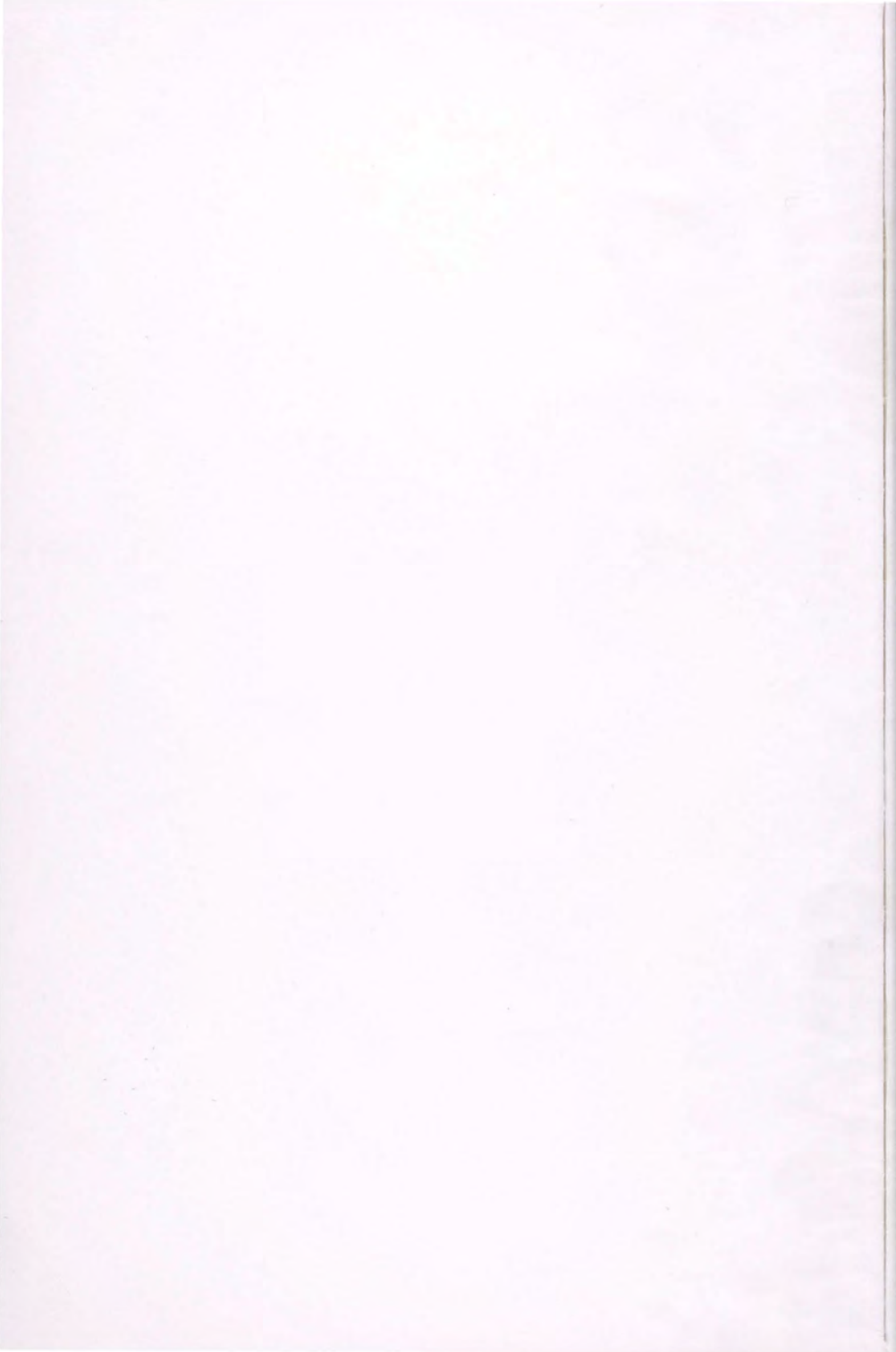




THE TULANE REVIEW

Omnibus 2017-2018



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"Mary Lou Williams" (Portrait Sitting) by Dennis Stock, Gelatin Silver Print

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She was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1934, two years before Stock took the picture at her home on Long Island. Her faith is evident in the photograph from the small image of the Annunciation that arches on the piano where the legs, shown on the keyboard behind her, in a way that puts her figure directly at the focal point of the composition. Also from her expression, which indicates with the perfect timing, while photographer cameras are unobtrusively with the said subjectivity of the Lens.

“Mary Lou Williams” (Portrait Sitting) by Dennis Stock, Gelatin Silver Print

Benjamin Goluboff

She was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1956, two years before Stock took the picture at her home on Long Island. Her faith is evident in the photograph from the small image of the Annunciation that stands on the piano where she leans, elbows on the keyboard behind her, in a way that puts her breasts directly at the focal point of the composition. Also from her expression, where irritation with the prying, young, white photographer contends unsuccessfully with the mild forbearance of the Lamb.

Estrangement

Sarah Chiddy

hey my sister fuck it go today
you're flying and I don't even know
go then to the frangipani trees go to
the land we spilled onto our mother
who unloosed us to this mysterious
and furied silence hey you
my sister where's your hand
it's dark and cold here the north
american winter hurts my bones hey
sister I'm alone can't you remember
when I came to you with a needle
in my hand we nursed your dying
cat to the next each night we used a
new iv we kept her beating hey
sister when you were a child and I was
older can you now remember when we
shared a bath how I drew microbes on
your back you grew up now you look in
petri dishes every day remember when
you lived with me and drank men two
times your age drunk until they gave up
couldn't keep your room clean hey my
sister where'd we go I have these night
mares where we don't find our way
home hey my sister there was the time
there is the time here was the time

Dear Lion One Day You Will Be Shot

Jonathan William

& afterward, unmoved by tritonal wind spliced through
The reeds, Sick Man will pleasure at your drop-dead sight,
The prize munition splintering leg near scrag & creek.

Dipshit Xury, overtaken by order, blasts the final skull
Mosaic &, scouring your body for meaty fruits, finds
You game not meat mostly bleak your composition.

Sick Man utters *this dispatched you quite*. Call it
Toadstool maxim, call it hungry delirium wainscoted by fire.
The organs call out *eat us / save us / use us / use us up* but

Your family absent, billowing away during the home-scurge;
Habitat viscera spills aside mechanical lubricants, steel.
Couth a petting paw for prize: Xury swings the hatchet,

Cleaves bare your paw. Dimwit Xury does all the do's—
Skinning you, he marvels briefly, pine-coat opal-lined, dense.
He stretches you out to dry in what is called vicious heat.

Canoeing down the river from the assuredly muddy banks,
Hospitality leaves surprise-the bipedal group saving the two.
Sick Man cradles your mane, a name looses in the ripcurrent.

NOCTURNE

Matthew Landrum

after Lorca

The oil pump at the edge of the property line clanks out the hours of parabolic stars and the sleep of horses. Your nails trace a Sagittarius on my back. Your kisses taste of late wheat. Here in the ease of summer, the future keeps its distance. Fireflies flick in the mist, neurons firing in some collective brain. Tall grass stirs in the fields. There is a limit to everything – oil, summer, desire. One day the well will run dry. The price of gasoline will raise eyebrows, end our long drives to see each other. But for now that autumn is only a name like peak oil or peak love. Citron and sugarcane – the sweetness of an unrefined thing: your hand – so small – against my chest. The stars have no eyelids to close in grief, exhaustion, shame and must keep their sordid watch through these hours of our depletion.

The Homecoming

Brett Cortelletti

Driving in my hometown after moving feels different
 from before. The car wash has grown a lot
 since I last saw it and half a dozen new restaurant chains
 sprang up. Every billboard that's been changed
 coughs to grab my attention, and the ones that have
 remained the same since before I could read
 them give me a wink and flaunt their longevity: Warrior's
 Pizza- Love at first slice. The new baristas treat me
 with indifference, as if I'm not a regular, and the one
 that remembers me does not ask, but states:
 "no room for cream in that, right." The man that I thought
 was senile remembers my name and asks if I ever
 finished Infinite Jest. The old graffiti has been elaborated
 upon and I mourn for the painted over fence
 post which my friend vandalized with the name of that
 cool band that played in town. As I buy plums at
 Walmart, my history teacher asks how life's going and
 he actually wants to know. I see an old classmate
 across the parking lot and don't mind not running into her
 and having to pretend that I've thought about her
 once since our last encounter. I feel like swinging by the
 library, but there are probably overdue fines waiting
 for me. Now that I'm old enough, I could pick up cigars
 from the News Store or have a drink at Martini's;
 It wouldn't be the same though. I've grown older and vice
 has lost its charm. There's no romance in a man
 returning to a bar he never went to. I left Mansfield too soon.

What the Fire Remembers

Lee Romer Kaplan

I remember
the roughness of his palms
on my skin
His voice insistent
telling me what
I 'd remembered
and how I'd remembered it
all wrong
though his memory
like everything else
we touched
had also turned to ash

The house that burned
was not the house
of my childhood
Papa burned that house down
years before
It took so many words to light the first match
It took years before the flame flared
hot enough to render everything
and all of us
into no one and nothing

Don't misunderstand
That house of my childhood
still stands
Someone else lives there now

There's a stone bench
 under a loquat tree
 at the foot of the
 steep terraced garden
 When I was twelve
 a boy kissed me there
 my first real kiss
 His hands on my hair
 the grassy green boy smell of him
 were almost enough
 to make me forget
 those callused palms on my skin
 those hands that burned it all, even me
 down to the ground

Songbird

Lee Romer Kaplan

Dina, Chaim, and the others
Teased me about spending so much time
With the *z'kenim*
And it was true
That the old ones
Smelled of stale cigarettes
And death
But I needed their stories
Those words that might become
Maps
To a world free
Of ash and bone.

As a child
In a country of survivors
I hungered for the stories
The other children of the village
Had long tired of hearing
Maspik im ha Shoah, they said
Enough of never again.

At lunch one Shabbat
Old Yosef from Lodz
Reached across the table
to take my hand
I tried not to look
When the cuff of his blue work shirt
Rode up, revealing
blue numbers
My mama, he said
Had sea blue eyes like yours.
Like you, he said
My sister Lena
sang like a songbird.

Peasant

MK Punky

No royalty in this family tree
Potato eaters Bean planters Dirt diggers
Involuntary serfs elevated to peasantry
Absent pious affectations and social pleasantries
My tribe had no aspirations
Aside from surviving the occasional genocide
Radio says
She big, a big girl thick 'n' juicy in the flavor spot
Ain't never tryin' to be somethin' she not
They don' know she older than the cotton gin
Sister of Methuselah
Sister of a man with a question mark back
Stooped over his cabbage patch in Poland
Dream-knowing 900 years hence a boy would be born
His crownless birthright passed and fumbled
Settled into a comfortable routine
Tending to the tubers
Peasant proud
Unpossessed of oligarch ambitions
Every remnant of his anonymous ancestors
Nearer than a velvet throne

My Mother Trick-or-Treats Without Me

Jennifer Bundy

Because I was bad, I carried my wand
from room to room, each a nest
full of dim lamps and knick-knacks, strings
of marbled beads. Grandmother stayed
there, waiting. I knocked on each door, and there
she was, night-gowned with a purple bowl
of stickers, bananas, wintergreen gum. Grandfather in
another room, she in the next, until I ran out
of bedrooms and porches and cars. She called to me
from the bathtub, beamed there and let me echo.
I asked for my next rightful treat in a wobbly voice
across that space, my profile catching
my periphery then, hair pulled back and stripped
of its hot-rolled curls, glitter damp around my jaw.

Somewhere, War Poems

Zebulon Huset

Somewhere along the blue or orange trolley line,
somewhere after the courthouse, past

the bank and 7-11 that swapped homes,
somewhere on the way from point A to G

I accidentally planted my packet of papers
like poetry seeds and forgot to retrieve them.

My war poems for class, annotated
in the sort of way that only occurs

during peacetime—sparsely, coldly.
The children's blood runs in the streets,

the indifferent streets highlighted for repetition.

The bomb's diameter expands past
the observable universe that encompasses

the grass calmly growing at Gettysburg
as a symbol of division: time over loss,

tragedy distanced by decades and decades and....

The Vietnamese villager burns
like a patriotic punk in July, ceiling fans

are transmuted into huey blades airlifting
the wounded during an in-store hallucination.

Somewhere in San Diego my papers
await a new hand, new eyes connected all

to the nesting doll of a brain, our organic
network of cortices that resembles

the internet from which I plucked the poems,
from which I purchased the ink they were printed with.

Somewhere their terrible beauty has passed on
like whispers on a near empty bus.

Sex Talk: Mama's Wisdom

Lester Batiste

Mmmmmmmhmmmmmmmmmm
 I know exactly what you be doing.
 I seen the evidence in your blue black jeans.
 Let me ask you something,
 you using rubbers?!?
 You know you don't wanna end up
 like Michael Jackson...going white
 after some night with a young girl
 color of a fudge sickle or worse,
 you could end up with a baby named
 Audio Science or Blanket.
 Boy you better throw that pussy
 cat in the pool and throw your
 head into them books. I don't want
 you throwing up in class after
 some hoochie mamma done told you
 she pregnant with yo baby..."Oh baby
 I can't wait to get married, have yo baby
 and be you baby mama"...child please,
 babies can't be having babies-ain't nobody
 got time for that! You better zip it up and not
 have a wardrobe malfunction because
 best believe a hard head makes a soft
 ass and all bees die after they get that one
 sensual stunning sting.

Diamonds Cut Diamonds

Jose Trejo Maya

My words split DNA
rainbows in the double helix.
You have too
have breathed –Lowlands.

But then what does
the calendar say now:
shifts Tonalpohualli
Matlactli

Ihuan yei

Quiahuitl

Izcalli

Ome Tochtli/

Ce

Xochitl

Izcalli

Ome Tochtli

Rains turn to flowers
and/or sight shatters time.
Quicksand's in the hourglass.

Bag Lady Praying at the School Door

Jacqueline Jules

With hobbled steps,
she pushes her portable chrome world
to the bench by the front door
just as teachers arrive.
She wears a long-sleeved white blouse
and red wool vest. Her cloud-colored hair
is braided, almost neatly.
No one knows who she is. Few ask.
She's harmless (the principal has decreed),
mumbling prayers over her plastic bags,
as children file through the doors.
Her lips move like Hannah in the Bible—
fervent supplication without sound.
But the priests here know she is not drunk,
but grieved by children who eat more at school
than in their own kitchens.
Her benedictions kiss our foreheads
as we begin another day
of teaching Rome, igneous rocks, and rainforests
in hopes of seeing small uncovered heads
grow large enough for cap and gown.

When You Close Your Eyes

Keith Dunlap

The clacking of the chain that drags the link of cars
up the incline to the apex of the superstructured hill
is like the ticking of a monstrous clock whose morbid joke
never fails to ratchet, in its dull mechanical march,
to a moment of metal suspense as fleeting and mundane
as a single drop of rain soaking into a pavement slab
before the rug of gravity is pulled out and the bottom of everything
falls away from pressurized expectation into a g-force train
the unseen mass behind us avalanching us down the hill
and the thrill of sudden and chaotic acceleration
and being slammed this way and that in the empty cab
a rough reminder of our physical fact and how confined
and limited and brief our ticketed freedom is.

That Which Was Never Meant for Us

D.A. Lockhart

Below ground we became all those things
our ancestors promised. Played dress-up
with bolero hats, beer-league newsboys,
cheese-grater lawn chemical caps, mixed
each one with Bill Bonds six o'clock
news ties, chased it all with highball
Stroh's cans bought at the Van Born
K-mart. Know that we bellered at things
we could and wouldn't be. Line work,
union wages, and knowing every shift
completed would land you somewhere
other than in an old man's basement
wearing clothes not meant for you
on time that always belonged to richer
men who wore clothes made only for them.

Bumper Sticker

McKenzie Zalopany

I've lost count of key strokes—deep cuts, long light scratches, tiny jabs—all from my bumper sticker tramp stamp. I've been around a long time. The old man before her put a Jesus tat on me but nobody ever said nothin'. She peeled that off in one swoosh, rubbing the sticky remnants off with one licked finger. The other day a white SUV drove behind me, read Make Rapists Afraid Again tailgated us for over half a mile, her baby in the back ate peanut butter crackers. I see her inside me. She cries with the radio off or holds his big fat baby toe listening to the news—hoping he won't be like the men who hurt me who'd like to hurt her.

Baby Daddy

McKenzie Zalopany

I use
 my mind
 powers
 ~telekinesis~
 at a stop light
 transmitting
 what I'm not
 gonna tell him
 I'm putting our kid up
 adoption
 Brainwaves
 exhaust from cars
 my little bump
 pushed out
 from vitamins
 they're all yelling,
 she's not gonna tell him
 I delete him
 from everything
 He posts
 You can unfriend me
 but you can't unfuck me
 you salty Bitch
 rubbing my stomach
 I think true
 My fetus probes
 my brain stream kicks
 says go go get
 I put salt on a snail
 once watched it die
 on the sidewalk above
 a chalk drawing of the sun.
 I tried to scrape
 off the little crystals
 reading his mind
 he said, you tried.

What the Iranians Did Instead

Mwende "FreeQuency" Katwiwa

yo masculinity so fragile
it would starve in a house made of kitchens
(it seems to only knows how to make meals of women's bodies),
it thinks Mr. Clean is a real live person,
it is still telling people the air is suddenly 'dusty' every time
you watch Set It Off instead of just admitting that shit is sad and made you cry.

yo masculinity so fragile
it thinks saying you do something like a girl is an insult,
thinks getting receiving a compliment from a man makes him or you gay

so fragile
it thinks you need to be a dick and have one
in order to be a man.

yo masculinity so fragile
that when a woman tells you 'no' you hear 'try harder'
but when she tells you she has a man,
you learn to recognize restraint.

so fragile
it thinks gift wrapping catcalls with compliments
means women should receive them like presents,
so fragile
it become a grinch or a gun if they don't.

yo masculinity so fragile
it would shatter under the weight of the truth

that it's not helping anyone,
especially yourself.
so fragile
that when it shatters, it'll still expect a woman
to clean it up off the floor.

yo masculinity so fragile
that it can't possibly be all your fault,

so fragile
we must deal with the fact

that this world makes men hard
because it is far less complicated
than allowing them to be human

yo masculinity is so fragile
that when it shatters
(and if you are lucky
it will eventually shatter)

it will die a heavy thing
having consumed so much of your being.

but on that day,
I look forward
to finally meeting you.

On Being a Small Town Queer

Barry McGuire

It sounds like underwater sticks and stones.
Like I'm the Mr. Crabs meme in a sea of slurs
Like I don't know quite why the words sting
But I think the Jellyfish Jelly might be worth it.
Sounds like a rainbow fish kill
A chorus of cracked shells and chipped scales

It smells like mothballs
Like the old outfit needs to be preserved
Like my grandma's house.
Like Cocoa Butter that attracts white lies.

It looks like letters I'd never send for fear of being sent away.
Looks like parents composed of tear stained pages
Like siblings with dancing ellipses for eyes.
Like a backspace button hit one too many times

It feels like Frank Ocean songs.
Like praying enough stripper booties
Will Novacane away the confusion.
Or Restarting my PlayStation one more time
Will get the disk to spin like everyone else's.
Like it was made to.

It tastes like an invitation.
An invitation to dine on my own insides
A family dinner where my grandmother slices
Another piece of my heart with every comment about "that cousin"
Who doesn't have a seat at the table, but is apparently the main dish.
It tastes like the fear that I'm old enough to serve myself.

Read in the Sky

Kayla Jackson

We do not like to play
nowadays. The
screams of mothers

often seem to trickle into a puddle of
Red. I watch my cousins' bodies DROP as
I watch my own
meet the [still-warm] ground!
Explosions of uncertainty,
Lingering. Being still. Unsteady,
our new expression. Something like,

get down!

That day we learned
freedom is merely a game. We only imagine
bright circled burstings in the sky
that drink my cousins' bodies into ground.

...Don't bring those

We do not like to play
nowadays. They bring
screams of their mother

With fireworks in our hood, features too
closely resemble
fathers Tears.

something else read.
They meet the [grim-reaping] ground.
Hasten to
Read every pop in the sky as
nervous fingers. My fingers,
being still. Sporadic. Motionless,
freedom. July 4th—

get down!

the celebration of
colors that break the sky;
have become equated with bright puddles.
Something else red

matches outside of the house

With fireworks in our hood,
features too closely resembling
their fathers.

[niggas die ev'ry day]

Kayla Jackson

Niggas die ev'ry day. It's a hard life
For niggas to dodge the blues' and whites' gun;
Get cut from history, a hard knock knife,
Brown skin Annies don't see tomorrow's sun.
Shriveled son-dried dreams raise sins as they kill
Black boys labeled men. An epidemic
Of Peter Pan, misguided-white-boy skill
'Cuz white pops who klan, have sons who mimic.
That nigga dead, ain't even got a case;
Story ain't make the late-night news; a slap
In the face of that nigga's en'tire race.
They can't do 'ish tho, but protest n rap.
 Maybe write a sonnet 'bout somethin' deep;
 Wake society from a walkin' sleep.

