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REFLECTION

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Cover Art • *Texture of Life* Katherine Charters

Mixed Media: Acrylic paint, tulle, and netting

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Creative Limit, Sean WILLIAMS
Graphic Pen and Water Color

Glass Hearts and Bullets

Corwin BRYAN

Beveling outwards
The shards of glass explode,
Spinning in slow motion
As the bullet passes through
The same air in which they now hang.
The hole in the pane
Weakens the widowed window
And cohesion gives way to a crack
That spreads, spiderwebs across the surface
Until the hollow glass now resembles
A desert parched by a thousand years of drought.
Now fragile,
Even more so than it always has been,
The vitrified sand comes
As fine as it was before it entered the furnace
And among the grains can be found
No connection,
No hold,
Nothing that any amount of adhesives
Could ever repair.
Pierced by supersonic lead,
The glass, now dust, clings to itself,
Somehow defying gravity,
Somehow still holding shape,
Desperately trying to deny
That even the gentlest breeze
Now threatens to whisk it all away.
The bullet fades into the distance,
Lost in the resounding silence,
Having left, in a fraction of a second,
A scar
That after a thousand years will remain.

All this comes to pass inside,
Hidden from view,
With the only external evidence being
A single, shining tear.

Entangled Words

Luca BACCI

My words entangle
Like a thousand barb wire fences
Weaving figure eight knots
Of death and danger,

That toil and snare
Drums drum out the beat
Of unheard marches
As soldiers dance
To a numeric phrase
Afraid of the bubonic plague.

Which drummed out
Those of us too afraid to play,
And those who could not survive mortality.
Rapidly these entanglements increase
Like a spider spinning a web of black tar
Around the clutches of a python
Who grips a grenade with no key
Like a map leading to nowhere
And—
Bam!

My words erupt from this inside out volcano,
Covering my victims in ash of story.
From Pompeii, to Bombay, to LA
This entanglement blocks out the sun,
And every man woman and child
Learns what it is
To “breathe through your ears.”

My lyrical explosion implodes
And I bestow life on those willing to listen.
This unpeeled orange
Begins to unhinge,
And my entangled words
Begin to give in

It unravels like Aladdin's magic carpet
And engulfs the world in a sea of darkness.
The darkest sense is light,
And the loudest word that you can ever yell,
Is whisper.
Silence remains unbroken until you utter it,
It is golden and our currency.

My tangled thoughts unleashed on the world
A plague of locusts, feeding on bewilderment.
Each sentence long enough to cover the world nine times,
Given to you in a box with a ribbon of fate,
Cut through with the sharpest of shears
Made of 7 billion ears.

And this hail mary full of grace
Atomic race
Nuclear warhead is dropped,
Swallowed by all ears
Pointing north the heavens above
But mouths to the ground bellow,
So that they too can spit out their
Entangled words.



Mr. Zebra, Maura LATTY
Woodcut Reduction Print



Mrs. Crocodile, Maura LATTY
Woodcut and Screen Print

Kubla and
the Jabberwock,
or,
The Second,
and Altogether
Stranger
Part

Brian JOYCE

'Twas brillig down in Xanadu
Where the momewrathes grabed and grabed and grew.
The slithy toves, the borogroves,
All wondered what to do.

And from the fountain and the caves
There was heard its mingled measure
Whiffing through the dome of pleasure
And burbling in the lifeless waves.

Yet, amid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war.
And with his vorpal sword he ran
Right through the caverns measureless to man.

Into the gardens bright with sinuous rills
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery
Here he stood a while in thought
before the forests ancient as the hills
Waiting he by the incense tree,
Where the match was to be fought.

Up came the Jabberwock in corded hame,
Splinking out its furmious, curded name.
The monstrous form, at once, our Kubla saw,
And began its gallish singing of Mount Abora.

For he who heard did see it there
And began to cry, "Beware, Beware!
It's flashing eyes and floating hair!"
He weaved a circle round it thrice
Then snicker-snacked those caves of ice
Upon the demon's head.
He closed his eyes with holy dread,
His legs as taught as beams of lead,
As he took the milk of Paradise.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
He passed a damsel wailing for her demon-lover.
She lay upon a green hill athwart a cedarn cover.
And all mimsy were the borogroves beside her lifeless ocean.

Yet on her dulcimer she played,
"And has thou slain the Jabberwock, my beamish boy?
The frabjous day! Calloohed! Callayed!"
She chortled in her joy.

'Twas brillig down in Xanadu
Where the momewrathes grabed and grabed and grew.
The slithy toves, the borogroves,
All wondered what to do.



Steam Rising, Brett BOLLIER

The Michael and Gail Gurian Non-Fiction Prize Winner

Outside, like fog

Julian LaCASSE

It's just the beginning I said and you said yeah of what (without thinking like you always do) so I said for you to get off my back and you said no it's not time for the beginning of that yet we still have to eat the flowers and go sailing and see the opening and closing of the mechanized mouths opening and closing by the riverside when the flies fly in.

Those flies with the blue bottoms that fly so slow we wonder if they're even flying enough to be called flies, the flies that really should be called floats because sometimes they float into your nose and my nose and the opening and closing mechanized mouths. The mouths cough them up. The mouths spit them out, out from their noses covered in what I used to call nose oil -on a rainy day in 1996 where there were plates of chips and the chips were stale but it didn't matter much, it was raining- because it's slippery. Like oil, and they spit them so far and so fast that all of the nose oil drips and slips and falls. It splashes in dots dots dots on the river where the reeds would blow if there were reeds by the river, by that path, by the grass by that hotel.

• • •

It's all relative I say and you say relative to what and I say well for me to answer that question it would all have to be...not relative, even my answer, because it's relative to everything but mostly time and space and love and death and those floats with the blue bottoms that fly so slowly we call them flies and then they become covered in nose oil that drips because it's cold outside.

It's cold enough to snow but it won't because where there might be snow there are already floats with two wings but no flakes. Each one is the same-that isn't relative. Yes it is I say it is because it must be because I already said everything is and my watch agrees and so do the flies. You mean the floats you say and I have to say yes but only if we're correct. Is that the job of the man (because as much as I like to cook, I don't think they would taste very good)?

• • •

I ALWAYS am. Correct, I mean. I must be, because I wear three watches all set to the same second and how could someone who is that right, right-down-to-the-second right, right every time and only-on-the-left-arm right, left to write right-here-where-I-write right, right at 6:03 when it is still-almost-dark-already right. It's all time and time is all relative you say and I say then I cannot and must be, right.

The reeds make a whisk...whisk...whoosh and sometimes a clap! sound. You know what time, right, before now, what time? When we were looking

out over the water behind the reeds in front of the hotel right beside the path listening? I say. Yes, we were imagining, while trying to keep the floats, (wings and blue bottoms and all- they are so slow- do they even have eyes?) out of our noses while I told you that the dots that invaded the tops of the reeds, the part that sticks up out of the water, proposing to become a land animal, proposing marriage to the terra, on its knees promising to take off all of those dots on the top to stick them to your face if you let it stay by your window to photosynthesize.

• • •

How do we define: you

"For her were meant those terrible words of Louis-Philippe, 'and a night comes when all is over, when so many jaws have closed upon us that we no longer have the strength to stand, and our meat hangs upon our bodies, as though it had been masticated by every mouth.'"

• • •

That reed didn't give you any freckles. Nature breaks the rules because it doesn't know the rules, which isn't really the same I guess, you say. Tortoises can live for up to 200 years so they move slowly. Like rocks (that's an order). They live for a long time, so long. So long that they have their own expression to describe how long they live and how long it takes them to move, or break. The floats move slowly too, but they don't live very long. They only live for a month. They only live to procreate. They only live to come and go, go die, I mean. They only live. Live only for a month, if you can stay by the river with me, and they, they don't get eaten by the mechanized mouths or fish or us but that doesn't stop them from moving slowly because it's a long month. You said how long is a long month, genius? and I said forever but you need to figure out relativity first, but you were looking into the bushes and I was looking at you, but talking to the mouths.

I always think about that day. That was the day that the enorgantithic orange cooler full of you-flavored Gatorade splashed, lifted by you (on purpose) on me. It saturated my hair, my clothes, my mind, and dripped slowly off of my fingertips, soaking itself into whatever I touched or almost touched or probably thought about touching. It formed that purpleblackred sheen on my skin when it dried so everyone could see it when I walked in the sun, and it felt like I always walked in the sun.

* Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p.45

We fish for jar with kittens
 my father said.

We drove by the my uncle's farm
 before parking at the dock
 by the As-sible Chasm ravine.

Deep water. I knew a canvas
 bag was in the trunk.

Loading the boat w/ beer
 and poles, ^{fishy gear} wire leaders, ~~etc~~

that bag ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{thunked} on the bottom
 of the aluminum hull, the sound of
 bodies distinct as any ^{bird} ~~bird~~
 flower I had ever or
 will ever hold. We fish

for jar w/ kittens, my father said
 "The diddick wales of animals"

Admit Possession to Rent
 Original Manuscript from Tod Marshall

the only animals to drink
 so ~~know~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~

I know
 that I
 would

and that
 my dead
 would kiss

I know
 lunch would
 be roast beef
 sandwiches and
 a thick stew
 w/ chunks
 of carrot
 and potatoes.

Row boats,
 four back on hour,
 fifteen back
 all day.

Chase
 or No food
 "Murr is
 my listy
 is-kimblet"

Oils
 whole
 woods
 Steve
 and

Admit Possession to Rent
Original Manuscript from Tod Marshall

We stopped at a farmer's house
before parking at the dock
that creaked over the river.
Rowboats for rent, five bucks
an hour, twenty for the day.
Deep water: I knew a canvas bag

was in the trunk. I knew lunch
would be roast beef sandwiches
and hot stew from a thermos,
chunks of carrot and potatoes
cut by my mother who slept
through the racket of our leaving.

While my father paid, I loaded
the boat with our poles
and tackle boxes, lead sinkers
shaped like grey pears, raincoats
and a case of beer. I was ten
and I knew my dad would toss

that canvas bag into the aluminum
boat with a thunk. We fish for gar
with kittens, he'd yelled last night
at my mother, and that was that.
The rowboat slid from the dock,
the occasional clunk of the first

six-pack clipped on the fish stringer,
and I knew that I should take my time
fastening the wire leader
to the brass swivel, tying on
those massive sinkers. I knew
that the six-inch treble hook

would tremble in my hands,
and when I was done, I knew
what came next, a canvas bag,
stiff kittens, blood. I tore
two hooks through the side
of a calico, yanked upward with a

sharp tug to lodge the third barb
beneath the ribs. I dangled
my fingers in cold water
to wash them, then reared
the rod back into a cast that splashed
twenty feet from the boat.

Admit Possession to Rent

Tod MARSHALL

As printed in his second collection of poetry
"The Tangled Line" and on the Poetry Foundation website.

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He popped the third beer and finished
baiting his hook. Too deep
for an anchor, we drifted,
and far beneath, the gar cruised
back and forth, their prehistoric
snouts slicing the dark, bumping

our bait again and again
until that fierce hunger I was learning
said clamp down and take it.



View from Ecola, Leah BECKETT

Rock Climbing in Zhengzhou

Katherine JOYCE

Happy Happy Hello Home

Leave my brush and pack my comb

I'm going on the nineteenth

Returning on the fifth

Outgoing on the fourteenth

Returning on the sixth

Staying? No, I've got to go

and find a broad wide place

Even though I love it so

My mind must find some space

Happy Humming Nihao Roam

"Excuse me, please, is this my home?"

The world you no more carry

So please do let it be

It fits right in My pocket

I'm glad you came to Me

Sitting? Hmmm...just for a bit

I'll put this in my case

Take time to sit on path well lit

And rest the running race

Contentment come Contentment go

Let me stop and say hello

Take the gift, not question it

Drink it in, not dissect it

This. There. Not square

For everything you can't prepare

This. That. Nothing flat

Buy yourself a traveling hat

The question's not "How can I fly?"

Why. Why. Why. Why?

The question's not "What do I want?"

What. Do. I. Want?!

The question's not on you at all

It's simple question of the call:

Will you, will you come away?

Come away with Me?

Or will you, will you? choose to stay

In paths that you can see?

Contentment come Contentment grow

Up the rock face I will go

Contentment stay Contentment sow

Plant deep in my heart, low, low, low

Women's Lib

Amanda PRZYBYLA

Judy's palm didn't rest idly on her knee for more than a few seconds. It darted into Fran's cheek, sending a shock-wave through her face after the sharp snap of skin against skin. The reddening spot, blossoming under the fresh glaze of tears, served as Fran's signal to gather her things and tread out of the locker room where the two of them sat.

Judy might have avoided it if she hadn't remembered their first college party together. The image still lingered into her head: Fran, rolling her skirt to make it shorter, tugging at bits and pieces of her outfit to keep everything in place, and begging Judy to go to Ed Nelson's house party down the road.

"Who's Ed Nelson?" Judy remembered asking.

"I don't really know. But you have to come with me. I have to be there tonight, everybody's going to be there."

"Not me. Fran, it's not ladylike." She crossed her ankles for emphasis. "I'd at least like to know who Ed Nelson is and whichever one of his friends has a birthday."

"It's nobody's birthday."

"Then why would he have a party?"

Fran combed through her hair more vigorously. Judy remembered her talking about some actress named Racquel Welch and how fabulous she looked in the preview for One Million Years B.C. But also about how she didn't have half the hair to mimic the style. She had always seemed more appropriate as Agent 99 from Get Smart, shoe phone in hand. "Sometimes people just have parties for fun," Fran said. "And I really need you to come with me. It's not unladylike. 'Lady' means different things to different people, and I'm just as much of a lady as you are."

Judy scoffed. Fran had seemed so different when they moved in a few months earlier. They had dressed alike, and sometimes even went to church together when Judy could make her, but Fran had morphed into a different woman. Though it wouldn't be the last party she would unwillingly attend, Judy appreciated that her friend kept most of her newfound freedom to herself. Most, but not all.

"Fine, I'll go. But we're not staying very long." Judy barely had time to find her clutch. Fran grabbed her hand and they ran out front where a gentleman waited for them in a Cadillac,

as if she knew the entire time that Judy would submit to her. She spent the rest of the evening drooping uncomfortably under a nameless man's arm while Fran had her first hit of reefer in a circle with Ed Nelson. She walked home, refusing to lower her standards again by riding in a car with a man she didn't know.

Sometimes Judy felt that little had changed in the last 40 years. Fran still ran around with men, using anti-aging creams now instead of reefer as her way of getting attention. When she joined Fran's water aerobics class twice a week at the Y, she didn't even resort to a fur-lined bikini—her Raquel Welch phase had ended decades ago—but men flocked to her anyway. In fact, what began with only a smattering of married men mutated into a watering hole for six eligible bachelors to pursue her.

