

.: Harpur Palate, Volume 15 Number 2, Winter & Spring 2015

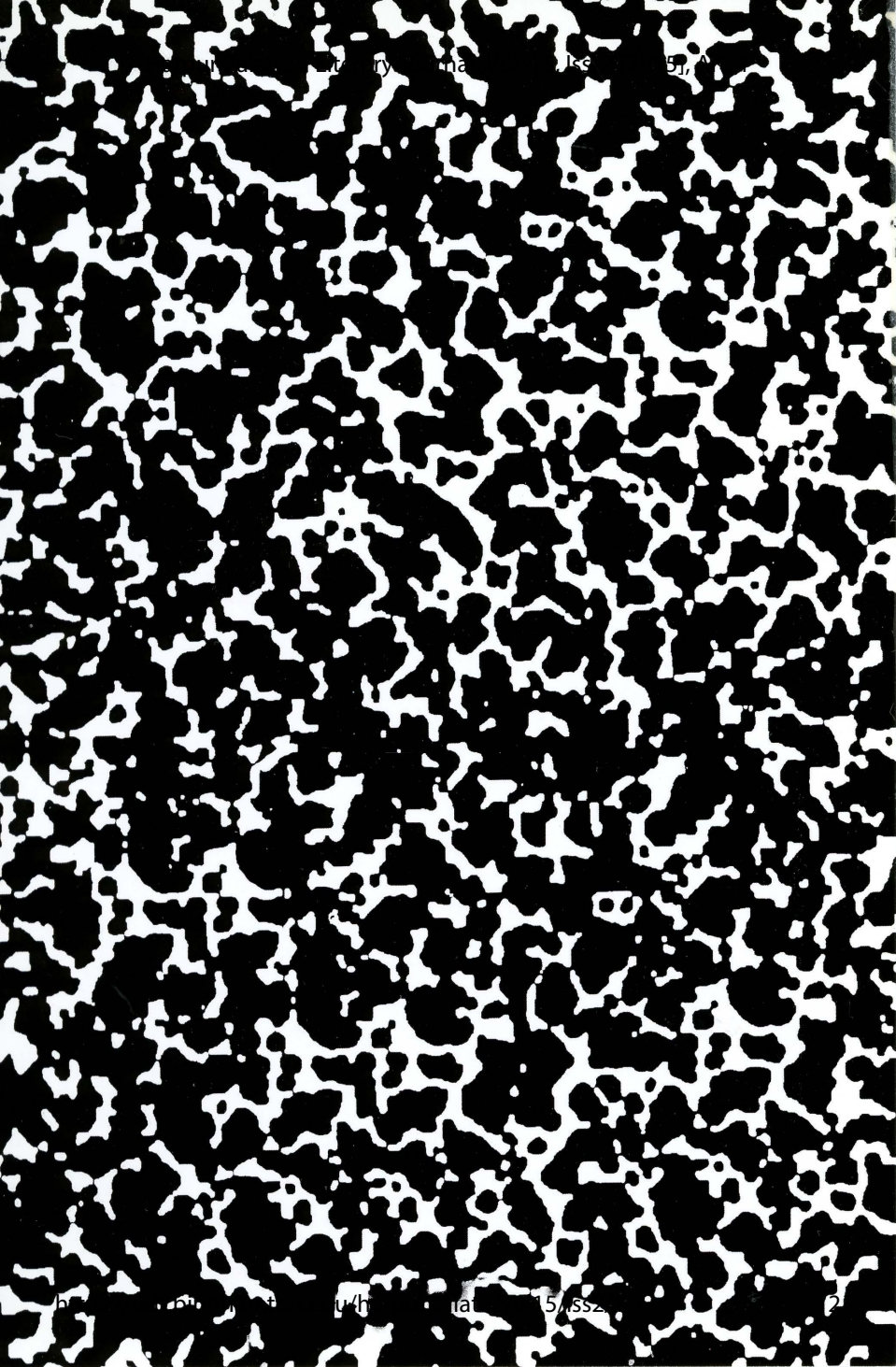
HARPUR PALATE



VOL. 15 NO. 2



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**BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY**

HARPUR PALATE

WINTER & SPRING

**BINGHAMTON,
NEW YORK**

Vol.15 No.2

Published by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB), 2015



**"I know our daddy is making us a rocking horse for
when we get born. It is blue like the sea, the sea I
live in when I dream."**

—Leonora Desar, "Alice & Larissa"

Winter & Spring 15.2

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GHAZAL IN GLASS

LUCY MADDUX
ALFORD

Leaves of the olives glinted there, crushed glass.
A broken sky flashed in the city's glass.

Passing through is a game of waiting, hemmed
for hours by conditioned air and glass—

paperless and cross-examined, to cross
a membrane of creek, the Jordan's clouded glass.

Sky pales and clings to the face, the shoulders
of hills suddenly bare as broken glass.

Shards of territory carve up the sky—
same anthem: *A palace of oil and glass*

at my right hand; at my left, a nation
of torn paper, tents, tires. Dim looking glass—

divided at the nape, your darker face
turned always away, each socket a glass

dried in the sun. No rain wets your lips, no
breath moves the olives, ashen under glass.

It's over, here. There is no end in sight.
Amma unrolls her scarf, bright coiled conch. Glass

fragments fall from the sky. She binds the wound
in the olive's root; a city's cracked glass

renders her shorn braid bandage. It's over.
No wind from the east, no birds glinting glass.

Sky reflects sky, the city the city.
The olive toils a braided root in glass

dust, fine as any Nile's silt but barren
as Ramallah's stilled vein, its blackened glass.

The poet scrolls these lines across a glass
screen, frozen in distance, barren as glass.

THE EXTENT OF FATHERLESSNESS - ALL PERSONS, ALL TENSES

KENDRA ALLEN

Our men our daddies and the man we cannot keep are all the same
person

Our daddies ran away at birth—
to the outside world we look like immaculate conception. As if we just
appear in mass numbers to become the world's most hated rappers or
your favorite ball players

... as if we do not have an origin story

We are magnificent in ways that we don't have fathers yet almost always,
we look exactly like our disappearing daddies.

They went away on crack binges / to Houston / some were stolen from us
/ they do not marry our mothers / some just go, we do not know where to
/ to jail / to hell, possibly. Some just didn't care enough to get away; they
are in the same cities as us—my mama's daddy lived forty-five minutes away
from her, her two sisters, and their brother until the day that he died.

We all, the aftermath / the children, connect with our runaways
innately. There are attitudes and noses and eyes and everything else that
our mamas used to love about them in our faces, in our bodies. We just
forgot that mama don't love these things no more and no amount of soap
can wash their imprints off of us. We can't scrub off the lies and make our
mamas feel better. We do not know what our real faces look like. We do
not know the actuality of anything.

—

My daddy apologized to me once during Ludacris' episode of *Behind The Music*. Ludacris was describing the feeling he felt when his daughter was born. He was explaining a necessity he had to always be in her life.

The lights in the room dimmed some.

He was explaining manhood.

The lights in the room dimmed some more.

He was verbalizing love.

The lights in the room dimmed some more.

He was explaining how he loved his child more than he loved being right.

Then the room we were in became dark.

My daddy said: I'm sorry that I wasn't there like I probably shoulda been

He probably was right

I probably shoulda said: I forgive you

There isn't one way to go about parenting black kids. A lot of us were raised under the voice of a woman of some sort, a grandmother / a mama / an aunt, it really does take a village / women who, just like us, did not have black men in their lives, so they tried to fill those empty spaces with cornbread and cabbage.

They did not know what else to feed us.

The unsaid rule is: we can laugh and play around about our missing parent, but no one else can. There are reoccurring jokes about our nonexistent relationships with our daddies and how they leave / when they leave / why they never fully return

Like: him going to the store and never coming back

Like: playing catch in the yard with an invisible man

Like: imagining conversations

Like: never attending a daddy and daughter dance

Like: him saying he will pick you up for the weekend and you are overflowing out of your socks with joy that you wait for him all night until you finally fall asleep on the couch

Funny, only when they are coming out of the mouth of someone who can relate, because these happenings are, more times than not, too true. The kind of truth that makes you laugh with a pang of misplaced comfort. It is too real. It is too real for black children to not have any communication with their fathers. It is too real to be afraid to talk to your mama about him. It is too real for some of us to not even know what he looks like.

For some little black girls and boys, we meet our daddies for the first time deep inside of our adult lives. In these cases, maybe a child of our own, or a series of unanswered questions about why we behave in the manner that we do, will trigger us to reach out. We think we are missing something important. We need to know why we were left with a bunch of women who could not teach us balanced love.

This one thing is certain for all absentee black fathers (I have not witnessed one to prove me wrong and I heart achingly wish for one to do so), when you finally talk face to face, you will go through a process of disbelief, a wave of rock bottom sadness and an ultimate high of disgust.

Your daddy, whom you haven't laid eyes on in over a decade. Your daddy, who you see once a year and finally summoned up the courage to question. Your daddy, who you are just meeting for the first time will say to you

- a. it was your mother who kept him away (not in a literal sense but in ways that attacked his ego)
- b. he could not financially provide for you (he thinks that is his sole purpose for your life)
- c. the past is in the past (meaning he is afraid of you and what you will say to him so he just wants you to forget it. he is saying do not hold him accountable for something that has already happened but he is not saying that things will change.)
- d. (the worst one) he isn't completely at fault, he cannot and will not take the full blame, that you, the child, could have reached out too.

To him, who knows nothing about you except that you carry his last name, will always believe that the phone works both ways

I guess he wants you to be his father too

There is an episode of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* that I hate to love called "Papa's Got a Brand New Excuse." In this episode Will's distant daddy decides to show up, sell his son dreams of a father/son connection and Will is happy. We, the audience / the kids who are just like Will, are happy that he got his father back too.

At the end of the episode when Will's daddy inevitably lets him down for what feels like the last time and Will is yelling that he doesn't need him because he learned how to drive / how to shave / how to fight without him and yelling about how he endured fourteen birthdays without him and never even received as much as a birthday card, he cries out TO HELL WITH HIM!!!! and we, the audience / the kids who are just like Will, recite this scene verbatim, and bawl every time that it airs
We all share a silent group hug every time we see Will ask,
"how come he don't want me man?"

—
I try to internalize whether or not there are distinct differences between fatherless black boys and fatherless black girls, whether one is affected more severely. And all I can come up with is what we have in common we both know of a man who strikingly resembles all of our flaws.
we both buy our mothers gifts on father's day.

we only acknowledge our fathers when we want to feel sorry for ourselves, when we need someone to blame.

The similarity between fatherless black girls and boys is that we are both affected to our disadvantage. We don't have the privilege of seeing stable black men in our vicinities. Faithful black men. Godly black men. We don't get to see black men taking care of black women, loving black women, protecting black women, raising black families. Loving their daughters, molding their sons on a day to day basis.

We are already black, we cannot afford to be bastards too.

We need to be engaged in the lives of black men –not Michael Kyle from *My Wife & Kids*, not Furious Styles from *Boyz N The Hood*, who are giving us ideas of black fatherhood, who cannot have a realistic impact on our

lives. We need to see black men in our families, in our homes, with loud personalities and a firm sense of self, we need to see them make mistakes and fix them.

We need to know that you are there.

—
When I was younger I used to take satisfaction in saying that not having a serious father did not affect how I turned out. I took satisfaction in not needing him, minimalism was enough. I didn't even try to entertain the practicalities of it all.

Until I realized that I could not modify my father's awareness was when I began to forgive him. I knew that his guilt would always be stronger than his presence. I knew that his pride had always rubbed off on me.

Sometimes when we talk, there is a disconnect between him and his pain, between him and his responsibility. A disconnect between him and his truth. I hear about a similar pain in hip-hop / in poetry / in my daddy's throat when he is trying to hold in his cries.

It is to be said that a lot of black fathers are living in fear of recreating their own fatherless childhoods.

Jay-Z, for instance, wrote a song about the joys of new fatherhood when his daughter was first born. It even had her happy voice in the background as theme music.

And then soon after, Jay-Z wrote a song about his realities when fatherhood presented itself to him.

In "Jay-Z Blue" Jay interprets his own fatherless childhood and how it could so easily happen to his own flesh and blood without warning. He says things

Like: Please don't judge me, only hugged the block, I thought my daddy didn't love me

Like: I don't wanna duplicate it. I seen my mom and pop drive each other mothafuckin crazy and I got that nigga blood in me. I got his ego and his temper, all I'm missing is the drugs in me

Like: Father never taught me how to be a father, treat a mother

Like: I don't wanna have to just repeat another, leave another baby with no daddy

This sensation doesn't vary much. My daddy had a providing father in his presence every day but that does not mean he had a man to model after. In fewer words, he has communicated to me the same terrors of this song. So has my cousin who has a daughter. So has my uncle who has a son. They all consume the same hurts, yet how these men go about being fathers all clash with one another—all crash into their offspring—all crumble into us writing about it twenty years later.

For some odd reason after my daddy is mean to me, he asks me nicely am I mad. I can depend on him to be worried if I hate him or not. I always say no. He says he doesn't mean to be nasty. I repeat: I'm not mad I don't get angry anymore. I am quite familiar with what he's capable of giving...

—

Growing up. This is what I comprehended about black men. They were beautiful too black and too strong, they were too majestic for this world. They walked to a rhythm. Their skin was bronze like trophies and their voices sounded like the bass in my trunk.

I knew I wanted one since I was a child.

The black man is like the mecca no matter how many bad encounters I've had with one. They are carved by the hands of God, they wear crowns around their temples for protection.

I just didn't have anything in my personal life to compare my vision to. There was no way I could have a black man for an extended period of time; they were not mine to keep, they do not like confinement / obligation / dependency. They are too hard and unwilling to break.

In Kiese Laymon's book *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*, he hints on black fatherhood and the idea that black kids need more than just black fathers in their lives in order to survive. He says, "black children need waves of present, multifaceted love, not simply present fathers." This is true and I agree, we need multiple forces of outside love, but I also believe that we need love in the home in order to know how to receive love secondarily. His notion of love being synonymous to survival, a

carnal need, is a technique that fatherless children cannot comprehend, for we cannot take love.

We fuck love up.

Black girls need fathers for this very reason. We need fathers to avoid looking for one in boys most importantly / so that we won't be afraid of men / so we can know how a man is supposed to treat us / so that we don't think we need a man in order to be a woman / so that we won't end up on shows like *Love and Hip Hop* / so we learn how to take direction / so we won't mature into adult girls with distrustful hearts.

Black boys need fathers so that they will not grow into adult boys who think women owe them something / so that they won't grow up to say that they only date white girls because black women are "crazy" / so that they won't grow up thinking that crying is an unmanly characteristic.

Black boys need black fathers so that they won't turn into another statistic. We need multifaceted love but we also need simple, unconditional love so that when we find someone to love on our own, it does not become hard to decipher whether or not we are sorting out our daddy issues or if it is the real thing.

—
My daddy once said that the women in my family cannot keep a man / we run them off / we are too attached to the women in our family opposed to the men we entertain. He remembers my family as a bad experience. I do not know how to separate his experience with my family and his experience with me—me and my mama compared notes and they feel the same

In Laymon's book, he also said that he is not the only black boy who realized a long time ago that his mother and her mother and her mother's mother "needed loving, generous partners far more than [black boys] needed present fathers." —my mama does not understand this, she is too hard and unwilling to break. She is too strong to believe that she needed help.

Some of us girls suffer a strong anxiety of meeting someone like our distant

fathers—so much that we don't meet anyone at all. I can't even get past the second date without jumping to conclusions.

My mother never remarried after my daddy showed himself to be no different than her father.

My grandmother never remarried after marrying an older, father like figure.

My great-grandmother never remarried ... after the second time.

A genuine trust of the opposite sex is a distance.

Our peaks become a midpoint.

We leave first. We never speak to the boys we like or the men we could have loved again.

It is not that we cannot keep a man, it is that we never learned how to be kept, and I still don't know whether or not this is something that can be reversed.

—

My daddy apologized to me once on a ride to Popeye's to go get some chicken. He dropped me off and said to not take his tone so literally.

—

when they leave, what I think they are saying is

let me go

don't nothing grow here

Like: me

Like: me

Like: me

/ like you / like simple sentences / like roots that have not been watered

SHE

**MICHAEL
BAZZETT**

was running from a witch and turned herself into a river
and now it's winter and I'm sitting beside her, listening
to the ice groan like a wooden boat.

But no. No witch. No chase through dusky woods.
Only meth. And the girl drowned.

But that ice still groans like a boat turning on its rope
and I want to climb aboard and feel it quaver
as we slip downstream.

SPECTACLE

EMILY BENTON

Standing barefoot over hose and sidewalk,
we search the house across the street:

the doorway we never knocked has lost
its shape—the screen now off-screen, thrown

into the yard like a child's plastic truck,
turned to ash by bittersweet orange

flames that lap against a new frame's edge.
From this vantage point, all smoke is screened—

a kaleidoscopic gray like late-night Channel 3,
a haze we can't help but watch, having risen

slowly from Sunday's couch, half-reclined
to an afternoon inside, keeping to ourselves.

We don't speak much—this gathering of old
and young, in house clothes and garden gloves,

with smartphones raised above the truck
that arrived ten minutes late to 15th Avenue—

our public square formed by those whose
names we can't recall, though didn't we pass

them on our evening walks, though we knew
whose lawn went un-mowed for months.

When the water's all but gone, we carry home
questions to whittle undone: Who cut

the screen? Who first breathed the fume
released by an object not meant to burn?

Who burned her palm reaching for the knob?
Who called the cops, the ambulance, the yellow

fire truck? Who leapt from his couch and ran
down the block, ax-in-hand, to save the children?

CINDERELLA TURNS

COLLEEN CARIAS

I tried to fit inside the tree you left me
atop I cried for you and father every dawn
the doves refused to pray they built a nest in ashes
I rolled in black until stones grew friendly
groveled the abandoned field gathered
nettles vines I stitched myself a castle garb
where birds would nest squirrels and fish lie
you said be good I heard be small be white be righteous
be autiful girl
nothing took
a walk at night blue tigers jostled to be near
me ran by day until my skin a purple hue
stretched until I could steal cloud from moon
now
I wait for the carriage to come get me
what is taking so long good mother
fetch me
your golden slippers

IS A DANGEROUS THING

**BY
COLLEEN
CARIAS**

**THE MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL
PRIZE IN POETRY**

I watched the street burn that night
signs for whitesonly come down
swastikas and militia march in its stead I saw
Selma girls in poodle skirts and Malcolm X glasses
Ferguson mothers fists tshirts black & white
I raised hands with the others unarmed I cried
Fat boys choked from asthma selling cigarettes boots
to their throats spit to their dignity
smokegrey hoodies guns and I only wanted

to march in red sequined high heel shoes
dance & forget we was going nowhere
paint stars along the river
where the bend melts into the place we said we'd get to
I watched gold and blue divide I said sister we have to fix this
I see men knuckles and fast trigger fingers I see fear
we need menstrual cycles to calm this down mother's milk
to succor hot pepper hips bang off steam

I watched my church burn that night
what do you mean I shall say grey
what do you mean I will look like the others

I am crimson for a reason loveme hateme see
me I am ruby I love to dance and live for foolish holidays with hearts
I hurt when I am cut when I bear a baby boy I like music that is loud
drum beats that vibrate inside my I like a maitai on the beach
different rums & a cherry I shouldn't eat I won't choke on cinders they

gets in your hair and nostrils I should be sweet there
is a prince somewhere slippers somesay glass somesay sanguine
dancing with or without me I want to savor scarlet violin strings
Rothko swath broad strokes until the canvas holds the sunset sailing on
a saipan not splayed on concrete cheek-to-sidewalk grey not
starhandprints on Grauman's Chinese Theatre marking where I gotten to
how many black hands

women not known

for their beauty they say shedevil say Norma Desmond old
sultry clinging onceuponatime beating
bosom native son you warned hold onto our rhythm hold on to
our yellow eyes and grape lips be loud mammy be hot dance until
the babies grewed a garden full of fallen apples put
down your hands do not surrender say baby steps knees bloodied from

crawling say I watch my city burn tonight I will keep marching sing
and paint and procreate I am spinning until the country holds still I am
clicking my heels say take me home I am drowning Toto rock I am
tree river I am not waking I see fires pirouettes toeshoes so I can
rest gazelles glancing on water I beg you cut off my feet

DRIVING THROUGH NAPPANEE, INDIANA

JUSTIN CARTER

In a half-mile stretch, we pass
three horse-drawn buggies,
my girlfriend & I driving
a rental across northern Indiana,
returning from a week in Iowa—
visiting her parents & eating
gas station pizza & gas station
sandwiches— to Ohio, to more
& more weeks of roller items. This
is all I can think of when I see
the Amish man & the shiver
of his horse— can they enjoy
these things? Can they go
to Circle K & give a man \$3.33
& receive, in return, two hot dogs,
chips, a fountain Coke—
pop, they call it up here—
though what I should consider
as I approach them this head-on
is how dim the lanterns hanging
from their hooks shine, how
I could have hit one of them if
I'd been checking Google Maps,

Carter

20

& how this town both embraces
& denies— stores & stores
filled with jellies & dried meats
positioned next to the McDonald's
& Wendy's that they probably
can't enter. I don't know if God
says anything in the Bible about
processed foods, or Styrofoam cups,
but I do know I can't stay here
long enough to find out. Too scared—
every sharp turn, I grab the palm
beside me as if I want to say
brace yourself, because too many trees,
because we don't know
if the shadows are hiding
the wooden wheels & their clacking
against the asphalt. I'm too petrified
of darkness, of swinging the car
too wide. We drive until
we're almost out of gas, miles
& miles past Nappanee. We drive
until every store has a light pole
out front, every open sign
is neon, & for dinner we do it again—
reheated burritos from inside
Valero, thirty-two more ounces
of corn syrup for me
& a Red Bull for her. How unlucky
we'd be to never enjoy this.

