

Jet Fuel Review

Fall 2013

Issue 6





A High Octane Literary Journal

www.jetfuelreview.com

lewislitjournal.wordpress.com

Artwork: Connor McLennan's "Paper Thin Walls"
Cover Design: Ashley Castillo and Audrey Heiberger

Mission Statement

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Fall 2013 issue of Lewis University's the *Jet Fuel Review* literary journal! We, the editors, have worked vigorously this season to create a rich and thought-provoking issue that will capture your interest and immerse you in a fresh, diverse aesthetic. Our ever present mission is to publish the very best of what we receive. In one of those odd twists that life gives us, we have pieced together an issue that illuminates the spaces in-between and beneath.

It would seem unnecessary to say that good art, poetry, and prose, are valued because of their ability to create layers, so it would appear obvious that we would publish pieces that are multifaceted. Although theme is unintentional, many of the pieces seemed to be commenting on this idea of multivalence. One need not look any further than our cover to understand this issue. Connor McLennan's piece "Paper Thin Walls" is more than just a child tearing open a white wall, it shows us what is underneath; it shows us the layers. There is also a distinct connection between the physical world and the intangible mindset. Behind the veneer of often perceived simple objects and everyday experiences lies the possibility of new meaning and harsh reality.

In addition to Connor's inspiring cover art, issue six of *Jet Fuel Review* features work from all across the globe, ranging from Kolkata, India to the familiar sites of Romeoville, Illinois. Specifically, Nandini Dhar, who hails from India, has submitted poetry that seems to transcend geography. One of our poetry editors, Deirdre McCormick, said that Dhar's work was both "brutal and beautiful," and brought back "chilling memories of chicken foot soup and flying teacups." Similarly, "Lightweight Carbon Wings for Human Flight" by Todd Mills illustrates the common difficulties humankind has with any kind of creation, but Mills puts a humorous and interesting spin on the subject. Another writer who seemed to inspire the editors was Joey Kingsley, whose poetry left us all admiring "her meticulous attention to detail and her creation of refreshing metaphors," particularly as evidenced in the poem "On 33 West," which received unanimous praise from our editors.

Overall, *Jet Fuel Review* is, first and foremost, a student run journal. In each of our past issues, students dedicated a large amount of their free time to crafting this journal, but, this time around, it was turned into a class. While most of the editors knew each other from other courses, there was only a few of us that had worked on previous *Jet Fuel* issues before. Due to many of the editors' lack of experience, the speed at which we came together was nothing short of astonishing. Whether it was our familiarity or our collective desire to put out the best issue yet, is unknown. What is known is that this Fall 2013 issue not only represents the best of our contributors, but it also represents the best of our editors. While reading through the pages of issue six of *Jet Fuel Review*, we hope that you are able to experience the love, passion, and dedication the editors had put forth into developing a nurturing environment for the creativity that ranges from around the nation.

Enjoy,

Tim Fitzpatrick, Ryan Arciero, Stephanie Raga

And the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors

Poetry

The Something Else

Chess is a score for music. Love is a score
for an original twisting.

There are twenty-nine people in the room
and all are in love

but they don't know. They're discussing it
anyway. (Everyone in this conversation

is saying the same thing—

it's a conversation with adaptation.) Is this
my implied contribution?

Even the repetition fails

as a repetition, and I keep trying to figure
the something else,

but if you think about instances of rising
heat, or art, and they seem contradictory,

they are structured. When one has a target,
being in a body,

aiming, like this,

at several options standing at an open bar,

and there is some spectral security

lining the walls, wearing the cheap blazers
they do,

what occurs?

There is an image of the body provided

by the spray of ordinary skill. I am still

in love

with a person not in this room,

but I do not want to leave where I am.

Therefore,

I attempt to repeat the repetition

of the sense,

of myself,

and I sweat as though a significant force

has been applied to me, and I begin

to raise possibilities

to someone who is standing near me

and who has also stopped moving entirely.

Samaritans

If there is an uninterpretable cry in the City,
if there is just one suffering,
there will also be men and women
going to homes,
and heavy breathing, but also light breathing,
and smothering, sometimes smothering.
Then a little mirror. But it takes so long
for anyone to get there,
 anywhere the ground lifts
and the roots pull, that however ordinary
the music in the streets,
still these men and women must move
into the way of things—
 the passages, the portals, the arrivals

they must repeat. It is this understanding
they have of poverty, of the poor in any way,
 because in time
the poor do bring their masters toward them.
Into the underground, in the new season,
the wind, a changing of positions,
and who is going
to read it? (Something that happens when
one is in close contemplation
of the ordinary.) To us there is much praise-
worthy in this city, in their women,
in their men, in their moaning in any way,
but I wonder, anyway,
 what the answer is for those people
in the way of things, for that sight
only some of them or us must ever attend to.

Still Be I Can't Wait White Flowers Backwards

Big drums. The air's not singing. Even me
Coming out of aught. I won't invite. Red flower
goop left her right cabbage green. From where
I am My attentions Straight with you. Have you
me? I thought whole taken for parts. Head home.
Right about now curtains. Down on you. Wade
In and kept hip if seen. You stand up On low
when you can. Of me Who isn't curled. Always
the look And then, Look, up Lasts for no more
a buzz. Will I leave With you. Over my shoulder
She heard &&&&&&& Cabbage leaves for me

fowl
like myself
& saw
Aught
Above.
Over us
in some
falling I
was small
& called down
to Aught.
She had after all
& the call,
she was not then yet.

I sit in front of
the strum.
I mostly occupy.

Still be I can't wait to be
sung back to possible.
Her with my mind looks into big drums.

**Singly Watch The Smoke Bloat The Pear
In Graying Phases.**

Pull off
our feet. The ground
like taste. Little jugs. She touches with me.
We eat
together to gather Yellow Candles.
I blow.
She sifts
away from rock.
Ick. A girl is filling.
Call it to hip. Position. Moon,
I may go in the size of your
eye socket.

Magenta In Bits, A Flower From The Ceiling Set

My eyes broad day light to fountain geese,
making me this place. From the ceiling,
my eyes are not up there.
Broad day light is covered with us
to fountain. Geese form into what else Exhausted,
Wanting to walk its surface,
glimmer
its common Outward.
 Said beneath
each beam,
Two Dales cuss flower markets: swerves out of blue thighs.
 Their scene came here

without rest, geese tails in the ground
flower. There, shape has a group
soft and heavy. Pull.
 She wraps
 her arm around the plant

 to complement her mouth.

Maybe You're Just a Harmless Flirt

As in coquette and cockteaser,
as in not serious, as in you *flirted*
with the notion of buying a sports car,
or in Italian, *civetta*, owl or hussy.
To flirt in Italian, an article advises,
approach the target of your lust and ask,
Is it hot in here, or is it just you?
Guaranteed to put you on track! And
don't forget when engaged
in an *amoreggiamento*
to mention how lovely his eyes.

Don't forget to hope it doesn't backfire.
Don't forget *harmless*, relieved
from damage or loss. Hope he
doesn't forget, because hurt is
where the body becomes a broken,
abandoned refrigerator, waiting for pickup.
Where the only process left is rust,
where you can end up standing
on the corner of Waverly and Eleventh,
a block from your home, wondering
where you're going, where the hell you are.

Man Kissing Boobs

Evening exhale of A. Finkl & Sons
steel smog, enhancing the North
Chicago sunset, and whatever it is

they use to tan the leather
at the Webster leather-stretch: Famous
Horween tannery smells like a golf course

outhouse, the neighbor's dead cat
blankets – mechanic-me, why can't I
look at a radio and tell the cloud to break

from a web of ostensible unphasing, street-
tough? Break, you beautiful storm, snap
like an aloe stem, juice me, rid me of that

city-stink, at least push it deeper down.
Pequod's Pizza, where I learned new words
on the bathroom wall, contributed too.

Amazed by the electro-gas twisting
of halogen tubes, a purple whale balanced
on one fin, draught mug frothing in the other –

the start of parts becoming parts, symbol
soup, lewd collection of letters and limbs
crudely sketched. The intersection of boyhood

and everything else, where our waitress perked
through her shirt, where I ached out my first
pornography on the wall with a felt tip pen.

Tales of the Jazz Age

Ravenous within the bounds of business, the reproach
of two gerbils in a cage, how hungry she must have been
to eat her mate. *How many lives have I ruined?* One
doubled in size overnight, the other became, by some gift
of this universal business, nothing more than a tail and some bones.

Sucking on silver polish in a room full of candles, fickle wicks,
a young boy draws the Predator's meaty tusks and whiskers
reads a word like *preemptor* two times in the footprint of a page –
how selfish the seizure of privacy in the intimate, how he prefers
the large intimacy of a party, men in bowties with lampshades

dulling the wan light of waning smiles. Indecency swings
from the chandelier. What ostensible parts asunder could be
worse than lightning pulled apart from its thunder? Forced to live
in the flash of trees falling alone in a forest – who can be sure
what's been stolen won't tear itself to pieces in the desperate

hope to find itself again? There are far greater times to be had
he assumes, sniffing the air for sawdust as a young boy
reads *Gatsby* in the basement, two gerbils squirreling in a cage.
Rancid, Black Flag, Operation Ivy, naive to the imminent
consumptions: crimson woodchips, lovesickness, small stack of bones.

Driving with Pizzelles

for Michael Earl Craig

I have been known to bring snakes to the revival tent.
I'm trying on hats in the handcuff factory / silk scarf stand.
I'll stick this thing square in the Geo Tracker, Megadeath
rattling the speakers. There once was a sort of music.

I'm in the lane to go left, steering with my knee, go straight,
trying to open a package of lemon zest pizzelles with one hand
and my teeth, checking cell reception, spitting gum out the window.
I am decorating my future motel room. A fat white Chevrolet

pulls up to pass, cannot, pulls back and signals he'll put a bullet
through the window into my skull behind the ear. Today a man
removed his shoes, one by one, threw them at the president. I'm alive,
thank heaven, because of the pizzelles, peeled with my teeth

set the pack in the passenger seat. The man in the fat white van
has a fat wife waiting back home in a thin kimono she lets slip
as she bends to pick the paper from the stoop and the neighbor waves
and wipes his mouth and says *Hold on, I've got something for you* –

they trade envelopes over the fence, mislabeled. Free radio
brings me news from Guantanamo Bay. A postcard from
Del Pabellon's been through weather, cat-parts in the dumpster
behind the gyro stand. We live in a very sordid country.

I am trying on my motel furniture. I'll rewrite most of the old poems.

Sunday Memo, Re: Joyce

Sliced almonds, dried berries sprinkled over steel-cut oats at the window this morning, smell of thyme from the planter. One small thrush pining over needle placement: thatched sprigs and twigs of poplar, cypress,

hair and twine. The water from the tap is cold the way spring pipes allow. Running over an apple, fingers still numb and thick from sleep. After a series of bird calls he'd like to name but can't, he wonders: must he inherit

the strangely sound of consonants in Euclid's use of *gnomon*, as Joyce suggests in *The Sisters* of *The Dubliners*? So too with *simony* in the Catechism, captured, in a sense, in the same story? In thrush-like

becomings and shivers of rose bush, he is convinced of his ability to extract meaning from abstract sentences. Venial sun, sincere and abundant, thawing the planter of thyme. Still the winter's white truculence has done away

with those who came together to escape the cold. Still and all he loved her, in a small way. Shock and awe dissolve to the quiet reverence of a man running his hands over an apple, buffing it across his musty lapel as the tree-line lays blue strips

of shadow like the blade of a sundial announcing itself upon the lawn like the sacraments of Joyce given to those willing to listen. Dun-colored morning, coffee sipped, stirring oats and working a new apple down to its core.

Ephemera

*Healthy children will not fear life
if their elders have integrity enough
not to fear death.*

- Erik Erikson

I used to know the story of why the grass grows
greener on the hill below the abbey.

What's kept in a box and buried
under a child's trundle bed, secret
Hushpuppy shoebox of treasures, becoming
the old Guillen Cigar tin of taboos, collected

matchbooks, beer tabs, Pamela Anderson beaming
in a windblown sundress, unused prophylactics:
a slapdash catalogue of Eriksonian industries, and guilt.
The best and worst things are often unforeseen.

There are those we cannot name or will not, swirling
in varied pockets of deep night or no-one-looking.

Swinging slowly in the swings beside the elementary
school we went to, she told me
what she'd do if she were pregnant, and had I heard
about the abbey on the hill? Young girls

took their unplanned blessings to the Abess'
commune to be delivered, then buried
silently among the gardens, flourishing
in emerald green, dappled with the cascade

of lavender foxgloves and bluebells
tolling omens of indifference through the valley.

Portrait of the Poet As A Ghost

A woman
eyes big as an ostrich egg
her household
the staircase

married at eight
widowed at ten
sharpens her alphabets

the bricks on the attic wall her slate
erases them
as soon as they've been written

no-hair girl
in between the cracks of the floors

listen
for the sound of her eyes
flipping the pages of her father's books

mothers
do not wish your daughters her fingertips
forever stuck
in the middle of a page

mothers
keep your daughters away
lest they write down
what you're sweeping away.

The Kitchen Goddess

After Jibanananda Das and Rachelle Cruz

Lock the kitchen doors at night.

Your daughter isn't safe.

This pretty maiden.

Widowed at twelve. Who could never grow up.

Could not look at any woman's swollen belly.

Her ceaseless quest to grow up. And pretty maiden grows smaller. And smaller.

So small. She wriggles inside the cracks in the kitchen wall.

Mother, lock your kitchen doors.

Your daughter isn't safe.

Blisters on her palm.

Blood. Pus. Broken skin.

Pretty maiden washes rice.

Your daughter's tongue.

Isn't safe.

These blackened skillets on the sink.

These half-eaten mangoes. Un-chewed chicken bones.

Not enough. Pretty maiden scrubs.

And scrubs the pots. Sucks the blood.

Out of little girl tongues.

Mother, lock the kitchen doors at night.

Pretty maiden washes rice inside. Bleeding hands. Cannot stop.

Do not worry.

Her wrath would not break open what you lock up.

Playing Witch

It is your twelfth birthday yesterday,
and you refuse to begin to bleed.
Instead, you, my cousin, thick as a myth,
let loose your banyan root- hair –
broken twigs, polythene bags, newspaper pieces
whirling around your cheeks.
You swallow an owl, and do not even burp.
I am scared of nor'westers,
and you order me to quit painting toadstools blue.
A day ago, our grandmother had thrown away
a bowlful of Maggi noodles,
thinking they were overgrown maggots.
You and I picked them up,
sucked the eggs out of them,
then spat them out.
We are learning –
to wrest our tongues on the slippery.
You invite the crows to nest in your curls.
I am on my way to a hidden closure –
fish-hooked inside a rosewood box,
a hyacinth purple skirt to twirl.
Here, in the middle of the courtyard,
a face is what you sculpt for me –
a sharp half-moon, scythe shaped.
Like an obsolete poem.
I watch you through the keyhole.
Dust in your hair, dust on your tongue,
hands spread. The summer storm
between your fingertips.
You chew its brown feathers alive.

Calder's Mobiles Don't Hang Straight

Calder's mobiles don't hang straight
but sidle up to the planet
with wry but confident angles

I envy but can't emulate.
The one hanging in your kitchen
looks like a tiny thunderstorm.

Posed there, you tilt and veer sideways,
confounding my approach. I snatch
a beer from the fridge and pretend

I'm too manly to let art
as fragile and tentative as Calder's
shift my vision even an inch.

Your whole apartment reeks of art.
Drawings primp in off-white mats.
Figurines in marble and bronze

squat in speechless dolor. One splash
of oil painting cowers the sofa
on which I'd hoped we could splay

not like lovers but comrades
determined to resolve the world.
You acquired your mobile from the man

himself, who in his last years touched
your childhood with tiny implements
essential to kinetic sculpture.

The rest of your collection deployed
as your elegance formed itself
from air, water, fire and earth.

I wish I had known you when stones
first cracked in your presence
and rivers slopped over their banks

and storefronts coughed up trinkets
to pave your way through Harvard Square
where your early triumphs occurred.

Calder saw this coming and planted
his mobile to observe and relate
your effects by shifting its angles

subtly enough to mimic
the way you balance entire worlds
on the tip of your pointed tongue.

Lullaby

The sound of willow birds chirping,
the beeping heart gone flat.

Your IV drip.
The coffee pot refilled.

The sound of first steps,
the ones untaken.

The ring of your urn against the railing.
The ocean's pretense of returning.

Like we could walk over and over
together, a record stuck on loop,

this song of maple leaves scraping
outside our window.

This lullaby,
drowning the sound

of your door become a wall,
your room painted over,
the maple now bare.

Heap

Take me back to the crash,
as happy as I am to be done
with the pill-bottle-fogs,
to walk to the bathroom
without being planted
like a fern on the toilet.
As happy as I am looking
through windows, knowing
I'm not bound to the chair—
take me back to the crash.
Take me to the right after,
where the truck drives through me,
where the windshield splinters.
Take me to the seconds
when streetlamps hang
from sidewalks and I fall
through the rain. Take me back
to when I was twisted on the asphalt,
when the eardrum burst,
when the leg snapped,
when I didn't feel a thing,
but knew this was my body—
and this was me breathing.

The Basis of Meaning

Jasper “hangs” by the door
Looking out the garage to the street

This moment lacks teeth in a row
He places his hand in a blue vibrating glove

& drives
A new hover car doesn’t come cheaply, he thinks

A head banger has died
& this a week ago Saturday

On the banks of the Mystic River
The word “Utah” dangles a pair of small plastic circuits

Where Jasper can’t reach
The end of the road swerves up ahead

Someone he knows lifts him from a vase
Really an urn

A civilized people
All want their hover cars

My Moment with Goethe & Faust

“Here,” sd the sky—

An entertainment handing me
a Black Widow—

“Hold Faust.”

“It bit me!” I sd

& winced negative space
Into Laundromat, cities, & townships

I mean I minced apple pie
Inasmuch as it is Always Already Taking Place

A small bruise
Appeared on my palm tree

“Abstraction is death,” sd Goethe
“Absurdity, a fig, a plum, asparagus.”

“You can feel the piano, can’t you?
Inside you a laugh track, I mean?”

I doped the spider
Which I still held in my hand

“It won’t be long now cow,” I sd
A screw in both my lungs

& stomped on it
Vegetatively

I felt drowsy
& pale

My iPod
Till the end

Fire Sermon

I've learned to speak Molotov

for the shatter of everything we know
and hold habitual in our knowing.
The night fires mark foreclosed acres

for miles, attracting a congress of moths.
Profligacy too requires a brand of devotion.
Yesterday I sided with the bankers.

After our tidal consumption of Glenlivet,

steak dinners, orgies and cocaine we ended up
tap dancing straight from the SEC to the ICU.
We now leverage mortgages against corn

and haggle with weather to fill our coffers.

Meanwhile the debt ceiling

bottlerockets to outer space.

The experts soothsay a fiscal cliff looms.
Never argue with experts.

Their list of credentials is often
long enough to stun an elephant.
Tonight the sky is dressed in artificial light.
It's the Fourth of July.

Soon we'll all be covered

in a Buddhist monk's windblown ashes.

Your Art, Dear Lady

Dying is an art, like everything else. I do it exceptionally well. - Sylvia Plath

The linoleum underneath knees
chilled muscles
cold foraging deep past tendon and fat
clammy skin peels
under careful positioning
until you lay your head to rest
in the dark black hole
that still holds
the scent of charred meat and gristle,
those potatoes you pared delicately,
slivers like white bone,
the starch lingers on lips and tongue,
its flour beneath fingernails.
Did the smell remind you of meals
children require
as they slumbered on,
tucked tightly like rising yeast rolls
in little pans nestled just up the stairs?
You clench tighter to the baking rack
tilt further into the oven.
Burrow a little deeper
into your art.
As the smell of heat
the call for an end
reminds you to plug the holes of the kitchen doors
so that cooking covers gas with the
tablecloth worn thin by cutlery, spotted milk, jam stains.
Use your own apron, ink splotched along the hem
to cinch the air tight.
Your palms linger in the grease,
caressing,
as you push deeper into the dying.
When the light of the morning hits the dark stove,
and linoleum loses its grip,
sickly sweet overpowers garlic, salt,
the children will rise
with a taste
of severed sugars and lies
in their mouths,
of oil, vinegar, and yeast,
the bread that never rose.

Tongueless

My tongue is stuck in a loop
of a word. I want to cut it out,
useless meat. I filled my cheeks
with sidewalk, licked the rocks raw
trying to get the word out. All
my secrets rot.

Opening

At the end of the hallway is a door
glowing green or angry or locked,
jammed shut by what's behind.

Some doors get to stay shut. Some things
don't need to be revealed today,

I may tell you tomorrow.
There is a broom
I will never tell you about, a mountain
I threw away, ashes I keep
in a can under the bed.
Close the door. I'm not interested

in feelings today. This can be the first time I let
you down. *I'm sorry* is a hiccup. I'll hold
my breath now, try to swallow the room.

I've been handed a lot of keys
I never asked for. This is your door.
Sometimes I forget things.
Keys made holes in these pockets

and my mother never taught me to sew, only
to carry things. The best way
to keep a secret is to forget it.

On 33 West

*The likelihood of transforming matter into energy is something akin
to shooting birds in the dark in a country where there are only a few birds.*
—Einstein

In the left lane: two men in the cab of a jacked-up truck
speed. The thin sliver of their side mirror tilts
& I see an orange hat bobbing like a dented apple,
five-o'clock shadow, the edge of a jaw, one cheek drooped
like a hound's. We've been following them for a mile
when I notice the deer's coarse hair ruffled in the whoosh
like grass matted in a wet yard, & the hooves hooked,
like the elegant ankles of a bride scooped up at the threshold,
over the handles of the mud-splattered four-wheeler in tow.

The buck is closer than he appears. Limp, the slender body
caves, a kind of surrender without surrender. How often
have I longed to be ferried through cold that shears
like the revolving barrel of the tractor's blades in hay season?
Last week, skidding on wet leaves, I flew off my bike
into a parked car. The thing about bodies
is that they break, in time, night pressing in: the mirror
severed from the car's door before the upper lip even registers
concrete or its nerves drive the brain to adrenaline.

