

TENTH *Muse*

VOLUME IV, SPRING 2014

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The staff would especially like to thank Professor Emerita Katherine Fischer, an innovator in and beyond the classroom and mentor to many, both students and colleagues. With her colleague in the English department, Ann Pelelo, Katie put the idea of a literary magazine at Clarke on the table and, largely due to the *Tenth Muse* endowment established in her honor, we'll be feasting for years to come.

COVER ART, "APPLE I" AND "APPLE II"
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Four years ago, the *Tenth Muse* was a mere idea dreamed up by Katie Fischer and Ann Pelelo and then made real by students in a small writing class at Clarke. Now, the *Tenth Muse* is a fixture on campus, a publication "for and by us." Having read all four volumes and been an editor for two years, I can honestly say it has been remarkable to witness the growth of the staff and the production as a whole. The writing and artwork in Volume IV of the *Tenth Muse* is a tangible copy of the dedication of a visionary group of individuals on staff.

Being an editor of the *Tenth Muse* for two years has been a blessing and an unforgettable college experience. When I started last year, I had only a vague idea about what a literary magazine was, but through the help of veteran staff members and my remarkable faculty advisor, I was able to jump right into the editor position, one that I learned quickly. However, being a part of the *Tenth Muse* staff has done more than teach me about literary magazines; it has given me new, challenging, and, of course, fun experiences.

The incredible experiences and the volume you hold in your hands would not have been possible without many people. First, I give my great appreciation to the staff of the *Tenth Muse*. Your hard work, dedication, creativity, and love for this publication have more than paid off and I hope you are as proud of Volume IV as I am.

Secondly, I would like to thank our faculty advisor, Anna Kelley. Without you this magazine would not be possible. Your time, dedication, and passion have not only made this publication possible, but have helped me grow immensely the last two years. Thank you for giving me the privilege to be an editor and helping teach me what it means to be a leader.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to the contributors, readers, the Clarke community, and all of the *Tenth Muse* supporters. Every year you give this publication wings.

Immeasurable thanks,

Susan Vaassen
Editor-in-Chief

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GRACE JENNEJAHN



Vintage
digital

MARY ZANGER

Wake Up

Wake up.

This is the beginning.

This is where it starts.

Pick up your lungs and your heart and start moving because the road will kick you to the curb where you will wait for a bus that never comes.

Wake up.

Let this day be beautifully ordinary.

Let us find valor in “getting by.”

Let us find joy in each other’s imperfections.

Wake up.

The world is ours if we want it. Not a gift, but an earned agreement with time.

Say yes. Sign that contract.

Wake up.

You are blessed to have made it to today. Wake up.

We will not all make it to tomorrow. Wake up.

There is purpose in our creating

And destroying in decaying.

Wake up.

What is now will not be forever.

Forever is already gone.

Wake up.

Slam the doors of missed opportunities and feel the fickle friendliness of regret.

Listen to the words of wisdom from those who have had the courage to wake up more times than they would like to admit.

Relinquish control,
 Get wrapped up in someone else
 feel the catharsis
 know that your heart does not have to be your own burden if you
 just
 Wake up.
 Let the sun be your mast.
 Let it raise you up from your pillow
 and into the shower.
 Processed rain that flows over your youthful bones.
 Cleansing you for another day
 Awakened.
 Be inspired by the fearless
 Jealous of the outlandish
 and in awe of anyone who walks another path.
 For they are walking, and that is brave.
 The ones without love are the ones we should save.
 Wake up.
 The world is a mess.
 War and fear and ignorance run rampant on our planet and yet
 we are here.
 There is goodness in this room
 cling to it
 binge on it
 because the world is also stunning.
 Open your eyes. Wake up.
 Tune in your ears.
 When we are ancient beings with more definition in the wrinkles
 on our faces than in the dictionaries on our shelves,
 Promise me that we'll turn up our hearing aids and listen to the
 world around us.
 Listen to the beautiful chaos that surrounds us.
 Wake up.
 I hope you've been listening.
 Are you awake?

HANNAH GOLDSMITH

The Tales of Captain Spiffy John

“Engines?”

“Check.”

“Rocket boosters?”

“Check.”

“Laser beams?”

“Check.”

“Good work, Lieutenant General Annie! How’s the radar look, Private Teddy?”

“...”

“Great! We’re ready for takeoff. Start the jet engines, Lieutenant!”

“Aye, aye, Captain Spiffy John!” I turned the ignition key and pressed all necessary buttons and various switches across the wide control panel. “Beep-boop-bop...Click-click-click...We have lift off!”

Captain Spiffy John took his place beside my seat. The space helmet hanging around his neck by the strap bounced off his back as he sat down. After adjusting the goggles resting on his forehead, he grabbed the Frisbee-shaped steering wheel. “Full speed ahead!”

“Errr-VOOM!”

“Next stop... Planet Z-158!”

We rocketed out of the atmosphere, stars and planets flashing by as we achieved warp speed. The engines hummed low as we whizzed through the solar systems on our third intergalactic mission that afternoon.

“What’s that, Private Teddy?” Captain Spiffy John asked.

“...”

"You see something on the radar?"

"..."

"There's an asteroid storm coming up?! Keep the engines steady, Lieutenant General Annie! This will be tricky!"

Captain Spiffy John began twisting the steering wheel this way and that, skillfully maneuvering around the comets careening toward our tiny ship. I did my best to keep the ship's rockets in check by strategically turning knobs on the control panel while Private Teddy sat lopsided beside me, watching the radar.

"KA-BLOOEY!" We jolted forward as a massive rock collided with the side of our rocket ship. "We've been hit!" Captain Spiffy John shouted.

I frantically began hitting buttons, my fingers flying across the dashboard. "Beep-bop-boop-boop... Nothing's working, Captain Spiffy John! Our jet engines were knocked off! We're doomed!"

"Don't be silly, Lieutenant General Annie! I'm the bravest space explorer ever! I'll make sure we're safe!"

The steering wheel shook violently in Captain Spiffy John's hands and sirens squealed. "Eeee-woo-eee-wooo-eee-woo... Warning! Red alert! We're going down!"

"AAAHHH!!" We screamed as our ship rocketed towards the closest planet.

"Ka-BLAM!"

"Oof!" The three of us were thrown, tumbling over our seats as the ship crash landed. We lay there for a moment, in shock from the impact.

Captain Spiffy John sat up. "Everybody still alive?"

"Yes, sir!" I confirmed.

"Private Teddy?" We both looked over at Private Teddy lying face down in a pile of rubble.

"..."

"Fantastic! Let's take a damage report."

I helped Private Teddy get back up and the three of us crawled out of the smoldering wreckage to examine the pitiful state of our ship.

"What's your opinion, Lieutenant General Annie?"

"Well... it looks like our fuel packs blew up and the engines fell off and the windshield is broken. But with a little work, it should be okay."

"Or we could be stranded here forever!"

"Oh, no!"

"Let's go exploring."

"Aye, aye!"

"Hang on," Captain Spiffy John instructed as he crawled back into the ship, reemerging shortly after with a pair of shiny yellow

weapons. "We need laser guns. You can have the Nerf 500."

"Yay! This one's my favorite!" I took the weapon and stuffed it in the back of my pants.

"I know it is." Captain Spiffy John smiled and ruffled my hair. I stood proudly with my hands on my hips, feeling prepared for an alien attack. The last time a monster got us we were left with scrapes and bruises, but the laser gun in my waistband gave me a new sense of bravery.

"Private Teddy, look after the ship," Captain Spiffy John instructed as he clipped the chinstrap of his space helmet and snapped his goggles into place. "Let's go, Lieutenant!"

"Aye, aye!" I pulled up my purple, rubber adventure boots and followed after him, leaving Private Teddy leaning against the side of the ship.

The two of us marched across the vast, hot, rocky terrain. We climbed over mountains and dusty wastelands until suddenly we came across a strange boiling lake, boulders peeking out periodically across the surface.

"Watch your step, Lieutenant! The entire lake is made of lava! You could burn your foot right off!"

"Oh no! How are we supposed to get to the other side?"

"Jump from rock to rock. Like this. Watch me!" Captain Spiffy John hopped from one boulder to another until he was halfway across the lake. Suddenly, his foot slipped from under him and he fell towards the rolling bubbles of the lava. He caught himself on another rock just in time—his feet balancing on the edge of one boulder, his hands bracing himself on another, and his body arched over the lava.

"Careful, Captain! Don't fall!"

"Don't worry about me! I'm the bravest spaceman ever, remember?" he said straightening himself out. "Come on, Lieutenant Annie! I think there's a machine shop on the other side of this lake. Maybe they can help us with our ship!"

"Aye, aye!"

I took a deep breath, mustering up the courage to take that first jump off the bank and onto a lava-surrounded boulder. I closed my eyes and leaped, my purple, rubber adventure boots landing solidly in the middle of the rock.

"I did it, Captain! Look!"

"Yep. I see! Keep going, Lieutenant General Annie! You can do it!"

I skipped from rock to rock until I caught up with Captain Spiffy John. Suddenly there was a slam even louder than our ship crashing, followed by the steady thudding of footsteps. Captain Spiffy John and I froze to the spot.

“Annie? John? Where the hell are you?” we heard a voice roar off in the distance.

I grabbed Captain Spiffy John’s hand. His fingers wrapped around mine. “Shh...” he whispered.

“Answer me!” the roar thundered. I sucked in a sharp breath, and I heard Captain gulp beside me.

“We’re...we’re down here!” he called back. The thudding footsteps grew louder until we caught sight of what had caused the sound—a creature more terrifying than the ship crash or even the lava lake itself. It was a great, terrible, hairy beast with a smell that burned my nose.

“What the hell is going on in here?” the creature boomed.

“Um... we’re just playing, Dad,” Captain Spiffy John answered.

“Don’t stand on the arms of the couch! Get down! Now!”

The captain and I quickly scrambled down to the lava lake; suddenly being burned alive didn’t seem that bad.

“Annie! How many times do I have to tell you not to wear your shoes in the house?”

I looked down at my purple, rubber adventure boots and quickly shook them off of my feet.

“Look at this mess! I come home from work and you’ve torn the whole basement apart! Put the cushions back on the couch!” the monster screamed, kicking a boulder towards us.

“Yes, sir...” Captain Spiffy John whispered and began picking up the boulders. I followed suit, cleaning up the lava lake, trying not to catch the monster’s eye. The boulders were heavy, but I picked them up and set them in place as quickly as I could.

“And what the hell is this?” The creature stormed over to the wreckage of our spaceship.

“It’s... um...” Captain Spiffy John stammered, grabbing my hand again.

“You taped blankets to the chairs?”

“We couldn’t get them to stay...”

“You used an entire roll of my good tape!” The creature tore at the side of our ship.

“We were just...”

“It’s going to strip the varnish off!”

“We just...”

“Whose idea was this?”

I froze in terror. Just a couple of hours earlier, I had found the solution to holding our ship together. I opened my mouth to answer the horrifying monster, but only a small squeak managed to escape. Captain Spiffy John jumped to my rescue.

“It was my idea, Dad... I’m sorry.” He stepped in front of me.

“Upstairs! Now, John!”

Captain Spiffy John bowed his head, accepting his capture by the terrifying creature.

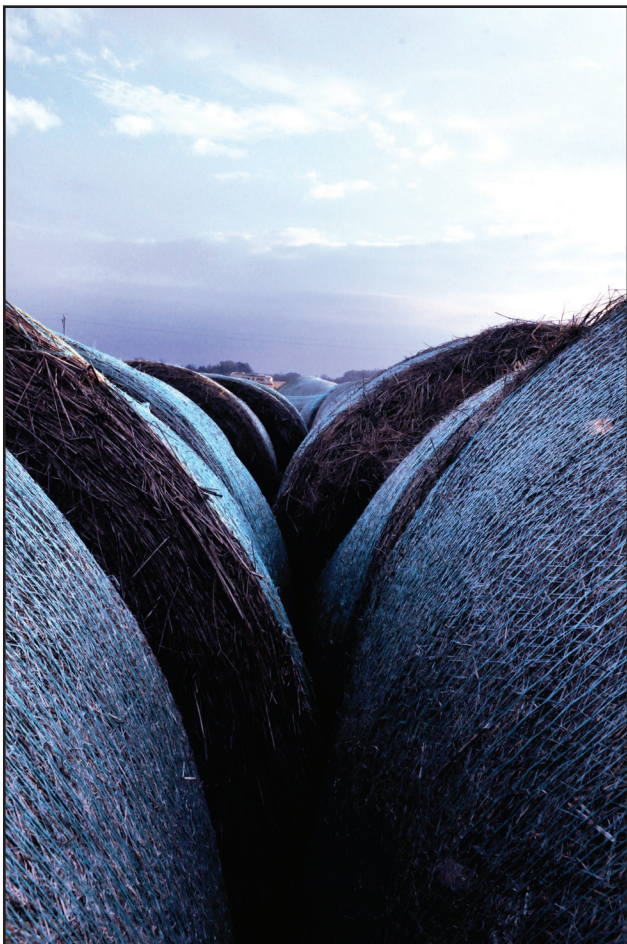
“And take off that stupid bike helmet!”

The captain unclasped the space helmet and his goggles, letting them drop into the lava lake. He flinched as the monster clamped down on his arm with a massive paw. Our hands were torn apart, and the captain glanced back at me with sad eyes as the monster marched him away. I bit my lip, trying not to whimper. The moment they were out of sight, I dashed inside what was left of our tiny spaceship. I curled up, hugging Private Teddy and hoping the monster would forget to come back for me.

“Don’t worry, Private Teddy. He’ll be okay,” I whispered.

“He’s the bravest spaceman ever, remember?”

ANDREA BECKER



untitled
photograph

HALLIE HAYES

The Golden Days

The fall air is friendly and cools the sun in pigeon grey. Cody, my brother, stands atop a steep cut of land crosshatched by fallow stalks. I trot across the lawn to ascend. He's playing a game, and like a typical younger sister, I want to join.

All I see is mud and sticks in front of me the whole way up, the hill is so steep. I am almost to the top—I can see their feet on the grass—two steps away, one step away, but before I can raise my head, words of rejection, “You’re not playing with us,” reverberate in my ears: Cody brings his hands up below his chest, unfurls his palms to my chest, firm. The sky balloons, fills my vision; I lose the earth beneath my feet. I am weightless, on the moon. I am scared, but the sound is lost in the hollow “o” I form with my mouth. The stalks reach out to catch me, etching their way in as I roll, bottom over crown, intermittently into shadows cast by my body again, again, again, the way I learned in gymnastics class, but in a way I never fathomed I would use.

When the hill guides me to the ground at last, the soles of my shoes kiss the grass, and I run for it.

My childhood home was nothing short of magical. Just outside the limits of the nearest city, the retired farmhouse escaped the entanglements of the growing Midwestern cityscape. Untouched since the Victorian era, the property included surrounding acres of grass, forest, and a red-bricked, peak-topped round barn in want of fixing. The whole area was my home, not just the house, radiating a laxness that I literally fell in love with.

Even after we sold the horses, we were never for want of

animals. Iguanas, piranhas, and snakes lived in tanks inside of our house while baby robins grew up in the garage, and raccoons napped on the front porch. Even a goat, Betsy, lived in her own private, wooden doghouse, and occasionally busted into the house to chew up my drawing paper. We always knew the coyotes were out when we'd hear her clamber up the garage roof, connected to the upper porch of the house, where her "Naah, nah, naahhing" in terror persisted all night long. We never dared let her in intentionally though; she was prone to head butt.

Out of all the animals that kept us company, none were more companionable than the dogs. My dad worked at the local Humane Society and made it a point to bring any animal in need of loving kindness to our doorstep when he could. This place was therapeutic. I still remember when he brought home a black and white rat terrier. She had been found abandoned, locked inside a house with twelve other dogs. Clients generally prefer the sociable dogs, not the ones that quiver when you toss a toy their way. But she fit right into our family. I christened her Maybelle, and my brother and I taught her how to put her front paws in our hands so she could rise up and give us kisses. Our other dogs, Labradors by the names of Willie and Jade, showed her how to run, uninhibited, through unfenced territory. I think it was the best thing for her.

My memories of this place appear as blessed whiffs of dreams when I recall them now. I remember standing under the open sky on the hill where we would often watch the orange glow ease behind a horizon of trees; where we would hack wood, load it into a cart, and haul it down with the lawnmower to stack neatly on the front porch for burning in the fireplace at wintertime. Here, I remember discussions with my mother about the warm creamed-coffee smudge on my knee. She always said it was the place where the angels had kissed me. And just like that, my little mind grew not to inhabit an afterlife, but to adopt a life before. My earliest memory is of me, walking towards my dad in the corner of the yard where there was a boat, the trees rustling against a translucent sky. Yet when I think of this memory, I always wonder, "And what before this?" as if this life were a birthmark on some other bigger picture, the edges fuzzy.

At the edge of the front lawn, a Cottonwood proudly stretched like a cat exposing its belly, unafraid. When the wind blew, the leaves shimmered, mixed, and the branches swished one after another in slow motion. In the springtime, tiny cloudbursts rode the breezes from the branch tips all around the property, as if the cottonwood casted innumerable enchantments.

I spent every minute outside. "Cody and you would wake up, eat breakfast, then be down in the sandbox, just like that," my

mom tells me now. She has to remind me because I don't remember everything, though I try. I cling to what I can. We pretended to be Indians living in the bare-limb woods, dry leaves screaming beneath our feet, and Eskimos once the snow came. After all the cold melted away, we'd get the hose out and let a stream trickle down the middle of the gravel road and marvel at the river we created.

Every day after school, the bus dropped us at the bottom of that steep gravel road lined with trees. I kept my head down during the hike up in order to find rocks with shells and holes imprinted into them, and later found ticks in my hair. Every inch of this place contained life waiting to be discovered.