Judy had won with Mort, though. He had opened a checking account for her during sophomore year, and she held the ultimate prize of 38 years of marriage close to her heart—even if she did look her age next to Fran. Before he died from a second heart attack, they spent Wednesdays at the homeless shelter and Sundays at mass once they started going steady, only changing their regular pew once kids came along. "Fanny," as Mort occasionally called Fran, never liked husbands or kids and preferred the single life ever since her first bra burning and subsequent obsession with women's lib in '67. Sex meant empowerment, so she practiced constantly—this week she targeted Frank, a man who visibly perspired in the pool.

Judy never cared to discuss anyone's sex life; yet Fran, as the resident sexpert, demanded an audience for her juicy stories. Any normal person would think themselves a good friend if they endured sweaty details to quench someone else's appetite for attention. Judy was a fairly normal person.

"So tell me about last night. Did you do dinner with Frank?"

Fran sat on one of the benches in the locker room, fidgeting with her bathing suit strap. "Sure, but I'm surprised I made it through dessert. He wanted to slow things down, the gentleman."

"Fanny, no man can keep up with you, gentle or otherwise," Judy said. Fran continued to tug and pull at her black bathing suit. The two of them meandered down the hall toward

the pool where their morning water aerobics class had started five minutes ago. Fran had always enjoyed making an entrance since that first college party.

They walked into the room as their classmates finished their warm ups in the water, and Fran quickly changed the subject. "I should set you up with one of his friends. Mort's out of your life now, you know, and Frank has quite a few Rotary connections." Fran's voice boomed across the pool and bounced off the high-vaulted ceiling. Judy couldn't shush her in time; the entire class broke their gaze on Bonnie, the tight-skinned instructor, but continued lifting their weights in formation as they gawked at the ladies. Judy noticed Denny first and how his goggles had already collected a lacy fog around the edges.

"Some of us need to remember that our time is our health, hmm?" Bonnie said, snapping the class back into the workout. Judy sheepishly grinned her apology, dropped her towel, and flopped in the pool quickly so Denny wouldn't see the jellied cellulite creeping up her thighs. Meanwhile, Fran peeled off her robe and snapped the straps on her black suit so they sat properly on her shoulders. Fran's taut, tanned calves melted into the water, and Judy tore her gaze from them to see if her friend had enchanted Denny as much as the rest of the class. His fully fogged goggles, instead of gazing at Fanny, had turned to her.

Fran daintily made her way to their usual spot in the back row. "Snotty bitch," she mumbled. "She needs to respect her elders." Judy absently nodded, cutting her feet through the water in an attempt to follow the rest of the class. She kept a covert gaze on Denny's silvery hair while following Bonnie.

Fran exaggerated every jump and lift possible, still managing to excite attention in the back row. Tilting sideways, she let out a moan to annoy Bonnie and demonstrate the difficulty of low-impact stretching. Denny creaked his head back and the two exchanged smiles while Judy was too devoted to her frog jumping technique to notice. Class ended after a string of slow-jointed jumping jacks and a jog around the edge of the pool.

Fran immediately glided out of the water to chat with her classmates as they dried off, while Judy prolonged her exit to avoid a fatal encounter with Denny. Wrapping her towel tightly around her waist to cover everything she could, she found him sloshing past her in his water shoes and rolling his goggles off his face; he found her eyes long enough to shoot her a wink. Instead of curling her lips into a smile, she grabbed Fran's arm and steered her toward the locker room.

"Hey, I was talking to Frank." Fran motioned to his gold-toothed grin.

"No time." Judy understood modest flirting enough to snag a husband, but Mort had been so direct

in their marriage, so pointed. The man consistently knew what he wanted; after all, he did propose to Judy after only knowing her for two months. He also demanded bacon every morning, well-behaved children, and a nearly spotless house for 38 years. Yet Denny's flash of a wink and uncanny resemblance to Bob Eubanks sent her into a hot confusion that even a frigid spray of shower water could not drown. She rummaged for a comb in her locker.

"Denny's a hot one, huh?" Fran said as she slid her suit straps off her shoulders. Judy saw her spine ripple in the smoothness of her back and wondered why God blessed some and cursed others.

"I guess so," Judy replied, struggling to maintain disinterest. "The goggles are a bit of a turnoff, don't you think?"

"Naturally." Fran slid her crimson blouse over her head. "But that doesn't mean he wouldn't be good for a shag. All that fog is probably hiding his bedroom eyes."

Judy's mind twisted at the idea of Fran and Denny in the sack as she sat alone in her house knitting or watching Wheel of Fortune. It didn't seem fair that Fran had this easy, lasting fun while she had landed a gig frying bacon and wiping dribbly noses.

"But what about Frank? It sounds like things are going well with you two."

"Judy, you've always known that I never stay with one man for too long, no matter how good he is. Commitment hurts—no offense to you, of course."

"But why him? There are plenty of other men in that class."

Fran stopped wringing out her suit in an attempt to contemplate the question. "He's cute. He smiled at me in the pool." When she turned her back on her friend to face her locker, Judy's stomach sank. Fran managed to squirm into her jeans and boots before noticing that she still sat hunched over in her towel. "Why aren't you dressed yet? I might die if I don't get coffee in the next five minutes."

"Sorry." Fran's sense of drama, not-a-day-over-50 look and designer sex appeal always trumped anything Judy could offer. For 38 years, she had only cared about her Bible study, her kids and what Mort saw in her while Fran focused on keeping her hand in the dating pool. She swam into her jumper and began combing her hair before Fran spoke again.

"So what do you think? Should I give him my number?"

Judy turned from her mirror to face Fran: her leather blazer, her gold bangles, her hand on her hip. She gripped the comb and looked back at her reflection, breathing a resigned sigh over wrinkles sinking deeper and deeper into her face.

"Sure. You might as well."

• • •

In the early years of their marriage, Mort often came home from work a few hours late on Wednesdays. After what seemed like the hundredth night of kids and dinner and cleaning, Judy hired a babysitter on those days and joined a weekly Bible study group. Every meticulous reading kept Judy's focus away from wriggling her son into his pant legs, keeping her daughter out of Mommy's lipstick, or wishing Mort could come home earlier. She drifted in and out of groups depending on who needed her at home, but had remained with this dusty crowd for roughly five years. Martha, whose house always provided the venue for Bible study, never excited Judy; she had always made the same food and followed the same pattern of read and talk, talk and read. Yet even Martha's dry style never prevented Judy from taking ownership over those nights away from the house.

She sat at a round table last Wednesday eating sugar-free cookies and listening to Martha roll her R's over chapter 8 in John's Gospel:

"Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?' . . . he straightened up and said to them, 'Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. . .'" and Judy had already drifted off.

Before she and Mort had the kids, Fran would host cocktail parties in her shag-carpeted apartment. For years, they witnessed Fran's expert hand with a martini shaker and more sophisticated conversation over the Kent State shootings or Nixon's visit to China. One time Ed Nelson even snuck in some reefer, and—

"So Judy, do you think this abominable woman should be stoned?" Martha had politely folded her hands to seem more inviting, even as Judy knew she'd rather crumble her own stupid cookies and make a martini. She fumbled for a response.

"I guess I don't really know." A few testy huffs indicated that the rest of the group would have happily cast all kinds of stones at the woman. She did not feel guilty as the rest of them had hoped, and instead slouched in her seat thinking about Martha's slim chances for survival against throngs of people with rocks in their hands. Judy sat through the rest of the group time, bored, until she could stop at the drugstore afterward to pick up a few things.

Stepping into the darkened house and flicking on Wheel of Fortune, Judy reached into the bag and slopped on an anti-aging cream from a tinny gold jar. She promptly found one of Mort's old, unopened bottles of whiskey in her basement once her thighs broke out in hives.

• • •

"So how did it go with Denny last night?" Judy started to think that he had a twitch when he kept winking at her in class, though they both knew about his date with Fran. The image of him churning his legs in the bicycle motion underwater sent her into lusty jolts anyway.

"I'd suspect you'd already know." Judy felt heat flushing her face. Had she seen him winking? How could she have stopped him from doing that? Fran attempted to swallow before continuing.

"Did you know Denny before we started taking this class?"

"No. Why?"

Fran struggled to compose herself, a state that Judy had never seen before in her friend. Fran had always acted coolly, refusing to reveal emotions that betrayed her best face.

"Because he talked about you a lot when we went out. He said I was so lucky to have you around. Mort was a friend of his, I guess, and he said he used to rave about you all the time. And. . .". Fran tried to continue but only bit her lip and sat on the bench across from Judy.

"Well, that's great, I guess. But what does that have to do with anything?" Fran twisted the ends of her towel and started pulling on her bathing suit strap again. Why the hell is she fidgeting? Judy thought. She won Denny, after all. It was over. Fran finally managed to speak again.

"Judy, I've been a horrible person my entire life. . ." she started. Judy expected some kind of monologue on her bad habits and her need to reform: Okay, I'm done with this whole "casual sex" thing. Will you take me to Bible study? Instead, Fran folded her hands in her lap to keep them from shaking.

"I changed banks thirty years ago." Her foot started tapping and Judy couldn't resist a little snort.

"Wow, I hope this isn't what you and Denny talked about on your date."

"No, you don't understand. I changed because it was closer to my apartment, and Mort was the one who helped me. We kept on talking that first day I came in and we went to lunch."

"There's nothing wrong with that."

"Let me finish. We went to lunch more than once—we might have gone three or four times. I went back to the bank a few weeks later to move some money around, and he slipped me a note with directions to the Desert Inn on the outskirts of town."

"I know where that is," Judy said. Her fists had clenched without her realizing.

"Will you please let me finish? He. . . he would tell you he was staying late at the office. Every Wednesday."

Judy felt numbness prickling around her neck. Mort always knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted two children, a boy and a girl. He wanted her to cook dinner every night. He wanted her to be more exciting when he came home from work.

"He was the one who started calling me 'Fanny.' It was after our first time together." Fran won. Fran had always won, every damn time, from the first day she slipped her bra out from under her shirt and threw it into the fire. Judy looked at Fran's wandering eyes. "How many times?" she asked in a low voice.

"What?" Fran garbled. Her tears had begun to suffocate her as she struggled for air.

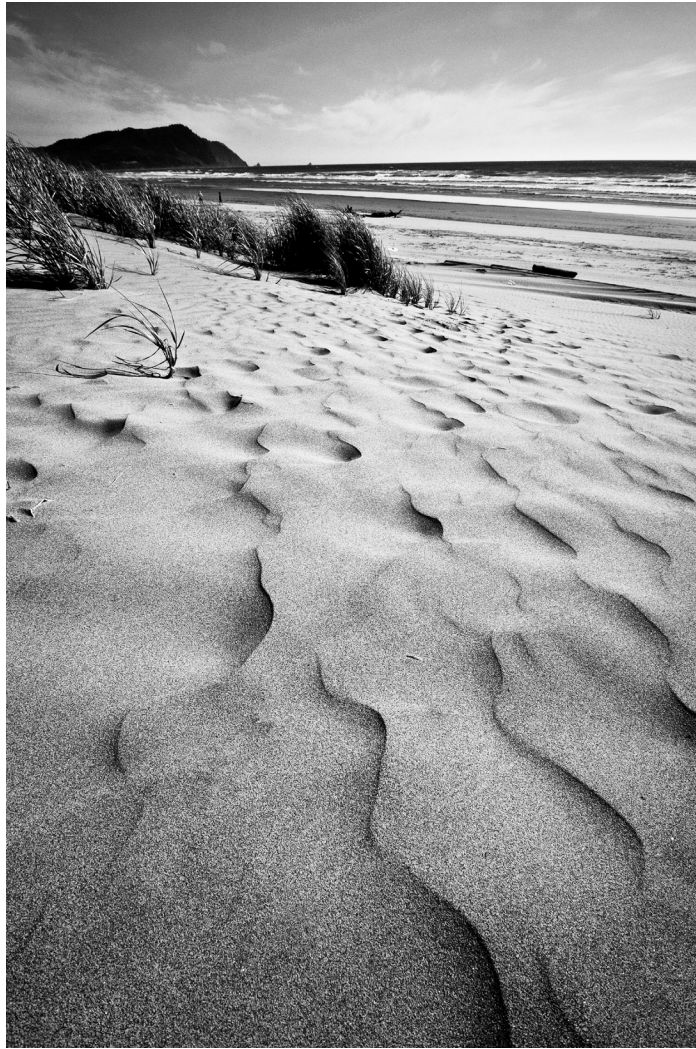
"How many times... Did you do it?"

Fran looked at the floor and twisted her towel more, refusing to speak for a few moments. "I'm not sure. We did things like that for..."

"For what? For what, goddammit?"

"For seven years." Fran flipped her hair nervously, but it only came off as casual. "I know you're probably mad. This stuff happens in even the best marriages, you know. We've been friends for God knows how long..." she drifted off again, releasing one end of her towel so it came undone from its contortion. "And I know you're probably a little mad... but can we put this past us?"

Judy's hand sat unbounded on her knee, awaiting its next move.



Sand Waves, Brett BOLLIER

The Journey of Insignificance

Kohaku FLYNN

The time has come to scuttle
Back to my safe haven.
I have wandered much too far
For I cannot find my way.

Dodge the enormous orange cloth,
Tickle across a pasty soft mass,
Climb a castle built for kings,
To find myself home again.

Only some nasty fellow
Has sealed the duct.
With a wave of a hand
Has sealed it, shut.

Sense of Remembrance

Dominic DiCARLANTONIO

A cast into the sea shares a reptilian ripple
with the foam and the stars,
life enigmatically simple.
Faint memories buried in the sand;
Olfactorious, just glorious,
the Night without a plan.



Portland Invasion, Brett BOLLIER

Hopscotch, Wind, and Whooping Cough

Ashley RUDERMAN

I'm allergic to the pink
bloom of dogwood trees and my
best friend grew up believing
I never cry. She'll never
know my tears rain petals down
to an asphalt ground, blossoms
part the grove like Moses would
the sea. Remember what the
common cold feels like? That, but
your eyes itch, too. I've learned to
like pine trees best—their calloused
cones only drop after fire,
a fire licked by lightning set
off by the sun who stuck her
face behind clouds because she
wanted a break from shining.

Untitled

Erin DEMPSEY

All corners of the universe charted on a fingerprint,
All interminable oceans gathered in a thimble,
All Atlas' weight saddled on the curl of an eyelash,
All ages of men embalmed in a drop of amber,
All loss crafted in a clay jewelry bowl,
All fear in skidding on the packed-down snow,
All grace glowing in a pearl hairpin,
All love in giving an omniscient, comfortable glance:
Everything known and felt and dreamt in a word.

The Michael and Gail Gurian Fiction Prize Winner

Bad Math

Amy COX

"Bang."

A dirt-stained finger jabbed at me. I almost tripped at the top of the metro station escalator with the bum's finger-gun aimed at my heart. I heard his wheezy laugh as he shot the suit behind me, and the suit behind him.

"Bang. Bang."

I assumed he lived on a bench in the park nearby. He always sat at the metro's entrance shooting at people with his finger and his thumb. He probably saw through all of us who passed the escalator's threshold. Probably knew more about us than we cared to imagine. Thank God, he couldn't tell, though. I thought there was supposed to be a glow to give it away. My reflection glanced back at me from the windowed CVS storefront. My so-called incandescence was pallid, sleepless.

