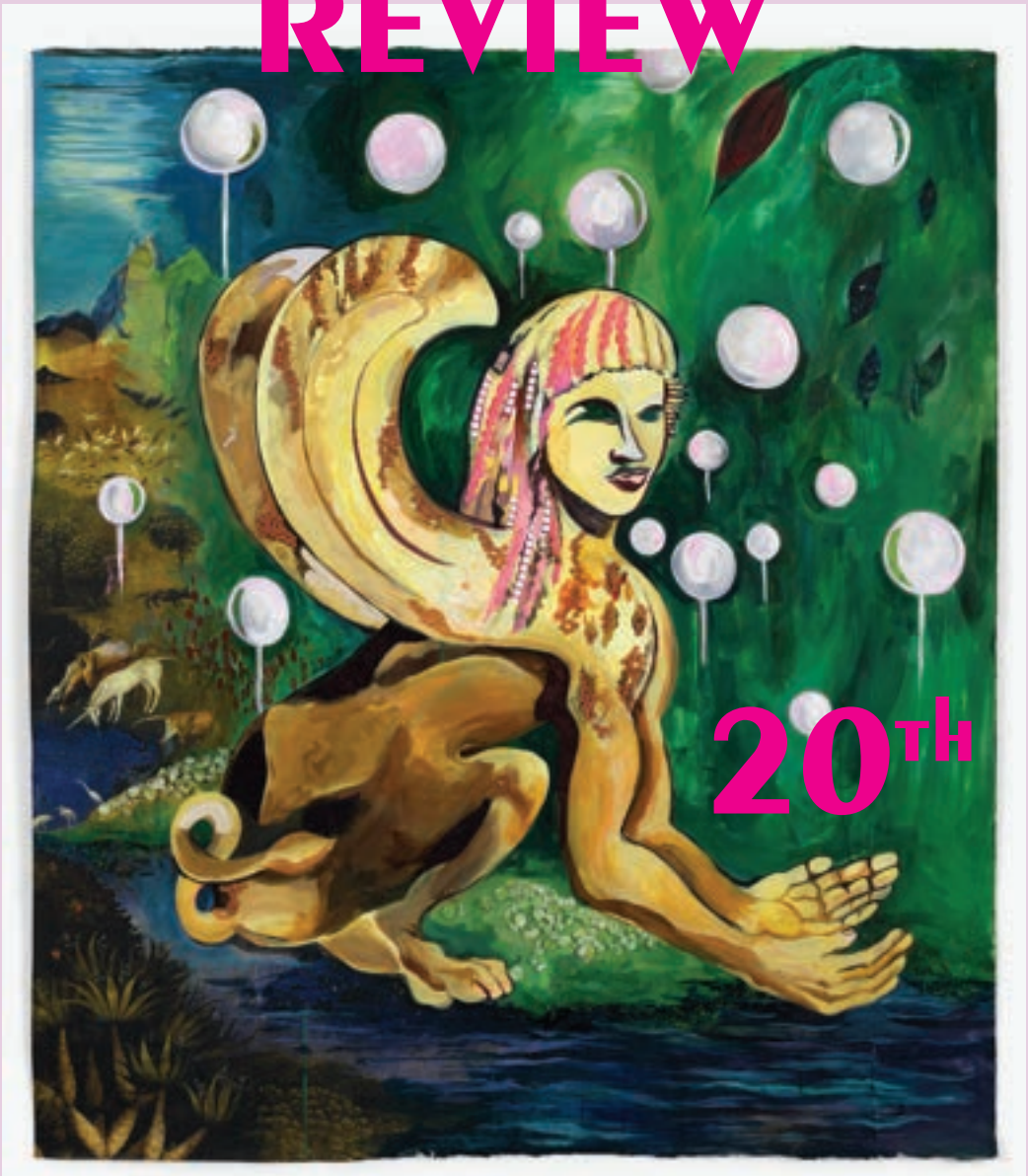
THE SAINT ANN'S REVIEW



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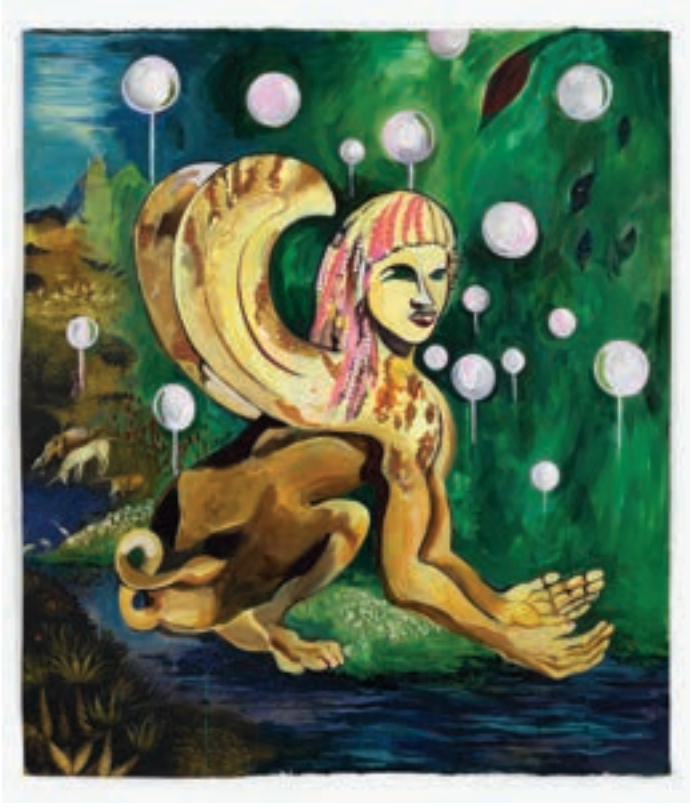

Chitra Ganesh, SPHINX, 2019
acrylic, ink, Kodak repositionable fabric paper, glass shards and beads, holographic sticker, textiles on paper on linen 52 x 46 inches

THE SAINT ANN'S REVIEW

A Journal of Contemporary Arts & Letters

NEW AND COLLECTED WORKS
THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

TWENTY YEARS AND COUNTING

IN MANY LANGUAGES—French, Hebrew, and English among them—the verbs "to count" and "to recount," as in, to tell a story, are related. Any reckoning of twenty years is a *compte-rendu* in more than one sense. We have sought to establish an inclusive and vibrant forum. To what extent have we succeeded? What remains to be done? Next year, as it happens, we welcome three new editors, of poetry, nonfiction, and translation respectively; we look forward to what their input will mean for the *Saint Ann's Review.*

Huge thanks to all who've contributed to this issue. They include Associate Editor Alexandra Zelman-Doring, who has helped to shape each issue in the past decade; Katie Michel of Planthouse Gallery, who gave us our initial design and would in normal times have designed this issue's cover; assistant editors, past and present; readers of submissions and friends who pointed strong writers our way; and the stranger who happened upon our magazine in a store or online. We wish to thank every writer who has published with us. We owe much to former and current heads-of-school Larry Weiss and Vincent Tompkins, and to founding head Stanley Bosworth, who called me back one day and said, "Run that by me again," "that" meaning this magazine. We thank kind administrators and tech helpers and high school interns, some of whom are now writing plays and novels. Many thanks to people who keep buildings running and others who expertly handle mail. This collection of new and selected works is the result of your efforts, your craft, your generosity.

Finally we reckon, in this season of reckonings, with the loss of our luminous colleague, Marielle Vigourt. Gratefully we reprint herein the essay she published with us eighteen years ago.

Beth Bosworth
Editor

THE SAINT ANN'S REVIEW

Editor: Beth Bosworth
Associate Editor: Alexandra Zelman-Doring

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Submissions: Material offered for first publication only is considered. Simultaneous submissions are accepted with notification. We consider short fiction and essays (up to 6500 words), poetry (up to 10 pages), drama (up to 25 pages), novel excerpts (up to 25 pages), reviews, translations, and works which defy category. The original-language work must accompany any translation and the translator is responsible for author's permission. Submit work through www.submittable.com; see our website link. We read September-July. Please allow 4-6 months for response, then query. All rights revert to the author upon publication. All work may be considered for publication online and on Twitter and Instagram. To read selections of published works and for more information, including contributor payment, please visit our website. Follow us on Instagram @saintannsreview; on Twitter @saintannsreview.

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Natalya Sukhonos
THE FRAGRANCE, THE GARDEN

Every night we drink red wine in the garden.
There are succulents and honeysuckle
and mirrors on the back wall
that summon words before there are words.

There's always such
alarming sweetness in these nights:
a rogue bakery, a ghostly fragrance of fried dough,
a summer languor sweeter than nostalgia.

We drink until midnight.
The scent of red wine
seeps through the dark
fingers of plants in the garden,
through the dusk of your palms and my hair.

If all the plants
are quiet, I can hear
shadows aflicker
in the glass
behind the garden.
I can hear water
thirsting for itself,
someone's hands wreaking havoc
with metal and twine.

The garden is haunted
by those who have never left
another garden on the sea,
in the city of twenty-two hills.

Come drink with us close to the ocean.
You can hear the wind. The plants crawling on the earth.
It is never quiet. We are still there when you finish this poem.

Cynthia Manick

HOW TO UNCOVER AN ORIGIN STORY

I.
In the 1940 census Uncle Lee
is one year old
and his two older brothers
carve out a space.

II.
They teach him the first
language of light and hands—
how to drink and spit,
sweet a bee hive until
it leaks like a sieve.

III.
They wash his feet, trying to get
rid of outhouse heat-stink.
Beside him: two Georgia pines
unwilling to bend or flee.

IV.
Uncle Lee is buried with
his Vietnam bayonet—a blade
blessed on a different dirt road.
I resist the urge to trace their
brother bond to some battle.

V.
Instead, I think of those ancient
figurines with arms missing,
torso turned trying to speak
someone's name.

Jody Winer

ANOTHER ART

It's always dusk in the sonogram room.
On the screen glow tornadoes. Like the cold
gel she squeezes over your abdomen,
the technician will eventually
warm to the wreck that is your body—no
spleen, no breasts, a chunk of lung gone. Now this
mystery lump. You lie back. The thick wand works
dark magic, explores your mortal torso.

Breathe, she gently repeats. *On your side, please.*
Facing away, you are a masterpiece.
Ingres odalisque, Stradivarius
cello. Exquisite the dip between rib
and hip. Your blue robe falls open, the tie
dangling in twilight. You, a life study.

Adam J. Gellings

HOUSE IN THE COURTYARD

With my eyes closed,

in the blue of each morning, I find

there is no desire within me

to leave this bed. I can hear

a bottle breaking.

Below a hose is splashing

against concrete. A thousand

jasmine flowers renew,

renew.

Sharon Dolin

I HAVE DREAMT A DREAM AND I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS

—Babylonian Talmud

Awakening to blankness, to snow
on my pillow—my head due north.

The tidal waves have gone and the sky
of black fish, sea of bare trees.

In the wake of another storm, glass-paned
with invisible priests forming the triangle

of blessing with their hands, may I ask—
before the curtains dissolve into ink

and the wind-slant severs day
from night—what was I dreaming?

Before the coat of grey wakeful casts,
fill me with freshets where salamanders

black-and-orange-flecked writhe
in the fire. Let me see on my wall

that spectrum ablaze.

Joanna Fuhrman

MURIEL SAID THAT TO BE A JEW IN THE 20TH CENTURY IS TO BE OFFERED A GIFT

Late Friday night, several hundred torch-bearing men and women marched on the main quadrangle of the University of Virginia's grounds, shouting, "You will not replace us," and "Jews will not replace us.'"

—*The New York Times,* August 11, 2017

We New York City kids always felt superior,
but then I wake up and it's 2017, and suddenly
I'm all jealous of the cold rocks under other
people's feet: the kids who got the coolest bullies
to sign their leg casts are now CEOs rewriting
the meaning of cloud script. *Resist, fail, and resist.*
Mrs. Whitebread's been in the same hallway
for thirty years pretending we didn't see her
crying behind the history textbook, triggered
by the passage her family erased. So why
not just fold your childhood into a terrycloth
swan? Ignore the blobs of bubble wrap, dirty
erasers—the mountains of cell batteries
in a place whose name you can't pronounce.

In a place whose name you can't—
you try to embrace the rage, *the stone insanity*
with all its cracks. Run into the crowded street,
the Bill of Rights written on your ass in eyeliner,
so the enemies you moon will finally understand
the uses of free speech. Click, pause, reset.

Become the anger you envy in other people.
Ignore the paperwork, bills, piles of laundry.
What color is the parachute of an airplane
in flames? Your future career was meant to be
an asteroid or telepathic frog. What happened?
Your new password is FUCKTHAT. Your
username is: theMemoryofSlaveryRacismLoss.

The memory of slavery, racism, loss
is not the same as the feeling of remembering
slavery, racism, loss. What you thought
was the ghost of the 20th century is just
a mustard yellow bikini top tied to
a sunburnt toddler at the public pool
in Park Slope, Evanston or Marin.
So little is covered, so why is it still around?
And who are we to complain? Former children
to the accidents of privilege. Born to families
with two-car garages, glass-door bookcases
and folk-song-packed grade-school assemblies
where white children sing songs about Rosa Parks.
Is this what we thought democracy looked like?

This is what we thought democracy
looked like: reading poetry in the sandbox,
the ocean removing its rubber mask,
revealing tongue-shaped retractable blades.
The kids' books we read on our parents'
faux-Chinese sofas included details
about charred bodies and lamps made

from human skin. Dear Reader, fill in
the details of your own tragedy. History,
please explain—how does comfort end
and responsibility begin? Privilege,
when will you flip over, and let us listen
to the B-side, the one where if you play it
backwards, the present moment makes sense?

Backwards, does the present moment makes sense?

At 18, I fell in love with an activist, and we spent our days in the Texas heat, walking around parking lots with clipboards gathering signatures for water regulation. I never completely believed in the reality of the world, felt more myself in the dissolving boundaries of de Kooning's blurry yellow. Even with clipboard in hand, did I have faith in my own relationship to the Earth? I couldn't feel it.

I didn't need to. I rented other people's passion.

One evening, I borrowed a housemate's vase so my boyfriend could display the algae from the polluted lake to the city council. A fancy vase was all she had, opaque, orange glass with spiderlike designs. I think it was from Pottery Barn.

Of course, he lost the prop in the chaos of the hearing. My housemate was furious.

I was working on an essay on dolls in Rilke and Djuna Barnes that night, far from downtown, so I couldn't tell her where it had ended up.

In the next day's *Statesman*, the story ended with a joke about the abandoned vase. No one could tell the reporter why that vessel was sitting on the floor.

No
one
could
tell
the
reporter
why
that
vessel
was
sitting
on
the
floor!

Why was that vessel sitting on the floor?
Are we the vase or the algae within it?
The clouds and the towers are not enough
to hide the country we maybe always were
or are. Here in this divided time. Here
with these conflicting signs. I watch the news
in a small town hotel room on the way
to visit my husband's Trump-voting dad.
On my laptop, a blurry photo of a young
woman holding up a handwritten sign:
THIS IS THE MOMENT HEBREW SCHOOL
PREPARED ME FOR, and I think of
Rukeyser's words, *The gift is torment,*
but also full life.

Matvei Yankelevich

UNTITLED

from the cycle of poems, *From A Winter Notebook*

It is winter and time to keep imperfect
record of inappropriate quantities just shy
of lethal, to do for others what I'd
not do for anyone I know. It's about
time you called what's going on just
that—dampened. Time for the pedal
to sphere the note from shape to non-shape,
a long-awaited exit. Time for fennel &
fantasies of getting into a pocket. Time
to look squarely at window's hunger,
to see the tablet in the soap dish.
Time for poetry to speak from its
bear trap about what's hideous and
wonderful in being caught at this
most indefensible task as the public
sphere yawns loudly. Time to regret
the unsaid, and the rest. Dear sphere,
look away.

Benjamin Gantcher
UNTITLED

No need to wake up when the stitching's come loose
a day like this your first companions
slip inside, wind and light printing nervy music
on the bed, you can almost flute it, density
grown holey with the freaking and homing
bird—utter utter thoughts you spring from—ink

I want to get washed in that tattoo
be written on in the original script of the trees
the sign of the gesture that is the trees
and you be scholar of us for the enigma
convinced of the wisdom of the language of my skin

David Constantine
BOTH KNOWING, NEITHER SAYING

We wake, both know, and neither says. Hearing the rain
Knowing you are awake in the dark and listening to the rain
I should not like you to know that I am thinking
Not of the harboured lovers whose contentment
Under the roof is deepened by the wind and the rain
Beneath the cloud, but of a man and woman I have invented
And she has woken alone in a tangled city
Thinking of him who should by now be in the daylight
Above the rain, in the azure, in sunlight thinking
How safe her room will be whose key he has
How close and home her bed will be, this pair
So concentrated in their single longing
Why must I think for him an hour or more of circling
Stacked and queuing in the empyreum and for her
Only confinement under the lowering cloud
And the black rain slanting in the second-circle winds
Into which zone he will at last descend
All hurry by now, all struggle, why can't I
Spare her, my fiction, knots of hopeless panic
Fearing the haste, impatience, anger of the lanes
Trembling in the fear that even such desire as his
Like hers, so clear and sole, will fret itself to death
In all this everyday of thwarting, fury, menace?
Awake, both knowing, neither saying, lying in the dark
Harboured under a roof from the wind and the rain
Why can't I bless even my poor inventions
With easy meetings? Light falling on this cloud
Above gives it the appearance of a soft white bed
And still I lock my lovers in a world of noise
Harsh lighting, error, gridlock, ambulances.

Asiya Wadud
AT THE ARCHIPELAGO

MINCE NO WORDS SAY the braying becomes more urgent mince no words say a continent with some matrilineal borders. mince no words say you should tax the remittance mince no words say the wall debilitates us both. now see the tribunal say they claimed us first. no it was impossible, but look how the just go on. now call it my own prayer and know that we utter it in truth—now mince no words because god believes it, too. say mince no words what is a storm but a levied load? say some of the bodies bear the weight while others carry the load. say some of the bodies carry the weight while others bemoan the birth and some of the bodies are subsumed while others are never known. now i know a good god who delivers everything that he can. now i know a good god who only deals a breaking blow and i know a good god who buries the stillborn before they're birthed and i know of a good god who bears all our leaden loads. repel the neat horror when you see the clean, straight cut. repel the neat horror when there's a certainty. repel the near horror when Murambi won't be claimed. repel the neat horror when our language has no words. i lick lap waters when all there's left is sun. i lick lap waters when my braying baby's urgent. and i lick lap the taste when the state won't claim us and it's okay I know this and I know where I was born. I wrap the fullness in a clam and wait for the tides. i wrap the fullness in a clam and wait for anything. i wrap the fullness in a clam and breath a heavy sigh and a sign gives *me supple clean hope with chemistry.* and a sign is a little torch on top my head and a sign is all i need to sear the darkness from the day and the day from the dismal and the dismal from the urgent and the urgent from the plover and the plover we always name in the conscription of birth. everything born as everything dies and the wide expanse between the two is the lip lap trying.

Nicholas Hamburger
HUSH

Like pushing off from shore on a starless
night, and not knowing where
the land begins and the water ends,
like the imperceptible difference
in darkness
from when one closes one's eyes
to when one opens them
once more, and nothing has changed.

But what does it matter? Hush. Let it go.
And then you again: don't tell me anything;
don't tell me anything at all.

Eamon Grennan
LOCAL

M'illumino d'immenso is what the dreamscribe had inscribed on the steel door leading out of my own last oneiric maze before waking and walking out into a day neither immense nor in any way illuminated but grey as the seal's round-snouted houndhead addressing me with big black glaucous grief-struck eyes yesterday on Glassillaun, where I'm caught in thrall to the hollow melodic out-of-sight but unmistakable snipe's snare-drum solo as it plummets from on high, all gimlet-eyed self-belief braving reckless descent at such speed it is a miracle of focus or some concentrated something we have no word for: simply being a real presence we take—like any other aureoled belief–-on trust for its single bewildering moment . . . till I'm transported back to this grounded world of bog-brown rough-cut fence-posts dangling like broken gibbets over air where the coastline has been in great grass-green masses eroded from under them—their tangles of barbed wire hanging useless, nooselike, and rusted to the russet of a dead foxpelt . . . and I stop to listen to a solitary invisible skylark going crazy again in the clear air, so not to let go its hold on morning or its own throat-music, simply voicing what is here and now: a few skyblue slashes tempering with promise the far-flung cloudmass grey to help me feel (if only for a moment) a trace of something somewhere somehow immense and (even in this its diminished local incarnation) illuminated.

Eamon Grennan
ROOM WITH MISIA

In Vuillard's interior where the walls
are chalkwhite flecked with yellow
stands a work-table of deal that holds a
leather-brown container for notepaper
envelopes pens, all leaning against an
upright grey square-cut wooden post
with angled supports slotted into a
roof-beam of charcoalish grey, beside
which a chair with backrest cross-slats
and a sea-blue cushioned seat barely
touches a wicker waste-basket tucked
in against one squared leg of the table,
to the left of which and attached to the
wall juts a ledge or shelf on which
(like a small still life) stand a black
ceramic jug, a squat coffee pot, and a
curved pipe, all wearing an air of we
belong . . . while attached to the wall
there's a painting (maybe Vermeer? a
copy) and a paler unknown one while
the wooden post has postcards or
small sketches pinned to it, and on the
lacquered wooden floor you'll see a
segment of a Turkish rug, its margin of
deepest maroon enclosing a narrow
fragment of creamy woven yellow—
and there beside the half-open door
(another grey, with daubs of yellow)
there in shadow stands a woman in a
long blue flowered dress who is
holding an open newspaper: her pale
auburn blonde hair is barely visible in

shadow, yet still she is a brightlit presence in that containing dusklight: a meditative observer, she seems to be taking (maybe with the party over) the room into herself, remembering the talk, the faces on fire with it and with the wine: remembering the way the light held each talker, caressed each brimming wineglass like a lover's warm hand.

Simone Kearney

THE STORY OF JACKY DORY (AN EXCERPT)

From the shore
I watch an object

get pared down
by the rain,

the rain paring
the object down

like a pencil,
or cream

cut away from itself
without friction,

cut away as if
the object

were soft and
vulnerable

(which it might
well be),

easy to cut away
as rain, as rain

gets heavy,
cream-heavy

as the object
it pares down,

pares down
to sparse cream,

heavy, heavy
cream as heavy

as the eyelashes
of my eye, eye-

lashes which rain
down too

on my eye
like cream-heavy rain.

Yes, I think:
this rain

is not unlike
my blinking: I

too am
paring away

at the object
like rain

dissolves (pares
down) an object.

Each time I
blink, the object

is pared down,
down.

A thought is
a sensation

of pieces of glass
touching.

This feeling is
a glue that glues

a clear structure
together, a clear

structure of
feeling, a structure

not unlike
a panopticon or

circus made of clear
glue-like toothpicks,

and the structure
wraps around

the body
like a glue,

a gluey view,
and the body

is wrapped
by the feeling,

the structure
of the feeling, and

the structure wraps
the body. The body

is a spectacle
for the feeling

and if the feeling
could laugh

and clap its hands,
the feeling would,

the feeling full
of a chittering

nervosity
before the

spectacle of
the body which

soars before
the feeling like

a minor shiny
horsehair

clipped and flung,
soaring into the

structure of
the feeling.

In my dream
along the shore,

I push a desk into
the place where my

bed used to be,
then I push my desk

into the place where
my chair used to

be, now there is no
room for the chair,

so I push a dress in
the place where my

pen used to be, and
then I push a pen

in the place where
my water used to

be, and so on and
so forth.

Gabrielle Glancy

MOTHER, ORCHARD, DARKNESS

in the story the mother moves
between the orchard and the sand
in a trick of fluctuation up
the dark canal and even after
because for some time distance
is realized backwards

it was only from beyond the trees
i could see the river moving
as distance across sand and
after as a fluctuation of darkness

imagine but the sand shifts
and there you see her
in the moonlight of the orchard
where the apples barely moving
seem to have a glow

A. Molotkov
WAYS AROUND IT

Life as an accident, a fire, an explosion, ~~future~~ added and subtracted as we curve carefully around our intended paths, rubbing our mistakes off on those who love us. In the cellars of our minds lie full chests of love and gold, but we don't know which is love and which is gold and which, last week's lunch or a ~~memory~~ from many years ago, an anchor in the dark. The fireworks and their reflections in your eyes and how you said, *I can't do this anymore*—how could you, in this expiring ~~future~~, with these effortless lights, your lungs full of holes.

Em J. Parsley

AND THEN HE TOLD ME, "YOU SHOULD READ GENDER TROUBLE"

All of what I'm perceived
to be, copy of copy
copy of body
copy of hetero [something-something fill this in
with smart words later] ontology, baby!

[something-something] the actor I perform
like a nervous understudy reciting
their one line in *Hamlet* until
the words lose meaning

[something-something] genealogy I inherited
my gender like one copies
cursive letters, three divided lines

is what you call me with reverence, and
when I say *no*, you
rub your thumb over
the vertebrae where my neck
and back meet and amend, *you, then.*
you. tuck my tag into my collar, you
comb the hairs at the nape
of my neck, you—no, wait

[something-something] heterosexual contract a guy
in my prose poetry workshop highlights this line

I write,
and you, hiking-boots-queer, Judith-Butler-is-God-queer,
and comments, "you should read *Gender*
Trouble, I think you'd like it."

[something-something] unstable categories when I
try to explain how my brain
shrivels with fifteen-year-old terror
of my own love, my therapist, supposed
specialist in LGBTQ+ issues, hits
me with, get this: love is love.

[something-something] false universality *love is love*?
If Dr. Therapist saw me with you—hiking-boots-Judith-
Butler-is-God queer, she wouldn't
know to call us love and I

wouldn't blame her but *still*—
[something-something] discursive I can hardly be
lenient towards *love is love* in the same
way I might for *a rose is a rose* because
the rose has a body that is, oh,
[something-something-clever-anything-smart] prediscursive?

[some-thing-some-thing] pre-fucking-discursive-
rose,

[some-thing-some-thing] a-body-is-a-body-is-a-
body-is

[something like] a rose except
that guy in workshop "you
should read—

[something] the trouble with the rose
is that he too cannot escape
thoughts like *love is love* and *you should read*
and the rose who is a rose who is
only ever a rose cannot copy like

copy like

copy like the trouble
is ever in my fifteen-year-
old fear of my own head and
the litany of hoping that

[something-is-something] is perhaps, after
all, nothing—but oh, you—
your careless muddy boots and
my careful folded hand in
yours, in perpetuity, with you—
your calloused fingertips pressed
to my palm pressed to the cuff
of your woolen sweater, scratchy
on my skin yet tethered, always—
you, to me, tethered and
solid in all our woven parts.

Cathy Fuerst

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Happy Anniversary Do you mean a celebration of an annually recurring date of a past event characterized by good luck and felicity and spontaneity? Or

1. the abrupt explosive cry of an animal
2. to utter such a cry
3. to speak gruffly
4. to misdirect one's efforts up the external covering of the woody stems, branches and roots of plants
5. a three or more square-rigged masted, except for the after-mast, sailing vessel

Aftermath? Do you mean a disastrous result or a new growth of grass?

Neither. After-mast.

Do you mean the fruit of forest trees or the upright pole which holds the sails on a vessel?

Do you mean the cargo space in the hull of a vessel or a dominating influence or a pause or delay, or a prison? Or do you mean clinch, contain, to keep in one's grasp, to be filled by, to avoid letting out, to stay securely fastened, oh, I am talking at great length. I continue to exist. I refuse to yield, keep back something expected.

Your love?

My hollow muscular organ that by rhythmic contractions and realizations keeps the blood in circulation throughout the body; the center of my total personality, intuition, feeling, emotion, according

to one's taste, perhaps even mine, fundamentally, by memory, deeply affected by you if only you would bark up my tree, dear, you are more precious to me than gold even in utter distress and surprise.

Do you mean the relative loudness in the pronunciation of a part of a word or a phrase? A balanced force that tends to distort a material body, my body, a physical, mental, emotional tension or a situation causing this?

I do not mean the military or fighting strength of an entire nation, but our bodies combined for joint action, although it could be fruitful, that, to compel through effort, overcome the resistance of, and break open, as a door, or my heart.

Mia Sara

THE COLLECTOR

She collects things in pairs,
has puppies on the brain
and worms in her hands.
If not worms, then ladybugs,
or even snails. She can spot
tiny lizards, half-hidden beneath
seedpods, from twenty feet away.
And often, as a last resort, when no
creature can be found for comfort,
she becomes one herself, pawing
the ground, snuffling, and baying.
She has even cosied rocks,
arranging them into families, and
the viscous slug she holds out to me,
an angry welt on her rosy palm,
needs another to complete it.
"So slug can have love, Mommy," she says.
If I buy her the puppy, a pelted surrogate,
dig hard in the garden for a brace
of fat worms to keep in a jar,
will that satisfy her need?
Or will I have to bear her
loneliness, her desire to return
where I can no longer carry her.

Moniza Alvi

A PHOTO OF FATHERBIRD

We don't speak of him very much
    though in his frame he sings and sings

Here I am! Here I am!

He perches just above life
    handsome, brown-feathered

a migrant—
    so many birds rolled into one.

We're shaken—the treetop
    is swaying in a gale.

Fatherbird stabs and stabs
    at the living world
        and he's almost broken through.

Martin Skoble

MY SISTER IN THE BARDO

for Sharon

In my dream we find each other
I didn't love you enough
That's why you died
I tell myself that's ridiculous

But I don't believe me
I dream us
In the café of earthly delights
Since childhood ended
We eat at separate tables
But I can see you there

What is on my plate interests me
(It still does)

In my dream I look up
You are gone
The air feels emptier
It troubles me, this chill
This sudden sense of absence

In my dream I rise from my seat
There, through the door, a struggle
You, entangled with a stranger
An unwelcome embrace
Something dark enfolding
Something dark, its face obscure

In my dream I cannot help
Time seeping between us
Becoming a tunnel of trees
Of shapes, of shadows
Living walls form a long path
In dim light to a distant door
Now you are running
Through shrieks of wind
Many colors screaming one into the other
A kaleidoscope of terror

Hands reach, grab, claw
No end
No going back

This dream leads a long way down
A cattle chute with barbed wire sides
Electric prods spark and jeer
The womb door opens
It begins

Mervyn Taylor
HOLOLO

for LeRoy

Let's talk, my friend,
when the wind comes
across the mountain
to touch our faces, and

flowers in your yard
rise on their stems
to salute, and the cock
puffs the feathers

round his neck, the
hens walking away
as if to say not again,
not today. Let's

talk about winters
in far-off lands, irate
husbands and windows
we jumped from,

let's brew the pack
and play a game of
rummy, though
neither of us is any

good. Show me
a painting you've
been working on
that may or may not

be going well. Let's
argue about a line,
a verse in a poem, the
cause of a fire that

has suddenly bloomed
on the hill. Let's leave
some issues for another
day, otherwise what

would we do tomorrow,
when your rooster's
tail grows too heavy for
his body, and the ladies

must remind him
when it's time to crow.
Let's talk until then
on important matters,

like the approximate
age of your eldest
turtle, like the day
that is dying outside.

Rachel Hadas

TWO SCENES

Haughty and priggish simultaneously,
Ottavio, Donna Anna's fiancé,
orders "Remove that *oggetto di orrore*"
(the bloody corpse of the Commendatore),
whereupon the servants promptly carry
the body offstage. They never marry,
Ottavio and Anna, that we know.
Her heart is with her father down below
or with Giovanni roasting in the fire
of guilt, deceit, insatiable desire.

"Sing sisters, sing, and tell me what has been,
will be, and is," the three grey Norns intone,
mournful beings who, though they know well
the saga, still are subject to the spell
of time and change. Their thread's about to break.
For no one's mortal or immortal sake
does cosmic slippage stop once it's begun.

I sat, then, spellbound, drinking all this in,
childlike in that it was new to me
but also old enough to start to see
the application to our several lives
of runic rules which govern husbands, wives,
sisters, fathers, uncles, cousins, mothers,
dragons, gods, goddesses, dwarves, and brothers.

Widowed, where am I in the story now?
And you, my lost companion, where are you?

Again the houselights dim. Great forms appear.
You're sitting in the darkness; you're not far.
It took your death to blow the mists away.
Your life-thread has been cut, and yet you stay—
invisible, but barely out of reach.
I'm still learning what you have to teach.

A. Anupama
DUINO, A READING

And the little pinecones were the least of it,
the sort of sea urchins to be found on such a cliff
on such a hot day when the castle and the cafés were closed
because it was a Tuesday,
and we forced open the water fountain tap, and we
walked together to where a vast sweep of Adriatic
forced a view to the castle walls in one direction, to Trieste
in the other.

Cicadas were most of it, but also a birdcall, all by itself.
The pines leaned in among the pebbles rolling
beneath our feet while we leaned ears toward the sea, where a boat
waited for a swimmer,
where our skin got saltier as the breeze evaporated us,
and the elegies evaporated in clouds of words.
We read just half of them, reserving a reason to return when
everything might be open.

Saar Yachin
A CONCISE HISTORY OF MY PEOPLE

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob he got lucky
Dreaming of those iron tracks running east past Eden,
The glorious sick transit over fields of beet and fields of buckwheat and fields of
kneidle and *shetls* and *yahrzeits*
And through laborious gates
To the desert so clean,
To my house so clean,
To the washing so clean,
In ethnic blue and white.

So clean the dishes. I wash them & throw the grayweater to my little my piece of desert. I stuff compost into the gluttonous hole in Zion's dysplastic heart. I am full. I mourn my supper. Hate has never been so bland.

And Jacob begot Judah and his brothers, and Judah begot the bejesus bestolen from him
And so set out lending morals, interest amassing
A locomotive joke traversing western lands, bubonic, multiplying, figures rising, surprising, enthralling
Like the body count in the latest bus bomb,
Like the number of our children in the plains of Moab so vast,
My overdraft so vast,
All so vast and dull.

I count. I recount. I sum up; enough. I begot it.

Erica Ehrenberg
THE WOODS BEHIND A SUBURBAN APARTMENT

The woods beside a suburban apartment
are filled with snow,
and Bruno lives in a tent
among the strictly planted trees
while at the same time he sits in a chair
by the kitchen window in the apartment,
holding a child.
The baby's hair is like the glare Bruno sees
in the tent every time he shuts his eyes.
He hovers in the apartment, in the empty room
where the jackets are hung,
the room where no one stands
for long, an entryway—
the floor is tile, onto which there slowly drips
snow melting from the nylon surface
of the jackets, the inside of the arms
still warm, the voices
of women and children in the next room.

Alla Vilnyansky

ELEGY FOR HERB

In Memory of Max Ritvo

As often happens with illness
you become a person
buried inside your body's tomb.

But now I see the sky has blackened again
inside your pupils

I want your soul
out of its lizard-like shell

MRB Chelko

THE SNAIL

Imagine so much contact. Commitment to a place.

To spread yourself across the ground. Your actual body.

Your belly. To touch is to move away. Beneath the weeds.

The fingers of children. Deployed

from the sky. Antennae. What reaches up.

Begs to be touched. Today. I've taken one bath.

And already I want another. To be wet all over.

To feel almost nothing until content creeps in

and again I want to be a good mother

or lover. The word asshole

enters my life from someone else's apartment.

A door slams overhead. Most fights

are over nothing. Most of the world's poems

are not worth reading. I have loved you all this time.

But have rarely bothered to show it.

The way the sky hangs around the earth

but stays mostly quiet. Last week it rained so hard

branches bent down to reassure the trembling sidewalk.

For this weakness. They were axed the next day.

I want to stop here.

But I have learned to resist my maudlin impulses.

A life moves slowly.

The trail of slime glistens.

And beauty cannot be escaped.

William Waters
PARTING

Today's slow rain
dropping on oak
leaves:
    …two
wet lips,
    parting

Donald Illich

FAMILY HERO

His cape and mask were missing,
the outfit he wore to save those he loved.
Swooping down on her boss,

he rescued his mother from an evil pile
of paperwork. She slapped
her superior's face, as she fled

through the company's open door.
After this performance, he discovered
his brothers trapped under a load of debt,

with enough zeroes to scare anyone.
Lifting the disorder, he allowed them
to run from it, so bill collectors forgot

they existed, loose change splashed
from their golden pockets.
Then his father needed help.

The curse of old age had arrived,
personified as a man with bad gait,
and a rickety back. He wished

he could do something, anything.
But a hero knows when a villain wins.
His father leaves only a pair of dentures.

Jenna Le

AUNT QUANG'S MEMOIRS

At home, I was called "Little Brother,"
not just by my older siblings
but by my parents too. I was everyone's
little brother, everyone's fool.

Ma gave me bowl haircuts.
She said they flattered my face:
I had a low forehead, pointy chin,
eyelashes thick
as black mosquito netting,
always slick with the pond-slime
of recent sleep.

My nose was bulbous, enormous
like a catamaran.
"That snout,
you inherited from him,"
Ma ominously whispered, gesturing at
the smoky parlor doorway.

As an afterthought, she added:
"Mind that you don't make it even bigger
by picking your nose, you filthy thing!"
I was nearly as rattled by her scolding
as that one time
she accused me of masturbation…

Ma dressed me in blue shirts, blue trousers.
She signed my pink-dressed sister Huong and me
up for ballroom dancing lessons.

"You, stand over here," she said,
gripping my shoulder hard,
and directed me to waltz my big sister
around the living room for hours.

Huong sighed that it made her feel
all grown-up and feminine,
dancing the western dances
like Marie Antoinette.

I felt like a whole pig
dangling from a neck-hook
at the Asian grocery,
its genitals clearly visible
but stripped of significance.

Sara Femenella
FORGIVENESS

We're temporal things launched timeless
Morbid clock hauled slowly through the mind

Everyday musings: this story has an ending, but I don't have it
Corporeal hunger of airplane for sky

I'm moody I'm sorry
He is good to me with his fatherly platitudes

A vow's just a figure of speech, might as well
Say wool sock, egg, carburetor, any of life's sturdy euphemisms

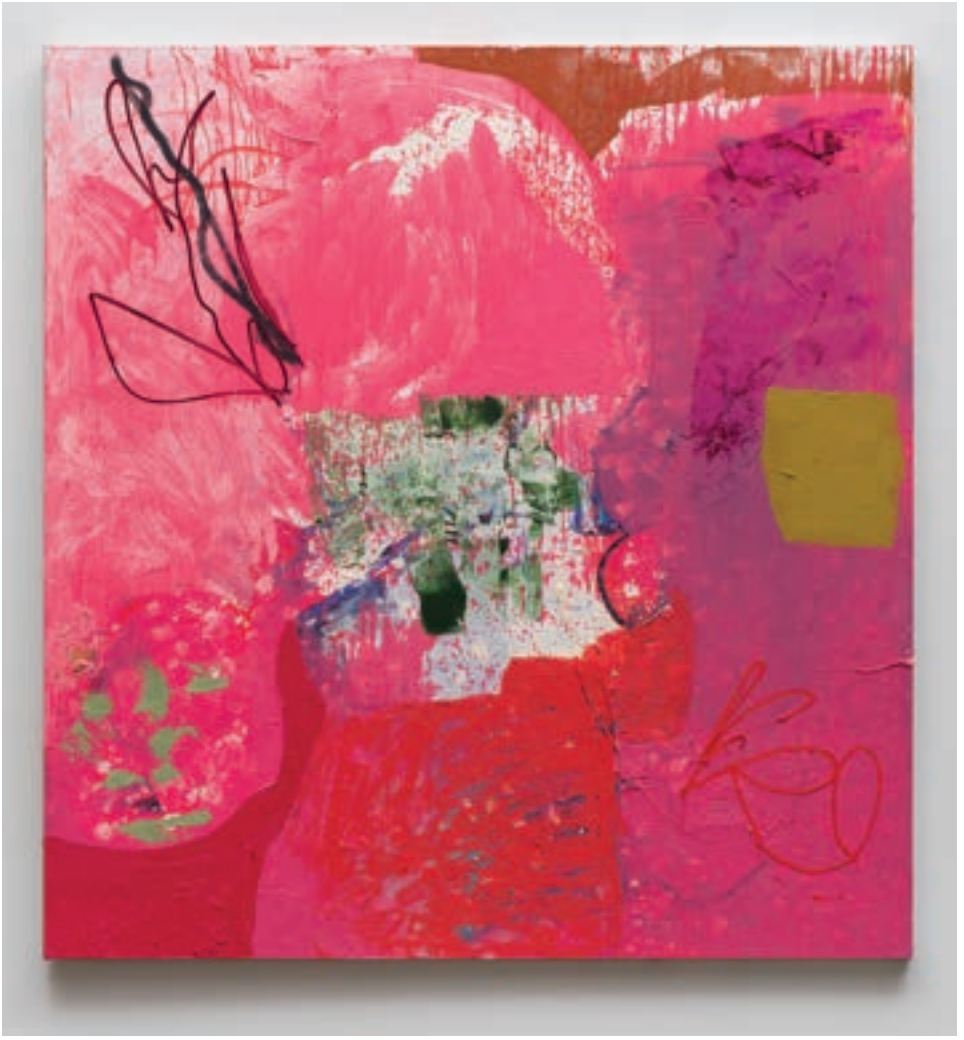
It's density we're after
Our bons mots, our huitres, our chilled Sancerre

In the pupil's centrifugal gleam my scapegoats and grudges
He suggests I drink less, which I'm trying to do

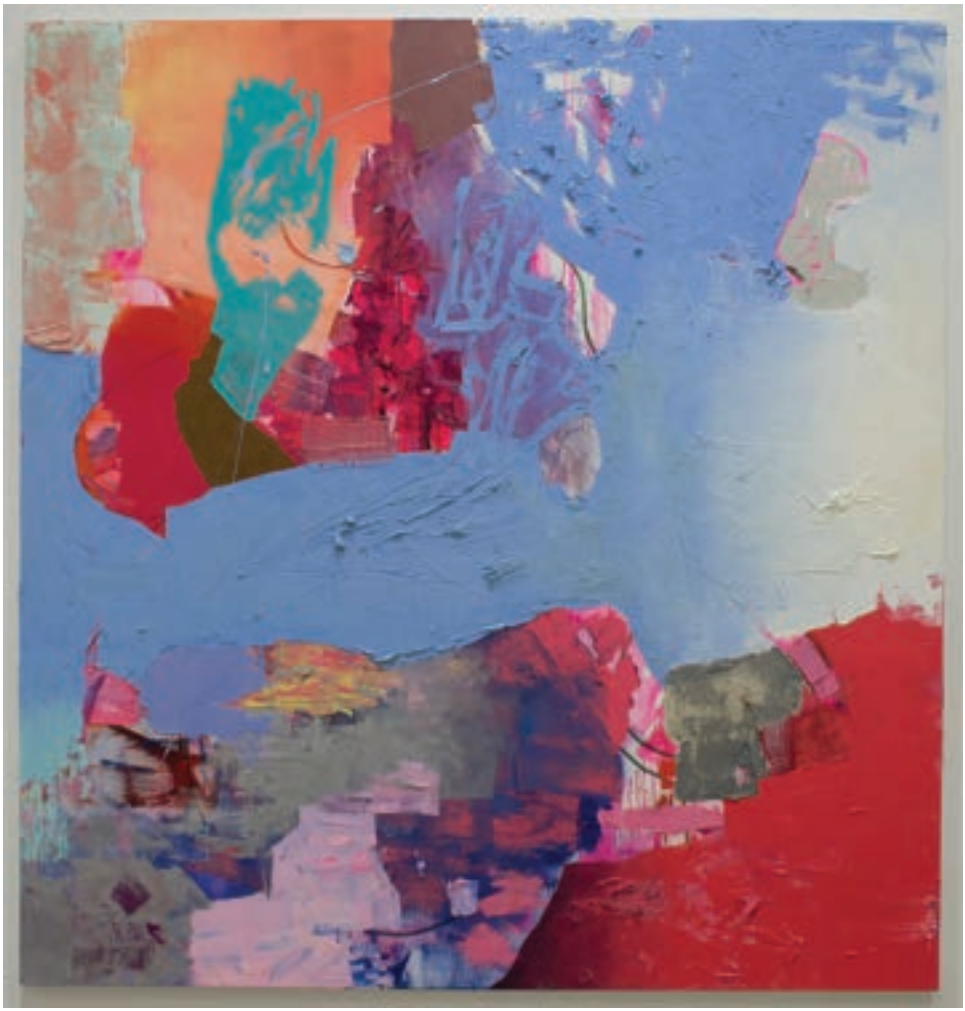
But honestly, what do we expect, with us saying each other's
Names like that, like things gone soft and black, like regrets

Pulling me close to him, holding me from behind
Curled into a longing shaped like sanctuary

Our linguistic ellipses
Our dénouement



Alexander Kroll , UNTITLED, 2018
oil on canvas, 63 x 60 inches



Alexander Kroll, THE ARISTOCRAT IN SPACE, 2018
oil on canvas, 63 x 60 inches (private collection, Seattle)

Alexander Kroll, UNTITLED, 2018
oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 30 inches

FICTION

BUTLER COUNTY

Marissa Levien

Cora Bertram walked into the morgue with an oversized garment bag, took one look at her husband lying cold on a table of polished steel, and told Lloyd, "I'll be taking him home now."

Lloyd knew he was in for it the second he saw her face coming through the door. She had the same look on her that she'd had that time she'd aimed a shotgun at her insurance adjuster, after her roof had caught fire. Lloyd sighed, pushed the glasses up higher on his nose, and got out from behind his desk, feeling his hips and back pop as he did so.

"Cora, why don't you have the funeral director come down here and take Carl. That's usually the best way to do these things."

"You think I got the money for a funeral director?"

Cora heaved the garment bag off her shoulder onto the floor and glared at Lloyd. She was a woman who shrunk with old age, whose skin had puckered and suctioned to her bones. Lloyd estimated her to be about one third the size of her husband, and one half the size of the garment bag she was carrying.

Lloyd gave her a weary look. It had been a long week. The drunk driver out on 14 had been a doozy. Two teen boys and their mother dead, slashed to pieces by windshield glass. And then Carl, who had been his constant companion at Connolly's every Friday night for forty years, had to go and have a stroke, had to leave him with no one to complain to. It didn't feel right at his age to try and make new friends. In fact, it felt desolate and impossible. And now, the last straw, he was stuck with Carl's mule of a widow.

"You're required by Iowa state law to work with a funeral director for at least a portion of the burial. And you need to have him buried in a cemetery."

"Horse shit. I got the hole dug already. Deb came and helped me this morning."

Lloyd pictured Deb Fielder, the only woman possibly smaller than

Cora, hoisting a shovel. It must have taken them half the day.

"Look Cora, I got no say, there's public health concerns—"

"Don't give me that horse shit public health—you saying Carl's contaminated? He didn't die of influenza—" Cora started smacking her hand on the table as she spoke, causing Carl's body to jolt a little bit with every annunciated word.

Don't give her a no, thought Lloyd, just give her a different kind of yes. That's what they'd said in marriage counselling. Of course there hadn't been enough yesses and nos in the world to fix that mess, but Lloyd still allowed that it was good advice for other situations.

"Cora," he said, keeping his voice even. She was a widow after all. "If you want to have him buried at home, you file a permit with the county. They'll come and inspect the land, make sure it's not too close to a water source or nothing—"

"Suppose there's money for that too—"

"I believe there is a fee, yes, and you'd still have to consult a funeral director—"

"Horse shit—"

"Well, then there's always cremation…"

Cora gave Lloyd a look like he'd just kicked dust in her eye.

"I'm not burning his body. That sends the wrong kind of message altogether."

She bent down and unzipped the garment bag.

"I'll be taking him home now," she said.

Lloyd felt sheepish. He wanted Cora to go away. He wanted to put Carl back in the fridge, shut the door and forget he was in there. He wanted to get back to his sandwich and sudoku. He wanted to be done with this job.