After dark, in the middle of summer when the Mulberry tree was full of succulent indigo berries, we could hear Rascal, the raccoon we raised as a baby, call to us, "Brr, brr," from the branches of the tree, and we would call back, lulling our "rrr's" from a warmth deep in our throats. Her cubs and she feasted on pinkie-sized mulberries, each fruit containing a bunch of infinitesimally smaller berries that exploded on the tongue. Willie never missed the chance to squat below and collect the stray berries they knocked loose from the vines.

A scar on Rascal's neck marked the spot where my mom had once removed a grub, and was how we always knew this was our Rascal, come back to feast on the vitality of this place.

I feasted as well. Settling down at night after wearing myself out all day exploring countless wonders of the outside world, I felt a deeper connection to my inner world as well. I often found myself scintillating—spinning and lifting off my bed, weightless. It was as if another part of my self were coaxed forward like smoke, beyond my body that sank heavy into the mattress springs. The darkness puffed up behind my eyelids, and purple shapes wafted by as I sank into the space around me.

Once, I remember getting out of bed to join my mom downstairs. As she settled us into the back and forth motion of the rocking chair, my ear to her breastbone, I watched the mother and daughter from a spot above, the scene encased in a tunnel, cloudy yet crystalline at the same time.

My dad eventually quit working at the Humane Society, and my parents ran their own business from a building right on their property. He was glad he no longer had to live off of money that came from a job that required occasionally euthanizing innocent creatures, and I was glad to have my parents close whenever I needed them. They groomed and boarded cats and dogs, and even sold homemade crafts. It was their dream.

The building was just a skip, hop, and a dash across the gravel

(barefoot, of course) from our back door. I remember one day the sky swelled pink and orange and mesmerized me in the heavy stillness that seeped down from it. Focused on the autumn etches of a bare tree against the sherbet sky, I moseyed along. Suddenly, black knit fabric rippled across the sky, yanked by some unseen force, and a glower burst through the intermittent holes. The “Cuckaws” of the crows resounded to the very limits of the stratosphere. The once-bare tree grew a full head of black petals right before my eyes.

But soon enough, the dream was over, and it was time to wake up. The property was rezoned and became part of the city. The taxes became unpayable, so my parents sold it. After varnishing the steps, painting, laying new wood floors, installing new windows, and paneling the walls to look like a log cabin, the house that had become our home through years of gradual renovation was handed over to someone else.

Our new yard was even smaller than our new house. As my world shrank, so did I. I spent hours a day on the computer, doing anything at all that would keep me occupied. I made minimal effort to make friends at school. Mom groomed dogs in a modest space rented at an animal hospital, and dad went to college for heating and air conditioning. Cody and I kept to our separate rooms.

The dogs suffered too. Willie got arthritis and began to have trouble breathing. The dog that used to spend hours on end roaming the countryside eventually could not even walk a mile. Maybelle receded into her PTSD: her shakes grew, as did that faraway look in her eyes. Toward the end of her life, she began running away from us, biting at whoever tried to coax her back. She was with the twelve dogs again, starving, convinced her salvation had been only a cruel dream.

My own dreams turned on me. The floating became less frequent, and the purple world was tainted by disfigured visages.

For six years after we moved away, I dug myself into a hole that I have been crawling back out of for four years now. Every day is a struggle to acknowledge that the world still reaches out to me like it used to. A struggle to reconnect with that sense of calm that exists inside of me, inside these memories, no matter what surrounds me.

Siddhartha Gautama knew the pleasures of paradise at least as well as I did. He grew up as a prince, secluded behind castle walls. Pampered as he was, he had no idea that life could contain anything but reward. When he finally did venture beyond the castle walls, the suffering he witnessed of the homeless, the sick, and

the dying instigated him to renounce his palace luxuries. Planting himself beneath the soft hush of a fig tree, he vowed not to leave until he had answered the question: What is the meaning of suffering in a world of abundance?

There, with a quiet mind, Siddhartha loyally ignored external distractions day after day, until at last, every one of his previous lives resurfaced to his consciousness. He touched one hand to the ground, calling the earth to witness his sustained enlightenment, transforming in that very instant into the Buddha.

The Buddha means “He who is awake.” This sage left humanity with the insight that “impermanent are all created things; strive on with awareness.” In crawling back out of the hole I dug myself into, my life has become a personal journey toward enlightenment because I have learned that all situations, whether heavenly or hellish, are fleeting. Temporary. The breeze blows, my image in the mirror quivers, and the trees beckon me outside, out where being exists in its purest form, unencumbered by the mind, reaching out with all there is and waiting for me to sink myself in.

I coast my bike down the slope of the driveway, and the breeze tugs at the hairs on my skin. A spider, dangling from the handlebar, catches my eye as I dismount the bike. Distracted, with one arm propped on the handlebar to steady myself for a closer look, another visitor flies in, unannounced, through my vulnerable shirt sleeve.

I hear it a split second before I feel it: a confused sputter on my back, then a sensation. Not pleasurable, not painful, but certainly energizing. Sensation in its purest form. I jump and shout and twist my t-shirt all around me, scratching, whooping, jumping out of my skin. I clamber up the steps, drop my bags, shut the door behind me and whip off my shirt. There it is: a red volcano hole amid a raised white circle of skin, surrounded by a sea of red with scratch marks jutting out at all edges and angles.

The stinging sets in as the confusion clears. It imbues me with a new sense of energy. Shakes me out of a stupor. Reminds me that I am alive. When I come back to my bike, the web sweeps across the front from handlebar to handlebar: home.

Just as the spider nestles on any appropriate surface, as the wasp lets the breeze carry it into open shirt sleeves, I am not interested in searching for bliss; I have had my share already to remember for a lifetime. Instead, I set my sights on that larger home that always exhausted me in the daytime and brought me out of myself at night.

Sometimes you need a little sting.

LAURA RADMER

To Autumn

It's not that I lied to you,
It's just that I developed a taste for chocolate somewhere
Down the line—first in moderation,
And then altogether. Still,
I have to eat it slowly, as if
Savoring a newfound capacity for a wintry breeze along my cheek
Before the cold sidles up too close to my bones
And I regress to how you knew me.

If I'm being true, lots of things
Have changed. When once I walked
Too close to the railing of the campus bridge (not too
Close for my comfort,
But surely for yours)
All I could think about was that when they fall,
The leaves here look just like they do in all the pictures—mazes of
Bloody red and orange, stretched out
Like tiny hands toward heaven. From
The high edge of the world, the death of Summer melts like
One hundred flame-licked halos into the tops of trees,
Cradling an apathetic sky.

You never told me
What the trembling image of autumnal skins looked like
On the icy water.
It's not that I'm mad at you,
But it's just something that's become
Important to me.

I once told you, crying,
That the worst thing about leaving was not being able
To see Halloween where I grew up—all
Paper lanterns lining childhood homes, and the smell of
Phantom campfires
To lull me into fonder daydreams than most anything else.
Now,
With time sweeping me through the constant brush
Of unfamiliar words past my lips (names,
Places and dates augmenting their significance
Like jewels on a timepiece)

I realized two days too late
That I missed Halloween completely. Imagine—
Something once so important,
Turned to transience in a mere
Three hundred miles by car.

I don't know how to tell you that
It just doesn't bother me anymore—
Like roses, TV shows, or
The taste of a Hershey bar.

It's not that I'm trying to hide from you,
It's that I often lose myself within the folds of the hours, asleep,
And dreaming of a thing without a name;
It's that these things and others have brothers and sisters which
equally
Defy explanation,
And somewhere, somehow, I've forgotten
How to tell you everything by way of wide eyes
And stupid hand gestures.

They always say "defying gravity" as if
It were an aspiration and not
A pipe dream. That
Change is good, and jumps meant to be made.
Seeing the crushed
Spines of leaves littering the sidewalks,
I wonder how the treetops feel
Bared naked to the cold.

JOEY STAMP

earthwork

The soothing cement massages my worn souls,
as my feet and I approach the parapet of dreams.

I pass an old man on the street,
whose beard is so encrusted,
with the old age of time,
that smoking is as easy as breathing,
to him.

The parapet is closer.

I look up to the sky and see
Men and women turning gears,
Grinding their way to the top,
Hoping to build their own glass houses.

The parapet is closer.

Motion and demotion
Existing as one.
Fat cats and holy rats
Sitting on piles of believers' bones.

The parapet is closer.

Plebeians and the proletariat,
What's in and out,
While their value is
Lifted from their pockets.

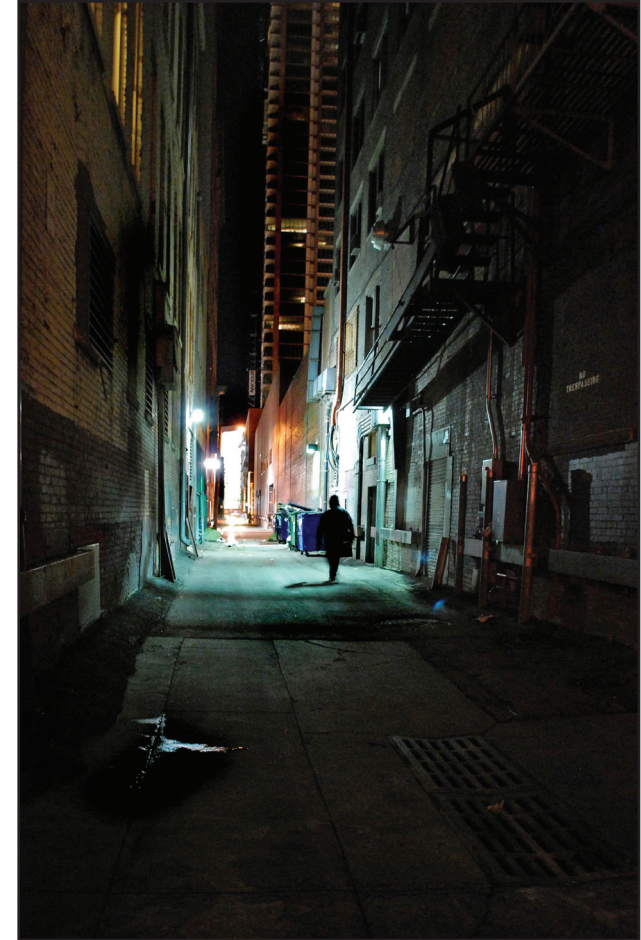
The parapet is near.

My feet touch what I think is my destination
Only to find no ground beneath.
I fall until falling stops and I look around to see
I am just one drop in a sea of drops.

The glass is full,
The water is wide,
And the end is nigh.

Bottoms up.

CARLOS RUIZ



Midnight Stroll
photograph

CONOR KELLEY

At the Broken Places

I drove slowly up and down the hills, watching the landmarks of my childhood pass. Thankful for each red light I approached, I breathed deeply as I tried to take it all in. The sky was cloudless and blue, and the sunshine fell softly on the streets.

I slowed as a small, unfamiliar restaurant came into focus near the top of a hill on an otherwise familiar corner. On the roof, a large Italian flag waved gracefully in the breeze. Cracked white plastic chairs and tables had been moved outside to enjoy the sunshine, but they were empty, bleaching in solitude. I had never been to this restaurant. Throughout my youth, here stood a corner store where the chubby little boy I used to be bought Snickers and Pepsi on his way home from middle school.

Paintings used to hang on the white picket fence next to the store, and each time there was a new one, I stopped and stared at it. There was a new one almost every day and a price tag on it in the form of a Post-It note.

I was excited by—and a little frightened of—the paintings. The figures in them were sometimes bleeding and the women were sometimes topless, which piqued my pubescent curiosity. Each day I looked forward to my walk home. When I was alone with my thoughts, I always fit in. When I ate my snacks, no one was there to make fun of me. I never told anyone about the paintings—they were my secret.

The thought of where they came from tantalized me. Who was this artist? Where did he come from? Where did he live? Was it the old Indian man who worked behind the counter? Some days I saw the artist as a cliché Frenchman in a beret and black T-shirt,

with a long cigarette in his hand. Other days I saw him as a mad genius with hair like Albert Einstein. But he always had a beard. I never knew a person with a beard. My mom said my dad had a beard, but she didn't keep any pictures of him in the house. Eventually the image of the artist in my mind was too blurry to see, like a penciled sketch that had been erased and drawn over too many times. The image was a smudge, and the paper was torn. But he had a beard. He must.

Only on television did I see them, those men with beards. They seemed to gain power from their beards like Samson gained power from his hair. I wanted power like that. I didn't have any power—all I had was a liberal arts degree from a tiny school across the country and an apartment in the basement of my mom's house. She didn't have any power left either; these days, we mostly just sat around the house while she told me stories about Dad and I told her stories about the snowstorms and the fish flies. I was sitting around waiting for something and she was waiting for something too, maybe to die. Maybe we both were.

I stepped out of the sunshine into the blindingly dark restaurant. I was standing just inside the door, waiting for my eyes to adjust, when the waiter came through the kitchen doors to welcome me. He asked me where I wanted to sit. I looked around; the restaurant was empty. I asked him if the table by the back window was okay. He placed a menu on the table and walked back into the kitchen.

My eyes wandered around the restaurant. Italian soccer jerseys hung high on the walls next to small televisions tuned to different, muted news channels. A large ceiling fan circulated the hot air with a soft hum. The air from outside was rich with the sounds of birds and people moving around and everything smelled like something. I looked through the window toward the backyard. That's when I saw it.

In the corner of the small yard behind the restaurant, in the shadow of the brick apartment building next door, nearly covered by bamboo, something was hidden. At first glance, it looked like it might have been a doghouse. But when the wind blew the bamboo a little, I saw that it was a tiny little yellow shed with a black roof and chipped shingles. When the gust of wind moved on, the shed was nearly invisible again.

I didn't dare to look away, in case I wouldn't be able to find it again. If I didn't hold onto it, it would stop being real.

My foot began tapping. I glanced at the televisions, then to the kitchen, then back to the shed. The little glimpse of yellow beckoned to me from beneath the bamboo. The curiosity pounded in my head. My chair squeaked hard as I stood up, walked through

the front door, and turned left.

The sunshine was bright, but I walked toward that fence like I had a thousand times before. I placed my hand on the fence the paintings used to hang on, debating the merits of trespassing. The wood was rotted green with age, and the gate looked like it hadn't been opened in quite some time. The wood was malleable, worn down by years of rain.

"Sir?" I heard the waiter call from inside the restaurant.

I bit my lip.

"Hello?" I heard him say, closer now.

I walked through the gate and closed it behind me. Trees and vines hung over the narrow pathway and leaned against the restaurant, thick enough to almost entirely block out the sun and cool the air underneath. "Hello?" I whispered, low enough that the waiter wouldn't hear me. I stopped walking and listened to see if there was anyone back there. The only reply was the sound of cars zooming by on the street behind me.

"Hello!" I called, a little louder now. Still no response. Still.

I emerged from the pathway into the sunny backyard and crept to the small shed. When I reached it, I brushed back the bamboo that covered the two large doors that comprised its front. It was shorter than I was. A large padlock, its numbers covered by rust and spider webs, held the two doors together. I brushed away the webs and stooped to gently pull on the padlock, to keep my snooping quiet. The padlock held firm.

I pulled it back again and peered through the crack between the two doors. Inside, something stood in the middle of the shed, and things leaned up against the walls on both sides. An easel and paintings, I told myself. I began pulling harder, the padlock crashing against the wood with each tug.

The padlock sounded like a heavy door knocker. The sound didn't concern me anymore—I had to see those paintings. Frantic, I pulled as hard as I could, back and forth, convincing myself that I could feel the lock breaking. I dug my heels into the dirt and yanked wildly on the lock. Come on, I thought. Open! Open! Open!

"Hey!" a voice behind me yelled.

I stopped. I closed my eyes and took a deep, rattling breath. Shit. When I turned, there was a middle-aged man standing on one of the balconies of the adjacent building. He looked as if he had been there a while.

"Can I help you?" he said in a curious way.

"Uh...no," I said to my feet.

"What are you doing there?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I...the...uh...mini mart?" I asked and looked up at him. I closed my eyes—that was the best I could do?

"Mini mart?" the man asked. His face lit up. He laughed.

"There hasn't been a mini mart here for years. How do you know about that?"

"Really, huh," I said. Already sweating from my battle with the padlock, the flop sweat now shot out of my pores. I wished I were sitting underneath those ceiling fans again. I wished I hadn't left that dark restaurant. "I, uh, used to go there."

"Me, too. I was here when they moved in."

"Oh."

I looked at him with nothing else to say.

"You wanna come up, have a drink?" he asked. "If you're old enough to remember that mini mart, you're old enough to drink."

Before I knew it, I had agreed and walked around to the front and up to his porch. I stood there for a moment, facing the two doors, before he opened up the door on the left.

"Come on in, uh..." he said.

"Vin—Vinny," I stammered.

"Well, Vin Vinny, I'm Jeff. What'll you have?" he asked as he gestured to a drink in his hand. He closed the door behind me. His apartment smelled of cigarettes and something a little ripe.

"What's that?"

"A White Russian."

"A White Caucasian? Sure," I said meekly. He gave a deep laugh and led me in. After a nervous spell of laughter, I took a breath. It's nice when a Lebowsky reference lands. He walked toward the kitchen, and I took a seat on the couch. His living room was windowless and cluttered. I wiped my forehead with my hand then wiped my hand on my khaki shorts.

"You know, I've never had a White Russian before. What's in it?" I asked, loud enough so he could hear me in the kitchen.

"Kahlua and cream and vodka," he said.

"Could you hold the vodka on mine?"

"So you want a Sombrero?"

"Yeah," I said. The word hung in the air for a couple beats.

"Wait, what?"

I could hear him chuckling from the kitchen. He walked out with our drinks.

"A White Russian without vodka is a Kahlua Sombrero."

"Why a Sombrero?" I asked, as I accepted the drink.

"Well, it sure as hell isn't Russian without the vodka," he said.

I laughed and choked on the first sip of my Sombrero.

"What do you do, Vin?" he asked.

"Me? Um, nothing right now. I just graduated from a little school in the Midwest and came back home. My mom was...is... both of us...we're okay."

We sat in silence for a couple moments. "Hm," he said and took a drink.