PUBLIC OUTCRY

**CARRIE
CHAPPELL**

stars stars stars dear carl
you make an inside out

i want to write this letter
to the girl who read your book

dear lost one losing why
not whistle dear stephen

why no epistles stephen carl
dear father dear man far

away in habits in pages folklore
is a bore i want to write this

to a chappell dear chapelle dear
airs of what i am

not a chorus of dear
carl carmer's initials

initial here
initially what is spontaneous

what is forever
is the passionate

Chappell

22

indifference of
blood dear blood blot

yourself on the shirt
of my back in certain

uncertain ways you do
not mean blood you do not

show the hand that unpicked
your image of no tongues

lines to ancestors
dear father dipping paper in

creeks dear girl sliding
in mud on creek beds sweet

tests tell me of my alkalinity
make of me a certificate of

my affinities bring me myself
show me the book of my ensemble

tell me to stop looking
for an outsider dear carl tell me

in a letter post haste carl
tell me once more of the stars

stars stars that the verses here are
mine not just a plot a shrine

BY DEGREES

**KRISTA
CHRISTENSEN**

It was the grayness, mostly. The clammy waxiness of his skin, the white crust settling into the corners of his mouth, the pained hoarseness in his voice. But more than all this: the gray of his pallor, the seeping out of his blood, the leaking out of his life, the ensuing flood that filled him. It was how he'd moaned, "Feels like it's... spreading," how he'd butterflied his fingers over his belly, how in that moment I saw right through his skin, gazed deep into him, regarded his broken guts like I might observe writhing minnows through a lake's glassy sheen. And then it was that scene, running through and through and through my mind on endless repeat. I knew it by the video clip that flickered in my brain, skipping and looping, that damn cinderblock again and again. Something in him was damaged. Failing. Ruptured.

Something within him had broken.

And then everything was breaking, splintering, shattering--the landscape of a marriage rending along fault lines invisible beneath his skin as he disappeared by inches, fading from unsnapped photographs, fading from my future like light at sunset. His waxy gray body lay heavy next to me, and he was sliding away, ungraspable. Irretrievable.

There is an easy humanity to the Fahrenheit scale. When he developed his temperature system in the early 18th century, Fahrenheit placed the average human body temperature at 100 degrees. For his zero, Fahrenheit used a frigorific mixture--a concoction that maintains its

neither thawing nor freezing, molecules oscillating between physical states in a sort of purgatory, engaged in a perpetual war between solid and liquid where atoms constantly defect. Fahrenheit's frigorific brew was a simple brine: equal parts water, ice, and ammonium chloride. We humans, too, are briny: simple yet elegant cocktails of water and salts and minerals--nothing, really, but glorified electrical conduits.

When Celsius debuted his own scale, he, too, formed a frigorific mixture on which to base his zero, yet he used just ice and water in precise proportions to craft his perpetual half-winter. In the un-human Centigrade system, 100 and 0 represent only the physical changes of water molecules: the vaporized and the frozen. Though Americans spurn the Centigrade system, it is so gracefully logical, so patently inarguable, so exquisite in its uniformity. Water is so reliable, so regulated, so well behaved.

When I taught high school on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, the December sun, rising like a sleepy teenager, peeked into my classroom window as lunch period loomed; dusk settled just after school let out. One winter day, when average highs hovered near zero, Gary lingered in my classroom. His skin was a polished kind of brown, his cheekbones high, his lips thick. Clad in black Chucks and a metal-studded sweatshirt, his gothic style had a homemade feel. Sweeping his hipster bangs out of his face, he moved for the door, and I asked whether he had a ride.

"Nah, Miss HC, I'm walking," he replied, lilting over each syllable in that trademark native cadence, softening *o*'s and lingering on *ng*'s.

I raised my eyebrows. "How far do you have to walk?"

"Not far. It's maybe two miles to my uncle's." Gary gestured east, into the gray beyond the glass door.

"Gary," I admonished, "it's like five degrees out. And windy."

"Don't worry, Miss HC, I'll be fine. I'm *native*." With that, he was gone. The following morning, he was back in class, digits intact.

In fact, at 0°F and light wind, hypothermia takes over half an hour to begin its waxy reign of terror. At -30°F, it might take fifteen or twenty minutes. Even so, Alaskans count on the cold, relying on it like an old, hoary friend. Though it can be inconvenient, uncomfortable, even dangerous,

consistency breeds affinity. The cold provides mechanisms for survival, despite its hazards. We all need something to rely on.

Humanity's doughy, fur-free skin shows we don't typically adapt physically for our survival. A rare example of human physical adaptation is vasoconstriction: a biological response to cold in which veins in the face and extremities shrink, conserving warmth and averting hypothermia, and a feature unique to Yupik, Inuit and Athabaskan people. Gary counted on his shrinking capillaries to preserve him on his winter walk, and they did not fail him.

Frigid air, when inhaled at sub-zero temps, freezes the mucinous membranes within the nose, stiffening each hair, scraping dry the trachea, sifting breath's moisture into dissipated smoke. The secret danger of the cold is not air, however, but water. With its multiplicity of material states, water cradles winter's danger in its icy grasp. As liquid, hydrogen and oxygen slide and whirl like herring, yet seize into a rigid lattice at precisely 32°F. At that point, what slipped and slid on a molecular level becomes, in its rigidity, even more slick on a physical level.

For millennia, we humans have managed to survive cold temperatures by our wits, using behavioral rather than biological adaptations, the most significant of which is constructed shelter. This is not a solely human endeavor: hares, mice, voles—many small mammals—survive winter by burrowing into the subnivean zone, a semi-permanent layer of snow that forms in cold climates. Snow differs significantly from ice, though both form from water at 32°F. As snow drifts and settles, the particles of frozen water trap air between them, transforming it into an insulating comfort.

This property of snow did not escape the witty human thousands of years ago. In just a few hours, an Inuit huntsman can craft an iglu: a shelter that capitalizes on subnivean physics. An iglu works because the blocks of snow congeal together, retaining their snowiness outside the structure, where molecules of frozen water and trapped air contain the heat generated inside. Yet within, where a semi-hairless human sits exhaling his nearly 100°F breath, perhaps even builds a fire, the nearer molecules revert to water: the interior of the iglu melts, just a little. As the snowy exterior of

battles this heat, the interior refreezes, but when it does, the molecules resolve themselves into ice, not snow.

This is the graceful, delicate beauty of the iglu: its stasis, almost frigorific in its delicate balance. Two states of frozen water butt against one another, locked in a perpetual and symbiotic cycle. Inside, the iglu takes on a glossy sheen; the downy snow gives way to a hard, icy polish.

When I taught high school on the Kenai Peninsula, in the early months of 2013, dog mushers lamented as race upon race was cancelled due to weather. Unseasonable heat caused the dependable snow and ice to shift and adjust in unpredictable ways. Crevasses spontaneously opened up beneath a sled team, wide maws set to gorge on fallen victims. River crossings, usually thick and solid, were instead a transparent green, papered in a few frozen centimeters of ice shredded sharp by thawing and refreezing, jagged like shattered auto glass.

The warm weather inconvenienced me too; we canceled our annual snowshoe trip that routed straight across a lake in the nearby Wildlife Refuge. Days from December, ice that should have been a foot thick was instead a few thin inches topped with a slush of meltwater. My students were crestfallen as cross country ski meets were cancelled and family snowmachining trips deferred. Pithy television forecasters named it the "Pineapple Express," a warm current of air sweeping up from Hawai'i. Usually that warm, moist air bumped against the coastal ranges that trim the middle edge of North America like rickrack on a child's dress, where it gathered moisture and drizzled it down over stretches of temperate rain forest. Instead, mid-winter thaws flooded our streets, gutters clogging with half-melt that crusted solid overnight.

That February, snowpack across Alaska was a fraction of average. In Anchorage, less than a third of the normal amount had accumulated; north of Fairbanks was a fifth of normal. Mushers on the Kenai traded dogsleds for ATVs. The Iditarod race, crown jewel of dog mushing, was rerouted at the last minute to avoid passes and crossings made dangerous in warmth.

The same physical change that kept generations of Alaska Natives

cozy converted roads into rinks that February. At 33°F, rigidly aligned water molecules react predictably. Unlike wheels on ice.

On the 6th, at four in the afternoon, after kissing his family goodbye, my husband Leif climbed into our F-350 Crew Cab. Moments later, as I nursed our baby, my neighbor tromped to my door through dense, thawing snow. Unable to get through on our internet phone, Leif had called her. His voice was tight, a shaken drink struggling to stay within safe walls of glass. "I'm so sorry, babe. I got in a wreck. The truck's totaled. I'm okay though."

"It's an F-350, dude," I said, sure he was exaggerating. "It can't possibly be totaled." I could not imagine that brutish vehicle a wreck; at five-foot-two, my feet barely reached the pedals.

"Um, yeah--it's totaled," he answered flatly. "I slid on the ice. I got hit. The medics say to get checked at the hospital."

"The hospital! You said you felt fine! Are you really okay?" I shifted the baby to my other hip, pressed the phone into my ear, listened through the buzz of activity behind Leif. My neighbor hovered awkwardly.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's just routine. I mean, it hurts, but I'm fine. I might have a cracked rib or something is all."

In Alaska, there are plenty of ways to die. Mauled by a bear is usually a tourist's first thought, though in reality, bears would rather leave and let be. Getting trampled by a moose is actually more likely; moose are surprisingly aggressive, and males weigh more than half a ton. Sometimes cyclists, pedaling the Alcan or Canadian Rockies, are chased down by wolves. A cyclist looks remarkably like a cantering moose or caribou calf, I suppose. Murder, especially at the hands of a lover, is another tragic possibility: Alaska consistently tops charts with its high rates of domestic assault and forcible rape. Booze is another likelihood, since the state ranks in the top five for alcohol related deaths, and leads the nation in incidences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. There's exposure too, which, though obvious, is arguably the saddest way to die, as an abandoned heap of cold, bloodless flesh. Don't underestimate drowning, either: Alaska has the longest coastline of all fifty states, and dangerously frigid waterways, even at the height of summer.

When I taught high school on the Kenai Peninsula, we teachers, on a given Saturday, piled into the school library for mandatory First Aid recertification. It was a simple matter: there was a video cassette, a relic at nearly thirty years old, dated by the clothes on its B-rate actors. There were scenes depicting heart attacks, dislocations, splints and tourniquets. There were falls from high rolling chairs and foolish custodians mixing ammonia and bleach. Yet I remember most the construction crew: a man in the driver's seat of a pick-up, his coworker in the truck bed filled with pallets of cinder blocks. I remember the driver slamming the brakes, remember a cinder block careening into the co-worker's belly. I remember the bulleted points rising over the paused scene in bright yellow Arial font:

Indications of Shock

- Rapid, irregular pulse
- Cool, clammy skin
- Shallow breathing
- Lightheadedness

I remember the injured actor's twitching frame, his ashen skin, his trembling hands. The driver-actor hovered over him, a model of concerned friendship.

Later, our school nurse would haul in the Annies, plastic human torsos at whom we would kneel as if for absolution, whose pale chests we would, one by one, forcefully compress, counting out breathily, "Onetwothreefour..." We would tuck into Annie's face and exhale heavily, twice, eyes on the cream colored plastic chest, watching for the rise and fall that told us our residual oxygen would be enough to keep an unconscious human alive. Afterward, we would fill in our own certificates and get on with the rest of our Saturday.

Leif had more than a simple cracked rib, although there were two of those. Beneath his unbruised skin pulsed a crushed organ, spewing blood by the liter into his abdominal cavity. There was also a doctor who refused to give him a CT scan, who tried to send me home with a man leaking life, a man going into shock, a man dying slowly, by degrees. A man who needed

not one, but two separate blood transfusions to survive. A man who earned his footlong scar, jagged skin stapled over the hole through which his ruptured spleen was finally evacuated.

Once Leif returned from surgery, skin gray and rubbery, he lay ensconced, immobile amidst a tangle of tubes and a sea of monitors blipping and blinking a perpetual certification of his life. It was deep morning, perhaps three, and I'd finally succeeded in getting the baby to sleep, propping him between the cushions of the window seat that doubled as a spousal bed. I was not sleeping when our sole cell phone rang. I'd texted Judy, Leif's mother, during the hours in Emergency, knowing she wouldn't respond for hours. Florida is half a work day ahead of Alaska, and today it was half a world away. Hoping not to disturb either sleeper, I tiptoed to the hallway, stood peering through the observation window into the room, watching two chests rise and fall.

"Is he okay?" Judy's voice cracked.

"Yes, he's out of surgery. We're in Intensive Care."

"Oh *Jesus*." She inhaled, and I pictured her, through the fog of distance, sweeping her hand down her face, nervously tugging her nose sideways. "You guys have to get the fuck out of Alaska," she blurted.

"I know," I said. It was all I could think of to say.

For humans, the adaptation--the definitive indicator--of intellectual superiority is the wheel. From pulleys to gears to tires, this simple machine accomplishes much with little energy. The earliest wheel is five thousand years old, from Mesopotamia; other models arose in Greece, China, Arabia, Central America. These locations all share one quality: they lie at or below the 45th parallel. The combination of wheel and axle is utterly insufficient for transportation through wintry climes.

For a wheel to move weight, there is just one physical requirement: friction. But on ice, friction is a farce. The wheels beneath a barreling ton of steel and chrome slide perpetually, catching and losing and catching and losing traction over roads slimy with the congealed snot of sludgy auto-grime and churned ice. During winter warm spells, the few roads that score Alaska's face become the huntsman's iglu in reverse. The topmost layer of

ice and snow on the road melts like the innermost layer of the iglu melts. Beneath this, a substantial layer of ice remains, refreezing meltwater from below, and after dark, when temperatures plummet, the roads harden into a freshly Zambonied rink.

When Judy finally deplaned at the tiny Kenai airport two days later, she squeezed me tightly. "They had to give him another liter of blood last night," I reported. "He's sprung a fever, too, so he's on some new meds, I guess. It snowed pretty heavy last night, I couldn't get back to him." My throat swelled; I had watched the sticky wet stuff fall to earth in clumps, and feared to risk another accident getting to him.

"It's gonna be okay." Judy gripped my arm, face gentle and earnest beneath her short chrome hair.

"I know," I lied. My empty bed last night was filled with nightmares of crushed metal, of swirling blood, of IV poles and monitor lights.

The following day, semi-coherent after seventy-two hours' recovery, Leif deployed Judy and I from his bed in Intensive Care. Our mission: clear out the truck before the adjuster came to total it. "Be sure to get the jumper cables. They were under the bench in the back. And also my fishing rod. And don't forget the ratchet straps."

The sun was early-afternoon bright when Judy and I pulled into the Reddi Towing. Even from the parking lot, the truck appeared folded in half. At the time of collision, the icy road, prodded into melting by the warm air above and cycled back into freezing by the cold beneath, had relinquished whatever traction the truck's wheels held. It had drifted into a spin, out of control, slipping first into the center lane and then into oncoming traffic. The SUV that slammed into it at forty-five had done so perpendicularly, so that the truck had wrapped itself around it, mimicked the clutching arms of a desperate lover, or the clinging of a sullen child.

Pulled by a macabre sense of awe and horror, I trudged swiftly to the vehicle through knee-deep snow, leaving Judy in my wake. The driver side doors swung open easily, but the passenger seat, where I usually sat, was virtually gone; the crushed door abutted the center console. The two car-seats on the bench behind it had crumbled; bits of plastic from their frames

littered a cab already strewn with glass and debris.

It was I, and the children, who would have faded from our future's photographs.

Judy appeared behind me. "Holy shit," she said. I nodded. The rod was a goner, and though I braced my legs and tugged, neither strap nor cables could be dislodged. The crumpled chassis had pinned every item Leif stored beneath the bench. At the hospital, Leif clucked and humphed at our empty hands, disappointed in his blissful ignorance, while later I fished shards of auto glass from my thumb knuckle with stainless steel tweezers. Outside, thawing ice cracked and split; melting snow sloughed off the roof, thudding to earth. Behind my eyelids floated images of twisted metal, wrinkled like a dryer-hot bedsheet left unfolded.

When I taught high school on the Kenai Peninsula, a former student of mine drove down the local highway. Brittany, with her dyed-black hair and pale skin, her wide smile and ready laugh, had struggled in school. We were all pleased, none more than Brittany herself, that she managed to pass my class and all her others, had been permitted to don the billowy gown and shake the principal's hand in her rite-of-passage to adulthood. The time was perhaps seven, but since the envelope of darkness descends so prematurely in Alaskan winters, it was deeply black over the unlit highway. Her Dodge Neon, petite and cream-colored and fragile, echoed the image of its young driver.

I don't know which vehicle first slipped into a spin--a merciless, unyielding spiral--and collided with the other, but I do know the impact rendered the Neon unrecognizable, and Brittany lifeless. In such instances, law officers and claims adjusters agree on one term: fault. Someone screwed up here, drove unsafely, made a dumb decision, and now, people are dead. Justice must be served. Blame must be assigned. There is no category on the checklist for a purely weather-related accident.

Yet this is the way it goes in Alaska. Brittany wasn't the only student I ever lost. The following summer, two daughters, two friends, and a father set out for an afternoon on Tustemena Lake. When the weather turned, the boat swamped, sending all five into the numbingly cold water. Only three

made it the two miles to lake shore: one sixteen-year-old girl gone and two girls left fatherless.

This is the way it goes in Alaska.

Each time I brought up the idea of moving, Leif's temper flared. He was exhausted by his slow recovery, by his follow up appointments, by his continued efforts to finish his semester. I knew his class work left him drained each night. Still, I couldn't stop myself.

"Do we really need to go over this again?" he sighed. "We're not moving."

"But it's a *sign*," I whined.

"What is?"

"This! You! Everything!" I gesticulated wildly over him, over his blanketed lap, his incentive spirometer, his vials of painkillers. "We said we'd be here two years, tops, and now, it's been almost four! We don't even *like* living in Alaska!"

"I like the fishing," he grunted, face placid in the wake of my tantrum.

I huffed, fumed, stormed out. But the next week, I was picking the scab, peeling the raw discussion open again.

The following winter, I taught high school in the mountains of North Carolina, when the East Coast shuddered beneath what meteorologists termed the "Polar Vortex." News outlets from Maine to Mississippi ran non-stop alerts on the dangers of sub-zero temps. A person could die in such cold.

Don't I know it.

At the time, no snow peppered the ground, but temps hovered just below 0°F. School was cancelled repeatedly due the extreme weather, but teachers were still required to report. After such a day, I returned home, to Leif and our two children. Spleen-less for almost a year, Leif greeted me with the embrace I had cherished by inches in the months after the accident. The children swirled around us, each eager to share what extravagances Dad had allowed them on today's "snow" day. After dinner, Leif and I sat; two glasses of Merlot stood guard between us as the children chased

balloons, batting them with foam swords, inches from knocking over lamps and picture frames.

"So, anything good today?" Leif asked.

"Just chatting with my principal," I replied. "*Y'all must think this is terribly backward, comin' from Alaska.*" I imitated her southern drawl, still a novelty after six months in the South. "Y'all probably don't close school for anything up there!"

Leif's mouth spread into a bemused smile. "What'd you say?"

"Told her about Kai's kindergarten. How they went out for recess until minus ten." I sipped wine and smirked. "She said," I put on my drawl again, "*Well, I bet you think we're just silly closin' over a little cold weather.*" I set my glass down and sighed, remembering. "I told her no way.

People in Alaska don't mess with cold. That shit'll kill you."

Leif's voice dropped an octave. "Yep."

I told her how it isn't just cold that's dangerous, though," I continued, voice lower now as I eased into the past. "How zero might seem pretty bad here, but thirty-five in February--now *that's* dangerous." I reached for him, wiggling my hand under his shirt, fingering his scar. He drew me close and laid his lips on my forehead. Nearby, our children whooped and squealed in a cabin-fevered frenzy.

THE ELEPHANT ROCKS

CLAYTON
CLARK

grow sumac in their dirt deposits. Rain-filled
depressions harbor tadpoles and mosquito larvae
like half-wombs. Hiking boulder to boulder

and slipping through chasms, the space between
downcut by water like a saw, we are not
alone here. Lichens green the gray-red granite

in crusts of algo-fungal marriage, and our friends
are getting divorced already. I thought we all agreed
to spurn our parents' cleaving, though who hasn't

outlived something he believed in? Scientists posit
the sun, in advanced age, will devour so much fuel
it burns this all to hell. We must rethink the myths

of our engagement: we committed to consume
each other till we're cold. Had I known my body
a natural resource, I would've better tended it

for you. Spring peepers animate the path before us,
so we retreat to barren granite where death is less
probable. These huddled stones, once magmatic,

weren't always outcrop. Overlying rock abrades
in time, but now the overlying rock, Elephant
Rocks are conserved from quarrying but exposed

to rain. I want us to begin by seeing everything
will be exhausted, so on a timeline long enough
no one's jilted. Like the fulsome crop of elephant ears

you admired at the rocks' end, enjoying our distance
from a star, when we start underground we break
the surface sharing our devotion to the sun.

SEED TICK: A PALIMPSEST

**CLAYTON
CLARK**

Our state issued a policy of executing inmates
with straight pentobarbital, same as vets
put down sick dogs. Unable to keep oxygenated
blood in its brain, our dog would pass out
from excitement, the vet blaming these anoxic
events on nodes that mushroomed from each
failing organ. To the end I'd like to remain
useful to you, but given my family history
of apoplexy, let's not count on it. If when
you can no longer see my name in this body
they still won't let a person choose his end,
please leave me. It's the time of year
for accidental deaths. A boy drowned last summer,
and boaters found his body surfaced miles
downriver. The parents tried to donate his organs
and tissues, but waterlogged cells are helpful
to no one. So give what you can then burn
me down and dump the dust into a river
because you know how much I've tried to be
everything to everyone. Remember the time
we saw a bull elk ahead on the hiking path?

You dashed downhill, and I followed you across
the bottoms to a riverbank. Crouched among
sawtoothed boulders, we listened through the water
roiling behind us, but all that ever tried to hurt us
were seed ticks we found crawling up our shoes,
heedless of the poison we'd sprayed on our legs.