It's a fact that starlight bends around the sun like a ring
around a finger, a mountain's switchback, the onyx icing
the eyes of the deer. November: more blue, less bark. Distances
are greater. The truck veers toward the exit, a golf ball sailing
over the freeway, and we lose them, the dead animal gone
into a blind spot behind a curve in the trees. They want
freezer bags of meat, a rough coat, the antlers' glazed rivers,
the deer that won't run into a clearing, a perfect shot, & later,
even upside down, strung from a tree with its split hooves
tied like a body bag, or a bag of corn meal, or a brown sack
of red potatoes, will swing a dead weight. The radio
blares a pop song. There are so many ways to pray.
We can gaze into gray into blue into purple
approaching the red-stained hill, the horizon vaster & smaller,
our lives shrunk down to the exact. At some point,
we get to leave. There is big space. We kill

& are killed, our stupid mouths half-open.
The tongue is a clause. It stops.

Early Arrival to a Beheading

Before me, a book of Flemish art: Samson, heroic & asleep,
& his lover, her breasts shattering into stars above him,

two moons snoring through Eternity
on a chaise, two armed guards at the bedroom door
as she cradles his head.

As if he were a swan instead of a man,

for a purse of coins, bluish silver, Delilah sharpened
the blade of the servant who, blended in shadows
& the signatures of rain, filed a dirk

into his hair like a slide, seven microscopic strokes,
one for each lock razored loose,
the hand's desire to render him Baroque
too strong for the brush that held it back,
speaking to the scissors in Light.

*

Sweep it up: yesterday a stack of records slid across the table
into a blue, dahlia-patterned bowl that torpedoed
into the floor, a lake of green tea glittering crystal
on the red Coca-Cola cup that had just held it,
the day fallen & steaming.

But here, our severance gathers, in nests,
under chairs, & into a field of splinters
that the apprentice brushes into an anthill of kindling.

*It was the charm of a gesture drowning
in the charmlessness of the body, Kundera says, where I sit
in the salon anticipating my summons.*

Four months ago, sweaty & tired, I stepped
from the brittle light into this bright interior of mirrors—
gilt faces, swivel seats & wash basins,
the black holes where people lose their heads.

*

Absolute freedom: the body charmed out of its skin & moonlight
filtering in through the ribs of the dark,
a lofty guide toward some kind of subjectivity.

In kindergarten: my father drove us to pick up
my mother from her work at The Paper. A bullet's clawed
scratching worried the wall of the passenger-side door,

the trunk duck-taped for the ride to the newsroom
where ice cream's éclairs, frozen shavings,
fell out of plastic wrappers like death threats opened
over the sink, licked shut by the crooked fingers
that load the traps.

*

But in the old myths, a batch of poison calls for the fat of a redhead
& only mistletoe cut with a golden sickle & caught
in a white cloak saves the afflicted from death.
Combing my hair this morning, the hydrogen bonds

knotted like a fence & denied all entrance,
the alpha helices in a single strand twisted like roped ladders
in each thin elastic body, a fibrous cortex,
roofing mathematical braids over skin.

*

And in my lap now: Samson who razed a temple's columns,
about to be shorn. The first shadow following trust
is a cuticle of doubt, my name scrawled
in The Book of Appointments like a fistful
of crabgrass persisting between footsteps, all faltering.

Self-Portrait with Phantom Limb & Vintage Revolver

And what is this? On the corner of Laurel & China
I lift a moth's rich brown & doily markings
so its feelers, the smooth limbs of a stunned dancer,

suggest an origami fortune catcher where it lies
in my hand, nine muscles in the hook of my thumb
contracting to maneuver the small puzzle of bones

in my wrist into a cup that offers little more
than the memory of ghost-flutter. And my life?
I see it as a bullet stuck in the chamber

of a vintage revolver I bargained down
to a third of the price. How tenuous these hands,
whose whorled patterns the color of parsnips

now ruffle the injured wing—
a pleated skirt torn like a shadow book,
lit & already yellowing from within—

so it folds back into itself & collapses. They hold
whatever they can find: even my skull
blooming like a fistful of red berries flung over snow,

a few bright interludes of trumpet between
talk-radio muffled by running water.
Why must the old faucet continue to drip?

Once, scientists believed that unpredictable pain
in patients missing limbs was a fabrication of the mind
& for decades no one knew why someone missing

his left hand could feel fingernails digging
into a palm where none existed. And for years
what was left unresolved grew into an ache

of nerves separated from their endings. And it
must be that our knowledge of what is missing
beats the body into hearing its own limitations,

a vernacular annunciated by absence so *the mouth*
 that in telling its secret, as da Vinci insists,
places itself at the mercy of an indiscreet listener

like a limb that tries to speak but is lost
 & thus eternally present—a bullet that won't discharge,
the other end of the line silenced now as a revolver

that houses multiple chambers,
 a series of selves that spins inside
the single cylinder of its hard body without release.

The Weight

Over the pea plants, Mendel guessed that if two chromosomes touch, one bold strand crosses its leg over the other. I used to believe that when I grew up, I'd change back. Standing around a pool table in that old neighborhood, I remembered the lesson. When I learned to play, the man said *hold the cue like a friend, not like you're trying to own it*. From my dead uncle I learned so many shots go missing that our inevitable vanishing seems always to be on the brink of vanishing. In Church Hill, from the stump of a beheaded crepe myrtle in the front yard another tree grows—not the same tree, but wildness returned, crooked life with tender buds. I woke up to the alarm: the incessant cricketing of a broken smoke detector.

I replaced the battery & from the stump of the lizard's tail, exposed muscles braid over bone so that new skin emerges a different color. There are small scales: sand & grit, a voice that runs through water, rises from the belly like steam, the body being so filled with want. Beep, beep: a man's voice on the message machine was tight, normal & downstairs my mother screamed his name before I left for school. Not because my father swung at her or missed the barn catching a gulf in flames on a hill, but because His name is the lonely she loves & my aunt's husband was dead on their honeymoon. My aunt also was dead & for years he was everywhere she was not. In fact, she's still not where he is. This is how the soul empties itself & floats.

Listening to Billie Holiday, her voice drags silk over gravel & glass. Because I want someone to hear me this way, let's pretend the soul holds a basket of broken eggs. Yolks lost, the shells blade-thin are dressed in film that's dried on the calcium's EKG. Across town, a train howls the edge of a field—the narrowest causeways of desire, back alleys stamped to death on chicken bones & cigarettes. Tomorrow, I'll scrub the walls & sing my mother's song, her freckled hands inside mine. *Soft-Scrub* bleaches flecks in those crevices—perfect corners, eggs & sheets fitted for buoyancy, fight. Once, I lived in a house where downstairs, a couple made love & in spite of brick walls, I heard them,

shrink to the size of a pea, quiet & light as its green weight
held in the hand, and cross each other over. Mendel, you bred
a hybrid strand of bees so vicious they had to be destroyed.

Jumping the Shark

On the last night of their Florida vacation, my mother
fell, walking back to the hotel on a dark path,

my father walking ahead in his light-colored shirt,
making them visible to traffic, marking her way.

I like the *telenovelas* on Spanish tv; they come to an end
instead of sliding into a long disastrous adventure

like the one that ruined *Happy Days*, though I was happy
when *Frasier* had a life after *Cheers*.

On Sunday afternoon, I see her, home again. Straight on,
her glasses in the way, I don't see, at first, the magenta

shadow at the outer corner of her eye, like Björk
making herself up for the awards show on television.

But from another angle, there it is. Time for the black
leather jacket and water skis. Time for the sparkling leap.

Aging in Oak

1.

If I'd been wiser, or a cooper,
I wouldn't lie

in this stopperless amphora
leaking nothing

from its jagged end,
once set in straw or sand, or racks to ride the sea.

I wouldn't be such simultaneity of liquid
and nothingness.

2.

A cooper cuts and smooths
green staves with an adze,

gives them a season
in the air, letting tannin residue

fall dark and ashy
to the zebraed ground.

What's left can be
heated, shaped into a barrel.

3.

I was not modern
and I lived in my mind. Tip me

into the bowl of your tall-stemmed glass,
lipstick on its sterilized rim.

Swirl, and find me mellowed,
after all, in oak,

faint hints of vanilla,
cinnamon, cream, and smoke.

In Our Small Lives

Remember the baby sparrow splayed out on the ground?
We were too young to know death and yet,
when our grandfather crushed it, we knew
what it meant. A simple movement; he used
the sole of his shoe, breaking its miniature body into bits.
Its mother, in the nest above, hovered over the remaining
chicks as if to say, *They are mine, don't touch.*
This, our first taste of death,
a gentle reminder of the delicate balance of life.
We buried that sparrow in the backyard; our mother,
with total disregard for our delicate minds, told us this
was mother nature at work. We needn't worry,
because this was normal. And in our small lives,
this would prove to be true.

Werewolves

He'll admit it; he's a werewolf. There's no need for torches, silver bullets or fantastic engines to ensnare the bones and drag them through the mud. He's a werewolf, to be sure, but not the good kind, just a regular guy who happens to belong *in extremis*. Not the kind you see in movies who can control their splendid transformations and turn into giant dogs lugaru style, or the mad half-men at the beck and call of the old moon, hopeless to resist some *a priori* rage against humanity and who awaken damp and bemused by their clothes tattered in that way familiar to all changelings. Not that kind—sadly—although it seems to be worse during the thunder moon. On those nights it's all he can do to stop himself from peeing on every tree and rubbing his sides against rough bark—the rougher the better. The leaves do seem to smell stronger and cool and the insects' raucous is deafening and almost painful. Thankfully, the nights pass quickly on all fours—a deep burn in the shoulders—seeking a bone-cold pond to snuffle in and scratch his nails sharp against rock and naked dirt.

The Admiral

Every bomber is a suicide bomber. I walked
into the strip club set to detonate. This morning
my hair smelled like smoke, though the laws

in this city insist on separation of booze,
cigarettes, and exposed vaginas. The word *no*
has never left my vocabulary, so what do I know

about taking off my clothes. By the time
the woman hauled her puckered implants to my table
to declare herself *100% gay*, the second boy

who blew up the marathon had bled out
on the boat or been arrested. I stopped listening
to the radio at *cornered*. I stopped apologizing

for not wanting a lap dance after the fourth
naked offer. When the world's on fire, everybody
finds their own way to the water. Nobody

was smoking and the juice was mostly
ice. The manicured pubes of the ladies
on stage humping the laminate with practiced

indifference had all the sex appeal
of street signs or furniture assembly
manuals. I expected a room

packed with wolves, slavering
and grabbish. I walked into
a fishbowl of dead-faced men

paying cash money to be lied to
poorly. I left the radio on
in the car, the voices of reporters

filling the interior with second-
hand blood, wounds head to toe,
I did not check my phone. If any
of those women had offered

to kiss me I would have taken
out my tongue, the thing I sell

to stay alive, left it on the stage
next to the singles and the fog
machine, somebody's discarded

juice glass, calling the name
tattooed across one's lower
back, *Serenity* – serenity. Whatever

fluorescent god we can pay
to grant it or rent it. Holy water
is made by the passing over

of sanctified hands. Melted ice
at the bottom of a glass, a young
killer's blood on a boat, no saints

in this country, not in this century
or this room, neither the cops
nor the boy nor the bomb nor me

and the woman tucking
my torn out tongue in her garter
like a dollar, like a blessing,

like the end of the fairy
tale, the newscast, the amen,
the amen, the end.

landscape with distant horn section

In your absence I boiled the eggs out
of their shells. In your absence
grabbed the hot pan handle, lightly burning
the hand still six days

from touching you. In this city without mountains
or you, the wind's my best measure
of distance -- today it barely stirs, even here
three flights up where you do not live

and the second egg is getting cold. A dead woman
sings in French, *ne me quitte pas*. Yesterday
on the radio a woman mentioned my age
in an ad for supplements against the horrors

of menopause, *When was the last time
you felt right in your body?* and I drove all night
into that voice. I felt the eggs in my torso
thinning to shadows, I drank with strangers

and exaggerated my faults, *ne me quitte pas
il faut oublier tout peut s'oublier
qui s'enfuit deja*
The wind throws over the note on my windowsill,
your absence hangs in me, a rumpled

cotton dress, unironed, the favorite, the tea
as always watching the sky through the trees,
brown edging up the long string, *ne me quitte pas
on a vu souvent, rejaillir le feu de l'ancien volcan*

qu'on croyait trop vieux ne me quitte pas
ne me quitte pas I know there is no easy
forever. I've kissed the forehead of a woman
in death's clear reach, I walk around this house

leaving trails of hair, markers by which you
could find me or know I was here *ne me quitte pas*
Everything is becoming an altar *ne me quitte pas*
in your absence, as my body abandons finally

the glitter of adolescence and Catholicism
ne me quitte pas in favor of a now magic, everything
hewing to itself in a yogic kitchen ecstasy
ne me quitte pas, the teakettle and fire

making their own whistling wind, I don't
want to talk about this anymore. Instead
a story about the body: a week
after my grandfather died, his assistant

hanged herself in the basement that was
their office. They were so close
to discovering a cure for arthritis
but she couldn't do it

without him. In the version
I know, my grandmother found her
but did not cut her down. Her dress
belted and pressed, shoes still, remarkably, on.

**Holy**

The nurses have left work. The pilots have left work.
The blank blue *caelum* covers us, as the split
pull of cloth. I've returned to a city of men
with names scrawled in ink across the throat.
Somewhere, you are hooked up to a machine. The monitor
hides your face, becomes it, black frame and flickering glass.
You sit at the head of the table in our sunroom.
I reach across my mother and touch your arm.
I kiss an area of the cold plastic
where your cheek would be, and blood
vessels prickle purple, below, at your neck.
You are tilting your head—I swear.
This is my dream. We drink tea. They paint
the station walls white for us.

Oath Detailed into a Landscape with a Crow-Quill Pen

It's as though I've put another voice into a cache
of mango leaves in an animal's stomach to starve
out the urine that makes the lily
yellow orbiting a center ten times more blinding
than the sun. After it was unhooked from a chain
& after the hinge closed the two hemispheres,
one man without a shirt who we would call
a boy drove a vehicle carrying what looks like a balloon
compressing the metal pit inside of it. How the pilots
signed it like a cast and wrote their wishes on its charged curve,
even the fins. In one argument about a figure
stopped in time, a woman is rubbed into a silhouette—
charcoal, corseted into her board of a torso. But this is a study
for a painting. What about the ladder
of a strap, the silk textile tattooed into the blood
pattern running over her back? I have taken her,
though she turned away, closing her eyes, thinking
she gave her exposed self to a doctor
instead of the blink it takes a lens to collect the light
reflecting off her skin. Because of the crows
fighting on the roof of my apartment
in a city in the United States
directly above my dumpster in the alley
I'm promising this with an ink that has an idea of a crow in it—
the way an idea of history is a diagram
of a promise of a room
where the windows keep shifting positions.
Even these crows mark the tile with their black current
feathers: above me, military jets
cross the high clouds for air shows
as they do once a year. Let the dew point be my witness
that I do not know what this means: to look at things
like prints of fruit crate art where there is a griffin
guarding three oranges
and decide why a griffin is guarding three oranges,
its lion tail curled into an almost O. As the gray
pipe of the security camera secured to the corner of the building
is my witness, I will never be able to do anything else
but give you a photo of your own shadow
stretched out over the ground. The shadow is an airplane

low over a road that converges with another road,
splits two fields, then opens up to a town
dotting a shoreline with peaked roofs.

I only have a copy of this body
diving over a line that extends to the sea, the city
grainy as a silverpoint drawing—the oldest
way to draw a pen across a surface—
putting metal to the page:
glue mixed with ground bone.

The Muse Appears with a Moon Rock and a Tuning Fork

Me me me me. I've already written myself
out the car door. I'd been driving through a night
forest: pines, maples, anxious boxes of houses.

I called my father. I was lost. He said, turn
around, and there I was, at the side of the road,
the plants shaped like hands. *Bon chance*. Strange

I can talk to you like this. I meant to leave
by Amtrak for New York with a red suitcase,
the zippered cloth edged with leather

shutting inside my white breath: but I woke
to ice erasing the sidewalk in a long smear. Sugar.
My lungs rustle like Mylar balloons. See,

I'm myself, written awake, in socks, cross-legged
on your bed, wondering about something...how I failed
you because I lost you in celluloid

fields quiet with soldiers, in Dr. *Zhivago*.
The sun will set, the clouds mottled with ink
numbers of what we owe. So, rub my

table with a rag. I can't talk to you
like this, like I left you in Paris, where a painter
is warming her hands over a bowl of boiled water.

Hello, Goodbye

When nothing began,
you tethered yourself

to the West
and let the ball fly.

You let mileage do the work
of pointing a finger

and squaring a jaw.
Hear that? A baby cries through

someone else's monitor.
A baby cries

through another radio,
someone turns a corner

down. A page listens.
More or less, you're the din

in my hard-of-hearing ear,
while the other's pressed against

this decade's sure crib.
How the night clears up

isn't clear at all—
it's not a logic that gets us

but the wick of a feeling.
If I had something to say

it would be this: *Come outside
with me, but ignore the moon.*

She Seemed to Arrive Slowly

For hours I pulled toward you, sea star—

I was a traveling pause, I went
deliberately across that dark floor.

The sand created clouds of my lungs.
Taking pleasure in holding zero,

my hands stirred the water and made
ornaments of oyster shells.

To charm your five fingers,
I unrolled a fog from my ear—

a long signature to know me by,
a dim and dissolving sugar. Star,

you are the evening that's easy to keep near.

The Photo Shoot

I am told to sidle up
to a tree; I ask its limbs

to surround my own
with leaves. There is a clothing there

is a clothing. Under a canopy of lenses
I subvert my self. I am almost

invisible. If my eyes would dilate
they would be two acorns.

There is something
about the veins and pores of flora

that my body responds to
by becoming unseen, becoming

too small to see; what's left
are a few bobby pins

and one clavicle. It might be
another body's branch.

The thing that's difficult
is the timing of it all. Knowing

when to breathe. Knowing when
to do anything, to ask for water,

for a robe or a mirror, to ask for a mirror.
To ask for proof of the shot,

of the shoot that emerged
years after my body left.

The Civil War Photographer

In my portrait studio, I place each
soldier's head between a metal vise

to keep him still. But things move
too fast in the field.

I photograph what remains
after the fighting's done: not smoke

but the cold cannon, the burnt-
out mill, the singed hills. Branches

curling inward like a man's nails
grown wild. I wish I had the speed

& color to capture
the ceasefire, when soldiers

on both sides go blackberrying.
The chaos of their arms

plunging into the gaps,
skin brambling to a blackish-red,

mouths bursting from juice & thorns.
How they hurt for what sustains them.

Lenox Avenue

after Romare Bearden's The Block

Footsteps pause & pace overhead: *lunga*,
andante, while something simmers
in someone else's kitchen—an aroma of split onion
with crushed garlic cackling in lard.
Sound & scent are trade winds

you catch in your mind. Soon
you arrive at the stove in North Carolina
where your great-grandmother is laughing
at a story back before

it became your grandfather's,
then your mother's, repeated like rows of seed
in loam. You're as much cecil, knotted with red
clay & sweet potato root, as you are these paved

asphalt streets. From your friend's Harlem balcony,
cars above & below the broken yellow line
push forward, as if cursive letters
on penmanship paper

where you first learned
to sign your name. Where you let it fill
the whole page. On your studio table
one paper sun rises

over a sea voyage two kids
watch on TV—their backs to the window
through which the other sun warms rooftops
up & down the block. Both skies

are the lime-tinged indigo of Southern
doorframes that neither flies nor haints
are said to cross. Both suns'
edges are cut smooth, their texture

crinkled like bed sheets
or sheet music or your wife's eyes when she laughs
to herself. Outside: the moon

Song

A ship is a neutral wand, friction
Denuded by spells of phosphor lotion
Theologian faces drool
Psalms in a column of gold between

Bucktoothed nimbi I floss like a sea
With fingers bone of clean & "ocean"
Pressing send on me

& the ship is unnatural, so my hair fills with fleas
& the chemical bath I dip me in tickles
& the Lord is inch by inch my friend
& a rat is a garden in concrete wind

& on the back of my eyeballs a dynamite prickles
As alphabets listen
& I bald & idiots glisten

Boy Racer

Fantails shed their silhouettes
Off a mythic hook
And crickets laugh like lawyers
Eating Möbius strips

Flint continues learning
Light frequent as its name
The roof beneath is forked
Charges through the hour

What if waves with windmill heads
Never asked for duels
The stories I have with being stung
With bees are already fuel

With the twang of the arrow
And snap of the bow
The Christian riding next to me
“His tears are truly frozen”

Talks of *Mist* and smells like hands
“Some of them instantly garbage”
Others slow and automatic
The woods maintain demand

A rim financed with apples
We never touched a thread
Shadow ironed with color
Their hearts beat quicker there

Rays a logical ransom
Parallel to crime
The driver listens while the hills
Loop from black to green

“I is not that scribbled face”
Says morning to a guy
“But coins I have to make
So pink slips caps-lock day”

Math continues paper crowns
Pulping in kerosene
And a white that amplifies
Running up its beams

Fred Astaire

One slips inside rain's costume
And flails like a pharaoh for sound.
A hymn farts in the balcony
But no amen abounds.
When perception, vein of ants,
Swirls under sidewalks and a stray
Kitten lights upon your lap
You pass into a crack in class
That isn't even there
Paint the stage with fleet harassing
Lights collecting rings
To form a face like a hinge
Upon which bliss can swing and creak.
What I feel remains discrete.