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I work down at that Office Depot. Manager."

"Oh."

"So what were you doing over there?" He asked with a smirk, rubbing his cheek with his hand. He was clean-shaven. "I was watching you for a minute or two; you were really going at that thing."

"Well..."

"I mean, occasionally someone really wants a fresh tomato from next door, but I've never seen someone try to break into that shed. Explain yourself!" he said with a mock royal accent and a grand gesture of his hand as he leaned back in his chair.

I picked up my glass and took a quick drink, trying to compose myself before I explained what undoubtedly would sound like lunacy. The ice cubes rattled loudly inside the glass as I put it back on the table. The glass was sweating on the outside, and I wiped the condensation on my pants.

"Well, I was sitting in that restaurant next door, you know, the one that used to be the mini mart, and I was thinking about, well, whatever I was thinking about, and then I saw that shed, and I just couldn't stop thinking about it and, uh, next thing I knew, I was trying to break the thing open."

I forced a smile. Jeff stared at me, his mouth hanging open. I felt my face get hot. He burst out laughing—deep, almost painful sounding laughs. Staring down into my beige-colored drink, I realized that I had indeed sounded like a lunatic.

"Holy shit, Vinny!" Jeff said. I laughed and shook my head. He laughed again. "Was it calling your name?" He hummed the Twilight Zone theme music—DOO-doo DOO-doo, DOO-doo-DOO-doo—and laughed once more.

Jeff walked into the kitchen and returned quickly with the bottle of Kahlua. He refreshed our drinks.

"You know, it was just like...when I was younger, there were these paintings on the fence next to the mini mart," I said with a smile. "I used to look at them when I walked home from school. It was about the best part of my day."

The leather chair creaked as he sat up. "Yeah? Tell me about these paintings."

"I think the first one I saw was a naked woman. I must've been in fifth or sixth grade." I could feel myself loosening up from the

Sombreros.

"That painting was like my first sex ed class," I continued. "I swear I could've stared at it for hours. There was something so... there was something about it."

"You know, some people would call that kind of stuff smut," he said.

"Not this stuff. No, it was like, like the purest thing I'd ever seen. My whole life, I've been shocked at how disgusting people are. The world sucks. Out there, I never see anything as beautiful as those paintings."

"Don't you think those artists are a little self-indulgent though?" he asked. "Isn't it all just 'look what I can do'?"

I mulled over my answer for a moment. "No. No, definitely not, because art is for other people," I said, feeling my heart beat faster and my voice get louder. "It's everything else in life that's self-indulgent, Jeff. Money, cars, houses, vacations—that's all just show-and-tell. If you live your life for yourself, at the end of the day, you're gonna feel empty. Selfish people are empty people. Art is for the people, and you don't abandon other people when life gets hard. You can't just pick up and move on. There are no such things as clean breaks between people because people end up in pieces, and yeah, they get stronger at the broken places sometimes, but sometimes they're so shattered that they sweep themselves up and head for the garbage. When things get tough, giving up only saves yourself, and only for the moment."

Jeff sat back down on the leather chair, and we tried to work ourselves out from underneath the weight of my diatribe.

I slurped the ice in my glass. "Can I get a glass of water?" I asked meekly.

"Huh?" he said with his eyes glazed over in thought. "Oh, yeah."

The orange light of the setting sun shone through his kitchen window, illuminating the checkered linoleum floor in a fiery glow. In the spotlight on the ground, the floor mat in front of his back door was covered in bamboo leaves. I bent down, put one in my pocket, stood up, and looked out the window. From his back window, Jeff had a direct view of the shed. The shed looked alive, burning bright in the orange sunlight. There was a dirt pathway that led from his back door right down to the shed.

I walked back into the living room. "It's late. I should be going," I said. Jeff smiled with his mouth but not his eyes. His eyes were far away.

"And, hey, what happened to the artist that lived in that shed out there?" I asked.

"He's been gone a while," Jeff answered. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering—I was hoping to buy one of his paintings today."

"Oh yeah?" he asked. I thought maybe I saw his eyes focus a little.

"I think there's a bunch of them just sitting in that shed," I said. "Maybe you should bust that padlock off, huh?" I forced a laugh.

He managed a chuckle. "Yeah, maybe. You probably loosened it up for me."

"Well, like I said, I gotta go," I told him. "It's been a pleasure, Jeff."

He walked me to the front door. "Thank you, Vinny," he said. We shook hands, and he patted me on the back as I left.

I walked down the front steps and out to the street, the sun cooling over the shoulders of the buildings behind me. I didn't turn and look at the shed because I didn't want to see it closed anymore. I thought about what we had hidden in our backyard, and I went home to find out. I went home to Mom, to sweep her up.

TABATHA MORAN

Mother

The only house our family owned
that wasn't condemned

was bought after I moved out. You wanted
a better place to raise your grandson. I grew up

in the dank basement of your parents' house.
A place built after you were old

enough to live by yourself,
away from your large family.

You moved out, at seventeen,
from the three-room, dirt-floored

shack, now a pit in their back yard
forced down, for everyone's safety.

I stayed with you for a week
in the home that was never mine.

From the day Dad passed
until the day after we buried him,

I never left your side.
To bear the burden together, a glimpse

of what our family life
could have been.

LARISSA LARSON

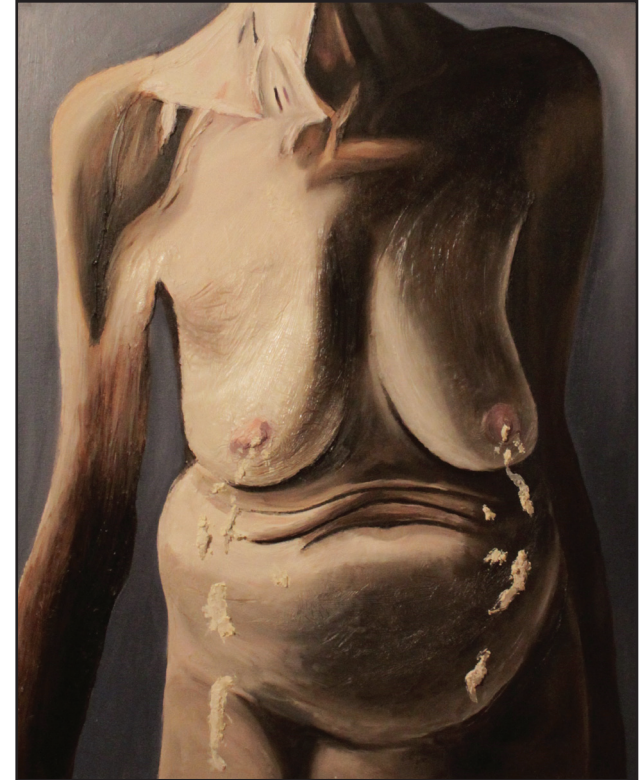
Photograph of 1962 Newlyweds

Two black and white strangers gaze
through glass, peering from the past into
the present. Her lips presumably colored
ruby red. Cat eyed, she wore a minimalistic
white dress. He, a suit textured like sand
beneath his face, swimming with a smirk.

The wall was plain and pale, lined with familiar faces;
the hallway always smelled of fresh linen on Mondays
and even Tuesdays if the laundry took two days.
I hate fingerprinting photographs. But I love the feel,
the raised frame, tarnished, tickling my fingertips.
Behind it, a hidden black velvet back barely visible,
black like his tobacco heart.

The nail firmly fixed in the plaster cast wall
is the only tangible item holding them together
in my framed mind. I remember the wheeze
of his lungs, the push pump of air through
the tiny plastic tube, his raspy laugh, the time
when my grandma believed life was worth living.

MOLLY HAUT



Expired
impasto

PAUL SCHMITT

Have It or Eat It

There are few instances in life in which it is appropriate to display an icing portrait of an individual's face on a cake. A funeral is not one of them. My dad apparently didn't realize the morbidity of slicing open a recently departed family member's face at the reception, though he was reminded by the cries of my little sister as he took up his traditional role of food-carver usually reserved for Thanksgiving turkey, but which in special instances extended to cakes on birthdays and funerals. The guests (apparently more sensitive to grief than my father) refrained from slicing into that section of the cake and spilling face crumbs. Instead, everyone ate the cake surrounding the frosting photo, leaving a soggy hunk of marbled dessert that would sit in our refrigerator for two weeks before it gradually grew blue spots of mold, as if to remind us all that Grandma can no longer eat the food you came here to get, and on the contrary, she's molding over more quickly than the slice of cake itself.

Her kind and feeble elderly smile quickly grew into a smirk. Her voice rang in our heads with every trip to the fridge: "Heh, you wanted some milk for your cereal? How about some guilt for not getting to know me better?" Or, "Oh good choice, I always use Blue Bonnet on my toast. It just melts so much easier. But I guess you would know that if you had visited more."

My appetite waned, and I didn't eat anything but dry bread and tap water while her cake portrait was rotting in the fridge. Coincidentally, throwing out a baked-good effigy of the recently departed is about as frowned upon as slicing it in half. The dessert remained on the top shelf for an entire month as I wondered to

myself what the proper procedure was in such a situation.

Burial seemed hokey, but cremation too severe.

A recurring image I had was of my family gathered on the edge of the Grand Canyon, garbed in funeral attire as my father gave a eulogy before letting the silver cake tray slip through his fingers and over the precipice, over which we would crane our necks as the cake grew smaller, all of us awaiting some sort of reassuring comic book "splat" as Grandma found her final resting place next to a cluster of sagebrush.

Someday I want to be famous enough for my face to be put on a cake that no one will ever eat out of some sense of reverence. Sitting on a marble pedestal in the center of a foyer, the cake would be entombed like Lenin, but in a crystal cake display with a transparent cover (which would never be taken off, of course) as swaths of adoring pilgrims shuffle past, wondering what my face tastes like.

Instead, the foyer would most likely be a refrigerator, and the crystal case nothing more than a plastic cover from the grocery store the cake was made in. No pilgrimages would be made, apart from the occasional visit from a curious grandchild, until my sludgy tomb slid off its tray as it was dumped by my daughter-in-law into the wastebasket from under the kitchen sink while her husband was at work and her kids were at school, none of whom outwardly acknowledge its disappearance.

ANNA SEGNER

The Self-Portrait

I woke to the morning call of the Baltimore Oriole cutting the silence of my cramped apartment. Instinctively, I tossed my colorful quilt off my chest and became aware that I was clutching a palette knife. It wasn't until I sat up that I realized I was starving and incredibly hungover. I carefully stepped out of my bed to avoid the several books and coffee mugs scattered on the floor. On my way out of the bedroom, I hit a stack of ceramic sculptures, and the clatter hung in the air like the smell of stale coffee.

I stumbled past my singing bird clock to the bathroom where makeup was sprawled across the counter, and an overwhelming amount of clothing was scattered on the floor. Evidence of last night was staring back at me in the mirror, sparkling actually—my face was covered in silver glitter. Last night was an art department party celebrating the leave of Angela, a once-loved but recently-disliked artist. Angela was notorious for never returning borrowed supplies and for over pronouncing words to sound more intelligent.

Looking like a terror with dark strands of hair plastered to my sweaty and glittering forehead, I lumbered into the kitchen and struggled to find a bowl that hadn't been used to mix paint. I poured myself a bowl of Grape-Nuts. The old school desk was the only seat in the kitchen that didn't contain a cat or a pile of books, so I dropped myself in the school desk and cleared the faux-wood surface. While shoveling Grape-Nuts into my mouth quickly, without breath, I had the sudden need to look behind me. I turned my body and head to glimpse into the ominously lit hallway. I don't know what I expected, but there wasn't a creepy man in the

hallway and there wasn't a ghost child haunting me, so I happily returned to my breakfast. But as I dipped my head to slurp another spoonful of cereal, I saw it.

I saw her.

On top of my bookshelf was the painted self-portrait of Angela. A chill ran through my hungover body. I dropped my spoon, splattering milk.

Before she came, I had been the cherished painter of the art center. The moment she showed up with her mixed media shit, everyone was mesmerized and said, "Angela, you are so unique" or "Angela's work is so edgy." Everyone said these things, except for me. She was a phony. She would crush the butt of her cigarette into her painting and throw soda at her canvas, but I knew she only did these things when people were watching. She once threw her painting in the snow and stomped on it until the board had cracked. It was no coincidence that she put on this show right outside the window of a gallery reception. It wasn't until she had gallery and teaching responsibilities that people realized that there was no substance to her. Eventually, her incapacity to get along with others caught up with her, and she was voted out. But I couldn't forget, and there, propped up against the television, I saw her crazed, vituperating eyes. The eyes were disproportionately large and shining dark like wet, smooth stones. The painting as a whole was disturbing, but the eyes were painted in a swirling circular motion, creating a crazed and mesmerized expression. The eyes were so miserable that I shuddered from fear.

The rest of her face completely contrasted the overwrought eyes. It was a combination of confident inexperience and egocentrism that painted the rest of the face, for her nose appeared straighter and gentler than it did in reality's harsh light. Her cheekbones were painted with a prominent, pale pink stroke, the same pale pink used as the lightest light of the lip. Her countenance was a confident acceptance of crazy. A stab went through my stomach as I remembered my watercolor landscapes in the gallery replaced by her mixed media paintings.

I must have drunkenly stumbled home with the painting after the party last night. We had set up a sound system in the studio that used to house Angela's enormous mixed media paintings. Where her gallons of black and maroon paint used to sit, there sat bottles of bourbon, trays of jello shots, and various other drinks. I overdid it. There were many instances from last night that I couldn't recall. I did remember that Angela's studio cupboards were opened, revealing the few things left behind: a mannequin (with unnaturally bent joints), a few plastic palette knives, the art department's Christmas photo, a few blank canvases, and the eerie

self-portrait.

While staring at the painting, I sat stirring my Grape-Nuts to mush. I spent the rest of the day disturbed by the fact that Angela was in my kitchen, sardonically scrutinizing the mess of my two cats and piles of shit.

All weekend, I couldn't bring myself to move the painting. Instead of ridding myself of it, I became obsessed with proving to Angela, in the middle of my kitchen, that my life wasn't a damn mess. I cleaned the kitchen, did dishes, and moved stacks of books into different rooms. By Sunday evening, my bathtub was filled with paint brushes, old picture frames, and the other art supplies that used to be scattered around the wooden kitchen floor.

Come Monday morning, my bedroom floor was completely scattered with the things that used to be in my kitchen, and my cats now rested in piles of clothing on the bedroom floor. I found a pencil skirt and a wrinkled chambray shirt in my closet, and dressed myself quickly while walking to the spotless kitchen. Everything had its proper place, except the painting. It still sat on the bookshelf leaned against the old television. As I ate my cereal and drank my coffee, I faced away from the painting. As I dashed out the door with a trench coat slung on and a scarf in hand, I never once glanced at it.

When I got to my studio, I began to prepare for the Monday morning figure study class I was to lead at 10:00. As I was searching the Internet for examples of master artists' studies of the hand and foot, I heard Sylvan's fancy shoes tap down the hall, eventually stopping in my doorway.

"You are a hot mess," he laughed. "You should answer your phone. I've been meaning to ask about Friday." He had a pink polo and a pair of gray dress pants hanging neatly by a black belt with a silver buckle.

"I guess you aren't teaching ceramics today, are you?" I said looking him over.

"No, I'm not teaching ceramics today. It's Tuesday," he said in a serious and concerned voice. "Rachel, are you okay?" It couldn't be Tuesday. It had to be Monday. I never left my apartment this weekend. Surely I could not have spent three straight days in that cramped little apartment. "Rachel?"

"I'm...fine. It's not my fault," I began to mumble. "If it wasn't for Angela...she's always there. I...I, I can't get her out of my mind. She showed up, and I can't make her leave."

"What?" he asked.

"It's her painting. She's always there," I said looking down.

"Rachel, why do you have one of her paintings?" Sylvan inquired. "Is it the self-portrait that you kept cursing at Friday

night? Did you take that? You really shouldn't be drinking." As he said that, Jerry, an older resident artist, came in.

"You have a drinking problem, Rachel?" Jerry questioned nosily.

"No, Jerry. You really aren't involved in this," I snapped. It was mean, but I didn't care.

"You should take the day off. I can take over your painting class for the day," Sylvan said. "In fact, this is not a request."

I didn't have a choice. I argued, but Sylvan insisted. I packed a bag of paints, and as I exited the door, Sylvan said, "If you stole that painting of Angela, just get rid of it."

When I left the art department, the wind violently whipped my face, so I wrapped my scarf over my mouth and began walking through downtown. Every window presented autumn tones of oranges, mahogany, rust, burnt orange, and vermilion. I passed crafty gourds, pumpkins, fake leaves with rakes propped against the display windows. I got to the door of my apartment building, and I couldn't bear to step inside or take one step closer to Angela's self-portrait. I pulled a cheap cigar out of my purse and took a long draw while brewing a plan to rid myself of Angela.

I needed to get rid of the painting. If I brought it back to her empty studio, I would always know it was there, waiting. In throwing it away, there would be a possibility that it would return. Burning it would be bad luck. The only way to fix this was to erase its existence. Cover it up. Resting in my bag were tubes of paint. Grasping the paints, I stepped out of the late morning sun and into the apartment building.

The next thing I knew, I was standing on the coral bathroom tiles, leaning against my aqua-colored easel. On the easel sat Angela's face with the horrible eyes.

I pushed all of the things off of my bathroom counter and squeezed the tubes of acrylic paints directly onto the smooth stone counter. My hands began to swirl the red, yellow, and blue with white, mixing pale caramel flesh tones of my own skin. I began to lay the pale paint on Angela's cheek, and her face began to twist and look tortured. Her upper lip snarled at me, and the eyes were unchanged: fixated, angry, and crazed. Seeing the expression, I swirled the paint faster and lathered it on thicker until the eyes settled into a hypnotized stare of resentment. I painted over her straight nose. After studying my face in the mirror, I mixed the tones of my chapped lips and smudged the paint over her plump lips. When the counter space was smeared with pools of paint, I began mixing paint over the floral wallpaper surrounding the mirror. I painted dark strands of my hair over her wavy hair. I painted until I realized the day's sun was no longer shining in

from the small window and no longer provided sufficient light, so I turned on the light switch.

