



THE BEND

12TH
EDITION

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This is the 2015 installment of the showcase for the work of students, alumni, and friends of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame – the journal known, in previous incarnations as *Dánta*, *La Rue Barbarian*, and *The Rhubarbarian*. This year's edition will simultaneously appear online.

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{ LETTER FROM THE EDITORS }

Dear Readers,

We are proud to present to you a small sample of the awesome work coming out of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame. The prose and poetry here collected enchanted and fascinated us. And we hope it mesmerizes you too.

Sincerely,

The Editors

{ CONTENTS }

POETRY

C. KUBASTA

Reconciliation 9

DÓNAL GORDON

At 14 11

DANNA EPHLAND

Mirth 12

Departure 13

Translating Trees 14

Wonder 16

JESSICA MAICH

Packing Up Our Mother's Clothes 19

DESMOND KON ZHICHENG-MINGDÉ

objet trouve :: found object 35

societe anonyme :: anonymous society 36

requiescat in pace :: may be rest in peace 37

LAURO VAZQUEZ

Origins of the High Five 38

PROSE

NATHAN GUNSCH

Dumbwaiter

19

SARAH SWANSON

Out and Away

37

CONTRIBUTORS

47

{ C. Kubasta }

RECONCILIATION

On the backyard fire pit, a cicada
anchors itself. What looks like
coupling is the adult escaping its
nymph-self; it splits its own back,
and emerges, lime green
and terrible:
splayed over the
carcass of itself.

What this makes me think of is pain. At what point
the body becomes the once-body to be
shed. Blake wrote “The cut worm
forgives the plow,” but what of the
once-worm, its own antecedent?

Icarus dies because he couldn't swim. Wings negate
the need for limbs. Adam gives up the garden for
the flesh. According to exegesis, the fruit appeals to
the flesh and senses, the emotions, the mind and
intellect.

We are bundles of flesh and senses, emotions, mind and
intellect bound of thread and pliant wax.

The stories of metamorphosis evoke

evolution: a bigger body, a greater skill, an
inhabited enlargement; better than before. Or
a great fall:
this blessing of first flesh.

But sometimes we become less than what
we were and it is no tragedy: only a tiny
splash, unnoticed by ploughman or
fisherfolk.

I say this because I have been
dreaming of other lives.
Alternately,
I am a better or worse
woman than I was the
night before.

{ Dónal Gordon }

AT 14

For George Stinney, Jr.*

And he then unripened
fruit, shook from the tree.

That fruit, strange fruit,
succulent then, to some.

* Arrested in March, 1944, tried a month later, George Stinney, Jr., was convicted of murder within hours of jury selection, that jury taking just 2 ½ hours to listen, 10 minutes to deliberate. He died by electric chair, 53 days after conviction, on June, 16, 1944, his eyes reportedly wide-open, tearful, after the first of three 2,400-volt jolts of electricity, his burned body then buried in an unmarked grave, so that anonymity might let him – and his family – rest in peace. At age 14, George became the youngest person executed in the United States in the 20th Century, the Bible he carried under his arm to his death reportedly used as a booster seat in the electric chair to compensate for his small size. His conviction was vacated, 70 years after his death, in 2014, when a South Carolina judge, using a writ of *coram nobis*, ruled that conviction a “great and fundamental injustice.”

{ Danna Ephland }

MIRTH

bird in a birthday palm, unearthly
joy is a humming
dearth arrested, her fine bones and taut engine
curse doubt, curse ambiguity, girth too
evidence of things dismissed, of lack and absence

hearse and limo trade places, days lurch
in the street, twelve floors down, she perches
at the curb, by a door, on a bar stool, nurses
a drink and a friend, nurtures anything
green, anything open

aperture inhales, exposes a view of sutures
pulled tight by gloves and skin, knitting fingers
quenched with pattern, row, stitch
after stitch after stitch, search
the turf she digs her toes into – stripes of iron and sand, clay,

even ash, a pail's worth
flung like a bride's untied bouquet, cast
in no particular direction

DEPARTURE

– a riff on Roethke's rhymes

You can argue that driving is too slow
but to get on a plane with that kind of fear
is to miss the trip entirely. Don't go

just now. You are the only one who will know
how to get there and when. Popping in your ear
or some other signal will drive you to a slow

decision, your bags all packed. Either way, you
set them by the door overnight and they stay there
while you dream of all the places you might go,

if only you could fly like everybody else, and how?
I dream the cab honks. I am on the top stair
looking down and I realize I can take it slow-

ly, not have to look at each sharp step. Like they do
in those pageants. Grown women walking on air,
eyes at the horizon. Surefooted, smiling as they go

down the runway in bright lights and fanfare. I know
how they turn around completely when they get near
the end, headed upstage making faces, deliberately slow.
I am the next contestant, in the wings ready to go.

TRANSLATING TREES

Of course, the gingko is a woman
standing in October sun. Suddenly
dropping her yellow dress to the ground,
stepping from it into the new season.

The cypress is an idea, though thin. Trace
its argument from canopy to root, climb
with it back up to the top, breathe hard.