Cover
Illustration

Moving Parts (2003) • 33

Cover 10/2

10/30

COVER



Moving Parts | Laura J. Stein

Collage 2017

16x20



Dainty Grave | Julia Daniel



Linocuts | Anni Wilson

Linoleum print
8.5x12



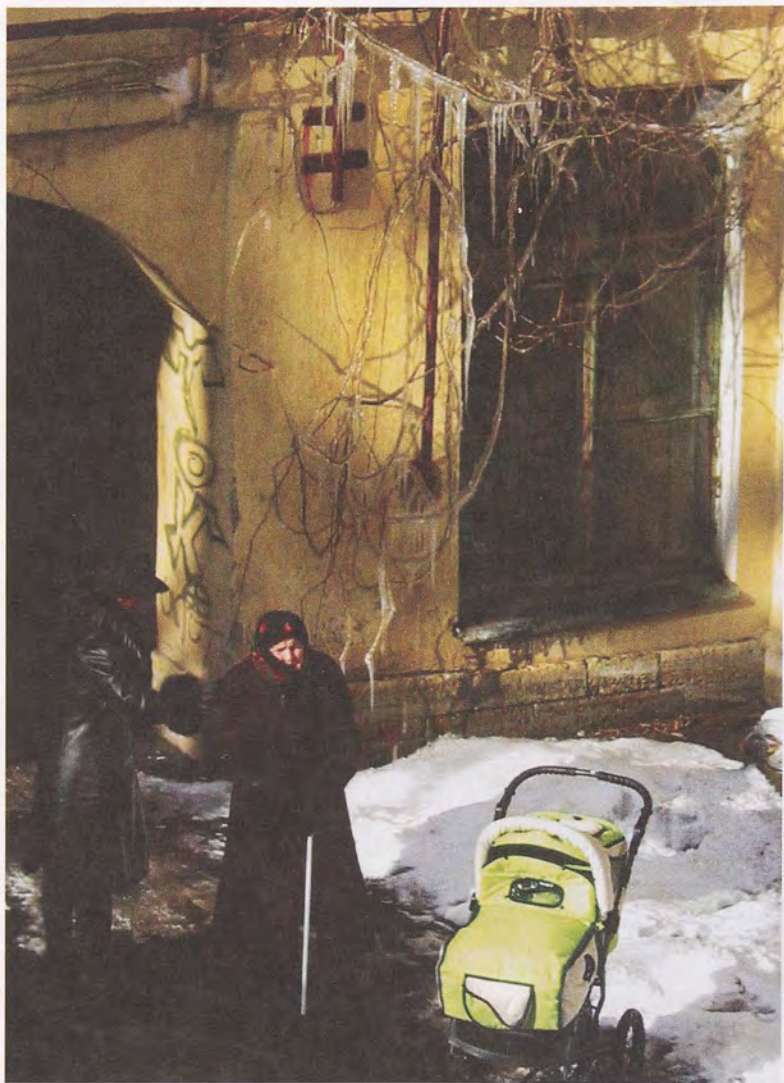
Escape | Keaton Boyd

Photograph

**Marble Palace Fireworks,
St. Petersburg,
Russia | Diane Martin**

Photograph
Canon PowerShot G11
1500x1200

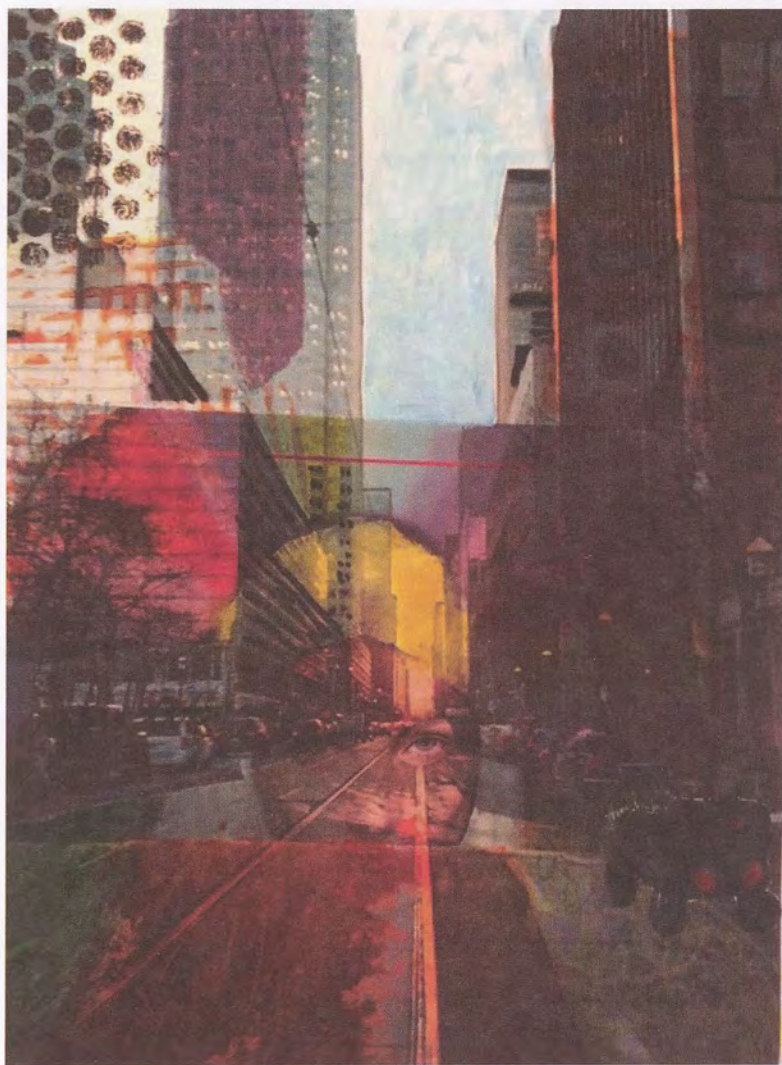




Three Generations | Diane Martin

Photograph

Canon Power Shot G2



Dreamscape | Fierce Sonia

Mixed media piece
16x20

Untitled:

Landscape | Olivia Cook

Freehand style ink painting

Ink on fabric suspended on

fishingline

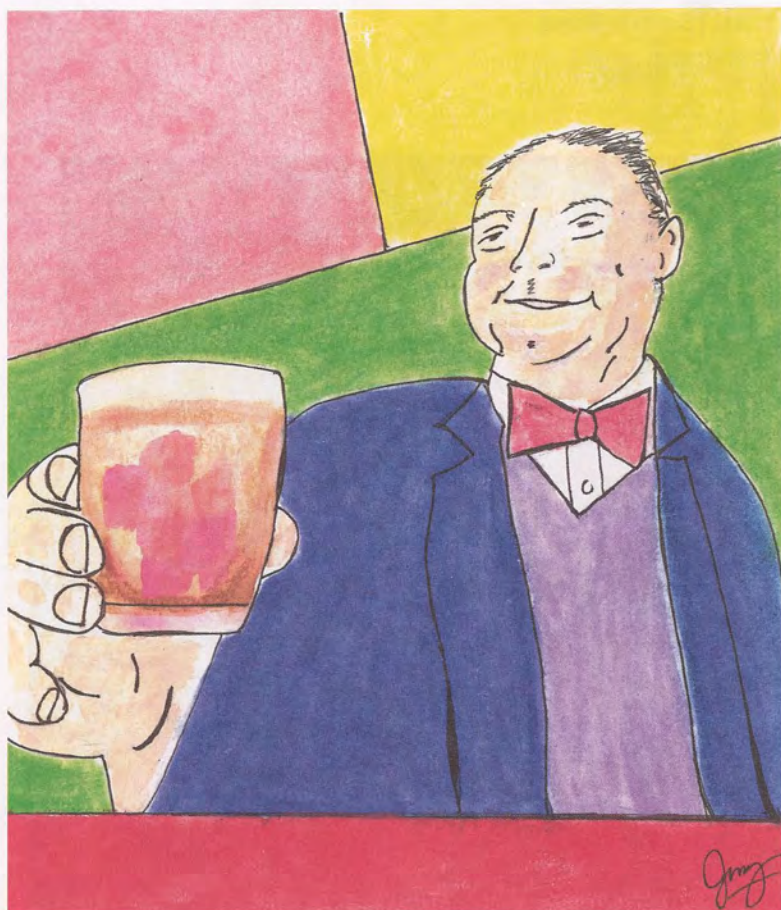
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DISK | Keaton Boyd
Photograph



Bubblegum | Keaton Boyd



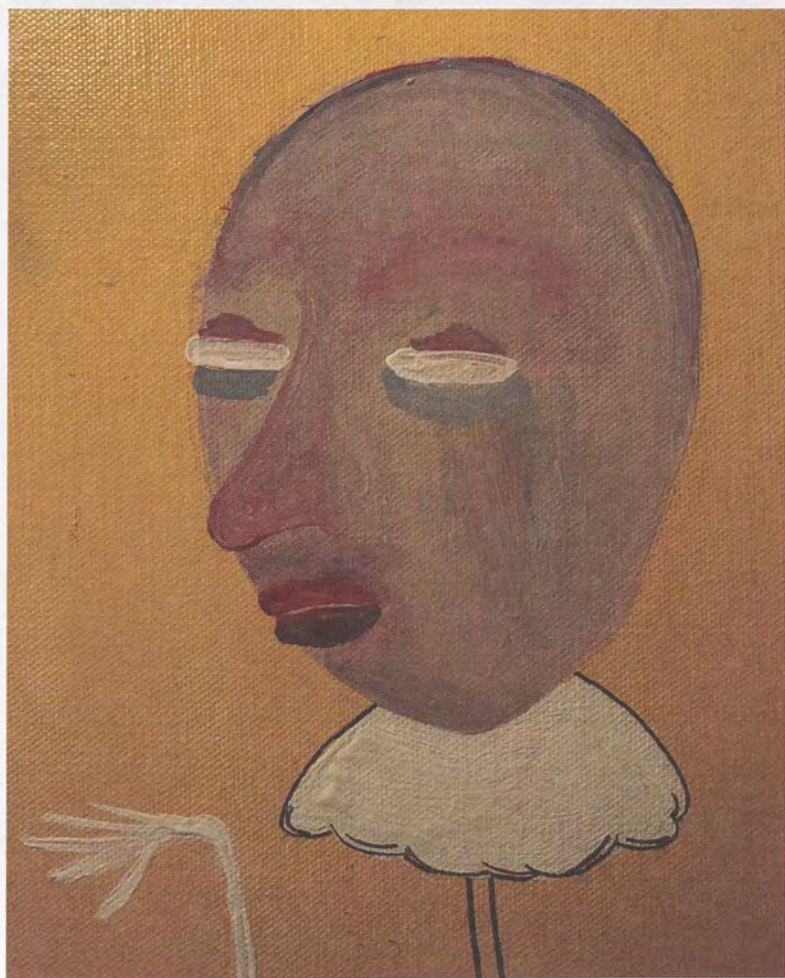
The Drink's On Me - Writer with Muse | Jameson

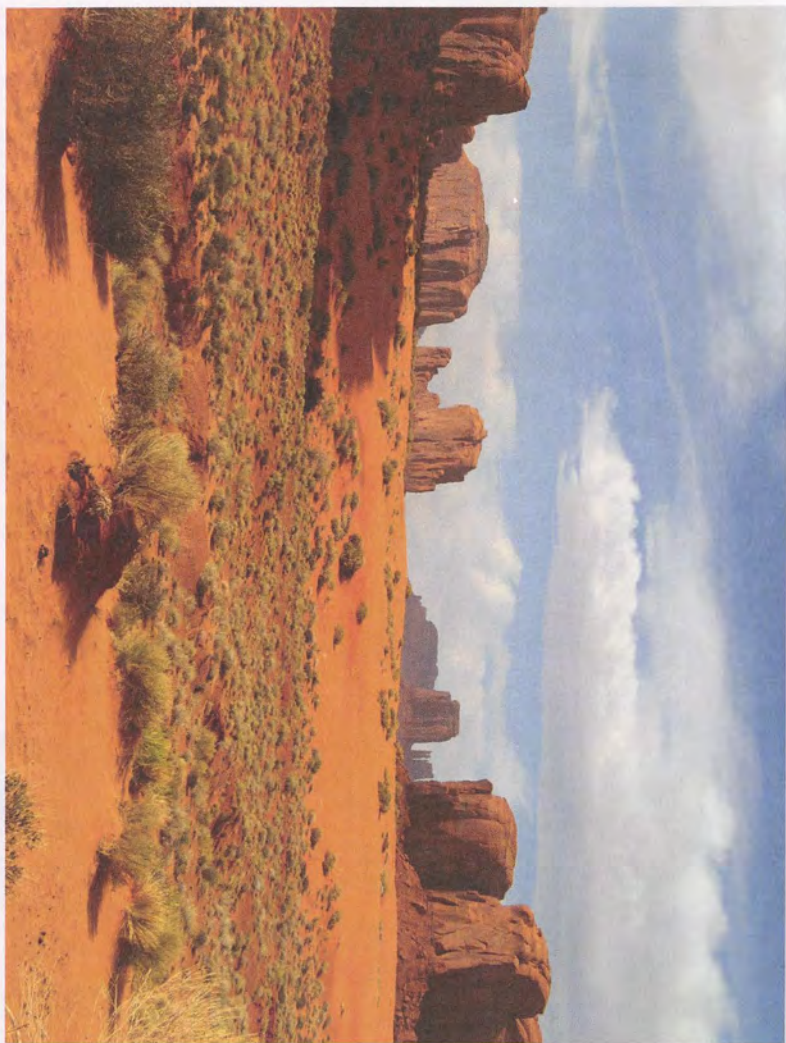
Currier

Ink, watercolor, and pastel on paper

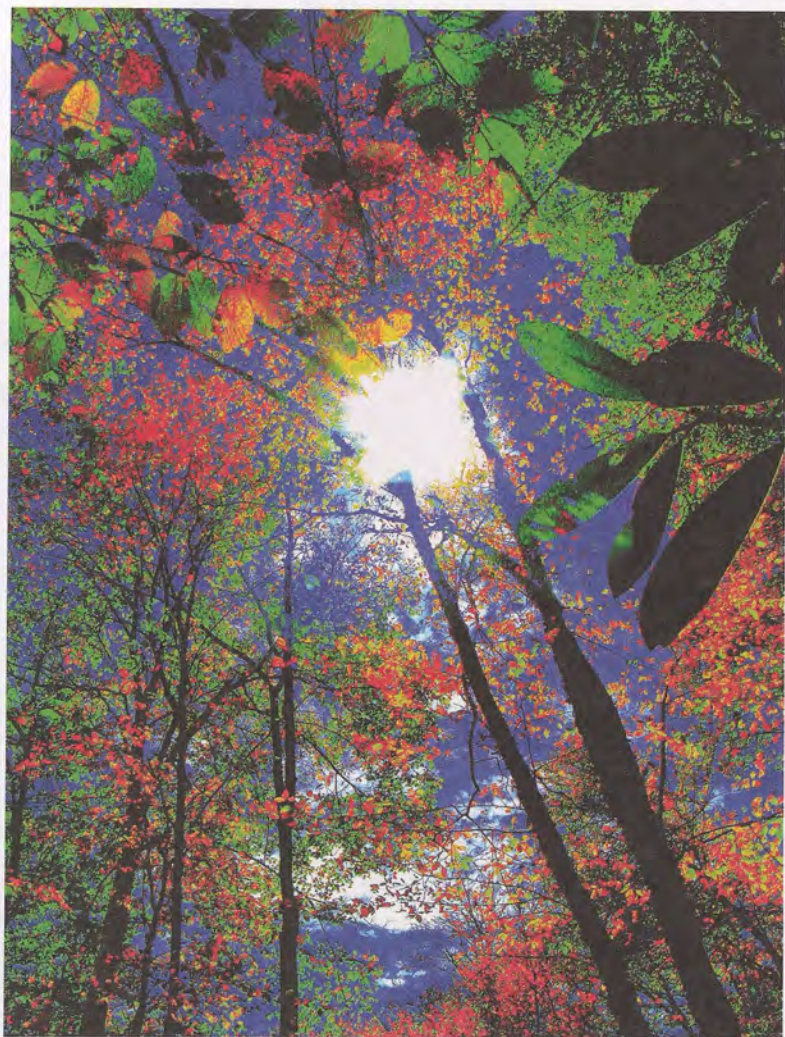
11x14

Henry | Agustin Barajas
Canvas





The Plains | Rollin Jewett



Sun Jewels | Rollin Jewett



On the Rise | Amy Guidry

Acrylic on canvas

10 x 20



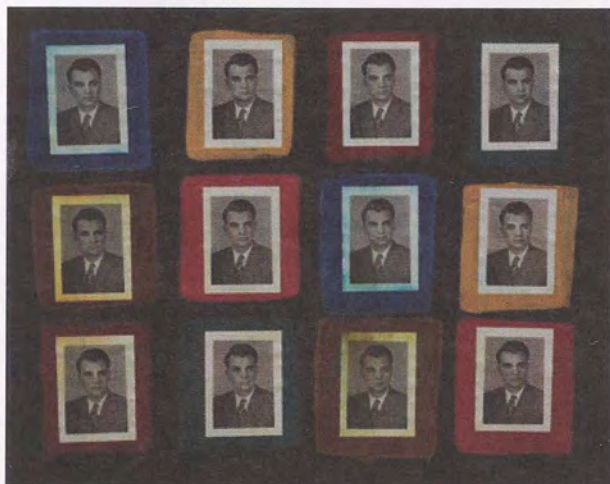
World-walker | Alex Duensing
Digital on colored pencil on photograph



Weeping structure | Alex Duensing

George | Silas Plum

Oil, Acrylic on Canvas with Additional Elements
16x20



Lenin | Silas Plum
Acrylic on Canvas with
Additional Elements
11x14

Balance Ton Porc | Natalie Toth

Chalk pastel and ink wash
20x36



acarpous | Anna Martin



Footprints in Garage | Jay Waters

11x6.18



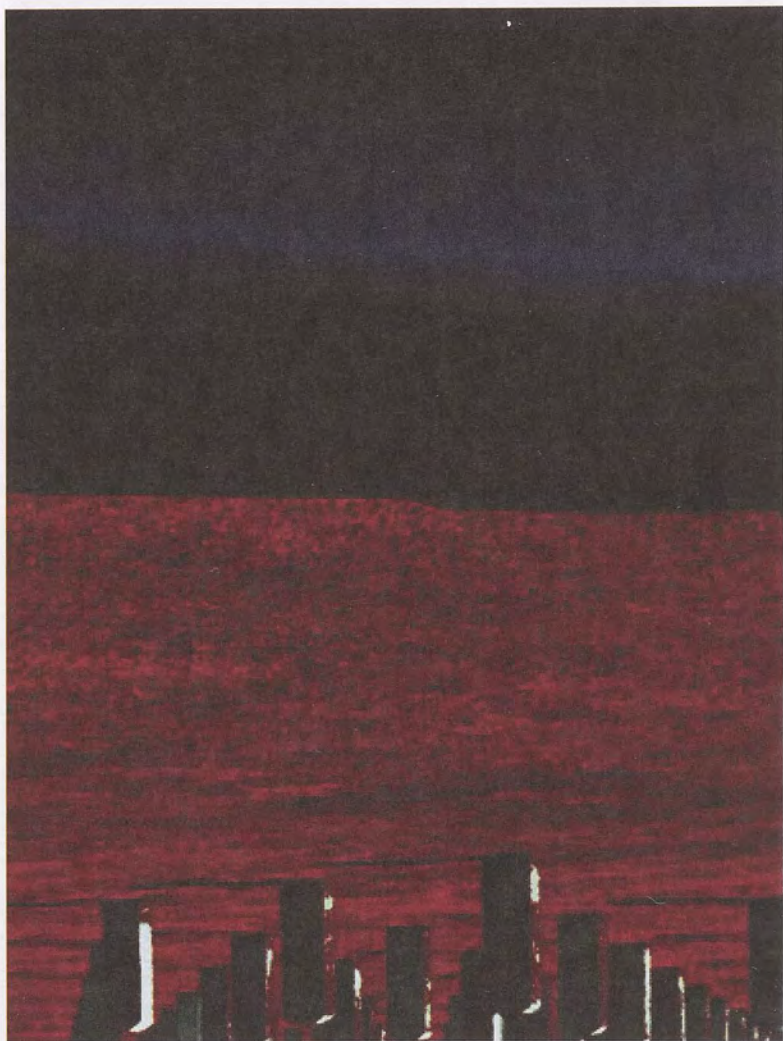


Amazonia | Ana Brotas

Ink on Paper, using local leaves, roots, seeds and fruits
as "paintbrushes"

10cmx17cm

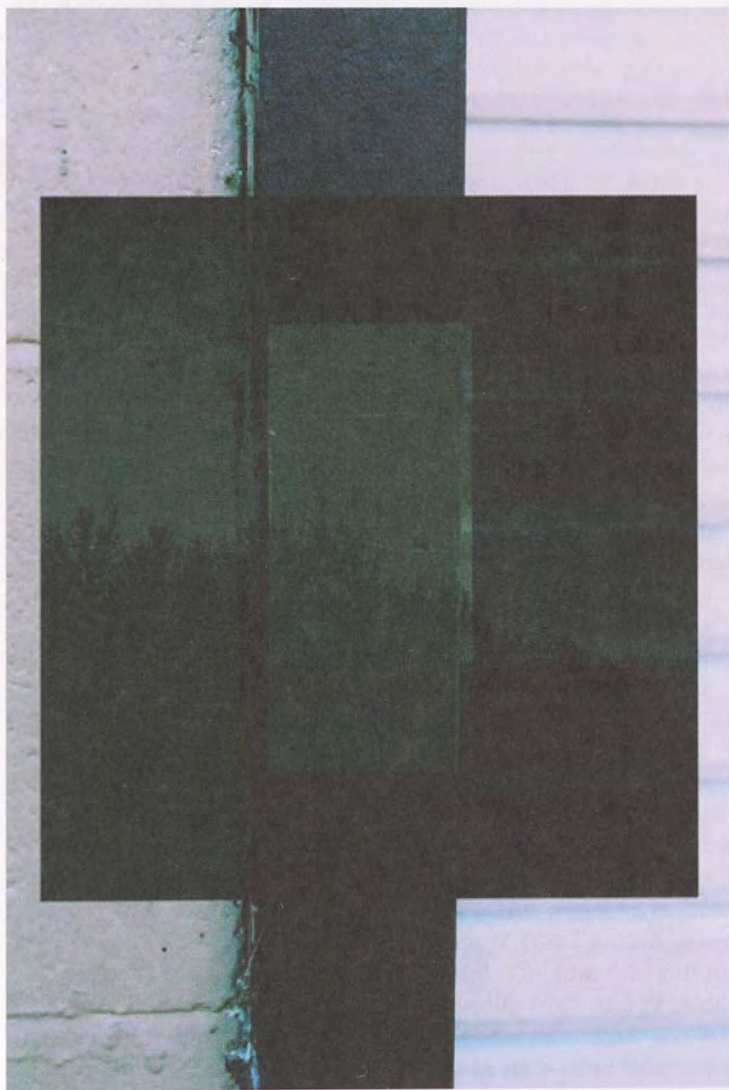
Memorials | Christopher Woods



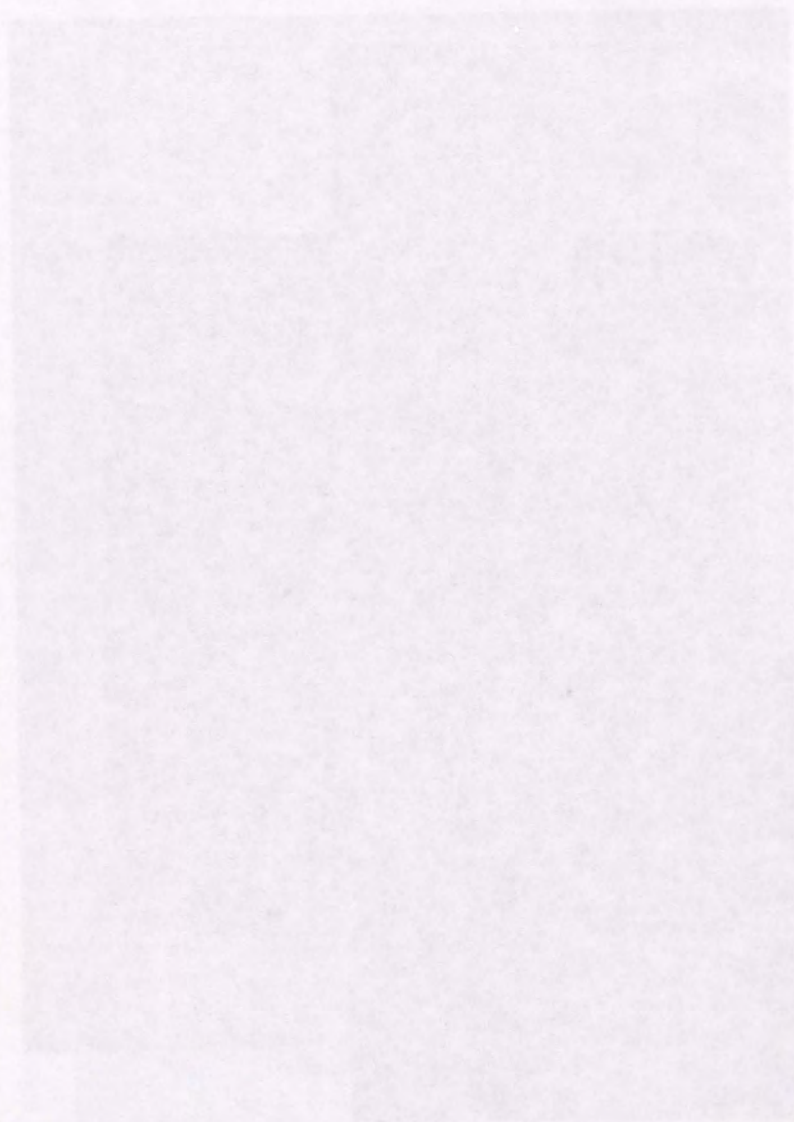
Backwoods II | Jenn Powers

A combination of photography, mixed media, and digital manipulation

2848 x 4272



Backwoods II | Tom Powers
A collection of short stories, novel, and plays
by Tom Powers
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GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

R. Sebastian Bennett

TOKYO, JAPAN 1990

At rush hour, a *shikan*—a train pervert—rode the same subway line I did. According to an article in the *JAPAN TIMES*, two German girls wearing sun dresses on the *Yamanote Line* had reported that they were molested. The girls said that even though the man was wearing pants, they could feel the poke of his genital organ against their buttocks during the subway ride. The man had been detained, but he claimed the contact was accidental since the train was too crowded and passengers were jammed against each other. Surveillance footage on the platform prior to boarding showed him cutting in line to stand behind the girls. But the article went on to explain that technically, since the man had remained clothed, and he had merely been “pressing”—not “fondling,” “stroking,” “thrusting,” “patting,” or “caressing”—no criminal behavior had occurred.