The bathroom wall was my palate. Everything from the toilet to my toothbrush was covered in paint. I decided my face on the canvas was almost finished. The face was no longer Angela's; the face was mine. Everything but the eyes. I hadn't touched the eyes. The eyes still had the same disturbed expression.

I scrounged around, desperate for the right tool or paint to fix it. As I looked around the cramped room, I stopped my glance abruptly at the mirror. Angela's eyes were staring back at me from my very own face. Those horrible, crazy, dark, swirling eyes. When I blinked at the mirror, the horrible eyes blinked back.

When I turned to the painting, I was disturbed to find that my face in the mirror looked exactly as it appeared in the painting. I grabbed the painting and threw it back against the easel. Paintbrushes darted out of my hands violently against the canvas. I beat the painting against the wall while shouting atrocious things until I fell to the floor crying. Out of fear of what rested upon my face, I never wiped my tears.

I grasped the easel to pull myself up from the coral tile. I grabbed the painting and rushed into my sparkling kitchen, where I threw on my trench coat and scarf. After a flight of stairs, the sidewalk and the brisk winds of evening struck me. I tucked the painting into my trench coat. A homeless woman came up behind me to ask for money, but she drew back in fear after looking at my eyes. I took my scarf and wrapped it over my head and face, so I could only peek out of a slit. I rushed back past the same autumn displays until I found myself outside of the art department. The door was open. I raced through the hall towards my studio.

"Rachel?" I heard someone ask from the ceramics room. Sylvan popped his head out. "What are you doing?"

"I'm not doing anything. I just came to drop off my new painting," I said quickly.

"Can I see?" Sylvan asked.

"No," I said readjusting my scarf, so he couldn't see my eyes.

"Dammit, Rachel, stop acting so strange," he said.

"I'm sorry. It's just, I don't..." I stammered. "It's horrible." I let out a little whimper.

"A painting of yours could not be horrible," he said more calmly.

I gave in and grabbed the painting from under my trench coat and displayed my revolting creation. His face did not draw back in disgust or fear, only a careful thoughtfulness.

I lifted my scarf off my face. His expression didn't quiver.

"Rachel. This is beautiful."

MARISA DONNELLY

To Exist in This World

Inspired by "Legend," a lithograph by V. Torrence

There is a boy in the sand
He sits on juttied grey stones
a precipice of Earth
along the edge of the shore
He thinks
about common things
the capacity of a human brain
features and fissures
pointed nose, thick plates of bone
sliding together
The earth
and its marble shape
countries like patterns of stars
across wind-whipped skies
Tornadoes and black clouds like granite
The unnamed children
standing voiceless
on invisible ledges with
hollow, open mouths
The key to a map
of a lonely, sunless beach
And a boy
like a single grain of sand at his feet,
small.

CARRIE PIEPER

Unreachable Heights

She was perched upon the highest rung
of a ladder I couldn't climb.
A wingless angel with a stone for a spine.

Placed so perfectly by the artist that made her,
like a model of a goddess
possessed by seductive power.

She had to be as real as he believed her to be.
So that little, lovesick artist
decided she was me.

Her delicate features he plastered
on mine. A cement mask
that would crumble with time.

He'd say my name as he looked upon
her face. A short prayer to the
statue who had taken my place.

But I didn't speak as an angel should
and the artist never
approved of the way I stood.

Under his pressure my body collapsed.
My eyes sought support from the statue,
but she just stood there and laughed.

Then his rough, forceful arms raised me
back toward the angel.
He lifted me as far as his body was able.

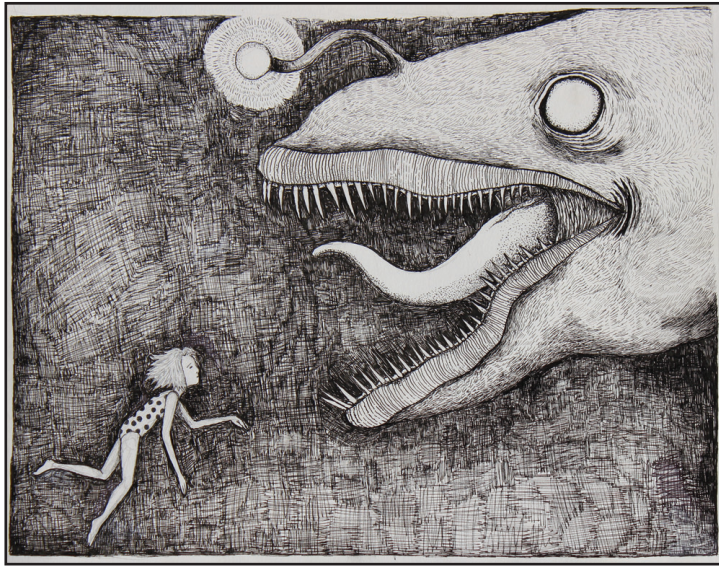
But his body was not as strong as
his mind. He cast me
away with a defeated cry.

When I reached the ground he grabbed
for my mask. He pried it
off in a quick, painful act.

He stumbled away to find the
actual girl. My raw, pink face
burned as the cool tears fell.

I lifted my head hoping it was
the end, so I could finally be
the broken statue that I'd always been.

EMILY COTTON CRAM



underwater fright
ink

DAVID ARMS

An Ambiguous Equation

“Get the hell out of here!” I shouted. “I’m sick of you!”

I aimed the football at the squirrel, warning that I meant business.

My friend yelled too, mostly jokingly, “Yeah! Yer not welcome ‘round dese parts! Now skeeter!”

The squirrel burrowed where the roof of my house and the roof of my front porch met. I had spent years listening to his scurrying and rustling above my bedroom in the middle of the night. I considered him and his family as loud and inconsiderate squatters. I never truly hated them, but I did find it enjoyable to yell at them whenever they crossed my path. Eventually, the squirrel disappeared within my roof and we went back to playing catch in the street.

As my friend and I tossed the ball around, the squirrel snuck out of the roof and onto the telephone line. I threw the ball, and suddenly we heard a loud crack above us. We immediately looked up to see the squirrel being electrocuted from chewing on the wire. He sizzled for a few seconds and then dropped through the air, landing at our feet. His body lay stiff and petrified. The smell of its burnt carcass filled my nose. After I recovered from the shock, all I could think of was how I had warned it that it didn’t belong here.

About two years later, my childhood friend, Jesse, decided to celebrate his twelfth birthday by inviting his friends on a camping trip on his grandfather’s land. So, one late summer day, he and his dad picked me up in their roofless, black Jeep. We drove through town, passing houses and businesses. I slowly began noticing the

distances between houses growing longer as we began to drive outside of the city limits. Soon, all signs of mankind disappeared, until eventually there were none other than the road.

Jesse's dad yelled over the wind for almost the entire drive. "Y'know, when I was a kid camping for the first time, I ended up having to wrestle with a bunch a kai-yotes!"

"Coyotes? And shut up, Dad. No one cares."

"Yeah, they all sprang up outta nowhere in the middle of the night. Of course, since I was the strongest, fastest, and smartest, I had to protect the women and children! So I grabbed a couple of the spikes holding the tents down..."

"Oh, my god," Jesse said, burying his face into his palm while his dad finished his story. This would not only be the first time I went camping, but also the first time I would be immersed in nature. I smiled as I started wondering what adventures this camping birthday trip had in store for me. I pondered what animals I would see and what interactions I might have with them. I felt excited, curious and uncertain about all of the possibilities this trip presented. I didn't completely know what to expect from this new environment, but I was anxious to explore it.

After about forty minutes, we arrived a few hundred yards away from the campsite. We had to park the car next to the barn and walk through a forest to get there. As I jumped out of the Jeep, I looked over a fence towards the forest. I was looking into a world very separate from the one I had become accustomed to. The grass on the other side of the metal cattle fence stood tall. The blades wavered in the wind, unsure of where they should position themselves. It seemed like a desperate and futile attempt to avoid being eaten by the cows that were gradually grazing their way up the hill and into my line of vision. Behind them, thick maple and oak trees seemed to bend over each other, completely shrouding our campsite and who knew what else in their dense, interlocking branches. A raccoon suddenly shot out of the grass and darted through the horizontal rungs of the cattle gate about twenty yards from me. I turned with it and watched it sprint toward the barn beside me. I wondered why he would leave his real home and join us on the other side of the fence. I thought, "You're just like the damn tree rats that live in my attic, aren't ya? You guys just don't get it." As it disappeared around the barn, I looked up to see the rest of Jesse's party guests arriving.

Eventually, someone opened the gate, and we started hiking towards the campsite. As I walked amongst my friends, I paid little attention to what they were saying. I focused on examining the cows from a distance and peering through the gaps between trees, eagerly anticipating that nature would surprise me some-

how. I finally caught a glimpse of what the trees had been hiding. The campsite stood a mere 100 yards from me. Behind it flowed a long, winding creek. A few cattle drank from it, while the rest of the herd grazed in the grass beyond them. The peacefulness transitioned my eagerness into a relaxed awe. I quickened my pace, left my friends, and headed down the trail alone toward the campsite.

My walk turned into a sprint once I saw a tin roof and a fire pit peeking through the trees from the bottom of the hill. The slope was so steep that by the time I reached the bottom, I had an incredible amount of momentum. That's when I noticed a long, thin wire suspended horizontally in front of me. Since I couldn't stop in time, I reached my arms out to grab it and prevent it from catching me at the waist. As soon as I took hold, my entire body stiffened and my senses turned inward. The only thing I was aware of was the shock running through my limbs. The wire sent reverberating waves of electricity through my body. The sensation was not only intense and terrifying, but peculiar. The feeling seemed to come from within my body, suggesting that I was the source of this dangerous sensation. I somehow managed to pull my arms away from the electric barrier and slumped down to digest what had just happened.

"Dude! You guys! David just got electrocuted!" someone yelled.

"Hey, you okay?" another party-goer asked.

I didn't even attempt to discern who was yelling behind me. I sat for a few more seconds, collecting myself. "Wow, how's that for an introduction to nature?" I asked myself. Then, I got up and walked with the rest of the group for the final fifty feet. I was told the fence's purpose is to prevent cattle from wandering off to where they're not wanted. The memory of the squirrel sizzling above me flashed into my thoughts. If I believed that the squirrel's electrocution was karma for burrowing into my home, then why was I shocked?

"You guys can't go running off by yourself out here! This isn't your backyard. You have to be careful. You could get hurt," Jesse's dad lectured.

I wondered what made me any different from the squirrel. I decided that if the rest of his family could continue to live in my home every day, then I should even the score, and I walked forward.

"Yeah, David! Can't say no one warned you now, can ya?" added Jesse.

Discussion of my electrocution died out as we began setting up tents. Our campsite was just outside of the forest, on the edge of an extensive, wide valley through which the creek intersects at

multiple points. After we settled in, we started to look for methods of entertainment. I looked up to the forest beside our campsite. Birds, squirrels, and acorns decorated the trees like ornaments. I looked down to notice that a lot of the acorns were on the ground at my feet. Unfortunately, this inspired one of my friends to suggest we have “an acorn war.”

“Let’s divide into teams...and throw the acorns at each other!” is probably along the lines of what this genius said. And so we did. The two teams filled up some buckets of acorns in the forest and positioned themselves on opposite sides of the creek. Then, an onslaught of acorns graced the sky with their trajectories set upon the faces of the opposing troops. When one army ran out of ammo, they retreated into the forest for more acorns, and the valley became still. There was no longer any clamor. The creek’s surface, untouched, seemed not to move at all. Unseen birds, hiding in the surrounding trees, tranquilized all life in the valley with their melodic vocalizations to one another. The cattle, scattered about the area, peacefully enjoyed their inactivity. They grazed quietly until the army, who had not yet retreated, hit them with a surprise attack.

“Watch this!” someone said right before hurling their largest acorn at an unsuspecting heifer. The loud thud of the impact against the cow’s body was followed by cheers and compliments from others in the group. Soon, everyone else joined in, and we attacked all the cows within distance. If they were lucky, our acorns missed and flew into the forest, causing the birds to scatter. We didn’t want to cause tremendous pain to the animals; we just wanted to create some excitement. There was nothing the cow could’ve done but endure acorn after acorn and hope we left it alone soon. Then war cries flooded the air and the other army strategically emerged from the forest, whipping acorns all around us. This process persisted until Jesse’s mom called us in for a dinner of hot dogs and hamburgers. An unofficial ceasefire was announced, and without declaring an end to the war, we headed back to camp.

Once it got late, everyone settled into their assigned tents. It was time to call it a night, so my friends zipped up the door of the tent, and we got in our sleeping bags. Though it was impossible for me to get comfortable against the jagged ground, my friends all managed to fall asleep. As I lay there, twisting and turning, I heard the howls of coyotes and the stories of Jesse’s father re-entered my thoughts. The coyotes’ piercing shouts made me kind of worried. I wondered if they were looking for me, organizing an attack, or at the very least, telling me to leave. The idea of spending a night in the wild had thrilled my instinct earlier, but I now asked myself if I truly belonged here. Throughout the course

of the day, we had terrorized some wildlife, gotten a bunch of bug bites, worried about being charged upon by bulls, and I had gotten electrocuted. I imagined how chaotic things would be for ourselves and the nature of this area if we were here every day. I pondered again if that electric fence was there to prevent not only cattle, but humans, from wandering where they’re unwanted. I was aware that we, as a species, need nature, but I asked myself, “How much does nature really need us?”

I dwelled on this question for a long time. I thought of the raccoon from earlier. I recalled how it had hurriedly left its domain and crossed over to join us by the barn. Perhaps he had come to our side of the fence instinctively, much like I to nature. Maybe he had felt compelled to be around us for some reason. I opened my eyes, giving up on sleep. I turned on my side and began watching the shadows of trees in the moonlight infiltrating the top of our tent. The tree leaves and branches were wavering back and forth just like the blades of grass beneath the cows had. I wondered what trees could possibly be afraid of. I thought about the firewood that had warmed us earlier and a potential answer sprang to my head: Me. I tried to discard the thought and remind myself of all the reasons I love nature and why I should stop thinking so much and just enjoy my surroundings. I didn’t want to believe that I’m just an affliction upon nature. I wondered if the squirrels lay awake in my attic every night, pondering these same issues. Neither of us seemed to belong in each other’s homes, yet that is exactly where we were. Despite the fact that humans and nature distress one another repeatedly, we seem oddly drawn to each other. The shadows on the floor began to slowly mesmerize me into relaxation, and I was starting to feel like I might get some sleep. Before I closed my eyes, a tiny orb detached itself from one of the shadows. I looked at it for a second, trying to figure out what exactly could be producing this image. Then I noticed its eight legs and, without thinking, I instantly jumped up, grabbed my shoe from beside me and smashed it. I didn’t fall asleep that night.

The next day, we all woke up and left the tent. We had donuts for breakfast. As we ate, everyone complained about how the mosquitoes and gnats would not leave our bodies or food alone. For the first time there was no fire in the fire pit. We had used up all of the firewood. Someone dumped the ash onto the ground a few feet in front of the forest, a sacrilegious burial. Its scent filled my nose and immediately triggered my memory of the electrified squirrel that wasn’t welcome in my home. I took a step back and looked up at the forest. The trees stood tall, looking down at their slain brother and I, not saying a word as a storm brewed in the distance overhead.

SARA KLUGMAN

Me you a young buck and a small chipmunk

leaves, like freshly cracked
almonds pulpy and soft

leaves whose quiver
wet colts all practice

when they learn about
standing, leaves in

proximal families, in
quiet fear and cluster

the young buck chews
them without remorse

between leaves, weight
transferred just so, alert

we watch him watching
us, and the small chipmunk

thinks about berries,
thinks about nightfall.

ANDREA BECKER

Of the Ocean

sweet smell, bitter taste
endless salty erosion
roaring disregard

freezing crashing waves
bite the shore with salty teeth
desolate and cold

EVERY RUX

The Fault Line

They trooped on down towards the coastline, he five feet behind her. They had scarcely spoken on the walk, or even in the planning. Was she going to the beach? Yes, she was. He'll come then. He was welcome but unwanted, and he went regardless. Down through the crowcloud green and off to the unmarked gravel path which led to the coast. She didn't turn back to look at him, but she stopped to take photos and count the sheep holding white against the rolling green of the pastures. Cows lowed softly through the wet air and marked their paths back to the barn; a deeper gray pressed flat into the dropping clouds. It was still and heavy, and the noise from the roadway flagged far off in the mist. They reached the gate marking entrance to the coastline and crossed it, wordless and careful, he still behind her, looking off at the sea and the shrouded isles miles off, suspended still in the mirrored sea, but looking only at her, waiting for a turn of the head, he behind her, man behind woman, but still she withheld. Still she looked on at the breakers weeping softly on the rocks, thinking that what he felt could only be him, but she tipped no signs, ceded no ground as she leapt soft, deerlike, down onto the searocks projecting sharp like fractured bones up from the sinking sand. He followed behind, leaping the same rocks then tracking up to a small grassy promontory hanging a few feet above the rocks inside the fence. As he turned away from her to mount the ledge, he could feel her eyes heavy on him; but when he faced back about she had settled in between the vertebrae of the moss-dark stones, her eyes leering without expression or pity or capitulation on the ruffled sea. A crane passed over her, humming

flatly on the whipping seabreeze, travelling without flap or flutter, gray bill pointed out to some unknown isle where it would sit cold and quiet. He could see only the back of her head protruding up from her bunker of rock, from the fractured stone, torched black from some unremembered heat. She stood and looked about her and feigned to the right, then doubled back upon herself and leapt from rock to rock, off to the left, around the edge of the promontory and out of view. She never risked a glance.

