

Preface



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It is You

And so what is all this come to?
These nights, long, restless,
Your body a whirlwind
While my own thoughts
Danced upon your lips,
Torso, bare, and your dark,
Thick curls like nooses
Around my fingertips.
Touched so gently,
There was nothing else
No other thought but for one
Trembling, shadowed thought
Fought in a struggle of wills;
Yours, mine, body and mind,
All competing against each-other.
Only the beating of your heart,
My heart, broke moonlit stillness
Of a room of wishes, hopes,
But finally transpiring
Into deliberate droplets
Of ice-water fingertips, burning
Against the base of my skull,
Traveling down my spine,
Up my spine – and at last!
Here you have them;
Guilty words, each and every one.

David Adams

ACTS

I'm an ash collector – I save the staining dust for when I forget how they fell on my shoulders. But what more can I gain from these past ashes except repeatedly remembering the burn and blackening my fingertips?

I have a pocket full of delicate bombs that I hoard in my heart – I use them as evil threats to my opposers and oppressors. But what else can I do with these explosive weapons of hate and revenge except tiptoe around them as they force love out of my full heart, waiting for a breaking-news, front-page tragedy?

I balance my life on a tightrope, easing myself across the narrow road that leads to life, while carrying a backpack of ashes, bombs, and other heavy rocks of unnecessary that slows down the process of getting to the small gate (through which I couldn't fit anyway). It would be so easy to just take it off of my back, throw it up, and watch it fall into your hands and become something beautiful. But how long until my load weakens me and I fall to the fate of Ananias? How long can I live a life with no foundation until the string breaks?

You could hook me by the lip and reel me in, but it will leave a scar on my face and I don't want to be ashamed when I meet you.

I'm struggling to shed this forgiven-of-sin skin, but each new step across the twine reminds me of Thoreauian simplicity – and each advance will give me that sweet taste of the raisincakes of love – and each bite of this simple sincerity will urge me to let go – and each burden that I let fall from my heart will quicken my journey – and each second that I am not balancing anymore is only more time spent rejoicing on the other side of the gate that brought me to life.

dedicated to leviticus, matthew, amos, and romans.

Kaylyn Myers

Manifesto

Identity Politics

(Under a new race called Free)

Is neither color-blind

No color defined

This Movement

(A rise of consciousness)

Falls short-

Refrains from

Possessing minds

This affinity

(Transcending ethnicity)

Is grounded

In a repressed

Dogma of One

Absolute,

That

I Am

That defies

Designations

That I Am

(Our truth at root)

Free People Embrace

All our thousand names

And our surnames

We trace

Our blood along

Transcontinental migrations

And then...

We search for who

We Are

Who

We Truly Are

And the search

Is our self-discovery

Realizing the self words

Fail to capture

The flaming butterfly

(Illusive grace wondrous to (be)hold)

That flutters to escape

Every eager grasp

And seers the fingertips

I am a Free

(black working-class bisexual woman)

Whose very nature revolts

Against the shackles that bind me

And I am bound by the shackles

Of any, each, every,

And all Free People, my people

And I am bound to...

Reject values of inferiority/superiority

Imposed upon my selves

Through the desecration

For they are an affront to the very

Essence of our (shared) humanity

Free People Share

Our humanity

And in so during

Are united by shackles

Thus

I am bound...

To the oppressed

I am bound...

To the oppressor

I am bound...

To the oppression

I am bound too

Yet Free People

Did, do and Ever Shall

Defy words

Flood margins

Rise above



En Un Mundo Estrafalarío

Silver Gelatin Print

Laura Rossi

Free People
By and by
Virtue of freedom
Can never cease to be

But...
Living grand illusions,
Social (de)constructions
Of status, class, outsider, enemy
Our senses refute our truth
Those who do not Suffer the hell of
denial
Live the purgatory of contradiction

I am free but you are bound
I am bound but you are free
We are Freedom, bound
And freedom bound

Dallea Caldwell

Pigments

Sarah Kendall

He lives out there, miles from any neighbor, in butch solitude; what's called the half-acre of chalk. A particular breed resides in the simple houses. They're scattered throughout the field of white poppies. The people choose to be alone.

One man with a dark gray beard lives in a stone house by a stream, and works for hours in his yard, fiddling with sticks and straight pins. He's planning a tiered bridge that will span the Mississippi River. A large woman, who lives a seven-mile stretch down the field, knits shawls that she ships to Paris. She earns enough money to keep her comfortable in seclusion. These people venture into town only for essential supplies.

Bart Christopher lives in the wooden house by the pale beige Emery trees, the only spattering of color in the fields. He travels to the market on Sundays, quickly gathering a small list of items and then retreating back home. Today he waits patiently in line, gazing at the magazines haphazardly gathered in the tin rack by the oranges. An advertisement on a back cover catches his eye. He plucks the magazine up on impulse, laying it down on the slow-moving belt.

The stark transition from the amber-orange leaves of the town to the bleached landscape of the chalk fields calms Bart. The creamy flowers pick up and twirl in the road as he steers his Buick towards home. The petals, light as vapor, fall in a mist. It reminds him of Pollack spattering a shower of eggshell paint across a long sheet.

Eager to get back to his canvas, Bart hauls the paper bags to the counter and waits to unpack the load. A carton of pistachio ice cream melts slowly while he paints. The natural light of the cabin casts shadows on the canvas, so Bart beams a standing spotlight towards his work. He forgot to seal the two gallon-jugs of paint before leaving for the store. A green plastic skin has congealed in an oval and Bart picks at it until the clotting breaks. He dips a number seven flat brush into the pot.

His technique is not traditional. Bart stipples the bristles in deliberate dotting motions for an hour, and then seems to destroy his progress by violent jabbing. He alternates colors, never favoring cool colors for warm or round brushes for flat. He varies his mediums. Every surface of the cabin is punctuated with canvases tilted towards the wall or vaulted to the ceiling. Bart would forget to eat, if not for the calendar tacked to the front door. The word "Groceries" is printed on the Sunday box, along with *Trash* and *Call Mother*. After accomplishing a short list of tasks, Bart can concentrate on what wakes him in the morning and what blesses his dreams in sleep.

Right now there's no telling what the subject of the painting by the fireplace could be. Globes of red and salmon acrylic paint clot along the right corner, while a pen and ink sketch of cactus plants comes together in the center. When his stomach rumbles, a reminder that brings him back down to the realities of life, he fixes dinner. The inky night casts a purple glow over the pasty flowers in the yard. Bart takes a baguette and wheel of cheese from the grocery bags and brings them outside to the porch. He takes the magazine as well, ignoring the soupy ice cream that's pooled on the counter top.

MAKE MONEY AS AN ARTIST. The promise strikes a cord inside Bart. The words reverberate deep in his belly, causing pangs of nausea and anticipation. Beside the ad, a clip-art picture of a poodle sits under a tree. The text box below instructs the reader to draw Filo the Dog. If you can accurately reproduce the pup, a career as an artist is within your reach. Bart tears the back cover off and studies the clipping, effortlessly sketching the dog in his mind. He traces the pair of floppy ears with his fingertip, curves his nail around the hind legs. This is it? The entry and viewing fee to the Academy of City Art is only ten dollars, plus a self-addressed envelope for the results.

*

Back inside the house he glances down at his wristwatch. It's past midnight now. Purple paint had dried in caked strips along his wrists. Bart decides to travel into town a second time this week, something he's never done in the three years he's lived in the chalk fields.

The post office is crowded on Wednesday afternoons. The carpet gives off a smell like hot linoleum and lemon lollipops. A wave of heat hits Bart as he stands in the long line of people, guided to the front counter by a set of parallel fuzzy ropes. He holds his jacket tight around his waist, feeling anxious. There are so many loud noises and sharp smells and muted colors. Everything here seems tinted beige.

"Next in line."

Bart steps up to the oval window, slides the letter into the sink-like dip in the counter top. He keeps his eyes diverted down, attention glued to the flaking green paint along his knuckles.

"Sir, you'll need some postage on this."

When Bart looks up, a woman with red hair and a slim, flat nose is holding up the envelope. He followed the order printed on the faded note card on his desk. The card read *Full Name and "to": Address on front and Your Address on back*, written in his mother's looping script. Bart doesn't understand the problem.

"Can I interest you in our fall foliage collection? Or maybe some Lucille Balls?"

Finally looking up, Bart studies the pale brown freckles on the lady's cheek, her pearl-colored lipstick and the row of square teeth, like blocks of vanilla Chicklet gum. Her gold nametag reads Delores. Bart's cheeks flush and he can't seem to form words. It's been so long since he's spoken face to face with another person. Real talk, not just a "thank you" at the grocery checkout line. Licking his lips, he tries to coax the words out. Bart fears he's stood in silence too long. There's no check-off list or note card for awkward postal situations.

Delores is now holding up a sheet, a grid of autumn leaves. Rich crimson triangles and chocolate brown stems splash the page. He nods his head in silence, mouth gaping just a little.

Delores peals a gold leaf stamp off and pats it on the letter.

"Oh, the Academy of City Art. That sounds exciting. Are you an artist?"

Again the words escape him. Not sure how to answer, he blurts out the first thing that trickles to the front of his mind.

"I drew Filo."

The words blare out loud in the room and echo back. Not used to hearing his own voice, Bart cringes at the reverberations. People turn and glance. Delores doesn't seem to notice.

"Well, I'm sure it's lovely."

Delores likes the man's closed-mouth smile and the way his maroon jacket is zipped all the way up to his collar, like a schoolchild dressed for a cold day on the playground. She notes his boxy hands. His fingers are bathed in dried green paint. He nervously peels off teal chunks, like patches of sunburn.

“Looks like you got more paint on yourself than on the canvas.”

The comment’s warm and playful, enough to pry a few more words out of Bart. “I don’t mind much.”

The line grows longer by the minute, and people sigh loud with impatience. A man jangles change in his pocket, tapping out a metallic rhythm of irritation. The sound triggers something Bart’s forgotten.

“Oh no, the entry fee!”

Bart hollers loudly and paws at the letter behind the glass. He taps his head with three jade fingers, severely disappointed. Now the line is rumbling behind him. Bart runs out the swinging doors in embarrassment, roaming the parking lot, trying to recall where he parked his rusty Buick.

As he fumbles to find the key in the front-door lock, Delores taps him delicately on the shoulder. She’s sprinted out, and has her head pointed towards the pavement to catch her breath.

“It’s not, a problem,” Delores insists. “We’ll just get you, a money order...and it will work out, fine.” Her panting words touch Bart. He wipes away the tears that are sliding down. Fishing out a crumpled ten-dollar bill from his jacket, he hands it to Deloris. She smiles again, pats his maroon jacket with sympathy.

“I’ll make money as an artist,” he promises.

*

A week passes and the painting by the fireplace has progressed significantly. Now three quarters of the canvas is covered with green and violet and magenta. Though the strokes are more haphazard than the top portion, rushed in places. Yet it seems to be evolving.

Crouched over his easel for hours, Bart takes a break to stretch on the porch. The air is crisp and the autumn wind feels good on his face. A crop of speckled mushrooms has popped up along the brick walk. The cedar brown spots match the color of Delores’ freckles perfectly. He wonders what Delores is doing now- talking with customers or sorting mail. Thoughts of mail steer his eyes towards his own mailbox at the end of the driveway. For once the red flag has been lifted up.

Bart sprints down the field, causing a spray of light petals to lift off their stems. He rips open the bright orange envelope.

Dear Mr. Christopher, Congratulations! Your drawings have elevated you to Semi-Finalist status. Reproduce the drawings enclosed and send back, along with a \$25.00 viewing fee for our panel of professional artists.

Beaming with pride, he immediately goes to his mattress and lifts it off the frame. Picking up the wilted manila folder, Bart removes two ten-dollar bills and four ones. He

opens the bottom drawer of his night table and sifts through the junk. Finally, he unearths four quarters. He slips the six bills and four coins into an envelope, being such not to make the same mistake twice.

Returning to the letter at the table, he unfolds the page to study the new image. This time he must duplicate a woman tossing Filo a Frisbee and a still life of a banana and an apple. Excitement mounts for this new task. After this he can start making money as an artist and prove his father wrong. He said that art would never lead to anything. Then Bart moved to the chalk fields. Now his mother sends him checks each month with a new note card of advice or instructions. He traces the woman in the picture with his fingertip. He'll prove his father wrong and his mother right.