During rush hour, at 300% capacity, the trains really were indecent. Sub-human. Subway guards literally pushed passengers through the doors onto the train until no more could fit, and passengers were breathing down each others’ necks... If you know you will be forced to press against someone, is it a “molestation” to select the person you prefer?

As I read the article, my face flushed—because twice I had made such a selection just before the subway guards began their shoving. Of course, I had not cut in line. But I had chosen the boarding line with the most attractive woman standing in front of me, instead of a salaryman. Was I a *shikan*? Was I a train pervert?

I played the two incidents in my mind. The first one still made me smile. Astoundingly, after we were in the train and pressed together by the force of the crowd, the twentyish office girl in front of me had *not* tried to move away. In fact—and this was the

amazing part—she had leaned her head back against my shoulder. And then, slowly, she moved her hips up and down, and side to side... We were so close that I could feel her breathe.

The second time was different. When the guards shoved me into the train and I was pushed into the woman ahead me, I felt her back and shoulders tense. She tried to move forward, but it was not possible. And I tried to step back, but I was up against the door. There was nowhere to go. So I just stood there, wedged against the woman. On the tracks, the train vibrated around the bends and shifted to and fro...

Instead of choosing the line with a pretty woman, should I have just walked to the nearest line and allowed myself to be pressed into a sweaty salaryman? The thought made me nauseous. And if he had disliked the contact, would the situation have been any better? What if someone selected a boarding line in order to be pressed into *me*? All of this was a moral quagmire. Was there a solution? What could I do? I had to commute to work every day... I certainly couldn't afford taxis five days a week. And the office was definitely too far to walk.

But then, like a mathematician in a pointed hat with astrological symbols finds the hidden code, the elegant solution—I had the answer: I would buy a bicycle! I would ride it to work everyday.

I studied my map book and determined how to ride around Hotel Metropolitan and down *Edonimae Dori* to my office. It wasn't that far, maybe eight or nine miles. I was so excited about the idea that I had trouble falling asleep. It took a bold and inventive mind to turn the hell of a Tokyo subway squash into a healthy morning bike ride. At 1:47 A.M., I took my emergency money out from under the insole of my right shoe. I had hidden thirty thousand yen there, almost two hundred and forty dollars. I stuck the money in my wallet and lay down again. Eventually, my eyelids closed. Just before I fell asleep, visions of spinning circumferences and prismatic ratios of distance-rate-time danced before my eyes.

In the early morning haze, I was the first customer to the little gadget store near the station. The wrinkled old owner was bracing up his awning. I walked directly to the back of the shop where propped against a shelf were two shiny bicycles. A red one and a blue one. I wanted the blue one. Then I spotted a bike helmet

and grabbed that, too. The store had everything, from ointments to octopus tentacles encased in plastic, all in a sixteen-by-sixteen room crammed to the ceiling like the hull of a nineteenth century trading ship.

I pulled out my wad of money and walked over to the shopkeeper, who was twisting the dial of a combination lock attached to his awning. "I would like to buy a bicycle," I said.

The shopkeeper took off his thick glasses and looked at me. He raised his eyebrows quizzically. In Japan, evidently a bicycle wasn't a 7:00-A.M.-Thursday-morning purchase. It was a Sunday-afternoon purchase, or an evening purchase.

"One bicycle and one helmet," I said with some finality, like Alexander the Great purchasing his fine horse "Bucephalus" and requisitioning battle equipment. I lay my money on the front counter, which was still covered with a film of dew.

Now the shopkeeper gave me a bizarre look with one eye half shut, as if I took baths with my clothes on or sucked up rice through a straw. With an examining gaze that started at my oxfords, swept over my suit (thrift-shop Armani), and lingered on the Japanese company pin in my lapel, the man decided I was serious. He determined that this wasn't a foreigner's trick. It was a *gai-jin's* aberration, an obsession, a bike fixation. "Just a minute," he said.

"The blue bicycle, please."

Then the bike was out front—gleaming and new, promising and grand. The helmet was there too, all black with a little sliding air vent. "*Iti no jidensha*—Good bicycle," I said and realized this sounded oddly anthropomorphic, as if I were comforting a pet. So I patted the money pile instead and paid 19,000 yen, about \$160 for the bike, 4,000 yen for the helmet, and 3,000 yen for a snap-on headlight and taillight set which the shopkeeper had brought out as well. "One lock," I added, and forked over an additional thousand yen.

With a shiver of excitement, I swung a leg over the bike, latched the helmet, and started off down the wet street—

"**MATTE! WAIT!**" The old man yelled. "**STOP!**"

I set the pedal brake.

"You must register bike. You must buy insurance," he said.

Was it true? Was this the law? "Where do I register?" I asked, annoyed now. I would definitely be late for work.

The shopkeeper opened an old filing cabinet with ornate brass knobs. He took out several notebooks and a sheaf of forms. After filling out three forms, showing my business card and key to my room at the boarding house, *Sanjo Ryokan*, for proof of residence, paying thirty dollars more in fees (which left me twenty dollars for food for the rest of the week), I was free to go.

The bike was smooth. And quick, too. Not like my racing bike back home, but fast for a one-speed, 1940's-style, big-seated, square-basketed old lady's bike. There was no cross bar, no horizontal between the seat and stem like on Western men's bikes. The frame angled down in front. All Japanese rode women's bikes.

I stopped back at *Sanjo* for a quick change into a T-shirt so I didn't sweat up my suit on the ride to the office. I stuck my jacket, tie, dress shirt, fresh undershirt, comb, map, and deodorant (American deodorant) into a gym bag, then headed out to the main street. At first I rode slowly on the sidewalk, passing other bicyclists and dodging pedestrians, until the crowd got too thick. Soon, in the joy of maximizing Tokyo transportation, the delight of whirring tires, I hopped my bike off the curb and onto the street, making sure I pulled up the front wheel for a solid landing.

I rode even faster now, standing up and tugging on the handle bars, pressing the bike frame from side to side as I pedaled. Every few blocks, I overtook another cyclist. But no one passed me. Why hadn't I thought of this sooner? This bicycle was ideal. Sublime... Wearing my helmet and sunglasses, I knew I looked like a dedicated cyclist. The Japanese probably couldn't even tell I was a foreigner.

I headed under a bridge which I didn't recognize, so I stopped to take out the map and look for street signs. I asked directions from a polite bowing man. Everyone was friendly today. Friendly about my bike. And I had only five more miles to go. Up a steep incline I rode, straining at the pedals, feeling the pull of the handle bars in my triceps and the pressure of exertion in my thighs. But I wouldn't grunt and pant. I would maintain a certain grace. I would control my body for maximum efficiency, breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth like a true athlete. *Grace under pressure.*

At the top of the hill I rested, coasted for a moment, and began to pick up speed again on as the road sloped down. Then I couldn't resist. The adrenaline surge of bicycle ecstasy came again, shooting

through my arms and surging in my chest. I let out a shout of joy and pumped as fast as I could, whizzing through a traffic-locked intersection and rocketing ahead of all the cars. I was a professional cyclist, a triathlete in his best event. No slow sidewalk riding. This was expert cycling. The street merged and I was side-by-side with moving cars now, straining to pass them. Slowly, surely, I could.

A huge bus loomed up ahead. In the midst of heavy traffic, it was traveling rapidly for such a large vehicle. I pedaled with all my might and gained some headway. Soon I was behind the gigantic bus, veering to the side to avoid its gray puffs of acrid exhaust. With each stroke of the pedals, I moved closer until I was alongside. Inside the bus, the Japanese passengers had spotted me, and they were applauding. They smiled and cheered. I waived back and pumped even faster, harder. The Japanese clapped more. They tapped on the bus windows, made pedaling motions with their fists, and waved two-fingered peace signs up against the windows.

Near an old cemetery, I had to stop to get my bearings again. But soon I saw the Aoyamatwin towers and knew my location. Just a few more minutes to the office. I glanced at my watch. A half-hour late for work. That was the price of transportation maximization.

The morning sun was a bright. A piercing white. I squinted and unfastened the strap of my helmet. I was a block from the office, beside a park with a children's jungle gym where I had decided to stow the bike. I locked the rear wheel to a chain link fence. A blanket of warm perspiration covered my shoulders and my T-shirt clung to my back. Sweat ran down my ears and forehead. The perspiration seemed almost to gather its own energy from the hot, humid air.

I walked over to the playground outhouse—the kind construction workers use, with a plastic door and a chemical toilet. Then I stopped, frozen in my tracks. Inside a laundromat, a row of women had lined up in front of a window to watch me. Apparently a foreigner in the morning was a surprising sight for them, a Ripley's believe-it-or-not. One of the women had a snaggle-toothed smile. Two more stared vacantly. The last woman frowned, with a crease in her lips that accentuated her jowls.

I felt good after the bike ride, strong and proud. The exercise had given me more energy than usual in the morning, enough energy to deal with these women, to combat their gapes. I swung

my gym bag over my shoulders and turned to face them head on. I gave them my biggest grin, a wide pearly beam. Maybe the buck-toothed woman would notice the effect of five years of orthodontia and take it to heart.

My smile clearly altered the women's expressions—turning innocent stares into alarm, and hostile glances into surprise. Now they knew I was not just an ordinary foreigner. I was not just a sweaty *gai-jin*; I was an insane barbarian with delusions of happiness. Fantasies of flowery bliss. And it got them to muttering. And shaking their heads. But then I went into the outhouse and disappeared.

When I came back out, like Clark Kent in the flash of a minutes' metamorphosis, I was a new man. My hair was slicked back. I was clothed in a gray suit and yellow tie like an ad from Gentleman's Quarterly magazine. I looped around to pass by the Laundromat window. I walked right next to it, just to check the women's reactions. I even paused to watch them laboring, arms scrubbing and folding, rounded backs hunched over. One woman spotted me, stared, and stood perfectly still, as if I were a feral animal which might frighten and run. She gave a low-pitched call to alert the others and they all gawked together, eyes wide with amazement. But soon they grinned and nodded in admiration at my miraculous transformation. And I realized the profound truth about the importance of a suit jacket in Tokyo. It was pure magic—Japanese magic.

That evening after work I ate dinner at a tiny restaurant near the office where the grandmotherly *obaa-san* talked softly to herself as she made me *yasai itami*, sauteed vegetables served in a wooden bowl. The food was fresh and tasty. I felt well-nourished and revitalized as I unlocked my bicycle, snapped on the battery-powered headlight and taillight, and started the long ride home through the dark.

It was a warm, sticky night. At first I rode slowly, on the sidewalks only. But I had to swerve into the street to dodge a urinating man—his stream had pooled in the middle of the sidewalk. In the dark, as if aboard a whirring alien vessel, I rode alongside cars and secretly gazed at the occupants through the windows. I stared down at blue-suited bodies and tired faces. There were only a few other bicyclists on the road, delivery boys with boxes of food and bowls of soup strapped to their baskets. I

out-pedaled them all. I streamed past with an effortless rush.

Near *Yoyogi Park*, I spotted two other cyclists riding faster than most. They wore cycling shorts and rode 10-speed bikes. They were actually standing up while they pedaled. I set eyes on them as if peering through a rifle scope. I grasped the handgrips tightly, stood up, and pedaled as hard as I could. Steady pumps of my legs. Triathlon kicks, timed and tuned years ago cycling along San Diego beaches. Again I felt my adrenaline building and glanced up at the flickering lights and enormous buildings of Tokyo. I needed to concentrate... I had no gears to shift, so I pedaled faster and faster. Soon I was overtaking the two Japanese cyclists, shoulder-to-shoulder with them. I heard their grunts of surprise and couldn't resist winking as I passed.

But the Japanese riders sped up, too! This was undeniable. They almost caught up to me. It was a race, no doubt. A *Tour de France* in Tokyo. A contest of wills. A contest of countries...

I glanced down at the spinning front tire and rushing asphalt. I increased the pressure of my pedaling, torquing down harder and harder. I leaned forward so that my body was almost parallel with the ground but I kept my shoulders and abdomen tight, holding the bike perfectly straight. Going this fast, swaying the frame cut your speed and control. Soon I was leaving the two gasping Japanese riders far behind again. Then I sat back down in my seat, let go of the handlebars, and lifted both my arms in the air. The surging wind of victory streamed through my hair. It was a good night.

In Shibuya, neon signs burned their hideously bright colors into the darkness of the sky, forming yellow, red, and blue streaks among the stars. The signs were everywhere. Enormous blazing billboards. A glowing orange reflection from a Fuji Film sign shone on my knuckles in eerie illumination. I tried to pedal harder to escape the lights, but it was no use. My entire body was aflame in psychedelic stripes.

Soon the streets became very crowded. And the sidewalks were worse. So I slowed and cut in beside a row of cars near the center of the street. I was heading out of the business district now, past a row of noodle shops, Pachinko halls, and leafless trees. Then I had to jerk my front tire hard to the left to avoid running over the body of a crow, dead on its back with one wing extended. Its bloody beak pointed to the sky. "Better luck in the next life," I said out loud.

Down an incline I sped. Now the air was cold against my damp hair. It chilled my ears and temples like an antiseptic spray. But soon I was in a warehouse district with only a few cars on the road. The dimmed lights from factory windows cast strange and distorted shadows, patches of white and gray on the street. I heard the buzzing, chopping engine of a motorcycle behind me. Then it was next to me. And suddenly—no warning—turning in front of me, cutting me off, broadsiding—

I crashed.

The front tire of my bicycle hit the fiberglass tank of the motorcycle. Then strangely calm and removed, I felt myself flying over the bicycle's handlebars through the air until I hit the ground, shoulder first—a hard, sudden impact. I rolled and rolled to decrease the force, as I had learned from years of skateboarding. I fought to keep my neck straight as I spun—dozens of turns, dizzy jerking spirals, spinal twists... Finally I lay still in the road. The buildings reeled. My hands were numb. I couldn't feel my body. The rough surface of the asphalt dug into the side of my face. I lay there motionless, gazing at the curb and wondering if I was paralyzed. All I could hear was the rasping sound of my own breaths.

In a blurred glance, I made out the knobby front tire of the motorcycle. I could see a yellow insignia on the forks: KAWASAKI. A foot stepped off the bike. A foot clad in Nike athletic shoes. I tried to sit up, but needles of pain shot through my hip and back. My neck throbbed. The motorcyclist took off his helmet, and I stared up into the frightened eyes of a teenaged Japanese boy. "*Daijobu?* You are okay?" the boy asked. His voice wavered.

Before I could answer, a car had pulled up alongside us and the driver leaned out the window to scream at the motorcyclist—"**WATCH OUT! YOU'LL KILL SOMEBODY ON THAT MOTORCYCLE!**" The car sped away, leaving only exhaust trails in its wake. Carbon fumes coated my throat. I coughed and managed to prop myself up on one arm. I pried open the plastic buckle and took off my helmet. It fell clattering onto the pavement.

The boy saw my Western features and let out a gasp. Trembling, he took two steps back. With my good arm, I tried to push myself up and get my legs underneath me. It was a feeble effort. The pain in my hip seized like a huge pliers. I lay back down again to catch my breath. The boy opened his mouth, horror rippling across his face. Once more, I tried to stand. The boy

glanced at his motorcycle, turned to walk toward it, then retraced his steps back to me. "*Daijobu?*" he asked again, bending forward and blinking too frequently.

"I don't know," I said and stifled a groan. Pressing both arms down and wedging my good knee underneath me, I was slowly able to stand up. The weight was brutal on my hip. A jack-hammer pain pounded inside my skull. I staggered over to the side of the road and leaned against a streetlight. The boy dragged my twisted, ruined bike out of the street. He tugged it up the curb, swung out the kickstand, and tried to stand the bicycle on the sidewalk. It fell over with a hateful clank and lay there, a few feet from a trash can.

I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out one of my business cards, smudging the printing with a bleeding thumb. The boy was shaking. He took my card, bowed, and tried to read my name through the blood. But he didn't offer his own card. "Do you have a business card?" I asked.

This set the boy trembling even more.

"Just write your name," I said.

But neither of us had a pen. The boy offered to go look for one and, before I could protest, he was pacing back toward his motorcycle. He didn't try to escape, though. He lifted up the seat, searched in a tool kit, but found no pen.

I tried to adjust my weight to lessen the pain in my leg. I rested my left foot on its heel and wrapped an arm around the street lamp for support. Then the boy walked away, and I watched him go from shop to shop until he disappeared into a store. Soon he reemerged with a pencil in one hand and paper in the other. I touched my elbow and felt the hot, wet, pulpy skin of the wound. Despite the sting, I pressed down with my palm to try and clot it. Where was I? I squinted to try and make out a street or a landmark. Nothing.

The boy held out the paper. His name was printed in lopsided English letters: SHIRO HAMADA. There was a phone number, too. I nodded and tried to walk away, but stumbled. I kept going and passed the boy's motorcycle—I had to fight myself not to knock it over. "I will call you," I said.

"Yes *purease*," Shiro answered obediently, and took this as a dismissal. Right away he hopped on the motorcycle and started it. Then he was speeding off into the night without another look back.

I stared again at my bike. The front wheel was bent, the handle bars were crooked, the frame was scraped, and one of the pedals had broken off. The bicycle had been smooth and fast. Now it was

garbage.

Tottering, with one hand over my bleeding arm, I made my way toward a subway sign down the street. It was a slow process. I took a big step forward with my good leg, stopped, then dragged my bad leg ahead, again and again—for two ugly blocks. Finally I was at the subway entrance and propped myself against the door. I had tried to optimize Tokyo transportation, but I had failed. Maybe I just tried too hard. Or was this my karmic punishment for being a *shikan*, a train pervert, if that's what I was? I couldn't think clearly anymore. All I knew was that my head was throbbing. It hurt like hell. And I just wanted to sleep.

Inside the station, the fluorescent ceiling bulbs made a bitter electric hiss. I paused in front of the subway route diagram, a blur of tangled lines, to try and make out the intersection of the light blue *Tozai* line and the *Yamanote* line back to the boarding house. Suddenly, behind me there was laughter and nasal guffaws. I turned to see two Japanese men pointing at me. More people stared. The laughter got even louder when I walked away exposing my bloody arm and dragging my lame leg. Then more snickers across the hall. Four young girls giggled and covered their mouths. They were extremely amused to see a funny, limping *gai-jin*.

I glowered at them, but then up ahead were more chuckles. A group of chortling boys. Suddenly, everywhere I looked someone was pointing and joking about my ripped pants or my odd shuffling walk, my mussed hair or bloody hand. All around, by the scores, they were laughing—a sea of open mouths, stretched lips, and crooked teeth. My eyes burned. I clenched my teeth and glared back at the crowd. But it roared even louder. I almost cursed—but that would have gotten the Japanese rolling in the aisles, I knew. So I hobbled to what seemed like the least populated hall in the station, where I encountered a new bunch of sneers from a line of women. Their eyes glinted with mirth. Yes, I was a comical injured foreigner. Incredibly humorous. A laugh and a half...

With searing hot cheeks and a few stinging tears (tears of rage, right?), I staggered along the darkest passageway until I spotted the bathroom. Then I was safe was behind its doors. Of course there was no toilet to sit on, just a gaping, brownish hole in the concrete floor. But there was a wall to lean against—clean or not. And I could catch my breath and press paper towels over my wounds. I unlaced my shoes and tied the shoelaces around the paper towels to hold them in place. These were my *gai-jin*

bandages.

The subway passengers had all laughed as if I were a clown. They thought my injuries were funny. Were pain and injury so amusing? Japanese thought foreigners were innately odd to begin with, I knew that. But why was an injured foreigner so comical? Japanese were supposed to have a different sense of humor than Americans, and incongruity or incompatibility was funnier to them. But how could you laugh when a person gets hurt? Was I slapstick humor? Was I a *stooge*?

I wrapped my elbow in a wad of toilet tissue, rolled up my shirt sleeve to hold it in place, and shuffled back toward the trains. Soon I was immersed in a new crowd and more laughter, but not as much as in the first groups. Now that the towels and toilet paper covered my cuts, there was less hilarious blood to see. At least I was alive. And not paralyzed. Always plenty to be thankful for. I should write down my blessings when I got home. Give thanks that I wasn't being scraped off the road by a huge, whisk-brushing Japanese street cleaning machine. I took a deep breath and let the air out slowly. I wasn't limping so much now, only dragging my left leg a little. It hurt worst on the stairs.

But I had a good story to tell—a tale of a championship bicycle ride and motorcycle peril. I saw myself then in a continuing melodrama, narrating the action in a somber tone: “He trudged through the train station and the sneering masses. Back to his meager little room in the decaying old *ryokan*, to the dubious comfort of his futon bed.”

After two numbing train rides back to Ikebukuro, I was safe at Sanjo. I stood at the hall sink outside my room. I had taken off my ruined suit and thrown it outside the hatch window where I had been putting all my trash lately. I had gulped down four extra-strength Tylenol to ease the pain in my neck and hip. Now I rinsed my elbow in the cold spray of the faucet. The water swirled crimson and pink with blood.

I took a deep breath and decided that I was not a slapstick stooge. I was not a punished train pervert. I was a wounded warrior. And a tired one at that. I lay down in my futon, closed my eyes, and almost instantly fell asleep. It was a deep hibernation of a sleep. My one escape, doubtless and pure.

Outside, the night sounds played like a junkyard orchestra

inexpressible ignorance

Cora Cruz

From time to time I think about my old friend, the one that saw me through my final phase of adolescence and through my first phase of adulthood – by which I mean the seven years between age 26 and 33, and the seven years from 33 to 40. The two periods are separated by the birth of my first son, which was, as is often the case, what marked the end of the period of complete self-absorption and the start of the toddling years of adult responsibility.

I am sure the chronology of my friend's life was arranged differently, and with different criteria altogether. To start with, he – I shall call him Henry – had an actual career trajectory, and was somewhat about its zenith when we met; he was also well into his marriage and parenting – in the thickest of its forests, though his versions of them were so foreign to my own notions that I largely ignored his circumstances. I was then still ruthlessly self-absorbed, and aghast at the legitimate job options that presented themselves to me. There had been absolutely no foreshadowing of this situation in the dreamy landscapes of earlier youth – I had sincerely believed, from the very start and without doubt, that I had only to follow my natural inclinations, which were compulsively reflective, studious and industrious, after all; and a vocation, with all the trappings of the middle class life to which I was accustomed, would come about in due course. In college, an academic career had seemed the way to go. I'd impressed myself, and some charitable teachers, with my abilities. But then three years of graduate study in philosophy laid its steely grip on my mind, a vice as cold and heavy as lead, paralyzing thought. It cornered my imagination until, desperate animal that I turned out to be – not nearly the clever cogitator I had supposed – I chewed through its fetters along with a limb or two, and escaped.

The real world stretched before me like a barren wasteland,

offering nothing even vaguely suited to my expectations. Temp agencies cast a baleful pall over several months. Recruiters derived considerable enjoyment from interviews that were really games – fun, for them – demonstrating my utter incompetence and complete ignorance. It did not occur to me to reciprocate: I was as surprised as they were to discover that there was actually nothing in the world that I could do that deserved earning a living, and almost nothing about the world in which people earned livings that I knew. The few short stints I was able to procure filing and faxing and sitting in mute confusion before computer screens took all the self-restraint I could muster. I wondered what could possibly make a person so desperate that she would willingly consign herself to such a penal existence. From the moment I arrived at the fluorescent, refrigerated ambience of the office, my body ached. To keep the blood circulating, I developed a habit of sneaking into stairwells, to run them up and down, execute hasty pushups and plies, throw a leg or other up against the wall. Back at my cramped perch, I glanced furtively at my coworkers. I was worried to discern if they were as physically uncomfortable as I was, or how they could possibly not be; but mostly I tried to figure out what they thought about all day. Surely it could not be only some version of how to get something for one dollar from one guy, and then swindle someone else into taking it for two – an algorithm to which I reduced, in my mind, the entire complexities of business and finance.