Yes, she thought of him; if she didn't she would have spoken, or at least smiled shyly as she used to before she passed out of view. Then she would have looked. She might have waved him over and pressed into his side as they flitted across the rocks, and the words, many or few, wouldn't have mattered because he would have felt her warm beneath his arm and they were in communion like coast and sea, fading one from the other to meet soon again in rhythm. But what did he expect? Should the years of common flesh torn and patched never numb the knitting? She oughtn't need to state the depth of it all to infinitum to secure his happiness. But thoughts were pretty things, and there she was, out of sight behind the sealeg while the cold breeze berated him and the sun threatened to set.

The point of its conception, of the conflict, he could not trace by scent or impulse. Or perhaps he could. What Tim said to him about her when she had first moved to Chicago. And he had always known there were others before him, and doubtless there would be after him. This wasn't the trouble. No, not the presence of the others, but the duplicity of her affections contemporaneous with his own surety. That he had loved first, that she could once imagine life without him, that she thought to heave him off like one of the others, and the rise of that realization melted him into the same mold as the others. He was no god to her. A god doesn't beg in the rain for any girl. And the fault line of her uncertainty had run under him and under them for years, and it gaped under the little promontory and the coastline, and she was still out of view, jumping from rock to unseen rock, and he could only hope that she thought of him.

He rested back on his hands and let his feet hang off the soft, crumbling ledge above the rocks, and he looked out at the Atlantic, blazed over with the orange of the evening sun. Down the shoreline to the right, past the blackened searocks and a narrow, pulsing inlet, he could see Tim and his wife walking along the water, jumping like children away from the cold tips of the tide, hand in hand. He hadn't known they were coming down, too. The two figures, shadow blackened by the dusk, sat in the sand, and he could see her lean into Tim, and their blacknesses met and

stitched together.

He stood and stretched and looked down for her along the water. She stood some way off, but she was facing him, and their eyes met for a moment before he broke off and took faint steps toward the gate. He could feel her hurrying back up toward him along the tops of the rocks, but he didn't turn to look at her. He stopped on the edge of his perch and looked out at the same water, and it might have been beautiful, but she was making toward him, and he thought of nothing else. He wouldn't speak. No, he wouldn't. He sat back down. He would wrench shut the fault line. He wouldn't stand in the rain for her. She would never know that he had loved first, that her initial uncertainty had gutted him on the roadway, that her indifference then still haunted him now. There would be no others.

He looked down at her as she scrambled up onto the ledge next to him. Her hair teased in front of her face in the salt breeze and her eyes were still white. She smiled at him and put her hand on the top of his head and made not an intimation of sound. He looked up at her, and her gaze was trained on the sea and isles in the mist and the sunset, and they held her fully. He looked at her then and knew that she hadn't thought of him, not once. Not below while she sat in the seams of the stones as she stared at the sea. He knew that she found the sea beautiful and that his heavy stare on the ledge above her had been but the wailing of crows in the green a mile back. She didn't need him at all. He was no god; no, not at all.

"Are you ready to go back?" she asked.

"Sure."

"It's beautiful out here, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think it is."

He stood and followed behind her as she made her way to the gate and back out onto the gravel path.

MATTHEW ADAMS



Koi
photograph

SARA KLUGMAN

Cold Fish

Standing in front of the cooler full of smoked fish on Wednesday
is enough to make any woman cry, startling

her sense of what is self-evident, what is animate
when prepared plastic tubs of whitefish hit lower than the Miles
Davis she

listens to to fall asleep, when a fish's implied salt unwillingly
shifts
her body to the left. Surely her equilibrium has been gone for days

maybe months, and surely equilibrium was always fiction—
and we only swim parallel with salmon, paired and orbiting.

Salmon, who climb ladders, lay eggs, leave homelands
to be netted and be exhibited in this shelved refrigerator,

laying languid on our tables on Sundays, touching red onions and
fingers—
salmon that she, tipping left towards the boxed crackers, nearly
tastes:

smooth, wet, and Atlantic. Fish scales rest in the dumpster
outdoors
their kidneys hearts and stomachs split, coiled into delicacies.

There is nothing romantic about what is lost in sediments of
rivers—
it is not prudent to ask her to shift onto two feet because

in time she will feel that the tile floor is cold—the assorted
olives are on sale, it's pouring outside, the fish remains stacked
and sealed.

SARA KLUGMAN

Rumi was Wrong

Rumi once wrote that “being human is a guest house,” an open
door,
an unfurnished body, a ribcage bowl. When I think about the
body

as a wooden house in the Berkshires, a motel on Cape Cod, a bed
in the Adirondacks—
there are factory carpets, unclaimed cigarettes, pastel paintings.

I'd like to paint my mailbox. I want to bring carpets and common
sense
my mother laid down in winters & wallpaper with garlic skins of
past dinners.

I don't want to think of inevitability, but to treat humans
and bricks with deserved fortification. I'll core earth

from below my feet in long cylinders, gather dirt
in my teeth from unwashed vegetables to make mortar.

The foundation will sit in the valley, arms resting on walls
beholden
to mountains. Crenellations on castles: the hair on my head. I'll
invite them in:

the post officers and prophets. Rumi insists that we will have
visitors,
who plunder our homes and rent us out before returning the key.
But,

I'd protest. I have a zip code here in my body, I can prove it—
it is numbered by the bones in my foot, by the space as broad as
my hips,

underneath the sink, next to the double hinge.
It's engraved by the weight of my conviction: I live here.

PATRICK DEENEY

The Soldiering Life and Hard Bread

“Mylo... Mylo, it’s time to get up.”

Mylo opened his eyes. The sun coming in through the gaping opening in the wall made it difficult to focus right away. He lifted his hands and rubbed them while letting out a big yawn. “What time is it?”

He felt the blankets move as his sister stood up and walked across the room. “Breakfast time. Here, eat this.” Her hand held out an apple to him. He pushed himself to sit up, moving his eyes away from the sun, then grabbed it joyfully and took a huge bite. His sister sat back down on the bed. “Looks like you are hungry.”

Mylo nodded vigorously as he crunched another mouthful out of the apple. “Where’d you get it?”

“You won’t believe it. Someone just handed it to me when I went out to get some water.”

Mylo looked up. “They just gave it to you?”

His sister smiled back and tousled his hair. The sunlight that passed through the hole landed gently on her face, hiding the dirt that covered it in a brilliance of light. A cut had appeared across her cheek that had not been there the night before. “Yup! He just handed it to me, so I thought I’d come right back and give it to you!”

Mylo smiled as he wiped his mouth of juice. He held the apple up to his sister, “Want some?”

Her head shook. “I’m not hungry. That’s all for you!” She stood up and dusted herself off. “Once you’re done we’re going to go find

more food. Sound good?”

Mylo nodded as he shoved the apple farther into his mouth, trying to get as much out of each bite as he could.

Echoes from the street below made their way up the rocky walls and through the hole in the wall. The daily clamor of the market on the street below where they lived was Mylo’s favorite sound in the morning. He stood up and walked out of the blankets strewn across the dusty floor to look down on the busy people.

Everywhere he looked people were busy carrying on with their ordinary routines. The sun had risen higher in the sky, bouncing its rays off of the rough white stones that made up the surrounding buildings. A few of the buildings had holes pocketing their tough exteriors. Some were small, but others spanned the length of an entire building.

The whole street was a mass of color and sound. A warm breeze passed by, carrying with it the smells from further down the street. Fresh-baked bread and cooking meats saturated Mylo’s sense of smell. He closed his eyes and basked in the warmth of the sun as his senses took in his surroundings.

A din from the same direction as the wind snapped Mylo out of his trance. A group of six men were walking in formation, each heavily armed and covered in armor.

“Look, Kay. Soldiers!”

His sister walked over to him and looked out the hole. She put a hand on Mylo’s shoulder and pulled him in closer. “I wonder what they’re doing here?”

Mylo started bouncing. “They’re probably here to catch the bad guys!”

Kay tousled Mylo’s hair again. “Probably!”

Mylo took another bite of his apple. “I wish I could be a soldier...Do you think that one day when I grow up that could happen? Do you think I could be just like Dad?”

Kay sat down on the ground and started wrapping her feet with strips of cloth. “When you grow up, Mylo, you can be whatever you want.”

Mylo’s eyes grew wide. He started imagining life as a tough soldier. He would travel to distant lands to save people from the rebels that killed people and destroyed buildings. Those people would be so grateful that they would make him a hero and give him all the food he could ever want to eat.

The last few bites of apple didn’t seem as exciting anymore. He moved away from the hole and put the apple down on a rock in the corner of their room.

“What are you doing?” Kay stood up and walked over to him. She picked up the apple and held it in front of his face. “Don’t

waste food. You never know when you'll be eating again."

Mylo reluctantly grabbed the apple and finished the last few bites, his mind still fixated on the soldiers. "Do you think Dad will come back?"

Kay finished tying the end of the cloth into a knot so that it would not fall off. "I don't know. Maybe we will see him again someday."

Mylo perked up a bit. "Then maybe he can take us to live with him!"

Kay motioned for the apple core. Mylo had eaten most of it, but there was still a little bit of fruit clinging tightly to the side. Kay nibbled a bit of it off and tossed it into a small pile in a corner of their small room. "I sure hope so," she muttered.

"Can we go to the market now?"

Kay smiled and nodded. She grabbed a few pieces of cloth and wrapped up Mylo's feet the same way she had wrapped her own.

Kay grabbed a satchel from the corner, and the two climbed out the hole. The sun had risen quite high since Mylo had awakened. The two stood on a narrow ledge that spanned the length of the old building. They made their way toward what used to be the building next to them. Now it was a pile of rubble that leaned against the wall of where they lived. The two hopped onto the pile of rocks and climbed down to street level.

Mylo looked up at his sister. "So what are we doing today?"

"We are going to see who can get people to give the most food." She scanned the market street and then looked down at her little brother. "Who ever has the most by the end of the day wins. Deal?"

"No fair. You already have a head start!"

Kay chuckled. "Fine, I'll let you go first. Just be careful and stay where I can see you, alright?"

Mylo nodded and dashed off into the crowd. People were everywhere, mulling about between the different stalls. Mylo threaded through the crowd to find his favorite stall on the street, a bakery. Two men were walking in front of Mylo, deep in conversation.

"Where do you think the soldiers were off to?"

"Another faction of those rebels was located, so they probably wanted to stomp it out before it grew any larger."

"Do you think they could also help with the rat problem we have here?"

"Did you get robbed again?"

"Yup. I turned my back on her for one second, and the next thing I know, I'm missing a few apples."

Mylo slipped past the two men and ran ahead. The mob thinned out a bit as he reached his favorite shop. Mylo clambered onto the counter so he could see what was for sale. Various pastries and breads sat in baskets, waiting to be bought by hungry customers.

"Hey, Mylo! What're you up to today?"

Mylo looked up. Gustavo was pulling a tray of fresh-baked bread out of a brick oven.

"Hey, Gustavo. Me and Kay are seeing who can get the most food today. She gave me a head start 'cause she was able to get some before I woke up."

Gustavo set the tray on a stone platform behind him and turned back to face Mylo. "That was nice of her!"

"Yup! She's a great big sister."

Gustavo laughed. His voice echoed out of the stall and off the opposite wall, filling the air with joy. He took a seat on a small stool behind the counter and started rifling through things. "How old are you now, Mylo?"

Mylo pulled himself up, crossing his legs on the counter, and held up his fingers. "Six."

Gustavo sat up on his stool and rubbed his large stomach. "Six? Wow, you're getting big! That means you need a lot of food. So here's what I'm going to do for you." He motioned for Mylo to lean in closer. "I'm going to give you two of my best loaves. Free of charge!"

Mylo jumped up. "Really?!"

Gustavo nodded. He pulled two loaves of bread out from under the counter. "Here you go! Enjoy them, little buddy. Say hi to Kay for me."

"Thanks, Gustavo!" Mylo took the loaves and hopped off of the counter. He weaved his way back through the crowd and found his sister standing in the shadow of the rubble pile they had climbed down. A man was standing next to her making conversation.

"So, how old are you?"

She didn't look back at him. "14."

"You're almost a fully grown woman. You need a nice, strong man in your life to keep you safe."

She looked up at the man. "There is already a man in my life. And because of him, I won't stoop to your level." She turned away and started walking toward Mylo.

Mylo held both loaves of bread high above his head. "Look what Gustavo gave me!"

Kay gave him a hug. "Wow, that's a ton of food! I don't think that I could beat you today."

"Did you even try?"

"Yup, but no one would give me anything."

"That's cause you're not as cute as me!" Mylo stuck out his tongue.

"Sure," she laughed. "Let me take these back to our room. You wait right here, okay?"

"Yup!"

Kay put both loaves into her satchel and started to climb the wall of the building.

A commotion started down the street. The soldiers from before were heading back up the street, only another man was with them. The soldiers formed a tight group around him, escorting him through the crowd of people. The seventh man wasn't wearing any armor and had his hands tied behind his back.

The situation seemed similar to one that had happened before. Mylo remembered when he was little, soldiers had entered his home and had escorted his dad away in the same fashion. Mylo started to follow them.

The soldiers moved swiftly through the mob of people, pushing aside those who didn't get out of the way fast enough. Mylo tried to keep up, passing through the crowd in the wake of the soldiers. Gustavo's shop came into view. The soldiers stopped briefly to buy a loaf of bread, then continued on their way. Mylo waved as he continued to follow the soldiers. Gustavo did a double take when he saw Mylo and tried to jump over the counter to catch up with him. His large stomach hit against it, knocking several loaves of bread onto the dusty ground.

Mylo giggled at the spectacle and continued following the soldiers. His imagination floated towards the soldiering life. He marched behind the group, waiting for the day he could be like his dad and become a hero.

The soldiers soon stopped in the middle of a courtyard. Mylo stood back as they climbed onto a platform and pushed the man down to his knees.

Mylo's mind filled with excitement. "This must be when they select the soldiers. That could be me one day!"

One of the soldiers walked forward, holding a scroll in his hands. He unrolled it and began reading: "On this day, the criminal known as Makine, second leader of the rebellion, shall be put to death." The soldier rolled up the scroll as two others drew their swords.

Mylo's smile dropped.

"MYLO!" Kay ran up and pulled him in close, turning him around and putting his head in her shoulder. "Why did you run off? I got so worried."

"Dad's not a hero, is he?" Mylo's breathing became shaky. "He's not off fighting bad guys and saving the day."

"No, Mylo. He's not."

Tears started to well up and seep out of the corners of his eyes. He began to weep. "WHY DID YOU LIE TO ME!"

Kay gently put her hand on the back of his head. "Before Mom died, she told me never to tell you about Dad. She wanted someone in this family to grow up seeing the world the way it was meant to be seen. With all the beauty, love and happiness that we all hope exist. Through innocent eyes."

Mylo wrapped his arms around his sister and cried. Kay picked him up and carried him back down the street.

Gustavo was sitting on his stool, clearing the counter of bread crumbs and dirt. "Kay," he motioned for them to come near.

He pulled a loaf of bread off the stone platform behind him. "He's had a rough day, huh?"

"Very. Thanks for the notice."

"I would've done it for anybody." He offered the bread. "Take this. I know how much you need it."

Kay grabbed the loaf, bowing slightly, "Thank you very much."

"See you two tomorrow."

She continued walking. They reached the building. Mylo wriggled free of Kay's arms and started to climb up to the roof. Both made it up and down the narrow platform towards their hole in the wall.

Mylo sat down on his pile of blankets, wiping his eyes.

"Here, Mylo. Have some of Gustavo's bread."

"No, I want the loaves he baked for me." Mylo crawled over to the rock in the corner and picked up one of his two loaves. He bit into it and immediately pulled it out of his mouth. "It's hard."

"It's day-old bread." Kay broke off a piece and struggled to chew it. "Gustavo has always given it to us. He can't afford to give us the fresh stuff."

Mylo sniffed and took another bite of bread. "I guess it isn't all bad."

ANDREA BECKER



untitled
photograph

ANDREA BECKER

untitled

he has become comfortable enough to blow his nose
but leaves his shoes on when he enters the house
the adopted neuroses of his parents
ensure
that if i ever bore his children
they would never touch
the mighty mississippi river
or taste cookie dough, raw and sweet

i have become freud's oedipus
scrubbing off his sweat
in hot water
i can still hear my mother say
"you were conceived the first time your father and i..."
and "those narcotics tore our family apart"
a weary sigh as i clean the room
from the last night
and the last and the last and
the condom wrapper floating in the backwash
forty ounce beer
shoved—courteously—under
my own bed

i do not know what enraptures me more:
the olfactory ghost of him in the sheets or
the ecstasy of washing it out
there is humility in both
my waning tolerance and my
waxing affinity

i suffer more sisyphian pain
than the tides of
the ocean
or planets in orbit

PAUL SCHMITT

Hunchback of Got No Game

My slouch vibes from the corner attract girls like the pious to a
church bell,
but I'm publicly reminded that my back will pay for my poor
posture
and we all know bell-ringing hunchbacks don't fare well with the
ladies.
One of my short-skirted church goers hears the diss and kisses
my ass by offering a swig of piss-water beer and I know I've found
my miss for the night—
even though she's done the same for five other guys
and by one o'clock there's more foreign spit in the can than I care
to taste
but which she just keeps drinking in.

Still, "she's not like that," I tell my friends as they trade tales of
guys chasing her,
and I want to ring my bell louder to draw her away but a man can
only hunch so much.

GRACE JENNEJAHN



Consumerism
digital

JOEY STAMP

American Dream

A gas station.

Woman in her late 40s, scratching lotto tickets. Teenager behind the register.

JUDY

Comeon...comeon...diamond....diamond....cherry. FUCK.

JAMES

Didn't win?

JUDY

No goddamnit. Give me another.

JAMES

That'll be three dollars.

JUDY

Here.

She starts scratching.

JAMES

How much have you won?

JUDY

Today? I think like ten dollars.

JAMES

What's the biggest you've ever won?

JUDY

Hmm...let's see...biggest jackpot. FUCK.

Throws lotto ticket to the ground.