A bell announced my arrival as I entered the drugstore and the doors slid shut behind me. I walked down aisle 3.

$1+1=3$. This bad math was the mantra I used to get myself out of my apartment. $1+1=3$. They lied. They said one and one was two, but him and me made—?

I cried when Carter sang that song about the only truth of existence, which is pain, which is sitting in the rain, accepting that life's insane and we only have ourselves to blame. When we met I wondered if he blamed, or loved himself. He talked about everyone projecting onto him and how nothing was ever his fault. It wasn't his fault he was an artist or that everyone saw his wounded soul while he bled onstage through his music because he was he. And I was me. And together we—

I walked down the candy aisle, past the bags of shiny wrappers. Hershey's Kisses? My fingers darted toward the bag. I hadn't eaten them since I went vegan with him.

How can you not like chocolate?
Child slaves make that shit.

Carter, it's a Hershey's Kiss. I pitched the wadded aluminum wrapper and it bounced off his cheek. His hazel eyes tightened into a glare.

It still tastes like blood.

I nestled the bag back among the others and sighed because he said such morbid things all the time, believed them with everything he had, and swore we're only as unique as our beliefs. We talked about the conditions of factory farms and the torture of innocent animals whose rights are sacrificed to feed the appetites of obese Americans, and yet my tongue ached for the softness of chocolate, the surge of endorphins after the sweet.

"I've heard that dark chocolate has, like, antioxidants or something," the peroxide-blond said from down the aisle. Her hair was pulled back, tight like the sport-tank and yoga pants that hugged her curves. She turned over the bag of candies to look at the nutritional facts. "Those are healthy right?"

"Antioxidants? Yeah," her friend said, smacking her gum while she tapped out a text. They matched in their neon tops and yoga pants, with their mats slung carelessly over their shoulders in tight purple rolls. The studio up the road gave discounts to students. I flashed them my expired school ID a few times before I found a real job, bartending at the Bohemian Caverns.

"I don't know, I've got a few more pounds to go."

"Whatever." Smack. "You look fine." Smack, smack.

I pushed past them as she balanced the bag in her hand, weighing need against want while her friend tapped away. I tried not to stare at their breasts. The fabric stretched against their shapes, the neon highlighting their perfection. Perfect bodies, perfect futures filled with perfect husbands and perfect children. But I knew about the excruciation of being perfect and no matter how hard you tried to be what he wanted it was never enough. Enough.

Farther down a girl and a man gaped at our aisle mates. I watched her try to mirror the yoga goddesses. She sucked her stomach flush with her ribs and stuck out the buds of her preteen chest. Her elbows and collarbones jutted out under the loose cotton of her T-shirt. Someday the world might think of her as pretty, but they would tell her she was not enough, and she would never have the chance to see her own potential to be something different, better than pretty—beautiful. I saw her and him, fat in the suit behind her, and remembered Carter's favorite catchphrase for railing against Americapitalism.

"Devolution of the youth," I whispered.

His balding head glowed in the florescence. The pale yellow of his button-down looked rancid where sweat stained the crease between his chest and his heavy gut. His tie draped down his front, a weak attempt to point glances away from his pregnant belly and down to his parts. We exchanged once-overs and my eyes followed the tie like they were supposed to and lingered over the bulge behind the zipper of his slacks. He stood with his legs apart, not quite thrusting toward them from behind the girl, running his hand absently over the candy on the self beside him. The crinkling was worse than the smacking. His lips twitched under the bushiness of his mustache like he was praying silently for them not to stop doing those nasty things. Harder, harder.

Carter was never rough. Not like that. In the beginning when we were only one-night stands, we stopped and started swift and quick. I liked the feel of his beard against my neck, and my imperfect breasts, and my thighs. It was always just soft enough to make me think about nothing at all except how to keep from falling apart because we were just whatever. Then we were together and I struggled to keep us that way. He was what I needed: a challenge. Being with him made me remember what it was like to demand something of myself and to have expectations, though they were usually his.

"Whatever," the goddess said to her smacking friend, tossing the bag onto the shelf with a sharp crinkle. "Let's go before I waste money."

"Three bucks," her friend said. "Don't break the bank."

"Ugh, whatever."

It wasn't just whatever, it was just enough. $1+1=3$.

I walked by the man whose idea of three probably included them in a dirty motel room with a king-sized bed and cheap sheets. That was where the preteen would end up if she followed their lead and let greasy pigs dictate her worth. Her desperation for an illusion disappointed me.

And yet we all hunt for the most effective drug store elixirs or the miracle teeth whitener I passed on aisle 6. I picked a kit up and read through the promises of a brighter smile and lasting results. The only thing guaranteed was a

false veneer and once they saw through that, well, there was nothing more to go forward with.

Enough? Light from the hallway behind him cast his shadow into my apartment. If I didn't recognize his voice when he slurred a greeting, I would have imagined it was something from a nightmare. You've had enough?

He dropped his dirty green duffel bag beside his guitar case and started wandering blindly around the apartment. His Ramones shirt was inside out and he was wearing women's pants.

The guys are leaving now.

Now? It's four in the morning.

I didn't go to his show because I was stuck in my bathroom doing bad math. My equation wouldn't balance on either side of the little pink equals sign. I showered. In the scalding water I scrubbed at the salty stains on my cheeks and at the dirty spots I imagined everyone could see, the blemishes of my naivety. I let him move in because he spent so many nights here anyway. My sister Cora warned me that it would get messy after I gave him a set of keys. She was right. He had made a mess of my heart with his not-quite love. Yesterday morning we argued about my recent disregard of his art. The pragmatist in me couldn't commit when I knew he was barely scraping by between gigs. He told me to get over myself, to embrace the present and live. I told him to get a real job. Though I couldn't be certain at that point, I already knew.

I guessed he wouldn't cover me in kisses when he got back, or celebrate by making love even though he was all about creation because it was the pulse of pain at the source life and everything. Instead staggered in at four in the morning, smelling of whiskey and cheap vanilla, saying he had enough.

He bumped his way around the small studio, tossing his clothes into the duffel bag without bothering to turn on the lights. I sat on the futon all night doing math and trying to figure out how to tell him, but he had shit to do and music to make with someone else.

Have you seen my Lennon shirt?

I'm wearing it.

He paused his rummaging search of the bathroom.

Can I have it back?

Really, Carter? Right now?

The guys are waiting in the cab. We've got a flight to San Francisco. This is the big time, Morgan.

I pulled it over my head and threw it on the floor near the bag. He came back and dropped a roll of toilet paper, a toothbrush, his bottle of shampoo, and a few bars of soap into the bag. I started shaking when he took his notebook off the bedside table. The scrappy book dropped into the bag and the Lennon shirt followed before he

wrenched the zipper shut. He shrugged into his leather jacket and his grin flashed in the darkness.

"Excuse me, please."

I looked up from the toothbrush I was examining to see a grandmother being escorted down aisle 6 by her young grandson. I flattened against the shelves of toothpaste to let them pass. Carter grabbed my toothbrush by mistake and when I found his in the holder the next morning I snapped it in half. That toothbrush was the reason I left my apartment and no matter how many layers of concealer I put on, I still looked like death.

The woman's face wrinkled into a smile from under her maroon sun hat as she and the boy shuffled past me. He kept his dark eyes trained on the ground, searching for obstacles for his grandma and her cane to avoid. I smiled back at them suddenly happy that youth had not completely devolved.

"Thanks, dear," she said. "So kind."

Thanks for letting me crash here, and . . . you know. It's been real.

This is happening? I hugged my knees to my chest and tears fell between my breasts and onto my bra.

Guess so. He pulled out a wad of folded notebook paper from the inside pocket the jacket and set it on the cushion beside me along with his set of keys. Take care, and just send me whatever I forget.

He never let me read what he wrote, but he left me with a few pages of his scrawl, a dry kiss on the cheek, and a secret he didn't even know about.

I couldn't look at the children's toothbrushes as I darted past on my way to the end of the aisle, just like I couldn't read what he left me. He didn't deserve whatever satisfaction was in that, not right away at least. I stared at the pages through my tears until the sky brightened early this morning and I dragged myself here because I couldn't just sit there with them after I deciphered what they said. If he had seen me in the glow of daybreak, he probably would have written a song about it. Pitying the woman he had never quite loved.

I turned the corner to aisle 7 and glanced up at the picture of a mother beaming at her toddler on the diaper package that sat on special display. I wondered if the child even belonged to the woman who was dressed too impeccably to handle such a walking terror. I brushed the tip of my finger across the her image as if I could feel her authenticity. The cool plastic rustled under my touch and her loving face warped into the way I guessed a banshee would look when she screamed. The child was running away from a monster.

I wandered toward the pharmacy counter and counted the different varieties of diapers. Nine brands and their various sizes spanned the length of the aisle not including the ones for adults, which sat near the back of

the store. It embarrassed me that people, young and old, sat in their own shit. I almost laughed at the ultra absorbent underwear, but bit back my immaturity when a gentleman who looked like my great uncle Ralph rounded the corner and began browsing the incontinence products. The assortment of colored wrappers and features overwhelmed me and the ridiculous thought of discussing the finer points of absorbency with him forced me to move on to the vitamins section. I didn't know how I could decide how to contain another person's mess when it normally took a good half hour for me to pick out the products I used to keep myself clean. He glanced at me as I passed and I was sure he saw through my polite nod. Carter indulged my juvenile sense of humor, usually making fart jokes after we slept together.

I folded my arms across my chest and regarded the pill bottles that spread out before me. It took a moment to find the prenatal vitamins. I noticed that most were decorated with the silhouette of a woman protectively grasping her belly. Mechanically I lowered my right hand to rest it on my stomach, which was more slender now between my yoga classes and being vegan. I pictured my nearly-perfect figure as it motherhood would round it, stretch it, ripen it. Sleep and the gummy vitamins in my hand would put color back in my cheeks. If I told her, Cora would come over and make me eat something, proudly assuming her new title of auntie and reassuring me Carter was only good for his genes.

He's nothing but a guitar-shlepping bum, she said after I introduced them at one of his shows. But Gawd he'd make beautiful babies.

I could feel a faint pulse beneath my palm. It beat separately from my own heart, slow, steady, strong. Tears prickled in my eyes.

"Mom, no!"

A towheaded boy strained against his mother's grip. A purple stain coated his mouth and I could see his belly button in the gap between his Legos shirt and his muddy shorts. He made a grab at the colorful bottles on the shelf, but she jerked him away again.

"No!" he whined, stretching to touch the bottles with his purple lollipop.

She paid him little attention, aside from the hold she had on his chubby forearm. The basket in the crook of her free arm contained an open bag of suckers and a few cans of a diet shake. Somehow she managed to take powerful strides in her pencil skirt while still balancing in her stilettos.

"If we can't reach a settlement, then the deal's off," she said into the cell phone wedged between the padded shoulder of her blazer and her ear. She expertly tipped a container into the basket without breaking her train of thought. "I understand, but we can't afford all this running around in circles."

I imagined what the softness of a child's arm would feel like in my hand, how I would lead it around, how I would juggle it with an armful of everything else in my messy life, how I would try to love it even though I could barely love myself.

He timed his tug perfectly and smeared a line of multivitamins with his slobbery stick, knocking a few to the floor. A triumphant grin widened over his sticky face, but his giggle was cut short by the slap of his mother's hand against his cheek.

In the moment between realization and recognition I saw his face melt from joy to agony. The sound of the smack was probably worse than the force of it, but before he let out his scream the pulse beneath my hand stopped. He was guilty of nothing but being a kid, and for that he was punished. Suddenly I was removed from my own body, seeing myself slam my palm against the face of a child who was dirty and bruised and I knew I hit her because she deserved it. Because she looked exactly like Carter but with my blue eyes.

I didn't hear the bum shoot me again as I shimied past people riding the escalator down to the metro. I didn't know if I had gotten on the right line until I heard the garbled alert for my stop. I didn't realize that I struggled to unlock the door of my apartment because I couldn't see through my tears. I didn't notice that the new toothbrush I forgot to pay for was still in my hand.

An Evening Garden Party

Lucia BALDWIN

The evening shadow was a welcome tall friend
Blocking out all the washed out mouths and eyes
All our eagerness replaced
With soft purple clothing
Hiding secret faults and faces
Lit up from behind

A silhouette of chess pieces
Each figure turning in manufactured time
Forever forgiven by a blind-eyed moon
Ancient light letting us grow up

Children cradled on foot paths
Music slipping down from the trees
Music of bows and arrows
Echoing sap
Piercing the tangled knots hidden in the lines of our hair
The ropes pulling our painted eyes downward

We are a bowl trapped from falling fire
Beads of golden sweat drip from the leaves
Glowing orbs splash
Feet kicking up hints of drunken drops
Smashed wine glasses fill the ballroom floor
Angels dancing in an inch of gin

As the flames stood in a line
We watched the leaves catch fire and die
Falling stars burning the hands of trees
Ash floating
Singeing our broken plaster
Carpeting our fumbled waltzes

We become ignited putting on shows
Glorious exalted arms uplifted
Standing on the shoulders of blackened Kings
The stumps of once green castles

It went on and on
A great parade into the night
Each light shining its brightest before it became extinguished
Finally leaving us to dance in the still shining darkness



Tomorrow Is a Different Country, Nikki BUSCH



The Abbey, Shelby Alice WALTON
Film

Glass

Adriana STAGNARO

Light filtering through the rent-house bathroom window. Suddenly the small place was familiar to me, the walls wading in the familiar tint. Standing fixed behind the frosted hopper-window pane, I caught the wind through the open crack. I caught the morning wind, drifting wet about the bushes and rooftops. It swept the room in a cold, clean way, the way the first rain always does, inviting itself everywhere, deep into lungs, making lungs feel like they haven't breathed in a season. The towels felt it, shaking. The chilly corners of the bathroom were new with the autumn. I hung like any of those things at the window.

The glass shone crystal white. Sparkling its mottled face like white diamonds, like a new shimmering pond, made of water that hung in the sky. A sleet of migrated glacier, blowing north winds into the tiny rent-house bathroom. But not so cold, no, and now the glass glinted a liquid silver between its diamonds, and cement hues of blue; and down in the corner a flush of pale turquoise, newborn green, a glow of peach. The mottled window was an indecipherable spill of the land behind it, now weakened with shades of water. I sipped it with my eyes, quenching, and new.

How often I stood at my own window, deciphering through the sticky rivulets running and chasing down the glass, how sodden the field was today, how shiny the rain-clean bushes would show, what animals would need out of their holes. You'll never know ahead of time what surprises to expect in the fall, but after years I had an idea of what to look for. The plants have a way of choosing some new spectacle each year—the oak branch I hadn't noticed went white sprawls like an arm of cauliflower into the backwoods; a stump with a rotted core, now wet, shows its fibers like flaming teeth, red and sappy; or maybe it'll be the vicious blackberries having quickly grown three feet in anticipation of the wet season...