Sentinel at the edge
of the lot, the poplar
flickers a border,
a crossing to the next yard.

The willow croons long after
the planter is gone. Raking
of thick yellow leaves is
a floor plan the children
design again this year
but not next.

The maple, a pair,
is heartbreak hanging
birdfeeders past blacktop
out a kitchen window

where steel sinks fill
with new dishwater.

The elm is a ghost, opening
the trail of an old disease,
follow it back –
American, ancestral, lost.

WONDER

I grow stretched
across a border,
a river. Canada
and the U.S. meet
in the middle
of a bridge named Peace.
I cross
from factories to parks,
back home to factories.
Dark and rapid water
cuts a deep boundary,
flows to the edge
crashing thunder and mist
on boulders below.
Flower gardens roll
for miles the summer
I climb on board
the *Maid of the Mist*
with my new husband.
We chug, smiling
and wet. Slickers like seals
in the stormy water
and sun at the foot
of the Falls. Niagara
Falls moves backwards

upstream. They shut it
off once to clear rocks
heavy water pulled
down. And when I was small,
back when winters were bad,
the Falls froze over.
No one believes me,
standing at the railing
in wool, watching colored
lights sweep patterns
on cliffs of New York ice.
I am twelve when cousins
from California visit,
exotic as citrus.
We walk through rock
tunnels behind the Falls,
peer out from under
raging water. I match
my family for once
in hooded yellow raincoats.
One cousin is blond, sixteen,
and drops her mascara
in the lawn. Father finds
it, spends the week watching
what we all watch. Sex
in the open for
a change, still pretending
it's not there. More than
anything, I want
to be pretty like my
distant cousin. Afraid
to ask, I stare
at the Falls' relentless

pouring. How long
has this been going on?
My backyard grows exotic.
In snapshots, magazines,
in the local news.
Tourists come for wax
museums, daredevil
barrels, honeymoons
and speedboat races.
Generators turn
river current to light.
Gravity spares no one.
It pulls until you find
one particular rail.
Step carefully over
to the wet stone ledge.
They look for you for weeks.
Sometimes they find you.

{ Jessica Maich }

PACKING UP OUR MOTHER'S CLOTHES

If opening the bureau drawer seemed a clear violation of your privacy, then touching the cloth that once touched you felt a sacrilege, so

we waited through several seasons before we tried again. Tiny ghosts and goblins rang doorbells in the dark and pumpkin pies

topped Holiday tables. After the First, a serious winter barreled in, so we waited for good weather, or so we told ourselves. Finally, the world filled

up with birds returning and sky and welcoming, and we knew it was time to take that step back into your closet, where you had stood and dressed

for life. And this is the place in the poem where the turn is supposed to happen, meaning redemption of some sort out of great difficulty.

But this is not that poem, and we did not feel redeemed bundling into trash bags, for safe passage to the donation center, your favorite things.

No, this is not that poem, nor that short story or novella. This is rather a simple lamentation sung one empty hanger at a time.

{ Nathan Gunsch }

DUMBWAITER

They had just finished cleaning the apartment when the baby started crying. The look that passed between them would have been mistaken for confusion and dread, if anyone else had witnessed it. Instead, the only thing between the man and the woman at this time of night was the bleached lemon scent creeping in from the kitchen and bathroom. It was an annoying smell. Too powerful for such a small space, in her opinion, but her husband had insisted on it.

“What do you think we should do?” he asked. “It’s already 2 AM. I was really hoping to get some sleep. We have a big day tomorrow.”

Tomorrow was today, now, she thought. But she did not want to think about it. It was going to be a lot of work, and they would have to figure out what to do with the baby. They hadn’t discussed that yet. They hadn’t discussed much of anything since getting the apartment. That was okay, though, as they worked well together, sometimes better, without actually speaking. No, she did not want to think about the next twenty-two hours. All she could think about was the crying and the low throb growing behind her eyes and that horrible lemon smell.

She peeled off her yellow latex dish gloves and opened the living room window, and then the kitchen window, and then started walking down the short hallway. She stopped in front of the baby’s door.

“What are you doing?”

She looked at him for a moment before responding. “The smell is too much.”

“Do you have to go in there right now?” He whispered.

“Come on, can’t you smell that? It’s horrible. It can’t be healthy.”

The baby's room was small, but in the dark it somehow felt larger, as if the soul of Manhattan were occupying the space where any light had been. She could feel the movement of the city beyond, below, and all around her, reassuring her, letting her know that this was exactly where she belonged. She could smell life and death and lemon, and hear the rustle of traffic from the open window. She felt a greatness in the room and thought the baby did, too, for it had stopped crying the moment she entered.

Then the moment was past, shattered by the renewed screams coming from the crib. It was screaming, not crying. The latter implied tears, but no matter how tight those eyes were scrunched together, none were forthcoming. So she waited, wondering if this was an outlet for that unspoken, primitive anger that humanity is born with but pushes out as it becomes distracted with language and grades and orgasms. Or perhaps there was a general sadness piggybacking on the breeze coming through the window, and the baby was sensing it, like an animal would. Because that's all this thing really was: a baby animal. Just like all the other baby animals in the city, with one big difference. This one was hers, and she didn't like the idea of her baby screaming. That meant fear, terror, something to be scared of. What if the baby was scared of her? She didn't want to think about that possibility, so she waited for tears.