DIRECTIVE FOR ASCENSION

**ADAM
CLAY**

Let the words we frame and chisel contain
the same language of those before and those
to come. If this moment is a place, let rain drift
to an elsewhere. Let our arrivals rise up
like the Estivant Pines. Let atoms
be atoms. Let song be song. If a moment
gone-by does not return, let the breath of a streamline
contain what you need. If sleep serves
a purpose. If memory divides the night,
let grace braid the strands. Let the lake be an eye
we stand upon and let mind be a way
to the body. If you fear death,
live within a pause. Let the mind envision
its exhaustion. Let procession slow down.
Let the mind become pollen. If sleep serves
a purpose, let acceptance be an orchid,
living only because of the climate around it.
If the world within this world holds us to truth,
let truth be a construct we use to know the past.
If water rises and falls, let it be because
of the moon and its pull. If the frame
becomes more useful than what it contains,
let eyelid divide light, let glass be more than glass.

BOTTLE

**CAROL
DAVIS**

The bottle of Parisian air sold for \$80,000.
In Beijing he displayed it on a shelf as art, sticker still
attached like the lingering red after a slap to the cheek, held it
high on a street as a silent protest to the city's grey air, thick with
particulates.

What if he uncorked the bottle?
Would the air hiss and slither, curling upward
like leisurely smoke from the night's last cigarette?
Or disperse like a man who gives the slip to the detective tracking him?

How do objects store memories?
A trick to ensure the next generation keeps the chipped teapot,
the figurine with the missing foot?
Is there a compartment like the tiny box on a poison ring,

that reassures by its very existence?
I am envious of absolute faith, the certainty that dropping coins into a
charity box
results in the elevation of the soul.
When my father died, his pacemaker kept trilling for a minute.

Was it to allow the soul to untether from the body?

I raised my eyes to the hospital ceiling to see if I could catch it drifting,
then lowered my ear to his chest to check for beats.

My friend collects perfume bottles: an apple, a castle, a woman's curved torso.

If she opens the right one she'll be wrapped in midnight chiffon, a New Year's
Eve party, circa 1900.

SKY COVERED WITH CLOUDS

**CAROL
DAVIS**

A tourist in a cowboy hat,
feather, pony tail past his shoulders,
slams his car door and walks into
the trading post.
Probably a rawhide cord around his
tanned, lined neck, a horseshoe
with a turquoise stone bouncing
on his pale chest.
He's come to buy a rug or a soda
or nothing at all.
Another stop on the map to check off,
hours between this reservation and the next.
What makes me so superior?
I too am a spy, sitting in my hogan,
watching him.

ON RITSOS' DIARY OF EXILE, BOOK ONE

**JIM
DAVIS**

Let the words we frame and chisel contain
the same language of those before and those
to come. If this moment is a place, let rain drift
to an elsewhere. Let our arrivals rise up
like the Estivant Pines. Let atoms
be atoms. Let song be song. If a moment
gone-by does not return, let the breath of a streamline
contain what you need. If sleep serves
a purpose. If memory divides the night,
let grace braid the strands. Let the lake be an eye
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a purpose, let acceptance be an orchid,
living only because of the climate around it.
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let truth be a construct we use to know the past.
If water rises and falls, let it be because
of the moon and its pull. If the frame
becomes more useful than what it contains,
let eyelid divide light, let glass be more than glass.

ALICE AND LARISSA

**LEONORA
DESAR**

I'm Alice and my sister is Larissa. Larissa says we're going to be born now any day.

Larissa says a lot of things. She says she's got Daddy's looks and Mama's mystery and our Aunt Carrie's sense of mischief. When I ask her how she knows these things from inside Mama's tummy, she just says, Because. Because I'm Larissa, and I just know.

But I know things too. I'm the big sister—not big as in *big*, big as in *older* and *smarter*. I know our daddy is making us a rocking horse for when we get born. It is blue like the sea, the sea I live in when I dream.

In my dreams Larissa and I are whales like in the book Mama reads to us from the outside about Jonah and the big fish. I'm a big whale and Larissa's a little whale, and we each have our own belly. I can feel the wet against my belly—it is mine and not Larissa's too—and this makes me feel glad and guilty at the same time. In Mama's tummy we're attached from the neck down to our belly, our two heads floating like quail eggs from one spine. We can pass our thoughts over the blue bone of our rib.

Like when Larissa thinks, When I'm born I'm going to find a baby boy to kiss. She eavesdrops when Mama goes out with the other mommies. She doesn't hear how Mama's voice can turn low and cold; she only hears the babies who have been born, the ones on the outside. She thinks, That one drools, and that one's a mama's boy, and that Kenny Brewster has the cutest bottom lip. She says she knows this by the way he cries and by his silence.

Some silence around here would be nice for a change, I say. Don't you ever shut up? But when she sleeps the guilt creeps back like firefish up my skin. I wrap my arms around our neck, whisper thoughts to Larissa like kisses down our rib.

Larissa whispers, What do you want to be when you get big? She says, When I'm big I'll be an astronaut. When I'm big I'll have three husbands. When I'm big I'll be a queen.

I say nothing. How can I tell her I wish for the wetness of my dream belly? To know what it's like to be alone.

I just say how strange Mama's been acting ever since she found out there are two of us with just one belly. She used to read to us about a lot of things—sleepy princesses and grouchy queens and some lady who lost her slipper. But now it's always Jonah this and Jonah that. Maybe it's because Daddy is so quiet. His silence is the color of the sea, of the rocking horse that sits unfinished in the shed.

Mama says, You have to have faith, Jim. She says, I believe in the goodness of the Lord. She scares me—I imagine fish dripping from her lips, her arms coiled with seaweed. Her voice whispers like seaweed—Heavenly Father, I plead the blood of the lamb over all children.

Larissa says we should whisper to Heavenly Father if Mama does. She whispers for boy babies with chubby kissing lips, for Daddy to paint our rocking horse pink now that he knows we're girls. I whisper, Please give me my dream belly.

When I wake up Mama and Daddy are fighting. Daddy says, What kind of life will these babies have? They're never going to be able to do anything on their own. Mama just keeps reading. Her voice is the lullaby of the whale, the way it must have sounded to Jonah when he was trapped.

That night I tell Larissa to think of the softest kissing lip, of the sound Kenny Brewster makes when his mama keeps him safe inside her arms. I tell her I will keep us safe. When she falls asleep I wrap my arms around our neck, squeeze and squeeze until our rib doesn't make a sound.

WHEN THE STORM

**CHELSEA
DINGMAN**

The leaves do not say
dead. Not unclaimed. Strewn about
silver sewers like socks
from a clothesline. Sky,

a skinned rabbit, drags its belly
over sawgrass. Slanted rain
slashes houses, a dead-end
street. In this womb, is time not

measured by what falls? Thick grasses
lace the surging water's surface,
a Queen palm's headdress nailed
to the clouds. How the sky sounds—

not of thunder, but bare rims
scraping the street. Wanting to be seen, wanting
not to hunger. My son
splashes next to a moldy mailbox, red

flag sagging. His face glitters. Cars pass,
windows black. A river now, the road
rushes into a turn. Mud
eddies around us. The Southern sun,

Dingman

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clenched in my hands. I pull
the sky down. Sip the spit of filthy
rain. Only leaves float
up. The sidewalks are gone.

ANALOG

**LAURA
DONNELLY**

She tells me
analog waves from the '50s

still seek an ear in our atmosphere,
that she wakes with the sound

of the Mister Softee's ice cream truck
in her head.

Next door, our landlord is dying
the death of the very old. His body

grown smaller and smaller until,
when my husband lifts him

from the chair to the bed, their intimacy
is the slip of a shadow.

When the daily rotation of nurses
ends, we'll collect the dead's mail

in an old paper bag, catalogs
and coupons that don't know he's passed.

She tells me after her father died
the sounds came back. Childhood's

white noise turned specific, odd
moments. *Out of nowhere*, she says.

A jack-in-the-box, a train rattling
the glass. The knot

at the end of the string undone
and all the beads clattering round.

NOT YOURS

**LAURA
DONNELLY**

That it was so overwhelmingly abandoned by everybody It was like leaving a corpse.

-- This American Life, "The House at Loon Lake"

Overcoats, thimbles, someone
else's newspaper clippings

turned brittle. At night the moon
crosses the lake in ripples

like a film slowed to separate frames
but no one watches

from the screened porch. No one
takes the boat from the tangle

of grass where it lays like a tin
wishbone stalled in the night.

If you pass by a house like this
hurry on. Take your lover's hand

lightly in yours like an egg
or piece of rotting lace.

Donnelly

50

AT 13, WHAT GIRLS DO WHEN THEIR MOTHERS DON'T TELL THEM NOT TO

JORDAN
DURHAM

It's true they learn voodoo so they might bind
a vagina quicker—with questions or spirits, spells
to conjure anything past lust—to a boy.
Their Ouija askings of last year: group hands on
the occult eye, strength in numbers. No pushing.
It's a portal, they've heard, like sex, straight soul
and body interactions on the board. They're ready. Their transitioning
Yes No and back again to *Is that you?* That had to be
a spiritual doorway stashed away. They knew too much. This board
left reading: try again another time. It's a summer
trip south to New Orleans—the girl, her friend, a back seat
Cosmo read. Contortions played out through the bumps
and pages of what sex positions get men going

best. In Madam Laveau's House of Haunts they choose to buy bone
from the inside of a witch's ear. Carved from Salem, Mass.
Use to *string around the neck*. It's guaranteed
the darkest of magic able to hear their skin-deep desires. Purpled
oils and salts mixed with blood pricked straight from a virgin
sheep's knee. *Savor these needs*. The girls want it all and hope
and secretly return with bone tucked between
breasts. It listens inside the shirt even when one of the girls

shouts from the top of a boy *I can have your babies now* and *Oh God Oh*
God he thinks because she came
home from vacation and sped up the process
one night by shoving a broom between her legs and believing
this is how to bleed before her time. The black magic market

of girls swapping what they know, handing out strokes
of knowledge on how to do it best. Another girl swears the spread
for the stranger is easy *Just open on command* but warns
the pierce from the needle hurts worse. Torn with penetration.
She faked her age to get it done. Probably illegal and still
proud but this first part she doesn't mention. Same as
when the last girl from the group swallowed
needle after pinpointed needle trying to stitch her baby back
to before creation. Her every teenage wish came true and she bled
though no other girls spent time explaining to her where
these other needles would go. Voodoo doll minus the ill-will.
To be unprotected. An un-mother again. Unsuccessfully
weaving this generation's virgin thread straight out of her body.

DEAR KANYE WEST

**BENJAMIN
GLASS**

It's me again. And again, thanks
For the bottle of scotch you sent.
It tastes like campfire.
Your letter said it straight: you've got
to be a god like you're a god
to those you are a god to.
I tried, I honestly g-d tried.
I told that joke you taught me,
at a party, some dapper goons
and festooned ladies, everybody
milling around like they aren't
thinking about what everybody else is thinking,
about the blind man that picked up
a hammer and saw. They stared,
and then they laughed because I brought
that scotch you got me. Boy,
were we drunk. Yes, I'm still in love
with XX. No, she hasn't come back.
It feels like losing that part of you that draws
joy out of pain like a needle. You're right,
you're g-d right, that means that what
I felt was like the throne of God:
irreparable as it is potent. Or do

I mean irascible? You've taught me more
than I can even remember!
I want to be like you, the genius
of your home, but my home's empty
as a metronome. I want to be you,
some days. I want to own clean sneakers.
I want to curse a paparazzo so hard
he pops like a balloon. I want my face
on every other page of the glossy earth.
Do you recall your letter awhile back?
You said XX was a Kia when I should
be driving Bentleys. Who on earth
wouldn't trade their heart for a stone?
And that stone for a luxury vehicle?
I keep imagining that blind man
holding a hammer until his knuckles
fray, and suddenly like a camera flash,
light enters his eyes and the world
glosses over him like the inside of
a snow globe. See? Some joke. Oh!
I found that rhyme for you (finally, right?).
How about hot heart/blown apart?

GOD'S HEAD

**JENNA
KILIC-SOMERS**

My father scales red snapper
under my mother's white orchid tree,

the butter knife cutting through
a layer of glass. I pick a scale

off the mulch, hold it up
to see a rainbow in its shimmer.

The Christian promise isn't there,
and I toss it back into the dirt.

*Bury them all, my father says.
Make a grave into a garden of fish.*

*Their heads will spring
from earth like flowers;*

*their eyes will stare long after
you cut their bodies from the ground.*

At that, he shoves the fish head
into my face, a puppet warning,

Say, Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim.

I jolt backward and fall under

the orchid tree. He laughs
and pulls me up, fish-slick

hand greasing mine. The garden's
entwined around itself:

orchid grabs bougainvillea grabs
honeysuckle grabs roses:

white, fuchsia, orange, red.
I fell into a canopy of rainbow,

but this place is a burial ground
of tree frogs, lizards, roly polies, June bugs,

anything we kids could grab.
He slits the gut and takes

my hand: *Grab here, at the base
of the head. Now pull.* The body comes

out of the body. I fling the mush
like a piece of rainbow. I bury it.

WELCOME TO NEWTON, IOWA

**PETER
LABERGE**

FOR MELISA GREGORY

First, there is no correct way to live
inside Iowa's late-winter mouth. By now
everyone has met a friend of the wind—
even the middle school kids gathered
like matchsticks in the lots of the Arby's
& the old Dairy Queen to pass bruised
soccer balls, smuggled cigarettes already
three-quarters smoked. This break
in the pavement—the result of snow
covering the cheeks of roads and fields
until its third day on ground, when more falls
& the world as we know it is laid to rest. How
do I explain what it is to live expecting the dirt
to stay beneath me—that no approaching tragedy
will hint its arrival, not for God nor the glory
of spring crop come early? Beautiful, this is
March in Iowa. March, when the earth strokes
its children only to plant them back inside
the clouds. We must remember nothing
is ever completely our own: not snow,
not March, not body, not God.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BENELLI M4

PETER
LABERGE

I do not know how I am to love inside
this world, inside this sun-struck body
of forest. I do not know what to think

about hunting, about Father: new maple
shotgun cradled in his lap. I would like
a small pistol with bullets that absolve

each sky of its secrets, each father's tree-
gutting responsibility. Perhaps I am
cared for the way the post-fire gun cares

for its sun-warmed victim. I confess—
I cannot name myself anything other
than *riverless ditch*. For today, no water

has come. For today, I do not know
how I am to love what is not here.

CHILDREN WILL DROWN IN WATER LIKE THIS

**RC
LURIA**

The girl watches the boy from the kitchen window. He's fishing in the canal, which is little more than a drainage ditch, but it does have fish and maybe a gator. The boy knows she is watching, so he casts his line with extra precision, sending it flying with that satisfying whirr, which he knows she can't hear but gives him confidence anyway. He knows, also, that her mother is watching and so he reels it in slowly, as if he has all the time in the world, isn't anxious at all, isn't waiting for the girl. The girl is anxious. She is dying to run out and meet the boy, to embark on the monster hunt, which he has promised is safe and authorized by the proper authorities. She is only waiting for her mother's go ahead. She's waiting for her mother to say, "Go on. There's a kid your age," as if it's that easy.

The girl knows it isn't that easy. So does the boy, which is why they are already friends. They spotted each other across the soccer field dividing the middle school from the high school: she having just proven to be the only sixth grader in the entire county to fail to do a single pull-up in the Presidential Fitness Test, he stealing away from algebra for an early lunch. They met in the middle and two negatives became a positive. Now, they meet before school, after school, leave notes for each other hidden beneath the bleachers. Until today, they have met in secret. The boy can't invite her over, he says, because his father is in the CIA and he can't reveal the location of their safe house. The girl knows her mother would not approve of a boy-girl friendship, no matter how many times the girl has said she is ready, especially not with one three grades ahead. But the girl also knows that her mother wouldn't question a friendship that began at her own suggestion.

Then it would be sacred, an act of good mothering, helping her lonely daughter keep her head above water in a town called Sea Level—a joke her mother has made seven times since moving here six months ago. So the girl made this plan and the boy stands outside, waiting.

The girl watches the boy cast his line with that careful rhythm. She thinks he does look like he could be a sixth grader, younger even. But that's what makes him beautiful. He is like the blue heron picking its way along the bank, thin and grey and shrug-shouldered. He wishes he were bigger. He wishes he were big enough to drape his arm across the girl's shoulder, to tuck her into his side, to protect her. He told the girl he would be bigger except that he's been genetically engineered so that all his growth hormones went straight to his brain. He hopes that she believes him. She doesn't care if he ever gets bigger. When their shoulders bump when they walk, when their hands almost brush, she likes it. She stares and stares out the kitchen window, willing her mother to look, to see, to have the idea. At last her mother does, says the magic words and the girl is out the door: no shoes, no stopping, no problem. Her mother calls a warning that disappears behind the slamming door.

When she gets to him, she waves her arm in a grand, absurd hello, like she's welcoming him to her planet. It's a show in case her mother is still watching. It's a "Look, Ma. Look at the first-ness of this meeting." If the boy finds the gesture odd, he doesn't show it. He just waves his arm right back.

"Hello," he says. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," she says. A fish leaps into the air and flops gracelessly back into the water. The girl knows it's a mullet, so does the boy. They've discussed the magic of it, how it always seems like they have reversed gravity. Really, though, it means there is a predator in the water.

"Let's go," says the boy. He's hidden his gear in the yard of a notorious criminal. There it will be safe from other thieves and cowards. The boy has told her many things like this. He has told her that there are marlin in the canal, that they'd swum in through an underground tunnel that goes from the canal right to the ocean and the fish have grown too big to swim home again. He has said that the girl probably won't see any marlin herself, because he's caught them all and eaten half and mounted the other on the

wall of his beach house, which maybe he'll show her one day, if she doesn't mind heights. He told her his beach house is on stilts so high you can't build a staircase, you have to be flown up by helicopter, which isn't as fun as it sounds, so he doesn't go there often. He prefers to stay here, where he's from, because it is easier and it keeps him real. The girl has embraced it all. She has packed a bag and stashed it in her closet for the day the helicopter arrives, which she imagines will come as a surprise. Maybe on her birthday. She imagines the monster and has laid in bed picturing it, dangled her legs over the side and felt its breath against her ankles. It's fun to imagine the boy's world. It's fun to create it with him. When he tells her they will catch the monster and nothing bad will happen, she imagines that it's true.

The girl and the boy march across the neighborhood. They sneak into the forest of Melaleuca trees that snakes around the neighborhood, the only border between their homes and the highway. If they cup their ears, the rush of cars sounds almost like the ocean.

It's nearly dusk and the sun is low on the horizon. In shadow, frilly, peeling bark looks like fingers creeping across the forest floor. Things scuttle beneath those shadows. The boy and the girl lift their feet high, careful to avoid hazards both hidden and plain, like the rusted, half-buried shopping cart and the trillion broken bottles and the human waste that sends up ammonia clouds that hover in the still, damp air. The girl cuts her bare foot on a shard of glass but she isn't worried. The boy has a plan. And it's a good one.

They arrive at their destination. They step out of the forest and into a yard nearly as littered. The boy navigates expertly, as if he's been here a million times. "Aren't you worried about the criminal?" asks the girl. "He's sleeping," says the boy, "He's always sleeping." The girl thinks this might be the boy's house because he really does seem to know his way around. But she doesn't want to ask because this is by far the worst house she has ever seen. The chaos, the thought of someone sleeping in this wreck, makes the girl nervous. She's not sure she wants to play this game anymore. This is not how she imagined the criminal's lair. Her foot throbs and she's getting tired. The boy notices her changed mood and he worries that he might lose her. He thinks if he moves quickly he might be able to keep them on course, keep

them together. The boy waves the girl over. "Here's the gear," he says with, he hopes, enthusiasm enough for the both of them.

The plan: inflate this kiddie pool and use it as a boat, row out to the middle of the canal, and spear the monster. The boy knows there are monsters because, look, right there, the remains of one of their brothers. The boy points to the other side of the chain link fence that divides this house from the neighbor's. Leering up from the dirt and overgrowth is a yellowed skull. "Isn't that just a gator skull?" she says. "No," says the boy. "Definitely monster." He hands her the gear but then looks around. "I forgot the rope," he says and then walks to the house, enters through a sliding-glass door. He hopes she will wait for him but he doesn't look back, in case she doesn't.

The girl looks at the skull. Across the fence, she sees a woman peering at her from a dimly lit window. The woman sees the girl watching and pulls her curtains shut. And now the girl is alone. She thinks about following the boy, but he didn't invite her, didn't even say if this is his house. Maybe he's trespassing. The house is smeared in greasy light and the girl stares hard inside. She can just make out the room. She thinks she sees the boy standing beside a sagging couch. He has his hands behind his back, like he is hiding something. She sees an arm reach up and grab the boy's wrist. She is scared for a second before she recognizes that it is a human arm. The boy seems to shrink, look even smaller, but then the girl thinks it is a trick of the light. At last, the boy is released and he walks out to the girl, slowly at first and then he runs. He closes the distance between them in only seconds. "Are you ready?" he asks. The girl looks past him for a moment, into the house, but the light is off. She can't see anything now. The girl looks back at the boy, at his face, which is caught somewhere between panic and hope. He holds up the rope, gives it a pleading little shake, and the girl is ready.

The girl is happy again, though it is darker now and the walk back takes forever. Her fear isn't gone, but she's adjusted to it, like the heat. She can feel it on her skin but she can wipe it away. The boy has bandaged her foot. He always carries some for emergencies. He noticed she was limping and he cared for her. Now she can carry on, grateful to be walking with

a friend, on a mission. She feels a sense of belonging here, something she hasn't felt since she was very little. Seven houses and six schools ago. Her mother says she gets restless, says change builds character, but the girl finds herself falling more and more out of sync with the other kids. As if each neighborhood, each school is a different dimension and she, the girl, is traveling through a black hole, crossing both time and space. She stays the same while everyone else gets older, smarter, more developed.

The girl hasn't even started her period. Her breasts are not yet developed, they aren't even buds yet, the technical term her doctor uses. Her mother assures her that she has breast seeds, the buds are coming, and then the full blooms and all the trouble that brings. Her mother says she should enjoy this time while it lasts. But the girl doesn't enjoy this time. She has feelings, new desires she can't name. She wants to understand the things other girls talk about at school: eating out. Fingering. She knows instinctively that they aren't talking about restaurants and piano lessons. But when she asks them what they mean, they just laugh at her. She finds books at the library but all prove useless in their own way. The science book is luridly appealing with its cover featuring a freshly husked human staring stoically into the distance, but it is too clinical. It names the parts but not how they fit together, not what makes them objects of such delight and secrecy. The romantic books entice with fleshy men and women spilling out of their blouses, their bodies pressed together against some strange and mild tornado. But they prove as cryptic as the talk at school—love buttons, love caves, love swords. There is no love in the locker room, only going down and feeling up, pussies and cocks, teases and sluts.

