulge in my coat.

“Show me what’s in your pocket,” she demanded.

I shifted uncomfortably then took out my handkerchief and opened it. She sucked in her breath.

“You *stole* them!”

“I didn’t think it would matter,” I mumbled. “There were so many of them.”

“*Madonna Santa!* For God’s sake, do you know how much trouble this could have caused for me if someone had seen you take all of this?”

My heart sank straight to my toes. The lipstick meant nothing to me, but the teaching job meant everything to my mother. Even if she had wanted to, she had been away from the laboratory too long to get a research job. Yet here I was, a teenager who had brought her mother low through willful misbehavior. She was hurt: and secretly, I was glad.

But it was my mother who ultimately revealed herself to be immune to consequences her actions had on those around her. After just two or three sessions, my mother would walk away from the cooking class and her contract with the college.

“How could you do this Rose?” her supervisor asked. “The students will be so disappointed. And I’m just flabbergasted.”

In private, my mother told me she didn’t feel appreciated for all the work she had been putting in. “I just wasn’t *enjoying* it,” she said. The excuse sounded flimsy. My mother complained about needing a job; and yet she had quit the one she had. Then I thought about the 15-minute drive to and from her class. Could *that* have been the problem?

The reasons were, of course, more complicated than my mother was willing to admit. Not long after my thievery, she turned over most of the grocery shopping duties to me without a word of explanation. We had just arrived at the local Market Basket, which was about twenty minutes from where we lived on Point Dume. My mother handed me the grocery list I had taken down from her dictation.

“After you get the total, come back out and I’ll write you a check.”

I blinked in surprise.

“You’re not coming with me?”

“You know what to buy,” she said, looking at me through sunglasses she wouldn’t take off.

“God knows you’ve seen me do it enough times. I’ll be waiting.”

Most trips after that happened without incident. But sometimes, I would return with a grocery-laden shopping cart to find her tapping her fingers on the steering wheel and huffing in annoyance.

“I said to be quick about it,” she would shout. Ignoring her, I would begin loading the bags into the trunk of her car while my mother continued to splutter.

It was only much later that I realized that her arbitrary, often antisocial ways were ruses to hide anxieties she never discussed. Whether those fears stemmed from her heavy accented, though perfect English, her foreignness, both or something more, I would never know for certain. What *was* clear was that however powerless she may have felt outside the house, she reigned supreme within it; and that I, as her one and only subject, was becoming her liaison to a world that discomfited her.

I wondered if things would get better in high school, which was two years away. Getting out on my own, even if it meant doing the shopping by myself, was my fondest dream. But I would need a

car and my father had no spare vehicle to give me. Even if he'd had one, I doubted that my mother would ever practice driving with me. So I tried to feel my way around the issue.

"Mom," I asked, "once I get to tenth grade, can I accept rides from friends?"

"No," she said. "Young people are just too prone to getting into accidents."

"So I guess that means no dates then?"

My mother's response was quick and sharp.

"Not until you're 18."

What my mother really meant was that sexual exploration was off limits. Doll-children didn't feel desire; or if they did, it was only after they left the mothers who didn't want to be responsible for consequences that might overwhelm them.

My mother's own sexuality baffled me. She had no difficulty with nudity and would sunbathe naked on our patio. Even in old age, she had a habit of walking around her cottage in the Arizona retirement village unclothed. But when I was a teenager, my father revealed that my mother had thrown him out of their bedroom not long after I was born. Only one other man—a British business attaché named James—came into my mother's life after she officially divorced my father. And that was by accident.

While she had been unemployed, my mother hit upon the idea of selling yarns as her businessman father had done. If Paolo Marinozzi and the Gucci brothers could make money selling quality goods made in Italy, then she could, too. It didn't matter that she had no entrepreneurial experience. "It's in the family," she would say, as though blood ties to a businessman were all it would take to be successful.

After more than two years of researching the addresses of yarn stores across the country and doing direct mail campaigns that only brought a handful of clients, she decided the answer to her problems lay in expanding her product line. That was when she contacted the British consulate in Los Angeles.

Jim was my mother's age. When my mother and I first met him at the door of our house in the summer of 1980, I had to bite down on an urge to laugh at the awkward comb-over that covered the crown of his balding head. Then he spoke.

"So delighted to meet you," he drawled.