JUDY

Um, let's see...I think two years ago I won one hundred dollars on the Buku Bucks scratch...or maybe the Pirates Booty Loot scratch...that was a good day.

JAMES

What did you do with the money?

JUDY

I bought more scratches.

JAMES

Why didn't you spend it on something else?

JUDY

I'm trying to win the jackpot. Duh, kid, why does anyone buy a lotto ticket?

JAMES

I don't know. Seems like a waste of money to me.

JUDY

The hell did you just say?

JAMES

Seems like a waste of money. You never win. No one who has bought a ticket here ever wins. And even if they do win, they just use the money to buy more lotto tickets, or maybe a pack of cigarettes. But no one ever does anything interesting with it.

JUDY

Fuck you. Ain't you got any manners?

She scratches in silence.

JUDY

Fuck....Give me...two of the \$5,000 FIESTA.

He doesn't do anything.

JUDY

Now would be great.

JAMES

Alright alright...Tener una gran fiesta.

JUDY
Shut up. Ain't no way to treat a lady.

Silence as she scratches.

JAMES
What would you do with the money?

JUDY
Fuck you.

JAMES
Seriously, what would you do? What are your dreams?

JUDY
You really want to know?

JAMES
Yeah.

JUDY
You're not fucking with me?

JAMES
No. Promise.

JUDY
....Paint. I want to be a painter.

JAMES
Get out.

JUDY
See, I fucking knew it. I knew you'd make fun of me.

JAMES
No, I'm not. I promise. Painting is cool.

JUDY
Yeah...It is. I really enjoy it. I want to get my degree in studio art. I could use the money to go to the community college, get my associates. Who knows, maybe sell some art to a fancy millionaire.

JAMES
That'd be cool...

JUDY
Yeah...

She scratches some more; he watches.

JUDY
What about you?

JAMES
Hmmm...Well I would definitely buy the next Xbox, that's for sure. Then maybe a pair of Air Jordans, oh, and a nice set of Beats.

JUDY
Really?

JAMES
What?

JUDY
You'd just buy stuff?

JAMES
Hey, I didn't make fun of your art crap.

JUDY
Yeah but at least mine was useful.

JAMES
Yeah...then I'd pay for my mom's health care.

JUDY
What's wrong with your mom?

JAMES
She has cancer. She's dying...

JUDY
Damn. I'm sorry, kid.

JAMES
Yeah...me too.

Silence. She scratches.

JUDY
Tell you what. I'm gonna go big, for both of us. Give me two of the \$20 GOLD RUSH TRIPLER scratch offs. One for me, and one for you.

JAMES
Whoa. Okay, big spender.

JUDY
Yeah. We could both use some luck. What do you think?

...well...if you are buying.

JAMES

JUDY

Yeah, I am.

She hands him the money. He pulls out two lotto tickets.

JUDY

Alright. Need a penny?

JAMES

Ummm...

JUDY

To scratch it with. Haven't you ever done these before?

JAMES

No. I can't afford to.

JUDY

Okay, I'll show you. Watch me do mine. There are many techniques, but basically your numbers have to match the winning ones. You just scratch off all of these ones here...*She scratches them off...*Ah, see, these are my numbers. These are the winning numbers.

JAMES

Did you win?

JUDY

Um...No, none of my numbers match.

JAMES

Ah, okay.

JUDY

Your turn, kid.

She hands him her penny.

JAMES

Okay.

He starts scratching. She watches him.

JAMES

Alright. I scratched them all off. Did I win?

He hands her the card.

JUDY

Um...lemme look...uh....um.....nope. Dang, kid. Better luck next time.

JAMES

Can I see?

JUDY

None of your numbers matched.

JAMES

But can I just look at it?

JUDY

Better luck next time, kid.

JAMES

HEY. Come on. Let me look at it.

JUDY

Look, forget it. I have to go.

JAMES

Hey, stop. *She tries to put it in her pocket. He wrestles it from her grasp. A struggle ensues.* Come on. Give it!

JUDY

No. Get off me!

JAMES

It's mine. Give it to me! *He knocks her over, grabs the lotto ticket...*All the numbers match. I'm a millionaire.

She tackles him to the ground and sits on top of him and starts hitting his face.

JUDY

NO. I BOUGHT THE TICKET. THE MONEY IS MINE.

JAMES

Get off me, you crazy bitch!

JUDY

GIVE ME MY MONEY. IT'S MINE. IT'S MINE.

They struggle. He pushes her off. He sits on her and puts his hands around her throat. She struggles more. She feverishly tries to knock her off of him. Her efforts weaken. She loses strength. He tries with his last effort to free himself. Then she stops moving. He gets off, struggles to stand. Pries the lotto ticket from her hand. Runs off.

MARK JONES

jazz haiku

crazy old woman
thinks Louis Armstrong's a god—
but listen

*

monoglot pianist
thinks he can play manteca
in church

CHLOE N. CLARK

So Fast It Was Supposed They Fly

The high wire artist broke
my heart with his first
step and I will always

remember that you and I
are not so different
with the language you
only half speak and the one
I only half remember

and each time he falls
I watch him in slow
motion, then backwards,
then sped up so fast

that one blink and I miss
everything that you told
me to watch out for

and sometimes I miss him
completely, I look away
and turn back to just the wire,
taut, and I can almost believe he never
stepped out at all.

DANIELLE LENSEN

Posy Designs

“The front door windows look *disgusting*. Did you even clean them last time?” Trista asks, as she speeds past the break room and into her office.

“I...no, I don’t think so. I ran out of time,” I answer, without looking at her. I’m focusing on trying to get my royal blue Posy Designs work apron tied over my head and around my waist. It’s all knotted up.

“Are you...is this how today is going to go? You can’t even get your apron on. Come here.” Her high heels clip against the red tiled floor as she walks toward me.

My arms drop to my sides. I feel the tug of the apron around my waist as she ties the four strings into a perfect bow.

“You’re wearing khaki,” she points with her whole arm, making it fall with a slap against her leg. “Corporate asks that you wear white or black. Why do I have to keep telling you that?” She tugs at the apron one last time, and I smell her musty perfume as she turns around to leave.

Her breath smells like egg sandwich.

I clip on my name tag and take a step forward in order to stuff my winter coat into my assigned locker.

“I didn’t even know they made khaki shirts,” she mutters under her breath as her high heels click out of the break room. Her long-nailed hands push the stockroom door open with a whoosh. She quickly leaves the stockroom and enters the sales floor.

“Tag said it was white,” I say to the empty room. I readjust my apron and slam my locker door.

It’d be okay if that egg sandwich were expired.

*

I picked up some holiday hours at Posy Designs two months ago because two part-time jobs are better than one. From day one, this experience has given a whole new meaning to the phrase “out of my comfort zone.” Posy Designs is a chain of retail stores, based out of California, that sells imported furniture, collectibles, dinnerware, and other stuff.

So much other stuff.

Do you need a trivet? We have those—I don’t know what they are—but we have them. Need a lazy Susan? I learned last week we have those. An elderly lady, dripping of Chanel No. 5 and too much makeup, walked in on Wednesday with the direct words, “I need a lazy Susan.” Broom in hand, I squinted at her and refrained from sneezing at the smell of her perfume.

“We...don’t sell...anything lazy...here,” I frowned, my brain racing to figure out the item.

“Right this way, ma’am,” Trista popped over, placing a hand on the lady’s back. “Are you looking for a porcelain or wooden one? We have the three-tiered ones as well. Are you entertaining for Thanksgiving in a few weeks? What’s the color scheme of your table setting?”

The store is cluttered and packed with sofas, loveseats, dining room furniture—all of which have first names, might I add, because “calling a piece of furniture by a single name allows the customer to get acquainted with the piece of furniture that will soon become part of their family.”

Because *that’s* normal.

Identifying and finding the “Abbie” sleeper sofa on the sales floor is simple compared to customers walking in the store asking for a porcelain cocktail spoon. How do you locate a porcelain spoon in a store crowded with wing chairs, ottomans, sofas, and lazy Susans? Half the time I’m more concerned with losing the customer in the store—really, like *in* the store. After fifteen minutes of tracking down a porcelain cocktail spoon, I can no longer find the customer who wanted it. I just start to walk around aimlessly or stand by the front door waiting for him to pop back into view. If I don’t see the customer after three minutes, I start to have irrational fears that he’s pinned underneath a toppled over papasan or one of our imported Buddha statues.

I’ve learned to embrace the daily mistakes I make working here. I learn from them, and, just for fun, rank them from “Worst Mistake Today” to “Don’t Worry About It.” Yesterday, I tripped over an innocent C-Table, sending its glass top shattering across Posy Design’s signature red-tiled floor. The retail price on it was \$315.

I didn't worry about it.

I walk into the store three mornings a week knowing that one of three things will happen: I'll either be blindsided by a strange product request, break something, or get degraded by Trista.

Trista is the manager of Posy Designs. She isn't required to wear a royal blue apron. Instead, she dresses in fancy pantsuits and a different pair of animal print heels every day. A blinged-out Diane von Fürstenberg keychain dangles from the store's front door keys every morning when she lets me in to start my shift. She's tall, but stout, and wears copious amounts of beige lipstick and self-tanner. You can tell she uses the spraycan kind because the very edge of her hairline is orange. Her brown hair falls in curls at her shoulders, and she always smells of some kind of floral perfume. It's this perfume I smell as I walk out of the stockroom and onto the sales floor.

"Are we going to get a card today?" Trista yells from the middle of the store. She's on the second rung of a ladder, shining the new shipment of crystal bowls and chinaware we must have just received. A big red sign stands next to the crystalware indicating that the bowl itself is on sale for \$799.

"I hope to," I say, headed toward the cash registers in search of the staff binder that contains today's sales goals. "Are those new?" I ask, stopping mid-step and pointing at the crystal chinaware.

"With that attitude and product knowledge, you will *never* get on register," she says as she heads down the ladder. "Yes, they're new. We got them in on Monday. Don't touch them. Grab me if a customer is interested."

In my two months at Posy Designs, I have yet to work at the cash register. Trista's policy is that we have to sell a Posy Design's credit card on the sales floor before being able to work the registers. I've been here two months and have yet to make any progress. It might—just might—be a little bit of my defiant behavior masked in my meek submissiveness.

"Did you look over the sales goals today?" she asks, approaching the desk. She hands me the binder. I open it and see the red and green numbers written across a big pie chart. I stop for a moment to read everything.

"Okay. I *assume* you can read," Trista says, making a circle motion with her entire hand before resting it on her hip.

"Oh...yeah, I didn't—okay," I say, making eye contact with Trista and realizing I needed to not only read her mind, but read today's goals out loud to her as well. "Units per transaction are down 15 percent, but overall sales are up. The use of the card is down pretty bad, and so is our conversion rate."

"We are doing terrible with sales this week. What do we need

to work on?" she asks, slamming the binder shut.

"Um, getting to know the customer and inquiring about what they're looking—"

"No," she interrupts, "We need to be aggressive with the card and get them to make purchases today. Ask open-ended questions. Don't let them walk out of here with just measurements. Tell them that the couch they want *today* will not be here *tomorrow*, and that they better pick up two or three throws to complement the color scheme of their living room and new couch. Get persistent, Danielle. Talk to everyone about the credit card. We need you on register by Black Friday."

The front door buzzes. She turns on a heel and marches to the front of the store to let Rachael, another sales associate, in for her shift.

I can feel my heart beating. I hate that Trista intimidates me so much. I hate that I need this job.

"Have you even read the product pocket guides I gave the associates last week?" she yells from the front doors. "So much info is in there about the card—I don't understand why you don't just take the time to read it."

Quickly, I glance through the pages of the product guide someone must have stuffed in my apron. I hear high-pitched chattering coming from the front of the store. Trista hired Rachael last quarter due to the fact that they've been best friends since their Delta Sigma Theta days. They're like twins. With different hair. That's about it.

"Danielle, you'll be in zone one today. Greet customers and—"

"Talk about the card. Yep," I interrupt as the front door dings with our first customer.

Trista disappears into the stockroom, as Rachael appears from the back with her apron neatly tied. A woman with two dining chair cushions pressed up against her heavy winter coat is at the front of the store. Our first customer.

"Hello! Welcom—"

"Yeah, I want to make a return," she says, not making eye contact, but instead looking at the other dining cushions along the wall.

"Sure. What isn't working with these?" I ask, pointing at the ones in her arms and ignoring her rudeness. "The style? Color?"

"No, they're too soft. People who come over complain they're too poofy," she says, pulling a few other styles off the wall.

What...a first-world problem, I think to myself. "Right. We can go ahead and return or exchange them for a different style. I'll get someone at register for you," I add, quickly walking to the

cash registers and grabbing the bridge of my nose.

"Does she have a card?" Trista asks. I jump out of fear that she's suddenly learned to appear out of nowhere.

"Oh, I didn't ask yet," I say, avoiding eye contact as I straighten an already perfectly straightened napkin on the hold shelf.

"Why do—" Trista starts. The front door rings.

"Hi there. What brings you out shopping this morning?" I yell in a loud voice from the cash register, interrupting Trista's thought. I quickly break eye contact with her and hustle to the front of the store. I round a corner of table lamps and make an abrupt stop at the dressers. I'm used to seeing ritzy elderly women, clutching their purses and adjusting their hair, as soon as I hear the front bell ring. This time, I see a man who appears to be in his late 80s. A skinny black cane supports his frail and doubled-over body. The wrinkles on his face have made his skin so folded over that it's tough to see the color of his eyes. A thin red mustache dots the skin above his mouth, and a stocking hat covers his head. He's wrapped in a thin windbreaker jacket and visibly shivers when he enters the store. The shivers don't seem to stop.

"Good morning," I say to him quietly, "Are you staying warm out there?"

"It's rather difficult to," he says. His voice is quiet and shaky.

"What can I help you find today?" I smile, looking him straight in the eyes to let him know I'm here to help.

"Well," he starts, "I'd like to buy my wife something nice. We'll be married sixty-five years next month, and she deserves something special for putting up with me."

I laugh through my nose.

"I'll let you look around a bit," I say, "We've got quite a few candles and gifts in the back. Just yell if you need help with anything in the meantime."

He nods his head, smiles, and shuffles toward the back of the store.

I turn around and run smack into Trista.

"Why—do you *do* that?" I ask, grabbing my stomach.

"Does he have a card? What is he shopping for?" she asks rapidly. Her eyes are huge.

"He's looking for a gift. I haven't talked about the card yet."

"Old people can be talked into anything. Talk about the card," she says, glancing behind her.

I pause, hoping that the awkward silence between us will clue Trista into the shallowness of her comment.

"...right," I mutter, walking past her and towards the man. I see he's glancing at the candles.

"How's it going over here?" I ask, straightening up some

candles a few shelves down. I glance over and see the man counting cash in his wallet.

"Oh, okay," he says quickly, shuffling to put his wallet back in his pocket. "Say, those bowls up there are something, eh?"

He uses his cane to point at the new crystalware Trista shined this morning.

"They really are," I say.

"My wife would love those." His arms are shaking as he cranes his neck to look up at the crystalware. His eyes are green.

"Just let me know if you want to take a closer look at anything," I say. "I'd be happy to take those down for you."

"She deserves something like that," he says, smiling. I don't think he hears me. I smile and head to the front to dust the coffee tables. Trista hasn't suddenly emerged behind any big furniture, so I assume she must be in the back. I hear Rachael discussing the benefits of the credit card with the woman who complained about the poofy cushions. I roll my eyes and head for the broom to sweep under the trunks and dining tables.

Suddenly, I hear an explosion. A sound so loud that I almost lose my balance. I glance around the couches to the front door windows to see if it came from outside. Instead, I see a man walking his dog as if nothing happened. My ears are ringing, and my heart pounds through my apron. It takes me a bit to realize where the sound came from. The broom falls with a slap as I run towards the man in the back. I see thousands of tiny glass pieces shimmering in the light on the red tiled floor. I'm breathing heavily as I round the corner, hoping I don't see too much blood.

Instead, I see the man, still doubled over, and crying. I rush over to him and place a hand on his elbow.

"Are you okay?" I whisper.

"I just—she deserves them—I...I thought I could grab it," he whispers back. Tears are streaming down his face. I glance up and see the crystal bowl missing from the top shelf.

I close my eyes and grab my forehead. Suddenly, I hear the back stockroom door open with a whoosh. Rapid clipping noises crunch the glass on the floor. My breathing intensifies.

The man is shaking uncontrollably. I place my hand on his back. He makes eye contact with me. I press my forefinger to my lips. *Please*, I mouth to him. Tears continue to race each other, getting stuck in the wrinkles of his face.

Trista's arms and shoulders are hovering over her sides as if someone had just dumped a bucket of cold water over her head.

"Are you..."

I take a step in between the man and Trista.

"I am so sorry," I say quickly, "I thought I could grab it from

the top. I'm—"

"I can't even *look* at you right now." She's rubbing her temples and can't seem to stop looking at the broken glass. "Do you even have a..." she takes a quick breath through her nose. "*—that*," she says, pointing at the glass on the floor, "is taken *out* of our revenue."

"I'm sorry—"

"You are such a mistake. I hired you on a whim, thinking you'd take up space and maybe learn something. It's a *privilege* to work here and ever since you've been hired, I've had to work twice as hard. You're gone. I will *make* it my mission—" Trista's lips quiver with each word she spits at me.

Rolling my eyes, I turn around and untie my apron. The elderly man must have left. Anger pounds itself into the form of a headache as I throw my apron on the ground. I walk past Rachael and her customer, both of them clutching credit card applications. I double back.

"Take a look on page twenty-seven of that credit card application," I say to the woman with the dining cushions. Rachael seems to be in shock.

"It has a hidden annual fee of \$50, and the interest rate starts out at 24 percent. You can't pay anything back in store, and customer service has weird hours. Yeah, it's the best way to get coupons, but in order to use those savings, you need to make the purchase with the store's credit card. We don't tell customers that on the sales floor because the supervisors tell us not to," I say, itching my nose. I glance toward the register and see Trista looking at me in disbelief.