"Jesus! What the hell is going on?" He was in the doorway. The move and the apartment had been her ideas. She had done all the research, gone to all the open houses, even drafted up a series of probable budgets. All the planning – that was when she was in her element. The practical application of those plans was a different story, though. "I really don't want to deal with neighbors at this point. Do you?"

She hated rhetorical questions. He knew that and immediately regretted his last two words. He did not regret much, never the big things. "Sorry," he said, meaning it. "Any ideas?"

Of course she had ideas, he thought. He knew she was quietly blaming him for purchasing the cheap kitchen and bath cleaner. In her mind, it was that toxic smell that had caused all of this. He wasn't going to defend himself though. It wasn't worth it at this point. The only thing that mattered right

now was getting the baby to be quiet.

Of course I have ideas, she thought. She knew he was quietly blaming her for picking this apartment, with its pre-war-sized rooms and nosey neighbors (according to the reviews on Yelp). And then of course there was the baby. She knew it was her fault, and she wasn't going to defend herself. She also wasn't going to bring it up now. All that could wait until later, when they were settled, maybe in a couple weeks. They'd be sitting at the breakfast bar on a Sunday morning, reading the Times, sipping coffee, glancing up every now and then to see the baby bouncing away in the pack-n-play the former owners had left. Then she would apologize about the baby, and he wouldn't care anymore because it was smiling at them, and then they would smile at each other and make love in the bedroom and forget all about it.

She couldn't forget now, though. It was still screaming, trying to squeeze out some tears that just weren't coming.

"Probably just needs a change," he suggested. That was the reason for moving to Manhattan in the first place: someplace fresh, new, and clean – metaphorically speaking, of course. In the few short days since their arrival, his nose had already become acclimated to the constant odor of baking urine and garbage. He had heard about how filthy the city had been in the 80s and 90s, and how much it had improved since then. He couldn't help but wonder if all the violence was a direct result of the filth. No one likes to live in a mess. Case in point: the screaming person in the crib. It was also why he bought the cleaner with bleach.

They agreed on the change. Like most things they did together, they quickly and successfully accomplished it with little communication. The baby was placed back in the crib. They left the room and softly closed the door. It was 2:15 AM.

The cleaning was more or less complete, but there were still a few things that had to get done before they'd be able to sleep without worry. First on the list was the cat; or, rather, the cat hair. It was everywhere. They had been so concerned with the kitchen and bathroom – where most of the mess happened – that they had overlooked the carpet in the living room. One glance at the bottom of their pale blue cleaning booties revealed a solid layer

of hair. As they looked at the room more closely, tiny tumbleweeds became visible along the walls. They both found cats disgusting. They found hair even more disgusting.

“We could just wait until the morning.” He knew this was unlikely, but he had another reason to postpone and decided to suggest it anyway.

“Absolutely not. There’s no way I’d be able to sleep knowing what’s out here. And we didn’t even check the bedrooms, yet. Cats go everywhere. Hair gets everywhere.”

“The noise is going to wake the baby again.”

“Maybe because it’s constant, it’ll be like white noise or something and not be too bad. Babies sleep in Manhattan all the time with much worse, right? We don’t have any other options at this point. If it wakes up, we’ll just figure something out.”

She stationed herself by the baby’s door. He started in the far corner. The vacuum was a new model and not very loud. As he worked his way across the room, the carpet changed color behind him from gray to off-white. Like every task he went about, he was thorough, and it took him a while to reach her. He pointed at the door. She gave him a thumbs-up, and he continued down and back and down the hallway again and into the master bedroom. Five minutes later, she heard the vacuum shut off. Then she heard the knock.

It was soft, but he had heard it, too, and joined her in the hallway. They both stood still, silent. It came again, this time a bit louder. He thought about looking at her but knew she would take it as a reproach, which maybe it would have been. Instead, he marched to the door and looked through the peephole. An old woman stood on the other side. If she could’ve seen his gaze, it might have frightened her, for he could be that way. Although most of the time he was very neutral, forgettable, even. Once, when he was in high school, the drama teacher had told him he could be a fashion model because his face was a blank slate. “You’re thin, tall, symmetric, and completely forgettable – that’s a good thing, by the way.” It had been a good thing. He hoped it would continue to be.

“I can see you there,” she said. “The peephole darkened.”

Well, aren’t you quite the Sherlock, he thought. He didn’t know what

to make of that. He unlatched the chain and cracked open the door. Out of the fisheye effect of the glass, the woman was larger than he expected. He smiled. She did not.

“Hello . . .” he whispered.

“Hi there. I’m Marianne.” She thrust her hand into the apartment, looking for his. He took it. Her handshake was firm and static, full of ligaments. “So you’re the new people, huh? Well, nice to meet you.” Hand still around his. “I live right there, that way.” Her left arm swung across her body as she pointed to his left, down the hallway, toward any number of doors.

“I hope the baby didn’t wake you.” Almost on cue, the baby started up again.