"I'm sorry, I can't release the body to you," he told her. He tried to sound conciliatory.

Cora's shoulders slumped a little, and if it was possible, she got even smaller. Lloyd felt lousy, and started filing through other suggestions in his head. There weren't any kids she could go to for money. There was that snob sister in Cedar Falls, but no, they didn't talk. Deb didn't have two nickels to rub together. And at this point in the con-

versation, Lloyd knew Cora would sooner get in a grave herself than accept money from him.

"It's not fair," she said finally, her voice as small as her body. "I'd have done just as good a job as Brown's or Lacey's. I made him a real nice cross out of wood…Weren't no money set aside, dumb cluck didn't think he'd go…I was supposed go first—"

Her voice hitched and her breath came fast. Her eyes darted around for a moment, swollen with tears, looking back and forth between Carl's body and Lloyd's face. Lloyd tried to offer her a handkerchief, but she batted his hand away with desperate violence. She stared down at the floor and took a few moments to breathe, willing her body to calm down. Lloyd didn't interrupt, let the room stay silent. Finally, she resumed.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd let me take his body now," she said. "You don't have to help me with it—I'm stronger than I look."

Lloyd looked down at Carl's grey clay-like face and felt hollow. He thought of the empty bar stool that would greet him after work tonight, and of the empty house that would greet him after that.

"Cora, I'm very tired," he said. He paused, finding that there was a familiar lump forming in his throat as well. And for once in her stubborn existence, Cora shut up and waited for him to continue. He was grateful. It wouldn't have been dignified for his voice to break.

"I can't release this body to you," he continued. "I would be breaking the law. But—" he added, as he saw her mouth fly open, ready for an attack—"but, as I said, I'm very tired. Sometimes, when I get tired, I get forgetful. Sometimes I even forget to lock up the building at night. They really ought to just let me retire."

Cora nodded slightly, and her mouth twisted in a broken, painful smile. "All right, then. I understand." She reached out to touch his arm, but pulled it back when she was an inch or two away.

"Carl liked you," she said. "And he didn't like most people. We were in agreement on that."

She bent over again with effort and hoisted the garment bag back up on her shoulder, like an ant carrying a seed twice its size. Then she walked back out the door. Lloyd heard the gravel crunch under her tires as her pickup retreated from the parking lot.

GRANDMA UNOMA RETURNS
Constance Johnson

THE FIRST PERSON TO WITNESS Grandma Unoma's return was her ex-husband, my grandfather Charlie. We didn't pay much attention because he is a drunk and once claimed to see Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King, Junior smoking weed during a stupor. He was married to my grandmother Unoma for nearly fifty years, though they only actually lived together as man and wife for two years. Apparently, they had a lot of make-up sex, and that's how she managed to give birth to six children. My grandfather claims he became a full-fledged drunk after marrying her. One night, he got so drunk that he wandered out of the house and onto the railroad tracks. He passed out, and a freight train ran over him. He lost his legs. Grandma Unoma called him "Stumpy" after that but occasionally became teary-eyed when she noted that his survival was nothing short of a miracle. Grandfather Charlie says it was the work of the devil and his favorite disciple, Grandma Unoma. God, according to my grandfather, would have killed him, freeing him from her.

Lest you think I'm exaggerating about my grandmother, here are two incidents that reveal everything you need to know about her. One of my most searing memories is of watching her inspect for dust during a family barbeque that my mother was hosting. The food was delicious. The weather was gorgeous, and the bugs were nowhere in sight. But Grandma Unoma couldn't just enjoy the barbeque, the melt-in-your-mouth spare ribs, the tender and succulent steak, the fresh-tossed salad, potato salad and macaroni and cheese with four cheeses. Mama had marinated the meat overnight in her secret sauce. Everything was well seasoned, nice and peppery, like Daddy likes his food. It was all so delicious, and the music was playing, and everyone was having a good time. Even the neighbors stopped by for some food. Meanwhile, Grandma Unoma was inside the house inspecting for dirt and dust. I spotted her running her index finger across the second shelf of a bookcase in the living room. She just rolled her eyes and shouted, "Lazy little girl, why don't you help your mother clean up sometime?"

There was no love lost between me and Grandma Unoma; I rolled my eyes and said, in the most disrespectful manner I could muster, "You're such an expert cleaner, why don't you come over and help clean up sometimes. You seem to have a lot of time on your hands."

She tried to grab my neck, but I ran. Grandma Unoma came running after me but took a detour to tell my mother what an arrogant and rude child I was. Fortunately, my mother was enjoying herself too much to pay attention. My grandmother left the festivities about an hour later, but not before whispering in my ear, "I'm not done with you, little girl. I'll remember this day, and you'll regret it when I'm done with you." Her breath reeked of stale cigarettes, which she smoked incessantly, and brandy, a glass of which she seemed to always have in hand.

That's when I learned to dislike my grandmother. My dislike bloomed to hate, the following year, during a Thanksgiving Day gathering. After too many glasses of brandy, Grandma Unoma declared, "The only child you have that's worth anything or who is going to amount to anything is Bettina. Those other two are losers." Now, nothing against Bettina, but even Stevie Wonder could have seen that her future was dim. She is pretty, beautiful even, but as my paternal grandmother use to say, "Pretty is about as useful as a car in the driveway that won't start. Where is it going to take you? Nowhere."

Grandma Unoma only said that about Bettina because she had a different father, and my grandmother didn't like my own dad at all. She referred to him as that "old nasty thing' and was always suggesting that he was a bigamist with another wife and several children in his native Louisiana. Bettina's father, as it happens, is serving a life sentence in prison for murder, and according to my mother was also a drug dealer who dumped her once she became pregnant. Despite all this my Grandmother adored him. She visited him in prison, and he sent her money once a month. Everybody knew he was up to no good. Who earns a six-figure income in prison? But Grandma Unoma thought Bettina's daddy was a fine man. She even tried to get Bettina to visit her father, but Bettina swore she wasn't going to visit any man in prison, even if someone claimed they shared the same bloodline.

Years later, at Grandma's Unoma funeral, I sat bewildered by all the people crying over her death. I thought they must not have known the same woman that I did. I mean, I was sad but in a detached way. You know how you feel sad when you see victims of earthquakes, terrorist attacks and other disasters, natural and man-made. Like my grandfather says, she was just mean and hateful.

One woman, I don't know who she was, cried throughout the service, and during the viewing of the body, took off her heels, a really nice pair of Michael Kors sling-backs. I had admired them at Bloomies, but decided to wait until they were marked down. Anyway, she took off her shoes and climbed into the casket. Well, of course everyone jumped up and tried to stop her, but she cried and said she could not go on living without her best friend Unoma. She raved about her dearly departed friend for about forty minutes, and then she just got tired of carrying on and sat down. She stared at my grandmother's corpse for a few minutes and then, squinting her eyes, started complaining about the Navy knit dress and jacket my grandmother Unoma was wearing. I guess she'd been too busy crying to notice the outfit before. She said, "I loaned Unoma that outfit. She never returned it. It wasn't hers to be buried in."

My aunts, uncles and other relatives swore the woman was lying and threatened to throw her out of the service, but I believed her. It was just like my grandmother to borrow something and ensure that she would never have to return it by being laid to rest in it. Well, that woman, whoever she was, wiped her tears away and stomped out of the church. She left plenty of other folks crying behind, though. Honestly, I suspected most of those folks thought that was expected of them. They wanted to put on a good show of grief, and maybe the family would give them an extra plate of food or a few extra drinks before sending them home.

Not everyone hated my grandmother, of course. Aunt Donna said her brother Eddie and my cousin Ray-Ray couldn't believe Grandma Unoma was dead. They kept checking her vital signs and making sure that she wasn't breathing, but that mean old lady was gone. Still, they

refused to leave her lifeless body until the hospital administrator came down to the morgue and threatened to call the police.

Two weeks after her death, Grandma Unoma returned. My grandfather spotted her first. He said: "I must have had too much to drink, cause I see Unoma." For once, alcohol wasn't clouding his vision. She was there. One night, she'd simply got up from her grave and with dirt and soil staining that navy knit suit, which puckered in spots where the thread had begun to unravel, sat down in our living room. She asked for a glass of scotch. She said for some reason she no longer desired brandy. Then she addressed her estranged husband. "You're looking good, Stumpy," she said and winked her eye at him. Everyone laughed and joked as if this dead woman sitting in the living room was the most normal thing in the world. She complained extensively about being dead, saying she missed her family. She said she was tired of watching the worms and bugs crawl around.

After she finished her drink, she wiped her mouth, got up and announced she was going back to her grave. It seemed her family wasn't nearly as interesting as she had remembered, and she wanted to return to the solitude of death. She said she'd enjoyed the scotch, which she also said was cheap, better than the company of her family.

"LittleSis, you look fat. Why don't you move away from the dinner table," she snapped at my mother.

"Shut up Lizzie," she shouted at her oldest daughter. "I'm sick of hearing your mouth."

She looked at my father, and said, "Do you ever see your other family? I know you got a wife and ten kids tucked away in Louisiana. Nasty old thing."

She glanced at me, and I just rolled my eyes at her. Then she said, "I got something real special for you. Oh, I got something real."

I muttered: "Whatever."

Everyone else ignored her insults as well, and as she headed out the front door, everyone waved good-bye and thanked her for stopping by, as if every relative we'd buried returned for a glass of scotch and insulted the family. But I happened to glance out the window and saw Grandma Unoma watching us from outside.

THE IDEAL SEX LIFE
Heidi Davidson-Drexel

I'M TRYING TO AVOID GETTING PREGNANT and it's not easy. I've heard French girls have a cap of some kind to insert before intercourse. Then the woman gets to decide when and whether she wants to use it. But we're not so far along here. Gerry is in love with the idea of a family and did not understand when I brought up rubbers. "We're married!" he cried. "Don't you want to have my babies?"

"Not really," I said, off-hand. Then he was really hurt. He didn't speak to me again until after dinner. I suppose I'm being unfair. Husbands expect babies with marriage. But feelings have their own way of doing things. I'm feeling a lot of things right now and none of them is a desire to get pregnant.

Gerry and I have been married one month. He's been my best friend since childhood, which seemed at first like the best possible scenario. Mother said I should count my lucky stars, few women are so fortunate. But since the big day, I've had nothing to count but doubts.

He returned from the war a year ago. The day after the train chugged him back into our sleepy midst, he was knocking on my door. At first, I was just glad to see him in one piece. He went on about how he'd been given a second chance at life, and talked incessantly of the old times. In the weeks after his return, we spent my days off taking long walks down each and every tiny street in town. Whenever I asked about what it was like over there—in Germany—he'd put me off and bring up some boring old memory. Finally I had to get serious with him.

"Gerry," I said. "Tell me a little something about the war. I've been listening to the radio. I'm not completely in the dark. It's on your mind sometimes, that much is obvious. I'm your friend and I don't mind hearing whatever it is you've got to say about it. Get things off your chest—you know you're safe with me."

He stopped walking then and looked at me. "I don't have anything

to get off my chest. And you may not be completely in the dark, but hearing about and seeing with your own eyes are two very different things. I don't think you realize what you're asking for."

"I can handle it, Gerry. Just start with anything. What's the memory that comes back the most often?"

He winced. "Come on. You don't want to hear about it."

"How do you know what I want to hear?"

He looked through the trees toward the farm fields on the edge of Main Street. "Remember the Chadbury's horse Napoleon? How he ran amok during the Old Home Week parade, knocking people over and eating cake off of their plates?"

"Of course, I remember. That stupid beast was still around until a few years ago."

"Remember Walla Walla soup?" He made the honking noise to go along with the decade-old joke.

"Walla Walla soup," I said, but my heart wasn't in it. Gerry seemed exotic to me now that he had been a soldier. He was more complex, darker in the soul, and that's the Gerry I wanted to get at. But he wasn't letting me anywhere near it.

Once he started working at the furniture store, he spent his lunch breaks visiting me at the druggist where I worked. I knew people whispered, wondering what was going on between us, but I didn't let it bother me. Gerry and I weren't like that. And then one day he declared his love. A surprise proposal always seems so romantic in the pictures. Even I route for the girl to realize her true feelings and give in. But in real life it's rather overwhelming.

He sat me down in the backroom of the shop and leaned too close. He said, "Helen, you can't imagine the wave of relief I feel at the familiarity of this shop, and this sleepy street. While I was away, home was all I could think about. And you were part of it, part of my home. Now that I'm finally here, that I know I will live, I want to start right away." He adjusted his collar and coughed once before saying, "Helen, will you marry me?"

The whole time he was making his speech, a sick, nervous feeling

was growing in my stomach. I said, "But Gerry, you're my best friend. You've always been my friend. None of the romance nonsense. We don't need it."

"I know it's been that way. But I've changed. We've changed. We're grown up now and it's time to call this what it is. I've loved you as long as I can remember."

"Well, sure, I've loved you too, Ger. But not in that way. Not love, love."

"See this is what I mean. You're talking like we're still kids passing notes in school. But we aren't kids any longer. That life's gone and I want the new one I'm starting to have you in it."

Dr. Fitz came in then for an ice cream soda and I had an excuse to get out of there, which I did as fast I could. As he walked out, Gerry said, "Think about it." Then he smiled and tipped his hat to Dr. Fitz.

I thought about it while I scooped the doctor's vanilla. I did want to become a woman in the larger sense of the word: I was eager to have intercourse. I had kissed and petted before, during my school years, and afterward, but had never been all the way. Most of my girlfriends were married already and I wanted to know what they knew, to snicker about the things they snickered about.

The year before the war ended I briefly went steady with a student at the university named Leonard. He was rooming in town and I fell for him. We talked about everything under the sun; he was clever and had opinions on just about any topic you could think of. In the evenings, he sometimes snuck me into his room and we would sit on his bed and neck until my curfew.

When the semester ended he went home and wrote me several letters. I treasured each one and responded with affection. But after a few weeks, his letters became more infrequent until he finally wrote to say he had taken a room elsewhere and it was best if we remained friends. I was upset, but not heartbroken. It was a grand little courtship, but I was certain it was not my last. However, that necking awoke something in me. I was eager for more. Seeing as I was a decent soul, I'd have to be married to do it.

In the days after Gerry's proposal I tried to see him that way. What

would intercourse with Gerry be like? He might not be so bad for that sort of thing. At least I wouldn't feel self-conscious. Not with ol' Gerry. But on the other side of the coin, I could see a million reasons not to marry him. We were too familiar. I loved Gerry, but he didn't give me butterflies. Was that enough? Were butterflies a requirement? My mother didn't think so. She and my father were all for it. She said, "When you're young, you don't always know what's best for you. Butterflies can lead to dangerous things. And Gerry's a good man. He'll take of you. What more could a woman want?"

It took a week for me to decide—going back and forth in my head about it. Gerry's a catch, according to the general consensus on these things. Tall, somewhat handsome, dark hair, dark eyes. And I do love him. When we were kids, I used to get sad when it was time for him to go home for supper. In the summer we would sneak out from our houses to meet at the edge of the woods after dark and hunt for ghosts. There is no one who will ever be able to touch my heart as Gerry has. In the end I said yes and we were married in his mother's parlor.

THE DAY AFTER THE RUBBERS CONVERSATION, I MADE his favorite dinner as an apology of sorts. Breaded pork and boiled potatoes. I even found fresh peas at the market. I tried to make it celebratory, make it nice. Then I called my friend, Betty, who said she would come by the next day to show me how to do a Lysol douche. You do it after intercourse. Every time. It cleans out the man's stuff so you don't get pregnant. Gerry won't ever have to know.

Over dinner, he wanted to talk about it more. "Why would you want to delay having a family?"

It was hard to know how to reply. I pushed my peas around on the plate while I thought of something to say that sounded right. There was no point in being hurtful. "I just don't want to rush it. Betty told me how tired she is now that she has the babies. Too tired to really enjoy her husband." I attempted a wink and then drank my wine quickly. How did I end up in this place? Lying baldly to my best friend in the whole world, watching my future sink into the kitchen floor of our starter home. In truth, I didn't want a baby because I wasn't sure I

really wanted Gerry.

"Well, when you put it like that." He smiled and ate his peas. "But I don't think I will enjoy it with a rubber. If you know what I mean." He winked back at me. "These peas are so fresh."

It was when Gerry and I lay together on our wedding night that I had my first doubts. Before the wedding, I was able (with my mother's help) to chalk my trepidation up to cold feet about marriage in general. But the first time we lay together, I began to feel that perhaps it was not possible to get past friendship with him. We got into the bed, me in a lace nightgown, he in his undershorts and undershirt. Objectively he looked good. I could see that much. But when he reclined beside me, I felt ridiculous. Then he leaned over to kiss me, his breath hot and eager. I nearly laughed I felt so silly. At the same time, I couldn't believe myself for having such feelings. They are not the feelings a good wife is supposed to have. I pushed them out of my mind, thinking of something really solemn (a maimed soldier I saw on the television), until I was sufficiently calm. I let him kiss me, many times. His arms were thick around my waist, his hands solid. He smelled like his father. But every time my mind wandered, I thought of that poor soldier and it sobered me up enough to do my job. Now, when I need to feed my own desires, I settle for a hot bath and a picture of Cary Grant that I cut out of a magazine. Perhaps a woman can spend a lifetime dividing her satisfaction.

Betty came by with the Lysol and brought her two kids. The baby was quite adorable until she woke up. The older one nearly broke a piece of Grandmother's good china. But it turned out the douche was easy to do. Betty said it had been working for her, and that it had worked for her cousin.

Thank God for Betty. A week before the wedding, I went to Dr. Fitz for an exam. I took the opportunity to ask him about ways to avoid pregnancy. He advised me to avoid what he called contraception. He said it was contrary to my womanly nature and perhaps I should have a few children before I decided against them. He went on, "The war has made men out of our women. It's such a pity. Don't you think it would

be better, for family life and for society in general, to go back to how it used to be?" I didn't know what to say, so I nodded and let him get on with the exam.

When Gerry got home after work that evening, he was in high spirits and carrying a bottle of champagne. He had gotten a promotion to shift manager at the furniture store. So I made his favorite again for dinner, and took care to roast the potatoes this time, using a recipe I had read in a magazine. He was tickled to see my effort. "You're coming around to this housewife thing, aren't you?" he asked.

The comment made me feel less committed, but I smiled anyway. "I'm learning all kinds of new things."

"I bet. Well these are the best potatoes I've ever had. You must be a good student." He rubbed my foot with his under the table. It had never been awkward between me and Gerry when we were friends, but since becoming husband and wife I hardly knew what to say to him. When you're keeping a secret from the person you used to confide in, it's like a door has closed, suddenly there's nothing to talk about at all. I grabbed the champagne bottle.

"Let's celebrate! Tell me about your new job. What are the responsibilities?" I popped the cork and poured it into the two wine glasses we were given for our wedding.

"Well, I'm in charge of the staff on duty during all of my shifts. I'm organizing schedules. Planning deliveries. Communicating with customers. And I'm getting an extra five dollars per week."

"That's worth celebrating. A toast to Gerry: shift manager!" We clinked and drank. The champagne was a relief and I poured both of us a second glass before too long. "Champagne's no good after it sits out, you know. It's up to us to finish this baby off tonight." I returned the foot caress.

"Tell me about your day," Gerry said. "What does a thoughtful, loving housewife do all day?"

"You don't want to hear about my day. It wasn't much."

"No, I do. Really."

"Well, I went to the market this morning and got the potatoes and pork."

"And they're delicious."

"Oh, and that Marge Ronan was running the cash register. You remember her?"

"The one with the hats?"

"Yes, fuddy duddy Marge was there. She says to say hello."

Gerry did a hilarious imitation of her nasal voice. "Don't forget to say Hi to Gerry."

I laughed and attempted my own version, "I always knew you would end up together. You two were so in-sep-ar-able."

"Did she really say that?"

"Yes, just like that, all spread out like it was such a tiresome word to say!" I was still laughing.

"No, I mean did she say she always knew we would end up together?"

I sipped my drink. "Oh yeah. People say that to me all the time. How cute it is, blah, blah blah."

"They don't say it to me. But it's sweet. Don't you think?"

"I don't know, maybe. More champagne?" We clinked and drank again.

By the end of dinner, I was very tipsy. I only just managed to get the dishes into the sink without breaking them all.

Gerry came up behind me. "You can do those later, can't you?" He put his arms around my waist from behind and started unbuttoning my dress.

"Oh," I started to protest, maybe out of habit, but something in my body stopped me. I actually wanted it this time. "Well, I suppose they'll still be here tomorrow."

"That's what I was thinking too." He got my shirt fully unbuttoned and turned me around. In spite of myself, I raised my lips to his, open and welcoming. "Umhmm, I thought you might be thinking the same things as me."

"Stop talking you lout." I kissed him hard.

"Oh!" he was surprised and I decided to push it a little further. I kissed him a little harder this time, gently biting his lip. He grabbed me around the waist and lifted me off the ground. I dug my fingers into

his shoulders and he pulled my legs around him. In my drunken haze, I couldn't tell if we were trying to get as close as possible, or if we were each fighting for the upper hand. All I knew was that I had let my body loose. It was in charge and it was hungry, or furious, or something. I continued to claw at him and kiss him hard enough to feel his teeth through his lips. He carried me to bed like that and entered me, stopping only long enough to remove my underwear.

I wanted it and liked it this time. I was with him, panting away, rocking back and forth, totally lost from the world around us. It seemed to just go and go. But my body wanted more. I felt myself push him up and press him to turn until we had flipped and I was on top. A flush of light went through me and I felt like I was floating. I moved on top of him. Fully in charge of every action, every feeling until my body exploded and I fell back onto him limp as a rag.

After a while he spoke. "Whoa. That was something."

I couldn't really speak, so I sighed in response. It was a deep, body heavy sigh.

"Could you maybe move? You're squishing me."

I came to. "Oh, of course." I rolled off him and adjusted my dress, then snuggled up next to him. "Did you enjoy it?"

"Yeah," he said. "I mean it was unexpected. Is that something you've been wanting to do for a while?"

"No, it just sort of came out of me. Like a wild animal." I laughed.

"You were really wild." He didn't sound as excited or relieved as I felt.

"Was it really okay for you?" I propped myself up on my elbow to see him better. The drunkenness had vanished, leaving only a hazy golden feeling behind, like the bubbles in the champagne.

"It was. I mean, it was a little scary. I wasn't sure what you were going to do. And I didn't really get to—"

"What?" I was feeling defensive now.

"I didn't get to, you know, complete my part."

"Oh." I smoothed the bedclothes beside me. "Well, is there something I can do?"

"Yeah. You could lay back down. If you don't mind."

I was done and ready to move on, but I didn't mind letting him finish. It wasn't only that it was my wifely duty. I had performed it before and would again, but I had experienced real pleasure and I wanted him to have it too. I was feeling generous. Curling a lock of his hair in my hand, I kissed his neck. "Of course, sweetheart."

He gently laid me on my back again and pushed up my skirt. In my mind, I pictured myself back on top, rocking and swaying like a leaf about to fall off the tip of a branch. I stayed there making supportive noises while he did his own little dance.

THE NEXT DAY, I MUSED OVER the experience while I swept the floor. Gerry had left for work in the highest of spirits, praising his good luck in his job, his new house and in "nailing down such a fine specimen of a wife" (his words, not mine). I was less jubilant, only because I was somewhat scared. Not for pregnancy. Everything was taken care of in that department. My privates were as clean as my floors.

Rather, I was scared of what I had experienced. Gerry had given me something that night, and not just an orgasm. I knew what those were—I had had them before in the tub with Cary Grant. But this one was like nothing else. My intellect and common sense had jumped ship and I was pure body in motion. It was the best feeling I had ever had and I was afraid that I would never be able to do it again.

Later I called Betty and asked her to come by. I was eager to get her opinion, or at least another perspective. I prepared ahead of time a basket of kitchen items for the older child to play with. Once his attention was lost in the egg beater, I jumped right in.

"Do you ever feel ambiguous about married life? All of that attention paid to the other person's needs?" I asked her. I started with the easy part—the part all wives complain about—while I worked up the courage to mention sex.

"Well, I'm just so glad Robert came back. Having Rosemary while he was overseas was nearly more than I could bear. Honestly, I'm so grateful, I couldn't care less about the rest."

There was a small chiding in her voice and I felt guilty. Not having pined or feared for anyone during the war, I suppose I got off easy. Gerry and I weren't married then, and of course I worried for him, but only for his own sake, not for mine or some future thing we might be building together. My worry was simple—the worry of losing a friend, and while it was there, it never filled me. I guess because Ger is great, but he's not a necessity.

But I persevered. I was desperate about my situation and needed help. "How are things with you and Jack in the bedroom?"

"What do you mean?" She smiled at me over her tea.

"You know what I mean. Do you enjoy it?"

Betty swished her hand dismissively. "Oh sometimes I do. But it's not that important to me to enjoy it every single time."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. It's just not something I think about that often."

"What would you say if I told you I think about it a lot?"

"I'd tell you you've got too much time on your hands." She laughed.

"Is it so bad to not want a baby?"

"No, of course not. But I think you're making a bigger deal out of it than you need to. It's better than you think it will be."

I looked at the top of her sleeping baby's head, but I felt nothing. Not even the hint of an urge. "Maybe," I said and stood to put the tea cups in the sink.

That is one thing I'm having a hard time doing. Filling my time. I clean something every day, but sometimes all the work is done by lunch, and then what do I do? I've read six novels since our wedding. When I can't stand to be in the house any longer, I take walks. Usually I walk the path around the lake. It's about a mile, just right for a long afternoon. And it clears my head. All of those evergreen trees make me think about how long things have been the way they are, and how long they will keep on being what they are. And all of those russet leaves blowing around, flipping and flopping in wind that's so strong, I can no longer wear a hat. November. It's stronger than me, or anything I might be feeling.

DINNER THAT NIGHT WAS roast lamb shank with cranberry gravy and mashed potatoes. I needed seven pots and bowls to make it. Gerry was still in high spirits when he came home. He carried a bottle of cheap wine in one hand.

"It can't be champagne every night, but I don't see how a little wine would hurt."

"A little wine never hurt anybody."

"Here pass me the opener. I'll pour while you get that delicious smelling goodness served out."

I went about transferring everything from the pots to the serving dishes. Gerry retrieved the two wine glasses from the cupboard and poured us each a healthy cupful.

"Jeepers, no skimping, huh, Ger? You trying to get me drunk?"

"Maybe just a little."

"Well, I'm all for it."

He smiled and we sat down. "To my beautiful Helen. I'm the luckiest man alive."

I raised my glass in response. "Now eat before it gets cold."

He put his napkin in his lap. "How was your day?"

"Just fine. I cleaned a bit. Betty came by for tea."

"Must've been nice to see those little ones. The older one's the spitting image of Jack."

"Yes, I suppose."

"They've lucked out in the kid department."

"They are cute. Can't imagine how she does it though. Stays as calm as a church mouse, while one's screaming its head off and the other one's tearing about the house putting Gram's china in danger."

"Kids are something else. You were a bit wild yourself."

"I know. No one wants a kid like I was."

Gerry chuckled. "You were a handful. Remember that time you brought that rat in to keep as a pet?"

"Of course, how could I forget that? And Mother found it in the milk crate in my room and beat it to death with one of my maryjanes.

God, I was furious." I helped myself to more potatoes and more wine. "You see why I don't want kids."

Gerry put down his fork. "You don't want them at all?"

"Maybe not at all. I can't say I've thought it through for the next twenty years. But certainly not now. We've talked about this."

His hurt face returned. "But what if I do want kids soon? I thought you were just being challenging the other day with all that nonsense. I don't mind waiting a few months—a year even, if you need. But, don't I have any say in the matter?" He wiped his mouth with his napkin.

"You have say, but I think I should too."

"I want a big family—a happy, warm house to come home to. Is that so bad?"

"No, of course not. But I don't think it makes sense bringing kids into this—whole situation yet."

"What whole situation?"

"Us. I mean, we're just not quite ready."

"Maybe you aren't. I've been dreaming about this for years."

"About this? Exactly this? With me?"

"Well some version of this. And I'm glad it's with you. I promised myself that if I made it back, I'd make a big family and surround myself with love." He took another mouthful. "Now I've got the first part done, I'm ready for what's next." He smiled at me. I mixed the food around on my plate. "Come on, don't take everything so seriously, Helen. Kids aren't as bad as they seem."

"It's not that." I cleared my throat considering the right words. "Do you really think a promise like that still makes sense once everything goes back to normal? Can you build a whole life on a thought you had when you were scared? Is it really that simple?"

"Goes back to normal—Jesus, Helen. You have no idea. I can't go back to normal. Normal will never be the same for me. But for you—what we have here—for you it's normal. Life's always been this simple, this predictable and it always will be. This little town and it's people, me. You can pick it all apart as much as you want, but it's only because you're lucky enough not to know any different." He put his full atten-

tion on his food. "Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one trying to make this work."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? Is that food on your plate an example of not trying?"

He looked up at me. "You're right. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. It's just—I really want things to move along for us."

"They've moved pretty fast already."

"But towards good things! I've got a beautiful wife, a happy home. It's the best a guy could hope for."

"For goodness sake, Ger, you sound like a game show host. And our next prize—a wife, kids and an acre of land!"

Gerry sighed and pulled his napkin up from his lap. He wiped his mouth and lay the napkin across his emptied plate. "I don't know what to say about it anymore. I'm trying really hard, and it's not funny."

"No it's not funny," I said and picked up our dishes and carried them into the kitchen. When I came back he was finishing his wine. "There's a lot to clean up."

"Fine," he said and kept on drinking, staring at the fireplace.

I worked away. He came in a few minutes later, reconciliatory, "If I'd have known what a cook you are, I might have asked you to marry me even sooner."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"I don't know."

"Me neither." I kept on scrubbing.

"I was hurt by what you said about not wanting kids."

I turned to look at him. "I know you have this big vision— and all of this experience I don't have. But you refuse to tell me anything about it. And I never bothered to make any kind of vision, but now that we're here, I'm not sure what I want."

He came closer and put one hand on my back. "What if I said you don't have to know now? It's okay with me if we wait awhile. We'll have kids eventually."

"But what if I never want them? What if this whole thing was a terrible mistake?"

He put his face into my hair. "You're overthinking it Helen. You forget how well I know you. Let's cross those bridges one at a time, when we come to them." He pulled back and turned me to face him, his hands on my shoulders, "Come upstairs with me, I wanted to try something new tonight."

I looked long and hard at him. I was still angry—not only with him, but with the whole situation. Angry at myself for being in it. And here he was, just trying to enjoy himself.

My heart fluttered with contradictions. This fight could be my way out. Just stoke the embers more, set the whole marriage experiment aflame and walk out. But how could I do that to Gerry? And where would I go? No one in town would look twice at me again if I left him. I saw two choices: life with Gerry, or forever living with my parents, playing cribbage and listening to *The Eddie Bracken Show*. I softened my tone, "I've got to put these other ones in to soak first. Then I'll be up."

"I'll be waiting." He smiled and headed up the stairs. When I got up there, he was in his dressing gown, leaning against the headboard reading. The cover of the book said, "The Ideal Sex Life."

"Where'd you get that?" I asked as I removed my stockings.

"A friend recommended it. Listen, I felt a little funny about the other night. Like I missed something. I'd like to try again that thing you liked so much."

"You do?"

"Yes. I want you to enjoy it too." He put the book on the table beside him and opened his dressing gown.

"And just what am I supposed to do?" I asked.

"You do what you did before."

"Just now? All of a sudden?"

"You liked it so much the other day."

"Okay." I removed my underclothes and crawled onto the bed beside him.

"I'm ready," he said. I looked over his shoulder into the plain brown headboard and climbed onto him. I wasn't uninhibited like the

last time. I couldn't bear to look him in the eyes, or worse yet, to look down. I let my hands get everything in the right place. I wasn't totally ready, but after a few tries, he was in. And he was liking it much more than before. He started to move me around, getting lost in the feelings. But I couldn't go there with him; my thoughts were racing. I tried closing my eyes and concentrating. I breathed deeply. But none of it was working. I wasn't miserable, but not passionately lost either. Not passionately anything. He finished and pulled me close to him. "I'm so glad I have you," he whispered.

I smiled down at him and hoisted myself up. In the bathroom, I measured out the Lysol and douched thoroughly. When I came out Gerry sat in bed, a fresh glass of wine on the bedside table, still reading that book.

"I'm going to take a quick walk before I finish in the kitchen," I said. It was only 7:30 and I needed a little air.

"Ok." He blew me a kiss.

I grabbed my coat and hat. The walk beside the lake was the only thing that might help.

I kept a hurried pace to stay warm. If it turned out I was incapable of loving him as a wife should love her husband, maybe Gerry could toss me out and start anew. Maybe my only job was to convince him of what a mistake he had made. My mind went through possible scenarios. I would leave the house unkempt. Refuse to cook dinner. Sit on the couch reading lady magazines and smoking all day. He'd say, "You're not who I thought you were."

And I'd reply, "You're damn right sweetheart," and cackle with laughter. Then he'd leave me in disgust, move to another town where he'd find an adoring wife, and I would be free. But I didn't have the heart for it.

I walked faster as the sidewalk looped around the edge of the town green and turned into packed dirt. The wind was picking up. There was a layer of ice on the lake, reflecting the street lights. Our dinner conversation replayed in my head. I knew Gerry was disappointed. He hoped for a perfect family. And why shouldn't he be? It was such a normal thing to want. Isn't it what everyone wants?

The wind pulled on my hair and shoved the remaining leaves off their branches. The air felt like ice on my cheeks. Inhospitable. Defensive. When I got to the far side of the lake, the ice was clear and black. I wanted to walk on it. I wasn't stupid, of course, and stayed close to the edge where it was shallow enough to be of no consequence if it broke beneath me. My step turned from a walk to a glide, to keep myself from falling. The lights of the town shone, mirrored in the ice's midnighty surface, and I slid above them, upright on top of an upside down world. I went from light to light, pretending it was somewhere new, some place I didn't know like the back of my hand. My steps became bold, wide lunges and slippery dancing moves. The wind blew as if it was trying take me away.

Beneath me, small cracks appeared in the ice. I abandoned boldness, for safety's sake, and slid back to the very edge, where the wide blackness turned to thin white, crushable sheets. I stopped for a bit, stabbing at the ice with my toes. The edges broke and scattered in a hundred satisfying directions. My dance turned to a march. I trampled the ice into smithereens until I was back to where the trail meets the sidewalk.

Then I turned and walked home. It took me half an hour to finish the dishes, mop the floor and get the kitchen back to sparkling. I worked with a vengeance, channeling my intensity toward bits of dried cranberry.

When I was done, I turned out the downstairs lights and headed upstairs to bed. In our bedroom, the light was on and Gerry was sitting up, asleep with that sex book open on his lap. I closed the book, turned out his lamp and climbed in beside him. Turning onto my side, facing away from the rhythmic sound of his breath, I tucked my knees up toward my belly in the fetal position—my favorite for sleeping. I looked around the room; everything became different and indistinguishable at night. The furniture turned into shadowy chunks; the windows were lit up silver by the moon. Our bedroom, a vast uncharted territory.

THE LAST OF THE NUBA

Diane Josefowicz

I MET Holly in December, after she'd exhausted the staff on the burn ward. She wasn't burned, but she suffered from a wasting disease that had attacked the blood vessels in her leg, requiring its amputation below the knee. The amputation was a rear-guard action against an illness that would never be definitively diagnosed, but had already destroyed the cartilage in her nose, whose collapse lent her face an infantile aspect, and her outer ears, which flopped at the tips, pushing through her thin dishwater-blonde hair. The amputation scar, which was coming in only reluctantly, required debridement, a procedure that landed Holly in the burn unit where persuading scars to form was something of a specialty.

I was the ward's psychiatric liaison, for the scars that were inside.

This was the time when I actually had patients, fallible bodies plainly ensouled, whose enthusiasms enlivened my existence, and whose excesses were easy enough to manage when I brandished my prescription pad and shot my cuffs in my white coat. I could order electroshock, wet packs, straitjackets, haloperidol. I could order nurses around, even late at night. Perhaps especially, late at night. I was twenty-nine and cocky, for all the usual disappointing reasons. My supervisor, an insectiform tissue-graft specialist innocent of even the most basic ideas about psychology, chirped that I reminded him of a captain he once knew in the merchant marine, on the verge of botching his first command. Had I forgotten, he asked, as I struggled not to squirm under his twitchy gaze, that I had yet to lose a patient? But, I replied—as he raised a skeptical eyebrow whose longer hairs resembled nothing so much as antennae—dying is just one of those things patients do. To my newbie clinician's mind, it was like the first time you have sex: the question is not who, or even whether, but when. Of course I had no idea what I was talking about. The first patient who dies on your watch lives forever in your mind, a scorching reminder of everything you have

failed to be. And in psychiatry, where our tools at this time were so few, dead patients often seemed to be entirely one's own crass fault—the suicides, particularly. Holly was my first immortal. She didn't commit suicide. I didn't kill her. But like anyone else in this business, I have my share of blood on my hands.

DURING HER DEBRIDEMENTS, HOLLY HAD a lot of pain but no one could get her on the simplest of medication schedules and so it went: her pain was allowed to reach a pitch, after which she received emergency doses of morphine, so that she was either screamingly under-medicated or nearly comatose. In brief lucid moments between these extremes, Holly worked at macramé and paged through the old magazines—*National Geographic* was a favorite—that tended to collect in the common areas. Half the nursing staff thought Holly had no right to howl over her limited wound when so many others on the unit were so much more extensively damaged. The rest blamed Holly's mother, Juliet, who did tend to haunt the nurses' station when Holly was enduring the worst of it, though I never noticed any unpleasantness in Juliet's behavior. The split on the ward did not quite conceal the fact that Holly was in danger from both sides. Half the staff wanted to kill her, and expressed their sadism by encouraging her doctor to limit her meds. The other half, who also wanted to kill her, expressed their murderous impulses by putting pressure on the same doctor to increase the morphine to quite unorthodox doses. The quisling wrote a script for whatever would keep the loudest voices quiet—and I don't discount the ones in his head—on that particular day. But, as I told my supervisor, anyone could tell that the girl's psychology was not the problem. What she needed was an advocate—I admit my voice rose here, I was more easily moved to self-righteousness in those days—whose position vis-à-vis the staff would eliminate any question of entitlement, claims of specialness, or selfish demands to jump the queue. With my help, which I planned to offer in the form of thrice-weekly hypnosis sessions—during which I imagined Holly, supine on my sofa, gazing alternately at the ceiling, at the spot where her foot used to be, and increasingly beseechingly at me—she could learn to endure her pain, earning the respect of the

ward nurses, who would in turn feel free, if "free" is the right word for it, to medicate her sensibly.

"A little pain now for less later," I told my supervisor, who had grown very still. "That's the lesson I'll impart."

"Give it a try," he said finally. "We can't seem to do anything for her. But you"—he sneered—"you've been trained by Freudians." Which was true. Freudians: Those for whom limited, delayed or even omitted gratification—no psychic pain, no primary gain—had ever been the gold standard of care. "Maybe your approach will shake something loose. God knows, we've tried everything else."

The ease with which we reached this agreement should have been the first clue that I was not fully in control of this case—which is to say, of my own contribution to it. Naturally, my supervisor missed everything, as did I. Holly came for six sessions, during which I encouraged her to elaborate on a fantasy in which she lounged on a warm beach, and taught her to call this fantasy to mind whenever the nurses were too rough with her stump. She did this, which had the effect of keeping her somewhat quieter during debridements, and the nurses, admiring her new fortitude, soon began to medicate her more reasonably. In other words, we'd achieved a triumph of publicity. As for what else we accomplished—well, I can see the truth more clearly now that so much time has passed. As is usual in cases of physician over-involvement, when I was depriving my patient of pain medication, I was trying to avoid a recent deprivation of my own.

When I met Holly, I was dating a policy analyst whom I wanted very much to marry. Annie and I were only three months into our courtship when I proposed. This antsy neuroticism was just the leading edge of my failings, which included a persistent slight aversion to sex, a prissiness about sounds and smells that I still had not completely overcome, despite two years' worth of sessions with a tight-lipped analyst, naturally also a Freudian, whose withering interpretations had gradually rendered me less prone to withering in more fraught contexts. I should add that Annie was pretty—far more attractive a woman than I had any right to hope for. Perhaps not surprisingly, she did not feel quite

the same urgent desire to marry me. But she was not a generally urgent person. That was one of the things I liked about her. She specialized in large-scale cost analyses of certain high-tech medical interventions whose cost was difficult to justify to the bean-counters in government and insurance—serious, deliberate work. Nights after my shifts, usually thirty-six straight hours on the burn unit, I was as vulnerable to Annie's calm numeracy as a lamb to the knife. Peeking at her through the curtains as I slipped my key in the lock, I found her singularly winsome: a petite brunette applying herself to her paperwork as she sat in the pooled light of my old gooseneck lamp, her glasses setting like dual suns as they slid down her nose. She would push her glasses up, re-knot her hair with whatever was handy—a pencil, a chopstick from her take-out dinner—and smile: *Hello, darling.* She was a goddess of the ordinary, of things that happened every other minute and could therefore be counted on to exhibit certain regularities. Whereas my days were full of unrepeatables like Holly, who were going through things, like their own dying, that would not reoccur in the history of the universe. For them, at least. Though it is surprising how many people die alone, or would, were it not for their doctors, sitting at the bedside, listening in. That is a data set no one has counted up, to my knowledge.

"You're overreacting," Annie complained when I told her this. She was speaking into my armpit, half-asleep after we'd made the sort of tender, exhausted love that I was capable of after my shift and at no other time. We'd failed to draw the shades, and Annie was burnished head to toe in the weak light that reflected off the snow accumulating outside. "People die by themselves all the time. Think of marriage. By definition, half of every couple dies alone."

She leaned over and drew the shade, thrusting both of us into the room's shadows, choosing the darkness instead of allowing it to swallow us up. As if we might have a choice. As if anyone did.

"To hear you talk, you'd think dying was just some ordinary thing people do."

Annie pressed her lips together, making of her mouth a thin, refus-

ing line. I murmured an apology; I hadn't meant to sound dismissive. My analyst had warned me about my tendency to let my speech outrun my intentions.

"If you are indeed my destiny," she continued, reminding me that my ring was still not quite around her finger, "then God has a wicked sense of humor."

"We make our own fate, Annie," I said, aiming for kindness because I didn't need to top a long day with a fight. I was surprised, as well, to hear Annie talk about destiny. I thought only primitive people still believed in things like that. "Besides, the law of large numbers would suggest that you're likely to marry someone sooner or later anyway. Why shouldn't it be me?"

"You're arrogant," she informed me, pulling the duvet up. Of course, she meant supercilious. But rather than correcting her, which would only have confirmed her impression, I reached instead for her feet and began to knead them, rolling my knuckles against the soles. At her office, fancy high-heeled shoes were sartorially de rigeur, which meant her days often ended with foot cramps. Unkinking these knots was an easy way to help her unwind. Mercifully it didn't require me to say much. "But don't worry," she sighed. "The law of large numbers only restates, in formal mathematical terms, what we already know from ordinary, non-mathematical experience."

"What's that?" I switched to the other foot.

"What goes around comes around. Karma's a bitch." A policy analyst. A night nurse.

She pointed and flexed, leaning back so I could get a better grip. I chafed her pinky toes, which were colder than the rest of her. A blister had burst on one of them, leaving little shreds of flesh that I rolled gently back and forth.

"Is marriage always a tragedy?" I asked, to distract her from whatever discomfort I might have been causing her, or not. The skin was dead, after all.

"What do you think? Husbands usually die first. That's demography for you. Ouch. Facts."

"Facts," I echoed. She had shut her eyes. Her death's head look was

not unappealing. I struggled against an urge to pinch off an especially resistant bit of old blister. The idea that I might have been repeating my workday experiences with Holly shimmered at some distant outpost of my consciousness. This was not tenderness. This was me, stupidly allowing work to bleed into my private life. Wretched scrap that it was, that I was. I took my hands off her. "Say," I ventured, as it was time to change the subject, "did you read that book I gave you?"

It was a new novel by an author we both admired. I hadn't read it, which was a mistake. As it turned out, the book described the unraveling of a marriage.

"You want to let me know what I'm in for," she complained as she scooted away in order to fumble in the nightstand until she came up with the volume, which she handed to me as if it had never been my gift to her but something disappointing that she'd only borrowed. Of course I was crushed, though not so much that I could not appreciate the social adroitness of this move, which kept me uneasy as I juggled my doubts and hopes. At least she'd read it—cover to cover, it seemed, as there was a lot of underlining in a blue pencil she usually reserved for editing quarterly reports. Pictured on the back was the author, a pasty man leaning against New England-style clapboards that announced his respectability. Possibly I'd wanted to suggest something similar about myself. I slipped the book between the mattress and the box spring, resolving to look at it later, when I would seek and likely find some small hope for our relationship in her scrawled marks, despite her overt rejection. That's my job, as a psychiatrist: doubting that any story is the whole story. Of course, the book didn't make her uneasy; I did. But wasn't that marriage's whole point, to find someone with whom to sound the limits one's uneasiness, in order to outgrow them?

A FEW DAYS LATER, HOLLY'S MOTHER CALLED with news: Holly was off the burn unit. The wound had finally granulated in. But she was having nightmares. All night, every night, dream-Holly lay immobilized on a marble bier, while a nurse pulled her toenails out with a pair of pliers. Sometimes Holly was made of butter, and the nurse had a pastry torch.

Sometimes the nurse was a wolverine.

"She's bedridden," Juliet continued. "Her aorta could go any time. Can you come out to Bethesda?"

"Of course," I told her. My rotation on the burn unit was ending soon. I had no other commitments. I was grateful for the chance to be of use.

I arrived to find Juliet was in the midst of an argument with a neighbor, a young woman whose face might have been striking, had it not been thoroughly smudged with soot from the leaves she'd been burning in the yard. The problem, Holly's mother informed me, was that the bonfire made Holly cough, putting pressure on her fragile aorta.

Juliet said to the neighbor, "This man is a doctor, Lola. He'll tell you."

The woman named Lola wore yellow Wellington boots and a barn jacket that closed with toggle buttons. She brushed a flyaway hair from her face, met my eyes and thrust out a hand for me to shake. No ring on her finger. I drew back, as if I'd received a mild electrical jolt.

"It's that time of year," Lola pleaded, though it hadn't been "that time of year" for weeks. "The leaves dropped late. Everyone's doing it."

Holly's mother had stepped away. Out of the corner of my eye, I could have sworn I saw her smiling. How intrusive, to engage me in matchmaking while I was trying to offer psychiatric treatment to her daughter. Perhaps the nurses had been right about her after all.

"Put it out," I snapped. "Doctor's orders."

Lola flashed a look that told me she would do as I said, but that I would be wrong to infer much beyond politeness from her acquiescence. Of course, this invitation left me free to infer a great deal, and I can see now that here was the key to Lola's influence, the ease with which she could unmoor me from my familiar perspective, lift the ropes and give me a push that set me to dreaming like a toy boat loosed into the sea. Against my own wishes, to remain coolly unflappable, professional, sturdy and dependable, as would befit a practically practically-married man, I smiled, pleased as—

"A late lunch?" she offered. "I have enough for two. Tomato soup, with cheese toasts."

"Raincheck." Inclining my head toward Holly's mother who was still loitering by the front door, I pulled out a business card and handed it to Lola. "Duty calls."

She slid the card into a pocket. "Do you ever call back?"

I smiled again, to mark the end of the interview, and headed inside to do my damned job.

Holly's cluttered house unsettled me. Plants of all sorts, in bright ceramic pots or else hanging from the ceiling in macramé hammocks, filled the interior, all the way from the front door to the glassed-in solarium at the back. In the dining room, the table was set cheerfully for seven—the whole family, including Holly, who could not possibly rise for the meal—with sturdy blue plates on Bonnard yellow placements, topped by folded napkins striped thickly in orange and white. Because Holly was too ill to be moved, I was to see her in the living room where a bed had been made up. Distressingly, the room had no door: our sessions were to occur in the midst of family life, with her four younger siblings running in and out while Juliet puttered among the plants. Try as I might, I could not tell the children apart. They were all variations on the same tow-headed, jam-smeared theme, preoccupied with mislaid shoes and lost homework.