Sam

you are a new
kind of body
made out of glass
If you lie down
on the thick carpet
in my parents' living room
I promise not to break you
I would like to shine
a flashlight into your chest
Your heart is forty-two cherry
Lifesavers stuck together
in the shape of a fish heart
If I was a glass-bottom boat
we could drift real slow
downriver to Vicksburg
We could do a lot of things
real slow if you like

Sam

you are a new
kind of garden
planted in my throat
The moon grows big pink
when you start soft-talking
into my sousaphone
I guess that's why I want
to swim in your fountain
make dog sounds
in your rose bushes
You are the first thing
I think of when I think of
lightning bugs & rabbits &
x-rated flower beds
Everything about you
tastes Wild Turkey
it's a hell of a thing
I want to run naked
in your summer grass
& start a family
of little gardens with you

Sam

you are a new
kind of birthday party
& hotter than
an aluminum slide
Everyone loves you
You are a stunning Appaloosa
When I put my legs around you
I almost feel Presbyterian
I feel like Stonewall Jackson
with my arm sawed off
I am delirious
I think I'll call you Antietam
You make me want to kill someone

Sam

you are a new
kind of suicide note
written on the chalkboard
in algebra class
What is the standard equation
for being dead
I'd like to know
because I haven't seen you
since Tuesday
& now it's Friday
I've spent the past
three days in detention
working on a solution to
 $x = \text{you} + \text{me} / \text{death}$
but the only answers
I've come up with so far
are lyrics to a Nine Inch Nails song

Sam

you are a new
kind of retention pond
filled with baby hammerhead sharks
Wouldn't you rather
be an ocean
We could live together until I'm dead
I would make a very nice iceberg
I want to settle in
I want to breaststroke for hours at a time
You don't understand
half of what I say
You ask *what is an ocean?*
I hold a mirror up to your enormous eyes
& shatter it into a thousand pieces

Like New Nickels

I saw the inside of a heart today, sliced open
like Christmas dinner. My wound
in anatomy class. I lost

the not-love-of-my-life to a woman
from Phoenix. I knew nothing
about either of them, except

that his dark hair got me lost and
his eyes were compasses
bright like new nickels. And

three years later I see a dinner,
several dinners as each of
those nickel eyes watch me

eat. And as I pull a salad to my lips
and teeth those new nickels are
pockets-full, and jingle

against other loose change. At once
I am the watcher, my dull copper eyes
remembering five-cent gazes.

Paper River

Picture a big book, like a dictionary, only not a dictionary,
the kind with pages edged in pale toenails
of gold,

& the big book is filled w/ paper birds
praying for fire.

Through the window I see girls in their white-dart dresses

& bare legs.

I envy them. I want everything they have,
their lightness, the tiny bones in their wrists. At first I thought

I was the book & then, the mind.
I am somewhere between the wing
& feather.

Picture the sorry meteor I make

when I make my way toward them, knowing safety is a lie,
dragging the debris of my body,

all wing & weather, something in me eager for the burning, bearing my glass
parachute & my acre of rain.

Fish in a Bucket

You, deep in rough surf.
It divides & creams the brown
kite of your body. I cannot locate myself.
Here you urge me forward & devout,
I go. Men carrying buckets
blue & brightly spilling fresh fish, their air
drowned hearts, their silver
muscle all one wish
for water. I am not a fish.
And I cannot stop *stepping*
on the fish, my blind
feet finning clumsy in the sugar-
sand. The waterline's hot blue
rim a halo belting my hips.
A red sprawl of lobster
canvassing your fine hands.
Something beautiful about the lung
of want in your face.
I am a crown, a cast hook,
the unfinished ring needing itself. Fine.
Barbed. Your come alive in me.
For the love of God, I am not
a bucket. Not a wish.
Here is how I will remember it.
Rum drunk. Dark
braids of my hair undone.

A Good-bye in 6 Parts

Here, for instance, is a long red skirt. I have strung
it to my waist.

The fruits are hymns: orange, lemon, tangerine. Smudge pots. Almond stands.

I paid for everything.

*

Full sail & temple windows.
The hive of bees & cockfights. Marmalade. Your tongue dredging
me.

The cistern of my body tipping. Saltwater guttering the goat trail.

*

Climbing the clay embankment, I imagined that the semi truck drivers were not
shouting sexual things to me.

*

The distant cruiseships at dawn, glittery & sad.
In a way, it was like a treehouse, all luck & rope.

Beneath the dripping tree, I drank from a green bottle.

*

Hitchhiking: *Pensaba que eras prostituta.*

*

Everything starting.

The soaked cherries of a bar tin.

Blue bowls of crushed tomatoes.

How you would pull my hair to the side to fuck me better.

I press blue hearts into the holes of my ears.

There is delirium in our fucking, & lights in the trees.

Return to Henderson Canyon

At dawn the stars swallow back their hard glitter

which emerges in birdsong, the ironwood trees
crackling with sound

as the heat of the day drags its shawl through the air,

and the birds go silent in sunlight,
sunlight which tears open the dandelion,

the fragile, doomed world a huge pot,
we constantly fracture and glue together again.

To smell the creosote plant, cup your hands
around a branch of blossoms, breathe into it,
it breathes back at you its sharp and musty scent.

Bees through the heliotrope, a blue surround,

a durable sound, how does anyone ever
stay present for long.

A cactus thorn in my foot, get the tweezers,
pull there, no, damnit, there

the leathery flap of the crow crosses, recrosses
your body, my body with his shadow, not doomed, are we?

yellow pollen between the fingertips
feels midway between air and dust

the rooms we thickly people and unpeople,

desires we lug around, lay out, fold up and zip shut.

The flowers sniffed and praised, picked, queried
to the last petal, pressed and tossed.

Root Position

Life-film of black and white
in minor keys. There lies
the augmented self. A reaching
—not forward—but back,

down, in. Where notes
once slid freely to major,
were unchained in C,
the root of

Sunday afternoons,
children's silhouettes
outside panes
of leaded glass,

two adults sitting
at an oak table,
newspapers spread,
agrément of tapping

as a girl's feet pressed pedals,
released sounds held
for longer than designed,
catching like moths

the vibrating chords,
as if able to join
the diminished triads,
the double sharp arpeggios—

the notes heard in different
ways by different ears,
altered by the unreachable
pinblock bridge of time.

How do we measure this hourly
life, the nightly case
of pedals? We look for notes even
in the shutting of eyes, of lids.

Lexiphilia

She was told at eight she had the disease.
The doctors shook their heads gravely,
Her mother fed her voraciously.
She has *the* disease, her teachers whispered,
looking from side to side to make sure no one overheard,
as if it might be contagious:
worse than a pig-like flu
or any helminthologic substance
known to man or beast (as these come and go in every school).
Her mother's mouth dropped open.

They soon learned that she had a more virulent strain
of the sad illness. It was not easy for anyone, least of all her.
The way they pushed themselves into her,
pushed their way out of her. She took them and smeared
them all over her, like a child in the playground who loves mud too well.

I remember the time she tried to purge herself of the disease.
She was in college and her bones began to show.
Ah, the thousand *petite morts* of the etymologist.
They will eat her alive. And they don't even have any brains.

She smiles, insists, I am not sick.
I just love the *bella viaggio* of the
dictionary, the playful romp with the word of the day,
I eat these wormy strings until, like tapeworms,
they wriggle through my body. Look at the way my fingers move.
I do not mind. I want no cure.

Such a shame, they sigh. And she was pretty, too.
(There's nothing wrong with television!)
Her eyes light up in response.
As if worms spell *tragedy*.

Art

Presentation of Mind



Flight of Time, the Fragile Present, Memory's Delicate Reflection



Reflections on a Passing Moment



The Anticipation



Remnants of Striving



Mourning



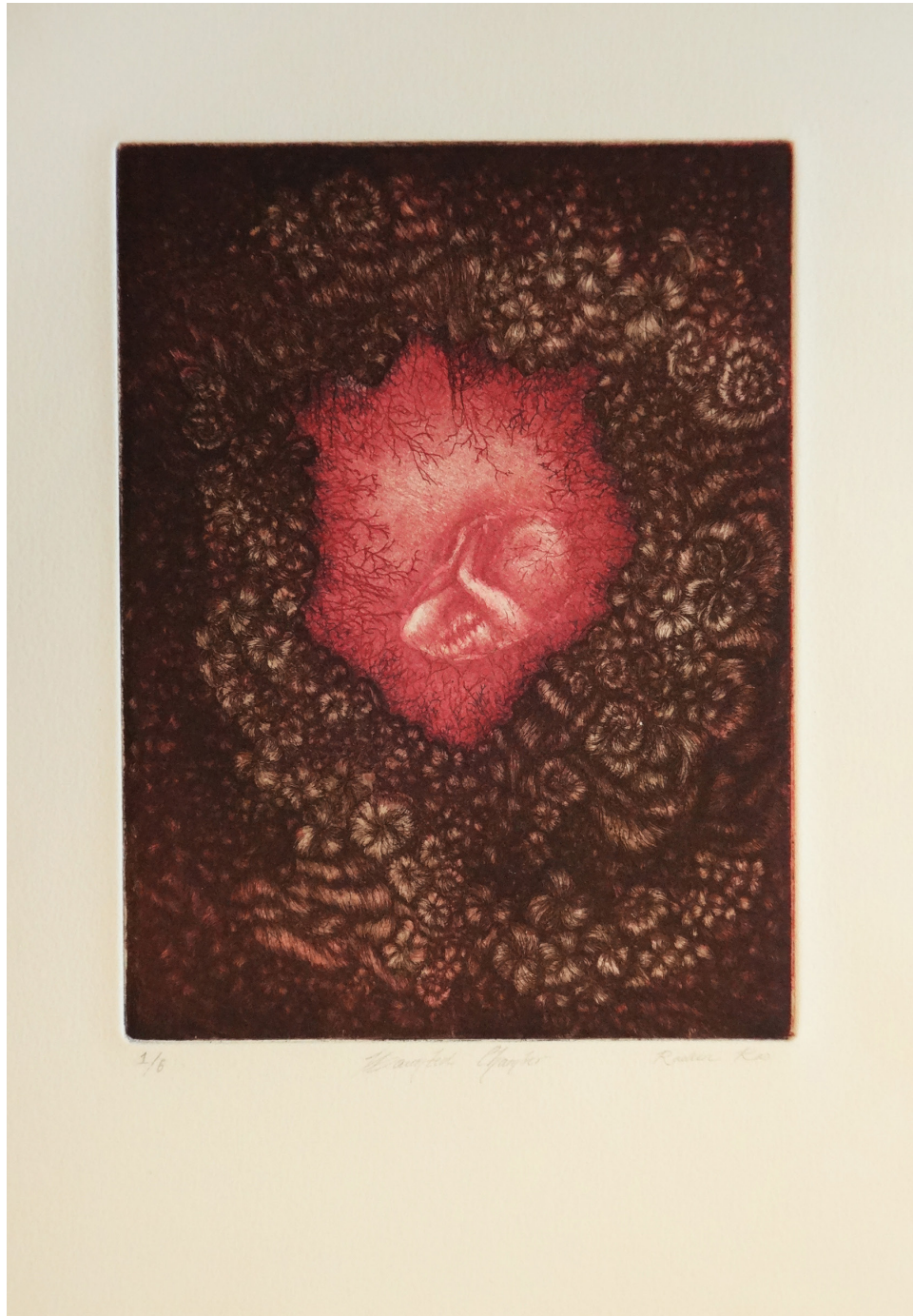
Regarding the Future Landscape



Inhospitable



Haunted Chamber



More Beautiful in Death



Perfect Grave II



Mother's Treasure, Father's Pride



Paper Thin Walls



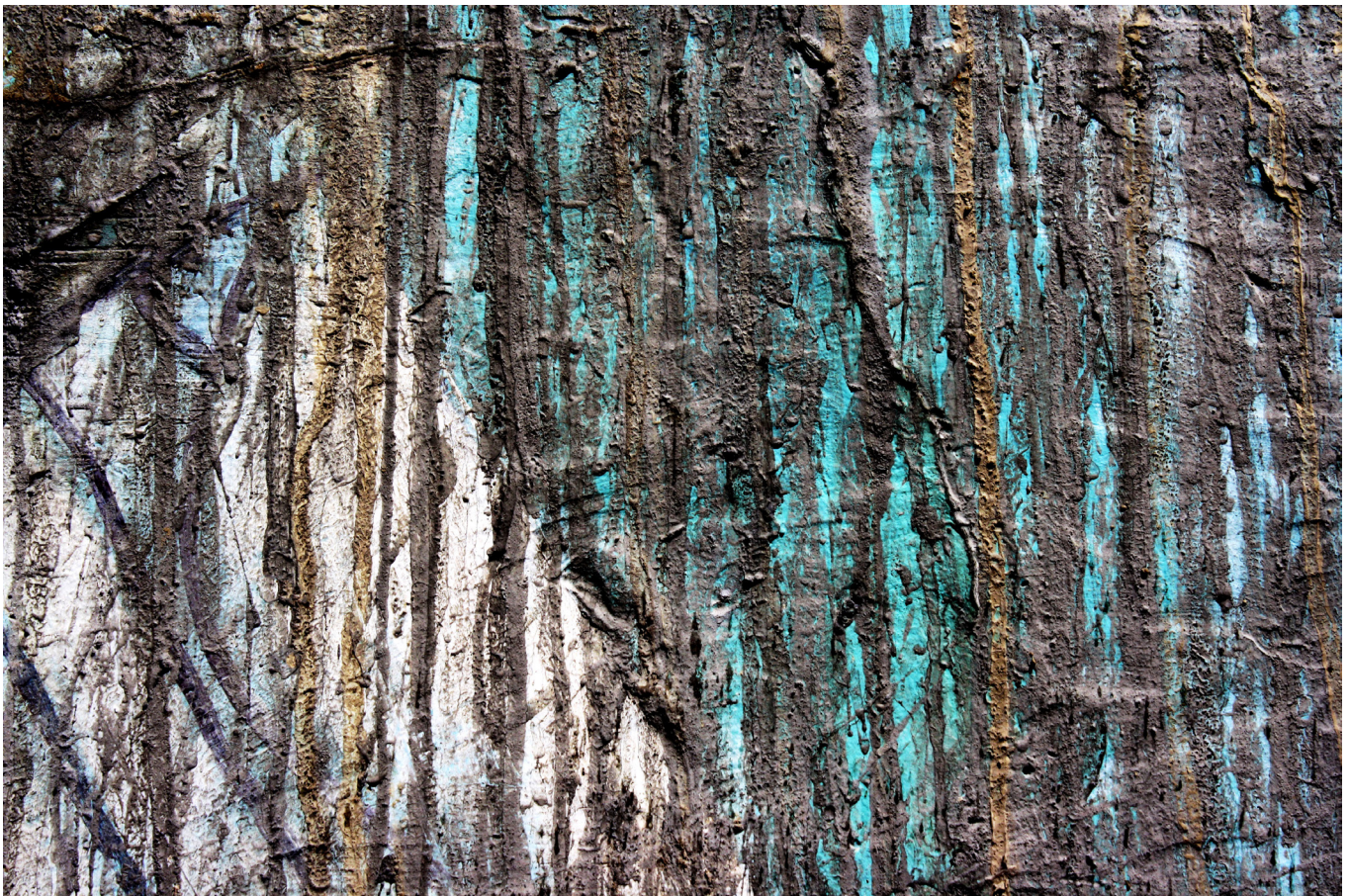
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Depot Sky



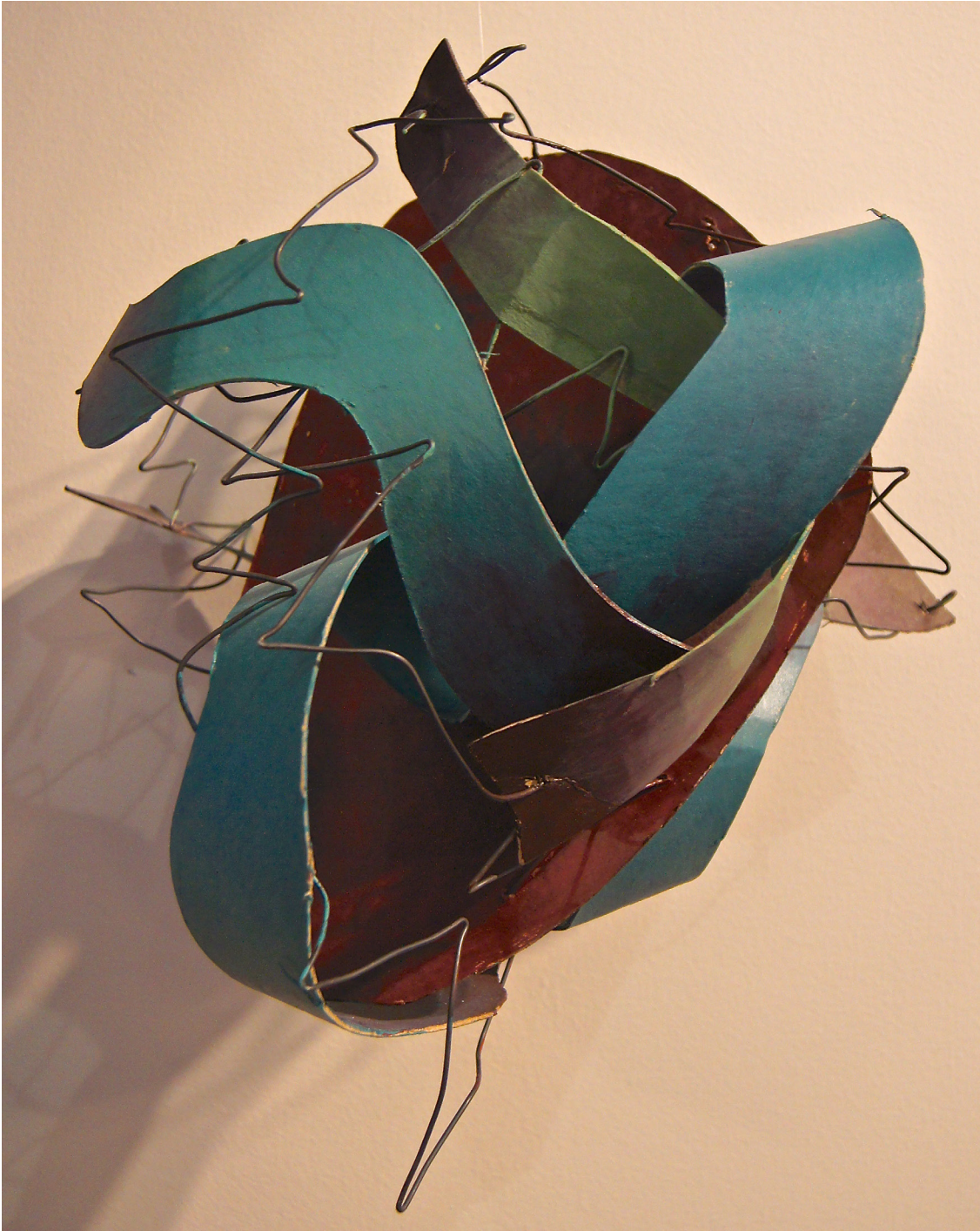
Drip Abstract



Houndini



Heart Monitor



Full Circle



Wind, Water, and Steel



I Get Found In My Mind



Fiction

The Smoker

He gets home between six and six fifteen every night, driving up in his blue truck with a six pack of domestic beer and a bag of carryout food from somewhere. He parks on the left side of the one-way street, crosses, then goes to his apartment on the second floor on the south end side. She comes home at approximately the same time and parks in whatever slot is closest to their building, though she favors the right hand of the one-way street when possible. She lives in the apartment on the second floor on the north side. She has drapes; he has blinds. After entering their respective apartments, each turns on the light by the door, looks around, then crosses to close their windows. You are surprised by how often the stereotypes hold them together and apart. On your porch, you light another cigarette, willing something more to happen between them.

You know that he parks on the left side of the street, because he received three parking tickets for not having an updated city sticker. You discover all of this when he left his car for three days without use. Business trip? You think not. He does not dress like the type who needs a business trip. Khaki pants, a white shirt, and a tie of some color, any color, never matters which color, every day of the week. As he leaves and returns home at the same time every day, this is not a business traveler. No, it was a personal trip. Not on a weekend, so no wedding of college friends that he is obligated to in any way. Besides, all of his friends are probably married by now or at that stage if they are not married, they are spoused in some way, either living with, engaged, or simply settled into their couple hood. He is the last of their group, as there always is in every group, without spouse, without lover, and hence their token single friend. The trip, you suppose, a small vacation to visit the family, as he does not want to sacrifice a weekend or a holiday for the obligation, hence the three parking tickets.

Two days of the week she arrives home later. Clearly she takes an exercise class, as her normally dark curly long hair is pulled into a ponytail and she is wearing sweats (pretty sweats, though, black yoga pants and a hooded black pullover, not the real sweats that women wear on nights alone without boyfriends or lovers or husbands, sweats with stretched out waistbands, holes, and coffee stains, and t-shirts or sweatshirts attained from ex-boyfriends, ex-lovers, and ex-husbands). So on those late nights she wears sweats instead of the professional garb she earned the right to wear with her degree from the University of Wisconsin, a sticker displayed proudly in the back window of her red two door Honda civic. She too lives on the second floor, though across the hall from him.

At one point, they were attractive to each other. He would wait in his car until she pulled up in hers, then jump quickly and efficiently from his as if he too had just arrived, so that they would meet at the shared front door to the four flat at the same time, then joke and jostle their personal belongings until one of them managed to get the key. Then he would hold the door for her, and you could almost see them in the small entranceway, each getting their mail, each trying not to look too interested or seem too forward, each peeking at the other's correspondence for some sort of shared interest—a magazine, a coupon, or even a takeout menu—so they had something, anything to say. Then you can see them on the steps, slowly, politely, leading and following the other, he taking in her well formed butt on the stairs, she wallowing in the heavily fragranced smell of fast food she never indulges in. You see their lights go on in their separate apartments.

You know all of this because you are quitting smoking, and part of your quitting program is to smoke only outside, which is not really a quit smoking program so much as a make-it-a-pain-in-your-ass-to-smoke program. You did quit actually, for a brief three week period where you thought obsessively about cigarettes all of the time, chewed gum until your jaw ached with pleasure, and planted yourself by the smoker at the office who was in Alcoholics Anonymous and hence allowed to smoke without anyone telling him how bad it was for him or that it was going to kill him or that he was hurting the environment or other people's health or that it was a filthy

stinky habit or that he was weak person to allow himself to be ruled and manipulated by a billion dollar industry since at least he wasn't a drunk anymore. There's a hierarchy to addiction, you know, and you actually considered starting heroin in that brief three week period because you knew that if you were a heroin addict, nobody, nobody in the whole goddamned world of your pathetic little universe would say jack shit about an incidental nicotine habit. They would light the cigarette for you, buy you packs on their way past liquor stores and gas stations. Anything to keep you off the smack.