“Didn’t even see you move in. When did you get here?”

“Uh, this afternoon. Or, I guess that would now be yesterday afternoon. The most recent afternoon.” She seemed to like this answer.

“Moving is hard work.” She finally released his hand, which was now slightly sweaty. In the process of disengagement, she shifted to her right and peered past him into the apartment. It was so smooth that it could have been planned. He saw the confused look on her face, but decided to let it go until he had to act on it. “No boxes,” she said to herself, but he heard her. Then to him, “You guys must be professionals.”

“Well, we’ve gotten good at it over the years. It helps that they sold us their furniture.” Her expression cleared on hearing that bit of information, and then cleared even more, to the point that it was now blank. That lasted half a beat, then her nostrils widened and her face seemed to collapse before convulsing into a trio of very contained sneezes, as if she were sneezing into herself.

“Damn cats. You know they had cats, right?”

“Oh yeah. We’ve been cleaning all night. I really thought we got it all. We vacuumed twice.”

“I heard you,” she said, and looked at him with a steady calm that unnerved him. “Thing about these old buildings, you can never really get them clean – really clean.” She imploded into another trio of sneezes. Afterwards, she produced an embroidered handkerchief, blew her nose, and

shoved it back into the pocket of her cardigan. “Well, it was nice to meet you. If I stay in front of this door any longer I’ll be sneezing all night.”

“I’m sorry. Yes, nice meeting you as well.”

“Don’t be sorry. It’s not your fault. It’s those damn cats. Anyway, the baby didn’t wake me. I’ve been awake all night.” She paused as if she were expecting him to say or do something. He did neither. She continued, “The older you get, the less sleep you need. And I have to say, I don’t miss it much. But you probably will if that crying doesn’t stop. Don’t worry about waking people – the walls are thin but the city’s loud, and most people need the noise to sleep anyway. You’re not from here, are you?”

He shook his head. “Baltimore,” he lied.

She looked at him as if she knew he was lying. “Well, get some sleep, Baltimore. You’re too young to be up this late. And if the child won’t go to sleep, try walking around the city. It soothes the savage beast.” She flashed him the faintest of smiles and disappeared down the hallway, walking much faster than he would have thought her capable.

* * *

She had imagined their first walk around Manhattan more than a few times before they moved. This was not it. The stroller was foreign and awkward. She was not put together like she thought city moms should be – she hadn’t even had time to shower. It was not a crisp autumn afternoon in Park Slope or the West Village or Forest Hills or Fort Greene or Riverside or any of the other nice, cozy, idyllic sounding neighborhoods she’d heard of but had no idea where they were. None of it was right, but here she was nevertheless, pushing a stroller west on East 67th Street between York and 1st at 3 o’clock in the morning.

She was exhausted. The baby had stopped crying almost the moment they exited the building, and she had considered walking around the block and going right back upstairs. There was still a good hour or so of the little stuff to complete – the tidying, the perfect-placing, taking out the detritus from the move. She felt bad leaving him to do it all, but he had insisted that

he didn't mind, and she had no reason not to believe him. He wasn't the type to be a martyr. So when they had made it around the entire block without a peep, she was about to head back upstairs when she reconsidered. What if the baby wakes up again? She continued past the building door.

She did not know where she was going, and she wondered if it was safe to be walking a baby around New York City at this time of night. Granted, an old woman had suggested it, and why would she suggest it if it were dangerous? Then again, she could be one of those shut-ins who hadn't left the building since the 50s, knowing nothing anymore of the outside world. The way her husband described her made that seem unlikely, though.

"She was very aware," he had told her, after closing the door.

"Why are you whispering? And aware of what, exactly? Aware of what, darling?"

He hadn't liked her tone. His stare let her know that. But they were both well beyond being intimidated by each other. These power plays were vestiges of weaker relationships. Whenever they would crop up, they would usually collapse of their own dead weight. She knew she still had these quirks, though she would be hard pressed to notice them in the moment, just as she was sure that he had no idea of the look he had been giving her. But they both knew exactly what they were doing when it came to the bigger picture, and they both knew there was no time for those tones, intentional or not. So he had caught himself, and a tint of compassion colored his stare while he said in a low tone, "No no no, not that. Don't worry."

"Really? You're sure?"

"Yes. Absolutely." She wanted to believe him, but she could see he wasn't quite certain of it himself. Getting worked up about hypotheticals, though, wouldn't help, and it certainly wouldn't quiet the baby. She let it go. They both did.

"I just mean she was very with it, for her age, I guess I mean. She was vibrant. Alive."

Alive. The way he had emphasized the word bothered her: as if they, the two of them, were not. He wouldn't have included the baby in his thoughts. Its presence in their lives was still new enough to be excluded from their

shared existence, though it certainly was trying to insert itself tonight. “There’s no doubt about you, is there?” She said to the stroller’s slumbering occupant. “You are very, very much alive.” This last part she said with a little too much excitement, and it came out louder than she wanted. A wave of embarrassment washed over her and she looked around, expecting to have drawn the attention of passersby, but there was no one. This surprised her for a moment, but then it didn’t. Even some Manhattan sidewalks could be expected to be empty at this time of night. It was 3:30am.