I was instantly smitten. My mother led him into the library and I slipped into the kitchen to bring out a batch of Scottish shortbread cookies I had baked for the occasion.

"Thank you, my dear," he said when I offered him the plate. He bit into a cookie and winked.

"Yes, that's lovely, very lovely."

He likes them, I thought. Tongue-tied but ecstatic, I scurried out of the room, forgetting to close the door behind me.

"She wants to marry a British man when she grows up," I heard my mother say. Jim sounded amused and a little proud.

"Oh, I'm not surprised. British men do know how to treat women."

I was mortified.

It would be almost two hours before Jim left. After he did, I found my mother basking in the afterglow of an unexpectedly happy encounter. She announced that they had decided to have lunch the following Sunday at the Sand Castle Restaurant in Paradise Cove. "He's got a lot of ideas that could help me," my mother said. Her eyes sparkled in a way I'd never seen.

For the next week, my mother routinely scrutinized the image reflected back in the mirror of her pink-tiled bathroom vanity. My mother was 55 years old. But with her short, salt-and-pepper hair and radiant olive skin, my mother was still a beautiful woman.

"Do you think I should put some dark streaks in my hair?"

"You look nice just the way you are," I said.

“Maybe I’ll get a trim,” she murmured, ignoring me.

She called the stylist she saw in Beverly Hills every six weeks and made an appointment. As it turned out, though, not even he could work his customary magic. A day or two before her date, my mother descended on the main bathroom armed with one box each of natural dark brown and natural black Miss Clairol, a pair of yellow Playtex gloves, and an air of grim determination. With the precision of the scientist she had been and the delicacy of the artist she imagined herself to be, she set about transforming the hair that had suddenly seemed so unacceptably gray.

That Sunday, Jim and my mother ate seafood in Paradise Cove and walked along the beach made famous on one of my favorite TV shows, *The Rockford Files*. They had gone out to discuss business. But when my mother talked to me about the lunch, business wasn’t uppermost in her mind. It was the fact he’d recently ended a relationship with the American woman who was also the mother of a young daughter.

“Jim really loves that little girl,” my mother said, looking slightly crestfallen. Then with a surge of brightness she added, “He *did* say he would call, though.”

My mother would have to wait more than two weeks to hear from Jim again. When she finally did, it wasn’t good news “I’m so sorry, so *terribly* sorry,” he said on her answering machine, half-eating his words from embarrassment. “I just *can’t* manage this.” Weeks went by as she sat by her machine limp as a rag doll, listening over and over to the voice of the man she would never see again.

I started high school that fall. And when I did, the screws around my growing need for freedom tightened even more. I now had to travel 20 miles to Santa Monica, which meant 45-minute trips to and from my house on the school bus every day. If I had to stay late, I needed to find a telephone and call my mother. An hourly bus ran between Malibu and Santa Monica, but that only helped me during the daytime. Under no circumstances could I ever come home after dark.

Tired of asking my neighbors for rides to nighttime performances, I dropped out of orchestra and joined the forensics club instead. Competitions were during day, which meant I could take the bus.

It took exactly two tournaments before I ran into trouble with my mother.

I bussed my way to Palos Verdes High, where I got an honorable mention for a dramatic reading I did of a short essay I’d written and phoned my mother to tell her about it. At the second competition at my high school in Santa Monica, I was too busy flirting with a tall curly-haired senior named Matt who wrote poetry to call home. When finally I returned to Malibu, it was dusk and my mother was furious.

“Why didn’t you phone? I was so worried about you!”

“Everything was fine.”

My mother scowled at me. Her eyes seemed to bulge out of their sockets

“Well what if you hadn’t? What then?”

“I was safe, Mom. Nobody bothered me.”

“Yes, but I didn’t know that. You should have phoned me. I was just about ready to call the sheriff’s department.”

I let my mother’s haranguing wash over me. The next tournament was week later at Hollywood High; maybe I would see Matt again and even win another award. My world suddenly seemed rosier than it had in a long time. On the Friday before the tournament, I reminded my mother that I would be going into town the next day for the meet.

My mother looked at me.

“You’re not going to that tournament or any other one again,” she said quietly.

“But I worked for weeks on those monologues!”

My mother had heard me practice and knew the hours I had put in. She'd even offered encouragement. "Very good," she'd said. "You'll do well."