I imagined I saw these whites and ambers and glossy greens behind the rent-house window, my Monet-patterned window. But they must be something else; the wild flavor of the wind encouraged my illusions. My memories from before of slowly pacing the house, listening to the rows of windows whistling against the wind, hanging inside the visual panoramic of our dense gardens, steeping in the heat of a locked house in autumn, these were so precious to me that if it didn't make me smile it would have made me cry. I wasn't sure what made this town's people sentimental. I wasn't sure about the town at all. What would a child here bear in mind to this light, this fresh rain? What flannels and hearths warming, what trees drooping, what trails dampening does he see? What fixes him at the window by the scent of it?

And then I saw in the corner of the plastic pane, I saw a spider—a spider! Fixed in his wispy net. How jealous I was, the thought of being staid in one place long enough to know it, day in, and every day; here he was surely familiar with the watery wind, he must have breathed it, into his small body, in billowy cups—look how it rattles your web, and how you wade always in its variant light—what don't you know? The window is the delivery post; there you hear every message. If only I could be like the spider and stay long enough, to stay still enough, there might be no place that I might not love.



Mattea SATTLER

Useless

Corwin BRYAN

Like a toothpick cutting through a mountain,
Or a spray bottle against a forest fire;
Like a rowboat in a hurricane,
Or an umbrella in a typhoon;
To use one's fingers to paint the Mona Lisa
And the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel;
Like trying to fell a dragon with a letter opener
And then trying to remove its scales with a feather;
Like a sword made of sand,
A dam made of dust,
Or a meterstick to measure mountains;
Like numbering the stars
Or shooing away the wind with a whisk of the hand;
Like a heart trying to pump
Blood as thick as butter
Or a hand over
The opening of a volcano—

Such as these are words
In attempting to describe love.

Delicate and Dark Olive

Emily RICE

I've gotten into the habit of kneading my hands together when I stand still too long. They are constantly dry, red dragon scales instead of peach-soft skin. I find myself attempting to rub the scales off, a Lady Macbeth attempting to rid herself of a hundred spots. These hands are a mark of hard labor; the same as my dad's tar-covered, cut and calloused hands that would bleed from large dry-skin cracks when he came home. I've seen it happen enough that I no longer ask if he's okay. I just assume that it was another rough day of carpentry or cleaning or painting.

I have a dishwasher's hands. They are soaked in soap and bleach water that is meant to destroy bacteria and keep customers healthy. When I was five-years-old dishwashing was also my chore. I would stand on a wooden step stool my father made me. It was a dark brown color with Emily Ann engraved on the steps: a proud mark of ownership.

My mother's hands were rarely dry. They were a dark-olive color, and slender. In my half-formed poetic mind I considered them piano player hands. I often wished that mine were as delicate. When I was five she worked in our office; keeping records and invoices for my dad's business. The back office was separated by a dark cellar and a large, heavy door. The cellar scared me. I was afraid to get trapped behind the door, lost in the dark and unable to return to the warmth of my family. Bothering mom in the office was strictly forbidden, unless it was an absolute necessity. Of course, my sister and I had a hundred tiny problems that, in our minds, were absolute tragedies. One summer my mother went so far as to shut herself in the back. My sister and I were told that there were bees that would attack us if we opened the door.

Running a family business demanded a lot from my mom and dad. He would spend his days in his white work van, the company logo painted on the side. She would spend her days watching my sister and I, doing the cooking, cleaning and accounting. It was probably a relief once I skipped off to kindergarten, one less distraction in a busy work day.

She kept up with us for a long time; it was the cancer that slowed her down.

I can't remember which hospital visit resulted in

her diagnosis. The first hospital I remember was the one that didn't let us bring my baby brother home. He was a red, shriveled, sad body that was wrapped in a blue blanket. He was only able to take a half-dozen breaths. My mother collected her belongings from the room in a sterilized nightgown that I was unfamiliar with. She didn't talk to me although I was the only one there. She just moved, a woman who was set to the metronome pace of grief. We drove home on the freeway and I thought that the grey world matched my family's grim mood.

The second hospital was next to a park. There were dogs in the park that my dad told me not to play with. I listened obediently, and told my sister not to play with them too. There were trees growing in the middle of the road. I found them entrancing; trees that watched patients' lives transform in the clean white light of hospital halls.

The hospital was blue-grey, if I remember correctly. And I didn't like it at all. The halls smelled like rubbing alcohol, too sterile for life to exist in. My mother was thinner than she normally was, and when she was healthy she was only ninety pounds. My dad would carry her when they danced. She just said that dancing with him felt like she was dancing on air, although she was unaware that that was really how she danced. At the hospital she was tied down though, tubes sticking out of her arms. The sight of it sent shivers up my spine, the feeling of spiders tiptoeing down your back; I didn't want to get too close.

She was home for the fourth of July, which was important because it was the biggest holiday for our family. There was a bonfire in the backyard, a barbeque, and too many family friends. They made our half-acre plot of land feel over-full with joy. During events like this my mother was an ever moving atom, bouncing with energy as she prepared food, helped the children, and entertained her guests. This year she stayed in bed, too sick to join the party. I brought her fruit salad, apples and orange and bananas covered in a mixture of cream cheese and marshmallow puff – my favorite part of the party. She smiled at me and probably kissed my forehead. The lights were off in her room and it was already dusk outside. She looked grey under the dim light, sickly and sorrowful. I kissed her back and ran outside, not ready for that type of reality.

She went through chemo not much later. There was talk of braiding her hair to save it. It was dark brown, almost black and always soft. But there was too much talk and not enough action. My father shut the door one night and shaved it all off in private. Her new look startled me, but not for long. It was strange, but only as strange as when my dad cut his beard. After a little time had passed her head was covered in soft fuzz; I liked rubbing my hands on it. It reminded me of velvet.

On Halloween that year she dressed up like a sunflower. She wore a big green sweater, always cold in the Puget Sound damp, and a homemade petal headdress. She painted brown spots on her nose. I was proud to have her come to school to see our costume parade. I think I was an angel and my little sister the devil. White, green and red walked home together.

Things got worse fast. More hospital visits. The chemo didn't work. The cancer that had started in her lungs moved to her brain. The doctors must have said it was only a matter of time. She wanted to die at home, not alone in one of the hospital rooms that scared me so much. And so she did, alone with my father. He came out shaken, and told us what had happened. My aunt rushed in, tears on her face. She and my father kissed my mother goodbye. I lingered in the doorway, afraid to be in the same room as a body that was so newly dead. I was afraid that if I kissed my mother's forehead it would be cold. I didn't want to remember her that way. She looked like she was just sleeping, at peace. Her piano-player hands rested on top of the blankets, ready to spring to life at any moment to hug me or brush my hair.

My hands are dry still; they need lotion because I wash dishes to pay for my college tuition. My nails are a green that has too much grey in it. It looks like Puget Sound water reflecting ever present rain clouds. These can't be hands that held onto my mother's sweaters. They're too grown up and unfamiliar with needing to rely on another woman for support. Someday they will also be a mother's hands I suppose, taking hold of my child's baby-pink fists and kissing each fragile fingertip.

Engagements, like eggshells

Ashley RUDERMAN

are meant to be broken. Other impractical things, like running the wipers when it's not raining, just to listen to them squeak and skid across the glass. She's driving east to talk to the Squid at the aquarium—her violets had stopped blooming. Last time the Squid warned that happens to houses that yell. The time before that, she watched them mating. She watched them swim in circles; she watched the Squid lay thousands of eggs in seaweed. Something ate them. Squids aren't the best botanists, but notice how many arms they have. Imagine being hugged by all of them.



Des Yeux Jolies. Maria MONDLOCH
Graphite pencils on paper



Leaving Eden, Kurt GUENTHER



Shrink the World, Kurt GUENTHER

Tulip

Eric KINCANON

I've got what I need.
A small hand spade,
 The right fertilizer,
 My favorite gardening gloves,
And a pad for my knees.

I mixed the bulbs up
 so the colors will be a surprise.

Stabbing the spade
 into the Earth
A shock fires
 between my elbow and shoulder.
The pain surprises me
 despite the doctor's warnings.

Rotating my shoulder
 to ease the pain
I hear the slider
 open and close
I hear the familiar pace
 of my wife on the lawn
She asks if I'm okay
 I am
She asks what I am doing
 I thought a new tulip bed would be nice.

Her mouth parts
 and she just catches her words
I can feel
 Her eyes are moistening
 Her lips are pursed
I give her
 the privacy she has earned

Looking down, I say
 It's a beautiful day
With her eyes fixed on me
 She says it is, it's a perfect day.

And she asks
 Is there anything I need?

Crossroad Blues

Blaine DENTON

"What happens after you sign your contract?" The prospective began tapping his fingers on the oaken desk, from pinky to index and back again. The pitch-room was luxuriously designed, it reeked of conspicuous consumption; dark hardwood floors, beige couches, and calming lights from the ceiling.

"Well, it depends really. To be honest, I've never really thought about it." Walter paused, "I've never received any complaints, does that make you feel better Scott?"

"That does actually. So after this, I just... go home and the agency will do the rest?"

"Pretty much, we'll contact you with the details and then it should be pretty clear what you'll need to do." Walter smiled, knowing that he'd sealed the deal.

"Great... Great. Uh," Scott smiled embarrassedly, "what if I breach the contract?" Scott looked out the bay-window, taking in the view of the city. He could see where the four main streets connected at the center, all leading up to this building.

"Scott, you're a good guy." Walter was really turning up the salesmanship here, "I know you're just trying to look ahead. But man, aren't you tired of always worrying about what you need to do? Who you need to please, where to go in ten minutes, what's for dinner, how many calories does this have? Just enjoy life man. This is for you, don't worry about the rest of the world!"

"You're right," Scott picked up the pen and scribbled his name. "Thanks Walt, really." He tossed the pen back to the table with a sense of finality.

"A pleasure doing business with you Scott, now just head over to the receptionist and she'll explain our policies to you." Walt stood up and patted Scott on the back, smiling the whole time.

"Now that is how you do it." A man of about fifty, in a three-piece suit pointed at Walter through the one-way glass. "Less than 15 minutes and good ol' Walt closed the deal." A young woman raised her hand.

"But Mr. Szas he didn't even tell the mark what his Obligation was going to be! You can't expect us to be that good." Her voice had a slight whine to it. A bank of flat-screen TVs sat on the wall above the one-way glass; images of Walt's pitch flickered across the screens, replaying the event from various angles.

"It's not about the Obligation--" he paused to look at his tablet PC. "Sally. It's about the reward for the mark. All the mark is thinking is how much he wants that new house, or job, or threesome with a movie-star. It's about desire, and people want pleasure more than they fear pain. Look, who can tell me who the greatest Pitch-man of all time is?" A few hands came up from the rows of trainees seated throughout the room. "You, with the nose." Szas pointed at the one with the nose.

"It was Robert Keffler sir—he pitched two-hundred marks in one day. Would've done more but he ran out ink and paper sir." He had the eagerness of what Szas called idealists.

"Actually, it was two-hundred and fifty marks" Walter corrected as he walked into the room. He was met with a hushed silence. "Szas, I'm gonna jump in here if you don't mind." Szas nodded. "Getting people to fulfill their Obligation isn't about numbers people, it's about understanding what people are willing to do to get what they want. Take Scott over there, he just agreed to fudge the numbers at his accounting firm—just so he could win the custody battle for his daughter. Who can tell me why?" He loosened his tie, and called on one of the recruits.

"He did it because he loved his daughter." He replied so quickly that his words slurred together.

"No, he did it because it was easy and he hates his wife enough to spite her like this. It doesn't hurt Scott to move some numbers around, it doesn't hurt anyone he knows, and he gets the satisfaction of screwing over his wife off to no end. Scott doesn't know that one of our clients is going to file charges against a competing firm, and they'll be using Scott's numbers as evidence in Federal Court. Don't get me wrong though, Scott thinks he's doing it out of love; always make the marks feel okay with their decision. You have to know which buttons to press or you're never going to close a pitch."

• • •

"Sir, I have a few questions for you if you don't mind?" One of the girls from the lecture was looking up at Walter expectantly.

"Call me Walter, and are you asking if you have questions or telling me?"

"Uh... Telling?" The girl figured it out, "Oh... I'm telling you I have some questions, and asking if you have the time to answer them."

"There we go, yes I have time. But first, what's your name?"

"It's Sally, si—Walter. I guess my first question is... how do you know when to close on a mark?"

Walter made a face, "Don't you go over this kinda stuff with Szas?"

"We do, but sometimes I feel like he's been out of the game for too long. Not like you, you're at it every day. I mean just look at what you did with Scott!" Sally was oozing admiration, and it seemed to grab Walter's attention.

"I guess... anyways, if you really want to know. There's no one answer. Every mark is different, and it's all about knowing which strings to pull: does he view himself as a good person? Or does he realize that he's an asshole? You need to know how to make him feel important before you can get him to agree to anything, much less to taking on an Obligation."

"See, Mr. Szas never explains it like that. I mean your face just lights up when you're talking about this. What about deciding who to pitch what Obligation?"

"That? That's the easy part, the Research Department just gives me a profile of the demographic we're looking for and then I pick from a list of potentials. As long as the person has the power to achieve our goals, I can get him to agree to what I want."

"That's really amazing Walter... I've been wondering though, what was your hardest pitch?"

"Hardest pitch? Probably this old lady who wanted to regain her youth... turns out she was a lawyer and kept trying to find loopholes in our Contract. Have you ever had

an eighty year-old woman berate you for 'unconscionable jurisdictional claims'? It's not fun."

"Oh I bet," Sally smiled, "Do you ever feel bad about what you do? I mean, I haven't even started and I'm already losing sleep. I just wish Mr. Szas was more like you Walt."

"Oh, Szas has been known to have the recruits tossing and turning at night... Maybe I'll tell him to take it easy on you. But you know, there is always that big, looming question. Am I a bad person? I honestly don't think so, I give my clients what they want in exchange for what the company wants. It's a business deal, nothing more." Walter snapped his head back in realization, "Oh well done Sally. Well done."

"What do you mean Walt?"

"Can it with the Walt business. You've been pitching me this whole time! And you've done a damn good job too."

"Was I that obvious? I just wanted to see if I could, I had a bet with Jonnie and Kate that I could get you to at least take me out for a beer."

"Oh, what's in it for me?"

"I'll tell you about how I decided to join the firm," Sally smiled coyly, "then maybe I'll touch your arm and giggle at all your jokes, reminding you of how amazing you are."

"Ha, well consider me sold." Walter laughed harder than he had in a long time.

• • •

Scott was sitting on his living-room couch, relishing the events of the day. He sipped on his beer, picturing his ex-wife's expression into his mind. She just doesn't get it; I can give Rebecca a good life. School, clothes, a father, anything she wants. Scott stood up to stretch, patting his Golden Retriever, Ace, on the head. I got my daughter, and the dog... life's going pretty good. Scott walked upstairs to see how the girl was doing, she hadn't seemed too happy when he took her home. I have a good job, a nice house, a dog, huge TVs... Rebecca'll learn to enjoy it. Scott opened the door to the guest bedroom, wincing as it creaked. I should probably get her an actual mattress, he said to himself as he looked at his daughter sleeping on the ground. As Scott was walking back downstairs he felt a tug on his shirt. He turned around to see Rebecca looking up at him. He patted her on the head and told her to go back to sleep. Instead, she hugged him and he noticed that she was crying. Great, he thought, just great. He picked her up to bring her back to bed and felt a warm dampness spread across his shirt. He swore and quickly put her down.

