

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 9 | Issue 1

Article 7

June 2009

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Recommended Citation

Balingit, JoAnn (2009) "The Pitch," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 7.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol9/iss1/7>

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THE PITCH

JoAnn Balingit

On my mother's death I shoot a documentary. It is set in the kitchen, one of the two most dangerous places in the home for women who have chosen men who hurt them.

However, it opens in her garden, where successions of vegetables ripen in pigments linked in this short film to the colors of human organs. Eggplant, cantaloupe, summer squash, tomatoes. Fiery zinnias, blue-purple snapdragons in the frame. Water-colored sweet peas climbing. The garden explodes like a carnival. She does not stroll but kneels. Camera zooms in on a swatch of white. My mother glints like a polished shield. That's the bleached cotton blouse she wore. I had wanted my mother to do a scene where she bends between willowed tomatoes and lifts their gold-dusted vines. Where she pinches off hornworms, bodies fat with leaf-light.

My father was not jealous of her garden. Thank goodness. He was jealous of imaginary suitors. (I have recently turned that project down.) He failed to see her garden as the lush, triumphant suitor. His failure gave her more time. His failure laid waste to her time.

I will walk you through it.

Moving inside to the kitchen, let's set up the shot. It is brief but difficult to execute—so slowly the moment unfolds. My father drags his bad left foot. He leans on the stock. Our pallid house burgeons from the inside out, a bud tearing heavily open. The world will finger its petals. Its dark and fragrant heart will be exposed.

Trouble is, I can't get my mom to turn around, even though I know she will face him. She just keeps fussing at the kitchen sink, like a bee tantalized by nectar. She hums. She sticks to the script.