“And then, the boys –” Henry reminds me. Fast forward a few more months and there he is, reclined among the pillows and comforters of the 44 hotel (conveniently next to the Yale club, which he frequents on his visits to New York), propped on an elbow as he smokes, coaxing my story with avuncular indulgence. He already knows it. The boys are also a disappointment, that was always how the story went and mine is no exception. They don’t want me. What they seem to want is a caricature of some sort or another, a mirror of some sort or another... a child or mother or some mixture both intimidating and ridiculous. I can never figure it out. It is much easier when I take myself out of the equation entirely, and focus on the roles, the performances. “And that’s it, the obvious solution,” I conclude, though Henry has nodded off from boredom. The only logical course of action, given the sorry state of the world as I found it, was to turn to a life of crime. Organized crime, of course, since I was an organized person. And

given my ethical reservations, it couldn't involve violence or theft. That left moral subversion, and as this seemed to me also the most meaningful sort of crime, it suited me perfectly.

Social conventions, when turned upside down, seemed much less of a lie. At least when it came to what services were deemed worthy of material compensation. Pleasure, too, revealed itself more honestly as what it was: unlike in regular life, where roles are taken seriously, where you're actually supposed to really be, all the time and behind the scenes too, whether there's anyone there to see or not, or as if there were always someone there to see, the thing you present yourself as at some particular moment to some particular someone, or alternatively, as what some particular someone expects you to present yourself at some particular moment. In the demimonde, no one expects you to stick to anything. You play the game until it's over. It's over when some scenario has been flung in the teeth of some ordinary good, when this good and its insult have confronted each other, raged against each other, and cancelled each other out. One is both actor and audience, and one emerges purged, cleansed as it were of some terrible anxiety, to resume the mantle of ordinary life once more (knowing secretly, how easily it can be suspended, superseded, in the interstices of pleasure). This play was the service for which I was compensated, and I felt it was fair.

For a while, then, I could breathe. The problem of eating and paying rent was solved for as long as I wanted to plan ahead, which wasn't very much. There was spare for luxuries too – some modest travel, some clothes – and time opened its doors. Time for lingering in cafes after rising just before noon, over books and notepads; time for museums, for daydreaming and listening to music, for running around central park reservoir on weekdays in broad daylight, for yoga and cooking, for ballroom dance lessons, for long afternoons of foreign films, for reading and reading ... opportunities the demise of which I had witnessed in my brief but tortured terms as office worker. This was more civilized. I learned to limit my shopping to weekends and rush hour to avoid dirty looks – as if I were some spoiled trust fund baby that could shop at Saks and Bergdorf Goodman in torn shorts all day. And I had reached an understanding with the doormen of my apartment building.

And yet, magnificently ungrateful that I was, I longed to fall in love, and be loved. I paced restlessly between calls at night,

replaying the most poignant songs from the height of the disco era – second cousins, in my view, to Chopin’s nocturnes. The decadence, the freedom, the vanities – this music knew it – they were empty, the cliché was true. I wondered what Henry thought, where he stood on this matter exactly, but I was never able to put the question to him, phrase it properly on an appropriate occasion. Or maybe it was beside the point with him. On my visits we exchanged books and our own stabs at writing. His poetry was spare and lean, and he made fun of mine, like I had no right to anguish and ennui. I held off writing for years after that, but confided my boyfriend troubles in novella-like oral installments each time we met. He seemed interested, and gave astute advice. He invented code names for these “persons of interest” – the Editor, the Zookeeper, and, most heartbreakingly because he was as gay as the proverbial Christmas tree, Impresario. Impresario was my ballroom dance teacher, who also played in a wedding band, which also performed in subway stations. To devote one’s life to the perfection of an art – the discipline, the sacrifice – well, it impressed me. The female dance instructors impressed me too, of course. What they did was as different as could be from what I did for a living: they were artists and athletes combined. They lived on tightropes of perfection, whereas I was nothing but a fraud: the therapist feigning sincerity in order to artificially encourage transference, the nurse disguising disgust at her patients’ bodies. But if I could make my body *mean* something, or no, make it say something meaningful, or no: make it *say* something *beautiful*, like they did... then maybe it - I - would be worthy of the kind of love I dimly imagined was worth being worthy of.

I must have gone on longer and harder about Impresario than about any of the others, because at some point Henry decided he had to see this fellow in action. I gave him the address of the studio and reminded him that the after-hours hustle dancing was on the third floor on Monday nights. Sure enough, one Monday I spied Henry sitting in one of the chairs lining the ballroom, leaned back on his elbows in his nonchalant way, looking amused and completely at home as if he were one of the regulars, one of the old-timers who’d been coming here for twenty years since the real discos closed. I’ll note here that Henry was not a small man, nor of the delicate sort: at six foot five or so, of solid frame and ever widening girth, sandy hair whitening and retreating from a prominent forehead, blue eyes that bulged somewhat – you could

imagine the discomfort they would arouse, if they fixed you - over Winston-Churchill jowls, he was a man whose physical presence commanded a quiet respect, but which for me called up a word that he articulated himself: tribe. It seemed we were tribesmen, he and I, and I wasn't clear then or now whether he was referring to the Celtic gene pool we obviously shared - an instant familiarity, involuntary as memory; or whether he meant we had personality traits, faults and flaws, metaphysical errors perhaps, in common.

Anyway it was a nice surprise, having him there. I confess I showed off a bit, taking on partner after partner, and I made sure Henry was watching when Impresario took the floor, dancing for his own enjoyment with his colleagues.

"Wasn't he wonderful?" I asked, a couple hours later. Henry was having a smoke, sitting cross-legged in the middle of the sidewalk on Broadway. There were few passers-by, it being after midnight on a Monday (or Tuesday, rather), but even if there had been anyone out, they wouldn't have thought him out of place. It was simply a fact that he was always exactly where he belonged, doing pretty much what was the thing to do. Henry responded that he was certainly something, all right. Back at the hotel, we had some pints of Ben and Jerry's and watched Woody Allen films till morning, when we fell asleep.

Though I rarely accepted money from Henry anymore, some precaution had to be taken that we not be seen together, among other reasons because my employer couldn't possibly have guessed how little business sense I had, and that stealing clients could not have been further from my mind or abilities (I wanted nothing to do with entrepreneurship). When Henry came to town, we'd set a time for me to swing by his hotel room. We'd leave separately. This arrangement continued in its platonic form after I married - there was another Impresario in the cards for me, the first had been the primer, it turned out - though it had always been essentially of platonic form, for me. Forward again a few years: I arrive after a long day at the office and sit for an hour or so in yoga poses, Henry smoking by the window for my sake, till I must rush home. Still, we manage to talk about books and philosophy, about my husband, about Henry's children getting older, about Henry's wife's work, eventually about my son, whom I bring as an infant on one occasion, laying him on a receiving blanket on the floor so he can stretch and ogle us; and sometimes we chat about a new girl Henry is seeing, or in love with, until he isn't. His hands

shake when he's not drinking, he mentions diabetes casually, and then there are the heart conditions and bypass surgeries, one after another, about which he doesn't seem concerned. He doesn't plan to change his habits. On one visit, he hands me a Marukami novel I've been wanting, an old one of his, and pictures fall out: his two sons, as toddlers, blond angels in patches of sunlight on hardwood floors. His wife against a rustic doorframe on a rainy day, waiting for something. I know her name because it was in a poem of his that I read long ago. She is so beautiful that I can't imagine Henry would ever look at anyone else, but then, I recall Henry mentioning, casually here and there as if as a reminder, that I was definitely not beautiful. On the back of the pictures are dates, and then a name carefully crossed out, then carefully re-written.

He had told me, of course. He'd spoken of it the first night we met, and then it stayed there, was always there, the backdrop against which we delivered our lines, acted our acts. He had told me that night at the 44 about his third son, born with something they couldn't fix or replace, though they tried. How unnecessary those attempts were and how they only prolonged the incomprehensible: incomprehensible because its subject cannot conceive it, has no notions for it, no comparisons, no future and no past, so it can have no reasons. How difficult, impossible, to operate on valves so small, with veins so thin they were barely discernible, and yet how clearly this tiniest creature, that knew nothing else, still knew that it suffered.

I've been at my administrative job for seventeen years now. On happy days I manage to slip out to the gym at lunch. Most days are not happy days. They don't let people in the stairwells anymore since 9/11 unless there's a fire, but I use unoccupied conference rooms for pushups, crunches, and barre exercises with chairs. I read and write when I can, but it's not enough by a long shot, will never be. I measure out my life in plastic coffee spoons, in sterile polyester suits, from a refrigerated cubicle. I tell my children often and repeatedly that they must have better jobs than mine, when they grow up. I hope I will be able to see them through this. My habits could improve: there's never enough sleep or exercise, so coffee and alcohol have views to secure employment.

Impresario 2.0 holds down the fort while I put in my weekday shifts. In the evenings I smell dinner from all the way down the hall. Sweet potatoes baking. The modest two-bedroom

rental with its dysfunctional stovetop fan is steeped in caramel perfume, decumbent bouquets of spiced roasts, mezzo notes of nightshade sauces, steamed yucca, boiled plantains. Soft landing: eviscerated by day, then back in the fold again, corporal again, small limbs clinging everywhere, jeans and t-shirt welcoming to skin. Windows opened wide to air out the cooking - we smell the seasons, hear the wind, notice rain and sunsets. Impresario 2.0 teaches dance lessons nights and weekends, while I take my turn at the household. The five years before our firstborn, we saved all our energies for our sessions on the dance floor - when we'd take each other on, move for move, action to reaction, strategy to counterstrategy. There is no room in such arenas for daydreaming, looking in the mirror, wondering what anyone thinks of you - no chance for this at all. Sink or swim, rise to the occasion or be vanquished... or worse, there is no dance. Pay attention. You have only a fraction of a split second. Faster. Focus. Hope you've practiced, hope you're in condition, hope you've had your breakfast. If not, too bad.

I no longer train for these matches with my husband. But they are the backdrop against which we deliver our lines, act our acts. We are fighters, practicing alone, sneaking in jogs, stretching in closets, reading and writing on subway commutes, between expense reports and whenever no one is looking. If and when we are lucky, we get signed up for the fights, the good ones. If and when our children are lucky, they have good trainers and coaches, good breakfasts, self-discipline, are born with all their parts, and don't always do as they are told. Maybe they can get signed up for the good fights.

Between the Toes

Katerina Ivanov

Once, Doctor told me to write down my worst fears. She handed me a pencil. I was sixteen. I didn't have to think.

1. Pregnancy
2. Heroin

She asked me if I needed to be checked into inpatient. She asked me if I needed to go to a hospital. I clarified: I was okay, those things hadn't happened to me. Not around me or with me, but to me. The inevitability, the violence of it made her pause. We both lingered on the word, yet.

She stayed quiet for a while, and then said, at least you know yourself.

The worst my body has ever been was the day of my college graduation. I had given myself some sort of upper respiratory infection by getting drunk and kissing boys and girls, worsened it with a central line of Adderall, Costco brand vodka, and Sunny D. Coming off the stimulants would make me ache and cry, and so I got pinkeye in both eyes as well, from rubbing at my face. I was dirty and limp, a puppet held up by cocaine and bits of dental floss.

It was, in many ways, a starting line. I took off.

I make a promise to a friend in my filthy bathroom. We are taking turns vomiting into the toilet.

We can never try heroin, I croak.

This conversation will be the last of my voice. I won't be able to speak for the next five days, throat blistered with stomach acid, but this is important. I'll lose my vocal training. I used to sing; I like to tell people that. And I played violin for thirteen years. Nothing has

ever felt so much like a precipice.

Never, my friend agrees.

My eyes are too glossy, during the ceremony. The pictures show them, hooded but still blown wide. The shiny exoskeletons of black beetles. The Dean hands me my paper and I think I am the devil.

Ryan and I sit on his apartment floor. He hasn't gotten chairs. We wonder about whether we are addicts.

I think it comes down to this, he says. I don't always buy it. But if I do, I take it. I agree. I don't own anything I haven't already swallowed.

A brief venture into sobriety:
My childhood home in suburban Florida is a lot like rehab. My family doesn't keep anything stronger than children's aspirin. There, I suffer deliciously, without medication. Even when the doctor clucks that you should really be on antibiotics, I refuse. This is, in many ways, my pennance. I'd be one of those springtime cicadas. I'd leave it; I'd kick it. Clearwater would be my my chrysalis. I move into an apartment down the street from the housing projects. They're the best projects in Boston, I say. You have to apply to get in. I'm not making art, but I live like an artist. I buy discount chicken at the Stop and Shop. I run around in a pair of flip flops I share with two other people. We call them the flip flops, as in who's turn is it to wear the flip flops? I wear them when I scrambled across rooftops downtown. Pulled myself up over the red brick, close enough to touch the Sam Adams sign, close enough to touch the goldfinches. I fuck next to the lazy, terracotta chimneys holding their breath. Me dangling my feet over, shoes just barely holding on. One of them collapses that summer, leaving a girl who was not me paralyzed. It should have deterred me. I lived loud and ugly and poor, breaking the window screen with my fingernails when I locked myself out. I was feral, but I wasn't taking pills. Anything can be a drug, if you let it.

The neighbors have a newborn. Their baby's first word is going to be fuck because of me. They stare, horrified, when I run out in the mornings in my underwear to flag down the garbage men after forgetting to take out the trash.

This street is trying to grow up. Planting shrubs to hide the view of the red brick apartments. Trying to make it so you can't tell the drug addicts from the homeopaths. Trying to find the charm in powdered milk.

Fifteen years ago, I couldn't walk alone in Jamaica Plain. Now, I lie on the sidewalks at night and listen to the babies cry. My nurse friend works with heroin babies at Newton Wellesley. They sound like fisher cats, like the snap of chicken bones against teeth. These ones are quieter, but not by much.

These neighbors are not the first on the block to reproduce; in fact, they're part of a growing contingent that gives me the stink eye over their strollers on my way to work. Reverse gentrification. Suburbification. *Get out, we want to raise our kids here.* It's hard to pretend you've made it. here.

The babies don't seem to mind me. They scream. I scream. *We're hungry.* They cock their heads up at me when I'm sprawled on the porch after losing my keys, picking at scabs to stop from smoking. Their caretakers angle them away from me, keep space between me and their perfect pink bodies.

I'm not dangerous, I want to say, but the screen door is already slamming.

In high school, we used to smoke in the bathroom: me, pressed up against the bathroom floor. My best friend Maria, standing on the sink, lifting one of the ceiling tiles with a single acrylic nail. Exhaling into the air vents.

"I'm pregnant," she would tell me, at least once a month while we smoked. She'd say it right after we would hear the door creak, and go scuttling into the stalls. This way she wouldn't have to look at my face. Maria was the one who designated, who drove. She waited while I smoked pot on the running trails, wrinkled her eyes when I pull myself into her Jeep, trailing sweet clove and sweat.

One time, I drove her. The woman at the front desk said, *honey you're really in no shape to take yourself home.* They gave her a big

old pad, almost like a diaper, for the residual bleeding and sent her on her way.

She ignored me in the car. Curled her eyelashes, brushed sunlight and dust from her eyebrows. Always fidgeting with her face.

Adderall and pregnancy. I specify. Ritalin and pregnancy. I pause, glance around my apartment, find only wary dust particles. Heroin and pregnancy. I shut my computer.

At Occupational Health, I have to pee in a cup. Required of all new hires. First, some boxes.

Check if you are pregnant

*Check if you consent to being tested for illegal substances/
non-prescription medication.*

I have to wait until my hands stop shaking before I squat. I come back clean, like I knew I would.

I still shake for days and nights after. I don't sleep well. The baby across the street has colic. I consider

Ambien. I chant the names of everyone I know who has overdosed. There's one kid who OD'd with his finger on the dial tone queued up in his hand. Logan Rudy, sixteen. Logan Rudy, Logan Rudy. Lullaby.

The first time:

I reasoned with a friend in his college apartment. My eyes were already ringed with stimulants. I could barely see and I felt beautiful.

"It'll help with the jetlag," I said.

I was later told that it was the most reasonable explanation they've ever heard for doing coke.

You have the most active depression I've ever seen, Doctor tells me. Why don't you just sleep for 20 hours like a normal kid. I like to tightrope. I go out and drink and pick fights. I lay facedown on my air mattress with a flannel comforter pulled over me, holding seances in my head, chanting the word fuck like

I'm possessed. I ride in taxis with my hand on the handle, imagining tumbling into traffic. A dismount, of sorts.

Writer's block, I call it. *Withdrawal*, most people prefer.

I'm terrified of being bored. I'm terrified of doing heroin. I watch *Intervention* with a biblical kind of fervor; watch the cornered addicts weep like I have my eyes taped open. Silently cheer when they flip chairs, furious at being confronted by the cameras.

A nurse graduated while addicted to heroin, I tell my roommates. *No one knew. She shot it between the toes.*

A few blocks over from the apartment is a stretch of Boston coined methadone mile. If you're a medical professional who lives here, they beg you to get registered to administer Narcan. OD Duty, they call it at work. No one wants to, too scared that the scabbed up leftovers of the person who was once pre-heroin will gut you with their used needle. I've seen it happen. I don't get registered.

Instead of heroin, I do other things-- mostly, other people's boyfriends. I drink so much I have permanent bruises on my knees and legs, from falling, from my body scolding, *enough*. My right thigh has an omnipresent shadow from when I had to be dragged across a rooftop. I remember having to wear pants so no one thought I was a domestic violence victim. No one is hurting me but me. I find that funny, but no one else does.

I make up allergies to explain why I feel nauseous. I'm allergic to wheat, pot, laundry detergent. If I just tossed the Downy, I would be better. I have dreams where I drink bleach and it smells inviting and clean. It washes the stirrings right out of my abdomen. I wake up disturbed, tasting a phantom poison. Sometimes I force myself to stand in the mirror. I never make it lower than my breasts. I ask myself, if I am an addict. Whatever the answer, I squint and try to figure out if I'm lying. I do things to try and regain some semblance of order. In a fit of insanity, I flush my birth control. I pop stolen antibiotics so that I can't drink.

I'm high functioning, I tell myself. I wake up late, but I make

it to work. I wax my labia raw. I go on dates where I pretend I'm a marionette. I give myself directions, like a toddler. *Now take a sip. Now laugh.* I actively force myself not to self destruct. I wear my hospital badge. I make strange, wounded noises into the night.

Now scream. It feels nice. The neighbors' baby screams back.

The Pie

Jesse VanDusen

As Mom slipped past the patio door something rotten came rushing after her. The smell was so faint it felt phantom, like maybe I was stroking out. Sudden death was a big fear of mine. Another big one being my mother. It seemed hardly a coincidence that tonight these had struck one after the other.

We'd gone out to the yard for dessert. My wife Lola was sitting at the patio table with my little brother, his friend the surgeon, and now Mom, who'd brought a plate of cookies. The Jacuzzi gurgled in the distance. Dad and I were staking torches into the grass, our beers sweating in our free hands. It was beyond humid, even for Cape Cod in July, and we were counting on the torches' lemon-and-chemical aroma to keep away mosquitoes.

"Syd," he said, when we'd finished, "How do you like the furniture?"

The table was made of dark wood slats, and the umbrella was navy cloth and parachute enormous. I'd have liked it more if we could close it for the evening and let the stars be our canopy. Where I lived only airplanes filled the night sky. I had to take it on faith that the rest of the universe was still up there. But I knew better than to make this, or really any suggestion. If not my father then definitely my mother would take offense at the idea that some aspect of their sparkling new summerhouse wasn't optimally arranged.

I smiled and sat down between Lola and Mom. "It's very comfortable," I said. We'd had a long day in the beach sun and a dinner with many glasses of Kendall J. The heat spilling from the torch flames was blurring the lawn and the faces of everyone around.

"What is this?" said Noah's friend. He was across from me, tapping the wood slats with his knuckles. "Is it elm?"

Dad took his place at the head. "It's Pottery Barn."

"Hal!" my mother erupted. She leaned in toward the surgeon and clasped her hands. "This is Crate and Barrel, dear. Originally we'd picked a set from Pottery Barn, but the delivery was a total disaster. Hal doesn't remember because he wasn't the one who had to camp out at the house all day waiting for it to show. These gentlemen arrived a whole four hours late. Unbelievable, the state they were in. Their eyes glassed over and calling me, '*hey lady, hey lady,*' like total thugs, I was mortified. I tried to reach Hal, but I should have known better. With him there's always something more important than calls from the house."

Lola was squeezing my thigh. She was an old friend but a new wife. Newer than the house even. She'd been discreetly gripping and glaring all weekend, but, like I'd told her, an appropriate moment for our announcement simply hadn't presented itself. When we'd shown up at the house three days ago everyone had been way too preoccupied speculating about my brother's friend. Noah had called on his way down the Cape to tell my parents he was *with guest*. My mother said it was impossible to believe the nerve of that boy, but really it wasn't. For the past couple years Noah had been working as a bartender at the Taj hotel in Boston, charming the clientele and bringing them like souvenirs to family get-togethers. This latest guy must have been in his mid-thirties, nearly a decade older than my brother. He'd been in the house less than an hour before deciding to pass around his phone so we could look at photos of the cardiology unit he'd helped open in South Sudan. My mother might have deemed him an utter stranger whom my brother had dared invite over, but she certainly didn't treat him like one. That first night she was so busy preparing dip and refreshments for the surgeon that she couldn't even be bothered to answer Lola when she asked where the bath towels were. What was I supposed to say? Mom, please stop fawning over Noah's boyfriend and listen to Lola? Oh, and by the way last month we eloped.

The surgeon stared across the table, so obviously full of shit as he nodded along to my mother's story.

"One of these delivery men decided to trounce across our fresh carpets in his *filthy* boots. He used our bathroom, the fresh bathroom," she said. "Without asking mind you. He had a fit in there. The stench was unbelievable. The house needed *fumigation*."

I tried to make eyes with Noah but Mom seemed to have his

attention, too. He was picking at the plate of chocolate-chocolate cookies and shaking his head, in agreement—who was he? Since when was he an audience for my mother's petty complaints? And he'd shaved his beard. He had a wax doll's face. He looked nineteen. I'd been in total shock on Friday when I saw him get out of the passenger seat of the surgeon's Mercedes. Since when did he let himself be driven anywhere? Did he think the surgeon spoke for him, too? *Noah* had never been to Africa.

"I said, 'unacceptable, this service is utterly unacceptable,' and they were still jeering, 'okay, lady. Sure, lady.'" She turned to me. "They were absolutely *abusing* your poor mother, Syd."

Dad poured back the last of his beer. The boniness of his arms was disturbing. To see him on the beach, wading into the ocean, somehow as flabby as he was thin. There'd been a big push to get his diet right after his heart scare last Thanksgiving. I wasn't sure how this was going. He might have overcorrected. These days my parents were dining exclusively on fish. Friday we had haddock, and tonight, salmon. Lola agreed: it gave their skin a weird, wan complexion.

"But what was wrong with the delivery itself?" I asked. "The set you mean?"

"Yes. Like, did it come as advertised?"

"There's a proper way to go about things, dear."

"Sure, Mom, sure. But when you say *proper*..."

"—Sydney," Dad said, slamming down my name as only he knew how, like a gavel. "Your mother was very disappointed with the service. She had every right to complain."