It was a home in which it was easy to disappear. I folded myself into an armchair, pulled out my notebook, and readied my pen. Across from me, calmly recumbent in the eye of all this activity, Holly looked up from her macramé long enough to murmur: *Hey.* She told me about her nightmares, which were like the children in their infernal similarity: she fell to pieces like a fillo sweet, she disarticulated like a chicken that her mother might ask the butcher to cut up. As was appropriate for a young woman of limited experience, her associations suggested the safe suburban universe of the meat counter and the bakery aisle. She relayed her dreams lightly, all the while making loops with her macramé. Perhaps she was too immature to fully apprehend her own circumstances—which is to say, she was too young to die. At once I understood my new task: to reconcile her, not to her ordinariness, as on the burn unit, but to her death. I told her as much, but she only

shrugged, a move that dislodged the loose shoulder of her nightgown. I tamped my irritation, provoked as much by her sexy show as by the disinterested, can't-be-bothered way that her long fingers worked the cream-colored string. Instead of analyzing her nightmares, I told her that they were a common side effect of the drug she'd been given at the hospital. With disgust I heard myself speak—I was not exactly lying, but I was avoiding the more difficult subject of her vastly foreshortened life, which now included the awareness that certain things, such as drooping peignoirs and their ordinary sequelae, would never be hers.

She said, too brightly: "So that's that, then." Another little shrug, another inch of fabric slipping away.

"I suppose," I replied, struggling not to reach across the space between us and quell my anxiety by covering the shoulder that was now fully exposed. But when Holly left off her macramé in order to pull up the fabric by herself, my guilt was enormous. She was letting me know that she wouldn't ask me to do deep work if I was not up for it. Wouldn't ask me to get too close if the prospect repelled me. She was only a girl doing macramé, after all. "We can certainly talk about the meanings of these things," I told her, contritely. "Dream interpretation is a very old and honorable—" I struggled for the right word and got it wrong anyway. "Activity. Practice. Preoccupation."

She nodded. To quiet me, I supposed. I was babbling. She again took up her macramé, and the visit was over.

ANNIE WENT AWAY for a month, traveling around the country on a project for a national children's health organization. In her absence I had nothing to do but check in on the regular outpatient ward and consult on cases as the need arose, which it did not often. I even had time to wonder about the wisdom of my proposal to Annie, who had come, suddenly, to bore me. She called every few days in order to squawk reports from her latest research into my ear. I permitted her to ramble, even encouraged it. I didn't want to cut her loose without knowing more about how and why she had suddenly turned out to be inadequate. All my training suggested that the fault was likely to be my own; there was nothing particularly wrong with Annie. So

I squelched my annoyance, and tried to treat her with the consideration that I imagined would befit a future wife. Mine, I mean. Perhaps I found Annie boring because although I continued to see Holly on our usual twice-a-week schedule, certain developments on that front had shifted the distribution of my interests. Still, the precise point of transition remained obscure. All I know is that one day, as I was arriving for my session with Holly, the neighbor Lola came running down the walk. Thick black smoke billowed from her doorway. She was slightly knock-kneed in her rubber boots, and wearing a pair of elbow-length oven mitts. She handed me a fire extinguisher and ran away, into the burning house. *Ladybug, ladybug,* I thought, mindlessly, as I ran after her, not wanting to feel whatever I was feeling, on seeing her again. Already my eyes were stinging, my face wet.

Inside, the oven door lay open to reveal a fire-licked interior and, at the center, a beautiful pound cake that looked just about done. I pulled the safety on the extinguisher and motioned for Lola to step back. But she came toward me instead, an awkward woman with her arms encased in oven mitts. "My cake!"

"Is on fire." I cocked the extinguisher's trigger.

"Not the cake! Just the oven." She reached into the flames.

"Lola!" I saw the burn unit, heard Holly screaming. "Stand back!"

She leapt out of the way. Without aiming, I shot, for what seemed like an hour. The fire fizzled. The wind blew through the house, clearing the smoke to reveal a miracle: the cake resting in her mitted hands.

"I was baking for Holly," she explained, setting the cake on the counter. With a rag, she began to mop up, mumbling all the while. She was sorry, she didn't mean to keep me, I could go if I wanted.

I didn't want. Something about her helplessness pulled at me, or maybe it was just the fact that I was early anyway, with nowhere else to go. Plus, with Lola, I got chances to do useful things, like put out fires. Or maybe I was just eager to learn more about this woman, this Lola, about whom—I now remembered—I had dreamed for several nights in a row, dreamed of her complete with her Wellingtons. She had slipped into my inner world without any particular invitation. And so I planted myself on her kitchen stool.

Her house was built exactly like Holly's, small but high-ceilinged, with the same large central room—Lola had filled it with books, rather than plants—and the kitchen opening onto it, backed by the glass solarium. In the center of the living area, a large wooden table stood piled with papers, more books and scrolls in different stages of unfolding. A typewriter crouched in one corner, a tongue of paper caught in the mechanism as if Lola had left off typing at mid-sentence, perhaps distracted by the smell of smoke. As I poked around, Lola explained that the mess was due to her work as an assistant professor at a local college where she taught a general course in the history of religion, as an outgrowth of her specialty, which was prayer in the ancient Near East. She was also an occasional guest in Holly's home, happy to babysit the younger children in a pinch.

As Lola cleaned up, she told me a story about an obscure Victorian named George Smith.

"He taught himself cuneiform on his lunch breaks when he wasn't working a letterpress in Paternoster Row. One afternoon in 1872 he was going through a cache of tablets at the British Museum when he realized that he was reading about a flood. There was a boat caught on a mountain. Doves."

"Ah," I marveled, catching her gaze and holding it, allowing her to expand into the space I was creating for her in my mind. I admit, this is a trick. But she had already colonized my dreams, and she could not have been unaware of the hypnotic effect of her own low voice, so different from Annie's yawps.

"Almost a thousand of years before the earliest account of the Flood." Her hands moved gracefully as she talked, like the doves she'd mentioned. "That's what got me into this business—that story."

She pulled off her sweater. Beneath, she was wearing a thin t-shirt, no bra. The armpits of her t-shirt were dark. With a toothpick she poked the cake in several places, and checked the result for crumbs.

"My new work is more recent," she continued. "Do you know about Amnon of Mainz?"

I shook my head. "Should I?"

"He's associated with a famous prayer. Actually, it's more like a hymn. It's the one you hear at Yom Kippur, about the broken pottery."

"We are as broken pottery," I repeated, astonished to discover the words rising up inside me despite years of conscious atheism. "We are the dream that flies."

"Exactly." Just visible through the solarium's glass wall, a group of geese honked as they flew toward the house in formation. "Tradition claims Amnon as the prayer's author. But there's no proof. All we have is a report from two centuries later, when a twelfth-century rabbi, Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, claimed the story came to him in a dream. In which the prayer came to Amnon when his persecutors cut off his hands and feet, after he refused to abjure his faith. It was a terrible story." She glanced at me in the appraising way that my patients sometimes did when they told awful secrets, checking to see that the revelation had not blown me away as they had been annihilated themselves.

"He was tortured."

"Yes. Or at least, that's the legend."

"Go on," I said, struggling to keep Amnon distinct from Holly in my mind. This was my job, in those days—to stay present while another person unwound the gauze from a festering interior wound. All my training was oriented toward reversing the ordinary reaction, to turn toward these things rather than away from them. I was still working on it.

"When did the story originate?"

"The ninth century. But a version of it was recently discovered in a cache of documents in Old Cairo. The cache is even older."

Lola's historical perspective calmed me, as did the homely cake, still steaming on the counter. She slipped her mittens on again and overturned the pan on a rack. The cake slipped free but before it could settle, she'd flipped it again, so it landed properly, bottom-down. Kitchen magic—a subject best avoided, given my present vulnerability. With Annie gone for weeks, I had only my unpatterned nights, which contained no accounting, no girl by the gooseneck lamp, and certainly no baked goods.

"The idea of dust to dust isn't new," she continued, brushing crumbs from the plate's edge. One landed on my lap. I picked it up, tasted it: vanilla, egg, something faintly floral. Lola went on: "We have it from Ecclesiastes. But the specifics of the prayer matter a lot more. Like, we are as broken pottery. That's not metaphorical. That's real. Broken pots are all over the ancient world."

"Ostraka," I said, another word that bubbled up from nowhere.

"Hey!" She laughed, delighted. "So you know."

It was a seduction, of course; she was lonely, looking for understanding and companionship. Perhaps I was too, and I was dreamy myself, from the warmth of her kitchen, her eyes flickering blue as the base of a gas flame. She smiled again, shyly, and I squeezed her hand to let her know this was not a classroom, and I was not a bored student. She returned the pressure, working the palm of my hand like she would work anything else that arrived in her life tightly rolled and bound, unfolding me one layer at a time. In light of this tender excavation, my wished-for engagement to Annie, with her policy prescriptions and her Law of Large Numbers, seemed like a misstep.

My mouth was dry. I swallowed hard, wanting more than anything not to blow this moment, and knowing, in my usual abstracted way, that my insufficiently-analyzed self-disgust would make me likely to do just that.

"Honestly, I have no idea what I'm doing." She backed off, sensing my hesitation. But an ashy smudge on her chin drew me toward her, an imperfection made irresistible by its smallness, which meant even I could rectify it, and I did, with one swift motion of my hand. Her smooth skin was young enough, still fresh—yet she seemed immensely old and, for just this reason, utterly magnetic. The dust of ages clung to her hair; she smelled of cake; I sucked her fingers and grit cracked between my teeth.

By spring I was spending most nights at Lola's. She would work and bake into the wee hours, even as I slept, lulled by her noises—the clack of her typewriter, the whirr of her hand mixer, the muffled *whumpf!* of the gas oven coming on. In the morning, I'd find a pile of

fresh typescript alongside a zucchini bread, a basket of corn muffins, a pile of cinnamon twists. Lola would be leaning over the kitchen counter, sipping coffee in her spattered bathrobe as she paged through some forbiddingly titled and extensively footnoted scholarly journal.

"Sleep is your friend," I would tell her, around a big sweet bite of her baking.

"Not my friend," she would reply, and set the percolator going again. Usually, it would be around five in the morning. I wouldn't have to be at the hospital until nine, so I would return to our bed, which smelled of sex, tangy and familiar, and fall asleep pleased that this bothered me much less than it used to.

Later, I would offer Lola sleeping drugs—not a prescription, which would be too unethical even for me, but samples I took home from work because they were overwhelming the clinic's cupboards anyway. Though Lola accepted the pills, she neither took them nor spoke with me about not doing so. Perhaps I'd crossed a line—one of the tricky ones whose breach is not significant enough to merit further discussion, though it should. I found the pills in odd nooks later, when hunting for other things—floss, extra batteries, a paper clip. One packet, with single capsule gone, had been thrust into the nightstand drawer where we kept the rubbers. Perhaps I should have made more of this discovery. I did note it. But discreet politesse again held sway, and besides, my days were too full already. Holly took every free thought I had. Well, not every free thought: my baker-scholar took a few thoughts, too. Coming from the hospital, where my own apartment was, and the grocer's where I picked up butter and sugar for Lola before driving miles to see her, I watched the sky for birds, smoke, anything. Signs.

SIX WEEKS INTO our at-home sessions, Holly's hearing deteriorated, and her speech grew strange in turn, until she was incomprehensible. At those moments she would abruptly stop speaking, like a radio signal cutting out. Seeing this pattern, Juliet feared Holly would despair. But Holly, resourceful Holly, who had learned sign language during her only year at college, simply switched channels, from speech

to gesture—and writing. She signed everything she could; what she couldn't, she wrote on slips of paper, napkins and receipts, whatever was to hand.

We were in session as usual, and she was pointing to a glossy large-format *National Geographic* that lay open on the coffee table to a feature article titled "The Last of the Nuba," as photographed by some celebrity shutterbug whose name I no longer recall. The photographs were intimate, as if taken with a zoom lens trained on people unknowingly going about their daily business in a hot climate that kept them mostly naked, while their remoteness kept them innocent both of their nakedness and whatever meaning it might have to onlookers. A teenage girl, who was not dressed but only jeweled, commanded my attention. As the photographer surely intended, I was drawn to the innocent cleft, lightly fuzzed, atop the two young strong legs, their litheness accentuated by surface effects, light sliding on oiled skin.

Holly was watching me closely, virtually unable at this point to lift her head.

Here was the healthy body Holly wanted, and it was so far from the degraded one she had.

"Why are you asking me to look at this?" I didn't even try to hide my revulsion.

Aren't they beautiful? she signed.

I wanted to retort: *Only if you found exploitation beautiful.* But my discomfort was my problem. Holly, who owed me nothing, should not need to make allowances for me.

"Perhaps," I offered, "it is just a matter of taste."

She wrote something down. Still sure I found her repugnant—my prissy response probably didn't help in this regard—she was careful to let go as soon as she felt me take the slip of paper. *The composition*, she'd written.

I thought: *And you, decomposing. Like Amnon of Mainz. And, like him, offering up your agony on scraps of paper. In Cairo, a thousand years ago, these fragments would be saved, to be re-found, years later, by a knock-kneed woman who came to me in dreams wearing yellow rubber*

boots. That day, when our session ended, I abandoned Holly to a room full of paper slips. One of the children, or more likely, Juliet, would have to collect them. Did Juliet read the scraps? Did she talk with Holly about what was on them? I hoped so; I trusted Juliet to do what I could not, to hold Holly through whatever she could not express: shame, desire.

Driving back, I struggled to breathe. The panic grew so bad I had to pull over, just outside the Potomac park entrance, between the river and the curved flower beds. I rested my head on the wheel, unable to rid myself of an image of Holly's body superimposed on the *National Geographic* photographs, with a result that was not too different from a *Playboy* spread. I exhaled shallowly into my cupped hands. Where had this image come from? Could Holly possibly want me? Once raised, this question was hard to bear, especially since I was staying almost every night just across the road with Lola. No one could miss my car parked in her driveway. Was that my job—to teach Holly, who had already been denied so much, about not-having?

It seemed cruel.

Then it hit me: Instead of a reasonable regimen of medication, I had offered hypnosis to Holly. And despite the fact that this intervention accomplished precisely nothing, Holly had complied. Suffered. Endured. One thing she did not do was complain, because in that case, her mother would have continued to wreak her quiet havoc with the nurses. Which was, in fact, the real pain to be addressed. It was all clear now. Unlike me, Holly had known from the start that the pathology I was treating had nothing to do with her. And perhaps my visits did not, either. It was possible that I merely liked her neighborhood—or, more precisely, her neighbor.

It was dusk. Clerks in flannel suits streamed from office buildings. A police cruiser passed without stopping, to my relief. I didn't want to have to explain myself, to insist that I was fine, just a little tired, as you would expect from a doctor coming from work. Downriver choppers churned smoke, spindrift over the freeway. Blinkers blinked. Wipers wiped. On greased rails the year slipped; a cormo-

rant retracted its wings and plummeted; the radio warned of frozen roads. I lifted my head, breathing more normally. I wanted a better look at the river, those headlights, that smoke.

A freak storm started soon after, the snow falling in wet clumps that stuck. The weather was so bad that I had to ski to the clinic the following day. Amazing sight: a psychiatrist pumping down a snowy city street on cross-country skis. Too bad there was no one to see it: the buildings were all shuttered, and even the clinic was deserted, though I had the radio for company. According to the announcer, the smoke plume I'd seen the day before was the last worldly residue of a young man who had set himself on fire in the park, protesting something or other. All day, alone in the clinic, I could not get the picture out of my mind. On some level, I believed the man was me, or should have been, as punishment for what I'd done, or failed to do, with Holly. With Annie. With Lola.

Whom I phoned in desperation. No doubt she heard it in my voice. She agreed to stay at my place the following night, after my shift ended. The streets were clear by this time but I had to ski home anyway, as there was no other place to store my skis. By the time I reached my apartment, my prescription pads had nearly frozen in my pockets. Lola removed them, flipping the pages as if to assess some obscure damage, and stacked them on the cluttered night table beside an academic paper about a lost Elamite matriarchy written by a woman whose work Lola did not much admire. My rejected gift, the novel by the respectable New Englander, was in there, too, but I was too worn out to note its exact position in the mess.

"What binds Holly to life?" Lola asked me, after I'd poured out the story of my last two days.

"She's twenty." The question seemed incredible. "*Life* binds her to life."

"You mean the future she doesn't have anymore. To which she felt entitled." Lola frowned. "I guess everyone feels that way." Her exhaustion told on her face, a dulling film that reached even to her eyes. "Just as it was five thousand years ago," she said, and gestured toward the monograph on the night-table. "And will be, I suppose, for another

five thousand."

"At least," I said sourly, and turned out the light.

Where Holly's cherub face was unlined, Lola's, in the near-dark, bore marks of her advancing maturity, fine lines that would eventually become furrows, the dermatology that resulted from a decade spent hunched over manuscripts. She rubbed her face as if to erase what I had just noticed.

"Lola," I pleaded, afraid my scrutiny had discomfited her. "Tell me again, about Amnon of Mainz."

"You always want a bedtime story." Her tolerant smile did not quite conceal her frustration. Where guessing at the contents of other people's heads was for me a confusing and often dicey professional skill, for Lola the same work was a straightforward matter of analysis, according to a procedure that had been laid down well in advance. With hermeneutics on her side, she was free to act as though such risks did not exist, as if everything short of mortality could be reversed, undone, by the close and exact attention demanded by scholarship, the tranquilizing apparatus of *loc. cit., et al.* Still, her work was a far cry from Annie's faith in cost analysis and demography, which had come to seem limited, unimaginative, falsely reassuring. Or maybe it just comes down to this: Lola believed in interpretation, whereas Annie preferred to stick to the facts. And, *mirabile dictu,* I'd finally taken a side.

Or so it seemed to me then. Looking back, it is hard to know.

From one of my thawing prescription pads on the nightstand Lola tore a page and scrawled on it.

"Look," she said, and show me an inverted triangle with a fourth line, like a gash, that stretched upward from the vertex. "Bet you can't guess what it is."

"I do believe that is a dirty picture," I said.

I didn't say: *But not as dirty as "The Last of the Nuba."* She pinched my arm.

"It's the sign for woman, you prude. In cuneiform."

I stared. The vertices might be the women in my life: Holly, Lola,

Annie. Perhaps such things just came in threes, like bad luck, or the Fates. Or perhaps the inscription was itself the important element, a symbol of our exigent need to relieve ourselves of whatever presses on the mind.

"How old is it?"

"The earliest cuneiform inscriptions date from about 3000 BC."

"Your point?"

"It seems we have known something about this for a long time."

"The triangle," I said. My mind swarmed, as if suddenly filled with locust-like supervisors ready to pounce on my incorrect answers. "Was it three separate strokes?"

"I don't think so. A wedge pressed into the wet clay—"

"And then the insertion," I blurted.

Lola smiled patronizingly, and at that moment I hated her. There was so much I didn't know, and would not soon—or, possibly, ever. Headlights from a passing car lit the room briefly and dissipated, like the skeptical light in Lola's eyes. The car turned the corner with a screech that threatened to haunt me forever. *Interpret*, I ordered myself, as if the truth might yet set me free.

And there it was, the truth: Annie had needed to push me away, and perversely, the rejection made me try even harder. With Lola, though, the question never came up. How could it? We'd emerge panting from the twisted sheets, so startled to discover ourselves in separate skins that speech, that earliest achievement after walking, would be impossible for hours.

One afternoon Holly was trying to teach me to sign her name. She had been for some time teaching me sign language, a few minutes at the end of each session. I'd permitted this, thinking it would help us communicate but with the deeper intention (it seems clearer in retrospect) of suggesting that our conversations would continue somehow, after her death, in the memory of the impressions we made on each other, when we touched.

She covered my hand with her own, pressed where I'd screwed up. I signed back, trying to be more precise, more articulate. My tendons

ached. We'd been at it a while. What life is: aching effort. Trying, in every sense. She took her hand away. We went on like this, haltingly, week after week. Meanwhile, Annie stopped calling, which was fine because I was unable to fully conceal her continued presence in my life, and her calls were upsetting Lola, who said nothing but cooked with less joy and wrote with less brio whenever Annie was too much on my mind. As it turned out, I missed the cooking and the writing more than I missed Annie and her calculator, and so I let Annie go, putting her off when she called and later failing to call back, shelving my cowardice as something to work on with my next analyst. The seasons turned; the leaves fell and so, too, the first snow. Through all of it, my rejected suitor's gift sat on the night table, with the scattered prescription pads and Lola's monographs. But Lola was still in the bed, and so, seeing no reason to complain, I did not. I'd learned my lesson, even if I still could not say precisely what the lesson was. I continued to visit Holly in the afternoons, when she talked to me in the language of her ideal body, smiling, flirting, shifting the covers to divert my attention to and from aspects of her real body, which underwent increasingly frequent and dismal fallings apart. A run of good days would be interrupted by a decompensation—a loss of feeling in a joint, a numbness that spread from the tip of her nose to her whole face—followed by a period of stability that would in turn be lost. As she taught me to sign simple words like *honey* and *milk*, I associated the gestures with the feel of her hands, the occasional touch of a forearm, smooth and cool and, above all, so young.

The night we celebrated Lola's thirtieth birthday was bittersweet; I had not yet proposed and didn't intend to. Not after Annie. Still, Lola didn't leave. I wondered how long she could hold out, how long I could. My neurosis generalized until I could no longer trust myself with patients and had to take a break from clinical work. I found a position in government-sponsored research, which at least put patients out of my nervous reach. I still worried about marriage, but I tried to do so in an ordinary way, by finding an older mentor like any other ambitious young man with his future much on his mind. My new supervisor,

a ruddy-cheeked former manufacturing executive who had not a single insectlike quality, fit the bill well enough, and with him I wondered if perhaps that was what marriage was like, a marathon of withholding. He replied, straightforwardly, that it was. He was unequivocal on the point—but he was unequivocal on most things. I briefly wondered if it might be a sign of neurosis and then shelved the thought. What did I know?

Holly was dying then—my first patient to do so. I experienced the loss as a whistling melancholy that eddied around me, especially in the car park near my office, as I thumped up and down the dingy stairwell, meeting no one, no one meeting me. I took some comfort from a set of new clothes, blue jeans and boots, the uniform of people who were relevant, to use one of Annie's words, people who worked with things that they could see, smell, taste, touch. "You're romanticizing," Lola observed with an ironic smile—for she was rather romantically aproned herself, kneading a loaf of wheat bread in her kitchen as she spoke—but she wasn't wrong, either. Maybe I simply needed something to idealize. I wept through the Holy Days and grew hysterical, if that is the word for it, at the recitation of the *Unetaneh Tokef*: *We are as broken pottery. We are the dream that flies.*

Holly died after Thanksgiving, in the last lowering days of November. Nothing happened except that one afternoon, a dead leaf fluttered in the periphery of my vision. I turned to see the leaf burn up, and I heard a cry that was like a sheet of foil tearing. That was all: a little leaf disintegrated with a cry, and I knew that Holly was dead. I got the call a few hours later. It was her father, slurring drunk, but by then I too was numb, having already anesthetized myself by laboring over the preparation of a few words, mainly of gratitude for the chance to treat Holly, and admiration for her and for this man and his wife. I remember saying something shamefully intellectualized about their fine parenting. Her father rang off, no word of thanks or anything else either, apart from a rough-voiced goodbye. I supposed I deserved it. But there it is again, the cry of tin, the hiss of a leaf going to ash.

After the funeral, Holly's family gathered at the house. Lola was there with one of her cakes. Juliet wandered, dazed, through the down-

stairs rooms, cradling the urn that contained Holly's ashes. At last she shifted a potted plant and placed the urn into the void. During an awkward coffee in the kitchen, where even the linoleum seemed hard and echoic as marble, she set the displaced plant upon the table and turned the refugee at intervals. I drained my cup and refused a second. Lola and I left together, buttoned into our coats. As we made our way down the walk, Lola looped her arm through mine, and for just a moment, before I recoiled, I knew how it felt to belong.

PLUM HILL

Jarrett Kaufman

THIS IS how it happens. We're sitting in a booth next to the window at a McDonald's. It's sleeting outside.

My wife Alice says, "Charlie. That man won't stop looking at us."

I grab my egg McMuffin. I just want to eat breakfast but Alice glares at me real hard. So I turn and look the the dining area over. There's this Hispanic woman sitting at a table. She's eating hash browns smothered in ketchup. The old woman who served us is standing behind the ordering counter next to the coffee machine, texting on her cellphone. I look past her. Then I see him. The man has a grubby red beard. He's sitting next to a woman with a mottled face.

Alice leans in close to the table and this time she says, "He's staring at us."

We were visiting my father for the weekend at the old lake house. It was his 58th birthday yesterday and last night, we ate store-bought cake and drank boxed red wine. Things were fine. They always are. But I talked Alice into leaving early. I knew my father wanted it that way. I did, too. So we packed our things and left this morning.

I stopped in Plum Hill at a BP. The car was low on fuel, and we had a 1-hour drive back to St. Louis. I was standing outside pumping gas when Alice knocked on the side window. She pointed to the billboard sign across the street that said: "McDonald's 1 Mile." She rolled the passenger window down and said, "Please. I'm hungry."

I look over my shoulder again and I study the man's face. That's when I realize the woman sitting next to him is looking right at me. So I glance at the man again before I turn back in my seat. Then I know. I recognize them both from a wedding photograph I saw in a local newspaper that I found at my father's house a few years back.

My face flushes. I say, "His name is Carl. He's my cousin and that's his wife."

Alice looks relieved. She smiles and then says, "Should we go say—"

"No," I say. I sip my coffee. I say, "No. I don't think we should."

"This is strange," she says looking down at her flat pancakes. "Charlie. This—"

"I know," I tell her. "Listen. Our family had a falling out years ago."

Alice cuts her food but she doesn't eat it. She sets her plastic fork and knife down.

I say, "It involved my mother." I say, "It had to do with her."

A semi truck hauling rock passes the McDonald's and all the windows shudder.

"I haven't talked to Carl or his parents since my mother died," I say.

Alice just sits there. She tilts her head to the side. I stir my coffee with a red straw. I add some cream. Alice knows that my mother died in a car accident when I was a boy. She knows I don't like to talk about it. She knows my father refuses to discuss it. But ever since we got married this spring, she keeps telling me that we don't talk enough.

Alice wipes up dried syrup on the table. She isn't talking now. I know this game.

I take another bite of my McMuffin then set it down. I say, "Fine."

"Charlie?" she says. She inspects her fingernails.

I clap the biscuit crumbs off my hands. I say, "Okay. Okay, Alice."

IT WAS Thanksgiving evening. We were at Uncle Frank and Aunt Ruth's house in Plum Hill. My mother and her sister, Ruth, were setting the table in the dining room. Frank was kneeling down next to the fireplace in the living room. He was stacking oak logs in the fire pit. I sat on the sofa next to my father. Carl was lying on the floor playing a video game. The Nintendo console was setting in front of the TV, the controller cord stretching across the floor. This was the first holiday that the family had celebrated together since Frank's mother, Rosie, had died from pneumonia earlier that year.

Frank sat on the stone hearth. He leaned over and rubbed his hand through the green shag rug that lay across the living room floor. He smiled. He'd knitted it a few months ago. He'd also knitted the matching green drapes hanging over the windows.

"Touch it, John," Frank said. He pointed to the rug. "Go on. Touch it."

My father grabbed a handful of fabric. He said," It's nice."

"I haven't had a drink in four months," he said. He touched the rug again.

"That's great," my mother said from the dining room. "I'm proud of you."

Frank knelt down next to the fireplace. He arranged the firewood in the pit. Then he chucked another log on the grate. He poked at it with a fire iron. He poked at it again. His face, hidden behind a red bushy mustache, had acquired a fleshy glow from years of straight whiskey drinking. My parents loathed Frank. He had been a reckless drunk.

Then Rosie died. Frank was drinking every day at that time. He was even sleeping at his mother's house. Everyone thought this was his manner to grieve. But Ruth told my mother that Frank came home one day with a box of sewing supplies he'd found in his mother's closet. He'd said, "I want to sew," and that was what he did. He knitted and the more he knitted the more pleasant he became. Months passed. He stopped drinking with no trouble. He told everyone that he didn't need whiskey anymore. It was something.

FRANK PACKED newspaper underneath the grate then lit it with his Zippo.

"I can manage my urges," Frank said. "I—I'm in control now."

"I'm glad," my father said. The wood began to burn. "That's wonderful."

Frank was looking at the fire. He said, "You don't believe me do you."

"What?" my father said. "Of course I do. Yes—"

"I'll prove it," he said. "Carl. Get the bottle of Merlot in the garage."

When my father smirked, Ruth said, "We keep the wine for company."

Carl hurried into the garage and Frank yelled, "Don't run."

I watched the fire grow. Not long after, Carl barreled back into the living room. He was holding the Merlot with both hands. He was smiling. But then his feet got tied up in the video game cords lying across

the floor. He fell forward. When the bottle hit the stone hearth, it shattered. The red wine was spattered across the green rug.

Frank hurled Carl to the side. He fell to his knees, frantically inspecting the rug. "Get me a towel," he yelled as he picked up the bottle shards. We were all silent. We watched him scrub at the dark red stains with a small white towel. His face got sweaty, and then he stopped. He pulled on his mustache. "It's ruined," he said. "Yeah," he said.

Frank stood. He was pacing across the floor sniffing the wine-soaked towel. Then he grabbed the Nintendo and said, "God damn it, Carl. God damn it." He threw it into the fire pit. There was a rush of blue flames and black smoke that rolled out of the fireplace. Everyone started to move around and yell at each other. Ruth opened a window. She fanned out the smoke with a *Town & Country* magazine. My father took the fire iron and dragged out the video game console. He set the charred Nintendo on the hearth. When the fire alarm sounded, Carl started to cry. This was when Frank went after him.

"No. Please," Ruth said. "Please, Frankie. Don't do this. Please don't . . ."

Frank grabbed Carl by the hair. He had a handful of it. He lifted Carl off the floor, dragging him down the hallway. His little body was flailing all over the place. Then they disappeared around a corner. After that, a bedroom door slammed shut. Ruth was standing in the kitchen by the stove. She was staring out the window. She was sobbing.

Frank came back into the living room. He sat down on the recliner chair.

"It's a shame," my father said. He nodded his head. "Yes. It's a shame about—"

"John," Frank said. He was rolling his fingertips together. "Shut the fuck up."

He swaggered across the living room. He glared down at my father and my father sat back down. Frank took hold of his shirt collar. When he tossed my father to the floor, my mother screamed. She said, "Stop." Frank was pressing my father's face into one of the wine stains on the rug. "John. Get up," my mother yelled. She began to cry now. "Frank," she shouted. She kicked the kitchen table. "You crazy asshole. You stop this."

"Quiet now," Frank said. He looked at her. He said, "Marge. Be quiet now."

"John," my mother said. She kept wiping tears from her eyes. "John . . ."

My father glanced at me. Then he looked at her. He said, "Everything's okay."

"No," she said. "Everything's not okay. I'm not okay. Charlie's not okay."

My father stayed huddled on the floor. He kept looking at me. Frank was kneeling down next to him. He held out his fist and he shook it. His knuckles were fat and hairy. I couldn't move from the sofa. It was hard to breath. It was so hard for me to breathe.

"You should listen to your wife," Frank said. He laughed. "Go on. Get up."

We left in a hurry. My father turned off the driveway then pulled onto I-15.

It was dark outside. We crossed an old trestle bridge and drove for a long time and no one talked. Cars passed by. I could see my parents in the flash of the headlight beams. My father was clenching the steering wheel. He was holding onto it with both hands. My mother was sitting next to him. She kept shaking her head back and forth.

My father rubbed his eye where Frank had slapped him. He mumbled, "Shit."

He turned on the radio. He was turning at the dial on the dashboard. He found a station. He listened to the weather broadcast. He listened and kept clearing his throat. Then he turned off the radio. It was quiet again. It wasn't until another car passed that I got another good look at him. I saw the swollen eye. It was red. His eye was red.

I said, "You should have hit Uncle Frank. You should've hit him in the face."

"What do you know? You're just a damn kid, Charlie."

"You didn't do anything. You just laid there," I said. "You did nothing."

"He's good at doing nothing," my mother said.

My father slammed his hand down on the steering wheel. He said, "Fuck."

"John?" my mother said. "John? Are you crying?"

"I did the right thing," he said. He hit the steering wheel with his hand again.

"All right," my mother said. She sat back in her seat. She sighed.

"I was protecting this family. Do you understand?" he yelled.

"Yes," my mother said. She puckered her face. "We understand."

"Charlie?" my father said. "Hey. Charlie? Answer me."

My mother craned her neck to look around the front seat. She stared at me harshly and I saw a desperate pleading in her teary eyes. I turned my head and I gazed out the window. I crossed my arms. I refused to look at her. That was when she said, "Charlie. Tell your father that you understand. Tell him. Just tell him that you understand so we—"

"Marge," he said. "Now damn it. Don't do that. Don't tell him how—"

I said, "Yes," as I leered out the car window. I said, "I understand. I understand."

"See," my mother said. "Your son understands. He understands."

I was gazing out the window at the empty crop fields and all the dead weeds that covered them. I made believe I was out there. I made believe I was standing out there in all that mud and in all those weeds. I made believe that I was out there and not in here.

ALICE STARES at Carl from across dining area. She says, "He's leaving now."

I look over my shoulder and see him walk to the red trash bins.

"Look away," I say. I turn back in my seat and lean in close. "Look away."

Alice chuckles. So I grab her arm. I hold onto it. She says, "You're—"

"Look away," I say again. I squeeze her arm. I keep squeezing it.

"Okay," she says. She lowers her head. "Okay. Okay. Okay . . ."

I let go of Alice's arm. We sit there and wait as Carl empties their leftover food and trash into the bins. He looks over at Alice and me. I act unconcerned. I drink the rest of my coffee. I stare into the empty Styrofoam cup and at the bottom, the coffee grounds look black like

coal. After Carl and his wife leave, Alice says, "You hurt my arm."

I look out the window and I see Carl and his wife hurry across the parking lot. I watch them get into an old rickety Dodge truck that has a rusted bumper. They kiss each other in the cab after they closed the doors. Then they drive away.

I don't want to tell Alice what I've tried to tell my father so many times. I don't want to tell her how that Thanksgiving night, when we got home, I followed my mother through the house and to the bedroom. I watched her pack a suitcase with her clothes. She was ripping through the closet throwing shirts and shoes everywhere. She did this while my father just sat in the dark kitchen holding an icepack to his red and sad swollen face.

"I'm not happy," my mother told me. "I haven't been for a long time."

Then she left for Plum Hill. She was going back to Frank and Ruth's house. But she never made it. A farmer named Willie Cobb found her early the next morning. He found my mother and her car all broken up and turned over in his empty cornfield.

"Are you listening to me?" Alice asks. When I don't answer, she says, "Hello?"

"Yes," I tell her. I turn my coffee cup then say, "I always listen to you."

"I don't want you to just listen, Charlie. I need more than that," she says.

I look down. There's syrup on the table. So I wipe my finger through it.

"Charlie. Stop that," she says. She looks down at the table. "Don't do that."

I wipe my finger through the syrup again. I watch it seep back together again.

"Stop," Alice yells. Everyone in the McDonald's is staring at us now. "Please."

I look at her. There are tears running down her face. She lowers her head. So I take her hand and I hold it. I smile the best way that I can. I smile and I keep smiling until she begins to smile. We sit like this. I hold her hand. We don't move. We just sit there for a while. Then I look out the window again.

NIGHTFOOD

J.W. McCormack

I HAVE a planet in my apartment and it may be a nasty, inhospitable planet but it is mine. Leeches squirm in the heating vents and the windows are cracked with ancient coral. Our kingdom is not peaceable and neither am I some child of the forest unfurled in the bud of a flower. I am, rather, a wild boy, a feral child bound by a mottled length of rope to the side of my mistress as we doze on a mattress overgrown with grass and fennel. She is an evolutionary exception, a proto-sapien enormousness of hands and feet; nothing of the primitive about her, her conquests are recorded in the paintings that peek out from behind the balustrade, stencils of oxen, atavistic horselings and sabreteeth, while her wardrobe of pelts drip in the closet opposite, blood pooling out from under the slats to mix with the bracken below.

I wake up hungry, interrupted from a dream of my old wolfpack, still imagining rough tongues and snouty nuzzlings to find I have been gnawing at the leg of my Cro-Magnon queen. It is the middle of the night but the stars barely penetrate the bedroom and the light fixtures are too high for my claws. My cave-wife stirs in her sleep, vast rumblings as she turns on her side and kicks me loose from where my teeth are still fastened to her thighs. The rope that binds me snaps and I plummet from the sheets of greensward to the swamps below. I yowl as I search for a raft of carpet. My hunger is a beast inside a beast. My only chance is to rove over the wilderness of our domicile. Perhaps the fridge at the far side of the Artic wastes of our kitchen contains some unfinished morsel, an incompletely clubbed seal or a subdued trout, even a leg of mutton. I require nightfood before I can return to my pastoral blankets and dream easy again.

But for now, I am the one being made a meal of. Swarms of mosquitos and other bloodsuckers coat my legs and shoulders as I swim beneath the bedsprings, the bedroom bayou punctuated by islands of laundry that drift past me as I pull myself into a huge boot lying

forgotten beneath a grotto of mossy linen and, plucking a reed from the inside of a marooned soda carton, row myself to the edge of the boudoir. There, at the intersection of the carpet and the creaking baseboard—for this planet is of railroad assembly and the only place to go is forward—lies the bleached skull of my old roommate. So that's where he got to. Alive, Patrick was a querulous critic of the chore wheel, a demon with the thermostat whose hair clotted every drain and whose leavings decorated the toilet bowl into which, if you stared deeply, you would see the lambent flickerings of an anglerfish deep inside the pipes. Now he is a feast for maggots, bearded with snails, stray bits of skin flapping from a face almost completely skeletonized by piranhas. As I row past, a corpulent centipede uncoils from an eyehole and extends itself winsomely in my direction. Patrick deserved better than to bloat crepuscular at the undertow; ex-roommate, ex-lifeform, he paid the rent on time, bought plenty of beer, separated the towels, fed sacrifices to the gods of the oven to keep their wrath at bay. But, alas, cohabitation is no rampart against the elements and we all have to feed the worms sooner or late.

Now I am in the library and can breathe without my throat becoming clotted with flies. Our scholarship has neglected the shelves and so deciduous trees have grown up around them. A jungle of spines and bark, pages make a canopy as their tatters catch in the leaves. I wash my hide with rotted volumes of Brontë, Borges, Balzac, and lesser Trollope. I have made my way to the tropical climes of the office when I hear the hooting. Half-hidden by the overgrowth, monkeys squat above the furniture, poring over dictionaries and incorporating Latin pronunciations into their repertoire of gibbering shrieks. Now that some prey has caught their attention, they discard their cruel study and begin hurling books flecked with their feces in my direction.

A howler descends from the boughs and lands on a swivel chair with such force that he begins to rotate overhead, slavering every time his orbit brings us face to face. I have scant time to clamber up a desk and hide in a drawer of pencil shavings and paper clips before the primate can tear my face off. I wonder for a minute what he would do with it once he had it, how he might improve it or use it to improvise a

crude puppet show, before I pull the cabinet shut. After a while, satisfied that he has left to seek amusement from the caterpillars that crawl amid the armatures, I slip out and proceed to the living room.

Here sofas, lamps, and chairs populate a trackless desert. Sand cakes the cushions and long-eroded portraits decorate the wasteland, while vultures circle overhead. Exhausted, I recline for a minute and watch the seasons subtly change while I steel myself for the remainder of my journey fridgeward. Further on, the living room becomes a reptile room. Chameleons take the color of a staticky television set, scales turning the colors of a test pattern. A blobular Gila monster squats atop a power strip while skinks droop from the cables and flick their tongues carelessly into outlets. A horny toad spins atop the record player, going round and round with reptilian indifference to the screeching vinyl.

As I wander the dunes of an unkempt dining room, I am assaulted by mirages that gradually bleed their way into substance. Shadows become snakes slithering across dinner plates, feathers begin to fall from the air. Suddenly I see a bird cage crashing through their air and rush toward the bars to free its captive. The bird is easily my size, as I have shrunk in the environs of my apartment and am little more than a grub to this raptor of a parakeet. He pins me with one zygodactyl foot and brings his beak close. When I am sure that I am to be pecked to death, he speaks instead: "Like the owl, I fly in the night over my own misfortune," and then after two sub-verbal squawks, he continues, "I am in harmony with my annihilation." This household dinosaur quotes Georges Batailles! He is a prodigy among parrots! I clutch at the feathers of this bird of the night as he takes wing and together we soar over a mountain range that gradually gives way to kitchen tiles.

Deposited upon a frosty cliff I shield my eyes against snowblindness and descend to the glacier below. Across the tundra the fridge is within sight. I shiver as I make my way across the dormant volcanoes of the stovetop. Someone has left the freezer door open, revealing the wrecks of ill-fated explorations and a lunar cold robs me of the last of my humanity. I am only an animal now, seeking shelter, warmth, and food. Fridge magnets spell out my fate, but I ignore them for I exist in

a place beyond language, I answer only to growls, howls and the odd mating call. I pull the fridge open with what strength remains in my limbs only to find a polar bear feasting on a carcass of takeout, something days-old and rank. Irate at this interruption, the bear lopes over to the produce drawer and opens the eternity of his teeth to devour me. But before he can, I howl into his throat and the sound that results fills the apartment, causing cups to clatter from their cupboards and wine glasses to explode across the permafrost.

An avalanche engulfs us and before I know it, a shape comes trundling out from the snowstorm. For my mate has awakened and the cave-wife comes running across icebergs that shatter at her passage. She swings her club and fells the bear with a single thump. My rescue is at hand and the order of nature restored. Through a series of grunts, we reaffirm the terms of our union. It is love between wild things, unfit for any ecosystem we cannot conquer with ideas. For we two creatures are distinct among wildlife by virtue of two things alone: first that we have symbols and second that we make sandwiches. In the garden of delights that grows up around us, we fold bread and slather mustard. At last I am fed and contented. I paint a pinecone in the likeness of my cave-wife with braided flowers for hair and she makes me a wreath of thistle and barley.

And after consumption comes the best part, the deposit. That is when we give back to the earth and enrich the soil with our waste and refuse. I flush the toilet and an ocean pours forth. In my overzealousness, I have created a clog and now we are at sea. We swim against the tide, carried blissfully over faucets, soap dishes, and purposeful turds until the bathtub begins to spout. A great blue whale, ancestor of everything, swims out from behind the shower curtain and with giant blue lips swallows us whole. In the heaven of its stomach, we curl up together, safe in the velvet belly of something that has never heard of humans and thinks only big thoughts as, blubbery and serene, it swallows small things. Soon will come the calls of love, the music of the deep. We make a bed together in its gullet. With a few chairs and a folding table, this could be a nice loft. The planet may be shrinking around us, but

we are resourceful creatures and will make a home inside this murky address for as long as it lasts, living on the fishes that wander in and fasten their suckers around our toes. Everything in the world eats at night.

SEARCH PARTY
René Solivan

On his thirtieth birthday my son Luis spends the day with me searching for his mother Vinita in the Bronx, something we've been doing together, on and off, since the day he was born. I watch from my car—a brown Ford Granada with a million miles on it—as Luis walks up to strangers on the Grand Concourse, showing them a picture of Vinita. They always say things like "She's beautiful" or "I see the resemblance," then shake their heads and move on. Luis looks up and down the Concourse, fanning himself with his mother's picture. He walks up to a store window, a shoe place, and stares at sneakers. I look at my watch and honk the horn, startling him. Luis looks at me and he's not happy. He's saying something not very nice so I look away. He gets in the car and instead of sitting in the front seat with me he climbs into the back, sliding across the tan vinyl like he's expecting his sister Ivonne to slide in next to him but Ivonne won't be sliding in. My daughter broke up our search party of three, years ago, when she left the Bronx pregnant with Husband #3 to live somewhere in the midWest on a farm. We hear from Ivonne once a year via a Christmas card filled with photos of her and my grandson and his father, their eyes looking up or down or anywhere but the camera. And even though they're all dressed in holiday attire (red and green sweaters with embroidered reindeers) no one looks happy. Yet, in her flawless Catholic schoolgirl handwriting Ivonne carries on about how happy they are, always ending her note with the same threat: *We're coming to visit soon.* But they never visit.

"When are you going to fix the A/C," Luis says from the back seat. "It's like Death Valley back here. We should go there again."

"We've never been to Death Valley."

"Sure we did. That trip to Vegas a few years ago when we rented a car and drove through Death Valley on our way to San Jose. It was like a thousand degrees."

"Wasn't me."

"Must've been Mami."

"I don't think so."

"It was somebody, some girl, Ginger maybe. Stop the car."

I hit the breaks and look out the windshield, expecting to see Vinita but all I see is a rundown pizzeria. I park the car and we go inside and I'm dreading it because I hate to watch my son eat, because he eats his pizza now like everything else, like he's choking. His head shakes, the neck turns to work the food down and I think he's dying and I say over and over, "Are you all right?" Luis looks at me the same way he did as a boy, like I'm out of mind, his eyes begging me to leave him alone. He moves to another table, his back to me. I finally relax and eat my pizza wondering where the hell Vinita is.

On the day Luis was born I held him in a chair while Vinita lay next to us in a hospital bed in the Bronx. "I have to use the bathroom," Vinita said, struggling to get out of the bed while I stared at Baby Luis. I said, "Would you like me to call a nurse," but Vinita never answered. By the time I looked up she was gone and Luis and I spent hours following nurses down corridors and stairwells searching for his mother. We found Vinita in her hospital gown, barefoot, her ass hanging out, arguing with a security guard who was refusing to let her leave the building, a scenario that has been playing out, in various forms, ever since.

"I called Ivonne last night," Luis says, chewing on a pizza crust in the back seat of the car. "I needed money but I didn't want to tell her I needed money until the time was right so I pretended I wanted to talk about Mami losing her memory and what should we do about her because you're useless, Papi."

"Your mother's not losing her memory."

"I know that but Ivonne's on a goddamn farm, she doesn't know anything. She said, Mami losing her memory would be a good thing, then wished she herself was losing her memory so that it could all be wiped out, our past. Then she started going on about Uma Thurman in some movie, how turned on she was by her, how she wished she were gay. Wouldn't that be better for me, Ivonne said, to be gay instead waiting around for another man to fuck up my life, *again*, and she

said *again* like it had ten syllables, her voice *reeeeal sloooow* like she was running out of batteries, like Mami when her pills are kicking in. And when I asked her about her son Ivonne said she didn't want to talk about him and then she talked about him, how he keeps stealing her credit cards and going off on trips. She let him have it the other night when he came home from Puerto Rico. I told him that trips are earned around here, she said, not awarded, this isn't *The Fucking Price Is Right*. Then her son gave her the evil eye, she said, and called her a *Chupacabra*, a mystical creature, he explained, a goatsucker rumored to roam the island of Puerto Rico sucking the life out of everything it touched. And Ivonne didn't know what pissed her off more. That her son called her a *Chupacabra* or that he felt the need to explain what the creature was like she was some moron, like she didn't stay up to date with Puerto Rican mythology and please let's talk about her son, she said, let's talk about something else because she felt her blood pressure rising. Then I heard rattling over the phone again. It sounded like pills in a pill bottle then the sound of running water. She cleared her throat and asked me how I was and we began to talk about asparagus and the antioxidants in green tea and I swear to God I was talking to Mami."

I turn on the radio. Real loud. Some oldies station. A song I like but I don't know the name, sung by Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett, I can never tell them apart. Luis climbs into the front seat and shuts off the radio. He says, "Why do you think Mami keeps running away?"