"Well, would you look at *that*?" I say, locking eyes with Trista, "I can read."

Trista is making weird throat noises as I make my way to the front door. I stop at the table lamps. The old man, still shaking uncontrollably, is waiting for me at the door. He's trying his hardest to stand up straight without his cane.

I look into his eyes and swallow back a twinge in my throat. I link my arm in his and slowly open the front door for both of us to walk through. I hold him up as we make our way out the door. His hand catches a bit of the front door window, leaving a smudge.

JENNA MICHEL



Humming Bees
impasto

ADAM D. O'DELL

Your Lover's Eyes

Your lover's eyes may not be perfect,
But they do look back to you.
Stroking her hair, which does not shine,
Still your favorite thing to do.

Beauty isn't static,
It changes every day.
Others may not see it,
But it's perfect anyway.

The world sees "perfect" beauty
Through size, and wealth, and fame,
But when you see your lover,
And you speak your lover's name,
Perfect isn't "perfect,"
But it's perfect all the same.

JOE ARMS

Fractured Prism

Beams of light are starting to burst through the blinds,
revealing the different shades you painted on your face hours
earlier.
When I first saw you, I noticed how transparent my drink was,
yet
it tasted so colorful.

The more I drank
the more beautiful
your shades became.

As we traveled past the chapel,
surrounded by evergreens and shaded from the heavens,
you discarded all facades and
presented me the prism you kept guarded in a cage of bone.

I was the first
man to speak to you in light years.
As my illuminated words touched your prism, you were shown
the entire spectrum of our potential love.
We quickly stopped at a rest stop in your bedroom
and explored the longest wavelengths
the spectrum provided.

You fell asleep in a blanket of comforting
verbs and adjectives
I presented to you.
When you wake up,
shivering,
you'll open your eyes and realize
my blanket has faded away.

I've left your prism broken,
cooling off,
in the space where I laid.

Please pick up the pieces.
It wasn't right for me to take it from you.
Please pick up the pieces.
A fractured prism can still take in illuminations.

MARISA DONNELLY

Little Wonders

RAIN – I am standing naked in the pouring rain. It's late on a Friday night. Or early on a Saturday morning. It depends on how you choose to look at it. The rain is hitting my body, and it feels like hundreds of little blunt needles. They don't hurt. But people always tell you that. At the doctor's office they look at you and say *Just count to three and think about Santa Claus! It's just a little poke! It won't hurt a bit!* They lie, those nurses. And they're pretty good at it, too.

But this rain really doesn't hurt me. It feels cleansing. It's entering my pores and washing out all the dirt like a microdermabrasion. *Microdermabrasion: a light cosmetic procedure that uses a mechanical medium for exfoliation to gently remove the outermost layer of dead skin cells from the epidermis.* The exfoliating process uses crystal or diamond flakes to rub on the skin and make it brand new again.

The average cost of a diamond engagement ring is between \$3,500 and \$4,000.

Meanwhile, at the dermatologist, diamond flakes are used to exfoliate a pubescent teenager's pimply face.

This rain makes me feel brand new.

LOVE – March 6, 1993: A mother gives birth to a nine-pound baby girl. This baby was stubborn and in breech position. A cesarean section delivery was required.

The mother looks down at her child. Despite the pounding in her head, the aching in her back, and the numbing of her abdomen, she sees the most beautiful creature in the world. She

cannot fathom that she has brought this life—this breathing, crying, blinking life—into the world. She would do anything for that nine-pound lump of flesh. *So this is what love feels like*, she thinks.

CHICAGO – It is August 2002. There is a man on the corner of Canal and Jackson Street, right across from Union Station. He has a saxophone with rust on the lip of the horn and a worn black instrument case sitting on the pavement.

He plays song after song on that street corner. Once in awhile, someone will stop and drop a few coins into his saxophone case. He'll smile with his eyes; the corners of his mouth will turn up, but he won't stop playing. He never stops playing.

Sometimes a little crowd will gather—mostly made of tiny children pulling on their mothers' arms, or couples, swaying to the music, calling it romantic and lovely. But I'm not so sure there's anything romantic about poverty.

This man on the street corner wears a ragged sweatshirt and green cap on his head. It's the middle of the summer, but that faded sweatshirt stays on.

His favorite song is "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." *Somewhere over the rainbow skies are blue.*

Do you ever wonder why some people have it so good?

Some of them have millions. Others spend their summer days on the street corners, every breath for a quarter.

LOVE – Is love real? What does love mean anyway? To tie ourselves fully? To tie a knot? To become one with another person in mind and body and soul?

Soulmates: An idea invented by online dating services that promises love for each user. Soulmates: Concept taken from Aristophanes' Speech on Love that explains a process for creating offspring. Soulmates: The concept behind Adam and Eve—Eve was made from Adam's ribs; thus, they are joined both physically and emotionally.

Humans spend countless hours searching. There is that sense of incompleteness. There is that fear that you will never find another to complete you. We all want love so real that it can never be broken. Will we ever find it?

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*

TIME – Every ten seconds, an instance of child abuse is reported. Every hour, seventy-eight rapes occur. Every day, eighty people commit suicide.

The clock on the wall ticks every second.

While you're waiting for a shift to end, while you're standing in line for your sandwich at the deli, people are dying.

Do you even notice?

RAIN – I am not drunk. I just love the rain. And what better way to enjoy something than to feel completely free?

Standing in the rain, I am free from thoughts. I am free from judgments. I am free from insecurities. No one is here. I am alone.

What better way to enjoy something than to feel completely free? I am free from everything. Even clothes.

CHICAGO – June 28, 2012: The city of Chicago decriminalized marijuana.

I was walking down North Avenue Beach to the bus stop on Lake Shore Drive when I saw a homeless man with a sign. This sign was plain black sharpie on a faded piece of cardboard. It read:

Fuck a cheeseburger, I just want to get high.

TIME – There are 86,400 seconds in a day. There are 10,080 minutes in a week. There are 52.2 weeks in a year.

How much of that time is wasted?

None of that time will we ever get back.

LOVE – The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world—750,000 teen pregnancies every year. According to the Center for Disease Control, one-third of girls get pregnant before the age of twenty.

Love: *A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another.*

Love: *A deep romantic or sexual attachment to another.*

Have we lost what it means to love? Instead of giving our hearts, we give our bodies.

So many are bringing a child into this world so young...but who is to say this young mother can't love?

The mother looks down at her child. She cannot fathom that she has brought this life—this breathing, crying, blinking, life—into the world.

She would do anything for that nine-pound lump of flesh. *So this is what love feels like*, she thinks.

RAIN – Every minute, one billion tons of rain falls on the Earth.

A single droplet of water can move up to a speed of 18 mph.

Before falling to the earth, a raindrop may travel thousands of miles.

I am standing in the rain, and I am singing. I am singing and I am laughing out loud because no one can hear me. I am crying because I am both happy and sad. I am singing and laughing and crying because this life is so confusing and sometimes that's all you know how to do.

In 2007, singer Rob Thomas released a track about life and rain.

He named it "Little Wonders."

These little wonders, these twists and turns of fate.

Time falls away, but these small hours still remain.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH



Tiles

ANDREA BECKER

Long Shower

“i gotta piss! get out” my roommate wailed
but
i sat like a rock
on the shower floor
for hundreds of years and watched myself erode
i turned to particles of sediment
that would float through an ocean
of shit
and gag grown men in processing plants
for sixty minutes of eight hours of seven days
of infinite workweeks
with no vacation and no reprieve

the clear water was lifted away from me
and i became eternally lost
inside mountains of waste
gratefully discarded into some designated prison
where i found the fortunes
of the hopeful sun and the wind in motion
and from the soil of the earth—
i was born again

the door opened
the fog diffused
“thank god” he pushed past me
“i was about to go piss
outside”

JOE ARMS

Naturally Uncomfortable

I stop sleeping at 9:00 am. Only because that's when I've programmed the small yet deafening plastic machine to flash and shriek until I'm coerced into slapping it silent. Every day it does this—its unnatural, daily routine. And every day I roll over to slap it silent and check a smaller, palm-sized, plastic machine for the day's weather reports. On second thought, maybe it's aluminum, or metal, or, more likely, a Frankenstein-esque creation. Whatever its composition, after a few swipes of my finger, I've now collected enough data to predict how the day's weather will behave.

The sun will break through the clouds just before midday, and there it will be unthreatened until it has left for the other side of the globe. During its time in my virgin sky, it will bully our occupied Earth with heat wave after relentless heat wave. I make the decision to clothe myself in a light cotton shirt and breezy boardshorts when I go out today.

I turn the brass shower handle from west to east, and rain falls from above. The water is bone-numbingly cold at first, but soon arrives at the temperature I've chosen. I let the wet flow from the crest of my head downward, where it picks up speed at my neck. Through the miniscule valleys of my skin, over my grown and sprouting hairs, and under my rooted feet, it flows.

I squeeze some ammonium lauryl sulfate, cocamidopropyl betaine and sodium chloride from a bottle named Garnier Fructis. The ooze drips from the overturned bottle with such viscosity that I wonder how it is supposed to cleanse me. The question lingers for a moment, then follows the shampoo bubbles down the drain.

*

The world's most widely consumed psychoactive drug is caffeine. The Wikipedia website tells me that from all of the data it has collected, it has learned that caffeine is a biocide that kills some beings, yet enhances others. And I routinely choose to abuse it every morning along with ninety percent of the adults in North America. This morning is no different, and after I commit my abuse, I try to conceive a justification for consuming an empty donut. Failing, I instinctively consume one anyway as I head out the door.

With a practiced flick of my wrist, I send gasoline into the engine of my motorized, horseless carriage and ignite a force that will propel me to whichever location I wish to go. And I wish to go to the Mines of Spain, a manufactured nature center in my hometown of Dubuque, Iowa. I travel thirty miles per hour, barely moving, down the recently asphalted avenue towards my destination.

At a stop sign, next to a branch of bank that I entrust to shelter my green-colored gold, I notice my alarm clock's older relation displayed underneath the bank's masthead, forcing the time and temperature into every conscious passerby. The L.E.D. lights of the sign are currently reading ninety-two degrees, and I start to sweat, either because of the lit sign or because of the sun. This sweat is not a process that I've chosen to do. I've been forced. As a counter measure, I force the climate of my car to lower the temperature to seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit, effectively canceling out the energy radiating from the sun and sign. I like being comfortable.

There is a dog on a porch. There is a dog on a porch lying down with eyes open but not seeing, only watching. He likes to be comfortable.

There is me in a car. There is me in a car sitting down with eyes open but not watching, only seeing. I like to be comfortable.

However, it's difficult when all I see are people crashing their cars because they were only watching. They liked to be comfortable.

I like to be comfortable, but I cannot be when I am traveling along the same roads used by bodies whose minds have traveled so far from them that they've been left blind. Unable to see their surroundings, they're forced to react to filtered, visual data that has the potential to steer the body into a broken state of being. Bodies do not see; they only watch.

After too long I realize that my body has survived the concrete and steel world and has reunited with me at the land of

wood and leaf and life. My body inhales oxygen, and I exhale all pollutants from the city. I like to be comfortable.

In the few steps I've taken from my car, which is now resting between two predetermined, carefully yellowed lines, I've been told three things by painted and hung slabs of dead wood.

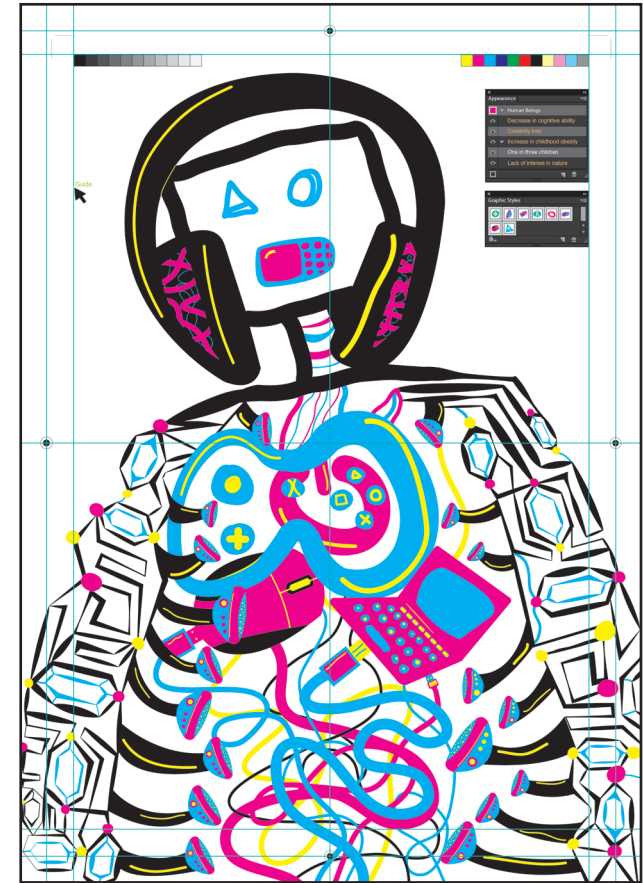
The first slab informs me that I am currently occupying space within a designated wildlife management area. I believe the first slab is implying that I must tame my behavior in respect to the effort that has been given to manage the wildlife, an effort that modifies the wildlife, a modification that contradicts the exact name of the area being managed. The wildlife is no longer wild; it has been subdued, broken and domesticated. Like me, it has been cultivated to be tame.

The second painted and hung slab prohibits the use of firearms. Without hesitation, I check the limbs I have attached to my torso for burning flames. Finding none, I realize that the slab painter naturally meant that portable piece of steel, powder, and projectile. I check my hip and find not steel, powder, nor projectile, but skin, meat, and blood. I wonder why the slab painter doesn't choose to paint and hang copies of this slab in the city where firearms can naturally be found.

The final slab tells me that no machine is allowed onto the off-road trails of the managed wildlife area. My stride breaks before entering the trails. Memories of my mornings magnify. I stop sleeping every morning at 9:00 like clockwork. Every day I disperse water over valleys and sprouts like an automated sprinkler. I consume caffeine for fuel like a car consumes gasoline.

And then my heart beats a little faster as I watch a field mouse dart across the off-road trail, and I see my body take another comfortable breath.

FAITH BRITT



Human Dependence on Technology
digital

Spectral Marches

there are days, silent, when scars of past times haunt,
wounds invisible that show no mark, nor color,
how for them to be like soldierly ghosts, unseen, yet ever present,
ever stepping.

as how they move and pound the grounds,
to breach palisades of fortitude, in disrepair,
breeze forth in a brisk order, and soon smash the gates,
hammering as furtive killers, one sudden strike!

just as sharp as razor slowly dragged to flesh,
these openings, though in mind, scream just like the rest.
condemn, banish, make war, of strife,
may it seek to end such weary night and previous life.

such spirits do persist, and commence the dark onward,
coalescing inside, making mind no outpost of defense,
recovering the past and bearing the present a sinister dream.
come no way in, spirits, no do not march with deceit, danger, and
drum

what once was buried now rises, airy cannons be gone
infiltrate mind, only in thoughts vanished, of years faded,
but pound no more in ear, blasted, aching drums!
there will be days, moments, and suffering, come.

your siege encircle consciousness, and slaughter mind,
your corruption never-ceasing, and will banish all progress,
you may rip bit by bit, and spook sanity to the bugle's retreat,
and lay waste, torture captives to black cerebral earth,

but may you, transparent beings, of which the past so readily com-
mands forth,
make haste, finish it well, and raze fortress,
for drums and danger will come as one again,
upon fields eternal where battles cease to end.

it is time to move on,
and seek peace of other minds,
there is no rest, no resistance strong,
no way to hold the line

and so I upon hill, defeated, watch city burn,
the light of fiery synapses ascend,
and ghouls dance gleefully around in hands,
to mock, to remind how little I stand.

there will be no battle,
to meet the mourn,
or any valiant strikes,
to bind up wounds

no. only to remain here,
to watch death march on thoughts, memories, images
to set ablaze and blow asunder,
all the while, as I sit feeling, raging fire in mind.

CHLOE N. CLARK

Tub & Wolf Spider

Stretch out fingers wire brushed
eyes jeweled blinking out song
notes I keep

myself from drowning most
when I think of sand filled
jars sitting by the windows
of empty houses

each step is many
a belly washed in dew
I want

to ask where you go for
those hours when I am
dreaming of typed spreadsheets
and soured coffee beans

curl out toes and stretch
out eyes in blinking blinking
circuitry certainty wait now I

hear your mother calling you
someday she will tell
you who you might
not ever be

JENNY PARKER



Penninsula State Park Sunset
photograph

Hand Cut Stones of the West Tower, Slane, Ireland

The Friary's ruins
on the Hill of Slane
are so easy to walk around,
so easy to take home a souvenir rock,
maybe one that Patrick threw at a Druid
on Easter, uncharacteristic but a tempting image.

I, prairie farmer, wouldn't have clung to old ways but
devoured the manuscripts, learning to read and write,
mixing paints and grinding stones for pigments,
butchering lambs for vellum and treating gut to sew spines.
New technology would have
courted me, the
capture of images and voices eternally
conserved in scrolls, until a raid or fire.

Ruins of the past are the feast of the present.

On the Hill of Slane
ruins stand in profile to the sunset,
a stone resistance to time,
an added mystery of where
and when and why I feel so comfortable
here on the rain-wet grass in modern shoes
with a digital camera out of batteries.
I want to climb the outside of the west tower,
illegally, peeking into the
narrow windows to see ghosts,
slinking behind the crenellations
watching the same sunset.
I would have wanted to learn to build,
to take earth eggs and make them squared blocks,
do it like the Romans, not underground like Celts,
nothing corbelled but angled corners
like the square cut of vellum, a new shape
for a new age of rectangles standing tall
laced by long windows like a needle's eye
for threading the pages together of past ages.

Sounds of Sights

*It was part of the colossal sun,
Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality.*

-Wallace Stevens

from "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself"

Driving eastward for a nine o'clock class
in freezing clear-skied winter I saw
the sun I'd tried to avoid looking into
circled
by a rainbow, scintillating
in frozen, moist air, with a parenthesis,
another partial circle.

