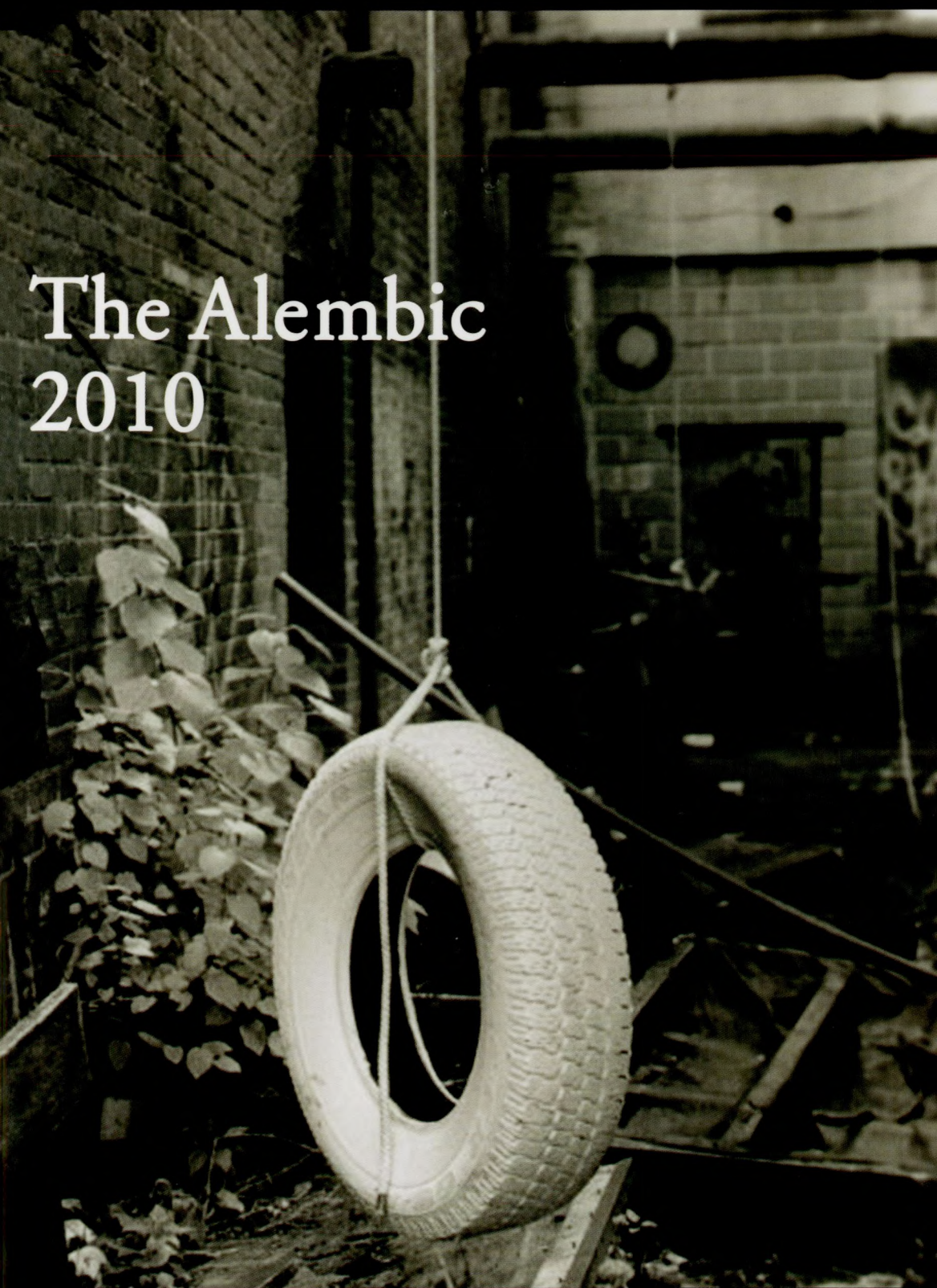


The Alembic 2010



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FILLING IN THE GAPS

THE EDITORS

Despite his reclusive lifestyle, J.D. Salinger provided inspiration for writers who followed him both stylistically and temporally. He may have shunned the mantle of literary genius, but his legacy was inevitable. His death marks the passing of one man out of the sequence of great writers, and leaves a void that emerging writers will strive to fill. The following pages display the fruits of a laborious love: the well-crafted verse and prose of those writers.

It is with great pride that we present this journal. It is part of the ever expanding fabric of the literary tradition that includes men like Salinger, women such as Wharton, and every contributor whose work you are about to read.

ROSARY BEADS BY AN AMERIKANER

STEPHANIE ALTONGY

The snow blankets the driveway, hiding everything I used to know. The big hand on the clock hits two. It could be three. I do not double check. The handsome man on the news, always looking perfectly presentable, is talking to me. I neglect to listen to the warnings about healthcare and the daily stock reports. The phone is ringing. I feel the sound penetrate the inner membrane of my ear; my brain refuses to register. My eyes close to shut out the view of the phone. The weight of my hands is too heavy to protect my ears from the piercing pain. The machine answers before I do. I am aware of the darkness in the room, except for the vanilla candle that burns bright enough to create a world of shadows around me. Vanilla was her favorite flavor. I always teased chocolate was better, but secretly I loved vanilla just because she did.

The coolness of my breath colors the air white. I contemplate grabbing a blanket, but I know the closest one is packed away in the closet, one that she embroidered. As much as my body begs for heat, my heart ignores its request. Memories throw me in every direction. The window catches my smile in one moment and the reflection of my head buried in my hands in the next. I tell myself to pray. The release of the word from my lips is accompanied by the image of them; the sweet aroma and the bumpy texture of each bead I fingered until I reached the end, tracing the small body pinned on the cross. Where they are now, I can no longer go. I want to fall apart and I do not care how ugly it looks if I cry.

Fifteen years before, I was admiring the freshness of the air, the familiar call of winter. The steep slope below my size four snow boots was waiting to try me on. One, two, three! I could have sworn I flew down that mountain, convinced either I was the most amazing slider ever or that I just had on a pair of lucky snow boots. The thought quickly escaped my mind as my life flashed before me. My gleeful smile, mouthing the words “weee!” had plunged into a frowning wail as I screamed for dear life. There was a small opening between the trees and I was heading there more quickly than I could fathom. It was either jetting through the clearing and onto the street to where I was not allowed alone or detouring toward the big green oak. Unable to shift gears, I decided to turn my body to my right; tumbling, somersaulting, and flipping. How proud I would have been on any other occasion, but I was too concerned with finding my missing boot and explaining the red splatters on the snow. I grabbed a handful of snow and mounted it on my forehead, relieved I had no need to go inside for some ice. Of course, she found me anyway, watching me from the window above.

She had a way of always watching me, even when she was nowhere in sight.

Running outside in her flowered sweater-dress and only in black pantyhose, she flung her hands in the air and started screaming “Ach mein Gott! Enkelin! Enkelin, I coming!” She charged at me with a crazed look on her face as if she was trying to find the robber that stole her purse. The sight of this oversized woman made me fall backwards. Again I tumbled, almost grateful to escape what was happening. I opened my eyes to find her hovered above me; hugging my head and screaming things in German. I started to cry so she would stop yelling. She carried me into the house, neglecting to locate my lost boot, and put me on the couch. She disappeared and came back with rosemary syrup and placed it on my forehead. She sat beside me with the rosary beads, praying it in entirety. She said Jesus would take care of my wound, wrapped me up in two big blankets and left the room. I was not sure what was going on but I was just glad I wasn’t being punished. The smell of vanilla reached my still numb nose. I knew what was headed my direction—a warm mug of hot vanilla. Not hot chocolate like the other kids got to drink; grandma’s specialty was hot vanilla. I remember thinking that grandma was cool and that getting hurt had its perks when she was around.

Ten years after my sledding disaster, I was looking out this same window, fiddling with the clasp of my bracelet. The black stilettos below me made me feel like a whole new person and that I could do anything. That is, to be able to do anything when your stuck-in-the-old country-immigrant grandmother lives in the next room, is a challenge. Sneaking out was my only way to go on a normal date. Sure, I felt bad about it but what she didn’t know couldn’t hurt her.

“A junge man should come to house. He ask us for das hand. Das ende.”

“Asking for my hand? Oma it’s just a date.”

“A datum? We no have datums en dis family. If he lieben you, he come speak with us.” “Oma! Lieben? How can he love me if I can’t even see him. This is Amerika! I am an Amerikaner!”

“Ach mein Gott! You no Amerikaner, you Dutch. Don’t you forget enkelin.”

“He’s just a friend Oma.”

“A Freund? Ha! Amerikaner boy want friend das ein girl? No enkelin, Amerikaner boys want girl for funny biznus. We no do funny biznus enkelin, you only funny when you married to un Deutsch man. Das ende!”

“Ach meines, Oma! Never will I get to be normal. Never!”

“They loose, das Amerikaners. Das no respect for parents and parents no love children. Das child einst eighteen, Amerikaner trows out of house and das the ende. Can believe! Trowing your kinders into street? It no wonder do drugs and talk boys das “frenz.” You no leaving das house unless you marry—to nice Dutch boy.”

Mom and dad were a little more understanding, having grown up in the Amer-

ican culture. But who could say anything against my grandmother? After the loss of her husband ten years before, mom was all she had. She was now the eldest of the house and it would be disrespectful to go against her word. *God, if Oma could only see me in these heels, she would never let me out of the house. I could see it now; she'd call me an Amerikaner and ground me immediately.* Ten past nine. I crept slowly past her room and made it down the stairwell. Mom and dad were in the living room; I told them I would be back by curfew. I walked to the end of my driveway, and then turned the corner and walked three more houses down. There was the car.

“So why didn’t I just pick you up from your house?”

“Don’t ask too many questions, I have a crazy grandmother. Just drive.”

As it turned out, grandma felt uneasy that night and was praying her rosary beads by the window to help her fall asleep. The next morning, over breakfast she announced to the table her “late night” sighting.

“Das neighbor, dressed like Amerikaner girls das you age, jumped in das car with some boy. Vat her mother is thinking? How she let her leave house looking like dat! No more you see dat Amerikaner girl. Das ende.”

Mom chokes on her bauern omelette and locks her eyes on my mine. I crack grandma a smile. “Yes Oma.”

That afternoon, as I was putting away my laundry, I heard grandma call for me, “Enkelin! Enkelin, come here I want show you something.” I went into her room reluctantly. I was convinced she was going to show me some other taboo Americans gallivanting in front of her window. I walked in to see her sitting by the vanilla candle. “Enkelin, do you pray?” I nodded yes. I lied. Then she took out a picture of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus in her arms. I was drawn in by the gold trimmings around the faces. She turned the picture over and pointed to a golden stain. “Smell.” I pressed my nose against the oil. Vanilla. “I prayed rosary for you. I prayed to this picture that God always with you. Oil leaked from picture. Das tears of Virgin Mary. Das miracle enkelin. It mean you blessed. When I no more here, Mary watch for you. She watch like I watch, ok?” She then grabbed my hand and placed it in hers. She wrapped the beads around my palm. I started to pray the Hail Mary out loud. “No. You pray, enkelin.” I tried again. “Hail Mary, full of grace—”

“Enkelin, what you want from God? You pray with you heart not words of others.”

What do I want? What can I ask for? Something tells me I shouldn’t read off a list of what I want for Christmas. I always wanted to be an American. For the first time, I did not mind being a German—I wanted the wisdom of my grandmother. I closed my eyes and I prayed. A real prayer—not someone else’s, but my own.

“What you pray, enkelin?”

“Oma, I can’t tell you because then it might not come true.”

“Vat? No es a birthday wish. You can tell me enkelin.”

“Oma, where’s your faith? Trust I prayed for something good.”

“Ay mi enkelin, you my special angel.”

About one year ago I was getting ready for Sunday brunch, awaiting the sugary aroma of Grandma’s famous German dessert, Apfelstrudel. Instead, the smell of burning butter and graham crackers reached me. “Ach mein Gott! I forgot das apfel.” Forgot the apples? That’s a big ingredient to miss when you are making apple strudels. That’s how it started. Then it was forgetting to turn the timer on for her chicken soup, forgetting to turn the stove off for her tea, and forgetting to lock the door at night so no Americans can barge through. The latter was a huge red flag, considering it was a paranoid trait of hers.

My heart aches when I think back to that day; I tiptoed into her room to put away her laundry as she slept for an afternoon nap. Out of nowhere, she bolted up from her bed and starting yelling at me in German, words I could not make out. Her eyes screamed fear and rage. She flung her arms in the air.

“Oma, what is the matter? What happened?”

Amongst the psycho babble in strictly German dialect, there was one word I could understand, “Amerikaner.”

“Oma, it’s me, your granddaughter.”

“I no have granddaughter. Vat you want you Amerikaner? I no have money!”

I froze; a chill surged through my body and a tear warmed my cool skin.

Mom and dad ran into the room, nearly knocking me over to reach grandma.

I stood, motionless.

Again I stare out at the snow. The machine picks up another message—the same words just with a different voice, “—I’m so sorry for your loss, she will be in our prayers.” I close my eyes as the words are said, clenching my teeth. Inhale, exhale. I rip the phone off the wall unit to maintain my sanity, scolding the callers in German. I find my way to the window again and let my body drop into the chair.

The light went out three days ago. So did the colors in my wardrobe. I wore the black dress the last night I could pray over her. Her hair was the only color in the dark room; the sweet vanilla against a world of chocolate lovers. The face was not hers; it was slim and pale. The body was not hers; it was small, lifeless. I could only identify her by the rosary beads wrapped around her frail hands, the same one she prayed over me with. Where they are now, I can no longer go.

At least she now remembers me, watching me watch out the window like she

did. At least she can now remember the apples for her apfelstrudel. I choked on the word “apfelstrudel.” I forced the word out loud, stressing the second syllable like she did, before sinking into the heavy wave of grief that crashed against my eyes and washed the salted tears ashore my dry lips. And then I heard myself echo, at least she no longer needs to fear Americans. “AMERIKANERS!” I blurred out the arguments, the lost look in her eyes, the daily conversations convincing her she can speak English. I’d rather pretend the year never happened—that she remembered me until the day she died, that God answered all my prayers that one day she would forget me not.

BRICOLAGE

BLAKE BERGERON

Roll old soul-giver, anxious under the machinery of the night and come to rest at the glass and concrete of insanity. Watergate windows hide steel bars that split the skeleton sun into its respective keyholes. The lumber of your house is yet intact; the fires have been staved off yet another night so that your shade may choose the comb you once dragged through your cherished greasy hair. Proclaim your love on a New York floor in the moonlight, or in a gallery mischievously disguised as a living space, in a crowd of youth, still unsure of the use of their hands and the fate of their flowers. Show me the mountaintops where srvakas and bodhisattvas hugged the mist, where trees flowed down the rivers and the yellow fog avoided London's streets altogether. Teach me how to cry in the face of love and not into the blank stare of my dark ceiling. Show me how to fill glasses with tears so that acid may be saved. Help me question the organ-grinders of the night, why they're always on time, and never accept my change. I've seen your screams, some claim they're pocket sized, but every time I try to grab them they run through my fingers. Oh soul-giver, where did they all go? They want me to mistake money for sincerity, will you lend me a dime?

Can my brain go down the drain and still remain sane?

Is a flower really sacred if it grows in the mud?

I've tried all the ices, and none can stop the swelling.

Why do philosophers teach you to be disgusted with yourself? Why can't they dare to tell us we're happy? It'd be the shortest stretch of them all. The sweetest pears are the canned ones we place on the top shelf, all syrup aside.

Donning beards in the streets of the east we fight for fiber-optic smoke and ink-well justice. Faces etched by children in Crayola bob in the audience of unwillingness while tattered suits trim branches with megaphones. And all of this with my back turned.

Yet, your sons still sleep on benches under the cold river sun of winter, sucking down the free cream they wish would make them fat. No one minds that they take the comfortable chairs, or carry the aroma of a faraway sea. Instead, they drink tea and make sermons of silence under calico lights in the presence of one of the kinder corporate gods, but wake up to say,

“Get outta this fuckin’ country kid, getsch ya degree, and get outta this fuckin’ country.” Will it kill me to pretend they’re right?

What did you say when snoring midnight didn’t recognize your face? Did you turn to the trembling dawn? Or did you let them both sit comatose in front of the corpulent blue glow?

DAYDREAM OF A TEMPORAL TRIREME

BOBBY BRETZ

Thirteen seconds ago I had little to show
For the work of the four seconds prior
From the first of the four I was flat on the floor
Set alight in my hero's attire

In the seconds between I was but seventeen
Though I think my expression could hide it
And my conscience was clean but I hurt the machine
So I forfeit the bliss it provided

A second ago and the month was a doe
Just like every second before it
And a second from now a new month will see how
Such a similar youth is awarded

Every second that flows has a gross undertow
That may carry you back to the worst
Every second is time without reason or rhyme
But at least each one follows a first

Every second I weather you'll see me together
Bound up with my dreams to the mast
A continuum twist and my time-ship does list
As it founders and sinks in the past.

DAY AT THE MUSEUM

JEN BRODEUR

I remember walking through each lofty room,
an artist's shrine, home of Picasso, Monet,
watching my mother look at the work
much differently than me,
stopping at each with a furrowed brow,
and I, just trying to find something
that didn't have a sign "Do Not Touch."
It wasn't till many years later
that I realized that I found
another world that day,
one beyond my little Rhode Island home,
beyond the raking of leaves, the waiting for snow;
and now each time I go back to visit
I wonder what day, what year
will I make that world my own.

LOST

DOROTHY HOWE BROOKS

He guides her into the church,
into the pew, one hand
loosely on her back, and she
lets him. She knows better
than to trust her tangled mind.
Amen, she says, and there's a moment
when it all falls into place
like shattered glass re-assembling,
and she turns to him, her face
lights with recognition,
then all becomes wavery, sense
without substance.
She follows him
to the altar, tastes the bread,
the wine...for a moment
she stands—solitary,
uncertain, turns
toward the sound of voices
chanting from the rafters,
lifts her head, the light
from the stained glass
high above shatters
into brilliant blues and reds
on her shoulder and on
the marbled floor beneath:
She is lost there, waiting
for some sign, some sense,
she has slipped out of time
into this never-ending present,
like a child
who has wandered into a deep forest
filled with sounds
she can't name.

PYRRHUS' LATEST VICTORY

DAVID CALLICHIO

Chet was both soft and tubby as a kid, but he grew rapidly, and his height leveled out the weight even if the one never quite caught up with the other. That seemed to be the way with his life too, what happened to him never quite catching up with what he wanted or perhaps thought he should have wanted, how he was, never quite making it to how he wanted to be. I was older and by custom his guide and protector since we were as close as kids can be till high school and even then for a while. I remember every March first we forced the season and played baseball in a damp soggy field with often, in the frigid winters of 43' and 44', some blackened clumps of left over snow in the farther reaches; it was just about halfway between his house in Brookline and mine over the line in Boston. We took turns pitching to each other, five swings each and the pitcher had to chase down the ball. That was easy for me because Chet rarely made good contact and sometimes I could get to his little pop ups before they fell whereas I put good wood on most of what he threw and drove the ball considerably. I helped him chase down the real long ones because it was better than just waiting for him with his waddling step to reach the ball and return with it. It wasn't really fun baseball, the best thing about it being Chet's delight at the idea it was a ritual. He could revel in enthusiasm over anything that seemed to suggest an order to his world or give significance to his life, which in a sense I did. We even played in the rain or, as could be the case in Boston, fabled "Lion" winds and large snowflakes.

I tried to teach him to defend himself as well so we put the gloves on at least once a week. He was not an apt student, utterly unable to move with any fluidity or get any snap or body behind the punch he threw; his jab just sort of floated out and hung there as useless as an appendix and the beautiful, tight rhythm of the left hook completely befuddled him. When he happened to land a punch, he became so happy he would let his guard down and simply dissolve into uncontrollable laughter, while doing the opposite if he took one; that is, crumpling and crying just as uncontrollably, not because of the sting but because he felt he had let you and himself down. It wasn't a question of physical courage, he had plenty of that despite the floppy helplessness and propensity to cry, it was just his depth of feeling about everything and his sheer joy that someone he could admire was taking him seriously.

Even his mind, which was quite good, seemed to slip around the norm, maturing early, then stopping, as if he had some built-in defense against development past what was needed to perform well on tests. Imagination wasn't exactly lacking, he simply didn't seem to care about it and the rhyming magic of poetry or then

popular songs, meant little to him, though he liked "Invictus", a poem I would recite as I was memorizing it for school and when I would chant the speeches from Macbeth I had learned for a simmered down production of the play behind the billboard near the railroad tracks; neither one of our sisters were old enough to handle Lady Macbeth's part so the production was cancelled after Chet and I tired of swapping the Macbeth/Macduff roles in the killing scene. Too bad because Chet got a real kick out of waving the stick he was using for a sword and saying, "Turn Hell hound, Turn!" and I was pretty sure, Life Magazine would have been very interested in it even though that summer we had finally begun to win the war in the Pacific and Europe.

I remember making him cry once by falling in front of him as we were running side by side in a pretend race. It was on the pebbly field by the firehouse that we used for softball on summer evenings. Chet, under my tutelage, had gotten to the point where he could connect with the ball pretty well, but was so slow moving to first that he was always thrown out. I was trying to instruct him on how to lift his knees higher—not easy, given his shape—so he could get more stretch into his stride. Then as we moved along side by side, something entirely unasked for seized me—it was a sense of power over another person, over this soft rolypoly boy, two years younger and absolutely trusting of me—God knows where I had dredged it up from, but, anyway, I answered its call and dropped suddenly, without warning, cutting his feet out from under him.

"That's how you block in football," I called as he tumbled scraping his hands and face on the pebbled ground. I was back up immediately, hands on my hips as if that was just part of his running lesson while he looked up at me in shock. "Well it is," I told him. Then he cried, both from the surprise and the pain, perhaps also from what he saw as the betrayal and without realizing why I suddenly found myself sitting beside him on the ground and crying with him.

Because we lived in different towns, though separated by only a block and a half, we went to different schools until he finished sixth grade and could cross the line to join me at Boston Latin School. We went to church together most Sundays for the simple reason that St. Aidan's in Brookline was closer to walk to than St. Cecilia's which was my Boston parish. Then, till I graduated four years later we walked to school every morning and during that time, at least for the first two or so years of it, we stayed close in the way young males can, playing whatever the season sport was after school, hitting downtown Boston for a movie on Saturday afternoon or playing the pinball machines in the Penny Arcade on Scollay Square, and talking, always talking, weaving fantasies of exciting futures that somehow had little to do with our daily reality and very much to do with the books we read and the movies we saw almost reverently every week.

One hot summer day in 1947 we took the long subway and trolley ride to Re-

vere Beach, then, perhaps to make an adventure out of it, decided to walk home, figuring we could thumb—another adventure— if we got tired. I was fond of hats at the time and kept sporting new ones in the hope that I could discover an identity for myself. This particular summer it was a red corduroy Kelly, flexible as a sailor's cap and capable of engendering marvelous flights of fancy for me. My hat and I were inseparable, the one both denoting and connoting the other. Kids knew me by it and the distant sight of it would announce my pending arrival on the corner for an hour or so of hanging around or Hawse Pond for some football or baseball, long before I was close enough to be recognized. Kids who didn't know me also noticed the hat, "Hey, look at the red hat," they might say as we passed by or they passed us or, "Hey which is the hat and which is the kid?" they might challenge.

"Come over and find out, 'I'd challenge back if there weren't too many of them or we were in my part of town.

Now Revere Beach is a lot farther away than it seems even on the subway and we hadn't figured out or for that matter thought about how we were going to get across the harbor, since pedestrians weren't allowed in the Summer Tunnel and Boston harbor certainly wasn't swimmable; but I was fifteen and reaching for my adult form and Chet a very tall thirteen albeit still a bit rolypoly, so such considerations weren't an issue.

What was an issue was our route, the long walk from the Beach to Shirley Avenue then to the limits of Revere and into East Boston—or Easta Da Bost as some of the Irish kids liked to say when they outnumbered you. Chet never said it that way but then I never thought of him as Irish—his last name, Kemple, being indeterminate—and he claimed Scottish descent all the while making fast and easy friends with the Irish kids at school; but then I made fast and easy friends with the Irish kids as well, at least with most of them. Chet was a bit uncomfortable because we went through some neighborhoods known to be tough. I wasn't; I knew some kids from School who lived here and one, Sabino Marinelli who was famous for being able to dribble a basketball away from anyone, was a particular friend of mine. He had even come over a couple of weekends last spring and hung out with my gang, the Bombers, and as soon as school started again, I was going to spend a couple of weekends with him in Palmer Square. For some reason I thought his name might be magic in his part of Boston, something like mentioning Tarzan to a group of angry apes in the jungle. Still it was summer and hot, and we were in strange parts and my hat was drawing attention so I made sure we stayed on main streets and didn't poke into any corners.

What we did do was build scenarios as we walked, little fantasies changing the dull streets around us into exotic locations or rather the movie version of exotic locations for that was our major referent. Most of that fell on me because it was

my job to weave magic for Chet out of the ordinariness of life and he loved it, sometimes laughing out loud at a particularly good passing dream that would turn glimpses of water into gorgeous lagoons, moored rowboats into sailing ships, trucks into tanks and the occasional swooping seagull into a Messerschmitt or Stuka. As the streets lost their newness and ceased to yield inspiration, I captivated him by chanting his favorite poem :

“ Out of the night that covers me
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever Gods there be
 For my unconquerable soul.”

Chet as usual cheered that first stanza and let his excitement build from there.

“In the fell clutch of circumstance,
 I have not winced nor cried aloud,
 Under the bludgeonings of chance,
 My head is bloodied but unbowed.

Chet was smiling now and bobbing his head up and down in furious agreement, so I stretched out the “ Beeyoonndd”.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,
 And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.”

“Yes,” Chet mouthed, “Yes!” as I took a breath and moved into my assertively flourishing finish, hitting the “I’s” at the end hard.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishment the scroll,
 I... am the master of my fate,
 I... am the captain of my soul.”

He was in such an ecstasy, so dizzy with glee at this point that he couldn't help joining in on the last two lines, intoning,

“I... am the master of my fate,
 I... am the captain of my soul.”

and breaking into triumphant laughter, laughter that caused an untoward incident. His high giggling drew the attention of a group of kids hanging around a

stoop down a side street. "Hey" one of them yelled out, "What's so funny, Kid?" Then, "And you with the hat. Where'dju get the hat?"

"In a store," I yelled back, "Where d'yah think?"

"I think you bring it over here, I'll kick your ass for you"

"Yeah?" I said still walking.

"Yeah, and bring your fat friend, I'll kick his too. See him laugh at that." He made a move to come toward us. I stopped. I could outrun them probably, but Chet couldn't and I could feel both his fear and his confidence that somehow I would take care of him. I couldn't leave him even though they probably wouldn't do much except push him around a little. He wasn't the kind of kid anyone really wanted to hurt.

So I whispered to him, "Keep walking" and stopped to face the kid. His friends hadn't followed him and he had stopped as well, putting his hands on his hips to stare at me. We were about ninety feet apart. I stared back, pushing my hat up a bit on my head to show my cool nonchalance, hoping it was a 'neat' move that made me look good.

The kid squinted, then motioned me forward with his hand. I took one step forward and stopped, checking behind me to see how far away Chet had gotten. He hadn't gotten very far and for some dumb reason had stopped; I angrily motioned for him to keep on going with my hand.

"Yeah," the kid in front of me said again, still squinting.

"Yeah," I said back and we stared some more.

"Hey Kid.."

"What?"

"You gotta name?"

"Yeah, I gotta name."

"Well what is it?"

"It's Michael. You gotta name?"

"Yeah, I gotta name, it's Rudy. You should know that because you're about to get your ass kicked by Rudy."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah! Now you'd bettah get the helloutta here before I really do it."