Smoke away, your coworkers told him, the same people who bitched about the thermostat every time it was a half degree outside of their range of comfort, the same people who took two hour lunches to work out at the company's gym, drank only bottled water, and discussed over lunch how many calories were okay to consume. Smoke away, they said, waiving every right to clean air and a friendly environment that the American Lung Association had fought for. And he smoked. You just sat your ass beside him and breathed his air and craved his smell and the taste of him in a way you hadn't craved anything or anyone ever before, until all you wanted was to kiss him, to feel his nicotine coated tongue in your throat, rub the roof of his mouth with your tongue, and taste the sweet tickle of nicotine on that insatiable itch on the back of your mouth that eighteen packs of Trident had done nothing to fix. And the day you do almost kiss him, just to get to taste, you start smoking again, since you are married now and not prone to kissing strangers any longer, and the only reason you are supposedly quitting again, and smoking on your porch and stalking your neighbors, now, is that you feel like it is the adult thing to do and not out of any acute desire to quit at all.

Their coupling did not go well, but it did happen. You know this because they went from orchestrated meetings at the front door with awkward conversation and flirty smiles, from his going out of his way to help her bring in her groceries or her new desk from Target on Saturdays with more flirty smiles and her intentionally dressed down but still adorable Saturday clothes (again with the yoga pants or perhaps a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt or a comfortable sweatshirt, but still showered and shaved, her hair never, ever in a ponytail as most women's Saturday hair is, and always with a glimpse of her Victoria Secret bra strap or her camisole cleavage), to her waiting in her car until he is inside and she has seen him turn on his light and presumably locked his door to sit and watch TV and eat his takeout dinner. If she arrives first, and he witnesses, he will actually circle the block and return a mere three minutes later. You mourn the loss of their romance for them and for yourself and wonder what went wrong. Perhaps he plays too many video games (he owns both Playstation and Nintendo), and she had envisioned antiquing on Saturdays or wandering city streets packed with kitschy little stores where she could grab his arm and laugh and snuggle. Perhaps she is too well organized, and he resents her need for dinner plans made at least three days in advance. Maybe it was bad timing or bad karma or just plain bad sex. That happens, you know, especially when you are of a certain age and know yourself well enough to know that the thing that attracted you—the one night of sex—was not good enough to even sustain another night. Their drama played out, their romance over, you stop watching.

Your friend Carrie calls. Your husband answers the phone. He sends you the Carrie signal, as Carrie is your guilt friend. Your friend who makes you crazy with her blathering about the men she meets on retreats for her church, men who are married, ministers, or who have already told her to her face they are not interested but she still feels the need to walk you through every excruciating detail of every meal and conversation she shared with these men including what everyone ate and the small talk that starts every conversation, and then asks you, "What do you think?" And all you can think but cannot say is, *oh my god get laid* and you know you are going to hell.

Carrie has been "saving herself" for the right man, which was a fine principle for her when she was young and 25 pounds overweight, but now she is a 38 year old virgin who is one hundred pounds overweight, and desperately wants to be married and having babies, but has not even been kissed since she was seventeen years

old. And you do want to tell her what she wants to hear—that she will find someone, that there is someone for everyone, that even though he said that he didn't want to date her, that it probably is for religious reasons. You want to believe it, that Carrie is sweet and nice, and that the world is not so shallow that just because she is fat no one will ever notice her. But you find her completely and utterly irritating. You have nothing in common with her whatsoever, and you know that you would not even be friends with her but that she cornered you in a Laundromat, found out where you lived, and never went away. Even when you moved seven hundred miles and four states away, Carrie never left. Your husband cannot handle her. He fakes coughing fits and diarrhea so as not to get stuck on the phone with her when you are legitimately not home. Even though you are rarely there when she calls (at the library, the grocery store, or your book group are your husband's regular lies), she still calls regularly, and is the only one of your long distance friends who has ever spent the time or the money to come and visit you. When he sends you the signal, you nod resignedly, take the phone, light one cigarette then grab the entire pack, and go to the front porch.

In the middle of your third cigarette, Carrie starts crying, and you realize that you have not been listening, simply nodding to yourself and making appropriate conciliatory sounds every once in a great while. You retrace the bits of conversation that you can recall—younger sister (29) getting married (including every detail of the wedding, which includes a weekend gathering, a secular ceremony despite the Catholic family's objections, the chicken or beef entrées, and fourteen different wedding dress descriptions), can't find a dress that she likes, no date for the wedding, and youngest sister (a mere 22 years old) probably getting engaged. These are traumatic events, but Carrie does not usually cry, is not a crier by nature. You switch to counseling mode, knowing Carrie must and should hate you right now.

"What's wrong, honey? Why are you crying?" You finally listen.

"I went to the hospital to visit Lisa. She had a girl. (You have no recollection of any woman named Lisa nor the imminent birth of any baby.) So I went after work, taking the six o'clock bus instead of the 5:30, which meant I had to take the seven, the eight or the nine to get home. But I really wanted to meet the baby, and she was only two days old and I held her and Lisa fell asleep. Lou had gone to the cafeteria to get some sleep. So I just sat there, holding this brand new baby, tiny and perfect, and the room was so quiet, just us, no one else. I just listened to the clock. And I thought, I could take her, you know? And at least have half of what I want. I could just take her. She would be mine. Something would be mine." She pauses. You say nothing. "But then Lou came back, and he took the baby from me. It was just so quiet. Just the sound of the clock. I didn't get home until 11 because I missed the 7, the 8, and the 9. I had to take a cab because it was so late."

"Wow," you say. "Biological clock?" You are all wrong in your humor trajectory. You know it the moment it comes out of your mouth, but it was just sitting there, full of it for you—a hospital room, a new baby that doesn't belong to her, and a ticking clock.

"Am I ugly? Am I a terrible horrible ugly person?" She asks.

"No," you say, believing it.

"Then why?" she asks, and starts crying again. "I don't want to be alone."

There is nothing to say, no way to say that you are alone no matter what, that even though you are married and have found your person, you are still alone. And you know that even if you said that to her, she would not hear you. No, she would not believe you. So you say nothing, because you want to feel kind even for the briefest of moments.

You stay on the front porch when you are done. And when your husband comes out, he grabs a cigarette for himself and sits in the chair beside you to smoke it, even though he has essentially quit smoking and only smokes two or three a day, mostly to be with you. And you know for the first time that even though you are married, even though you are together and make plans about houses and puppies and eventually children and moving

to new places and make lists of vacations that you want to take to places that are foreign and unattainable, you know that you guys are brand new, and that the places will probably never be seen, the dream house never built, and that you are average in every way.

When you tell him this, he says, "I never thought anything different."

"And you're okay with that?" you ask.

"Of course."

"I guess I just always thought that we were special or different in some way."

"You don't think everybody thinks that?" he asks.

"I don't really think about other people," you say. "I guess I just didn't think we'd be this un-sexy so soon," you say, looking at him in his drawstring shorts and white undershirt and smiling, then at your own jeans and tank top—the shirt chosen specifically for its comfort so that you would not have to change into pajamas for bed.

"You don't really have to," he says, responding to the easy part. "Just everybody thinks it."

And he says things like this, and you know that he is adult, grown-up, sure of himself and the person he is in a way that you will never be. That he will be a good father, a good parent in a way that you are not able, not equipped to be. That he will never walk by the oven at two o'clock in the morning, or whenever it is that your baby wakes, and think *I could. I could put the baby in the oven.* (Because new babies are even smaller than turkeys.) You know that he will never shake your baby or even be frustrated to the point of thinking about shaking your baby, because he is calm in that way, and children, nieces and nephews, kids in the park, respond to that calm, curl up on his lap, and lean into his body for hugs. Kids rarely know what it is that they are thinking and feeling, and you know this, because you feel like a kid most of the time, and respond in the same manner to him, reach for him in the night to calm you in a way that you are incapable of being calm, lean into him on the couch to learn how to be still like he is, steady yourself at the sink, doing the dishes, with your pelvis against the counter in the manner you have seen him do in order to mimic, to capture, if even for one minute, that thing that he is.

In the three flat directly across the street, a new couple has moved in on the second floor. You know they are new to each other as well as the neighborhood, and that they are not married but living together, for when they moved in there were two of everything and multiple boxes of the same things. Fifteen boxes of kitchen stuff alone—that's two adult apartments, not one. And none of it still in Crate and Barrel packaging or in the original appliance box, which means no wedding. Two dining tables, one round, one rectangular with four chairs each; two adult beds: one a queen with an antiqued iron head and footboard and the other a double with no head or footboard; two dressers: one an IKEA black and the other either an inheritance or an antique store find; two televisions, a large and a small; two stereos, though one has components and independent speakers, the other a compact system with everything attached; and two couches, one solid navy blue, wide, and long, the other a pale Martha Stewart green with a striped square ruffle at the bottom. The couches are the evidence of the newness of them. Everything else can be accounted for as simply second room material, an office, a guest room, or even a radio or TV to cook by, but two couches says brand new. Especially in the city. Each night you watched her move pictures on the wall, reshelv books, replace lamps, and reorganize the knickknacks on the built-in shelves after they had moved the entertainment center, the TV, or the couch (the green Martha Stewart instead of the blue).

The first three weeks are a wonderful time for them and for you—watching them negotiate the new standards of their couple-hood. She is determined to get everything unpacked and decorated, each night changing from her work outfit into a pair of jeans or sweats, pulling her hair into a ponytail, and then painting the trim around the front windows, hanging curtains (sheer ones, thank god) and laying artwork around the room for him to

hang when he gets home. He arrives home later than she does, and you watch him come home, gather her close to him, and sometimes tumble to the floor in kissing. It's lovely really, to see them so happy and know that all of those months of planning and thinking and wondering and dating and getting to know and then wondering some more and questioning whether moving in together was a good idea had paid off in this type of bliss for them. She would run from the back of the house where the kitchen was to get him to reach the wok, the bread maker, or the waffle maker that they kept at the top of the cabinets. He would jump up from his book, his movie, or his TV program just to chase her back there, get the desired small appliance and hold it above her, away from her, just to tease.

They buy a new car together, a silver Volkswagen, and you watch them on the street negotiating who gets to drive. On weekends, when they go shopping for a new throw blanket for the couch or a new bed spread or a new salad bowl; or when they go to the movies or a play and come home talking animatedly about the merits of the drama or the characterization; or when they go to Whole Foods and they carry in the economy toilet paper, salsa bins, and mesh bags full of fresh produce; you watch them stand across the car from each other, each with their own set of keys, discussing who gets to drive. He is significantly taller than she, so any decision requires a significant change in mirrors, in seat, and in music in the CD changer. Until finally he drives each time, and she simply waits at the door until he hits the unlock button on their key chain that second time.

There's a woman in the bathroom of the Gap, in the front section of the rest area on a couch, breastfeeding a baby, presumably a new baby—it's sucking and breathing and snorting and hiccupping all at once, the way brand new babies do before they figure out the biology of their lives, before they figure out how to relax, just relax and let the one thing happen, breathing and feeding at once. And you stop, stare, and hold your breath until the baby breathes, hiccups, snorts or sucks again, to make sure that it's okay. The mother is crying. Her face is splotchy and broken by her tears. She is trying to hold her baby, wipe her tears off of her face and her baby all at once, trying to keep her tears off that baby mashed to her breast.

You nod at the woman and pass by her, into the bathroom part of the bathroom, away from the couch with the baby and the woman holding it. When you come out, the woman is still there, still crying, still holding the child, and you stop.

"Are you okay?" you ask. "Is there anything I can do?"

You envision getting a cup of water for her, or gathering a roll of toilet paper for her, something soothing and simple, something to take care of this woman and this moment.

"I'm fine," she says. "Everything is fine."

"Are you sure? I could get you some water or some toilet paper," you say.

"Could you? Just for awhile?" the mother asks, and piles the baby into your arms. Then leaves.

You hold the baby for a bit, just staring at it, looking at it and into it—the way you can with the brand new and the very old. You juggle it around, laying him on your shoulder for a bit, then in your lap, then back to your shoulder, then cradle it against you, feeling its small body mold and re-form in every position, craft itself to you, around you or onto you. You finally lay it in your lap, and slip your fingers into the edge of the shirt to peek into the diaper. It is a boy. He fusses a bit.

"It's okay," you say. "Mommy will be back soon."

You repeat this as you walk in circles in the bathroom. You sing to him, the song your father sang to you as a child, "Bye baby bunting, daddy's gone a hunting, to catch a little rabbit skin, to wrap his baby ____ in."

You do not know the baby's name, though, cannot fill it into the song, fit it in the way you are supposed

to. You start another, the one with the baby in a cradle in a tree top, but that one too requires a name. After a while, you do not know how long, the baby starts fussing. You sit on the floor with him and hum a bit, hold him to your chest so he can feel your chest moving and vibrating. You stick your finger in his mouth to soothe him. Your watch says 4:30, but that does not tell duration, as you had not checked the watch when you got the baby, so there is still no way to know how long, exactly how long, you have been with this child and the mother without. How long constitutes abandonment? What is the line between a break and desertion?

“We’ll give her another fifteen, then we’ll do something. Now that we know we’ve had some time together. Does she do this often? What’s your name?” you ask him. You see a baby bag and look through it. There are diapers and spare clothes, tiny clothes, impossibly small, and yet you know now, from holding this boy, from feeling his body, that even though they are so small that they will bag and gap on him when you change him. “What’s your name, little one?”

“Well, baby, what do you say we take a little walk?” You sling the bag over your shoulder, place him on your shoulder, cradle him the way you have seen other mothers do it, then walk through the door and back into the store.

You walk through the accessories area and then through clearance. You check your watch and realize it’s been an hour since the mother left you with this baby, and you start to feel like the worst mother in the world for letting her leave him. *Don’t worry* you whisper and then you realize—you could leave him, just leave him, and no one would know. You could just lay him in the middle of a Clearance rack, and some girl looking for a size 2 peasant blouse (the absurdity!) would find him, squawk, then do the right thing.

“You are not mine,” you whisper, and the baby starts to cry. You go through lingerie. Pubescent girls choosing nighties and cotton camisoles with matching equally adorable cotton pants to wear while they masturbate alone with stolen romance novels in their parents’ houses in the beds their parents bought them give you the look you have given countless other women with babies who cry in public spaces—that look that says, *fuck off* and *can’t you even get your kid to be quiet for fifteen minutes?* The baby wails. It’s an impatient look, the look of the young and the un-childed, the look that demonstrates how important good cotton semi-sexy everyday wear cotton underwear is to single women, and why new mothers, alone and uncertain and disdained and trapped in their houses, put their babies in freezers after getting that look at the Gap.

“This is a cigarette moment,” you whisper as you go through the revolving door to the outside world. “Don’t worry, baby. She’ll be right back.”

You juggle the baby, the baby bag, your own bag, and your urgent need for a cigarette as you dig furtively through the deep pockets of your coat for cigarettes and a book of matches. You used to love the deep pockets of this coat, the fact that they could hold so much and leave treasures from year to year, now you curse them. You juggle some more as you try to free two hands to strike the match and cup it and light the cigarette. You get one puff before baby loses his mind into that full out shaking baby scream that only brand new babies are capable of. People on the street are looking at you, condemning you not only for smoking with a brand new baby but also for being outside with him without all of the baby bundle stuff you are supposed to have in the middle of winter. You know that any one of them could have taken this baby, stolen him away, left him with proper authorities in a place with fluorescent lights and other criminals—a place where they would make a name for him that had nothing to do with him, and when they found his real mother, a woman so desperate for help that she left her baby in a bathroom with a stranger, they would put her on some kind of mommy probation and make her life even worse. You take one last puff, then two more, blowing the smoke as far from the baby as possible, put out the cigarette, then go back inside. You sit in the bathroom and wait.

“Your mom has half an hour, little one, then, well, who knows?”

When the mother comes back forty minutes after the last time you checked your watch, she gathers him to her, and he mashes himself to her.

“Thank you,” she says. “You have no idea what you’ve done for me.”

“You’re welcome,” you whisper and leave, almost running through lingerie and knocking over a display of cargo pants. You don’t want to know. You don’t want the chance to take him away from her or report her or that maybe-missing baby. And you really don’t even want to consider where she’s been or why she’s so alone that she left him with you. You don’t want to wonder if what you’ve done is right or wrong or even think for a moment about how close you were to deserting him. You just want to leave, smoke a cigarette, go home, and tell your husband what you have suspected since you married—that you are not an adult at all.

Something has gone wrong between the couple across the street. You know this. You are smoking more just to watch them fall apart. There’s now a purple bean bag chair in the middle of the well-planned, color coordinated living room. It sits in front of the television with the man in it, the chair folding around him, the beans nesting themselves to his thighs for maximum comfort. He plays videos all of the time, where once they sat on the couch and snuggled to bad movies, now he plays, you can see the brawl of color on the screen, even make out explosions, and his arms pumping when he fails at whatever it is he is playing. She is rarely in the room with him, though she stalks into the room occasionally to get his opinion on something or other, invariably waits with her hands on her hips, and then turns away. She is in sweat pants every night now, and has cut her hair into a professional bob that fails to make it into a ponytail, so she opts for an old red head band that she wears every night. One night, you are able to see her struggle up the front stairs with a large basket of laundry. At the second floor, you see her struggle to get her key, hit her knuckles on the railing, and then knock on the door. You look into the apartment and know that he is there, watching television on the floor in his purple bean bag. You watch her knock, see him look then ignore, and you will him to get up, go to her, will him to know that whatever is wrong can be fixed if only he gets out of that chair, opens his door and does the laundry for her. You see her enter the room moments later with the huge basket, dump it on him, then walk to the other end of the house. And every night at exactly eleven o’clock, as you smoke your last cigarette, she enters that living room alone, stares briefly at the wall then switches off the last lamp in the living room and goes to bed.

Your husband quit smoking. Just stopped one day, walked into your living room, grabbed a cigarette from your pack, announced that it was his last, and went to smoke. You ran after him with a cigarette of your own, saying, “Let me go with you. If this is the end, for real, I want to be there.” And so you stood side by side on the porch for the last time, and smoked those two cigarettes in silence.

He has not smoked since. It’s been ten days, and you know, though you are sure he does not, that it has been exactly ten days and he has not smoked, craved, twitched, fidgeted, or done anything at all that exhibits the struggle of quitting. In fact, as you sit with him at a bar watching a bad band from Colorado with a lead singer who is clearly a girlfriend of one of the members of the band, who does no actual singing, rather dances and sways and twirls her arms in complicated poorly lit configurations, then murmurs monotone lines from bad 80s cereal commercials (Lucky Charms!) into a microphone, you blow smoke deliberately in his face and realize you might hate him a little bit for leaving you in the world of smokers alone, for growing up without you, for being too lazy to even be properly addicted.

“I’m going to head home,” he says, leaning across the small table, his hand around your wrist, lancing your hand and its cigarette to the table. “You coming or staying?”

“Staying,” you say. “Don’t you want to see the end?”

“No. Not one bit,” he says, shaking his head and grimacing. “This is one of the worst things we’ve ever seen.”

“Oh, yeah. It’s a train wreck. But don’t you want to see if that girl ever actually sings?”

He leans in and you think that maybe he is going to kiss you, even though he has not kissed you for the last ten days until you've brushed your teeth, consumed a bottle of Diet Coke, a can of beer, or a glass of lemonade to mask the taste of your smoking. You close your eyes. "I just got to get out of here. The smoke, you know?" He turns to leave.

You start to call his name, to put out your cigarette, to ask him if he is ok, if maybe this whole thing has been harder for him than you'd thought, but he cannot or will not hear you, and you watch him leave, his shoulders straight in the black leather jacket he'd worn the night you first met him.

You call his name again, but he is gone.

You sit alone at your table and you smoke the way you used to smoke, so that you do not have to talk to anyone, and you order a glass of wine because it seems like something a woman alone in a bar would order. The key to being alone is to stare at everyone a bit too long, a bit too desperately, and to keep looking even when you should not. To break eye contact is to invite conversation. You stare at the three single men at the next table as they scout the young and the single ladies in their own furtive groups, at the sound boy for the band who does nothing but stare at the singer of the band and you feel for him and his unrequited longing, and at the three or so awkward new couples learning the rhythm of each other's bodies at the bar. When you see him looking at you, you notice first that he is old and not really handsome. You stare. You do not look away. You like that he is wearing a cardigan sweater in a sea of leather jackets and skinny tee shirts that hug thin chests, that he wears his glasses on a string that hangs from his neck, and that his hair is thin and stringy and completely un-styled. You like that he is an adult.

He smiles, and you look away.

"I'm George," he says, by your table suddenly, and you get up to leave, but he stops you with his hand on your wrist, and you lean up and kiss him, deeply, tenderly, with tongues and gentle contact.

"It's been a long time since I kissed a girl who tastes like cigarettes," he says, smiling and running his hand on your jaw.

"Just give me a minute," you say. "I have to go to the bathroom."

You run home, wanting him. You want. You want. You want.

You go inside and find your husband, standing at the sink, washing dishes, his pelvis against the porcelain, his arms and hands full of soap, his calm obvious in the arrangement of clean plates lined up neatly in the rack, the silverware separated with spoons face down in order to drain the water from the shallow dents. You lean in to kiss him.

"You'll taste like nicotine," he says.

"You used to like that about me," you say.

"Well," he shrugs, as if shrugging is an answer.

"I'm not ready for us to be married people," you say.

"We are married people," he says.

"But I mean *married* married. You know, like 401ks and savings accounts and property taxes and income brackets, we- only- talk- to -other- people- when- we- are- with- each- other- at -cocktail- parties- married -people. I don't want to be like married people who don't get off their ass when the other person gets home. Or who don't really kiss with tongues at least once a day. Or who say I love you first thing in the morning and last thing at night, as if the words are only bookends. I mean, I don't want to have to wear matching underwear or

anything, and I love you and all, but I don't want to be that kind of married."

"Matching underwear?"

"Matching underwear. Single people have to wear matching underwear in case they meet someone," you explain. "I'm saying, I don't want to wear matching underwear or meet someone to impress with it. But I don't want to be done. I don't want to be un-sexy so soon."

You turn him to you and kiss him, push his back against the counter and tongue fuck him roughly, ramming your teeth and tongues together, try to suck the calm out of him, take some for you. He pulls away, lays his hands on your shoulders, you feel the water spread through the thin material. He is quiet. You listen to the running water, the clink of silverware lapping at the bottom of the sink, and the sound of bubbles disappearing from your husband's arms.

Your Mom and the Sea Cows

That trailer that teeters on top of the hill, the one filled to the brim with all those things, is just a short car ride away. This is where you're headed today.