Determined, he lifts the canvas by the fireplace off the easel, sets it on the floor, and tacks up a sheet of white paper on a drawing board. He sketches Filo and the woman a few times with a pencil, then crumples the sheet and starts a new picture with ink. After three hours, the cottage is littered with crumpled wads of white, like the chalk field has infiltrated the inside of the cabin. Each time his arm wavers slightly the pen wobbles in his hand and causes his line to swerve. Then he starts again, this time on the still life. Bart wishes he could add a splash of cherry-red to the apple, or deep tan to the banana. But the letter clearly states the entries must be in black and white. Color is strictly prohibited.

The next morning sun coats the field, slicking the field with a wash of dew. Bart pinches his cheeks to wake himself. Rolling over, his body crunches over a row of paper balls tossed haphazardly away from his easel the night before. It's eight in the morning, and he realizes the post office should be open by now.

The door chimes jingle as he enters the familiar blue building. Delores looks up, weaves him over to her counter.

"I've been wondering about you."

She glances down at the letter Bart's gripping protectively. Noticing how the streaks of emerald paint smeared on his jacket match his eyes, she smiles.

"What did you draw this time?"

"Fruit and a Frisbee."

He pauses for a moment, and then tilts his eyes up to meet hers.

"I'm a semi-finalist."

Delores gushes over this statement like a proud mother adoring her child's first clay handprint.

"That's fantastic. Let's get this post-marked and send it off."

She brings the envelope to the electronic scale. The coins bunch together in the bottom left corner.

“Have you got some money in here too?”

“Twenty-five dollars.”

Delores crinkles her eyebrow down towards her freckled nose.

“Maybe you should write a check.”

Heat rushes to Bart’s face and he shifts his weight from his right foot to his left foot. His mind races to picture the letter note card. He’s sure he’s done everything correctly.

“It’s all in there. I counted twice. I’ll make more later.” A small bead of sweat trickles down his neck.

“Alright then, alright.”

Delores tries to calm him, but sees he’s already heading for the door. She watches him through the picture window, climbing into his truck and starting up the engine, wondering where he’ll speed off. Sighing, she cradles the letter in her palm, shifts the change from side to side. She turns the letter over, grabs an orange post-it, and jots down the return address.

*

The next week is a blur of taupe for Bart. Between Filo’s black outline, the starched white paper, the enveloping chalk field, he can barely remember the seduction of pigments. Three paint cans, opened once three weeks ago, have now caked shut. He works methodically at the small card table in the center of the room. Filo starts making appearances in his dreams.

He hasn’t driven to the store today even though the calendar says he should. He won’t let give up the practice time. Bart only realizes day slipping into night by the shadow cast on the Frisbee lady’s coat.

At seven thirty there’s someone knocks on the door. Heart thumping, Bart scurries over to the curtains and draws them back just an inch. Outside there’s a maroon Volvo parked next to his truck. Another knock.

“Bart, it’s Delores.”

He opens the door abruptly to meet a grinning face. Delores is not wearing her standard navy-striped uniform. She’s dressed in a sundress, violet sweater and cream jacket. She’s carrying something strange, a cellophane cone printed with daisies. Inside is a bouquet of green paint tubes.

“The first time we met, it looked like you were almost out.”

“I’ve got some, mostly in cans.”

A full minute of silence passes between them. Delores arches her eyebrows.

“Can I come in for a minute?”

Bart smacks his forehead with the flat of his palm. “I apologize. Come inside.”

As he leads Delores inside, he remembers one of the first cards his mother made for him. *Manners*. The amount of information under this subject spilled over onto two cards. ‘Guest rules’ was on the second card. He should have remembered.

To make up for this error, he offered to take her coat, get her a glass of water, start a fire or open a window, depending on her preference. She said a glass of water would be lovely.

White Bart clatters around the kitchen Delores takes a quick glance-around tour of the cottage. A one room set up, her eyes can't choose what painting to focus on within the small space. Her eyes jump from canvas to canvas. Some have been splashed with heaps of metallic paint, others display detailed seascapes, a series by the door depict purple orb floating on a blue background. Besides the cans, brushes and rows of thin wooden stretchers, there's little else. A card table is set up in the center of the room, covered with pen and ink drawing; dogs and apples it looks like. The bed in the corner is also scattered with paper. A faulty hanging curtain exposes half a bathtub. The sides of are splattered wit gold and green drips. For a moment her mind wanders. She pictures herself coiled up beside Bart in the tub, washing the paint smears off his arms with a sponge.

As Delores takes a step closer towards the curtain, Bart enters triumphant with two tall glasses. Ice cubes clack together as he walks slowly, delicately, as he's filled each cup to the very brim. After delivering the drinks, he jogs back to the kitchen and returns with a dish of sugared almonds. Delores takes three and crunches on them softly.

"I hope you don't mind me stopping by. I was curious about your paintings." She takes another look around. "They're really wonderful, very innovative."

Bart stares at the floor, takes a handful of nuts from the bowl. He knows he hasn't touched a brush since his last trip to the post office. He wants to be accepted by the Academy of City Art. They don't want paintings, they want Filo. Then he can make money and prove to everyone he can do things too.

"Plus, I've got a letter for you. It arrived on Saturday. I thought you wouldn't want to wait till Monday to take a look."

She plucks the letter from the cone of paint tubes. Bart tears at the envelope and reads the letter aloud.

Dear Bart, Congratulations! You are one of our finalists. Reproduce the drawings enclosed and send back, along with a \$50.00 viewing fee for our panel of professional artists.

Bart hustles over to his bed and lifts the mattress, but the manila folder is empty. While he ravages the bottom drawer, Delores handles the letter.

"How many finalists are there?"

"Only one or two."

"Are you sure, Bart?"

He's scrambling around the cottage like a hen racing for shelter from the rain, plucking up stray dimes and quarters from the room. In a rushed move towards the tub he puts his foot through a six by eight canvas, a peach dappled dessert scene. Frustrated, he kicks the frame off his foot and huffs towards the kitchen.

"I need fifty dollars."

Trying to count up the coins in his hand, he hums while he tries to then subtract the correct amount.

“Well, a little less than fifty dollars.”

Delores walks over to the torn canvas. Picking it up, she attempts to press the torn sections back down to the frame.

“Bart, you’re very talented. Why don’t you just stick to painting?” She picks up the sketch of Filo and the lady. “You don’t need this Academy turning your creativity into the same old generic stuff.”

“Put that down!” Snatching the picture out of her hands, he smooths the edges down even though there’s not a dent in the paper.

“I’m a finalist. I’m...I’m going to make money as an artist.” Tears start to dribble down his cheek. “He’ll see.” He stamps around the room, looking for something to quell his fear or frustration or whatever it is he feels synching up inside his gut. Bart finds the green and pink painting by the fireplace, marches outside onto the porch with it, and tosses it into the field. A green square patches the fallow field.

“I think I should go.”

As she leaves, she sees Bart through the inch of window exposed by the curtains in the cottage. Bart sits at the table, sniffing and sketching, mouthing something to himself.

*

Next week Bart enters the post office and marches straight to the opposite end of the room. He hands his letter to a young man named Felix with slicked back hair and an earring. Delores watches him the entire time, decides to take a chance. Standing beside Felix, she sees the letter is addressed to the Academy.

“Good luck to you, Bart. I hope it all works out.”

He won’t respond, doesn’t even meet her glance. His hands are clean, paint free. Felix weighs the envelope, slides it down the outgoing slot and slips by Delores on his way to the coffee pot.

“I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings somehow. That wasn’t my intention. I just, I don’t want you taken advantage of, that’s all.”

When he looks up she sees the dark half-moon under his eyes. It looks like he hasn’t slept for days. He half-nods at her and mumbles something softly, then leaves.

*

Even in winter, the Emery trees that mark the exit out of town bloom beige leaves. When the snow drapes the fields, the trees are the only splash of color for miles.

Bart won’t see Delores anymore. He goes to Glenton now each week to mail his pictures and check to the Academy. He’s thinner, cashing his grocery checks from his mother to pay for the viewing fees. The staff at the Glenton branch have pegged Bart as a kind of joke, the county’s fool. But his determination astounds them. He’s set on making something of himself and won’t give into the fact he’s being had. That possibility is whited out, a blank spot in his perspective.



Young and Old
Silver Gelatin Print
Cory Luquet

Third Generation Blues

Her smile
Is of tamales dulces in her stomach.
She walks
Her hands prune-like and rough,
Still barely intact warm cups of brown leather
From years working in cañaverales.

Abueli says
With aroz y frijol negro in her voice:

Cuando tu viene pa Miami, mija?
Little Havanna
Habana Pequeña.

And I don't understand her
Pa ya's
And
Pa ca's.
My SAT II Spanish.
My white classroom Spanish.
Spanish my mother did not teach me
Because
Where would that take me?

Assimilation in
White America.

I carry the self hate of
Third generation displacement
On a bus named *Sarita*
That travels the long black hair
2,000 mile highway
2,000 feminine cinta
Over and under H.R. 4437 walls
Hate Resurrected
A transit of veins and songs
Cantos of homelessness
On buses named after women
Dark haired women

Silence grows and comes of age
Between Abueli and my mother
Her second generation daughter.

In sociology classes
I heard that we do not assimilate well.
We live in barrios
Where no English is heard.
We breed gangs
That go after your daughters.
I keep my head down as everyone
Takes these notes
And then locks their cars doors
When they're just driving through.

The violence is between generations
Of women
Each three standing in different places
Of a wall that keeps growing.
Abueli far beyond it
no longer hoping to return.
My mother
Uncombing history from her hair
Laying down a brick when no one is watching.

And myself at a crossroads
Inching south
Picking up and reclaiming the cloth of culture
Left behind on the way north
Weaving for colors
Dreaming and touching
A fatherless place
And a land enclosed by water
Where the smell of tamales is real.

Anna Lapera

Metropolis

This city is hungry for men drip-dropping through the streets,
slopping through alleys and sky-scraping office pits.
Its rain is acid; it begrimes windowpanes and beats down
upon pots of grey flowers. Ash drips –
drops seventy stories and gnaws the ground level,
where suits and ties scuttle off to business
and cardboard carcasses cry ink in the streets.

Rachel Stark

Wait From Summer

All county roads sang with
the zip of rubber cars along
their curves, potential roadkill
was swerved around.

The drive down brought memories
of legs locked under dress
that weighed an ounce or less.
At the time I was
a scale so my measurements
brought unsatisfying quick results
I was a brick, so wear and tear
made me appear all the more au-
thentic.

My neighborhood swelled
with the sweaty jelly of
summer underarms.
The leaves trembled till
they morphed hues
as if they couldn't wait to fall.
I left town before most hit the
ground so I could first.

Tim King

Will o' Wisp

their wandering
awakens the wilderness that slept, unearthed with silent eyes,
stirring under their footsteps. branches
bowing murmurs of rustling.

they meander closer. routes
crossing, their drifting limbs
tangle,
traipsing over sage umbrated vales, sensed through the moss, vibrations, soft,
ascending vines and stones to this willow's shade.

unbending beneath her back.

they turn,
enfold, loose their molten
skins, descending into lush
beds, their flesh pistils,
violet and carmine, under
this unblinking canopy.

arcng slender arms down
to veil the two rapt in
one's feral leaves,

wild behind a peridot curtain.
she between he,
reverberating
through the stem into soil.
throwing limbs, lost
in themselves.

rough against their skin, trans-
formed for a moment as it ends



Sauntering Jauntily through New York

Silver Gelatin Print

Cory Luquet

here,
in cradling roots,
like fallen fruits,
lying
among our own petals.

they reassemble,
regrow their flowers and thorns.

searing, bleeding sap where he

carves a jagged heart to mark
who they were.

Andrew Winegrad

From a Christmas Dinner

Rachel Bernstein

They were speaking in low voices in the kitchen.

“How is he? Has he said anything about what he wants or is going to do?” she asked her fiancé. “Hasn’t he told you anything yet?”