But now her voice was cold.

"I don't care," she said. "If I say you're not going, you're not going."

Speechless, I ran into my bedroom, slammed the door and began to sob. First it had been orchestra. Now the debate team. Why did my mother always want to get in the way of the things I wanted to do?

The following Monday at school, I tried to explain my absence to the forensics coach. She had no sympathy for me.

"You can't do that," Miss Fernandez said, "and especially not at the last minute."

"But my mom...it wasn't my choice. She made me stay home."

Tears of frustration welled up in my eyes.

She softened slightly. "I see. And I'm sorry. But you've got to understand that even one no-show makes the whole team look bad."

"What am I supposed to do, then?"

"I don't know. Maybe you need to think about whether or not you can stay on." That day, I left the forensics team.

I felt trapped. If I didn't do exactly what she said, she had threatened to send me to live with my father. She knew how attached I was to our house and how much I hated the lover who later became his second wife. Yet her conscience wasn't entirely clear.

Once, out the blue, she turned a trouble face to me and said, "You think I'm your jailer, don't you?" I didn't answer. By then, I had learned that my best defense was to keep silent. For as long as I had to live under her roof, I would become just like the dolls that stared dumbly into space from the shelves of my pink-walled bedroom.

OUT OF THE BOX

By: Andy Miller

I step out of my hotel. Hop in a taxi. Tell the driver “Wailing Wall, please.” It is Shabbat, so there are no cars on the streets, no one around, except me, a foreigner in a seemingly abandoned city. I was told specifically by the Birthright Israel staff not to go for fear of violence as the country was in the grip of what was to become known as the Second Intifada, but there I was, with an Arab-Israeli cab driver, in the Old City, on a Saturday morning.

No Jews. No tourists. I am clearly not being taken to the Wailing Wall, at least not now. The driver mentions the Sabbath, as if to explain away the absence of other human beings from these odd, abandoned streets, striking the fear of “what if?” into my well-traveled yet jetlagged brain, trained to be fearful of men such as this. My heart begins to pound a bit harder. My rational mind says, “Get the hell out of here” while my curious mind says, “let’s see where this leads.” The cab driver continues to weave in and out of the single lane streets of the Old City, past empty shop windows, dirty buildings, locked doorways and closed businesses. “Where the hell is he taking me?” It’s too late now, time to enjoy the ride.

The cab comes to a stop outside a shabby, foreboding building on a street that time long forgot. The driver tells me this is a market and I should shop. I am not an idiot; I have traveled all over the world. I nod my head, get out of the cab, and shop. Under the watchful eyes of the shopkeepers, who appear to have opened the store just for my shopping pleasure, with the cab driver looking on and speaking with the others in their Arabic tongue, I peruse the various menorahs, mezuzahs, tallit, tfillin, and the other chotchkies I tend to avoid while travelling. My memories and photographs are typically my souvenirs, however I feel just a bit compelled to make at least a few purchases if I want to return to the hotel in the same condition in which I left.

I make my selections, I do not haggle, I receive wide smiles, and gratitude from the shopkeepers and the cab driver happily beckons me back into the car. I passed the test, whether that was spending the requisite amount of Shekels at the store, appeasing the shopkeepers, whom I believed to be related to the cab driver, or being brave enough not to run when the cab pulled up to the establishment in the first place. My mind numb, my heart racing, scared, but fully, completely, utterly, alive. “Is this what it takes, stepping outside of my box? Defying the wishes of my trip leaders, and most likely US State Department warnings, to feel what it is to truly be alive?”

Suddenly the empty, derelict ancient stone streets became a bit more inhabited, cleaner and busier, I see Jews walking to and from synagogue, I see tourists, I see tons and tons and tons of IDF soldiers. My heart stops pounding. I have arrived at the Wall.

I have a habit of – no, a genuine interest in—observing and conversing with those I deem different from me. *The Other*, the one who exists outside the box. The man serving Guinness in a bowl to his dog in the pub in London. The intravenous drug user at the Acropolis (“A Ruin at the Ruins”). The people speaking in front of a statue of Jesus, Hebrew letters above his head, on the Charles Bridge in Prague as a form of reconciliation. This is the good stuff, this is real life, this is unfiltered. People living outside of boxes history and society and ourselves have placed us in.