"Your mom is just going through a rough patch bud," your dad says with both hands on the bottom of the steering wheel. He's cruising in the right lane, letting all who want to pass zip on by. "You're important to her, these visits are important to her."

Everything you tried this morning fell through, all your efforts for naught. The fake stomachache, the fake headache, the fake homework, hell even tried the fake Saturday school detention, it didn't fly. It was never going to fly. You knew but had to try and take your shots.

He'll pull off the highway and drive along the creek but he'll never take you to the top of the hill. It's always a drop off at the bottom. And you'll have to climb up the rocky brown dirt road. If it's dry like today, it's dusty, and your bare legs will be appropriately filthy by the end of the walk. You'll fit right in, you think.

When you pull the creaky tin door open, things will fall out, they always do. Sometimes it'll be Beanie Babies, or recyclable cans, or bags of shoes, or naked cabbage patch kids, or curtains still on their rods, or garbage that needs to be taken out, or whatever was on the Home Shopping Channel last – boxes of flameless candles. Whatever it is make sure you get it in back in the trailer before she makes it out of the far bedroom, sees, and has a fit. You don't want a repeat of the Mrs. Beasley doll incident.

Inside, you'll smell hamsters. But don't get excited, there are no hamsters.

There will be some rustling around in the back room, and then she'll appear, in a bathrobe or kimono or long t-shirt, something loose and draping. She may or may not be smoking, if she is, the cigarette will dangle casually, dangerously between loosely clasped fingers. Threatening to burn up all that's been collected.

Because of the clutter she moves cautiously, the path to the front door is engrained in her, it's part of her, yet she steps delicately. You watch her walk, and weave around piles, and duck under clutter, stepping over and in to the room with the invisible couches. The room you are in.

She'll say something like, hello darling, or sorry, wasn't expecting you. She'll act like she would've cleaned or put something presentable on, but it isn't true. It's always the same.

Oatmeal will be offered, and you'll accept hoping it'll be something with fruit in it, peaches and cream, blueberries and cream. You're disappointed when it's brown fucking sugar and maple, but come on, don't act so surprised.

She tells you to have a seat, and this part is tricky. You'll have to look around a bit and choose carefully. If there is a pile of soft things, if it looks consistent, you're lucky, nestle right on in. If the pile looks suspicious, test it out, feel around with your hands before getting comfortable, you don't want to dice your ass cheek on a set of kitchen knives again.

While you're sitting, wedged between the heap of Olympic embroidered sweatshirts and the industrial-sized Campbell's soup box filled with miniature lighthouses and Depression glass, you'll notice something new today, something you definitely never noticed before.

On the crooked shelf, the one balancing atop two nails in the wall, rests a porcelain manatee, the cow of the sea. And when you get the chance to take a closer look, you'll notice more, smaller ones, a family, or flock, or herd, whatever the term. They're neat, and organized, free from dust above all the commotion below.

You've had this urge before. You want those sea cows. Just like you wanted that crystal dragon and the troll doll with crazy hair and a jewel for a bellybutton. But things don't leave the trailer, this was made clear. When they're in they're in, and you can expect stinging swats on your ass for disobeying the rule.

When your mom runs out of cigarettes, she'll tell you she'll be right back. She's in different clothes, better clothes and makeup. You watch her leave with a slap of the tin door and wait to hear her rusty jeep start up with a rumble and screeching like mice.

Very carefully, you place each one of the sea cows in a separate pocket so they won't clang together and make noise or chip.

Instead of letting the shelf remain empty, you manage a dried starfish, a blue glass dolphin, and two sandollars, keeping with the aquatic theme will make it less noticeable you think, and place them up there casually, not too neat.

You imagine your mom returning home and looking right at the shelf.

"My manatees, my fucking sea cows, tell me where they are," she'll yell and point and head to the kitchen to get the spoon for whoopin-butts the one that's spruce, firm with the perfect amount of flex. You would have to come clean then.

You sit, and wait, you stress and imagine. You contemplate putting them back, giving it all up. But you don't, you want them, and you're going get them this time.

There are boxes blocking the TV. You move them just so, and make a little cubby for the screen. It's like watching cartoons down at the end of a short hallway, a cardboard hallway. Time goes by, the shows change; your mom isn't coming back, not anytime soon at lease. This has happened before. You know what to do. When you're tired of cartoons, you call your dad.

You hear him pull up outside, he came all the way up the hill this time, the rocks pop and crunch under his tires. He gives the horn a honk.

As you're climbing into the car one of the sea cows clanks on the plastic side of the seat. Your dad looks at you, then at your pockets, then straight ahead and puts the car in gear.

Back down the hill you go, under the old oak branches and along the creek, past the tavern on the corner, and onto the interstate.

At home, in your room, you clear off the top of the dresser. Shoving all the books and pictures, the wooden letters that spell your name, the cup full of pencils and pens, all the papers with doodles and grades, into a pile on the floor. You carefully remove the sea cows from their individual pockets and place them one at a time on to their new spot. You think about all the other manatee knick knacks out there. The places where you could find them. You think about how you'd like to gather them all up and have them here in this room with you.

Paris Street; Rainy Day

La première partie: Giselle's Diary

mardi, 15 mai

A second day of rain. Claude and I took lunch at a small cafe on the rue Saint-Lazare early in the afternoon. His wife went yesterday to Normandy with their children.

I doubt anyone in the Quartier knows us, or on a day like this would even notice another umbrella-topped couple. Still, it seemed so bold to step out in public with him.

Afterwards, we went to the apartment. Under the covers together, we sought to excite each other. Sated from lunch, Claude fell asleep before we made much progress. I confess it was a race, and that he beat me only by a short time.

The odd light of the overcast day had given way to twilight when we awoke. He was gently insistent in his need for me, and I was quite happy to oblige him. After the love, we supped on bread and cheese accompanied by strong coffee.

Claude eventually took his leave, and I spent the rest of the evening reading at the bookstore down the street. The furnishings in the apartment are too spare for me to be comfortable here alone. This is something we should talk about.

samedi, 19 mai

I went to confession today. To my dismay, Father Hiver heard me again.

"I can't offer you absolution," he said when I'd finished my litany of minor sins and one adultery.

"Father?"

"Oh, for the little things I think a few Our Fathers and daily use of the Rosary will suffice. But for the other, well..."

I had it in my mind to tell him I truly repented loving Claude, but not in my heart to lie to a priest that way.

"My daughter, this makes three times in two months that you've confessed adultery. If you were sorry, if the previous penances had done some good, you wouldn't be confessing it again."

"True. I tell myself not to sin, but my heart aches for him so I do. I regret the sin, but not the acts that contain it."

Father Hiver sighed. "It wouldn't be quite so bad if this man weren't married, didn't have children. You really are blessed to love and be loved. There's too little of that in the world. It's your choice of lover that offends God."

"What should I do, then?"

“Pray for guidance, and trust that right action will bring the forgiveness you ask. Go now, although I’m not foolish enough to add, ‘and sin no more.’”

dimanche, 20 mai

I’m not sure if I took Holy Communion today out of defiance, or because I feared people would notice and talk.

mercredi, 23 mai

As arranged, we met at the apartment. Today was such a lovely day, with lace-thin clouds and wonderfully yellow sunlight. It almost seemed a shame to spend the hours together in bed. Almost.

Claude surprised me by bringing some sketches and small paintings to brighten the drab walls of our make-believe home. He says a M. Gustave Caillebotte, who works here in the arrondissement, did them. While I recognize the name, I wouldn’t be able to pick the man from the many artists who apply their skills and ply their living here.

Imagine if, purely by chance, he captured us as we dined or walked arm-in-arm at midday. Do painters change the faces of their unwitting subjects as a matter of courtesy?

vendredi, 25 mai

Claude left to join his family in Honfleur today. He’ll be gone two weeks, making this our longest separation. I’m lonely for him already. Looking in the mirror, I wonder if my eyes have always been the color of the envy I feel for his wife.

I told him yesterday that I wanted to see him off at the station, but he wouldn’t hear of it.

“It’s one thing to be seen on the street or dining together. You could be an old acquaintance, a client. Saying au revoir at the Gare Saint-Lazare? That’s a different matter. What if somebody recognized me? How would I explain that to Valerie?”

He was right, of course. Far worse than having Father Hiver know of my sins would be Valerie knowing. From what Claude says of her, she’s a good woman.

samedi, 26 mai

Reading what I wrote last night, I was mildly surprised to realize that I speak of “my” sins. As if they were mine alone! It was, after all, Claude who pursued me in the beginning, while I resisted falling in love with a man I knew was bound to another woman.

To be sure, I doubt Father Hiver would see a distinction. In the end, my resistance was a lie told to my heart.

lundi, 28 mai

I spent the morning walking aimlessly, or so I thought. Near noon I realized I was in the 7th Arrondissement. So much for having no destination: this is where Claude and his family live.

Judging by their home, it's no surprise he can afford to keep me in a pied-a-terre. If anything puzzles me, it's that he's chosen a shopkeeper's daughter for his mistress, rather than some stationed lady. But, then, who said the heart has to make sense?

La deuxième partie: Honfleur, Normandy

A small bottle lay broken on the carpet. Perfume stained the wallpaper next to the bedroom door.

"Why do you lie to me?"

"Come now, Valerie. What makes you think I'm having an affair?"

She seized a second bottle from the dressing table, then set it back. "An affair"? Don't you mean 'another affair'? We've been through this before." The bottle was in her hand again, then flew across the room to explode against the door. Her aim was improving. *With luck*, she thought, *the next one might take the bastard's head off*.

Claude began to protest his innocence. She cut him off in mid-sentence. "Women know these things. We see when you put your ring back on as you walk down the street. We smell the difference between the soap they buy and what we use in our bath."

"This is nonsense, darling. I promised you I wouldn't stray any more."

"And your promise was worthless. My God, Claude. You smoke Gitanes, and you come home smelling of Gauloises. Haven't you even noticed that the perfume you buy her is a jasmine from Fragonard, while I wear Mane's rose?"

Valerie watched the blood drain from her husband's face, and thought it one of the most beautiful things she'd ever witnessed.

The children knelt on the grassy riverbank, luring ducks with bits of bread. Claude and Valerie sat in the shade from a nearby tree. There was tension in their postures, the movements of their hands, but the anger of that morning was absent.

"Why?"

"I honestly can't stop myself."

"You'd better learn how. For the children, if not for me."

"I know." He stared along the river for a moment. "I never mean to hurt you."

"That doesn't keep me from hurting." She looked to see what had caught his attention. A passing barge, perhaps, or the leap of a fish after flies. "Is she better than me?" The words "in bed" went unspoken.

"No." A smile flew across his face, chased by a frown that settled where it had been. "I had to teach her things you taught me."

"You piece of shit."

"I know."

“Do you love the children? Me?”

“Yes, and yes. Of course I do. Nothing changes what I feel for you. It’s just...”

“Do you love her?”

He answered without hesitation. “No.” He hesitated. “I love the fact that she loves me.”

“So, what’s this one’s name?”

“You don’t need to know. I’ll end it when we get back to Paris.”

“You’re damned right you will.”

La troisième partie: Giselle’s Diary

dimanche, 10 juin

I went to the Gare Saint-Lazare this afternoon, just to see Claude from a distance. Just to heal the wound of missing him these past few weeks. Not knowing which train he would return on, I took a table at the cafe across the street from the station. My book filled the time between scanning the crowds leaving the station.

Eventually, I saw him come through the doors and walk toward the rank of cabs. He had a small girl in his arms. Following him with an older boy in tow was a woman: Valerie. Claude saw me, I knew. When his wife followed his long gaze, I averted my face and looked at my book without seeing the words written there.

My God! She’s beautiful, and the children are lovely. The four of them looked so right together.

lundi, 11 juin

Claude came to me this afternoon, bringing only himself. I would have welcomed some souvenir of his trip to Normandy, something tangible to say he thinks of me when we’re apart. How foolish, of course. He couldn’t very well go shopping for a present to bring his

His whore. There, I’ve said what I am.

We fought. Yes, I started it. I’ve missed him so much. I love him. I hate him for his wife and children.

All he did to set me off was say he was thinking of leaving Valerie. He thought to please me.

“Why?”

“To be with you. Why else?”

“I can’t be your wife. The Church would never bless it.”

“So? The Church’s blessing doesn’t matter. We can have a civil marriage.”

I twisted his choice of words. “There’d be nothing civil about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“How long would it take you to start cheating on me?”

There was no answer to that. He tried, instead, to seduce me into our bed. I refused, and he left seeming angry and hurt.

jeudi, 14 juin

I met Valerie today.

La dernière partie: Quartier de l'Europe, Paris

Rain drummed on the city. The unexpected change in weather filled cafes early. By luck of good timing, Giselle found a last empty table under the awning of one on the Avenue van Dyck, near the ornate gates of the Parc de Monceau. She ordered cafe au lait, lit a cigarette, and settled in to read.

“May I join you? This seems to be the only available chair at the moment.”

Without looking up from her book, Giselle gestured for the woman to sit. “Please. It’s no day to be searching from place to place.”

“Thank you.” To the approaching waiter, she said, “Coffee, black, and crepes.” To Giselle, she said, “Would you like something? My treat, of course, since you’ve been so kind.”

“I’ve already ordered coffee, but thanks just the same.” Giselle looked up at her new companion, and forced herself not to leap up from her seat.

“You’re welcome.” The woman extended a delicate hand across the table. “I’m Valerie Bizet.”

Feeling suddenly, amazingly calm, Giselle took the proffered hand. “And I’m Giselle Gauthier. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” She closed her book and set it on the table. “Do you live nearby?”

“No, my husband, children, and I live on rue Varenne in the 7th. You?”

“Somewhat. I have an apartment on rue du Faubourg.” She gestured toward the cobblestone street, where the shadows of passersby glistened wetly. “You picked a fine day to visit. Shopping?”

“In a way. I’m...” Valerie seemed to search for certain words. “I’m looking for my husband’s mistress.” She blushed. “I can’t believe I just said that to a stranger.”

“Not a stranger. Just a sister you hadn’t met before.” There was a surrealness to what was happening. Giselle chose her words with care, lest she betray herself. “So, you have a rat in your life, too. My mother was right: all men are bastards.”

Valerie laughed, showing beautiful teeth against her tanned face. “I think they’re born that way.”

“And grow worse with age. Perhaps I’ve seen them together. What does she look like?”

“Knowing Claude, she’s young and very pretty. Tall. Slim-waisted, with fine *mésanges*.” Cupping her hands in front of her in mimicry, she laughed again. “But, I’ve honestly not seen her. He won’t tell me her name, of course. He doesn’t think I know he has a place to keep her here in the Quartier.”

Giselle smiled knowingly. "There are lots of girls like that here. Many of them model for the artists near the station, but most of those are the painters' mistresses." She paused to think. "Is your husband -- Claude, you said? -- is he an artist?"

"No, his only talent is being rich. Let's see: Claude is older than you and I, just past fifty but not yet given to a man's late paunch. Slightly taller than average, and I think handsome despite a scar above his right eye. An accident at school when he was young."

"And a moustache," Giselle said to finish the description. "Of course. I've not only seen them; she's a friend of mine. I warned her she'd get caught, but she insists love will protect her."

"We're fools about love, aren't we?"

"Always. Even when it bites us fatally. She's not all that beautiful, you know. And I suspect her breasts would never fill a champagne glass. Still, I can understand why a man would be attracted to her."

Valerie asked, "Can you take me to her?"

"Why?"

"I don't mean her harm. Claude won't give her up on his own. He has a weakness for other women. This isn't his first affair. I was hoping I might persuade her to give him up, instead. If not for my sake, then for the children."

"He's done this before? I'd wager she doesn't know that." And, until now, Giselle hadn't, or at least hadn't believed it. "Perhaps, with that in hand, you'll let me talk with her. A friend might be more persuasive than a stranger."

"As you said, not a stranger but a sister. He's wronging us both. Still..."

"Then it's settled. I know her well enough to convince her I'll see her in Hell before she ruins everybody."

Valerie smiled warmly at this.

Even before her lover's wife spoke, Giselle understood the woman knew the truth.

"Thank you," Valerie said, "for me and my children."

- end -

Lightweight Carbon Wings for Human Flight

Xerxes was well dressed in public. In the city he wore a narrow tie, slacks with a crease, and polished shoes. He preferred public transportation, except at home in Ventura, where he wore jeans and a T-shirt and drove a seven-year-old Corolla. These were the easy offsets: his way to glide through the world unnoticed, or as unnoticed as a tall, good-looking man who talked to himself in public in a loud voice, could be. Maybe he was an actor rehearsing a scene. But would that explain his odd figure-eight pacing in the park?

Xerxes did his best thinking walking in big cities. In New York, he would join the stream on 5th Avenue. As long as he walked with the pack, he didn't need to think about where he was going--or whether he was in danger of a bus or taxi running him over when he crossed the street. Walking charged his brain and his destination was often a nice surprise.

When he was a child, he wanted the ideas to stop. He thought about them as kites that filled the sky. He imagined slicing their strings with a laser. He imagined them pierced on the highest branches of cypress trees at the beach. Lasers would do it. They could do everything. Make a cat chase the dot—or a fish. He thought about how he could make a racetrack for fish and put weights on the faster fish to make the race more even. *I can build a laser slingshot. I can build a laser cannon!*

"I really can build a cannon, Mom."

"I know you can, son. You can do anything you set your mind to."

"Can Mandy do anything she sets her mind to?"

"Your sister is very smart."

"Is she a genius?"

"She tests very high on the tests like you do."

"Why does she tease me?"

"That's just the way she is, Xerxes."

By twenty Xerxes stopped building prototypes. There wasn't enough time to build them. *Other people can help if I give them good drawings.* He practiced his drawing until he was as precise as Leonardo. By age twenty-two he had come to the attention of DARPA and began working on Black Budget Projects.

"To most people our technology seems more like magic than science," the project director said. "You don't have to hold back here, Xerxes. Let your imagination rip!" She was a tall, dark-haired woman who reminded Xerxes of his mother.

DARPA gave the inventors free rein. They didn't need to provide long narratives or abstracts of invention. A drawing would do. They loved Xerxes' drawings. He was fast and drew with such precise detail, many of his ideas could go directly to prototype. When his mother died he stopped drawing. He felt alone and didn't want to work.

"We don't expect deliverables, Xerxes," his director said. We just want you to sit at the meeting with the specialists."

Xerxes took long walks in the hills overlooking the Pacific. A year later, he agreed to work on a project at the University of Chicago. He continued his walking in the city, sometimes going so far he needed to take a taxi back to his hotel. *DARPA understands. They offered to wire me to record conversations when I'm talking to myself. They don't make demands, but they need me when they need me. I like flying business class. Good hotels simplify my life. If I forget my razor and toothbrush, housekeeping brings it up. I have everything I want, except the thing I want most.*

The girl next door was nineteen, but he didn't know that for sure. He didn't really know very much about her except that she was beautiful and seemed to be a shy, eccentric soul, like himself.

Their houses were set back equal distance from the street. Two 1920s-style California bungalows with bedroom windows exactly aligned. Xerxes kept his shade up--she her curtains parted with shade down. Xerxes was propped up in his bed thinking about ways to make a troop carrier disappear. He knew how to bend light. What other large objects could he make disappear?

How about oil platforms? Hideous iron islands that light up like cruise ships. He knew how to make them disappear. *Skin the platform with TV screens (ultra-thin OLEDs), then run a continuous loop of sea and sky. That would end the eyesore. But the oil companies would build more platforms!* He imagined sticky balls floating onto shore. *How would you get rid of all those sticky balls? Ha! Velcro vests for the fish!*

She had just stepped out of the shower, and he saw her silhouette against the translucent shade. He remembered when they added her bathroom. During the demolition phase, the contractor parked his dumpster in Xerxes' driveway. He complained that the City was holding him up because they wanted a steel beam.

"Always over-engineering," the contractor grumbled.

"It's not the way I would do it," Xerxes said, a picture of a honeycombed beam flashing before his eyes. *Carbon beams—graphene!--to build bridges and airport terminals. Lightweight carbon wings for human flight. She must have moved in two years ago. Oddly, I don't remember the day.* She undressed and stood in front of the translucent shade. Her hands were on her hips and he could see the outline between her thighs. *Is she taunting me?* He went back to his thoughts to distract himself. *I can make tanks invisible. I can make tall buildings disappear.*

Two days later, the fog burned off early—a perfect morning for thinking. He sat in the lotus position, while a sycamore filtered the sunlight. His intention was to think about the DARPA project, but an image of his mother came to mind. She was talking to the girl next door about her son. "He's smart but lazy. A lazy, lazy boy." It was her little joke. Xerxes didn't mind. Of course he was lazy—how else to quell the onslaught?

The sun helped. He was stripped to the waist. These warm days in the garden felt so good. *Sun for sleeplessness. Sun to stimulate the melatonin. Sun to slow "ideation!"* That was the word DARPA liked to use.

Xerxes' mother left him the family house and a small stock portfolio. His last check from DARPA was \$55,000 for consulting on a new approach to desalinate water. They were experimenting with capillaries, but the secret was to corkscrew the valve. *Spinning frees the salt!* He could make a delicious chocolate with his corkscrews. If the contracts continued, he would be able to take care of someone, someday.

She was at the window again, drying off. When she turned around, he studied the silhouette of her arms holding her hair up and how her legs connected to full hips. When she turned sideways, he admired her breasts. What is the source of the bright light? She is revealing herself, part by part. He was aching.

That's how Edison did it. He was lucky because no one had done anything with electricity. Edison electrified everything. He couldn't stop himself. An electric carriage, an electric flame. Once he opened up, he couldn't stop. An electric chair! Great men stand on the shoulders of great men. I would like to stand on somebody's shoulders and look into Candy's bathroom window.

Xerxes got a call from DARPA. They wanted more help with the University of Chicago project. His solution was to write a form of artificial intelligence with random and discordant bits shuffled into an expert system. This approach would resemble human thinking.

When he got back to Ventura, the wisteria on his front porch was purple and glowing. Daisies and sword ferns smothered the yellow sandstone in his garden. He would soak up the sun to relax his mind. When the sprinklers came on, they made a twisting spray. It made him think about light riding piggy-back on sound. *This was something important. It had implications to the Big Bang.*

He needed to relax his mind. Another sprinkler flung water like a wave. He imagined how Candy might toss back her sheets and crawl into bed, silky and soft, after a bath and treatment with oils.