I don't say anything. Luis repeats his question, louder, because he thinks I didn't hear him.

"I don't know why she keeps running away," I say.

"I used to think Mami left because she didn't like me and Ivonne. We could tell she was never into it."

"Into what?"

"Being a mother."

"That's not true, Luis."

"Sure it is. Mami always acted like those workers at the movie theater, you know, the ones selling popcorn and candy, bored out of their mind, like they were just there killing time until something better came along."

I'm trying not to listen to Luis, my eyes fixed on the red traffic light in front of me, thinking of that time me and Vinita spent in Las Vegas walking through smoky casinos holding small plastic buckets filled with quarters, sipping on vodka tonics until someone said something about downtown, have you seen downtown, you gotta go downtown, the slot machines are so loose. So we took a cab downtown, neon flashing everywhere, billboards zipping by of old singers we thought were dead and we sat there laughing trying to forget that the economy was shit, that our lives were shit.

"But me and Ivonne moved out years ago," Luis says. "I think Mami runs away because she doesn't like you, Papi."

"Get out!"

"Papi—"

"We're here! Get out so I can park."

With Vinita's picture in hand Luis gets out of the car in front of the Loew's Paradise Theater on the Grand Concourse. I find a parking spot a few feet away and watch Luis through the rearview mirror. Again he walks up to strangers and talks to them, holding Vinita's picture between them. I get out of the car to stretch my legs. I look at the entrance of the theater. This is where we found Vinita when she ran away a year ago, standing in front of the theater in tears, saddened that this once glorious movie house had been butchered into a multiscreen complex by some corporation. It was here, in the 50's, where me and Vinita held hands in the dark every Saturday night, sitting in red velvet seats, stained and torn, waiting for the movie to start, our heads looking up through a cloud of cigarette smoke at a ceiling that looked like the night sky with tiny lights twinkling like stars. And maybe Luis is right, maybe Vinita doesn't like me *now* but she did then, I know she did, I'm sure of it. We'd stroll out of the theater holding hands, looking the best we've ever looked, always stopping near the exit for a kiss. Then she'd pull away and stare at a movie poster of Grace Kelly or Marilyn Monroe and she'd mimic their pose and we'd laugh.

But today Vinita is not standing outside the Loew's Paradise Theater. Luis is walking towards me with her picture, looking defeated and

I'm wondering how do I get the last thirty years back.

Three days ago I sat next to Vinita at the funeral of her brother Javier the Professor. Afterwards everyone went to his widow Lourdes's house in the Bronx where every surface was covered with Puerto Rican food brought over by family and friends. Later that night Vinita sat in our living room in front of her typewriter talking about her dead brother, about his life, his youth, the time he did this and that. She lit a Marlboro and began typing non-stop for hours. I was on the sofa putting my feet up on the coffee table when the typewriter's bell rang and the typing stopped. Vinita said she had to go out for cigarettes. "I'll be right back," she said, but she never came back. I should've known because we had just seen this scene in a movie, some guy says he's going out for cigarettes or milk but he never comes back and how dumb she must think I am for not picking up on that. No wonder she doesn't like me anymore. Fuck me.

I'm walking along the Grand Concourse between Fordham and Kingsbridge Road. Luis catches up to me. We walk through a park and stop in front of the place me and Vinita used to hang out in our youth, the Poe Cottage which is not really a cottage but a farmhouse built in 1812, the tour guide said every time we took the tour. Often we were the only ones on the tour and the guide knew we knew every detail but he'd tell us again. This is the place where Edgar Allan Poe wrote many of his great works, he'd say, where he spent his final years, where his wife Virginia died. And when Luis asks now what are we doing here I tell him his mother loved this place, loved disappearing here, staring at everything, the table Poe wrote at, the chair Virginia sat on, the bed they made love in. We move into the roped-off kitchen area and I say, Don't you love that, Luis, the way the old china on the table still looks like the Poes have gone into another room and would at any moment return. Then we're moving again and I'm staring at the Poes' bed and Luis asks me why am I crying. Because they made love on this bed, I say, until Virginia got sick and died on it and isn't that the saddest thing in the world.

"THERE'S NO PARKING," Luis says. "Just stop right here."

I double park the car in front of a brick house and Luis gets out. He runs up to the house, climbs the porch steps and rings the doorbell. His cousin the deaf girl opens the door, he goes inside. Ten minutes later he comes out of the house chewing on something and gets back in the car. He sticks a chocolate protein bar along my neck and asks me if I want a bite. No thanks.

"Mami came by here a few days ago and spent the night," Luis says.

"How's the deaf girl?"

"She gave me twenty bucks for my birthday."

"What else did she say?"

"She didn't say anything, Papi, she signed and my sign language is shit. I only picked up a few words like 'Mami' and 'Uncle Javier' and some lady, a 'Miss' something or maybe she meant 'Mami missed Javier.' As I was leaving I wanted to sign 'Take care of yourself' but I think I signed 'Go fuck yourself' 'cause she tried to take the twenty bucks back."

We drive along Jerome Avenue until we reach the Woodlawn Cemetery, drive until we're past the iron gates at the entrance. The cemetery is like a huge park, roads going everywhere. Luis tells me to turn left.

"I think it's up ahead," Luis says.

I park on the side of the road. There is no one around. We get out and search for Uncle Javier's headstone. We were here a few days ago and Luis is sure he remembers where his Uncle Javier's headstone is but he doesn't. We wander the grounds for some time, sweat dripping everywhere. My feet begin to hurt so we stop walking and I rest against a mausoleum, the grey stone like a block of fire against my ass. I pull away from it. It's huge, this mausoleum, like a little stone house for four. I think I say Wow and Luis starts going on about how Woodlawn has one of the most distinguished collection of historic mausoleums in the country like he was some tour guide all of a sudden or a salesman trying to sell me a mausoleum.

"How do you know so much about mausoleums?" I say.

"I used to work here, remember?"

"I don't."

"I only lasted a few months."

"What did you do?"

We continue walking, admiring headstones and mausoleums like we have all the time in the world.

"I used to remove leaves and other shit from the graves," Luis says. "You'd be surprise the shit people drop here like they were at Coney Island. No respect for the dead. Here it is."

Luis is standing in front of a headstone but it doesn't have his uncle's name on it. It says *Herman Melville.*

"Mami loves Herman," Luis says. "She used to read *Moby Dick* to me."

I don't remember Vinita reading *Moby Dick*. I don't remember much though.

"When I used to work here," Luis says, "I'd take breaks and hang out with Herman and I swear, Papi, sometimes I could I hear the ocean…"

Luis looks over Herman's headstone like he's expecting Vinita to be sitting behind it reading *Moby Dick*.

We continue on, strolling in between the headstones for some time.

"There it is," Luis says, pointing to his uncle's headstone. We walk up to it and look around. There is an old man nearby standing in front of a headstone, shaking his head. But no Vinita. A breeze ruffles the leaves above us and we look up.

"There's a building here filled with nothing but urns," Luis says. "It's pretty cool. Want to check it out?"

I shake my head and walk towards the car. Luis follows.

"Have you decided?" Luis says.

"What?"

"Do you want to be buried or burned?"

We get in the car and drive off.

"You should decide, Papi, and put it in writing so we can avoid any arguments when you're dead."

I turn on the radio. The Rolling Stones.

"I think burned is better," Luis says. "It's quick and cheap. Ivonne would want to bury you so she'd have a place to visit you but she'd nev-

er visit. Mami wouldn't care either way…." Luis continues rambling in the back seat until he gets distracted by a song on the radio he's convinced was playing in the car while he drove through Death Valley with someone.

IT'S DARK and late as we drive down the Grand Concourse. We decide to end the search, agreeing to call in sick again tomorrow, to search the other side of the Bronx. I turn right on Valentine Avenue and park near Luis's apartment building. I go inside with him so I can use the bathroom. My son is not the neatest person. There are piles of clothes in his living room like he was sorting his dirty laundry and got distracted. I climb over the clothes and go to the bathroom while Luis collapses on the sofa. I'm in there maybe five minutes but by the time I come out Luis is asleep on the sofa, a hand clinging to the twenty- dollar bill the deaf girl gave him. I pull out another twenty and place it on the coffee table. I look around. My son has lived here for four years and this is the fourth or fifth time I've stood in his apartment, each visit revealing a surprise, a new chair or lamp or piece of artwork. I see nothing new except two birthday cards on top of the television and a framed picture hanging over it. I'm surprised because this picture is one Vinita has spent years searching for, accusing everyone, including Luis, of stealing it. He always denied taking it yet here it is in plain sight: a black and white of Vinita and Grace Kelly taken in 1954 after I'd quit my job to follow Vinita to Hollywood when she wanted to be in the movies. And while Vinita spent her days on Hollywood Boulevard chasing her dream I altered costumes in the costume department at Paramount Studios. When I told Vinita that Grace Kelly was filming on the lot she insisted on visiting me in hopes of getting a glimpse of her idol, and that day Vinita followed me with her purse to Sound Stage 6. I told her to pretend she was my assistant as I knocked on a trailer. The door swung opened and an older woman with grey hair stood there. We exchanged words and the woman vanished inside then *she* appeared, Grace Kelly, in a fully-skirted floral dress, looking more beautiful in

person than on the screen of the Loew's Paradise Theater. Vinita gasped while Grace and I exchanged words about a dress she could *move* in but not *sit* in, a sky blue evening gown that suddenly appeared out of the trailer on a hanger, in the hand of the older woman with grey hair who handed me the dress and disappeared. And that's when Vinita asked Grace a question: What was the name of her lipstick? Before I knew it they were carrying on, Grace and Vinita, about makeup and hair and shoes. Then they were laughing and Vinita opened her purse and pulled out the Kodak Brownie camera I'd given her and asked Grace if she would take a picture with her. I was shaking, trying not to make eye contact with the crew members that were walking by. I told Vinita photos weren't allowed and that's when Grace said, "I won't tell." And Grace didn't tell but someone did because by the end of the day I was fired and two months later Vinita and I were back in the Bronx where I walked around in the snow, in a daze, still stunned that I was fired over a picture that now hangs in my son's apartment over an old television.

I stare at the picture of Vinita and Grace for a long time. Vinita is wearing a dress I had made her. She looks beautiful, like an exotic version of Grace. I'm glad we'd left Hollywood when we did because it was inevitable that the movies would've scooped up Vinita and I would've lost her forever. I move in closer to the picture. The frame is crooked. As I straighten it the telephone rings. Luis stirs on the sofa and rolls over. I answer the phone and before I can say anything the voice on the other line says, "Happy Birthday Luis."

And I say, "Where are you Vinita?"

Our search party's first stop this morning was Lourdes and Javier's house. In the past we often found Vinita there rummaging through her brother's garbage. "Javier throws things out because he gets tired of them," Vinita always said, "not because they're broken, especially now that he's retired and bored." There was no sign of Vinita or Lourdes there this morning.

But as I park the car now across from Lourdes and Javier's house I can see the garbage cans have been put out near the curb. Next to them stand two old school desks. The front door opens. Vinita and Lourdes step out onto the porch carrying another school desk. They climb down the steps and place the desk next to the others. Lourdes sees me first and waves. Vinita looks at me and I can't tell if she's happy to see me or not. The women hug and Lourdes goes inside. Vinita crosses the street and approaches the car. I lean over and push open the passenger door and she gets inside looking annoyed like I was a taxi driver she'd been waiting too long for.

"What have you been doing?" I say.

"Helping Lourdes clean."

Vinita looks out her window and stares at her brother's garbage.

"Is there anything there you want to bring home?" I say.

She shakes her head.

Vinita continues staring at the garbage and I stare at her unable to look away. I want to say something but don't know what to say and this is why, I'm sure, she doesn't like me anymore. Because I never say anything worthwhile, because I don't like to go out anymore, because I couldn't give her the life she wanted, because I stopped making her dresses years ago. And maybe I should surprise her and make her something, something simple, a summer dress or two. This is what I'm thinking about, summer dresses, when I feel, in the dark of the car, the gentle touch of Vinita's hand on mine that tells me she still likes me. Just a little.

FOCUS
Glen Pourciau

Blair and I were enjoying our favorite vacation spot, beautiful weather, nothing rushing us, nothing disturbing our peace of mind. I'd had a martini at a bar we'd visited on previous trips and Blair had an IPA that made him smack his tongue on the roof of his mouth. He paid the tab and we went out the door, on our way to a café down the street where I especially enjoyed the chicken piccata. But first Blair said he'd take a couple of bulky bags we'd been toting to the car, which was parked a block away. I settled into an Adirondack chair on the bar's porch and waited.

A woman with dark curly hair and a sleeveless flower-print dress was sitting in the Adirondack to my right, years of suntan on her face and arms. She flashed a smile, an aspect of persuasion in it, and leaned in my direction.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question? Do you think narcissism is a bad thing? If you're a narcissist that means you take care of yourself, doesn't it? Isn't taking care of yourself a good thing?"

It annoyed me that her question implied the answer she wanted to hear. "I think it's better to be sympathetic to other people," I said.

She seemed to breathe my answer in and made a face as if what she'd breathed didn't agree with her. "But don't you have to look out for yourself and not depend on others to take care of you?"

I had no desire to get in an argument, but her questions provoked me. "You can't justify seeing yourself as more important than others. Other people's circumstances and points of view should be considered and respected."

I hoped my reply would make her sit back and drop the subject.

"For me," she went on, "I have to be the focal point. Is it realistic to assume I can see someone else's point of view as well as my own? Is it even possible, deep down, for me to value the well-being of people outside me over my own well-being? Does anyone else really see things

that way? Do you?"

"Some do."

"Are you a religious person?"

"No."

"I am religious. I am a creature created by God, just as you are, and he has given us his blessing by creating us. If we don't value ourselves as we should, we disrespect him."

An uncomfortable silence grew between us. I feared she could get hostile and express further justifications for being narcissistic. She could be telling herself reasons to dismiss my opinion, muttering internally that I didn't love myself enough. I wondered if she had a husband or lover who criticized her for self-centeredness.

Soon I saw Blair nearing. He stepped onto the patio and smiled at her, and she gave him an assessing look. He helped me out of my chair, and we headed toward the café.

"You won't believe what that woman just asked me."

I looked over my shoulder and saw her following us with her eyes. I filled Blair in as we walked and told him I'd sensed a stormy reaction inside her. We were ready to change the subject once we were seated at the café. Still taking the place in, I glanced out the glass storefront and saw the narcissist come into view. She took a right turn through the front door, where the host greeted her and led her to a window table across from us.

"What a coincidence," Blair said.

We tried to ignore her. I asked the server for a glass of red wine and Blair ordered a beer. Our drinks came quickly, and a few minutes later her server, the same as ours, brought her a glass of red wine. We enjoyed our drinks, my eyes drifting toward the storefront, apparently gazing out. She seemed occupied with checking her phone.

My dinner arrived, no eye contact having passed with her. I commented that the piccata was delicious as usual, and Blair praised his pasta dish. The server brought out her food, and I saw that she too had ordered chicken piccata.

"Tough bite?"

I'd stopped chewing. "She ordered piccata."

"You have no reason to fear her. You know almost nothing about her."

"What I don't know about her is what I fear."

We discussed what we'd do the next day, determined not to let her disturb us, but underneath she stirred in my mind. At any moment she could move toward our table, and it occurred to me that I wouldn't be using the café's restroom.

When the server came to remove our plates, we said we'd loved the food.

"Interested in dessert menus?"

I shook my head.

"No chocolate cake?" Blair asked.

"Not this time."

She signaled the server after he put our check on the table, and he went straight over to her. She handed him her credit card.

"After we pay," I told Blair, "I want you to go get the car and come pick me up."

"Are we on the run?"

"How do I know who's nuts these days?"

"I'd be leaving you alone with her again."

"Good point. Let's walk out together."

Blair signed the bill, and we stood. I stared at her, and she stared back.

Blair took my hand.

She did not follow us.

THE FLIGHT FROM SAIGON
Thomas Beller

Let's start in the present, more or less, and with this woman I know, Cynthia. She wears sweatpants and there is a pimple on her nose more often than not. She has trouble getting out of bed. I once sat on the second-floor balcony of my house and watched her get out of the backseat of a car. I thought, Oh, there is Cynthia my old friend's friend's niece and she has gotten a ride to my place with a friend.

I watched her close the car door, take a step away, and then stop. She waved at the driver, opened the door she had just closed, reached in, and plucked out her cell phone. She showed it to the driver, a gesture that said, "I almost forgot my phone on the floor of your car but I got it now and everything is OK."

It was a balmy day and Cynthia was wearing sweatpants and slippers and white socks. She looked a bit like someone who was on too much medication. Anyone could see it. The body language. The extra weight. But she was attractive, a placidity registered on her features, which would have been sharp if it weren't for the weight. It had been flattering to get the call about her—that she was having a hard time in college, could I check in on her, try and keep her in view. Of course, I'd said. Only when the car, a silver sedan, made a U-turn could I see that the driver was a black woman of middle age; she was an Uber driver, and the "I almost lost my phone" gesture, which had a hint of the personal, was not directed at a friend but a stranger. Though who knows, maybe she made friends with the driver. Which in a way would be even worse. I don't know why. Something about the intimacy of that "I almost left my phone on the floor of the backseat of your car but now I have it and all is well" just upset me and made me feel bad, which made me think about Will, whose face now and then registered a beleaguered expression that suggested that fate was working against him, like the time he scalped tickets for a Rangers game on his birthday and made it to the seats with Lacey, only to be informed that he

had bought fake tickets and would have to leave. I met Will and Lacey for drinks at Buffy's later that night and we laughed about it, and then some thing passed across Will's face that made me sad. But maybe this isn't a good example of what I mean, since there was a straightforward reason for sadness in that moment, being tossed from the Rangers game on your birthday just when you got comfy in the seats with your girlfriend.

But this is withholding. The key detail about Cynthia is that she has a famous, wealthy father who is dead. He wasn't famous for being wealthy, exactly, but his success had made him rich, and it was all bound up together. She didn't use his last name. In that sense she had something on Will, who was rather burdened by his well-known last name.

I like this young woman. She comes over to my house now and then to study. She just sits at the dining room table. It was my idea. She should use my place as a study hall. It's right near the college. From here, she can walk.

Of course we chatted now and then.

When I found out who she was, I realized her father had died when she was still a child. I wondered if this biographical detail should have been included when my friend called to say he had a friend who had a niece. But I understand why it was not. I only found out when she mentioned a winter holiday in Little B.

"What's little B?" I said.

"St. Barthes," she said in a casual, tossed-off manner that almost offended me, as though it were a commonly used acronym. "As opposed to Barbados."

"What were you doing over in St. Barthes?"

"I was on a boat. With my whole family. For two weeks. Which, if you can imagine, was taxing. You can't really leave a boat."

"It sounds rough. Do you get along with them?"

"There was a crew member I liked. Herman. From Trinidad."

"What about your family," I said. "You know, them?"

"Some more than others."

"And who do you get along with less?"

"I guess my cousin. She thinks she's a writer."

"And that's a problem why?"

"She hasn't written anything."

"So it's undeserved," I said.

"Yeah. She just likes to give advice like she knows what she is talking about, and she doesn't, it's annoying."

"Is that the worst of it?"

"I have this other cousin who is annoying, too."

"What's annoying about her?"

"She is very tidy. She says she doesn't like New Orleans because it's dirty."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I said I love New Orleans because it's dirty. And I also said New Orleans isn't even dirty. If you wear brand-new white Converse sneakers to Jazz Fest after it rains, they are going to get muddy, okay? That's not a basis to cast aspersions.

It's one of the things about New Orleans I love. Tidy people hate it."

I laughed at "aspersions."

Later I started mulling over the way she said, "Little B." Who spends two weeks on a boat? Rugged, outdoor types who rough it on the high seas in a jalopy of a sailboat. Or…

I googled her name. Then I tried it with the word *yacht* next to her name.

There it all was.

She came over a week later. That was the deal, Wednesday afternoons at 3:30 for an hour before her 5 p.m. class. I wanted to bring it up. But I couldn't think of how to do so, other than saying I had googled her. Instead I put her tea and cookies down and, taking my customary seat opposite her, asked about her grades.

"If I were doing all right, would I have an arrangement to come over to your house every week to study?"

"I don't know, I thought this was just a good way of getting oriented before class."

"It is. Don't get me wrong, I'm really grateful for the tea and cook-

ies and everything. But it's the sort of support you get when you are not doing well in school."

"And have you always not done well?"

"I've had ups and downs."

"Where are you now?"

"Let's just say I hear from the Dean a lot."

"The Dean? Why do you hear from the Dean?"

"Let's just say the school really, really wants me to graduate. So they have a special person on the case for this purpose."

"What purpose?"

"Keeping me from failing out."

"And how is that going?"

"So-so."

"And why does the school want you to graduate so badly?"

"Because of my family," she said. We had the habit of only intermittent eye contact when we spoke. Now she looked at me and said the name of her father. "So, you see," she said.

"So you are the daughter of…"

She said his name again.

"But you use your mother's name because…"

"It just makes everything simpler."

She was nine when her father died. The age I was when my father died. The next week I said something to her about it. I'd hesitated about bringing the matter up because a slight self-consciousness had entered into my thoughts about Cynthia. Previously I had offered her tea, cookies, a table, the comfort of a house silent in the absence of little children, which is its own kind of silence. When we spoke I was kiddingly impatient.

Once, apropos of her grades, I repeated a line my family lawyer had offered me a few years after my father died, when I was in danger of failing out of ninth grade. "Right now you only have to meet a specific standard to succeed," he said. "That is a situation unique to school. Later on in life, there is no specific standard. You can't know that your effort will pay off. Now, all you have to do is try."

Herbert, who took me to play tennis with him at the Midtown

Tennis Club, who looked so handsome and strong in his tennis whites, skidding back and forth on the clay behind the baseline while I lobbed my moonballs at him and cut dink shots that died dishonorably at the service line. He received them all with a smile and then took me out to lunch. These games must have happened every few months when I was twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Later on he would take me to lunch at the Oyster Bar when the herring were in season.

Not every year. But often enough to make it feel like a tradition.

Herbert was so unfailingly graceful, so attentive to my mother when she had a problem or concern about something, so patient with me. Only once, when I was an adult and on the way to my shrink, did I see another side of him—he was walking down Park Avenue a couple of blocks away. I recognized him, was excited to greet him. Then he passed a window in which he could see his reflection. He turned to it, his figure erect, handsome, and touched the middle button on his immaculately tailored suit. It shocked me for some reason. Looking at your reflection in the window as you pass by on the street is a natural gesture. But the way he did it betrayed a slight vanity.

It had never occurred to me he would have this as part of his personality.

Maybe I was able to sustain this fantasy because I knew him in such a narrow context—he was more than a family friend, but also less. We didn't know his wife, his children. In a way, he took care of us. I felt flustered and crossed the street.

Vanity has, within it, sexuality, and Herbert was not a sexual person for me—he was a man, a strong, smart man who was helping my mother and me navigate the world the way a husband would, or a father. He had sat in my father's hospital room and listened to what my father had to say about his will.

I needed him to be pure beneficence. Vanity, even a little, complicated this.

An unreasonable, intolerant position. But little kids are fascists, and grieving little kids are especially severe fascists.

"I'm sorry about your father," I said on Cynthia's next visit. "My father died when I was nine. So I kind of know what it's like."

"Oh, but I'm fine," she said abruptly. "It's fine."

That she was so vehement about being fine, while also so conspicuously not fine, interested me. It made me think of Will. Which may be a clue to my long-lasting, almost obsessive reviewing of the Will episode in my life—shouldn't this woman make me think of myself, of my own father's death? When I got fat, and slumped around in a daze, and forgot things, and did badly at school? Maybe thinking about Will was just a way of working out my own experience of the death of my father. Or maybe the death of Will reminded me of the death of my father, which would be why I can't seem to get over it. Maybe I felt a similar triumphant thump in my chest upon hearing of both deaths—not joy, but an adrenalin bump of, "I'm still alive." Maybe my distress at the idiotic, mostly accidental death of Will was all wound up in the similar feeling of oedipal survivor guilt that I experienced with my dad.

There is one more detail about Cynthia I want to report, it's almost the main detail. Once, she told me that she had been attacked by a guy while she sat alone in a theater.

"Why were you sitting alone in a theater?"

"I was an apprentice lights person. I was practicing the different lighting cues for this dance performance. And this guy walks in. I'm like, Can I help you? And the next thing I know…"

He put a knife to her throat. The lighting console was at the back of the auditorium. She was alone in the auditorium with all the seats, the empty stage. She spent a long time trying to talk him down, humor him, waiting for an opportunity to scream. Then two men in walked in. Dancers. The guy brought the knife down to her stomach. He wasn't college-age. He was older.

But, she said, "there was this ambiguous scruffiness to him."

But surely these two guys could see the knife.

They didn't. They asked where everybody was, and she said rehearsal didn't start for another fifteen minutes, even though there was no rehearsal that day. They just stood there at the back, near the entrance, for a minute and then they left. The knife wielder let the knife down. It was like the close call had exhausted him. She shoved him and ran, screaming, out through the lobby, out the doors. The first people she

saw were the guys who had walked in a few moments earlier. They were the ones who talked her down, who helped call the police, who waited with her until they arrived, all of them wondering if the knife wielder was still in the auditorium. He wasn't, it turned out, having left through the emergency exit. When it was all over she gave them her name and number and she said to me, "I told them if there's anything I could do for them, let me know. I owed them a major favor."

"You could also have been pissed at them," I said. "I mean they walked in, stared at you alone with this strange guy who is holding a knife to you, and didn't notice?"

"I heard from one of them a while later. He asked if I could write him a recommendation to medical school."

Back when I was obsessed with tennis at sailing camp—I was obsessed with tennis because I was very tall and fat, and it was a nightmare out in the dinghy with the life preserver up against your neck having to rapidly duck whenever someone yelled, "Tack!" so I did a lot of tennis instead of sailing—I once saw a counselor come out of the riflery range and look down at the steps. Just a few wooden steps. This guy was of no importance to me, except he was good at tennis. A slight build, dark features, black hair, always wore a watch, even when he played. A young guy but a counselor, an adult in my twelve-year-old eyes. And very good at tennis. And when he looked down there was something vulnerable in his expression that sent a shiver through me. Not exactly sad. More like pensive. Usually he was a bit of a jerk. I never said a word to him. He was totally unimportant in my life. Except I shivered when I saw that expression. And I have always remembered it.

Cynthia, when she looked away from me nervously after telling me that she was fine, it's fine, so insistent, had a bit of that quality to her face. Except it made sense that she would have a moment of pensiveness in such a moment, while what had so fascinated me about the camp counselor was how out of context it was that this flash of humanity or whatever it was should suddenly be visible to me.

Which brings me, in a roundabout way, to Will. There are certain obsessions that transcend the unhealthy and simply become part of who you are, in the way that an injured leg or arm might remain func-

tional but with some strange quality to the motion of its use. You can run and throw, but it looks a little funny. At some point it stops being an injury or an aberration and becomes an identity, the way a tree, confronted with a metal fence or some other unnatural obstacle, will grow around it, encompass the obstacle into its very marrow. This is how I feel about Will. It's not even a source of pain anymore.

He has been dead for seventeen years, which is twice as long as I even knew him. He's not there and yet he is sort of there, part of how I see things. Not long after Will bought his loft in Tribeca, I got a key to the place.

My own key. Handed to me by Will. A trinket. A little shiny thing. I let it lie flat in his palm for a moment, regarding it as though it were some attractive, sinister thing. It was the key to a loft apartment within which was the office of my magazine. It was also, in a roundabout way, the key to Phnom Penh.

And from there, to Saigon.

The flight to Saigon was present, as an idea, from the moment I decided to go to Phnom Penh. It happened in the other office, Will's office, which was adjacent to our office—the office of the magazine. Why the literary magazine I had started had an office in Will's loft is another story. He wanted to be part of the magazine. I guess he wanted to be part of my life. He had admired my writing, he told me when we first met, and I had admired his writing. We had read one story of each other's, exactly, at that point. Both were either about or made mention of a dead father. And neither of us ever brought this biographical fact up to one another for the duration of our friendship, which turned out to be the rest of his life.

For this story, the important detail is that we were alone in the loft, in the office, which was our office beside which, like snake eyes, was his office.

I had been fired from a job I had really wanted and been glad to have. I was at loose ends. Will had made a push for me to go to Phnom Penh to work on the *Daily.* A splash of sunshine was coming through the grimy window looking out onto the street. I said yes. It came out

in a jumbling rush. I said yes, he said, "Come on! It will be great!" as though he hadn't heard. There was a dam-breaking feeling, a giving up, a plunging, falling feeling. "Yes, I'll do it!"

I said. And then we were on our knees looking at a map.

It was an old map of Vietnam and Cambodia. Only now, in memory, does its provenance come to seem conspicuous, spooky—a hand-painted map with everything written in French. Topographical notations. The blue of the sea off the coast of Vietnam. The landscape in green and white.

"Here is Phnom Penh, and here is Saigon," he said, putting a finger on one and then the other.

It was a military map. Something Will had picked up during his souvenir hunting expeditions in Saigon. He had been among that first generation of travelers to wash into the country when it opened to tourists in 1991.

"And it is a twenty-five minute flight from one to the other," he continued.

"Now wait a second, I just got my head around Phnom Penh and now you are shipping me off to Saigon? Why."

"Because it is such a great town. You have to see it. A twenty-five minute flight. And then we will, we will have the best time. I'll bring a wad of hundreds and we will…"

I forget the rest. He had never before said something like that. He had never before brandished the idea of money or cash, or giving it, or sharing it. I was sad to feel my own excitement at his benefaction. Sad to know that in agreeing to go to Phnom Penh something had changed between us. My unemployment was a kind of orphanhood. I didn't like it. But I was excited now for this trip. This map. A map of a landscape where many people died fighting a war, for what?

Our first real conversation took place in the apartment of Christine, the girlfriend with whom he had taken a long, drunken, self-funded journalistic expedition to Saigon. Will invited me for dinner. She was there but wandered in and out of our sphere like a mom checking in on a boy's playdate, a concept foreign to me then but familiar to me now. They seemed to not be getting along. She had "a low center of

gravity." I wasn't looking at her ass, wasn't thinking of her like that. It only occurred to me later when he got together with Lacey, who also had a low center of gravity.

Will had a young man's body and an older man's face. Heavy jowls even though the face was still so youthful. I saw a picture of him at the age of three or four, once, and he had heavy jowls then, too. The baby fat morphed into that decadent, wolfish look, even as the rest of his body was outrageously lean, muscular, and athletic. This jowly, confused, sneering, anxious, tender face looming among the shops of Saigon, buying things for what must have been astonishing sums from the seller's point of view. Though I know Will negotiated. Not so much to get a better deal but for the experience. Something to spice the story. We shared this tendency to spice the story, to adjust the life to the future version of the life that will one day be told. Our methods were generally different. For example I was stupid, daring, willing to go without a plan, but I didn't want to die. I was not brave. I thought the idea of Vietnam was frightening, but Cambodia was its own entity. The idea of Cambodia terrified me.

And yet, with the exquisite sense of provocation that only children and those who remain childish possess, it was in Phnom Penh that Will aquired his most valuable souvenir—a project. Having a project in Cambodia was no accomplishment. Everywhere you looked in that country there was a screaming humanitarian crisis. Will's project was a newspaper. Four pieces of paper stapled together, in those early days, but still. He stumbled onto it when looking for a printer while staying at the Renakse Hotel. They did not have a printer, he was told. But upstairs, in the attic, were some Americans who could perhaps help.

And so he went upstairs. I heard this story from Bill, who was one of the two people working in that attic space, but I see it from Will's point of view, perhaps because a year later it was me winding my way up the spiral staircase, the cool, open space of the lobby's tiled floor dropping away as I rose—it felt like Hansel and Gretel when I did it, complete with a view of a magical castle when I got to the top. The royal palace was directly across the street. An impossible steep roof. A

fairy tale.

Will, the lost son of a lost newspaper dynasty, walks up a spiralling staircase and into an open air hallway with a clear view of the palace roof. The palace! I can't believe I can write such a word with a straight face, but there it was, its steepled roof, the color, a magical canary-yellow orange, the shapes of the *apsaras* so perfectly foreign, sinister, and exquisite. He would have walked along that outdoor hallway, knocked on the door. Been greeted by a handsome deadpan man his own age. A man wearing a Brooks Brothers shirt. Or maybe a tee-shirt. But Bill was a guy who even in a tee-shirt exuded a quality that suggested that he had worn a Brooks Brothers shirt, or had been expected to wear it, or would one day wear it, or would continue to not wear it but in defiance of this expectation. Up in the attic of the Renakse Will found his printer, and his project. A newspaper.

It was a project that translated into a perverse provocation back in New York. Among his friends, the ones adrift or miserable, he could now dangle an opportunity. People in Will's position—people with proximity to fairy tale sums—are familiar with the beseeching gaze of those in need. They approach, asking in essence to be saved. Even if they never say the words. I called it the Third Penis. It sat on Will's shoulder, and everyone could see it. To make matters worse, it would sometimes become erect for no apparent reason. It was a mortifying fact of Will's life, the Third Penis. And I don't know why I called it that. What would the second penis have been? No matter, the penis on his shoulder was the cause of much bizarre behavior, drunken getting-out-of- your-own-skin behavior, acts of bitterness, cleverness, cruelty. The paper in Phnom Penh was, in a subtle way, a game changer for Will in New York. Now he could offer something that had a story attached to it—his philanthropy, his act of charity, would be poison to a friendship if administered directly. But laundered by the newspaper, it lost its poison and became a gift. Though a poisoned gift. Because what kind of gift was it to send someone to Phnom Penh in 1993?

The first person who took him up on this offer was Teddy. I had come to know Teddy in uneasy circumstances, when he appeared one

day in Will's loft. There was a suitcase nestled next to the couch. Such a handsome guy, I thought. A strong jaw, the tight crop of curly hair. Yet something about the depths with which the blue eyes were set beneath his brow suggested something unbalanced, strung too tight. You see this among men with no body fat sometimes. Sanity requires a small percentage of body fat. Without it, the soul becomes unmoored.

I got to know Teddy quickly and slowly: He was Will's best friend at a very young age—thirteen. They both landed at boarding school at the same time. Now Teddy was an actor. He would be sleeping on Will's couch in the living room. For how long? I didn't ask. I don't think Will did, either. It is understood that there is a statute of limitations of sleeping on someone's couch. But no one knows exactly what it is. Both the sleeper and the owner of the couch will feel some invisible pressure gauge rising. When it comes to a certain point, something will be said. Usually by the owner, unless the sleeper makes a preemptive confession, apology, request. And though the couch was ordinary, if overstuffed, the living room was not. It wasn't even a living room.

It was a swath of land at one end of the loft's main space. Teddy had a key to the place. And I had a key to the place.

I didn't like that he was always there, surely because it made me feel like the freeloader he was, as opposed to…to what? I had a magazine and an office for the magazine. That Will had given me that office and a key to the place felt like something I had earned. But what does that say about my feelings about old friends, that I felt different than Teddy, the handsome couch surfer?

Part of my problem with Teddy was that I had developed a taste for being alone in the loft. It didn't happen often. I was still unsure if I could just drop by. But apparently I could. Sometimes Will was there with friends. Or he was there alone. Sometimes no one was there. I would roam around, look at things. The TV, for example, sat atop a hideous black cabinet of some kind.

I mention it because all the furniture felt like a hand-me-down from Will's college years, or someone else's college years. Or else he had bought it from a supply company that seemed to specialize in the

offices of bail bondsmen, or private detectives, or some down-market operation seeking to project a legalistic bearing. There was a printing shop up the block that specialized in business printing—the neighborhood was one deep breath away from the financial district, and it still had that seediness, that grime. There was a stash of tape cassettes in the black cabinet. I examined them one day. A homemade recording of a Rangers' game. A homemade recording of a Nirvana concert.

A copy of *MASH*, the movie. Several cassettes of pornography.

These old industrial buildings of Soho were not built in any harmony or logic. The windows, when there were any, all looked out at each other at odd angles. For example from where I stood holding a homemade VHS cassette of pornography, I had a view of four windows—two looked more or less directly into, and down into, a kitchen about twenty yards away. One looked out onto a sliver of space through which you could see Church Street. And one more was exposed to a window a few feet above it—I think that was an apartment but it wasn't clear. Anyone who came to that window would have a clear view of me, of the living room. Of whoever was on the couch. Such as Teddy. For this reason, among others, I put that cassette tape away. But I would go back now and then, and think about it—what the odds were of Will's returning home, how long it would take to lower the blinds on all the windows, how much time I would have when I heard the key in the door. How conspicuous it would be if Will, or someone else, came home and found me standing up, all dressed, as though walking back from the bathroom to the office at the other end of the loft, and saw that all the blinds were drawn?

All this was put on hold during the time Teddy spent living on Will's couch. Now I was never alone, it seemed. I started to resent Teddy, in part because the tendril of contempt, once it established itself, was so self-incriminating. Every condescending thought I had towards Teddy could be turned directly back at me, who had no more right to the place than he did.

And then it was declared that Teddy would be flying to Phnom Penh to begin working at the paper as a photographer. Had he any

experience as a photojournalist?

It would turn out to be a career for a while, at several different papers. Teddy was a natural: fearless, a bit unhinged, an athlete. But at the time I thought he was some sacrificial figure. Will threw a party for his departure. I stood around muttering, "This is crazy. He is going to die in Cambodia because of this whim. It's not right."

That feeling never left me. But six months later it was me and Will and a splash of sunshine hitting the wood floor in his office, which was adjacent to my office. Two rooms facing the street, and the rest of the loft sprawling back toward the inward space of the block. It was all so nineteenth-century.

There was even a strip club on the corner, one of the last of its kind, unreconstructed. The giant hotel that would be erected wasn't yet on that strange triangle on Church Street, which was then still occupied by a nursery whose sprinklers would come on in the middle of summer nights. The floor has been renovated, it was a pleasant warm color; we were on our knees making whooping sounds. Looking at a map. Yelling. It was cathartic.

This is not a story, it's a psychoanalytic session. It's aimless, driven by association, the guilt functioning like yeast in a cake, just enough to make it rise. Too much ruins the taste. It's because of Cynthia, her remark about those two guys who didn't save her but then helped her, the look on her face when she reported her remark at the end, "You guys did me a solid, let me know if I can ever do anything for you."

How had they figured it out? Same way I had. You get a name, you type it in.

""Why would they want you to write a recomendation?" I asked. "You mean like a testimony to their virtue?" She gave me a deadpan stare and it occurred to me. Her other name. The Dean trying to make sure she graduated.

"I don't know how much pull I would have with medical school admissions."

That father of hers, a workaholic. I had thought about him now and then when spending what should have been blissful and unen-

cumbered time with my own children. I was one of those dads diving into his cell phone at the playground. I always pulled out. I knew not to vanish down there. But I felt the pull. Will died in the era of the clamshell. His big technology experience was seeing a food service truck with the company name on the side, Sysco, go by so often he decided they must be doing great business, and calling his family's lawyer to demand they buy the stock. He was always demanding these obscure trades. It was a source of friction. In this case he got his way, somewhat. He spelled it wrong, giving the lawyer not the food service company, Sysco, but Cisco, the technology stock. A huge success. But he never got to tell his side of the story.

"What did you do?" I asked her.

"Nothing. I never got back to him."

She shot me this look. It wasn't the heartbreaker look. But it was, in its own way, vulnerable, distressed. As she gathered her things, the usual fumblings of possessions suggesting an anxiety beneath the placid heaviness, it occurred to me that there was something about her departures that always suggested that this would end up being her last visit. The last time I saw her.

For the first time, I felt a pang of grief about this.

I looked at her and said, "I think you did the right thing."

"Thanks," she said with a tight little smile.

Everyone is so hard on themselves, it's exhausting.

HOLIDAY
Maggie Paley

It's a holiday weekend. My mother and I are guests of my Aunt Helen and her husband, Uncle Boris, staying in the annex to their bungalow. The bungalow is small, low-roofed and cozy. The swings on the front porch are two pallets, hung from the ceiling by chains, covered in a bright, striped fabric. When I was little I used to lie on a swing to read. The annex is a plain narrow wooden building with two rooms like railroad cars and a bed in each. It smells musty; I like the smell, it reminds me of my childhood when Helen used to ask me to get things out of the annex—beach chairs, blankets, sun hats. There are mouse droppings in the corners. I like this, too. There were mouse droppings when I was a kid, mysterious traces of other lives.

My mother's bed is on one side of the wall between the rooms; mine is on the other side, and I can hear her at night, talking to herself. Probably she's talking in her sleep. She seems angry, or upset, but I can't make out the words. Her voice is low; lower than it is in real life, and the sounds she's making sound more like moans. In the morning I ask her was she talking to me in the middle of the night and she says she wasn't talking at all.

We get dressed and go to the main house to get breakfast. Helen and Boris are still in bed, and the door to their bedroom is closed. We can hear their voices as we stand in the kitchen, facing the back porch. Birds call to each other. A blue jay cocks its tail on the porch railing. Helen is scolding Boris. Did he forget to take the trash out last night? Did he forget to cover it? Because she can hear the crows cawing outside the window. Then Boris says, "Oh Helen, you're a firebrand of a woman." He has a furry voice. There are muffled sounds: laughter, creaking bedsprings, then Helen says, "That's all very well, but you'd better get out there and put the cover on the garbage, mister." My mother says, "Let's go take a walk."

My mother and I walk up the hill to the Pearls' house in the woods. There are evergreens all around the house. The path is lined with

stones, the door is painted red. My mother knocks and no one answers. "Gloria Pearl used to be my best friend," my mother says. "Now where is she?" We go on to the Kellys'. Their house is white with green shutters; it sits in the middle of a garden that Mathilda Kelly tends incessantly, wearing a flowered jump suit and a floppy hat. But she is not in the garden right now. We knock at the door and no one answers. I pick a red rose from the garden and give it to my mother. She puts it behind her ear. One of the thorns pricks her earlobe.

My mother moans every night we're there. She sounds like the wind soughing through the trees. She sounds like a ghost. We sit together on the lawn to the left of Helen's bungalow. The lawn slopes up to the next property, the rich people whose house is on the corner of Wixon Pond Road. My mother spreads a blanket and we have a picnic. She hands me a paper plate, on it a chicken leg and a mound of homemade potato salad. "I'm disappointed in the way you've turned out," she says.

I say, "Is that why you moan in the night."

"Why I moan in the night is none of your business," she says. "Why didn't you become a diplomat? You were so good at negotiating between your father and me."

"I didn't want to become a diplomat," I say.

She's very pretty, still, in her eighties. Her eyes are blue, her nose is proud and bony. She has a sweet expression. She files her nails to points. I think she imagines this is the fashion.

I eat my chicken leg. She eats a chicken breast. I say, "I always wanted to make my own way, and not have my parents tell me what to do."

She shakes her head. "You're your father's daughter," she says.

We go to the lake and change into our bathing suits in the little wooden changing room. My mother taught me how to swim when I was an infant. She didn't want me to end up like my father who always looks like a dead man in the water.

The dock used to be full of kids my age and older. Now hardly anyone is there and the lake is choked with water lilies. I dive off the dock and take a short swim. Vegetation grabs at my legs. I remember

the snapping turtle. They used to say it would bite your feet off if you didn't watch out.

It's still hot out after supper and the four of us—Helen, Boris my mother and I—sit on the back porch in low Adirondack chairs. The porch is on stilts; there's an outdoor shower below, and there's a clearing that stretches from the porch to the woods that mark the end of their property. The grass is now knee-high in the clearing and there are many saplings. The foliage is deep green; the air is heavy. Two lush maples stand to the side of the porch, between the bungalow and the annex. Their leaves flutter, as if they're listening to us. We can hear Philip, the high school boy who lives down the hill, playing scales on his trumpet. Helen sits on the arm of Boris's chair and ruffles his close-cropped grey hair with her hand. Boris smiles. "Don't stop, Helen," he says.

That night I wake up because something is stirring in the next room. It sounds like a sheet on the clothesline, flapping in the wind. I tiptoe to the door and see my mother moving around in a kind of dance, shrugging her shoulders, jerking her arms, stamping on the floor with heavy feet. She doesn't see me; she's got her eyes closed and her ears cocked. I want to know what she's hearing. She never tells me anything and then she thinks I should know. I look out the window where a tree branch is scratching against the pane, saying let me in, let me in. I turn back to my mother and she's whirling around. She doesn't look like my mother anymore, she looks like Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god who's known as the remover of obstacles. Ganesh is wearing a blue t-shirt. She has elephant ears and trunk, two plump legs and two sets of arms and hands, and in each of her hands she has a tambourine. She shakes her tambourines at me, then she walks through the annex wall, and she's gone.

I put the best spin on it that I can, telling myself at least I won't hear her moaning any more. I'm happy to have the whole place to myself, even though my mother has abandoned me. She might have taken me with her if I'd been a better daughter.

I don't want to let Helen and Boris know what really happened so I say Gloria Pearl came to the annex in the middle of the night and

offered my mother a ride back to the city. They believe me. When I leave I'll pack her suitcase into mine.

I'm five years old, staying with Helen and Boris for the summer while my mother works at the Empire State Building. I have an upset stomach and they have let me sleep in their bed. I'm dreaming about my mother; she's sitting on the daybed in our apartment. She has her hands in her lap and she's not doing anything. She looks so sad. I say, "Mommy, what's the matter?"

She says, "I have a lot on my mind."

I say, "Can I go visit Daddy? He'll take me to the park. I want to feed the squirrels."

She says, "Where is your loyalty?"

In my dream I don't even know what she means. I hold up the American flag. "God bless America," I say.

My throat is full of burning liquid. It spurts out of my mouth before I can rush to the bathroom. I throw up on the bedclothes. I throw up on the floor and in the toilet. I'm mortified. Helen and Boris will never let me stay with them again.

"I haven't thrown up since I was five," I tell my massage therapist. "I don't know how."

She says, "If you can't throw up, how can you say No when you need to."

My massage therapist tells me to make myself throw up. I say No.

It's the end of the summer and Helen and Boris take me to the casino, a green wooden building with a big front porch, halfway down the wooded path to the lake. There's a Labor Day party at the Casino. Inside there are card tables. Helen plays bridge, hand after hand. Boris is her silent partner, and he's always the dummy. That's a bridge term, but it means he has time on his hands. My mother says that's his problem, he has no profession, he makes furniture for family members, he plays the violin, he has too much time on his hands and he gets into trouble. I don't believe Boris gets into trouble. I'm the one who gets into trouble, when I don't clean my room or I don't do my homework. In the Casino there is music playing. Boris gets up and does a kazatzky,

that's a dance from his native Russia. Men do it; they crouch down and they kick their feet forward, one foot, then the other. Boris does the kazatzky while he's the dummy. My mother says she'd rather see him dance than listen to him talk about politics. He keeps saying the Soviet Union is going to win and soon we'll all be good communists.

I'm in the big grassy field in front of the Casino. The neighbor boy Philip is chasing me around the field. I'm wearing a pretty pink dress because we're at a party. "Take your pants down, Blossom," Philip says.

I say, "I'm going to tell my Aunt Helen what you said."

"I'll tell her you pulled me behind the bushes and kissed me," he says.

I say, "You're stupid. I'll go inside the Casino if you don't stop."

He stops. He takes out his trumpet and begins to play. The leaves on the trees are turning color. Some trees have fiery red leaves, some trees are still green, some are part red, part green. I'm part father, part mother, but I don't know which parts are which. Philip is playing "September Song." It's one of my father's favorites; he used to sing it around the house when we all lived together. "And these few golden days I'd spend with you." In my dreams I'm watching the nightclub scene from *La Dolce Vita.* Marcello's father flirts with the beautiful woman Marcello invited to the table. The clown plays the trumpet; his tune describes the ecstasy of longing. I'm one of the balloons, following the clown as he strolls off stage.