This is why I left the hotel that morning—to experience what I knew our highly planned trip to Israel, where we were driven around in private air-conditioned busses with armed ex-IDF soldiers guarding us, would not—the chance to interact not as students, not as Jews, not as Americans or any other person in a box. This was my chance to interact, share, discuss, and learn, existing outside of the box, the essence of what it is to be human.

Once I pass through the heavily guarded gates, I enter the area near the Western Wall. It is quite large. A quarter of the courtyard is occupied by IDF troops, who are either on patrol, flirting with

one another, or on a big armored cultural field trip, I cannot tell. I go to the Wall, I experience all that is the Wall, and it is amazing, however, I want to see more. "What is here that I am not supposed to see?", "Why was I not supposed to come to this place, alone, even with the presence of an army division to protect me?" I walk from the Wall to the first set of metal detectors I see, which happens to be surrounded by IDF troops.

As I pass through the metal detectors, I enter an ancient world of winding alleyways, shadows, stone façade shops, and myriad languages. I enter a shop where I met Ramadan, a middle-aged Muslim man, an Arab, the Other that I was to be protected from at all costs. This man, however, stepped outside of his box, treated me as an equal, invited me into his shop, served me sage tea, spoke in a kind and caring voice about politics, his family, his yearning for peace and the notion that a very small number of bad seeds need not determine the fate of an entire people. Ramadan wanted peace, for his children to grow up in a safe place, to run a business, to be a human being. Ramadan's wishes, hopes, and dreams are my hopes and dreams. I am no different from this man than I am any other man.

I thought back to my experience in the taxicab. If the cab driver and the shopkeepers he brought me to were people to be feared, was that thought simply due to the box I put myself in, that of an American and a Jew and a potential target? I came to realize the boxes we place ourselves in are just artificial constructs that push us farther and farther apart.

My experience in the cab? A kind man's way of showing a tourist a place to get a good deal on some souvenirs for his family (my parents still display the menorah in their home), my experience with Ramadan, a discussion amongst two individuals, who happen to live in two very different parts of the world, but who share more in common than we lack. This otherwise scary, life-threatening journey proved something some might think of as naïve and trite: Most of us utilize boxes to separate ourselves from others: Jews, Arabs, Christians, Americans, Israelis, gays, lesbians, Millennials, loyalists, separatists, Orthodox, secular. We all want peace. We all want to raise our families in relative comfort and safety.

The best experience of my trip to Israel was something all of us can realize without ever leaving home. If we step out from beyond our protective boxes, shed our preconceived notions of the Other, have some conversations and some sage tea, we can begin to heal the world's problems.

I return to the hotel that afternoon and tell of my experiences. The trip leader admonished me, but I could not have been more grateful for the opportunity and hopeful for the future of humanity. I often think, if just a handful of the other students on the trip had created the same opportunity for themselves as I did, and stepped out of their boxes, exposed themselves to society, and made real, tangible connections with other human beings who were previously been deemed "different", what an amazing world awaits us all.

About the Contributors:

M. M. Adjarian is a writer and professor who lives in Austin. She has published her creative work in *The Provo Canyon Review*, *The Milo Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The Prague Revue*, *RaJAH: Rackham Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *Crack the Spine*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and *The Write Place At the Write Time*. Her articles and reviews have also appeared in *Arts+Culture Texas*, *Bitch Magazine*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *The Dallas Voice*, as well as in several academic journals and compendiums. Currently she is at work on a family memoir provisionally titled *The Beautiful Dreamers*.

Jason Dean Arnold [no bio available]

Bowen Astrop is a figment of his own mismanaged imagination. While his body is rumored to inhabit space in Atlanta, Georgia, his mind can often be found on the road or in the clouds. If you should see him, please pretend you don't. We don't want him thinking he's real.

Jesse Back started writing poetry at 23, short stories when he was in his early teens. He likes Tom Waits, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Johnnie Walker. Jesse is currently raising three kids with his wonderful, beautiful, magnanimous girlfriend in a small apartment on the edge of the city. He has had several poems published at several different publications.

Elyssa Bonifacio has always been interested in the arts but did not know what aspect of it. One day Elyssa picked up a camera and started taking pictures of everyone and everything. She never thought she really had a talent for it, but she enjoyed it. Elyssa then decided to study photography at The Art Institute of Philadelphia. Her passion for photography grew from there. Elyssa loves to photograph nature and landscapes.