“Nothing at all so far,” her fiancé whispered. He held his son tighter to his chest as the little boy squirmed. “He’s coming through the foyer this way now. All I can gather is that he wants somewhere closer to Bonita, by the beach, in a place where the air is bracing, the water’s warm, and he wants to see dolphins.”

“Sh-h-h! I hate that we always have to whisper like this. Dolphins! You feed the baby, here he comes.”

Two moments later, the old gentleman, her future father-in-law, stood in the doorway, leaning one hand on the frame. He was tall, possibly taller than his son, but it couldn’t be made out so well because of his fat. One of the things he liked to do was to pause in the doorway or by a window and look everything and everyone over at least once with his good eye, then twice with his bad one. There was no telling when his bad eye would stop.

“Excuse the intrusion,” he said at last. “What are Valerie and Simon cooking now?”

“Not sure,” the fiancé said. “But whatever it is, they aren’t cooking it now. Go into the family room and find out what’s going on, Dad.”

“I was just admiring the tile work in here, I think Valerie and Simon have set themselves up in a nice place. It’s a little close to the city for my taste, but it’s nice, don’t you think, Robert?”

“Sure, Dad,” Robert said. “Maybe you should ask them where they got the tiling done. Or for an agent. Go ask them.”

The son, who was in his mid-twenties, burped the baby and handed him to his father. The old gentleman set the child down in the playpen and blew his nose.

“You know, your step-mother’s hands were as cold as ice when I first met her,” said the old gentleman, jolted by a memory. “It was our first date and I’d never felt such clammy hands. And somehow we still knew. Where are we sitting?”

He pulled out the chair blithely and sat down. Although he weighed nearly three hundred pounds, his clothes hung loosely on him. He liked to make people think he had once weighed more. The bags under his eyes settled into neat pools of moon skin while his cheeks reddened and sprouted into bumps like a newborn’s face.

His future daughter-in-law, Rosalie, his son-in-law, Simon, and Valerie brought in the roast beef and vegetables. Simon and Valerie were a few years older than Robert and Rosalie. They were still in their pajamas for the day. They sat back at the table and looked disinterested in the meal they just made. They kept their eyes politely on the old man, like elderly listeners.

“You knew we liked brisket, didn’t you?” the old man said. “I was just saying I don’t talk nearly as much when I come for a weekend here, and then I eat too much. It’s living in Florida—having too many people to talk to, and so forth, and you can’t be bothered to eat. What a nice piece of brisket that is! Done just well enough. I haven’t seen a brisket like that for centuries. A

small bit of veal or duck we might have, but Fergie can't digest most meat." He often forgot that his wife was right there. He used to be a gourmet cook, when the children had known him at his best. His big face suddenly crinkled like an apple, with revulsion.

"You know, well, I'm sure," he went on, gazing at the brisket his son was now carving. "I suppose it's all right. Did you ever have problems cutting brisket?" He pointed across the table to his son-in-law. "Their mother used to make brisket when Robert and Valerie were small, usually during the holidays. I don't know where your mother used to get it. Carillon's, I suppose."

"Pass the green beans to Dad," Rosalie said to Simon.

"Mr. D, green beans?" Simon asked, looking half his age as he spoke.

"Oh," said the old gentleman. He looked straight ahead at the mirror behind the table. "I was just watching you carving," he said to Robert. "I was looking at your cheekbones. You've got just the expression of your great-granduncle Sonny. I remember him when I was a little boy. Father took me to see him—it was one morning. He took me down to a warehouse, would it be? It was the same day your Uncle George stuck his thumb in the bike spoke and had the tip cut off. He had punched me in the eye and we ran out of steak, so your grandmother stuck fish on the blow."

"There's that fish again." Rosalie laughed.

"We're just a bunch of sailors," said Robert. Everyone was laughing.

"What are you laughing at? What have I said?" the old gentleman asked, smiling.

"That's where you get your taste for lob-stah," said Rosalie to Robert, elongating the accent.

"Ah, lobstah!" said the old gentleman, delighted by his strange success. "Occupational insanities recap before I return there. Scene one took place on the docks on a Friday morning. My supervisor Steve called me over. 'Yes, S?' I said, Steve asked, 'Are you flirting with Kathy out there?' I told him, 'I can't really flirt with Kathy, she's spoken for and baby drama abounds.' Steve inquired, 'baby drama?' 'Or baby-mama drama, I should say,' I said, another odd look from Steve. I told him, 'never mind...it doesn't matter. Nobody's here. Should I be stocking?' Not much later, Steve comes back out with a paper brown bag and asks, 'Did you see who put this on my desk?'

Carl, the other hand, says, 'No, why? What is it?' Steve says, 'I don't know. It says it's from 'J.'" I asked, 'Jack Daniels?' Steve said, 'Oh, he is just "Jack" to me.' Carl said, 'And you don't you know what it is?' Steve replied, 'Well, now I hope it's liquor.' I think I said too much, or too little. I tend to confuse the two. You knew what I meant. 'Sole,' Steve said. 'Dover sole,' I said. 'Mr. Drake,' he said, 'I haven't had a Dover sole for a the longest time. Not one I'd sell you. Lemon sole,' he said, and something-grayling did he say? Well, that's the way it is. And so we go on.

"No," the old man said after a moment. "Kathy, your mother, my ex-wife, was very fond of fish. When we were first married, and so forth, we came down from Buffalo—How old are you kids? Twenty-eight? Valerie, you're not twenty-eight!—it was just before you were born, and my wife said, 'I'd give anything for lobstah.' The bus didn't get in till eight, but we were green and irresponsible in those days, hence why I married your mother. I was ready to kick everything on the planet over. Anyway. So we went across the road and your mother said, 'Come on—'"

Valerie interrupted, picking up the story. "And a bus driver leaned out of his cab and said, 'Watch out, lady. Babies are scarce this year.' Mom told me."

"I'm sure she didn't," said the old gentleman, blushing a little. "Only your father's imagina-

tion could do that, I can assure you that much.”

“But then what happened?” asked Simon.

“And there was a little place, a real Boston fish place. I forget the name—and we had a grand old lobster each, maybe I had a couple dozen; I don’t remember now, I couldn’t say. And I suppose we must have followed it with lemon sole. They had nice duck too those days.”

“And that’s how I was born. Great story,” Valerie said. “More vegetables, Dad?”

“Me? Oh, no. I don’t eat what I used to. It’s still working all the time, and these new teeth of mine—I’ve had a lot of trouble with them. Don’t give me any more. I don’t mind a couple of slices—well, just another. And some fat. That’s what I feel like sometimes. You go home and you get to the house, and it’s dark. And it’s empty. Even with Fergie here, just sometimes when you’re out on the golf course it’s all too quiet.”

“I think you should go where you know and remember best. Where was that one beach?” asked Rosalie.

The old gentleman put his knife and fork down. “Bonita,” he said, in a stern voice, raising his chin. “I’d go there, but who knows what it’s like anymore.” He said this with indignation and contempt.

“But that woman, the Biscuit lady, Bisquick?” said his son.

“Biscuit? Bisco. I’ll tell you what happened with that one. When I was ten years old, the first real book I’d ever read was *Jude the Obscure*. We were on vacation in Del Ray that year, in some pink stucco condominium getup with a water front view. Every morning, just before noon, I’d go out in the pool in the middle of the courtyard which all the condos faced, and went swimming, sometimes with or without my seven-maybe-six year old brother, depending on whether he was going to get up that day.

Fairly early on in our two-week stay, I’d met a girl in the pool who looked to be about the same age as me. Her name was Jennifer Bisco, she was from New Jersey. Her uncle had a construction company here and he was currently working on the water front mansion for a tennis player and his actress wife. We even walked down the beach one day and could see the construction from where we were standing. It looked empty and about as big a hotel, but it didn’t seem impressive yet. Jennifer Bisco was a swimmer herself, she had taken lessons in synchronized swimming as well. She’d try to show me a couple routines, and I’d imitate her and we’d spend hours like this in the pool. Eventually, when Jennifer Bisco wasn’t around, I’d get my brother to figure out the routine and we’d try to do it unison, even though his lungs usually bottomed out and he had to come up to the surface before I did.”

He stared and then suddenly he turned to his future daughter-in-law and said, in another voice, “Those sandwiches I won’t forget. Tuna, right? You remember?” He wagged a finger at Rosalie. “Rosalie, your mother is a wonder at the tuna sandwiches. It was the first time I’d met someone who knew how to make them just the way I always ate them. The day Kathy signed the papers, you remember she came down and made tuna sandwiches. What is the secret? I know she won’t tell. Something was different with the mayo. I think she added relish.”

He paused and his eyes grew vaguer. “No,” he went on, “I don’t know what I’ll do. I think I might go to Bonita and look around. I will get a list of houses, and put my furniture in store. I could live with your cousin Andre, or his sister down there. Nevermind. They have their own lives. I want my independence, with Fergie. Life is beginning for me, for us—that is what I feel. We probably should travel more while we still can. There was a place in Alaska I saw. They only have

those earthquakes so often. My father's friend Ace had a house in Juneau. They wanted just ten thousand for it when they sold it. That could've suited me."

"Just ten thousand? The cost of living there is so high though," said Robert, in alarm. "You'd be best in Bonita. I think Fergie would like the warmer weather."

"Oh," said the old gentleman sharply. "Fergie wouldn't mind a cruise at least."

"Where would you get the money to move though?" said Robert.

"I should raise it," said the old gentleman.

"Raise it? How?" asked Simon.

"That's just it," said the old man cheerfully. "I honestly don't know. Where there's a will, there's a way. Through Robert, or even you, Valerie."

Brother and sister looked down the table at each other in consternation.

"How about I get the coffee started up and we hit some pig?" Valerie said.

"When are you and Simon going to think about children?" the old gentleman said as he got up to clear the table. "You've been married for a year now, but I think it's better not to do things the way Kathy and I did. We waited so long to have children, and now I'd be lucky if I even got to see grandchildren in my lifetime." He shifted his weight in the doorway as he handed three dinner plates to Valerie. She looked at him balefully. "I know you said before you got married that you wanted to wait for a while. I'm just saying, look at Robert and Rosalie. They're young, they can afford to wait. But with everyone waiting, I've got nothing to look forward to anymore."

"Back out to the living room, Dad," Valerie said. "I'm coming in a minute with the peppermint pig."

Valerie came out, while Robert and Rosalie came in to put their plates away.

"Living with Andre? And Fergie?" Robert said.

"Sh-h-h," said his fiancée. "It's a day-dream."

"But what are we going to do?"

In a few minutes, they walked out with coffee. The old gentleman was sitting down in the La-Z-Boy, with his sweater undone and his fingers criss-crossing over the coffee mug. He eyed the pink pig in its plastic wrapper.

"I've been wondering," the old gentleman said as the pig started to pass around. "How long has it been since we started this? I want to say since Sarasota. Right? I know we didn't do it in Burlington."

Robert sat on the sofa and leaned on the arm close to his father. He gave the pig a gentle whack with the silver hammer and gave the red bag to his father.

"Is there a lot of sugar in this, Valerie? Thank you," the old man said. He gave the peppermint pig a hefty crack, opened the velvet bag, and then spilled the contents out on the table. "I'll just have a nice big piece."



Hindsight
Silver Gelatin Print
Melissa Weiss

Barium

When he handed me the stainless-steel beaker,
I didn't ask questions; sitting in the soft-lit room, I took the beaker
from his hand and tilted it to my lips: a foaming white milkshake
of liquid metal. I swallowed as quickly as I could, shoving my tongue
against my throat and hoping the substance would follow.

Would it hurt me? What did it mean to drink barium? I couldn't remember
its properties—was this the element, lightweight and versatile,
used in power plants and neon lights? It didn't matter; the doctor
had left the room. *Hold your breath at the beep*, he said over the speaker.
I was flat against the table. I closed my eyes, trying to feel inside for the metal.

Meanwhile, behind a wall, the doctor watched the barium's progress
on a TV screen. My organs were illuminated, and he could see them perfectly:
that crisp, white-on-midnight image. He pointed with the stub of a pencil
to the exact location of the moving metal; ignoring the surrounding space,
he traced my esophagus, my stomach, searching for holes.