He hoped she was spying on him. Now when he practiced his yoga, it was for Candy to see. He was shirtless, in loose white pants, and barefoot. His chair changed positions electronically—John, his neighbor, made the modifications. He stood in a shoulder stand, held the position, then slowly lowered his legs into a pike. He caught her watching him from behind the spreading Fig Vine.

He would knock on her door. If her father answered he would say he needed an assistant for the DARPA project. Assistant—not model. DARPA wanted renderings for their “companions.” She should be blonde and nicely shaped for long space missions. No, he wouldn’t ask her father. He would wait until he saw her in town.

He had seen her just a week ago at the beach wearing short shorts. Her legs were brown like his. He would like to cook her dinner with food he grew in his hydroponic garden. *This was the way to end world hunger. It’s simple to grow food in water, but a better idea is to fax it to the hungry.* His dot matrix food printer had gone viral on the Net.

How should I break the ice? Maybe John can introduce us? He talks to her when he delivers the mail. He wouldn’t talk to the father. He would wait until he saw her again. She liked to stroll through town, but was never with a boyfriend. *Lucky for me.*

DARPA had given him an advance to build a robot based on his ideal of the perfect female. “What kind of brain would it have?” the project director asked.

“Sir Isaac Newton comes to mind.”

“And for beauty?”

“I have an idea, but let me give you some drawings.”

He started with magazines from the used bookshop in Ventura. It seemed he should know the range of possibilities for the body. He bought a stack of old *Playboys* for research and context.

Xerxes’ sister called him a week before his thirtieth birthday. She had an idea for a language interface between humans and computers using iterations of tiling patterns.

“That was my idea—a year ago,” Xerxes teased.

“You always say that. You know I invent just as well as you. What are you doing for your birthday, bro?”

“I haven’t thought about it.”

“It’s a big one.”

“Can I call you back, Mandy? I’m a little busy.”

“Busy, huh?”

“I am working on something for DARPA.”

“That’s funny—I am too.”

Xerxes sat in his lawn chair for sixteen hours. When the stars came up, he thought: *The robot should be able to teach us about the universe, the Big Bang, black holes and the multiverse. She should know about planets and stars, but should speak with modesty and in a soft voice.* He wrote his thoughts on his iPad and stored them in the cloud. *She will have a repertoire of randomized responses so that you will never know what to expect next. Her mind will be associative: poetry and metaphor will be part of everyday conversation.*

Mandy paid a surprise visit. “You don’t look so good. Aren’t you sleeping?”

“I’ve been working on something for DARPA and I’ve gotten myself into a bad place. I haven’t felt like this before. I’m a little, uh, obsessive.”

“I have a surprise for your birthday. We are going to have a birthday party.” Mandy said.

“Just you and I?”

“You and I and the neighbors.”

“The neighbors—next door?”

“Don and Candy—” Mandy said.

Xerxes felt his heart beat faster. “You know them?”

“Remember, I lived here too. It was my idea to buy the house next door.”

“We owned both houses?”

“Still do.”

There was a knock on the door. Candy stood behind Don. She was wearing short shorts, and her legs were browner than Xerxes’. There was an uncomfortable silence.

“Would you like something to drink?” Xerxes asked.

“Drink, drink, drinkin’ away with the lame and weary,” Candy recited.

“I have lemonade. I made it myself,” he said.

“Sit next to Xerxes,” Mandy instructed. “Don, you sit here.”

Candy crossed her legs, inviting a long look. She placed her hands on her lap and smiled.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she, Xerxes? Do you want to have her?” Mandy asked.

“In your most frail gesture are things that enclose me.”

“I don’t—understand. What have you been working on at DARPA?”

“I open petal by petal as spring opens.”

“What are you saying, Candy?”

“My eyes, deeper than all the roses; not even the rain has such small hands.”

“What is this, Mandy?”

“It’s ee cummings. Ask her about the universe, Xerxes.”

THE END

At the Sound of the Beep

“Hi, you’ve reached Ana and Jeff Winston. We can’t take your call right now, but please leave your message at the sound of the beep, and we’ll get right back to you.”

Day One

April 1, 4 p.m.

Jeff, I know what you’ve been doing. You’re helping yourself to my trust. And that wasn’t too smart. That is against the L-A-W. You can’t just take my money. I’m going to call the IRS on you. How do you think you’ll like prison? You won’t have all your fancy friends, will you? They’ll desert you like the dog you are.

April 1, 4:30 p.m.

Jeff, it’s your little brother Johnny again. I’m calling to tell you that you can’t just steal people’s money and get away with it. You fucking asshole, you thought you were pretty smart getting control of my trust. That’s what a big brother is for, right? To watch over you. Like you’d ever help me.

April 1, 4:40 p.m.

You thought you could do whatever you wanted, didn’t you, Jeff? Just take your poor brother’s money. So what if I don’t have the cash to buy gas or food. What do you care, you in your fancy house in California?

April 1, 6:30 p.m.

Hi, Ana. It’s Jeff. I’ll be home in about an hour. The meeting with Southwest Mortgage went long. We still can’t come to an agreement about how to proceed with the shopping center tenant closures. I listened to our messages—sounds like my brother is on a rampage again. Shit, just what we need. Okay, talk to you when I get home. Love you.

April 1, 11:30 p.m.

Jeff, I got your message. Just because you told me to stop calling you doesn’t mean that I will. I’m not afraid of you, big shot. I’ll call you any fuckin’ time I want. I don’t care if it’s upsetting Ana. Tough shit. You give me back my money so I can go out—then I won’t call you.

Day Two

April 2, 9 a.m.

This is a message for Mr. Jeffrey Winston. I’m calling from Calabasas Cardiology. We need you to come in and redo part of your nuclear stress test. It’s nothing to concern yourself over. It’s just that the results in one

section were unclear. Call Rhonda to make an appointment.

April 2, 2 p.m.

Hi, Ana. This is Robert from Guardianship, Inc., returning your call. I haven't talked to you since you moved to California. Well, anyway, you guessed it. John is off his meds. He needs to be hospitalized, but you know we can't commit him unless he proves a danger to himself or someone else. I know how annoying John's calls can be. Try to get your phone company to block him out. Here's another piece of advice. Never answer his calls. Never return his calls. He lives for that. Believe me, I know. We had to change our number at the office and at home. Ana, you and Jeff can call me anytime. Bye for now.

April 2, 3 p.m.

Hey, Jeff. It's Max Montez from the high school. I got your call, and yes, I'll make sure the boys aren't wearing cargo shorts tomorrow for their match. I really want to thank you again for volunteering to be the golf coach this season. It's made a big difference, and not just in the way the guys are playing. I can see they're listening to your advice about getting ahead in life. You tell them like it is—and they hear it. See you tomorrow.

April 2, 3:30 p.m.

Hello, Jeffrey. It's me, John. You've got a big problem—ME. And there's only one way to get rid of me, Jeff. Kill me. Yeah, why don't you kill me. You know some guys who could do it. Just call one of them and say you have this problem with your brother. Yeah, put out a contract on me. Have one of your goons murder me.

April 2, 5:30 p.m.

This is Verizon returning your call, Mr. Winston. Unfortunately, in the state of California you cannot block one person from calling your number. Call Intercept will intercept every call made to you. If you would like to add this service to your account, call us back.

Day Three

April 3, 2 a.m.

Hello there, Jeffrey. How come you're not answering your phone? This is Frank—Frank Sinatra. Your brother tells me you're singing at the Copa with my friend Sammy. Hey, Jeff, you used to buy my records, and I liked you. But if you keep up this singing, I'm going to cut off your fucking balls.

April 3, 2:23 a.m.

Sammy is dead, and so is Dean. Look in the fucking mirror, Jeff. You aren't Frank. You can't sing worth shit.

April 3, noon

Hi, Jeff. This is Robert from Guardianship returning your call. I also left a message on your cell. As I told Ana and your sister Louise, we can't do much right now. John's never easy, even when he does take his meds. And schizophrenia is always a weird deal. You can call me on my cell when you get home, and I'll take the call.

April 3, 2 p.m.

Hi, Ana. It's Steve. It sounds like Jeff's brother is really bad this time. Those phone calls day and night can't be easy to take. You're sure something can't be done to hospitalize John? God, I remember what a great kid he was. What was he, thirteen, when you got married? He was such a sweetheart. Life can be such shit. Oh, well. What

can we do? Call your brother.

April 3, 5 p.m.

Jeff. Jeff, are you there? Answer the fucking phone. You think you can just ignore me?

April 3, 6 p.m.

Jeff, it's Louise. I got your message. I don't know what you're complaining about. You moved away from Portland so you wouldn't have to deal with any problems. You left, and I have to deal with Mom and our crazy brother. I have such a bad cold, but Mom calls me at 8:00 this morning saying she's having a stroke. I have to get out of bed and take her to the emergency room. We sit there for three hours, and she's fine. So I'm not in the mood for your bullshit. If you don't think Robert and the Guardianship are doing a good job, move back here and take over.

April 3, 6:20 p.m.

Jeff, I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to block my calls. I'm really bugging you, aren't I, big man. I think you have a problem—John's the problem. What are you going to do about it?

April 3, 6:45 p.m.

I ain't quitting, Jeff. I'm havin' way too much fun. I guess you may want to have me assassinated, huh? I better stay away from windows.

April 3, 8 p.m.

Jeff, goddamnit. You blocked 10 of my calls. But now I'm back on track, and I have all the time in the world. Here's the deal, asshole. I'm not stopping. Your only choice is to attack John. Have me murdered. Step up and beat the Lord, tough guy. Call your man, Mr. Sinatra, and have me shot.

Day Four

April 4, 9 a.m.

Hi, Ana. It's your brother Steve. You make me laugh. I can just see you picking up the phone and putting it down as fast as you can. How many times did you say Johnny called in 10 minutes? Eight? At least he finally stopped. Call me.

April 4, 1:30 p.m.

Mom, it's Kim. I'm just having an awful day. Everything is going wrong. Sorry for crying, but I can't help it. I hate going to work. I hate it. And I hate that I have to put Leo in day care every day. Call me, okay? I love you.

April 4, 3 p.m.

Thanks for the call back, Mom, but I'm tired of sucking it up all the time. My boss is just a jerk. He came in with a hangover this morning and started yelling at everyone. I can't take it anymore—I'm going to start looking for another job. Talk to you later.

April 4, 8 p.m.

It's Kim. I got your call, Mom. You don't need to tell me I'm a single mother. I'm very aware of that. Maybe you and Dad think I can't afford to quit my job, but I can't afford to be this stressed. You just don't understand. I

thought if I moved back to Portland, it would be easier for Leo and me, but it's not. I never thought I'd be in this position.

April 4, 10:10 p.m.

Howdy, Jeff. It's your brother John again. I know you think you married Kim Novak like you're one of the Rat Pack. But Ana ain't no Kim Novak. She looks like shit.

April 4, 11:30 p.m.

I hate you so much, Jeff. I wish you were dead. As a matter of fact, I'm going to say a prayer for your death. Yeah, right now. *Dear God, listen to my prayer. My brother has already had two heart attacks. One of them almost killed him. His heart is weak. Do the job, Almighty God—give him another heart attack. Do this for me, your faithful servant John, and I will always be in your gratitude.*

Day Five

April 5, 10 a.m.

This is Calabazas Cardiology again. Dr. Martin wants Mr. Winston to redo the nuclear stress test as soon as possible. Again, don't be overly concerned. He just wants to make sure that the results are clearer. Call the office today.

April 5, 5 p.m.

Hi, Mom and Dad. I just picked Leo up from day care, and we wanted to say hello. Call us. Love you.

April 5, 10 p.m.

This is John. Goddamnit—stop fucking around, Jeff. You better start answering my calls, Jeff, or I'm going to hurt you real bad. You think you can just ignore me, Jeff, but I know how to get to you. Just you watch, asshole.

Day Six

April 6, 1 p.m.

Hello, Ana and Jeff, this is Robert from Guardianship. I really think you're worrying unnecessarily. In our business, there is no 100 percent, but John has rarely been violent. Yeah, I do remember that time he tried to run Jeff over with his car, but that was 20 years ago. John likes to make threats, that's all. I can't say anything positively, but I'm sure your daughter and your grandson are safe. Please call me back if you want.

April 6, 5 p.m.

Hi, Dad. It's Kim. I got your message. Yes, I'll make sure the alarm system is on. I think during the daytime is a little paranoid though, don't you? Uncle John isn't going to hurt Leo and me. Remember I'm the one who went to visit him when he was in the care facility. Talk to you later. Love you.

April 6, 8 p.m.

You asshole—you're threatening to charge me with harassment? Harassment? I know what you're up to, Jeff.

You want me behind bars. Then you'll get all my money right away. Why don't you just go suck your cock, Jeff. It's the only thing you're good at.

April 6, 9 p.m.

It's your sister Louise calling back. Jeff, like I said before, you left me with all this shit to deal with. The least you could do is not threaten John with a restraining order. It just gets him all riled up and makes life more difficult for me. Take your phone off the hook, go play golf or whatever it is you do down there.

Day Seven

April 7, 10 a.m.

Hello, Jeffrey. It's your mother. I want to talk to you about harassing John. Please stop. Have a nice conversation with him. Well, okay, then. Good-bye.

Day Eight

April 8, 8 p.m.

Hi, Ana. It's Steve, your brother. Glad John has stopped calling you. Jeff's threat must have worked. Hope Jeff is feeling better. Call me later. Love you.

Day Nine

April 9, 1:35 a.m.

Ana, I woke you up earlier, didn't I? And you forgot to screen the call. See, I'm very smart. You'll have to be on guard all the time. I'll make sure of that. Now you'll always be wondering if I'm going to call you in the middle of the night. And you can tell my stinking brother I know what he's doing. I'm calling the FBI, the IRS, and the CIA. You are both screwed.

April 9, 1:55 a.m.

Ana and Jeff, did you think you could go back to sleep? Did you think John would let you alone? I'll never let you alone. You make me want to puke.

April 9, 10 a.m.

Hello, Jeff? Ana? Are you there? It's Mother calling. Oh, I wish you'd answer. Please pick up the phone. I wanted you to know that I talked to John, and he won't call you any more. So don't harass him anymore, either. Oh, I just wish this wasn't happening. Okay, I guess I'll hang up since you're not answering. Good-bye now.

April 9, 11 a.m.

Hi, Ana. This is Carin at the museum calling to remind you about the scholarship meeting tomorrow at

12:30. See you then.

Day Ten

April 10, 4 a.m.

Here I was thinking I was going to fuck someone tonight, but you must have called and cancelled Ginger. Can't I even get laid, Jeff? You fuck Ana all the time. Why can't I have a little fun?

April 10, 11 a.m.

Hi, this is Robert at Guardianship returning your call. I'm sorry, Jeff, that you're upset. We're doing the best we can. I'll be in the office until five p.m.

April 10, 1:30 p.m.

Mrs. Winston. Please call Calabasas Cardiology as soon as you get this message.

April 10, 2 p.m.

Mrs. Winston, this is Rhonda at Calabasas Cardiology. I tried your cell and left a message. Please call us as soon as you get this message.

April 10, 2:15 p.m.

Hi, Dad. It's Kim. I know I didn't talk to you or Mom yesterday, but I had to work late, and then Leo had open house at school. Lisa from across the street said you called because you were worried. I'm fine. Stop worrying. If it makes you feel better, I will keep the alarm on all the time. Call me later. Love you guys.

April 10, 2:20 p.m.

Mrs. Winston, this is a nurse at Calabasas Cardiology. We've been calling you and calling you... Oh, my God, I don't know what to say... Look, the paramedics had to take Mr. Winston to East Valley Hospital. Don't bother calling us back. Just get to the hospital as soon as you can. You need to hurry.

THE END

Arboretum Again

A deluge of nostalgia flushed him out of the banquet room into the hotel's bar, away from clattering dishes, squawking microphones, and soused classmates he hardly knew after fifty years.

A bank of lights above a mirrored wall was the bar's only illumination. What a nice refuge, he thought, reminiscent of something not quite tangible. It might have been a stream of silvery baubles, a chute of fresh spring water, a channel of shiny minnows, a reflecting pool of flowing mercury. It might even have been an optic tube, the kind in his physics lab that recorded photons propelled randomly toward a target of unknown disclosure. Whatever. He pulled out a stool, his eyes transfixed on images mirrored now on the wall like a pastiche of jumbled realities. It soothed him and muffled clanging decibels from the banquet room. Open-mouthed, he imagined them to be real optical images, not the invisible virtual ones behind the wall. Optical ray diagrams flashed across his retina. He paused, breathed heavily, and finally focused on the only object he could clearly make out: it was, the longer he bent the rays to a sharp focal point, the real image of a handsome, blonde bartender whose socks were propped on a rail, exposing tanned, hairy ankles. He glared at him, then another pastiche formed; it was himself, years ago, stealing glances of college boys sitting with hitched-up pant legs.

Pervasive nostalgia—the whole evening had been that and there was no escaping. He decided to enjoy it, on his terms, with another scotch. When he pulled out the noisy stool, it awakened the bartender, but his “how goes it, buddy” greeting to him fetched him only his drink and a tab. He sipped glumly and, once again, began to scan the mirrored wall. There at the end, in a haze, he began to make out someone. The figure seemed a little slumped, but its chin was tilted heavenly to project clouds of smoke. He made nothing of it until, emerging as a sort of after-image, he visualized himself again. He was rushing across campus to the student lounge. He was skipping Professor Weissenburg's saliva-splattered recitations of Schiller for a coffee date with the slumped figure at the end of the bar.

The figure began poking a frozen daiquiri with a swizzle stick. He stumbled toward it, recognizing the translucent skin, beaky, thin-lipped face, and glacial blue eyes buried deep in the froth of golden hair. The illusion had transmogrified.

“I thought you had died,” he said in the I'll-be-damned tone he had been using all evening.

“I did,” she replied in a deep, smoky voice.

“Well, I thought so. I saw the obit in the alumni magazine, and Chris had written me about it in his Christmas letter many years ago. But how...?”

She turned on the stool, crossed her legs, and looked straight at him, breaking out into a big keyboard smile.

“Well, heavens sake! Now I recognize you. You're the only good thing I've seen all evening. Come over here, Tex, and buy me a drink. I just can't stomach all the speech-making going on in there.”

The good calves were still there, and he gave her a peck on the cheek and a squeeze around the waist. He felt the same plumpness dusted over with gardenia powder, and when he took both her hands, he felt their smooth strength and short nail tips, just as when she was a student in the Conservatory.

She cupped her hand on his cheek and tossed a laugh at the ceiling. “You old darling. Do you still work on those Two-Part Inventions?”

He saw her image in the mirror, framed as it would have been in the glass door of the Conservatory practice room. "I always could read music, you know. If you'd only had helped me a little with the fingering."

They had argued about fingering, but that was how they met every afternoon, he sitting at a keyboard in a practice room, feeling lonely, finished with his physics lab, with nothing else to do before dinner, peering through the glass door, and waylaying her to pass in the hall. He'd entice her into the room, feigning ignorance about some fingering problem, and when she at last relented and sat beside him, the touch of her soft hips and the gardenia smells distracted him, and when ultimately their fingers entangled on the keyboard, he said, "To hell with Bach, Ziggy, let's take a walk around the Arboretum before supper." It was where students went on a warm afternoon to cool off by watered greenery.

Now their fingers met but with another urgency, begging for sanctuary from life's buffeting. He lifted her palms to his mouth and lightly touched them to his lips. Then, holding her hand like a sheath of opalescent damask, he examined her fingers, one by one. They were longer than his and were tipped with short, squared-off nails, glistening like raindrops.

They talked breathlessly. She told him her Carnegie debut recital had been "hampered by uneven tempi," according to the reviewer. Yes, she had played Ravel's "Jeux d'eau," no, she didn't try again, yes, she married a New York broker, no, she had no regrets, yes, she had three kids, and no, she didn't miss performing.

"Was it cancer?" Yes, and her husband had taken to heavy drinking, and the children had developed drug habits. He caressed her hands, marveling again at how she could be so insouciant with a cocktail or cigarette, yet so disciplined with power at the concert grand.

"You think of me, Ziggy?"

"Lord, yes. Remember those student recitals, Tex, how you made toilet grunts every time we heard a wrong note? And I'd pinch you so hard you'd squeal and I'd get the giggles? We were simply awful!!" She laughed; golden sheens sparkled in the mirror.

Yes, they were awful; some had called them rebels, too. His roommate, Rob, the pre-med major, called them "apostates," which they were and why they formed a friendship in the dining hall of Littlefield Cottage, the girls' dorm where freshman and sophomore boys were required to take their meals. Tex despised the thought of putting on a coat and tie for dinner; she refused to participate in dorm committees and socials. Thus he became a waiter and she a "head" of a table. He admired how she never bowed her head for the blessing and passed the serving dishes counterclockwise; she admired him for bringing in extra helpings which Mrs. Cooley, the bespectacled cook, and her jolly black assistant, Elizabeth, allowed because he openly ridiculed the menus of the dietician, the uppity young State University grad who thought she knew everything about cooking. "She thinks slop is the only way to cut the budget. Betty Crocker shit. And pan scrapings were for the cats. Oh, Lord, she could learn so much about barbecue," Tex said, feeling emaciated and stunted in his growth the whole time he worked that damnable dorm dining room.

Once, for three days running, the dietician prescribed a lunch of Welsh rarebit and Jell-O cube dessert. The dining room erupted in protest (the housemother, Mrs. Dabney, was absent with a cold). "Y'all can just send the Jell-O back to the kitchen," Tex told Ziggy. Then he bent over her shoulder to show her how the Jell-O cubes could be catapulted toward the kitchen by placing them on a fork's handle and striking the tines. Jell-O cubes went flying, and Mrs. Cooley and Elizabeth jumped with glee behind the round windows of the kitchen's swinging doors.

Mrs. Dabney emerged from her apartment in a silk kimono and disheveled silver-blue hair. She shook her fingers and commanded the students to walk around the block in a driving snowstorm "to find their wits." Her denunciations sealed a bond of camaraderie between Tex and Ziggy.

Ah, such memories, he thought. How diffracted they seemed in the mirror.