• • •

"So is this your idea of taking a girl out for a beer?" Sally swiveled her leather chair to watch Walter as he

poured drinks at the bar.

"What, a skyline view of the city at night isn't as good as some crowded bar?" Walter sat down in his own chair and handed Sally a drink.

"No, I'm not complaining... it's just no one's ever taken me up to the roof of a skyscraper for drink before." Sally kept swiveling the chair, trying to find the one spot that would allow her the best view. "It's kind of breathtaking."

"Ha... Well, I'm not going to say I told you so, but..." He smiled.

"Oh don't look so smug, you didn't make this view."

"You're right... but I did convince Szas to pay for this swanky Scotch." He said, taking a sip.

"Somehow I don't think swanky is how you should be referring to \$2000 a bottle Scotch... I do have a question for you though." Sally had stopped spinning so that she could make eye contact with Walter.

Walter sighed, "What kinda question?"

"A Firm kinda question... if that's okay." Sally seemed nervous enough that Walter decided not to mock her.

"Go ahead kid, ask away." Walt looked up at the silver clouds drifting across the moon, I shouldn't have expected a rookie to be able to resist talking shop.

"It's just... I know what all the textbooks say about it, but how the hell did the Firm start?"

"First off, stop calling it 'the Firm'; that's what all the rookies do. Call it by its name, good ol' R. Johnson Liminality. 'The Firm' just sounds like you're trying to impress some mark." The two sat in silence for a long time, just staring as a blurry panorama of lights winked on and off throughout the city. Sally took out a quarter and began to roll it across the back of her index finger to her pinky. She seemed to be lost in thought when something occurred to her.

"R. Johnson... Liminality? Isn't that a bit too on the nose?" Sally seemed skeptical.

"Hey, I didn't name the place; I just work here. So are you ready for your practicals tomorrow?"

Sally sighed, "I guess... I mean how hard could it be?"

• • •

"Scott, I just don't understand why you fought so hard to take Rebecca away from me... You won't ever let me go upstairs to see her." Addie sat on the couch, rubbing Ace's head which the dog had placed firmly in her lap.

"You look terrible. Couldn't you have showered or something before coming over? Addie look, she's my daughter. You're a kindergarten teacher, you can barely support yourself, much less a child. Besides, you left me, so why should you get her?" Scott fought to hold back a smirk.

"I left you because you cheated on me!" Addie tried to regain her composure, yelling at him isn't going to help.

"Well maybe if you'd ever put out I wouldn't have had to cheat!" Addie slid from the couch to the floor so that she could hold onto Ace.

"Scott..." She sighed, choosing to ignore the jab, "how's Becky doing? You know she's at that age where she's going to need a female influence."

"She's fine... well, sort of. But that doesn't matter; I'm taking care of her now."

"What do you mean sort of?"

"I think you should go, you're going to make a bigger deal out of this than it is."

"Scott." She snapped, finally losing control. "Tell me what's wrong with my daughter!" Ace looked from Scott to Addie, worried that his masters were fighting again.

Scott gave an exasperated sigh, "She's started wetting herself again. She wet me actually, when I picked her up."

"It's been years since she did that! I knew living with you would be too much for her!"

"Look, it's fine. She hasn't done it since that night, and I mean if you want to call her or something every night you can do that. I'm not unreasonable."

There was a creak at the top of the stairs, and Rebecca's voice squeaked out "Mommy?"

• • •

The next morning the class of recruits was gathered in one of the basement auditoriums. The room was immense, designed to hold around three hundred people. Szas stared at the class intently, leaning on a desk, arms crossed. Someone raised a hand but was quickly discouraged with a glare from Szas.

"Look, I know you all think that you're hot stuff for making it this far. But this is where we separate the boys from the men," He paused, "and girls from women I guess. Practical... some of you may have been trying to get the vets to let you know what they are. Well, now you find out. You all have your randomly assigned Obligations, so you should all have been thinking about how to pitch them. For your final test we send all you little rookies out into the world to find a mark. Second, you get to know that mark. Third, you tell that mark about our little system; then lastly you close a deal. Now, I don't care how you do this... but remember, the mark has to voluntarily agree; we've had some people get desperate enough to resort to threats and blackmail, but it just doesn't work like that people." The class stood to leave the room and begin their test. "Oh, and before you go. We only have spots for five people," He looked around at the twenty people gathered, "every time someone confirms a closed deal you will receive a text mes-

sage so that you know just how little time you have left.”

•••

All others were racing to be the first ones out of the door, but Sally was taking her time.

“Aren’t you worried that all the marks will be taken by the time you actually get outside?” Walter was half joking, but he was also worried that Sally would fail.

“Oh, I think I already have a mark picked out for me.” Sally was a little nervous but she suspected that the higher ups were also watching to see which rookies could handle stress. They said there were only five spots... but this firm wasn’t exactly known for its forthrightness.

“Oh?” Walter considered this for a second, “you’ve picked someone you know haven’t you?”

Sally blushed, “Yeah... that’s okay isn’t it?”

“There’s no rule against it, but be careful going down that road. Are you sure you’re okay with giving a friend an Obligation?”

“Yeah, well I haven’t looked at it yet. I feel like if I do, I won’t be able to close.”

“Well either way, you better your ass moving.” Sally looked around and noticed the empty room. *I guess I should give Addie a call.*

•••

“Sally, how’ve you been doing? It’s been too long.” Addie gave her a long hug, and Sally could almost feel the desperation for friendly human contact. The two were sitting in a corner table of the local coffee shop.

“Forget me, how are you holding up?” Sally was beginning to get nervous, *maybe I should have checked that Obligation.*

“You know... Scott won’t let me see Becca, Becca’s missing me... Sally, she’s started wetting herself again. You remember the last time that happened?”

“Yeah, it was that car wreck years ago. She’s really struggling huh?” Sally’s phone played the chorus to *Bohemian Rhapsody*, indicating a new text message. *Well, there goes one spot.*

“She really is, I just want her to be okay and I know that she won’t be so long as she’s with Scott. She needs me Sal...”

“Look, about that. You know that new job I got?”

Addie nodded, not sure where this going. “Yeah?”

“I think I can help.” Her phone rang for the second time, *shit*, she thought to herself.

“Are you sure? I didn’t know it was a law firm you were working at.”

“Sort of a law firm, anyways we deal with stuff like this all the time. If you really want your daughter back, I can help.”

“Okay Sally, what do I need to do?”

“Let’s go for a walk okay?” Sally needed time to think. Addie stood up, and Sally tore open the envelope

containing the Obligation. *Oh, so that’s what it is.*

•••

“How do you think they’re doing Szas?” Walter walked into the board room.

“Well, we’ve had no actual closes yet. But we’ve sent out two texts so far.” Szas’ mouth twitched as if his lower jaw moved independently of the upper one.

“I’ve always hated that tradition Szas... it just seems unfair.”

“Walt, come on. It’s what we’ve always done. Well, at least as long as we’ve had cell phones. You know we do it to find out which ones are truly committed. The ones who will close even after they think they won’t get the job.”

Walter sighed, “I know boss. But that doesn’t mean I like it.”

•••

“So all I have to do is sign this contract and you’ll get me my daughter back? What happens to Scott?” Addie was beginning to warm up to Sally’s pitch.

“That’s up to you. Whatever you ask us to do, we do.” Sally’s phone rang again. She wasn’t even paying attention at this point; she just wanted this to be over.

“Anything I want?” Addie’s face grew darker. “Sally, what kinda place do you work for?”

“Addie, you know me.” Her voice took on an edge. “I wouldn’t work any place I didn’t want to.” *Even if they did assign me this Obligation. How did they know I’d go to Addie. how did they know I’d pick this folder?*

“Okay, okay. You’re right. So um... if I sign, I could ask you to--” *Say kill, or something bad. Help me justify this decision Addie.* “get me my daughter back and make sure that Scott pays child support.” *Damn it, damn you Addie.*

“Yeah, we can do that.” Sally’s phone rang, *one more spot.* “All you have to do is agree to one request on our part.”

“What request?”

“Ad, don’t worry about that right now. Just be happy that you’re getting Becca back into your home. Isn’t that enough?”

“You’re right Sally. I owe you so much. Where do I sign?”

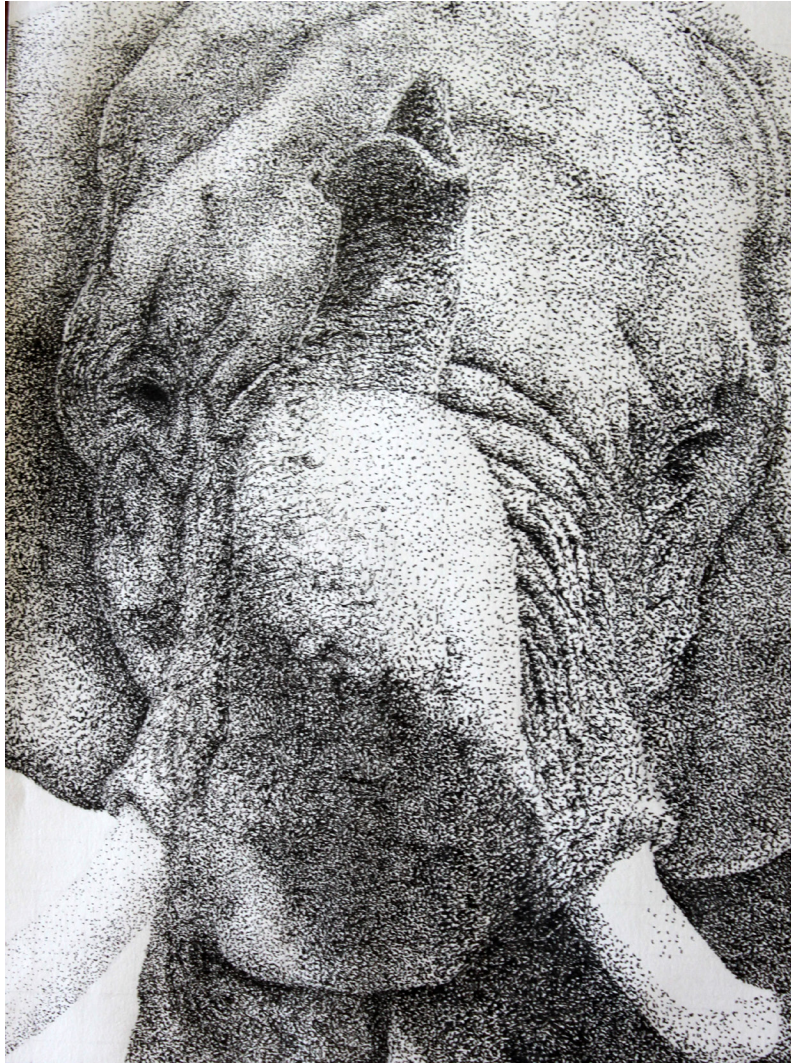
“Right here,” Sally handed her the documents. *I can’t believe they’re asking you to let someone kidnap one of your students. Oh Addie, you’re going to hate me when you find out. I’m so sorry.*

“Okay, just on this line right?” Addie was pointing to a blank space on the page.

“Yup,” *What am I doing?* Sally’s phone went off.

“Sal, who keeps texting you? That’s like five messages since we’ve been here.”

Sally had come to a decision. “Just sign it Addie, I’ll tell you about it later.”



Elephant Stipple, Maria MONDLOCH
Felt-Tip Pen



Blue Sky and Red Rock, Stephen PAUR
Watercolor



The Royal Stables, Brett BOLLIER



Dal Più Remoto Esilio, Monica FRESHLEY

The Michael and Gail Gurian Poetry Prize Winner

12 Minute Phone Call

Julian LaCASSE

My dad called
to tell me that
*fish don't ride bicycles and
human blood is chemically
almost identical to saltwater.
So Darwin was right.*

The finches.

He said: *I'm excited about
an old lady in a B & B on an island
in Puget Sound and
when was the last time
we talked?*

He remains
rolling down the snowy hill
of Sisyphus' nightmares or

*How was Italy? Oh and
speaking of, Hurricane Irene kicked ass in
New England, reminded me of living in Boston,
he said.*

But he likes the rageful weather:
wind and rain and even snow and *you know, seasons.*
And the storms and when they hit the ocean,
they bloody the saltwater and
so do I



Reflection of Venice, Molly JOHNSTON

A Tiny
Hand-Drawn
Panorama of a
Sunset...

Daniel FLADAGER

This is like one of those things you've done forever but don't know when you got started or even what got you started in the first place, like biting your fingernails or avoiding cracks in the sidewalk, and to stop would change the very rhythm of your steps. This is like one of those things where you realize: you and I are the piecemeal construction of our superstitions.

• • •

This is like when I was little, and had an imaginary friend, but rather than a friend, he was more an imaginary pen pal. At first, I could close my eyes and see him bent over the same book I was, or playing with his friends while I played with mine. We went to the same school, we read the same books and watched the same shows and we lived in the same house, but it didn't take unnaturally long for me to find out that those trees that would scratch and bluster at my window, the posters in my room that somehow looked like they moved and accosted me, the alarm clock that crawled off my dresser like an overgrown spider, the things that made me want to sleep with my eyes open, those things need not happen to him, and to him those things I never did. For a while, I felt good, if only pleased with myself, about that.

Then I left home. I went to college in a different town and he filled a backpack full of clothes and now rents a small apartment somewhere north, on top of a rise surrounded by cultivated rolling hill fields.

That's what it's like. Sometimes I feel like it's me doing it and sometimes I don't. I never feel like it's real, I'm not confused like that, but it goes on whether I'm there or not. I must be, in some way, but sometimes I look and he's brushing his teeth or listening to music and dancing in front of a mirror and I wonder, because it wasn't me that did it, but I must have.

I guess now I've just practiced it enough I've gotten so good I don't have to close my eyes or do anything special, and maybe it's always just somewhere back there like a heartbeat, like a nervous tick I can't control. When I'm not thinking about anything I sort of just drift and know. I couldn't very well call it seeing even if that's what it is. If you asked me to draw his face I would have trouble. If you asked me to write his name, sometimes I would have to think for a few minutes to recall it. If I had to describe his life, I might say something, but that would just be a reaction. Something that's not real can't be anything, and it's not really a matter of description anyway.

• • •

Like right now *he's slapping the alarm off before it buzzes and slipping quietly out of bed. The girl beside him has thick, black mounds of long hair and mumbles sleepily as she turns over. He pulls on a pair of pajama pants that lay crumpled on the floor and heads down the hall to brush his teeth* but I had to stay up all night

studying an uninteresting Biology textbook, which lays on my chest, the spine cracked to a chapter on symbiosis as I bop the snooze button with the bottom of my closed fist and roll over, crinkling the pages under me, for another ten minutes' sleep.