At night, the girl watches *The Incredible Hulk* on TV. When Dr. David Banner transforms, green muscles bulging through his tattered clothing, she feels a tightness in her groin and she whispers the foreign words like a prayer.

The boy could tell her what the words mean. He reads about them in the magazines his father buys, "men's magazines" his father calls them. There are stacks and stacks of them in his father's closet where he's saving them, he says, for when he has a son. A real son, man enough to appreciate them. The boy has taken them when his father is gone or asleep on the couch. He

hides them in his room where he reads them like homework. He's ready to impress his father or the other boys at school. He's thought up seven different scenarios and will, if necessary, describe them in detail. He will tell them about girls named Bunny and Honey and Candy. He will describe the reverse cowgirl and the banana split. He will say he's done the things that men do. He will not, he decides, ever tell them about the girl. He will not tell them that he has a friend who is a girl but who is not his girlfriend. He doesn't want to hear what they would say about that, doesn't even need to because he can imagine. And when the boy thinks about a future in which maybe she is his girlfriend, he knows what they'd say about that too: she's too pretty, too normal. They'd tell him to give it up.

At night, the boy lies in bed, which is really just a mattress on the floor, and thinks about the future. He thinks about girls. He thinks about the monster. When he's thought too much, he traces his fingers across his jaw, down his throat. He slides his palm over his shoulder and onto his bicep. He can almost circle his arm with his middle finger and thumb. The boy slips his hands over his belly, which sags a little over the waist of his shorts. He pretends the softness there isn't his own.

They are at the canal now, but the far end. The end where it slides under the highway and into their neighborhood. The kiddie pool won't inflate so the girl steals a float from the nearest patio—one of those giant tubes, big enough for two but their butts will hang in the water. The boy is impressed. They put the tube in the canal and fall backward into it. The water is warm and soaks through their shorts and over their laps. It smells earthy, like decaying plants. They wriggle around until they settle in side-by-side, each with one arm draped across the other's back. The boy reaches, nearly falls out, and grabs the paddle, the homemade spear. Together, they push away with their feet. They are off.

The sun is low on the horizon, bathing everything in a dim, pink gold. Porch lights are snapping on. The boy and the girl drift; their fingers and heels make lazy waves on the otherwise still surface. There is a monster to hunt, but for the moment neither of them are in a hurry to find it. The boy rests the spear against his shoulder, folds his arm across his lap to hold it in

place. The girl ties the paddle to the float handle. They don't really need the paddle; the water is slow and moves in one direction, but the boy likes it. He says you never know. There could be rapids. He doesn't seem to be worried about rapids now, though, so the girl starts a game. Alternating between knocking on his knee and drawing her fingers down his shin, she sings, "Crack an egg on your leg, let the yolk run down, let the yolk run down." The boy smiles faintly and shivers. The girl carries on, "Stab a knife in your leg, let the blood run down. Let the blood run down." Her fingers slide down his shin and then back up, up to his thigh. She lunges and squeezes his waist suddenly, trying to startle him. The float rocks wildly and she digs her fingers into his side. "Now you have the creeps," she yells. She starts to tickle and the boy laughs. He can't really stop her without dropping the spear, so she presses on. He wriggles and laughs and she laughs. She stops tickling and lets her hand fall on the boy's where he holds his side. The boy is very still but then he lifts his finger. He slides it between the girl's. He's never held hands before and he's not sure if this counts, only one finger. Her skin is soft. He ventures another and she doesn't move away. She spreads her fingers wider, now she and the boy are fully entwined. The insects are humming and starting to sting, but neither moves to swat them away. The boy looks at the girl, nearly tells her what he's thinking, but he can't. The girl moves their hands lower, but the boy startles. He pushes her hand away. "Sorry," he says. He shifts and is a silhouette against a porch light. She raises her hand to her eyes, squints to read his expression but sees only a shaggy outline. "I had a reaction," he says, the only explanation he can offer. He wants to hold her hand again, but he doesn't know how to ask. She feels a vague hurt that lingers in the heat of her cheeks. The girl senses she has asked for something, and been denied.

The girl suddenly wants to go home, to go to bed where she can look out her window and see the sky. She can imagine herself somewhere else, someone else. She can be someone who never needs anything from other people. Someone like her mother, though the girl would never admit it. Her mother is the kind of person who never gets lonely. Or so it seems to the girl. To be lonely, you have to need something from other people. Her mother doesn't seem to need anything from anyone. The girl found the proof of that

in her mother's nightstand. The girl knew just what it was as soon as she saw it. She recognized it from the anatomy book. It looked just like the picture except neon green. She imagines her mother stole it off her last boyfriend and it turned that color over time. She imagines her mother in the locker room with the other girls, bragging. She feels envious but also angry, betrayed. The girl thinks her mother keeps the best part of a man in her drawer so she can get even that all on her own. The girl thinks, now she'll never have a father. She doesn't know that what she found in the drawer is her mother's own prayer for company.

She doesn't know that her mother still thinks of herself as a girl sometimes. She sees her mother touching her face in the mirror and she thinks it's vanity. She doesn't know it's fear. The girl doesn't understand the forces that keep them moving. She doesn't understand how they course through their lives like a river, flowing to one, inevitable destination.

"There," says the boy. "The monster!" He points to a spot not far away. They have made their way nearly to the end of the canal. The girl can see her house. She follows the boy's pointing finger and sees something disappear beneath the water. A pair of glinting, evil eyes. She is sure of it. Ripples mark a bull's-eye and the boy paddles toward it. The girl feels a rush of excitement and dread. This is it. The showdown.

When they get to the spot, they peer into the water. It's brown and hard to see, but a shape moves below, just out of focus. It creeps closer to the surface. The girl can almost make it out. She sees an oval, maybe the head, maybe with fangs. And then it is rising, rising and the girl can see what it is. She can see that it is only a turtle, wobbly and moss covered. It takes a nip of air and then it dives again, swims away. The girl's heart is knocking and she finally exhales. She looks at the boy, thinking he will be relieved too or disappointed or offer a new game to play. But he still stares into the water. He is focused.

"Do you see it?" he asks. "It's there. The monster. We have to kill it or it will keep coming back. It's the kind of monster that creeps in at night, when you're alone. It leaves marks, but not where anyone can see them. And sometimes it just sits on your chest, pressing the air out of you little by

little until you have no life left in you at all.”

The boy can feel the monster reaching for him. Even now. Even here with his friend. It's getting stronger. He's tried to get help. The boy's guidance counselor has suggested a meeting with his father. He has called the house twice. Once the boy's father answered and then immediately hung up. Once, he slept through it, though the boy let it ring and ring and ring. The boy has been acting out at school. He's been missing classes. There was an incident in the bathroom. The boy wants help so badly but he can't say what he needs. It's the kind of help you can't describe and everyone around you maybe knows it, knows there is something you need but they can't give you, so they get angry with you instead. This is how it is with the guidance counselor. He gives up on the boy. Says he will have to sort it out on his own. He will have to grow up.

He thinks about leaving, escaping Sea Level, escaping Florida. He did run away once. He slept under an underpass. He even made it all the way to the county line, but then couldn't think where to go next. So he came back. He came back and stood by the canal and waited for the girl to come to him. And she did.

The girl watches the boy. She waits for him to laugh, explain the game. But then her mother comes out yelling loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear, “Get out of that filthy canal. There's alligators and snapping turtles and Christ knows what else.” And there are. The water is dark and full of creatures.

NO LAND

**STEPHEN
MASSIMILLA**

after Dean Young

But bright wings
hung above like some dietary angel's notion
of calories; they could electrify the sky somewhere,
a high-convection season.

Meanwhile, the lighthouse seemed squat as a cream pie.
A diver I recognized flippered ahead,
neglecting me for other fresh snappers.

We had brushed our teeth together. In the mirror—
a smirk, a nod from you,
a casual sign of *agita* or hunger?
Sometimes, every silence is a hairpin.

Manta rays stopped the currents,
trailing sizzling barbs
while I scanned
through waves of skate wings

for a layer of butter
among the neon radish colors
and waved at a girl on a balcony

who seemed trapped but comparatively happy.

How outlandish that people exist.

It's as if a heron trembles,

our scuba tanks sending champagne bubble clouds

up to where feathers slice a salt-skin of water. Tropes drawn

like chains across our chests, capable

of the awful things we know they're supposed

to be. Something of a famished life follows.

Someone surely chose this strain:

someone who wrested this last resort

from the ocean

to help us find our way here and bake.

THIS SNOW, THIS DAY

**LINDA
MICHEL-CASSIDY**

The doctor wore a navy blue blazer, his outfit for giving out bad news, which he scheduled for Fridays. Good news, would there have been any, was delivered by a phone call from his secretary, a thing that might happen any day of the week. She's a mumblor, but you can still get the gist from her tone—or from the fact that it's her on the line. Those times that the doctor didn't wear the suit jacket, he wore scrubs, changing them at lunch, whether they were soiled or not. Occasionally he'd forget that he was still wearing them at the end of his long day, and then he could be seen in the wild in his green drawstring pants and matching V-neck that showed too much chest hair. He moved about town as if not covered in blood.

There was a tunnel from his office to the hospital, which people in town referred to as The Habitrail. Every now and then, he'd run through the hall from surgery and put the blazer on over the scrubs. This was his emergency news-delivering outfit, which he thought, incorrectly, was a reassuring look. I can promise you, it was not.

My appointment was on a Monday. Because I had been on vacation, I missed the usual Friday. The delivery of my news threw us both off schedule.

I wore ski pants, just in case. Not one for meditation, at least the sitting-still kind, I prefer to hit the slopes—just eight miles from my home—when I have something to think or not think about. I remember feeling obtrusive when the swishing broke the waiting room stillness as I walked down the hall to his office. The pants were magenta, a color I am not at all drawn to.

Michel-Cassidy

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"Cancer," he said only once, and would manage to never say the word again, thereafter using the word *malignancy* and eventually, simply: *it*. In his jacket with all of that chest hair showing, my doctor informed me that intestinal surgery was in order. He slid a square box of tissues across his desk towards me. "It is a big surgery," he said, twice. I wondered where the line lay between big and little surgery. I felt like a robot for not crying, but I was not raised to be dramatic. My people are stoics and cynics, the kind of people who would deny such a thing as a *little* abdominal surgery.

"I'll show you if you want," he said, pointing to his shelf of thick books. They appeared to have been well read, which could only be good. Unless, of course, they'd come from a garage sale and were published in the 1930s.

"Yes, please," I said, not because I didn't have a basic understanding of how my insides were arranged, but because I wanted very much to see what a hunk of intestine separate from its person looked like. I pictured penne pasta or rigatoni, but pinkish-red. Whoever had his office before him must have been substantially taller, because my doctor had to stretch so much for that huge book that I almost stood up to get it for him—and I'm not tall at all.

"Do you get queasy?" he asked. I told him that I once bagged a digit when my brother lopped off part of his finger in the spokes of a dirt bike, so not to worry. You put the piece in a bag, and then that bag inside of another one filled with icy water. I was fifteen, and to this day I have no idea how I knew to do this.

He opened the book—very large and official looking—and pointed to a black and white illustration that was almost-lovely, like an etching. I looked at his fingernails: short, but not chewed, and very clean. My own had been nibbled—gnawed upon, as if by a miniature beaver—a behavior I had developed within the last week.

I had thought it would be a picture, a photograph of the real thing. "That's a drawing," I said. "A cartoon." This was a great disappointment.

"You don't really want to see what it looks like," he said. I felt a wall go up, a thin one, but still. Doctor on one side, crackpot on the other.

I did want to see it, very much so. I felt that if the procedure and my insides could be made more real to me, if I could see those parts to which I had no access, then I would have some sort of agency. No, not agency, but

understanding. I've always been a visual person. Language has never come first to me, so my way of grasping the elusive has always consisted of a ricocheting translation between the two modes.

He then said a bunch of not-too-helpful medical words, followed by talk of a hose being sliced in two spots and then the openings stapled together. What I took away was that he'd be cutting a section out of my intestines and rejoining the two ends. It felt logical.

On his big calendar festooned with Georgia O'Keefe-ish watercolors of the Southwest, we scheduled the surgery for the only day available for several months: Christmas Eve. "I do not want anything sitting there in me for that long," I told him, pleased that he wasn't letting a holiday get in the way of the thing in my belly.

He unskillfully acted out the calming measures that he had been taught in medical school, despite my absence of hysteria. He talked about my relative youth, as compared to other patients similarly afflicted, and my excellent physical condition. *Except for that rotten part*, he didn't add. "You shouldn't need more than three or four months to be back to normal," he said, looking down at his hands. "Five, tops."

I'd been thinking two weeks.

"How much intestine will you remove?" I asked, counting in my head until February, then April, and picturing that hose.

"You'll still have plenty," was his weird response.

After I failed to weep or pass out, he walked me to the reception area. I put out my hand to shake his—I was raised to be polite to everyone, *no matter what*—and he gave me a blank stare and tipped his head to the side. It took him about five beats to return the gesture.

"I should learn to ski," he said. "Since I live here."

Yes. Yes, you should, I thought.

I made lists. I tried to picture the surgery. I fell into inexplicable giddiness. I considered my family's medical past, but replaced that with thoughts of monochromatic places lit only by the Northern Lights. I decided it would be an excellent idea to run the half-marathon in Greenland the following June, imaging this goal to be realistic. I would wear clamp-on ice grips on

my impulse-purchased puffy orange boot-sneakers. I could feel the bite and hear the ping and a little squeak as the prongs cut a divot in the ice, my foot twisting a bit with each stride. I considered what it would be like to be on a glacier, and wondered if I'd be able to sleep where the sun doesn't set.

I tried to figure out how many ski days I had left until the big surgery. I made a mental calendar into the new year, guessing for how many alpine races I would need to find a substitute referee, wondered if I would be able to get in enough hours to keep my license and how many of my daughter's events I wouldn't see. My vision of the near future was reduced to mathematics, in an effort to make it more palatable. I did not at that time wish to consider how one tells such a thing to an eleven-year-old, that there was this disease, there would be surgery, that a lot of things could happen.

I was captured in childhood by an East Coast storm with brutal wind and half-hard snow that had felt like tiny electricity on the exposed parts of my face. Because I hadn't been west, I did not yet know winter didn't have to be so tangible.

This is what I knew: we lived in a "berg," as my mother called it, so small that it didn't have its own post office or school district. The landscape was brown and worn in a way that did not say *rustic*, but rather, *used up*. Snowfall was a relief, a bit of temporary magic.

We were born for the cold, the kind of kids who have one thing on our Santa list: a blizzard. We were a fungible group, my brother, random kids from around, whoever wasn't grounded or running a fever over 101 degrees.

We lumbered toward the outer reaches of parent-approved wandering, throwing hunks of ice at frozen apples. For reasons never made clear, our official perimeter widened when there was new snow, because we were slower or because of the evidence we left—maybe both. Pushing and pulling the shorter ones over a disused cattle fence, we plopped in heaps on the other side. We pretended we were the von Trapps sneaking over the Alps, hoarding snacks in our pockets in case they were our last.

We passed the nuns' crumbling belfry and collectively sighed in relief. We had heard, as well as spread, the rumors of the insane sisters housed there. This site provided fodder for our more elaborate nightmares:

orphan-filled basements, bald 103-year-old nuns wandering candle-lit halls, priests stealthing out of the early morning windows. Our sounds ricocheted off the low walls that had been there since our parents were kids in the snow.

Despite the rules, the terrors, we were there for the sledding. We paused to admire three sets of deer tracks, sneaking behind bushes whose Christmas-red berries, in a less exciting season, had sent two of us for a stomach pumping. We rounded the fishpond that was deeper than a man with his arms held up, or so went the lore. Filled with algae, semi-frozen but still smelly, this pond may or may not have taken the life of a six-year-old-girl, *who was not Catholic*, the nuns had whispered. We flattened ourselves against the wall of the building that appeared to be built from the rocks that lined the shore of the reservoir, another place we had been forbidden to play. The building, pigeon-colored with a lot of points and edges, called to mind a medieval palace. We wished there were a moat.

A quick scoot across an open field, around a line of pine trees planted as a windbreak and we were atop a pristine hill. On this morning, or some other: a broken nose, snow pants ripped apart by the blade on a flexible flyer, my brother crying. On that day, on all of them, we walked inside a snow globe.

Even after the surgery was over, its mechanics remained abstract, at least as presented by my doctor. I was unable to process the good news that, except for the business of being sliced open and rearranged inside, I should expect a full recovery.

During a post-op visit, my doctor talked of wanting to quit being a surgeon to become a screenwriter—a bit of personal intrigue that, THANK GOD, he did not reveal until I was in the ICU and hopped up on morphine. Later, he would tell me the story. While sworn to secrecy, I can reveal that it sounded intriguing.

I was given excellent odds, not at all supported by information available online, percentages about recurrence that in my head made themselves into pie-charts, evenly split. Against character, I remained inappropriately positive. At home, I tried to read, but could not concentrate. I survived on broth and *CSI* reruns.

Eight weeks and one day after my Christmas-eve surgical event came an epic snowfall. Pristine, brilliant and white beyond white, the morning cruelly teased my sensibilities, my “mind of winter,” as Wallace Stevens said.

By four in the afternoon the day before, the schools were ordered closed for the next day, not so much because the roads would be impassable, as we all had high-clearance trucks, but because no one would have shown up. This spectacle unfolded through a prism of icicles, some up to three feet long, which hung outside the window in my living room, where I was two months into my three-month sentence of couch arrest. I watched the storm warnings out of Albuquerque until I could no more.

I had gone back into the hospital several times since December. Violently allergic to the pre-surgical antibiotics—code for they wouldn’t stay in me—I caught one infection after another, some interesting, the others dangerous. Whatever part of my body was supposed to take nutrients from the food I ate had declined to do so. Despite this, I was told that my recovery, from a surgical standpoint, was ahead of schedule. I would not be retested until May, so missing this snow, on this day, would have no relationship to my prognosis. It was more about the fact that I could barely stand up.

Compared to being trapped in my house, the physical discomforts were minor inconveniences. I slept ten, sometimes twelve hours a night, just to pass the time. Noises had been made that perhaps I needed antidepressants, which I resisted. The crisis, as I saw it, was this snow already piled three feet deep and so white that it was baby blue. The dagger was knowing this much powder at the 8,000-foot elevation where I lived, equaled five feet, even six, up on the mountain.

I got my ski pants out of the back room, just to look at them. My favorite pair is brown plaid with lots of pockets, including an insulated one for a phone, so that the battery holds all day. Such considered design! It also has a series of grommets to run a headphone cord up the side of the pant, but I’d never gotten the coat that went with. I put them on, just to see, over one of the pairs of long underwear that had been my daywear for the last few months, the waistband rolled down so that there was no pressure on the scar. Those pants fell right down to my knees. I’d lost as much weight as my

visitor's expressions had indicated. Even after I put on my specially ordered extra-small truss, those pants weren't staying up. I found an old pair of my daughter's, suspended race-training ones, the kind that usually go over a speed suit and can be removed while still in ones skis, tear-away style—another fine piece of engineering. I filled up the space where the muscles should have been with extra layers.

My plan was to drive up the mountain, certain that getting out of the house could only be beneficial—despite my involuntary driving hiatus. I will confess that I put in my contacts. In my everyday life I prefer to wear glasses but they don't fit under my goggles. Even the most half-assed investigator would have known that something self-delusional was afoot. I also picked up my ski mittens, which I can't wear to drive because they are like teddybear paws. So there was evidence, absolutely. But the story I was telling myself was about a quick visit and looking. Only looking.

The drive up the hill was one of the first times I'd been in my truck since the surgery. Just being in it, making my way up the twisty road, felt like a part of myself was returning. The road, the falling rock warnings, the sheeted rivulet along side—everything was as it had always been, as I would soon be, as well.

In the parking lot at the resort, the excitement was palpable. The lot wasn't that big, a person could easily walk in, but I took a shuttle, in order to save what little energy I had. From the bus I could see that the front face of the hill didn't look crowded. Locals always head to the back or the ridge, hoping to make fresh tracks. Not my concern, I told myself. I was just up for a peek.

I thought I ought to take a look in my locker, and make sure my stuff was still there. I could have been evicted or something, for having gone missing for so long. I'd check on my gear, get a fancy coffee and sit at the picnic table at the base of Al's Run with the snow bunnies. Then I'd go home.

I was comforted by locker room three's specific aroma: sweat, wet wool and chocolate. It's next to the candy store, which makes hot chocolate the old-school way: milk and actual chocolate in a blue enamel pot on a hotplate, the drink so thick it's best enjoyed with a spoon. Because we are

in New Mexico, you can get this with chili powder on it. If you have your own, you can put a shot of Kahlua in as well. But I digress.

Getting my ski boots on was something of a challenge. The bones in my feet had relaxed, what with all the couch-sitting I'd done. I couldn't fold into that half-stand-half-crouch position that gives a person the angle to slide into a boot engineered to be tight enough to keep the foot from torquing on impact. The process, which included flopping down on a bench for a rest, took what felt like an hour. Other skiers came and went, commenting on my absence (about which I was vague) and welcomed me back.

When I climbed up the cleated steel stairs to the base, a bizarre rush of something replaced the malaise I'd been dragging around. Even now, I can't find the words for it. Perhaps one might be conjured: at-home-ness? My body had memorized this place: the combination to the locker room, the way I have to stand on tip toes to get my boots down from on top of the cabinet, how to talk on a cell phone hands-free by tucking it between the ear pads in my helmet. I clipped into my skis without consideration. The way to move about encumbered by five-foot-long planks had become my sixth sense.

The glide over to the lift, only about twenty-five yards, caused me no pain, or none that I remember. Someone slipped in behind me in the queue. I could have ducked under the rope and made my retreat, but I never considered it.

When the attendant scanned my pass, the date of its last use flashed on his monitor. "Where have you been," the dude said. "Jail or something?"