I said "Yeah?" one more time and he said, "Yeah!" back then I moved off slowly, watching over my shoulder. His friends behind him had finally left their stoop; they just looked bored, however, by the whole thing rather than ready to do anything so I walked on.

I caught up with Chet easily, but the spell, the magic of the day was broken now and we both knew it. We walked only as far as the next trolley stop and got on. I wanted to “hop” it because I was worked up and would have trouble sitting still, but Chet never could hold onto the back so we paid our nickels and rocked through the tail end of East Boston on the worn woven seats.

“Were you scared?” Chet asked me when he felt we were far enough away to be safe.

“A little.”

“You didn’t look it.”

“Of course, I didn’t look it.”

“I was really scared.”

“Well, don’t worry about it now.”

“I was so scared, I almost wet myself.”

“You what!”

“Yeah, in fact I did a little, I’m sorry, but I did. Please don’t tell anybody, Michael.”

“Who would I tell, Chet?”

He nodded, “Then I got afraid I was going to cry. You know how I can’t help crying sometimes. Jesus, Michael do you think I’m ever going to grow up and be tough like you?”

“I’m not so tough, I told you I was scared.”

“Yeah, but you’re tougher than I am. I mean I tried to be. That’s why I stopped and you had to wave me away. If a fight started I was going to go back and fight by your side, like we imagine it sometimes, the two of us against the world, the two of us against evil. But instead I wet myself and you were waving at me to go away and....”

“It’s not that important, Chet, don’t worry about it.”

“It’s not?”

“No.”

“Then what is?”

“All the other stuff we do, the movies, the books, the things we make up in our heads, in our minds. I mean this other stuff is like school, it’s just what we gotta get through each day until we can get back up here,” I pointed to my head, “back into ourselves and by ourselves.”

“You sure?”

“Very sure.”

Chet nodded, "You know, you may be right...Still I'd like to be tough, like you..."

"Chet," I cautioned, shaking my head hopelessly.

"All right, then I won't worry about it, not if you say I shouldn't"

"I do."

We were quiet for a block or so while I looked out at the street, hearing music I didn't recognize, sounds of life I didn't want to transform into magic, of comings and goings that seemed ugly now because the dance was over for the day.

We were almost at the stop where we had to switch to the train that would take us under the Harbor when Chet said, "I had fun anyway, Michael, thanks."

I nodded. The trolley slowed, slowed, then lurched ahead.

"Well, I did, it was fun, really" Chet insisted as the world stuttered by with the noisy roll and rock of the trolley.

We split for a few years when I finished high school and with only occasional contacts grew apart. The soft shy kid, grateful for almost any attention had come into his own by then, sprouting to over six feet and if never quite slimming down—an aura of softness seemed to linger around him—at least losing the appearance of helplessness that characterized his early years. He seemed to have lost other things as well or maybe just hadn't gained anything. Still wedded to the church without even the hint of a question and eschewing poetry (outgrowing, it seemed, even his favorite) or anything that smacked of the impractical, he had become very fond of a certain kind of good time, usually having to do with beer and minor dissipation. We found each other again in college during his Freshman year and it was immediately clear how little there was left between us—he didn't ask me what I was reading, just pumped me about "gut" courses and the upper class dorms, "houses" we called them, that were best for "contacts"—but it was also clear that like cousins, we were bonded by a communal youth. We greeted each other with special warmth at chance meetings in the "Square" or when we passed on our way to class; and once in late winter, despite a searing wind, actually stopped to chat in one of the frozen lanes of the Yard. He wanted to boast about his Fat Tuesday escapades, tell me how, instead of eating, he drank lots of beer and otherwise caroused in the limited ways permitted in 1952 Cambridge; then, after a night of drunken squalor, how he dragged himself out of bed for early mass so he could have his forehead marked with the ash of repentance. He was hung over and looked like hell, perhaps even still a little drunk when he moved through the breakfast line at the Union and caught the critical eye of the "Biddies" who were serving. A "Tsk Tsk" from one of them who was ladling scrambled eggs onto his tray finally broke through his fog.

"I'm Chet Kemble," he announced, "and I know I look like hell; in fact I may still be drunk even though I've been sleeping it off. But...but I got up this morning

after almost no sleep and made sure I went to Mass," he raised his voice a decibel or two, "because I'm a Catholic...and...no one is going to take that away from me because I... am... proud of it."

His dirtied forehead was proof so the proclamation won him sympathy and even a couple of giggles from the embarrassed ladies.

I guessed he was still trying to be whatever defined tough for him now.

Two weeks later, the second one in Lent, he searched me out in my room. With the new term barely begun I was still serious about keeping up with the reading which this evening included, among other dainties, Poe's strange, oddly themed story, "William Wilson". He had been drinking again though not to excess. His problem this time was uncertainty. His friends, the group he had been drinking with, had gotten rambunctious and one had challenged him to fight or leave.

"So obviously, you left, smart move."

"You don't know this guy. He's a terrific fighter, I wouldn't stand a chance with him."

"That makes it a doubly smart move."

"Yeah, but I told them I was comin back."

"Now why'd you wanna do that?"

"So they wouldn't think I was still a kid and yellow."

"These guys friends of yours?"

"The others are, but he's an upper classman who hangs out with us sometimes."

"Chet what the hell is going on?"

"I want you to come back with me."

"Come on Chet, we're a little old for big brother stuff, besides, you're bigger than I am."

"With someone else there, they won't gang up on me."

"No, they'll gang up on me."

"Can't you get some friends to come along?"

"What friends?"

"Some of the Boxing Club."

"Oh for Chrissakes, Chet..."

"Please, Michael," he said, and for a second looked like he was going to revert totally to his childhood and cry.

I think I actually sighed, then asked, "How many are there?"

"Martin's the only one to worry about, if he calms down the others won't do

anything.”

“And he’s drunk?”

“Not that drunk.”

“Allright come on,” I got up and put my jacket on, then, feeling bound by it, quickly changed it for a sweater in case I did have to throw a punch.

“Mike, he’s pretty tough, you really should get some help.”

“Why? I’m just going to talk with him.”

Martin was maybe five eleven, rawboned with the kind of thick wrists that denoted hand strength. His fingers were short and stubby and looked thick enough to bend bottle caps with ease. In fact he looked like the kind of guy who might stand around doing just that to show off. He stood at the bar in the middle of about five other guys, three of whom I knew vaguely, so there would at least be no ganging up. It was a weeknight and so quiet, the bartender didn’t even bother to come over, figuring I’d let him know if I wanted anything.

Without waiting for an intro, Martin spoke, “So you went for help.” There was an edge of sneer in his voice.

“Martin, I just..” Chet started but Martin talked over him.

“He doesn’t look big enough to help you.”

“I’m not here to help him.”

“Good.”

“No, the one I’m here to help is you.”

“Me!” he laughed more loudly than was necessary.

“That’s right, you.”

“Well, let’s just step outside and get the help going,” he moved for the door.

“Suit yourself,” I said, following and noting the others coming after. The bar was in a little nook formed by three streets, quite isolated especially this time of night, so I thought he might try something as soon as he was out the door. He didn’t. Instead he waited till his audience was assembled, calmly nodded and smiled at me and said, “I’m Martin, who are you?” then, without waiting for my answer, turned suddenly, and punched Chet right in the chops. Chet, because he wasn’t expecting it, took it flush and staggered back. I moved to get between them but Chet, of all people, wasn’t having any of it.

“You sucker punched me,” Chet shouted, pushing me back and throwing a punch of his own which surprised Martin and caught him on the side of his face. He shook his head a second, then wound up himself; Chet, however, wasn’t waiting and crowded in flinging a wild flurry of punches, ineffectual except they kept Martin off balance.

“Fight fair, you bastid,” Martin said loudly, trying to free himself and get room for his own punches. Chet hung in close, pawing and grabbing, occasionally even managing a short punch.

“In the belly,” I called to him encouragingly, “Stay in close and go for his gut, you’ll take his wind away.”

Martin pushed Chet away and turned long enough to point at me and tell me, “You’re next.”

I put my hands in front of me and showed him how I was shaking with fear and the crazy kid actually started to come after me. That’s when Chet pulled a “Dempsey” on him; that is, he hit him when his head was turned, the same way Dempsey hit Sharkey when he had looked away to complain to the referee about a low blow. The difference was that Dempsey’s punch took Sharkey out, Chet’s just infuriated his opponent who either was very tough or so damned drunk, he wasn’t feeling anything. Martin really went after him then, plunging in with his head down and pummeling with punches a few of which actually landed and Chet, stung rather than seriously hurt, punched back. His punches, tighter, more measured, seemed to be having some effect, so apparently he did remember something of those sparring sessions when we were kids.

They separated. Both were out of breath now and gasping as Chet looked at me. I expected to see tears, then realized he was smiling.

“You’re still next,” Martin told me, between heavy gasps.

“Looks like you got enough on your hands as it is.”

“Fuck you!” he told me.

“Why do you want to fight me?” I asked him.

“Why!”

“Yeah why?”

“Don’t you want to fight,?”

“No, I don’t want to fight.”

“What the hell, are you yellow?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then what the hell did you come here for?”

“To help out a friend and as I said, to help you.”

“I don’t need...”

“No, listen for a minute. You both hit each other, you both hurt each other, you both showed the kind of guy you were, no one was yellow, so why don’t you shake hands now like men and call it a night.”

“ Fuck you,” Martin said again, then took a deep breath and seemed to wince. Chet must have caught him a good one in the ribs. He breathed in again, not so deeply this time, and looked at Chet, “You’re gonna have a shiner tomorrow.”

“ So? You gotta fat lip, now.”

“ It’s not bleeding though,” Martin said aggressively.

“ My knuckles are,” Chet said.

Martin flexed his own muscular hands and looked at them, “ So are mine, scraped anyway.” He hesitated, threw a look my way, then said, “ You know, Chet...”

“ What?”

“ ... You’re... well, you’re okay ... yeah, you’re all right.”

Chet nodded, “ Thanks.”

Martin hesitated just a second more, using it to throw me another look, then turned back toward the tavern, “ C’mon,” he said to Chet, “ I’ll buy you a Dimey.”

Chet took a breath and puffed his chest up. He looked at the two bruised knuckles on his right hand and I felt, a little sadly, that tomorrow he’d be wearing his shiner with pride.

What a thing to have taught a friend!

“ You comin, Michael?” I heard him ask.

“ No I’m gonna get back to William Wilson.”

“ Who?”

“ My book.”

“ Oh yeah, right, Okay... Well, Thanks.”

“ Don’t thank me, you did it.”

“ Jesus, I did, didn’t I, I really did,” he sighed, “ I’m finally ‘the master’, I’m finally... ‘the captain’,” and once again, for a moment, I thought he was about to cry, but then he just smiled, broadly, and followed Martin into the tavern.

GRIEVING

MADELYN E CAMRUD

I sit at a table filled with snow
that has fallen all morning,
fallen through the trees,
and past the deck railing.

Staring through the window
I brush the snow aside,
try to write. The phone
rings, once, twice. I answer.
No one is there.

You come from our bed
wearing white shorts, white t-shirt,
dragging your bare feet
on the floor. You stop.
in the hall, I get up
and go to you. We embrace.
“It was no one,” I say,
then help you back to bed,
you, the one I grieve,
your body still here, parts of you,

missing, gone. Already
the table is heaped white.
I push the pen through
all that has fallen.
There is no other way.
It is cold work. I can tell
the snow will fall a long time.

KWANSABA FOR RICHARD WRIGHT

GLADYS JUSTIN CARR

a song rises in the throat shakes
shivers itself free then flies fine-tuned
out of Hell's Half Acre seeking natural
bridge and bulwark builds over and over
each to each word phrase moments in
and out of time forms stories beyond
desire beyond wounds until joy claps hands

I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND IN BRAZIL

JAY CARSON

the Portuguese coming at me -
endless blocks of mysteriously sculpted smoke.

The feshwada stew so good
despite the pigs tail and cheeks;
never-ending beef, fish, and vegetables.

And that I ate everything
with the hungry favela
on the street so nearby.
The locks and gates
on every house:
something must have happened
my black Spanish Harlem friend said.

The fires in the mountain brush:
clearing fires, back fires,
fires for their own sake

And that story from my friend
about his swimming away from the fishing boat
when it unaccountably went over
and he the only one with snorkel mask and flippers;
twenty-seven hours of swimming,
exhausted, finally sending back help
for the already dead

But I understand his tears
and my happiness, alive,
even full, still on top of hell.

TAKING BLUEGILL AT LAKE SENECA

RALPH CULVER

Under the weight of a few rocks
and the unmerciful heat of midday
they lie: eight bejeweled beauties
aligned on the edge of the dock,
the first five utterly still,
the two next whispering at the gills,
and the last not quite reduced
to commentary but yet in the vail
of acts and action. A tremor
shudders his length to the tail,
the caudal fin taut and quaking,
and I suddenly feel a memory
fall through me of what it meant
to consider surrender, remembering
swimming for shore on a dare,
our rowboat out too far
and the sound of thunder nearing;
a limitless pain and fear
deep in my thighs and calves
so pathologically engraved there
I stare down at my bare legs
in wonder, and laugh.
But I am young,
and so these fish are young,
this water with its battered skin is young,
the trees surrounding, young—
even my father and mother are young.
Soon the eighth captive is left
no belief in escape,
but speaks instead a conviction
of infinite release.
I will not be the one

to flay them naked
or scuttle the flawless heads
in the minnow bucket for the coons.
I will not touch them again
except to eat them.

So speech is mine.

The first words are small
and have a taste of hook,
the sting of a pearl of wine.

HANDS

ROBERT DESROCHE

With these white chalk dancing hands of mine
I want to do things I didn't think possible;
Tracing over the elongated curls of your
Ever-fainting hair – following the lines off to
Weak waiting breasts which smile beneath
Your folded-forward head containing the famous
Stare. Where the mona lisa's eyes dimple
Within themselves; looking carelessly to your
Limping brain. Yes I've always known oft to
Where your eyes looked and wondered why your
Body was still so capable of flowing gentler than
Any bathing brooks. So when I the teacher try to
Hold you I come to find that whimsically and
Fantastically I have the nightmare of no hands.

SEPARATION IN WHITE

DONNA L EMERSON

White houses, blue doors, adorn Santorini.
White churches, red domes, fit in between.
I follow your steps up past the steeple,

you lose yourself, and in leaving, lose me
amid white paths, stones, shutters, and crosses.
White houses, blue doors, adorn Santorini.

Your pathway too narrow, too hard to follow,
your tale hard to hear, harder still to find.
I follow your steps well beyond the steeple.

You're gone by the foundry, roll down the hill.
I watch, reaching, you slide down the grasses.
White houses, blue doors, adorn Santorini.

No sound now. Brown, beaded mules stand quiet.
One arm waving, one pushing you onward.
I can't follow your steps much past the steeple,

wait helpless by perfect Paraportiani,
you caked in mud, asleep in the sand.
White houses, blue doors, adorn Santorini.
I kneel by the steps beyond the steeple.

MY TIME MACHINE

GRIFFIN FOX

I can time travel.

My brother Nick is seven years older than I am. So when I was nine years old he was sixteen. When I turned nineteen he was already twenty-six. I used to flinch every time I encountered Nick. He enjoyed punching my shoulder and on other occasions he would pin me down on the ground with his knees on my shoulders while repeatedly digging his fingers into my chest. At times, the years that separate my brother and I seem insignificant and we are able to understand one another. But today our age gap seems spacious.

All of a sudden I am sitting around a campfire in the middle of Wisconsin. I am eighteen and Nick is twenty-five. It feels natural to be in the dark woods late at night. He tells me about his first day on duty in Iraq. He is with sixteen of his men in three armored trucks patrolling the streets of Baghdad. The truck in front of Nick is suddenly launched twenty feet into the air after rolling over an IED. He is surrounded by dust that has crept in through the cracked windows. There is screaming and confusion. A piece of shrapnel has ripped through the door and severed off the head of the soldier sitting in front of him. The man's blood is on my brother's face. The medic is eighteen and tries to do something about the head that is now sitting in his lap. I don't want to talk about war anymore. It seems unnatural, far away from the trees that sway in the breezy night.

Suddenly I am on the shore of a great lake. I climb to the top of a rock and dive off into the water. I sink as deep as I can. The water has rushed all around my body and there is complete silence. It is colder and darker where I am, but I find this soothing. My feet hit the muddy floor of the lake, spewing a cloud of dirt while the rich silt engulfs my toes. I float back to the surface and as my head emerges I see an eagle floating in the air. Its wings are spread out wide as it bobs and weaves, weaves and bobs, gliding through the currents of fresh air. The eagle is beautiful and elegant in each graceful flutter of his wings, yet fearless and powerful as his glaring eyes patrols his domain. I climb out of the water and back onto the shore. The sun beats upon me as I lie down and close my eyes.

In an instant I am back in Saint Paul. There is a large field of plush grass where a monument has been erected. I sit at the base of the monument and stare up into the sky. There are very few clouds and the picture perfect blue sky stretches on forever. A cathedral rests off in the distance. It feels unnatural that I can see this colossal edifice while sitting in a soft field of grass encompassed by the never-ending sky. The cathedral makes God seem man-made, almost as though humanity has been lead astray by thinking that we are greater than we really are. What would

this cathedral look like in the face of God? How does this cathedral compare to the enduring firmament that perpetually towers above it? But I don't want to think about God right now, so I look back into the sky and lose myself.

I am now a freshman in high school and I miss Nick. I am sitting in his bed because it makes me feel as though I am closer to him. He has just mailed me a book by a woman who is writing about living in Puget Sound. As I read, the pages open up to me and a moth flutters around a candle before settling into the flame and burning itself alive. Nick is trying to introduce me to nature philosophy. It makes absolutely no sense. Why would a moth decide to fly into a flame?

These thoughts about moths and flames diminish as I am now in the middle of a prairie smoking a cigarette. The towering skyscrapers of downtown Minneapolis are a shadow off in the distance. There seems to be an eerie relationship between the tall grass that I am sitting in and the city that is lurking on the horizon. There is something broken in this picture. So I turn my head and watch the cigarette smoke billow out of my mouth in a great circle before it rises into the air and disperses where it can no longer be seen. I can see the smoke flutter away from the tip of the cigarette as I hold it in my hand. The smoke swirls and dances in every which way with no particular pattern. I think that this makes sense somehow. It is chaotic, yet sometimes the smoke seems to freeze and hold itself. And for that split second I see a marvelous vision of artwork.

I close my eyes and I can see myself sitting on the moon. The surface is dusty and dry and stretches on before disappearing into the universe. The earth where I had been only moments before is floating in the middle of a black abyss. It looks all too real from where I sit. I can see no buildings or cars, no trash or street signs. I pull out my cell phone and see that I have no reception here so I toss it away and it sinks into a pile of dust, gone forever. I am closer to the stars than ever before as they twinkle and burn in their own day and age.

MUMBAI

SARAH FROST

Grief ...
the bereaved
screams from the newspaper.

Two years old,
eyes shut,
he clutches a ball,
the neck of his carer.

His tender mouth
inconsolable,
stretched across his face
like a wound.

Mother shot, father shot,
saved by a nanny,
but seared,
as if these dark men were poets, he their words.

HUBBA HUBBA

DANIEL JAFFE

In vague gesture, your father half-lifts his chicken-skin hand, whispers, “Closer.” He gasps despite the oxygen flowing through tubes into nostrils. He coughs.

You’re still his little girl, as you’ve been these 52 years, and now Dad wishes to speak special words. So, you stand from the metal-framed hospital chair, lean forward over his bed, stroke his damp forehead while willing your face into a stiff comfort mask despite the stench. “Yes, Daddy?”

How long since you’ve called him that? The name of greatest tenderness, revealing your own childhood state of heart and frailty, demonstrating that even though you now stand above and look down, you are looking up in respect and need. He is still the Samson who carried you on shoulder up and down Manhattan’s avenues; who, swimming in Catskill summer lakes, pulled you safely in a rowboat behind, the rope lead draped around his neck. This is the same man who lifted you high above Bronx Zoo railings to see, unimpeded by bars, the lions and tigers and bears. Oh, my.

Again his hand lifts, trailing tubes of dripping...saline?...sugar water?... medication? He must want to caress your face, to connect with the flesh of his flesh and make a final offering of paternal affection, perhaps even a blessing of biblical proportion, agnostic though he always was. You lean in closer, tilt your head, bring your ear so close you feel warm breath from his lips.

Daddy reaches up. He grabs your left breast, squeezes hard. “Hubba hubba,” he says. Then hand drops to bed, head flops aside, heart monitor issues a high-pitched flatline screech.

You recoil, jerk yourself away, yank yourself back to yourself. As you stare at him, a young nurse rushes in, her black stringy hair flapping back and forth like a row of empty playground swings. You begin to shake. The nurse takes Daddy’s neck pulse, wrist pulse, listens to his heart, closes Daddy’s eyes. No crash cart as on TV because this is reality and this is Daddy’s time.

Only now does the nurse turn to you, her face mirroring your earlier mask of measured comfort and calm. She wraps an arm around your shoulder and says, “Come,” speaking in tones you used to employ when soothing your boys after chin scrape or knee bruise.

The nurse is nearing the end of her shift if the scent of failing deodorant is any indication. She leads you into the hospital hallway. “I’m so sorry,” she says, sounding sincere although she must say this to strangers five times a day...ten times. What is the nature of sincerity? Or, for that matter, of fatherly love?

Hubba hubba. Your breast burns with the sting of Daddy's fingers and you scratch.

Hubba hubba? You squint in disbelief.

Hubba hubba!

A laugh gushes forth like blood from a severed artery.

"There there," says the nurse, hugging your shoulder tighter still. "There there."

You shake with laughter, guffaw as never before. "I can't believe this!" you exclaim, your stomach heaving, your eyes blurring with tears. "This didn't just happen! It didn't! Not Daddy!"

Through the blur, you see Mom turn the corner and approach, take one look at you, and drop the vending machine's paper cup. Coffee splatters all over Mom's green stretch pants that have surpassed all reasonable expectations of stretching. Splatters onto Mom's sleeveless yellow cotton, Phoenix-desert-perfect blouse she bought fifteen pounds ago. Droplets of coffee fly even up to Mom's poufy, dyed-platinum hairdo, now flattened somewhat here and there from days and nights of hospital chair dozing. Mom's porcelain-smooth skin crinkles as much as Facelift Number 3 permits. She shakes her head, minces geisha-style to you, grabs you from the nurse, clasps you close and sobs against your neck. This pressure applied to artery causes your laughter to cease.

"Take me to him," whispers Mom.

"I'll do that," says the nurse. "Your daughter needs to rest."

Mom lifts her head, squeezes your forearm. "You were with him? He wasn't alone?"

You nod, you shake your head. "Not alone." Your turn to grab and clasp and sob. Daddy's two women.

Mom whispers against your ear, "Did he say anything before—?"

Your mouth opens to scream into Mom's ear, to scream anger and fear, horror and loss. You have no words.

"Later," Mom says, wiping her nose. "You'll tell me later. Go sit."

You are home in New Jersey now, in bed beside your husband, Abe, for the first time since having rushed to Arizona and Dad in the hospital. It's been nearly a month. Abe reaches over and caresses your face here in bed, runs his lightly callused fingertip along your cheek. He kisses your ear, questions how you feel, whether the pain of loss has at all eased. His breath is toothpaste minty. You don't wish to talk, you wish to lose yourself in your husband's love, in physical sensation from the man of your choosing. But this might be unseemly so soon after.

A week sitting *shivah* at Mom's with Abe and the boys, who all flew out to Phoenix. A week surrounded by a dozen-odd cousins you hadn't seen in years, by Mom and Dad's retiree community neighbors you'd met during previous visits, some of whom wept endlessly over bagels and lox and ruggelach, declaring sadness at the loss of your father while re-suffering losses of their own parents and husbands and wives.

Airport goodbye to Abe and the boys—"I'll be home soon." Another two weeks keeping Mom company sorting through insurance papers, mutual fund statements, and pension forms until Mom reminded you of your own life back East. Not that you needed her reminding, but you did need her permission. Good ol' Mom.

During those first two dutiful weeks of yours, Mom forgot her hospital question, weakened as she was from not even sipping water, concentrating as she did on daubing Vaseline around nostrils to heal skin all raw and flaked from tissue rubs. But one morning, bolting upright in bed, she demanded with a hand clutch of desperation: "For God's sake, tell me his last words."

You fantasized telling Mom the truth, fantasized her blushing at "hubba hubba" recognition, her embarrassment that in his final-moment confusion, Dad revealed a flirtatious Mom-Dad privacy. You imagined telling Mom the truth, could even hear her shriek at "hubba hubba" recognition, her horror that you'd learned your father to have been a philanderer, a frequenter of strip-clubs and whores, a man with a mistress, with many. You pictured yourself telling Mom the truth, imagined her slapping you for tarnishing Dad's memory with what could only be a lie.

So you now lie: "He said to tell you that he loved you."

A new round of gut-wails, Mom's loudest keening yet.

You fantasized telling Mom the true words, imagined her sobbing and begging forgiveness for never having stopped Dad's inappropriate touches during your childhood. What? Did Daddy ever touch little-girl you inappropriately? And now you can't remember? This is the imagining that has been your mourning-period companion, the deepest fear that you fended off as you held Mom at the cemetery, as you shoveled earth onto Dad's coffin, as you embraced your navy-blue-suited boys and wiped their tears, as you murmured *kaddish* beside Abe, as you lay down each night on Dad's side of the bed beside Mom to soften her shock of being so suddenly and completely alone. How tight your shoulders and back each of those nights as you lay awake, listened to the central air-conditioning hum, to Mom's whimpers, sniffles, nose-blows echoing your own.

Abe has always told you that men think constantly about sex, but somehow you figured something more soulful would be on a man's mind immediately preceding death. On the other hand...maybe there was a certain sense to it—sex as the beginning of life, so why not as the ending?

How dare this be Daddy's legacy! Day after day you've been studying every photograph in Mom's albums: of Daddy bouncing baby-you on his knee (where were his hands?), of Daddy reading toddler-you a bedtime story (where were his hands?), of Daddy hugging little-girl-you on white horseback in upstate New York (where were his hands?), of Daddy tying up your near-adolescent pig tails in blue ribbons (where were his hands?), of birthdays and Chanukahs and picnics and ping pong games in the park. Daddy dancing with you at your sweet sixteen party (hands?), kissing your cheek at your engagement party (hands?), embracing you and burying his weepy face in your neck at your wedding. Hands hands hands hands hands.

You think back to the hospital yet again, and you focus, for the first time, on the hand itself rather than on the grab. Picture that hand. Remember that hand. How Daddy's hands had aged over the years. How they had changed. His fingertips had thickened, joints bulged here and there, the sparse knuckle hair had turned from brown to gray, barely visible blue veins had grown to worm-like surface prominence. That yellowish crepe-paper skin. Not the same hands from your childhood. Not the same hands at all. Old-man hands. Weak hands. Pathetic hands. Unrecognizable hands. Hands you never knew. Confused and disoriented hands making one final grab at a life his but no longer his.

You wouldn't fault Daddy for forgetting his name, would you, or yours? For becoming lost one day in his own neighborhood, or for abandoning a kettle on a lit stove. You wouldn't fault him if he thought himself King David or Napoleon. You would never blame him for such old-age confusions, but would explain to yourself that he was no longer the man he once had been, that his was no longer the clear mind of health. You would wrap his knight-in-shining-armor past in spotless white paper, bind it with bright blue ribbons, would place this family heirloom on a closet shelf for safe-keeping until you were ready to unwrap and contemplate.

Daddy is gone, but you are here.

Rationalization heals almost as effectively as forgiveness.

You look over at Abe, feel another of his caresses against your cheek. He has not stopped caressing, although he has been careful to caress only your cheek. For the first time in a month, you fully meet his eyes with yours, and you whisper to him, "Hold me tight."