Lola took this opportunity to tell Mom the cookies were delicious. In the eight years we'd been together, she'd never abandoned her conviction that my mother could change. She acted as if all this required was to talk Mom in different directions. Towards compassion, humor...

"Those?" My mother waved her hand at the plate in the center of the table. "They're store bought. Hal picked them up. I don't really understand why."

Dad gave off a defeated look. He'd begun peeling the label from his empty bottle, like I do.

"I'm sorry," she said. She saw how small and startled Lola looked. "Sweetheart, nibble. Please. We're waiting."

Lola lifted a chocolate chunk.

"But leave room."

"For the pie!" said the surgeon, twirling an invisible thread in the air. He and Noah exchanged looks, laughter, and then even Lola joined in teasing me.

To say there'd been a lot of talk about this dessert would be an understatement. Mom had been reminding me of its ever-nearing arrival all weekend. It seemed anything, and even nothing, was a good excuse to talk about *my* pie. The bourbon pecan. "Your absolute favorite," as she called it, to which I could only widen my eyes in what I hoped appeared as anticipation.

Lola knew my actual favorite was blueberry. She didn't understand why I hadn't bothered to tell this to my mother. Out of pity, I said. Mom was getting older and seeing less of me and had probably dreamt since last November of the moment when I'd put my lips to her baking and burst with a familiar satisfaction. Lola wasn't so sure about this. She thought the pie idea had come to her just this weekend, after I'd complained about the haddock on our first night, how boring it was and how unlike her to serve fish to guests. According to Lola, Mom was trying to prove to me she still knew what I wanted. I told her this didn't make any sense. Didn't Lola remember Thanksgiving? The reason I'd never had the chance to taste the pie that day?

I mean, she must have. We'd been in my parent's kitchen, peeling potatoes over the sink. Noah and another of his friends, the professional coffee critic, were out buying Kendall J, and Mom was at the stove, shouting: "Hal! HAL!" Dad had been scurrying up and down the basement stairs, fetching stocks and milk and fold-up chairs, but now he'd disappeared.

"Sydney, dear," my mother asked. "Will you please go and see where he is?"

She had no idea that he was laid out on the blue galaxy carpet of the basement playroom, a tray of frozen pigs-in-blanket scattered about his flannelled, surging chest.

"I'm heading inside for another," Dad said. He dangled his empty over the patio table. "Anyone want anything?"

"Hal, check in the oven will you? The pie must be getting close."

I heard my father slide open the glass door to the kitchen, shutting the screen behind him.

"In my African unit," the surgeon started.

That smell had drifted out of the house again. It lingered this

time and I could make out the sweet of cinnamon and nuts baking, though this was quickly overpowered by the stench of something sour, like hot trash. I was reminded of certain people in the city where I lived who would approach beseechingly on the street, looking clean, average, presumably lost, and then start in on some loony, eschatological rant.

Lola's nails dug deeper into my thigh. I looked at her, like *I know, what is that smell?* But this wasn't what she wanted to exchange silent stares over. In fact, no one seemed remotely fazed by the odor. Mom was as rapt as she'd been all weekend by the surgeon's colorful recollections, and Noah gazed off blankly, watching the mosquitoes as they darted in and out of the torchlight.

The surgeon stopped. "Sydney," he said. "Is something the matter? You're looking out of sorts."

My leg burned from the nails.

"I've got a lot on my mind," I said.

This was honest, I thought, and I was pleased with myself for leaving it at that. Why did he have to go and ask *what* was on my mind?

"I don't know, Doc. I'm wondering, like, why are you devoting so many resources to fixing hearts in Africa when here at home there are plenty that need fixing?"

Noah sighed. "Always the antagonist."

"It's a legitimate concern," I said.

The surgeon brushed back his silver, Clairol hair. "And you are not the first to raise it, friend. Personally? I reject borders. I abhor this artificial carving up of continents we've inflicted. When you say home—my home is this universe."

The smell from the kitchen was filling my mouth, an invisible slice of rotten pie. I bit my lip.

"Does it disgust you, Sydney? The idea that we might all be connected?"

I looked around, hoping someone would acknowledge, if not the smell then at least that the surgeon was being dense. I got nothing. Not a shrug from Noah. Not a raised brow from Mom or a smile, however small, from Lola.

"Sure, Doc," I said. "That's what's happening here."

"I suppose it would explain the profession you've taken up."

"My what? You mean as a t-shirt designer?"

"Precisely. I imagine it provides you with a good amount of the

solitude you require. You work in the safety and security of a tiny urban nest, yes?"

"I don't know what makes you say tiny."

"Well, if you'll grant *me* the role of antagonist a moment, I'd say this position you hold—"

"As a t-shirt designer."

"It's a travesty. You have no real connection to the people upon whom your livelihood depends."

"I know they love t-shirts, Doc."

"Oh, I'm sorry, but that's not enough."

Mom's hand was to her mouth. It was as if she were a little girl who'd just seen her classmate pantsed.

I stood up. "You know what?" I said. "You're enough." I brushed off Lola and made for the house.

"Don't be like that, friend!"

When I got to the screen door I had to hold my breath the smell was so bad. Dad was crouched over the oven. He raised his brow to me and swigged on the freshly opened bottle. "It stinks," I mouthed. I watched as all the lines on his face and baldhead converged. "It doesn't," he mouthed back. His scowl, at least from this distance, seemed practically pleasant compared to what I remembered from growing up. We'd be at dinner, a nice Saturday place like the Eagle Steakhouse, and I'd correct Mom for something silly like mispronouncing *gratin*, when all of sudden he'd turn towards me with this look on his face, not like I'd said a bad word, but like I was one.

"It reeks of asshole," I mouthed. I closed the glass door over the screen.

I should be making sacrifices—that was what Dad had told me on the night before Thanksgiving. I'd asked again if he'd pay for my wedding. Sometimes sacrifices are financial, he'd said. I'd tried explaining to him that it was only for his and Mom's sake that Lola had even considered a formal wedding, but he wouldn't hear it. When I proposed the courthouse, he said, "Don't be ridiculous." He sounded like Mom. She had this picture of the world hidden inside of her and anything she saw that didn't match it was absurd. Cars with their windows rolled down, sweatpants at the dinner table, a Marlboro dangling from the president's mouth. She laughed at the way I made a living, at the idea that Noah's friends were something more.

"Forget her," I said to Lola. It was late that night in November

as we lay on my childhood bed, looking up at the plastic, phosphorescent stars pasted to the ceiling. "We'll get married how we want. We already live how we want."

"Wait," she said.

I put my face in her hair. It smelled lovely, like fresh coconut. I wondered what shampoo she'd been using, but stopped myself from asking when I remembered she hadn't packed any. She'd been taking whatever was in my parents' bathroom.

"Please," she said, "Sydney, shut the door..."

When I got back to the patio she was defending me. "Syd thinks a lot about suffering, believe it or not," she was saying. "He basically didn't eat last fall until Hal got out of the hospital."

"But how many times did he visit?" my mother asked.

"It really upset him, Bethany. It was too much."

"Okay, let's change the topic," Noah said.

The surgeon turned to him. "Did you not visit either?"

"No, our Noah was a good boy."

I glared. "How many times did he come alone?"

"I said let's change it!"

Mom craned her neck to the kitchen behind her. "What is your father doing in there?"

"The pie," I started. The pie is rancid? The pie needs fumigation? "He's checking on the pie."

"Hal!" she shouted. To the sky, to no one. "Your father, he thinks he's master of every rock and stream."

"You told him to—"

"He doesn't know the first thing about pies. Hal! Get back out here. HAL!"

"If you want him," I said. "Why don't you go in there, and get him yourself."

I spoke slowly, deliberately, and she looked at me in total shock. It felt good to watch her retreat to the house, like she was the pansted one now. Unfortunately, she was also still my mother.

"Do you think everything is okay in there?" said Lola.

"I don't know." I turned to the surgeon. "There was that smell—"

"Jesus, Sydface," said Noah, "Are you seriously fretting over the fucking pie?" He really sounded like my brother now, which I almost couldn't believe.

"I'm not *fretting*. You did catch a whiff, right?"

"Sydney, you know I wasn't referring to the pie."

"Really, no one smelled it?"

"Something's going on here," the surgeon said. "Beneath the surface."

Lola laughed. "Will you tell them at least?"

"Tell us what?" said the surgeon.

"We have an announcement."

"Lola!" I erupted. "Not now."

Noah pointed. "She pregnant?"

Lola laughed again.

"She's not—Doc, I know you smelled it. When the door was open. I'm positive."

"Loli, darling, give us the news."

"Doc, that's not—it's none of your business."

"Don't mind my brother, people." Noah's face was so god damn bright and charming. "He gets like this when he's nervous."

Lola nodded. "It's true."

My skin was burning now. My ankles itched. My throat was maybe swelling? I imagined the surgeon in Africa, draped in nothing but an open white coat and lording over a row of sickly children on steel cots, their bed spaces shrouded in silky white mosquito netting. A rickety fan spinning overhead. Flies buzzing, intravenous dripping. The surgeon running a hand across the hair on his chest, his abdomen, his...

I whispered to Lola. I said I was feeling very uncomfortable.

All of a sudden a wave of seriousness struck across Noah's face.

"Wait, Lola, you're not actually preggers—are you?"

The surgeon looked over my shoulder to the house.

"What's going on in there?" I asked.

"They're taking the pie out. Your mother looks pleased. Friend, I'll tell you my secret if you tell me yours."

"It shouldn't be a *secret*," Lola said.

I heard clapping coming from inside.

"What is it, Doc?"

"Well," said the surgeon. "One time, while I was treating this patient, Akifa—"

"Oh, Christ," Lola burst out. "Syd and I are married! We're wife and man. Moshe Greenblatt the legal aid as our witness."

Noah bit down on his fist. "Fuck me, Sydface. This is gold."

"Congratulations, congratulations," the surgeon was saying. He was hugging my wife whose name he couldn't even get right.

Noah raised his empty wine glass. To me, the incoming parents,

the pie. "Here here," he half sang. "For the newlyweds!" "Who's that?" my mother said. She was beaming. The wrinkles under her eyes had softened and her dark hair shone in the moonlight. Dad was at her side with a stack of white plates and she held the golden pie to her chest. It reeked.

"Well," Noah said, casually, "Syd is married."

My mother made eyes with my father. "Oh really," she said, and proceeded to lay the pie on the table. Dad handed her a silver, trowel-like utensil and she cut into the thick pastry.

"I'm serious," said Noah.

Dad gripped Mom's shoulder, Lola my leg. I turned to her, totally unsure what to do in the face of my parent's blatant, though not entirely unsurprising, disregard for reality. She was scrunching her nose, almost as if, could it be—did she finally smell what I smelled?

Mom drew up the trowel and the surgeon coughed.

"That looks terrific, Beth," said my father.

The mushy green filling dripped out the sides of the slices as she transferred them to plates. There were steaming clumps on the wooden slats and there was a pale, viscous residue on the bottom of the tray. Even the soaring gulls embossed on the rims of the plates seemed to be turning up their beaks at what they were circling.

"Okay, Sydney," Mom said. "Dig in."

She served me my heaping portion, my pungent plate of *merde en croute*. I put a fork through and it sounded like a boot heel plunging into fresh mud. My mouth was getting watery but not in the good way. Maybe I could do this if I didn't breathe. If I closed my eyes and thought of a hazelnut éclair. If all these people around me would quiet and the world inside of me would, too.

"Bethany, if I may. What precisely have you baked into this delicacy? I only ask as I have certain allergies."

Dad balked at the surgeon. "To what, nuts?"

"Certain types of flour."

"Well it had better be mortal," he said, "Because Bethany has worked very hard."

"Hal, please." She was looking around like she was keeping an eye out for something, nervous, embarrassed even, which wasn't like her at all. The longer I let the pie wither on the prongs of my fork, the weirder she got. Her eyes and mouth seemed to shrink and darken among wrinkles, becoming like pieces of fruit left to rot

in the bottom of the sink.

"I don't understand," she said. "Isn't this what you like? The bourbon pecan?"

"It's not exactly what I remember..."

She leaned in, waiting for me to bite. So much cleavage had formed in the vee of her shirt that I thought I might be sick, right here, all over this Crate and Barrel dining table.

"The pie is entirely the same as you remember," said my father.

I reached under the table for Lola. She was looking down, shielding her eyes from my parents. She wouldn't take my hand.

"Don't I know what you like?" my mother said. "Don't I know my children?"

"Come on," I said, "Isn't that a little dramatic?"

Suddenly Dad's face drew up like this was Eagle Rock steakhouse. "Excuse me," he said. He pushed back in his chair. "Dramatic?"

"Hal, calm down, please. Don't upset our guests."

"He's being a brat."

"*Guests?*" said Lola.

I reached across the table with my fork. "You're telling me you can't smell this?" He slapped away the cutlery. It landed on the brick screaming, like a slap struck suddenly across everyone's faces.

"What is wrong with you?" he said. "Your mother gives *everything* to make you happy and this is what she gets? This, this ridiculous behavior."

I mumbled to myself.

"What's that?"

"I'm not the ridiculous one," I said.

"SydneyISwearTo—"

I don't think he knew what to do with himself. There was no word to express how mad he was and so he was searching for a gesture, something legal but bold. He dove his hand into the tray and tore out a hunk of pie. Next thing I knew he was coming around the table with it. Green residue streaked down his forearm. He was wide-eyed, might have been slobbering, like something possessed, a zombie, a zealot...

I jumped up and kicked back my chair. "I'm married," I yelled. It wasn't what I'd wanted to say but it felt right coming out. "I'm happily married! Leave me alone!"

I had to sprint to get away from his fistful of dessert. First around the patio and then towards the lawn.

"Hal!" Mom cried. "Hal, your heart!"

I ducked between the mosquito torches. I was so relieved to be free of him, to be darting through the flaking, dead grass, that it took me a second to notice that the grass was also on fire.

My mom was over my dad. She was pulling him towards the patio. He must have knocked over the torches on his way after me. The surgeon and Lola were picking them up off the blazing lawn. Noah and I stood frozen.

"The tub!" Lola shouted.

Right, I thought. I threw off the cover from the Jacuzzi and began splashing water at the fire. This wasn't working so well. Noah reached for the pie and dumped it out on the table. Right, I thought. I ripped the tray out of my brother's hands and filled it with pool water. Trayful by trayful, everything was brought to a smolder.

"Are you sure he doesn't require medical assistance?" said the surgeon. He was with my parents, trying to assess what damage had been done. He raised his voice. "Does *anyone* require medical assistance?"

"They're fine," said Lola. She was standing by the screen door.

Needless to say, the atmosphere was tense. I think she and everyone else were waiting for me to issue some kind of statement. Obviously my father wasn't in any condition to make one. A conciliatory statement, I assumed. Like say sorry. Or at very least something to that *effect*. Fine, I thought, and "Fine," I said.

"I'll eat it, okay? I'm going to eat it."

I scooped up a big stinking glob from the table and without bothering to see who was watching I put it in my mouth. As it was about to touch my tongue, I got worried. What if I couldn't keep it down?

"Oh," I said, some nuts spilling from my mouth. "Oh, it's good!"

I tasted caramel. I tasted rich bourbon. I tasted bits of crispy crust, tasted sweet, a hint of salt, loads of luscious butter.

"Hey, it's really very good!"

No one cared. Not Dad, who looked very red and confused in the face, or Mom, who was sobbing gently. Not Noah, who stood behind the surgeon whispering apologies, and certainly not Lola, who'd opened the patio door and gone through. Everyone was apparently past the pie situation. They left me outside to clean up the mess.

I decided to stay there, on the lawn, all night. As protest. As

punishment. I lay my head in the burnt grass and let myself get bit up by the bugs. In the morning I'd be ready to face the family. In the morning I'd know just what to say. For now it was enough to stare up at the sky, to be no one to the stars, and for them to be everything to me.

Portrait of a Marriage

Holly Corbett

Braced against the cold gusts being whipped to a howling frenzy between the silhouetted downtown skyscrapers that served as wind tunnels, John Wright contemplated the well-dressed guests that hurried past him towards the upscale Bradford Gallery, feeling slightly foolish yet at the same time victorious. He held the heavy gallery door open for his wife, Beatrice, a slight smirk appearing on his face as he felt her critical eye run over his casual wear of khakis, a plaid collared shirt, and scuffed brown shoes, all of which were totally out of place amongst the evening dresses and expensive jewelry of the women and the dark suits and ties of the men. He realized that if he still loved her he would feel bad about disappointing her at every turn, but all he felt was a cynical amusement. He may have been dragged to this formal event, but he'd won out by refusing to waver to her nagging regarding his clothing. Let her play dress-up in her best navy pantsuit, favorite tennis bracelet, and faux pearls; if he couldn't do what he wanted – and he couldn't help but think of the microwave dinner and championship game he was missing out on at this very moment, sharply feeling the uselessness of having watched the entire football season only to be forced to abandon the game at the very end, when the stakes were highest – then he would certainly dress how he wanted.

In their twenty-plus years of living in the area, the Wrights had never once attended the gallery's annual silent art auction, or even stepped foot in the gallery for that matter. Yet since retiring at the same time six months previous, a goal that they had always had but should have re-evaluated after thirty years of marriage, Beatrice had become very civic minded and filled her time by volunteering for organizations that funded cancer research, that fed the homeless, that educated children, that saved animals, that in short promised to save the world and everyone in it.

John wasn't sure, but he thought the charity benefiting from the auction was a school for the blind. All he knew for certain was that her volunteerism kept her out of his hair most of the time, this being a rare exception that he figured was punishment for his remark about how they didn't need to make a big deal of their wedding anniversary, an event that neither looked back on with sentimentality and that only seemed to be celebrated as an excuse for gifts. She had been capable of going to a preview of the auction on her own before that conversation, so he didn't see any other reason for his attendance now.

Though Beatrice had insisted on arriving far earlier than what he had thought necessary, there was already a large crowd assembling in the sparsely decorated lobby, the focal point of which was a fifteen-foot high gray statue that seemed vaguely human in shape with a round, head-like protrusion atop a stick of a neck extending above a rather shapeless body made of two rectangles that met at a slight angle where a waist would likely be. His smirk evaporated as he took in the scene and waited in line to pay for the privilege of viewing more trash he didn't think fit for a garage sale.

They finally approached the counter where a middle-aged woman wearing an elegant, high-necked evening dress was assigning bidder numbers and accepting payment. The woman was eager to share information about the gallery, the artists, and the school that was benefiting from the auction and attentively listened to Beatrice's compliments regarding the "brilliant" pottery sitting on nearby podiums and the "gorgeous" arrangement of roses and calla lilies displayed on the caterer's table. More than anything, Beatrice praised a certain "masterfully done" painting that she was determined to take home. John tried to ignore this façade of enthusiasm, yet trickles of her performance still found their way to his consciousness. Knowing all too well his wife's ability to prolong chitchat, he finally interrupted, "Let's go look at that painting. We're holding up the line."

Beatrice gave him a brief, but fierce, scowl, her muscles tensing, exaggerating the lines in her face, her eyes shooting rays of hate that couldn't be more intense if he had murdered their son, her composure momentarily broken in view of the outside world before she quickly regained it and turned back to the woman at the counter to say a few cheery, parting words.

He followed as she bounced across the hardwood floors, past multiple rooms of stark white walls populated every few feet with

paintings, the clacking of her heels warning people to make way. They went towards the back of the gallery, arriving in a quiet room that the crowd had not yet discovered. Except for a young, attractive couple, they were alone. After grudgingly forking over fifty dollars just to get in and enduring a week-long stream of praises for this painting, John's expectations were high.

"Here it is," Beatrice proudly announced in front of a painting that was half blue, half green with flecks of various other colors over all of it.

"Solitude. Oil. By Priscilla Salzburg," he read the nameplate. "Never heard of her."

"Isn't it stunning," said Beatrice, ignoring the remark. "Such depth of feeling. Look at those colors. And the technique..."

"When did you become an expert on art?" he wanted to ask, but using his better judgment he stayed silent while the overabundance of acclaim poured out of her. When she acted like this, he knew that there was nothing he could say to sway her opinion.

As he watched her animated gestures, he couldn't help but wonder at what point she had transformed from a beautiful, lively young woman into the fake, overly excitable, silver-haired monster that stood before him now. He had loved her once, in his senior year of college and for maybe six months afterwards, when they were first married. They had been yin and yang, complements to each other, she bringing idealism, optimism, and hope to the equation, he being the practical foundation, the sensible business partner. But like Pangea, though they may have started as one, fault lines that first seemed inconsequential expanded, and they slowly, imperceptibly drifted from one another until an ocean divided them. Now they may as well have been on different planets. He absentmindedly felt his empty left ring finger and wondered if it would be worth it to lose half of everything he owned to be rid of this invisible chain. However, he couldn't imagine life being much different, or better. He almost lived alone now. They had separate bedrooms, separate schedules, and kept separate company (he mostly preferring his own). If he had the energy or the inclination to see other women, he could probably do so without her knowledge or her genuine care; she would feign being hurt, but in the romantic realm, theirs had not been a real marriage for years.

Eventually Beatrice excused herself to write a bid. He knew

that he would see very little of her until it was time to go home. She seemed to find a familiar face wherever she went and was always happy to talk to whoever would listen. Though the drive out and the time so far in the gallery was the largest continuous chunk of time they'd spent together in at least a month, he welcomed the break. He was more of a wallflower anyway and decided to take his spot near Ms. Salzburg's painting.

The crowd slowly found their way to that area, and the young couple who was originally in the room situated themselves only a few feet away from him. The woman wore a black cocktail dress that exposed her toned arms, milky-white shoulders and a hint of cleavage. She was brunette, slim and silent – everything his wife wasn't. There was something about the woman's poise, about the coolness of her expression that captivated him. A large diamond ring adorned her left hand, attesting that the tall, handsome man next to her was her husband. The young man eventually spoke to him.

"Your wife seems to have fallen in love with that," the man pointed towards the painting. "I see she's left you to stand guard."

"It's the second most important job, only behind writing out the check," said John. "You'll soon learn that, if you haven't already."

"Oh, I was pretty quick to learn my place," said the young man, smiling broadly, genuinely, as only a newlywed could.

"So, what brings the two of you here?" said John, looking towards the man's wife. She was watching the crowd and appeared not to notice him.

"We know some people that are running the auction." "What do you think about this painting, honestly?" asked John, frowning as he looked it up and down.

The young man stammered, "Well, I'm not an artist, but..."

"But you prefer to know what you're buying a picture of," said John.

"Abstract art isn't for everyone," said the young man.

"A bunch of random colors thrown on canvas," said John, feeling relieved now that he'd voiced the opinion he'd held since he first saw it.

They continued talking about the auction, but it quickly reached that awkward moment where strangers no longer know what to say to each other. Though they were silent, the trio spent the rest of the evening next to each other, quietly listening to the overwhelmingly positive comments made about Beatrice's intended

purchase. Occasionally someone he knew would pass by him, but rarely did anyone speak to him, which was what he preferred.

A few minutes before the close of the auction, a short, stout woman with unnaturally orange hair stopped in front of him.

"You've been here all night," she exclaimed, motioning towards him with her hands, her large, cheap bangles clinking together. He looked down at her and replied that he had.

"I was talking with Beatrice earlier about the painting. I can tell it's made quite an impression on her."

He squinted at her, trying to figure out how this woman in the tacky, shapeless purple dress knew him or his wife. He grumbled, "Yeah, she really likes it."

"What about you? You don't seem as excited."

"Abstract art isn't for everyone," he said.

The woman slowly nodded her head and excused herself.

Almost as soon as bidding was closed, Beatrice came bounding up to him, reveling in her victory.

"What's the damage?" he asked, as he always did of purchases.

"It's worth \$800, but we got a great deal," she said.

He shot her an expression that made it clear that she hadn't provided enough information. She finally acknowledged that their winning bid was \$500. Grudgingly, he went to pay for the "masterpiece."