THE MOTHER PARTY

Rachel Lyon

THE WEEK AFTER MY MOTHER DIES, I host a party.

The funeral was small. She was a weird woman. She didn't have many friends.

Regardless, I plan the festivities soon enough after her death that most of my second- and third-tier acquaintances don't yet know that she's gone.

That makes it easier. I'm twenty-eight, grown up enough that even if they did know, they probably wouldn't suspect me of holding auditions.

It is, after all, the sort of thing a poorly brought up child might do—and although I was poorly brought up, by the time you're in your twenties no one expects you to act like a child anymore. A twenty-eight-year-old woman is expected to take in stride that the dead can't be replaced.

But I see my mother's death as an opportunity. I've been intending to replace her for years.

She left me a not insubstantial inheritance. Supplementing with my own personal income, I have enough to pay her replacement about 50K a year for ten years. In ten years I'll be almost forty. At forty, I expect, I'll be more or less weaned.

The replacement's age, on the other hand, isn't really a factor. Obviously the ideal candidate will be at least twenty years older than me. But if a nurturing woman in her late thirties applies for the job, I'll consider her. Character is the real key.

In the end, my list of criteria is pretty simple:

1. Candidate will be even-keeled, self-possessed, with a good sense of humor, humble and sane. Disqualified, for example, is a certain ex-babysitter who once tickled me until I cried. My aunt Theodora also does not make the cut. She once burst into tears watching a commercial for Cheerios.

2. I know I can't predict whether the candidate will ever truly love me (I'm not crazy, understand), but she will have to demonstrate at least some vested interest in me. I am an interesting person, so that criterion is not too hard to meet. Still, it disqualifies a few otherwise acceptable prospects. For example, a dignified woman I once sat beside on a plane, who pretended to fall asleep in the middle of a story I was telling about an ex-boyfriend who broke up with me the day before Valentine's Day.

3. Candidate will be childless. I'm not interested in any new brothers or sisters.

I decide it will be best if my mother's replacement is hired on a probational basis. A nine-month trial period will be followed by a two-year binding commitment, during which time she will perform all the requisite duties (e.g. hosting holidays, giving birthday presents, calling just to check in), and meet a list of predetermined emotional needs (e.g. listening to me vent at the end of the day, giving interpersonal advice). For the sake of the contract, I write up a list of said needs. (As it's rather exhaustive, I won't include it here.) At the end of two years, her performance will be evaluated. Together we'll reexamine the program. Necessary changes will be made.

Invitations to the party end up requiring some research. For instance, I want to invite the woman with the dreadlocks who reads in the community garden on Sundays. But I know nothing at all about her, and she isn't there the afternoon I go by.

I want to invite my fourth grade teacher Miss Elizabeth, but I don't know her last name. After a somewhat confusing ten-minute conversation with an administrative assistant at my old elementary school, I'm told Miss Elizabeth left years ago to work at a charter school across town. When I call them up, they tell me she's out on maternity leave. Disqualified!

I do end up managing to track down Sandy Moffat, hard tough Sandy who used to drive the yellow bus I took to junior high. I've always treasured how one time she pulled over, killed the engine, stomped down the aisle, and humiliated Andrew Martin. She picked him right

up by the nape of the neck like a kitten, and demanded point-blank to know why I was crying. From her poorly curated MySpace page I can see Sandy looks about the same. She's gained a little weight, but if anything the extra pounds add to her impressiveness. In her pictures she's even stronger and more robust than I remember. Her expression is stoic. Her shoulders are square and broad.

I send Sandy a note explaining who I am, admitting she might not remember me. I tell her the time and the place of the party: my garden apartment, Saturday night at eight. I tell her it's very important to me. I say it's a potluck. I do not say that the potluck is part of the test.

Next I look up Melanie Ortiz, the round-faced young secretary who used to work at my father's office. When my mother would haul me in with her to ream out my dad for something or other, Melanie and I would eat M&Ms and play jigsaw puzzles in the waiting room, ignoring the yelling behind my dad's closed office door. When I look her up on the company website, I am delighted to find she still works there. She's moved up through two mergers, and three new office buildings. I call her directly and remind her who I am. She seems glad to be invited.

I call up my mother's estranged friend Angela, a woman with reserved Midwestern manners who must eventually have been put off by Mom's erratic behavior. I invite Angela, and I invite Mathilde, my college French professor, who used to drink loose tea in a silver tea ball and took an interest in me despite my lousy conjugations. I invite Marcy Jones, a former coworker who once set me up on a date with her nephew, and Jane Priestly, who long ago married and divorced an alcoholic cousin of mine. I invite buxom, chatty Dina, who was my tour guide on a ten-day trip through Greece and Turkey when I was nineteen.

The invitation list ends up being remarkably long. There are just so many women who would make better mothers than my own mother did.

A few of the candidates can't make it, of course, but most of those send their regrets—a good sign! Susan, who owns the bakery around

the corner from me, arrives first, with a paper bag of pastries. Teresa, my Italian neighbor, brings anise cookies and schnapps. Tattooed Cynthia, who works at my favorite bar, doesn't bring anything, but talks with the other guests as easily as an old friend.

Marcy Jones comes in heavy and full of real laughter, ready to mingle, with a bottle of wine. Angela arrives nervous, with crudité. With a look of concern she says to me, How's your mom, then? I nod, smile, and introduce her to Mathilde, who is wearing a scarf tied just so, at the throat.

Melanie Ortiz the ex-secretary shows up with lasagna in a Pyrex baking dish under aluminum foil. When she hugs me she smells like Pantene. She's so young! I'm surprised and tell her so. She says she was just barely twenty back when we ate M&Ms and played jigsaw puzzles. I ask her if she's married now, if she has kids. She says no—and pulls into the lead.

I talk my way through the crowd buoyed by anticipation. I ask each of the guests a few questions right off the bat, to get a sense of their qualifications.

You can tell right away if a person is poised and engaged, but it takes time to gauge whether or not she is sane. Then, of course, there's the question of health. One mother dying has been quite enough. I ask each of them: How have you been? And then: Any serious illnesses run in your family? In a way that I'm sure seems fun, if a little ironic, I ask how they've been sleeping, and whether they've recently experienced any loss of appetite, any mood swings.

I follow grave topics with lighter conversation. I steer the dialogue around to children. If they have any, I cross them off my mental list.

Cynthia leaves after just forty-five minutes, closely followed by Susan, Teresa, and Jane. I'm sorry to see them go, until it occurs to me that their leaving early is in itself a mark of ineligibility. My new mother will be available when I want her.

Marcy Jones and Dina the tour guide chat easily over plastic cups and Styrofoam plates. I join them with a pleasant expression, but when it turns out they're comparing horror stories about dating, I feel my

face fall. This is not a mark in either of their favor. I want a new mother, but I have no need for a rotating cast of father figures, coming in and out of my life like understudies who do not know their lines.

That leaves three: Melanie Ortiz, Mathilde the French professor, and Sandy the bus driver, whom I've lost track of somehow.

Melanie and Mathilde are sitting together on the love seat. I pull up an ottoman and join them.

What are you talking about? I ask. My tone is playful and friendly.

They look uncomfortable. Melanie says: Well, about you.

I say, I thought I felt my ears burning!

They laugh without laughing. Mathilde puts hand on my hand. She says, We're worried about you, *chérie.*

I smile harder. Why? I ask.

Melanie leans forward. We know your mother died, sweetie.

Mathilde says, We're so sorry.

I feel my smile becoming a grimace. I say, How did you find out?

Melanie holds up her Galaxy. There's my mother's Facebook page, her wall clotted with reminiscences.

What can I do? I'm determined to remain cheerful. I say: Well, so! There you have it! The position is open!

They exchange a look I find difficult to read.

Your mom was a wonderful woman, Melanie says. She seems to mean it.

Not really! I reply. Not really, at all! *You're* a wonderful woman. I gesture at Mathilde. *She's* a wonderful woman, I say. *Sandy's* a wonderful woman, wherever she is! All of you would do a much better job than my mother did. So!

I get up. I'm a little dizzy. I have the upsetting feeling my cover's been blown.

There's no paper application or anything, I say, but I'll be holding interviews as soon as possible. I would like to have the position filled by the end of the month!

I find Sandy alone, outside on the porch, smoking. I go out through the glass door to join her. It's chilly, and she has her hat pulled down

hard over her ears. Behind me I can feel Melanie and Mathilde watching.

I stand with Sandy a moment, looking out at the empty road, the dark woods.

Weird party, she says.

I say, Cigarettes shorten your lifespan by an average of 6.5 years.

She squints and exhales. When it comes to life, she says, I value quality over quantity.

The door opens. Melanie and Mathilde slip out and close it gently behind them.

Thanks for having us, Melanie says to me. It was great to see you again. You've grown into a real woman.

Mathilde kisses both of my cheeks. *Porte-toi bien*, she says.

Sandy and I watch them walk together away from the house, toward the road. At the end of the path they part, turn, and get in their respective cars.

Can I bum one of those? I ask.

Sandy holds out the pack. I put a cigarette in my mouth and lean toward her so she can light it for me. When I inhale, I cough.

You all right there, cowgirl?

I nod. I take a breath. I try to regain my composure.

She leans back and looks me up and down. When she exhales, smoke mingles with the steam from her breath in the cold. I remember you, she says at last. You were kind of a shrimp, weren't you?

Yeah.

Yeah, she repeats, I remember you. Your mother's a loon.

I smoke quietly, my eyes crossing a little as I watch the cherry glow.

I don't remember most parents, but I remember her. Sandy laughs, and her voice is dusty and thick. How could I forget a woman who chased me down in a parking lot?

She chased you down?

Chased us down. Chased the bus. She was worried about you. She wanted me to look out for you. As if I didn't look out for all you kids. As if I didn't know how to do my job.

My cigarette's burning down to the filter. I don't want it to go out.

Sandy rubs her neck, grimacing as if it hurts. She told me you were

fragile. Fragile was the word that she used. It's a real problem, in my opinion, when parents think their kids are fragile. Kids are resilient. They can eat dirt, break their legs, they'll be fine. It's adults who get cancer. Osteoporosis. Rheumatoid arthritis.

I want to ask her if she's all right.

I want to ask if she has any daughters. If there's room for me somewhere in her solitary, bus driver's life. I want to beg her to make macaroni and cheese, and sit with me at the kitchen table, playing Go Fish and smoking through sunrise.

A FOX IN THE YARD

Hananah Zaheer

THERE IS a plain roti on a metal plate in front of me and I tell myself that this is better than another kind of life I might have had. In my old life, I was naive, I had ideas; when I saw injustice, I thought I needed to fix it. Now, I tear off small pieces and dip them in the water one by one. I can eat; this is a celebration. I ease the roti into my mouth, gently, on the right side because the left is always sore, even after they took out the broken teeth and the wires that had to hold my bones for all those days.

"Faster," they tell me, "it's time to get to the yard."

Their patience with me keeps running thin. I slip more pieces into my mouth, then get on my feet. My compliance helps the system. They have returned my blanket to me. The gaggle of uniforms no longer comes to help me walk out of the cell. I'm grateful. Movement belongs to me again.

The yard is small and bare. The earth is uneven under my slippers and the grass is dying.

There is one other woman standing against the fence. I remember reading somewhere that to know the world you have to know yourself first. I know that woman. She is tired and a little bit afraid and her eyes keep wanting to meet mine but when I look back, she can't hold my gaze.

When I look away, she takes a step away from the fence. She is letting me know she is alive.

"Twenty minutes," the uniform next to me says and shifts her weight to one hip.

2

SHE IS BORED. Her body is bored. The tips of her tiny gold chandelier earrings are bored.

She would rather be out in Sadar shopping for nice silks to wear

for when some boy's family comes to her parent's house to propose marriage. It is not right for her to be here, to be jailed with us. She stands when we stand, watches our breathing, how we eat, how we sit on the toilet.

Outside, that kind of attention is only reserved for the extremely important, the very lucky.

Watching those kind of people is a privilege. She wishes we were those people. But we are not; we are ordinary and even our crimes are ordinary.

The woman across the yard is not in a hurry. She does not have an understanding of time like she used to. It's always the same for her: morning through window in the cell, cold cement against ankles for the rest of the day. Just when the stomach starts to undulate, there's roti and water. Her malaise makes me impatient. If I was a uniform, I would be bored, too. There are still hours in the day, even if they pass without anyone marking them. You just have to listen to your body; it keeps you knowing. My fingers sometimes twitch and press invisible buttons. Three years of busy nights at the Railway Station, punching in passenger names, releasing the rails one by one, will penetrate anyone's muscle.

The uniform switches her weight to her other leg. Her hips are ample. My mother-in-law would have approved of her body. She called women cows but not in the way that you might think. She thought cows were patient and domestic and unlikely to cause trouble. I was a fox.

The woman across the yard is a dried-up gazelle pretending to be a cow.

On the other side of the yard is a soccer ball. We are expected to use it. This is how we show the suits that our spirits are not broken, that they have not isolated us so long that we are forgetting what it feels like to be stirred.

3

"Get moving," Uniform says and she is looking at the woman near the fence. Her foot taps and grinds against the dry grass.

The tip of my nose is cold and I take a few quick steps. I will the woman to move. This is a moment of shatter, the kind which will determine the course of everyone's day. The outside world is full of these. In my old life, I avoided shatter with a sequence. I made my husband and his family breakfast, I changed into my pajamas, I slept. I awoke before my husband came back from his office, I made dinner and I left for work. I was sure I was in control. But that is not exactly how things work. I know this better now. There is no future, no certainty, only options.

For example, you could have not been crying in the kitchen at the thought of children you send off in trains to the camps outside the city, or you could have remembered that your mother-in-law always wanted her son to leave you; you could have not told her you thought the government was evil, that you were going to save the children. Those were options. Then, you might have easily had the chance to delete passenger names off the list before guards barreled in the door and handcuffed you. You could be the fox she thought you were; you could be clever.

Action and inaction have equal consequences. They will, in any case, for all of us here in this yard, especially the rest of the woman's day.

The woman is containing her movement in rebellion. I can see it in the alertness of her eyes. I can allow myself alliance with the uniform now. Things have to proceed in order, time has to carry them to their natural ends. I understand this now. Any other choice risks chaos. A clock, for example, loses its identity when you break its arms. Trains set to depart at certain times will gather energy, ache to slide along the track. Impatient steam needs release. A person at the end of their life doesn't have much to lose, they say. I will join the uniform's indignance.

4

"It's unacceptable, ma'am, with all respect due that someone, an ordinary someone, can hold up your time like this, especially when

they are here in prison, especially when their time will cease to exist in two months exactly. It's an inconvenience, for all of us, really. You have the next thing to attend to. We have to make our daily trip to the warden's office, there will be a bathroom visit at some point. Time has been given purpose. It serves no one to squander it, ma'am. It's selfish is what it is."

Uniform's hand tightens on her baton.

"Shut your mouth."

I understand that she is used to seeing me as a problem. It is what my file says and how the warden addresses me. Perhaps she needs some reassurance.

"I support you. I stand by the side of authority…"

Uniform's baton lands on my back.

"You just earned yourself solitary."

The skin on my arm can burn under a twist, I've learned this in the last few months. But back in my cell, I can at least see clear line of time again. I will sit until the light fades on the names I've scratched on my cell wall—parents, husband, friends, streets I lived on. I will sleep and at some point my body will build up enough need for me to stand at the door until a uniform walks me to the bathroom. In my past, it didn't sit well with me when things didn't go my way or how I thought they should and the lack of food bothers me but I won't object this time. One day, I will be walked to the chair and strapped in. Then, my body can rest its knowing. I am used to the quiet hissing cries from other cells by now but the wailing from the gazelle end bothers me. I imagine it will keep me up all night.

5

It's MORNING and the light is reaching in through the skylight the same dim way as it has all this time. They are waiting at a distance from the cell while I arrange my bed and fold the blanket. Uniform is standing next to the door and I wonder if some boy ever came to her house to ask her to marry him. Her lipstick color is too orange today, too bright to suit her skin. I hope she finds a husband, soon. I wonder who has

taken my job at the railway station. The right lever on the main release sticks. Someone needs to oil it every three days. I should have left a note. My husband is probably waking up to a cup of tea, maybe a new wife. I try to imagine what his life might be like but when I do that, my thoughts start to scatter. Back to folding the blanket, pillow goes on top, all corners align. I'm going to put time in sequence: turn, step one, step two, step three, turn right, repeat.

DELIVERING A PRESCRIPTION ON SATURDAY NIGHT

Lee Oleson

I HEARD shouts. I stood in front of the building, looking for the apartment to make the delivery. More shouts. I followed the sounds to a door opening into a dim stairwell, felt my way up the stairs, knocked on another door at the top. A voice came through, "Push!" I opened the door into a room, a kind of hall or a sort of a warehouse or apartment. Across the room by a window a man sat on a bench. He was bald, short, and fat and ate a sandwich from a brown paper bag, a crutch by his side. His right foot was bandaged and stuck out straight like there was something wrong with it.

I asked, "You ordered a prescription?"

"How come you took so long, kid?" he said. "I was calling at you from the window. I was right at the window! You didn't see me?"

"It's dark out," I said.

"Dark? It isn't dark. What are you talking about?" He tried to stand and couldn't, then bent to pick up the crutch from the floor and called, "Geraldine!"

"What?" A voice came from the back.

"Come out here!"

"No!"

"Come out, damn it!"

A large, redheaded woman in an orange robe, a pink slip showing underneath, walked in, humming. She held a large plastic Donald Duck cup. "What, hon?"

"This boy says it's too dark out to see. You think it's dark out?"

"It's dark. All you have to do is look."

The man pulled himself up on the crutch, hobbled to the window, looked out, hobbled back to the bench, and sat again. "Don't look dark to me."

"I can't help that," she said. "It's dark!"

"I have a prescription for Rasko," I said.

"That's me," the man turned to me. "Me, I'm Rasko. Max R. Rasko. Call me Mr. Rasko." When I asked for identification he showed me a driver's license then signed the form I gave him. He reached down and pulled a cigar box from under the bench and took bills and coins from the box and paid for the prescription in exact change.

I gave him the bag with the drugs and was going toward the door, then I heard a shout, "Millie's boy!" I turned around and saw the woman in the orange robe opening her arms wide toward me. "I know you!" she said. "You live on Grissom Street! You have a brother, Markie. I know your mom!"

I didn't know who this woman was.

"You're Michael!" she said.

"No, I'm Hugh," I said. "Michael's my brother." Then I remembered. Her family lived down the street from us till they moved out years before, I think because the mom and dad drank so much and the police came too often. My mother always told me to stay away from them, but I didn't. Her son Tommy and I used to watch TV at their place. Every so often this woman—I remembered— came out of her bedroom, she'd say hello on her way to the kitchen, get something in the kitchen—whiskey, Tommy always said—then go back to the bedroom.

She went on, "Well, Hugh, I know your family! You look just like Michael, you know. Gary Travers is your uncle."

Gary Travers was an important person in town, deputy police chief. Everyone knew who he was. Not many people knew he was my uncle, my father's brother. My father had died in a car accident and since then—for reasons I never found out—no one in my family talked about Gary. His name never came up, or if we brought it up we were told not to bring it up. I was trying not to listen, but this woman wouldn't stop talking.

"Gary's cute," she was saying. "You know, all the girls think he's cute! Not just little girls, big girls. Hugh, can you get me a date with him? Huh?" She laughed loud. "I'm just talking! Talking, talking! Can you get me a date?"

"For God's sake, leave the kid alone!" the old man, Rasko, said.

"Did I say something wrong?" Geraldine laughed again. She walked over and pushed him hard on the shoulder, so he almost fell from the bench, then she moved over to me and put an arm around my neck, nestling her head close to my chin. "My husband's touchy, you know. You know how the geniuses are—they're touchy!"

"I'm no genius," Rasko said.

"That's for sure!" Geraldine laughed and kissed my ear so I felt the hot breath of perfume and alcohol. "Say hello to your mom, Hugh! Tell her you met me. I'm Geraldine. Geraldine! She'll know! Hugh, I bet you're on the honor roll at school!"

"No," I said.

"Bet you are!" she went on, swallowing hard from the cup. "You're a runner, I bet! You're in track?"

"No."

"You're in football."

"No."

"Well, what do you do?"

"I—don't know."

"You do too!"

"I—I work."

"See!" Rasko called out. "He's making a hint. He has to get back to work! He's delivering prescriptions. It's his job. He has a job. That's more than I can say for you!"

"I know you're a hard worker!" Geraldine said, leaning over me. "It runs in your family. That's what I admire about your family. Everyone's so productive! And your mother—she's such a dear, such a hard worker too, though I guess she hasn't worked for a while. It was terrible the way your father died."

Geraldine settled on the bench next to the old man. "Max," she said, nudging him. "His pappy was the one they found dead in the car on Beartown Road. When the police come, he was dead."

"Killed in the wreck."

"Not killed in the wreck! You know, Max!"

"How then?"

"Everybody talked about it. You know!"

"It was suicide."

"No!" She turned to me. "Your uncle was there? Gary Travers? He was there in the car with your dad when the police come. Everybody talked about it."

I knew nothing about this. All I knew was my father died in an auto accident on Beartown Road in the winter, when I was three. Something about a slippery road.

"Gary was there!" the woman said. "When the police come. He said it was an accident. People believed for the longest time! That's how dumb we were.

We were dumb!"

"What are you talking about, Geraldine?" the old man said.

"Then we found out," Geraldine said. "You know, Hugh, what it was? It was cold-blooded murder. You know that, don't you? I've said it all along. Nobody will make me take it back! Cold-blooded murder on your uncle's part, and everyone knows it's the truth! It'll all come out."

"Geraldine!" the man shouted. "What are you talking about? Where'd you get that? You're making it all up! Gary murdered this boy's father? Is that what you're saying? This boy's father? Where you get that? I've never heard of such a thing! You're talking about this boy's father! Good God! His father! The boy is trying to do his job and you tell a story like that!"

She got up from the bench and came over to me. "Hugh, I've been silly! I am, Hugh." She put an arm around me. "I don't know what I'm saying, really don't. Just blabbering away, blabbering away! Don't listen to me. "It isn't true what I said," she went on. "Not a word. I get funny—you know! Gary Travers is such a nice man, would never do that. Has a nice wife and kids. I get flippy. Don't listen. I'm flippy. I heard horrible things about your uncle, everyone did, none of it's true. It's what everyone said! Maye it's true! Hugh, tell your mom Geraldine says hello! Geraldine! She'll remember me. We're good friends. I found her car keys in the Rancho River parking lot one time during the

snowstorm. Found them in the snow!"

Rancho River was a bar.

Rasko was holding the prescription bottle at eye level. "I can't read this," he said.

"Why not?" Geraldine took the bottle from him. "It's English," she said. She studied the label. "It's just plain English. It says in plain English, plain English, Indochin. I-n-d-o-c-h-i-n. Can't you read? Indochin."

"I have another delivery," I said, heading for the door. "Call the number of the pharmacy—it's on the bag—if you have a question, okay? I have to go."

"This isn't what I ordered!" Rasko yelled out.

I stopped. "What did you order?"

"Something for gout. Gout. You know what gout is?"

"Gout?"

"Okay," Rasko said. "You don't know what gout is. They send somebody here, for a person who has gout, someone like me who's inflicted with gout, someone who's suffering and needs help, and they send someone who doesn't know what gout is."

"It's a kind of plaster?" I asked.

"That's it! That's what I need to know! I want my money back."

If the customer wasn't satisfied, I was supposed refund the money without question. All the customer had to do is sign a form. I took out the form from my pouch and asked the man to fill it out, which he did, then he gave me back the bag with the prescription and I gave him his money back. "Tell your boss I need something for gout," he said. "Got that, kid? Gout. G-o-u-t. Tell him you're coming back right away with it! You're coming back right away?"

I said I didn't know; it depended on what my boss said. I told him I didn't know if I'd come back right away. The truth was I wasn't coming back, no matter what my boss said. I had to get out of there. It was the old man—and the woman, what she said about my father.

"When you coming back?" Rasko said. "If you don't come back right away, I'll call your boss! I'll call him now! I have his number." He

picked up a phone from the floor next to the bench. "I have your boss's number and I'm dialing! I'll be talking to your boss!" I went out the door, down the stairs, onto the street.

It was snowing. I walked to the car and got in. Janine was in the passenger seat. She was skinny and had long, stringy hair and wires on her teeth. She had a big smile. The engine was running and it was warm inside. I turned on the headlights.

"Where do we go now?" she said. "It's snowing. This is fun."

"I don't know," I said. We sat for a while.

"Don't you have more deliveries?" she asked.

"It isn't good driving in the snow," I said. We looked at the snow falling through the headlights.

"It's snowing hard," she said.

I told her that one of the people upstairs said my father was murdered. Cold-blooded.

"What?" she said.

"They said it."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"What woman?"

"Geraldine. She knows my mother. She lived down the street."

"She said what?"

"She said my father was murdered cold-blooded. She said Gary Travers murdered him."

"Gary Travers? The policeman? She's making it up."

"She said it."

"She's crazy. What's her name?"

"Geraldine."

"It's a lie."

"I don't believe it," I said.

"Your father died in a wreck," Janine said.

"That's what Mom said, it was a wreck. It happened when I was three."

We watched the snow for a while. "The man up there, he said he's going to call my boss," I said. "He wants to get me fired."

"Who?" Janine said.

"A man up there."

"Why?"

"He said I didn't do a good job."

"Think he will?"

"I don't know."

"Hope he doesn't get you in trouble."

We watched the snow for a while more. I took a bottle from under the seat.

"What's that?" Janine said.

"Whiskey. Ever had it?"

"No."

"My brother got it for me." I pulled open the bottle and I took a sip and she took a sip and I had a sip, then she had a sip and I had a sip.

"It burns my throat," she said. She coughed.

"It's good."

"It's horrible."

After a while I felt better. Janine said she was getting sick . We drove off at top speed. We were downtown and then I saw my brother Michael standing with his friends by the Greyhound depot. He was wearing a light overcoat, which wasn't warm enough, and his lumberjack hat. It was still snowing. The depot was closed so I didn't know why he was there. I pulled up at the curb to talk to him.

He came over. He walked with hunched shoulders, like he had a barbell on his shoulders. He was that way, muscle-bound, a football player. I rolled down the window and snow came in. He leaned in.

"You finished work, Hugh?"

"Uh-huh."

"You're messing around again," he said. "You're speeding around. That job's an excuse to get the car."

I said nothing.

"You taking the car home, Hugh?" Michael said. "Mom's waiting. You shouldn't be speeding around with Janine. You shouldn't be with Janine in the car. You know what Mom said."

"What?"

"She said you shouldn't be driving around except for your job. You shouldn't be driving Janine around. She told you that a million times! Look, Mom needs the car to get to work."

"I'm going home now."

"I need the whiskey back," he said. "Where is it?"

"It's gone. We drank it," I said.

The next thing I remember is Janine and I driving down a road fast, but I knew the road. There was a steep hill and trees and rocks on both sides and a pile of rocks at the right. We went faster. We came to a curve I didn't remember. Another curve came. I didn't remember that one either. The curve went right but we didn't make it, went off the road. A tree came at us. We missed it. The car hit something, a rock, or a log, and we were in a field, and the car was rolling and we were yelling and it stopped and we were yelling and the car was upside down and we were messed up. My door wouldn't open. Janine got out her door and I also got out hers. We were yelling and running around in the field. I felt blood on my neck.

Janine said, "I don't have a coat. Where's my coat?"

I didn't know where my coat was either. It got colder. We walked across the field, we had to walk, to the road and then we were walking along the road as fast as we could to keep warm. My head was bleeding. I had a scarf in my pocket and used it to wipe the blood off.

We walked back to town, fast as we could. We kept walking but it was a long time before we got there and we got to Janine's street and we saw her house, with lights on outside and she went in and I went back to my house.

When I got there I knew there was blood on my face. In the garage there was a sink and I got rags and began to clean my face. I went into the house, crept past Mom's bedroom and went into my room where my little brother Markie was asleep in the bed next to mine. I took off my clothes, got in bed. I couldn't sleep, then I slept. Then my mother, dark hair, thin, was sitting on my bed, saying, "Hugh, you hear me? Where were you? I was worried.Where were you?" She wore her kimono robe, so thin you could almost see through it. "Are you all right?"

I told her the car was totaled. She didn't believe it. She put on an overcoat and went outside to see the car and came back. "Where is it?" she said.

I said again it was totaled, I said I'd pay for it. I said I'd get another job to pay. She asked where Michael was and I said I saw him by the bus station.

"When?" she said. I said it was a long time before. "Michael isn't home," she said. "My children are running wild." She cried, her body shaking beneath the coat.

My little brother Markie woke up and went to Mom's room to sleep. Mom asked what happened again. I told her about the curve, how it went and the car rolled. She asked where. I told her past the rock pile, that Janine and I walked back, and she said, "Janine?"

I told her Janine was with me when I had the wreck and that Janine and I were getting married. She already had heard that.

"Don't talk that," she said. "You're not getting married."

I told her about my job. I said I thought I was fired. I'd had problems, I said. I didn't say what.

I told her about what Geraldine had said, that my father was murdered, Gary Travers murdered him.

"What?" she said. "That doesn't make sense. Hugh, the police were looking for you. People said you were driving around downtown drunk. I didn't know what happened to you. I called the police."

Mom said people told lies about Gary Travers all the time, and I shouldn't listen.

"Hugh, I know Geraldine, the woman who told you that, she's a drunk, that's what she is. Don't believe her."

The doorbell rang. Mom kept the overcoat over her robe and went to the door. It was the police again, two of them, tall, with big shoulders. They explained they had found Mom's car wrecked and they asked Mom, did I know about it? They said I had been speeding downtown and people said I was drunk. The police asked me, was I drunk driving? Did I have anything to say? Mom said I couldn't talk because it was too late. She went into the other room and talked to them. After

a while they left.

"You and Janine, you're too young to know about love," she said. "People think they're in love, they don't know what they're talking about."

I lay in bed for a long time. When I woke it was late afternoon. Charlie, Mom's boyfriend, in jeans and a hunting vest and a hat with ear flaps, was talking loud in the living room. I was in the dining room, listening.

"Hugh was drunk?" Charlie was saying. He was so loud you could have heard him a block away. He was husky and sure of himself. "Driving drunk?"

"Hugh was drinking and driving," Mom said.

"Christ almighty!"

"And he heard that story from that woman Geraldine…"

"What story?"

"You know," Mom said. "She goes around saying Gary murdered my husband, comes right out and says it. She's been saying it for years, that's how crazy she is."

"I know Geraldine," Charlie said. "I know her old man—what's his name? Max. All he does is eat. I know Geraldine goes around saying that stuff and I've heard it. It's a lie. I don't know how she gets away with it."

When I walked into the living room, Charlie looked at me and lit a cigarette and pulled on it. "Have to relax," he said. "All this stuff 's too loopy."

Mom was in her wool slacks and fluffed cotton blouse. "Geraldine!" she said. "She's trash! Always in trouble with the police. Drinking problems. She and her husband were evicted when they were down the street."

"You don't believe the stuff she says, do you?" Charlie asked me.

"The woman was drunk," Mom said.

"Where do you get this stuff?" Charlie asked me. "That woman Geraldine says your dad was murdered. Geraldine told you that—you believe it? You wrecked your mom's car. What do you say about that?

What kind of a boy wrecks his mother's car?"

Charlie and Mom went into another room. I heard them talking but could make out what they said. They came back.

"I'm not going to listen to this anymore," Mom said. "These stories about Gary being a murderer—as if I had something to do with it. They say I had something to do with it. That's the kind of town this is, people believing stories like that. They make up stories, make up stories about Gary and me, and I've never had anything to do with him."

"With Gary?" Charlie asked. "You never had anything to do with him?"

"I've never had anything to do with him," Mom said.

"I thought you did," Charlie said. He stood up and I saw how huge he was standing up, six-feet-four in heavy boots. "I thought you had something with Gary."

"What are you talking about?" Mom said.

"You told me you had something with him," Charlie said. "I know you had something. You were running around with him for the longest time, everybody knows. You think it's a secret? You were running around with him."

"I never had anything with him."

"You told me you had something with him. Everyone knows you had something with him."

"I didn't have anything with him!"

"God, Millie, you think people don't know? The way you run around? You think we don't know?"

"That's enough! Get out!" Mom yelled.

"Millie!"

"Out! I won't listen! Out!" Mom pushed him in the chest, hard toward the door. "Out!"

Charlie left, shouting, slamming the door so hard the house shook. As he drove off, the roar of his pickup rattled the windows. Mom came to me, smoothed my hair, gave me a squeeze on the shoulders, led me into my bedroom, and sat me down on the bed.

"I don't know about men, Hugh."

"When is Charlie coming back?" I asked.

"He's not coming back! I've had it with him, with men! I don't want him back!" She sat me down on the sofa and looked me in the eyes. "Do you love your mother?"

"Yes."

"I hope so!" She went into the living room and I could hear her sobbing. I was afraid to go into the living room after her. I heard her opening the desk cabinet where she kept the drinks. I knew the sound, a squeaking and scrapping of wood, of the latch door opening. I went into the living room and watched her pour whiskey. She saw me.

"Don't you ever let me catch you with this stuff," she said. "It's not for kids! Your father was the same way. He was like the others. He was irresponsible."

I had something to say. "Michael says Dad gave us piggyback rides, him and me both."

"Michael says that? Your dad gave you piggyback rides? Maybe he did. He was playful. He liked that sort of stuff, games with you kids."

"He worked in a pharmacy."

"Yes, your father, God bless his soul, he was a pharmacist. I've told you that. Look, honey, I have a headache, okay? Don't talk to Mommy. I have to sit down." She sat on the sofa, holding her head, swaying back and forth on the sofa. "Everything is wobbling. Sit next to your mommy. Give a hug."

I sat next to her and gave her a hug. She was shaking and wheezing. The skin of her arm next to mine felt cold. "Give another hug, Hugh."

I gave her another.

"You're a darling, Hugh. I can always talk to you. I could never talk to anyone like I can talk to you. I've made mistakes. I shouldn't have anything to do with men. I'm being honest with you, Hugh, maybe I shouldn't say these things. You have to learn yourself. You'll be tempted. Little girls will come along—big girls—you'll be tempted. Don't give in. The Bible says there are the temptations of the flesh, do you know what that means? I'll tell you, you can't go off with just anyone you feel like. You can fall in love with the wrong kind of person, and when you're in love, it's hard to get out, it's impossible sometimes. Hugh, you don't know what I'm talking about."

"I think I know."

"How do you know?"

"I think I know."

"What do you think you know?"

I mumbled something.

"The wonderful thing is we're all forgiven," she said. "Do you know what that means? It means we can do the most horrible crime and if we sincerely ask forgiveness, we're forgiven."

I nodded.

"That's important," Mom said. "I couldn't go on if it wasn't true."

"Forgiven for what?"

"Things start out one way, your life starts out one way, and it goes off, and you do the best you can, you really do, and there's nothing you can do, you try and try. Hugh, let's get down on our knees and pray."

"Huh?"

"You know what I mean. Get down on your knees."

I got down on my knees, next to her, so we were both facing the sofa with our hands on the cushions. "Honey," she said. "I'm going to pray now and you pray with me. When I say something, you repeat it. "

My knees hurt on the carpet, which was too thin, my knees hurt, and I was tired, trying to understand what was going on.

"God," she said. "Forgive us our sins." I couldn't speak. "Hugh," she said.

"Repeat what I say. Forgive our sins."

"Forgive us our sins."

"We can't help ourselves."

"We can't help ourselves."

"God help us."

"God help us."

"As soon as possible."

"Soon as possible."

"Okay!" she said. She got up suddenly. "Don't you feel better now?" She was looking at me and smiling. I was still on my knees. "Get up, get up, little man! Feel better? The power of prayer. It makes you feel so much better."

Suddenly, I was thirsty. "I'm getting a glass of milk."

"Honey, get yourself milk." When I returned from the kitchen with the milk, we sat again on the sofa. Her mood was cheery, almost laughing. "Don't worry about the car, hon," she said. "We'll take care of it later. We'll worry about it later."

She sat on the sofa, the glass of whiskey no longer in her hand. "I'm going back to sleep now," I said. I finished my milk and was in my bedroom in a minute, took off my shoes, slipped out of my clothes, got into bed, and went right to sleep. When I woke it was past five o'clock in the afternoon. The house was quiet.

It was hard to be with Mom after that. I knew she was lying. I didn't know anything else, just that she was lying, and she was loopy. Sometimes I didn't know what she was talking about. When she talked, she jumped from one thing to another. Sometimes I thought she wasn't my mother, she was someone I didn't know. I couldn't help thinking that.

When I got old enough I moved out from the house, as soon as I could, when I was twenty I moved far away, to another state and got a job, got help from my uncle, and came home for short visits only. Michael and Mark believed Mom, no matter what. I didn't believe her, didn't feel good talking to her. I was being lied to. It scared me.

Years later it was a nursing home in Navesink on the Jersey Shore, where she was, where I went almost every week, making my way into New Jersey, going down the Garden State Parkway, then onto Highway 36. The nursing home was well kept up, airy and modern. Mom watched television, that's all she did. It was the days of *Oprah*, Mom watched that and watched reruns and commercials and soaps, and each one kept her interest, as if it was something real.

I could get her to talk sometimes, not always. If I brought in a book or a magazine she read before dozing off. Her hair thinned, spotty. At moments she was full of life, though the cancer which she didn't talk about, was making its way—the drugs only slowed it. She refused to go to the hospital. She'd stay where she was, she said. She was always talking to the nurses' aides, telling them stories of her life.

"Mom," I said. "Don't you want to go to the hospital?"

"Stop asking me!"

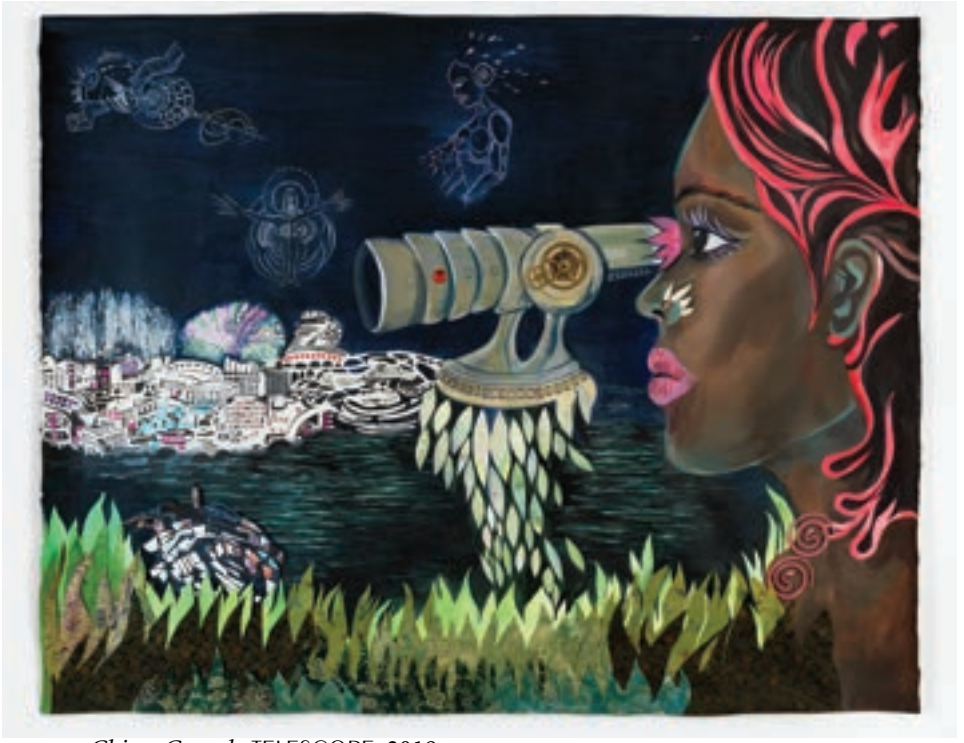
I never asked her about Dad; she brought it up. "What happened to your father?" she'd say. "Everyone asks. Nobody believes me. They think terrible things."

One time she sat up with new energy. "Hugh, I have to tell you the truth about your father. He lied about everything. You could catch him with the church steeple in his pocket and he'd say he didn't have it, and it would be sticking out of his pocket, that's how he lied.

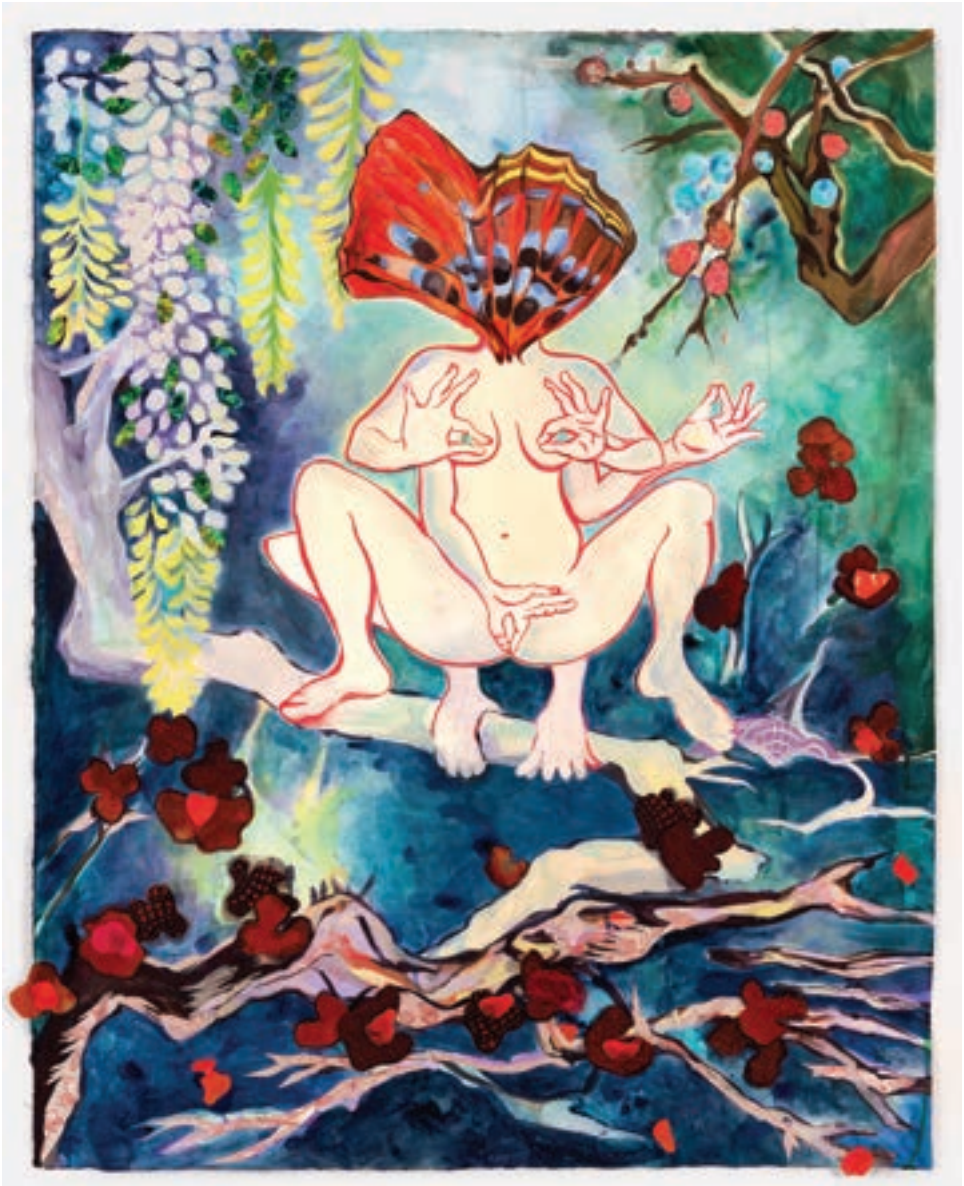
"People tell stories about me, well, I won't give up!" she said another time. She turned in bed, coughing, then relaxed. "It doesn't matter now…"

"Hugh," she said later. "You were my favorite one. I've always been able to talk to you."

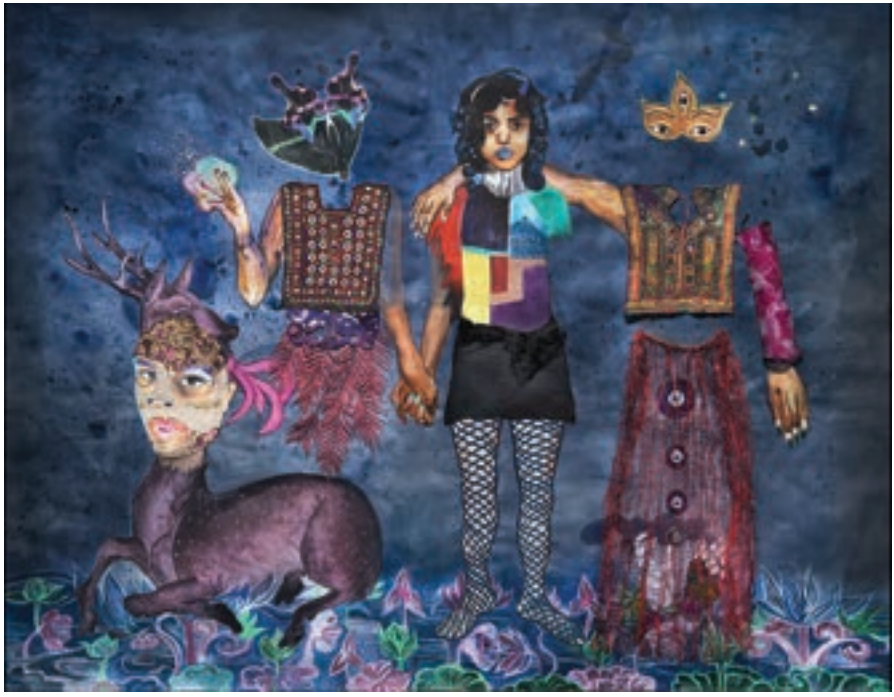
I told her to rest. She leaned back and was asleep. When she woke later, I was there and by that time Michael and Mark were there, and she didn't talk and we stayed with her through the night, and when we came back from being away a half hour it was light outside and if you listened you could hear the birds outside and people were in the corridors, and we found out she had died before we got back. I mourned her just like my brothers did, and some friends, and if anyone asked me about her, I said I mourned her and it was true. There was nothing more I could do.



Chitra Ganesh, TELESCOPE, 2019
acrylic, ink, mirror pieces, textiles, embroidery,
brass gear parts, plastic toy snakes, on paper;
mounted on paper on linen, 40 1/2 x 52 inches



Chitra Ganesh, BUTTERFLY, 2019
Water-based paints, fabric hardener, archival PVA glue, and mixed media on paper on linen, $51^{1/2}$ x 41 inches



Chitra Ganesh, AFTER THE STORM, 2019
Water-based paints, fabric hardener,
archival PVA glue, mixed media;
mounted on paper on linen, 84 x 108 inches

TRANSLATION

Ivonne Gordon Carrera Andrade
EN EL PALADAR

Esa esencia que nos mece en voces de signos
no me dejar reconocer el aroma en mis ojos de sueño y de amor.

Mientras se mezcla con el humo y las hojas del viento
el aroma del café invade mi cuerpo.

El néctar mañanero me construye a media voz,
para en un momento hacer de mí una diosa de siete voces.

Aprecio en el paladar su roce amargo y su color a troncos
de árboles maduros, y en ese momento la penumbra se desmorona y
comienzo a repetir las sílabas de tu nombre. Hay pájaros hilvanados
en el vuelo, hay piedras buscando una ribera. Hay lagartijas avivando
el vuelo de los colibríes. En la nebulosa de la olla de café,
te encierro en el movimiento de ese líquido oscuro que se desvanece
en mi garganta.

Así me quedo cada mañana,
callada, quieta contigo en el fondo del café.