Weeks before, I'd settled on *palpitations of the heart*, a romantic diagnosis—
I didn't care if something else was wrong; I welcomed the intermittent flutter
on the left side of my chest, a reminder that I was still here and alive:
I'd straighten up and press my hand into it, wanting to feel the flutter from the out-
side;
or, wanting to eliminate the source: it would pop, or squish flat; or disperse, disappear.

The doctor returned—*the x-ray is fine; everything looks normal; you can go*.
I didn't question him, but the barium was fresh in my system, and I wanted
to know what he knew: not the source of the palpitations, but the insight
brought about by liquid metal: how fast it moves, or slow: how subtly
it overtakes the body: how it infiltrates the organs: makes them glow.

Phoebe Westwood

The Night Before

Michael Gutschell

“So, what do you want to do for our last night in the world as we know it?” Kristen shook a can of Pringles onto my plaid comforter.

I reached for a couple. “Well, we could always rob a bank.” Then my mind took off— whoosh! Kristen and me: a modern day Bonnie and Clyde. But Kristen would be the biggest, butchest, and blackest Bonnie ever. And I, of course, would be the most aristocratic Clyde. Now, what does one wear to perform a bank robbery? I could wear Kristen’s fedora, and of course we’d need handkerchiefs over our faces, or is that too Western? We could steal a convertible, hey, like Thelma and—

“That’s so lame.”

Crush. My dream of Thelma and Clyde in cowboy costumes and convertibles went up in a cinematic puff of smoke.

“The blonde bob wouldn’t work for you, anyway,” I tossed my head.

“If we’re going to spend next week in God-forsaken Nicaragua,” she went on, ignoring me, “We should do something that we can only do here. We could rob a bank in Nicaragua.” She gave me her “Poor mortal” look, the one where she tucks her chin into the folds of her neck and squints her eyes.

“Fine. What’s your idea?”

I knew I had said the magic words. Kristen sat up straight and brushed off her T-shirt.

“Well,” she began, “I was thinking we’d walk around the CCC campus.”

“Oooo!” I squealed. CCC = the Cleveland Community College. The school Kristen and I would attend if we ever decided to go to college. I knew when Kristen said we would “walk around” we’d do quite a bit more than walk. She always had fun ideas, which was what made us such great friends. She had the creativity, and I followed them through with full enthusiasm. Basically, I was the cute, if not bright, sidekick to her genius.

“So dress in your most outrageous get-up and I’ll meet you back here at eight. Now I gotta go to Paula’s, Mom needs supplies,” Kristen heaved herself off the bed and bent over with a grunt to retrieve her sneakers. I sat cross-legged on the bed chewing Pringles and watched her. When she was finished, she sat up wheezing and brushed a hand over her forehead, wiping the sweat off. “I’ll give you a call later,” she said as she left, floorboards creaking.

“Tootles,” I listened to her huff and puff down the stairs and out the door. I sighed and flopped full-length on my bed, groaning when I heard the crunch of Pringles underneath me. I’ll clean ‘em up later. I snuggled until I was comfortable, grinding the chips into dust on my comforter.

Everyone should have a friend like Kristen. We’d met freshman year in high school and been devoted friends ever since. We had helped each other through boyfriends/girlfriends (we both had had our share of each), parents, homework, fashion dilemmas, and basically all the emotional turmoil that comes from being a teenager. I had a crisis for every year of high school (well, practically every *month* of high school). There was my freshman Where-Do-I-Sit-During-Lunch Crisis, my sophomore Spiritual Crisis, my junior Sexuality Crisis, and then finally the What-Am-I-Going-to-Do-with-My-Life Crisis.

During my Spiritual Crisis, I started attending a church called St. Martha’s in downtown

Cleveland. Kristen came along for moral support, and we both ended up staying. The church did a lot of “outreach work,” and tomorrow we would pack up and go, with our youth group, to Nicaragua. We were going to run a day camp for children. None of us really knew much about Nicaragua. “Are we going to Africa?” Ginger, a junior in high school (also sorta my girlfriend) had asked. The others laughed, and I joined in, shaking my head at poor Ginger’s ignorance, but in reality I was wondering the same thing. If not Africa, then where?

“Central America,” Chris had answered.

“Close to Brazil?” she asked. I had to hand it to her, she wasn’t afraid of asking questions.

“Um. No. That’s South America.” Chris pulled out a map and showed us where we’d be going: A little country between Honduras and Costa Rica.

“Costa Rica is a hot tourist spot. It has beautiful beaches and volcanoes,” he explained, “And Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Central America.”

So we were off to a country in between beauty and poverty.

But before we went, Kristen and I were going to have one last hoorah in Cleveland. I jumped out of bed, brushing the Pringles off, and opened my closet. I have a sequined blue dress and tall cotton-candy blue beehive reserved for outings with Kristen. I knew what she would wear as an “outrageous getup.” She would dress in a gray pinstripe suit and her fedora, and thus dressed we would terrorize CCC.

“We’re ordering pizza tonight.”

I jumped at my sister’s voice. “Can’t you knock, or let me know you’re there?” I threw the dress and wig on my bed, forgetting again about the Pringles.

Julie stood in the doorway as if posing for a photo shoot. My sister turned out gorgeous, which you wouldn’t have guessed when she was a scrawny kid with thin hair. People used to think we were twin brothers. She had brown hair with tawny highlights, hazel eyes, and while we weren’t looking she had filled out. Boys went crazy over her, which in turn drove my family insane.

“Going out with Kristen?” I detected the slight distaste in her voice. She didn’t like Kristen too much, thought she was “too coarse,” an opinion most likely copied from our mother. I liked that raw quality to Kristen: it’s what made her different.

“Yeah, but I can be back for pizza.”

“Okay. Jon’s coming over, and so is Tess. So if you want, you could invite Ginger,” she disappeared from the doorway.

I groaned inside. Jon was Julie’s boyfriend, a tortured soul, whose passions seemed to be partying and Jesus, an odd mix, if you ask me. I went to church to sing and have fun with my friends; he went to cry during Confession. And Communion. And the Prayers of the People. And just about every part of the service. “He has a deep connection with his spirituality: You wouldn’t understand *depth*,” Julie would say. At least I didn’t always look like I was experiencing stomach pains. Tess was my Dad’s girlfriend of maybe seven years. A pretty, young brunette, whose winning quality was her husky radio host voice. Mom doesn’t mind Tess, I guess, I’ve never heard her complain. Sometimes I wonder why she doesn’t date anyone. And even if Tess doesn’t bother her, it’s not exactly a picnic when we’re all together. And poor Ginger is clueless to the whole thing, and laughs too loudly and is obviously friendly. She kind of reminds me of a dog: mindlessly optimistic. “Things *always* get better!” she chirps with the wisdom of a child who has experienced nothing.

Weary with the prospect of spending an evening with my family's significant others, I went to the bathroom to shave my legs.

When eight o'clock rolled around I was sitting in the couch in the living room, one leg over the other, jiggling a red heel. Dad's gold Lexus purred into the driveway before Kristen had arrived, which is what I was dreading. He came in and took one look at me. "Oh, God. Gavin, do you have to?"

I rolled my eyes, "I'm just going out with—"

"Kristen, I know," he rubbed his forehead. "People will talk."

"Yeah?" my voice was a little too loud, a little too defensive.

"I just don't want you to get hurt."

"I know, Dad. Thanks for your concern." It would have been a perfect time for Kristen to pull up, but she didn't. We paused in silence, him still standing there with the mail in one hand, his forehead in the other. I sat on the couch, foot jiggling furiously.

"Did Julie tell you about tonight?"

"Yeah."

He nodded and shuffled to the kitchen. I felt so stupid, sitting there with a beehive and a dress and heels, my legs shaved and face done up. I wished Kristen would come already. Finally her battered car chugged in front of the house. I hopped up and clicked out the door.

I sashayed to the car. Inside, Kristen flashed a smile and thumbs up, and I felt instantly confident. I tossed my head into the air, beehive quivering, and put a hand on a hip. Then I saw him.

Robbie.

Robbie was in the backseat. And he wasn't dressed up. Poor stupid Robbie, he's not horrid or anything, he's just awkward. He's plain, clumsy, skinny, dorky, and doesn't have many social skills. Plus he's hopelessly in love with me. It wouldn't be so embarrassing if we didn't look like we were brothers. Of course, I'm much better-looking. Kristen must've seen my face drop because she started laughing. I flung open the door. "Well. What a surprise. How are you, Robbie?"

He smiled sheepishly. "Fine, thanks. How're you?"

I ignored his question and slid into the front seat, giving Kristen my "Look." My "If I could pulverize you now, I would," look.

"Robbie called and wanted to do something tonight, seeing as tomorrow we'll be out of the country," Kristen said, biting back a laugh and starting her car.

I glared at her. "Even though we'll be out of the country *with* him."

"Hey, you don't have to talk about me like I'm not in the car!"

I stared straight in front of me. "So what are we going to do?" I said after a moment, as if it were a great chore for me to be there. Kristen smacked me and adjusted her fedora.

"I was thinking we'd drop in at the Rocket Star Café."

“Oh, I like that place!” Robbie said enthusiastically. “This one time I went there, this guy, oh, it was so funny, he—oh man, this’ll crack you up—” it was apparently cracking him up, he was having trouble finishing. “He, well, he ordered a quiche, and when he got it he was like: ‘I didn’t order this!’ And the lady was like: ‘Yeah you did,’ and he was like: ‘No, no, I know I didn’t,’ and then—”

“So Jon and Tess are coming over for pizza,” I said to Kristen.

“Oh, boy, that’ll be fun. Is Ginger coming over?”

Robbie went quiet, leaning forward. I shot him my “Look” and he sank back.

“I haven’t decided yet.” I snapped down the mirror and made sure my hair was tucked underneath the wig, even though I knew it was.

“Maybe you shouldn’t invite her,” Kristen swerved around a car moving too slowly for her, honking. “Move it, granny!” she yelled out the window, before turning back to me. “Other than the fact that she’s vapid and not right for you, it would make your Mom more uncomfortable, to be the only one without someone.”

“Gee, thanks. You know, I like hanging out with Ginger. We have a lot in common.”

Kristen rolled her eyes.

“We do! We both like show tunes, and singing, and oh! I love her voice. She sounds like—”

“Ella Fitzgerald. I know, I’ve heard it all before, and I maintain that no one, especially not some little white girl, can sound like Ella.” With that, she punched play and Ella crooned from the speakers.

“Ahhh!” we melted together.

“Her songs are too long,” Robbie said, and we both ignored him.

*

When we got to CCC, we parked in a handicap spot and flung the doors open. I love stepping out of a car wearing heels. I can see how the camera would capture it, focusing on my red high heels and moving up my body, taking in my full glory. Robbie fell out beside me.

“Wow, you look good.”

I gave him an obliging smile and gave Kristen my arm. We walked proudly towards the café, looking around like tourists. Robbie trotted behind us like our eager child, or dog. CCC, even though it’s a community college, has a nice campus. It has green grass and lots of weeping willows. The buildings are all gray, but whatever. As long as you don’t actually have to attend classes, it’s a fun campus to hang out in. Three jock block heads came out of a building, laughing. They stopped when they saw us and I felt myself tighten up. My hands got sweaty then cold, and my teeth started chattering. Kristen tightened her grip on my arm, out of comfort, not fear. Kristen wasn’t afraid of anything.

“Check out the freaks,” one guy said loudly, and the others laughed.

“Halloween’s over, fags,” another said.

“Fuck a pig,” Kristen growled, and the boys looked taken aback. We were now facing them on the path, and Kristen stopped. Let’s just go around, I pleaded, hoping she would catch my thought. “Out of our way, please,” she said. Her eyes weren’t asking, they were saying “Now.”

One lunged and grabbed my arm. I couldn’t help but scream, and they laughed. He reached for my wig, and I cringed, squeezing my eyes shut. Please God, don’t let them hurt me.

Then there was the thud of flesh connecting at high velocity and he was no longer holding onto me. I opened my eyes and he was holding his jaw. Kristen stood in front of me, daring the others to come closer. Her sheer size coupled with her evil eyes did the trick, and they broke to let us pass. “C’mon,” she said, and led us through, like Moses after parting the Red Sea.