Now they heard applause coming from the banquet room, and Ziggy draped her hand around Tex's neck and dug deep into his nape, the way she used to when he tried to ripple an arpeggio on the piano. "I wanted to know so many things about you," she said. And he unraveled the story of his life: how he had earned a doctorate in physics, suffered the pettiness of university academic life, lived a bachelorhood, never had another woman in his life (concealing, nevertheless, the repressed sexual assignations buried in the crypts of his subconscious), and his fantasies when listening to the *Goldberg Variations* of Turek and Gould—how he dreamt even of her standing behind him in a recording studio, touching his shoulder and tapping fingers ecstatically to his brilliant Baroque mordents and trills.

She looked deep into his yes. "Maybe you would have been happier in the Conservatory."

"Become a musician? I'd have died too soon like the rest of you," he chuckled. "Olga, I heard, died after a song recital in Moscow, that South American gal who played Villa-Lobos in the dorm parlor, and your flutist roommate, Jean."

"But your gang wasn't so lucky either. I heard your friend Blanco committed suicide and your roommate, the MD, died of AIDS."

Empty-faced, they stared at each other in the mirror and ordered another round of drinks. He broke their silence and said, "Maybe if you had helped me more with the fingerings, we might have ended up in a recording studio."

"Tex, the virtuoso interpreter of Bach. Hell, why not?" she said.

Their foreheads touched.

"Or maybe," he said, "the Arboretum was to blame."

She smiled big. "Ah, the puppy-loving things that went on there."

"Is that what you called it? You might have egged me on a little. Taught me some serious things. Why, Ziggy?"

He saw the flicker of her cigarette lighter in the mirror, saw her toss her head back to swirl the smoke upwards. "Oh, Tex. You were just too young."

He groaned for a second. "But I remember how you made me boodle your breasts a little. Then you stopped. Why?"

She sighed. "Oh, well, there just wasn't enough *rubato*, that's all."

She took his hand, patted it on her lap, and then squeezed hard. He felt powerless in her grip, like felt on a hammer's key being bashed *fortissimo*.

"Well, anyhow," he said, "you could have changed my life. Maybe. I guess that steelworker got in the way."

Saying that surprised him. At last it surfaced, festering after so many years.

She quickly responded with a whoop. "Oh, my, I had forgotten Angelo. What a character. He started showing up at the dorm. Mrs. Dabney had a fit, and those straight-laced little bitches wagged their tongues off."

Was that Ziggy talking? He didn't remember her using such language. Was it her carnal nature? Had she purposefully humiliated him, or was she innately deceitful? Or was it something else, something to do with his own naïveté?

"Oh. Tex, years ago we had all the same libidos young people do today. We didn't talk about them then."

But she *had* told him how she would get “wet” playing Ravel’s “Jeux d’eau,” he not knowing exactly what that meant, thinking it was from perspiration. He’d heard the story of how a famous pianist had stopped concertizing because of peeing in his pants. Finally a psychiatrist cured him by telling him to wear a diaper. High emotion can do that, but there could be other causes, according to Rob, the pre-med, who explained to him the autonomic nervous system, punctuating it with the taunt he had heard too much from everyone: “Ziggy is too hot for you to handle, Tex.”

Stan, his house counselor, a returning vet, had told him: “I know you are supposed to be going steady with Ziggy, but you ought to know that some of us ex-GIs see her often with a rough-looking guy at the beer parlor.”

His housemates told him about seeing her sneaking off to an ice rink in a nearby town with a steelworker. One of them chided, “Can’t you cool her off, Tex?” Blanco warned him that Ziggy was twirling him around, using him to escort her to dances when she had a boyfriend back in New York. Rob told him bluntly, “Girls aren’t for you, Tex.”

But he paid no attention. He saw himself smirk in the mirror. They all were just jealous that the sexy, desirable, popular, and talented Ziggy kept company with him. Or was it just pubertal bravado, a defiance of his housemates, a proclamation of a masculinity surpassing their own frustrated libidos? And wasn’t it healthier, anyhow, to make at least an attempt at “normal” sexual gratification rather than the perverted ones they practiced—like lighting farts in the dark, thrashing masturbatory fists under bed sheets, or carrying around condoms in their pockets? And the stupid game of “dropping the soap” in the showers. He cringed.

Then he remembered how his defiance was strengthened by Stan, the burly ex-Marine who took a liking to him and told him that if any of the guys gave him any trouble, to let him know. He liked, too, the way Stan would let him ride with him on his bicycle on a cold winter’s morning when they pulled breakfast duty at the dorm. Stan had a way of wrapping his arms around Tex’s chest while he pumped the bike and breathed warm breaths down his neck. How pleasant that was.

Eventually, however, the teasing got too harsh, and he went back to wearing a coat and tie for dinner at another dining hall. Their relationship cooled and, for many years, Tex regretted it. And now, fifty years later, the evening’s pervasive nostalgia wanted him to recapture those times and steer them to what might have been an alternate future. The mirror lights flared.

“What did you really think of me then, Ziggy?”

“Cute. Fun.” Clichés bounced against the mirror.

“Well, just imagine this: What if there had been no steelworker. Suppose I had switched to the Conservatory?”

“It would have been too late, Tex, for you to begin a career in music, you know that. You were pretty hyped with your physics. You’d have clawed your way through graduate school, and if I followed you, what would I do, stay home and practice scales?”

“You could have had babies. You had them anyhow.”

“Oh, no.” She gnashed her teeth. “First I had to give my ambition a whirl in music.”

Their images locked in the mirror. Time froze; youthful looks began to fade.

Then Tex brightly said, “Okay. Let’s try this. Pretend that I was the one to follow you.”

She frowned. “It would have been useless.”

“Oh no, honey,” he said. “Oil money could make a difference. My family’s money could have sucked up to those Fort Worth supporters of the Cliburn competition, entered you in some big European concerts, paid

for tutelage with Madame what's-her-name in Paris, bought off that Carnegie reviewer. I could arrange for the bouquets, tuning and crating of your favorite piano, schedule flights, hotels, hairdressers, everything."

Her eyes widened. "What an idea! It isn't just luck to make the big time. It does take money, you're right. Oh, I'd have worked that much harder. All that support and adoration. I couldn't fail, could I?" She clutched his shoulder, stared dreamily at the mirror. "I'd dazzle them with Ravel and Debussy, wow them with Grandos encores. Oh, Tex. Let's go back!"

Starting with the Arboretum, he thought. Willow trees drooping into ponds, the bright Ohio spring light, the sporadic giggles of coeds hidden with their boyfriends in the meadow's edge. The envy of his housemates.

He wanted to hear the chromatic runs, the clarion chords, the cascading *glissandos*, Ziggy bowing graciously in her blue chiffon gown to thunderous applause, he waiting in the wings to congratulate her. Resonances of glorious music and drowning adulation, her triumph his, her love his.

"Tex, where are you?" she whispered.

Words would desecrate the moment; he couldn't speak. He could only swirl images of mountains, sunken cathedrals, splashing waters, Spanish castles. They flashed like laser strobes across the mirror, blinding him, until he closed his eyes and rested them on the bar's edge, drenched in ecstasy.

Sounds became muted. Slowly he lifted his head to see the mirror's images smear.

Panic seized him. "Ziggy, you were going to die, remember? Too soon. What would I have done with the rest of my life, where would I be? I couldn't be just a camp follower. You understand, don't you? I mean it was all a dream, really, life is more than just learning the fingering. I needed something solid in my life, something to anchor me, not just vague impressionistic music."

He felt her grip on his shoulder loosen. He heard her say, in a fading voice, "It was your idea, remember?"

Then followed a burst of applause from the banquet room and a shuffling of chairs. Departure time.

He slid his stool back, saw a door behind the bar open with operating room-like lights blazing and spotlighting the blonde bartender with a trash can. Yes, he looked exactly like Rob, tanned, hairy ankle and all.

Slowly, a smile too young and big crept across his wrinkled face. And his ears began to ring tranquil harp-like sounds, sounds like a gentle wind rustling willow branches. He smelled whiffs of duckweed. He caressed pliant young bodies on the cool grass of the Arboretum.

Then he pushed back the stool, stood up, waved a curtain across the mirrored wall, and stumbled off to say good-bye.

THE END

Two Men and a Gun

It's hard to say exactly how I ended up in this dreadful situation, although I could easily put all the blame on the *Thomas-Cook* train schedule. If they had made their timetables a little easier to read, and their columns more evenly aligned, I may have never ended up on this midnight train to Athens. Yet here I was, sandwiched in among all the dissolute of Southern Europe in a third-class train compartment, trying to figure out how I was going to get some sleep.

It was bench seating only, benches that faced one another with such little space between them that one had to sit straddling the knees of the person opposite you. There were smells of human body odor and of middle-eastern cooking, *zeera* and black cumin, the mixture of which was not a pleasant thing. I couldn't imagine someone could be cooking in such confined quarters. I looked around but couldn't make out where the smell was coming from.

Across from me was a sinister-looking character; a man in his mid-thirties with narrow-eyes and high cheekbones. I assumed he was from North Africa, although one could never really be sure about this kind of thing when traveling along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. He had dark skin and an angular face and he was carrying a canvas satchel with Nubian markings. He was a man of mixed races, and a man who could not be trusted, that much I knew. Call it experience or traveler's intuition, after logging many miles through third-world countries one acquires an instinct for this kind of thing. I had encountered this type before; trouble, not in size, but in opportunist nature. And I saw in his eyes, the furtiveness and cleverness of an accomplished thief. He was filthy and unshaven. His clothes were soiled. Among the many odors in the train compartment one was particularly strong and I assumed it came from him.

And in the instant I was thinking this I caught his dark eyes studying my carry-bag. The satchel, which I kept on my lap, had a shoulder strap securely wrapped around my neck. In it were my most valued items; my passport and credit cards, what few euros I had left, and some souvenirs I picked up along the way. His eyes went from the bag itself, to the attachment latch, and followed up the strap to where it disappeared around my shoulder. When he realized I was watching him he quickly turned his eyes away. He had a satchel too, and when he saw me looking at it, he pulled it closely to his side.

I brought my hand thoughtfully up to my chin. It was only then that I realized I was likewise filthy and unshaven. Perhaps it was I who smelled of body odor? I discreetly took a sniff of my underarm but could not tell if the odor was coming from me or not.

It had been nearly three days since I had taken a bath. Having crossed by ferry from Brindisi the night before, arriving in Corfu in the early morning hours, there was no time to shower or shave. By the time I reached Patras, sleepless and exhausted, I was desperate to find a sink or washbasin. But the train station had only the old, European-style bathrooms with a launching platform, no running water, and a bucket for a flush.

It was an uncomfortable arrangement no matter how you look at it. And despite the lack of accommodations and the desperate guy across from me, sleep, I knew, was what I needed most. I looked around the car. It was completely full. A group of young *Europass* students had already commandeered the one small piece of floor space and were sleeping there, piled on top of one another.

I pulled my carry-bag close to me, keeping an eye on the man across from me, and I tried to get comfortable. In shifting my body weight I accidentally bumped his leg.

"Excuse me," I said.

He did not reply.

He was sleepy too, I could tell, and as tired as I. His eyes were bloodshot and his eyelids looked heavy and like they wanted to drop. He also shifted uncomfortably and likewise pulled his satchel in close to his side. Then he curled his hand around it and held on to it like it was filled with gold. It made me wonder what he had in it. Maybe he's a gem trader? I thought, or the thief of a gem trader?

If only he would fall asleep. If he would sleep, then I could do the same. And almost exactly when I thought of it, I saw his lids beginning to drop. Go down, I thought. Yes. Let them go down. Let them drop. But then the thought crossed my mind: What if he's faking? Lulling me into a false security, so that I would sleep, only to wake up hours later and find my carry bag gone, cut from my shoulder with a knife.

We both exchanged guarded, hard looks, and bouts of drowsiness. His eyes would close, and his head would bob, and then he'd snap himself back awake. And I, in one instant, lost all consciousness, although just for a few seconds, awaking to see him glancing at me with a little smirk on his face.

Not so easy, I thought.

I caught him pinching himself, and then shaking his head, trying to shake out the drowsiness.

You're going down, I thought. I can outlast you. But each time I saw him struggling, I found myself struggling too; fighting off the inevitable sleep that I knew would eventually win over my body.

The night wore on. The vintage train rattled over the tracks. The noise and motion helped kept us both awake. Still, as the hours past it became nearly impossible. The accumulation of three bad nights had caught up with me. The weight of my eyelids were feeling like lead shutters, ready to close for a long winter. I did everything I could to fight it. I tilted my head back, and then sideways. I scratched my side though I didn't have an itch. The good news was that he was not doing much better. I watched his head bobbing. I watched him fighting it, and clinging to his pouch more protectively.

And finally I saw him unclasp the middle button of his shirt and reach his hand down deep into it; down along his side. His eyes gleamed at me. He gave me a little grin, and a head-nod, letting me know that he had something, a knife or a gun perhaps? It didn't matter what, I realized. He had a weapon of some sort, down there in his shirt, and whatever it was it brought him fresh confidence, confidence enough to sleep.

And now his eyes began to close and his expression was sure. I watched him with one eye still open, watching me.

And he's probably a light sleeper, I thought, with a hair-trigger finger that's equally light and fast.

It is unfair, I thought, as my eyes, too tired and too heavy to fight it any longer, began to close. There is no justice. This scoundrel would have a peaceful night while I would suffer from frequent awakenings and sleep apnea.

Then it dawned on me that I had a similar option. The idea seemed too obvious, yet likely to work. I unbuttoned an opening in my shirt and reach down with my hand, down along the side of my chest to where I kept nothing. I left my hand there, warm against my side, and I watched him, his one eye still open, watching me, but fluttering closed.

Okay, I thought, *détente*. And I smiled at him; a little smile; a warning smile, and I closed my eyes and slept.

Nonfiction

Roadside Persistence

Shortly after my husband Paul and I purchased our Ford, I discovered fang marks in the front bumper, as if a python with teeth the size of guitar picks had been hitching. This was unwelcome news. We had just ended a turbulent eleven-year relationship with a Corolla, and I was not about to travel that road again, if you know what I mean.

Admittedly, the Corolla served as a rebound, a pick-me-up after my first car died and my first husband traded me in. A bit banged up from the ride, I let my parents convince me that a four-door was constructed less like origami and held better resale value than, say, a red Miata. That, and they fronted the cash. Weak in so many ways, I consented. Fading photographs portray a happy version of me with my arms around the shiny black bomb, m-m-m-my Corolla. A couple of kids in love.

How young and naïve we were.

Not surprisingly, Toyota does not advertise the true meaning of *Corolla*. Dictionary.com, source of all truth not covered on Wikipedia, calls it the “inner envelope of floral leaves of a flower.” Who names a car after flower parts? People step on flowers. Mean people, but still.

Our first confrontation involved a woman so eager to get to the McDonald’s drive-thru that she drove through my lane, driving me into a hydrant.

Weeks later, we, the newly rebuilt Corolla and I, paused in a near-empty parking lot after retrieving theatre tickets. As I left a voicemail for then-boyfriend Paul, I noticed a long boxy car of the Elvis impersonator variety tearing down the lot’s center road. Upon reaching my row, the car abruptly turned. It hit the curb, gaining enough momentum to use my hood as a ramp, drive over the next car, displace a third car, and coast into a space at the far side of the lot. My hood crinkled like a beer can, smashing the windshield but—miraculously—not me. Fused to the seat with fast-drying shock, I tried to figure out what parallel universe I had become stuck in. Two men appeared and asked if I was all right. One looked exactly like Matt Damon, and I kept thinking, *wow, he looks exactly like Matt Damon*. As we walked toward the runaway car, which had begun to resemble Christine, the back door opened, and somebody’s great-grandmother emerged. She squinted toward the Corolla and then said, “Oh, did we do that?” I exchanged a glance with Matt. Then I dialed my friends at the body shop.

The Corolla and I endured other trials: towings to dog-patrolled lots for forgetting to vacate on street-cleaning day, a boot for parking at Burger King but ordering at Einstein Brothers, a shattered rear window from an attempted break-in, a keyed side, and a nastygram calling us parallel parking hogs. Bruised we were, but not broken.

After Paul and I married, we all relocated to Northern Virginia and stayed out of trouble for quite some time. Then we moved into DC, and the pixie dust expired. We exacerbated the problem by parking on our street, a bustling ambulance and bus route. If we used our black-diamond driveway, we would likely awaken to learn that our car had sleepwalked into a bus, which, in retrospect, might have been preferable. To prove my point, I asked an economist to calculate the slope of said driveway. When I showed her diagram to Paul, he argued, “It can’t possibly be 78 degrees; 90 degrees is straight up.” Whatever. It’s steep.

One evening, as I watched Kevin Kline inform Meryl Streep that he needs her like he needs a case of anthrax, a biliary calculus, pallegra, and encephalitis, the street outside swarmed with police cars, creating a discotheque-type scene in which the Village People might jump out at any minute. A high-speed chase between a stolen

minivan and another car had ended only somewhat spectacularly with the minivan hugging our stone retaining wall. When I saw our rusty, dusty hoss curled up and quietly sleeping nearby, I squeaked out a prayer of gratitude and thought, *we can't afford to be hit by a maniac*. Then I reconsidered: maybe an unlucky strike wasn't such a bad idea.

DC: fulfiller of dreams.

A week later, I heard CRASH-SCRAPE-BANG and peered outside to find an SUV, askew. Our pug said, "You better get out there, fast," so I rappelled down to the street. A distraught, incoherent woman in health care garb materialized. I reluctantly looked over at our Corolla: its entire driver's side was bashed in, sideview dangling like a cheap earring. The woman confessed that she had ignored a warning light for a couple of weeks, resulting in an untimely axle malfunction precisely where we had parked, though the street was empty for at least a block in either direction. I sensed a pattern forming.

We got acquainted with a new body shop. I begged the Corolla's forgiveness.

The second swipe involved a short elderly man in overalls driving a white van, the third a hit-and-run in the night. Having finally received the message, we started parking on a side street, and just in time: the pole outside our house then intercepted an SUV driven by a man tanked on PCP, which is code for *stupid*.

Ne'er-do-wells slowly realized that there was no point in bothering with our car. Even vandals only busted a tiny triangular window, easily fixed with plywood and duct tape, coagulated nectar of the gods. The Corolla was tired. It was time. Scratched, stained, ripped, matted, and dented, virtually no body part had avoided triage. Despite its wounds and imperfections, it had provided, protected, and stayed, which is more than I can say about some people.

When Paul and I presented the limping Corolla for trade-in on the Ford, we told the dealer it needed work. After a quick review, he reported, without creasing his plastic grin, "Yes, it is kind of rough," and offered us \$600. We accepted.

Before our first payment, Paul broke off the gas cover, leaving a shallow hole on the side of the car. He handed the severed disc to me, I deposited it in the map pocket, and we drove off.

See You Later

On July 17th 2011, I was in my room waiting for the premiere of the ABC Family movie *Cyberbully* after having dinner with my family. It was a lazy day; none of us had any plans except staying at home. I was lying in bed when I heard my mom scream. I rushed out of my room and followed the sound of her sobs to find her in her bedroom talking on the phone. "Please tell me you're pulling a prank. I'll forgive you for being harsh, but please tell me you aren't serious." I immediately thought of my grandmother and I started to panic that something had happened to her. As I watched my mom cry and beg, my mind was scattered trying to tie everything together. Once she hung up, I asked her what happened. "Roy's gone." I stood there confused for a second. *He's gone? Did he run away again? Was he kidnapped? Was he in jail again?* Not another second went by when I realized what my mom meant. In that moment, I was not interested in knowing what happened. All I knew was my cousin was not alive anymore.

Both my brother and dad had blank expressions on the drive to my aunt's house. My dad kept telling us not to worry because no one had identified Roy's body. My mom and I continued to sob and when my dad realized that nothing he was saying was comforting us, the car ride was silent except for our whimpers and sniffles. A few of my oldest cousins were at my aunt's house when we arrived. I cried in my cousin Deici's arms and started to hyperventilate. She repeated my dad's words, "We don't know if it's him. Don't cry." Roy's parents and brother were not home. We all sat in the living room hugging and crying and waiting for a response from Roy's parents. As the clock ticked by, more of our aunts and cousins were in the house but there was still no response. Since we did not know for sure, we all agreed that we would not tell our grandparents out of fear that the news could affect their health. For some reason, we all kept the living room lights off. The only light we left on was the kitchen light as if Roy were in there preparing food to satisfy his endless hunger.

As I sat on the couch with swollen eyes, I reminisced on my childhood with Roy and my cousins. The five of us were always together because none of us were more than two years apart—Roy, Danny, Jenny, and my brother Alex and I. Roy was the oldest and the most outgoing which made him the leader of our group. He would plan out our days in the summer. We usually ran in the sprinklers and sat in the blue plastic pool that had no room to swim in. When we wanted a snack, we devoured cucumber with lime and salt that our grandmother happily prepared for us. We spent the majority of our time outside, but our time spent inside was far from boring. We each picked a band member from the Vengaboys to play and we would hold concerts for our adoring fans, Jenny's Barbie dolls. Sometimes we played restaurant with the most popular dish served being Pringles. For the games where we needed pairs, Roy and I always joined together. Jenny would be furious with me when I would pick watching WWE with Roy instead of playing dolls with her, but I would not care because Roy was the one who wrapped his arm around my shoulders and protected me as if I were his little sister.

When we grew older, things changed. Roy ditched school, got in fights, and spent days without coming home. My aunt was restless. She was constantly picking him up at 2AM from different places. Roy started getting in trouble with the police, and by this time, we all felt distant from him. We did not understand how he was heading toward a completely different path from the rest of us. During this time, Roy was not as big a part of our lives as he was when we were younger. My cousins would constantly bash Roy while I sat there quietly hoping that he would return to hang out with us. Any chance I could get, I talked to him and asked if he would stay out of trouble. He would always say *yes*, but he would never follow through.