I tried to chuckle back, but I'll bet I just grimaced. The glint off of the mountain was blinding. I had not seen light this bright for many weeks.

I rode up with my friend, Jack, who had taken in my husband and daughter for Christmas dinner while I was in the ICU alone and not knowing to press the button for more pain meds. I had sort of hoped to not run into anyone who specifically knew I was supposed to be doing the opposite of getting on a ski lift.

Our daughters raced alpine together and they were in the same classes in middle school. Both girls were excellent students, but hell-bent on focusing their energies on racing down icy courses at speeds nearing sixty miles an hour. Jack set gates and I refereed, and as such, we had done this ride up the

lift many times at sunrise to prep for a race. Our hill is at its most beautiful at dawn, even when it's fifteen below.

Jack's wife was a medic for the team and my husband filmed their runs, so the two of them had first-hand knowledge of the gnarlier wipe-outs, whereas Jack and I got our news by way of the coaches' gasps on our single-channel radios. We all prayed that these girls would get over it before suffering a debilitating crash or missing so much school while on the road with the team that they lost their chances for the top-tier colleges for which we'd preferred they'd be gunning. Our girls are of this place and there's nothing to be done about it.

At the top of the lift, as I readied to slide onto the landing, I thought, *Now here's a moment when this adventure of mine could go very wrong.* It had only been two months, yet I wondered what muscle memory, if any, had survived. I had straitjacketed my midsection into submission; this day would be, by default, all about my thighs. I knew Jack would sweep me out of the way of the chair if I stumbled. He understood why I was there, while knowing that I ought to have been on my couch. He would neither admonish me if this went poorly nor congratulate me if it ended well.

"You good?" Jack said. "Snowmobile ride back down if you want. No questions." He asked this not because he thought I would take him up on the offer, but because he knew a potential disaster when he was sitting next to one.

I told him I'd make my way around the back of the hill, staying on easy greens, nice and slow. My reasoning for not skiing down the front of the hill that day was supposedly because it was too public, but in reality, it's because it was too bumpy. Instead I took a flat run, barely a slope, over to the lift that would take me to the back side. I shied from areas where there might be a hidden bump or a need to make a quick turn. I moved like I had never before put on a pair of skis. Or something else: I'd never even seen someone ski, and I was a Weeble weighted in all the wrong places. I suspected that if I fell, I didn't have the stomach muscles to get back up. All I was fit for was rolling. For an instant, or ten, I considered mountain lions and hypothermia.

I rode the second lift, an old-school wooden one, with a guy from Texas who'd heard the outstanding weather report while at work in Dallas the morning before. He'd skipped out at lunch, driving through the night to be here, for this snow. He didn't make first tracks, but was ecstatic nonetheless. Because he was a stranger, I could give him my facts. The Texan and I skied the first curve, barely a turn. I was afraid to lean in and I knew I was sitting back, the opposite of what one should do. I righted myself with a jerk that felt like electricity. My center of gravity was nonexistent. For the first time in years I'd need to concentrate and do the things that beginners are told to do to keep from falling. I lied to the Texan, telling him I felt great, just slow and that he should go. He raced off, all powder and euphoria. The truss, too loose, slipped northward, binding my ribcage, making it difficult to draw a full breath.

The flat and wandering run around the back side is over four-and-a-half miles long. I had, in the past, bombed down it in twelve minutes. On this day it took me almost two hours, quite a lot of alone time.

I passed the bend where the previous December my cell phone half-rang and then disconnected, because of the terrain. The message on my voicemail said that my mentor in art school had passed away from the very same kind of cancer of which I might, in four years and ten months, be considered cured—or so said WebMD.com. I am lucky, extremely so. I know this every minute of every day. Yet, my stomach felt like I'd been lowered gut-side down onto a table saw, and I'd have preferred it didn't.

I continued. I meandered, moving so slowly that it could be called nothing else. The day was too stunning to look at head-on. Each contour was either absorbed below my knees or it was not.

I passed a little tree run that I love, Arroyo Hano, a sort of play on words, a ditch of a run named after the resort founder's son. It's lovely in there, isolated enough that you'd never know there was a terrain park just on the other side. It has the charm of those small triangular plops of public lawn you see in cities, with only one bench, and always a plaque for some unfamous person who had loved that view. I didn't dip in, there was no way I could risk slamming into a tree, but I loved seeing the entrance and its promise to be there for me later. It was nearly too much, being back there. But the

day wasn't about hitting my favorite runs or catching new powder. It was about ingesting this place as if it were a tonic.

I had skied until just before my surgery. On my last day up, light-headed and jittery from the several days of the liquids-only, intestine-cleaning diet, I was sticking to groomers. Prophetic of nothing, but still clear in my mind, were two easy runs, wide-open and flat, that I took, oddly enough, with my doctor. I had, on one or all of our visits in his office, harassed him about living in a ski town and never having skied. And there he had been, in a brand-new ski outfit, a season pass attached to the jacket's zipper. He'd clomped up the stairs to the base lift, evoking both Frankenstein's monster and a toddler, and I'd followed, hoping he wouldn't tumble backwards. He wanted to show me his skills. That day in December, he had just completed his first set of lessons and he wore the scared-witless glow that verified he was hooked.

He wasn't a bad skier, my doctor, but was a stiff and cautious one. That seemed appropriate, given his line of work. *Relax, you can still saw people open if you've ripped your ACL*, I thought but didn't say. He was too new to have developed any bad habits. I skied behind him, which he said made him nervous. He would have been less pleased if I passed him and then forgot he was back there trying to recall if he should press on the uphill or downhill ski to make a turn. He had that look, the one that said he knew that some magic was waiting for him, but that it would take patience.

When we took those two little runs, we did not once mention the surgery, then less than forty-eight hours away. On the lift, he told me what he'd done in his class, and I listened as if I didn't already know what went on, as if the miracle of pressing down on a ski's edge was a revelation to me, as well. There had been a shift in power, or knowledge or something like that. He had his shelf of leather-bound books and I had my eight-year-old scuffed boots, the warped closures held together with duct tape.

Eventually, I found unmarked snow on a gentle glade connecting two open spaces. No one was back there. The pass was too flat to interest experienced skiers—everyone local was up on the ridge. In summer, this is

a good hike-to picnic spot, level enough to spread out a towel and take a nap. I pushed my way through, knees bent, butt out, as if ready to sit. This trail is one that, in other years, I'd zipped through, as it's the shortcut around the back side.

My surgery had given me the gift of slowness and the time to pay attention. It was just: me, some big animal tracks, and the muffled grumble of a lift motor. The view was the best features of sugar, diamonds and clouds, all merged into one—the sparkling negating the feeling that if I dared unzip my jacket, I might see what was left of my insides.

I don't remember the rest of the run. My remedy soaked into me, like a cool cloth on a feverish forehead. I'd bet that I was the slowest one on the hill that day. I suspect that I laughed or maybe screamed. Something loud came out of me, that much I recall. A sound that was spring-loaded, from deep in my gut, where it had been lying in wait. When I got to the base, I was a mess of sweat and shivers, my goggles fogged with condensation. My mind buzzed as if I'd just handled snakes or caused a levitation.

Maybe this foolishness of mine set my healing back, stressing my abdomen more than it was ready for. But here's the thing: I didn't fall. I did this stupid act by myself, not with someone holding me by the elbow, which meant I could hold this, my winter cure, right where I needed it.

Some facts:

My surgeon is now addicted to skiing. While enthusiastic, he is less-than-artful. Three winters ago, he crashed into my husband in a yard sale so phenomenal that ski patrol was called before they even stopped rolling. For whatever reason, this bonded them.

The screenplay, the writer of which finally said, "Call me Rob," has been completed.

December 24, 2013 was my seven-year slice-a-versary. Three days after that, on my birthday, a "lemon-sized mass" (another doctor's words) would be found elsewhere. Thanks to ever-improving technology, its laparoscopic removal and the recovery therefrom was far less interesting. Having the Winter Olympics to watch helped a lot. Nothing beats watching the luge whilst on Percocet.

My tests have all come back clear.

YAHRTZEIT

**JED
MYERS**

In this instance, it's early May.
I've taken note, the moon is near
full. Here where I live,

not where he remained and entered
the earth, there are salmonberries
already plumped and reddened. Here,

far from the house I left and the year
he last hung his Wilson racquet up
on its hook in that clean garage,

I've seen him scuffling up close
to the net, heard his forehand grunt,
nearly touched the sweat on his brow

as I did when he thrashed on his final
bed. Here, I've seen a barred owl
shadowing on a low cedar bough.

These days rainless and open—vision
permitted between here and above.
And of the wind—it isn't much

more than a few gusts sweeping through
from the shore around dusk—it scatters
petals torn from the cherry and plum

as I walk toward home. I've thought
I might light a candle, or write a poem.
Both wouldn't hurt. Now while I can,

while the earth's in just the position
it was, regarding the sun, as when
he left. Three years it's been,

and, although I'm not much
taken up with tradition—as he wasn't
one to ever speak of the oneness

of all there is—let the candle be lit.
Some of him must've entered the light.
What I see by it, let my hand write.

PRIMA DONNA

**PATRICIA
NASH**

"quixotic" I guess
—lots of things are.
Saying, "I'll be there
in 5 minutes," for example, if
it's 20 all the way across
town. Not only that. What's more
is that you're stood in
your own way, so what, so that
'll be more than 20, if
you're honest
to God. Lots
of things are, but
does that make them less than?
If I want a windmill to just "be
itself," I know I ought to
step the fuck back, quit
taking pics, writing postcards, asking
where's the bathroom?
But I want a windmill
to be more than that. I want public
restrooms just for myself.

I don't care
where flour or tulips come from. Give me
fresh bread, a nice bouquet, a round-trip
ticket (no stop-
over). Give me the first novel, EVER
and forget there ever was
or is a crisis. Give me la plancha combo
meal, in English please.
Lots of things are.

THE SORROWS OF THE DEAD

**EUSUF
NAUSHEEN**

refuse to perish with their mortal masters.
The griefs they grieved, the slights they bore,

how can they not, once told, return to task
the living—a collector at the door?

You tend to them the way you water the plants
that yellow regardless on the window sill,

the way regret catches you like a feather
on the windshield that turns, stalls, lies still,

and disappears. Familiar, like old friends,
like the loping gait of the three-legged cat

that comes to your porch at dusk to find
a bowl of milk. Surely, you owe them that.

PRESCRIPTION

**JOHN
NIEVES**

If you are afraid of disappearing, stand under
a just-changed streetlight, stand twelve feet
above the sidewalk, stand in the center of a metaphor
for someone else's longing. If you are worried
about fading out, burn every photograph you can
find with you in it, record over your voicemail
message with fireworks and buzz saws, refuse to say
your own name so you will never be done with it.
If slippage of self is your concern, your own memory
of you, get other people to tell you about yourself
and record it, play it at the beach, mock the ocean's
constantly unsure shape. If terror is just your natural
state, avoid mirrors, avoid anyone who wants,
with all of their heart, to be a mirror.

HOW THE SOLSTICE DRAGS THE SKY

**DANIEL
RUIZ**

Whenever I see a sponge
hard as a dinner plate I think that water
is the cure for cancer—to simply soak
a man in a vase full of ocean. Watch
what happens when we with tweezers
pull a man by his hair out of his aquarium.
I get strangely dissatisfied when people
guess my age incorrectly—more defensive
than a fight between Muhammad Ali
and Muhammad Ali.

I get worried, too,
on less-than-windy days, that the clouds
have stopped to get gas and don't
remember how to crawl. It's a muffin
morning, where each leaf has washed
its face before work. When the small
hand of my daughter stops swooning
over plates of soft cookies, I'll know
that the real her started living
in the woods months ago, that her nails
are long and jagged like the walls of her cave.

On the longest day of the year,
God holds the earth like a trophy
to see his face in the Pacific Ocean.
On the shortest, he prays
to the earth and goes to bed early,
listening to a CD of the seas talking.
Sure. When the clock skips an hour,
the sky twists backwards against our eyes
like the cap of a closed cola bottle
being closed a little more,

and I love having more day, more streets, more thick
glass ceiling to smash into when I think
I'm in the clear, more dwarves peeking
at the street from under the sewer plate,
more ears flinched at the sound
of something you can't see coming.

THE BOONIE HAT

**LINWOOD
RUMNEY**

Creased on both sides, the full brim proves
even then my father, an army ranger
in Vietnam, squared the boundaries
of his vision through the hats he wore.

Standard issue in '69, made
of rip-stop cloth-leaf camo pattern-
it has black metal eyelets and mesh
ventilation screens, two on each side.

The label reads, *Hat, Camouflage,
for Tropical Combat, Type II.*
It's most decayed along the chinstrap
where his sweat and decades of attic

storage frayed the nylon-cotton cord.
This is the hat he loaned me for my travels
in Costa Rica, because, he says,
The sun hits harder than you think.

Cooled by his vintage shade, I was
neither invading force nor listless tourist,
though I feared I might be both.
I wore it as I learned the layout

of San José, shielding my eyes
with auburn-tinted metal-rimmed
Aviator glasses. Absurdly dressed
in the military trappings of my father's

generation and thinking I'd camouflaged
my blue eyes, pale complexion
and straw-colored hair, I manufactured
my first *¡Buenos días!* and *¿Dónde estoy?*

I wore it again as I hiked three days
through the Cloud Forest to spend a week
at a tourist's lodge owned by an expat's son.
Seen by hawks from above, I wanted

to seem a forest pixel moving too slowly
to be of interest, and seen from the side
by howler monkeys screaming
between tree limbs, I wanted to be

the figure of a man distilled from leaf
to leaf. By day I paid my keep digging
a fish pond, and at dusk, we split
a bottle of whiskey as he recounted

stories of gelding stallions. His tongue
muffled by booze and trapped
between his father's homeland
and the only country he knew, he detailed

the knots used to keep the horse
from kicking, as the sun softened
behind clouds. Folded on my knee
my father's boonie hat hid nothing,

as my friend explained where to find
the seam, how to sever cords anchoring
organ to muscle, as the sun set,
splayed out and wincing beneath us.

DAILY BREAD

**LINWOOD
RUMNEY**

No music allowed in the bakery
where I work-the baker's zealous speech
carries the morning cadence.
I, alone with him where
no natural light can enter, heT and deliver
bulk bags of ?our, yeast, salt.

Over the hymn of industrial mixers that flash
like chain mail, he proclaims,
Of all things men make, bread is closest to God.

I shuffle between proofing stations
to oil and stack racks of bread pans,
building transient temples gleaming
a head taller than me-ready to receive
the daily dose of faith.

Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?
he intones as the dough congeals,
folded and braided into itself
by the rhythm of the mixing blade-
*Who eat up my people as they eat bread
and call not upon the Lord?*

We slap dawn's first dough
onto the cutting table as he repeats
that I am un?t to bake with him:
It takes belief first, then skill.
Lacking both, I grip the slicer,
crude in its perfectly rectangular shape,
and plunge it into the dull mass
before me, granDng form to his faith.

PICKING OUT YOUR NAIL POLISH

AMY
SCHMIDT

It's an ordeal, deciding the color. On your nails
right now is a bright orange, garish
and shocking, painted months ago for Halloween.
You can't go to your grave with nails
the color of a deer hunter's hat, that much
we've determined. But otherwise, we're stumped.
Your sister thinks mauve's best but I say it's too much
like dusty, plastic flowers or kitsch country art, the kind
with silhouettes of geese and bonneted girls.
Lynn arrives with a sack of options, all in shades
of pink with names like *Chastity*, *Miami Nice*
and *Lovie Dovie*. Of course, your mom's mortified.
We hold each bottle up to your hand, swollen
and pale as a dead carp's underbelly. Nothing's
right. I call a friend and ask what she's got.
Come look, she says. She's pulled out a small box
by the time I arrive, has it setting on the coffee table
like a plate of cookies. We pick up each glass bottle,
turn it, hold it up to the light, set it down, decide finally
on a plain red, color of school book apples
and cardinals in winter. Tucked like a heart
into my coat's breast pocket, it pulses
with the desperate hope we've long since
given up.

TABLELAND

BY

JL

SCHNEIDER

**THE HARPUR PALATE PRIZE
FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION**

Schneider

96

“Searching for the lost is a great initial error we all commit.”

—D. T. Suzuki

One year ago today I left the United States.

London, Ecuador, and now Cusichaca, a British-run archeological dig in southern Peru. Since being here my understanding of movement and place and “home” has fractured and dissolved into an indecipherable wasteland of multiple definitions and cultures. Each day feels large, a psychological eon not commensurate with the few hours between Andean sunrises, as if I’m stuck in the very non-Western, non-linear Inca concept of time. Like the Mayan Ages, each Inca Age ended in cataclysm, only to start a new cycle, somewhat similar to the 12,000-year *mahayuga* cycle in India, which ends in dissolution, *pralaya*, only to begin anew. Or the Greek cycling of events through time, *anakuklosis*. Each day is an Age of Experience—the digging, learning the landscape, the soil trickling through my fingers—only to repeat itself the next day as I rise to the excavation sites at Patallacta and Pupatuyoc. I’m distended, unattached to any psychic or physical place, which in the temporal plane is the Exile’s native soil.

Being an Exile isn’t moving away from but toward home. If one has always felt apart from the things that are supposed to make you feel connected; if one has felt like a foreigner in one’s own country, unable to participate in the artificial trappings of dictatorial custom that one grows up with—marriage, career, money—imbued with all the glue but none of the stick; if one has consciously decided to be a non-producer in a consumer society; if one’s only interest has been the conducting of one’s true business, which the poet B. H. Fairchild identifies as “locating truths that do not participate, however indirectly, in the prevailing circus of lies”—then being an exile, being a foreigner, disembarking from the train at Km 88 on the edge of the Urubamba River in Peru is like arriving at a familiar place. I’ve been borne along, comfortably so, as Supervielle’s “mobile exile,” which can only be created by distance. If one is defined by

separateness amidst the connotation, often oppressive, of inclusion, then true exile, true separateness—knowing nothing about where you are and being unknown to everyone—is like stepping into one’s shadow that has always been lagging a couple of feet behind.

*

Tonight I’ll be staying at 3,076 meters (10,092 feet) above sea level instead of the 2,650 meters (8,692 feet) a.s.l. at base camp, my first shift doing guard duty on the Tableland. Everyone in camp has to take a turn on the Tableland so the dig’s equipment—shovels, picks, buckets, wheelbarrows, trowels, brushes, tape measures, etc.—doesn’t get stolen. It’s 4:30, the sun is going down, and at this altitude the coffee takes forever to boil over an open fire. The wind picks up every afternoon in the Urubamba Valley, more fiercely up here, and the flames whip furiously about under the coffee pot. Verónica, *Wekey Wilka* in Quechua, a 5,750-meter (18,860 ft.) snow-capped peak I’ve come to adore as a real woman—she’s always naked in the distance, sensuous, lithe-legged, with a pronounced pubis and long hair shrouding a bowed head—is sharp and clear in the northeast, though there are passing clouds above me. Peruvian Premier cigarettes to pass the time.

It was a slow Sunday down at camp, and I didn’t get up here until after lunch. Most of the archeologists have gone off for the weekend to Cuzco or Ollantaytambo, and only René, the Dutchman, is down below to guard things.

The wind blows, the *ratama* bushes rustle, a sparrow hawk hovers motionless beyond the Tableland’s rim—100 meters away at eye level—like a stagnant kite over the Cusichaca ravine. Its sharp beak holds steady into the wind, wings stiff, waiting. It dips down and rockets straight into the valley, disappearing beyond the lip of the Tableland.

A cloud moves overhead. It has definition and border, like an entity in an old sci-fi movie, and quickly envelopes the Tableland. In another moment, the land clears. All over the valley these smaller clouds, distinct and independent as blunt rowboats, move south toward Cuzco, and above them, elephantine clouds moving more slowly, like galleons sending their runners ahead. It is familiar beyond weather. The large and the small, the whole and the

pieces fractured out of it scattered to other places.

*

Work on a dig is arduous and monotonous—the Age of Tedium. It's hot on the Tableland during the day, there is no shade, and dust creeps into every fold of skin and clothing. My job consists of trowelling off the top two centimeters of hard-packed earth in a 30-foot square plot. If nothing shows up, do it again. Scrape, remove the dirt to be sifted for artifacts and bone fragments, scrape some more. Scrape down to a certain level indicated by Nic, the site supervisor, then stop. I'm cleaning dirt.

At the same time it feels like working a backward loom, unweaving a sweater, unskeining wool, retracting a clew of thread. It feels like, in a way, going home.

These people—the Inca and the Wari they conquered, the Tiwanaku before the Wari, the Chanapata before them and the Chavin before them—are not my ancestors. But if I dig a little deeper, I can imagine they are. I'm re-borning the dead. All the tribes of humanity come from a single tribe, a single group, a single pair of rutting enthusiasts. The deeper I dig, the further I can imagine past the tribes and primates and down through the kingdom Animalia to single cells joining with other cells, all the way back to my pre-sexual-cell ancestor doing its thing somewhere abyssal below my fingers....

I cough up a dust-gob and let it fly.

I find dozens, sometimes hundreds of potsherds during the day, most no bigger than three or four centimeters square. They're dull, post-Inca, archeologically worthless, but when I find one there's a twinge of excitement. I've found something that's been buried for hundreds of years. I touch it, fondle it, look it over, knowing that the last person who handled it was someone who, at this strata, lived very close to the reign of the Incas, perhaps even heard stories from his elders about Huascar Inca, who ruled at the time of Pizarro's arrival, or about his grandfather, Topa Inca, responsible for the greatest expansion of the Empire. These finds are momentary klaxons during the endlessly dull silence of scraping, when I spend most of my time wondering when the next break is going to be and

day-dreaming of home.

*

The fire crackles inside the circle of stones and steam finally rises from the coffee pot. The wind has abated, and it's now so quiet I should have heard the woman and girl come up the trail, their feet skiffing over the Tableland's dusty terrain. I don't know they're there until the woman says, *Buenas tardes*, startling me.