INA, LUNA

KELINA JONES

Ina, Our moon is named Luna, though whether the Roman goddess was named after the rock, or vice versa I do not know.

Ina, there are moons I do not know the names of. Saturn has 18 moons. I couldn't tell you who any of them are.

Ina, sometimes at night I lie awake in bed, convinced I should get up to write something down, and when I finally do, it's gone.

Ina, often I stay up until 2 am talking to strangers on the other side of the world over my computer.

Ina, often I feel lonely and I think *At least Luna is outside my window tonight.*

Ina, the Moon Orchid uses weather cues to bloom en masse.

Ina, today over the computer, you told me you were lonely, and I wanted to tell you to go look at the moon. But that would have sounded silly.

Ina, once in a while I feel like a beached whale being pecked at by seagulls, but it's different from feeling lonely.

Ina, when I was little I had a room with a window big enough to let in the whole moon. The moon was loneliness. It was also beautiful. I realize this now. That these two things are not incompatible.

Ina, I am a slow learner.

Ina, I would still take tea and company over the moon's loneliness any day.

Ina, goodnight. Don't be lonely. You're too lovely for that.

OCTOBER INVENTORY

CHRISTIAN KNOELLER

waking before dawn
without reason
to a silent sky

dream after dream
of having lost
the way

the river down
as Indian summer
lingers—leaves

of sycamore and
cottonwood clogging
logjams

trails I'd groomed
for years blocked
by deadfall

still the brittle
hulls of milkweed
dispense their seeds

with an abandon
we'd all but forgotten
to long for

THE ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

RICHARD KRAUSE

Kalid and Hamid's family were nomads forced to relocate after their uncle was killed at a dispute over well water.

Their mother had died of childbed fever with their stillborn brother a hundred miles from the nearest hospital.

Towards evening their silhouettes darkened the dunes for what seemed an eternity as their father led his two sons across the vast desert to the bazaar at Basra to trade in dates.

As the boys slept under the night sky they dreamed of magic carpets, colorful fabrics, the ornate shapes of hookahs, shiny copperware, the whirling sounds of flutes, an array of scents, snakes and birds of every color, condiments, syrups, lotions for the body, veiled servant girls bringing pistachio sherbet, sweet melons, fruity bars of indescribable desserts glazed with syrup and dusted with coconut, grenadine drinks made from fresh pomegranates, a countless display of confections whose sugars speedily crystallized on the surface.

Everything vividly contrasted to the monotony of the hot desert, to the splay step of the camel, to the sag of its top load, to the fierce blazing sun before its last red rays disappeared into a cluster of cool palms. The night offered a reprieve of scenarios unimaginable during daylight.

The boys wondered at the stars sprinkled overhead before their eyelids involuntarily closed, while the small campfire shadowed the cheekbones of their sleeping father.

Biting into a sweetmeat, staining the near perfection of the rectangular candy, the boys were rudely awakened by the intrusive sunlight and gritty sound of their father's sandal. It was a daily balancing act, for those who had invented the zero, to keep their bellies from shrinking to naught.

Since their uncle had died the treks across the hot sand were more punishing. Another family link had been broken, as their father sat gazing for hours at the sheer vacancy of the desert.

When his wife had died, Kalid and Hamid seemed cut off from his affections as cleanly as their camel's footprint was erased by the collapsing grains of sand. The two boys blamed themselves for losing their mother, as if their youth and preoccupation with sweets somehow caused it, just as any vitality insults the memory of those who have passed away. Their father's warmth was now buried like the imagined flanks of a woman outlining the next dune. The hot sands kept him

going, yielding to the curves of his wife's body underfoot.

It is remarkable how individual dramas play out in worlds barely imagined, as we peacefully enter an oasis, a bazaar, forgetting the endless beauty of the stars and the sparkle of sand.

Suddenly there is an explosion of anger at a well, a well-calculated blow to the temple, collapsing a grown man like a house of cards, as a tiny rill of blood trickles out an earhole. And as there is no hospital, no physician that can help, what's left of the family picks up and moves on. The authorities comb the rubble for clues, but end up running the teeth through their own hair the next morning after splashing aftershave.

Sometimes the unreality of a blast will send the tiniest fragments, or sharpest projectiles, hurtling through space with such accelerated slow motion that they seem unreal. Dumbfounded we look at the fragment of bone that travels so fast as if to reconstitute the skeleton before it lodges in the soft flesh of a palm tree, or bounces like a toothpick on a cobblestone demonstrating some elementary law of physics. Body parts follow almost unrecognizable as anyone's relative.

The family entered the bazaar. After selling their dates, the boys raced to the confection booth clutching the coins their father had given them. They could hardly sleep the night before, imagining the sweets they would buy.

The boys truly loved each other. They shared candy as if it were one mouth, taking pleasure in the sweets melting on their palates. The nougats, the thick-jellied colloidal suspensions, the pink dots and rectangles peeled off long strips of white paper one by one, the assortment of powdered juicy fruits and colorful licorice, their choices were dizzying as their poverty multiplied the pleasures on their tongue. The complex sugars, the fructose and the sucrose, educated every nook and cranny as they vacuumed and swirled the riot of taste around their mouths, each buccal cavity cornering a sweet before it attached to the roof of the mouth to release additional sugars, while the tongue stood sentry mixing the sweetness with saliva. The boys were masters of confection as only the poor can be, and knew to the hundredth of a dinar the exact sensations a coin could buy.

After they bought their cache the two boys repaired to the nearest cluster of palm trees, and sat cross-legged to observe the procession of shoppers in the bazaar and await their father.

The boys were perfectly content, smiling blissfully through the succession of sweets in their mouths, truly in seventh heaven at such an embarrassment of riches. How lucky they were for the extended dry season, for this year's dates were sweeter as the translucent brown indicated a thinner tunic around the seed so their load fetched a higher price and their father was correspondingly more generous.

Their father had stopped at the bagman's shop to purchase an enlarged sack, next to one of the most expensive carpet merchants in all of Basra, when the explosion came.

He was lifted out of the bazaar along with the carpet merchant's patron, Karim el Har, a prominent Shiite leader. Both rained down on the earth in pieces. The bone that flew by the two boys was followed by body parts, torn bags, swatches of carpet, splintered tent poles, and an appalling unwinding of internal organs like pink balloons and twisted red ribbons.

Even the glass from the confection stand shattered through sweetmeats and into shoppers' faces.

The scattering of debris obliterated any memory of the tourist in khaki pants and shirt carrying a camera who had ducked out of sight only moments before. Though some witnesses reported him to the police, the newspapers never mentioned him. Nevertheless, the story circulated on the streets about the curious immunity of foreigners.

Newspapers reported that Karim el Har had been killed by a rival faction, though no one claimed responsibility. Editorials speculated that the government had many enemies who often fell out with each other. The CIA wasn't publicly implicated, but everyone suspected their involvement, rumors often verified only after the operatives had left the country and the regime had changed hands. Six people in all were killed, and thirteen injured.

Kalid and Hamid were brought unharmed but stupefied to a shelter where they fell that night under the watchful eye of missionaries from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The missionaries had learned of the explosion and had gone immediately to the hospital, where they found the two desert boys who had lost their father. All their belongings, even their camel, had been destroyed in the blast.

The two boys touched no food, nor did they seem to have interest in the confection gumming their sweaty palms, squeezed beyond recognition. Their eyes were glazed when they learned that their father was dead. It was remarked that the boys, who had no known relatives, might even owe money for the expense of disposing of their camel's remains.

The missionaries whispered about finding a new life for the boys who soon recovered their appetites, though a pall curtained their eyelids when questioned about the bombing, and their sleep remained uneasy. The roofs now over their heads precluded observation of stars and the reassuring sounds of nocturnal life on the desert.

There must be a key to why the philanthropist left the orphanage all his money. His biographer reported that he was "shy with boys," and "seldom talked much"

even when he visited once a month. He'd remain in the corner and let the houseparent or second help attend to them. Maybe it was the powerful appeal of the penny candy that drew him to them, but then put him off for the cavities all those sweet teeth developed. Maybe it was the monotony of the nights wrapping candies with his mother and Aunt Mattie, then taking basketfuls to sell on the streets of Philadelphia and Lancaster.

The philanthropist was the Pied Piper who had whole communities of children trailing after him. It was the unfair appeal to their appetites when they were at their most vulnerable and couldn't afford dentists, and had to live with the pain in their little mouths as the sticky sugars ate into the dentine, maybe that made him shy with children. Some didn't even suck, just chewed the candy outright, champing down to establish dominance over the sweet. Maybe the candy man had guilt over that. When we have anyone so firmly in the palm of our hands we withdraw from them to stand in the shadows, ashamed of the control we have over their frailties.

When someone says I want to go into the food business, immediately bells go off. You imagine a Pharaoh's giant storage bins, biblical control during the seven lean years, an absolute power over people.

Children are so easily seduced with sweets and the philanthropist recognized early on that the addition of milk could give consistency even to caramel. He found that secret out in Denver where he had followed his shiftless father before relocating back East.

A philanthropist is motivated by an array of impulses too vast to catalogue, the basest we won't even consider. The simplest is that Fanny couldn't have children. It's surprising with such a broad-bottomed name to fall back on. Anyway, that was the reason given for deciding to start a school for orphan boys.

The vats of chocolate deeper than the waists of grown men and more capacious than even the roundest body size were daunting. The giant hydraulic sweep of the spatula mixing the thick brown waves of chocolate back and forth made for a powerful impression on the appetite. How could anyone escape, like the pot that would not stop boiling, the spilling out the factory doors and windows, down Main street, the milk chocolate traveling around the lampposts topped with candy kisses, down to the amusement park and the zoo where caged animals already slept on cocoa bean mulch, all the way down to the Swatara River outside town, chocolate coating everything in sight?

The confection informed the night dreams of almost every citizen in the town, connected as they all were with the chocolate factory. Chocolate coating peanuts, almonds, blown rice, and little boys and girls as they slept, wrapping stickily around their white teeth, eating into the hardest substance of their bodies. It was chocolate dreams out of hand churning back and forth in those giant vats of bit-

tersweet and milk chocolate.

During the Great Depression the philanthropist employed the whole town when the rest of the country was out of work. He built a giant hotel and country club, a large indoor ice hockey arena, an independent rail line to the chocolate factory, a sports stadium, and an amusement park with one of the largest roller coasters in the world.

Still the cold sweats of the factory workers were legendary. They went home after each shift jittery from the machines, from the constant movement of the shiny hydraulic like a giant reproductive unit with its lubricated precision that interfered with the pleasures of their sex life.

The little droplets of kisses overwhelmed onlookers even in factory tours. Some fainted from a visible chocolate reaction. There was something threatening about all the kisses ending up being dropped so uniformly without any of the messiness of human beings applying their mouths to each other. The warm brown globules adhering to white paper were a model of sanitation and self-sufficiency. The aluminum foil wrapped the kiss like a preserved memory so precisely that children squealed, "Mommy, can we come back again!"

Row after row of bars were boxed like legions of chocolate soldiers and sent around the world, expressions of the free enterprise system that seduced the appetites of everyone. The chocolate in K rations during World War II transformed every sweet tooth to a life sustaining food rallying for democracy. Today chocolate is classified as a food, not a candy, and historians credit it for helping to win the war. Few admit chocolate is habit-forming, a narcotic, little different from that terrible melodic lure of the Pied Piper where children are led through the nose by the confectionery success.

Little wonder the philanthropist wanted to give back, have the orphanage end up controlling the factory lock, stock, and barrel, as a kind of poetic justice for the confection so thoroughly manipulating the sensibilities of children.

Every seduction always has its comeuppance. Seduce kids then kill them with kindness. Give them three square meals a day and put a roof over their heads, give them a suitcase of clothes and one hundred dollars to make their way in the world and something will spring back into place. We get repaid.

The philanthropist knew that the complete control he exercised over the children's appetite was unfair, and so he vowed to take care of the most needy. It was a gesture almost without parallel, tying up your stock in the neediest, like Jesus suffering only the children to come to him, after seducing them with sweets.

The philanthropist became an institution, the town a part of the culture that never questioned his motives of bringing pleasure to so many, appealing to their tastes, narcotizing them with a gift the Aztecs thought came from the gods, a divine

food, till the very air of the town that bore his name was redolent with the rich smell of the confection every time it rained. Cocoa beans were the mulch of record and the streets were named Chocolate and Cocoa avenues, like the town in the highlands of Cuba where the Founder owned sugar cane mills. Even cocoa butter became the soap of choice for most of the town's citizenry.

The school was waiting for just such boys like George Brent. When his mother came and picked George up he was only eight, legally an orphan since his father had died when he was eleven months old. He was taken away from an old woman and her daughter whom he loved for their kindness. The day he was supposed to leave he hoped his invariably tardy mother would never come, but this time she was on time.

George was watching a jungle movie that afternoon and he prayed it would never end. It was the saddest day of his life. His mother wouldn't tell the old woman where she was taking George, only that he was being placed in a school somewhere in Pennsylvania.

On the way to the bus stop, his mother told the teary-eyed, unwed thirty-five year old daughter that she should have children of her own.

George never forgot the long ride to Pennsylvania, the Pez candy gun, or the two clear plastic inserts full of ammunition. Numbers comfort us against the vagaries of fate. The ammunition was not to shoot anyone, but to protect his feelings nevertheless, something he could store up and count to employ against the unfamiliarity of his new home.

George should have been overwhelmed by the chocolate, but while children are easily seduced, even sweets quickly eat through to the loneliness exposing aching nerves that often cannot be appeased by a mouthful of candy as easily as adults think. Children always have a nose for blackmail.

At first George consoled himself with the thought that he was going to run away, but the thought gradually dissipated around the twenty-one boys. He lived on various farms at the Home as the orphanage was called. George had an unremarkable school career, outside a certain facility with foreign languages nurtured by the constant drilling of his German teacher, Herr Schwarz, who was fascinated that one of his graduates collected Nazi memorabilia. George developed an ease of recall that became second nature and quickly enabled him to excel.

The life of the boys was remote from the events of the world. They milked the cows every morning and evening, huddled up against their warm bodies in the coldest weather, and sent the milk to the nearby chocolate factory. The more athletic of the boys milked by hand to build up their muscles.

George was assigned to housework too, doing dishes, cleaning silverware with

silver polish and the baseboards with toothbrushes, shining the linoleum floors with shiners, moving back and forth on cut-off pant legs. George took his turn as cook, making oatmeal, eggs, toast, and pancakes for twenty-one boys.

When George left the Home he went into the Army and was sent to a special school because of his aptitude for languages, and later attended a major university for an advanced degree before being recruited by the CIA for covert operations training.

It was the cold war era and so everyone was on edge after the Korean conflict, and more than willing to do their patriotic duty rooting out communists who would upset the most prosperous period in the history of man. Men like George fanned out around the world infiltrating foreign governments to protect the interests of democracy against the contagion of communism, socialism, or whatever threatened our way of life.

George like most CIA operatives served his country in an organization whose methods, destabilizing foreign governments, rigging elections, fomenting riots, assassinating undesirables, never clouded his loyalty. Even dictators and military juntas were supported if their interests were compatible with ours, while many a populist opposition leader became our enemy and had to be eliminated. If anyone had any qualms about the crimes they committed, or broke the code of silence, they were "reeducated" in special training centers in Silver Springs, Maryland. Targets were often kept from operatives until the last moment, or they were privy to only a portion of the operation not to directly link their own actions to any atrocity.

As funding improved so did the technology, and the killing became routine. The horrors were rationalized by learned white papers produced by think tanks that called for the expunging of certain individuals, or the toppling of governments unfriendly to our interests. The weaponry guided by miniature components became indescribably sophisticated, with plastic explosives so portable they could be detonated from a shirt pocket or by a ballpoint pen or camera. The ability to blend with the population or simulate tourists became a science; indeed the CIA became a secretly funded shadow government with its own fleet of airplanes to make sure that the values of democracy and free enterprise flourished in every country whose resources were in our national and business interests.

George became proficient in Arabic and was posted throughout the Middle East. He was quickly reassigned when a country became too hot, or after an exceptionally dangerous mission, whether it be bombings in marketplaces, taking out a Senator standing at a vendor on the very steps of a capitol building, assassinations inside Presidential chambers, the pot shot to intimidate a labor leader at a rally, contact with rebel leaders sympathetic with the West who were then betrayed, the sinking of socialists by pinning atrocities on them, or attacking journalists,

breaking their legs or blinding them for writing articles counter to the interests of democracy and free trade. Even local terrorists were enlisted and trained; groups later when our interests changed that we'd eliminate. The workings of the agency became so notorious that Congress passed legislation in the seventies, during the high point of George's activities, making foreign assassinations illegal. But this was easily circumvented by outsourcing to third parties.

It came as a complete surprise when George Brent received a phone call from the Home informing him that he had been chosen "Alumnus of the Year," as the one individual who best demonstrated the humanitarian ideals of the Founder. His vision in starting a school for orphan boys was carried on by its graduates, inspired by the motto "His Deeds Are His Monument, His Life Our Inspiration."

"This year's winner," the President of the School announced at the banquet honoring George, *"has exemplified that venerable tradition by making the world safe for democracy, liberating the children and giving them a better life. And as the Home has now reached out to all races around the world, we are honored to recognize men like George Brent for carrying our Founder's legacy beyond our shores."*

"Little did anyone ever imagine a confection as having so much influence, sweetening the lives of so many. Graduates like George Brent have brought democracy to the most unlikely places so zealously that George has even been asked to leave countries that could not grasp the vision of our Founder in opening up markets worldwide in order to afford everyone a more prosperous and democratic life."

"That George Brent was declared persona non grata in the Middle East only attests to the zeal of his commitment. Of course his operations are classified, so we will never entirely know the full extent of the good that George did emulating our Founder's vision for orphans worldwide. So let's all give a round of applause for this year's Alumnus of the Year recipient."

One can only speculate if George, sitting in that auditorium having his deeds extolled, saw through the bright faces of 1,200 boys dressed in their shiny Sunday Best shoes and pressed suits and ties, Salvador Allende slumped over his desk after taking a bullet to the head, or Manuel Noriega, on the payroll of his own CIA for twenty five years, hounded in the convent in Panama all night by rock music, or the countless bloody revolutions instigated in African countries. He must have seen the misery destabilized governments brought to one indigenous population after another so our sugar mills, our copper and oil companies, could operate unmolested. Did he think of the genocide against the natives in Guatemala, the torture chambers of the military junta, or our hand in the disappearances in Argentina? Did he think of all the families' lives disrupted by our destroying populist movements unfriendly to our multinational companies?

The sheer number of assassinations, the screaming, stunned shoppers in markets and bazaars around the world, the disoriented old men and women, fetuses ripped

from wombs, the merciless machetes terrorizing the countryside because our covert operations tipped the scales of what might be resolved peacefully by local people, all the bloodbaths our espionage caused meddling in the affairs of foreign governments, employing their own language and our sophisticated gadgetry, all this must have occurred to George as he sat there.

Countless civilians were caught in the crossfire, peasants riding their donkeys, traveling to market with their chickens or goats, carrying their produce on exploding buses, babies in their mothers' arms trapped inside burning buildings, ambassadors' children killed or an opposition leader's daughter crippled at a disco. Did anyone on the committee think of the tens of thousands of CIA assassinations in Operation Phoenix? George, the brochure admitted, was "persona non grata" in the Middle East, and his top secret activities couldn't be spoken about, but it went on to say that "he made the world a better place to bring up our children."

Did the irreparably damaged eye of a seven year old boy pop into the Selection Committee's mind, or the facial disfigurement of a fifteen year girl, the shortened life of the pregnant mother, or even the well-meaning activist whose assassination stopped land reform for another generation and the return of resources to the people, so they could continue to be exploited by foreigners at dirt cheap prices?

Kalid and Hamid sat in the audience looking at George Brent with their shiny dark eyes. Did they recognize the Alumnus of the Year as the man in khakis or his proxy, who ten years before passed in Basra just prior to the explosion that killed their father? Was he the one who walked away from the bazaar after placing the plastic explosives that took the life of Karim el Har and led the two boys on a journey that would end in an orphanage halfway around the world? Could anyone grasp the enormity of awarding a humanitarian prize to someone who could have been that very operative who blew up their father? Of course we will never know for sure if George was the one, since his actions as the brochure said are classified

Is childhood not a long line of confection? The sweets we vacuum in our little mouths at a tender age, suck up to dissolve every available crystal, every creamy atom of chocolate. Don't our eyes lose focus when our mouths are so preoccupied and our brains engaged in those peculiar sugar highs that cause us to whack our playmates out of the blue when the teacher's head is turned? Then we'll go on to get the award for good behavior in recess even though we were the aggressor, the ball of candy that we pilfered still in our pocket or bulging from our cheek.

Had the sweet tooth worn off in Kalid and Hamid as they sat in the audience? Did they put two and two together? Obviously the board that made such a decision safely inside the US had lost no loved ones. That George was persona non grata apparently didn't faze them outside serving almost as a merit badge proclaiming that George, formerly an Eagle Scout, had done his job well. In the heady flush that comes with being beneficiaries themselves, the Committee bestowed their

reward.

The School had given Kalid and Hamid a home, had taken in these two orphans from Iraq who may otherwise have been wandering around the Al-Hijarah desert gathering dates for the rest of their lives. Who would want that to happen when they could come to America, to the town with the largest chocolate factory in the world?

The nagging question is, had George himself created two of the very orphans that the Home so desperately needed? Social welfare rendered the Home obsolete for the last twenty years, so the school had to alter the Deed of Trust and look abroad. Today single parents can get generous amounts of State money outright rather than place their children in an orphanage. So it was incumbent upon alumni like George to unwittingly create orphans to supply the Home's dwindling population and continue the Founder's vision since the endowment had grown so large that total operating expenses were covered by only a fraction of the interest earned.

One could picture the Founder in his late seventies looking down on the town pool, from the mansion he had turned into a country club, at the youths in their bathing suits, as his official biography noted, imagining that there would always be orphans to continue his philanthropic vision, and that there would always be alumni to promote the shining ideals of his legacy, willing to carry on that vision at whatever cost, even if it meant conferring an honor on a man representing an agency that had created the very orphans that he gave asylum too. For it was crucial at all costs to perpetuate the benevolence.

Did only I detect a wry smile, or was it a brief moment of compunction, on George Brent's face as he shook hands with the President to receive his prize as "Alumnus of the Year"?

HAUNTED

KATIE KROUSE

The last slob who owned this house
left pieces of herself for me to clean:
the sink's clogged with sighs and gasps,
the freezer's full of raw energy,
the sump pump leaks giggles.

I'm still expanding the rooms
that shrank around her form -
the counters catch my belt loops,
chairs tangle my legs,
I trip, turn, almost catch her -
this tiny, untidy woman,
reaching to place a jar of pickles
on the top shelf that I
would have to stoop to kiss.

I follow her narrow waist through tight halls,
counting footsteps, trading breaths,
the wallpaper bleeds through my skin.
Deeper and deeper I move into her house;
deeper and deeper she moves into me.
Home is where the heart is,
and she keeps mine in the broom cupboard
beneath the dustbin.

THE BLIND CHARIOTEER

RICK KURKER

They say that passion rules the truest love,
That reason blinds, misguides, a feeling heart.
But how, without the mind, is passion tamed?
For thought is but the source of one's prudence,
And love sans thought a bottomless pit,
An endless drop with no resolve in sight,
A train beyond its steering tracks, aimless.
Want misdirection? Then follow your heart.

TONIC FOR THE BLUE MALADY

BRUCE LADER

A fluted note of therapeutic fire
lightens heavy moods like castanets.
You can savor the pulsing music solo
or in combo accompaniment
with footwarming effects,
totally free in secluded chambers
and brazen alfresco.

Fingering the harp strings
fades gloom away in topsy-turvy delight.
A tap of triangle or vibraphone
will tickle your tastes. One minute
it fiddles designs over mellow passages
of nerve fibers, toys tender-sweet,
next the senses can't wait to gallop

long allegros and orgasmic cadenzas,
reprise varied segues
smoother than nibbling meringue pie.
A certain tone, lips in harmony
with reed, changes the tempo
of movements, is all it takes to revive
the singing spirit of your tongue.

DAVID LIED

CONOR LEARY

David lied. He lied on mattresses and cushions, in cribs and cots, and four-poster beds, surrounded by cuddly creatures, folded books, and extinguished flesh, beneath mobiles, canopies, ceilings, and the stars. He lied to people, to men, to women, the old, the young, the State and lied especially to the IRS. He lied with words, with devilish combinations of grammar and syntax to achieve ranks of fabrication that made alchemy possible. He lied to joke, to tease, and to mock, but also to incite, to neglect and to enjoy life to the absolute fullest. He lied to everyone really; to see his natural craft inspire relenting minds to sway, like a king who adored watching his supplicants bow before him. He lied with pictures, with gestures, with waves and a bucking chin. He lied with his clothes, about his wealth, throughout every social circle like a mischievous sprite. He lied to churn gossip, to produce laughter, to watch people squirm, and to make them swoon. He lied to make himself feel better, to make the world cry and want to die. He tried for just that reason and sighed each night he lied.

David cried. Through bibs and tissues and sleeves and handkerchiefs, he cried shameless tears. He cried shamefully as well. He cried in the privacy of his home or his office, in the shadows and in the vivid sunlight. He cried at movies, during scenes of passion and during the lengthy credits set to inspirational songs. He cried in the theater, in restaurants, in court, in school, on the bus, in cabs, and in jail. He let the tears fall like the waters of a broken dam to reveal his feelings, to make others cry, to disenchant the stereotypical macho attitudes of masculinity, and to infect others with guilt. He cried when justice was forgotten, when humor was lost, when respect was trampled on, when speech was rebuked, and when speech was mind-numbing. He cried when he thought about the life gone by, about empty beds, about fathers and sons, and train stations, and college and money. He cried like a baby, like a toddler who dropped his ice cream in the most unforgiving sand, like a widower kissing his wife the earthy farewell, like the madman submitting to the voices in his head, like the victim of murder or fashion suicide. He cried under blankets, over discussions, at weddings, at funerals, and graduations. He cried in parks so dark and quiet, he could hear the sin sizzling in the abysmal air. He did not cry in church. He cried to hear his tears fall and to feel them simmer. He cried to look at his feet to see his shoes swimming in the forming puddles. He sighed when he cried and when he tried, but he did not cry when he died.

David sighed. He sighed when he read, when he walked, and when he ran. He sighed when he smiled, when he laughed, when he spotted an attractive woman,

or spoke to one in a bar. He sighed to flatter them. It made them glow and he sighed even more when they did. He sighed to relax his shoulders and to make her relax. He sighed when he bowed his head and when she removed her dress. He sighed after sex. He sighed to incapacitate his bodily functions. He sighed to dream. He sighed uncontrollably when his lungs barked for less carbon dioxide and craved an influx of oxygen. He chose to sigh when the moment was right, to compliment the mood, the ambiance, the success of others and their imminent failures. He sighed to trigger compassion, alarm, and suspense. He sighed when the minutes of the night pressed down on his sternum and when he gazed into the furthest reaches of space. He sighed for his tiny soul trapped inside its ribbed cage. He signed before he died, for even when he tried to cry, to hear a final sound, the world itself had gone mute.

David died. And when David died, he died on no soft surface. He did not lie on cushion or pillow when he died. He did not die beneath canopies or the stars. He died beneath a ceiling however. He died in tandem with the striking of midnight. He died slowly and sadly and stupidly. He died without fame, without prestige, without vengeance, and without any shadow of the night reaching out and securing hold of his neck to snuff him out. He died and dangled from his own tethered bed sheet. He died suspended over the floorboards. His toes died pointing straight down towards Hell while the crown of his head rose awkwardly towards Heaven.