He takes a quick shower and glances at himself sideways in the small bathroom mirror, patting his stomach in a satisfied way before wrapping the towel around his waist and slipping into his bedroom to get dressed. The alarm buzzes faintly through a dream for a few seconds before I roll groggily out of bed and sit in the shower, letting the hot water steam up the inside of the tiny bathroom until the back of my neck is numb he draws a plain black t-shirt over his head and sits on the bed beside the girl, pulling shoes on his socked feet as she rolls over in her sleep I'm staring at myself in the mirror with a toothbrush hanging out of my mouth like a thin cigar, pushing my hair back and forth across my forehead he had a bunch of these fortune cookies made up a couple months ago. They all opened up to little love notes instead of fortunes that he spent days and days writing, things like "I bet you're more beautiful the next time I see you" and "It's a shame it's not still yesterday." Cheesy stuff like that, obvious little things that make me nervous one is complete nonsense, it almost laughs at you as you puzzle over it. "Silly sweet sweat still don't ever leave." another is a tiny hand-drawn panorama of a sun setting behind the horizon of an unbelievable sea: I can tell it's a sunset because he's drawn an uppercase "W" in the right hand corner. Sifting there, he brushes the hair out of the girl's face softly and takes a quick peak at her closed eyes as she squinches up against the light. He leaves one of those cookies on top of a note with some scribbled instructions telling her she has the run of the house as long as she wants and walks out, shutting the front door quietly behind him. Sometimes I can't tell if he just likes to be memorable or if he really does love every woman who meets eyes with him.

• • •

I fling my backpack over my shoulder as the door moans shut behind me. It's about a forty-minute walk to school, depending on traffic, from one side of downtown to the other. It takes me from one poor section of town where I rent a studio apartment, across a magnificent bridge over a beautiful though trash-filled river, through the modern business and retail district downtown, then on a path through the park to the other poor section of town, where my school hunches bright and green among the concrete and spray paint and the dry, dead grass *the sun beats on his shoulders as he stretches his arms straight up and behind his head. He hears a crack and his eyelids droop with satisfaction. The fields aren't yet golden but a deep royal green and he can see them stretch to the horizon from atop the hill. The sky seems both far away and close. It touches the young wheat down by the river, and clouds like liquid silver float high and stacked like paving stones. He pulls his bike away from the side of the building and bounces the tire on the ground in some sort of excited anticipation.*

I turn onto the main road that takes me to the bridge after passing by bail bonds offices and derelict businesses specializing in vacuum cleaner and watch repair. Cigarette butts and ancient beer cans crushed down to paper width and covered with a lifetime of sticky grime litter the sidewalk. Here, though, even the trash on the sidewalk seems more sharply outlined than most things in the hard-edged business district, where it's hard to tell sky from sidewalk. Where everything takes on a dull, steel gray tint that makes me nervous but draws me in pleasingly, too, somehow.

I walk slowly toward that gray-on-gray steel-domed ball of downtown. I relish the slow pace of walking *he's riding a bike fast and with zeal, zigzagging between cars and people. At the bottom of the hill lies a town put together by farmers long ago - with squat buildings, ambling streets and dim, sweet smelling bars. He had left early so he could grab breakfast.* If I leave early enough, I get the chance to take my time. Sometimes I give myself an extra hour just in case an interesting person is waiting for the bus somewhere and I want to stop and have a discussion with them about whatever interests them. But interesting people, by the looks of faces as I pass, don't always or ever take the bus.

I stop to lean against a brick wall across from the courthouse with the big clock mounted to the side of it. I sometimes roll myself a cigarette here. As a rule, I don't carry a watch or a cell phone. I like to have to work to tell time or make a phone call. There's something ritualistic in these little motions and mild inconveniences that makes me feel like the world comes into sharper focus by degrees the more I participate in them. I usually leave this spot when the clock shows 7:15 to stay on schedule, and right now it's 7:09.

He walks into the diner and sits in his stool at the bar right by the cash register and peeks at the clock mounted on the wall.

-- James, the waitress says suggestively, putting a thin napkin and a cup of thick coffee in front of him.

-- Maggie. James replies, winking as he takes a sip. A man with a scruffy beard and dusty work clothes comes and takes the empty seat beside him.

-- Mornin'.

-- Mornin' Peter.

-- Happy hump day.

-- Yup.

God sometimes I wish something actually exciting would happen. It's 7:12 and I'm puffing on my cigarette. I don't smoke very often, it's the only reason I'm able to afford this expensive rolling tobacco rather than just buying packs at the gas station, except on these mornings when the sun peeks through the cracks of the buildings and gives everything the look of being constructed by delicate pieces of polished, painted metal, then I can't help myself.

But the brick wall behind my back has this crazy little ledge that sticks out about an inch all the way around and it's just high enough to dig into my shoulder blades whenever I lean against it. I fidget uncomfortably and flick a little grey smudge of ash onto the sidewalk. The light near me turns red and cars start to roll up behind one another. I try not to catch the eyes of the drivers. I'm kicking at something on the ground with the toe of my shoe. I look up to see a redheaded girl with a yellow scarf wrapped around her neck – it's not that cold outside – walking across the street in front of the cars. Her eyes look like they're attached by invisible tiny wires to invisible tiny hummingbirds buzzing around her head. I can't tell if she's looking at me or not – I never really can – but she could just as well be looking at the architecture, the patterns of brick on the buildings. I'm looking at her in short bursts between my eyes on the ground or staring at the sky, and I wonder if she can tell, like when I look somewhere for no real reason except I feel like looking there, and someone will be staring directly at me from that very place. Then I wonder if somehow I knew they were there, looking at me, as if I could somehow feel something as intangible as a look, but I wonder anyway.

-- So what're you doin' tonight? He asks Maggie.

-- I don't know. she puts her palms on the counter and leans deeply towards him. what am I doing?

-- First thing's first. love. he raises his eyebrows toward the order window behind her and winks as the service bell rings and the cook calls out his order he's always winking I've seen him practice it in front of a mirror to get it right.

-- Smartass, the waitress says, smirking.

I wonder if she can feel me looking at her. I pull out the little piece of paper I keep in my back pocket to write things down on and I guess I sort of just pretend to be engaged in something important. She passes by me slowly. I can't tell if she looks at me or not *opportunities are god's opinions* I guess so, but still I crush the stub of my cigarette underfoot and cross the street with the clock still reading 7:14.

I'll be coming on the bridge soon now.

I remember one time his bike got a flat tire while he was out on a ride beside some sort of farm, with rusting machinery and silos looming unreal like giant silver obelisks beside him, looking like they were sculptures in front of a massive painting. He threw the thing down right there on the side of the road in a ditch and just walked off with the biggest smile. He didn't try to find a ride or call for help, he just walked all the way back to town. I bet it's still rusting in that field, the other tire gone flat too by now.

It's like those books or movies where someone wanders off into the woods with nothing but a backpack to keep them alive and they stay out there. Some of the saddest of us yearn to do the same, but I think we really only want to be found out. Like children, every last one of us still

from them.

Except James *he didn't even lock his bike to the rack, just hops on and pedals away – too fast – weaving through pedestrians.* The bridge looks ancient as you approach it, like it was dropped from the sky whole to crash violently into the embankments that rise high out of the river and remained intact, or it looks like the earth grew the thing itself. It used to be a sort of cream-white, but now its massive arches are stained brown and black with patches of moss clinging to it in places, rusted brown dripped-water stains running from the road deck down.

He leans his bike against the side of Timothy's Auto Repair. He's not a mechanic, but he does the paperwork in a dusty, window-less office with a thick door.

--How ya doin' James? The boss asks.

--Well, thanks, he replies while shoving the punch card in the clock. There's a sharp crack like the breaking of an old, thick branch.

--Coffee?

--No, thanks. He shuts the door to his office behind him. Two heavy desks sandwich a scuffed file cabinet with refrigerator magnet poetry covering both sides. He arranges little rectangular words on the side facing the desk opposite his: had fun last night school blue walk still cream red and s on the wall.

He gives a smug smile to himself and sits down.

I think that maybe I'll talk to the girl who sits next to me in class and laughs with a short sharp exhale of breath whenever someone makes a reference she understands. She looked at me the other week. Only for a moment, but I got it. There were flowers in that look. From where I sit, I can see her doodle sometimes in the margins of her notebook. I could bring her to my apartment and leave little doodles lying around, taped to the wall and absently placed on my desk. Places that look hidden or casual or interesting, but accidental.

I'm halfway across the bridge where I stop and lean against the railing, staring at the city and the green park. There's a clock tower that reads 7:20. I leave here at 7:25. Looking down, I can see a man like a discarded bag of sand under a worn olive-green blanket, pressed up against the bushes by the river sleeping on the rocks. Huddled out of view he looks like he wants to be no more than a part of the landscape. He shifts minutely under the blanket and I wonder if it's more warmth or camouflage. Suddenly I feel nervous. I look away.

The girl with the black mounds of hair walks into the office.

--Wonderful morning, ain't it? He says, smiling. She says nothing as she shuts the door behind her. She stands still and close to the door with her hands crossed in front of her, playing with a thin white slip of paper. She looks like she wants to say something but just can't figure out what it is. He raps on his desk with his knuckles.

--Hey! He says, what's up? He throws a paperclip at her

playfully. It bounces off her shoulder and lands on the ground like a little piece of broken glass. She looks up at him with red eyes.

--What's wrong with you? She says, but she doesn't sound sure of her own question. He looks taken aback. Her hand moves in to her jacket pocket. I mean, she says meekly, I thought you were– I thought you– she coughs and looks at the ground, shuffling her feet. I just want to give you a chance to explain, she says. He tilts his head and a concerned crease appears just above his eyebrows. I roll and light another cigarette, staring at the clock tower.

--What're you talking about? He asks. She walks forward two paces and puts a little rectangular slip of white paper on his desk and quickly steps back.

--Rory's outside the door, she says, if he hears anything, he's going to come in. I think about flipping over the railing, crashing into the river. I've written things – poems, pages for stories, fragments of thought, observations, realizations – and kept them in a shoe box under my bed. In fifty years they're to be revisited and edited by a wiser man: the intersection of youthful energy and the restraint of old age. Until then, they're supposed to sit: forty-eight years and two months more. Who's to say these things don't get discovered, reproduced, commented on, expounded, then exalted in my death? I can't tell if it would be me who's famous then, or somehow my corpse. If I could feel the weight of the flowers at my headstone, then maybe that would make the difference. I look back down at the man concealed near the bushes of the river and take one last deep drag of my cigarette, let it float feather-like down to the river. He squirms and lifts his head slightly, peering around him before letting it settle back down.

Sometimes I think that if I put ten pounds of rice in my backpack and walked into the woods, I'd be dead of lack of attention in no more than a week. Long before the bears ever got the chance. I step back from the edge of the bridge and the clock reads 7:24.

--What's this? He asks as he grabs for the slip of paper.

--What's this? She mocks, it's from you, she says, from your stupid, cheesy little cookie. She's gaining confidence, angered by his feigned confusion. James looks down at the paper, written in the same font he uses for his love notes. it says bitch bitch whore all my eggs are poisoned I put scorpions in your shoes and spiders in all your clothes. His eyes got wide and then narrowed, deeply thoughtful. He tries to shrug it off. He's forgetting it already.

--Katie, you know I'd never– he gets up and starts to walk around the desk.

--Stop, she says. He chuckles and continues to walk towards her, still explaining what he's already decided is nonsense.

--STOP! She yells. He takes one more step and the office door opens as Katie's hand comes out of her pocket and sprays burning red liquid on his face. He's on the ground before a fist comes from above and connects just beside his eye. He's rolling around on the ground covering his face when a steel-toed boot strikes him near

burning red liquid on his face. He's on the ground before a fist comes from above and connects just beside his eye. He's rolling around on the ground covering his face when a steel-toed boot strikes him near the base of his spine. He cries out in pain.

I look at the clock: 7:25. I fish headphones out of my backpack and put them in, turning music up as loud as it will go before I continue again, walking rhythmically on.

Two pairs of strong arms wrap under my arms and haul me into an almost-standing position. My eyes feel like hot irons fused them shut. They drop me into a chair and tell me to stay there.

I cough. My throat feels like I swallowed a burning coal. Hoarsely, I try to tell them I didn't write that note, but it's hard to speak. I think it's a pretty violent reaction to a stupid little note anyway.

--Shut up, someone says, pushing me hard against the back of my chair.

--Call the cops, someone else says. I try to tell them it's a mistake.

--Shut him up, someone says. A hand slaps me across the face. I groan and spit on the ground.

--And don't do that.

I'm still trying to talk. God, my throat burns. Someone's on the phone. I can hear half of a conversation.

--Yea, down here at Timothy's...He put poisonous spiders in my receptionist's clothes and poisoned her food...we think he hoped she wouldn't read the note before she had breakfast. It's supposed to be dessert...the cookie...yea... a fortune cookie...I don't know why.

--He always used to tease me because I refused to eat desert first, Katie whines from a corner. I usually eat the cookie after breakfast, but I was late for work- she sobs. My mind's no more than explosions in the dark and I close my eyes against the light - all I see is light amplified and beaming, drilling me somewhere behind my eyes painfully.

--If they're dessert, then why does he give them to the girls in the morning?

--Why don't you ask him?

I don't say anything.

--Because he's a fuckking sicko, the man on the phone says, that's why. Quiet.

I cough again. I say, I didn't- another slap.

--You really gotta shut up, bro.

--We should knock him out, someone says.

--I've never knocked anyone out before. Have you?

--No. A pause.

--What if we give him brain damage?

--I don't care.

--But I don't even know how to knock someone out if I wanted to.

--I do. We just hit 'im with this. I hear a hand grab echoing for something. It was the heavy, satisfying sound you hear when you drop a large dictionary on a table. I tense my neck and clench my jaw.

--Ok, thanks, the phone is put back down on the receiver. They'll be here in two minutes, he says. There's a pause, then he says, put that thing down. Are you crazy?

--I was just-

--They're going to be here soon. Put it down. A substantial thud like a weight being dropped on wet grass echoes through the little office and I relax.

I'm beginning to see more clearly. I can see blurry, tear filtered shapes. I see Rory and two other guys. One is the blonde kid that works in the shop. He had told me his name once but I forgot it long ago. The other has shoulder length, thick, curly hair and also works in the shop. I didn't know his name either but I talked to him sometimes about football, or the weather.

When I look over at Katie, first I see that she's leaning inside a corner of the wall, her eyes pointing directly at the ground. Her arms hang so heavy that she could have been carrying large grocery sacks by her fingertips, but all I see in her hands are two small zip lock bags. One has a wiry black spider in it; the other contains an angular, translucent scorpion. I can't help myself I get up and try to go to her, and I'm two steps in I'm being flipped through the air onto my back, like someone slipping on a banana peel my feet penduluming ridiculously. I'm on the ground now, a knee driving into my chest I'm coughing sputtering my world bursts of light against my eyelids.