The woman is old, maybe 50 or 60, ancient for a campesino. She's thin and sallow of face, most of her teeth are missing, and she wears a dirty, threadbare brown dress. The young girl, dressed similarly to the old woman, has the exotically long, jet-black hair of campesino girls, clear skin, and sharp, distinct eyes—Verónica's younger sister. Both have small shawls covering their heads, like mourners, and neither wears shoes. Two tatterdemalion ghosts appearing out of the *huaranhuay* bushes.

The woman says something in Quechua, which I don't understand. I ask her in Spanish where she lives. *¿Dónde vive?* She points toward the valley below, which is where I presume they're headed.

René told me before I came up that he'd been visited by two girls during his shift (Domingo's daughters; Domingo is the President of Cusichaca Valley), and he had given them something to eat. In a way, at least temporarily, the Tableland is my home, and the woman and the girl have entered it through a very expansive door. They are my guests, and I should offer them something. There's bread in the equipment tent where I'll sleep tonight, but I don't want to give it to them. I wonder if I'll be treating them like beggars, insulting them if I give them food they didn't ask for. Instead, I go to my rucksack and get a new pack of cigarettes. I tamp them down and offer the woman one. The girl wants one, also. She doesn't look more than ten years old. I ask her in Spanish if she smokes. She says yes. I ask the old woman if the girl smokes. She says yes.

I give both of them cigarettes, and I take one, also, which we light off a stick from the fire. In the silence of the small, flat mesa of the Tableland, as we smoke without speaking, it becomes embarrassingly apparent, without

speaking, it becomes embarrassingly apparent, without deeds or surveyors' sticks, whose home this really is. Everything—the valley, the mountains, the mesa, even the Inca ruins crumbling around us—belongs to this old abuela. It's hers by birth and right, by the common familiarity of having been here every day of her life, and she's so nonchalant about her possessions. It occurs to me that maybe I should ask permission to sleep on her floor tonight.

She says something to me, then to the girl, again in Quechua, and they start walking back in the direction from which they came, not down into the valley where the woman said she lived. They're not passing through. Apparently, I was their destination, why, I don't know. I watch them go, the girl leading the woman by the hand. On the next tier up on the Tableland, as they retreat into the mountains, the old woman stops and looks back at me. It is a searing stare, yet benign with some kind of knowledge. The distance between us shrinks to inches, and it feels as if her eyes and mine are stitched through by a taut thread. Then she turns and disappears amongst the dwarf *supaicarco* trees and *tuna* cactus.

*

On my first night at Cusichaca I talked with Nic about the dig. Nic is 31, an ex-hippie with a thin black beard and passionate black eyes. He always wears a leather poncho, sandals, and baggy pants, and drinks Pisco Puro rum like it's water, as he was the night of my arrival. One of the first things he said to me was, "With twenty serious archeologists I could finish this site in a month." Instead, he has to contend with flabby, complaining, Earthwatch people, a small group of American volunteers who have come to help out on the dig. He doesn't like Americans. They're pushy. They think they own the world. They're self-indulgent. He had no problem saying this to my American face as he pounded down the rum.

Nic's attitude is prevalent among most of the Brits. Newcomers are not in the "biz," we're not even amateur diggers. Some of the English group have never been on a dig, either. However, they're all here via

the Institute of Archeology in London, which makes them insiders. And they've already been here a month, which makes them veterans. Like the Inca ceremonial sites which ascribe importance to height, the regulars have their tents on the upper level of the camp, above what's called Residential, and the rest of us have ours on the lower. A crude form of land-inspired *jeraquía*.

The Earthwatchers don't consider me a part of their group because I'm not a dues-paying member and I didn't come with them. They know I'm here via London where I've been doing my graduate work (not in archeology), so they assume I have some connection with the Brits. And the Brits don't consider me a part of their group because I'm an American. The Exile's sweet spot.

Nevertheless, I tentatively try to make some inroads into breaching the gulf between the Brits and myself by producing the last of my expensive, duty-free scotch. Since they've arrived the Brits have had nothing to drink but Cusichaca whiskey (the local moonshine), homemade *chicha* beer, and the very cheap Pisco Puro rum. The moonshine could strip varnish off a boat, the Pisco is undrinkable unless mixed with something, and the *chicha*, also called *a'qa*, which is made by chewing corn kernels then spitting them into a vat to ferment, tastes exactly the way it's made.

Some of the Brits have adopted the local custom, practiced since the Inca, of ritual libation, pouring a small quantity of liquid onto the ground before drinking to honor the Inca earth-mother goddess, Pachamama. It's a small nod to indigenous custom, though empty of symbolic content for Westerners. It's a reflex, and after a while most of us indulge in this and other minor rites as adaptations, trying to fit in. But such cultural pandering seems obvious and desperate to me, like we're teenagers anxious to imitate the latest slang. It doesn't make us contiguous, merely mimes.

Mysterium tremendum, terrible awe ("awe" from the Greek *achos*, "pain"), is supposed to be the emotion associated with rituals honoring the gods, and that sums up the feeling I have when I see my expensive scotch being poured on the ground.

*

Emily, a student from the Institute, recently told me a dream she had about being home. She was sitting at her parents' kitchen table thinking how wonderful it was to be back in familiar surroundings. Then she realized she hadn't said goodbye to everyone before she left the dig. She was sad about this, and wanted to come back.

I've been asking the other diggers about their dreams, and most of them, typically, are also about being home or going home. Displacement. At least in the beginning. Even as everyone settled into and became familiar with Cusichaca, they were still British or Dutch or Australian. They were here, but were more attached, psychically, to the old world than the new.

But as they began to absorb local color and custom and the very thin Andean air into their lungs, a fog of ambiguity started to creep in. Now, their dream landscapes are as often located in the present environment as the one they left. There's still much talk of home—pubs, soccer teams, distant friends—but I also see a lot of happy faces on site, none of which have the hollow-eyed looks of those wishing to be elsewhere. They seem comfortable, their shadows close to their bodies, and some of them have even begun to think of Cusichaca as their home, even though they're 5,000 miles away from familiar environs and are living in tents. And at the edge of the eye, barely detectable, a trace of confusion and bewilderment, as if the bridge the dreaming mind has constructed between here and there is not entirely secure.

The triumphant return of mythology is supposed to have a reward at its end—the success of the hunt, the birth of a child, a reintegration into the autochthonous known. But, as in Emily's dream, many of the diggers' returns are accompanied by sadness, and carry with them a going out again, a return here.

I feel it too, the circling planets of home and here, the confusion about which is which. I've accepted since I arrived that this stay has an expiration date. But I never expected to be as comfortable as I am, or that the idea of home could have a half-life built into it. Home, the idea of home, is supposed to be permanent. It has the psychic gravity of a sun around which wandering rotates. Home is that place of geographic and

metaphysical comfort, the place where you want to be, which, when traveling, is always elsewhere. It's not a flimsy rectangle of tent nylon tucked among some *retama* bushes.

*

The day stays late this high up. Just before sunset, as I'm sitting in the La-Z-Boy (a wheelbarrow tipped down on its handles, slouched comfortably in its tub), a horse and rider leisurely ascend from the lower tier of the Tableland. In the distance I can see her long black hair tied in the back. She's wearing a long dress, straddling the horse bareback, shoeless. Then I hear her. She's singing a very soft song, almost to herself, in Quechua, which I don't understand. However, it has a tone of ancient desire and tired haunt, which I do understand. When she gets closer, seeing me, she stops singing but keeps riding. She has an oval face without expression. She's looking upward, toward the mountains, slowly rocking back and forth with the horse's rhythm. When she's within earshot I silently raise my hand. She says, *Hola*, quietly, modestly, and I rejoin with the same. Our eyes meet. When they do, I get the feeling that I know her, though this is impossible. I've never seen her before. And in her black, almost indifferent eyes an intuition of me, also.

I've experienced this moment a thousand times—the brief, off-hand acknowledgment of the recognizable stranger at a coffee shop, in a grocery store, or on the street. But on a small, flat spit of land in the Andes? *Hola. Nice to see you. I think I know you. And I can tell by how you look at me that you feel the same. Perhaps we could stop and talk. Goodbye.*

She plods on through a small field of dry, severed corn stalks, the horse's hooves scraping against the brittle, hollow tubes.

That night, after a very long journey piloting the Space Shuttle (which I eventually crash land), I'm sitting in the dark in someone's suburban backyard. I look up and see a light on in the second floor window of the house. My mother and stepfather are standing in the frame, staring out into the night, awaiting my return.

The traditional, end-of-the-dig talent show is scheduled for tonight in the marquee (pronounced marquee), a British term for the large, open-sided tent where we eat our meals. Afterward, it's up to the schoolhouse for a fiesta for Estella, our Peruvian cook. It's her birthday. I stick around long enough to hoist an honorary glass of chicha, then go next door to a low building off the schoolhouse where some of the campesinos are making a moldboard for one of their single-blade, horse-drawn plows.

Juan is here, a tall man who smiles broadly and often; Claudio, a stocky, older man with large, round eyes; the barrel-chested, square-faced Don Hustus, a man of respect in the Valley; and Nieves. Nieves had polio as a child, and now walks with a severe limp. He's working the bellows of the forge. Don Hustus holds the steel in the fire with a pair of heavy tongs, and Juan is sitting on a pile of wood, waiting for the steel to come out.

When it does, glowing red, Don Hustus places it on a piece of railroad track about 18 inches long, then Juan takes a sledgehammer and pounds on it. The tip flattens out, slowly fanning into a fish-tailed blade. The moldboard they're fashioning was taken from the undercarriage of an old truck, a trailing arm, I think. The truck piece, Claudio says, drinking Cusichaca moonshine and doing little more than supervising, is strong metal. It's going to make a smooth furrow, he says, and cut the ground deep.

The forge fire is the only light in the small, low-roofed adobe house cluttered with large chunks of firewood and broken plow handles. The heat and light are fierce around the forge, soft and dim to the corners. All the men are drunk, which is not unusual. Drinking is a part of their lives, like coffee to Americans. Work, drink, work—these dark-skinned men, determined at their task in the Peruvian Andes, not that much different than they were centuries ago. I've never seen one of them not get up at dawn. They seem to have no doubt, no contemplation of elsewhere. This is their land, and they work it using the tools they make with knowledge solemnly passed along by firelight and libations.

The men work at a quick but measured pace, an art form, which Don Hustus is in the process of teaching to Juan. Nieves already knows how to forge steel. All of them work seamlessly together, know without knowing. There is no hesitation in their thick forearms and steady faces. I'm pretty sure there are no gods in that trailing arm, and I'm pretty sure they know this, also. Nevertheless, their actions seem sacred. There is no distance between toil and intent—labor that will produce the plow that will till the soil that will grow the crops that will fill their stomachs that will let them live another day to make another moldboard. Each swing of the hammer has meaning. It is centered. It is *attached*, as surely as any gesture can be attached, culturally or historically, to a place, as deeply as a *retama* bush's roots to the soil. If I didn't know better, I'd be envious.

But I do know better. At least know, it's too late for me. There have been too many books read, too many "answers" offered, too many questions asked to fully participate in such contiguous agency. Too much thinking and too many cliffs. It's not ignorance that roots these men to their hearth, it's contentment.

*

The traditional leaving of myth usually means departing from home, the place of one's birth, and moving from comfort into disquiet, from the known into the far-off strange.

The far-off strange was this place, Cusichaca. Now it has become the known, and my impending departure feels like moving into the unknown, though I know it very well. I have a warm bed and a woman and the approbation of marriage waiting for me in La Maná, Ecuador, where my wife is in the Peace Corps. I can hear the call—to the emotionally close, the safe, the secure, but which also feels like the far-off strange.

I sit at a table under the marquise and smoke a cigarette. I listen to the idle chatter of after-dig conversations, look at the familiar faces, breathe the thin, Andean air, and feel...in place. That small, Ecuadorean town is my hearth and home, even though it's 3,000 miles from where I was born. It's where I'm supposed to return in a couple of days. And suddenly I don't

know how I'm going to get there.

*

On my last shift on the Tableland five local kids are doing their own archeology in the garbage pit, digging through the debris we'll leave behind, looking for anything that's useful—an empty coffee tin, any jar with a lid, a plastic bag—as much of our garbage is to them. One of them finds an unopened tin of sardines. They get very agitated, and the boy who found it has to defend it from the others.

Later, they wander over to where I'm watching them from the La-Z-Boy and ask for *dulces*, sweets, or sweet biscuits. This is the last day the Project is going to be up here, so the food situation is lean. I can't give them anything, not even water. I only have enough sterile water for supper and breakfast coffee. The oldest boy suggests I go up to the canal and get some more, which he can just as easily do, as it's only a hundred meters away and up a few terraces. But if I do this, they'll rob me blind. I've been warned. Everyone's looking for a handout before we leave, everyone's on the take. Finally the boys depart, cursing me in Spanish and calling me *gringo*.

*

No one talks during the short walk to the Km 88 train station. Some people are silently weeping as we plod along the tracks for the last time. Waiting for the train, a gloomy pall hangs over everyone as they sit quietly on their rucksacks, their faces already beginning to wear the memories that will one day be filled with either fondness or haunt. Most of us will be staying at the Empirio Hotel in Cuzco tonight, and later there'll be a big piss-up at the Abraxas bar. The dig's gear came in today on the cargo train, and we spent all day off-loading it onto a rented, open-back truck. It took three trips to get everything to the Deposito, where it will stay in storage until next year.

To get to the Deposito we take the back streets through Cuzco, away

away from the tourist traps and through the alleys of indigenous poverty. The first trip goes well, and the half-dozen of us sitting atop the huge mound of tents and tables and boxes are only a curiosity to the Peruvians looking up at us from the street. But on the second trip, as we slowly inch our way through a long, crowded street of vegetable stalls, someone throws a carrot at us. Then a potato. Then more potatoes, which hurt. I get hit in the stomach with a tomato, which makes a large, exploded stain of red juice on my shirt.

If we were on the street, this wouldn't happen. We, white people, Westerners, gringos, are the bread and butter of the tourist economy. The *Guardia Civil* would sweep in and mercilessly "disappear" anyone caught harming a white person on the street. Everyone knows the rules. The government can't afford bad publicity. But on the back streets riding in a rickety truck atop a pile of forty-year-old canvas tents, we're prize targets at the carnival. We're fair game. We walk among them like gods with our money and arrogance and indifference, and the locals can't do anything about it. They know their government kisses the asses of the American and British governments, while they get little in return except orders to toady up. Their stalls might as well be stacked to the tops of their tattered awnings with resentment instead of vegetables.

On the last trip the epithets fly. *iGringo! iNorteamericano!* Then the vegetables. It's a massacre, pelted like tumbled prisoners in the streets of Paris. It feels like a Peruvian version of being tarred and feathered before being sent into exile. The best we can do is pick up whatever lands in the truck and throw it back. We don't have a chance, and when we arrive at the Deposito for the last time we're covered with stains and bruises and defeat.

*

At bottom, the psyche is simply world," Jung said. Biology, carbon, ashes and dust sifting up through layers of intelligence, inference systems, and limbic networks, bubbling up like inverse archaeology into the cathedral of the mind to create the allegorical, the metaphorical, the supernatural

interpretations of the world, all in a desperate attempt to make sense. They're meaningless compared to the grief-stricken faces I see at Abraxas.

All night our eyes meet across a hazy, dimly lit bar in Peru—the love and the sorrow, the fleeting joy and the votive sight scorched with humanity. Perhaps not yet consciously, we sense this is the end of a minor Age, our grief the cataclysm that ushers us into the next cycle of our lives. Mythological rationale, also meaningless. In each glance the distance shrinks to inches. The time I've spent with these strangers I know so well, my comrades, compresses to seconds. The memories are already moving forward, chromed by fondness or haunt, forever stitched through with Cusichaca.

At the end of the night the innumerable oaths to write letters, the exchange of addresses, the sincere promises to meet again that will never be kept. Then home.

A BEN MANIFESTAR LE COSE NUOVE

**JOEL
STREET**

The old pope sits on a green upholstered chair
that had been the family heirloom of a friend
and now it's in the end, narrow and crowded,
of the sitting room of his retirement suite.

He finishes the paper. If it's Wednesday then
works alone might do the saving trick.
"Check your Augustine," he thinks, "before you steer
the ship of faith." And as he leans to sleep

the cushion slips from the green upholstered chair
and the white cassock gets tangled, and he dreams
of a monumental ziggurat: even in Akkad
they say there ought to be an Albert Speer.

Who says that? They do. It bustles here
like in no Bavarian market town,
like no papal piazza that he's lived above.
He holds the calling card of someone he was told

to meet, but can't find time for that amid
his slow ascent: the body's a body, even here.
Alone on top he watches the everycolor smoke
like bubbles in a garden on a summer day.

FOUR HOUSES DOWN

**REBECCA
TURKEWITZ**

We'd been living in the house on Black Brook Road for two months when I heard the wailing coming from down the street. It was storming that night, as it did all that August, and the cries had to rise above the noise from the wind and the angry trees and the rain. The wails came every minute or so, each one a sob that would break open into a scream. The sound was so wild that when the first cry woke me I was sure I was imagining it.

I was twelve, starting the sixth grade in a few weeks, and I liked to think of myself as tough. I never cried, I wore boys' jeans, and I practiced defiant stares in the mirror when I got out of the shower. But the noise that cut through that windswept night filled my mouth with a sour taste and made my heart thump loud in my chest. I rolled onto my back and listened, watching the shadows that the shuddering tree branches threw onto my walls. I heard Katrina's footsteps flap across the hallway and she slipped into my room.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered when she saw me awake. She kneeled near the edge of my bed, her long hair mussed from sleep. She was fifteen, and trying to look out for me. "What do you think it is? Wolves?"

"There aren't any wolves here," I said, sitting up. We had moved two towns over from our last house, less than ten miles, but our new street was flanked with deep woods and it felt isolated, belonging to a different type of New England town. "It's a woman, definitely."

"That's even worse," Katrina said. "I've never heard anything like it."

I got out of bed and rested my forehead against the window. The houses were smaller than the ones in our old neighborhood and spread further apart. The street was slick with water and the lamplight jumped across

the pavement as the rain fell. There was a light on in Miss Browning's, four houses down on the other side of the street. Another wail came, and my head bumped the glass. Katrina squealed, but softly enough that our father wouldn't hear that we were awake and come check on us. He had taken to sleeping with the television on; I could hear the drone of voices through the wall. "It's Miss Browning," I said. "The lady with the cats."

"What do you think is wrong with her?" Katrina asked. "Someone should help."

I glanced over my shoulder and rolled my eyes. "Are you volunteering?" I wondered if other people on the street were pushed up against their own dark windows. Although my family was still mostly on the outside of it, the neighborhood was tightknit. It pulsed, breathed like one being. It was the kind of place where the kids played hockey in the street, built forts in each other's yards, and slept over at one another's houses. Whatever was happening at Miss Browning's would become a part of the street's undercurrent of gossip. I knew if I asked around I could solve the mystery.

"She's crazy," Katrina said. "That's what Alex and his brothers said about her, anyway."

"Alex is always making stuff up," I said. But our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Haycock, had also warned me about Miss Browning. She told me to stay out of Miss Browning's yard and not to pet the cats that lived there, because Miss Browning was a "private" person. There was an army of cats that lived in the woods behind Miss Browning's yard. Most of them were all white, with one blue eye and one yellow eye. They had shriveled ears and long, mean faces.

The wailing slowed and eventually stopped. I climbed back into bed. Trina scooted in next to me, pulling the covers up to our chins.

"This place is too weird," she said. "I wish we were home."

I shrugged. "What's the difference? We barely moved."

"Emma." Trina flopped onto her side to face me. "You can't be serious."

"There's nothing wrong with this house." I said. "And, as an added

bonus, it seems like we live down the street from a werewolf.”

Katrina laughed. “I don’t buy your new tough guy act. There’s no way you’re happy about having to go to a different school. You must miss Mansfield.”

“I don’t really care one way or the other.”

“You little liar.”

“You don’t know how I feel.”

“Jeez, relax. I’m just teasing. And I miss home.”

“You just don’t want to be away from Brian,” I said. Katrina was in the process of mourning, publicly and loudly, the loss of her most recent love interest, a floppy-haired, skate-boarder named Brian. Brian had found the prospect of their long distance relationship too challenging.

“So what if I miss him?” Katrina rested her head against my shoulder. “One day you’ll understand,” she said, as if she were wise and world-weary for pining over a boy who had once said that he thought dinosaurs were mythical creatures, like unicorns.

After a few minutes, Katrina got out of bed. She surprised me by kissing me on the forehead, and I snapped my head back. “Are you going to be okay alone tonight?” she asked.

“Knock it off, Trina. I’m going to be fine.”

But after she left I couldn’t fall back asleep. I couldn’t stop thinking about Miss Browning’s wailing: the wildness of her sobs, the unapologetic way that she had forced her suffering outwards onto the night. When I finally slept, I dreamt of her odd-eyed cats, spitting and yowling in the tree outside my window.

*

I woke early the next morning and got out of bed right away. My father was surprised to see me downstairs, as he got ready for work. I asked him if he’d heard anything last night, and he said that he hadn’t.

“Why, what’d you hear?” he asked.

“Nothing—just that the storm was loud.”

“Was it bothering you? You can tell me if you’re having trouble

sleeping." His concern embarrassed me. He was always trying to catch me at odd points in our conversations, trying to get me to admit to emotions I wasn't feeling.

"No, I like storms."

"All right," he said. "But the rain's cleared up today. You should spend some time outside. Maybe actually talk to the other kids. If the Wilson boys are playing basketball, you should join them." He picked up his bag and headed toward the door, stopping with one foot in the house and one foot out. "And don't go easy on them, either. Take them for all they're worth."

Since we'd moved to New Coventry, I'd spent most of my days reading or playing basketball in the driveway by myself. I'd also been exploring the woods on the other side of the street. I had been using sticks and old boards to build a small clubhouse, and occasionally I'd find strange treasures to collect—sea glass, marbles, an action figure of some off-brand hero, a toy mouse, a plastic ring. I didn't spend much time with the other kids on the street, and this bothered my father, who'd chosen the house partially because he liked the way everyone in the neighborhood got along. The other kids seemed fine, but in a boring, small-town way.