Dan Branch lives in Juneau Alaska. He has essays forthcoming in *Foliate Oak Literary Journal* and *Kestrel*. He is currently enrolled in the University of Alaska Anchorage MFA Creative Nonfiction program.

Stefan Chiarantano is a Toronto-based photographer, writer, and experimental filmmaker. He photographs urban environments shooting in black and white using natural light but also shoots in colour. He was the co-editor of the first two issues of the literary journal 'Things Japanese'. His photography has been exhibited in several Toronto galleries, and his experimental films have played in Europe, Japan, North America, and Australia.

A.L.A. Covington has an M.F.A. from Spalding University. She has published short stories in *The Declaration*, *Equilibrists*, and the anthology *Woman's Work* and creative nonfiction in *The Delmarva Review*. [After growing up on a Virginia cattle farm, she attended the University of Virginia, where she studied literature and enjoyed creative writing workshops led by National Book Award winner John Casey. A graduate of Georgetown University Law Center, she settled in the Washington, D.C. area and, finding writing and research far more palatable than the fisticuffs of trial work, gravitated to an appellate litigation practice with the federal government.] She lives in Bethesda, Maryland, where she raised two daughters. "Pigeons and Panthers" is based on her unpublished novel, *Broken Dolls*.

Phaedra DeJarnette is a student at Harrison School of the Arts. She lives in Lakeland, Florida. Her work has been published in *Lingo Magazine* and many poetry anthologies, such as the *Polk County Poetry anthology*.

Katacha Díaz grew up in Miraflores, a suburb of Lima, Peru. She earned her BA and MPA from University of Washington. She was a research associate at the University of California, Davis. Among the

many children's books she has authored are *Badger at Sandy Ridge Road* for the Smithsonian Institution's Backyard series, *Carolina's Gift: A Story of Peru* and *Wild Horse Country* for Soundprints. Her writing has been featured in *Foliage Oak*, *Guideposts*, *Turtle*, *New Moon*, and more. She lives and writes in Astoria, Oregon, where she is at work on a short-story collection and memoir.

Andrea A. Fitzpatrick lives in Missoula MT. She grew up primarily in the Northern Idaho Mountains without electricity, running water, phones, or television. Until entering college at the age of twenty-eight, her formal education was limited to the thirty minutes during which her father taught her the alphabet at the age of nine. She graduated from the University of Montana with a B.A. in English (2013) and is currently writing her thesis for a Masters in an interdisciplinary program combining Environmental and Native American Studies with English.

Allen Forrest is a graphic artist and painter was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine* and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

John Gorman snapped the "Eyesore of the Week" for the *Queens Ledger* before his words found their way into print. Now he spits wine for a living. His work has appeared in *Monkeybicycle*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Newtown Literary*, *Writer's Digest*, and elsewhere. His debut novel, *Shades of Luz*, is published by All Things That Matter Press. He earned his MFA in Creative Writing at Pacific University.

Andrew Gretes is the author of the novel, *How to Dispose of Dead Elephants* (Sandstone Press). His short stories and poems have appeared in such literary journals as *Witness Magazine* and *Fiction Fix*. He is currently a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Marc A. Irwin is a semi-retired corporate business manager, who is beginning to publish the work accumulated since earning a degree in literature and creative writing at the University of Missouri at Kansas City during the '70's. His work has been previously published in *Nasturtiums* and *Number One*. He currently writes *Simply Cycle*, a blog about everyday bicycling in the USA. Poems submitted will be included in a forthcoming collection in 2015.

Kathie Jacobson's work has appeared in *Driftwood Press*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Hermeneutic Chaos*, and *Sassafras Literary Review*. She lives and writes in Oakland, California.

Margie Kelk's artistic practice reflects contemporary concerns about cultural history and politics. Kelk takes an exploratory and experimental approach as she appropriates and reconstructs visual fragments of ideas through diverse artistic media that includes ceramic sculpture, installation, drawing and painting, animation and photography. She has been showing in Canada, the United States and Europe. Recent solo exhibitions include *Beyond Absurd* (2010), *Nowhereness* (2012) and *Swarf* (2013) at the Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Ontario and *Nowhereness* (2014) at Artcite, Incorporated, Windsor, Ontario. Upcoming exhibitions include *Counterpoise* at the Red Head Gallery. Kelk is a graduate of Wellesley College, The Johns Hopkins University (PhD.), and the Toronto School of Art.