The avenues, however, were not empty. Cars – mostly taxis by her assessment – continued careening across lanes and through yellows as if it were rush hour. This calmed her, and she realized what was causing her anxiety: the lack of people. Crowds were one of the reasons she had picked New York City. After their previous lives, all she wanted to do was get lost. They would, of course, eventually have a circle of friends. But in her imagining, it would be a circle of insignificant, regular people. A circle that would be no more noticeable than the manhole covers that pockmarked the streets and sidewalks, like the one she was rolling over right now. It wobbled a bit, and she was returned to her present solitude. She could taste her conspicuousness. The action from Second Avenue drew her west.

She turned left at Second and headed south, away from the empty street, opting for the artificial comfort of the avenue’s traffic and lights. Everything was new to her, every storefront seemed almost glamorous, every lobby grand, and every doorman more useless. Even though the absence of a doorman had been a necessary feature in choosing their new building, they were particular curiosities for her. She had never understood their purpose. They seemed like a vestige that should have fallen off a long time ago, like tails on humans. But here they were, wagging away, trying to please. They bothered her.

She caught sight of one a few doors down, standing by the curb as if he were about to hail a cab. He didn’t. Rather, he subtly drew his gloved right hand to his face. A thin cloud of smoke appeared for a moment and disappeared – rather quickly, she thought, before she noticed the blue light. He continued to look like he wasn’t smoking until he noticed her approaching and then slid his right hand into the pocket of his overcoat. It emerged empty.

She stopped.

“Good morning,” she said, smiling.

“Good morning, ma’am.” He doffed his cap in a manner she was sure he had honed over the years to charm the female tenants and show deference to the male ones. “And who do we have here?” he asked, stooping, about to look into the stroller.

She cut him off with a finger to her lips. “A sleeping baby. I hope you don’t mind me asking, but was that one of those new electronic cigarettes I just saw you with?”

He paused, and she imagined him thinking about lying and then thinking better of it. She continued before he could answer. “May I see it? I’ve never held one before. Are they heavy?”

“Um, sure.” He brought it out of his pocket and gave it to her. She was expecting something like the one-hitters she and her friends used to smoke weed out of in high school and college, but it was lighter than that, even though it was bigger. “Technology,” she said, not really to him.

“Pretty neat little things, they are. Quite handy in a –”

“Are you allowed to smoke on duty?” she asked. She smiled the smile of a co-conspirator. He looked confused and then down the street for that unnecessary cab, looking busy. “I’m sorry, what was that?”

“Are you allowed to smoke this while you are working?”

“Well, no, not technically, but –”

“I didn’t think so.” She placed the e-cigarette in her pocket.

“Hey. What are you doing?”

“You will get it back. My sister happens to live in this building. I will give it to her tomorrow and tell her that you were smoking on duty. I assume she will tell your boss. Or not. I’ll leave it up to her.”

“You can’t do that. You can’t just take that.”

“Yes, I can. Are you listening to me? You’ll get it back. You have an easy job, you should be able to do it right.”

“Ma’am, I’m very sorry, but please.” His volume was inching up.

“Please be quiet,” she snapped. “If you wake this baby, so help me God, I will tell my sister that you harassed us and you will be fired. Now, go back to

your post and let it go. You'll get it back." She walked past him as he struggled to say something else, but all that came out were broken consonants.

She assumed he would follow her and try to stop her, and she had already determined a restrained and measured response to his shouts and to the eventual hand grabbing her shoulder from behind. Neither came. When she turned west on 59th Street, she glanced back down the avenue and was disappointed. The doorman wasn't there, and for the second time that day she thought that New Yorkers weren't as tough as she had expected. She placed the e-cigarette in a plastic bag she found in one of the stroller's many pouches and then returned it to her pocket. It was only then that she considered the police – and then her husband. Her mistake stopped her on the sidewalk so abruptly that the baby woke up. They stared at each other for less than a moment before the panic set in, in her. "Move. And think. But first, move." That's what he would say, so that's what she did. Her panic was still there, but the baby's eyes were closed again. At least it's working on someone, she thought. What was she doing with a baby? What was she doing with a stranger's e-cigarette? She moved faster.

Her thoughts raced infinitely faster than her as she crossed the northbound lanes of Park Avenue. It had been ten minutes. Time enough, she thought, for the doorman to have called the police, if that's what he was going to do. Midway across the southbound side, she noticed the police cruiser stopped at the light. The walk signal switched from white to red.

The seconds ticked down. She stared at them as she crossed. The final countdown, she thought, which reminded her of the song, which in turn reminded her of the Challenger explosion, which she had seen live on TV in the second grade. Her school had organized a viewing party in the activity room of the school library so they could all witness the first member of the Teacher in Space program, Christa McAuliffe, carry the banner of underappreciated educators everywhere into the great beyond. She wondered, now, if that had been a strategic move, the teachers hoping to get some respect through association. The whole class counted down from ten, with the crescendo culminating in, "Blastoff!" A few moments later, that banner was carried into the great beyond, albeit a different one than planned, and

any hoped-for strategic association was incinerated along with the crew. She remembered being very confused about what she had just seen and about why many of her classmates – and teachers – were crying. Then a fast-thinking librarian switched the input of the TV to the VCR and popped in what could only have been the first movie she grabbed, *The Final Countdown*, in which an aircraft carrier travels back in time on the eve of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. “It’s the final countdown, dadada daaaa, dada da da da,” she sang to the baby.