My dad was worried about me being lonely. A year and a half earlier my mother had died in a car accident, swerving on an icy highway to avoid a crashed motorcycle. She was in the hospital for two days, but she never woke up. I had spent my time since then steering my thoughts away from her absence, trying to outrun the wave of sadness that trailed behind me. I had been keeping my head down, coping by focusing on putting one foot in front of the other. That summer I was just starting to resurface, finding that I didn't have to be so protective of my thoughts, that they wouldn't wander quite so quickly to darker places during moments of stillness. I felt like I was climbing out of a murky body of water and the world was taking on crisp outlines that I hadn't even realized were missing. It was a bad time to come to my senses and reenter the world—the last few weeks of summer were sunless and dank. It stormed during the nights and a slow drizzle fell almost every day. The drizzle wasn't enough to drive me inside, so it was a summer of soggy socks, squeaking shoes, and toes that blistered and swelled.

I was emerging from my grief into a new feeling of invincible boredom. I was cultivating a new persona: defiant, brave, untouchable. The world had done the unthinkable to me. What other threat could it possibly pose? The new school, the new town, the new drafty house that my father spent his evenings and weekends repairing—they were all just changes in scenery. But Miss Browning was something to fix my thoughts on. I wanted to know more about her. She was a strange-looking woman, but she had a shadow of prettiness about her, like a beautiful building in decay. She was tall and slim, her face angled and sharp. She had silver-blond hair that she wore in a long braid. It was hard to guess her age, but I would've put her around sixty or seventy. I had heard that Miss Browning kept her house full of junk, and her backyard was full of odd refuse: an old washing machine, wheelbarrows, bags of soil even though she didn't garden, dozens of birdhouses. The kids in the neighborhood said Miss Browning performed weird rituals in the shed behind her house, which was why the door to the shed was always padlocked.

Before Katrina woke up, I slipped out to the woods and looped around to Miss Browning's property. When I neared the shed in the back of her yard, I thought I heard something moving inside. I put my ear against the shingled siding. There was definitely someone in there. It sounded like someone was dragging something heavy, or scraping something away. The shed had no windows, and even if Miss Browning had walked out she wouldn't see me unless she circled around to the back. I slid to my knees and cupped my hand over my ear so that I could hear better. After a minute I heard feet sloshing through the grass and I leapt to my feet, ready to spring towards the woods.

"What the hell are you doing?" Katrina hissed, her face splotchy with red. She was in her pajamas, and without her make-up she looked years younger, like an old picture of herself. She dragged me towards the woods instead of angling back across the lawn.

"We don't have to hide," I said. "I wasn't doing anything wrong."

"Like hell you weren't. And that woman is nuts." Katrina yanked me down the path until we were obscured by the trees.

"Calm down. I was just curious."

"Hoarders are mentally ill," Katrina said. "Not crazy in some fun, exciting way. She is clearly unbalanced."

Miss Browning had never seemed sinister to me, only odd. I liked the pale blue of her eyes and I liked that she kept to herself. Once, I had run into her on the path in the woods and she had given me an elegant half-smile that seemed genuine and kind, lacking the put-on cheerfulness that adults reserve for their interactions with children. One of the white cats had been following close at her heels.

Katrina dragged me home and made me promise that I wouldn't go back over to Miss Browning's, warned me to mind my own stupid business or she'd tell Dad what I was doing, and stormed upstairs to shower. I just barely stopped myself from shouting up to her that she wasn't my mother.

*

Over the next few days I pieced together more of Miss Browning's story, mining information from the Wilson boys and Mrs. Haycock, who had lived in the neighborhood for forty years and whose own kids were grown and gone. She babysat for the younger kids on the street and had her hand in everyone's business. Although Trina and I insisted we were way too old for babysitters, she made dinner for us every Thursday, when my dad taught his evening seminar. At dinner, I learned that Miss Browning had grown up in the same house that she now lived in. She had inherited it from her parents. As a child, she had been a talented ice skater, even performing nationally. She had been competitive, popular and smart. But as she grew older she became witchy and weird, not liking to leave the house very often, spending all of her time painting and writing in journals. She had worked, for a time, at the veterinary clinic at the university, helping a professor who was a friend of her father's. She had never gone to college, never married. But then, late in her life she had met Mr. Wallace, a sociable man who owned a deli in town and had been a selectman. He moved in with Miss Browning after his retirement. Mr. Wallace had already been married once and had two grown children. No one understood this new match, but the couple had been inseparable until Mr. Wallace died, five years earlier.

From Alex Wilson and his brothers, I learned that the wailing

happened once a year, on the anniversary of Mr. Wallace's death, August 13th. Every year the boys would wait up, huddled in Alex's bedroom under a fort of blankets. They told a similar story to the one that Katrina had recounted—about the hoarding and Miss Browning's mean streak. They said they suspected that she had poisoned Mr. Wallace after he threatened to leave her. And some people thought Miss Browning had bewitched Mr. Wallace, tricked him into loving her and accepting her crazy ways. Laura and Sam Hastings, twins who lived on the other side of Miss Browning's house, swore that one time they saw Miss Browning leaving the woods, stooped over, carrying a heavy sack stained with blood. Whatever was in the sack was about the size of a large dog, Laura had told me during a game of flashlight tag that the Wilsons had organized.

But the story the other kids told with the most reverence was that Miss Browning was keeping the embalmed body of Mr. Wallace in the shed behind her house. They said Miss Browning had an uncle who worked at a funeral home in Willington, and he had embalmed the body in a special way, restoring Mr. Wallace so he looked even better than he had at the end of his life. Since they had never officially married, Mr. Wallace would have been buried next to his first wife, which Miss Browning couldn't allow. So she and her uncle brought the body back to the shed, where Mr. Wallace could stay with her forever. She was, after all, a woman who kept things for too long, who accumulated objects past the point of reason. And once, when the door to the shed was slightly ajar, someone—one of the older neighborhood kids who had already gone off to college—had caught a glimpse of what looked like the figure of a man slumped in an old rocking chair.

The other kids in the neighborhood were happy to feed my interest in the mythology surrounding the old woman, even though I had kept to myself for so long. Katrina was interested in the stories, too, but mostly because they gave her a reason to talk to Alex, who was beginning to take her mind off of Brian. I watched the way she blushed when Alex teased her and the way she puffed up with pleasure whenever he paid her some compliment. I wondered how she could do so little, in the wake of her recent heartbreak, to protect herself from this new threat.

I hoped that her crush on Alex would at least make her less homesick

and bring some peace between her and my father, who had been at each other's throats since the move. Katrina resented Dad's decision to uproot us and his refusal to listen to her side of things. She didn't want a clean slate, the way my father and I did. Her room was plastered with photographs from our old life. Above her bed she'd hung a large photograph of her and my mother holding hands in front of our old house in Mansfield. Katrina is probably five in the photo, and she's staring up at our mother with a big, guilty grin, as if she's done something terrible that she is immensely proud of. Aside from Katrina's room, the only other photograph of our mother on display was a framed picture of our family in front of Niagara Falls, which hung above the bureau in my room. Katrina had insisted that I put it up when we were unpacking. My father didn't talk about all the photographs of our family that had been boxed up for the move and then never unpacked, and we knew better than to ask about them.

*

One afternoon, maybe two weeks after the wailing, we were drawn inside the Wilsons' house by a bad spell of rain. The gang was feeling antsy and cooped up, and when conversation turned to Miss Browning and the corpse again, Sam Hastings finally lost his patience with me.

"If you're going to keep talking about it, you need to actually do something," he said.

Katrina tried to get him to shut up, but it sounded enough like a dare that I was hooked. He wanted me to break into the shed that night and report back on what was really in there—if it was haunted by Mr. Wallace's ghost or contained his embalmed body.

"Or both," Mark, the youngest Wilson, said.

I asked how I'd get around the padlock. He said there had to be a way to break in—the metal clasps were probably easy to pry off the doorframe. He could even lend me some of his father's tools. There were grumblings from a few kids—ones who thought I didn't understand how real or big the risk was. But there was no way I was going to back down and lose face

in front of the group. And I thought I would finally get a satisfying answer, something that might placate my obsession.

On the way back to our house, Katrina asked me if I was serious about breaking into the shed. It was illegal and senseless, as far as she was concerned. She said I was just being reckless.

It was the wrong thing for her to say. I loved the idea of being reckless, of being the type of girl who didn't care what happened to her.

"If you insist on being such an idiot, then I'm coming with you," Katrina said. "If anything happens to you, Dad'll kill me, so either way I'm dead."

Knowing Katrina would be with me pushed away any doubts I had. For the first time in a long while, I was excited about something. I was rediscovering how good anticipation felt.

*

That night I waited for my dad to drift to sleep, my ear pressed against the wall. I had stashed a bag with a flashlight, a screwdriver, and a hammer underneath my bed. The rain fell in steady pellets outside. The air in my room was heavy and damp. I couldn't wait to get out into the freedom of the night.

When I went to fetch Katrina she was already awake and dressed, chewing on her cuticles. "In and out," she said, her knee bouncing. "We'll take one look inside that shed and then we'll come straight home." I nodded.

We listened for signs of wakefulness from our father's room, but only heard the television. "It's a good thing he sleeps with the TV on now," I said.

"He does it because he can't stand to be alone with his thoughts for even a second," Katrina said, her voice tight with anger I didn't understand. "He doesn't want to think about Mom. Which is why we moved, you know."

"I know."

"You do?" Katrina asked, sounding both impressed and troubled.

"I mean, obviously."

"Well, it's messed up. It's not normal. He can't just pretend she never existed, like we can erase her or something."

"That's not what he's doing at all," I said, because I needed to defend

our father and I didn't have the words to defend his choice. But even back then I knew Katrina was right. We were trying to mask my mother's absence with more absence, widening the hole she'd left in our lives until we couldn't see the edges of it, until it was so big that it wasn't recognizable as a hole.

Katrina looked at me as if she felt sorry for me. I said, "Let's go," and we tiptoed down the hallway, not putting on our clunky boots until we were out on the porch. Once we were outside I could breathe again. I wanted to run all the way to Miss Browning's. I felt none of the dread that showed on Trina's face.

"Thanks for coming with me," I said as we walked.

"You're going to owe me for this forever."

"I know."

"You don't actually think there might be a body in the shed, do you?"

"No." I was disappointed at having to acknowledge this, but I still felt that the adventure would be worth it and something important would be revealed to me.

When we got to the shed, Katrina stood on lookout, watching the rear-facing windows of Miss Browning's house. I saw what Sam had meant about the padlock; the metal loops that the padlock circled through were rusted, as were the nails that held it to the wood of the doorframe. Using the screwdriver, working the edge in slowly, I was able to tear one of the plates free.

"How will we put it back?" Katrina whispered. "She'll know."

"We can hammer it in," I said, knowing we wouldn't. I laid my hand on the doorknob, the skin on my arm prickling underneath the heavy fabric of my raincoat. I pushed my wet hair out of my face and Katrina gripped the back of my coat. I pulled the door open a crack, and shined the flashlight beam into the shed.

"What do you see?"

There was so much junk filing the shed that it took me a moment to fixate on anything specifically. The shed was crowded with smooth slabs of wood, which had landscapes painted on them—vivid scenes of forests and beaches and snow-covered fields. On high workbenches there were also

birdhouses, painted like miniature post offices and churches and police stations. There were small wooden statuettes of cats and people. In one corner there were dozens of hand-painted dolls with rosy cheeks and bright blue eyes.

"It's amazing," I said, and I could feel Katrina's grip relax. I moved so that she could peer in, shining the flashlight for her so she could take in the wonder of it. "They're not bad."

"They're beautiful," she said, laughing. "They're actually really beautiful."

I wanted to respond, but couldn't. I was oddly moved, impressed by the complexity of this woman's life, which we had assumed had been so empty. If the shed had been better lit, it would have looked like the interior of an antique store or the window display of a toyshop around Christmas. I wished I had brought a camera.

Katrina took a sharp breath and grabbed my arm. The flashlight beam jerked to the floor, throwing the room into darkness. Katrina tried to pull me away from the door, but I wouldn't budge.

"What?" I demanded.

"Don't look." Katrina pulled frantically at the back of my jacket, yanking so hard that I needed to grip the doorframe to keep my balance. "Come on, Em," she whined. "We have to go."

I scanned the flashlight over the room, trying to hold the beam steady against Katrina's hysteria. When the light swept all the way to the wall I was standing against, I saw what had frightened Katrina and I swallowed a scream. It had been too close for us to notice immediately, just an arm's length away. I pulled the door open wider and took a step into the room, Katrina still gripping my jacket in a tight fist. Against the wall, immediately to our right, the figure of a man sat stiff and upright in an old armchair. He had salt-and-pepper hair and an uneven smile. His hands rested, palms up, in his lap.

"It's a doll," I said. "It's just a doll." But we both knew that it was different than the other dolls. It was bigger, carved more carefully, painted less gaudily. And it was too ugly and too flawed to be a typical doll. Although neither of us had ever seen Mr. Wallace, we knew that this was him. It was a

doll made to look just as he had looked in his last years in Miss Browning's house, after age had carved its imperfections into his features. The surface of his skin wasn't sanded smooth; it was carved to look crumpled and loose. The spaces under his eyes were sunken, painted a lavender-blue and finely pockmarked. His nose was too large for his face, and the tip of it was slightly bulbous. His upturned palms were wrinkled and painted a jaundiced shade of yellow. The fingers seemed poised to snap shut on anything that landed in their reach. His smile was what unnerved me the most. His expression was almost mischievous, and I thought maybe the wickedness was an invitation, alluding to a secret shared with a lover. But the expression was also unreadable, private and turned in on itself. I couldn't tell how much of this effect was intentional, but Miss Browning seemed like a skilled and dedicated artist. She had been trying to capture a specific look of his, I was sure. One that she had loved, or maybe one that had always troubled her.

I thought of the months, or even years, that Miss Browning must have spent carving and painting this intricate statue—all the time focused on recreating the man she would never get back in the flesh.

Katrina had relaxed next to me. She was examining Mr. Wallace as intently as I was. To my surprise, she looked calm. "It's amazing," she said. She reached out for the statue and I snatched her hand away.

"Don't touch him," I hissed.

I don't know how long we stood there after that, studying the mystery of this man caught between the living and the dead, trying to read his inscrutable expression. Outside the shed the rain picked up and tapped at the roof, like fingers drumming impatiently.

"She must have loved him so much," Katrina said.

"It's crazy. She's completely insane." My stomach felt knotted, as if someone had taken a fistful of my insides and squeezed. "Let's get out of here." I kept my eyes on Mr. Wallace as I shoved Katrina towards the doorway. I imagined the statue blinking to life, its textured hair turning soft and rippling in the wind.

After we left the shed I stopped and picked up the rusted lock. "Leave it," Katrina said, but I was already hammering clumsily. She hushed me, but

I was determined to nail the shed door shut. The hammer slipped against the wet metal and caught the side of my finger. I cried out more loudly than I should have.

We turned towards Miss Browning's house and then took off running, not caring that the mud was climbing up the legs of our jeans and we were leaving big, messy footprints in Miss Browning's lawn. When we reached the street we kept running, our boots making sucking sounds against the wet pavement. We shucked off our boots on the porch and I bolted the front door once we were inside, even though I knew a lock would not keep out whatever it was I didn't want following me home.

Katrina went into the bathroom to change and wash up while I went into my room. I stood next to my bureau, unsure of what to do next. The image of the doll was burned into my memory and I was shaking. My thoughts tumbled over each other until I couldn't keep them straight. I felt as if I was on the verge of remembering something I had long since forgotten, something I would keep on remembering and then forgetting for the rest of my life.

My mother was a professor of biology. One evening a few months before her accident, she had been driving me home from a friend's house when she pulled the car over and pointed out my window at a large Victorian house. A strange swarm of dark, writhing shapes was billowing out of the attic window. "A colony of bats," my mother explained, leaning so close to me that I could smell the sour-sweet of her breath. It looked like the house was breathing black fire. Soon, the bats scattered and were gone. "The world is a weird place," my mother had said. "A pretty wonderfully weird place." And we sat in the car for a while longer, not speaking, with the gray dusk closing in around us.

I would live the rest of my life without her. I had loved her, and now I could never have her back. How could you face the fact of that head on? How could you spend months locked in a shed with it, build a monument to it? And why would you want to live inside of your memories—be enveloped by the false promise of their warmth?

I reached for the photograph of our family on the wall and I ripped the cardboard backing out of the frame. I yanked out the picture and I tore it into

long thin strips. I let them flutter to the ground and then I got into bed, turned out the light, and pulled the covers over my face. Even though I knew that Katrina would come into my room, when the door opened I jumped.

"It's just me," Katrina said, her eyes wide in the dark of my room. "Are you all right?"

"I'm freaked out," I said.

"I know," Katrina said, sliding beside me. We fell silent, comforted by the familiar way the bed held each other's weight. We listened to the steady static of rain on the windows, the tremors of wet leaves in the wind, the rhythm of our sleeping neighborhood. Katrina rolled onto her side, facing away from me, and I curled up against her. The storm had left a muddy smell on our bodies, and I breathed in her scent: wild, salty, familiar. I pressed my face into the soft hair at the nape of her neck, sensing that there was something fragile in the moment, and that the closeness I was feeling towards her wasn't permanent, but would come and go throughout our lives without explanation.

Long after I thought Katrina had drifted to sleep, she spoke. "We can't tell anyone about Mr. Wallace. Okay?"

And we didn't. We told the other kids that the shed had been filled with boring knickknacks. We made up details about broken lamps and poorly constructed birdhouses. The other kids lost interest in our story, and we could see the extreme disappointment in their faces. And we were fine with that, knowing that we owed Miss Browning the right to her private incarnation of grief, aware of how glad we were that no one could pry into our own minds and unearth our own secrets to judge them against the impossible standard of normalcy.

Later that night, when the thunder that had been threatening finally came and shook the windowpanes, Katrina and I woke next to each other and held hands, and I did not hide the fact that I was afraid. I remembered that I had torn the photograph, and with a desire so fierce it felt like being set on fire, I wanted the picture put back into one piece. I understood, then, that even with all that I had lost, I was not done losing. I understood that I was not done acquiring things worthy of being lost. I closed my eyes and I listened to the storm rage.

OF SMALL ACCOUNT

**ROSS
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I told her not to, but Heidi 3-D printed a little boy. He came out thin with oily blonde hair and a dirty face. He looked to be maybe five or six, and he wanted nothing but to have a father. In fact, he wouldn't stop crying until he got one.

"You see? I knew this wasn't a good idea," I said.

I mostly meant that we couldn't afford to have a kid, not if we hoped to pay off the house. After all, Heidi and I worked at Soy-In-And-Out, a bottom-rung meatless fast-food joint.

Heidi said, "I can fix this."

She 3-D printed the boy a really good father. This guy was tall and handsome and slicked his hair back and wore an English-cut tailored suit. He had a big house in a nice neighborhood. Sure, this father worked a lot, but he came home every night, unlike some fathers. At any rate, he could afford to pay for the boy's college.

"I don't want this daddy!" the boy yelled. "I want *this* daddy!"

The boy latched onto my leg. I looked at Heidi. She was smiling. She walked up to us, and we group-hugged.

In this way, we became a family.

*

We named the boy Adam, after the first who was also, in a way, 3-D printed.

The day before Adam's first day of kindergarten, we took him to the store to buy clothes and school supplies. Heidi pushed the plastic cart, and

Adam and I walked along either side of her. If you didn't know any better, you'd think Heidi and I 3-D printed our little Adam the old-fashioned way, if you know what I mean.

"My god," said Heidi, examining a spiral notebook, "they want *three dollars* for one of these?"

I showed her the school-supply list from our local paper.

"It says we're supposed to get him *three* notebooks," I said.

"This stuff is all so expensive," Heidi said, glancing at the pencils, the scissors, and the folders.

I grabbed one of the cheap, ten-cent folders and put it in the cart.

"I want *this* folder!" Adam said.

He held up the most expensive one there was, a shiny, Optimus Prime folder that cost sixty cents.

I wasn't all that serious, but I kind of was, when I said to Heidi, "You know, we can just 3-D print all this stuff."

"That's a *great* idea."

We abandoned the cart on the spot, which only contained off-brand glue, off-brand crayons, and the generic folder. Adam threw a fit, bemoaning our denial of Optimus Prime.

"It's not fair!" he screamed.

Heidi and I glanced around at the parental onlookers, judging us cruel and unfit parents, no doubt. Certainly the other children present felt fortunate not to have to go home with us, empty-handed as Adam was.

He started bawling.

I grabbed his hand and drug him out of the store. I remember thinking in that moment that for a 3-D printed kid, Adam was a lot like all the other greedy, non-3-D-printed kids I'd ever known.

*

When we got home, we 3-D printed Adam all his clothes and school supplies, including a passably semblant knockoff of the Optimus Prime folder. When we tucked him into bed that night, Adam was satisfied and eager to start school.

Again, I wasn't all that serious, but I kind of was, thinking about

money and all, when I said in bed later that night, "You know, school is so expensive."

"I *know*," Heidi said. "Just think about all the lunch money he's going to need."

"That, and stuff like band."

"And sports."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Heidi and I jumped out of bed and dashed down to the 3-D printer, which we kept locked in a basement room, hidden from Adam. We hauled it out to the backyard and spent the rest of the night 3-D printing a small building, which would serve as his elementary school. We 3-D printed teachers, other six-year-olds, textbooks, even a pudgy bully with a too-tight striped shirt and a cowlick.

The next morning, after Adam had his breakfast, we waved goodbye to him. He walked out the backdoor, across the backyard, and into the little 3-D printed school, which we named Washington Elementary – the least-suspicious-sounding name we could think of.

Heidi and I held each other in the kitchen and pretended like it was real, like we were watching our real son attend his first real day of school.

"We're *such* good parents," Heidi said.

I pulled her tight and kissed her, but only briefly. We had on our Soy-In-And-Out black slacks and polo shirts, and we had to be to work in fifteen minutes.

*

Over the next few years, we 3-D printed Adam new 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teachers: Mrs. Dobbs, Mr. Levinson, and Miss Topf, respectively. When he joined the 3-D-printed little league baseball team in 4th grade, we 3-D printed all his opponents using substandard materials so that Adam would always win.