When the table was gone, he had sighed and the captivating sigh snapped his neck forward. The rope caught the sigh in his throat as David chose his hour to die. David had lied in waiting. He had lied in silence and lied with a venomous disposition. He would not be crying in the theater that night or attending the bar to lie to the lovely ladies. He would not lie and sigh with them in his bed. The cold mattress died in the shadow of his hanged body, never to cradle him again. He had tried to cry as he prepared to die, but finally with a sigh and a pitiful lie, the legs of the table stood no longer.

He lied last to himself: "It won't hurt a bit."

THE DISGUISE PRINCIPLE

BETH LEONARDO

Olive was 82 years old when she began hoarding prescription pain pills. She had been pondering the act for about a week, carefully mulling over the pros and cons of such an endeavor. There were plenty of both, and she was not a woman who acted on a whim. The number one con, ironically, was not the ultimate consequence which would occur when she finally took her pills, but rather that long interim during which she would amass her collection. Olive was acutely aware that on those days which she neglected her medication she would be riddled with a pain so intense that at times it would be hard to breathe. She would be consumed by pain with an insatiable appetite for the sufferings of an old woman, a pain so greedy it would lengthen each consecutive day so as to have more time to inflict its torment. And yet, Olive knew, it was a pain she could manage, a pain which paled in comparison to one which she had been enduring for far too long. The second con, Olive reasoned, was that in order to get away with this, she would have to be careful, stealthy, and quick. A short list, but one made infinitely more difficult by the fact that arthritis had warped her fingers into a mangled distortion of their former selves, and by the fact that quickness was an adjective which had long eluded her aged frame. Every move she made carried the weight of 359160 days of living; a weight that at times seemed far too great for bones hollowed by osteoporosis to bear. And so, with stealth and quickness thrown to the putrid air of nursing home ventilation, Olive could only be careful. But somewhere amidst her calculations of pain and suffering and unavoidable challenges, Olive concluded that the potential benefit, that ultimate, beautiful, benefit, was worth any effort.

On the day Olive decided to take action, everything fell perfectly into place. The pills, as always, were in a small white paper cup on her dark brown dinner tray. The cup, as always, was in the right hand corner of the tray, next to the mug of water, the consistency of which closely resembled a kind of syrup, due to the excessive thickening powder which the nursing home insisted was mandatory. Inevitably, the food on the tray was no more appetizing than the water. It was mashed to a smooth blob and seasoned with just enough thickening to ensure that even those patients who could barely swallow their own saliva would be able to get it down without choking. Olive waited until the nurse wasn't looking, and then carefully dumped the pills into her withered hand. The nurse glanced her way for a moment, and Olive felt a pleasant sensation course through her shrunken veins, a sensation which she had not felt for perhaps the last fifteen years of her life: adrenaline. Emboldened by this sweet reminder of what a life feels like when it is truly lived, Olive held her composure and met the nurse's tired gaze with a steely determination. In the balance of what could have only been a few moments,

Olive struggled to remain calm, and focused all of her attention on not letting the pills, along with the dream of all they had in store for her, slip through her fingers. *Come on you old bat, this isn't the first time you've had to steady your hands because of nerves. Just hold on.* For the first time in a very long time, Olive allowed herself to remember. She closed her eyes and imagined herself back on stage, under the spotlight. She felt the eyes, not of the nurse, but of an audience of hundreds, staring at her hands and anticipating their movement with bated breath. She inhaled as deeply as her lungs allowed and whispered to herself once more. *Steady, steady.* Finally, the nurse turned away to focus on Olive's roommate, just long enough for her to slip the pills into a sock which she had placed at her hip minutes earlier. Later on, when the lights had been turned out and Olive was sure no one was looking, she placed the sock in the farthest corner of her nightstand drawer. Once the pills lay securely hidden away, Olive pondered her quiet victory in a moment of self-satisfied elation. If she could only keep this up for a short while, she would have a fine collection of pills in no time.

The following day at five o'clock, Olive sat in her chair, anxiously awaiting her next opportunity to smuggle contraband into her sock. She secretly hoped that this night would be another close call, that another kick of adrenaline would spur her heart into high gear, that the warmth provided by a sudden rush of blood would make her feel alive once again. She even hoped that her roommate would notice her act, that in performing before an audience, even an audience as decrepit as old Wilma, she would get an even greater high. So focused was Olive on achieving this remnant of her former life, she could only muster a halfhearted complaint about being in her nightgown before the sun had even set. This complacency was highly unusual for Olive who, despite having lived in the same nursing home for years, refused to accept that the nurses couldn't be bothered to make accommodations for individual sleeping habits. The oppressive routine which conducted her daily life was in fact one of the central reasons why Olive had been inspired to begin her pill collection in the first place. The nurses began the cursed bedtime routine at four o'clock and steadily worked their way down the hall, stripping people of their day clothes and whatever shreds of dignity they still clung to, until the entire floor was ready for bed. They were always done by five, just in time to distribute whatever excuse for a meal the so called chef had prepared for the evening, along with the precious prescription pills.

Perhaps it was because Olive had replayed the conquering moment of the previous evening in her head too often during the day, or perhaps it was because her second exploit lacked the novelty of an opening night performance. But whatever the reason, on this evening Olive's small act of rebellion lost its thrill. She realized that it was no great feat to evade the nurse, who was so worn down by the long shifts and heavy physical labor that she barely even noticed whether or not Olive touched her food. And Wilma, far from gazing on in awesome amazement at

Olive's deft maneuvering of the pills despite her broken hands, could barely stay awake long enough to pick at her own meal. Olive ached as she placed the pills into her pocket, feeling the lack of adrenaline almost as deeply as she had felt the news of her diagnosis so many years ago. For the second time in two days, Olive remembered. She remembered sitting across from the doctor as the word "osteoarthritis" dripped from his mouth and washed away the one thing in her life which had mattered most. She remembered looking at the empty seat next to her, the sole purpose of which seemed to be to remind her that she was alone on the scariest day of her life. She remembered how her hands, then still possessing their delicate beauty and elegance, were not being held. Until that moment she had put everything on hold for those hands. She had practiced for hours upon hours each day, she had traveled the world to showcase their talent, she had sacrificed family, friends, love, youth. And this was her thanks; she was a seventy year old woman at the doctor's office, betrayed by her hands, and alone. The pain of this recollection was almost too much to bear, but when Olive snapped back to the present it wasn't any less bleak. In a brutally clear epiphany, Olive saw that she had been foolish to think she could hold on to anything from her former life for more than a few brief moments. Stealing a few pills here and there was never going to make her fingers the slender, graceful members they once had been. Evading the gaze of the second shift nurse would never be the sensational nighttime show she had briefly allowed her imagination to fancy it could be. But rather than allowing herself to sink into despair, Olive became all the more determined to carry out what she had begun. Every time she evaded the nurses, it was a triumph for beaten down geriatrics everywhere. Every pill she stole was a slap in the face of this goddamn institution which held her captive.

And so, each of Olive's successful smuggling operations remained known only to her. If the nurses were aware of any triumphs regarding Olive, it was only that she had finally ceased with her incessant tirades. Olive had been a patient longer than most of the nurses had been employees, and her stay seemed even longer in light of the constant criticism which she dealt like a crippling blow upon anyone who dared try to cheer her up. Any time spent in the presence of Olive was time spent nodding in straight faced agreement about the evils of nursing homes, the pains of arthritis, the insult of pureed food, the inhumanity of having to follow the same schedule as a bunch of old people. Any response, other than grave assent, was sure to receive a scathing retort, and God forbid someone try to make a joke about Olive not being such a spring chicken herself. One poor nurse had made the fatal mistake of gently chiding Olive, "Oh come on dear, it can't be all that bad. Why don't you try to find a hobby, do something you used to love?" Olive had smashed her gnarled fist on the edge of her dinner tray, so that the greasy brown gravy and mashed potatoes catapulted forward, splattering all over the nurse's white shirt. "You don't know a goddamned thing, you cheap tart. Get

the hell out of my room! GET OUT!” That incident alone had fueled an exceptional flame of ire in Olive which lasted for over two weeks. In fact, Olive’s cantankerous nature had become such a fixed part of the nursing home’s atmosphere, that it was really a wonder no one felt any concern for her present silence. Most likely the nurses were too overworked to consider silence a bad thing. They looked at Olive and saw the same woman who had been aging in room 316 for well over a decade and, so long as she was conscious and breathing and the medication was distributed, they assumed they need not worry further.

Olive continued to gather her pills each evening. Only twice was she caught attempting to slip them into the sock at her side. On both occasions she merely played the Alzheimer’s card, staring blankly at her hand, as if she had forgotten which route it took on its way to her mouth. She then gave a little gasp, for theatrical effect, and compliantly swallowed the pills. If anything, these minor “episodes of dementia” only served to confirm the nurses’ assumption that Olive was finally settling into senility. She had waged a valiant war against aging, but the final outcome was inevitable. In these few short weeks of Olive’s serenity, the nurses even found themselves falling into a kind of sympathy for the old woman. The sweet little smile she gave as she brought the white paper cup to her lips seemed to say “Oops, can you believe how silly I can be?” They soon considered all past offenses forgiven: merely the understandable rantings of the tired old lady she now seemed to be. They even began to feel guilty for the times when they had treated her brusquely, when they had neglected to see past her more frustrating qualities, and failed to notice the charming woman within.

Olive noted the softened demeanor of the nurses with a wicked satisfaction. She knew they felt guilty for their previous neglect, and she was proud to have accomplished so much. Had she known it was so easy to prick their conscience, she may have faked the loss of a few marbles years ago. But Olive soon sensed another emotion in the nurses, an emotion which filled her with loathing and disgust. She could feel it in the gentle, almost unconscious pats they gave her arm while walking past. She could see it in their eyes as they handed her the dinner tray. She could hear it in their voices each and every time they addressed her. It was pity, and she found it repulsive. In all the years of Olive’s stay at the nursing home, she had been too much of a burden for anyone to feel anything for, other than the utmost irritation. But now that Olive was too preoccupied with her collection of pills to catalogue her complaints, it was as if she’d unwillingly let her guard down, and people bothered to look at her long enough to see what she really was. Or rather, they looked just long enough to see what they thought she really was; a poor old lady who had no one in the world left to care if she lived or died.

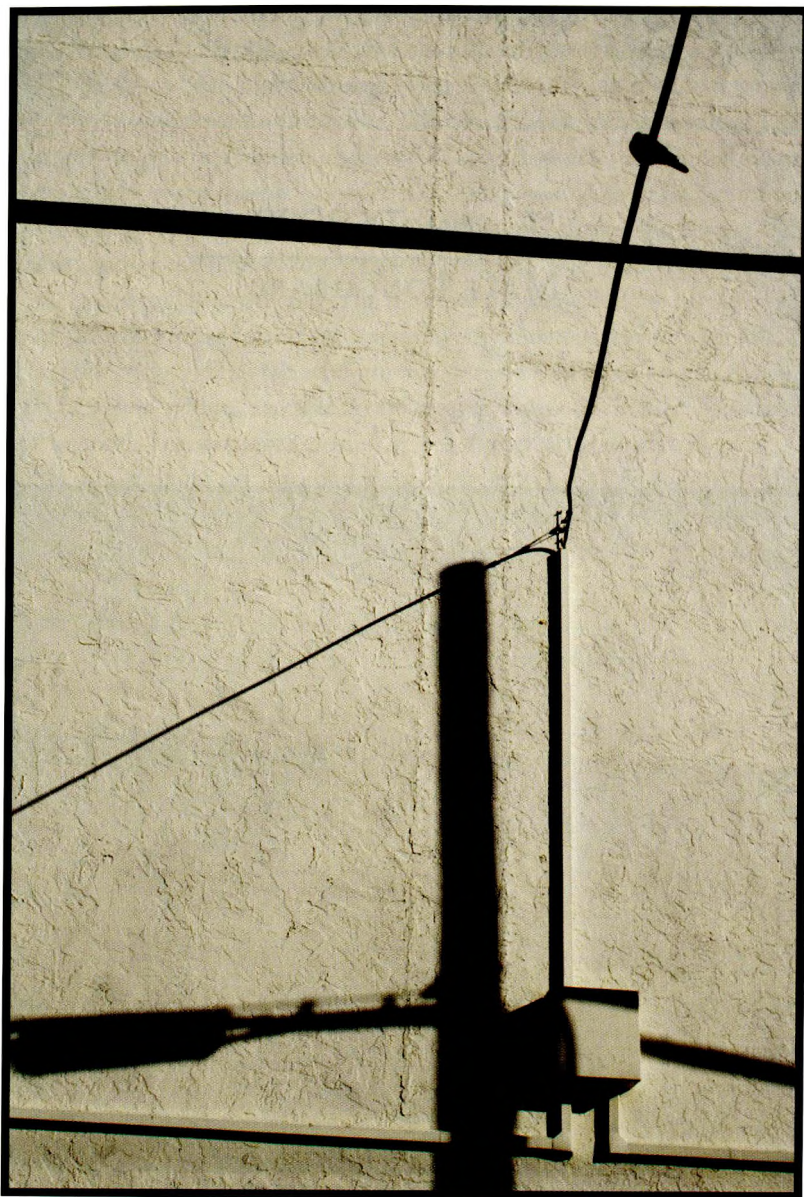
Olive physically cringed at the thought; she didn’t want or need anyone’s sympathy. Mercifully, the idea that someone pitied her had not occurred to Olive

until nearly three weeks after she had begun her silent war against the nursing home. Her stockpile of pills, which she had unconsciously begun to stroke whenever she felt the urge to blurt out some verbal assault or another, had grown to a sizable little mound within her sock. Olive had taken to keeping it at her side most of the time; it was hidden under the blanket and she only slipped it into the drawer on days when the beds needed to be stripped. The nurses were not inquisitive enough to warrant the effort of opening and closing the drawer for concealment, and as the pain of her arthritis increased, she found it helpful to feel that bulge grow pill by costly pill. The moment she identified the pervasive stench of emotion which oozed from the nurses as pity directed towards herself, Olive clutched the sock with all the strength her warped hand could muster. She then slipped her hand within, awkwardly rubbing the smooth round tablets in an attempt to sooth her wounded pride. When dinner arrived that evening, Olive asked the nurse to get her a second glass of water in a tone so endearing that the nurse immediately complied. Olive dipped her right hand into her pocket and scooped out as many pills as she could cradle in her palm. Slowly and carefully she poured them into her mouth. Then, with infinite care and determination, Olive pressed her two wrists on either the side of her mug of water, as she had grown accustomed to doing ever since her fingers had lost any vestige of usefulness. Olive brought the mug to her lips and swallowed. She felt the lukewarm, syrupy liquid swoosh around the pills in her mouth and carry them down into her throat. She placed the mug back on her tray and sighed contentedly. Then she laid her head against the back of the chair and closed her eyes. When the nurse returned, she witnessed Olive's last living movements. To her they seemed strange; crooked hands scurrying in horizontal lines, twisted fingers fluttering frantically up and down. She had no way of knowing that the twitching of Olive's thin lips betrayed the most sincere smile she had ever worn, or that the tune in Olive's mind at the moment of death was Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.

AUSTIN, TX 2009

MATT LONGOBARDI



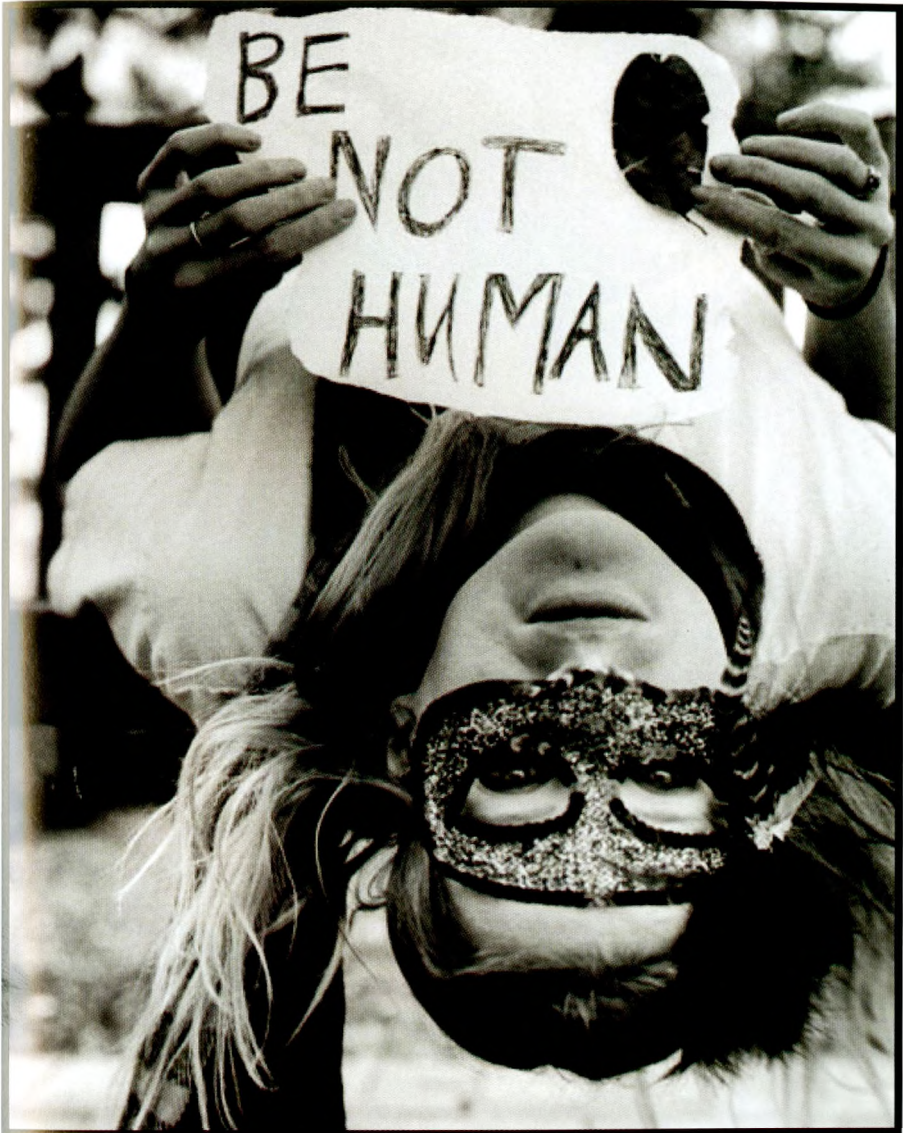


MIAMI BEACH, FL 2010

MATT LONGOBARDI

AVALANCHE VOCALS

MEGAN COSTELLO





ACCELERATED CONSCIOUSNESS

MEGAN COSTELLO

DOVER CLIFFS

ANEGLA GREEN





PORTABELLO

ANEGLA GREEN

SUMMER DISH

JOHN MANGO



UNTITLED

JOHN MANGO



GARDEN LESSONS

BUFF LINDAU

Such abandon, such profusion
whether I notice or care or credit them
each green promise has burst forth
doing its lavish summer display
a wealth of hue and color, tone and shape.

The soil, the sun, the rain arrived on time
synchronized in warmed botanical rhythm.
Hiding through spring and early summer,
the flowering burst forth in every corner
unruly, unabashed, while I wasn't looking.

Silent, it mounted up and moved close.
Now, here it is—bushy pushy bold exuberant
nothing timid nothing quiet, a noisy July event—
one brilliant color vying with another
up and down the familiar hill,
transformed into a Schumann piano quintet

fierce tones melded together, yet distinct,
a rhapsody of purple, orange, yellow, red,
underscored by greens between, along the fence,
topping the hill, swimming beneath and around,
wafting support for every budding thing.

Careless of my own self-thwarting woes
my fixation elsewhere, this ensemble
soars along in heartless focus to fulfill
its annual destiny. This year maybe moreso
or is it always more than expected?

Its vigorous, devil-may-care rhapsodic return
has lessons I could learn and teach the young,
about moving forward, not falling back,
discovering talents, dancing into flowering mode,
thence to grab the needed elements, and bloom.

PAPER DOLLS

STEPHEN LYNCH

She crawls across the room to a patch of sunlight in the corner
from a window on the wall plain white.

Its dreary shades provide a shelter from the world outside;
one other than the carpet and toys she knows.

And she projects her dreams on paper dolls and scattered things
in the house her father built for them.

A photo album page proves that her age has never changed
though she grows older and older every day.

She stands up and looks at me; I've never felt so God damn empty.
A hint of hunger is all I see for what she'll never be.

She preps the band and sets the stage, reads lines from her own
scripted page.

The paper players quote the girl and music sprouts from her hands
and mouth.

LETTING THE MOUNTAIN DO THE TALKING

JESSE MACK

To make the mountain speak, I throw
stones into the river, watch them
sink or float away—

Do they settle in the underwater
gravel of the riverbed
or on some muddy bank?

Who watches me cast them off like old selves?
The neighbor with worn out boots, his wife
whose dog died last week?

Will they not notice? Or will they watch
and say, “He’s throwing stones,” which is more
than I can say? The mountain

keeps its silence. A bluebird gathers
breadcrumbs where I left my lunch
beside the broken bench.

II

Early light on the mountain
is darkness to the senses,
shade of refining fire.

I hear no voice astir
in the leaves’ empty rattle.
Wind pulls them over stone.

They tumble down the side
of the mountain, into the pond
and hang like lilies there

over the empty water.

The mountain in the pond
looks up at itself. I listen:

no noise. Until the wind
turns loose another, then
another leaf from branch

or cliffside, lets each fall
patternlessly upon
the dark face of the mountain.

III

The empty distance between me and
the mountain wants to hear a psalm.
I cry out like some wild

Anthony of the desert, chant
like leaves, like running water over
stones in the brook. The mountain

responds with my own voice, then silence
as if to remind me of its distance,
to remind me what it is:

a mountain. In the desert, you lose
sight of little things, like names,
door keys, or the hour.

I want to hear a bird, and when one
calls some morning song above
the bench where I sit, I'm tempted

to believe he sings for me, and not
to listen. When I listen, I hear
that what he sings is, "Listen!"

A hush falls over the pond beside
the mountain, now transfigured in
the white fire of the sunset.

THE ALBUM

LIAM MCCARTNEY

“I’ve been on game shows, you know,” he said.

She scoffed, “Yeah and you won a ton of money. You’ve already told me. Did you forget?”

He grumbled. Had he? He was forgetting what he had forgotten. But wasn’t that the point?

The lights went up and he went blind for just a moment. She turned to the now illuminated camera before them with a feigned amiable air, “Welcome Back!” she called to the audience. “We’re here with the man with the perfect memory! Nathan Moss. Earlier in the show he wowed us by remembering the names and birth dates of every audience member. He said it was easy. So during the commercial break we gave him a list of randomly generated numbers. Let’s see how he does, folks!” She smiled, begging for him to fail.

The obnoxious lights swung to shine on him. His pupils, *what was the word? Shrunken? No, there was something more specific. No matter.* He took a deep breath and he rattled off the fifty or so random numbers, each to six decimal places. He could have thrown in pi to the first thousand digits past the decimal too but he wasn’t that cocky anymore. Besides, he was directed to stick to the script. They had a show to run after all. Applause followed. It seemed genuine, but it probably wasn’t.

“How does it work?” she asked.

What? How does what work?

“Excuse me?” Laughter ensued.

“Your mind! Tell us how it works, Mr. Moss. Tell the world.” She spoke through clenched teeth, giving each syllable a punch, gesturing to the camera that came to focus on him.

It just does, what do you want me to say?

“Sometimes it’s in pictures, other times it’s lists.”

“What are?”

What are what? He hesitated. The word was gone.

“Memories?” she offered, almost smirking.

Yes, memories. Awe, crap! What’s gone now?

“Yes...my memories. They differ, but with no true rhyme of reason as far as I can tell. Some are pictures, some are lists, and most are just there.”

This wasn't what they wanted. The producers. They hoped he'd spit out some grand tale of the unfailing memory. Some detailed description of how he made memories.

It's not like that. Memories aren't made.

“That's all?” she hissed.

What? You're expecting me to teach you how to use your memory?

“Memories are given. That's all there is to it. Retain what you get.”

She sighed and called the commercial break. When the lights went down and the mics went dead, she wheeled on him.

“Listen you little ——, you wanna play hard? You wanna —— up my show?”

He felt like laughing.

She went on snarling, “You wanna play hard? Let's do it, you piece of ——.”

Then he did laugh.

The lights came back on along with the mask of the gracious hostess.

“Truly you're a marvel, Mr. Moss,” she said, shaking her head, “But forgive me. I have to point this out.”

Here we go.

“You seem a different man from when the world saw you last. A year ago, you were on The Late Show, and well, let's see for ourselves.”

The mics cut and she waved a hand. The screen behind them started up and a video of him came on. It was a different host, a different Nathan.

He watched himself strut around on camera. He could have thrown up. The video Nathan was laughing, “My mind is perfect! I'm twenty-two years old and I haven't forgotten a thing since the seventh grade. I could name every element, with symbol and atomic weight, but I wouldn't bore you. I could recite The Odyssey, The Iliad, The Divine Comedy, The Fairy Queen, and the complete works of T.S. Eliot. I wouldn't miss a syllable! I'm fluent in twenty languages, including all dialects of Chinese. I can read hieroglyphics and cuneiform. I can tell you the license plate number of every car in the parking lot outside. I can name every country, state and province in the entire world. I know every constellation.” The video host laughed with glee.

“My mind is extraordinary. It is perfect.” Video Nathan repeated, grinning.

Wipe that smirk off your face.

The video host asked if Nathan felt blessed, “No, just lucky.”

Make that cursed.

The video faded away. The present host eyed him maliciously, “How do you explain the sudden change in personality?” she asked

There was nothing sudden about it, I think.

“I thought differently back then.”

Nine months ago it had happened. His mind could no longer sustain new memories. He was preparing for a lecture on Chinese dynasties from the early twenty-first century BC. He had sat down as usual, opening the history books. He read up on the Xia Dynasty and Yu the Great. He retained it in a single read through, not a problem. He moved on to read “the Shang Dynasty, or the Yin Dynasty was the second Chinese dynasty.” After he finished that sentence he no longer knew what he was reading. He went back, calmly, and reread, it was wholly unknown to him. Perturbed he called forth the Xia, he rattled off the emperors, the princes, the great warlords, it was all there. He tried another new dynasty with no luck. Frantic, he called forth anything, anything at all. Everything was there, but nothing could be added. It was as though he’d used his mind to it’s potential and now there wasn’t any room left. The capacity had been reached. He kept trying but he quickly learned it was futile. There was too much else there, it was like packing a suitcase meant for a weekend with clothes for a year.

Days later he discovered that he could make a new memory, at a price. He was required to sacrifice an old one. So he relaxed his grip on the Xia in his mind, and picked up the book again. Shang was logged. But the Xia might as well have never existed. So that was how he would be forced to live, with a weak hold on all his memories, on all that he contained in his mind. And things would come and go, unbeknownst to him.

The psychologists said he’d pushed the limits like no one before. He’d carried in his mind more than any human in history could have ever made claim to. They spoke to him, asked him to recall what memories he could from childhood; he told them about the CD player his parents gave him one Christmas. How he never cared for it and how it was beaten up over the months he owned it due to his neglect. He told them how it broke and how he cried when it did. He missed listening to his favorite songs on the bus ride to school. He told the psychologists how guilty that made him feel.

Half an hour later he put on his coat, his hands still shaking from the slew of profanities his lovely hostess just berated him with. He walked to his car alone, and sat in the driver’s seat, pocketing the instructions on how to drive. He wouldn’t need them this time. However, he pulled from the glove compartment the directions home.

He had to try three different keys on his chain to open the door to his apartment. Once inside, he breathed deeply and was relieved. He went to his bedroom and changed, tossing his shirt to the back of the closet and pulled out a tee from the bureau. From within its folds a sock fell, it drifted down to the carpet with a lazy pace. He knelt to pick it up, it was too small to fit him, too colorful as a bright green, and at the heel two tiny pom-poms extended. The elastic wasn't really elastic anymore; it was a sock well worn. *Who does this belong to?* There was an air of familiarity about it that he could not place. He stuffed the sock into his jeans pocket and went to the kitchen, hunger calling louder than mystery. He found the post-it he kept on the stove. The directions to make pasta, apparently. Following it to the letter, he prepared dinner.