Eve Kenneally is a first-year MFA student at the University of Montana. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Cutbank*, *The New Old Stock*, *The Sundial Review*, *Star 82 Review*, *three drops from a cauldron*, *baldbip*, *Bluestockings Magazine*, and *The Feminist Wire*.

Kim Peter Kovac works nationally and internationally in theater for young audiences with an emphasis on new play development and networking. He tells stories on stages as producer of new plays, and tells stories in writing with lineated poems, prose poems, creative non-fiction, flash fiction, haiku, haibun, and microfiction. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in print and on-line in journals including *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Red Paint Hill*, *Elsewhere*, *Frogpond*, *Mudlark*, and *Counterexample Poetics*. He is fond of avant-garde jazz, murder mysteries, contemporary poetry, and travel. Kim lives in Alexandria, VA, with his bride, two Maine Coons, and Tibetan Terrier named Finn.

Sara Krueger received her B.A. in Film from Columbia College Chicago. Her work has appeared in *Menacing Hedge*, *Devilfish Review*, *Jersey Devil Press* and is forthcoming in *Driftwood Press* and *The J.J. Outré Review*. She has attended artist residencies at the Atlantic Center for the Arts and the Ragdale Foundation. Sara lives in Chicago with her husband Garrett, her cat Lando, and her dog Luna.

Thom Kunz received his MFA in fiction from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington where he studied under Allan Gurganus, Rebecca Lee, and other inspiring talents. His fiction has appeared in *Other Voices*, *Ellipsis*, and *Slow Trains*, as well as essays for the *AWP Writer's Chronicle*. He currently lives in Wilmington, NC with his muse Olivia and a memory-challenged cat named Roxy.

Miles Liss was born in Boston, but soon left in search of adventure, though he was only two. Since then, his adventures have taken him to several exotic locations, including India, Israel, England, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition to writing poetry, Miles also paints and, lately, watches birds. He is planning on doing some gardening this summer, and writing more poetry than ever.

Dan MacIsaac writes from Vancouver Island. In 2014, he received the Foley Poetry Award from America Magazine. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including, *Poetica*, *Vallum*, *Poetry Salzburg* and *Agenda*. Links to publications of his verse by journals online can be found on the publications page of his website, danmacisaac.com. His most recent short stories have appeared in *Stand* and *Brittle Star*.

Brandon T. Madden has been published in graduate and professional journals including *S/tick*, *The River and South Review*, *Flyover Country Review*, *The Write Time at the Write Place*, *Gravel Literary Magazine*, *Empty Sink Publishing*, *Sediments Literary Arts Journal*, and *Octavo Unbound*. *The Transnational* published his political essay, "Do Americans Still Believe in the Principles of the Declaration of Independence," in 2015. In 2011, he published his first novel, *V.S.A.*

Michal Mitak Mahgerefteh is an award-winning poet and artist from Virginia. Her iPad digital art is reproduced on throw pillows and framed prints. Michal is the editor of *Poetica Magazine* and author of four poetry collections.

James Bruce May reads Creative Writing at Greenwich University and Goldsmiths College in London, England. His work has appeared in *HARK Magazine*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Open Pen Magazine*, *The Star's Nest*, *Word Bohemia*, *The Treacle Well*, *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, *The Fat City Review*, *The Puffin Review* and others.

Alisa Hagerty Miller recently completed her Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies from Western New Mexico University with major concentrations in English and Writing. Before enrolling in graduate school, she worked for ten years as a commercial pilot. She is completing a final revision of her first young adult fantasy novel, while writing about the flying life and other subjects.

Andy Miller is a recovering attorney, project manager and single Dad to two wonderful boys. Originally from Chicago, he currently resides in St Paul, MN. He attended University of Wisconsin-Madison for his BA and University of Denver for his JD. He loves ideas, words, travel, observing people and being in nature.

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz is a writer and photographer. She also loves to sew, garden and read. She blogs at <http://www.onewriter.blogspot.com>.

Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He lives in Crystal Lake, IL with his wife, Vickie and daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee whose work has appeared in hundreds of publications including *The Louisiana Review*, *Bluestem*, *Emrys Journal*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *The Red Cedar Review* and *The William and Mary Review*. He has poems forthcoming in *Sobotka Literary Magazine*, *The Alembic*, *Old Red Kimono* and *Milkfist*. He was a recent finalist in *The Rash Awards*, *Sharkpack Alchemy*, *Writer's Digest* and *Bacopa Literary Review* poetry contests.

Francis Raven is a Washington, D.C., based poet whose books include the volumes of poetry *ARCHITECTONIC CONJECTURES: POEMS ABOUT THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT* (Silenced Press, 2010), *Provisions* (Interbirth, 2009), *Shifting the Question More Complicated* (Otoliths, 2007) and *Taste: Gastronomic Poems* (Blazevox, 2005), as well as the novel *INVERTED CURVATURES* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2005). Her poems have appeared in *Bath House*, *CHAIN*, *Big Bridge*, *Bird Dog*, *Mudlark*, *Caffeine Destiny*, and *Spindrift*, among others. Her critical work can be found in *Jacket*, *Logos*, *Clamor*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *The Electronic Book Review*, *The Emergency Almanac*, *The Morning News*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *5 Trope*, *In These Times*, *The Fulcrum Annual*, *Rain Taxi*, and *Flak*.

Denny Riley lives in Richmond, California with his wife and books. From his desk, he has a view of the Golden Gate Bridge. "A Chest Of Drawers" is the story of his relationship to a piece of furniture he found on the street in San Francisco. Recently he completed his novel *How To Roll A Number*.

Lewis Rosenbaum is a poet, journalist, essayist, and editor of the *Chicago Labor & Arts Notes*. He has worked as a social worker, factory worker, bookseller, and history teacher. He has been active in revolutionary politics for over 40 years.

Ege Al'Bege has been producing art with a vengeance for as long as he can remember. Growing up in Miami Beach, after emigrating from Colombia at the age of three, Al'Bege's work is deeply inspired by the strangeness and singularity of Miami, *the Magic City*, and draws on the beauty and the grotesqueries of the human species. The mixture of revulsion and fascination with the modern world are a driving force in his growth and motivation as an artist.

M.C. Rydel lives in Chicago and teaches at The Hadley School for the Blind and Loyola University. His poetry has been published in *Chanterelle's Notebook*, *Down in the Dirt Magazine*, *Lucky Star Magazine*, *Shadowboxing*, and *the Oyez Review*. M.C also performs his poetry at a variety of venues in Chicago.

Gerard Sarnat, MD received his education at Harvard and Stanford. He established and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised, has been a CEO of healthcare organizations, and was a Stanford professor. He and his wife of forty-five years have three children and two grandchildren with more on the way, and live in the room above their oldest daughter's garage.

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb's poetry has appeared in *Aji Magazine*, *Petrichor Review*, *200 New Mexico Poems*, *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Kudzu House Quarterly*, *Science*

Poetry, Spectrum, Dark Matter: A Journal of Speculative Writing, Wilderness House Literary Review, Concho River Review, Pedestal Magazine, The Blueline Anthology, and others, with poetry forthcoming in the anthology *Talking Back and Looking Forward: Poetry and Prose for Social Justice in Education*, *Caesura*, *Sliver of Stone*, and others. She holds an interdisciplinary MA from Prescott College and is co-founder of Native West Press, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit natural history press which seeks to raise public awareness of some of the non-charismatic creatures with whom we share the American West.

Larry Schreiber has lived and practiced medicine in Northern New Mexico for thirty-nine years. He is the proud father of fourteen children, ten of whom are adopted from around the world. His writings run the gamut—of children growing up and down, experiences in the Indian Health Service, working in a war zone, caring for the dying and HIV persons in a rural community. Schreiber's upcoming publications include, *War Literature and the Arts*, *Anak Sastra*, *Dirty Chai*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Lime Hawk Literary Arts Collective*. He lives with poet Catherine Strisik in San Cristobal, New Mexico.

Jay Shearer has appeared, among other places, in *Other Voices*, *Southeast Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, and *Florida English*. He's the author of a chapbook novella *The Pulpit vs. the Hole* (USC's Gold Line Press) and a novel *Five Hundred Sirens* (Cairn Press). He teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago and lives in Chicago with his wife and two sons.