She had a nagging suspicion that the song was not, in fact, in the movie, even though she always associated them. She also had a nagging suspicion that this was it, this was her *Challenger*. The doorman had called the cops. The light is going to turn and the car will pull up next to her and that will be the end of their New York lives, the lives she had meticulously planned and mercilessly enacted. One reckless moment, something as seemingly insignificant as an electronic cigarette, would be enough to blow it all up. It was all her fault.

It was also all in her head. Now on the sidewalk and out of the walk signal’s red glow, she came back to her senses. So what if they stopped her? They weren’t going to haul her in on account of a cigarette. Worst came to worst, she would probably just have to return it. That would be embarrassing, and could pose a problem for her fictional sister, but she’d figure out something. She was more concerned about her husband. He would be less easy to appease. That is, if she told him, which she would, most likely. All the deception in their lives was shared. Any extra would be an unnecessary complication.

Then there was the third option, which was the option that actually occurred, of the police cruiser accelerating past her and leaving her standing on the corner of 59th and Park with a doorman’s e-cigarette in her pocket and a baby in the stroller, a baby that was now awake and vacating its bowels in a loud, bubbly mess of a sound. In her haste to leave the apartment, she had forgotten to pack a diaper bag, so she did an about-face and headed home. The baby immediately fell back asleep, and she was just about to congratulate herself on her good fortune when she realized she was downwind, and would

be the whole way home. She picked up the pace.

* * *

He had thought he'd be able to focus without the incessant crying, and he was right, to an extent. Focus he had. What he didn't have were any ideas about how to get rid of the bodies. Or where. Or how to get them there, wherever that was. He had a serious disposal problem, and he could feel himself approaching the rolling foothills of panic. The slight emotional incline gave his heart and lungs a bit more work to do, which caused a bit more oxygen to be dissolved in the blood, teasing him with the onset of euphoria. He knew it wasn't real – or, at least, really euphoria. It was only panic's Trojan horse, and he did not want to pull it inside. If he did, if he let himself think everything was okay and wait to deal with this until later, the belly of that horse would open up and out would spring not Odysseus, but her. She had chosen the city, chosen the apartment, chosen their new lives, planned it all out. She had done her part, and well. Sure, the baby – and the full extent of what that meant – was a wrinkle, but it had still been more or less expected. And now it was his turn. And he was stuck.

“Move first, then think. But move.” He opened the hallway closet to put away the vacuum, turned on the light, and saw the solution to his problem. It looked like a window whose glass had been replaced with some sort of ribbed board, the surface of which reminded him of something else from a long time ago.

The rolltop door at the top of the stairs of his best friend's house had been a mystery to them for years, all the more intriguing on account of the old-fashioned padlock that kept its contents secure. “This is how we can make our escape,” his friend said after picking the lock and lifting the door open. From what or whom they were escaping wasn't clear, but he readily agreed that it was perfect. “How the hell did you do that?” he asked. His friend gave him a smile he had never seen before. “Practice. Lots and lots of practice.”

They both looked inside. He spotted the rope first and started pulling. Dust and debris snowed down on their heads, and a metallic groan rose from

the bottom of the shaft. He kept pulling and soon a large metal box occupied the entire space behind the door. “Okay, let’s check it out.” He got in. His friend followed, and they lowered themselves down.

It ended up being just a dumbwaiter that went down to the basement, to a similar door which had been similarly padlocked next to a large Amish-made workbench. When they had tried to pull themselves back up, the deteriorated condition of the pulley mechanism would not allow it. They had gotten stuck.

The door in the closet was stuck. The handle which would have been at the base had long ago been removed, and layer after layer of paint had glued it shut. Out of other options, he sketched out a plan and his anxiety evaporated. It was still there, but he wasn’t swimming in it. He walked through it, quickly, calmly. If she were there, she would have been relieved to see him moving like that, for that’s how she always imagined him: gliding.

Tool bag in hand, back in the closet, he removed a razor blade and used it to cut through the paint along the edges of the door. Then he took a spackling tool, inserted it into the cut paint, and slowly pried away the caked on latex from the surrounding molding. Once the paint was loose, he went back to the razor blade, making parallel cuts to his first and thereby creating thin strips of paint, which he peeled away to reveal the joint between the door and wall. There was a faint sound of sticky release when he applied pressure near the edges. The door was at least moveable, now, but he still needed something to move it with. He took out a mini pry bar from his bag, shoved it between the base of the door and the wall, where the handle would have been, and rocked it back and forth all along the width of the door, loosening it as much as he could. He moved it back to the middle, wedged it as far down as he could without damaging the door or molding, and started to pry the door up. Once it was about an inch open, he replaced the pry bar with his hands, reached in, and pushed.