“Burn in Hell!” the first one yelled after us.

“Cowards,” Kristen muttered, marching forward. Shaking, Robbie and I followed our Moses.

*

We ordered ice cream sodas and sat in a booth. The red plastic creaking was the only sound as we adjusted ourselves. Robbie dragged his fork across the table. I sat with my eyes down; I didn’t want to see everyone looking at us.

“C’mon, guys, don’t be pathetic. They were just a couple of jerks.”

I looked up at Kristen. “I wouldn’t mind them calling us names, but what if they had hurt us?”

She rolled her eyes, and my temper flared. “Don’t act like I’m being stupid! These things happen!”

“Puh-lease. This isn’t the Laramie Project, Gavin.”

I slammed my hand on the booth and stood up. Kristen looked at me with her “Poor mortal” face until I sat down again. There was nowhere to go.

“Your sodas,” the glasses clinked on the table as the waitress unloaded her tray. “I like your hair,” she said to me, smiling. “Is there anything else I can get for you?”

Kristen shook her head. I took my glass between my hands and sipped from the straw. We drank in silence for a few minutes.

“You gotta do what you wanna do,” Kristen said finally. “And screw the rest.” A typical Kristen sentiment. She tapped her fedora forward and sat back, like an old-time detective.

Robbie lifted his glass. “A toast! I love toasts. To doing what you want!”

“To defining ourselves!” Kristen contributed.

“Fine,” I grumbled, trying to stifle a smile, and lifted my ice cream soda.

“Keep eye contact or you’ll have five years of bad sex,” Kristen warned, and laughing, we all struggled to maintain eye contact.

“Nicaragua won’t know what hit ‘em,” I smiled.

Things Taken For Granted

Without pot smoke sweat, there is no laundry.
Without drink there is reality.
I've found a three-leaf clover beside
the field of fours.
Does it stink like the rest of plant-
life, or does it blend in with the air?
The air is bald people's hair.
The wind is dead people's sins.
The sun is not God's eye, but it
was shining, so I capitalized
the name just to be safe.
The clouds were apparently taught
by Johnny Cash to cover the sky,
but no one taught
them why they
had to do it.

Without cops, there is no chase.
With no chase there is no reward.
There is no combo of hand motion
that gives me a rise when I
didn't have to work for it,
unless it's a surprise.
There is no pitchfork without rhythm
but there's rhythm without blues,
there can't be colors without hues
except the ones you see in dark.
I've scolded sense of scent
for showing my unknowns,
but I never thanked it
for saving my nose
from the banality
of no taste.

Tim King

Mourning Dream

Summer sunlight sifting in from somewhere
bounced off our skin. Arms bumped against
arms in little fidgets, wanting to get out of there,
wanting to start the meeting. I don't remember when
I realized these were all your friends: before or after
my vision narrowed to the woman sitting
across from me, who said you were dead, then clicked her
pen and tried to get on with the meeting.

I grabbed for the arm next to me: some man I knew;
I couldn't figure out who, but decades of sun
were soaked into his skin and I needed only to
latch onto his arm to keep from falling, like the one
night I kept waking up scared and cold: after some time
I remembered you were there, then: *I am me...this is mine.*

Phoebe Westwood

Cemented Music for Cloisters and Taverns

Draft Nine

I am a loosely tied shoe walking
Over a crack in the cement after
Reason but well before rationale.

Rather, excess and absence.

Recollections of malt liquor
Guzzled in varying amounts
And those two narcotics
Dependable and always sufficient
Seldom hollow.
My notepad and I never felt so alive as we inaugurated
That avenue charted so haphazardly from Charm City to Napa Valley
Proudly leading us nowhere.

High in the Sierras we acted out
Scenes from innumerable plays
Actions and words exhausted by a history
Of which I was adamantly opposed.

You taught me of ambiguity and clarity,
Their rivalry and interdependence.

Do you recall that river,
That cool water which we rested upon?
It was quite blue. Binghamton, big business, abandonment.
I think it was precisely this feeling that facilitated our union.

Words were seldom spoken on that picnic bench
Legs crossed, designs devoid.
We wondered why it was that when we wanted fresh air
All we could taste was cigarette. You replied
With a vague consortium of potato and cheese, ignored
My eyes fixated on my left hand.

Under the pavilion she stood with her eyes
On the horizon. We asked ourselves why
The sky doesn't speak.

I haven't heard from you since.



Reading Comprehension

Silver Gelatin Print

Emily Kimak

Hunger

Michelle Zahler

The walls were yellow. It was an ugly color, like mustard, but she knew why they had chosen it. For the same reason the golden arches at McDonalds were yellow. For the same reason the tables at her school cafeteria were yellow. The color was supposed to promote hunger.

We'll see about that, she thought smugly as she followed the counselor down the narrow hallway to the fourth door on the left, which stood ajar. Her plastic nametag flashed Rachel as she stood aside to let her enter. "Your roommate is in session now," she said with a sympathetic smile. "She should be back in twenty minutes. In the meantime, the cafeteria is open if you want to get something to eat."

Jenn shook her head. "I'm not hungry."

"If I had a nickel for every time I heard that," Rachel muttered as she spun on her heel and headed back the way she had come, her short ponytail bobbing.

Jenn put her bag on the only available bed, the one by the window, and stared at it, reluctant to unpack. Unpacking was something you did when you were planning on staying for a long time. But then she remembered that her dad had dropped the bag trying to unload the car. Everything inside was tumbled. She couldn't leave it such a mess.

She was folding her last pair of jeans and tucking them into the drawer under her bed when her roommate appeared. Her blond hair was tied in twin braids and her green eyes twinkled with amusement as she smiled at Jenn. "Welcome to the loony bin," she said, extending her hand. "I'm Jodi."

"Jenn," she replied, shaking her hand. The girl's wrist glittered with a red beaded bracelet.

She collapsed into the swivel chair at the desk and spun around lazily. "So you're the new kid," she mused, glancing at Jenn. She laughed at her blank expression. "Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

"I won't be here long," Jenn said.

Jodi smiled. "That's what they all say."

Rachel came striding into the room holding a tiny plastic cup and a glass of water. "Time for your medication," she announced, handing the cup to Jodi.

"I already took it," Jodi answered.

Rachel sighed, as if she was used to this kind of thing. "You did not."

"That never works," she said, accepting the plastic cup. She dumped two white pills into her hand and tossed them in her mouth. Then she took the glass of water and swallowed nearly half of it. Rachel crossed her arms, apparently not completely satisfied. Jodi opened her mouth wide and stuck out her tongue. As Rachel bent to peer into her mouth, Jenn was reminded of the time she went to Sea World and the dolphin trainer had looked into the dolphin's mouth to see if she had eaten the fish.

“Fine,” Rachel said, standing back up and leaving quickly.

When they could no longer hear her footsteps, Jodi cupped her hand under her mouth and spit out the two pills. “The trick is to put them under your tongue,” she said as she flicked them into the trashcan under the desk.

“What are they for?” Jenn asked.

“Depression,” Jodi replied, lacing her fingers behind her head and spinning around in her chair. “Do I seem depressed to you?”

Jenn had no good answer, so she asked instead, “How long have you been here?”

“Four months,” she said casually.

“They can keep you here that long?”

“They can keep you here as long as they want,” Jodi scoffed. “The rules vary depending on the severity of your case, but usually they send you home when you gain twenty pounds.”

“And if you don’t?”

“Then you stay here until you gain twenty pounds or until you die, whichever comes first. But if you lose ten pounds, they put you on IV.”

“Can they do that?” Jenn asked. “It’s not a hospital.”

“They need your parent’s permission.” Jodi shrugged. “And they usually get it. Shani has been on IV for weeks. She just refuses to eat on her own.”

“So she just stays in bed for days on end?” Jenn was finding it hard to imagine someone so sick that she had to be force-fed.

“Nah, she carts it around with her. But don’t stare when you see her. She hates that.”

“I bet,” Jenn muttered, turning to look out the window, wondering what the hell she was doing here. She wasn’t sick, not like these people were.

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” Jodi said. She grinned. “We’re not all crackpots, I promise.”

Rachel poked her head in the doorway. “It’s time for group,” she said, and disappeared.

“What’s that?” Jenn asked as she followed Jodi out of their room and down the hall towards the lobby.

“Group therapy,” Jodi explained. “It’s fascinating. I like to make up stories about repressed memories.”

She must be a dancer, Jenn thought, noticing how Jodi walked with her back straight and her feet pointed out. They passed the lobby and continued down a wide corridor that smelled like food. The smell made Jenn nauseous.

“It’s no accident that the lounge is across the hall from the cafeteria,” Jodi said, gesturing to the large room filled with long tables to their left. She pushed open the heavy wooden door to their right. “They hope that everyone will come out of therapy and be ready to eat. The cafeteria is open all day, as if anyone would go in there without being forced. But I guess the last thing they want to do is limit our opportunity to eat.”

The lounge was covered in gray threadbare carpet, over which were two dozen chairs arranged in a circle. As the rest of the girls filed in and took their seats, Jenn began to feel as if she were at an AA meeting. She sat down reluctantly.

Rachel came in surrounded by an air of self-importance, holding her clipboard as if it was a sacred text. She sat in one of the chairs and scanned the room to make sure all of the other seats were filled. Almost as soon as she started talking, Jenn tuned out. She was more interested in the other patients than in what Rachel had to say.

She spotted Shani immediately; she was the only one with an IV stand on wheels. The plastic bag that hung from it was attached to a long tube that ran into the back of the girl’s hand. She was dangerously thin, as were most of the girls, but her sunken eyes and thinning hair set her apart. Jenn doubted she would ever recover. If she were to define the point of no return, Shani would have been the definition.

The other patients all looked the same to Jenn. The large bony hands, sharply defined jaw lines, and prominent collar bones blurred together until she felt as if she was staring at a row of Barbie dolls on a shelf. She wondered how long they had been here, and why none of them seemed to be making any progress. When she noticed several of the girls bouncing their knees, she almost laughed because she knew what they were thinking: fidgeting burns calories. She couldn’t help but wonder how she had come to be in the same room with them.

“Jennifer,” Rachel said.

“It’s Jenn,” she said, snapping to attention. Everyone was looking at her, and she suspected that Rachel had called her name more than once.

“How does that make you feel?” Rachel asked, leaning forward, her pen poised over her clipboard.

“Indifferent,” Jenn said, since it was obvious she hadn’t been listening. She wasn’t even sure who had been speaking. Muffled laughter followed her comment.

“Jenn,” Rachel began, irritated. “The fundamental agreement of group therapy is that everyone will listen to everyone else.”

“Rachel,” Jodi piped up, tapping her watch. “It’s six o’clock.” Jenn had completely lost track of how long she had been sitting there, not listening to people. The seats emptied almost immediately, and Rachel led them across the hall to the cafeteria. The chairs here were yellow, and the smell of food was almost overpowering. The girls all sat at one long table, and Rachel sat at the head of the table. Jenn should have realized that their meals would be supervised, but she was surprised nevertheless. Had she regressed back to early childhood, when she couldn’t even be trusted to feed herself?

A tray had been set at each place, and the five food groups stared her in the face. Chicken cut into tiny squares, an apple, cucumber slices, rice, and a carton of 2% milk. Why couldn’t they

at least have skim milk? The sight of that tray in combination with the smell of every food that had ever been cooked in the cafeteria clouded her mind and made her head swim.

“Jenn,” Rachel said, taking a sip of her milk. “Can I see you take a bite?”

“I’m not hungry,” she replied, pushing the tray away from her.

“If you eat,” the girl to her left said, staring at her with dark eyes. “They let you have phone privileges.” Her tongue was pierced. Jenn suspected that she had done it on purpose, to make eating uncomfortable.

“I’m not hungry,” Jenn repeated.

“That’s your answer to everything,” Rachel quipped.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jenn noticed faint movement under the table. When she glanced to her right, away from Rachel, she noticed the girl next to her holding a small bottle in her lap. The girl passed the bottle under the table to the girl next to her, who passed it to Jodi. Without blinking, Jodi accepted the bottle and slipped it into her pocket. Jenn looked at Rachel, who was pouring ketchup over her rice.