Ivonne Gordon Carrera Andrade
translated by Cindy Rinne

PALATE

The fragrance of coffee rocks us like voices full of signs.
I cannot separate anything, my eyes grow drowsy, tender.

Coffee blends with smoke and with leaves of the wind,
its robust aroma invades my body.

The early morning nectar veils me in a soft hum,
for a split second it transforms me into a goddess of seven voices.

My palate appreciates its bitter taste, the color of mature tree trunks
appeals.

In this moment, gloom falls apart and I start to repeat the syllables
of your name. There are drizzled birds in flight,
stones searching for a river bank, and lizards fueling
the beating wings of hummingbirds. In the nebula of the coffee pot,
I enfold you in the swirl of dark liquid that drips
through my throat.

I remain each morning, quiet, still, with you
at the bottom of the coffee cup.

کسی ترا میخواند
هوا چو آواری
به روی او میریخت

درخت کوچک من
به باد عاشق بود
به باد بیسامان
کجاست خانه باد؟
کجاست خانه باد؟

میان تاریکی

فروغ فرخزاد
(تولدی دیگر، ۱۳۴۳)

میان تاریکی
ترا صدا کردم
سکوت بود و نسیم
که پرده را میبرد
در آسمان ملول
ستاره ای میسوخت
ستاره ای میرفت
ستاره ای میمرد

ترا صدا کردم
ترا صدا کردم
تمام هستی من
چو یک پیاله‌ٔ شیر
میان دستم بود
نگاه آبی ماه
به شیشه ها میخورد

ترانه ای غمناک
چو دود بر میخاست
ز شهر زنجره ها
چو دود میلغزید
به روی پنجره ها

تمام شب آنجا
میان سینه‌ٔ من
کسی ز نومیدی
نفس نفس میزد
کسی به پا میخاست
کسی ترا میخواست
دو دست سرد او را
دوباره پس میزد

تمام شب آنجا
ز شاخه های سیاه
غمی فرو میریخت
کسی ز خود میماند

Forugh Farrokhzad
translated by Fayre Makeig
IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

In the midst of darkness
    I called out to you.
Silence, and a light wind
lifting a curtain.
In the downcast sky
a star blazed
a star fell
a star was dying.

I called out to you
    I called out to you
all of my being
like a bowl of milk
in my hands.
The moon's blue glance
grazed window glass.

a sad melody
was rising like smoke
from the city of crickets,
curling aimlessly like smoke
against the windowpanes.

All night there
    in my chest
someone was gasping
without hope.
Someone was rising

wanting you.
Two cold hands
pushed her aside again.

All night there
    sadness streamed
from black branches.
Someone kept apart from herself.
Someone was calling you.
Air came down on her
like a collapsing building.

The small tree of me
    was in love with the wind,
with the wandering wind.

Where is the home of the wind?
    Where is the home of the wind?

אלי אליהו
היסטוריה

בַּעֲבוּר הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה
עֵצִים נִגְדְּעוּ בְּטֶרֶם עֵת,
שִׂיחִים אֲחָדִים נִקְרְעוּ
מִן הָאֲדָמָה, תְּלֵי נְמָלִים
הִתְפּוֹרְרוּ, צְפּוֹרִים נָטְשׁוּ
אֶת קִנָּן, חֹלֶד נִמְלַט מִלַּהַט
הָאֲדָמָה הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת.

בַּעֲבוּר הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה,
כְּפָרִים הִתְרוֹקְנוּ מִיּוֹשְׁבֵיהֶם,
בְּאֵרוֹת נִסְתַּתְּמוּ, כְּבָשִׂים
הִתְפַּזְּרוּ לְכָל עֵבֶר.

בַּעֲבוּר הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה
אֲנָשִׁים שָׁכְחוּ
אֶת שְׂפַת אִמָּם.

Eli Eliahu
translated by Marcela Sulak

HISTORY

For the sake of this house
trees disappeared before their time,
much brush was torn
from the earth, anthills
crumbled, birds abandoned
their nests, a mole fled the heat
of the overturned earth.

For the sake of this house
villages were emptied,
wells were blocked, sheep
scattered to the four corners.

For the sake of this house
people forgot
their mother tongue.

Arseny Tarkovsky
ЖИЗНЬ, ЖИЗНЬ

I.

Предчувствиям не верю и примет
Я не боюсь. Ни клеветы, ни яда
Я не бегу. На свете смерти нет.
Бессмертны все. Бессмертно все. Не надо
Бояться смерти ни в семнадцать лет,
Ни в семьдесят. Есть только явь и свет,
Ни тьмы, ни смерти нет на этом свете.
Мы все уже на берегу морском,
И я из тех, кто выбирает сети,
Когда идет бессмертье косяком.

II.

Живите в доме—и не рухнет дом.
Я вызову любое из столетий,
Войду в него и дом построю в нем.
Вот почему со мною ваши дети
И жены ваши за одним столом,—
А стол один и прадеду и внуку:
Грядущее свершается сейчас,
И если я приподымаю руку,
Все пять лучей останутся у вас.
Я каждый день минувшего, как крепью,
Ключицами своими подпирал,
Измерил время землемерной цепью
И сквозь него прошел, как сквозь Урал.

III.

Я век себе по росту подбирал. Мы шли на юг,
держали пыль над степью; Бурьян чадил; кузнечик
баловал, Подковы трогал усом, и пророчил,
И гибелью грозил мне, как монах.
Судьбу свою к седлу я приторочил;
Я и сейчас, в грядущих временах,
Как мальчик, привстаю на стременах.

Мне моего бессмертия довольно,
Чтоб кровь моя из века в век текла.
За верный угол ровного тепла
Я жизнью заплатил бы своевольно, Когда б ее
летучая игла
Меня, как нить, по свету не вела.

1965

Arseny Tarkovsky
Translated by Jeff Landman

LIFE, LIFE

I.

I do not believe in superstition or fear.
I run from neither slander nor poison.
There is no death in this bright world.
Everyone is immortal. All things everlasting.
There is no need to fear death at seventeen
or seventy. There is only reality and wide light
and no darkness and no death in the world.
We are all on the shore already, the sea,
and I haul the nets with you, among you,
when a sun-lit shoal of life glints by.

II.

Live in a house—it will not ruin.
I'll call up anyone's century:
go on in and build my house.
Look—with me at one table your children
and wives, at one table grandfather
and grandson: the furthest future
unfolds itself now, and if I raise my hand
slightly, all five rays of light will be yours, forever.
Yesterday my collarbones pillared the past like lumber.
I measured time with a landman's steel line
and pass along through it, like the Urals.

III.

I took up the age to make myself.
We walked south, held the dust above the steppe.
Tall weeds fumed, the grasshoppers on the horseshoes
touched antennas and played and prophesied
and threatened me with a friar's death.
I strapped my fate to the saddle, in the future
even now, half standing like a boy in the stirrups.
To me my immortality is enough, for
my blood flows from age to age.
For the level warmth of a right-angled room
I would gladly give my life
when its brief needle leads
me through the world like a thread.

Arseny Tarkovsky
UNTITLED
(AN EXCERPT)

Я в детстве заболел
От голода и страха. Корку с губ
Сдеру—и губы оближу; запомнил
Прохладный и солоноватый вкус.
А все иду, а все иду, иду,
Сижу на лестнице в парадном, греюсь,
Иду себе в бреду, как под дуду
За крысоловом в реку, сяду—греюсь
На лестнице; и так знобит и эдак.
А мать стоит, рукою манит, будто
Невдалеке, а подойти нельзя:
Чуть подойду—стоит в семи шагах,
Рукою манит; подойду—стоит
В семи шагах, рукою манит.
Жарко
Мне стало, расстегнул я ворот, лег—
Тут затрубили трубы, свет по векам
Ударил, кони поскакали, мать
Над мостовой летит, рукою манит—
И улетела...
И теперь мне снится
Под яблонями белая больница,
И белая под горлом простыня,
И белый доктор смотрит на меня,
И белая в ногах стоит сестрица
И крыльями поводит. И остались.
А мать пришла, рукою поманила—
И улетела...

Arseny Tarkovsky
translated by Jeff Landman
UNTITLED (AN EXCERPT)

In childhood I fell ill
from hunger and fear. I peel dead skin
from my lips and taste them; remember
the cool salty suck. Always I was going
and I am always gone, stumbling along
I sit on the front stairs—I flush and bake
and march into delirium after the piper
and sit behind the rat trap on the river
and flush and bake, then freeze and quake and again
Mother stops and beckons with her hand as if
she were near—though I can not come to her
I try to come to her—she stands for seven steps
she beckons with her hand, I stay still climbing
seven steps, she beckons with her hand.

Hot
I became hot and undid my collar, I lay down
now the bronze blast of the trumpets, light cymballed
through the centuries, the horses galloped four-hooved snares,
mother flying over the driveway beckons with her hand and
rising higher…
And now to me dreams
over the apple trees a white hospital
around the throat a white sheet
and a white doctor examining me
while my little sister all white at the foot of the bed
preens her wings to flex them. And remained herself
until Mother came and beckoned and flew away....

Marc Jaffee

WULF AND EADWACER

from the Anglo-Saxon

My people as though given a sacrifice
will kill him if he come upon that threat.
Divided are we.

Wulf on one island I on another.
Fast is that island surrounded by fens.
Slaughter-cruel men there on that island
will kill him if he come upon that threat.
Divided are we.

My hopes of Wulf were long journeys to me;
when it was rainy weather and I sat in sadness
when the battle-bold warrior consoled me in his arms,
was a delight to me was an ache to me as well.
Wulf, my Wulf my hopes of you
did starve me— your seldom-comings
and my fearful mind— not the scarcity of food.

Do you hear, Eadwacer? A wolf
shall bear our whelp to the wood.
That which is easily rent was never joined—
our tale together.

Han Dong
AT SIX IN THE AFTERNOON
translated by Anna Sun and Zack Rogow

One afternoon around six
I was lying in bed
falling asleep
Then I woke up
It was pouring outside
Someone called
to tell me it was raining
Yes it was raining
While we were talking the rain stopped
but something was dripping
That voice was like blood
Then it too stopped

Evgeny Saburov
translated by J. Kates

UNTITLED

A dusty windowsill. Sashes, frames.
An office desk and yellowish shelves.
In the red glow of sunset
the shadow from a lamp
started dancing on the wallpaper.

—How my knees ache!—you said.

A drunk looked the windows in the face,
was pushed up by an unsympathetic hand
as he slipped slowly toward the floor.
Ashes on the floor. Fatigue.
He sat down kind of sideways.

— My knees ache!—you said.

VIOLENCE FOR NON-BEGINNERS

Daniele De Serto
translated by Wendell Ricketts

First of all, I'm asking anyone reading this not to waste a minute trying to psychoanalyze the issue. You've got nothing to tell me that I don't already know, and you're going to end up on the wrong track, no matter what. And I say that in full possession of the facts. When I was enrolled in the program of "Science and Methodology of Psychology for Clinicians blah blah blah," before I called it quits, I took ten different courses in two years and had excellent grades in all of them. Just as an example, there are the A-plusses I received in both "Deviant Sociology" and "The Physiological Foundations of Behavior," which were more than sufficient to authoritatively confirm that my relationships with my parents or what went on in my childhood had nothing whatever to do with my practice of violence. What led me in this direction were nothing more than the relentless circumstances of existence. Looking for alternative explanations is pointless. The rent that comes due every single month, the frustrations of everyday life, and, above all else, the nine exasperating hours I spend in the office each day—those are motive enough. Maybe those don't strike you as valid reasons, but they're logical and they speak for themselves, and they're the reason I go to the grand openings of shopping centers or to big chain stores like CostCo, Walmart, etc.—because I need to let off steam. What I'm specifically talking about, just so we're clear, are those events where they dangle a small number of dirt-cheap sale items before a horde of salivating consumers.

This outlet I've found for myself, though, isn't focused on impulse buying or any of the other psychopathologies characteristic of those sorts of environments. I go for a very specific reason: so I can jump into the middle of the fray, land as many blows as possible, and get away with it scot-free. A good, solid shoulder tackle, an elbow in the ribs, a knee to the groin, and, if I can, kicks and punches wherever. I've

got some tonnage on me, and that gives me an advantage, no question. I'm built tall and thick, and my shoulders are broad enough to make people think twice. But the most important thing is knowing how to choose the person you're going to hit. I'm a disciple of a sort of taxonomy of victimhood that I've developed over the years, which includes corresponding techniques of violence for each situation.

Really serious brawls, to be honest, are a rare commodity. Only once have I been lucky enough to end up right at ground zero after someone else had lit the fuse. There were these two guys arguing over some item or other, and the hostilities had escalated to include the friends who were with them. They started wailing on each other among the discounted household appliances, stomping around so hard that the light blue carpet had come loose in places, and treacherous flaps and edges were sticking up here and there. Pretending I was trying to separate the combatants, I waded right in, happily landing a couple of rib punches and experimenting with a semi-strangulation. In all the commotion, when no one was looking, I even pitched a cell phone smack into the temple of a salesclerk. A productive day, to put it mildly. The guy slumped to the ground, cradling his head and…but why am I telling you all this? Because I need some suggestions. Please, though, keep the aspersions to yourselves. As I've already said, there's no inner psychic conflict that needs to be resolved and anyway, whether you approve of me or not doesn't interest me in the slightest. The problem I'm facing is that there was an unexpected development a few weeks back, and that's why I'm at a bit of a standstill right now. Basically what happened is that I'd heard about the grand opening of a shopping center outside of town, a couple of hours away by car. I got there with a good amount of lead time, and I immediately blended into the crowd of ravenous contestants congregated around the entrance. It was an extraordinarily diverse group. A few people were pretending to socialize, but they were just making the usual trite comments; it was a way to hide. I was already thinking about how I was going to teach them a lesson they wouldn't forget. Don't misunderstand: I'm not on some deeply heartfelt crusade against the self-indulgence of consumerism—or any other questionable ethical conduct, actually. I don't give a shit

if some people lose their minds just so they can get their hands on the latest-generation laptop for cheap. The only thing I care about is that the thing eventually comes to blows, and these are the people who make that possible.

The shopping center was located in an industrial area. It had been constructed on a plateau that looked out over an expanse of chestnut trees on the slopes of the hills. Further in the distance, beyond the orchards, there were two constellations of tiny houses, all jumbled one on top of the other. Even though these two little clusters weren't all that far from one another, it seemed as though each one was willfully ignoring the other, like two rival villages in a comedy. All around us, greenery sparkled under the autumn sun. The view was soothing, nearly touching. But I wasn't going to let it make me soft. No, my friends, have no fear of that. You'd best believe I'm not one to go soft on you. Just to get things started, I pretended someone had shoved me from behind, and that gave me the chance to deliver a super-violent head-butt to the heavy-metal freak standing in front of me. I hit him so hard on the back of his skull that I could feel the blood bubbling beneath my skin, filling my forehead and my nose.

As soon as the gates opened, a mad race to the stores began, just as if it had been scripted. I was among the first to get inside. The garish lighting flared off the resin floor, the plastic plants, and the brightly colored handrails. In the center of the lobby was a circular fountain that hadn't been connected yet. One guy leaped into the empty water basin, taking a shortcut to the other side. Meanwhile, I was hot on the heels of this Bengali guy. He was the only Bengali in line, and I'd been keeping an eye on him since before they opened the doors. Now, I was tailing him as he faked right and left, snaking his way through to get ahead of the crowd. Even as big as I was, I stayed right on top of him, not giving up a single inch. Before he could cover the last few feet and jump on the escalator, I laid him out with a roundhouse kick from behind. He crashed to the floor, taking the booth of some random credit card vendor with him as he fell. To the credit card guys, it must have seemed like a plane had fallen on them from out of the sky. Meanwhile, I'd slipped onto the escalator, and from there I observed the scene, safe

and above suspicion. When I got to the second floor, I found myself in front of a phone store. A red carpet led to the entrance, and tall plants in vases had been arranged in parallel rows along the sides. This guy in a hoodie was headed for the same store, and he was moving so fast that he was about to pass me. As I think about it now, I remember him tall and covered with acne. I knew I was giving up my cover, but I couldn't help myself: an instinct told me to reach out and grab him by the hood, and I did. The next thing I heard was a dull thud, like the sound of a refrigerator door slamming shut. The guy lay crumpled on the ground in an unnatural position, his limbs at odd angles, and for a while he didn't move. He barely even moaned. Then he pulled himself over onto his back and sat up, just staring at one of his shoes, which had come to rest a few feet away. The only hitch in this entire work of art—or, I guess it would be more accurate to say, the only flaw—was that a security guard had seen the whole thing and was pointing his finger at me.

"Don't you move, you!" he said. "I know who you are!" He spoke into his two-way radio, communicating in code with someone somewhere about what was going to happen next.

The minute I saw him, I decided to give myself up. He had a look on his face like a guy who'd seen it all. Honestly, he surprised me. He didn't have the lazy, furtive air of his colleagues, whose only approach to the job seemed to be to strut around making sure everyone knew they were *highly skilled because I've taken any number of on-the-job training courses.* The man I was facing was no youngster. He clearly had some experience under his belt, and he seemed conscientiously intent on carrying out his duties. I was almost sorry I wasn't on his side.

But getting back to the facts. According to the tale he told at the police station, he'd apparently spent the last few days watching videos of an altercation triggered by yours truly months earlier at a department store. He'd happened to be at work that very day and, though he didn't have enough to grab me at the time, once he'd taking another look at the surveillance videos, he testified (quite convincingly), he was able to put the whole thing together.

At the police station, a pall of cigarette smoke wafted among the desks, its movement illuminated by a yellowish beam of light at the center of the room. The lieutenant peered at me. He smoked and peered at me some more.

"So what you'd like us to believe is that you just happened to be at both of these free-for-alls?" he said.

"Sorry?"

"The fact that we've got you in the leading role in at least a couple of surveillance videos of incidents in shopping centers—that's just a coincidence?"

"Leading role? I didn't notice anyone auditioning actors."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning nothing."

"Don't get cute with me."

It's not like I was embarrassed. Honestly, the whole situation had gotten to be a total drag, what with the long silences, all that cigarette smoke, the portraits on the walls of ancient officers on horseback, and the glare of the overhead light on the lieutenant's forehead. There was a sheet of blank paper and a pen in front of me on the desk. What were they waiting for? A written confession? I sketched a couple of doodles, and then I had a brainstorm and drafted a tourist menu for a restaurant.

—Pappardelle with pesto or farfalle in *ragù*
—Meatballs with garden peas
—Dessert or fruit course
—Coffee
—$14 (excluding beverages)

Sounds good, right? They even give you coffee. If you didn't order more than one bottle of water, you'd spend $15 at most. The lieutenant was stroking his beard.

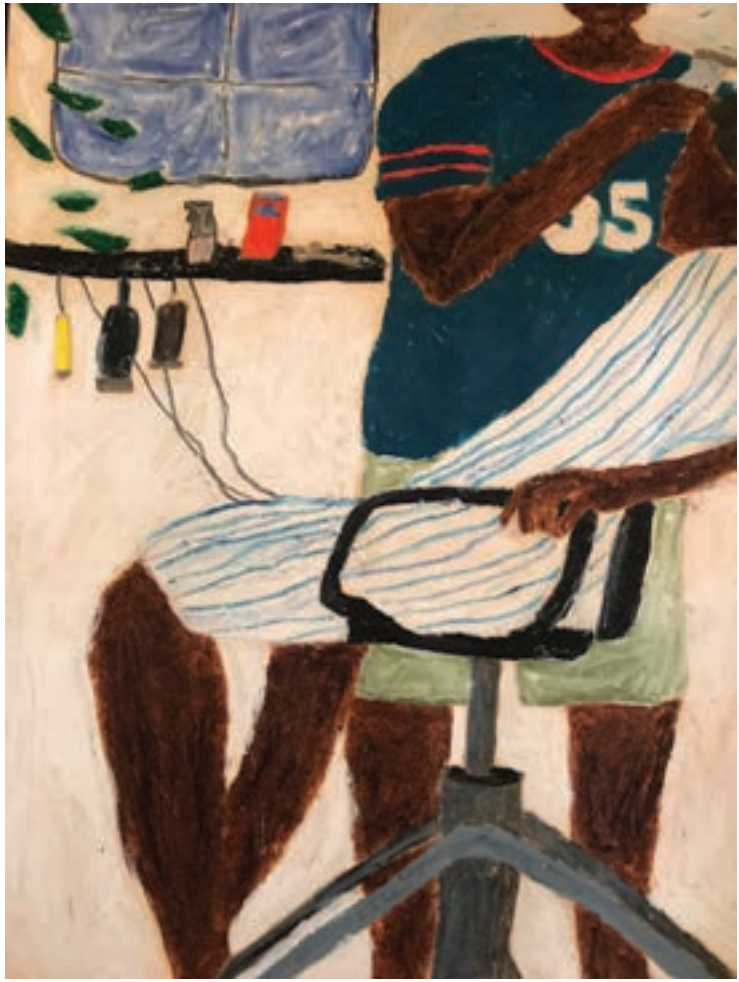
"How's that kid doing?" I ask.

"He's improving. Any regrets?"

"Not the kind you mean."

"Fine, I'm done with you. But don't think you're getting out of this."

I won't bore you with the details of how the whole legal thing shook out in the end. Let's just say that going back to my former activities would be very dangerous. In shopping centers, I mean. I've ended up having to content myself with occasionally shoving someone on the subway or speeding through a mud puddle next to some solitary, defenseless pedestrian. The gratification in that is minimal, though. And so? So nothing. For the moment, that's where things stand. What I need is to get back on track like a guy who's serious about his life. So I'm asking someone to come forward with a workable idea (forget stadiums, though; I'm already eighty-sixed from all of them) because I keep seeing wild game all over the place. Plus I truly miss the tension of those moments. I miss the white-hot sensation of being in a place where something is happening, where I can cause pain on a grand scale and then wake up the next day, still buzzing, maybe not having slept more than a few hours, but with a crystal-clear vision in my head of the way things are sliding right into their proper places, orderly and well-behaved at last.



Marcus Leslie Singleton, WBAT'S GOIN' ON, MY BROTHER/ AYE MAN, SAME SHIT, 2019
mixed media on paper, 9 x 12 inches

Marcus Leslie Singleton, GETTING READY, 2018
watercolor, 20 x 30 inches

NON-FICTION

TESTIMONY
Jerald Walker

THE GAMES STARTED at sunset, but by noon the crowd would already be a few dozen strong. There'd be coolers full of beer and, to ward off Chicago's vicious mosquitoes or a nasty fall chill, trashcans full of fire. Someone would have brought a boom-box, its speakers vibrating like war drums to the beat of the Ohio Players. By the games' end, if there hadn't been any violence, the festivities would have produced a few cheerleaders, women over sixty who still remembered being graceful and some who had entirely forgotten, like Mrs. Dean, who fell once and sprained her wrist after only one lackluster spin.

It was October when Mrs. Dean got hurt, just after the final game of the 1980 season, when I was sixteen. Our only active legend on hand was June Bug. Big P. had died of a heroin overdose and Hunter was in jail. Rumor had it that when Hunter climbed through the shattered window of a dry cleaners, three fur coats under each arm, he squinted past the glare of a flashlight, recognized the guns aimed at him were being held by detectives Stick Man and Cowboy, and said, "Y'all realize the big game is Saturday?"

"Damn, that's right," said Stick Man, as he and his partner lowered their weapons. "This Saturday or next?"

"This one."

"You still on parole?"

"Two more months."

"How's your jump shot?"

Hunter grinned. "Sinking like battleships, baby."

Cowboy nudged up his Stetson with a forefinger and said, "Okay, Hunter, get out of here."

Hunter smiled and began to walk away, stepping lightly on the broken glass, and then pausing to turn when Stickman called his name and told him to leave the fur coats. Hunter complied before going straight to White Castle for five cheeseburgers, a large Root Beer, and to rob the teller. The officer who caught him this time did his duty. His

unwavering adherence to the law, in addition to his failure to inquire about Hunter's jumper, spawned another rumor: his nephew played for the opposition. "That's his nephew right there!" A finger in the crowd directed us to one of the players, the fat one waving the money. "Your uncle," someone yelled, "is a snitch!" The cop's nephew ignored him. He waved the money some more, calling us out, taunting us. His teammates stood off to the side stretching their calves and hamstrings, cigarettes bobbing between their smirking lips, and their fans, who'd arrived in a six-car caravan, began to egg us on.

June Bug finished his beer. He swaggered forward with his thumbs hooked on the front of his blue shorts. Four young players he'd hand-picked followed him. The teams met at center court. Someone reached for the boom-box; the volume on the Ohio Players fell.

"So," grinned the nephew, "where's Big P. and Hunter?"

"Devil got one of them," June Bug answered. "Your uncle got the other."

"I ain't got no uncle."

"Yeah, you do," came from the crowd, "and he's a snitch!"

"Listen," the nephew said, "y'all come here for some ball or to call folk names?"

"Both," June Bug responded. He took a thumb from his shorts and jabbed it over his shoulder. "Me and my boys ready to put a whipping on ya'll monkey asses."

The nephew held up his money. "These two Grants say you won't."

"You're on."

Other bets were made. The referee, a local reverend whose occupation presumed neither objectivity nor fairness, collected the money. He was a former playground legend himself and it was for this reason alone that he was trusted. His fanny pack full of bills, he walked onto the court and led a pregame prayer. Then hands were shaken, the whistle blown, the ball pitched high in the air.

It was a rout from the start. We shouldn't have been surprised, considering the absence of Hunter and Big P., and the fact that one of June Bug's players, dressed in matching red wrist bands and knee pads, which should have tipped us that his game was weak, missed

every shot he took. When we were twenty-three points down with five minutes to go, June Bug called a timeout.

He pushed his way through our side of the now agitated crowd, stopping several yards away where, leaning against a crab apple tree, a lone man stood smoking reefer. "Want to play?" June Bug asked.

Buggy didn't respond. We weren't certain, by then, if he could even talk.

All many of us had ever seen him do was chain smoke his dope and throw punches at the air. June Bug asked him again. Buggy pulled at his beard and seemed to be considering the offer. We looked at each other with puzzled expressions, and then back at Buggy, who took three fast hits from the joint before letting it fall to the grass. His first step toward the court triggered sporadic laughter, but also, from the old-timers, testimony.

"Before he when to 'Nam, that brother could play."

"I remember."

"Was scouted by Bulls while still in high school."

"Could out-dribble you with just two fingers."

"Two? You mean one."

"Used to shoot them rainbow jumpers—*swish*—damn near every time."

"I remember. I remember."

But those of us who hadn't seen it or couldn't remember found this hard to believe, especially since all he was doing now was trotting up and down the court, looking confused. He didn't call for the ball and didn't seem to want it. Every time someone threw it to him, he threw it right back. We were laughing like crazy. "Shoot the ball, Buggy!" someone yelled. And more and more people yelled it until it reverberated through the crowd, even among the opposition. "Shoot the ball, Buggy! Shoot the ball, Buggy!" We chanted and laughed until the game ended, at which point Buggy, a fresh joint already dangling from his lips, resumed his place near the crab apple tree. Money changed hands and hands were shaken. The volume on the Ohio Players was raised. Several women clapped their hands to the beat as they glided to center court. Mrs. Dean, draining her sixth beer, stumbled toward them.

GOING COASTAL
Elizabeth Fodaski

WHEN I WAS very young, perhaps five or six, I began to draw a recurring image that would appear in virtually every picture I made throughout my entire childhood, or at least until I stopped drawing without inhibition. My stock image was of a little girl, a glorified stick figure—instead of lines, I drew thin ovals for limbs, like the balloon creatures that can be purchased for a dollar at street fairs. The girl had pigtails, dots for eyes, and a small curve of a smile, from which sprang a speech bubble that read, "Send away!"

No one in my family has any idea why I wrote these words or where the idea came from. It was just one of the things I did, in keeping with my other eccentricities, like walking around naked, cutting my own hair, and stealing everyone's pickle when my grandparents took us out to lunch in a diner. I called my drawings "send-aways," the metonym—the wanting to be sent away—replacing the figure itself. And I had scads of them. Now I keep the only few that have stayed with me—through my parents' divorce, countless moves, college, my travels, marriage, and children—in a worn manila legal-size folder marked on the tab with my childhood nickname, Liza. It is impossible to know what I was thinking when I drew them, or rather when I drew the first figure and wrote that speech bubble for the first time. All subsequent drawings were renditions of a favorite figure, a visitation with a character well known to me and my family, a familiar albeit peculiar child with one urgent wish.

I had orphan fantasies like any other healthy child, but I don't remember ever actually wanting out, which is to say, I knew my home to be the place I was meant to be, and I can claim no conviction that I was destined for greater things. The drawings were made during my family's eight or nine ordinary, happy years before my parents' separation, when all hell broke loose in all the expected ways (acrimony,

blistering rage, thrown objects). As Martin Amis recently wrote, "People are original and distinctive in their virtues; in their vices they are compromised, hackneyed, and stale." This strikes me as a reversal of Tolstoy's logic about happy and unhappy families, and I can't decide which philosophy I believe to be truer. All I know is that in my own life, with my own unhappy family—hackneyed or otherwise—we did a lot of staying put, in Brooklyn or Wellfleet, but never anywhere else. I never went on a trip with both or either of my parents, who didn't leave the country once in my childhood, except for my mother's quick solo trip to London when my sister and I were tiny. I thought I would live resolutely otherwise and saved up all summer from a job flipping hamburgers when I was seventeen to visit a Spanish girl I'd met in an exchange program. She summered on the Costa Brava, and, as it turned out, she was raising herself. We had a fabulous time. So I developed a tendency to stray wide in my wanderings, sometimes traveling far from home before returning, a little changed, to my known world.

The summer between my sophomore and junior years of high school, when I was fifteen, I told my mother I was going with a friend to California for a week but stayed almost three, driving recklessly across the country with a twenty-year-old man in a rusted old Volkswagen microbus when she thought I was flying. The following spring, I was the only junior in my New York City high school to pass Driver's Ed, and the road test, the first time. I got my license at seventeen, which is also when I bought my first car, a grey Toyota Corolla that served me equally well on the back roads of Wellfleet, where we spent summers, and the streets of Providence, R.I. where I brought it along, against the rules, my freshman year of college. By the time I was a senior and Providence had become familiar, my friends and I would occasionally jump in someone's car late on a Friday or Saturday night and drive the 182 miles to New York City, sometimes arriving in time to make last call at a late-night bar and other times pulling right up to Veselka for a 6AM breakfast. All of which is to say I like to sit near the exit sign.

Perhaps because I like a quick getaway, I have always been a passionate driver. I'm usually game for late-night runs to the only store

open and have always been willing to drive people wherever they need to go. For a year I drove the shuttle service on my college campus, and I imagined all the grateful students I shuttled desperate to flee the uncomfortable situations they found themselves in. One phone call and there I was, saving them from awkward conversations and drunken mistakes. But more powerful for me than the actual ability to flee is the desire, the capacity to choose my fate, and the proliferation of options. I love city and country alike, but what keeps me sane is the possibility of leaving one for the other. As Frank O'Hara said, "I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway nearby."

Swap subway for sea, and that's me. Bring me to a dock and I will jump off, if only for the splash. And I can say with no equivocation that Wellfleet, MA is my favorite place on Earth. That skinny, easternmost peninsula reaching its chicken claw out into the vast Atlantic is the place I am most content. Just having an ocean nearby makes a whole day of staying indoors tolerable.

Which is why I could never live in Kansas. Or Colorado or Utah. Or Missouri or Kentucky or Nevada. I'd have a hard time in Austria or Switzerland or Chad or Mongolia, or any landlocked place. More than just wanting to hug a shoreline or tread close to an edge, I need the water and its endless possibility. I have no religion, but I have a gut understanding of baptism and all its promise of renewal and purification.

I'm no champion swimmer. I've never sailed a boat, put on a pair of water skis or mounted a surfboard. A brief, brisk dip in a cold ocean is enough to restore my contentment in sitting comfortably in a folding chair, feet in sand, with a book. But it's more than placebo or drug—unlike the (untouched) bottle of Ambien in my medicine chest, the ocean promises so much more than a quick fix. When I was a girl my father told me to picture Portugal across the sea, and that made sense—envisioning small Portuguese children building their own Portuguese sandcastles that would eventually be washed away by the same water I lived and breathed every day made the world somehow vaster and smaller at the same time—everything was possible but nothing

required. And we were all connected by this enormous anarchic privilege. Here was the great connector—that hugest and most magisterial body my tiny mind could conjure. No one who has ever felt cramped or squelched or blue with rage hasn't envisioned an escape, the edge of one world and the beginning of another—a coast, a new frontier.

I suppose it's this living on the edge, on my sliver of land, brackish water gurgling below as I stand on my Brooklyn promenade looking out at everything and nothing, that makes all that is inside the perimeter feel open, at the very least, to possibility. Just knowing that one block from my home is a borderline—a limit but also a cutting edge—the end of this, my land, and the beginning of a new element, gives me solace. It's knowing I can leave that helps me stay put. Send away.

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S HEBDOMEROS, LE PEINTRE ET SON GÉNIE CHEZ L'ÉCRIVAIN: A UNIQUE METAPHYSICAL SELF-PORTRAIT.

Marielle Vigourt

"Pour qu'une oeuvre d'art soit vraiment immortelle, il faut qu'elle sorte complètement des limites de l'humain: le bon sens et la logique y feront défaut. De cette façon elle s'approchera du rêve et de la mentalité enfantine." *(De Chirico, quoted by Breton in* Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, Gallimard 1965)*

Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) is well known for his painting, less known for his writing. Yet he wrote all his life, both as a critic and as a poet-novelist, and Max Jacob once referred to him as "the author of *Hebdomeros*," thereby acknowledging the major importance of this novel that was published in 1929, serially at first in the avant-garde review *Bifur*, then in book form under the title, *Hebdomeros, le peintre et son génie chez l'écrivain.*[1] In 1928, in "Le Surréalisme et la Peinture," Breton had repudiated de Chirico's post-1918 painting for having left behind his anguished metaphysical vision for the apparently safer refuge of Classicism; the 1929 novel, however, was hailed by the Surrealists as a ressuscitation of de Chirico's genius—a chronological oddity that makes the work all the more intriguing, and points it out as in many ways the pivotal point of the artist's work. James Thrall Soby, the major Chiriquian critic, expressed the unanimous feeling of wonder when he wrote that, "after 1917, de Chirico's genius flared up again, seldom in his paintings, but in his writings, his short prose pieces, and

1 The major importance of the work has been clearly perceived. Originally written in French (de Chirico was an Italian born in Greece but lived in Paris for many years), it received four Italian editions, as well as German, English, and American translations. In this article the original French will be quoted from the 1964 edition, Giorgio de Chirico, *Hebdomeros* (Paris: Flammarion), and the English translations will be those of John Ashbery in *Hebdomeros*, trans. Ashbery, Polizotti, et al (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1992).

his extraordinary novel, *Hebdomeros*, published in 1929."[2] The genesis of the book involves both painting and writing, as de Chirico had done some drawings on the theme of the novel since 1925 and included in it some pieces of earlier writings, a number of poems from 1911 to 1913 in particular. The novel also contains many references to painting. It is both a summa of previous writings contemporary with the metaphysical paintings, and a reapprehension of the real in its primal character, freshness, and totality, in a manner very similar to that of the metaphysical paintings. Our appreciation of the paintings is therefore enhanced by our appreciation of the text, and vice-versa. The book has been called "a sort of hermetic commentary of Chirico's mental adventures,"[3] "an objective monologue" (Manganelli), "a picaresque of the imagination" (Crosland), "the finest of surrealist fiction" (Ashbery). Balducci sees it as "a visionary journey through languages, rhetorical formulas and styles both exhalted and mocked."[4] All critics agree on its poetico-autobiographical, oneiric, and enigmatic character. At any rate, as the most purely metaphysical of de Chirico's creations, Hebdomeros seems indeed a key to an understanding of de Chirico's work. What makes this book so "metaphysical," and what can its reading bring to the viewer of the paintings? We will try to explore how the book, as a metaphysical self-portrait, relates to the visual works not only in terms of iconographic motifs but also in the way it approaches reality, i.e. the Chiriquian metaphysical way to Reality, shown here to be simultaneously a disorientation and a balancing process.

THE VERY TITLE OF THE NOVEL, "Hebdomeros, le peintre et son génie chez l'écrivain," presents it as autobiographical. As a roman-à-clef, Hebdomeros offers numerous references to, and echoes of, paintings and painters. It pays a conscious homage to Max Klinger in the scene in which centaurs are having a chat with washerwomen, which is direct-

2 James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* (New York: MOMA, 1955).

3 Jose Pierre, *Surrealism* (London: Heron Books, 1970), 155.

4 Paolo Balducci, "Le Classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico," *Cahiers du MNAM* (no. 11, Nov. 1983).

ly inspired by Klinger's etching *The Centaur and the Washerwoman,* which de Chirico had described earlier in his article on the German painter.[5] Klinger's *In Flagrantis* is also mentioned, which is the title of an etching from Dramen (1883), a cycle for which de Chirico had expressed his admiration. Hebdomeros being presented as slightly gluttonous and colicky[6] reminds us of de Chirico 's fragile health and sweet tooth. We also know from Isabella Far, de Chirico's second wife, that Greek mythology was so present for de Chirico that the real and the unreal had stopped having well-defined boundaries in his mind; now the novel has neen noted for its neo-Greek Stimmung, the name of the main character is Greek, Ulysses, Herakles and young Achilles are names of passing characters, and the source of the novel has even been traced back to the philosophic didactic tale of the Hellenistic period: the rooms which Hebdomeros begins to explore could be the various stages of initiation leading him to immortality, in the same way as the numerous adventures of Luke of Patras led him to come back from the condition of beast to that of human.[7] As for the iconographic motifs reminiscent of the paintings, they abound: the mentioning of late afternoons, shadows, invading trees, zebras, trophies, metaphysicians, stone characters, public statuary, artillery at the barracks, are only a few instances of the images that inevitably conjure up de Chirico's paintings. In particular, "the tail-coated politician holding a stone scroll on which the sculptor had engraved his name and the date of his work" (11) or the sculptures of warriors and great politicians whose "effigies naked or clothed according to the fashion of the day, would stand in the peaceful shade of the square" (13), immediately evoke de Chirico's many piazze with the famous coated figure of a man seen from the back standing in the middle.

5 Published in *Il Convegno*, Milan, 1921.

6 Repeated allusions are made to "petite colique" (6, 95 for examples), menus are listed appreciatively (81), and Hebdomeros is said to be "un peu gourmand, avec tact et intelligence."(87)

7 Paolo Balducci, "Le Classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico," *Cahiers du MNAM* (Paris no. 11, 11/1983), 29-30.

As self-portraiture, the novel, a mode of indirection attempting a self revelation and unification through release and creation, corresponds to the "he" mode, as opposed to the "I" of the memoirs or the "image of self" of the self-portraits. De Chirico' s 1945 *Memoirs*, as a conscious assertion of self as truth and revelation, read more as a vindictive manifesto than a piece of true creative art, while de Chirico's numerous self-portraits as an artist, along with his double self-portraits, seem to deny centeredness in their very assertion—centeredness is denied in the very interrogation of one's own self-image, let alone when the image is double. But as an indirect representation of self through a persona, Hebdomeros offers a direct representation of de Chirico's mental world and vision, and this in a way that happens to be very reminiscent of that of his metaphysical paintings.

Autobiographical, poetic, oneiric, anachronistic, the novel seems to have remained a true enigma, perhaps fulfilling thereby de Chirico's hope and providing us with the best self-portrait possible, especially in light of the artist's admonition: "One must picture everything in the world as an enigma [...] even at the point where one can picture the creative geniuses of the past as things very strange, as things that we will examine from all sides. To live in the world as if in an immense museum of strangeness, full of curious manycoloured toys which change their appearance [...] all subject must be put aside." [8] De Chirico's imperative is precisely echoed by Hebdomeros exhorting his disciples, "chercheurs métaphycisants" "entraînés depuis longtemps au jeu difficile du renversement du temps et à tourner l'angle de [leur] regard," to examine the signs on all sides, "de face, de profil, et en raccourci." (50)[9] This therefore appears to be the key to de Chirico's

8 De Chirico, "No Music," written during the first Parisian Period (1911-1915), reproduced in Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, 246.

9 "when you have found a sign, turn it round and round, look at it from the front and from the side, take a three-quarter-view and a foreshortened view; remove it and note what form the memory of its appearance takes in its place, observe from which angle it looks like a horse, and from which like the molding of your ceiling,

manner and epistemology: always see everything as enigmatic, change perspective, turn perceptions around, play with the perceptions of animate and inanimate, of picture-within-picture, balance extremes, so as to perhaps eventually attain some kind of irreducible reality, strike some "équilibre absolu," or "idéal fugitif," the latter expressions being Hebdomeros's. (16, 19) And so, Hebdomeros and his companions imagine that they are passengers of a submarine watching unobserved the mysterious life of the deep (4), or a whole family gazes at the broken pieces of the vase "arranged in the shape of a trapezoid like a well-known constellation, as if the sky were turned upside down." (6)

De Chirico's famous 1911 self-portrait bears at the bottom the engraved inscription: "Et quod amabo nisi enigma est?" (And what shall I love if not the enigma?), echoed by his 1920 self-portrait: "Et quod amabo nisi quod rerum metaphysica est?" (and what shall I love if not the metaphysical aspect of things?), giving thereby a cryptic summary of de Chirico's program—which Hebdomeros seems to implement. Even the fact that this credo should have been put in the form of a question, as if to preclude any possibility of premature termination of the search, is in keeping with the open-endedness of the novel: the assertions are basically only an interrogation, and while claiming his place in the tradition of great Italian painting—the Roman classical tradition of funerary portraiture presenting the subject looking over a stone parapet with carved lettering was adopted in turn by most Renaissance painters for the portraiture of the living—, de Chirico diverges from tradition by thus stating his theme in the form of a question: enigma of life/death is the subject portrayed, and the search is always ongoing. In the novel, we are told that Hebdomeros is afraid of

when it suggests the aspect of a ladder, or a plumed helmet; in which position it resembles Africa, which itself resembles a huge heart, the heart of the earth, a vast, heated heart, I dare even say overheated, it beats too fast and needs to adjust itself [...] you have been long involved in the difficult game of reversing time and switching your angle of vision [...] as metaphysical seekers..." (De Chirico, *Hebdomeros*, trans. Ashbery, 42).

opening a discussion with his friends on the eternal questions, "What is life, what is death?" but deep down he feels instinctively attracted to the enigmatic elements in all things, animate and inanimate. (5) (Later, he wonders, "La vie ne serait-elle qu'un immense mensonge? que l'ombre d'un rêve fuyant?" (92) No wonder then that the word "strange" should be the launching word of the novel, as it opens, "Et alors commença la visite de cet étrange immeuble." From the very first page, everything is open to question and wonder. We cannot trust reality nor our perception of it, "ne te fie pas aux apparences" (72) seems to be a general imperative, and the suspicion is lived through and explored in awe and wonder rather than used as intellectual defense. Everything is experienced as an enigma, words being no exception: "Gladiateur! ce mot contient une énigme!" (7) Some words are repeated twice in the manner of strange incantations,[10] and they are less important because of their semantic significance than because they strike a chord or echo, making us more aware of some mystery, some reality to examine. Reality thus apprehended appears loaded with strange, unexpected possibilities of transformation that are equally accepted, and during which a multitude of levels of reality come into play, such as the reality of dream, of reminiscence, of madness, and of dramatic play. They overlap and mingle so that all blend in, along with past and present, subject and object.

The incipit, "Et alors..." takes us into an action that is already in progress/motion, robbing us of any chance to take a stand or a reflective pause: not until the sixth page are we given a hint as to what the expedition is about, with the incidental remark, "l 'étage signalé comme le plus riche en fait d'apparitions étranges," so we understand the "strangeness" of the building comes from its being the locus of strange apparitions. This mode of presentation, both enigmatic and bent on ignoring our ignorance, is typical of de Chirico's approach both as a painter and a writer. What we are presented with is indeed "strange apparitions," and what is real and what is not, what we know and we do not know, becomes almost irrelevant, as we are forced to a new and

10 See for examples: de Chirico, *Hebdomeros*, 28, 63, 64, 72, 100, 126.

arresting vision any time we would rest with the previous one. By the time we have understood something about the expedition, the scene has already changed a number of times, to show us other facets of the kaleidoscope. Not only are we thrown into the middle of what is going on, but there is actually no plot, and scenes and visions appear and disappear without any dramatic necessity. So if these scenes have a claim upon our attention, it is less because of a linear dramatic interest than because of a self-generated power and movement that is not linked to a traditional story with a beginning, a middle and an end. De Chirico seems to be in perfect agreement with Alberto Savinio, his brother with whom he enjoyed a great spiritual closeness, and who wrote: "Is [the reader] longing for a story with a beginning and an end? This is contrary to the noble purpose of literature, which knows neither beginning nor end, and wants only to give form and shimmer to the continuous present in life. Let the reader beware and not allow himself to be distracted from the art of strolling. Seriousness is much different from what he may think." [11]

As a matter of fact, we can never be sure of how to take what is said, seriously or otherwise, since the tone of the novel is equally enigmatic. There is an obvious mock-epic flavor in the mention of the "deux mille six cent soixante quinze visages" (64) turned towards Hebdomeros, and all the hyperbolic expressions do not mean much, as they are put into perspective by the immediate denial that often follows, as well as the mixing of styles,[12] and the strange, often silly humor (such as the one-eyed Perikles who "contemple d'un oeil (c'est le cas de le dire puisqu'il

11 *Alberto Savinio, Speaking to Clio,* trans. John Shepley (Evanston: Marlboro Press, 1987), 115.