There it was: the rope, the open shaft. He started to pull, and decades of dust and neglect rained down just as before, and he expected that subterranean groan to again accompany the dumbwaiter on its ascent, but it was silent, save for a few squeaks. When it finally arrived, it was bigger and in better

condition than he had hoped. Fifteen minutes later, the bodies disappeared below the sill. He lowered them only until the top of the dumbwaiter was just below the opening. Then he knotted the rope to the bracket on the top of the box, immobilizing the whole system. He guessed that everyone's door was also sealed shut, but he couldn't take any chances. He would have time in the coming days to figure out where, exactly, the dumbwaiter led. But as far as she would know, everything was taken care of.

He closed the dumbwaiter door, stowed away his tools, and vacuumed the closet and hallway. He was coiling up the cord when she opened the door to the apartment. The baby was still asleep. She nervously held the electronic cigarette in her coat pocket, out of sight.

"Success?" he whispered.

OBJET TROUVE :: FOUND OBJECT

“Some would have seen this as cowardice.” Again, Gigi’s thoughts slip into an easy language. She’s not proud of it, but it seems easy to talk with the old priest. “No, I think I couldn’t decide,” the Jesuit says. “I think that’s ultimately it. That I couldn’t make up my mind. And let things slide, until there was no decision that needed to be made. The years catch up on you, and before you know it, no one wants you anymore. And you have little desire left in you. No sexual desire or the desire for companionship.” The Jesuit lifts a bookmark from his book, and dangles it out the window. His fingers are long, with knobby knuckles that end in broad fingertips. His nails are white squares, surprisingly clean for a man living in a tree in the middle of a jungle. His hands must be huge, Gigi thinks, as she sees the short length of ribbon between his thumb and forefinger. It’s not waving in the breeze. It’s weighted down by a ring. “A bit ostentatious for a homeschooled priest, don’t you think?” The old Jesuit says. He says this with a laugh that comes straight from the belly. “Can you see the spot of red? It’s a garnet. It’s seated on top of the ring. There are no clasps around it, nothing to hold it in place, but it’s very properly fixed, and attached. The ring that bears it is not silver. It’s white gold, which the store clerk recommended. Said it was fashionable then, and would be fashionable forever. I guess we believed her.” He lets go of the ribbon and the ring, and it drops through the air. It’s light enough now to buffet slightly, like a daisy twirling in a small descent. Gigi steps forward to try to catch it, but it falls softly onto the grass at her feet.

SOCIETE ANONYME :: ANONYMOUS SOCIETY

This was as good as a pact. It was also the beginning of a kind of secret liaison between two men, albeit with conflicting ideas about one thing. And Gigi of course, having listened to all this, and now made a witness to the wager. She took the money from both men, and put it in the biscuit tin on the sideboard. The sideboard was mounted to the front wall of the living room, much like in the hut where the meetings were held. All the huts in this village had some feature which seemed to connect them to each other, as if they were designed by one architect with a single blueprint, then the work got spread thin, and variegated, upon commission. The way the doors were made, some had four hinges and double locks, as if to make them sturdier. The painting and words over the threshold, some on a board like a sign, some directly on the wood of the hut. There were words over the windows too, painted on the outside, and on reverse on the inside wall, as a complete mirror of each other. As if the wall did not exist, or was made of glass. The use of feathers, made into windchimes. These seemed merely ornamental since they made no sound in the wind. Gigi placed the cover back over the biscuit tin, pushed it in with the palm of her hand. The biscuit tin had a name. Geronimo named it "The Citizen's Biscuit Tin". After that chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It was the same with his walking stick, which he hung over a large hook in the kitchen meant for a heavy skillet. The hook looked like the chandelier in another chapter in the book, and that's where Geronimo's walking stick belonged.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE :: MAY HE REST IN PEACE

The old Jesuit has many things in his treehouse. They remain concealed, in boxes stacked to reach the ceiling. There's a large hole in the roof that allows natural light to come through, for his reading in the day. His eyes are still good, even at this age. By nightfall, he's asleep. He lights no candles. His home would shine like a beacon, like a lighthouse otherwise. "More to the myth," the tourist from Bordeaux said. "They say he's truly touched by God. That he survived death. Has seen Death in the face, and walked away from it." Really? Geronimo didn't even look up from his book, swirling his Chilean wine in a terracotta bowl better used for herbs. The wine stained the terracotta, and changed its beautiful orange-brown into something of a dirty red, like old blood. Gigi had tried to rinse it off, to return the color. Geronimo had the same dried look on his face when he eventually looked up. "And you believe these ideas about the man? You believe in these constructions, do you?" His voice had acquired the high diction of the professor in him, as if to interrogate the line of inquiry. There was no inquiry, Gigi thought to herself, adding black cumin to the pot of curry. This was not a debate in a classroom or some belabored academic conference where the only ones who knew what was being talked about were the ones talking. Let him finish, Gigi thought, smashing the garlic with the broad side of her cleaver. "I don't necessarily believe in it," the tourist said. "No, no, no. But it is impressive, don't you think? To have a legend attached to you. While you're still living. To be that legend. They also say he saw angels. Four of them. Two children. And two adults, but too tall to be human. They say he looked for wings too, like the woman in the village. There are overlaps. Similarities. Maybe they saw the same thing, would you say?"