He sat at the kitchen table, the dim chandelier hanging above. He quickly became aware of the stench of garbage. *When was the last time he had taken it out? And where was the garbage bag?* He polished off his meal quickly, trying not to allow the flavors of tomato and basil mix with the odors of soured milk. He found the old bag, sitting next to the window to the fire escape. *What is it doing there?* It lay open, as though it had been sifted through and abandoned. He picked it up and began to take it out, so he could toss it down the chute in the hallway, where it would be incinerated. But the bag tore open, halfway there. The stink erupted into his home, instantly permeating everything. It was horrid. He worked quickly to clean it up. He tossed everything he could into a new bag and ran that to the chute. When he got back to his apartment it laid on the floor, waiting to be found, it had fallen from the trash. It was a post-it, crumpled and intended to be forgotten. He unfurled the yellow paper, and on it he read, in his hand, with screaming sharpie, "*You love Zoey*". It meant nothing to him, and so stuck it with the sock, down his pocket.

He tried to sleep, but he couldn't. The best he could manage was a twilight state between waking and slumber. A thought came to him in and while in this uneasy condition, the thought terrified him. *What if you forget your name?* He feared if he slept it would disappear into the night. He would wake up no one. *Is that possible? How do you hold on to your identity?*

Frustrated he got up and went to his bookcase because something drew him there. He pulled forth a leather binder, seemingly at random, but there was some ritualistic sense about it all. He broke the album open and examined the pictures within. The first was a woman of sixty or so, white liberally streaking her once auburn hair. Her face was beginning to wear, wrinkles were developing with a determined purpose. Her eyes were grey, but she smiled out at him, radiating love. The caption read; Mother, Anne-Marie Moss, November 14th, 1947. Underneath lay sentences, blurbs, that described his relationship with his Mother. Most had been crossed out, being outdated, but there was one that was carved

into the paper, as if meant to never to be forgotten. "Always love you, and always will be there, Nate." *Was that true?* He couldn't remember. He felt like it was. But he couldn't remember the last time he had seen her.

As he turned the page, the protective cellophane envelope crackled. He saw pictures of vaguely familiar people. Who were they? They were his Father, Sister, Brother, nieces, nephews, and his best friend, as the titles beneath the photos said. After he had studied them long enough they all became familiar enough, but none of them felt intimate. They had all written little lines like his mother. They'd poured some monumental, immeasurable amount of love in between the covers of this album. He reveled in it, the kind words, the support they all had offered him. He saw pictures of these people hugging him, standing with him, laughing with him, celebrating with him. These people were family.

He felt sick for the second time that day. He'd never be able to return the love. He sat there, letting the night slip into morning, immersing himself in this barely remembered past that was rapidly fading away. Soon the photos would become an impossible puzzle, or foggy windows. He would be looking at his unknown past, a jumble of memories that no longer existed for him. He would see himself standing along side strangers whose adoring expressions would mystify him.

Then came a page, torn from the binding in a rage. All he could see was the remnants of the letter Z. The left over shreds stared at him and they evoked some vivid and powerful passion in him, a striking tumult of emotion. At once a hot fury took hold of him and an inexplicable something swelled inside him. *What was it?* It took some minutes before he recognized it. It was longing. Longing for something that was ripped from his life.

Bewildered, he shut the album. There was nothing in it but a series of windows to another person's life.

In the morning he'd wake with his name intact. In the morning his mother would come and he would ask her name. For he dreamed that night, and his mind chose to remember it.

GARDEN

TANUJA MEHROTRA

(for Mira and June)

If I build you a bower
of willow to spill over and swing upon;
or a maze made of high-walled stone
for hiding, and I show you how
earthworms shine in the sun when unearthed,
would you entwine like the jasmine vine?

If I help you steady the shovel, dig deeply
in the dirt so that it blooms under your
fingernails; or let you wander barefoot
over rocks, eat marigold petals, save
all the dead heads, sip sand, get stung,
would you roll each other down this hill forever?

If I left you alone in this suburban
silhouette of grass and flowerbed
would you cleave together, through
drought and rain, wind and sun?
Would you eat from the same apple?

LISTENING

ANN MINOFF

On a slow evening
listening to the sounds of Brazil
considering
the back of her eye
the imperishable
might and depth of infinity
the hum of the universe

I want to paint God
to draw her nose and face
the back of her neck
the left ear and right
but I must understand something first

Lose the polished ruler
the malevolent measure of all things
and listen
to the point in the
round space of her eye

Then even if I think
I'll fall from grace
If I fall into that place
I will paint
God

BRAVE

JED MYERS

Only as brave as the late day's clouds'
first blue-gray droplets shivering loose,
leading the dark fringe down the scattering
wind, toward something else;

brave as the air itself—streaked
with smoke, thrashing, its gills
choked in the hoisted net, its ocean
gashed and bled—still breathing;

brave as your own blood tumbling the narrows
between decayed walls along with your longings,
fears, errors; only as bold
as the crumbled ledge of your outlook

falling; you must only be brave
as the world you're made of. No more,
no less—to live your hopes toward death
till there's nothing left to save.

ENA'S JUG

DAN NEAL

Twenty-thousand years ago, a blue hypergiant star heaved its last mighty sigh and gave up its ghost. But the dying titan's death rattle was more violent than anything man can comprehend. As the last of its hydrogen, helium, and other more exotic atoms were spent, an explosion of catastrophic proportions occurred. This explosion ejected material so intensely hot that it ignited all matter within six billion of miles in a final act of annihilation. This effervescent violence raced out to greet the rest of the universe, including a small yellow star over thirteen-thousand light-years away.

And in particular, its largest rocky satellite.

Sixty-five hundred years ago, in what is now modern day Israel, Ena and three of his tribesmen crouched amidst large rocks on a hillside in the moonless night. Here, they silently looked down upon two men who had stopped to build a fire and rest for the night. They were stalking these men, holding their flint knives firmly in their hands. The reason for their ill will towards the two strangers was simple: they had stolen something from Ena's tribe. Now Ena and his band of three were going to kill them and take back their possession.

How this object came to be stolen was through the actions of Ena's nephew, Pakhdon. Earlier that day, Pakhdon and his friend, Sheniy, had gone to the watering place a parasang or so (about an hour's walk) away from camp to collect water for their small tribe's grain crops. Pakhdon had brought his uncle's prized clay watering jug to collect the water, and it was the only such jug the tribe had. As they filled the jug, two men stopped at the watering place for a drink on their way home. Pakhdon, ever the braggart, began antagonizing these men, who were of diminutive stature and passive nature. As it turned out, when prodded enough, the two short men were tremendous fighters. They embarrassed their taller rivals, slapping them around like concubines and taking their jug as retribution. Pakhdon and Sheniy could do nothing but return to their camp, besmirched and ashamed.

"There were six of them, Ena," Pakhdon had proclaimed. "They came out of nowhere, like sandstormers. Bandits! They jumped us and held flint knives to our throats. They took the jug, and said if we followed them, they would cut out our eyes and feed them to the vultures."

Ena was greatly dismayed. Without that clay jug, the tribe could not bring the watering hole's life-giving liquid to their grains, which they had only just recently learned how to plant through Ena's wife, Binah. She had come from a tribe that

Ena and his people had conquered and killed. They were skilled in many ways Ena's tribe was not, but they were not good fighters, and it had cost them. Binah was one of the only ones that Ena had allowed to live, as she was the chief's most beautiful daughter. Out of gratitude for having had her life spared, Binah showed Ena and his tribesmen how to plant grain, a process she had learned from her father. A rudimentary part of this process meant watering the crops often, and even though they lived near a wadi that provided decent natural irrigation, it was not enough for both man and crops.

Coincidentally, as a spoil of his triumph over his wife's people, Ena had taken the conquered tribe's large clay watering jug, primarily for the decorative color drawn so meticulously onto its surface. The color used was one that Ena had only seen in the dusky sky, a purplish-blue that he became enamored with. He was grateful to his gods that his tribe hadn't destroyed it in the raid, because now, it served a two-fold purpose. It was Ena's favorite possession, as well as a symbol of life for the tribe.

This was the jug that Pakhdon had let be taken from him. This was why Ena would not part with it.

"We have other jugs." Pakhdon argued.

"No, they are too small. The purplish-blue jug is beautiful. We will retrieve it."

So four of them had set out, Ena, Pakhdon, Sheny and Sheny's younger brother, with flint knives in hand, to find these bandits and to take back what belonged to Ena, and by extension, the tribe. It was afternoon then, and they had gone to the watering place. They asked the old woman who went there every day if she had seen six men with a jug, and where they may have gone. She laughed and said she had seen two smaller men with a jug, and they had proceeded due north along the tree line of the desert. She had clearly known what had happened to Pakhdon and Sheny. After parting her company, Pakhdon said the other four must have broken off from the group, and Ena said it didn't matter. They would find the jug and bring it home, and that would be enough for him. A few hours later, after dusk, they found the two men sitting around a fire, and that's when they had hidden amidst the rocky outcropping on the hillside. Ena saw the jug illuminated by the fire a few cubits away from the men, and was relieved it was not damaged.

"I don't understand where the others could have gone, uncle." Pakhdon said quietly. The desert wind can carry a voice for an incredible distance. "We should be cautious, as they could be anywhere near here, right Sheny?"

Sheny nodded in hesitant agreement. He did not like lying to the chief of his tribe. But they could both tell by Ena's demeanor that he didn't believe them, and he probably never had. All he cared about was that jug.

Ena told the boys to watch closely so that they could observe their enemy's fatigue overtake them. Within the hour, the fire began to smolder, and the two bandits were asleep. Ena turned to Pakhdon and the other two, and studied their constitutions. They were all adults now. Pakhdon was almost sixteen and already had a concubine, pregnant with child. Shenyi was fifteen and had the beginnings of whiskers growing on his upper lip. His younger brother Sheliyshiy was thirteen, and was just becoming a man himself. But none of them had ever seen battle before; they were too young to have been a part of the assault on Binah's tribe. And although they were men, they had never had to fight to justify their manhood. That is, until earlier today, and Pakhdon and Shenyi had failed that test. Ena thought it would be better not to acknowledge their failure, but rather to have them learn from it. He would teach them, as his father had taught him. They would become fighters, Ena thought. Fighters who could wax eloquence about their might and vitality to the next generation, starting tonight.

"Pakhdon, this is your time for vengeance," Ena whispered. "You can now be boastful for a reason. I know you would not have allowed them to take my watering jug from you if they had not overpowered you." Pakhdon nodded, trying not to look sheepish. "Shenyi, you and Sheliyshiy will circle around them until you are directly in line with us, with them in the middle. There is no wind tonight, so we needn't worry about them smelling our scent. Make sure you keep at least thirty cubits between you and them anyway, in case you make noise. We will allow them to rise and face us, but not before we have the advantage."

The boys nodded silently. They knew what needed to be done. No immoral acts of cowardice would be tolerated. No, for the honor of their tribe, which by its very existence gave their lives as much meaning as their own names, they would kill these dogs and take back the jug, as well as whatever trinkets the bandits had on them.

They split up and moved silently towards their prey. Shenyi and Sheliyshiy crept around through ferns near the bandits. They crouched so as not to alert the bandits to their approach; their breathing was soft and shallow. Ena and Pakhdon slinked down low to the ground, being very careful not to wrestle any rocks loose from their precipices as they descended from the slope. They also did not wish to anger any snakes or scorpions that may be in their path.

Pakhdon was nervous, visibly sweating. These men had soundly beaten him before he could so much as lay a hand on them, and he had always considered himself to be a solid fighter. He hoped that Ena would prove to be an even better fighter, and that their four could overpower the bandits' two.

As they came within thirty cubits of the campfire, Ena reached his hand out to his nephew, and he motioned for him to wait until the brothers could make it to the opposite side. He knew it may take them a little while longer, as navigating

through vegetation silently was a time-consuming venture. Finally, he could see they were all in place. He raised his hand to the ready, so the brothers across could see.

Ena screamed out, "attack!"

The bandits cried out and leapt up as Ena and his cohorts charged the campfire, as if they knew the attack had been imminent for some time. The first one to make it to the bandits was Ena, and even he was surprised at the speed with which the men had prepared themselves. He swung his flint knife for the closest one's face, but the diminutive man ducked and heeled his palm into Ena's nose, knocking him down. While the brothers tussled with the other bandit, Pakhdon had tried to sneak up on Ena's target, who stood over his uncle looking victorious. But the bandit turned and stared the boy down.

"Ah, the blowhard," said the bandit. "So, you think you have found the courage to face us a second time? Or were you just waiting for the opportunity your elder brought you so that you could stick your blade in me while I wasn't looking?"

"I don't need him! I'm a warrior!" Pakhdon did indeed see this as his opportunity to get his knife into one of them. They were, after all, the ones who had so embarrassed him that even an old hag had laughed at the sight of him. He lunged at the bandit in an indignant rage, a rage that overtook his cowardice. He missed and suffered a knee to the groin. The knife had fallen out of Pakhdon's hand, and the bandit took it. The boy was on his hands and knees when the bandit grabbed him by the hair and put the flint knife to his throat.

"Well then, tonight son, you get to die a warrior. Be proud."

As the knife was about to break the skin of Pakhdon's throat, a brilliant light washed over all of them like water, blanketing the entire horizon. All six men stopped their battle and gazed up at the heavens.

What they saw astounded them.

It was a cascading radiance as bright as the full moon. It bathed them in yellows and greens and reds and, most magnificently, that familiar purplish-blue. There was no sound to this magic, just an epic show of light, opening from a singular point in the sky like a desert rose.

Ena, who had since risen through his bloody haze to save the life of his recalcitrant nephew, stopped in wonder, as did the two bandits, and the other boys. The knife had since dropped from Pakhdon's throat, and they all took a step away from one another, gazing heavenward.

"What is it?" One of the brothers asked.

"It is a sign." Said a bandit.

"A sign of what?"

“Of a god’s power.”

Ena looked at the bandits, whom he had since concluded were not actually bandits, but merely travelers. Travelers who were very capable of defending themselves. In the soft illumination of the miraculous night sky, he could see that they were also identical twins. But he knew in his heart that the travelers were right. The light was ever-flowing and slowly enveloping the entire night sky.

“This god is worthy of worship. He has taken over the entire heavens,” said Ena.

“There is wisdom in your words,” responded one of the travelers. There was a wordless agreement between the two travelers when they said, “come back to our camp, men. We will set up an altar to this god, and be the first to truly worship him. We will see if we can entreat him to favor us above all others, as he clearly has become greater than the other gods around him.”

Ena considered the ramifications of this decision. Would this mean he and his tribe lost their battle? No. This new god clearly desired for them to put aside their animosity.

“We must return to our camp first,” replied Ena after a few moments. “But we will accept your offer. Tonight, though, let us stay here as friends, and pray to the one who has seen fit to acknowledge our battle with his arbitration.”

This was desert hospitality: a kindness and generosity between those who needed it, or in this case, had come to an accord. Past aggressions could be put aside for the sake of a common good. It was how things were done between men in the Levant.

That night, they stayed in the shadow of the hillside, silent in prayer at first, as they watched the beautifully fluid ribbons and strands of color that flowed out to greet their petitions. Eventually, they all began to converse in the glow of their new god’s countenance, and they shared stories of wars, fights, and even jokes. To their rationalization, it would seem this new god approved of their newfound friendship. All had forgotten that, only a few hours earlier, they had been rivals, and that Pakhdon had nearly been slaughtered by the travelers. Pakhdon, for his part, was content now. He had stared death in the face and had not backed down, and although he had lost the battle, he was proud of himself. Tonight, he was a man.

In the morning the new friends parted ways; the travelers with their stories, the boys with their newfound pride, and Ena with his jug. Ena was not angry with Pakhdon for his folly, for indeed, it may have been the catalyst that brought a god’s patronage upon them all.

The light that bathed them in such a splendid aura became a source of wonder for hundreds of peoples across great expanses of land, triggered by a god who watched over his creation with care. It became luminous enough to be seen even

during the day, and it was revered by many as a sign of blessing and benevolence by a god that had been, until then, unknown. The light would last for months, until it became no more radiant than the Morning Star. Eventually, generations would forget about the event as the light dulled beyond even its faint neighboring stars. But Ena and those who were with him that night would remember it as the night a deity revealed himself and called them to not only a truce, but to a merging of their tribes. This amalgamated tribe would go on to merge with more tribes as generations passed, and eventually, their descendants would become as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

ARS PERSONA

TIMOTHY OTTE

I may not be now
who I once hoped to become
though, having now become
who I am
I am certain:
who I am becoming
is becoming on me.

& though who I am becoming
is not who I once hoped to be
I am certain that had I known
this is who I could become
then I certainly
would have hoped to be
who I am now.

I am certain
who I am becoming
is now who I hope to be
& I am certain:
I am.

SOCK SONNET

JEFF PAJAK

Thou dost not know if 'twas then sewn by care-worn hands
- This fair-torn sock, weathered and sopped, stretched 'cross the street -
Or if by cold, matchless machines in grease-black lands;
Yet now it lies with scarce hope of its match to meet.

Wherefore, was it neglect, birthed by an absent mind?
Or thought's darker defect - unrepentant disdain?
Why ever would this love be of a stranger kind,
And flee without regret what's left out in the rain?

Mayhaps the lost endearment of forgotten wares
Be trivial, so for inconvenience he forsook;
But if towards smaller things no charity he bears,
Then what would one have done when storms o'erflow the brook?

And yet do not despair in these enduring days,
Though wild skies try us like frayed clothes and take their toll.
Along may come a new guardian to tend thy ways,
To love and wear thee right, and mend thy tattered sole.

STOLEN EGG

JANE LUNIN PEREL

Carnelia is leafing through another spring catalogue. Pastel eggs and toddlers squeezing bunnies on the cover. She still stiffens, seeing the pastel egg replace the roasted egg of the Pesach Seder Plate. She was so guilty as a child. She tried to tell herself the painted eggs looked fake and that she didn't like the bunnies or even the chicks with the jellybean eyes. Not the pink paper simulated grass, either, that held the wooden nests of Easter eggs. But how in secret she wanted them. It seemed all spring belonged to Christians. They had stolen the egg, the symbol of the fecund, renewed birth. They bound it up with the risen Christ, whom she was taught to reject, not as teacher but savior.

But her egg was roasted to a tarnished yellow, brown on the edges. Just a symbol. Not eaten. Why was it so serious to be one of the Chosen People? Her name appeared on no gingham basket. No cakes in the shapes of lambs would ever be baked for her. Matzoth can hardly be decorated. Why bother? The idea is to remember the constipation of the Jews in the desert. Cast away again, she felt lost, left out. "Let her color some eggs. What's the harm?" the neighbor said. It was her choice. She said no because it was like having a Christmas Tree.

When Amber was 9 and the boy threw change at her, saying "Pick it up Jew," Carnelia scrambled out of her office and down the highway to confront the principal who wanted to know from Carnelia "what really is the difference between a Christian and a Jew?" Carnelia told him: "If I accept Jesus as savior, then I'm a Christian." How clear it seemed to him then. Yet she had to request that the boy and his parents apologize to Amber. Maybe do community service. "Of course," the principal said, the shining green and turquoise Easter eggs resting on plastic grass across his desk.

The egg that gets her the most is the one that says MOM in pink and lavender. It's next to the one made with an egg wrap that the catalog explains achieves a "Dior elegance." The kit is \$24.95. The rest of the eggs are either pale blue with stars or puppies' faces. The last pages show spring wreaths, which Carnelia cannot have

either, even though the butterfly wreath announces, "Spring is in the air with four hand painted butterflies." Maybe Carnelia will tie the roasted egg to her door with the roasted shank bone of the Pascal lamb. Then the neighbors will say that she's finally changed. Has finally gone in for decorating her empty door with rotting food.

BIRD-WATCHING CARNELIA AND ARI FIND THE
AVONDALE SWAN IN A SMALL COVE
OUTSIDE OF WATCH HILL, R.I.

JANE LUNIN PEREL

She is angora winged, glissading on water. She dips her neck, poising her tail feathers as she feeds on dark algae in the pull of the salt marsh. When she lifts her head she preens herself—a Queen before the mirror, forgetting the knavery of the King. She is all desire and white ashes strewn over the decks of burials at sea. She knows the secrets of dead mothers. What the murder victim whistles before the assassin rolls her into a white sheet. She is an ancient merchant, bartering feathers for salt. Where the sea rose withers, she lounges, lils under eel grass. Imperial, she turns her back to the burning sun, folds herself into the shape of a bruised orchid. She naps and dreams, moon lace over black water. When the moon swells she wakes and cruises under its glowing belly. Then she drops her eggs, like Baroque notes from a harp. The other one who has touched them with his burning, fans her. Shadows of white bouquets hovering by the embankment. Our Lady of the Swan.

VINTER

JANE LUNIN PEREL

Carnelia did not understand his speech but understood his mouth, that it was a trough of dark wine. That all the grapes from his vines, the vines of his father and his grandfather rolled into a similar pit were eviscerated there into pulp. Then from pulp they were pressed into juice, the skins and seeds sliding off for musky compost. He knew the secrets of the vats. How much pressure. What temperatures to bouquet that juice into wine. Those vats, those wine wombs, in the chamber of alcohol fumes. Mildewed heat. She did not understand his words, but his hands passed the yellow compost over hers, like ground monarch butterflies. He wanted her to feel the dust of grape skin, seed, vine that he pressed it into her fingers. The remains of the sun's elongation into earth. She felt the grapes before they were ground up, rain riveted, driven in clusters that catch the light, that soak it in before they were plucked, snagged, pulverized, heated, aged, bottled, labeled, "Apremont." She sat with him, and he pointed to the map, his mountains and traced a time line of erosion with his fingertips. His eyes set into hers, a man whose talk was ruby orchids, whose body glowed through his bones, who inhaled her with the wine they drank together, toasting the grapes, the magenta abyss of his mouth succulent to her, sodden as the fields, closer. Then Ari arrived with the car.

TWELVE HOURS TO SELF-DISCOVERY

COREY PLANTE

5:37 PM

“Corey,” my mother calls sweetly from the kitchen. Wordlessly, I close my laptop and shuffle in for dinner.

“You’ve been awfully quiet this evening,” my father says to me, already chewing a mouthful of chicken as I sit down in my seat directly across from him. Having been home from college for two weeks of Christmas break, I feel strange at this quiet family dinner. It’s foreign to me now and far from the raucous dining hall I am now used to.

“I suppose I’ve just got a lot on my mind tonight,” I reply.

“What is it?” my mother asks from my right, genuine interest sparkling in her friendly brown eyes.

“I don’t know. I guess it’s just feels peculiar being home again,” I admit. “I really miss all of my friends, and it’s just so quiet here. All of this down time has me feeling kind of lethargic.” My parents look at me, and I can almost hear the inaudible snow falling outside – a stark contrast to the pounding footsteps, the shouts, and the doors slamming to the beat of blaring music of my dormitory.

“What in the *hell* does that mean?” my brother says, scolding me with something that sounds like an accusation. “Talking all high and mighty cause you’re a ‘college boy’ now?”

My parents exchange swift and furtive glances at one another, trying to gauge whether or not they should get involved.

“It means sluggish, and kind of apathetic,” I explain calmly. I can hear what might be something like contempt in my voice. Why couldn’t I just say sleepy? Had college transformed me into the pretentious ass that my brother sees now?

“I guess I’ve always kind of thought with words like that. I think that college just taught me that it’s okay to use them,” I explain, realizing it for the first time myself.

“Well you’re better off enjoying the relaxation at home while you’ve got it, kiddo. It can only get harder,” my father says, undoubtedly thinking of his own brief stint in higher education.

“That’s just it, though. Without all of my work, I feel so *bored*, so underutilized.”

“Why not try writing?” my mother suggests, “You never did finish that book, did you?”

“No...” I begin to stumble over my words. “It isn’t... Maybe...”

“Haven’t you been at it for, like, *years* now?” my brother remarks, not even attempting to hide his skepticisms. The scorn stings me like hot grease splashing on an already open wound; I have my own doubts without having to deal with his.

“Mi-*chael!*” my mother scolds in that drawn out and wide-eyed way mothers reserve for minor offenses. “I’m sure it’s going to be great!” she assures me, reaching over to pat my hand. Her fingers are warm against my skin as I clutch my dinner fork just a little bit tighter. “I can’t wait to read the rest of it!”

My father mumbles in agreement through another bite of food as I hang my head ever so slightly, focusing on my own plate and wishing that I could feel something more than shame when I think of my book. While I appreciate my parents’ encouragement, their words are not enough to stifle the fear that is now rampaging through my gut, the fear that I had swallowed and hidden away months and months ago. After all, it would forever be Mr. and Mrs. Plante’s responsibility to support me unconditionally. And as much as I dearly love them both, how qualified are they to determine quality of my work based on two very rough chapters that they read well over a year ago? What literary expertise can lie within the minds of two real-estate agents? I know that I am not better than my parents, but can they understand what I am striving for, what I long to create with this novel?

“Go for it,” my father says, beaming over at me. “Get that thing done so we can get it published!” Published. The “P-Word.” My father has no idea how much that word terrifies me. It puts a certain responsibility on me to cater to a ‘target market’ whose tastes are different from my own. And there has to be a pinnacle of achievement involved. There has to be this invisible bar that I am meant to reach and do a back-flip and pirouette over – like some ridiculous monkey or trapeze artist – in order to validate the three and a half years that I spent pouring my soul out through the tips of my fingers and into over two-hundred pages of mere *words*. I smile weakly, aware of the melancholy that I am slipping into with every moment that I contemplate what it means for me to *write*.

You see, I nearly died once, and that was how this whole mess started. And it was just that sudden. One night I was up late (per the usual) fixing my computer and watching Keanu Reeves make an ass of himself as the demon-slaying Constantine. I awoke in the late morning, took two steps, and collapsed, writhing in pain and drenched in sweat and tears. I can still remember my mother’s shriek. Viral meningitis wracked my body, and I was only deemed fit to leave my home after over a week of hospitalization, a half a summer’s worth of bed rest, and a painfully meager diet. I was up and about just in time to start my junior year of high school pale, weak, and fifteen pounds lighter. I had lived through a one hundred and six degree fever and a spinal tap, and I had endured the delusions of

a morphine-induced haze.

When all was said and done, my precocious, egocentric mind convinced itself that I had learned something: a grandiose lesson that I absolutely *had* to write about. I had come back from my flirtation with death's door, discovered my self-worth, and believed that I had discovered the true value of life. A reflection of myself, a protagonist named Dylan Parish, popped into existence, and he had a story that burned inside of me, begging to be unleashed. So I began writing. Over the course of three painstaking years, it didn't even feel like work; the story came alive and unfolded outside of myself in this strange universe. It was a place where I was God and creator, but I never had any real control over anything that happened. The characters were unique and real and alive just like you and me. They pursued their desires. They loved. They cried. And they lived. They did this all while I played the helpless spectator and scribe, pressing this world down onto paper. The process was exhausting and painful and somehow made me feel alive and drained at the same time.

And then I showed my family the first few chapters. Swelling with pride, my parents threw around those intimidating words like 'target market' and 'publishers.' The entire act of writing became more about catering to some enigmatic readership than my own writerly self.

And then the doubt socked me in the gut like an angry world-boxing champion.