"Bidder forty-three," he identified himself to the elegant woman who was still working the counter. Beatrice didn't miss the opportunity to boast of her prize to the woman.

"Did you meet the artist?" the woman asked. "She's here tonight. She came into town just to attend this auction."

"I didn't know that. I'd love to meet her," said Beatrice.

"Hey, Mark," the woman called to a man flipping through papers. "Can you find Priscilla? They just bought her painting, and they'd like to meet her."

Mark didn't hesitate to leave behind the paperwork and immediately went to search for her. However, this left some confusion as to where the paper with their winning bid was. As they waited for it to be found, John saw the short, stout woman approaching them.

"Did you get it?" she asked Beatrice.

"I did. I was so nervous at the end, though. I kept watching for other bids and by some miracle there weren't any," Beatrice said rapidly, as though the adrenaline of bidding was still rushing

through her.

"That's great," said the stout woman. "Well, I just wanted to say good night."

John waited for her leave, then asked, "Was that the artist?"

"No, of course she's not the artist," Beatrice laughed.

"Then who was she?"

"Don't tell me you don't know Brenda Plowman. She only had the classroom next to mine for five years," said Beatrice, her upper lip lifted, emphasizing her astonishment and disgust.

"I found the paperwork," said the woman behind the counter. She began telling him about the documentation he would need if he wanted to claim the purchase as a charity deduction on his taxes, a subject which fully engrossed him.

Somewhere in the background, he heard Mark introducing his wife to the artist. He vaguely heard her lavish the artist with praise as he finished writing the check. Reluctantly, he handed it over, then turned around to find his wife giving her most amiable smile to the young couple he'd stood by all evening.

"Dear, this is Priscilla Salzburg, the artist who did our painting," Beatrice introduced her.

"We met your husband earlier," said the young woman, finally looking at him, not with anger or contempt, but with the eye of someone who saw him for what he really was, a miserable, bitter old man. He shifted his weight and looked towards the ground. He'd never felt so on display, so old.

"We just love your painting," said Beatrice.

"I'm so glad. It's always satisfying when my artwork finds a home where it evokes strong emotion," said Priscilla before excusing herself and her husband.

A chill hit John as Priscilla's husband opened the door. He watched the beautiful, young couple walk out, hand in hand, smiling, the couple he and Beatrice used to be. What did Priscilla know now of solitude, with her youth, her beauty, and her new diamond ring? He smirked, wondering how long the happiness would last. How long would it be before they admitted to themselves that the other was full of shit? How long before they screamed those admissions in exaggerated form to one other, doing their best to bring each other down? How much longer after that until neither one cared any more?

"You won Solitude, right?" a teenage boy asked him, handing him the heavy, abstract painting.

"Yes, I did," John confirmed. He waited by the door and let the bursts of cold air run through him as he looked over the eyesore he'd bought. The more he looked at the painting, the more he hated it, the more he hated the perfect couple and their happiness and his sham of a marriage. Before he knew it, he was outside, his arthritic hands throbbing with pain as he whiteknuckled the painting, bringing it high above his head, then smashing it onto the curb blackened with old chewing gum, the crack of its wood frame, the fluttering of the loosened canvas in the wind, the gasps of bystanders giving him a feeling of satisfaction that he hadn't known in years.

CONDUIT ROAD

Brian Howlett

Friday May 19, 1989.

Do you want to see Batman or Lethal Weapon before it reaches the theatres this summer? How about a copy of Madonna's "Like a Virgin" two months before it hits the record stores? A carbon copy of a Rolex for what you might pay for a pack of Carlsbergs, or a Louis Vuitton that'll fool the folks back home? Be my guest. Just walk down any street on either side of the harbor, stop at any corner, bend over and start shopping.

In fact, he thought, Hong Kong doesn't just pirate things. The city itself is a knock-off. It's nothing more than a bootlegged version of Manhattan. With more rain, and less talent.

He liked that last bit. He was on a roll. His feet tapping in the back of the taxi and his legs keeping time to the flow of the words filling up the vehicle. He only hoped that it would last, because the tap could turn off as suddenly as it turned on, which was one of the reasons he was writing for a Hong Kong newspaper and not a real one back home.

Manhattan with a *lot* less talent. A big fat compromise from the start. A punt, to use the American football term, a game he had grown to love even more than his native football. A land of twenty-seven year olds in a perpetual state of motion, arriving and departing, bobbing and weaving, money and passport in hand, intent on the now. You hold up your hand in the grimy, sweaty air to grasp a friendship even for a moment, but it vaporizes in the din and commotion.

And so we descend upon Kai Tak airport without baggage, or a history to declare. It's all one bright happy future that is ravenous with its potential. The moment our plane taxis to a stop on this, the soil of another land, we are granted license to chase our dreams and hunt down any affirmation we can find to prove to ourselves that we are each a special bird and that this is our

time to take flight. Our hearts spring with percolating notions of success in photography or design or art or even, yes, journalism. Ability doesn't need to match ambition because we have been told there are jobs to fill, gallery walls to decorate, and column inches to be written. This is not where the best of our generation comes, save maybe for our greedy young lawyers and bankers and boldest architects.

So if you can stomach the fact that you're living at the cultural edges of relevance, you will find opportunity. Nigel himself was rigging the game, already putting himself in line for a column at the age of twenty-eight. Sure, he was writing for a newspaper few bothered to read, and the overwhelming majority of people didn't even understand the language even if they did pick it up. The *Evening Standard* was hardly a training ground for future Pulitzer winners, but this was lost upon the friends and family back home who read the packets of press clippings he regularly posted with such pride and delight.

How is it that the Australians, South Africans, Kiwis and Canadians don't recognize that the only real thing to be made here is money? Commerce is the territory's art form. 'If it moves eat it. If it doesn't, build on it', he would write to his tittering friends back home, never bothering to acknowledge that the phrase wasn't his own clever device, but a cliché traded among the expats.

For some reason, he always enjoyed his sharpest insights on the taxi ride down from his flat halfway up the Peak in Midlevels. Maybe his body clock was still on British time even after these four years. Even though it was cocktail hour, maybe it was still morning for his brain, which was historically his favored time to step outside things and attempt larger observations on the world.

Or maybe it was simply the view. As he did on every trip down Conduit Road's steep, snaking pitch, he leaned forward to peer through the windshield into the jumble of the skyscrapers below, as if he were on an American roller coaster. The wipers worked feverishly to wick away the water, but the one on the passenger side was slightly bent, and left the far right side of the windshield completely under water. Still, he could make out the lights below and the squares, circles and polygons of the skyscraper roofs.

Central District was a global financial centre but even it gave in to the chaos of Asia, and from up here it appeared to be laid down without a plan, as if one street simply begot another as Asia's riches washed up along the shore of the South China Sea over the

decades. This, in spite of the celebrated architecture of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank building, and the glittering shopping malls and hotels that sat in its shadow. Some of the most expensive shops in the world were here, and yet you would still see the pig carcasses laying as offertory to the chefs on the surrounding sidewalks.

As his driver lurched toward the downtown streets, Nigel tried to corral his thoughts onto paper but even that last one lingered in his brain uninvited, distracting him; *his* driver. Back home, he would of course say *the* driver.

Here, as an expatriate, you come to feel like you own everything and everyone.

Focus, he told himself, laying pentip back onto notebook. The events playing out in Beijing these past few weeks were turning into a gift and he didn't want to miss out on what might be his best and only opportunity to gain attention back home.

Because for once, the story had come to him.

The typhoons have come to the territory like they do every May. The umbrellas are opening in salute, red, purple and yellow blooms in the slanting grays of the rain. And the humidity, every bit as sopping, creeps into every nook and cranny of our flats and our bodies.

He scratched the last part out. Effing wanker, he thought. Think think think. It was difficult to write in the back of a taxi at the best of times. But today, with the South China weather announcing itself so angrily in the path of his jangling, rusting taxi, with his driver seeming to pay it no heed, his pen was having difficulty making contact. *And the humidity has come with it, every bit as wet.*

"Keep it simple, right mate?" he said happily to the driver. He loved talking to them even though all they could do was nod their heads and smile between puffs on their cigarette. How old was this one? Fifty? Seventy? He had no idea.

"It's the hardest thing to do, though, you know? We're all too bloody smart for our own good," he continued. "I wish we were more like the Americans or Canadians. They don't complicate things. They're stupid, but they're happy. And successful."

Being able to speak your mind without worrying about being understood was one of the perks of being the stranger, he thought. Shit. There he was again, straying from the story at hand, and he was running out of time. He'd be with his mates soon, and this moment of clarity would be lost to the calendar, as the cocktail hour would turn into another night that would likely end in a

fog, especially with this being a Friday and the end of one of his busiest weeks yet at the paper. And moreover, especially with what happened in Tiananmen today.

As the taxi slipped down into Wyndam Street Nigel once again did his best to concentrate.

But the rain and the heat do not register this year: The torrents still wash the pig guts and palm leaves and fast food containers and cigarettes down the shallow gutters of the streets, sending them bobbing along their way out into the harbor; but people are paying no mind to the weather. The upward trajectory of the Australian dollar has been momentarily forgotten. The commercial exploits of Jardine Matheson have been set aside. The affairs of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui have moved from the front pages of the gossip magazines that hang like flags at the myriad stores up and down the crowded streets and choking alleyways.

He looked at the last sentence. He didn't like the flag simile, but he couldn't come up with anything better, so he pressed on.

Instead, the typhoon of 1989 has brought with it images of protest signs and of defiant youth locking arms in a rare display of political solidarity and we are fixated by them, wondering, (worrying), 'what next?'

He looked out at the Botanical Gardens passing by on his right, even lusher in the rain. He lifted his pen again, and rolled his window down slightly in spite of the storm. This was his favourite part of Hong Kong. On his first day here, not yet in the routine of taking cabs everywhere, he walked home from the newspaper and quickly became lost in the winding streets. He had ended up in the Garden, and the oasis of brilliant oranges and reds and the lush greens so deep they were almost black played like fireworks to him. He had been baptized in a world of concrete and beige, and this riot of colour was almost too much. He surrendered on a bench in the middle of the park, alone, the darkening sky making the colours even more brilliant, with the sweat seeping into his blazer, completely unprepared for the eerie, exotic bird song and the rich floral perfumes being lofted into the heavy air to then sit just above it like icing slathered on a cake.

"Marlboro-la?" he asked the driver, tapping him on the shoulder, using the local word for cigarette. He accepted the Pall Mall, and happily ruminated over the smoke, looking out the window into the sheets of rain lashing the side of the car, coming at it almost horizontally.

He had been too arrogant to read up on southeast Asia before coming out, relying on what little he had learned about it in school. Those history classes never prepared him for seeing palm trees right outside his office window. Sitting there in the Garden he was struck with a realization that his country had claimed some of the most desirable parts of the world as their own, when no other country was looking, perhaps. He was the palest Brit, and here he was, his passport allowing him to feel perfectly at home in the tropics.

The taxi settled into the flow of heavier traffic waiting for them on Albert Road as the road levelled off from the Peak, and Nigel returned to the page, reviewing what he had put down before continuing.

For these few weeks in 1989, there is one story in Hong Kong. One hope.

Nice. Maybe he could do this.

The embers were lit in a historic square two thousand kilometres north in the heart of a nation where its brightest lights – its students – had gathered to mourn the death of a hero, Hu Yaobang. The one leader who dared articulate the hopes of the country's youth.

Nigel, like everyone else in Hong Kong, had come to respect Hu, but even in the early days of his ascent the old China hands in the Evening Standard newsroom hadn't given Hu's attempts at reform much of a chance.

Within days mourning flowered into protest, and protest matured into demands. China's youth is waking up to confront its ossifying leadership. The country's leaders are statues, not men, and the students have tasted the promise of democracy, like the first drop of blood on the tongue. One student became five hundred became five thousand became two hundred thousand. It is an emerging collective versus the established collective. Who could suspect that young communists were capable of such drama? Such individual acts of defiance? Not the West.

The days and the crowds and the history rolled into Saturday, May 13 when the most emboldened and passionate and determined among them began a hunger strike. Imagine, in a country where hunger is such a dreaded fact of life, a desperate few would dare taunt that very thing.

Nigel embraced the narrative even as the stop and go traffic of rush hour jerked him back and forth on the sticky vinyl seat. This was a hybrid journalism and prose he had never attempted,

even if he didn't know what he might do with the finished piece. His editor wanted nothing more than accounts of the nightly gatherings taking place in Causeway Bay's Victoria Park in support of the students; column inches about a nascent optimism coming to life among the normally staid, apolitical Hong Kong people. She didn't want conjecture. Certainly not melodrama. She wanted pictures of celebrities.

Did his contract allow him to pitch to other publications? Imagine if his byline appeared in the Daily Mail or Telegraph in the form of a feature? He could use the photos his friend Robert had been taking in the Park. They were more artful than the snaps the Standard's hack was producing. Like his own words, Robert's pictures were striving to capture something bigger.

Today, on May 19, four short weeks later, over one million people joined a rally in Tiananmen to argue that their time for democracy has come. Is it finally time for this most ancient part of the world to shed its skin?

"One point two million," he corrected himself aloud, leaning in to the driver. "Maybe not a lot in a country of a billion, but in one place? With one purpose?" He turned back to his notebook, channeling his excitement. *One purpose.* Nigel liked that, too.

When he first came to Hong Kong four years ago, a week after graduating journalism school in Sheffield, he had been cocky enough to think he could gain some experience, make a bit of money and see the world, and then return home to a real newspaper after imposing his journalistic will on the backwater pages of a colonial daily.

The South China Morning Post and The Hong Kong Evening Standard were small market quality but the advertising money gushing across their pages made them every bit the rival of the world's biggest newspapers. Every ad was a full-page offering from the likes of Mercedes-Benz, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Cartier and lately, Hutchison Whampoa as it giddily introduced the first mobile phone to the territory. The papers could afford the best presses and four-colour printing, and Nigel quickly fell into line behind the other reporters in the newsroom; it was about the ads, not the editorial.

Nigel rolled his pen between his fingers.

It is their turn, these students and professors and factory workers and young parents and even these soldiers in their tanks lined around the edge of the Square. It is time to believe in a new China. And now the whole world is watching. Including the six million people in Hong

Kong holding such a unique hand.

This, the final clash between British and Chinese. Democracy and Communism. Money and poverty. Hong Kong and China.

He was being dramatic, but it felt right and true. At least at this moment, in this cab.

White and yellow. Water cress sandwiches and rice. Pig carcasses and roast beef. Queen and ruler. Sailboats and dragon boats. Tea and beer...

Shit. "Where am I going with this?" he said. The taxi driver nodded at him, lighting another cigarette. The ride was almost over. They were nearing the Press Club. The bar would be full, and his colleagues already setting the table for a long argument about what, exactly, today's rally meant.

One point two million people.

He was running out of time, and the words started to elude him as the downpour gave way to mere raindrops. The tourists seeking shelter in the tea shops, bars and malls reappeared. Some inevitably would be seeking out the antique stores three blocks away on Hollywood Road. More knock-offs, he thought. Except the bootleg Han Dynasty clay sculptures and teak carvings from the north were posing as the real thing, inviting some poor American or German to pay twenty thousand dollars for something that cost twenty dollars to be made in a back alley warehouse in Kowloon. But what did it matter? The statue would still stand proudly on display in that home in Miami or New York or Frankfurt, and the tourist's friends would still admire the exotic history that it represented.

Behind his taxi, the barefoot workers climbed back up the bamboo scaffolding of the new Central Plaza skyscraper, working seventy stories above the ground without so much as a work glove, let alone safety harness. Rumor had it that for every floor constructed in Hong Kong, a worker is killed.

Asian math.

Maybe the protests won't add up to anything, he suddenly thought. He remembered assisting Royster with background for an interview with Li Peng last year. Peng was making a quiet tour of the colony and the Governor had arranged a sit down with the English press. It was Nigel's first visit to Government House. The Standard's publisher sent his limousine to take he and Royster. They stepped from the Rolls Royce and Nigel saw the Bank of China building rising up behind it. 'The Dagger of China', the

Hong Kong-ese christened it soon after it was topped off in 1985.

Royster had played the interview by the book, and there was nothing to be gleaned from the fifteen minutes they were granted with the Premier, other than the expected praise for Hong Kong's economic success and enterprising spirit. The article read like a promotional brochure for the Hong Kong Tourism Association.

Nigel leaned in toward the driver. "Peng's a fucking bastard," he said. "He is dead in the eyes. Dead in the eyes. What are we all thinking? China isn't going to change!"

The driver nodded.

"This place is just one giant going out of business sale," he continued with certainty. "Come nineteen ninety-seven we Brits will have to leave and you poor fuckers will be left to the mainland's devices."

"Six million rats on a sinking ship," he continued, his voice rising. "The fossils are giving the students an inch with a smile for now, but they will never give them the holy fucking mile they're asking for."

The taxi stopped in front of the Foreign Correspondents' Club, pulling into line behind the other cars ferrying the territory's journalists, PR hacks, stringers and other media moths attracted to the Friday ritual of raising a glass to the week that was. It billed itself as the most famous press club in the world. Talk about audacity, Nigel thought, getting out of the taxi, fumbling with his umbrella. The only thing world class here is the white glove service and cut crystal glassware.

He reached back for his notebook.

"You're fucked, mate!" he said to the driver, tossing him the ridiculously cheap sum of what was the equivalent of two pounds back home.

The driver suddenly started screaming at him. Nigel understood the anger if little else.

"That's it, let it out," Nigel said, laughing. "Get angry. Get pissed! I would."

He turned away and the cab roared out of the car line and away. He opened the notebook to the last page. The final drops of rain streaked the ink and clouded the words but he didn't try to shield the paper because he realized he was finally seeing things clearly. There was a different story to be written. Hong Kong would likely stand by and stand down as the protests in Tiananmen

turned to dust. There was too much of a history for it to turn out otherwise. The city created fortunes every day, and that was all.

He tore the damp, limp pages from the notebook, crumpling them into a ball and then throwing them into the gutter, watching the paper ball scuttle down the hill, along with the rest of the garbage heading toward the harbor. He headed inside the Press Club for his first argument and drink of the evening.

Outside, the torrent of young expats flowing into Kai Tak continued unabated, not a one likely to leave any kind of mark on the world.

Extinct

Megan Roberts

Steve let Stephanie guide him through the house, matching rooms to their online photos. Beyond the entryway, the dining room was darker and smaller than expected. The furniture was gone, but a dog barked in the backyard. "The kitchen's that way," Stephanie said. Steve held the swinging door open and smelled his wife's hair as she passed. This is what it had taken to get her out of their house. She still wore yesterday's sweats.

"We can just paint the cabinets, but the appliances have to be upgraded to stainless." These days she spoke without moving her jaw.

"Shouldn't we upgrade our own appliances first?" he said.

"Today's market demands it." He remembered what she looked like when she smiled. She had taught second grade. She liked silly songs. The dog scratched at the back door, whining for attention.

"You know best," he said.

Three months of watching house flipping shows on HGTV and she sounded like a professional. As they walked down the hall she recited square footage statistics and calculated the cost of improvements. Two thousand for new carpet, three for paint, ten to upgrade both bathrooms. The Pepto Bismol tile, tub, and toilet in the main bath had to go. She'd splurge on granite countertops, Calcutta Gold, and put penny tiles on the floor to retain the retro feel. She needed the sconces her favorite TV flipper had used on that ranch house in Texas.

While Stephanie took measurements, Steve moved on to the master bedroom. From outside, the medium-sized black mutt tracked his movements. Paws on the windowsill, the dog stared at Steve and barked on beat, a painfully pitched plea that seemed both insistent and resigned. Steve wanted to open the window and let the dog in. He could let the lonely animal sit in his lap and nuzzle his neck. Instead, he stood where the bed had been, based

on carpet indentations, and wondered what the former owners had discussed the last time they lay there together.

"Good-sized closets," Stephanie said from the doorway.

"Do you think they'll haunt the place?" he said.

"They didn't die here," she said. "We're not required to disclose it."

The owners had been killed in a car accident. Their four-year-old son survived. One car, one tree, one crash-tested car seat. Rumors suggested intoxication. Who drove, and where were they going drunk with a kid?

"That's not what I asked," he said.

Stephanie looked up. "We've got to replace that ceiling fan. I know just the fixture."

They retreated from the barking and swept through the smaller bedrooms, connected by another awful bathroom. Updates would be simple and inexpensive. The second bedroom still had Noah's Ark curtains and a night light plugged in. Steve's breath caught and Stephanie's face went pale.

"Is anyone feeding that dog?" Steve said.

"Not our problem."

A month later, Stephanie dressed for the closing. Heels, her favorite scarf, the brown pants that fit again. Steve brought his lucky pen. They walked in together, his arm around her. Winter hadn't let up. She didn't resist his warmth. He touched her stomach, not so far from the spot where he'd once felt the baby's foot, or elbow, or knee. When he pushed it, the baby had moved away, then pushed back again, their first game together. Steve had never felt that kind of rush. He would be the athlete Steve never was. She, Stephanie had said, would be intuitive, responsive to the needs of others.

They sat at an oversized conference table, surrounded by real estate professionals. "Are we doing the right thing?" She stopped signing long enough to unwrap another bite-sized candy bar.

Steve smiled and slid the next document her way. "No turning back now."

The doctor couldn't say for sure what had happened. All was well, then sudden bleeding, cramps, the empty sound of the sonogram swooshing without the rhythm of the heartbeat. Six months pregnant, Stephanie had ended the fall term telling her principal she wouldn't return after Christmas break. She spent the winter on the couch under electric blankets, not a stay-at

home mom, but still a stay-at-home. On TV, professionals joyfully turned spaces from one thing into another, covering old with new. Steve came and went, cleaned her dirty dishes. They didn't discuss Stella—the name Stephanie had whispered from her hospital bed. They discussed hardwoods, paint colors, curb appeal.

Steve suggested the flip. He saw the For Sale sign on his way home from work. The house was in Stephanie's school district. It took him two weeks to convince her to see it, but by the time she went, she was already obsessed with the project.

They signed their names side-by-side thirty-six times. He didn't tell her the down payment came from the college fund his parents had started, and she didn't ask.

She wound the key on her ring as they drove to the house. Steve didn't acknowledge Stephanie's humming, for fear she might stop. Stephanie turned the deadbolt. "You should carry me over the threshold," she said.

"We've been married eight years." Steve held a sledgehammer. He had watched enough of Stephanie's shows to know that demolition was the best part. He was looking forward to knocking down the wall between the living room and dining room together.

"I didn't budget for the front door," she said. "It's hideous."

"Doors can't be that much."

Stephanie wrote \$500-\$1,000 in her notebook and circled it three times. Now that they owned the place, everything seemed uglier. The electricity had been turned off and the natural light seemed out of balance. The entryway was too dark, while light cast through the living room windows was painfully bright. Stephanie recoiled. The dog barked. Steve patted the treats in his pocket. They tried the light switch again, but the faux crystal fixture didn't respond.

"How could anyone live with ceilings like this?" she said.

"You didn't notice them before?"

She shook her head and wrote more figures.

"I'm going to let the dog in, OK?"

"Hello?" said a voice down the hall.

Steve gripped the sledgehammer tighter.

A young boy with dark hair and puffy cheeks peeked around the corner, then disappeared. Stephanie looked to Steve for verification that he had seen the child as well. He held the sledgehammer ready, which felt both ridiculous and right.

An older woman appeared in the same place the boy had.

Stephanie gasped. The dog barked louder. Steve lowered his weapon. "We're the new owners," he said. "We just bought the place. Today."

The woman—almost as short as the boy and dressed similarly in a t-shirt, khakis, churchshoes—introduced herself as his grandmother. Her dull hair hung flat behind her sagging jowls. The boy retreated down the dark hall behind her, dragging his palm along the wall.