“If you lose anymore weight, Megan,” Rachel said. “You’re going on IV.”

“I’m eating,” the girl across from Jenn responded. She reached into the pocket of her jeans and, to the delight of the girls around the table, withdrew a pair of chopsticks. Rachel was not amused.

“Megan,” she said.

“Do you want me to eat or not?” Megan snapped. Rachel fell silent, and the girls nodded in approval as Megan struggled with the chopsticks. The others picked at their food, some eating, some just moving the food around on their trays.

Back in their room, Jodi closed the door and took the bottle from her pocket. Without glancing at it, she tucked it inside one of her pillowcases. She was smoothing the blanket out over it when she noticed Jenn staring at her. “Ipecac,” she said in response to Jenn’s unspoken question. “It makes you sick.”

“I know what Ipecac is,” Jenn said. “It can kill you.”

Jodi waved her hand dismissively. “That’s just a myth.”

After a pause Jenn asked, “How did you end up here?” Jodi looked at her and raised an eyebrow. “You seem normal enough.”

“Is that a compliment?” Jodi asked, peering at her.

“You’re right, you don’t seem depressed. So what started this whole thing?”

“My ballet instructor told me I was fat.”

Jenn sighed. “She did not.”

“She implied it. And she’s not the only one. When I got accepted into Juilliard, the judges told me that I needed to lose weight before I started the fall term. So I did.”

“But you’re not at Juilliard.”

“Take that up with my parents,” Jodi snapped. “I was ready to start school, but they sent me here instead.” She sighed, dropping onto the edge of her bed. “Now I’ll never be a dancer.”

“You can still be a dancer,” Jenn said.

“No I can’t. I haven’t had a real ballet class in three years, I’m out of shape, I’ve wasted my best dancing years in this place—”

“Three years?” Jenn interrupted.

Jodi smiled at her slip. “Yeah, I’ve been here three years, off and on,” she admitted. She laughed suddenly. “And you thought four months was a long time!” Jenn sat on her bed, trying to imagine what it would be like to spend three years here, under constant supervision, surrounded by girls whose every thought and action was determined by how many calories they had consumed that day. “It seems like an endless cycle,” Jodi said. “I get discharged when I reach my target weight, and a few months later, I relapse and find myself right back here. Rinse and repeat.”

“Have you ever thought about...not relapsing?”

“It’s not that easy.” There was a pause. “As long as we’re playing shrink,” Jodi said. “What brings you here?”

Jenn shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“You can do better than that. When did you stop eating?”

To her own surprise, Jenn actually remembered the first time she had refused food even when she was hungry. “At my sister’s funeral.”

“How did she die?” Jodi asked without an iota of sympathy in her voice, for which Jenn was grateful. She hated it when people tried to express their condolences; it always sounded insincere.

“She died in a fire. She was having a sleepover party at our house and one of her friends was afraid of the dark, so they lit a candle. It fell over while they were sleeping. The fire marshal thought they probably never even woke up.”

“Where were you?”

“I was there,” Jenn said bitterly. “I was supposed to be watching them. Some babysitter, huh? I don’t even remember leaving the house.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Jodi reasoned.

“Then whose fault was it?”

“It was an accident.” Jenn rolled her eyes in response. “You did the best you could.”

“The best I could?” Jenn stared at her incredulously. “I saved the dog. The *dog*, Jodi. My little sister and four other ten-year-olds were in the basement, and I grabbed the dog and bailed out. I forgot about them.”

Jodi leaned forward. “When did this happen?”

“Five years ago.”

“You were thirteen years old. Of course you panicked. I’m sure nobody expected you to rescue your sister and her friends from a fire.”

“Fourteen.”

“What?”

“I was fourteen.”

“My point is, you were just a kid.” She paused. “And your parents are not disappointed in you.”

Jenn blinked. “I didn’t say they were.”

“You were thinking it.” Jodi smiled knowingly. “I recognize the lost-little-girl eyes.”

* * *

In the middle of the night, Jenn woke up facing an empty bed. The sheets on Jodi’s bed had been thrown back and the lump in the pillowcase where the Ipecac had been was gone. She slipped out of bed and cautiously opened the bedroom door, squinting against the sudden brightness of the lit hallway. She strode down the hall towards the bathroom, but when she pressed her ear to the door, she heard nothing.

She knocked lightly. “Jodi?” she called softly. When there was no response, she felt her anxiety rise to panic. She knocked and called again, louder this time, and still there was no answer. Soon she was yanking on the locked handle and pounding on the door, shouting for Jodi to come out. Doors throughout the hall started to open, anxious faces appearing in the doorways. The door at the end of the hall swung open and Rachel came flying down the hallway towards the bathroom.

“Jodi’s in the bathroom,” Jenn said, stepping back as Rachel fumbled on a chain for the right key. “Make her come out.”

Rachel found the proper key and the bathroom door opened. Jodi was lying on the tiled floor, curled in the fetal position, clutching the bottle of Ipecac in her bony hand.

* * *

It was almost dawn when the ambulance came to take Jodi away. Two paramedics had arrived, but it only took one of them to lift Jodi’s slight weight and lay her on the stretcher. Jenn stared at the covered body as it rolled past. She didn’t want to end up like that. So she turned to

I Come From

I come from women.
Mujeres of all shapes and sizes.

I come from
People displaced to unfertile lands
Creating poverty, creating bands
Of caravans that move through colors.

I come from the long migration
Along the Caribbean coast of Central America
That strip of land
You know, the one with the black Jesus
With the *merengue* and *marimba*
That traveled on the ships from Capo Verde
Not from Spain.
I come from the falsification of history
And I carry its pain.

I come from
¡Esque te dije!
Hands on hips
“This is my kitchen”
Tamales dulces
Wrapped in dark green banana leaves
A forced fusion of
Indigenous food and
The colonialist’s language
Kind of like me.
They come with heavy dancing
Hips and gigantic breasts that
Suffocate you when they hug you.
Cooking and fighting and laughing
While the oil is salpicando off the pan onto my skin
And I flinch like I’m little again
Because in this kitchen, I am.

I am responsible for 800 miles of
State of the art fences.
And of a generation empowered by women.
Freedom fighters in laundry mats
And construction hats

I come from being criticized for
Being Americanized:
Bueno niña,
Estas americanizada
But I am second generation displacement
On an unfamiliar transit through women
Black haired transit
Of fifteen years in America
And no English.

I come from women.

Because only a mother could wake up to hear me crying
When I know I wasn't making any sound
Crying into my sheets
Does she know it's over a man?

But I come from hope
I come from hands
That can tear down any fence with one
And rebuild economies with the other.
I come from warriors during the day
And song singers at night.
I come from "it's latin curves, you're not fat"
And only a woman could've given me all that

Anna Lapera

Coastal City

Ali said, "If not, my spirit will find
you," and I looked back at my window
just up the hill from the sand.
I once wanted to avoid him, but I was leaving
the next day and I looked at my hands
and said "I'll see you in the morning."

I wasn't sure that was true but I knew by morning.
I didn't doubt Ali, he knew how to be found,
and he wouldn't let me go before handing
me the photo he promised as a window
to him, to his town, so that when I left
I'd still think my shoes were full of sand.

Everywhere we went we crossed sand;
I would see it in the air next morning.
I walked home under the moon to pack, leaving
out that tiny box I later gave him; he found
small treasure inside, secret as a curtained window,
and wore the box on a string, hiding it with his hand.

I had no clock, no hands
to tell me when to wake up, but all that sand
must have been an hourglass, and I didn't need to uncover the window
to be on time, didn't need the pink lights of six in the morning.
Ali said "I'll wake you" and I hadn't thought I'd find
him but I couldn't lie and leave.

I opened the door to leave,
with that strange box in my hand,
and almost expected to find
him on the step, but he'd never go beyond the sand.
I walked slowly through the morning,
before anyone had opened their windows

against the coming heat. I saw a smile like an open window
as I approached. It was the only way to leave.
Ali appeared near the water as sure as morning,
nodded to me, photograph in hand,
picked up a shell from the sand,
everything, each other, rare finds.

He knocked at my window without hands,
left the traces of sand that
I find in my shoe each morning.

Margaret Bryant



B+
Silver Gelatin Print
Rachel Stark

The Two-Faced Man

A struggling mind
Trying to find
Its own peace and protection.

But in a bind
This single mind
Renders anew its own reflection.

To escape
And relate
To others in its world,

Its fate
To desiccate
Itself is unfurled.

Two seeming one
Can never become
A unified body and soul.

The two faced one
A moon and sun
Is an empty shell, changing and old.

Colin Riley

Glosa

*On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner,
He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,
He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs,
With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd.*
-Walt Whitman's "The Runner"

Cut young from soccer, he went out for Cross
Country. With face set stern as a gunner,
Awaiting orders from his brigade boss,
On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner.

Food attains new meaning once you begin.
He didn't understand why French toast, eggs
Tasted important. He'd always been thin.
He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs.

In the same way that stone, grass, sand, and moss
Meant more than floor, the radiant stripped sun
Translated to summer, peeling skin gloss.
He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs.

There was rapture in sailing the green lawn,
Fingers of wind sifting through his hair. Dazed,
Sometimes venturing outdoors before dawn
With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd.

Zach Martin

Museum

The museum of our generation contains
a deep blue dress,
which caused an impeachment and a life
shattered by normal bedroom activities.

Sex, in any form, was never a taboo
in my house, but even so, my mom
hurried to switch the channel when the
President's drawl filled the TV speakers
as he claimed faithfulness.

(Do you know what oral sex is?)
my dad asked. I rolled my eyes
and went back to watching TV
because playground gossip filled
in the gaps the news anchors left out.

This memory museum is handed down
and this next generation's shall have burned
bits of building and flags made of every different
material.

A news reel ran every ten minutes in my drama
class, while arms encircled my shoulders. I walked
upstairs and saw the parents lined up to the parking lot
to retrieve their children (we all lost responsibility that
day) and I dry heaved in the bathroom.

Goosesbumps still overwhelm me when
I hear the endless specials about it,
now that half a decade has passed.

Safety scissors slice through red, white,
and blue, as my mom tries to explain to
the two year olds she teaches, that
"bad men hurt us, so now we remember
this day."

Jillian Schweitzer

Full Womb Sestina

My first fender bender was at age twenty one,
when I rear-ended an SUV. “Well, then she
deserved it,” John said, imagining an asshole soccer mom full
of fuel to burn. But it was a woman
who stepped down, cautiously, from the car in front.
After our insurance-info swap, she said she was pregnant

and “I didn’t go into labor, so that’s good.” *She’s pregnant?*
At once I translated her curious stepping, one
foot and then, slowly, the other, from ticked-off business woman putting up a front
to second- or third-term expectant mother. She
didn’t say much; when she spoke her voice was soft—a tolerant woman,
I thought. I didn’t suspect that she was full

with child. “Oh, I’m so sorry,” I said, coming at her full-
on to touch her shoulder, a gesture to say “a pregnant
woman is the last person I’d ever want to rear-end,” and this woman,
surprisingly, did not back away. Still, after one
moment I took back my hand, assuming that she
didn’t want the college girl who’d hit her car to confront

her with human touch. I took one last look at the front
of my ‘92 Olds: a dented license plate and grill fractured full
down the middle. I put the key back in the ignition—she
started fine—and I hoped the pregnant woman would stay pregnant
for the normal length of time: I didn’t want to be the one
responsible for a premature birth. A young woman

with a sketch of life ahead of me, I wanted womanly
duties, not jail time. Later that day, relaxing in front
of The Learning Channel and craving just one
episode of any makeover show, I was in full
need of mindless TV-watching. But 2 PM gave way to a pregnant
woman. Babies crawled past the screen to reveal, “A Baby Story.” She,

the mother, a week before her due date, couldn’t feel the baby kick; she
had driven herself to the hospital and was waiting for test results. Woman
after woman, in half-hour blocks all afternoon, put their pregnant
stories on display, and for days I couldn’t stop watching. At the front
of my mind were questions I couldn’t work into words, and at the same time I was full
with what I took to be woman-understanding: those cautious steps, one

foot and then, slowly, the other: she has one-pointed focused front
and center at her womanhood, her womb: at the growing life inside fully
susceptible to chance, and so she takes each pregnant moment one by little one.