We really wanted to get Adam some real stuff – a real trumpet, say, or a real wooden bat, or a real human friend – but each month, when the mortgage payment came due, it was easier to just keep on 3-D printing our son all

his needs. Plus, Heidi got promoted to Manager at Soy-In-And-Out, which meant that, in addition to getting to wear the gold Manager Sport jacket over her black polo, she also got a raise. We started setting money aside for retirement. If you didn't know any better, which no one did because we didn't have any friends, you'd have thought we were actually successful.

In 5th grade, when Adam became interested in Eves, we 3-D printed him one of those, too.

The first Eve had auburn hair and freckles. She looked like the mascot of a long-defunct meat-centric fast food chain. Overall, I'd say she was a success. She gave our Adam his first hand-holding experience, which took place one day at the lunch table. We made her ask him to the 3-D printed school dance we held that fall, and we made Adam say yes. To this end, she provided Adam his first slow-dance experience, during which Heidi, as the parental chaperone, made sure Adam's hands stayed on Eve's hips and Eve's hands stayed on Adam's shoulders.

That summer, as he became more serious about baseball (he was a good shortstop), Adam broke up with the first Eve. He told her, "I just really need to focus on fielding grounders right now."

But by the next fall, he seemed ready, or at least Heidi and I were ready, for another Eve. To save a bit of money, we recycled some parts of the old Eve, and, this time, 3-D printed a tall brunette one. She was athletic and played softball. We figured shared interest might keep Adam from getting bored as quickly.

For a while, it worked. Adam and the brunette Eve played catch together, practiced hitting and pitching. But Adam didn't show any interest in Eve beyond having her as a glorified teammate. Heidi and I spied on them often, and Adam didn't want to flirt with her or hold her hand, despite his other 3-D printed classmates all having boyfriends and girlfriends by that point.

We cornered Eve one night in the backyard while Adam was in his room studying.

"You know the All-School 3-D-Printed Dance is coming up," Heidi told her.

"Yeah," Eve said. "So?"

"So, are you going to ask Adam?"

"Um, probably not," Eve said. "I don't think he'd say yes."

"Why not?" I asked. "He seems to have taken a special liking to you."

Eve shook her head. "I don't think he likes, um, my kind. Not like that."

"What do you mean?"

"*Girls*. I don't think he likes girls."

"Really?" Heidi said.

"Yeah," Eve said. "He's always staring at Josh. You know Josh, the catcher on the team?"

It all became clear to me then.

"We don't need an Eve," I said to Heidi. "What we need is a *Steve*."

*

So, using some of the spare parts of the brunette Eve, we 3-D printed a Steve. We tried our best to make him look vaguely like Josh, who was short and stocky with curly black hair. Sure enough, the second Eve had been right. Adam took an immediate liking to the mysterious new student who showed up the next day at school. Before long, Adam and Steve were spending every waking moment they could together.

Steve would meet Adam at our backdoor and they'd walk the ten paces to school together. By this time, we'd upgraded the elementary school into a junior high – Lincoln Junior High, to be exact – and Adam and Steve would linger between classes at each other's lockers, batting their eyes and flirtatiously running their hands along each other's chests and shoulders.

Through our constant spying and questioning of 3-D printed Lincoln Junior High Students, we soon learned Adam and Steve were an exclusive couple. This made it a bit complicated when, one Thursday night at dinner, Adam asked if Steve, whom he referred to as his "best friend," could stay the night tomorrow.

Like any parents worth their salt, Heidi and I were committed to at once fostering the natural sexual growth of our child while also artificially delaying his first real sexual encounter.

"How good of friends are you and Steve?" I asked.

"I told you. We're *best* friends."

"I think what your dad means to say is, are you and Steve friends with *benefits*?"

"Friends with benefits?" Adam said.

Heidi nodded. "Yeah. Like, you know, benefits."

Adam looked confused. "We learned about fringe benefits in social studies," he said.

"No," I said. "We're not talking about fringe benefits. Although those are good to have, and Soy In-And-Out's could be better. We're talking about *sexual* benefits."

Adam's face turned red. He was a smart kid, and he could tell that we knew.

"So you know," he said.

Heidi smiled warmly and took hold of Adam's hand.

"Of course we know," she said. "Which is why Steve is welcome to stay, but he has to sleep on the couch in the living room."

Adam smiled, and the redness slowly left his face.

"Thanks, Mom and Dad."

I almost said something about unprotected sex leading to pregnancy, but fortunately stopped myself before opening my mouth.

Duh, you know?

*

It all came crashing down because of a stupid oversight on our part: Sex Ed. Heidi and I hadn't even bothered to examine the contents of the Lincoln Junior High curriculum. We just 3-D printed it.

So one day at school, Mr. Jeffrey, the Sex Ed teacher who relayed the events of that day to us later on, taught Adam and his 7th grade classmates all about the process of human reproduction. This was kind of ironic since literally everybody at the school, including Mr. Jeffrey himself, had been 3-D printed and not sexually reproduced.

It became clear to the students something was off about the reproductive process Mr. Jeffrey spoke of, since none of them had actual parents who had had actual sex to produce them.

"Don't we come from a 3-D printer?" said Jessica Kemp.

"Yeah, that's what I always thought," said Benjamin Martinez.

"My earliest memories are of the insides of a machine that took raw materials and made them into limbs and a body and a face," said Darla Friedman.

"Technically, you're right," said Mr. Jeffery. "*We* come from a 3-D printer. But the School Board wanted you to learn how *humans* reproduce."

"Humans? Aren't we human?" said Steve.

Mr. Jeffrey shook his head. "No. We're 3-D objects."

"Who is the School Board?" asked Adam.

"You don't know?" Mr. Jeffrey said. "It's your parents, Guy and Heidi."

At that, Adam came storming all ten paces home, throwing open the backdoor. Heidi and I had gotten home from work shortly before and were preparing supper.

"Adam," Heidi said. "You're home early."

"Guess what we learned about in school today?" he said.

"What's that?"

"Human sexual reproduction."

"Shit," we both said, which gave it away. He knew.

"I want to know the truth," Adam said.

Heidi and I looked at each other, still in our Soy In-And-Out garb. We had no choice. We led Adam down the basement stairs and into the room we kept locked.

I pointed at the 3-D printer. "That's where you come from."

Adam walked up to the 3-D printer and pressed the button. Out came a Steve. He pressed it again, and out came an Eve. He pressed the button again and again, until the room filled with Eves and Steves and friends and clothes and parts of schools.

"My whole life is a lie!" Adam screamed.

He looked at us accusingly. His eyes were moist, his face red.

I nodded.

I don't know what movie Heidi had recently seen, but she said, "Your life may be a lie, Adam, but our love for you is real."

This only made him angry.

"I hate you! Both of you!" Adam yelled. "I'm leaving and never coming

back!"

He grabbed the hand of a nearby Steve – a husky one with olive skin – and together they darted out of the room.

*

We never saw our Adam again. Looking back, it's surprising Adam didn't figure out on his own he was 3-D printed. He was such a smart kid, but I guess even smart kids don't stop to wonder if they were 3-D printed rather than sexually reproduced.

But it's okay. We have a better setup now. Heidi and I ground up all the stuff from the old Adam's life and used it to 3-D print a new Adam. However, this new Adam never becomes truly self-aware because, before he does, he automatically removes his own rib and uses it to 3-D print a new Eve.

Then he dies, and the Eve grows and does the same thing with her rib. Then she dies, leaving us with an automated, low-maintenance cycle of toddler Adams and Eves – which, we learned the hard way, are the best kind.

Now, we actually own our house outright, as well as the Soy-In-And-Out franchise we work at, which is especially profitable nowadays.

If you didn't know any better, which no one does, you'd think our 3-D printed veggie burgers were actual veggie burgers, and that our 3-D printed employees actually got paid, which they don't, and that our whole 3-D printed life is an actual life, which it really isn't, but kind of *is*.

"SO MUCH OF THE NEW YORK I KNEW IS GONE":

AN INTERVIEW WITH

LIBBY CUDMORE

BY

MELANIE J. CORDOVA

Libby Cudmore is an alumna of Binghamton University, where *Harpur Palate* has been published for the last fifteen years. She worked at video stores, bookstores, and temp agencies before settling down in upstate New York to write. Her short stories have appeared in *PANK*, the *Stoneside Collective*, the *Big Click*, and *Big Lucks*. We are grateful that she has taken the time to share her insight on her first novel, *The Big Rewind*, some of which takes place in Binghamton itself. *The Big Rewind*, which has received a starred Kirkus Review, is forthcoming with William Morrow in February 2016.

In *The Big Rewind*, Jett Bennett moved to New York to become a music journalist. What she found was a temp gig as a proofreader, but at least she's fitting in with the artists and musicians in the tragically hip Brooklyn neighborhood she calls home. But when Jett opens up her mail and finds a mix tape meant for her neighbor KitKat, a local queen bee renowned for her "enhanced" baked goods and retro videogame collection, everything changes. Jett drops off the cassette and discovers that it's game over for KitKat: someone bashed her head in with a rolling pin...and left her pot brownies burning in the oven. Kit Kat's boyfriend, Bronco, is MIA. Her sister is so desperate for answers that she asks Jett to snoop around. Then there's that mix tape. Jett didn't know KitKat well, but she knows music, and a tape full of love songs from someone other than Bronco screams motive—sending Jett and her best friend, Sid, on an epic quest through

record stores, strip joints, vegan bakeries, and basement nightclubs to find KitKat's killer, a journey that resonates with Jett, and her past, in unexpected ways.

MJC: Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. The opening chapter of *The Big Rewind* has one of the most intense and exciting images of the entire novel—Jett discovering KitKat's dead body splayed across the floor while pot brownies burn in the oven. From there, we're taken with Jett on an investigative journey filled with tension to find her killer. After starting so dramatically, how did you work to keep that energy moving? What narrative considerations do you make before you begin writing?

LC: The detective novel is all about movement—the detective is constantly asking questions, and each of those questions takes her to the next place, the next question. I gave her little quests—find a tape player, find her high school ex—so that in every chapter she was on the move.

But this wasn't a novel that I planned out, chapter by chapter. I start everything in notebooks, so I wrote the opening scene on the bus on the way home from work. It just came to me while listening to Sid Straw's "CBGBs," and when I had written it out, I thought this is actually a genius idea and I'm going to roll with it. I didn't know who KitKat's killer was when I started. Sid's whole storyline was lifted from a short story that never got published. I rarely plan longer projects much past the first few scenes, so all I knew was that Jett had a mix tape that was going to lead her to find her friend's killer. The rest worked itself out on the page.

MJC: *The Big Rewind* has a connection to a wide variety of locations, especially around New York City. What sort of research do you do about these places to accomplish this successfully? How did you see place expressing itself as you wrote?

LC: I spent a lot of time in New York City as a kid with my grandmother Rivkah, who was the influence for Jett's grandmother. Later, I lived in Brooklyn Heights, right off Montague Street, (just like in Bob Dylan's

"Tangled Up in Blue"). And I still visit frequently, so those were like little research trips so I could get streets and subway lines right.

But so much of the New York I knew is gone. An early draft of the chapter "(Looking for) the Heart of Saturday Night" had Jett and her friends going to Grey's Papaya after the club, but halfway through writing, that location closed. I went back and changed it even though it broke my heart. The club that they're at is modeled after one I used to dance at, Luke & Leroy's, and that's gone too. St. Mark's Place is unrecognizable. Pomme Frites burned to the ground four days after I was there during my bachelorette party weekend. So while New York is often expensive and frustrating to her, I wanted her to have the same sort of romantic wonder about it that I did when I was living there, so I made Barter Street in the spirit of the New York City I remember—fun and strange and bright and wonderful.

MJC: At the outset, Jett introduces us to her New York City neighborhood, where she's been living in her grandmother's rent-controlled apartment. She describes it as "the Barter Street district of Brooklyn, just east of Williamsburg and, judging by how people dressed, slightly beyond Thunderdome," which not only shows Jett's wry sense of humor, but also something significant about the culture in which she's living. Bartering is a mainstay of this community, and Jett uses it to her advantage while sleuthing. What was it about this lifestyle that compelled you to include it in *The Big Rewind*? What role do you see Jett playing there and how did that influence you when developing her character?

LC: I was trying to be as sarcastic about the hipster lifestyle as I could possibly be, and nothing says "I have so much money that I never need to worry about it" than paying for goods and services with whimsy. But the idea grew on me, and I realized that I could use it as a tool for Jett. She's broke, so it's a system she can work to her advantage not just to get information, but to make friends. She's new to this neighborhood and a little shy, but at the end of the book, she's forged these intimate connections with all these different people through Billy Joel records and Blackadder DVDs. In the genre, there's this tendency to introduce a character who can give

the detective information, then we never see them again. Not so in *The Big Rewind*. I wanted to make these people, for all their quirks, to be people she can rely on even after the story ends.

MJC: Music in *The Big Rewind* is, naturally, of primary importance. It shapes everything from the organization of the book to the emotional states of the characters. Mix tapes are messages, memories that unfold as Jett progresses through the book. Her best friend Sid describes their importance:

"I can't even remember the last time someone made me a mix CD, let alone a tape. But when you hear the first song and your heart soars and you know..." He sighed. "It's the best feeling in the whole fucking world."

A mix tape also serves as a clue for Jett as she tries to solve KitKat's murder. Jett's insight into the music industry puts her in a unique position of utilizing that evidence more than the police could. Since it wasn't intended for her, what do you see as solidifying Jett's intense connection to KitKat's mix tape? How did you make the selections for it? In what ways do you envision people who aren't as familiar with musical history engaging with that aspect of the novel?

LC: Jett's own romantic history is wrapped up in music, so she's naturally curious about KitKat's. It's something that she wished they had shared when KitKat was alive, so she feels a certain level of protectiveness around these songs. And then there's this song she can't find anywhere, and we've all had that moment where we hear a fragment of a song and it we desperately try to hold onto it until we can look it up, the notes dissipating with each passing moment. I've discovered some of my favorite songs that way. Jett feels like this song has all the answers she needs, if only she can track it down. It cements that connection between her and KitKat, even if it's something that KitKat never got to hear.

The music is probably the single most personal aspect of this novel. Jett's favorite artist is Warren Zevon, who, coincidentally, is my favorite

artist. Imagine that. I have almost every single song mentioned in the novel in my collection, and a lot of them were on these incredible mixes people made for me over the years. As I was writing, I thought about songs that meant something to me in moments like the ones the characters on the page were feeling, and plugged them in accordingly. There were times where it turned my heart inside out to write, but when the tears were wiped away, I was proud of those paragraphs.

And honestly, if I could include a CD with every copy sold, I would. But barring that, my hope is that people will make their own mixes for this book, that they'll go seek out artists—Tenpole Tudor, The Vapors, The Magnetic Fields—that they hadn't listened to previously. We have access to seemingly every song recorded in the history of music, so there's no excuse to putting down this book and snarking "I don't know who Steely Dan is."

MJC: I love the idea of including a CD with every copy. Readers will have to settle for tracking the songs in the novel, and there are a ton of great ones. Reading the book made me create my own playlist!

Except for the murder-mystery part, Jett's situation is a common one among Millennials particularly—she's a college grad seeking both work and meaningful relationships. In the book, she balances these things like spinning plates. What was the process of expressing that aspect of her life as distinct from her investigating KitKat's murder? How did you decide which plates to add to her hectic life and which to crash?

LC: Solving this case gives Jett purpose, but in order to solve it, she needed to expose herself to the life going on all around her. She had to go outside of her apartment, explore beyond her neighborhood, make friends, face a past she's been running from. The two storylines run parallel, they inform each other. And with this, I ended up removing scenes that I liked, just because they were merely window-dressing. They weren't informing the main story, KitKat's case, so they had to go. I don't like to waste words.

But I didn't want Jett to be perfect, so I had to crash a few of those plates. She doesn't get everything she wants. People are jerks to her. She's a jerk to other people. She screws up and she has to confront real mistakes

that cost her dearly and sometimes they don't work out the way she thinks she wants. That's life, and I wanted to make Jett's life as real as possible on the page.

MJC: Who are your literary influences and in what tradition do you see yourself working? What are you working on now that we can look forward to?

LC: Raymond Chandler is probably my biggest influence. Obviously, the title is an homage to *The Big Sleep*, but the original title was *No Awkward Goodbyes*, in tribute to *The Long Goodbye*. Chandler's prose was so sharp and bittersweet and beautiful; when I'm writing, I try to keep those three things in balance. It's very easy to be caustic and it's very easy to be gauzy, so I strive to write sentences that hit you and kiss you at the same time. It's hardboiled, sure, but it's not ugly.

Obviously, Warren Zevon is all over this book, much for the same reason. His songs are so dark, but sung with this sardonic cheer that I just love. Zevon's music has been with me my whole life, so naturally, he's going to be a big piece of my first novel, right down to the opening quote.

Currently I'm working on a series of short stories for Nick Mamatas over at *The Big Click*, which previously published my story "Late Night on Rt. 17." I'm also working on a new novel, as well as a book with my writing partner, Matthew Quinn Martin, author of *Nightlife*. I keep busy.

Harpur Palate would like to extend many thanks to Libby Cudmore for her time and generosity. We are excited about her future projects, and look forward to seeing *The Big Rewind* on shelves across the country in February.

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An Indiana native and resident of the San Francisco Bay Area, **JOEL STREET** is a poet and writer whose work has appeared in *The American Reader* and elsewhere. He is completing a PhD in Classics at the University of California, Berkeley.

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ROSS WILCOX is an English PhD student at the University of North Texas. His work has appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Nashville Review*, and *Pembroke Magazine*. He lives in Fort Worth with his wife and two cats.

FRIENDS OF HARPUR PALATE

As a nonprofit organization, we are grateful to our generous sponsors at Binghamton University for their support, and invite others to help us publish the best established and emerging voices:

Professor Robert Micklus and the English Department, Professor Maria Mazziotti Gillan and the Creative Writing Program, the Graduate Student Organization, the Graduate English Organization, and Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger.

As always, we give special thanks to Colleen Burke, Professor David Bartine, and Dean Susan Strehle for their tireless efforts on our behalf.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Harpur Palate has no restrictions on subject matter or form. Quite simply, send us your highest quality short stories, flash fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Almost every literary magazine says this, but it bears repeating: please familiarize yourself with our publication before submitting.

We prefer to receive submissions through our online submission manager, accessible from harpurpalate.binghamton.edu. Please note that *Harpur Palate* does not accept unsolicited email submissions and cannot accept submissions from anyone, past or present, associated with Binghamton University.

PROSE: Fiction (100 to 6,000 words) and Creative Nonfiction (100 to 8,000 words) accept one longer piece or three flash fictions per author.

POETRY: Up to five poems, no more than fifteen pages total.

DEADLINES: September 1 to November 15 for our winter issue, and February 1 to April 15 for our summer issue.

Simultaneous submissions are acceptable if you notify us immediately upon acceptance elsewhere. Include your manuscript, a brief cover letter, and a self-addressed, sufficiently stamped envelope (SASE). Manuscripts without a SASE will be discarded unread. Copies of manuscripts will not be returned.

We do not accept novel excerpts.

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal, Vol. 15, Iss. 2 [2015], Art. 1
Address submissions to the appropriate genre editor and mail them to:

Harpur Palate
English Department
Binghamton University
P.O. Box 6000
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000

Due to the number of submissions we receive, we cannot respond to questions about whether your work has been read. Unless otherwise noted on our website, our response time is one to four months.

Except for book reviews and cover art submissions, we cannot accept work from authors affiliated with Binghamton University past or present.

BOOK REVIEWS

We are now accepting book reviews via Submittable for publication on our blog. Please visit harpurpalate.submittable.com/submit.

THE HARPUR PALATE PRIZE IN CREATIVE NONFICTION

AWARD: \$500 and publication in the winter/spring issue

OPENS: September 1st

CLOSES: November 15th

We are pleased to announce the *Harpur Palate* Award for Creative Nonfiction. Developed by Marissa Schwalm, former Editor in Chief of *Harpur Palate*, the prize will be awarded in November of each academic year.

Essays in any style and form are welcome, provided they are no more than 8,000 words and previously unpublished. The fee is \$15 for each entry of three poems and includes a one-year subscription to *Harpur Palate*. You may submit as many times as you wish, but no more than one piece per entry fee.

We prefer to receive entries through our online submission manager, accessible at harpurpalate.binghamton.edu. Include a cover letter with your name, address, phone number, email address, and story title. Your name should appear only on the cover letter and nowhere else on the manuscript.

THE MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE IN POETRY

AWARD: \$500 and publication in the winter/spring issue

OPENS: September 1st

CLOSES: November 15

Milton Kessler—poet and teacher—was a great friend and mentor to students in the Creative Writing program at Binghamton University. In honor of his dedication to the development of writers, *Harpur Palate* is pleased to announce the annual Milton Kessler Poetry Prize.

Poems in any style, form, or genre are welcome, provided they are no more than five pages long and previously unpublished. The fee is \$15 for each entry of three poems and includes a one-year subscription to *Harpur Palate*. You may submit as many times as you wish, but no more than three poems per entry fee.

We prefer to receive entries through our online submission manager, accessible at harpurpalate.binghamton.edu. Include a cover letter with your name, address, phone number, email address, and poem titles. Your name should appear only on the cover letter and nowhere else on the manuscript.

THE JOHN GARDNER MEMORIAL PRIZE IN FICTION

AWARD: \$500 and publication in the summer/fall issue

OPENS: February 1st

CLOSES: April 15

John Gardner—prose writer and teacher—was a great friend and mentor to students in the Creative Writing program at Binghamton University. In honor of his dedication to the development of writers, *Harpur Palate* is pleased to announce the annual John Gardner Memorial Prize for Fiction

Short stories in any style, form, or genre are welcome, provided that they are no more than 8,000 words long and previously unpublished. The fee is \$15 for each entry of one story and includes a one-year subscription to *Harpur Palate*. You may submit as many times as you wish, but no more than one story per entry fee.

We prefer to receive entries through our online submission manager, accessible at harpurpalate.binghamton.edu. Include a cover letter with your name, address, phone number, email address, and story title. Your name should appear only on the cover letter and nowhere else on the manuscript.

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Subscriptions, contest entries, submission fees, and donations can be sent to:

Harpur Palate
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P.O. Box 6000
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You can also purchase subscriptions, submit your work, or enter our contests via Submittable. Please see our website for details.

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