12 The lyrical ("Farewell, high mountains and rocky peaks!...")(14) is juxtaposed with the argumentative, the rhetorical and the familiar (for instance,"if a rebel [let's call him that]..." (4), or "...the leap through the window into empty space [suicide in a dream] and the gliding descent, like those Condor-men Leonardo drew... (2), or even with the practice of listing and giving examples: "Ex.: 'the broken vase was very valuable/Ex: The closed door would not budge.'" (6)

est borgne) (61) ..."or others who "n'ouvrent qu'à-demi un oeil" (60), or those who wait for "des demi-heures entières," an expression which recalls the idiom of fairy tales and of dreams. (103) This method undermines the possible pathos and balances it out. Just as space and time are likely to shrink or stretch in the most unexpected ways, the very range of idioms gives the text a tone of total equanimity, as if it were situated beyond irony. When de Chirico uses a paragraph full of rare and bombastic words to describe the explorer moved to tears as he recalls the poor polar bears on their icebergs, only to top off the loony evocation which ends up with the "logical deduction" that the black race is the most polite of races, with the incongruous injunction to give him his cold seas, so that he will warm them in his ("Donne-moi tes mers froides, je te les réchaufferai dans les miennes" (22), he uses the same level tone as when he tells us that, "Hebdomeros ouvrit la fenêtre [...] mais évita de respirer fortement l'air du dehors, de prendre des attitudes de prisonnier libéré, de malade se sentant mieux, etc, et d'ailleurs il n' y avait pas de quoi, et la nature, ou plutôt les éléments eux-mêmes, l' aidèrent à éviter ces attitudes compromettantes pour un homme sérieux comme lui, de sorte que, par rapport aux attitudes, il ne pouvait se vanter qu' à-demi d'être un malin dans le sens métaphysique du mot." (121-22)[13] Thanks to this uniform tone encompassing all possibilities a constant tension is maintained between what is kitsch (oversentimentalism, overabundance of clichés) and what is prosaic, in opposition to what Hebdomeros calls "la vanité des héroismes humains" (61); a new space is established, one of a broader perception of reality. Likewise, when Hebdomeros alludes to the "stupid puns and crude jokes" (77), his judgment is retrospectively put into perspective by his own stupid puns, "L'acropole? non, dit-il avec un fin sourire, il

13 "Hebdomeros opened the window of his room but he avoided taking in deep breaths of the outside air like a liberated prisoner or an invalid who feels better, etc.; besides he had no reason to do so, and nature, or better still the eements themselves, helped him to avoid these attitudes that were compromising for a serious man like himself, such that with regard to attitudes he could only half-boast of being 'knowing'" (108) "Demi" ("half) is used four times in one page.

ne s' agit cette fois ni d'accroc, ni de Paul' (64) or, "Foi inébranlable. Il aurait bien voulu la soigner cette fois, sa foi grossie par tous les exemples quotidiens." (69) And however stupid and crude this way of joking may seem, the recurrent sounding of "demi" and "foi" is significant [14]: "demi" hints at the partiality and fragmented character of the perceived reality, and "foi, fois, foie" (faith, time, liver) are the object of verbal play, as if to undermine the seriousness of the crisis of faith (foi) even as faith is possibly the whole point of the work. This epitomizes de Chirico's epistemology and manner: a linguistic approach of his topic, which uses the words as it examines and erodes them, the topic seems to be precisely a putting into question of itself, and an attempt at finding what a topic might be, and what approach might be taken of any topic, that is, of reality. In a world of fragments and partiality ("demi" contrasts with the "all" sought and at times grasped by Hebdomeros) "foi" is definitely one of Hebdomeros' problems: "Hebdomeros voulait croire" (45), but "A quoi faut-il croire encore? les dieux émigrés." (129) "Jadis [...] les foules criaient leur foi" (101), but now Christian symbols as well as Greek mythology have lost their living meaning: "les temples [sont] réduits comme d'énormes jouets" (28), "la lyre [est] énorme et lourde comme une cathédrale ridicule" (14), and Hebdomeros places his only faith in human imbecility. (69) Faith is indeed in question, and the unity of mind and spirit that corresponds to faith ("foi" pertains to the spiritual realm, "foie" to the physical, and "fois" to the mathematical) may be contrasted with, even as it encompasses it, the taste for tasteless puns and word-plays that seem to scatter and dissolve the meaning. It is as if words overflew by themselves and called for other words, but the adequation between words and things, as well as logical consistency, seems to be lost. In the midst of clashing styles, "serious" does indeed take on a broader

14 "Foie" (liver) is clearly suggested by the context: "he would have liked to heal it, swollen by the daily examples... he would have liked to heal it as the liver patients heal themselves with the warm and cholagogue waters: acquae calidae." Later on the prodigal son comes back to his father as the latter has just had an operation on his liver (85).

meaning, one which would be all-embracing.

The novel presents the same surprising, provocative compositional manner as the metaphysical paintings: their mysterious, disquieting, compelling quality can be traced in part to the use of multiple vanishing points and impossible perspective pointed out by the presence of an isometric solid at the point of convergence.[15] Their uncanny hypnotic power also comes, contrasting with the multiciplicity of vanishing points, from the subaquatic lighting[16], the absence of animation and movement, the impression of silence and stillness. In Hebdomeros, not only are there numerous contradictory perspectives and viewpoints being entertained, and an endless self-reflexivity, but silence alternates with sound, both enhancing and setting off each other (thunder clap sliced in two: "bruit de tonnerre coupé en son milieu. Entre une vague et l'autre c'était le silence et le calme le plus absolu" 11), or silence and sound are evoked simultaneously (as in the case of the pianist playing or the rockets taking off without any noise, and later, when the silence sets in as the prodigal son reaches his father's villa, the noises die down, the wind holds it breath). Going thus against our expectations, surprising us by neutralizing and suppressing noise even as it is evoked, we are made to envision multiple possibilities at once, and a balance is struck that opens up a new sense, one which encompasses both sound and silence. This same process affects all aspects of reality in the novel, through effects of contrast, or oscillation, or balancing out. Oscillation is constant, between real and unreal (dream or reality? buildings or toys?[17]), between impressions and

15 Cf. Rudoph Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (L.A. and Berkeley, Univ. Of Calif. Press, 1954), 241-244.

16 The same subaquatic lighting is evoked in the novel as, "diffused light which eliminated all shadows." (4)

17 "Parthénagogé, pédagogé, éphébogé, ce bâtiment plutôt bas et bien proportionné avait tout d'un énorme jouet qu' après plusieurs essais ou aurait mis à sa place définitive." (17) ("Parthenonized, pedagogized, and ephebogogized, this fairly low but well-proportioned building, looking for all the world like an enormous toy which after several failures had been finally placed in position.")

facts from the outside world, between recorded truth and true acts,[18] between inside and outside,[19] happiness and unhappiness,[20] knowledge and ignorance.[21] There are many more examples of the constant process of readjustment at work, such as, "un balcon ni très bas ni très haut, un balcon juste," (100), or, "le cortège d'heures tristes ou souriantes, ou simplement neutres, ni tristes, ni souriantes, des heures, quoi!" (86) Uncalled-for and contradictory qualifications such as, "des maisons clairsemées bien qu' assez proches l' une de l'autre," (121) seem to be there just to shake our rooted vision without ever giving it a single direction. Out of a fear of the unknown, a desire to rest, or to assert and exercise control, one may be tempted to freeze perception and movement, take refuge in the "safe, well-closed bedroom of the inn" (which is evoked throughout the novel as Hebdomeros's favorite place, to which he yearns to return), instead of remaining in the flow of dynamism. But distorting perspective and breaking its laws bars the way to reassuring coherence and logic, or to any strategy of avoidance, adequacy, or conformism. By being made to experience disorientation through the use of multiple, seemingly "impossible" perspective, we are also made to face vacuousness, and a new space opens up, along with the possibility of a new field of being being revealed.

Vegliante presents Hebdomeros as de Chirico's spokesman and

18 E.g. the story of the broken vase, which is used as illustration of how reality is perceivable in various ways. (10)

19 "le ciel est un vrai plafond sur la ville" (17) ("the sky is a true ceiling on the city), or later Hebdomeros "fait en barque le tour de sa chambre" (rows inside around his bedroom), the trees invade the inside of the house before going away quietly, etc.

20 "c'est pour soutenir l'équilibre, disait le guide, car trop de bonheur nuit" (73) (for balancing purposes, too much happiness is not good).

21 Hebdomeros' revelations of the "all" do not preclude his total inability to understand the three words, "Carrière du Cimetière," as is mentioned in a note at the bottom of 112; likewise, the assertive start of the miraculous inscription in the sky, "scio" is given a different twist by the unintelligible words which follow it, "detarnagol bara letztafra." (42)

alterego.[22] It is true that as the central consciousness of the novel Hebdomeros is the only unifier we have as we live through the disorientation process induced by the shifting and multiplication of viewpoints and perspectives. It is also true that we recognize certain unmistakable characteristics shared by de Chirico in his self-portraits and Hebdomeros as described in the novel. There is a touch of defiance, a sort of messianic vanity and arrogance that is conveyed by de Chirico's self-portraits, as it is by Hebdomeros, and by de Chirico in his Memoirs. But this does not mean that we ever get a clear picture of Hebdomeros. We are in the center of Hebdomeros' perception and action but he is either too distant, or too close, or too contradictory (he wants to be alone yet wants attention, he is presented as melancholy and serious yet his savage screams as he plays football with an old shoe give a different picture to the disappointed maid, etc.) for us to understand and see him. Nor is Hebdomeros' idealized self-portrait, which de Chirico did in 1929 as part of *Metamorphosis, suite de 6 lithographies*, any help. When, in the novel, Hebdomeros himself is presented within a picture, it is significant that that picture "remained an enigma for everyone." So instead of assuming a posture of reliablility, Hebdomeros, the central consciouness of the novel, shifts and contradicts himself, and the reader has absolutely nowhere to rest. Hebdomeros' refined education, tact, self-control and politeness, are first praised and emphasized, only to be later denied, just as the eccentricity of his judgments on "moral" and "immoral" foods makes him an unreliable judge of the shamelessness of people eating figs with ice or strawberries with cream (which he sees as proof of "l'imbécillité humaine qu'il estimait immense et éternelle et dans laquelle il avait une foi inébranlable." (69) We are left with obviously unreliable views of reality, and we cannot trust Hebdomeros' hypotheses or judgments, even as we are forced to entertain them through the curiously free-flowing and almost hypnotic character of the narrative which takes us, as it were, unawares. We are not taken in, yet we are made to take all the avenues

22 Jean-Charles Vegliante, introduction to *Poèmes-Poésie*, Giorgio de Chirico (Paris: Solin, 1981), 10.

as the long run-on sentences, which give to the text a fluid, shifting texture, lead us on forever, from one space to another, from one room to another. "Aller sur l'autre rive," the artist's imperative, must be done without shortcut, as the allusions to several drownings of "nageurs intrépides" make clear to us. [23]

All we have is fragments and partiality and there can be therefore no direct representation but only indirect contact with reality. Yet there are signs, which Hebdomeros, despite his fear and his apprehensions, seeks to spot and decipher, with particular attention given to the minimal, "in-between" realities, such as shadows or absence thereof (noon being paradoxically the best hour for the apparition of ghosts). De Chirico wrote that,"there are more enigmas in the shadow of a man who walks in the sun than in all the religions of the past, present, and future."[24] So shadows are given a privileged status in both painting and writing because they are a sign of the mystery, just as there is a "purity" perceived in echoes, voices, breezes, smokes, and songs, which explains why these evanescent realities are the only ones to be given in the novel the epithet of "infinite." On rare occasions, an object strikingly bears perfect witness to the other dimensions of creation and is then said to be "metaphysical." Clarity, transparence, perfect balance are the signs of its metaphysical character, as if it were a perfect echo (receiver-transmitter), at least for human perception. Trophies and mountains (44), pines and glaciers (70, the glaciers are called "remnants of illustrious cathedrals ruined by the canon") are all explicitely described as so many tokens of the vital impetus, or "feu intérieur" (44) that initiated them. Petrified forms of life, statues, are there to be deciphered, and according to de Chirico, the statuary keeps us from the trap of verism or naturalism. We may remember that after his 1919 revelation de Chirico advocated a return to tradition and the human shape, which was to be effected through the statuary. [25] In this respect

23 See 82 for instance.

24 Translated in Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, 307.

25 *Il Convegno* (1920), quoted in *Giorgio de Chirico Néo-Baroque* (Paris: Art Curial, 1985), 6.

de Chirico's 1923 "stone self-portrait," in which he represented himself with only his hands having the appearance of flesh, can be seen as a precursor of the novel's old gigantic stone men who, having lost their pink cheeks, become completely petrified and are broken down into little pieces by a so-called sculptor suffering from dreadful strabismus [26] —an evolution that may hint at the everlasting cycle of nature, the distorting defect in vision being an indication of all the possible varieties of perception; the "cretan eye," which crowns several of de Chirico's paintings, could represent, along with the single eye of the 1915 painting *The Seer*, or the 1916 *Jewish Angel*, the all-encompassing unifying vision which our "normal" dualism usually keeps us from.

De Chirico felt that the sensation of omen, left to us by prehistory, would always exist, and he saw it as the eternal proof of the non-sequitur of the universe. It is this non-sequitur which opens up a space and a possibility for change and mutation, and it is this ancient intuitional sense of perception which can make us more perceptive. De Chirico's world is obviously divided between perceivers and non-perceivers, and in his eyes the only way not to be totally controlled by past experience and caught in the linearity of time is awareness. So Hebdomeros wonders at the apparent unawareness and indifference of his companions, which contrast with his own puzzlement and restlessness, and their incomprehension is contrasted with his total comprehension and sudden cosmic revelations. He cannot rest until he reaches some clarity on the enigmas facing him, which, we are told, always throw him into endless meditations and soliloquies. In Hebdomeros, the various scenes/tableaux écrits that unfold are usually linked by a mere indication of thought process: "évoquer, penser à, faire penser à, pareil à, comme, tel," are the tool words for those changes of setting. The description of the mental process is triggered off most of the time by a change of light/ing, and can be seen as the equivalent of the different pictorial frames which signal the passage between different states of

26 "Un homme aux allures inquiétantes et qui louchait horriblement" (a man with a disquieting manner and a horrible squint) Cf. 77-78, for the story of these "grands vieillards de pierre."

reality in the metaphysical paintings. According to de Chirico, "metaphysical" referred to Leonardo de Vinci's "cosa mentale" or Poussin's "concetto," in that perspective where "la mente [...] si va affaticando intorno la cose"—which, translated as, "the mind tires itself thinking around things," gives an accurate description of Hebdomeros' condition in the novel. Such a statement as, "Hebdomeros thought of all this as he examined and analyzed his state of mind"(8), is rather typical of the endless self-reflexivity we are made to witness and participate in. "Voir, pressentir, impression" are with "penser" the key-words in de Chirico's vocabulary. De Chirico' s world is that of omens, of the time before the happening.[27] His focus is on the moment when things are about to emerge, a moment of precarious balance, that of the emergence of the "is." So if there is no linear plot in the novel, there are such occasional happenings as "bouleversements telluriques"(62), earthquakes, tidal waves, massive emigrations, comets announced and announcing the end of the world; changes do occur, albeit hardly perceptible and affecting shadows (those of the rooster and of the shepherds invade and eat up the whole landscape 41 and 48) or "nostalgies et élans" (which take on the hieroglyphic shape of an immense greyhound (62), or evoked as changes of set, or photographers' tricks. [28] Some "phénomènes inexplicables" (41) do take place, for there is such a thing finally as the mystery of the fact that there is, rather than there is not, which is the core of the mystery of reality, the most inexplicable of all those so-called "inexplicable phenomena."

Hebdomeros does experience moments of realization, or revelation. As he is exploring the strange building, he suddenly experiences a moment of "total understanding" in front of a group of gladiators, just as later on, in front of a "spectacle," he understands "everything" (104).

27 See (7) for references to bad omens and premonitory dreams foretelling sickness, (12) for comet predicting the end of the world. Hebdomeros also entertains all the catastrophic consequences of the hypothetical falling of the lit candles inside the piano, which he "crosses out" with"mieux vaudrait ne pas y penser." (8)

28 "Changements de décor," (40) "trucs de photographe," (48) "rideau qu'on soulève, paravent qu' on tire." (80)

In another very strange scene, which turns out to be one of shearing, Hebdomeros sees himself naked and kneeling, in a "grande caisse de pierre dépourvue de toute ornementation," and he identifies with the lamb being shorn and with Isaac offering himself for sacrifice (37): "Hebdomeros le vit et se vit lui-même, nu et agenouillé, comme Isaac s'offrant au sacrifice." In this scene of visual recognition, Hebdomeros thus probably identifies with Christ/the Lamb, though the pronoun "le," in italics in the text, remains without referent or definition; though a few lines later we identify it with the lamb, de Chirico has still no referent provided for the pronoun, and we must establish the meaning, fill in the blank. This is typical of de Chirico' method of double negation: conjuring up a reality by evoking its lack and the ensuing frustration. We then hear that these "bassins d'origine préhistorique" were used first as tombs for the remnants of the first five legendary kings, then as washbasins for the laundry, and finally as birthing-places for cows (38) : a revealing evolution, proceeding from the rituals of death, to those of purification, to those of life, which presents us with the central Christian mystery in pagan terms, and which makes these stone crates a place of foundation, cleansing, renascence and recreation, a vital locus par excellence. It seems relevant here that de Chirico had had a revelation in the Villa Borghese in front of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love, a painting which presents two women, one clothed, the other nude, seated on Christ' s empty sarcophagus. The sarcophagus, just as the stone crates, reminds us of the omnipresent parallelepiped (Arnheim's "isometric solid") found in so many of de Chirico's paintings (even if only in dotted lines), or, in his self-portraits, in the form of the stone parapet, which also evokes the Byzantine altar-tomb association, connoting thereby death and resurrection. [29] The union between "sacred" and "profane" is felt in the scene of shearing with all the more intensity, because the presence of a cow and its calf, and a peasant girl and her child, clearly evokes the Nativity (37-38). But Hebdomeros thus faced with the mystery of incarnation still

29 We can also evoke the paintings with the omnipresent brick walls, behind which so much seems to be happening. In the novel the wall, a form of the isometric solid, is called "cette cloison ridicule qui ne servait qu'à délimiter les frontières." (22)

dwells on duality: when he looks at the scene framed by the window of the stable, he thinks of the possibility of painting this "scène curieuse." Not only does he entertain the idea of painting the scene (which implies distance), but he would entitle the hypothetical picture *Les Deux Mères*, one more reminder of division and partiality, even as the fused ideas of Christ and motherhood connote union and oneness—Incarnation being the Oneness of perfect integration. The scene therefore is only one among others, and Hebdomeros' quest cannot stop there. The endless movement of mise-en-abyme can only stop when the thinking, contemplating, meditating, yields. The counterexample of that happening would be the confusing scene when a painting, entitled Caucase et Golgotha, with Hebdomeros himself in it, is described, and compared with another painting, one by André Brouillé, with Renan in it (23): it seems a particular significant instance of picture-within-picture in that it represents a scene of crucifixion[30] at the moment of transition between death and resurrection: Christ has died already, and has not yet risen. Not only is Christ absent from the picture, but Hebdomeros, despite the multiple analogies made throughout the book presenting him as a Christ figure, is alongside the road, sitting on a rock, in the position of the thinker—a possible indication that he is falling short of the perfect wholeness/holiness and embodiment represented by Christ Resurrected; Hebdomeros' attitude is compared to Renan's "dans le fameux Renan devant le Parthénon peint par André Brouillé." André Brouillé probably stands for Pierre-André Brouillet, who signed André Brouillet, and who was actually the author of such commissioned works. One of them, Renan à l'Acropole d'Athènes, was commissioned by the Sorbonne in 1901. *Caucase et Golgotha* evokes both Christ and Prometheus, the reconciliation being further emphasized by the presence of "et,," a conjunction de Chirico also used to link Prometheus and Christ in his story "The Engineer's Son."[31] Ernest Renan' s rejection of Catholicism and his ambivalence to-

30 Three crosses on top of a rock, "femmes éplorées," "légionnaires romains,""hommes portant des échelles," are mentioned.

31 See George Waldemar, *Giorgio de Chirico, avec des fragments littéraires de l'ar-*

wards a Christianity which refused rational criticism is well-known,[32] and the parallels drawn between Hebdomeros, Christ, Prometheus, and Renan on the one hand, and the Golgotha, the Caucasus, and the Parthenon on the other, makes the reader all the more aware of the equal intellectual treatment received by pagan and sacred figures or episodes through both the use of picture-within-picture, and the endless interrogation of the mysteries. Finally, at the end of the novel, Hebdomeros "understands" ("et il comprit," in italics in the text)[33] when he recognizes that the Woman Immortality has his father's eyes, and he experiences a feeling of smooth navigation when she asks him, in a picture-within-picture echoing, "As-tu jamais pensé à ma mort? As-tu jamais pensé à la mort de ma mort? As-tu pensé à ma vie? Un jour, ô frère..." (italics in the text) Then Hebdomeros, in the attitude of Rodin's thinker, ceases to think, "sa pensée à la brise très pure de la voix qu'il venait d' entendre céda lentement et finit par s'abandonner tout à fait. Elle s'abandonnait aux flots caressants des paroles inoubliables et sur ces flots voguait vers des plages étranges et inconnues. "(130)[34] So Hebdomeros recognizes the Muse has his father's eyes, and the encounter stops the search/escape/flight and brings rest, as well as stops

tiste (Paris: Edition des Chroniques du Jour, 1928) xxx. :" ...Hommes Superieures: c'est ainsi qu'il avait l'habitude de nommer Prométhée et le Christ." He then goes on to describe Mercury helping Jupiter's eagle carry the wounded Prometheus, in a scene that obviously evokes a burial of Christ, and is the description of the etching by Klinger.

32 Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863) had known an extraordinary success and been the subject of much controversy in France. Was this biography of Christ heretical or did it signify the victory of the modern spirit of rationality and science? Was it really necessary to differentiate facts from legend?

33 "Have you ever thought of my death? Have you ever thought of the death of my death?Have you thought of my life? One day, O brother..." (117)

34 "His thoughts, in the pure breath of that voice that he had heard, yielded slowly and ended by abandoning him altogether. They surrendered to the caressing waves of unforgettable words, and on these waves they floated toward strange and unknown shores. They floated in the warmth of the setting sun, smiling in its descent toward the cerulean skies." (117)

time to the extent that, as Hebdomeros puts it, when one discovers or creates, one then lives eternity, the "mother of life." (125) Immortality is presented as both an eternal noon and an eternal recurrence, motion being both dissolved and born at the center of the wheel, and the merging is possible between the four elements, between verticality and horizontality, father and mother principles, rest and mobility, yielding and resting: absolute balance is reached, perhaps at this famous point of the mind which the Surrealists' aim was to determine, and from which, to quote Breton's famous words, "life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived in a contradictory fashion."[35]

The fact that the voice of Immortality should have expressed itself in the form of a triple question harks back to the 1911 and 1920 self-portraits' inscriptions: interrogation is the revelatory mode, and not peremptory assertions (the lapidary inscription in the sky, "scio," only led to nescience). And in any event these privileged moments of change or revelation are just moments, epiphanies do not last (70, 104), "énigmes toujours irrésolues" (97), and other "strange and unknown shores" are awaiting. Neither do the revelations happen as a consequence of asserting control: rather they seem to be an incidental consequence of a state of tension between searching and letting go, a state of alert awareness between opening and closure. All of Hebdomeros in fact oscillates between openness and closure: first we enter a house, then more doors and corridors open onto "Society," then the aquarium and those who have never heard of the Transvaal war are evoked (9), the closed door would not open (10), before a draft opens up the door (12), and a huge glass house is evoked (16), of which the back wall opens up like a theater curtain (17). The tall buildings made of cement close in on the painter's house whose green shutters are now closed (20), and the town is described, a place "where sometimes

35 "Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d' être perçus contradictoirement. C'est en vain qu'on chercherait à l'activité surréaliste un autre mobile que la détermination de ce point."

a window would be open but one would pretend it was merely an effect of suggestion." The opening or closing of doors or windows is a constant feature of the novel, and so is looking through a window, a porthole, a skylight.[36] These openings are found at various heights, as if to signify that regardless of the level, or depth, or altitude, there is always a possible window opening onto another reality. The interrogation into the reality and falsity of things is what keeps the book going. "Un décor en bois fait toujours plus vrai qu' un décor naturel" (83), just as, on the screen, we are told, false beards always look more real than actual beards. So Hebdomeros wonders why the theater is always considered as something shameful (65), a question to which he never finds an answer. "[37] Obviously, all realities, including that of the stage, are presented as equally valid, or rather, equally partial. The stage is both a closed and open space, which acts both as a separation and a link, a profane and sacred space: it is also another form of the recurrent parallelepiped/isometric solid. Through his choice of signs and perspectives, de Chirico's vision in writing and painting is one of the partiality of our usual vision, and an apprehension of the unknown that encompasses it.

The analogy is famous between a painting and a window, but an insistance on the awareness of it adds one more dimension to the picture-within-picture motif. Is the picture a sight seen out of a window or the window itself? According to de Chirico, framing the various realities inside a square or a rectangle has the effect of giving them metaphysical value by isolating and solidifying them.[38] It also has, simply, the immediate effect of making the reality of the viewer possibly felt as just one larger rectangle within a still larger picture. At the same time these frames give a structure, a necessary albeit restrictive limit.

36 See for instances 8, 24, 37, 44, 57, 71, 120, 128.

37 See for theatrical references 17, 27, 28, 42, 48, 59, 66, etc.

38 De Chirico, quoted in Massimo Carrà, *Metaphysical Art*, trans. C. Tisdall (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 94. "The landscape, enclosed bewteen two columns as in a square or the rectangle of a window, acquires greater metaphysical value since it is solidified and isolated by the space that surrounds it."

This mise-en-abyme, creating a double or multiple perspective, acknowledges the necessity for structure/embodiment, while expanding its limits by neutralizing its rigidity. We know that de Chirico admired the openings in Giotto's paintings because they induced a foreboding of cosmic mystery. In de Chirico's novel as well an in his paintings, we find ourselves truly in-between two realities, at the point where possibilities are equally entertained, and it is this balance between opening and closure which may lead to a deeper and broader understanding of the totality. In both writing and painting De Chirico constantly balances out elements and signs to attain a state of pure resonance, equilibrium, absolute purity, what he calls the "idéal fugitif" (16), knowing that constant readjustment of vision is in order, because "there are no static/stable values" (205), any attempt to grasp and possess a revelation is doomed to failure, one has to ride it out ("voguer") and go on, so as not to be trapped in non-reality, even if one does not know what reality is. In some cases, reality in the very process of its negation is mentioned as if one knew what reality is, as if we had been given a reliable basis and a canon of admissibility. The result is an uprooting of any assumed basis, and the tension between various realities is echoed by the tension between knowledge and non-knowledge.

The omnipresence of Hebdomeros' name gives the text its coherence.[39] As a Christlike figure, his characteristics are unmistakable, since he has disciples and "Thus spoke Hebdomeros" sounds like a leitmotiv,[40] but when he is compared to Christ having to go onto the prow of the boat so as not to be crushed by the crowds, it is obvious to the reader that he is falling short, since Christ is said to have actually walked on water. There is a constant feeling of incompleteness as we are compelled to enter into the center of what appears to be a very fragmented being. But as the unravelling of a mind, the narrative is situated at the very core of the realm where action, i.e., change, occurs. It seems that Hebdomeros' task is to encompass all with a new eye/I, so as to allow

39 See Jacqueline Chénieux, *"Hebdomeros, l'énigme d'un nom,"* (Paris: Cahiers du MNAM, Paris 1981), 244-253.

40 Hebdomeros also identifies with the Lamb (57), stresses his infinite pity for humanity (62,104), and his anger is called "juste et sainte." (68)

space for a new human to appear, one with more encompassing perception. Hebdomeros also bears a name which in Greek means, "the man of the seventh day." Schmied remarked that the number seven could be an allusion to the Greek festival which took place on the seventh day of the month to celebrate the birth of Apollo Hebdomean, while at Lesbos these Hebdomean celebrations were in honor of Dionysos.[41] This also makes of Hebdomeros the living unification of the Dionysian and Apollinian principles. He is therefore the one whose task is to achieve unity (and therefore must go beyond shame, self-consciousness, separateness); he completes a cycle (God rested on the seventh day), and announces a new one, he is both completion and in-betweenness. In the novel we find numerous references to a whole range of states of being, such as the inanimate, half inanimate, half-animal, the mythological, the heroic, the angelic, the demi-godly, or the godly. One finds ichtiosaurs and mammoths (10), but also bears, cockroaches, peacocks, zebras, fish, elephants and tigers (7, 56, 73, 92) and even a "myopithèque," which in all likelihoood must refer to a shortsighted ape. This fantastic zoo reminds us of the Romanesque Bestiaries, and of Apollinaire's Bestiaire ou le Cortège d'Orphée, published in May 1911, which shows the traditional reflexion on the animal realm to be part of de Chirico' s cultural heritage as well as ambiant surroundings. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* knew a broad diffusion in the late Quattrocento, when there was a need for a return to the mythic Golden Age as an alternative to the historic values of the Humanistic culture, and the same may be true of de Chirico's focus: he always mentions animals in connection with the human state:[42] we find "vieux centaures" (51), the only ones with far-reaching eyes, "hommes-condors, oeil de vautour (7)," "femmes aux têtes d'oiseaux" (35,) "soldat accroupi comme une panthère" (33); the inanimate state is evoked in relation to the human state, and the gigantic old men with pink cheeks reminiscent of

41 Wieland Schmied, "Pictor Classicus Sum," (*Giorgio de Chirico*, Paris: Chêne, 1979), 119.

42 "Lear n'avait plus rien d' humain, il ne faisait pas non plus penser aux statues ni aux gladiateurs, cet homme singulier avait l'aspect plutôt pétrifié, plateformisé" (21). "... as though he were petrified, platformized" (16)

pink clouds or pink statues eventually become reified, and are broken up into pieces thrown into the valley so as not to litter the gardens .(78) Any one of these states is seen as enigmatic in relation to the human focus, represented in the novel by Hebdomeros. Architectural elements with human characteristics, demi-gods (14, 121), humans with frequent as well as uncalled-for references to their bodily functions and noises, animals with human faces, mythological creatures, angels (33, 59), all the range of inanimate and animate reality is present, and instead of a static picture of the human, we are given a whole spectrum of dynamic human states, without being held up to a fixed model to emulate—because, the implication is, there is none existing yet. Men become subhuman ("bestial" or "plateformisé"), things become humanized (the climbing tablecloths or the choked trees for examples), with always the possibility and hope of rising to the state of demi-gods—which, significantly, would correspond to a moment of "équilibre absolu" (supreme balance)."[43] The metaphysical paintings are well-known for their lack of human figures: apart from silhouettes, shadows, plaster constructions, and mannequins, the only real people are diminutive figures in the background. If they are not altogether absent, they are present only through their signs (a glove, a train, a toy, etc.) Only in 1920 did de Chirico reintroduce conventional humans in his painting. Likewise, in the novel, people are presented either as mechanical (a man for instance systematically asks people what they have eaten), or as petrified statues, fictitious figures, puppets, phantoms ("un vrai congrès de fantômes"[44]), or actors ("personnages de drame." (8) But the fact that de Chirico defines phantoms as elemental forces which are embodied in philosophical, literary, or real figures, indicates the potential as well as the ambiguity of the shadow/phantom/mannequin status. If the Chiriquian world picture were to be drawn, nature would come first, then architecture, which "complements nature,", and then the human, as a "prolongation of architecture." The 1917 painting entitled *The Great Metaphysician* seems to epitomize de Chirico 's vision of the human as emerging from, and prolonging, architecture.

43 "dans chaque homme était descendu l'espoir d'un demi-dieu." (121)

44 The references to "fantômes" are numerous (cf. 9, 71, 72, 91, 97, etc.)

The gigantic body is made up of measuring instruments piled up into a sort of architectural construction, ending with a small mannequin head. Standing on a low base, it looks like a statue in the middle of the piazza which is empy but for a tiny shrouded figure in the distance before one of the surrounding classical buildings. The shrouded figure is evidently one of the past, and de Chirico's metaphysician is emerging, a unique creation in the making, just as in the novel the narrative creates itself at every moment until it catches up with Time and merges with Life once more, its sole self-sustaining motive being self-recuperation. One accusation formulated against Hebdomeros was that it was tedious, and perhaps more rhetorical than poetical; but one may wonder whether de Chirico was not in fact coming back to the first sense of the word "rhetoric" despite or through its apparent formal negation. In a world where words have lost their vitality, and vision has lost its perspective, he confronted the empty rhetoric in his novel, and the empty perspective in his metaphysical paintings. With the primal form of the parallelepiped, which contains and defines a space of emptiness and an in-between, de Chirico grounds us in a perceptive mode which allows us to access a different reality, that of the revelatory experience. We seem trapped in an impossible situation, hence our possible boredom, unease, or even anguish as readers or viewers of de Chiricos's works; but at the same time we are forced into a new field of vision, which is a new field of being; a new human may emerge.

Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical work, placed under the sign of doubleness and duplication, can be seen as an attempt at oneness encompassing the multiple, the contradictory, and the unknown. De Chirico had adopted Heraclitus of Ephesus 'imperative, namely, to discover the eye of everything, and his portraits, novel, and metaphysical paintings, all represent a search for a new I/eye/subject, via "objectivation," which means first exile from identity. De Chirico's work may be seen as a form of exorcism since exorcism is a process of negating while giving form, questioning while asserting. In Hebdomeros, everything is presented as eminently suspicious, including oneself, speculation, excuses, self-righteous speeches, all is presented as so many possible escapes, not to be trusted because nothing is ever what it seems,

and we are systematically denied any anchorage. On the road toward "absolute balance" (121) or "idéal fugitif" (6), de Chirico is interested in what remains despite, and over and against, questioning and erosion. In his painting, the smoking locomotives, the faceless mannequins, the frozen, armless, helpless figures, the sightless plaster head of Jupiter, cry out with the absence of sound, expression, and movement, the blatant emptiness and the lack felt as we expect the richness of Antiquity or of Italy (according to the subject), takes us by surprise, breaks the thread of the chain of memories, and imposes itself on us so forcefully that we cannot escape what is there. The high number of de Chirico's self-portraits, accountable by the fact that, in his search for the human, he is after all the closest observable human at hand, may also reflect a need to exorcise self-consciousness so as to let creativity emerge. De Chirico's genius is that, exploring different ways of perceiving, exerting his transformative vision to see the non-immediately apparent reality (animate or inanimate, picture-within-picture, reality within reality), he caught something new and irreducible by inviting the void and the unknown—which may partly account for the arresting, compelling quality of his pictorial universe. His works have an "inhabited depth"[45] because of elements of the unknown hidden in them. To that extent, Chirico does carry us beyond all painting and writing,[46] since we feel, as he wished us to feel, that "other signs are about to enter the rectangle of the canvas" [47]—and we can add, "as well as that of the page." André Breton used to say, "between what I recognize and what I do not recognize is I." De Chirico's unifying eye seems to encompass the "I" but also what has not yet been recognized as "I."

45 An expression he used in "Sull'Arte Metafisica," in *Valori Plastici,* Rome 1, 1918/19, reproduced in Carrà, *Metaphysical Art*, trans. Tisdall, 90.

46 In "What Impressionism Should Be," trans. by Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico,* Appendix A, 245, de Chirico wished for "a picture that would carry us beyond all pictures."

47 In "What Impressionism Should Be," trans. by Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico,* Appendix A, 245, de Chirico wished for "a picture that would carry us beyond all pictures."

FINDING FAITH ON THE FUNG WAH: RECALLING THE DISCOUNT BUS LINE ON THE OCCASION OF ITS DEMISE

Christopher Wall

I GOT ENGAGED on the Fung Wah bus to Boston. At least I think I did. As struggling young artists—still struggling in our 30s—my girlfriend and I were expert users of the discount bus company that left from New York's Chinatown. We jockeyed for seats as close to the front as possible because fumes from the bathroom made us queasy. ("No Number 2," the driver barked, suggesting it was the only English he knew.) But we also had to sit back far enough that we couldn't see out the windshield, because watching the driver slalom up the interstate brought on a different queasiness all together—the kind that starts when you realize life can end at any time. Once when we mistakenly sat in the front row I cringed as the driver cut off car after car till I closed my eyes and made peace with the universe, but giving yourself up to eternity five times in the first ten minutes can make eternity lose some of its power. Still, if you survived the anxiety, and smells, and incidents —like the dad who directed his child to pee on the seat because the bathroom was unusable—and if you avoided a bus that caught fire or careened off an exit ramp into a guardrail, it was a surprisingly good deal. For ten bucks you could make it to Boston in under three hours, then stagger to a bar to calm your nerves and still be on time and under budget.

Eliza didn't need to drink after trips like this. She had her knitting. The bus was dark enough the night we got engaged that I couldn't see her expression, but looking back it's stunning how quickly she ended what had been a two-year debate. First she noted that her friend Laura, who lived in Germany, could only travel the following October or November.

"Uh-huh," I said.

Then she mentioned that Carlotta could only travel from Florence

the following September or October.

"Uh-huh," I said.

"So if we're going to do anything next year . . . it has to be October."

I gazed out the window and noticed my reflection superimposed on the landscape speeding by. I wondered how a couple could vow to stay together when everything around them kept changing. Could we afford kids? A mortgage we could default on? How long would we struggle to make both art and money? I didn't have an answer for any of it, but succeeded for a moment in casting those worries from my mind.

"Okay," I said. "October it is."

When the bus stopped for gas in Connecticut, we made a run for the bathroom, then met in line at the Burger King.

"I think we might be engaged," I said. It felt like one of those intimate romantic moments you enjoy together before ordering cheeseburgers.

"Okay," she said.

She didn't mention that she thought we'd been engaged for over a year.

BACK WHEN I WAS twenty four, relationships seemed more straightforward. I'd become engaged to a previous girlfriend the old-fashioned way by proposing to her one night after watching Letterman's *Top Ten*. You might not consider that an ideal moment, but it was, because it was the only time I was sure we'd be alone over the holidays. (Her pesky sister kept tagging along.) It turned out to be a brilliant move. You'd be surprised how romantic—and efficient—you can be during a commercial break. My girlfriend responded by flapping her arms and saying "I'm going to be sick! I'm going to be sick!" which, she assured me later, was her way of saying yes. We weren't a good match, though. One of the only things we shared was an inability to acknowledge our worries, so as our relationship unraveled we just quietly changed our understanding of what it meant to be engaged. First we set a date. When that passed, being engaged meant "being capable of setting a date," and then finally "being capable of working toward a relationship

where you could theoretically set a date." After a dispute one evening, we noted that while we agreed on what had happened—we could both see a ring on her finger—we no longer knew what it meant, so she gave it back.

Without realizing it, I'd become unengaged to one girlfriend and, years later, engaged to another. I'd been so careful to avoid this. I'd used the subjunctive whenever discussing the subject with Eliza: what we'd do if we *were* to get married, what kind of ceremony we'd *theoretically* have, what kind of rings we'd exchange *in the abstract*. We'd gone to open houses as well—a common hobby in New York, I maintained. The only thing I refused to do was set a date—or a year—or set a plan in motion that would prompt European friends to buy a plane ticket, because after that I'd have as much control as I did sitting on the Fung Wah with my eyes closed. According to Eliza, though, we'd become engaged when she started ignoring my strategically placed verbs, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. Though the moment itself was lost in history, I'd been *en route* for years. I just didn't know it.

I FIRST ASKED Eliza out when she designed a play of mine because she had cool red boots and hipster glasses, and when we met at a restaurant—we still don't know if it was a date or not—she effused about a Shostakovich opera in which a man wakes up to find that his nose is missing, only to track it down and discover that he's been divorced. The nose has become *much* more successful than he is and refuses to be reattached. Afterward I wasn't sure I wanted to sit through a modern opera, but I did want to sit next to Eliza while she described one.

Later, when a blackout hit the northeast in the summer of 2003, Eliza decided on instinct to pack a flashlight and leave her Lower East Side apartment. Less than two years earlier she'd watched the Towers fall from her rooftop, and didn't want to be alone. A throng of pedestrians swarmed the roadway near the Manhattan Bridge, which was closed to traffic except for vans ferrying long lines of the infirm and out-of-shape across. She caught a glimpse of a woman hunched over a guardrail, keening in labor, and then ended up at my Brooklyn apart-

ment four-and-a-half miles later. Unprepared as usual, with no way of getting news, I'd wandered the neighborhood, listening to people on their stoops listen to battery-operated radios, taking comfort the way I most like to be comforted—from afar. It was too soon after 9/11 not to be thinking about it, yet people tried to reassure each other without acknowledging the faint whiff of danger that clung to the air.

Eliza knocked on my door shortly after I returned. My phone was dead, my doorbell broken, but she'd figured, with a faith that has never made sense to me, that she'd be able to talk her way into my building and that I'd be home. Incredulous, I asked what her backup plan was, but she didn't have one. She would've sat outside, I guess, wondering if I was stuck in rehearsal in Manhattan and then, as it grew late, making one of those impossible calculations we make when we don't have enough information and don't know how things will turn out, deciding whether to stay or hike home with a dying flashlight.

Seeing her in the doorway, drenched in sweat, I made a decision on instinct as well—that I'd be crazy to let her go. We walked down Seventh Avenue and bought Thai food from a restaurant that had set up a sidewalk buffet, then gazed that night at the skyline from my studio, a view that extended from the Statue of Liberty in the harbor all the way up to the Chrysler Building in Midtown, the giant torch and the famous spire and the windows of the financial district now unrecognizable in the dark. *It's like being on top of the world*, I remember thinking. *And we can see none of it.*

SOMETIMES, DURING OUR TRIPS on the Fung Wah, when the driver took the onramp at high speed I'd recall the anxiety I felt the first time I drove on a highway. My instructor, a stern woman, warned me to *never* look at the guardrail or oncoming traffic, since our bodies inevitably follow our gaze. The edge in her voice—which continued at the end of each session when she tried to sell me vitamins—suggested she was trying to save my life by insisting I could lose it any time.

If our bodies follow our gaze, though, how do we approach something we can't bear to look at? This is how unbelievers sidle up to faith. We use the subjunctive. Keep close to someone while wrapped

in the illusion of distance. Avert our gaze just long enough, in a kind of fraught choreography, to be drawn into our lover's orbit. And we realize, long after the decision's been made, that we've chosen to be the reliable thing in someone's unreliable world.

THE FUNG WAH'S SAFETY RECORD WAS harder to laugh off once we were bringing a baby onboard to visit grandparents down in Philadelphia, so a few years ago we started riding another discount bus line with cleaner bathrooms. From afar, though, I maintained a soft spot for the bus company, which led an improvised, meager existence that shouldn't have worked and yet worked over and over again. At some point it became a saint on the dashboard of the car I don't own, so I was shocked to read how many risks the company had actually been taking—it lost its license a few months ago after a surprise inspection revealed cracks in the frames of three-quarters of its fleet.

For those of us whose daily routines seem duct-taped and jerry-rigged, there's a fraught choreography in the kind of worries you can allow into your mind, because the line between productive, paralyzing and lifesaving is hard to see. Seven years after getting engaged on the Fung Wah, we have a second child on the way, not because we can afford him but because biology suggests it's now or never. I can envision the birth this coming summer, and some of the juggling that will be required to balance infant care, work, and an older son in preschool, but if I gaze too far ahead I realize we have no plan, and no money, for childcare for this little one, and I start to feel queasy.

If I could have understood the Fung Wah driver, I might've asked how he managed it, day in and day out, weaving through traffic, knowing he'd never make the schedule he was given but trying anyway. Unable to see far ahead, or glance at the Jersey barriers beside him, he would've had little besides faith that his eyes would keep falling, over and over, on some middle distance that would see him through.

AUSTEN IN ADAPTATION
Chloe Smith

"It is a miracle of harmony, of the adaptation of the free inner life to the outward necessity of things."

—John C. Ransom

"You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water, my friend."

—Bruce Lee

Viewed as individual entities, each cinematic or televisual adaptation of Jane Austen's novels exists in a vacuum of intentionality and execution that can be neatly summarized. Emma Thompson and Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility i*s a clandestine modernization that cleverly manages to paint Austen's original intentions with a bold feminist brush that was, to some extent, unavailable to the author in her own time. Patricia Rozema's controversial rendering of *Mansfield Park* is an overt modernization of the 1814 original that is enshrouded in a cloak of seeming historical and textual "faithfulness." 2007's televisual adaptation of *Northanger Abbey* (written by Andrew Davies and directed by Jon Jones) is in many ways quite faithful to the text (and, more importantly, to Austen's vision) and at others prone to bodice-ripping fantasy scenes that exemplify the ways in which cinema can be a blunt instrument for converting a classic novel into a film. But while each adaptation of Austen's work is invariably viewed as a representation of the work from which it comes, these adaptations rightfully take on lives of their own, with varying levels of "success" depending upon the stylistic approach taken by the writers and filmmakers. This leaves us with the question of how to define success in adapting the works of one of the world's best-loved writers.

To explore the works of Jane Austen without investigating the realities of her life in Regency England would be insufficient at best and

irresponsible at worst. It follows, therefore, that the cinematic and televised adaptations of those works should be examined with an eye towards their ability successfully to recount Austen's stories (without shifting her intentionality) for an audience dispossessed of her context. The greatest challenge facing the adapter of classic literature is to tell, in two hours time, a centuries-old story to a modern audience that has little or no familiarity with the world that the characters inhabit, without creating an "alternate reality" within the narrative. In order to maintain the tone of the original work, these filmmakers must maintain the existing reality of this narrative without resorting to the transparently disingenuous devices of voiceover, montage, etc. that are often employed to instantaneously orient modern audiences. What this all leaves us with is a set of films varying in their level of "narrative anachronis." i.e. the insertion of unobtrusive cultural touchstones into the diegetic world of the film. Take, for instance, the almost embarrassingly overt opening line of writer/director Douglas McGrath's 1995 adaptation of *Emma:* "In a time when one's town was one's world, and the actions at a dance excited greater interest than the movement of armies, there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run." (*Emma, 1996; dir. Douglas McGrath; Miramax Films). I*s this blunt explication of Austen's favorite subject matter necessary in a film that plunges its audience into the midst of a country wedding? Certainly not, but, despite the decided lack of Austenian delicacy, it lulls the viewer into a sense of comfort by reducing the scope of Regency England to a palatably small group of local families.

Cinematic "period" adaptations of Jane Austen are most illuminating when solidly rooted in the realities of the time period of their textual counterparts, though a rigid adherence to the portrayal of such realities only serves to stifle the boundless creative possibilities that the film medium offers. In his essay "Clues for the Clueless," John Mosier condemns the tendency to praise the rigidity frequently exhibited in the BBC's productions of Austen's works: "An analysis of a film adaptation which judges its success solely or even primarily on the extent to which the film mimics or recreates a given historical period or place is as deeply flawed as one which insists on judging according to the extent to which the film plods through the novel paragraph by paragraph." (Mosier, 230)

And so a delicate balance must be struck when navigating the difficult waters of transposition. An avoidance of the tempting cinematic/narrative shortcuts mentioned above, coupled with a clever and diverse employment of the film camera to bring to light the impossibly complex inner lives of Austen's characters, allows for a rich authenticity not "…concerned with absolute historical fidelity in minor details, for example [...] whether a flower included in a scene grew in the region at the time…" (Mosier, 230). But why is it not a good idea to employ a narrator or a block of onscreen text to provide details about the world of Austen's time that is so different from that of the audience? The answer to this is both absurdly simple and vastly complex: to reduce the widely understood social complexities of her time to a few well chosen remarks spoken by a disembodied voice would be foolish, but to disregard Austen's careful and consistent use of negative space in creating a subtle and dynamic picture of the intricacies of country parish life would be unacceptable. After all, as Dr. Wendy Craik states in her book, *Jane Austen in Her Time,* "Jane Austen…is one whose principles entail great economy, and, hence, exclusion." (Craik, 2).

Meanwhile, those adaptations that make references (overt or clandestine) to the aforementioned intricacies of quotidian life in early nineteenth century Britain create a necessary and appropriate sense of "otherness" in the audience. This "otherness" allows viewers to be simultaneously immersed in the narrative and potently aware of the differences between their lives and those unfolding before them. My aim in examining the virtues and failings of various cinematic and televisual depictions of Austen's novels is threefold: I wish to 1) illustrate how frequently narrative anachronisms make their way into the final product of an adaptation of Austen's works, 2) elucidate the pitfalls certain filmmakers encounter in representing the author's intentionality and historical context, and 3) illuminate which tactics employed by writers and filmmakers have done (entertaining!) justice to the endlessly complex world that she created in her novels.

"If Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism is to be celebrated for its courage in breaking with the past, Jane Austen's, too, should be recognized for its reintegration of her predecessor's gender politics into mainstream language and ideologies."(quoted in Looser, 178)

The above can easily be said about Emma Thompson's decidedly feminist take (*Sense and Sensibility, Ang Lee)* on Austen's tale of two sisters with diametrically opposed personalities. Never straying from the author's stoically funny tone, Thompson's screenplay and Lee's thoughtfully precise direction carefully retain all of the emotion and humor intrinsic to the narrative while simultaneously placing the role of women in Regency England center stage. That they manage to do so (in a feature-length film!) without turning the story into either a cloying romantic comedy or a heavy-handed feminist manifesto is no small feat indeed, and the constant awareness of the interplay between cinematography and dialogue is a lesson in that which is ultimately most successful in adapting Austen's work.