Who in the *hell* did I think I was? What business did I have to be a *writer*? What story could I possibly have to tell? What was I beyond your average, pretentious, angsty, white, middle-class crybaby with a standard sob story? Who would read a story about a life not so unlike my own, of a boy struggling to find love in his world of misguided, miserable, and misanthropic youths? In the oversexed and violent modern age, who cared about sentimental, idealistic romantics? Plagued by these doubts, my young and fragile intellectual mind cracked under the pressure. Overnight, my protagonist Dylan Parish stopped living. But he didn't die. For a time I forced him to move, as I became more of an erratic and unskilled puppeteer rather than the former voyeur in a fanciful and fictitious world. Eventually I just stopped writing altogether, consumed by my doubt and distracted by the awkward adjustment to college life.

But after a time, I found myself debating philosophy and the meaning of life with friends and companions, people that made me happy to be alive just from the comfort that comes with feeling like you are truly understood. I read provocative works of literature that awed me with the authors' capacity to use language as a tool in crafting true works of art. Even the lectures of my articulate professors evoked a certain fervor in me. *These* were individuals that actually understood how I felt, people who sought and found pure joy in the sounds of echoing laughter and the warm embrace of a friend rather than under the skirt of

some flirt or at the bottom of a shiny, red Solo cup. These people cared more about being themselves in a world gone wrong and saying what they had to say, even when no one would listen. Brimming with intellectual stimulation from my peers, professors, and everything in between, I had begun to feel more alive than ever before. And I hadn't thought about what it all had meant to my writerly self until my mother brought up my book as casual dinner table conversation; I never should have been concerned with the judgments of others. The only person I would ever have to impress would be myself.

So I sit here, chewing on more than just my food. I remember the words of Herman Melville, told to me by a professor – “It is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation” – and I realize that all I ever had to do was continue onward, writing for no one but myself. *Screw* publishers and my target market! I *am* my own target market! I think of my friends and professors, all of that inspiration, and I can feel the juices returning, the impetus finally surging once again. The lifeblood pumps back into Dylan, back into Emma and Cadence, Dieter and Logan, all of these characters that validate whom I dream of being: the writer.

“May I please be excused?” I say.

12:03 AM

Yawning, I stretch my arms towards the ceiling and hear the disks in my back snap and pop. I pluck my square-framed glasses from the bridge of my nose and plop them onto my glass desk so I can rub some life back into my face and eyes. My mind is all ablaze with a passionate delirium that makes my hands tremble. I cannot remember the last time that I felt this powerful, this alive and sure of myself.

Somehow, the climax of the entire novel has been reached, and that world has been changed forever. My fingers ache to plunge onward, to slam down those next words, sentences, pages, and chapters until I reach that final period that stands as the testament to the end of more than just a book. I am yearning for the conclusion to my naïve childhood, that cathartic closure that comes with answering that proverbial question: who am I, and what is that person capable of? But my eyes and body quake under the strain. To pull off such a venture, I need help.

I slide my feet into my sophisticated-looking slippers. I'm still wearing khakis and the button-down/sweater combo that makes my friends say that I look every bit the writer that I aspire to be. Smiling in spite of myself, I stumble through the dark and quiet house and into the kitchen to put a kettle of water on the stove. Only a piping hot cup of tea can complete this writer's image that I keep in my head. I rub my hands quickly over one another, wringing them out like some sort of drug addict shivering in the cold as I move closer to the kettle, seeking its warmth.

And then it dawns on me. I just wrote somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty pages in six hours. My mind isn't nimble enough – too untrained in the field of mathematics after only a semester of humanities courses – to calculate how many words per hour. All I know is that the number is big, real big. I keep smiling, fiendishly eager to continue as the kettle begins to howl. I laugh when I realize that I might have gone completely mad.

5:53 AM

My lips are chapped and my mouth is caked with the residue of three, four, five cups of tea? I lost count hours ago, and re-using the same mug made things only more difficult. My eyes burn mercilessly and my legs are rigidly cramped pieces of bent wood. Somehow I am sweating just from the effort of keeping awake. The small light on my desk has been my only source of luminance, so I notice as the darkness turns to light behind the shades of my window, and the birds begin to sing their morning songs. My head is on the verge of throbbing its way right off of my neck and onto the floor. But the adrenaline is more than enough to overcome the pain.

I've written eighty pages in twelve hours. Eighty pages of dialogue and events, climactic situations and life changing moments in the lives of these characters that sprang forth from somewhere in depths of my mind. I feel empty and complete at the same time. I feel simultaneously triumphant and remorseful, and for what, writing the rest of a novel that might never see the light of day?

"Why?" my voice croaks aloud.

I can hear the voices of all these characters, ringing in my head, each clear and distinct. They tell me that I never had a choice, that regardless of whether or not the story ever sees the light of day, the singular act of giving life to it by revealing it is all that matters. It will never matter if anyone else ever sees a single one of the seventy-one thousand and thirty-two words that I had strung together to forge my tale. All that matters is that the experience of writing the novel allowed me to discover my self-worth, conquer my fears, and realize that I had nothing to prove to anyone but myself. And so I stare at that final punctuation and think about the book as a whole. It is verbose, weird, sentimental, cliché, and overly romantic to a nearly disgusting degree. In short, it is everything that I am.

"...Corey?" my mother calls from the kitchen, quietly and meekly this time, almost exactly twelve hours after her last. She had gone to bed and slept her full night of sleep while I sat toiling away at my desk, and her intuitive sense knows that I am awake. Not wanting to worry her with suspicions of my insomnia and madness (both of which could be very well true), I quietly close my laptop and click the light off before crawling into bed with the aim of feigning sleep. But I am fast asleep before my head even hits the pillow.

CIGAR BANDS IN AN ASHTRAY

RICHARD T RAUCH

Time provokes a confused dance,
interpretive, of course, like cigar smoke
blown blue into a ceiling fan—

all slipstreams on slow speed, rings
twisting to toroids, dissipating in wisps,
as if watching a memory emerge^¾

floating, falling, mixing
with symbols and objects, furniture and drapes,
settling down as dust to the floor,

leaving only that stale, distinctive stench
of lingering dreams and unreconciled thoughts,
lost with the ashes and butts

and brightly colored bands
that spawn musical visions
of festivals in the Caribbean,
of dusky, maduro-dark dancing girls
playful in love

with who knows who cares who
(and I think they've been drinking too!),
roaming mystically, wistfully about the streets,
whispering exotic secrets to each other,
and laughing laughs

that carve out everlasting niches
into those quaint and cuddly
convolutions of your deepest brain,
where mambo meets tango,
and smiles begin.

HOME

KAITLIN SEARFOSS

I think about my home.
There's always you
And there used to be me.
Sitting in the car,
The radio plays the music
Of my lonely heart.

Inside of my heart
I am sheltering my home
With the music
Of my being. And you
Drive the car
Of all that is me.

And I'm just that: me.
I'm soul, mind, and heart.
My body is the car.
My destination is home
Which is where you
Wait. You play the music

And I dance the dance. The music
Is all around me.
Tell me, do you
Even hear it? It's in your heart.
It's just as much your home
As it is mine, here in your car.

Driving in this car,
Humming to the music,
I'm thinking of home.
And though it's only me
Here, me and my heart,
It's like I'm with you.

I'm always thinking of you
Looking at me as I walk away from the car
With a sadness in your heart,
Turning off the music
Because there is none without me
Now that I've left home.

I hope you don't forget the music
We played in your car. Think of me;
Keep me in your heart when I'm not at home.

POLITICS AS USUAL

SONYA SHAH

The red carpet rolls. The musicians strike the first G major in Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance." *This is it.* Facebook rises, runs his hands across the lapel of his black coat, and pushes open the door, and then slowly, intentionally, with one foot in front of the other, he walks down the aisle keeping a 4/4 time signature. Facebook nods as he passes the rows of words gazing backward. Facebook takes it all in, savors this once-in-a-lifetime moment, this hall-of-fame moment. This day is the most important day of his life. This day he has been accepted into the institution, the establishment as a word, imprinted, defined, for time immemorial.

Facebook reaches the head of the altar and the formal part of the ceremony begins. American Webster stands at the helm, holding ritual. He signals the crowd to be seated, then gestures Facebook to place one hand on "the book" and the other hand in the air. "*In is dies,*" *on this day,* the ceremony proceeds in original Latin. After a series of ritualized passages extolling the virtues of man and word, "*Vir est dignus, vox est verum,*" *man is worthy, word is truth,* the ceremony reaches its pinnacle in new English. Webster recites, "*Visio Libri,* Facebook, are you a social utility tool that connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them?" Facebook responds, "I am." Webster continues, "Do you, Facebook, accept your placement on page three thirty-five, column two, line forty-three?" Facebook lowers his neck in ceremonial acceptance. Garlanded, he turns to face the audience, the stadium of 215,000 words. Webster signals Facebook to step up to the microphone. Now it is Facebook's turn to address the 1,559 pages seated around him. Although Facebook has his under-30-second speech pinned under his lapel, the crowd, the moment, the glory of the day provokes a raw, off-the-cuff address. "Hello ummm...everyone. I am so thrilled to be here. Really it's an honor. I never thought that I would be. . .well, you don't want to hear that just now. I just want to say that I'll do my best to honor the traditions that are here, and ummm...become your friends." Facebook steps away from the pulpit. An awkward pause between the two confirms Webster's displeasure. But before Facebook can glance an apology, he is ushered to his page. Facebook takes his seat between Façade and Facsimile.

Façade outstretches his hand over the armrest to tender a quasi-shake. Façade is aware of the contemporary dialogue regarding Facebook's privacy rights and "the users" reactions to the recent re-design. Facebook's decision to "dumb down" the site and highlight marketing on the coveted upper right quadrant of the screen has raised serious questions about Facebook's intentions to "create authentic community." As opposed to doing the get-to-know-you thing, the formal coffee-

table-chat thing, Façade prefers to cut the bullshit, and get straight to the point, because what Façade values above all else is transparency. *Who is this guy? Does he truly value his "users"? Or are we pawns, the insignificant mass, the dispensable, expendable, throwaway mass.* Façade pauses for an internal breath. He feels the tirade growing within him. But this surge of anger holds something more than his generic mid-morning rants against all things institutional. *This one is personal.* Façade has stake in the outcome, because Façade is also a "user," he is "on Facebook." And Façade has found unexpected catharsis in this online technology, using the site to revisit moments of childhood that continue to reap uncertainty in adulthood; to stay current on long-distance friends who are too far away to meet for coffee; to hold himself accountable to relationships past. Façade releases his hand from the shake, smiles an awkward smile, and turns away before his internal monologue finds its external voice.

A few pages down the way, MySpace lets out a you-know-that-I-know-that-you-know kind of wave, beckoning Facebook to join the gang. "You see, it's me and AOL, and Friendster and Hotmail." Facebook shrinks into his chair. "Oh no," he mumbles. Facebook wants nothing to do with this Mickey Mouse gang, this Donald Duckie club, a bunch of wannabe cool cats who wax odes to *Borat* and tell *your mama* jokes. "Your mama is so stupid she doesn't even know where the play button is on a VCR." AOL guffaws through the punch line. Facebook is unable to believe that they are from the same family, descendants of the same lineage, first cousins and second cousins once removed, but blood nonetheless. *Where did the bad genes come from? He searches his past for a biological parting. We are of a different breed. There is no way we are related.* But they keep screaming, and now Friendster yells, hand cupped over mouth, "Hey, cuz, do you remember the time when..." and then they start singing the theme song from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. Even if Facebook can claim biological independence, meaning that AOL was adopted and Friendster is actually not his real brother but a stepbrother, the reality is that they all know the lines from *The Big Lebowski*, and that makes them family. "Hey, cuz, why don't you show them how you walk the chicken?" Friendster flaps his bent elbows high in the air. Some of the other words chuckle across the pages. *Walk the chicken.* Facebook wishes for a sharp object and a soft pillow.

Ding. A new message appears in his inbox. He opens his account. It's from Google. Facebook peruses the pages in front of him and tries to locate her. She is easy to find. Elegant, sophisticated, she might as well be the only word on page 469. Their eyes interlock in a deep and penetrating way. Facebook breaks the gaze to read his message. "Tuesday, 2pm, meet me." Facebook stares into the LCD, hand on mouse, skirting over accept. At first Facebook visualizes the juvenile—a joyride in the Google maps mobile, a tour of the facilities, the campus, some free eats in one of five restaurants, a spin on the ellipticizer, a 20-minute head and neck massage. But quickly he realizes that this is just the tip of the iceberg of "life with

Google.” Facebook closes his eyes to the unconscious, which gives passage to a more phenomenological experience. The picture: Google and Facebook subterranean, traveling alongside the speed of light, traversing 1,000 leagues under the sea searching for earth’s oldest life form. The underwater apparatus in which they travel slows to take a series of photos of a bacterium encased in salt crystal. The camera’s depth of field narrows to capture an extreme close-up of the crystal’s multidimensional surface. The aquatic backdrop blurs intentionally. The camera steadies. Google whispers, “I can take you anywhere. Anytime. Anyplace. On land. Sea. Space. You can see anything. Find anyone. I can make your wildest dreams come true.” Google’s hand glides over Facebook’s hands. Gently she guides him, interlocking his fingers with hers “Just name it, type it, press the button.” She cups her hand over his, and together they press down on the mouse. *I accept.*

Message Sent. On the right-click, Facebook expects to feel the rise of the mariposas, but instead he experiences a rush of apprehension. A flash of uncertainty: *What if she is too much for me? What if she defines me?* There is a learned piece of this boy-word, a socio-conditioned aspect of this boy-word, who is intimidated by her her-ness, the she-ness of her power. Seamlessly nonlinear, multiply intelligent, she seems to possess a way of knowing that is beyond his grasp, that he cannot even conceptualize. *But maybe it’s not just gender,* he tells himself. *Maybe I want to blaze my own trail, not ride the coattails of another?* He looks over at Google and wonders whether competition will be the defining dynamic in their relationship. Facebook wonders whether he can be a pioneer in web-based community-building, a leader in time-space-relationship compression, on the forefront of nostalgia technology, while she masters the art of search, of knowing what users want before they know it themselves, the mother of online epistemological unconsciousness? Who will be the architect of the 22nd century? Who will alter destiny? Can they do it together?

This flurry of doubt is interrupted by the continuous chatter of 140 characters after 140 characters traversing across his Twitter box. Twitter is anxious to know about Facebook’s day. “How did it go? Did they like your speech? Where are you now?” Twitter asks why Facebook hasn’t Twittered back, Twitter asks what she should make for dinner, Twitter says she is just a block away from the grocery store, Twitter asks what Facebook is doing right now. And right now. And right now. Facebook reads the infinite stream of thoughts but does not type his standard seven-character acknowledgment, no “Thank you” or “I am fine” or “Miss U 2.” In doing so, Facebook confirms his choice of anytime, anyplace, anywhere over casual Twitter sex. Yes, he will share this road, this path, this lifetime with Google. Facebook closes his laptop with a touch of higher power.

From page 998, Xerox turns his head to welcome Facebook. Xerox outstretches his hand and places it on Facebook’s shoulder. Facebook accepts the offer of friendship and mentorship, from shoulder to hand. Xerox has long inspired

awe within the techno-community because he is one of the few technologies that has proven longevity. When asked by his mentees, *How do you do it*, as though there is some great secret, some divine knowledge to being relevant, Xerox humbles, tries to explain that it is simple, that everyone can do it. “It’s about staying true to one’s core values and growing into the needs of the environment around.” In other words, Xerox has both added scanning and PDF technology and emailing function to a user’s personal computer. At the same time, Xerox has never compromised the value of the hard copy, the paper in one’s hand, reading off of the screen. Lastly, Xerox places the deepest value on access to information, and he embraces technology to further his sense of purpose.

The two words sit down together to chat. Facebook demonstrates reverence through eager eyes and shrunken posture. *Teach me. Love me. Take me in.* Facebook starts, “I have so many questions,” but Xerox gently shifts the conversation, “For that we have time,” and then his voice drops a half an octave. “Right now, there are other things you need to know.” Xerox points to a number of words collecting in the corner, cloaked in dark cloth, entering large, ominous doors. “They call themselves the Latin Germanic Derivates. The LGDs for short.” Before Facebook can register a reaction, Xerox begins at the beginning, “A few decades after the civil war, the nation was still in conflict, torn along North – South lines. Noah Webster believed that by capturing American English into a dictionary he could assist in the unification of this great nation.” Then after the 50-second synopsis of the events of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Xerox arrives at his own birth. “Since the industrial revolution, things have changed dramatically. The conflict is no longer geographical, but technological. It’s about progress. You see, the LGDs believe that post-industrialized words will be the demise of the nation, and perhaps life as we know it.” Xerox makes a grand gesture to all things sentient, all things green. “They are calling for a return to simpler times; to words with authentic old- and middle-English roots; Latin and Germanic. Not you and me.” Xerox takes a breath. “They believe this is the only way to, you know, *salvation*.”

Facebook doesn’t know where to start. His first instinct is toward inclusion. “But I am part Latin, part Germanic. *‘Fec, visio, oris, os’*: take your pick. It’s Latin for face, on my mother’s side. *‘Boc’*: old English, Germanic, meaning book, writing, related to birch tree, the bible.” Xerox shakes his head. “That’s just your name.” Facebook takes a moment to consider this harsh and obvious reality. Xerox softens, places his elder hand on Facebook’s shoulder. “To them we have no real ancestry. No origins. No claim to history. We are born out of an unnatural state. We are artificial. We are the problem.”

Unnatural state. A return to simpler times. A threat to life on earth. Authentic. Original. Progress. What’s next, stoning infidels? Hunting witches? Facebook could cite numerous examples of historical resistance to change, beginning with Socrates’ fear that the written word would negatively affect man’s relationship to memory and

knowledge. Facebook could offer a point-by-point analysis and deconstruction of any of these 215,000 words' claim to authenticity or originality or the natural. *But this is not the time for rhetoric.* Facebook flips open his laptop, hand on keyboard, ready for hard data. "Who are they? Where do they meet? How can I find them?" Facebook wants names, page numbers, column designations, dates of entry. Although Xerox expected an impetuous response from this young buck, he isn't prepared to deliver the next piece of information just yet. Xerox fumbles for a gentle response. "Well, it's complicated." Xerox circles around what needs to be said. "We have some leads." He attempts to reassure. "We're organizing too." After walking each turn of the verbal labyrinth, Xerox musters the courage a mentor must have to break difficult and not so encouraging news. Xerox's voice deepens, steadies, carrying the force of his age. "The truth is, we don't know. All we know is that there are many who identify as LGD. It's gotten quite bad. Permeating all levels." *Permeating All Levels.* Xerox doesn't need to say it. On this pronouncement, the two words turn away from each other and toward their own thoughts.

Facebook slides his arm down his teak armrest. He drops his head over the back of his chair. His bare neck grazes the red fibers of his seat. *This magnificent book.* Facebook closes his eyes, creating some needed space for the imagination. He conjures the details; the dark pressed print of each eight-point character, the curve of the vowels, the stature of the consonants, the nanogram weight of each singular page, how each one of the 1,559 pages delicately lies on top of the other, how the papers curve and fall as one continuous mass. *Is this the end of the Imagination?* The sadness, the isolation settles deep within him. *I always wanted a slot in the dictionary.* This is the book that Facebook has idolized since he was a schoolboy. This is the place where Facebook thought he would make a home, and imprint into a community. This is the house where Facebook would grow old. But it is not so. Facebook is being forced out of safety of home and a sense of belonging into a predatory relationship. *This magnificent book* is now the hunter, Facebook the hunted. The hunter looks through the barrel of his gun, watching Facebook, tracking his every step. The hunter will release a bullet perhaps today, or maybe next year, but the bullet's trajectory is written. On impact, the bullet will accomplish its destiny. Facebook will fall. Standing on top of his kill, the hunter will strip the lifeless Facebook of his skin and splay him on the floor of his home or his original copy of Webster's first-edition dictionary.

The sun is setting. The dictionary is closing. The day is almost over. Facebook strips his black jacket, unsnaps his index card speech, removes his button-down, and uncuffs his gifted cuff links. Stepping out of his trousers, he washes his face. He wants to strip himself of all things Latin, all things Germanic. He scrubs and scrubs, but he cannot remove the *fec* or *boc*, not today. Facebook slips into his bed and pulls the sheets over his eyes. He takes a moment to replay his walk down the aisle. He wishes he could stop the tape there, after he was garlanded and

ushered to his seat. No, maybe right after he met Google. Pause. Stop it right there. *That's it. Page 469. When I saw her across the crowd of words.* But the tape continues to roll through the rest of the day and then again in an endless loop. He waits for something, anything, a sign, a sense of security, a kick in the pants from Myspace, a call from Xerox calming his worries with wisdom, a stroke of his hair from Google, the VCR to run out of juice. Nothing. Facebook peers out of his sheets. He looks to his left, Façade's fingers twitching nervously over an armrest. *Always thinking, thinking. About what? What are his origins, anyway? Where does that ç come from? Is he one of them?*

Facebook turns to his right, to see his ol' aunt Facsimile sleeping soundly, her snore unencumbered. Solid and unmoving in stage-five sleep, she is unaware of the brewing storm. Facsimile has suffered significant hearing loss from too many high-pitched transmissions. Facebook places his hand on the blanket over her rising and falling back. He gives pause to the fragility of life and acknowledges her proximity to the last days. *It's better that she doesn't know.*

Facebook draws the sheets over his body and produces a lengthy exhale to begin an intentional induction into sleep. He spreads his legs wide across the mattress, squaring his shoulders just beneath the pillow, adjusting the fall of his neck onto the pillow. *Just relax. Let it go. This is not the end. Tomorrow is another day. Just relax. Let it go.* The six-stanza mantra begins, and continues over 1,008 repetitions. On the 1,009th recitation, Facebook takes an abrupt turn into the unconscious: Facebook and Google are subterranean, searching for earth's oldest life form. The underwater apparatus in which they travel is nearing a curious bacterium encased in salt crystal. Facebook and Google's arms are interlocked over a mouse pad. Ding. The moment of intimacy is interrupted by an instant message from the expeditions chief microbiologist. "We confirm that the aforementioned bacterium is two hundred and fifty million years old. It is, in fact, the oldest bacterium on earth." Google hastens to the command center. Her team has already gathered. Google slides into the captain's chair. Google pulls the camera over her eye and places both hands on the telephoto lens. With agility, she enters the 1,500-millimeter range. To the crew she waves a *stand by* signal. Google steadies. Followed by the command, "It's a go." Google clicks her index finger in rapid succession, while the ship's second in command streams video. The principal scientist inserts a small 1/1000 mm filament into the turns of the crystal. Google et al are on the cusp of opening the crystal, birthing this pre-life form on live feed. Facebook bears witness. The mariposas flutter around his stomach, acknowledging the significance of the moment. But the speed of the mariposas reveal *something* else, a new and unfamiliar feeling. And if Facebook were to put words to it, to make meaning of this feeling, he would say that it feels similar to "overwhelm," that he is having "a sensation of apprehension," but the closest depiction of the feeling would be that of "an urge to..." *Wait.*

EGRET

HANS JORG STAHLSCHMIDT

This small suspense before the egret puts
down the other foot, particles of light

running along the neck, down the spine,
into the talon, then he is still like the lagoon:

the shallow waters of the rivulet mirroring his
white intensity. In the distance a red car passes

through the green meadows; it looks ridiculous here
where everything is camouflage, adapting

to the colors and rhythms on the edge
of a great ocean. Once as a little boy, I was

standing still in a tide pool, watching crabs
swimming closer and closer toward my small feet;

afraid to move, I screamed until my mother laughingly
pulled me up to her large, safe body. Suddenly, the egret

flies off, there is no hesitation between the stillness
and movement, the white wings pushing

through the air and the body stretches out
long and clear toward the sea.

WEIGHTLIFTERS

DANIEL TORDAY

When I was a kid my parents were best friends with a couple I didn't like very much. George and Martha Klonfelder were the parents of Tyler Klonfelder, a kid at my school you couldn't really be friends with. He was generous and smart but he'd had some kind of issue at birth and the toes of his left foot turned in like they were afraid of everything they faced, and he himself was so inward pointing that, even if I wanted to be, I wasn't friends with him except when he came to our house with his parents.

But that wasn't why I didn't like the Klonfelders. My reasons for disliking them weren't rational. I didn't like them because George and Martha were the names of a hippopotamus couple in a series of children's books I loved as a toddler. It was like being friends with someone named Babar or Br'er Rabbit. The only other thing I disliked about George and Martha was that they were openly, deliberately in love. George was a baggy Sephardic man with a wide face and chubby hands whose Creator hadn't exhaled the two breaths needed to fill him, and Martha was the most beautiful of all my parents' friends. This made George's devotion all the worse. He practiced chivalry like an overwrought Galahad, pulling out her seat and kissing her hand with raw earnestness. He kissed her forehead when she smiled and her cheek when she told a joke, and it all made me roll my eyes so often I gave myself headaches.

Every year the Klonfelders came to our house after high holidays to break fast. Fall of the seventh grade was no different. Tyler and his parents brought the whitefish salad from the good deli on Reisterstown Road. Tyler and I sat on the couch watching Orioles base runners succumb to Andy Pettitte's pick-off throws and I tried not to look at his balky foot. We were all sitting around spreading cream cheese on our bagels when a crash came from my father's study.

It was Martha. She was lying on her side next to my father's desk. She had her hand on the back of the teak chair Harvard gave him before he left to join George Klonfelder's lab at Johns Hopkins. It was tipped over and she held onto it with just her left hand like she was going to use it to prop herself up, only she wasn't really trying. She was just lying there like the girl in that Andrew Wyeth painting. A trickle of blood moved very slowly down her forehead.

"Go grab the kit from our bathroom," my father said.

"I'll take care," George said, and he pressed the tails of his Thomas Pink shirt against her head. Even for his Sephardic swarthinness and his fat, fat hands, George was something of a weakling, and you could see the flab of his hairy stomach as he lifted his shirt. He was a biochemist like my father, and it was hard to imagine

he ever lifted much more than a Petri dish, so when he went to lift his wife he took her under the arm and stumbled. He almost fell himself. He wasn't quite strong enough, his feet weren't planted right for the lift, so she shrugged him off; she'd come back into herself, put her hand to her forehead and seen blood on her palm. She stumbled as she lifted herself, putting all her weight on the Harvard chair. Soon she was standing on her own and laughing at my father's jokes. All George had was a bloody shirt and his undying love.

We were in our first year at college before we learned that Martha Klonfelder had multiple sclerosis. The onset of the disease came slowly, then all at once. After that day at our house—after a couple more falls and some numbness in her extremities—she'd gone to be checked out. Tyler Klonfelder emailed to let me know. Our mothers had been pushing for us to be closer since we were little—we'd avoided it through elementary school and high school, it was anyone's guess why they thought we would pursue it in college—and with him at Cornell and me at Colgate, we weren't far. I could only assume Martha pushed Tyler to write me, and there was something I disliked in the thing, so I simply wrote back a short note about how I was sorry, and what could you do?

Tyler didn't write back.

Four years later, when we were both seniors, I received another email from Tyler. He'd joined a weightlifting team, he said, and he was going to be competing in the club regionals up in Syracuse, and he thought I might want to come to watch. My first thought, of course, was: Tyler? Weightlifting? What kind of insanity was this? The skinny kid with the clubfoot? Less out of friendship than curiosity, I agreed to go.

The regional club weightlifting championships were held in the Carrier Dome, and inside there were a hundred people speckled across bleachers that held tens of thousands. On the basketball court mats were laid out. Tyler's skill was the clean-and-jerk, and his name was called over the PA. I'd arrived too late to take a seat by his station, so I stayed where I was across the gym while he went at his weight. He slapped his hands together to conjure a dim cloud of chalk and approached the barbell.

I marveled at the change in him. You wouldn't even have noticed Tyler's foot. In his tight red Cornell singlet he was an internecine collection of muscle systems. His arms shone hard like ironwood. His thighs bulged from the tight-slung legs of his singlet, and even his face had been hosed full of muscle. Tyler whipped the three-hundred pound barbell into the air and then let it fall and bounce and walked back over to the lowest step on the bleachers, where he sat down next to a man even bigger than himself. This other man was Tyler's exact height, and even in his grey button-down you could see the deltoids pushing out for breathing room. His

neck struggled against his collar. Had this man not been sitting next to Martha Klonfelder, I might never have recognized him as Tyler's father.