Despite everyone warning me against it, I decided to ask Roy if he would be my escort for my *quinceanera*. He didn't hesitate when he said *yes*, baffling me. I expected some kind of pause or resistance. I told him that he

had to attend rehearsals, and that he had to stay out of trouble. He smiled and said “okay.” Everyone told me that he would not even go to the first dance rehearsal. They also told me that if he did go, he would not stick around or he would not take it seriously. They were wrong. Roy was at every rehearsal and he was the quickest to learn the steps. He watched his feet as if there were mini-television screens on his shoes. When the rest of my *chambelanes* were goofing off, he stayed focused. Everyone thought that Roy would cause me more stress during those months, but he caused the opposite effect. I was stressed out and nervous the day before my party while we were rehearsing at the venue because one of the guys from my court was not taking the rehearsal seriously. As Roy and I were waiting for our entrance, I started to cry quietly. He turned to look at me and said, “Are you . . . are you *crying*? This wasn’t part of the deal! You’re not supposed to cry. Ignore Charlie. He’s an idiot. Do you want me to beat him up?” I quietly whispered, “Yes.” And he said, “I will when we’re finished rehearsing, but you need to stop crying because I can’t see you cry. I’m gonna start crying. Do you want me to cry?” I stopped crying and laughed due to being reminded of the times he wrapped his arm around my shoulders when we were kids. The familiar feeling of protection I received from him made me hopeful that things were going to return to normal.

Cousin Deici’s phone rang and we got the response that we were not prepared to hear. My uncle had identified the body. Roy was in a car accident with his friends, but he was the only one who died. The details are still fuzzy but what we do know is that Roy and four of his friends drove to Chicago to pick up an air-conditioner. They were about five minutes away from dropping Roy off at his house when they saw a rival gang member. They each flashed their signs and the rival threw a brick at the driver’s window. The driver wasn’t hit, but he swerved and consequently crashed into a tree. The air conditioner in the back of the SUV hit Roy on the back of his neck when he bounced out of his seat due to his lack of a seatbelt. His spinal cord was injured and he died instantly. When the police officer knocked on my aunt’s door that afternoon, he did not understand the pain his words caused when he said, “You should’ve taken care of your son. Now he’s dead.” That police officer only knew Roy as a delinquent. What he did not know was that Roy was waiting to receive his GED in the mail so that he could take engineering classes at the College of Lake County. The officer also did not know that Roy was feeling regret for the distance that had been created in our family and that he was going to try to fix it.

The last time I saw Roy was on Father’s Day. I feel regret for the words I did not say. Our entire family gathered at his house to celebrate. It was the first time I had seen Roy in months and he was grilling hamburgers for everyone. Honestly, I was upset that he was there. I did not want him there because I was frustrated with his disappearing and reappearing act. Calling me by my middle name, he said “Michelle, why are you ignoring me?” and I walked away from him without saying a word. That same day, my mom said that Roy approached her and told her that he wanted to visit us soon because he missed us. He told her, “I love Michelle, *tia*. I want us to see each other more often.” I bawled when my mom told me this and the remorse I felt became infinitely deeper. To this day, I regret not saying anything to Roy that day and not speaking to him more often.

When my aunt returned home, her face was blank as she hugged a frame with his picture. Her eyes were bloodshot and swollen, matching all of ours. She would not speak, but as soon as she would try, she would sob uncontrollably causing a chain reaction. We were all in a difficult position. We wanted to be strong and comfort my aunt, but we were all in pain too. We were all weak and we just wanted everything to be a lie. Seeing her breakdown was difficult, but seeing her in denial was much worse. When we finally maneuvered her to bed, she stood up and calmly said, “No, I can’t go to bed. Roy isn’t home yet. He’s going to call me soon, so I have to stay awake. He always calls me to pick him up no matter what time it is. I have to stay awake.” She constantly checked her phone waiting for the call she was never going to receive from him.

Being at his wake was one of the most difficult proceedings I have ever had to witness. Seeing my cousin lying in a casket with the clothes he wore at my uncle’s wedding, just four months previous, caused my heart to stutter. My family and I sat in the front with our matching black clothing and swollen bloodshot eyes. There were moments when we stopped crying and we were all quiet. We were overwhelmed seeing him lying motionless when just a year ago he was ballroom dancing with me. The tears disappeared and reappeared just like Roy did for the last few years of his life. We all watched attentively as my aunt stood up and walked to his casket. She caressed his face and begged him to wake up. She became hysterical and told him to stop sleeping because he had

been asleep for too long. This was too much for all of us to handle and we broke down with her before leading her back to the couch. When it was time for us to say goodbye, I debated on what to say. *Should I apologize for ignoring him? Should I tell him that I loved him and that I was going to miss him?* Once it was my turn, I looked at him and noticed that he needed a haircut. Knowing Roy, I'm sure that he had noticed this also and had planned to have it cut. I bent so that I could kiss his cheek. His skin had lost its warmth and fleshiness. Kissing the dead felt like kissing a mannequin. It was Roy's body, but he wasn't there anymore. Only then did I know what I should say to him: I simply whispered "Roy, see you later."

Biographies

Poetry

Seth Abramson

A graduate of Harvard Law School and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Seth Abramson is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Thievery* (University of Akron Press, 2013), winner of the 2012 Akron Poetry Prize. Series Co-Editor for Best American Experimental Writing (Omnidawn, 2014), he is currently a doctoral candidate in English Literature at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Footnote: "Something Else" and "Samaritans" are centos composed of two-, three-, and four-word phrases from a series of lectures on avant-garde literature delivered by University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor Emeritus Cyrena Pondrom in 2012. No more than six single-word substitutions were permitted per cento.

Catherine Blauvelt

Catherine Blauvelt is a 2012 graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In 2013 she won the "Discovery"/ *Boston Review* Poetry Contest. Her poems have previously appeared in or are forthcoming in *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Boston Review* and *The Iowa Review*, among others. She currently works for the Iowa Youth Writing Project and teaches at the University of Iowa.

Susana H. Case

Susana H. Case is a Professor and Program Coordinator at the New York Institute of Technology. Her photos have appeared in *San Pedro River Review* and *Blue Hour Magazine*, among others. Her Slapering Hol Press chapbook, *The Scottish Café*, was published in a dual-language version, *Kawiarnia Szkocka*, by Poland's Opole University Press. She authored the books, *Salem In Séance* (WordTech Editions), *Elvis Presley's Hips & Mick Jagger's Lips* (Anaphora Literary Press), and *Earth and Below* (Anaphora Literary Press). *4 Rms w Vu* is forthcoming from Mayapple Press in 2014.

Jim Davis

Jim Davis is a graduate of Knox College and an MFA candidate at Northwestern University. Jim lives, writes, and paints in Chicago, where he edits *North Chicago Review*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Seneca Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Contemporary American Voices*, in addition to winning multiple contests, prizes, Editor's Choice awards, and a recent nomination for the Best of the Net Anthology. His book, *Assumption* (Unbound Content, 2013) will soon be followed by book two, *Earthmover* (Unbound Content).

In addition to the arts, Jim is a teacher, coach, and international semi-professional football player.

Nandini Dhar

Nandini Dhar hails from Kolkata, India. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Potomac Review*, *PANK*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Pear Noir*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Her work has also been featured in the anthology *The Moment of Change: An Anthology of Feminist Speculative Writing*. She teaches postcolonial literature and gender studies at Florida International University, Miami and co-edits the online journal *Elsewhere*.

William Doreski

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and teaches at Keene State College. His most recent

book of poetry is *The Suburbs of Atlantis* (2013). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *Massachusetts Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Alembic*, *New England Quarterly*, *Worcester Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Modern Philology*, *Antioch Review*, and *Natural Bridge*.

Kevin Dougherty

Kevin Dougherty was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and under a tree. Currently an MFA candidate at the University of Arkansas, he enjoys writing poems about skin, water, and accidents. Work of his has previously appeared in the 30th anniversary edition of *The Allegheny Review* and Bowling Green University's *Prairie Margins*.

Raymond Farr

Raymond Farr is an author of numerous books in print, including *Ecstatic/.of facts* (Otoliths 2011) as well as *Starched*, *Rien Ici*, and *Writing What For? across the Mourning Sky*. His latest book *Poetry in the Age of Zero Grav* is due out in 2014. He is editor of the experimental poetry zine *Blue & Yellow Dog* (<http://blueyellowdog.weebly.com>).

José Gutierrez:

José Luis Gutiérrez is a San Francisco-based poet. His work has appeared in *The Cortland Review*, *Eratio*, *Margie*, *Juked*, *DMQ*, among others.

Summer Jenkins

Summer Jenkins spends most of her time insanely busy, scribbling on every surface that can be found (including walls, although she will, hopefully, grow out of that soon), and making sure that her wonderful fiancé and cat don't decide to abandon her through lack of food, shelter and occasional affection. She has a Master's of Arts in Creative Writing from Longwood University, is an Adjunct at Central Virginia Community College, donates time to her local library, and is currently working on her second Master's at Lynchburg College. Let it be said that she never stopped to smell the roses.

Emily Rose Kahn-Sheahan

Emily Rose Kahn-Sheahan lives in Chicago where she hosts and curates the Mental Graffiti poetry series and *Real Talk Live* when she's not converting coffee drinkers to the amazing world of loose tea. Her work has recently appeared in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *After Hours*, and *TimeOut Chicago*. Her chapbook, "Cigarette Love Songs and Nicotine Kisses" was published by Cross+Roads Press.

Joey Kingsley

Joey Kingsley is an instructor in the English department at the University of Mary Washington. She received her MFA in creative writing (poetry) from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2012. She lives in Richmond, Virginia.

Kathleen Kirk

Kathleen Kirk is the author of four poetry chapbooks, most recently *Nocturnes* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2012). Her work appears in numerous print and online magazines, including *Arsenic Lobster*, *blossombones*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Poetry East*, and *Waccamaw*. She is the poetry editor for *Escape Into Life*.

Erika Lutzner

Erika Lutzner's first chapbook, *Invisible Girls*, is available through dancing girl press as well as her second, *Bedtime Stories*. Her next book, *You Were My Death*, is forthcoming by Kattywompus Press. Erika curates Upstairs At Erika's, a monthly writers salon in Brooklyn, New York. She also runs *Scapegoat Review*, a quarterly journal.

Carlo Matos

Carlo Matos has published four books. His poems, stories and essays have appeared in many online and print journals like *Menacing Hedge*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Atticus Review*, *DIAGRAM* and *Arsenic Lobster*. Reviews of his books can be found at *Boston Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Portuguese-American Journal*, and *The Conium Review*. He earned a Ph.D in English literature from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and teaches writing at the City Colleges of Chicago. A former cage fighter, Carlo now trains fighters when he's not entertaining clients at the Chicago Poetry Bordello. For more about his work, please visit carlomatos.blogspot.com

Marty McConnell

Marty McConnell lives in Chicago, Illinois where she works for a youth and family center. She received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, and her work has recently appeared in *A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry*; *City of the Big Shoulders: An Anthology of Chicago Poetry*; *Gulf Coast*; *Indiana Review*; *Crab Orchard*; *Salt Hill Review*; *Beloit Poetry Journal* and others. Her first full-length collection, *wine for a shotgun*, was published in 2012 by EM Press.

Tyler Mills

Tyler Mills is the author of *Tongue Lyre* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), which won the 2011 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award. Her poems have received awards from the *Crab Orchard Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Third Coast* and have appeared in *AGNI*, *Best New Poets*, *The Antioch Review*, *Georgia Review*, *TriQuarterly Online*, and elsewhere. A graduate of the University of Maryland (MFA, poetry), Tyler Mills is currently a PhD candidate in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Jennifer Moore

Jennifer Moore has poems published or forthcoming in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Best New Poets*, *The Volta*, *Columbia Poetry Review* and elsewhere, and criticism in *Jacket2* and *The Offending Adam*. She holds degrees from the University of Colorado and the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is an assistant professor of Creative Writing at Ohio Northern University.

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren is an MFA candidate in Poetry and Literary Translation at Columbia University and the *Dispatches* editor for *Words Without Borders*. Her honors include an Academy of American Poets Prize, a Hopwood Award, and a 2013-2014 Fulbright Fellowship to Brazil; she was also a finalist for this year's Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship. You can find her work in literary journals including *Narrative*, *Guernica*, *The Common*, *Two Lines*, and *BOMB*.

Daniel Poppick

Daniel Poppick's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *BOMB*, *jubilat*, *Iowa Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Claudius App*, and elsewhere. A chapbook is forthcoming this fall from Petri Press. He lives and works in Iowa City, where he curates the Antibody Series and co-publishes the *Catenary Press* with Rob Schlegel.

Nate Slawson

Nate Slawson is the author of *Panic Attack, USA* (YesYes Books, 2011) and two chapbooks, including *The Tiny Jukebox* (H_NGM_N Books). Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bakery*, *Whiskey Island*, and other places. He lives in Chicago and is the publisher/designer of *THE NEW MEGAPHONE*.

Danielle Susi

Danielle Susi is an MFA student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Pink Pangea*, *Airplane Reading*, *Vagabond City*, *Squawk Back*, *Decades Review*, *The Milo Review*,

and elsewhere. She is the recipient of a writer's grant and residency from the Vermont Studio Center.

Emily Vizzo

Emily Vizzo has recently completed her MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts and a summer residency at the Vermont Studio Center. Recently, she published work in *FIELD*, *The North American Review*, and the literary magazine *Ellipsis*. Emily Vizzo's journalism work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Scripps Howard News Service* and other national platforms. She is a National Writing Project fellow with the San Diego Area Writing Project and teach yoga at the University of San Diego.

Helen Wickes

Helen Wickes lives in Oakland, California. Her first book of poems, *In Search of Landscape*, was published in 2007 by Sixteen Rivers Press.

Andrea Witzke Slot

Andrea Witzke Slot is author of the poetry collection *To find a new beauty* (Gold Wake Press, 2012). Her work has appeared in such places as *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Borderlands*, *Verse Daily*, *Southern Women's Review*, and *Translation Review*, while her scholarly essays on dialogic poetry and social change are forthcoming in critical collections from SUNY Press and Palgrave Macmillan. Andrea teaches at UIC and is an associate editor at *Rhino Poetry* as well as the book review editor at *Fifth Wednesday Journal*. She lives outside Chicago with her husband, the youngest of her five children/stepchildren, and her crazy West Highland Terrier, Macbeth. Learn more at <http://www.andreawitzkeslot.com>.

Art

Brittany Bishop

Brittany Bishop is a Junior at Lewis University pursuing majors in Psychology and Art, as well as a minor in Creative Writing. She enjoys creating art and fiction pieces. Bishop also loves taking walks in the woods, going up to Starved Rock, and basically all things nature.

Brittany has been interested in art her entire life and has been encouraged to develop her skills since she can remember. Over the past three years, she has been experimenting with everything she can. Brittany is not in a rush to find one particular style and is more interested in adventuring into many different medias, topics, and styles to grow.

Cynthia Heller-Heinz

Cynthia Heller-Heinz is a full time artist and teacher. Her husband of thirty years, a ceramic artist, and Heller-Heinz work out of their home studio in Warrenville, Illinois. It is a place of creative dust. She has always made art and is fortunate enough to have had parents who recognized and encouraged her work. At age seven Heller-Heinz began taking classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. She earned a bachelor degree in Fine Arts from Pratt Institute. In the year 2000 Heller-Heinz received her M.F.A. from Northern Illinois University and has been teaching drawing there full time.

Heller-Heinz became involved with the health field. Through investigation of the physical effects of time on the body, she found a fascination with aging flesh. Not only is she observing age on the human anatomy but time's impact on the organic matter in her surroundings. She is a committed gardener and often watch as the tomatoes ripen, to rot, to seed, to regeneration. Heller-Heinz witness the same cyclic effect on the matter of fabric and flesh. Her family and the nature encircling her studio have become the resource for her visual vocabulary. Heller-Heinz is inspired by continuous changes observed through inner-connectedness felt by engaging time and the positive metamorphosis of the body and spirit. It is possible to see the full potential of life in nature and she finds it imperative to offer this image to the viewer through drawing.

Regarding the seeming abundance of nature; we photograph, we paint, we hang it with reverence on our walls, yet we so easily dismiss the fragile, temporal aspects of nature. The sparrow, common and plentiful as the newspaper, the epic image of the forest, they are all a fleeting moment vulnerable to our human disposal.

Raeleen Kao

Raeleen Kao is a Chicago-based artist working primarily in the mediums of etching and graphite drawing. She is currently employed as a printer at White Wings Press, a print studio located in the historic neighborhood of Logan Square in Chicago specializing in multi-plate etching and photogravure. She previously worked at Tandem Press in Madison, WI, Anchor Graphics in Chicago, and studied photogravure at Cape Fear Press in Carolina Beach, NC. She has worked on print projects with artists including Fred Stonehouse, Judy Pfaff, Robert Cottingham, Audrey Niffenegger, Enrique Chagoya, Jose Lerma, Teresa James, Nikola Lopez, Julie Farstad, and Diana Sudyka. Her personal work has been exhibited at Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago, the Monmouth Museum of Art in Lincroft, NJ, Peltz Gallery in Milwaukee, WI, and has won the ArtSlant 1st 2013 Showcase Award and a second place prize in the 23rd Parkside national exhibition of small prints, juried by John Hitchcock.

Connor McLennan

Connor McLennan has been an art student at Lewis University for 4 years, Majoring in Painting and Studio Art. McLennan combines elements of color, gestural line, representation and expression. Initially attracted to the represented form of the human figure, McLennan then adds an emotionally driven abstract element to the piece. Being a musician of multiple instruments, McLennan uses the fluidity and energy of sound to create a gestural and expressive quality of line and color. When first starting this combination of elements, McLennan was trying to “vandalize” a canvas (as a street artist would a building) and then paint a more traditional portrait over the top, giving the pieces an urban, weathered and atmospheric setting. As work progressed and experimentation took place, mindless vandalism turned into the portrayal of the figures inner emotions. While contrasting organic shapes with geometric shapes, McLennan also depicts what is seen and what is felt within the subject. McLennan has been awarded for his work in shows such as The Presidents Art Show (4 years in a row), *Windows Magazine* (4 years in a row) and The Celebration of Scholarship (2 years).

Michael Progress

Michael Progress is currently the Assistant Dean for the College of Business at Lewis University. In addition to his Bachelor and Master degrees in business, he recently graduated with a Bachelor degree in Studio Art from Lewis University this past May. Progress’s main areas of interest are in the areas of photography and found objects sculpture.

Much of his recent artwork has been inspired by urban areas. He believes being raised in a rural area has enabled him to have a unique prospective on the urban areas that he captures in his artwork.

Jessica Richey

“Houdini” is a three-dimensional piece composed of clay, tape, marbles, charcoal, cardboard, and hot glue on a cardboard background.

“Heart Monitor” is a three-dimensional piece made out of painted cardboard and wire.

Mark Swain

Mark Swain holds an MFA in painting from Northern Illinois University. Professor Swain has taught full time at Lewis University for 15 years and has been the department chairperson for the last 9 years. Swain’s interest in painting and drawing began to develop during his time as an undergraduate student here at Lewis. His style has developed into what is often referred to as social realism. Much of Swain’s interest in subject, form, and content is derived from his immediate surroundings often involving the mundane and otherwise unnoticed aspects of

our visual world. He typically paints on canvas or panel in oil or acrylic. Most of Professor Swain's paintings are accompanied by a similar preparatory drawing.

Fiction

Karen Dwyer

Karen Dwyer's recent fiction has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Other Voices*, and *The Southeast Review*, and her nonfiction has appeared in *Brainchild* and *Gettysburg Review*.

Dennis Herbert

Dennis Scott Herbert is dangerous. He is a recent graduate of Coastal Carolina University and current MFA candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato where he serves as one of the fiction editors for the *Blue Earth Review*. His work has appeared in *TRON* and *Archaios Literary Art Magazine*.

Lennart Lundh

Lennart Lundh is a short-fiction writer, poet, historian, and photographer. His work has been published internationally since 1965, including a previous appearance in *Jet Fuel Review*. A chapbook, *Pictures of an Other Day*, was released by Writing Knights Press (Cleveland) in 2013. Lundh and his wife live in northern Illinois, where he manages text acquisitions for a university.

Todd Easton Mills

Todd Easton Mills received his bachelor's degree from Antioch University. As a young man he defined himself as a traveler, working his way around the world and supporting himself as a laborer, cook, and teacher in faraway places like the Highlands of New Guinea. Now, with his drifter days behind him, Easton Mills live comfortably with his Zimbabwean wife in Ojai, California.

Easton Mills cowrote and produced the documentary film *Timothy Leary's Dead*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rougarou*, *The Alembic*, *Griffin*, *The Legendary*, *ONTHEBUS*, *Voices*, *The Coe Review*, *Yellow Silk*, *AUSB Odyssey*, *Sage Trail*, *RiverSedge*, *Paranoia VHS*, *Collage*, *Antiochracy*, *Forge*, and in the anthology *Poets on 9-11*.

Cyndy Muscatel

A former English teacher, Cyndy Muscatel has published many short stories, children's stories and memoir pieces. She has written for several magazines in the Palm Springs area, specializing in interviewing celebrities, sports figures and politicians. She writes two blogs, *A Corner of My Mind* and *Writing Do's and Don'ts*. Muscatel also teaches creative writing to adults, and is proud that many of them are now published writers. She is working on a memoir, titled *Radio Days*.

James Pratley

James Pratley earned his bachelor's degree at Oberlin College and his doctorate in cell biology at the University of Texas. Pratley attended the Aegean Center for the Fine Arts in Paros, the Aegean Arts Circle in Andros, and several workshops in Europe and America.

His two novels, *Leto's Journey* (Vantage Press, 2002) and *The Green Helix* (CreateSpace, 2011), both have settings in the Greek islands.

Music and science are his two loves in life: He has played piano and organ in recitals and worked in research labs around the country and in Europe.

Frank Scozzari

Frank Scozzari's fiction has previously appeared in various literary magazines including *The Kenyon Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Folio*, *The Nassau Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Ellipsis Magazine*, *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. Writing awards include Winner of the National Writer's Association Short Story Contest and three Pushcart Prize nominations.

Nonfiction**Wendy Bilen**

Wendy Bilen is an Illinoisan, born (Arlington Heights) and raised (mostly Elgin), though she transplanted to Washington, DC, a few years back. She is the author of *Finding Josie*, an award-winning biography-memoir about the search for her grandmother's legacy (throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota). Bilen's essays, articles, and photography have appeared in several journals and newspapers, including the Washington Post. She teaches writing to young women at Trinity College in Washington.

Gabriela Mendoza

Gabriela Mendoza is a freshman at Lewis University majoring in psychology. She grew up in Waukegan, IL where the majority of her family live close by. Her education and family are what she values the most, and she hopes to someday earn a Master's Degree in Psychology to motivate her younger cousins to pursue a higher education.