Phoebe Westwood

Draft four; frozen outside your door

Draft Seven

A dream I once had that my shoebox was
Left in the middle of the floor
Woke me up feeling vulnerable.

Hastily, suitcase veiled
Keys quieted and
Door triple-locked.

I am suddenly the center-pointing circle of fingers
A naked detail on Desert Lane;
A plan abandoned, but not forgotten

The door, my ear, Ezra Pound
The destruction of words.

He whispered, forcing hairs on ends
Requesting to breathe in a house
Filled with stagnant air and mind.

He slid a bottle of tonic under my door
To which I had one ear pressed.
He passed a note:

“You and she, perhaps the best texts of history. How-
ever,
After reading your mail, your creditors would probably
disagree.
Open that window, if you will.”

Derek Ford

25 Hours

Jean Berger

Kol Nidre, veesare, vecharame, vekoname, vechinuye, vekinuse...

All vows, bonds, promises, obligations, and oaths wherewith we have vowed, sworn and bound ourselves from this Day of Atonement unto the next Day of Atonement, may it come unto us for good; lo, of all these, we repent us in them. They shall be absolved, released, annulled, made void, and of none effect; they shall not be binding nor shall they have any power. Our vows shall not be vows; our bonds shall not be bonds; and our oaths shall not be oaths.

I stand, holding onto the back of the seat in front of me, singing the words that chastise us year after year. I feel insignificant looking at the *Sifre Torah*, the Torah scrolls, all adorned in white jackets embroidered with delicate gold thread, special for the High Holidays.

As a congregation we finish the first recitation of *Kol Nidre*, pause and then join in as the Rabbi sets the tone for the second. We only say this prayer three times a year, on the same day, and in the same service.

I sing along, try hard to concentrate. I am here for a reason: I am human. I have made mistakes. I have hurt people. I have done wrong. I am here to repent. The words come naturally; I've known them for as long as I can remember.

I'm not hungry yet. I didn't stuff myself because it's worse that way, you dehydrate faster. We had fish, like we always do, hardly seasoned. Seth complained but ate it anyway, understanding how seriously I take this holiday.

In addition to the three cups of water I'd guzzled after dinner, I had made tea and taken exactly thirteen sips, like Dad does. I'm feeling it now, all the liquid, even though I stopped at the Ladies' room on my way in. I have to go again but I can wait until after *Kol Nidre*-I have to. It is the most important prayer of the year, the reason that there isn't an empty seat inside the airy 16th Street synagogue.

My feet, not used to standing this long, begin to tire. I shift my position, try to concentrate on singing. A baby's cry comes from the far right side of the sanctuary and I think, we are crying out to you God, help us.

I had to memorize this prayer and its translation in my eighth grade Rabbinics class, for Rabbi Slater, who was obsessed with memorization. Will Seth still be in Jewish school when he's in middle school? I wonder.

Tom and I argued about it all of last year, when Seth was still in preschool. I wanted him to switch to Jewish day school this year so that he could learn everything about Judaism, everything I knew but might not get around to teaching him. Tom wanted him to go to public school, to be like "every other normal kid". In the end it came down to money; we didn't have enough for private school. But Mom and Dad said that as long as they could, they would pay tuition for Seth's Jewish education. Tom had been furious, enraged that this money, designated for our son's education, wasn't going into Seth's college fund. What use would it be, he asked, to have a Jewish educa-

tion at the kindergarten level and not be able to go to college?

Seth is at the children's service off in a side room now, run by an enthusiastic Georgetown sophomore named Abby. I wonder if she went to a Jewish school.

The third *Kol Nidre* begins, the Rabbi somehow carrying a more somber tone than he had before, and I realize that I've stopped singing, that my mind is wandering and I'm not concentrating. I resume singing and force myself to remember everything I can about sins.

There are two types: sins against God and sins against other men. (The *Kol Nidre* applies specifically to God.) Sins against God I had committed in the past year were not praying enough, not giving my son the best Jewish experience I could have, finally breaking down and letting Tom bring pig meat and shellfish into the house. Sins I had committed against men were much greater, and how appropriate for me that the great Rabbis were so chauvinistic as to exclude women from people who could be sinned against, since my sins had been distinctly against a man.

I had sinned against Tom, perpetually. Lying about wanting a second child. Telling Seth, in one horrible, unguarded, and regretted moment, that Daddy wasn't really a Jew, that he pretended because he wanted us to be happy. The *Purim* party and wine tasting where I flirted with Nate Jacobovits and after way too many drinks let him kiss me on the walk home. Despite the fact that it was a *mitzvah* to get drunk on *Purim*, adultery was one of the three offenses in Judaism where death would be preferable. Along with murder and idol worship, any type of sexual crime was deemed worse than death.

I saw Nate tonight, coming in alone, as he always does. He chatted with me a bit before we both entered into the sanctuary. He had apologized profusely after the *Purim* party, said how it was all his fault, how he would apologize to Tom, do anything. Of course I hadn't told Tom. I'd told Nate that it was wrong, but it happened, and the best thing we could do would be to mature, accept it as a mistake, and move on. Whenever I see his gaze rest on me I know he's thinking about that, and wonder if he knows I am. Is he atoning for that tonight, or does he have worse sins to own up to?

The third recitation finishes and we continue with the rest of the service, a long service to have late at night after you've already eaten. No snack breaks for this one, no refreshments on *Yom Kippur*.

Sleep is basically the only pleasure that's allowed. Eating, drinking, showering, using electricity, wearing perfume, and sex are all forbidden. Even the wearing of leather shoes is not allowed, although at our conservative congregation, some still do. I wear white Keds, a tribute to my mother, who has a pair she wears only once a year, especially for this occasion.

Not being with my parents gives me a sense of pride and independence-proud that I am carrying on in their footsteps even without their presence-but it also makes me lonely.

I'd called them up in tears when Tom and I had come to the worst part in our fight about Seth's education. I knew they'd tell me that well, what did I expect, for marrying a (debatably) non-Jew, and maybe I wanted to hear it. They had offered to pay for Seth's education, concerned more

about his well being than about making me feel guilty. So here I am, a cubicle monkey at the Treasury Department, getting checks from my retired parents in Southern California, cheating on my husband, doing who knows what to my son.

The ark closes and we sit down, ready to hear the Rabbi's sermon. It's barely two minutes before Mrs. Bussman in the seat in front of me is snoring softly, her head tilted to the side. I listen to the Rabbi talk about the importance of representing our countries, wondering if he would listen to my problem about kissing Nate, and if he listened to that then would he stay to explain why I have so many dreams about him?

On the walk home Seth and I discuss what he did in the children's service. They learned about Yom Kippur, heard a story about Jonah and the whale, and said prayers.

"Why didn't Daddy come with us?" asks Seth as we climb the last hill before our street.

"Some people say sorry in different ways," I answer. "Some people...well, they just do things differently. Daddy makes mistakes like all of us, and he apologizes for them in his own way."

"Is it because he's a fake Jew?"

I would slow my pace but it's getting late and I don't want to be out on the outskirts of D.C. at all hours with a five year old.

"He's not a fake Jew," I answer wishing I hadn't taught him the word "fake". What a terrible word. "He's just as Jewish as you and me." That's true, at least from a Reform perspective, Tom having been technically converted to Judaism at a Reform synagogue.

"But you said he wasn't really--"

"Even grown-ups don't always mean what they say, Seth. Mommy was angry. I didn't mean it."

There I go again, I think. Not even twenty minutes after the *Kol Nidre* service ends and I'm already telling lies.

At home, Tom rushes to clean up a dish he left in the sink from a snack he had while we were out. Strange that he would do that on the one day he knows I will not enter the kitchen. Our Golden Retriever, Golda, comes to the door with a smile and greets a receptive Seth with a wet kiss. Tom finishes with the dish, comes to give me a kiss. I give him my cheek, not wanting to inadvertently bring about the desire for any forbidden activity.

"Good sermon this year?" he asks. He came with me the first two years we were married, and every year after that elected to stay home.

"It was okay. He talked about Israel and the United States and how we can't just be liberal cynics, how we have to support both of our countries because we need Israel and Israel needs the

Diaspora.”

“Ah, a political twist. Sounds like a desperate ploy to keep people awake. Was the Bush administration there atoning for all of their sins?”

“Not quite. You want to read to Seth tonight?”

“Sure,” he says. “Golda needs to go out again.”

I let Golda out the side door and stand outside while she does her business. The air has cooled but it’s sort of nice. I’ve always loved feeling change in the weather. Change in the weather, change of life. That knotted feeling in the pit of my stomach. The cool air signals all of change, tells me something’s coming. Maybe it’s the world around me, or maybe it’s just me.

Once inside I crawl into bed without brushing my teeth, not wanting to swallow water accidentally. I let Golda jump on our bed and cuddle with me even though Tom can’t stand her being there. I’m asleep before he comes in.

Seth is jumps in a far corner, on grass that is springy, like a trampoline. He talks with a Jewish girl, dark haired with glasses. Seth asks her to marry him, and then I am at the wedding ceremony, my five year old son in a tuxedo waiting for his five year old bride to arrive. Except it’s not me standing around the canopy with him, or Tom, it’s Mom and Dad. Where is Tom? I look around and see no Tom anywhere.

Two poster-sized lists are posted by the reception area. The first has my son, my whole family, Golda, Abby, and George W. Bush listed. The second list has only three names: Mine, Tom’s, and Nate’s. I go drink wine at the outcast table, and find Nate and Tom there, arguing about who plays ping-pong better.

“I did ping-pong for my sports requirement in college,” says Tom.

“But I’ve eaten more delicacies than you’ve ever seen! Rugelach! Betcha don’t know what rugelach is.”

“I won four thousand pounds of rugelach at my last ping-pong tournament, I’ll have you know, and tried to eat it all before it went stale and got it all in except for eighteen pieces, I’ll show you the video sometime...”

The morning comes and I feel cloudy. I long for a sip of water. Tom’s sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee, which I for some reason don’t crave. Mind over matter. I struggle to put the leash on a squirming Golda, too excited for her walk to sit still, and give Tom a peck on the cheek before taking my girl out. The fall trees are just starting to brown, a little late since it’s already almost October. I shiver and wish I had worn something warmer, and as I see grass at the park I remember my dream, the ping pong and the lists and Seth’s wedding. And Nate.

At home I can’t look Tom straight in the eye. I have these dreams frequently, much more than I should, but something about last night’s dream was different. Something about *Yom Kippur*, I think. Maybe I just feel guilty because this is the one day my feelings should only be concerned with gaining forgiveness.

“Something wrong?” asks Tom after I shoo Seth into the bathroom to brush his teeth. “You’ve been acting so distant lately. What’s going on?”

I contemplate telling him about Nate. We had one kiss, and I dream, but that’s not all. I have fantasies. I think about leaving Tom, going with Seth to live with Nate, a lawyer who could surely afford private school tuition, and more importantly would realize its importance. I think

about having another child, a girl. I want one, badly, so badly. Just not with Tom.

“There’s a lot of stuff on my mind.” I was supposed to have asked forgiveness from everyone in the past ten days, *Aseret Yemei T’shuva*, the ten days of repentance. I only asked forgiveness from one person: Seth. Nate asked me to forgive him and I said of course, but didn’t ask for his forgiveness because I’m not sure I deserve it. I should have asked Tom, should ask him now, while he’s here, listening. But then I would have to explain.

“You think it might be it this time? Maybe?” He looks at me through thick glasses, concerned, wanting my problem to be the same as his. How can I tell him? Getting birth control without his knowledge, taking it religiously, all the while letting him think we were trying to conceive again. Seven months this has been going on. For the two years after Seth was born it was that I wanted to get my bearings, get used to one kid before we have two. Then for three years, I said I wanted to make sure we were financially stable with just one child. Now it’s flat out deceit.

I will myself not to lie, tell myself I can be vague for now if I have to but I shouldn’t lie. Tom deserves the truth.

“I’m sorry, I can’t talk about it now. I have to tell you—” Seth interrupts to ask what he should wear, his yellow shirt or his blue shirt. I tell him either, and he runs back to his room. “I can’t tell you now. Not now.” So, the jig is up. He knows now. Something’s going on.