Oblivious to oncoming commuters,
driving the speed limit, I stared
in awe, remembering
Wallace on "Things..." not hearing his chorus

but in spellbound adoration of the brilliant blueness
above the treeless flat earth prairie,
a circle round the sun as silent symphony.

In spite of title and admonition
I'd always believed it to be a metaphor.

ANDREA BIXLER

Things That Go Bump (and Smell) in the Night

Back in graduate school, my research was on home range size and habitat use by striped skunks. OK, let's get this over with so you can focus: You think it's weird that I studied skunks, but I wanted to work with a common animal that few others had researched. Many were studying bears and red wolves, and deer are boring. In retrospect, though, skunks were a bad choice for me not merely because of the smell, but because they are nocturnal and solitary. I didn't always like being alone in the woods at night (as you will see); plus, to me, the most fascinating part of behavior is the interactions among individuals. With skunks, I got to observe social interactions only once, when I trapped a mother with her kits. A glossy, black-and-white skunk is a lovely, elegant animal—from a distance, at least—and the young are adorable. I ooded and ahed over them and felt guilty while they made pitiful little cries to each other. It wasn't a very enlightening experience as far as skunk social behavior goes.

But you're still wondering about the spray. Yes, it is nasty. If you've only smelled dead skunk by the side of the road, you have no idea how nasty fresh skunk spray is. And no, there is no way to keep them from spraying. Acting calm and approaching them slowly helps, but there are no guarantees. Once I'd trapped them, I had to be able to handle them to take measurements, determine their sex, and attach a radio collar. Because skunks carry rabies, which is a much greater concern than their odor, the animals had to be anesthetized. To accomplish this without taking a chance

of being bitten, I had to get close enough to insert a syringe. To prevent getting sprayed on my approach, I carried a large-size, heavy-duty trash bag in front of me, draped the bag over the trap, and injected them through the bag. That way, most of the spray got on the bag, which I could throw away as soon as possible.

Still, I smelled a little like skunk much of the time, or at least that's what my friends and family told me. And I don't think they were just ribbing me to get a reaction. Once, at the post office, another woman standing in line sniffed and asked for all to hear, "What on earth is that terrible smell?" Of course I tried to look as if I found the mysterious odor just as offensive as she did, but I could hardly wait until I'd purchased my stamps and could high-tail it out of there.

I worked almost entirely by myself in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Since this is one of the most popular national parks in the country, I was still surrounded by people, sometimes even at night when skunks are active and I was out looking for them. I actually would have preferred knowing there was no one else about to the chance that there might be creeps or weirdos skulking around near me. This was before the time of cell phones, so if my car broke down, I would have to walk miles to the ranger's home and probably wake someone up to come help me. On the other hand, if a stranger approached me, there wasn't much I could do besides run. After months of planning every other detail, my research advisor asked me, about an hour before the first time I drove up to the Smokies to start my research, "Are you going to take Mace or something with you?" This was his only suggestion for the problem of my safety.

I was always a little nervous about my nocturnal excursions, although not enough to prevent me from going out every night to radio track skunks. On a gorgeous moonlit night when I was fully awake and the research was going well, my work was really fun. At such times, it was easy to focus on the science. Sometimes, though, it was freezing cold and the rain soaked through my boots; I was tired, and motivation was at low ebb. And I was always more nervous about the human animals than the so-called wild animals. Yes, there were bears and coyotes, but I was confident they would not intentionally approach me. One time a coyote almost stumbled across me when I was sitting quietly, apparently upwind of him, and it frightened him worse than me. He took off like a flash, and rightly so. People are the animals that can be crazy, mean, and scary.

When I was radio tracking skunks, I carried over my shoulder a radio receiver about the size of a hard-bound novel and, connected to it by a long cable, an antenna I could use to detect the

direction from which the signal was coming. I wore headphones, also connected to the receiver, that fully covered my ears so I could detect even a faint signal from a far away radio collar. In addition to the radio tracking equipment, I wore a headlamp so that I could see where I was going and read the dials on the equipment while keeping my hands free.

One particular balmy night, I had already been unnerved to see someone lying by the edge of the road. I checked to see that there hadn't been an accident and discovered that he was an intern I knew who worked on a different project. And he wasn't wearing much. (Okay, field researchers can be a little odd.) He was occupying a wide spot beside the road where normally I would've parked my car and gotten out to try to get a good reading from a skunk's radio collar. His presence reminded me that there might be others out in the park, too, but as always, I told myself it was silly to be worried about other people. This person, and others like him, would simply be enjoying the night sky (and night air, apparently), and I should just go on about my business.

I parked instead in the next wide spot, and set off with my equipment. I was tuned to the frequency of one particular skunk's radio collar and walking toward a stream. Even with the headphones, I could tell how much noise I made tramping through the weeds. Anyone nearby could've heard me more easily than I could've heard them. I left the grassland and entered the trees near the stream, where it was darker. My headlamp cast weird, flickering shadows all around. Suddenly I heard what sounded like a deep male voice say, "Hey!" Panicked, I swung around, shouting, "Who's there?!" and grabbed off the headphones. I accidentally knocked the lamp off my head. The light went out leaving me in the dark, trying to disentangle the cables, the straps, the antenna, and my hair, find the lamp, get it back on.

And then to my profound relief, I heard it again from the direction of the stream: "Ai!" The bass voice of a bullfrog repeating his call, "Ai!"

ANDREA BECKER

untitled

I have a recurring, dark dream in which I sit at a long, ornate table, but the table and the room in which it is kept are unfinished and dilapidated. I have a guest, seated adjacent to me at this table rather than at the opposite end. He feels disconcertingly familiar. He is a beautiful man, albeit gaunt and dirty. He is tall, thin but solid, with a chin-length mop of dark hair and stormy gray eyes. His posture and his heart emanate despondence. We each sit at a neatly set place at the table, but all of our fine, beautiful dishes are cracked and filthy. The only illumination of the room comes through the windows—thick beams of moonlight bounce opaque off of the windowsills, onto my own sharp cheekbones, finally lost in the deep, sad pools of those eyes I can't yet bear to meet.

My dream's dinner presents me with the proverbial crow upon my plate, and he talks to me. He declares it would be an altruistic gesture to offer my guest a piece, if just a leg or a chunk, of his full breast. In response, I plunge my fork into his stomach. His talons dance and dig short, deep gashes into the raw wood of the table. After he eventually stops writhing in protest, his cries still ring in my ears: shrill, brazen, harsh. It's always at this point that I almost feel my eyelids flutter in the waking world. Instead, I am unfailingly drawn wholly back into my subconscious.

I imagine digging my soiled fork into my own leg, prodding hard at the reflexes, involuntarily pushing my sharp heel through the foot of the man beside me. I know his silence, however, and it will not be ruptured. Instead of hurting him, I glance upward and unwillingly become swept into the whirling hurricanes of his irides. The hurricane's own translucent eyes pierce me straight through. Precipitously lost in some quiet storm of doubt and starvation, I inhale deeply the scent of the room's damp earth and my own cold sweat. I wake.

CONTRIBUTORS

MATTHEW ADAMS graduated from Clarke University in 2009, with a major in communications and a minor in graphic design. Since then he's been working as a Software Packager at IBM in Dubuque, IA. In his spare time, he likes playing video games and doing photography. His interest in photography began in high school, and he was the photo editor for the *Courier* while attending Clarke. Now, he mostly does nature and architectural photography.

DAVID ARMS is currently a sophomore at Clarke University. He has always enjoyed writing, and last year he took a course called Essay Writing at Clarke. In that class, he produced the first drafts of his essay. In the future he hopes to be a published author in multiple publications. He also hopes to receive a degree with a major in computer information systems and get a good job in a computer-related field.

JOE ARMS is a communications major and writing minor at Clarke University.

ANDREA BECKER is a book hoarder born and raised in the dusty river town, Dubuque, IA. She is currently a student at Clarke University. She shares an attic bedroom with creepy crawlies, including an eleven-year-old corn snake, a yearling tarantula, and an infant chameleon. She leaves her sanctuary for coffee, Mexican food, other animals and visits to friends and family. One of many traits of gypsy descent, family relationships are a pertinent part of Andrea's life. As a reader and a writer, Andrea's favorite character is always the antagonist. While this may seem dark, she believes that the sorrow and struggle of the antagonist are attractive—because they allow room for growth and redemption. Andrea is a firm believer that pure joy cannot exist without sorrows, tribulations, and tests of character. She hopes to imbue her readers with the facets of this human experience of growth.

ANDREA BIXLER has taught in the biology department at Clarke since 2001. Her academic background is in animal behavior, and she teaches that subject as well as evolution, environmental biology, subtropical ecology, and others. She lives in Dubuque with her husband, a fellow biologist and science fiction fan, and two cats.

FAITH BRITT is a junior graphic design major with a writing minor at Clarke University. She has little free time, as she basically lives in the graphic design studio at Clarke, but she immensely enjoys the challenges of each project she creates. She currently interns at Kendall Hunt Publishing Company and loves every minute of it. She is minoring in writing because she has always enjoyed the subject, and writing skills will greatly aid her design work as typography and language are major parts of graphic design. After graduation next year, she looks forward to moving home to Monticello, IA, and hopefully starting a small graphic design business after gaining experience in the field.

CHLOE N. CLARK is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing & Environment. Her poetry and fiction has appeared in such places as *Rosebud*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Supernatural Tales*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and more. For more of her writing, check out her blog, Pints and Cupcakes. Follow her on Twitter @PintsNCupcakes for her ranting and odd puns.

EMILY COTTON CRAM is an aspiring artist and illustrator. She has attended Clarke University and currently works for Elk River Merchant Antiques and Hy-Vee bakery. She specializes in animals, fantasy, portraits, and sculpture. She aspires to someday work as a children's book illustrator.

PATRICK DEENEY is currently a junior at Clarke University. As a biology major, he is usually busy with homework, but when he has the free time, Patrick tries his hand at writing. Although he doesn't think that he is very good at it, he keeps trying in hopes of being published one day.

MARISA DONNELLY is a junior creative writing and secondary English education double-major at Waldorf College. Her writing has been published in Waldorf College's literary magazine, *The Crusader*, as well as in Creative Communication's *A Celebration of Poets*. This past year, 2012-2013, she was awarded the Salvesson Prize in Poetry and Salvesson Honorable Mention in Prose at Waldorf College.

RYAN FURLONG is a double major (English and history) at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He is graduating within the next year and hopes to attend graduate school for American and English literature. He is heavily involved with the English Honor Society and History Honor Society on campus and loves to research antebellum literature, specifically the American transcendentalists and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Moreover, he hopes to teach at the collegiate level in his future career.

HANNAH GOLDSMITH is a student at Clarke University in Dubuque, IA, working towards her B.A. in drawing and sculpture as well as minoring in philosophy and writing. Hannah works predominantly in

graphite medium on paper with text support. Her work has been displayed in group shows in Quigley Gallery, Dubuque's Kirby building, and various pop-up shows. Hannah finds inspiration in graphic novels such as *Ruse*, *Walking Dead*, and Marvel Comics as well as flash fiction and six word memoirs.

MOLLY HAUT is currently studying to earn her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Clarke. With interest in sculpture, she pushes the boundaries by exploring different mediums such as cardboard, paint, human hair, and found objects to create visually stimulating and captivating art works that leave her audiences shocked, disgusted and/or uncomfortable. Several of her works have been shown in Dubuque at the Nash Gallery and in the student show at Fall into Art. She has also displayed her work in Art Haus' Emerging Artist Exhibition in Decorah, IA.

HALLIE HAYES is a native of Dubuque, IA. Having grown up in the Dubuque countryside, she laments the disconnection between the small-town Dubuque she knew as a child and the processes of modernization that the city is engrossed in today. Hallie has always enjoyed a love for language, whether through books, lyrics, television, or simply by listening to the conversations of those around her. After graduating from high school, Hallie attended the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, where she engaged with a number of professors in classes such as World Religions, Human Origins, Cultural Anthropology, and Western Humanities, introducing her to an affinity for the social sciences. She transferred to Loras College in favor of the smaller class sizes and declared a double major in English creative writing and Spanish and has since met some of the most knowledgeable and personable professors she could ever hope to find. Hallie hopes to utilize her interest in the social sciences and the writing skills she has developed under the guidance of her professors to help defend what she sees as the most important essence to human nature: the natural environment itself.

GRACE JENNEJAHN is a senior graphic design major at Clarke University from Chicago, IL. She has always been passionate about art; the ability to express herself and her ideas through different mediums is something that is exciting and challenging for her. The Clarke art department has helped her cultivate her skills, and she is excited to apply them to the real world when she graduates in May.

MARK JONES is an English professor at Trinity Christian College, where he specializes in Renaissance Literature. As a writer and amateur jazz pianist, he is fascinated by improvisation in music and in other forms of composition. These poems represent a genre that he has been experimenting with in recent months. He calls it "jazz haiku."

CONOR KELLEY writes and edits in the city in which *Frasier* was based. His work has been featured in various literary magazines and newspapers in the United States and Ireland, including *Word Riot*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, *Foliate Oak*, and *Slow Trains*. His baseball instructional book focused on catching is slated for a 2014 release with McFarland Books. In his spare time, Conor enjoys [hobbies] and [interests]—when he's not [doing things], of course!

SARA KLUGMAN is a senior religious studies major at Carleton College, in Northfield, MN. She is a dancer with the Semaphore Modern Repertory Dance company at Carleton College and has been writing poetry and weaving words as long as she could speak. She understands her work as a poet and practice as a dancer as synergistic and complementary.

LARISSA LARSON is a senior at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, IA. She is majoring in English with minors in music and writing. Her poem "Untitled" is published in the 25th ed. of *The Briar Cliff Review*. She graduates in May and hopes to teach English in a foreign country or join the Peace Corps. Her favorite movie genre is psychological thrillers, but she is always up for a good serial killer film. She's an owl-loving insomniac, avid coffee drinker, and wearer of beanies.

DANIELLE LENSEN earned a Bachelor's Degree in English at Clarke University in 2011. She is a library specialist at Northeast Iowa Community College in Peosta, and also spends time at Camp Albrecht Acres as an office assistant. Danielle lasted two months working as a sales associate during the holidays at a popular gift and furniture store in Dubuque. Posy Designs was inspired by this experience (she never wants to see another porcelain cocktail spoon again).

ROSEMARY DUNN MOELLER lives on a farm with her husband, travels whenever possible in the migratory flyways, and writes to grasp moments that she needs to hoard. (She and her husband will never have their own reality show.)

TABATHA MORAN is a creative writing major and women's studies minor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She has lived in the Eau Claire area for about four years with her partner. It's an amazing little city, full of inspiration and sense of community. A lot of her writing is inspired by her feminist values as well as her keen curiosity about people and the world. She also writes about her family and things that happened in her life. She uses language to paint emotions. Words do that for her—they make the intangible real.

ADAM D. O'DELL is a junior music major (composition and piano emphases) at Clarke University as well as a published and internationally award-winning composer, published academic writer, clinician, pianist, and music educator. In his free time, he enjoys playing ultimate

frisbee, watching movies, critically analyzing said movies, procrastinating, and thinking of clever progressive verbs to include in his biographies. Upon graduation, Adam hopes to study a year in Ireland through the Fulbright program, attend 5-7 more years of school, culminating in the receipt of a Doctorate (DMA) in Music Composition, have trouble reintegrating into society, hitchhike to Buxton, discover a box hidden by a stone wall, discover the secret location of Zihuatanejo, and build a boat with Tim Robbins. After that, Adam hopes to become a Professor of Music.

JENNY PARKER is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at Clarke University. She has been interested in photography since high school when she took every photography class that was available. Recently, Jenny has been active in the Dubuque Camera Club. Friendly competition and being around other photographers has helped rekindle her passion for photography.

CARRIE PIEPER is a senior drama and English major and writing minor at Clarke University. After (hopefully) graduating in May, she plans to move east to pursue a career in theatre. She is looking forward to this adventure after having lived in Iowa her whole life. While many of her future plans are still being sorted out, she knows that wherever she ends up, she will continue to write poetry in her spare time.

LAURA RADMER hails from Brookfield, WI, a small suburb outside of Milwaukee. Currently, she resides in Eau Claire to attend the university where she studies literature and theology. In the future, she plans to work in publishing on the east coast. She is passionate about writing, reading, language, and someday aspires to be a published author.

CARLOS RUIZ, born and raised in Denver, CO, has been involved with art since a young age. At the age of 8, his art was displayed in the local city art show and won best sculpture. At 10 years old, it was recommended by a teacher that he attend Denver School of the Arts, but due to the cost, it was an option his family couldn't make possible at the time. He's currently finishing his senior year at Waldorf College in Forest City, IA, earning a degree in communications and continues fueling his passion for photography in his spare time.

PAUL SCHMITT is a junior at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, in Winona, MN. When he isn't scribbling marginalia, paying dues as a bassist, or brewing coffee, he can be found tweeting at @paul_schmitt.

ANNA SEGNER is from Owatonna, MN, and is a junior at St. Mary's University of Minnesota majoring in literature with a writ-

ing emphasis and studio art with an emphasis in painting. Although much of her time is spent reading, writing, and making art, she also enjoys spending as much time outside as possible.

JOEY STAMP graduated from Clarke University where he received his B.A. in theater with a minor in music. In 2012, he moved to New York City to pursue directing and writing. Since then he has written "Marley: A Musical Tragedy" with Adam O'Dell, which premiered at the Cabrini Repertory Theatre Festival, and also an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, which just received a reading at The Abstract Sentiment Theatre Company.

MARY ZANGER is a business administration and drama student from Dubuque, IA. On the Clarke University campus, she is actively involved in many student organizations and a member of the student senate. In addition to being involved in the Clarke community, Mary enjoys participating in community theatre in Dubuque. She believes strongly in the power of words and hopes that more people will learn to use language to inspire and motivate each other.