As I walked over to their side of the Dome, Tyler packed up his gear and then George Klonfelder lifted his wife clear into the air, like it was the most natural thing he'd ever done, and carried her to a wheelchair along the far wall. He was just strapping her legs in when I reached them.

"The Klonfelders," I said.

Martha Klonfelder looked up from her wheelchair and for a moment she seemed not to recognize me. Her upper body recoiled from my words as I shouted over the din of the Dome. As muscle-bound as her son and husband had become, it was Martha who had changed most drastically. Her face was aspic, waxen and oily, and her cheeks were now full and bubbly with excess. Years in a wheelchair had left her blanched and heavy.

"Well, wow," Martha said. "David Hirsh! I wouldn't have known you on the street with your long hair." She took my hand in hers. I thought to comment on their appearance, but what could you say to people who seemed to have all undergone transformations you'd only find in Ovid? Tyler suggested we meet up for lunch at a restaurant on Erie Boulevard. When we arrived in separate cars it was just George and Martha and me. Tyler had gone to the locker room to change. We got a table for four.

"It's so nice of you to come root for Tyler," Martha said. George looked around the room. Muscles I couldn't name tensed and relaxed involuntarily under his taut sleeves. "He's gotten so far involved with the lifting, and all of his other friends are lifters too—to have an outsider there to cheer him on means so much."

"Happy to be there," I said. We talked and ordered drinks and caught up on my parents and the people we knew. "So," I said. "What got Tyler so into the, uh, the lifting?"

Now George Klonfelder's wide face snapped toward us. It was as if he'd forgotten we were there, and now I'd asked a question only he could answer. He wiped some sweat from his brow, put his hand lovingly on Martha's, and said, "He's had to help out. His mother needs it." Martha looked down into her gin and tonic. George explained that he'd needed to put on the muscle for his loving wife. That's how he said it—"loving wife," though she was sitting right there and though we were meant to be talking about Tyler after all, and he reminded me of why I'd always disliked him, though now it was beginning to affect me differently—he held my eyes with his, and I can't say what I saw there but it was something entirely new. His Creator had stuffed his face so fully since I saw him last that a thick purple vein stood out in the middle of his forehead. The rest of his body was so big his hands no longer seemed fat.

George explained that once Martha had lost the use of her legs, he'd had to start lifting her every day. He enumerated all the places he lifted her as if it was a poem he'd memorized: he lifted her into bed, out of bed; into the car, out of the car; to bring her to the beach, up the country club stairs, onto the couch, into her chair; to put her in a booth at a restaurant. At first he suffered through the pains of the lifting, he said, until he realized he was growing. He was becoming more solid. So he started lifting weights with a trainer and then got into the competitive Delmarva circuit.

"Six months to fifteen pounds of muscle mass," George said. The air conditioning was cranked in the place but sweat was visible on his upper lip. "The next six months I started on shakes and got thirty-five pounds. Next year I'd won Senior Regionals in dead lift, bench and clean-and-jerk. This year I won everything."

George finished telling me about his accomplishments and finally Tyler arrived. I saw now that he still limped on that balky foot, but he held his shoulders back and his head up and his body looked so disciplined you hardly noticed he had feet at all. Tyler had always been an affectionate kid and he kissed his mother on the forehead, but when George stood for a hug he just shook his father's hand. You could almost hear the sinew crunching in their powerful grips.

"So awesome you came out for the meet, brah," Tyler said to me. He was looking down at his menu. He looked up and scanned the room for a waitress without making eye contact. "Dying of thirst here," Tyler said. "Fucking dying."

"Tyler," Martha said.

"Tyler," George said. Tyler looked his father straight in the eyes with a withering glare.

"Well, he's won his meet today," Martha said. "So get yourself a drink, honey."

Tyler barked for the waitress and ordered a Long Island iced tea, which he downed in three long, breathless gulps. He put his hand in the air again, this time with the glass in it, and the waitress saw his empty glass and brought another.

Martha asked after her son's studies. He refused to engage her on anything but his weightlifting and we all ordered and ate and would I be exaggerating if I said that all along I was hardly even there? It was like I was granted the status of an observing therapist. They talked about finding a place to go on vacation together that summer where the walk would be short enough to carry Martha to the water and who would carry her to the water when they got there; what Tyler was going to do the following year and wherever he did it would he or would he not help out with his mother; and all along Tyler had the affect of the spoiled fifteen-year-old he'd never been at fifteen, even as his parents tried to placate him. Tyler excoriated his father for his technique in the bench press when they were lifting

the day before, and for his lack of resolve, and for not ordering another drink.

“What are you sweating about, Dad?” Tyler said. “It’s freezing in here, and he’s sweating over something.” Little beads of sweat were popping up on Tyler’s forehead now, too. When Martha dropped her napkin George picked it up. George cut Martha’s chicken breast into small pieces for her, rubbed his hand up and down her back. Again Tyler gave him that withering look. “She can’t cut her own food?” Tyler said. “Let her do something for herself, would you?” No one said anything. Martha looked down at her plate like her son had some festering zit on his face and it was impolite to stare. George just sat and looked at his son without defending himself or really saying anything at all.

Finally the check came.

Outside the restaurant I gave George a hug, and bent down to kiss Martha goodbye. I told her to give a huge hug to my mother and father.

“Thanks for coming to the meet, brah,” Tyler said. He still hadn’t made eye contact with me since he’d arrived at dinner. “Didn’t expect you, but there you were.” It seemed that would be it, but before I’d turned all the way to leave Tyler finally caught my eye and said, “And shit, sorry you had to see all this.” I assumed he meant his awful behavior, the self-awareness of which confused me, so I just shook his hand and got in my car. Then, on my ride back to Colgate, across the green hills of Route 13, I realized the “this” he was referring to must have been his mother.

When I got back to Colgate that evening there was already an email from Tyler thanking me for coming to his meet, and the voice of his note was so different from that of the petulant child I’d watched at lunch that I wondered if he’d even written the email to begin with. I wrote a nice note back, saying how much I’d enjoyed seeing not just him, but his loving parents. The next day I called my mother to debrief.

“At bottom, David,” she said, “it was just very nice of you to join old family friends for lunch.”

“But what do you think is going on?” I said. “What the hell happened to that kid? I know we weren’t nice to him in school because of his foot, but come on.”

My mother said none of us knew what went on in other people’s homes or in their heads for that matter, and I in particular didn’t know what it was like to grow up with a challenge like Tyler’s foot. How hard must it be to be the Klonfelders?

“Believe me, it’s not easy on any of us,” she said. “We hardly even see them anymore, and they used to be our best friends.”

I didn’t know they didn’t see each other anymore. I’d always assumed they all still spent their weekends together. George and my father were both still at

Hopkins; they all still lived in the same part of Baltimore. Four years had passed since I'd lived at home, but who knew that so much had changed?

My mother told me that since my father had taken on his own lab at Hopkins he really only saw George Klonfelder at meetings. "There's a lot you don't know about what happens in other people's lives," my mother said again. "A lot you probably wouldn't want to know, too."

I didn't think of the Klonfelders again until four years later. My family was invited to the Weisfeld wedding down at the Suburban Country Club in Baltimore, and even though it meant flying out of LaGuardia late on a Friday night and flying back early Sunday morning, my mother implored me to come, so I did. But before I came down to the wedding, my mother said, she had to tell me something. It was about the Klonfelders.

"George is leaving Martha," my mother said. It had been so long since I'd last thought of my parents' friends the first image that popped into my head was of a cartoon hippo packing a suitcase and heading for a fleabag motel. But then I said, "Whoa," and the weight of the announcement hit me. That guy? I thought. Uxorious George Klonfelder, who'd changed his whole body and given every last bit of himself—every bit of himself I was able to see, anyway—to his beautiful wife was going to leave her? It seemed implausible.

"Wow," I said. "I kind of can't believe it."

"No one can," my mother said. "I mean, we don't see George and Martha much anymore, but the way he gave himself to her. . . . He did all that weightlifting and everything. Just for her. Just to be able to take care of her. And now." Without thinking another word I told her I thought he was a cad and a jerk and the worst kind of worst kind of person, but my mother kept breaking in until I let her talk.

"You can't say that, David," she said. Her tone was the very same one I remembered her using back when I told her about going to see Tyler Klonfelder's meet in Syracuse. "You don't know what it's like to be in someone else's home, in their body." My mother went on to tell me she supposed Martha would move to a group home, where she could get some nursing help and the help of other challenged people. George had made plenty of money off patents from his lab. He'd pay for it.

"And don't even ask," my mother said. "I don't know if he's seeing someone else, or what. I don't know and I don't want to know."

My parents and I were seated at a table with the Klonfelders and for all intents and purposes just the Klonfelders. There was another Baltimore couple I remembered from shul, but I never even said hello to them and they spent the

whole night on the dance floor and then at some open seats at a different table.

I saw Tyler from a distance a couple times as I mingled and I avoided him. It was hard to tell, since he was wearing a tuxedo, but he didn't look as big as he'd been when I saw him back at college. His neck looked comfortably suited to his collar. After half an hour of walking around eating hors d'oeuvres and chatting with family friends I hadn't seen in many years, I looked over to see George, Tyler, and Martha Klonfelder sitting on one side of the table, each staring abstractedly at the dance floor. Martha looked much as she had that day at the Carrier Dome—her face had blown up a bit more so that she looked more wrinkly and she didn't appear to be moving her arms much, but to be honest I didn't have it in me to look at her for too long. Martha was sitting next to Tyler, with George on the other side of his son, so I sat down next to Martha. Dinner had just been served, and while I got started on my filet I let my mother lead the conversation.

"So, Martha, you know David has taken a job with a firm in Manhattan," she said. "They call him a one-L, because it's his first year as a lawyer." I tried to look my mother off—who the hell wanted to talk about me amidst all this Klonfelder madness?—but Martha nodded and smiled and said that was great. Really, only her head moved when she nodded. My mother asked Tyler if he was still into weightlifting. She knew George was still a champion, but she wasn't going to ask him about it.

"Oh, no, that grew old for him," George answered for his son. "Something about not enough time to study—is that right, Tyler?"

Tyler didn't answer his father. He didn't even look at him. He told my mother he still worked out, just wasn't into the competitive aspects of the sport anymore. My mother said that was nice and changed the subject back to my time in law school. She told Martha about my apartment in Fort Greene and my classes at Columbia. While she talked, Tyler leaned over and cut his mother's steak into bite-sized pieces.

"Gonna have to be smaller than that," George Klonfelder said. He wasn't even looking at his wife's plate. He was staring off at the dance floor. Just as it had been in that Syracuse restaurant, his upper lip was collecting sweat.

"This is how they cut the food in the group home," Tyler said. "Like the way regular people eat it. So that's how I'm gonna cut it." Tyler reached over and took a long gulp of a very tall Long Island iced tea. For all the drastic transformations the Klonfelders were undergoing, it was good to see something had stayed the same.

"Well, I've cut the damn food up for a decade now, son," George said, "and I'm telling you they need to be smaller. She'll choke on that."

Tyler just kept on cutting the steak into the same sized pieces. George slapped

his cloth napkin down on his chair and left for the bathroom. I finished eating and asked if anyone needed a drink. Tyler did. When I came back I put a Long Island iced tea in front of him and sat in the chair George had vacated and asked Tyler how weightlifting was going. I knew my mother had just gotten an answer to the same question, but it was on my mind and sometimes when I'm nervous I can only think to ask the exact thing I don't mean to ask.

"No more time for all that noise, brah," Tyler said. He didn't look me in the eyes as he explained that after Cornell he'd moved back to his parents' house. They set up a room in the basement and he stayed around to help out with Martha. He spent a couple years working as a tech in his father's lab and then got a masters in chemistry. Now he was in Trenton, working for Pfizer. I thought I might ask him if he missed his mother up there, or what he thought of what was going on between his parents, when a feeling welled up in me that I remembered all too well—it was the same feeling I used to get when Tyler came to our house after the high holidays, a feeling of wanting to ask him all kinds of things about his experience of the world, but then being unable to.

This time I fought through it. I asked him if he had a girlfriend. "You're so fit now," I said. "Even without the weightlifting, you must really do well."

Tyler smiled a little, but he didn't answer because he wasn't looking at me anymore. He was looking out at the dance floor, and he said, "Just look at that fucking asshole."

I looked up half expecting to see Saul Steinhorn, a kid from our gym class who used to tease Tyler, asking him if he was going to climb the rope that afternoon. Instead it was George Klonfelder. He was out on the dance floor. His white tuxedo shirt was soaked through, and you could see the bulge of his lats along his sides as he lifted his right arm to let someone's daughter twirl around. My stomach sank. But then I realized this girl was maybe fourteen. There was no chance this was the woman he was seeing—if he was seeing someone at all. I watched George twirl and dip this young girl and then pass her off to two women about my age, maybe a little older. One was an Indian woman in a purple dress that was probably Vera Wang but looked like it would have fit in at a prom. The other was platinum blonde in a white strapless. George danced between the two, never getting too close or too far. Tyler had stopped watching already.

Again I started to say something, but now what was there to say? Tyler looked up at me, looked me in the eyes for the first time since the end of that day in Syracuse.

"Tell me the truth, brah," he said. I sat ramrod straight. "What did you really think when you saw me lifting at Syracuse? You don't have to blow smoke. Was I pathetic?"

"You were just really different," I said.

“But what did you think?” Tyler said.

What did I think that afternoon? Did I know enough to put it to words? Time was suddenly moving very fast. I had to say something honest.

“I thought you’d changed a lot,” I said. I reached out and took a sip from my Jack and Coke. “I think I thought for a second what a shit I’d been to you all those years.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Tyler said. “What did you think when you saw Mom, is what I mean. Did you know she’d been the one who wrote you the email to bring you out that afternoon?” I said I didn’t, but that I’d thought of it when I got the second email when I got home.

“Actually,” Tyler said, “that one I wrote. You wrote me such a kick-ass note back.” We sat like that for another couple minutes, listening as the band played “Disco Inferno.” I scanned the dance floor for George Kloufelder but didn’t see him. My parents returned from dancing. Salad was served after the main course, like we were in Italy. Martha didn’t say much, but my father chatted Tyler up about his drug research job, and they all talked across me, and I was thankful I didn’t have to say anything.

When the time seemed right I excused myself, pleading bathroom but instead going for a cigarette. Two girls were out there. One bummed me an American Spirit. They were the women from the dance floor, the George Kloufelder girls. They talked to each other. The night was cloudless but we were too close to the city for complete dark. Out along a dense stand of pines that cut the country club off from Park Heights Avenue, the city glowed pink. The prom-dress girl asked if I’d gone to Owings Mills High.

“Yup,” I said. She was very pretty, with a nose so thin in the middle it almost had no bridge, and thin eggplant-colored lips. “Class of ninety-four.”

“Whoa, old man!” the strapless platinum girl said. “We’re ninety-niners.” I talked to them and became a little interested in the Indian one, so when she offered me another cigarette I took it and lit it and then George Kloufelder came out. He was soaked all the way through his shirt now. You could see the squiggles of black hair showing beneath his wet silk shirt like some kind of ancient Aramaic script. The girls giggled. George asked if he could bum a cigarette. The girls giggled again, whether at the lurid spectacle of this homunculus in his wet shirt or the fact that a fifty-year-old man had said “bum” I don’t know, and the platinum girl gave him an American Spirit and lit it for him. They talked to him about his dance moves, and which songs he did which moves to, and it was very, very hard to tell if they were flirting with him or making fun of him.

George was remarkably stoic in the face of this. He held his arms at his sides, but he was so muscular they wouldn’t lie flat. It made him look forever ready to

jump. He sweated and sweated, and as he talked to these girls he kept looking at me out of the corner of his eye without acknowledging me. He lifted his cigarette for a shallow puff.

“For someone in such good shape,” I said, “you’d think cigarettes would be taboo.” This was probably the first thing I’d said directly to George Klondfelder since I was a teenager. He jumped at the sound of my voice. He took another shallow puff.

“Stress relief,” he said, and that was it. He talked to the girls some more and then they each stepped out their cigarettes and went inside so quickly George and I were left standing there. I took a step back and leaned against the wall. George stayed standing as he was. He swayed just a little forward and then just a little backward. Out across the field the pines swayed with him in the heavy summer air, their tops black and waving against the pink sky.

“You never liked me when you were a kid,” George said. “Back before you had real reason not to like me, you didn’t like me.”

I started to say something but George put one of his large hands up in the air.

“No, no, this is one of those things we never say to each other—that kids act just like they want and adults pretend not to care for the sake of the kids’ parents, but adults, they know. They know what the kids think. You’re an adult now, even if you don’t have kids yet yourself, and you must know it. You were ashamed of Tyler, and for whatever reason, before there was a real reason not to like me like there is now, you never liked me.”

We stopped to take in the painful admission of self-knowledge, and the permanence of leaving his ailing wife, buried in what George Klondfelder had just said.

“I could always take that, of course,” George continued. “People don’t have to like me. But what I couldn’t handle was, you clearly didn’t like Martha. No one didn’t like Martha. She was the most beautiful woman in this town, and she was my wife. And there was some little shit, the kid of our best friends, who didn’t like her. That I couldn’t take.”

George put the American Spirit to his lips. He took a shallow breath and then spit the smoke out. He threw the cigarette on the ground and stepped on it. The butt kept smoldering. George made no move to step it out again.

“George and Martha,” I said.

“What?”

“It’s not that I didn’t like you,” I said. “I haven’t thought about it in a long, long time. But it was just because you were named George and Martha, like those little books about the hippos named George and Martha. So I didn’t like you all, yeah, because of the names. Silly.”

The muscles in George's forearms flexed involuntarily against his wet shirt. I saw him look down at his hands. His shoulders dropped just the slightest bit. Maybe he found something meaningful in what I'd said. Maybe he was thinking how sad it was that he couldn't go back to Martha now and tell her why I was always so rude to them when I was a kid. He said no. He said, no, no, that's not that silly, actually. Surprisingly, he said, that made some sense.

"I guess that's a reason," he said. "I guess when you're a kid that's a reason not to like someone. I guess we have our reasons."

"It wasn't just that," I said. I didn't mean to be speaking out loud but it continued. "You were always just so doting on her. You two were always just so openly in love and I think when I was a kid I found it, well . . . I guess then the word I would've used would have been mushy. I don't know if there's a word for it now. Mushy sounds so juvenile."

George was staring right at me. The dark trees were moving still against the pink sky. The very sides of his eyes seemed to turn down, and involuntarily his deltoids and his biceps flexed.

"Happy," George said. Then he turned around and walked inside.

Would you believe it if I said the rest of the night I danced with the thin-nosed Indian girl in the purple dress? That she and I saw each other regularly for more than a year after that night, but that she broke it off one night and I never found out the reason? There are reasons and there are reasons and there are reasons, and my reason for dancing that night was that when you were dancing you weren't talking, and when you weren't talking you weren't talking about what lay behind the wide, flat face of George Klonfelder.

My parents danced, too, but I never once danced with my mother. I should have asked her; probably I should have spent time with Tyler and Martha Klonfelder. They sat at their table the rest of the night—Martha was in a wheelchair, after all, and it was only later I considered that, as far as he'd come, Tyler Klonfelder probably couldn't dance on a balky foot. But I had nothing to say to Tyler, and whenever they weren't dancing my parents sat and talked to Martha. When I looked around I would see George Klonfelder out there dancing, too. His sweaty shirt, his giant muscles, his wide, flat face all trapped him in whatever was the very opposite of happiness. Whenever I saw him, I looked away as fast as I could.

MAKING MY WORLD OF CUT-PAPER DOLLS

ELIZABETH TWIDDY

- *after Papa and Simic*

1. The Box

i have a little box
that is myself
with as many mirrors
making as many fractions of views
as possible—infinity—
infinitesimal—
with all its glass
edges exposed—

i have to be careful
not to cut things
as i examine
these infinite splits
of the world—
a naked light bulb hangs by a thread
in the center of the box—

2. Memory Makes the Box

Memory
practicing its scissor-clips
in the dark—
My Memory
taking its sleep-walking foot-steps—
picking and choosing
opening and closing the lids
of all the old boxes—
those boxes of dolls,
those cut-paper dolls—

3. Inside the Box: the Ballerina Box

In one little box
there is a ballerina
with pink toe shoes—
she spins
as a tune plays
until I shut the lid.

Sometimes,
in my dreams,
she comes to me and confides
she wishes I'd keep
her lid shut, so she can hide
in the quiet, in the dark.

4. Inside the Box: the Live Mannequin

Here I am,
in the store window—
boxed in glass.
I'm still, and silent,
but if you look closely
you'll see my heart beating faintly
with the slight quiver
of the covering cloth:
my visual is loud, calling:
Here I am.

THE MONARCH

ELIZABETH TWIDDY

The monarch
flapped in the open yard, large,
pulsing as a ghost,
no more to me than an ordinary insect,
dying, almost unnoticed
with the other darting spirits
by the waxy pachysandra,
rapidly consumed by the earth.

I was astonished
to see, one night,
a filter of light
sift through its dusty wings,
and to think that the monarch,
floating between the dewy
buds of the red roses,
was transformed
into one of God's damp servants.

For life
it siphons nectar from milkweed
until its last swimming sweep
as it lights onto the cold sill of my room
to watch and throb with pungent glory.

In my room,
over a bed bleached white, stretched taut,
my family hovers. They shuffle and need faith.
When sun oozes in, all morning
they sit and wait to strike
like black ants
surging over a dying insect.
They peer over the edge of my bed:
sip their juice.

EMPEROR'S JACKET

KAROL M WASYLYSHYN

The thickening quiet and ice —
he could not know
what lay on the new path before him
or who, hidden in the bracken,
awaited his trial there.

He did not see that the emperor's silk jacket
was really knotted and spotted with mud . . .
it had felt so smooth and generous at the table
where they beckoned each other
into a union of lasting effects.

He had not seen the photos of prey
dripping blood from the tiger's mouth on the wall there
blood that would soon intermingle with his —
he careening in a mire
barely half his own making.

THE CURIOUS HEIST

ANDREW WEYANT

George and I arrived in Paris in the winter of 1919. George, freshly recovered from a nasty wound suffered in the Argonne, had determined that Paris was the place to be. I was just out of University and ripe for adventure myself, so I followed him. Despite the cold season our spirits were high and we even had a little money. We were filled with the zest for life that George embodied, exuded, and took very seriously. We arrived about the same time people started smiling in photographs.

That winter would have sent weaker men back to England, where the offices of our fathers had secure jobs ready for our taking. Honestly, if not for George's influence I probably would have taken such a job and left Paris altogether.

We lived in a flat above a bookshop with no heat but form our breathing. I remember curling up on the straw mattress with as much clothing as possible, closing my eyes tight and praying for sleep to come. In sleep there was warmth. There was warmth in girls if you had one but we arrived too early for Paris' spring flowering. We were in the mood for survival, not for love.

George convinced me to stay through the winter, and I can now say it paid off immeasurably. The following events took place in the early summer of that year, if I remember accurately, when *Gay Paris* was gathering steam and we were all enchanted with a certain *joie de vivre*...

George and I made a habit of visiting the cafés around Montparnasse, and most evenings we would meet friends at the Dôme, Closerie, Deux Magots, or the Select. By this time we relocated to a slightly larger flat in the Rue Mouffetard, and were in short walking distance of these notable places. (I've been told that the Dôme has since been turned into a bank). We were very happy, very poor, and so was everyone else. (I don't buy that malaise-talk about everyone being depressed after the war- George was proud of his wound and unashamedly showed it to willing friends.)

One evening we were drinking with several people we knew from a night in prison (a different story altogether) when George suggested we go to Zelli's. Zelli's was the most popular dancing house in Paris and everyone immediately agreed. (I've also been told that Zelli's has since been turned into a department store, *c'est la vie n'est pas?*). Our friends wanted to go right away but George insisted we order another absinthe cocktail before Zelli's. So it happened that George and I took a separate taxicab and set in motion a wild string of events.

We finished our drinks and asked Jean-Luc, our waiter, to hail a taxicab. We

paid for our drinks, tipped Jean-Luc several centimes, and slid into the back of the cab. Immediately my hand touched something cold lying on the seat. I picked it up and examined the object. It was a gold cigarette-case with the initials "C.M." engraved on it. George finished speaking with the driver and turned to me.

"What's this, mate?" he asked. I handed the case to him and he took a turn examining it.

"It was on the seat" I explained. George smiled and handed it back to me.

"Smells like perfume" he said. I pocketed the curiously gilded case and the cab sped along the dim, hazy Paris streets.

We soon arrived at Zelli's and met our friends inside. I danced with a blonde girl, slender but with large, sad eyes. She spoke to me in German and I didn't follow her. George found himself in a high-stakes card game and was losing. He called me over and I warned him to get out fast.

"Nonsense, old chum" he said confidently. George held a curious belief that he could escape any situation regardless of the circumstances. He doubled his bet and lost bad.

"Well," he began, "Time to feed the dogs." He reached into his wallet and took out its contents- a meager sum that didn't cover. I was little help. Armando Zelli, the owner, was a large Portuguese who wore his hair in a ponytail and was constantly smoking a cigar. He came over to the table and the matter was angrily explained to him. George didn't look frightened, not even when Zelli leaned down and blew a puff of smoke in his face. I thought we were really in for it but George reached into my breast pocket and pulled out the gold cigarette case I found in the taxi.

"This should cover the expenses" he quipped and offered it to one of the men. Armando's eyes lit up and he grabbed the case from the table. He studied it and looked at me, then George, then back at me.

"Where did you find this?" he asked. I opened my mouth to speak but George was quicker.

"It fell out of an aeroplane and landed on my head- nearly did me in." Armando blew out another puff of smoke and chuckled. The table was silent. I thought for sure we were in for it. He brought the case to his nose and smelled it. He closed his droopy eyes and sighed. Several moments passed. Zelli placed the case on the table and slid it back over to George. He straightened his bulky back and pointed at the case with his smoldering cigar.

"That girl is bad news" he said, then puffed on the cigar. Naturally this intrigued George, who crossed his legs and fingered the gilded case.

"Is she?" he asked with a smile, then: "What if two fellows wished to return this case to the girl- bad news or no?" The table was still silent, I was still sure we

were in for it and Armando was still puffing on his cigar. George opened the case took out a cigarette. He offered one to me but I was too nervous to smoke. Zelli was contemplative for several moments then he removed the cigar from his mouth and shifted his massive frame.

“She lives near la Place d’Etoile, Right Bank, Rue Napoleon. Your debts are covered but don’t ever come back here.” I thought it prudent to leave right away and started pulling George towards the door. He resisted and turned to Zelli.

“How will I know which house is hers?” Zelli asked his cigar and smirked.

“She owns the largest house in Paris,” he said slowly. George pocketed the cigarette case and we moved towards the door. I turned once before leaving and saw Zelli still watching us with his droopy eyes, still puffing on his cigar. A moment later we were outside.

George flung away his cigarette and hailed a taxi. There was almost a row when a sailor, arm around a girl with long, dark hair, exclaimed that it was his cab. Fortunately his girl pulled him away and we slid in the back.

“Rue Mouffetard” I said to the driver, but George was quick to overrule.

“Nevermind that- Rue Napoleon” he said. Then turning to me he winked and flashed the gold cigarette case. It gleamed in the dim space like a magic ring.

“Never ignore fate, old boy.” I looked at my watch. It was well past midnight. I shrugged and leaned back.

Outside the cab Montmartre was teeming with life. We rolled past girls in summer dresses endlessly pouring out of an endless string of cafes and nightclubs. We rolled past cramped apartments where painters spent more on wine than on rent. We passed the windmill and I recalled the night that George tried to climb it. We passed Père Lachaise cemetery and George leaned over to me. He pointed out the glass.