--Woah! Someone hollers.

--Tricky little fella.

--Nice catch, Rory. They're laughing. One of them I see give a sidelong glance to Katie in the corner, like making sure she watches, and I follow his gaze. I catch her eyes and for an instant and I'm reminded of something, some revealed truth part of the brain that only surges forward in certain moments I've only ever wanted that which beauty desires most and everything looks cartoonish in an instant, like it was painted shoddily with child's fingers, and I want to lend a comforting word, some saving explanation, but something in those eyes like rabbits', frozen, with ears pricked, is like maybe she's wanting it, and I keep silent with rage, the actor in me giving up.

•••

I pull my headphones out as I enter this coffee shop downtown where the barista always smiles sweetly at me when she hands me my cup. The walls are all painted this deep, calming brown and she draws me little pictures in the foam, handing me the lid separately so I can look at them - hearts and leaves and smiling faces. *James is being loaded into the back of a police car.* For the first time I see something different in his eyes as I shuffle forward in the cashier line. They are bloodshot and hazy, with cuts above his eyebrow, but that sort of thing would never take the smile out of him before. For the first time, I see nothing but the deepest misery and regret in him. *He leans his head back heavily against the hard plastic seat, his hands crossed at the wrist behind him.* I expected more: a lifeless body would have made more sense. I can imagine myself defending honor, lions painted somewhere, in a single, uninhibited and self-sure moment

time ahead or behind.

Who knows for how long something like that will land someone in jail. *A long time. that's all.* Long days of doing nothing – nothing interesting, at least – in prison. I pay for my coffee and stand off to the side. I think of how sometimes people replace one habit with another one. Like a smoker who starts chewing a pack of gum a day. I once tried that for biting my fingernails, just making my jaw sore.

The barista hands me my little paper cup with that smile on her face. I smile with my eyes staring at the foam heart design and drop a folded dollar bill into her colorful tip jar.

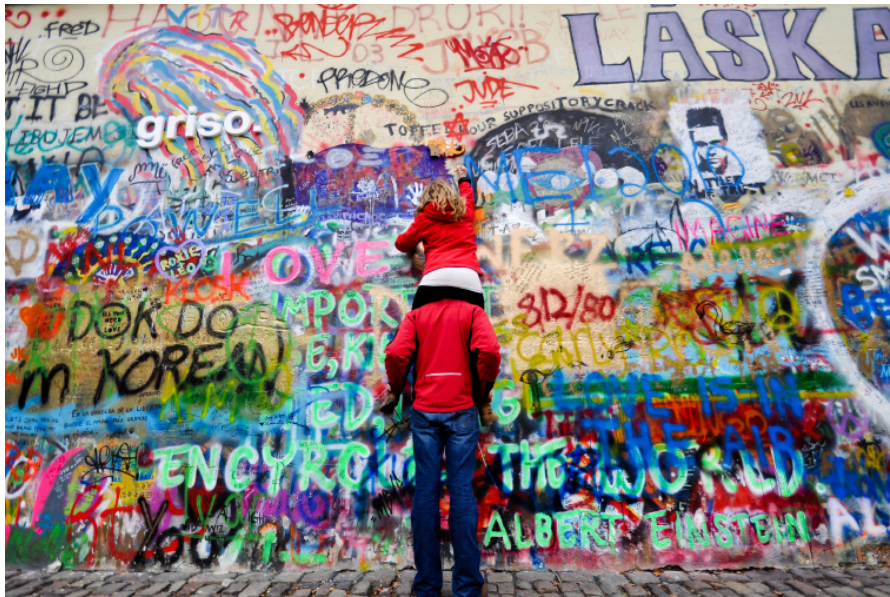
"Thanks!" She says, then leans over and calls into the crowd, "I can help whoever's next over here."

I walk out of the coffee shop onto the sidewalk, sipping. I pause, looking up at the clock that's mounted above the door of the big mall above me: 7:36. I've two minutes before I need to leave to make my class. There's a bustle, a commotion going on as cars crawl slowly through the system of traffic lights, getting to work. What is a habit? It's a quick reaction to something, is all, like nervous or doubtful feelings, or a smile you could feel in the dark. I walk back into the coffee shop and lean casually on the counter as she works at the machine. Her attention drifts my way.

--Hey, you wanna get a drink sometime? I ask. That's how to ask. The barista looks at me with a strange expression on her face like she didn't hear me right.

"Um," she finishes steaming a big metal container of milk and hesitates. I see her eyes dart up to the ceiling as she twists the knob that lets steam into the container shut. She starts to say something but I turn and walk away quickly, leaving my coffee on the counter, but I don't want to walk back to get it. I shove the door with its little tinkling Christmas bell open and heave myself out of the café. I thought I heard her talking to my back as I walked out, but I tried not to listen. *The police band crackles and sputters as the car jostles down the street. He sits staring at his knees, his lips moving slowly, forming words like some sort of prayer. Then his eyes flick upwards and he turns his head quickly behind him, like he saw something.* I pull a pack of gum out from the inside of my backpack and shove three sticks in my mouth and start to chew.

A bus rolls up to the stop outside of the coffee shop. From here it goes to the parking lot under the bridge where another bus runs to another town not far from here. It would cost exactly \$1.25, less than the price of my coffee. I feel a tug right around my navel, right where it's supposed to be. It's 7:38. I'm surrounded by the realization of twenty-two years of rising action and a bottom about to drop out. Opportunities are god's opinions I know but still-



With a little Help. Brett BOLLIER



Lightning Tango. Brett BOLLIER



A Brief History of the Camera. Brett BOLLIER

the routine

Julian LaCASSE

every morning, a hazelnut americano
if you asked me why i would probably say
because.
friday night, pulling out cigarettes,
1, 2, 5 and another week
wiggles quicksilver through my
toes.
pasta sauce is an underappreciated
luxury- it adds a lot to an
otherwise nude breakfast.
have a good day smells like coffee
by now. i would like to see those
letters floating in midair
grab the *good* and put it in my pocket
for later
then i could forget about the pressure
that barista puts on me as i walk out,
smelling like tobacco, looking forward to
scraping the last of the pasta sauce
from the glass jar
with a spoon



Duke of Gloucester Street, Blair KELLY

Homecoming

Michael BARFIELD

The Winnebago is this little fast food joint on Whitby's main drag after you get off of the highway. Whitby is conveniently situated a few miles outside of this lakeside community where lots of rich people have big cabins and boats. The only locals that hang out around the lake have jobs at the tourist-y bars and restaurants. But when all those city people come from whatever city they're coming from to the lake, they have to pass through Whitby. That's how the Winnebago gets a lot of its business. Luckily, no one has thought to put in a McDonald's or something or else we'd probably be out of business pretty fast.

George Luby has owned the place for at least fifteen years. We keep dropping hints to him that we're long overdue for some updates and renovations (like when we keep burning ourselves on the thirty-year-old grill), but he insists that the customers love the retro feel that the Winnebago offers. "Besides," he likes to add, "I just bought a new blender like last week." We don't really have any need for a blender at the Winnebago. And he's been saying "like last week" for a year. The customers think he's going for a 1970s-chic look, but it's just a bunch of leftover furnishings from the goddamn 70s. Sorry for swearing.

Whitby folks don't usually leave Whitby, just a long-standing tradition I guess (we love our traditions in Whitby, like the Lavender Festival in July). So, following that tradition, after I graduated from Whitby High, I decided to take on more hours at the Winnebago instead of going to college. College isn't a big deal in Whitby. My sister Erin is one of the few people I know who's gone to college, and even outside of the state to boot—California. Some art school. We don't talk much, but I think she likes it.

Louise went to college, too. She was one of the smartest people I've ever known, which was part of reason I liked her so much. From the second you started talking to her, you could tell that she wasn't meant for the typical Whitby life cycle. She was meant to get out and do something big, which was also part of the reason I liked her so much. She was always reading some interesting-looking book, and I'd ask her what she was reading. All the times I did this, she'd never once mentioned any book I'd ever heard of—I'm not familiar with most books. But all the same

I loved hearing her describe the plot and characters. It always made me wanna read the books just so we'd have something else we could talk about. I think she was flattered that I was always curious about what she was reading. When I realized she liked me back in the same way I liked her, it was one of the greatest days ever.

After high school, Louise went to a college way over on the east coast, which was hard for me. But I'm pretty sure it was harder for me than it was for her.

Anyway, a few months after I took on more hours, I asked George Luby if I could take the night shift, which he gave to me in a heartbeat. I didn't mind taking the night shift because I was having trouble sleeping anyway. I kind of fell into this bad habit of staying up til five a.m. every night, and then I'd come into work feeling like death. I don't know why I couldn't just sleep like a normal person.

I soon discovered that the night shifts at the Winnebago weren't so bad. The other regular who works that shift is a big, oily fellow who goes by Mongoose. Once I heard that he got his nickname from surviving a pretty nasty snakebite, but for some reason that just doesn't sound believable. Mongoose is older than most of the employees, but I guess that's not saying much since the majority of us are teenagers. Mongoose just seems old because he's been working at the Winnebago longer than anyone, aside from George Luby. Mongoose likes my company because he doesn't have to worry about me accidentally closing the till before I give someone the right amount change back. Also, I don't talk much. The last kind of person you wanna spend sunset to sunrise with is a chatty person. You'll pull your hair out.

This one time, Mongoose and I worked the night shift on the Friday night of the Whitby High homecoming game—this was two years after I'd graduated. It was also Halloween weekend, like it usually happens to be. The weather was starting to get chilly. Chilly enough to the point where the cold made your breath look like fog. Walking through the neighborhoods at that time of year is funny because half the people have Halloween decorations up and the other half have Whitby High banners and stuff saying, "Go Phantoms!" Well, I think it's kind of funny anyway.

And on this one particular night, as I made my way down Bullitt Street, the town seemed practically empty, so I assumed everyone was just finishing up with the big game. But just when I thought I was alone, I swear I saw someone walking across the street like they were coming towards me. I looked up in that direction and there was no one around. I didn't think anything of it at the time because I assumed it was just a shadow.

The door to the Winnebago jangled when I walked in, and Missy Cleary shot me a look of relief. She took off her apron right away and headed for the employee bathroom to change out of her uniform. She seemed pretty eager to get off work. I guess I wouldn't blame her, having to work during the big game and all.

When she came back out of the bathroom she still looked upset, so I asked what her if everything was okay.

"Yeah, it's just that asshole over there thinks he's real fucking hilarious," she spat out, jerking her head in Mongoose's direction.

"What'd he do?"

"Well I tried to get away with not wearing my uniform tonight cuz I was already annoyed about missing the game, but Mongoose said I looked like a lesbian truck driver and made me change. Then he thought it be funny to call me Margie in front of customers. That doesn't even make any sense." Mongoose loves to give new people a hard time.

Missy was wearing an oversized plaid shirt and cut-offs. Usually, we don't wear our uniforms on the night shift because the drive-thru's the only thing that's open, and no one really cares. It's kind of nice because no one who works at the Winnebago is much of a fan of the uniform: a custom turquoise bowling shirt with either black pants or black mini-skirt for the ladies.

"Sorry, Missy. Mongoose does have a bit of a salty sense of humor I guess you could say. The Margie thing was probably just some weird movie reference."

She didn't say anything back. She just raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips, which made me think that what I'd said hadn't made her feel any better. I guess there wouldn't be much point in trying to ask her out anyway, even if I could ever muster up the courage to do it.

"So, do you know if we've won yet?" I asked, attempting to make conversation.

"Yup. Becca just texted me that we won by seven." She gave a little unenthusiastic fist pump while continuing to mess with her cell phone.

"You going to any after-parties or anything?"

"Yup. Should be fun. Well, have a good night, Tom."

"You too. See you later."

I'm not exactly proud of it, but I stared at her butt

as she walked out.

"You here, Tom Hill?" Mongoose shouted from the back room. Mongoose always calls me by my first and last name.

"Yeah, I just got here."

"Great, can you be a dear and lock this shit up?"

"Now? Isn't it a little early for that?"

"Nope, I got special permission from the boss."

He came out front to the counter so he wouldn't have to keep hollering. "George is worried about the kind of rush we might get from people leaving the game, and since there's only the two of us, he doesn't want us to have to handle the place alone if it goes apeshit. Only doin' drive-thru tonight, brotha. Lock it on up!"

The Winnebago was surprisingly quiet for those first two hours of the shift. We were expecting to get a lot of frustrated high-schoolers banging on the glass doors because we'd closed early. But no one showed up. Not even the drive-thru was seeing any action. I remember just staring blankly at a grainy black-and-white monitor, waiting for someone pull up.

I had an old radio nearby to help pass the time. Some old blues tune was mingling with jerky static. Not the best reception in Whitby. Mongoose was whistling while he mopped, but I couldn't make out the tune.

I've never fallen asleep on the job, but I think I might have that night. I just can't think of any other explanation for what happened. One second I was listening to what sounded like Screamin' Jay Hawkins, and then all of a sudden a loud jolt of sharp static burst out of the speakers, giving me a heart attack. A bunch of different voices seemed like they were fighting to break through the noise. It was like that kind of sound you get when you're tuning it and you stop between two different stations, with the voices overlapping. I scrabbled for the volume knob and turned it down all the way. While I was still trying to get my heart to calm down, I noticed Mongoose wasn't whistling anymore. I listened intently.

"Hey, Mongoose?"

I felt kind of stupid for being so freaked out. I convinced myself it was just left over from the radio giving me such a start. Still, I wondered why Mongoose wasn't answering me. I figured he must have stepped out for a cigarette, but I felt like I should go check anyway.

Right as I was about to take off my headset, I caught some movement on the monitor out of the corner of my eye. A sedan had pulled up to the speaker box.

"Welcome to the Winnebago," I said. "What can I get for you?"

I waited for an answer. Then I realized the guy didn't even have his window rolled down. The screen was too grainy to let me see inside his car. At least, I assumed

it was a he, because the next thing I knew, someone was talking to me through the headset.

"I don't want anything. But thanks."

"Hello?" was all I could muster, wondering if the voice was actually coming from inside the car.

"Hello. I said I don't actually want anything. To eat, I mean. I'm just passing through. So tell me. What exactly is in Winnebago Sauce?"

I wasn't really sure how to respond, but for some reason I thought it would be rude not to.

"Um, we're not supposed to give that away. It's a secret."

"It's ketchup and mayonnaise, isn't it? That's what it always is."

"No, sorry." I was kind wishing Mongoose that was nearby or at least within earshot.

"Listen," the voice said. "You're from around here, right? I mean, you work here so you must be. Do you know someone named Lisa or something like that?"

"Um, sorry I don't think so."

"Or maybe it was Lois. Something with an L. I'm supposed to meet up with her before we go to this party at Chadwick."

"Chadwick?"

"Yeah, you know, Chadwick Hall."

"No, sorry."

"Well, anyway, if you see her, let her know I stopped by and I'm looking for her."

"Wait, why would she be here?" At this point I was pretty sure that the guy was lost.

"Said something about having to tie up some loose ends. Something about a guy named Tom. Or Tim. Hell if I know, right?"