"We won't be long," Steve said.

Stephanie glared at him. The house was theirs now.

At the far end of the hall, the boy tugged at the edges of the air conditioning return, pulling from one corner then another. When it wouldn't budge, he reached his little fingers into the vent slits, searching for a better grip, and pulled again, groaning for strength.

"He's destroying our property," Stephanie said, quietly. Steve put his hand on Stephanie's shoulder.

"I told you, don't touch," the grandmother said.

The boy kept pulling, forcing the metal from its frame. Finally, he loosened the vent, reached in with his tiny hand and pulled out a plastic dinosaur. Stephanie looked away. Steve's chest tightened. The vent snapped back into place.

Steve knelt. "What's your favorite dinosaur?" he said.

"We just came for the dog," the grandmother said.

"We were going to call the pound," Stephanie said.

Steve shook his head. Stephanie leaned against the wall.

Steve focused on the boy. "Elijah, right?"

"Eli."

Eli. I'm sorry things look different in your house, buddy."

"It's ok," Eli said. He walked the dinosaur up his own arm and sat it on his shoulder.

The desperate dog finally scratched the kitchen door open and ran in, tracking prints and knocking the grandmother off balance. Steve caught her, but they bumped Stephanie, whose finger slipped into the gap she'd dug in the wallpaper and ripped a few inches off. The dog's muddy tail slapped the wall. The grandmother rubbed her elbow. "I told them not to get that dog," she said. Stephanie held blue stripes in her hand, torn edges and failed glue. She didn't try to rub the wall smooth again.

Eli squeezed his wiggling dog, burying his face and dinosaur into her fur. "Lulu, Lulu, Lulu, Lulu." Lulu let him pull. She licked the back of his head and pawed his legs.

"I'll go get the dog's bowls," the grandmother said. Steve offered to help. He followed as far as the kitchendoor, but stopped at the sound of Stephanie's voice.

"When I was your age, my favorite toy was my little red wagon. I took it everywhere, all over the neighborhood, even upstairs to my room to be a bed for my dolls." She had her finger back inside the wallpaper. Eli didn't respond. He worked Lulu's front paws onto his shoulders, then fell backwards under her weight.

When Steve was Eli's age, he was obsessed with a stuffed frog and jealous of his sister's broken arm. He remembered getting lost in a department store and thinking his mother had left him. He remembered what it felt like to be found and admonished and hugged again.

Eli jumped to his feet and reached his dinosaur up to Stephanie's face. The toy had textured scales, red on brown, and spikes growing out of its tail. She didn't push it away.

"Dinosaurs are unsinked," he said.

Hearing Eli's mispronunciation, Stephanie's shoulders dropped. "We're un-synked," she said.

Eli's frown opened wide, forcing his fat cheeks even wider. "We're dead?" Sobbing, he backed away and hugged his dog.

Steve stepped forward to intervene as the grandmother rushed back from the kitchen.

"No, you're right," Stephanie said. "They're dead. We're fine."

"Stephanie," Steve said.

"We're leaving," the grandmother said. She grabbed Eli by the wrist. Crying harder, Eli said, "Lulu's bowl! You said you would get Lulu's bowl." He dragged his drooping grandmother into the kitchen. Stephanie followed. She bent as if to take the grandmother's other elbow, but resisted.

The kitchen felt ten degrees colder than the rest of the house. "Lulu broke the door," the grandmother said. "I tried to fix it." Steve shoved it with his shoulder, but it wouldn't catch. Eli saw the split door frame and stopped crying as quickly as he'd started.

"Mimi, measureme!" He stood with his back against the molding, covering his past height marks.

"I've got a pen," Stephanie said.

Steve offered the tape measure off his belt.

They gathered around the door that wouldn't stay shut. Cold

air seeped in, turning breath visible. Eli pushed the crown of his head against the tile sample Steve held flat.

"His curls don't count. No cheating," the grandmother said.

Eli nodded, serious. Stephanie twisted her own matching curls between her fingers. Lulunosed through knees, sniffing at the air blowing in from the yard she'd been so desperate to leave. Snow had begun to fall and already coated Eli's swing set. When Steve knelt to Eli's level to check that the tile was straight, he saw Stephanie lift her heels out of her shoes and wink at Eli to do the same. Eli blinked back. Steve readjusted. Stephanie marked the line.

The South

Dominic Frost

The rising sun heralds another quiet day in paradise. The feverish yellow sky with her acrid clouds shines again with bright promise like molten gold. I stretch my arms and legs out so that I am a star in my den. Today marks a year of my solitude - I have carved each day on the wall in ritual - and I feel sharp. I have not had coffee in six months; I have not had a cigarette in four. I think I am nearing absolution, and my ketone levels are excellent. As is my routine, I roll out of bed and sit cross legged in front of my large window. From my penthouse suite on the eighth floor, I survey my battered kingdom and compile a mental list of errands. Though my water supply has dwindled to a few small drums, today I might first treat myself to a new pair of shoes. Today is a special day. After these two critical devoirs, I will water and prune the garden that I have made in the observatory across the way, and then have a delicious dinner. Last, I will jerk off and go to sleep: fine resolutions, on which I congratulate myself. Every morning, I do fifty crunches, twenty pull ups, fifty more crunches, and twenty five push ups. I drink water, and eat my breakfast of canned provisions mixed with the fresh vegetables that I grow. The entirety of my dance, I perform in the nude.

As I enter my foyer, the closet for my armors, my feet kiss the cool tiled floor through tattered socks, and a tremor runs up my spine. I don my foil suit, lock my breather from the air, and proceed through the decontamination shower that separates my home from the irradiated barrens. Outside, all is still. The oppressive sun asserts its tyranny upon me and all things as my boots fall heavily on the pavement. Stomp. Like my visor, with its film of condensated breath, the road shimmers in the sweltering heat. The air, too, afflicts me with its caustic haze - as if all of the plastic in the world has melted and now quells the labored inhales I draw through my filtered mask. Stomp, stomp. I look

around, and the world is my oyster.

With the city and society gone up, consumed by molecular rot, my shame has withered away. The ecstasies and pitfalls that accompany my incessant loneliness express themselves freely through primal action. Here, with no fear of judgment, no faith in god, I release my inhibitions in the face of desire, frustration, rage. Because of my limitless access to food and water, my idle hands have become instruments for my devil's fickle whims. I go to the sex shop and carry a silicone body to the square that used to entertain bustling masses: musicians, artists, tourists, the locale. I make empty love to the tainted, lifeless thing and do not feel like an exhibitionist, but rather caressed by the spiteful hand of jealousy and longing. I spend a day dousing expensive and beautiful cars in gasoline and lighting them on fire, imagining the seared flesh of the bastard kings that did not live through the bombs - and feel an illusory power that soon sours to disappointment and hunger. Today, I steal a pair of John Lofgren Boots - handcrafted from the finest leather to the highest standards, they are heavy with luxury. Alone, I will marvel as they develop a unique patina, as they mold to my feet - and when they run out of tread, I will throw them away, because all of the cobblers in the world are dead. I let out a sigh as I behold them. Then, I lace them up and walk away. Stomp, stomp. My irradiated food burns like octane as I become a rocket flying towards the bright star of self realization.

I stroll down the damp isles of the grocery store whistling a tune that I remember from a film. All around me, cockroaches, emboldened by the scarcity of predators, scurry without regard across the floor and shelving. Where they find morsels, they congregate en masse, in amorphous red-brown tangles. Breathing deeply, I drink the balmy air, laden with their oils and excretions, their sex and death - indifferently commingled in this insular world of filthy linoleum and aluminum - and the sublime wraps her arms around my shoulders and neck. As I close my eyes, I feel her lips hovering near mine in a penultimate kiss, but she dissipates. I lift my heavy boot over a writhing pile and press onward towards the belly of the market. In a back room, I rediscover a cache of drummed water, which I stockpile in two conjoined shopping carts. As I push my spoils back through the cockroaches, the heavy wheels dig into the saturated flesh of the wood pulp underneath the marbled vinyl veneer. I hear a slight creak, and a footstep

squelches in the tile. I turn, and scarcely perceive the man before the light all goes out. There is an instant of pain, as the marauder's pipe cracks against my head, and then an immediate release as I tear from my lifeless corporal form.

What happens next I almost do not register because of its nearness to mundanity. Outside, for the first time since the bombing, I hear a bird singing. On the telephone wire, he empties his troubled love to the vacant street, which presently hums with the vibration of motors. Enchanted, I leave my carts and crumpled body, and isolate myself from all but the sweet noise that pours from the songbird's beak. The music wells to a symphony as others join, and I am in rapture. Warmth emanates from my core, out to my fingertips and back. I pulsate with a divine rhythm, and as I reopen my eyes, I am no longer in my wasteland. Instead, I block traffic, standing in the intersection staring at the chorus of birds, and rediscover my self consciousness. Amidst the bustling city, I am still alone, but no longer forsaken. The jarring noise, the menagerie strikes me with unfettered little blows that draw my attention from the wound in my ethereal head. I hurry out of the street, and in the clear and clean air, under the now blue sky, I direct my gaze to a girl - the only discernible entity in populated thoroughfare. As she walks, her hair sways as if untouched by the wind, trailing her without gravity. Her white shirt and straight legged jeans affect the same weightlessness as her dark locks. As she strides along, she hardly grazes the pavement with her Air Maxes.

In this mirage that transcends any real place, I walk behind her, aching to be beside her. She invites me, too! I reach for her ghostly hand and feel, for a second, the physicality of her flesh between my fingers before she is gone. In the wake of her body, my fist closes around itself - my knuckles turn white with the strain of an intense longing. But upon my resignation to despair, I notice a glimmer. Again out of reach, on the corner towards which I amble, she precipitates. Leaning against the pole of a traffic light, she turns her gaze, veiled by the sun to her back, towards my approach. The mirrors of her eyes linger for a moment, longer than a moment - expressing some beleaguered wish - before she turns back towards the street. Under the yellow sun, with funny European cars puttering by and the faint smell of fiery meats in the air, I pause to distill her affect. Without a cigarette, she is conspicuous - an onlooker of the abstractly gruesome spectacle of

the street. Her immaculately sculpted features find no place amidst the worldly beasts. We are not in heaven, at least not the one I had pictured, but I imagine her to be an angel. Perhaps, without her, this populated earth has been the war torn wasteland, and she has broken my vision. Her form flickers for a moment, as if the present juncture falls on the cut between the reels that project her. Through my realization, she becomes the embodiment of fear and grace: absolute power communicated through a tender, delicate touch. I am small in her shadow, but my panic fails to overcome the girl. Despite my doubt, she is real. I surrender. I want to hold her, to love her: for her to choose, to take me up to the vastness of the sky. Suspended among the drifting white continents, I yearn to stay in this moment with her for eternity.

Verified

Rachel Zarrow

She wasn't like my last girlfriend, Megan, the quintessential San Francisco millennial who dropped the "h" from her name because she found silent letters pretentious. Emily was a different type of acquired taste. I first saw Emily at a backyard Halloween party in the Castro. She was standing on one of those rickety, not-up-to-code wooden staircases that leads from the apartment into the yard. Twinkling market lights strung across the yard reflected in the clear frames of her glasses. Looking up at her glowing silhouette felt like striking gold; I was a Gold Rush pioneer finding a glimmering nugget amongst the dirt that is San Francisco. She was hold-ing a red cup, talking to a group of guys who looked fourteen. Even from my spot down on the patio, I could tell that none of them could grow a half-decent beard. I stroked mine proudly, ig-noring the fact that it had taken ten weeks to get it to an acceptable length and it itched like hell. I tried to distract myself by checking my phone but without my buddy, Alan, as my wingman, I was as good as useless.

Within the first five minutes of arriving, I had lost Alan to the crowd, despite his bright red and white striped Waldo costume. He's an acknowledge-everyone-you've-ever-met kind of guy, whereas I'm more of the pretend-like-you-don't-recognize-anyone variety. I hardly knew anyone at the party, but Alan had invited me. I'd been living in San Francisco for three years and The City was beginning to feel like a soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend. I was ready to wipe my hands clean of the place, but I couldn't turn down the invite. Besides, I had nothing better to do.

Given San Francisco's low standards, the backyard was just a dismal smattering of ce-ment squares which looked like they'd been rearranged by seismic activity, shattered in odd places with weeds eking their way up through the cracks. All things considered, the host did a good job of sprucing the place up with

strings of lights and jack-o-lanterns everywhere. I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned to find Alan with two Coronas.

"Thanks man," I said, quickly downing the rest of my first beer.

I tossed the bottle into the trash and looked up at Clear Glasses Girl. She couldn't have been more than five feet tall—the guys who were chatting her up towered over her. Sprite-like, especially among the sparkly lights, she reminded me of Tinker Bell.

"Do you know that girl?" I asked.

"Nah, man, never seen her in my life. But she's hella U.H." Alan said. (Alan had coined the term U.H. (*undercover hot*) to describe someone who's unconventionally good-looking.)

"I know. I can't stop staring." I took a swig of my beer and glanced in her direction just in time to see the three guys she was entertaining burst into laughter at something she said. Then, she caught my eye. I looked away. When I finally looked up again, she was still staring at me, mouth turned up at the corners, forming the smuttiest smirk I'd ever seen.

"Be cool, man," Alan said, watching this all play out. I wasn't drunk, but I was loose, re-laxed after a couple beers. Right as I began to pick up a paddle to join Alan in doubles beer pong, she approached us. She was even more devastatingly attractive up close with dark eye makeup and wavy brown hair.

She looked me up and down, taking in my costume. "Who are you?"

"Paul Bunyon," I said, holding up my plastic axe like an idiot.

"I thought you were an axe murderer. Paul Bunyon is way lamer."

I shrugged in defeat and took a sip of my beer, trying to think of a comeback.

"Now you have to guess who I am," she said.

I felt myself turn red in the face. Halloween is the one holiday with a built-in pickup line (*Who are you?*) and I forgot to use it. I looked her over, exercising my Halloween-given right to check her out, protected by the "admiring a costume" clause. She wore a flannel shirt and tight jeans. I liked her costume choice even if I didn't know who she was supposed to be. Unlike the girls who dress up in lederhosen or french maid costumes, she left something to my imagination.

"Are you also Paul Bunyon?" I asked, nodding toward her shirt, similar to mine.

"Really?" she asked, raising an eyebrow above her glasses.

I'm a moron. "I know! An axe murderer."

Much to my relief, she let out a big laugh, and then held up a piece of poster board. It said *Sorry* in childlike script. I still had no idea who she was supposed to be.

"Nothing?"

"Not ringing any bells."

She flipped the poster board over and on the back, in the same handwriting, was written: *What do you mean?* She pointed to her arms. Her flannel shirt was rolled up to her elbows and her forearms were covered in fake-tattoo sleeves.

"She's Justin Bieber, you idiot!" Alan shouted from the other side of the pong table.

"Yes!" She spun around and pointed at him, relieved, like our interaction had been a big-ger waste of time than a trip to the DMV. "Way to go, Waldo!"

"Nice," I said. "Are you a big fan?" *When did I forget how to flirt?*

"No, I just thought it was funny and that people would get it. And, for the record, most people did. Two songs on Billboard's Top 10—*come on!*"

"My apologies. I'm not very up-to-date with pop culture. Can I make it up to you with another beer? I know I need one after that dazzling performance." I held up my empty.

"Sure! When you get back, I want to hear about what kind of music you *do* listen to, if you don't listen to the Biebs." She smiled.

When I returned with our drinks, I didn't see her anywhere. *She's gone. Way to go, Josh.*

"Yo, Bunyon."

She jutted her chin toward me from the pong table, where she was showing Alan some-thing on her phone. She handed her paddle to Alan and sauntered over to where I stood. We dis-cussed our tastes in music and I finally began to hit my stride in the conversation when a girl in a Chipotle burrito costume interrupted me, grabbing her by the arm.

"Our ride is here. Let's go!"

"One sec," she replied to the foil-wrapped friend. "I'll meet you out front."

"It was nice chatting with you. I'm Emily, by the way."

"Josh."

She smiled. "Give me your number." She handed me her phone. This was the first time a girl had ever asked for my number and I

was so clumsy. Hands shaking, I typed in my number.

"I'll text you so you know it's me," she said. "See ya....hopefully soon." Her hand lingered on mine as I returned her phone. The feeling of her soft hand sent a twinge of excitement through my body. When Alan and I left the party, I said something that I never thought I'd say.

"Maybe San Francisco's not so bad."

The next morning, my buddies and I went out for brunch, along with all the other millennials with tech job salaries. Brunch in San Francisco is an ordeal, waiting in line for an hour to over-pay for mediocre scrambled eggs. When we were finally seated at an outdoor table, Alan, our friend Eddy, and I shared a pitcher of Bloody Marys. Eddy's dog, Rufus, lay sprawled at our feet, perking up whenever a plate of bacon wafted past us. Alan and Eddy talked about football and I pretended to listen while compulsively checking my phone.

"What's with this guy?" Eddy asked, pointing at me.

"Oh Joshy's whipped, probably tryina' get with that famous chick from the party."

"What?" I asked.

"That girl, Emily. That's why you keep staring at your phone, yeah?"

"A famous chick?" Eddy was suddenly interested.

"If she's famous, that's news to me." My mind raced to all the potential embarrassments in store if she was, in fact, a celebrity and I'd been too oblivious to recognize her. Even worse, our conversation had started with me admitting that I don't keep up with pop-culture.

Alan took his phone from his pocket and opened Instagram. He typed her name into the search bar and we huddled around the screen. To the left of her name was a small picture of her face—clear glasses, red lipstick—and to the right of her name was a blue symbol with a white checkmark in it: Verified. (Also known as Instafamous.) Alan clicked on her image and user-name: @almostINFAMOUS. She had 72K followers. Her feed was an artful arrangement of pho-tos of her doing cool things in cool places with cool people, each image edited and faded into a consistent color scheme.

Picture: Silhouette of a man in front of a neon sign in Austin.

Caption: late night beibe-que

Is she on tour with Justin Bieber?

Picture: A bare foot with a tattoo written in Latin, *auribus teneo lupum*. **Caption:** hold on tight

Thank you, high school Latin.

Picture: Laser beams and lights, a DJ in action, taken from the booth. **Caption:** i'm with the dj

Is she a groupie?

Picture: An arrangement of car keys, plane tickets, a passport, and wallet. **Caption:** outta here

I think those are the keys to a Porsche.

"Damn, this chick is hella cool," Alan said.

"Damn," I agreed.

Eddy pushed his sunglasses up on his forehead to take a closer look.

"Wait. I recognize her. That's Emily deVeaux."

Of course Eddy knew who she was. He seemed to know every good looking twenty-to-forty-year-old woman in the Bay Area. And most of them seemed to know him too.

"I heard her speak at FounderCon. She's big in the entertainment world. I think started on tumblr and then brands started paying her to be an influencer. Now she runs a marketing agency for music tech. She's super legit."

She's smart, too. Eddy, the token "hot guy" in our friend group, seemed shocked that she was texting me and not him, despite the fact that she didn't even know him.

"No offense, but what do you guys have in common?"

"Maybe she just wants a piece of him," Alan said, pinching my cheek. "I mean damn, son, who wouldn't wanna get nasty all up in this beard?"

"Well she doesn't want a piece bad enough to text me," I grumbled, wondering if our encounter was a fluke, a drunken mistake that she regretted, or worse, forgot about in the morning.

After we paid, we walked to Dolores Park. Eddy played fetch with Rufus, his big, sloppy Chocolate Lab, while Alan and I laid on a blanket. I watched Eddy flirt with girls, effortlessly, with the help of his built-in wingman, Rufus. Eddy would accidentally throw the frisbee too close to a girl's blanket just to get her attention. Then, Rufus would launch himself toward the blanket to get his frisbee, before rolling onto his back for a belly rub. It worked every time. I checked my phone, wondering if she was ever going to text me. It was torture knowing that my future happiness rested entirely in her hands. Whenever I've had a girl's number, I've struggled

through the discomfort of playing it cool and forcing myself not to text her too soon. But at least I had a little agency in the situation. This was bleak. Everything reminded me of her. First, the sound of Justin Bieber playing on someone's boombox, and then, a group of guys walking past with Mission burritos, which also reminded me of Emily—if only peripherally—bringing to mind her friend who dressed up as a burrito for Halloween.

My mild hangover lulled me into a nap and I woke with a start. I checked my phone for the time. Only a few minutes had passed, but I saw a notification on my home screen. The exhilaration that comes with a text from an unknown number was something that—as the one who typically asks for the number—I'd never experienced.

hey Josh, it's Emily from last night.

I scrambled to think of something clever to say—maybe a joke about not remembering any Emilys, only Justins (Justin Bieber). But I knew a dad joke could fall flat over text. I considered asking Alan for a suggestion about what to say, but then I felt a premonition. I've always been skeptical about things that seem too good to be true—that pyramid scheme to sell kitchen knives that I was almost roped into in high school, the apartment in the Mission that was listed on Craigslist for \$600 a month, the herbal remedy that Megan promised me would prevent everything from male pattern baldness to cancer. Emily was probably too good to be true, so why bother telling the guys that she texted me and making a big deal out of it. I decided not to respond right away—I didn't want to appear desperate. I waited until the walk home from the park to text her back. I couldn't think of anything more original to say and played it safe, responding with a question.

Hey hey, how's your Saturday?

Not even two minutes later she responded: so great. *slept in late and then went to ocean beach* punctuating it with a thumbs-up emoji and an emoji with sunglasses on. I was taken aback—I'd expected her to wait hours to respond. She wasn't messing around. Before I could think of a response, she double-texted: *grab a drink with me? tuesday?* Another first, getting asked out. I sent her the thumbs-up emoji, the sunglasses emoji, and the martini emoji for good measure.

The night of our first date I primped for thirty minutes. I shaved

my beard, brushed my teeth, and dipped my fingers into a tub of styling product. In one fell swoop, I ran my product-moistened fingers through my hair, twisting it a bit so that it looked “tousled.” Megan once told me that she liked me better with my hair styled like this, which I think was intended as a compliment. I threw on a grey, cable-knit sweater and jeans. Looking in the mirror, my outfit appeared a little bit grandpa-ish, but I was afraid that if I wore flannel again, she’d think I was trying to make that same weird Halloween-related joke that I almost made over text about Justin Bieber. I was not going to be that creep who thinks one conversation equates to an inside joke.

I walked the half-mile to the bar, almost getting run over by a tech bus leaving its shuttle stop without signaling. *San Francisco, you’re going to be the death of me.* The cable cars at Church Street rang in an ear-splitting trill as I approached the bar. Emily was walking toward the bar from the other direction wearing a big pair of headphones. We had decided to meet at Black-bird, a cocktail bar halfway between our apartments, and the fact that we both arrived at the agreed-upon time put me at ease. Neither of us appeared over-eager-early or rudely-late. Our tim-ing put us on even playing field. *I’m not out of my league.*

“Nice timing.” She had that signature slanted smirk on her face that, if paired with other words, would seem like a sexual invitation. She looked me over, head-to-toe and back up to my head, and shot me a look of what seemed like disappointment, like I wasn’t as good looking as she had remembered. (I had never been checked out before and found the whole experience quite unnerving.) Emily was even more attractive than I remembered. She wore a black crop-top, tight black jeans, and a jean jacket with the sleeves rolled up. And red lipstick. Another first for me, going on a date with a girl in red lipstick. Megan never wore makeup—which was fine—but I liked the fact that Emily did. Imagining her applying it in the mirror at home sent a chill through me. It suggested that she made an effort to appear sexy, that she found herself sexy, and that she wanted to be sexy for her date with *me*.

“It must really be the halfway point,” I said, not letting on that I knew, for certain, that it was exactly the halfway point, the reason I had suggested this bar as a meeting spot.