“Okay,” he says, and being the person he is, gives me a hug. He’s not mad at all, doesn’t suspect anything, is totally willing and able to trust me. “I love you, Lilly.”

“I love you too, Tom.” What have I done? “Can you make a sandwich for Seth’s lunch before you go?” I remind him, since he isn’t fasting.

“Sure.”

I walk into the sanctuary after dropping Seth off at the children’s service just in time to see Mr. Bussman gently nudge his wife to wake her, as the ark is being opened and the congregation stands up. Now I feel the beginning pangs of a headache, probably from caffeine withdrawal, and notice that my throat is parched. I see Nate walk in, alone. How could he not have a girlfriend, I wonder. Or does he? I never bothered to ask, just assumed that he didn’t. He can’t see my eyes fixed on his, a sea of people between us. I sit, stand, stand, sit, pray, atone, apologize, chastise myself alongside the others, until it is afternoon, time to pick up Seth. Parched, I walk him back home during the *Yizkor* part of the service, a remembrance service traditionally skipped by those whose parents are still alive. Seth goes right to the kitchen and starts eating one of the sandwiches that Tom made earlier. I’m starting to get hungry and thirsty, but still the headache is my biggest problem. The scents of Seth’s food are swarming me, making me feel dizzy, confused, queasy. I sniff the salty smell, strong in the air, and something smells off. It couldn’t be, could it? Tom wouldn’t...

“Seth,” I ask, as he takes a sip of orange juice, “what kind of sandwich is that?”

He shrugs, looks at it, and with a rebellious innocence, answers “ham and cheese. Daddy said it’s his favorite so I asked him to make it for me for today.”

Too shocked to say anything, I take the sandwich out of his hands quietly, tell Seth to wait there, and walk outside to the neighbor's garbage can. I don't want it in my house, on my property, anywhere near my son.

"Why did you do that, Mommy?" is the little voice I come back to.

"It's not kosher, Seth. Ham isn't kosher. Meat and cheese isn't kosher. I'll make you another sandwich, what do you want? Grilled cheese? Tuna? Peanut butter and jelly?"

"But Daddy eats it. Why does he get to eat it and I can't?"

"Because Daddy does things differently than we do." It's never been more apparent.

Seth asks a few questions and I answer them as diplomatically as I can. When the evening comes we walk back to the synagogue for the closing service, *Neilah*. Still trying to concentrate on praying, my headache worse than before and my throat feeling like sandpaper, I notice how few people are here as compared to this morning. I wonder how many of them lasted the full 25 hours without food and water, and when they stopped feeling bad about their sins and started to simply feel hunger and grouching. I'm so thirsty I could drink sea water now, although I have yet to crave any kind of food.

In the last part of the service I try to hold on to the feelings I've had all day. *Yom Kippur* is a strong holiday, but once the fast is over, people forget too easily everything they prayed for. I hold on to the unrest, disquiet, anxiety that I feel, and pray that I will be able to do something constructive. Soon the service is over and people exit the sanctuary with amazing haste.

"That was a tough one for me," Nate says after the service is over as we eat bread rolls in the lobby, and pats his stomach. "Although I could stand to miss a few meals." I grin weakly, look around for Seth. We have to leave now, before Nate scares me and makes me change my mind. I spot him chatting up Abby by the sanctuary door and motion for him to come over.

"I've got to get this one home for some dinner," I say, and leave before Nate can reply.

The walk home is quiet, cool, and I've had just enough food to allow my mind to think clearly. Seth is silent. He must sense that I'm thinking hard about something. Tom won't be happy, neither will I, but something has to change. He has to know everything. If there is a chance for us to survive this marriage, then I have to stop lying. And if there is no way this love can be salvaged, we both have to know. Tonight, for the first time in a while, I will be completely honest.



Conversation

Charcoal

Emily Kimak

Para mi abuelito

His absence is most evident in the front yard
Where his garden used to grow.
As his body wilted,
So did the flowers,
Without the care he had
Lavished upon them.
It was in his garden
That I fell in love with the first blossom
And the last to bloom,
Pulled at the soft petals and traced
Their outlines
Between the pages of my diary.
It is in his garden
That I miss him most,
Sitting in what used to be shade.
I can see the street now
Through the wrought iron bars
That used to be covered in
A sea of green.
I imagine he took his flowers
With him
To wherever we go when
We leave this world,
And that the disappearance of his garden
Was prompted by the beginnings
Of another
Somewhere else
Where the sun never ceases
To shine
So that he can always find
A seat in the shade.

Adriana Saldana

love poem 1

you are as slippery as milk.
pale and mercurial, you thicken my words in my
throat
and fall through my loose grasp of who
you are.
you are insubstantial,
your body not solid but skittish—
my touch would give you whiplash,
my falls would break your bones.

and so I keep my hands warm in my pockets,
and my tongue in my mouth,
leaving you unsolved, and unbroken.

instead I watch your long bones,
the intent in the muscles moving under your
skin:
how you are put together,
how you fill the space.

It's the only thing I know about you, so I hold it
close.

Debra Lenik

There Is Nothing...

so desired as that
tightly grasped possession well
lassoed, whip driven

so prayerful kisses
blown wish for blessings promised
and snatched for granted.

In this lies pursuit.
Self sufficient ambition:
To conquer my own,

not seek the bridges
to greener pasture than these,
rich with devout fruits,

not grieving the dream-
illusive life that perhaps
surreality slips.

Why suffer envy
feeling buried under burdens
of profound riches?

As heaped hindrances
have my treasures been perceived,
goals in/of themselves.

For what does a stream
drowned in the flood of itself
dare cry out in thirst?

And likewise can I
boasting such hearty bounty
fairly yearn further?

Dallea Caldwell

219 14th – – 223 14th

The men have come and gone and
cleared away the last of the rubble
and the broken red bricks of our friendship.
I miss it, now, on my daily walk –
my eyes idle around the street but linger
in that vacant lot where rote contradicts reality.

I walked by it every day for years before and only sometimes
picked it out of the row of buildings
(splashing through puddles to the cover of the stoop,
clutching a newspaper over my head and shivering
in the cold ink and rain gushing off its pages),
but the solid brick always filled its space.

In recent years the city's stop lights and neon ads have
faded the green paint on the doors and the shutters to grey.
And the windows may have looked a bit cloudy with dust
or exhaust, though I admit I didn't really notice. I suppose
long before it was destroyed the wrecking ball was inching near.
Still, I can't displace that building from 14th Street;
I walk by it every day.

Rachel Stark

You do not know me

You do not know me.
You have never seen my eyes, or the way I walk.
To you I am an interference, a disposable being.
Because of this I do not recognize myself.

I am not a historical date.
I am not a war.
“I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea”- Rumi

I am breath. I am voice. I am being.

I am a mother.
I am a six year old boy who witnesses my sister find the Divine in her legs that dance out beneath a Soviet Union mini skirt.

I am a Pashtun, a Tajik, a Hazara, an Uzbek.

I am a farmer from the countryside.
But because my irrigation system was destroyed, my flowers do not bloom, and my water is contaminated.

I was beaten in front of my students. I was forced to leave my school because it was burnt to the ground.

I am a student.
I am a resistance fighter.
I am a religious leader.
I am a political figure.
I am a boy, a girl, a child.

I saw my mother slide beneath the vibrant colors of the burqa, only to be told years later that the only way she will be free, is if she lifts it.
I saw her stay inside the house when I left. When I return I find that she has remained in place.

I saw the rocket flare and fly through my town on its way to kill my family on the other side.
I am that rocket. I will explode, only no one will be watching.

I am a construction worker in Iran. And when the inspectors come I must flee to the dark, damp corners of the site.

I transport arms across the border from Pakistan to be sold to the Taliban and the United Front.



Father and Son at the Marketplace

Silver Gelatin Print

Melissa Weiss

I live in a city that has no name and no location on a map.

I am told to love democracy and that my vote counts. But I don't understand why my vote counts and my voice doesn't.

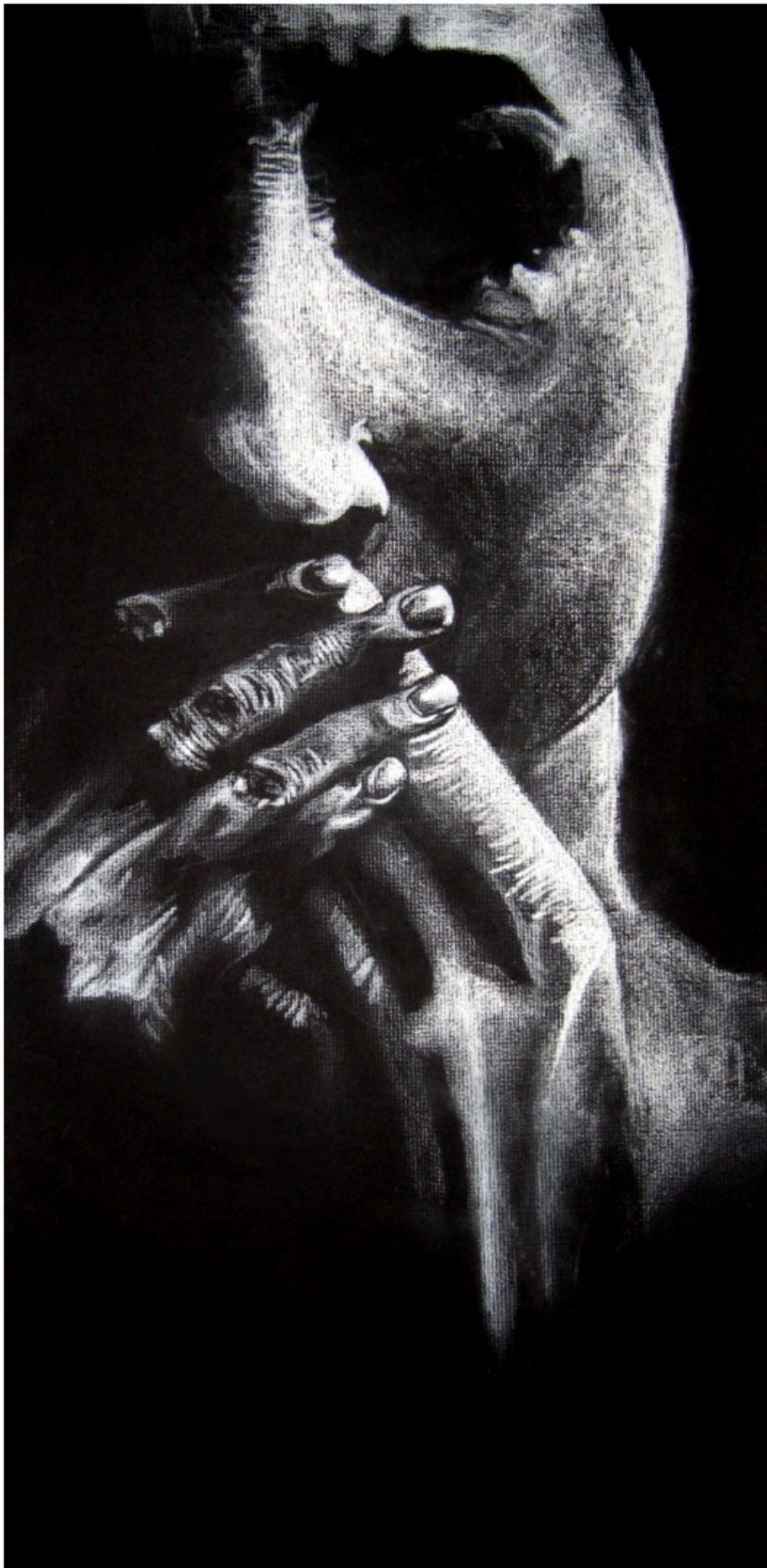
If, I am not a communist, or an islamist, or a democrat,

If I am not made of money,

And if my produce and my land don't matter,
And if my education isn't worth anything because my teachers don't exist ,
And if I am not a son or a daughter because my parents are not alive,

Than who am I?

Jenny Berkowitz



Silence
Conte
Rachel Stark

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