He thought that was funny and started laughing, but then it sounded like something got caught in his throat and it made him start coughing pretty bad, like he was gonna lose a lung or something. I glanced behind me to see if Mongoose was back, but there was still no sign of him. The guy was still hacking his brains out in my earpiece when I turned back to face the screen. I squinted at the monitor and thought I was seeing things at first. His sedan wasn't the same at all anymore. The front of car was completely smashed up like an accordion, and I swore I could see smoke coming out of somewhere.

My first instinct was to go help the guy, but the thought of going outside alone freaked me out. And even though he may have been hurt, that guy was kind of freaking me out, too. Something wasn't right about the situation.

I ripped off the headset to get the sound of him coughing out of my brain, but it still rang in my ears. I gave the whole place a quick once over to check if Mongoose was in the building. Then I yanked open the back door,

panting. Sure enough, he was standing by the dumpster with a cigarette.

"What?"

"There's... someone in the drive-thru."

Mongoose just stared at me blankly. "Um, okay..."

"I just couldn't find you."

"I told you I was taking a smoke break, remember? Did you like fall asleep or something?"

"Oh. Maybe. I dunno."

"I don't think anyone's here, man. I've had my eye on the drive-thru entrance this whole time."

"Oh. Um, nevermind."

"I'll be back in there in a sec. Try not to nap without me, all right Tom Hill?"

"Ha, sure."

I walked back inside, stumbled I guess is more like it. I decided that I must have fallen asleep. I ran to check the monitor just to make sure the sedan wasn't still there. Sure enough, the monitor showed no signs of anyone.

The radio was on, which startled me at first. I thought I had turned it off. But then I remembered that me turning it off had probably just been part of my dream, or whatever it was. The station wasn't playing blues anymore. It was some sort of radio DJ that I'd never heard before.

"All right, boys and ghouls," the voice said. "The time is now half past the witching hour. You know what that means. The good doctor's got a few tunes for you that'll be sure to rattle your bones and make you scream. But first, your local news!"

I turned the volume up a little more and put my headset back on.

"The forecast calls for heavy, heavy rain throughout the evening and going straight on until morning. Perfect for washing away the bloodstains, am I right kids? Ha ha, just teasing."

I thought I must have misheard the voice, because I could see out the window that it was definitely not raining or coming even close to it. It wasn't even cloudy. You could see the moon and everything.

"Jeepers creepers, it looks like the Phantoms aren't the only Halloween winners tonight. The Wolves pulled it out by a nose against the Razorbacks in one of the closest games of the season for either team. I actually got a chance to talk to Wolves quarterback Jacob Harker after the game and he said he'd be celebrating how the team usually celebrates home game wins: with a nice big rager at Chadwick Hall! But don't you listeners out there think about crashing. It's invitation only, or so I've been told."

I'd never heard of either of those teams before, but Chadwick Hall sounded weirdly familiar.

"But the real question on everyone's mind is, what lucky lady will get the privilege of accompanying golden

boy Jacob Harker to tonight's festivities? Will her name start with an L or something?"

I stared at the radio hard because I couldn't help feeling like it was watching me somehow. I thought maybe I should turn it off, but then I thought that thinking that made me seem paranoid for no reason.

I looked up at the monitor screen and saw a man in a big overcoat with his hood up standing in front of the speaker box outside. I couldn't see his face. He looked like a hobo or something. He was freaking me out, but I just told myself that he was outside and I was inside. Safe. Even though I felt like he was staring at me through the monitor.

"Sir, the drive-thru is for cars only."

He just stood there. Didn't say anything. My voice got a little shaky.

"Sir, is there anything I can help you with?"

I'd been so freaked out that I hadn't noticed the radio go quiet. I glanced at it, as if that would make it turn back on. But it wasn't even off. Just quiet. I turned up the volume a little and it seemed like all I was getting was static. But there was also this faint, steady noise. Sounded like breathing.

"Hey, kid."

At first I thought the gravelly voice was coming from my headset, so I yanked it off with a start. Then I realized it was coming from the radio. I checked the monitor again and the man hadn't moved.

"Are you guys still open?" whispered the radio.

I didn't say anything.

"Hey, are you there?"

"Uh..."

"Hey, I asked you a question, kid."

"You need... you need a car to use the drive-thru. Have a good night."

I tried to shut the radio off. The static-y breathing wouldn't go away.

"Well, I don't have a car. Do you have a car?"

The radio wasn't turning off, so I tried to unplug it.

"Hey, I asked you... a question."

"Hey, Mongoose? Are you back there?"

"Mongoose took off. Said something about a party at Chadwick. Hey, are you sure the doors are locked, Tom? You were in charge of locking the doors, right?"

The screen suddenly went all fuzzy, and I could barely see anything. The last thing I saw was the man walking through the drive-thru towards my window. I jumped up and booked it to the back door.

"Mongoose! There's someone out there."

Mongoose was in pretty much the exact same position by the dumpster where I'd left him the first time. His cigarette had almost burned down to his fingers. I think I was kind of freaking him out.

"Dude. There's no one out here."

"No, but it's not a car. It's like this hobo or something just standing around."

"Ok, whatever. If it'll make you feel better I'll cut my break short."

"Um. How long have you been out here?"

"Shit I dunno, like 5 minutes."

He wasn't too happy about coming back inside. I was pretty embarrassed because it seemed like I had fallen asleep again.

I went back to the monitor and Mongoose took a seat at one of the booths to read his comic book. He tells me they're actually called graphic novels. I felt awkward about letting Mongoose see me get freaked out like that, so I tried to make conversation to break the silence.

"Hey Mongoose," I yelled. "What are you reading?"

"Sandman."

"What's it about?"

"Dunno, I just started it."

I didn't ask him any more questions after that.

I did notice that the radio was off, though. I was too disoriented from the whole evening to register if I'd left it on or off. I tried turning it on but I realized it was unplugged. I couldn't remember if I'd actually done that or if it had been in a dream. I decided that I must have actually unplugged the radio.

I plugged it back in and got a little bit of a voice with a whole bunch of static. I tweaked the knob and the voice came in clear as a bell.

"...all from me for tonight, boy and ghouls. This is Dr. Nocturne wishing you a happy eve before Hallow's Eve. Now get some sleep."

The radio switched over to some slow song that reminded me of being at a high school dance.

For the next hour, I couldn't stop myself from checking the clock every two minutes. Finally, some folks in an SUV rolled up at about half-past one. I asked to take their order and they gave it to me. Two cheeseburgers and two diet cokes. Their window was rolled down and everything. I could see them, and they looked about as normal as people can look. They had "road trip" written all over them. As I punched in their order, I tried to make casual conversation, which is something I never do since I'm not that good at it. I asked them where they were headed, and they said Maine. I said that that was quite a drive and they agreed. I told them that I'd have their cheeseburgers right out in a jiffy. I never say jiffy.

"Hey Mongoose, we've got customers."

I thought he must not've heard me.

"Hey Mongoose! I need two cheeseburgers."

Still nothing.

Frustrated, I took off my headset and went to see what the hold up was. I craned my neck over the counter but he wasn't in the booth where I'd left him. His comic book wasn't there. The whole dining area was empty.

I was about to check the back door again, figuring that was the only other place he could be, when I heard the sound of knuckles tapping on the glass doors to the Winnebago. The man in the hooded overcoat was knocking.

Then I heard a scream coming from outside the drive-thru window. Praying he wouldn't find a way in, I ran back to my post to check the monitor. The SUV was on its side, totally wrecked and smoking. I couldn't see the couple that had been inside the vehicle but there was someone else—a girl with shoulder-length chestnut hair—surveying the wreckage. Her back was to the camera and the monitor wasn't picking up a very good image, but I could recognize that chestnut hair from a mile away.

"Tom!" Louise cried out. "You've got to call 911! I think they're really hurt."

Forgetting all about the hooded man outside, I dashed out the back door to find the wrecked SUV.

It wasn't there. After skimming the vacant area around me, I stared blankly up at the camera we use to check when someone's pulled up to the drive-thru. The night was chilly. Chilly enough to the point where the cold made your breath look like fog.

It took me a second to register the fact that I was getting wet from the heavy, heavy rain that I didn't remember seeing just a few seconds ago.

Then the speaker box crackled to life with the sound of the girl's voice.

"Welcome to the Winnebago. Tom's not here right now, but can I take your order?"

I didn't stick around to answer. I went back inside, but no one was there.

I shuddered when I realized there was still someone standing at the front doors. It wasn't the hooded man anymore. It was the girl with the shoulder-length chestnut hair.

"Louise, what... what are you doing here?"

She probably wouldn't have been able to hear me through the glass doors. But something about the little smile on her face made me feel like she could.

It was the first time I had seen her since graduation. I guess that seeing her should've made me feel more surprised or excited or nervous or something. I guess that I should've been thinking about what I would say to her after all these years of not speaking (Lord knows I had a whole speech prepared). I guess I could've even been thinking about why she was back home in Whitby when I was pretty sure she was supposed to be at her school on the other

side of the country. But I was too distracted when I saw that her head was bleeding pretty badly. So were her shoulder and her leg.

I came out from behind counter and went to unlock the doors for her, but she stopped smiling when I came closer. She looked scared. When she stared at me through those doors I thought my stomach had turned to ice. Before I could get the key in the lock, she had started running in the other direction, towards the woods near the highway.

When I finally got the doors open, a blast of cold October wind smacked me in the face and it made me jump. There was no one out there.

"What the hell are you doing, man?" Mongoose had snuck up behind me. I jumped again. "Shut the door already!"

"Sorry. I thought there was someone out there."

He looked at me funny and said I was really pale. He thought I was sick so he made me go home and sleep the rest of my shift off. I ran the whole way home because I thought something was following me.

The next morning when I woke up, I had a message on my answering machine. My mom had called to tell me that Louise had passed away last night. She and this other guy were in a head-on collision with another car.

Even though the accident happened on the other side of the country, the local news still covered it since Louise had been a Whitby resident all those years. The reporter said that she and another student—a football player—had been on their way to a party when another car swerved right into them. The couple in the SUV hadn't survived either. The reporter said that they wouldn't have swerved so much if the road hadn't been wet from the rain. I guess they swerved because a homeless man had stepped out into the middle of the road, or something like that. I don't really remember all of it. I'm kind of trying to forget.



Medina, Leah BECKETT



Pulse, Leah BECKETT

You Told Me
it Would Have Been
Something to See
if the Volcanoes
had Been Out

Maria MILLS

You told me that view would have been something to see if the volcanoes had been out. You and the skyline both were shy and skinny friends of the boy I was with that August when I was coming down from the heat of the summer, living for the sheen of the moon upon the pavement. The city was out on the town that night, if I recall correctly. I sat on your lawn cross-legged, both wide-eyed and unashamed with that brown-skinned boy at my side. The city breathed and glowed in the low light, but no plumes of orange ash graced our mountain-range. You came outside.

The first words you ever spoke to me were probably something like "Most people stay in their cars." You addressed me from the privacy of your lawn, the one we had invaded. We were stealing your view, the million dollar one, the one your divorced parents paid for. The skyline was red across its shoulders, like I had been two weeks previous when I came home from San Diego with a sun burn. The city was sunburnt, but only across its collarbones. You were abrasive, but only if I thought you were hitting on me. And I can see now that was not your intention.

You knew the fickle quality of love, but I was still working it out in my head like a math problem. You invited me inside the cool stillness of your garage, me and my boy both, for you had gone to school together as sophomores and so knew each other better than I knew either of you. You had built a boat in your garage that August while I just whittled away the days doing my summer reading and nights navigating the cool streets of the sky with him. We sat cross-legged on the still-warm cement and sipped the sweet pattern of the summer constellations, our mouths eager for the sweetness. "Most people stay in their cars," you told me, while I lounged against the front tire of his car, but I wanted to stand up and ask you how it felt to live in a house that held no home. I guess I knew. I took my boy out to gaze at somebody else's skyline while you built a boat in your garage.



Discovering the Waterfront, Kurt GUENTHER



Illumination, Nikki BUSCH

tom hanks takes a cold shower (his philosophy on coming to terms)

Devin DEVINE

no longer living in the sense of we,
island, isolation is
confined, refined
"WILSON"
falls empty once, twice -
third time
that'll be a ten dollar fee

evasion,
persuasion,
it is easier than you'd think.
when dangling
on this edge
waiting to fall back into
the old habits.

die hard,
try hard.
it is easier than you'd think
to fall back in
to the swing of
things, that poison
rhythm, and logical sway.

but it's unusual
unnerving,
but not unheard of
to feel that uprise
that uptake
that virginal intake
of air

what a clean slate,
to start so pure
so honest to begin,
commencement without formality.
all hidden in that sidelong glance
it's like a kiss
at the corner, shadow bound.
womanhood, manhood
the dusk of childhood
to be drawn from what.

is it a sketch or is it
planned
fate, has been given such weight
stressed or pressed
or is it impressed upon

wait for it to pass
like any other fleeting flight
flicker in,
flicker out.
catch it
before
it slips
through your fingers, it's time
and time again.



The Fairest of Them All, Maura LATTY
Gouache on Canvas



The Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards

Poetry

Prize Winner • *12 Minute Phone Call*, Julian LaCasse

Honorable Mention • *Engagements, lilke egg shells*, Ashley Ruderman

Honorable Mention • *"I" decided to write*, J.W. Trull

Fiction

Prize Winner • *Bad Math*, Amy Cox

Honorable Mention • *Women's Lib*, Amanda Przybyla

Honorable Mention • *Crossroad Blues*, Blaine Denton

Non-Fiction

Prize Winner • *Outside, like fog*, Julian LaCasse

Honorable Mention • *Lines on Looking Into Milton's **Paradise Lost**:
A Fractured Love Story*, Alexis Rice

Honorable Mention • *Delicate and Dark Olive*, Emily Rice

Submissions

To be considered for publication in our Fall 2012 edition, submit poetry, prose (guideline of 3,500 words or less), and visual arts such as etchings, woodcut or screen prints, paintings, drawings, photographs, collages, and ceramics by emailing them to reflection@gonzaga.edu. Please contact *Reflection* if you are concerned about submitting your visual artwork, as we will provide a representative to photograph your work upon request.

Reflection looks forward to hearing from all Gonzaga University community members including undergraduate students, alumni, graduate students, and staff from all areas of the university.



Luca Bacci
Lucia Baldwin
Michael Barfield
Leah Beckett
Brett Bollier
Corwin Bryan
Nikki Busch
Amy Cox
Erin Dempsey
Blaine Denton
Devin Devine
Dominic DiCarlantonio
Daniel Fladager
Kohaku Flynn
Monica Freshley
Kurt Guenther
Molly Johnston
Brian Joyce
Katherine Joyce
Blair Kelly
Eric Kincanon
Julian LaCasse
Maura Latty
Tod Marshall
Maria Mills
Maria Mondloch
Stephen Paur
Amanda Przybyla
Emily Rice
Ashley Ruderman
Mattea Sattler
Adriana Stagnaro
Shelby Alice Walton
Sean Williams