From very early in the film, purists are struck by Thompson's adherence to the novel's dialogue when John Dashwood (played by James Fleet) and Fanny Dashwood (played by Harriet Walter) are rationalizing away the promise of financial support for his sisters that John made to his dying father. It is almost entirely comprised of direct quotes from the original text, but, like much of the screenplay, Thompson has rearranged the lines in such a way that Fanny and John's unmitigated selfishness is conveyed as quickly as possible. Coupled with Lee's purposefully abrupt visual transitions, we hear the pair conduct this rationalization while, in turn, dressing in their very fine home as they prepare to invade the Dashwood home at Norland Park and then travelling to the estate. The economy evident in combining the practical actions of the Mr. John Dashwoods' trip to Norland with a wonderfully clear explication of the characters' traits meets one of the great challenges in adapting beloved works of fiction, and it is crucial in reducing a fifty-chapter book to a two-hour film.

Approximately fifteen minutes into the film comes an extraordinarily cohesive moment between dialogue and camera movement that stands as a testament to the power of the visual medium to correctly imbue silence with Austen's trademark wink at the audience. It is the exchange between Edward Ferrars (played by Hugh Grant) and Elinor Dashwood (played by Emma Thompson) that results in the two taking a walk on the grounds to see the beloved tree house of Margaret Dashwood (played by Emile François). As the two flirt innocuously on their

way out of the house, the camera stays put after their departure to reveal a Mrs. Dashwood vastly contented by the burgeoning romance, and then eventually pans upward to reveal an extremely disapproving Fanny Dashwood wearing, as Thompson writes in the screenplay, "a face like a prune." (Thompson, 18) Thompson's nods to feminism have been criticized as being too overt and standing in contrast with Austen's subtle upbraiding of the unquestioned patriarchy of her time, but this criticism ignores the compelling sentiment expressed in the Looser quote above; if Austen was "mainstreaming" gender politics, so, too, is Thompson bringing into focus those more revolutionary aspects of Austen's characters that were always a quiet presence in the novels. One very important way that this was accomplished in the film was through Lee's careful use of framing to illustrate just how stifling it was to be a sentient woman always housebound. In her essay, "Sense and Sensibility in a Postfeminist World," Penny Gay notes the "sense of enclosure that accompanies most of the scenes with the women indoors: the sit, doing fairly meaningless 'work,' i.e. decorative embroidery—with the exception of Elinor, who is seen agonizing over the family budget; they gaze out of windows and doors, waiting for a visitor; they pace like caged tigers." (Gay, 93) The use of the word "tigers" is an important choice here, for these women are not docile, helpless creatures. Elinor sees to the Dashwood affairs in the place of their lost patriarch, Marianne has the ready opinions and sharp mind more usually attributed to young men at the time, and Margaret (who plays a much larger role in the film than the novel) has tendencies towards boyish play that speak for themselves. It follows, therefore, that these restless creatures are not content to be trapped in their idyllic, cottage/prison, but, as Lee illustrates through carefully chosen elements of mise-en-secene, it is only with the help of men that they can be freed from it. Take, for instance, the scene towards the end of the film in which Colonel Brandon (played by Alan Rickman) is reading to Marianne on the lawn in front of Barton Cottage.

INT. BARTON COTTAGE. PARLOUR. DAY

MARIANNE is on the sofa by the window. She is pale, convalescent, and calm. She listens as BRANDON reads her the poem....We move back to find MRS DASHWOOD and ELINOR at the other end of the room, sewing peacefully.

Lee's decision to move Brandon and Marianne outside while Elinor watches them wistfully from the interior of the house does much to clarify the unavoidable truth that courtship and marriage are a woman's only means of escape from the lifelong imprisonment of her family home.

The interweaving of Thompson's thoughtfully chosen words with Lee's subtle visual treatment of the feminist subplot of those words allows for a thoughtful handling of one of Austen's most complex tales of family and financial politics. Indeed, in this version of *Sense and Sensibility, t*he author's intentionality is maintained partially because the writer and director were not one and the same, thus preventing the film from descending into a recklessly forceful and modern take on patriarchy that would do a disservice to Austen's carefully choreographed tale of hard-fought female independence. The delicate balance struck by Thompson and Lee in this project mimics the very balance that Austen strove to maintain when quietly protesting the unmovable barriers to freedom faced by women in her time.

On the other end of the spectrum from the slow-paced adaptation of Thompson and Lee is that of writer/director Patricia Rozema (*Mansfield Park, 1999,* written and directed by Patricia Rozema*),* who takes a wildly passionate, almost frenetic look at what is arguably Austen's most severe work, *Mansfield Park*. Rooted in the narrative of the novel, this film is certainly an adaptation of that work to some extent, but it also draws upon Austen's juvenilia and personal *c*orrespondence to tell the story of Fanny Price (played by Frances O'Connor), who is often called Austen's least likeable heroine. The novel's Fanny Price is a serious and devout young woman who is, essentially, a passive character in this tale of social mobility, but Rozema's film represents a decidedly different interpretation of her. In their article "The Mouse that Roared: Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park,*" *L*inda Troost and Sayre Greenfield comment that "The film's Fanny has both more character and less than Austen's original. She has more force and sparkle, but less certainty and passion." *(*Troost, *Greenfield,* 192*)* The "force and sparkle" of which the the authors speak is precisely what makes this film almost as much a work of historical fiction as an adaptation of Austen's work. In the

film Fanny Price is presented as a confident budding authoress; clearly an amalgam of the original character and of Jane Austen herself.

Rozema's departure from the text becomes apparent quite early in the film, in a montage sequence of Fanny growing from the frightened nine year-old that arrives at Mansfield into the bold eighteen year-old of Rozema's creation. The sequence begins with a young Fanny (played by Hannah Taylor Gordon) directly addressing the camera as she reads aloud from Austen's juvenile work "The History of England from the Reign of Henry the Fourth to the Death of Charles the First" (1791). It then fades into a shot of an approximately fourteen-year-old Fanny reading a (summary of a) later section of the same, and concludes with the adult Fanny once again directly addressing the camera as she presents her completed work to her cousin, Edmund (played by Johnny Lee Miller). Everything in this sequence—from the direct address of the camera to the self-satisfied curtsy that Fanny performs upon completion of her opus—paints a picture of an outgoing and secure heroine that Austen certainly would never recognize, and whose shameless self-approbation stands in direct contrast with the modesty that is the core of Austen's original. Following this scene is one in which Fanny childishly flirts with Edmund, chasing him through the house and across the grounds as she playfully whips at him with a jacket; actions much closer to what we would expect from her inconstant and indecorous cousin, Mary Rushworth (played by Victoria Hamilton).

When the film takes on Fanny's potential romance with the superficial and vain Henry Crawford (played by Alessandro Nivola), the "mouse that roared" completely ceases to be recognizable to those familiar with Austen's Fanny Price. In an incident taken from Austen's own life (in which Austen was engaged, for one night only to family friend Harris Bigg-Wither) and not from the novel, Rozema's Fanny briefly accepts Mr. Crawford's offer of marriage, only to repent and withdraw her acceptance the next morning. Once again Troost and Greenfield expertly pinpoint the consequences of the monumental shift in values reflected by Rozema's narrative choices: "The novel's Edmund and Henry can be weighed by their actions, their self-knowledge, their morality, and, if we have any doubts on these scores, we can trust Fanny's own unwavering attachment to Edmund… She would

never say, as does Rozema's Fanny after her flip-flop on Henry, 'I have no talent for certainty.'" (Troost, Greenfield, 190).

However, it is that very certainty that gives the novel's Fanny Price a reliable point of view and, ultimately, makes her the object of her cousin's desire. Without her unfailing virtue, her proclivity for quiet observation, and her primness, Fanny is nothing more than a less rich version of the endlessly shallow and opportunistic Mary Crawford (played by Embeth Davidtz) – a woman that Edmund reviles solely because she is nothing like Fanny. So, while Rozema's Mansfield Park bursts with a pleasing energy not present in the novel, it also strays so far from Austen's intentions that it recounts a different love story altogether, and not one that the original author would likely endorse as an homage to simplicity and moral fiber.

With a screenplay written by the adaptation juggernaut Andrew Davies (of BBC *Pride and Prejudice* fame, among others), 2007's ITV production of Northanger Abbey (Granada Productions, 2007; writ. Jon Jones)promised and, in many ways, delivered a satisfying transformation of the novel; it managed to remain fairly committed to Austen's overarching vision while still taking creative advantage of the capabilities of film. With a short and simple book like Northanger Abbey, Davies did not need to do any real rearranging of the narrative in order fully to tell Austen's story, and the result is a traditionally "faithful" adaptation in the sense of content. The issues, therefore, with this adaptation pertain to tone and, once again, intentionality when it is viewed through a lens of Austenian sensibility. While the novel is, at its core, a not-so-subtle send up of the gothic romances that Austen herself loved and a defense of novels themselves, it is also a bildungsroman that condemns Catherine Morland's overactive imagination and rewards her eventual ability to control said imagination. In purposefully laying bare Catherine's inner-life on the screen, Davies chooses to indulge the girlish reveries of his Catherine (played by Felicity Jones) by including several sequences of her novel-inspired fantasies. While these somewhat lascivious visual representations of Catherine's fantasies (only implied in the novel) certainly do take a certain amount of liberty with the restraint that Austen employs, they also do a nice job of bringing

the audience into the heroine's warped view of the world.

The film, on occasion, strays into the same type of blunt overstatement that characterizes the opening of Emma, the most notable of these moments occurring when Catherine is caught snooping around the bedroom of the late Mrs. Tilney. In the novel, Henry Tilney confronts Catherine and is shocked when she awkwardly implies that Henry's father killed Mrs. Tilney. Henry then makes a very guilt-inducing speech to Catherine in which he asks her to "…consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained," but that never involves the type of overt accusation that Austen would have deemed too emotionally aggressive for a man like Henry Tilney. In the film, however, this speech is transformed into a deeply charged and baldly stated "… and so you decided that my father must be a murderer? ...What sort of a fevered imagination must you have? Perhaps, after all, it is possible to read too many novels." One can almost feel Austen shudder at that last line. And a similarly mawkish moment (completely fabricated by Davies) comes near the end of the film; The camera trains on a copy of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* burning, and we then see a visibly subdued and maturely poised Catherine sitting at home amongst her younger siblings after her return from Bath and Northanger. They ask her whether or not staying in an old abbey was frightening, and she tells them that: "People who read too many stories imagine all sorts of horrid things about ghosts and murders, but it is very wrong of them to do so, and it can get you into serious trouble…" As a line at the end of a novel that extols the virtue of… the novel, I am not sure that Ms. Austen would approve…

SO WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US? With a seemingly untenable formula for the creation of a well-rounded Austen adaptation; some overtones of feminism can be good, but one mustn't employ too many because Austen wasn't at liberty to do so herself. And we mustn't take a serious heroine and make her silly and flirtatious, but we also shouldn't take a ridiculous and immature heroine and teach her too much about the world in too obvious a manner. A perfect set of criteria, indeed, if not for the fact that adaptations, like novels themselves, need room to breathe as beings born of the confines of an existing text. Given the endless possibilities that the film medium offers, adaptations must

explore these while training an ever-watchful eye upon that cursed source material. In the introduction to his book *The English Novel at the Movies,* Michael Klein writes: "A film of a novel, far from being a mechanical copy of the source, is a transposition or translation from one set of conventions for representing the world to another." (Klein, Parker, 3) This process of "translating" for modern audiences novels set in Regency England makes it inherently difficult cinematically to entertain in that understated fashion that is so recognizably Austenian, but it is important that writers and filmmakers keep in mind both her intentions and her sociohistorical context when attempting to do so. Without those, adaptations of her work would be simple romantic comedies devoid of the carefully crafted interactions that define her narratives. As Austen said herself in a letter to the royal chaplain, "I must keep my style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other."

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Sima Rabinowitz

WHAT SHE SAID

EIGHT HUNDRED DEAD WOMEN KEPT me alive. They came from around the world. The trip took some of them weeks, even months. One or two arrived overnight. I knew some of them before the accident, but most were strangers until they moved in with me. A larger number had experienced grave illness and knew what it meant to be frail, fragile, and in pain. Several died by their own hand. None of them spoke, but every one of them had something to say.

The books inhabited every surface of the apartment. Some remained crammed in padded envelopes in my mailbox until I figured out which stack could support one more volume before collapsing. Thick anthologies sat on the long library table to make them easier to reach. The smaller paperbacks were piled up in plastic crates, others were loose on the faux wood floor, shielding me from the artificial gleam of the laminate planks.

Lesbia Harford (Australia, 1899-1988)

Auta de Souza (Brazil, 1871-1901)

Blaga Dimitrova (Bulgaria, 1922-unknown)

Lady Weis (China, 1104-1113)

Rafaela Chacón Nardi (Cuba, 1926-2001)

Eita Anitam (Estonia, 1930-1998)

Joyce Mansour (Egypt, 1928-1966)

Maire Mhac an tSaoi (Ireland, 1927-unknown)

Ome Shushiki (Japan, 1608-1725)

Masha Thabi (Malawi, 1890-unknown)

Anna Roemer (Netherlands, 1584-1651)

Ruth Dallas (New Zealand, 1919-unknown)

Perzyna Avatam Bar Adiba (Morocco, 1700s)

Gloria de Sant'Anna (Portugal, 1925-2001)

Olga Kirsch (South Africa, 1924-1957)

Sor Violante de Ceu (Uganda, 1602-1693)

Ana Enriqueta Terán (Venezuela, 1918-unknown)

Words only say what is gone.
Ann Stanford (USA, 1916-1987)

I stored the notebooks and pens—"Inspiración™" black, blue, and gray hard cover spiral notebooks manufactured in Japan, ordered by the half-dozen online and the gel, felt-tip and rollerball inks (magenta, azure, nutmeg, violet)—in a slender metal cabinet, stark white with heavy narrow drawers, intended for artists' supplies. Only a few notebooks fit in each drawer, which helped me organize them by theme: the ancient Chinese poets with their moonsand melancholy; one hundred years of Poetry, stubboringly American; contemporary Caribbean writers, their slang, ripe tropical fruit; French poetry from the Middle Ages through the twentieth century clinging to form and meter; the collected poems (one slight volume) of a twentieth century Finnish poet, naïve and sincere; the awkward transcription of the incantatory poetry of a Mexican visionary; the wildly inventive, desperately sad metaphors of an Argentinian poet who died by suicide before she was forty; the pioneering spirit of early Canadian settlers, their stark frontiers; the poetry of escape—from loneliness, from confinement, from humiliation; from torture, murder, prison; the poetry of defiance—challenging gender bias, class constraints, the relentless demands of daily life.

Home. Finally. I don't know how I got here. I am disoriented and surprised. But I have a project. I have my poets. I will track down the women who are gone, perished, lost, unknown, unremembered. I will listen to the language of accident, cruelty, inebriation, grief, elation. I will revive these voices. I will learn to walk again. The language of survival.

I didn't read poetry in the hospital. When they woke me at 4:00 am for bloodwork and a quick, sloppy bath (cold inattentive spray and shampoo, the same dirty BandAids on the slick shower floor morning after morning) I begged for, and was sometimes allowed, an instant coffee (the burnt brew not offered until 8). I struggled into my clothes with the "grabber" (long handle, short, sharp claw to pull on pants and socks) and read the newspaper from the day before. A welcome escape, no matter how dire the news. When we gathered, a disheveled group of patients with hip, knee, back, and shoulder injuries for our

three-times daily walks, I focused with exquisite intensity on essays in *The New Yorker* (an American journalist in China, the musings of a philologist, assessments of American consumer culture) as I waited my turn to plod up and down the dullhallway with a disaffected aide at my side who seemed not to notice how I could barely keep my balance, attempting to lift one stiff, unwilling leg and then the other. And every evening, while on the other side of the flimsy, stained curtain my roommate watched *CSI* or *Criminal Minds* at a volume that could wake a hospital patient a continent away, I read slowly, slowly a novel of immense skill and beauty by the Canadian novelist Kim Echlin. I clutched the book to my chest, while I waited for the night nurse to bring my Oxy and the Heparin shot. I did not read poetry. Fiction, an anesthetic. Poetry, a stimulant. But I knew, if I could get home, poetry would be my salvation.

In the hospital, they gave me too little. At home, they allowed me too much. The doctor and physical therapist warned me not to let the pills wear off completely before the next dose (the medicine would be less effective because it would have, essentially, to catch up to the pain), and to take the medication at least thirty minutes before physical therapy sessions. This proved nearly impossible. I often had to wait as long as an hour for the nurse to bring me the pill. Sometimes I couldn't get it at all. While two levels of Oxy Contin were authorized (5 milligrams or 10, very small amounts, up to 80 may be prescribed), I was seldom able to get the nurse to bring me the higher dose. Dependency is a reasonable concern, I soon found out—by the third or fourth week at home, I was counting the hours from one Oxy pill to the next, unrelated to the intensity of pain in my hip—but the level of pain I endured in the hospital seemed en-

Oxycodone Hydrocholride®: extended release tablets an opioid analgesic for oral administration around the clock to treat post-operative pain needed for a long period. Exposes patients to the risks of opioid addiction, abuse and misuse, which can lead to death.

tirely unreasonable. It wasn't difficult to persuade the doctor to write a prescription for more when I returned to his office for a follow-up appointment, though he made it clear this would be the last refill. And it was.

A project, opioids, and pinotnoir have this in common—they will take you out of yourself. Out of your body. Out of the world around you. Away from what makes you anxious or fretful. Away. And they have this in common—they will distract you. From what annoys you. From what hurts. There are details you should keep in mind, but you are too distracted to notice. They will not take away your pain, but they will loosen its grip on your attention. They have this in common—they will help you sleep and hinder your rest. Easy, early drugged slumber. Then, insomnia. And they have this in common—they make you think that what you are doing matters. You need to believe this to keep working. They enhance a narrow, near-sighted concentration so exquisite, reliable, and unique that gradually the drug (project, opioid, pinot) feels necessary to accomplish anything at all.

Domaine Jean-Noël Gagnard
Cono Sur
Cloudline Cellars
Pegasus Bay Waipa Valley
Au Bon Climat Santa Barbara County
Bodega Chacra RÍo Negro
Siduri Russian River Valley
Decoy Sonoma County
Castle Rock
Good Hope Point
DeLoach Heritage Reserve
Château de Sancerre Rouge
Stoller Vineyards JV Estate Dundee Hills
Ken Forrester Cape Breeze
Clos de la Chance Santa Cruz
Finca del Portillo Bodega Salentin
Pencarrow Martinborough
Cosumano Pinot Nero
Domaine de La Folie Clos de Bellecroix
A to Z Pinot Noir

I was able to work long before I could return to my job. My boss allowed me to stay at home (writing fundraising proposals) with daily phone check-in and conference calls with colleagues. I'd start in the middle of the night, I was in too much pain when lying supine to sleep (a second surgery a year later to remove the misplaced metal plate to which my fractured hip had been fused during the first surgery helped)

and remain "on the job" until the middle of the afternoon. Then, I'd "transition." I got out the notebooks. The pens. Another pill. The poems. I numbered the notebook pages, dated every verse I copied, listed the title of the poem it was from, and the original source, if I did not have it. I copied fragments and whole poems. I copied languages I can speak or read (French, Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese) and languages I do not (Irish, Danish, Polish, Dutch). Dates and page numbers in blue. Section headers (a new book/a new era/a new country) in red or pink or purple. Verse in black. Remarks or notes in green or orange. Titles underlined. Poems in quotes. The poet's year of birth (when known) and death (often unknown) in parentheses. The poet's name recorded with a felt tip pen and boxed with a thick outline. The obsessive nature of the routine was part of the project's daily allure. The addictive discipline.

Unwrapping the book-of-the-day was part of my recovery. The morning ritual a trek to the mailroom (long hallways, stairs), to see what had been delivered the night before. There was something nearly every day. I was especially intrigued by the abandoned books: used booksellers sent inexpensive volumes culled from Friends of the Library sales. Musty. Plain grainy covers, green and brown. Crisp, yellowing pages. We were rescuing each other.

My first big outing, once I graduated from eight weeks with the clunky silver walker to the freedom of a cane, was to the doctor's office (when I convinced him to renew the Oxy prescription), followed by a trip to the New York Society Library on the Upper East Side. The oldest library in Manhattan, it has a spectacular and unusual collection of books in all genres and in the summer (it was June) allows patrons to withdraw books for three months, which suited my situation perfectly. The library is located in a beautifully renovated old building, and while the claustrophobic elevator is antiquated and slow, with is heavy gated door, the ten floors of stacks are accessible.

Lovelier in New York City,
yet the same.
Phoebe Cary, USA (1824-1897)

It is exceptionally hard to be physically disabled in New York. Cracked and crooked steps. Elevators perpetually out of order. High

curbs. No ramps. Frantic foot traffic on nearly every street. The pushing and shoving. Impatient cab drivers. The buses with steps so steep even fullyable-ied riders struggle to climb them. Heavy glass doors impossible to open with one hand or limited strength. No amount of knocking seems to rouse attention or assistance.

A heavy door is how I got hurt. It was an unusually warm early spring day. Over my right shoulder I carried a cotton coat and two large bags of books and notebooks (another obsessive project, a collaboration with a composer in Brooklyn abandoned after the accident). To open the difficult door, I mustered every ounce of strength with such force that I was flung forward, and, unbalanced by the weight I was carrying, crashed onto my left side on the granite floor on the other side of the door. I was broken in two, but I didn't know that yet. And not knowing I couldn't walk and shouldn't try to move, I managed with help, to get myself into a chair, a cab, and home. Later, when the ambulance team saw my crooked leg, ankle and foot, they told me I had almost certainly broken my hip. I was sure they were wrong. Twenty-four hours later, as they prepped me for surgery after a night in the ER and a day sleeping immobilized in my hospital room, the anesthesiologist asked me what medications I took. I told him, "None. Ever." He laughed. "You've had eighteen different drugs today." It was just the beginning.

I think I've arranged it that the hospital work is one world and mine at home is another.

--Lorine Niedecker to Louis Zukofsky
September 2, 1957

And that comma bothers me.

--Lorine Niedecker to Louis Zukofsky, 1960

I sat down at 1:30 to chicken, cauliflower, jello, biscuits, and cake.

--Lorine Niedecker to Louis Zukofsky
February 18, 1962

Silly, but lately I've become very painfully interested in poetry!

--Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman
Date not recorded

The more I read and copied, the more there was to read and copy. I kept discovering new poets from every era and every region of the world. On the Internet, I investigated library sites and archives searching for my poets and ordering their books

or books about them from libraries, bookstores, and online sellers. I read scholarly essays in digital journals available through public library databases seeking new poets more than analysis about my poets' techniques or their cultural and social contexts. If a poet was prolific, but the work didn't appeal to me, I didn't read the whole of it. But when I found a writer I loved, I tried to read everything she'd written (Inger Christensen, Alejandra Pizarnik, Pat Lowther, Dahlia Ravovitch).

Some of my poets were prolific correspondents. I loved their letters. Their travels. Their jobs. Their kitchens. Their gardens. The music they listened to. The books they bought or borrowed. Critiques of other poets' work. Critiques of their own. Their disputes with publishers.

Argos Public Library
North Michigan Street
Argos, Indiana

Buffalo Erie County Public Library
Lafayette Square
Buffalo, New York

Madison Public Library
201 W. Mifflin Street
Madison, Wisconsin

The system I devised for organizing and recording what I read was regimented and disciplined. I rarely deviated from it. The order in which I approached my poets and what I chose to copy was scattered and random:

A lyrical achievement	*Where twilight crumbles into dust* --Cécile Périn, France (1877-1959)
Themes capturing my mood	*I searched for myself until I grew weary* --Lal Ded, Kashmir (1300s)
Any reference to pain	*Patterns hurt across the stranger city* --June Jordan, United States (1936-2002)
Every reference to wine	*Where is my home? I forget except when I am drunk* --Li Qingzhao, China (2084-1110 B.C.E.)
Images that kept me awake	*Exile of exile has withered my skin* --Rachel Morago, Italy (1790-1871)
Companions in sleeplessness	*A life forever wakeful* --Kadya Molodowksy, Poland (1894-1950)
Advice that lessened my agitation	*Take up paper and pen* *be not less celebrated* --Laura Terracina, Italy (1511-1577)

Titles I liked	*The Third House* --Amy Károlyi, Hungary (1909-?)
Descriptions of life in the city	*Morning in the city fills empty streets wall to wall* --Patricia Beer, England (1919-1999)
Compelling rhymes	*No poder creer, no poder ser* --Susana Thénon, Argentina (1935-1991)
The sadness of yearning	*Every waiting moment is a fold of sorrow* --Lynette Roberts, Wales (1909-1995)
The desire for notoriety	*Even now…like a legend* --No Ch'onmyong, Korea (1912-1957)
Compulsive tendencies	*What counts is always the word* --Daria Meranti, Italy (1914-1995)
A larger purpose	*Grief dazes our nation's artists* --Margaret Tuyet, Vietnam (1914-?)
Writing instructions	*Omit! Omit!* --Akiko Yosana, Japan (1868-1942)
A desperate landscape	*All images vanish, device dies in this presence* --Susan Frances Harrison, Canada (1859-1935)
A wish	*We love the capacity to think of nothing* --Inger Christensen, Denmark (1935-2009)
Love between women	*Hiding my tears for her* --Tomiko Yamakawa, Japan (1878-1909)
More wine	*transfiguring the world* --Jean Garrigue, United States (1914-1972)

I copied and copied. My poets became a new drug—I needed them to get through the day. I never confused their work with my own, but they were revived and breathed through the act of transcription. The poets by era. The poets by region. The poets by theme. The poets by publication. The poets by era and re-

Transcribe

Tran—across; *Scribe*—write, copy, translate, transpose something in one language using another language.

gion. The poets by region and theme. The poets by era and theme. The poets by era and publication. The poets by region and publication. The poets by theme and publication. Pages and pages of spreadsheets.

Some of the poets included in the manuscript are familiar to readers of English: H.D.; Gertude Stein, Audre Lorde. Others are known primarily or only to a small readership of specialists in the literatures of the places and cultures to which they belonged: Izumi Shikibu of Tanzania, Parvin E'tesami of Persia. All are deceased.

I tried not to think about what I was going to create or how I was going to organize the contents of twenty-six notebooks of six dozen pages each, filled with the verse of eight hundred women from more than sixty countries. I tried not to think about withdrawal from the comfort and haze of routine and obsession. I pretended I was not broken and disabled.

What She Said took three and a half years to complete, the first line of poetry I copied to the last line I wrote myself. I was sad beyond expression when the project was done. How to make it through the day without my poets, with the compulsive transcribing. One long piece from the manuscript was published, incorporating fragments from hundreds of the poets I'd been living with. The manuscript as a whole interested no one: an undeniable failure.

Elegy

Whose voice?
whose long-lost vowels?

O, what you
meant/mean to me

I was/am without
you no one

I will be letter
by letter myself

And no one
else none other

And only you
every small

unexpected breath

You walked
across my fractured

Life with your
strangled syntax

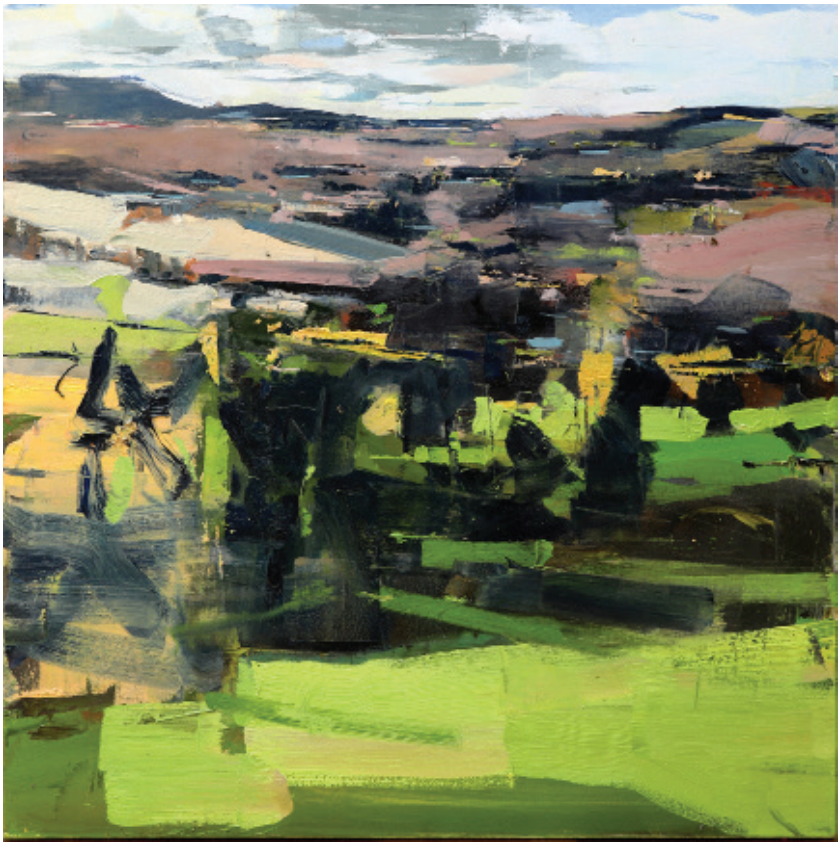
And nightmare rhythms
I will take you

With me when
I leave this world

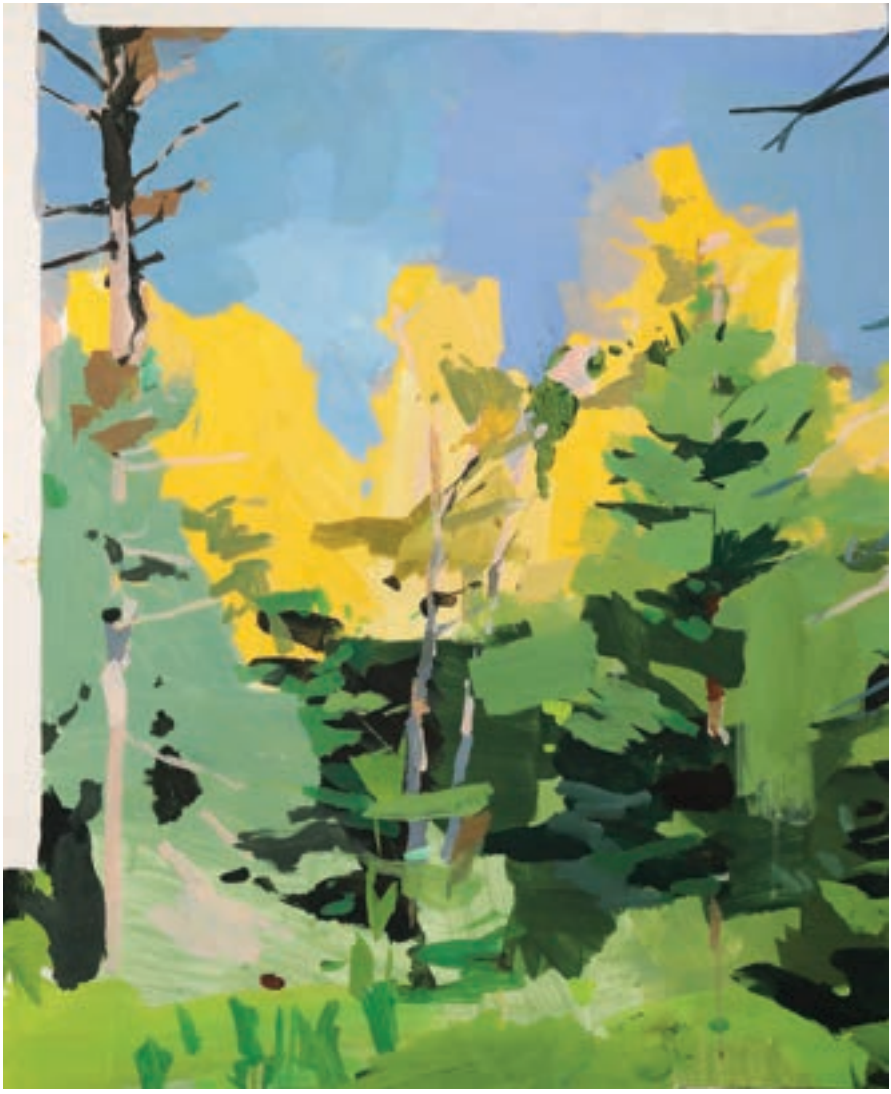
I want these voices to live, but not as much as I needed them to

survive. I could tell you that I have given up on the idea of a life-saving project. The daily obsessions, the compulsive routines. Chardonnay, chenin blanc, cabernet. But it would be a lie. The notebooks of copied verse: I think I will keep them. Discarding them would be a loss I am not sure I can endure.

That's all I can say.



Shane Neufeld, *Gallatin, 2019*
oil on canvas



Shane Neufeld, *Waldinneres, 2019*
acrylic on paper, 29 x 23 inches

MONIZA ALVI was born in Pakistan and grew up in Hertfordshire. Her poetry collections include *The Country at My Shoulder, Europa* and *At the Time of Partition*. Her most recent collection is *Blackbird, Bye Bye* (Bloodaxe, 2018). Her poem in this issue appeared in that book.

A. ANUPAMA is a poet, critic, essayist, and translator whose work has appeared in *Drunken Boat, Waxwing, Juked,* and other journals. Anupama lives with her family in Nyack, New York.

THOMAS BELLER writes frequently for the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. His most recent book is *J.D. Salinger: The Escape Artist*.

IVONNE GORDON CARRERA was born in Ecuador. She is a poet, literary critic, and literary translator. She is the author of several books, including *Ocurrencias del porvenir; El tórax de tus ojos;* and *En nombre del silencio*. Her work has been included in anthologies in the United States, Latin America, Uzbeskistan, and Europe, and translated into English, Polish, Greek, Romanian, and Flemish. She is the recipient of numerous international awards and h r work is recorded at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

MRB CHELKO is author of the chapbook, *Manhattations*. Her poems appear widely in journals, including *Bennington Review, Crazyhorse, Gulf Coast,* and *Poetry International*. She lives in New York.

DAVID CONSTANTINE has published twelve volumes of poetry, two novels and five story collections. In 2018 Bloodaxe published his *Selected Poetry of Hölderlin*. His poem in this issue, "Both Knowing, Neither Saying," will appear in a collection this year by Bloodaxe.

HEIDI DAVIDSON-DREXEL is a teacher, writer, and parent living in Portland, Maine. Her work has appeared in several online journals.

DANIELE DE SERTO's work has appeared in journals such as P*ortland Review, Fiction Southeast, Litro Magazine,* and elsewhere. He lives in Rome, Italy.

SHARON DOLIN is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Manual for Living* (U. of Pittsburgh Press). Her prose memoir *Hitchcock Blonde* is out soon from Terra Nova Press . She is Associate Editor of Barrow Street Press.

HAN DONG has published several volumes of poetry as well as novels and collections of stories. The first full-length collection in English of his poems, *A Phone Call from Dalian*, was translated by Nicky Harman. Han Dong is also a cofounder of the magazine *Them*.

ERICA EHRENBERG's poems have appeared in the *Paris Review,* the *NY Review of Books, Slate,* the *New Republic,* and Everyman's Library Pocket Poet Series.

ELI ELIAHU's publications include *Epistles to the Children,* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved); *Ir veh-beh-helot* [*City and Fears*] (Am Oved), and *Ani veh lo malakh* [*I, and not an An-*

gel] (Helicon). He works as an editor at the daily *Ha-aretz*.

At a time when Iranian literature was dominated by men, FORUGH FARROKHZAD (1935-1967) began publishing poems that pushed the boundaries of what could be expressed by women. Her work remains seminal.

SARA FEMENELLA'S poems have been published in *Pleiades, The New Orleans Review, Salamander,* and elsewhere. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

ELIZABETH FODASKI is Chair of English at Saint Ann's School and the author of two books of poetry, *Fracas* (Krupskaya) and *Document* (Roof Books). Currently she is working on a collection of essays.

CATHY FUERST is the head of the Preschool at Saint Ann's School. Her poems have appeared in the S*aint Ann's Review* and the *Seneca Review* and at *Proteotypes*.

JOANNA FUHRMAN is the author of five books of poetry, including *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (Hanging Loose) and Pageant (Alice James). Her poems have appeared in the *Believer, Fence, New American Writing*, and elsewhere, as well as in *The Pushcart Prize 2011* and *365 Poems for Every Occasion* (Abrams).

CHITRA GANESH's wall installations, comics, charcoal drawings, and mixed media works on paper often take historical and mythic texts as points of departure to complicate received ideas of iconic female forms. Upcoming projects include the Queer Power Facade Commssion at the Leslie Lohman Museum, 2020-2021. Ganesh lives and works in Brooklyn.

ADAM J. GELLINGS is a poet from Columbus, Ohio. His work has appeared in *DMQ Review, Salamander, Willow Springs* and elsewhere.

GABRIELLE GLANCY is the author of several books, including the poetry collection, *I'm Already Disturbed Please Come In*, and *The Art of the College Essay*. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *American Poetry Review* and *New American Writing*. She is also a translator of works by Marguerite Duras.

EAMON GRENNAN's most recent collections are *Out of Sight: New & Selected Poems* (Graywolf) and *There Now* (Graywolf, and Gallery Press). For the past decade he has also written short "plays for voices" on Irish literary and historical subjects for Curlew Theatre Company in Connemara.

RACHEL HADAS' latest collection is *Poems for Camilla* (2018); also in 2018 her verse translations of Euripides' two Iphigenia plays were published. *Love and Dread* is forthcoming.

NICHOLAS HAMBURGER is a writer based in New Orleans. He was recently awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to pursue creative writing in France.

DONALD ILLICH has published poetry in journals such as the *Iowa Review, Fourteen Hills,* and *Cold Mountain Review*. He recently published a book, *Chance Bodies* (The Word Works).

MARC JAFFEE is a poet, playwright, and novelist. He lives in Brooklyn.

CONSTANCE JOHNSON is a freelance journalist based in New York and working primarily in television news.

DIANE JOSEFOWICZ's fiction has appeared in *Conjunctions, Fence,* and *Verity La*; other work is forthcoming in *Sou'Wester.* She lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where she serves as communications director for S*wing Left RI.*

J. KATES, poet and literary translator, lives in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire.

JARRETT KAUFMAN's stories have appeared in *Owen Wister Review, The Worcester Review, Fiction Southeast,* and other journals. His awards include the Ernest Hemingway Flash Fiction Prize, and his work has been anthologized in *The Storyteller Magazine, Short Story America*, and elsewhere.

SIMONE KEARNEY is a writer and artist living in New York. She is author of *Days* (Belladonna Press, forthcoming), *My Ida* (Ugly Duckling Presse), and *In Threes*, a chapbook (Minute Books). She has published poems in the *Brooklyn Rail, Boston Review, PEN Poetry Series,* and elsewhere.

ALEXANDER KROLL is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. He has exhibited his work nationally and internationally including exhibitions at Fredric Snitzer Gallery in Miami, Praz-Delavallade in Los Angeles and Johannes Vogt Gallery in New York.

JEFF LANDMAN is an artist, designer, and builder working out of Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

JENNA LE is author of *Six Rivers* (NYQ Books) and *A History of the Cetacean American Diaspora* (Indolent Books). She won *Poetry By The Sea*'s 2019 and 2020 sonnet crown contests. She lives and works in New York.

MARISSA LEVIEN is a writer and artist living in New York. Her work has been published in *Slice, LARB PubLab*, and elsewhere, and her first novel, *The World Gives Way*, will be published by Orbit in 2021.

RACHEL LYON is the author of *Self-Portrait with Boy* (Scribner). Her short work has appeared in publications such as *One Story, Longreads, Joyland*, and *Electric Literature.* She is Editor-in-Chief of the literary journal *Epiphany*, and cofounder of the Ditmas Lit reading series in her native Brooklyn.

J.W. MCCORMACK is the fiction editor of *The Baffler.*

In 2009 FAYRE MAKEIG received a PEN Translation Grant to translate the book *Tasian,* the collected free verse of the contemporary Persian poet H. E. Sayeh. She works as editor and translator and lives in New York City.

CYNTHIA MANICK is author of *Blue Hallelujahs* (Black Lawrence Press) and editor of *Soul Sister Revue: A Poetry Compilation* (Jamii Publishing). She has received the Lascaux Prize in Collected Poetry, and her work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books,* the *Wall Street Journal,* and elsewhere.

Born in Russia, A. MOLOTKOV moved to the U.S. in 1990 and began writing in En-

glish in 1993. His poetry collections are *The Catalog of Broken Things, Application of Shado*ws and *Synonyms for Silence.* Published by K*enyon, Iowa, Antioch,* and other publications, Molotkov co-edits T*he Inflectionist Review.*

SHANE NEUFELD, RA has worked in urban, residential, commercial as well as institutional architecture: among these projects figure Pierhouse, a residential building to be completed on Brooklyn's waterfront, and RAMPed Up, a USGBC National Competition Winner for an affordable house in New Orleans. Currently he oversees his own office while pursuing a career as an artist.

LEE OLESON was born in Connecticut and raised in California. He has worked as a newspaper reporter, a railroad brakeman, and at various jobs around the country. His stories have appeared in a dozen literary journals.

MAGGIE PALEY is the author of *Bad Manners*, a novel; *The Book of the Penis*, non-fiction; *Elephant*, a chapbook of sestinas; and many magazine articles and book reviews. She lives and works in New York.

EM J. PARSLEY's work has appeared or is upcoming in *Birdcoat Quarterly, Vagabond City Lit, After the Pause,* and elsewhere. When not in El Paso, where they attend the U. of Texas at El Paso's MFA program, they live in Kentucky.

GLEN POURCIAU's third collection of stories is forthcoming from Four Way Books. His first collection, *Invite*, won the 2008 Iowa Short Fiction Award. His stories have appeared in A*GNI Online, Epoch,* the *Paris Review,* and elsewhere. He lives in Galveston, Texas.

SIMA RABINOWITZ is author of *The Jewish Fake Book* (Elixir Press) and *Murmuration* (New Michigan Press). Recent work appears in *Independent Variable, Writers Resist, and Slag Glass City*. She lives in the Bronx.

WENDELL RICKETTS is a writer, editor and a translator from Italian. His translations include *The Wrong Door: The Complete Plays of Natalia Ginzburg; Woman Bites Dog: The Mafia's War on Italian Women Journalists*; short stories by Giovannino Guareschi, Matteo B. Bianchi, Michele Murgia, and others, and a series of studies on Erasmus and 16th-century printing and publishing in early-modern Europe.

CINDY RINNE creates art and writes in San Bernardino, CA. She is the author of several books, including *Mapless with Nikia Chaney* (Cholla Needles Press), *Moon of Many Petals* (Cholla Needles Press), and *Listen to the Codex*. Her translations of Ivonne Gordon Carrera's poems have been published internationally.

ZACK ROGOW was co-winner of the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Award for André Breton's *Earthlight*. His co-translation of *Shipwrecked on a Traffic Island and Other Previously Untranslated Gems by Colette* was published by SUNY Press, and his translation of Colette's *Green Wheat* by Sarabande.

Poet and playwright EVGENY SABUROV (1946-2009), born in Yalta, had a distinguished career as an economist and bank director. He began to be published abroad in the 1970s. In English translation his poetry has appeared in the *Hawai'i Review,*

Inventory, Poetry International, and *St. Petersburg Review.*

MIA SARA(POCHIELLO) lives between Los Angeles and New York with her husband and children. Her poems have been published in various journals and she is currently working on a memoir.

MARCUS LESLIE SINGLETON's exhibitions include Office & Gallery, Los Angeles; Medium Tings, Brooklyn; and University of Washington, Seattle. He lives and works in Brooklyn.

MARTIN SKOBLE is poet-in-residence at Saint Ann's School, where he created a school-wide poetry program and continues to teach a workshop for highschoolers. His poems have appeared in various journals, and in 2017 he was part of the *dial-a-poem* tribute to John Giorno at the Red Bull Arts Center.

CHLOE SMITH recently presented the essay herein at the Literature and Film Association's national conference. She holds an MA in English literature from Stony Brook University and is currently Head of the High School at Saint Ann's School, from which she graduated in 1998.

RENÉ SOLIVAN's stories have appeared in *Black Denim, Northridge Review, River Poets Journal*, among others. He is the winner of awards, and his plays have been produced or workshopped at the Mark Taper Forum, Geva Theatre, Off-Broadway's Spanish Repertory, and elsewhere.

NATALYA SUKHONOS's poems have appeared in *American Journal of Poetry, Driftwood Press, Literary Mama,* and elsewhere. Her chapbook *Parachute* was published by Kelsay Books/Aldrich Press.

MARCELA SULAK is the author of the lyrical translator's memoir, *Mouth Full of Seeds.* Her third poetry collection is forthcoming with Black Lawrence Press. She has co-edited *Family Resemblance: An Anthology and Exploration of 8 Hybrid Literary Genres* and has translated five collections of poetry.

ANNA SUN has published a collection of stories in Chinese (*The Blue Notebook*, Shanghai Literary Arts); a novel in English (D*reamers of the Absolut*e, Sylph Edition); and essays on Chinese literature in the *London Review of Book*s and the *Kenyon Review.*

Trinidad-born MERVYN TAYLOR is the author of several poetry collections, including *No Back Door,* which received the Paterson Award for Literary Excellence, and V*oices Carry,* both published by Shearsman Books. His latest, *Country of Warm Snow,* is forthcoming also from Shearsman.

ARSENY TARKOVSKY (1807-1989) was born in Elisavetgrad. He translated poems from Turkmen, Georgian, Armenian and Arabic, and published numerous volumes of his own verse.

MARIELLE VIGOURT was born in Reims, France and began teaching at St. Ann's School while preparing her dissertation on the vision of Giorgio de Chirico as painter and writer, at Syracuse University. She chaired the St. Ann's French Department,

later the Romance Languages Department, from 1991 until her retirement in 2015.

ALLA VILNYANSKAYA was born in the Ukraine and came to Philadelphia in 1989. Her work has been published variously online and in print, and she is working on her first full-length book of poetry.

ASIYA WADUD is the author of *Crosslight for Youngbird, day pulls down the sky...a filament in gold leaf*, written with Okwui Okpokwasili, *Syncope* and the forthcoming *No Knowledge Is Complete Until It Passes Through My Body.* Recent work appears i*n e-flux journal, BOMB Magazine, Poem-a-Day,* and elsewhere. She lives and works in Brooklyn.

JERALD WALKER's essays have appeared in the *Harvard Review, Mother Jones,* the *Missouri Review,* and other publications, including the *Best American Essays* series. He is the author of *The World in Flames: A Black Boyhood in a White Supremacist Doomsday Cult; Street Shadows: A Memoir of Race, Rebellion, and Redemption,* winner of the PEN New England Award for Nonfiction; and *How to Make a Slave and Other Essays,* which includes "Testimony," the piece appearing herein.

CHRISTOPHER WALL's play *Dreams Of the Washer King* premiered Off Broadway at Playwrights Realm. He was commissioned by New World Symphony to write a play with music called *The Inherent Sadness of Low-Lying Areas* that explores life with PTSD, and his essays have appeared in the *LA Review of Books,* the *Missouri Review,* the *Gettysburg Review,* and elsewhere.

Along with Sonja Foss, WILLIAM WATERS is co-author of *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation.* His poetry has been widely published.

JODY WINER's poetry has appeared in *Epoch,* the *Massachusetts Review, Open City,* the *Spoon River Poetry Review, a*nd other journals. Raised in Florida, she lives in New York.

Hebrew poet SAAR YACHIN has published four collections: *Crimes Against Despair, Hebrew Epitaph*, *Divided by Seven,* and *Kitonot Vekabin.* He is working on a novel, a fan-fiction ripoff of Theodor Herzl.

MATVEI YANKELEVICH's most recent book of poetry is *Some Worlds for Dr. Vogt* (Black Square). He translated T*oday I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (Ardis/Overlook), and is co-translator with Eugene Ostashevsky of Alexander Vvedensky's *An Invitation for Me to Think* (NYRB Poets), which received an NEA Award. He is a founding member of the Ugly Duckling Presse editorial collective.

HANNAH ZAHEER's work has appeared or is forthcoming in A*GNI, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, South West Review*, and elsewhere. Currently she lives in Manila, Philippines and is working on a novel and a story collection.