Ken Simpson is an Australian poet. His latest collection, *Patterns of Perception*, was published last January by Augur Press (UK). He has had about 25 poems accepted for publication in poetry journals this year. He lives with his family at Lysterfield in Victoria.

Deborah Singer is a poet, playwright, and synesthete originally from San Diego, California where she studied truth with the Mesa College Theatre Company and created, published, and performed with the Queer Players. She presently lives in Vancouver, Washington with a cat that almost always has a runny nose. Her writing has appeared in *Labletter*, *Off the Rocks*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Cirque Journal*, *Trajectory*, and *Steam Ticket*. She is the grateful recipient of a 2012 Grants for Artist Projects (GAP) award from Artist Trust.

G Smith is an anthropologist by degree, an appraiser by career, and a writer by life. His wanderlust is only surpassed by his passion for nature. He has a permanent bodyguard, a pit bull named Sativa, and a mother that calls him a cross between Mother Teresa and Jesse James. He prefers to live and work at the beach.

John Stocks is a poet and Creative Professional from Sheffield UK. Since 2010, he has appeared in the UK *Soul Feathers* anthology, alongside Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy, Maya Angelou, Sharon Olds and others. He has also had the honor of sharing a page with Maya Angelou in the anthology *Heart Shoots*. His poems have also appeared in *This Island City*, the first poetry anthology of poems about Portsmouth. John was recently featured in The Cinnamon Press anthology *Shape Shifting*, The Northern writer's anthology *Type 51*, and in the Red Claw Press anthology *Seek It*. In May 2013 he was included in the international anthology *For Rhino in a shrinking world*. In 2015, he will appear in an anthology memorializing Seamus Heaney.

Warren Stokes is a self-taught artist and mazeologist. During his early years, he had a love for drawing sports and comics, but frustrated with the look of his people he never took art seriously. A trip to the library changed his life when he discovered the art of architecture, making his goal to become a professional architect and design houses. Unfortunately, his first drafting class would be his last as he found out he wasn't as in love with the preciseness and fractions needed in design. Attending Colorado State University for Technical Communications and Journalism he received a degree in Public Relations

with a minor in Cultural Anthropology. During that time, he began to develop a love for writing and public speaking or storytelling.

Melissa Toledo is a gifted observer with a keen eye for beauty, individuality, and dramatic composition. She is a master of light and shadow, creating 100 percent of her signature cinematic lighting manually on set. As a third-generation New Yorker, her childhood exposure to the bustle, density, and creativity of NYC neighborhoods such as Chelsea, Greenwich Village, and the Bronx, ignited her gifts for observation and expression. Melissa currently lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband, daughter, hamster, and 2 lovely kitties.

J. T. Townley has published in *Collier's*, *Harvard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Threepenny Review*, and other magazines and journals. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and an MPhil in English from Oxford University, and he teaches at the University of Virginia.

Emily Tucci [no bio available]

Amanda Tumminaro [no bio available]

Jay Hansford C. Vest, PhD. is an enrolled member of the Monacan Indian Nation, a tribe recognized by the state of Virginia, he is a direct descendent of the seventeenth century chief Opechancanough who arrested Captain John Smith in 1607 as a murder suspect during British Colonization of Tsenacomoco (Powhatan Virginia), and he is an honorary Pikuni (Blackfeet) in ceremonial adoption (June 1989). Dr. Vest is a full professor in the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. He is author of *Will-of-the-Land: A Philosophy of Wilderness Praxis* (2011), *Native American Orality: Interpretations of Indigenous Thought* (2014), and *The Bobtail Stories: Growing Up Monacan* (forthcoming), as well as more than one hundred sixty scholarly journal articles, chapters in books and other published writings.

Robert Vivian [no bio available]

Lauren Wethers [no bio available]

Evan D. Williams is an independent art scholar, appraiser, and photographer born and based in Ithaca, New York. His photographs have appeared in *Forword*, *States of Mind*, *Stillwater*, *The Ithacan*, and *Weill Cornell Medicine*, and in juried exhibitions at Ithaca College and Cornell University. His thesis on Anna Atkins's *British Algae*, the world's first photobook, was recently presented at Oxford University, and published in *Antennae*. Williams is now working on his own photobook in collaboration with acclaimed Filipino-American poet José Perez Beduya.