“Oscar is buried there” he said in a rare hushed and reverent tone. Those were days when a city could mean something sacred to a fellow.

The taxicab left Montmartre and entered the more chic, wealthy neighborhoods surrounding l’Arc de Triomphe. We circled la Place d’Etoile and moments later arrived in la rue Napoleon. George told the driver to wait and we stepped out into the street. George lit another cigarette and kissed the gilded case. He looked at me.

“She’s bad news” I said. He just smiled wider.

“Let’s just find the house.”

It was not hard to find. I believe Zelli that it was the largest house in Paris. Two marble lions roared a warning as we strode up the path to the front doors. Above the ornamented doors squatted a hulking, shrieking gargoye. The mansion

rose four stories from the ground and ivy crawled over the lattice work on either side of the doors. A torch burned on the wall. Along with being the largest, I found it the most curious house in Paris. George and I approached the doors and he knocked twice, hard.

We stepped back and George took a drag on his cigarette. He leaned back and looked up at the sky.

“Beautiful evening, non?” he asked me. I nodded. It truly was a beautiful night.

We heard a rustling on the other side of the door. A moment later it creaked open and a tall, old butler stood in the doorway.

“Good evening gentlemen,” he bowed. It was obvious he had been dozing; his eyes were half-closed and his bowtie just a touch askew. George introduced us and asked if the lady of the house was present.

“I’m sorry, Madame Mimieux has retired for the evening,” he informed us. I let out an exhausted sigh. I looked at George and waited for him to hand over the case. Manifestly, he was not ready to give up the adventure.

“Ah, well it is rather late” he began, “My friend and I have something very important to give to her- it must be delivered in person, you understand.” George finished speaking. Above us, a sparrow alighted on the gargoyle’s stone head. The doorman cleared his throat.

“If you wish to see her, I recommend you inquire tomorrow afternoon. She can also be found most evenings at les Deux Magots, on the left bank. Doubtless she will be there tomorrow.” The taxicab blared its horn from the street and the doorman offered a look of distaste. George took a final drag on his cigarette and flicked it against the ivy lattice. A look of greater distaste appeared on the older man’s face. Sensing we were overstaying our welcome, I thanked the butler and we began our retreat towards the cobblestone street. The door shut behind us and George again kissed the gilded case.

“What a curious night” I remarked. George winked and we reentered the idling cab.

“I say, we haven’t been to the Deux Magots in some weeks” he smiled. I leaned back and offered a final glimpse of the strange mansion.

“Rue Mouffetard” George told the driver.

“What a curious night” I repeated.

It was almost eight o’clock in the evening when we arrived les Deux Magots. There is something enchanting about cafes at night. In the day they serve as places of serious meetings, quiet reflection, or relaxing chats. At night they exude a charm that sweeps you up and bears you on a wave, all the while sprinkled with

a fairy dust. The noise forms a distinct rhythm. Chairs rattling, glasses clinking, voices rising and falling- one can not help but be happy in such a place.

When we arrived the café was crowded as usual but George and I squeezed around a small table inside. He took out the case and lit a cigarette. The place hummed and he leaned forward.

“She could be any one of them” he said with excitement. I was not sure what expectations George had in mind, but I admit I was secretly excited to meet the owner of a gilded cigarette case and a strange Parisian mansion.

A waiter approached our table and we ordered gin rickeys. George leaned back confidently in his chair and folded his hands over his breast. On his face was a wonderful look of satisfaction. (Years later, when his blank, ashen countenance slept in death, I laid my hands on the casket and recalled this image). He winked at me and studied the interior of the café. The waiter returned with our drinks.

“Excuse me,” George laid his hand on the man’s arm, “We are supposed to meet a woman here, Madame Mimieux, could you tell us where she is seated?”

“Madame Mimieux?” he asked.

“Yes, is she here?” The waiter eyed us for just a moment but it was enough to give away his unease. My curiosity increased.

“Of course,” he said, looking towards the bar and nodding, “She is seated at the bar- the girl with the feather in her hat.”

“Cheers” George replied and the waiter moved to a different table. We immediately directed our gaze towards the woman he described. She indeed was wearing a blue hat with a peacock feather. I studied her dark blue dress as it hugged the smoothness of her back. Her skin was porcelain-white. When she turned her head we could see her ruby lipstick and pearl necklace. She blew out a breath of smoke and dabbed out a cigarette. I was struck by her beauty. George looked at me and didn’t say a word. Slowly, his gaze back on Madame Mimieux, he brought out the cigarette case and kissed it.

I was surprised to see her alone at the bar; at least she appeared alone. George rose confidently from the table, drink in hand, and smoothed back his hair. I was unsure of his plan, but interested in his approach. He took an elongated gulp of his gin rickey and moved effortlessly to the bar. I remained at the table and watched in earnest as George introduced himself and invited Madame Mimieux to join our table. He made a gesture and the woman, who could not be older than forty, looked at me. Her beautiful green feline eyes glistened and I felt my chest warm. I was already in love with this mysterious woman. She turned back to George and smiled her assent.

They squeezed around the table after George procured an additional chair from a neighboring group. Madame Mimieux extended a gloved hand and I

nervously introduced myself. She turned to George.

“Now,” she propped her elbows on the tabletop and leaned forward, “What do you have to show me?”

George, coolly leaning back in his chair, slowly reached his hand into his breast pocket and drew out the gilded cigarette case. He placed it on the table and slid it over to Madame Mimieux. She looked back and forth between George and me, her ruby lips hinting at a smile. We watched in silence as she casually picked up the case and opened it. Again she looked back and forth between George and me.

“I’m missing several cigarettes” she said, “You boys wouldn’t happen to know where they went?” Her tone was mock-serious.

“Carrying charges, darling” George winked. Madame Mimieux smiled and showed a row of yellow teeth.

“Where did you boys find this?” She ran a finger along the gilded surface of the cigarette case.

“In the backseat of a taxicab” I said, eager to join the conversation. George finished his drink. Madame Mimieux nodded.

“I’m always losing these things.” She looked down at the table and straightened her peacock feather.

“Well, you are lucky that two gentlemen like ourselves came to the rescue.” George signaled for another gin rickey.

“I am, aren’t I?” she said quietly. She looked at me with her feline eyes and I smiled foolishly. We bantered for several minutes and after we ordered, and finished, a bottle of wine Madame cleared her throat.

“Boys,” she said with a smile, leaning in close, “Would you be open to making a little money?” When she spoke this last word her tongue licked her lips so quickly I nearly missed it. I suddenly felt embarrassed in my worn suit jacket. George looked at me and raised his eyebrows.

“What do you have in mind?” he asked, now looking at her. She leaned back in her chair and called for a drink. When the drink arrived she took a sip and her face became very serious.

“I need help. You boys seem to be the type of people who can help me.” George sat very straight and asked what was wrong. Madame Mimieux took another drink then she leaned very close and spoke in a hushed tone.

“You see, I am an art collector. Art is my passion; each painting I own is like a child to me. However-” a waiter appeared at a table next to us and began mopping it down. Madame stopped speaking. When he left she resumed.

“However, my collection has been the target of a theft, the theft of a piece very dear to me.” I looked at George but he was enraptured by her plight. Madame

Mimieux's face bore a look of consternation. It was enough to sink a chap's heart where he sat. She again ran her hand along the peacock feather then let it rest on her pearl necklace. She looked truly helpless.

"You see, I would go to the authorities but it wouldn't be any good. The prefect of police, Monsieur Lapeche, is in dirty with the same man who stole my dear painting." George clenched his teeth and slammed his fist on the table.

"Bloody hell, it's enough to make a man sick."

I thought her very brave, and images of a helpless Madame Mimieux flashed through my mind. Here she was the victim of a terrible crime, and facing it all so wonderfully, beautifully, with such grace. She sighed and took a sip. George cursed again and I ordered us all another round despite the half-full glasses in front of us. Madame Mimieux sighed again and folded her hands on the table. She leaned forward and looked imploringly at George and me.

"Now: if you boys are open to making some money- a substantial sum I assure you- you could be a great help to me." She licked her lips again and fingered her pearls. George drained the remainder of his gin rickey.

"I think I understand your predicament," he said, "And we would be glad to help a damsel in distress." I nodded. Madame Mimieux allowed a smile to steal onto her face.

"Oh boys, you are my saviors, you truly are." She clapped her hands. George smiled wide and put his hands out in an emphatic gesture.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all – just part of being a gentleman." We all clinked our glasses when the new drinks arrived and took satisfactory sips. The waiter mopping down the bar eyed us warily.

"Now, the details" Madame said, smiling. She ran a delicate finger along her peacock feather.

For the next several days, the days leading up to our mission, we couldn't stop talking amongst ourselves about Madame Mimieux. She warned us not to call at her home and it took every ounce of energy to obey. We were so drawn to her that we appeared at les Deux Magots nightly in hopes of catching a glimpse but we never saw her. When we sat at table with friends we tried not to mention our mysterious acquaintance and eased this effort with knowing glances between ourselves. After days of anticipation, doubt, confidence, and mutual reassurance, the night arrived. It was a typical early-summer night in Paris, warm and fresh. The rain earlier in the day left the city streets smelling like chestnut trees. George and I, dressed in suitable black attire, took a taxi over to the right bank around ten in the evening and spent several hours fortifying our spirits with brandy in a park. I kept assuring myself that we were righting a wrong- that we were helping

the otherwise helpless Madame Mimieux. George didn't seem to need any reassurance. His adventurous spirit must have reasoned that this was a fine opportunity for glory and an exciting story. If he was nervous at all he kept it well-hidden.

After midnight George checked his watch and picked himself up. We were half-drunk but the imminent mission rather sobered us. George exhaled after taking a final swig of the brandy. In his eye was that look that few other men could have ever exhibited. Here was George in his prime. I half-expected trumpets to blare from the darkness. He helped me up and clapped me on the back.

"Are you ready mate?" he asked.

"Of course" I responded. I was not lying – I told myself this was the sort of thing we came to Paris for and it swelled me with gusto. George winked at me and we moved into the streets.

As we stealthily crept along the sidewalks of a chic *arrondissement*, not far from Madame Mimieux's curious mansion, I thought back to Armando Zelli's warning. He had told us she was bad news- but that could have been spoken by a spurned lover or fueled by unfair gossip. We had investigated her ourselves and found her charming and innocent. I made myself forget Zelli's warning.

The target was a Rembrandt. Madame Mimieux described it to us as a dark painting of a nude woman lying on an ornate bed. She told us we could find it hanging in his personal gallery. As she went on to describe to us where the gallery was and how we should transport it, her eyes gleamed. When she told us how much she would pay us for the deed our eyes gleamed. We were scheduled to meet her car on a nearby side-street around one in the morning.

With these details in mind George and I approached the home of the art thief. The house was certainly large, but not comparable to Mimieux's mansion. It had all the pretention of a building built in the Haussmann era, and large symmetrical windows stared out from the *façade*.

George stopped in the street in front of the house and sighed.

"What fortune, mate" he said, "That *we* should find the cigarette case." I silently nodded my assent. I realized then that George's view of the universe focused on some kind of predestination, and that he placed us as the beneficiaries of a predestined endowment. We were *meant* for great things, great adventure. I looked at George and felt a kinship and full respect. Here was the man who would guide me through life. What fortune, indeed.

A taxi heading in our direction caused us to take refuge in the bushes next to the art thief's home. It passed and we began our mission.

On the left side of the house was a latticework sturdy enough, we hoped, to support our weight. George slung his bag over his shoulder and we quietly crept

to the side of the house and knelt in the shadows. The moon was three quarters and rather bright. In the light I could see George testing the durability of the lattice. He said it would hold one of us at a time. George began to ascend the latticework and I kept a meaningless lookout. The streets were quiet and the houses dark.

I looked up and George was nearly on the roof. When he reached the top he gave me a wave and I began the climb. There were several moments when I feared a creak would awake someone inside or signal a weakening of the lattice. I safely reached the roof and George was there to give me a handshake.

“Cheers” I said. He lit a cigarette and we tried not to make any noise. It was easy in the moonlight to locate the chimney. George gave me his cigarette to finish and then crept carefully along the slanted shingled roof. He reached the chimney, our point of entry, and waved me over. I tossed the cigarette off the roof and met George at the chimney.

“Will we fit?” I asked.

“Of course” he whispered. I looked down into the darkness of the chimney. At the bottom I could see the faint red of dying embers. No smoke came out.

“Probably retired for the evening” George said. I agreed.

He took a long length of rope out of his bag and tied it securely around the base of the chimney. The idea was to lower ourselves into the house through the chimney with the rope. There was a brick ridge surrounding the chimney that would catch the rope from coming off. I watched as George circled the chimney several times with the rope and securely knotted it. He shouldered his bag and gave the rope several tugs. He looked at me and winked.

“She’ll hold, mate” he said. I trusted George but was not eager to volunteer as the first to descend.

“Stomp out the embers when you get to the bottom” I said. He smiled and prepared to descend. I did the sign of the cross and George lowered himself.

Ten minutes later we had both survived the dark, suffocating descent and managed to roll out into a large room. There were bookshelves wall to wall.

“The library” George said quietly. He reached into the chimney and cut the rope where it hung in the opening. He carefully placed it in the bag.

“Can’t give our secrets away” he said, “Let the scoundrel work to figure it out.”

“With Madame Mimieux’s instructions in mind we navigated through a small dark room into an open foyer with a staircase and then into the gallery. We were very silent the whole time and I could feel my heart beat in my chest. The gallery was sizeable, but not as large as you found in the Luxembourg Museum or D’Orsay. This thief truly found his calling- there were close to twenty paintings

in his gallery, each one ornately framed.

We walked up close to the dark walls and inspected each painting. When we found the one Madame Mimieux described, the nude woman lying on an ornate bed, George put down his bag and silently took out a knife. While he cut along the edges of the frame I listened carefully for any movement in the house. There was no noise save for the soft scratching of George's knife along the canvas.

In the dark I felt my heart beat and looked at the painting next to me. Three men sat smoking pipes on barrels in a dark room. Their faces were white and one was laughing. I turned back to George and he had finished with the knife. He delicately pulled the canvas away from the frame and rolled it around his arm. Then he slid the painting off his arm and placed it in his bag. With a nod George closed the bag and we crept out of the gallery with our prize.

Madame Mimieux instructed us to exit through a back door, away from the street. Moments after leaving the gallery we located such a door and gently unlocked it. We slide out into the night. I felt very pleased with our accomplishment. We had righted a wrong and were en route to returning the stolen painting. As George and I navigated our way to the meeting point I looked up at the bright moon and remarked that it shone for *us* this night. George clapped me on the back and didn't say a word. Any useless words would ruin our glorious achievement.

We met Madame's car in a side street not far from the art thief's home. George dropped the bag in the front seat and Madame's driver inspected the contents. With a smile he gently placed the painting back in the bag and handed us two envelopes. The burly, mustached man did not say a word as he drove us to the left bank. I remember he made several wrong turns and I silently questioned his effectiveness as a driver. I didn't care because we had more money than we could have earned in a year back home. Eventually he dropped us near the Luxembourg Gardens and George and I shook his rough hand.

During the walk home through the dim Paris streets George turned to me.

"Good show, mate, good show" he smiled. I winked and allowed a feeling of complete happiness to wash over me.

"Never ignore fate" he said as we reached our flat. I promised him I never would.

Three nights later George and I were at the Dôme with friends. It was just getting dark and we were enjoying a Pernod before dinner. The adventure of the recent night was fresh in our minds, and the reward was fresh in our wallets. We had a glorious secret that came out through knowing glances and vague comments. The secret burned in my mind and the presence of our unknowing friends made

the evening exceptionally exciting.

George and I were nearly finished with our second Pernod when one of our friends made a comment that I have never forgotten.

“Did you hear about the art heist at Monsieur Laclerc’s home?” Nobody made much noise but George and I looked at each other with utter shock. Our friend continued:

“Well, I read that Monsieur Laclerc- you know him? He is a curator at la Louvre- Well, he is a trustee and a holder of art while they finish the new gallery.”

“What happened?” George asked sincerely, now gracefully recovered from the shock.

“I read that an expensive Rembrandt was stolen from his home just a few nights ago.” Our table murmured in interest.

“Fascinating” George said, sitting back and cradling his Pernod. I looked at him but he didn’t make eye contact. A taxi blared its horn in the street next to us and I mindlessly studied the passersby. The conversation soon changed and I finished my drink. I looked at George again. He wore a face I had never seen before. He lit a cigarette and his eyes caught mine. Neither of us reacted immediately. George blew out a puff of smoke and winked. I offered a slight shrug.

“Dinner menus?” someone suggested. George nodded and leaned forward. The passersby continued to file by the café tables. I leaned my head back and sighed. Looking into the evening sky I smiled in disbelief. I felt as if I had awoken from a dream. The waiter brought several more Pernods and set them down on the table. Around us Paris sounded her symphony. Someone proposed a toast and we all clinked glasses.

“To fate” George said.

“To fate”

“To fate”

“To fate”

“To fate” I said and sipped my Pernod. Those were days when a city could mean something sacred to a fellow.

EMPTY PROMISES FILLED WITH LIES

BRENDAN WHITMAN

I live a life of sin while I walk through my
life surrounded by manikins, Life's an empty
promise, filled up with lies everybody
wants something got their eye on the prize
but I, struggle to find footing and even
where to begin because no one realizes
for me how hard its been, my patients is worn
thin and lately Ive given serious thought too

giving in some days I wanna give up on
it all I have a hard time standing things
I pray for the answers, because I'd like
to see what understanding brings and
I know I'm your friend but its just hard to
get excited when you know where you'll
end up you defend but if you live on the
edge its hard to tell when you tense up

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David Calicchio is a retired teacher of English and Drama. His translations from Pirandello, Goldoni, and Betti have been performed in Cambridge(MA), Philadelphia, Tampa, and Williamstown where his version of "Six Characters..." was directed by Olympia Dukakis. He has also translated a novel by Ferdinand Camon (Memorial, Northwestern Univ. Press) and had a WWII memoir printed in Gooch, (Holiday issue 2002). He was born 12/31/31, educated at Boston Latin School and Harvard College (AB 1954), served two

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Gladys Justin Carr, former Nicholson Fellow at Smith College and Univesity Fellow at Cornell, left her day job as a book publishing executive to write full time. Her work has appeared in over seventy literary magazines, and has been cited in *Literary Magazine Review*. Publications include *The North Atlantic Review*, *The Potomac Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *The NY Times*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *The Worcester Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Meridian Anthology*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *The Connecticut Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Salamander*, and *The International Poetry Review*, among many others. She is the author of a chapbook, *Augustine's Brain – The Remix*, coauthor of the volume, *Edge by Edge*, and has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

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Christian Knoeller, Associate Professor of English at Purdue, has published poetry widely over the past 30 years with work appearing in journals such as *English Journal*, *Evansville Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Iron Horse*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Spoon River Review*, *Weber Studies* and, *West Branch Quarterly*. His first collection, *Completing the Circle*, received the Millennium Prize from Buttonwood Press and the next one—titled *Feral Grace*—is in the works. He holds an MFA from the University of Oregon and a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. In 2007, he was awarded the Jill Barnum Midwestern Heritage Prize by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

Richard Krause

Richard Krause's writing has appeared in such magazines as *American Writing*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, the *Hawaii Review*, *The Prose Poem*, and the *American Poetry Review*. Hotel Amerika will publish a selection of his epigrams in the fall. In 2003 Livingston Press published his short story collection, *Studies in Insignificance*. He teaches at a community college in Somerset, KY.

Katie Krouse

Kathryn Krouse is a senior at Providence College. She is majoring in English and Secondary Education.

Rick Kurker

Richard Kurker is a 2009 Providence College graduate and former *Alembic* editor. Born and raised in Connecticut, he is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in biochemistry at the University of Notre Dame, but continues to indulge in his passion for writing in his spare time.

Bruce Lader

Bruce Lader is the author of two full-length collections and a chapbook. His first volume, *Discovering Mortality*, was a finalist for the Brockman-Campbell Award. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Fulcrum*, *New York Quarterly*, *Harpur Palate*, *Confrontation*, *Poet Lore*,

and other journals. He is a former writer-in-residence at the Helene Wurlitzer Colony and has received an honorarium from the College of Creative Studies at UC-Santa Barbara. www.bruclader.com.

Conor Leary

Conor Leary is a junior at Providence College, majoring in English and Theater Studies and minoring in Writing. His earlier writing was heavily influenced by the fantastic: spells, enchantments, wizards, and other symbols of mystification. It has evolved over six years to include stories and plays about reality, suspense, heartache, and joy. His writing has always been descriptive, putting the words together to form an absolute picture. It is his artform and he hopes to always use words to paint a story.

Beth Leonardo

An English major in her junior year at Providence College, Beth has always had a deep love for writing. All of her writing, however, was strictly academic, and it was not until a class with Professor Osondu that she made a sincere effort to write creatively. She has thoroughly enjoyed the creative process and so, although she plans to teach high school English in her hometown of East Providence upon graduation, she hopes to continue writing as well.

Buff Lindau

Buff Lindau lives in Burlington, Vt., where she and her husband raised their two sons. She has worked at Saint Michael's College for some 30 years where she is director of marketing and communications and executive editor of the college magazine. She earned a doctorate in English from the University of South Carolina in the 1970s with one of the first women's studies dissertations. She started writing poetry at age 59, and has published poems in *Bridges*, *The Onion River Review*, *Families: A Journal of Representation*, *The Chaffin Journal*, and a few other places. She writes about the world that is closest to her family, gardening, the incidents of everyday life, friends, the changing seasons of Vermont's natural world.

Stephen Lynch

Stephen Lynch was born in Asheville, North Carolina and lives in Saunderstown, Rhode Island with his parents and two younger sisters. He is a junior and an English major. In his free time Stephen enjoys his free time.

Jesse Mack

Jesse Mack is a junior at Providence College who divides his time between his studies, poetry, and songwriting.

Liam McCartney

Liam McCartney grew up on Long Island. He is currently an engineering major at Providence College and hopes to attend Columbia University in the fall. He has submitted his story to the *Alembic* at the encouragement of his mother and father. Specifically his father.

Tanuja Mehrotra

Tanuja Mehrotra has an MFA in Poetry from San Francisco State University. Her poems have appeared in such places as *The Asian Pacific American Journal*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Transfer*, and *Dogwood*. Her work soon will appear in *Indivisible: Contemporary South Asian American Poetry* and in *Shadows: The Disappearing Woman*, a book of poetic responses to found photographs. She lives in the Belmont, California with her husband and two daughters. She most often finds herself writing poems in her head and is thrilled when they find a home in ink on the wide open space of the page.

Ann Minoff

Ann graduated from New York University with a degree in philosophy and continued her education at the National College of Chiropractic in Illinois. She received her Doctorate of Chiropractic in 1982. She currently teaches Yoga and classes on Kabbalah. Ann's work is forthcoming or has been published in *The Alembic*, *The Distillery*, *The Literary Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Nimrod*, *Porcupine*, *Quiddity Literary Journal*, and *Sacred Journey: Journal of Fellowship in Prayer*.

Jed Myers

Jed Myers is a Seattle poet whose work appears or is forthcoming in *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Fugue*, and elsewhere. He has served in an editorial role for *Tufts Literary Magazine*, *Chrysanthemum*, and *Drash*. By day, he is a psychiatrist with a therapy practice, and also teaches at the University of Washington.

Dan Neal

Dan was born in Rhode Island in the great year of George Orwell fame: 1984. He graduated from Salve Regina University with a B.A. in Philosophy, and a triple minor in Religious Studies, European History and Politics. He has two Masters Degrees from Providence College; one in Biblical Studies and one in American History. His future is vague, but he would like to wind up doing something that requires an intense amount of creativity and imagination. Perhaps that is writing; he doesn't know yet, but he's hopeful.

Timothy Otte

Timothy Otte will be graduating from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota in spring of 2010 with a BA in both Theatre and English. Hi Mom!

Jeff Pajak

Jeff Pajak is a junior at Providence College, and is majoring in English. He lives in Western Massachusetts, has two sisters and two parents, and spends much of his time writing and reading for pleasure. He especially enjoys Tolkien, Frost and Shakespeare, and aspires to follow in their footsteps.

Corey Plante

Corey R. Plante was born and raised in North Smithfield, RI, a town less than a half-hour away from Providence College where he is currently studying English and Writing. He has aspirations to be a Professor in one or both of those subjects, and hopes to return to PC and teach Development of Western Civilization. He is an avid cyclist in the warmer seasons, and he enjoys critiquing and creating both literature and movies.

Richard T Rauch

Richard T. Rauch lives along Bayou Lacombe in southeast Louisiana and works testing rockets that may someday return human explorers back to the moon and on to Mars. Rick's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Old Red Kimono*, *Quiddity*, *The Oxford American*, *THEMA*, and *Westview*. He enjoys, among other things, kicking back with a good cigar from time to time.

Kristina Searfoss

Kaitlin Searfoss is a junior English major and writing minor at Providence College. She lives in Norwood, Massachusetts.

Sonya Shah

Sonya Shah is core faculty in Interdisciplinary studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco—she is committed to teaching and learning using progressive pedagogy, mainly critical inquiry, transformative and integral learning. Sonya Shah is currently lead facilitator for the media and visual art leadership institutes for the National Association of Media Arts and Culture. She has been teaching/facilitating for 15 years. As a media and literary artists, Sonya Shah has produced community outreach programming for KQED Public Radio and Television in San Francisco; her documentary, *Something between Her Hands* (2004), is distributed by the National Film Network and has screened in over seventy

film festivals, conferences and colleges. As a literary artist, her most recent works have been published in *Sou'wester* and *The Rambler* and is upcoming in *RiverSedge:11*.

Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt

Hans Jorg Stahlschmidt is a German writer and psychologist who lives in Berkeley, California in 1982. He works as a building contractor as well as a clinical psychologist. His poetry has won several prizes and has appeared in many journals and anthologies, among them *Madison Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Manoa*, *Texas Poetry Review* and the *Anthology of Magazine Verse* and *Yearbook of American Poetry*.

Elizabeth Twiddy

Elizabeth Twiddy's first collection of poems is *Love-Noise* (Standing Stone Books, 2010), and her chapbook, *Zoo Animals in the Rain* (Turtle Ink Press, 2009), includes several poems that have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. She has won, among other awards, The Joyce Carol Oates Award from Syracuse University, where she earned her MFA in Poetry. Most recently, her poems have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *POOL*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Two Rivers Review*, *Stone Canoe*, *Slush Pile*, the Australian journal *Skive*, and elsewhere. She teaches adult poetry workshops at the Downtown Writer's Center through the Syracuse YMCA and serves as an editor for the poetry journal *The Comstock Review*. She lives in Syracuse, New York with her husband, the composer Edward Ruchalski, who has set a number of her poems to music for choir and for piano.

For more, visit elizabethtwiddy.com.

Karol M Wasylyshyn

Karol M. Wasylyshyn, Psy.D. is a consulting psychologist based in Philadelphia. She works as a coach or trusted advisor to senior executives in global companies on issues related to leadership – particularly the behavioral dimension of effective leadership. Their compelling stories have been the catalytic spark for her first collection of “executive poems” including *Emperor's Jacket*.

Andrew Weyant

Andrew's writing aims to subtly layer humor, often taking the form of mockery, beneath a surface level of serious narrative. He enjoys beautiful settings that act as characters and witty but pointless banter. He has been influenced by a mix of bastardized Hemingway, Bret Easton Ellis, and Oscar Wilde. He hopes one day to learn how to write absurd vignettes at the feet of the master, Matthew Charlton. Andrew hangs his hat on the adage stating "All good books have one thing in

common—they are truer than if they had really happened." When not writing stories Andrew enjoys exposing fraud, causing minor scandal, and grasping at the ideal. He is doing fine.