Inside, I ordered an involved whiskey cocktail—the kind that makes me both love San Francisco and loathe it. It was served in a stemmy glass with some esoterically complicated in-gredients:

cacao nibs and cold brew-distilled simple syrup. Emily ordered a gin fizz.

The question came after we clinked glasses. “I gotta ask. What happened to the beard?”

“It was just part of the costume.”

“Ah. I see.”

“What happened to your sleeves? I thought you were tatted up?” I pointed at her arms.

“Just part of the costume,” she replied with a smile.

The conversation began to flow, interrupted only when we ordered another round. We chatted for the next hour, which constituted me asking her questions and feigning surprise when she revealed some tidbit about herself that I already knew from her Instagram feed. She told me about her family dog (a Golden Doodle named Bunny), her favorite sneakers (Nike Air Jordan Retro IIIs), and her guilty pleasures (sleeping late, mac n’cheese from the box, and *Survivor*).

“That show’s still on the air?”

“Yeah, duh. Season 37 and going strong.”

I laughed, relieved to find out that not every single thing about Emily was cool. For the first time all night, I relaxed. We were three or four drinks.

Seeing the couple next to us close out their tab, Emily nodded her head toward the door.

“Wanna get out of here?”

We walked into a shiny, marble-floored lobby and took an elevator up to her apartment. She switched on the lights to reveal an apartment that can only be described as “swanky.” In one corner, an Eames Chair casually lounged on top of a cowhide rug. Her apartment looked like a Pinterest board, trendy plants and Edison bulbs everywhere. She removed her shoes and left them near a shoe rack by the door, a not-so-subtle hint for me to do the same. I left my Sperry’s alongside her collection of Nikes. The den had a large leather couch, a big-screen TV, and a Sonos sound system. I was most surprised by how spotless the place felt, like it was cleaned pro-fessionally, recently, and often. There was no sign of roommates. She asked me to put on some music, so I fumbled with my phone, trying to connect to Bluetooth. I didn’t want to admit that I’d never used a Sonos and struggled in silence while

she was in another room.

"Hey do you smoke?... Weed, not cigarettes, ew," she asked when she finally came back into the room, carrying a huge Volcano vaporizer.

"Yeah. I used to smoke more in college but I still hit my vape pen every once in awhile."

The Sonos clicked on and one of my recent Spotify playlists began to ooze through the walls. And then we got high. I was a little tipsy and a lot high and it felt fantastic. We laid on her couch in silence, in opposite directions, her feet stretched out by my head and my feet by her's.

"My feet feel so far away," she said, and we both burst out laughing. She wiggled her toes near my head and, for whatever reason, her toes didn't gross me out. In fact, I wanted to give them a squeeze and maybe suck on one of them. I'd never wanted that before; maybe I was just high. *Or maybe I had always secretly wanted to play with someone's toes but had just never let myself acknowledge it.* I was too high.

As if she could read my mind, she tapped my shoulder with her toe. I reached over and gave it a squeeze. She rolled on her side to face me. My body felt too high to move, so I turned my head in her direction and smiled at her. In one swift motion, she tossing her head back, sending curls flying behind her shoulders, and proceeded to Sexy Crawl on her hands and knees to-ward my end of the couch and lean over to kiss me.

Emily had a strikingly feminine body. Her shirt came off to reveal curves tucked into a matching bra and pantie set, something out of a movie. I knew she could feel my erection strain-ing against my jeans but I didn't want to make it more obvious, so I just laid there. If she wanted to find out, she'd reach down and feel it. Straddling me, she pulled on my hair with and whis-pered in my ear, *I like your hair*. I mentally thanked Megan for the grooming advice. Maybe that waste of a two-year relationship wasn't such a waste after all.

I told Emily that I liked her hair, too, and kissed her back as best I could, given that my head felt bubbly, like I was deep-diving without oxygen. I continued to enjoy the kiss for another two more before I began to get into my own head, a sign that I was too high. *I shouldn't have shaved my beard. Should I try to take things further? Do I want to take things further? Does she want it to escalate? If I don't make a move am I gonna look like a total pussy?*

Before I could decide what to do, she decided for me. She unbuckled my belt, unzipped my fly, and took me into her mouth. Jesus Christ. She teased me for a few seconds.

"Let's move to my room." She dragged me by the hand to her king size bed. "Do you mind if I take my pants off, given that you're not wearing any?"

"Hey, you did this to me," I said.

"Then you should return the favor."

I began to remove her pants before I was even sure if it was something I wanted to do. I felt like I was her finger-puppet, submissive to her commands. As I unzipped her fly, the rough metal of the zipper scratched my thumb and shook me from my high, trance-like state. I could tell she wanted something from me and I thought I might want to give it to her, so I waited for the next command.

"I want you inside me," she said and grabbed me by the dick.

I wasn't sure what I wanted. I kissed her neck while I turned this request over in my head like a lucky penny—something both shiny and dirty, something I didn't know if I wanted. She licked my neck and whispered into my ear an explicit string of desires, dirty talk could be dis-tilled into two words: *Fuck me*. She looked me in the eye and I couldn't tell if her expression contained a desire or a plea.

"Hey, let's pump the brakes for a second," I said.

"What's up?"

"Just need a minute."

"Ok. I'm gonna grab the vape."

She returned with the Volcano and I tried to decide if I should hit it again. I decided against it, knowing that it might cloud my judgment. I'd better not. I couldn't recall if I'd said it or just thought it, so I said it aloud, "I'd better not."

"Better not what?"

"Take another hit. I'm high enough."

"I didn't ask if you wanted one." She laughed playfully. "You're so stoned. It's cute."

A few minutes later, she began whispering her desires into my ear once more. In my head I had decided that I wasn't going to sleep with her, but my body wouldn't obey. I was hard again. Misreading my physiological reaction, she asked, "Do you have a condom or should I grab one?"

I was not in the right state of mind to be making this decision.

She reminded me of my childhood dog, a stubborn terrier who would get so fixated on a ball that if I put it in a drawer or on a shelf, she would stare at it, against all attempts to distract her with food, toys, or attention.

"Slow down, not yet," I mumbled into her hair, grabbing her ass in an attempt to give myself a little time to strategize.

"Ok, ok. You just really turn me on."

We started to dry-hump, something I hadn't done since high school. And then I saw her rip open a condom wrapper. I put my hand on hers to get her attention.

"Hey, this was really fun...but I think we should call it a night."

"Why?" I fumbled with my words. I'd never had to turn someone down, and certainly not an out-of-my-league, Verified, Undercover Hot Girl. "It was fun but I think we should slow down."

"Why?"

Was this really happening? Why couldn't she just take my "no" at face value? Was she really going to humiliate me like this?

Before I could respond, she asked, "But weren't you like, really into it a minute ago?"

"Yes, I was—I am—but I think things are moving too fast."

"You're kidding, right?" She began to laugh but stopped herself when she realized that I was not kidding.

Yes, I decided. Yes she was going to humiliate me. I steeled myself for level-ten mortification. Instead, she said nothing like a parent who is "not mad, just disappointed."

She got off the bed, grabbed a big, terrycloth bathrobe, and tied the sash around her waist. She stood on the other side of the room with her arms crossed in front of her.

"I'm sorry," I offered.

"Don't."

"What?"

She made a noise of exasperation and rolled her eyes. "Don't do me like that. You have no idea how many plans I had to change in order to go out with you tonight. It's not as if I had nothing better to do. We go out for drinks, you come home with me, I smoke you out, and start to...get you going...and then you're just gonna leave me like this? High and dry? Fuckin' blue-balls. Not cool."

I'd never been spoken to this way and I'd certainly never heard a girl use the term "blue-balls" proverbially or self-referentially. Maybe that was only because I'd never left anyone high and dry,

so to speak. I had no response so I began to rummage around, gathering clothes from the floor. As I dressed, I began to have regrets. *What's wrong with a girl who likes to have sex?* I could hear Megan give me the slut-shaming lecture for the millionth time. *Why didn't I just say yes?* I requested a Lyft and saw myself out.

I waited for a Lyft outside. A gust of wind blew down the street and the only words I could think of were "bone-chilling." This date was bone-chillingly bad. Finally, the 2010 Honda Civic arrived. I sat in the passenger seat. "I'm here for Josh," said the driver, a middle-aged white guy with stained teeth. "That's me."

"Right on," he said, pressuring me into the dreaded, obligatory Lyft driver fist-bump that I thought had expired when Lyft got their Series B. His fist was dry and hairy.

At the next red light, he reached into the backseat. His hand emerged with a McDonald's bag. The light turned green and, speeding through the intersection, he pawed through the bag. The smell of fried food permeated the air between us and I knew that if I didn't take a shower when I got home, I'd smell like fries when I woke up.

Through a mouthful of Big Mac, he asked, "Want me to turn on some music?"

"Sure."

"Is it too late now to say sorry?/ 'Cause I'm missing more than just your body.//

Oh, is it too late now to say sorry?/ Yeah, I know that I let you down, is it too late to say I'm sorry now?"

At the sound of Justin Bieber's auto-tuned falsetto, this night had officially escalated from bone-chillingly bad to bone-chillingly worse.

"Can you please change the station?"

"You bet," he said in his grating, sing-songy voice.

"1738"

I had never before felt relief upon hearing the intro to Fetty Wap's Trap Queen but any-thing was better than Bieber. I closed my eyes and rested my head against the headrest, wondering if I had done something wrong. Was it my fault for leading her on? Was it all just a big mis-understanding? Why didn't I wanted to get laid? What's wrong with me? Should I text her to thank her for the drinks she paid for and for the great time we had before she freaked out? Ana

lyzing the night's events was too exhausting. I opened my eyes and began to scroll through In-stagram. That's when I saw it, @almostinfamous's post from eight minutes ago:

Photo: Selfie of Emily with bloodshot eyes, in her bathrobe, blow-drying her hair. Her vaporizer was on the bathroom counter, intentionally included in the corner of the shot.

Caption: high n dry

I stared at my phone in disbelief and, before I could change my mind, I commented.

@therealonejoshy: what do you mean?

being the right of the world and the right of the world to be
 an "open market" through which to pass. There were, of course, a few
 exceptions, but they were not the exceptions of the world. The world
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CONTRIBUTORS

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Keaton Boyd is a photographer based out of Jacksonville, Florida, and Savannah, Georgia. Boyd has been photographing for five years and graduated from the Episcopal School of Jacksonville in 2015. He is in his junior year of college at Savannah College of Art and Design and majoring in photography.

Ana Brotas is a Portuguese multidisciplinary artist interested in material and aesthetic manipulation in order to tell stories. The constant search to find appropriate forms of visual storytelling has led her to explore a wide range of mediums, consistently embracing a playful discourse that connects art with her social and ecological context. She studied Cinema at the Film and Theater School of Lisbon and Fine Art at both Central Saint Martins and Goldsmiths University of London. Her work has been exhibited and published internationally. She was awarded at Camberwell's and Deptford's Contemporary Visual Arts Festivals. Recently she has created a public interactive billboard for downtown Los Angeles commissioned by WeTransfer and an interactive performance piece for the Sydney Opera House Summer Program. Currently, she is coordinating the MAE arts project.

Jennifer Bundy is a poet from Florida. She has an MFA in poetry from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and teaches creative writing at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts. She has also taught at José María Infantes, a secondary arts school in Spain. Jennifer is the poetry editor for Bridge Eight Literary Magazine.

Olivia Cook (b. 1994) received a B.F.A. in painting from Savannah College of Art and Design. By creating and suspending large scale environments, Cook explores two landscapes: the landscape of the past and the landscape of the mind. Informed by *daxieyi*, an unrestrained freehand style of Chinese painting, the art examines the liminal expression of places and events that make up these two landscapes.

Holly Corbett currently lives in Las Vegas and works as a college writing instructor. She has previously published poetry and artwork in 300 Days of Sun.

Brett Cortelletti is a junior at Malone University majoring in English Language Arts. He has served as an editor for The Quaker, Malone's online literary journal. In addition to being a reader and a writer, he is also a competitive long distance runner. Most recently, his work has appeared in Panoply: A Literary Zine.

Cora Cruz lives outside New York City, where she works in financial services. Between this and tending to her three kids, she continues her studies in philosophy, with an eye toward integrating this scholarship into both literary and technical/academic writing, which she regards as two sides of a coin. Recent publications include fiction in issues 30 and 40 of 34th Parallel Magazine, and an academic article (on free will) in the Comparative and Continental Philosophy Journal.

Jameson Currier is a self-taught artist, illustrator, and graphic designer who has relied on online tutorials and an occasional real-time workshop to guide his artistic experimentation. He is the author of twelve books, including *The Wolf at the Door*, a novel set in a haunted gay guest house in New Orleans. He is the founder and publisher of Chelsea Station Editions, an independent press, and Chelsea Station magazine, where much of his design and art work can be found tagged as "Peachboy."

Alex Duensing:

Wishing the best for your unendingness, he is sincerely yours,
 Alex Duensing, Founder and Friend of the Friendists, Brains of the
 Operation, Ender of a minor apocalypse, Poet, Artist, Breathing
 Being

Keith Dunlap's first collection of poems, *Storyland*, was published in June 2016 by Hip Pocket Press. His work has appeared in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Georgetown Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Sou'wester*, and *The Tule Review* among other places. He lives in Portland, Maine.

Dominic Frost was born and raised in Oakland, California and studies English alongside Fine Art in the Tulane graduating class of 2019. His short stories draw on the existentialist tradition of the parable, and center around the problematics of phenomenal reality. Outside of the literary sphere, Frost is an avid painter and illustrator who sees the distinct practices of writing and drawing as oscillating in importance, but always informative of one another.

Fierce Sonia is a mixed media artist. She builds a substrate with acrylic paint and collage. A narrative is constructed by the tension between the lush layers moving to dreamy feminine mindscapes with a brighter palette. If you listen closely her work has a soundtrack, a rhythm, a pulse that will give you a magic carpet ride to a fairytale that restates your own heartbeat. She has a public studio at Torpedo Factory: 105 North Union Street, studio 5 Alexandria, VA 22303. Follow on Facebook www.facebook.com/fiercesonia or @fiercesonia on instagram

Benjamin Goluboff teaches American Literature at Lake Forest College. In addition to some scholarly publications he has placed imaginative writing -- poetry, stories, and essays -- in many small press journals, most recently *The Bookends Review*, *Unbroken*, and *The Museum of Americana*. Goluboff's *Ho Chi Minh: A Speculative Life in Verse and Other Poems* is out this fall from Urban Farmhouse Press.

Amy Guidry is an artist currently residing in Lafayette, Louisiana. She comes from a family of artists including the late painter Eleanor Norcross. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums nationwide. Her paintings are present in public and private collections throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia.

Zebulon Huset is a writer and photographer living in San Diego. His writing has recently appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Louisville Review*, *Meridian*, *North American Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Portland Review*, *The Maine Review* and *The Roanoke Review* among others. He publishes a writing prompt blog (*Notebooking Daily*) and his flash fiction submission guide was reposted at *The Review Review*.

Kayla Jackson is a native New Orleanian who goes by the performance name, "Apostrophe." Kayla is a local spoken word poet, vocal musician, and visual artist. She is currently a graduate student at Tulane University pursuing her master's degree in English, and is one of the captains of Tulane University's slam poetry team, *Rhyme Verses Rhythm*. In the summer of 2015, Kayla self-published her first spoken word chapbook and is currently working on writing her first novel.

Rollin Jewett is active in many artistic disciplines. His photographs have recently been seen in *The Sea Letter*, *Flash Fiction for Flash Memory*, and *Eye on Fine Art Photography*. Mr. Jewett is also an award winning playwright, screenwriter, songwriter, author and poet. His feature film credits include "Laws of Deception" and "American Vampire". His stories and poetry have been published in many literary magazines and anthologies and his award-winning plays have been produced all over the world.

Jacqueline Jules is the author of three chapbooks, *Field Trip to the Museum* (Finishing Line Press), *Stronger Than Cleopatra* (ELJ Publications), and *Itzhak Perlman's Broken String* (Winner, Helen Kay Chapbook Prize 2016). Her work has appeared in over 100 publications. She is also the author of 40 books for young readers including the *Zapato Power* series and *Never Say a Mean Word Again*. Visit www.jacquelinejules.com

Lee Romer Kaplan, civil rights lawyer turned M.F.A.-wielding English professor, spent her youth shuttling between Northern Israel and Berkeley, California, and more recently, NYC. Her novel manuscript, *The Flight of the Lesser Kestrel*, finalist for the James Jones First Novel Prize and Dana Award, is set in Israel during the Lebanon War. Recent work at 100 Word Story, Postcard Poems & Prose, and forthcoming in *Nothing Short Of...*, a flash fiction anthology from Outpost19 Books.

Mwende "FreeQuency" Katwiwa is a 26-year-old Kenyan, Immigrant, Queer Womyn speaker and performer. A 2017 TEDWomen speaker and ranked 3rd at the 2015 Individual World Poetry Slam, FreeQuency is an internationally touring author, host, youth-worker, social-justice lecturer, teaching artist and workshop leader who has spent her life at the intersection of arts, education and activism. An award-winning poet/speaker, she and/or her work in Reproductive Justice, #BlackLivesMatter organizing, LGBTQ+ advocacy and poetry have been featured on Upworthy, OkayAfrica, TEDx, the New York Times, For Harriet, Teen Vogue, Huffington Post, Everyday Feminism, and other outlets. View her work at www.FreeQuencySpeaks.com.

Matthew Landrum holds an M.F.A. from Bennington College. His chapbook, *The Homeland -- Translations from the German of Katharina Müller* is recently out with Cold Hub Press. Experimental translations from his Lorca project appear in *Agni*, *Crannog*, and *The Notre Dame Review*. He lives in Detroit.

D.A. Lockhart makes his home in traditional Three Fires Confederacy territory. He is the author of *This City at the Crossroads* (Black Moss Press 2017) and *Big Medicine Comes to Erie* (Black Moss Press 2016). His work has appeared in the *Malahat Review*, *Grain*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, and the *Windsor Review* among others. Lockhart is a graduate of the Indiana University-Bloomington M.F.A. in Creative Writing program. He is a member of the Moravian of the Thames First Nation.

Anna Martin is a visual artist and writer, native to Baltimore, Maryland, and currently based out of Salt Lake City, Utah. She is an avid explorer and much of her artwork is inspired by her travels and life experiences, and she strives to capture emotions and inspire others through her work. Her work has been previously exhibited in various galleries and museums, such as the Rosenberg Gallery, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. She has also been published in various art magazines such as Grub Street, Litro, Green Writer's Press, and Plenilune Magazine. Anna also frequently works under the pseudonym Vacantia, and more of her work can be found at her online gallery: <http://www.vacantia.org>.

Diane G. Martin, Russian literature specialist, Willamette University graduate, has published writing in New London Writers, Vine Leaves Literary Review, Poetry Circle, Open: Journal of Arts and Letters, Breath and Shadow, the Willamette Review of the Liberal Arts, Portland Review of Art, Pentimento, Twisted Vine Leaves, The Examined Life, Wordgathering, Dodging the Rain, upcoming in Dark Ink, Wordsworthing, and Rhino, with photos in Conclave, Slipstream, Dodging the Rain, soon in Dark Ink and Stonecoast Review.

Barry D. McGuire is a recent Tulane graduate with a chemical engineering degree. The Houma, Louisiana native is a self-described nerd, unapologetically black, and aggressively queer. His love for social justice and an equitable society is only matched by his love for cheesecake and chemistry. He can often be found performing at local open mics or taking a nap on the couch in The O at Tulane University.

Jenn Powers is a writer and visual artist from New England. Her most recent work is published or forthcoming in Hayden's Ferry Review, Jabberwock Review, The Pinch, and Calyx, among others. Please visit www.jennpowers.com.

MK PUNKY: A founder of the '80s hardcore band The Clitboys, MK PUNKY is the author of many books of poetry, essays, journalism and fiction, most recently the novel Year 14, winner of the 2016 Barrelhouse Prize. MK serves as Poet Laureate of Vista Street Community Library in Los Angeles.

Silas Plum, through assemblages of defunct currency, discarded photographs, and long-forgotten illustrations, challenges the idea of objective vs subjective value. He believes strongly in the tired old maxim that the true value of an object is more than the sum of its parts, that the gut is a truth-teller, and that the Aristotelian notion of learning-by-doing is the best teacher around. Judge his worth at silasplum.com.

J D Rejo-Maya: Born in Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico, where he spent his childhood in the small neighboring rural pueblo of Tarimoró and wherefrom he immigrated in 1988. He has been published in various sites/literary journals in the UK, in the US, in India, in Spain, in Australia and in Argentina. While in ceremony with Chololo medicine men in the Tule River Reservation, he dreamt the above written prophecy...His inspirations include Nezahualcoyotl, Humberto Ak'abal, and James Welch.

Laura J. Stein was born in New York City. She received a B.F.A. from Cornell University with additional studies at the Pratt Institute, the School of Visual Arts, Parsons School of Design, Cooper Union, and the Art Student's League. In January 2018, she will have her first solo show at the Sheetz Gallery, Penn State Altoona, Altoona, Pennsylvania. Her work has recently been exhibited at the Trestle Gallery, NYC; the Coburn Gallery, Ashland, Ohio; the Waterloo Arts Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio; and the Next Gallery in Soho, NYC. She currently lives and works in New York City. Her website is laurajstein.com.

Jay Waters walked away from a good job in order to teach in college and do other things, including photography. Old enough to know better. Yearns to be a well-travelled Southerner. Believes that a photo should be, for as much as possible, just the coincidence of life and camera - but is learning Photoshop and Lightroom just in case. Inspired equally by Edward Hopper, Ansel Adams, Gordon Parks and Randy Newman. Usually finds things interesting that most others don't. More work at noodlephotos.com. From McCalla, Alabama.

Jonathan William Stout teaches rhetoric at The University of Iowa. J.W. received a B.A. from Pacific Lutheran University and an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His work has been published, or is forthcoming, in *Prelude Magazine*, *The Iowa Review Online*, *Poetry is Dead*, *Omniverse*, *Horsethief*, and elsewhere. *The Dream of Zukofsky* was a finalist for the 2017 *Omnidawn* Chapbook contest.

Natalie Toth is a junior at Tulane, studying Philosophy and Studio Art. She likes to dance and read cookbooks. She made this piece in response to the #MeToo movement, inspired by the French equivalent, #BalanceTonPorc, and the imagery of the American flag.

Anni Wilson is a printmaker working in linoleum. Her current project is a set of sixty linocuts illustrating Restoration comedies, versified by collaborator Craig Kurtz. Recent works have been featured in *Gigantic Sequins*, *Metonym*, and *The Penn Review*. She resides at Twin Oaks Intentional Community in Virginia.

Christopher Woods is a writer, teacher and photographer who lives in Chappell Hill, Texas. His published works include a novel, *THE DREAM PATCH*, a prose collection, *UNDER A RIVERBED SKY*, and a book of stage monologues for actors, *HEART SPEAK*. His short fiction has appeared in many journals including *THE SOUTHERN REVIEW*, *NEW ORLEANS REVIEW* and *GLIMMER TRAIN*. He conducts private creative writing workshops in Houston. His photography can be seen in his gallery - <http://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/>

McKenzie Zalopany is a creative writing student at the University of South Florida. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bad Pony Mag*, *3Elements Review*, *Superstition Review* and *The Odet*.

Rachel Zarrow is pursuing her MFA at UC Riverside Palm Desert and she received her Bachelor's at Stanford University in 2013. She is currently working on her first novel and has had work published online in *The Atlantic* and in-print in *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

Submission Guidelines:

The Tulane Review accepts poetry, prose, and art submissions.

Poetry and prose submissions should be sent electronically through Submittable at our site, review.tulane.edu. Please submit no more than five poems and limit prose submissions to 4000 words per piece.

Art should be submitted electronically to Submittable at our site in high-resolution CMYK format. Please include dimensions and media form.

Please include a cover letter with biography for all submissions.