{ Lauro Vazquez }

ORIGINS OF THE HIGH FIVE

It happens in 1977 at Dodger Stadium in front of forty-six thousand screaming fans:

 this fireworks explosion of flesh and fingers that marks,
 this the first high five in California's history:

Dusty Baker has just hit the last home run of the season and Glenn Burke, a young still closeted outfielder – out of sheer joy or coincidence – has thrust his powerful palm in the air to greet his friend now at home base.

From high on there this sanctified gesture will be known as the high-five. And this dandelion shot between the palms of these two men will ricochet around the world punctuating the smallest of victories.

But the ascend of the high five also marks the descend of one of its fathers: When Glenn Burke is outed within the locker-room of the Dodgers he is abruptly dealt to the Oakland A's and then quietly relegated to the minors.

 But worse than the knee injury that retires him from the sport,
 or the car that plows into him breaking his leg in four places,
 or the struggling drug habit,
 or the time spent in San Quentin for grand theft ,
 or the diagnostic that tested positive for HIV,
 are the words like “faggot” and the crippling looks that left him – at
the end of his life barely able to lift his arm.

{ Sarah Swanson }

OUT AND AWAY

Lavender will be the last. She has already lost basil, cinnamon, hyacinth, soil. Petrol, cold cream, and kindergarten classrooms are on the verge. With the scents, her memories. And with her memories, connection to herself.

She has not consulted, nor has been consulted. She has come to understand the plan. Oh, it was a surprise in the beginning: her morning bath soap, pink, smelling of something she could never name, some floral mélange, no longer scented, even when she shoved it directly into her nostrils – nothing. She uncapped the shampoo bottle on the ledge next to her – her decades-long affair with an almond oil coconut blend – and again, nothing. Throughout the day, normal scents surrounded: the just-watered ferns, the eraser against the crossword. She eventually forgot the morning's oddity and moved on.

She has lived her life as if a box – lidded and sealed. Whatever is contained within her is for her use only and never to be shared. But as her memories slide on top of each other, and out the sides, she is slowly losing everything. With a hundred scents missing and others drifting each day, she enters a new phase, a study of what once was, a keeping hold of whatever is left.

Twelve, and with it all the misdirected love. It is winter; the land is plush with snow, the sun as bright as anything against the drifts. She is in the woods following her father. He's making tracks without thinking of her – wide and deep and so she must gallop along to fit inside his prints.

He's whistling, sharp, two-fingered. She's calling out "Molly, Moll-ee, Mahhhh-leeeee." Their beloved rusty-furred retriever has gone missing.

"Molly, Molly, Molly," her words muffled by the scarf her mother

insisted she wear. The wind bites through though, and with every syllable she's hoping, pleading, that the dog will appear. Her father looks back at her, says "let me call for a bit" and he fills her silence with his low tones.

They continue walking, deeper into the woods than she thought they owned, into the part where last summer the neighbor boy asked to see her underwear. The pines, thick. The sun not as high as when they set out. Shadows cast through boughs like girls' eyelashes.

Her father pauses, holds his head slightly higher. His awareness makes her aware. She smells Molly before she sees her. Mineral, animal. The smell of warm iron. Her father tells her to stay where she is but she does not.

On the snow, in a clearing as sweet as a baby's cradle, Molly, on her side, coils of herself splayed red and pink. Tufts of fur are bobbing against the white. Her tongue – that's the worst – her tongue, not out of her mouth, but not exactly inside either, looks as if it could taste the snow.

A wolf, a bear? She doesn't ask her father; the only sound from him is a clouded exhale.

Walking toward home she wonders what she'll say to her little sister but then realizes it's not on her to tell. The footsteps her father makes are now a ramble and more than once she falls but he does not wait. She continues to think of what she has just seen, the scent of her dog sharp inside her.

Two years later, on the first day of ninth grade, she'll ask for permission to the bathroom and she'll encounter the same smell only this time it's her own.

It's June, the month of marriages, and of course it's her sister's wedding. All the bridesmaids hug bouquets of peach and cream roses, roses from her grandmother's tumbling garden. Their dresses are a terrible type of yellow nylon with lace overlay – sweaty at the armpits on this temperamental day. And their hair! Swoops and swags, piled high, higher. She is at least seven inches taller, ten with her square heels.

Her sister is a precious pearl – shiny and small and waiting to be discovered.

The church is hot; ceiling fans arthritically circulate. The whole

sanctuary is humming with heat, the groom red-cheeked and brushing his brow, uncomfortable in so many ways.

She's been asked to sing and it's her sister so what could she say? She places her bouquet on the top of the piano, nods to the accompanist, and begins. She has only sung in private with records and radio, usually at night in her tiny bedroom, her sister on the floor looking up into her face. Usually it was songs about holding hands and missing boyfriends, longing songs, young songs. Innocent. But that's not how she feels now. Aged. Grave, maybe. Not like her bedroom all those nights, nothing like it. Looking at the guests – all those round eyes – she feels the responsibility of adulthood as heavy as a cloak. Her baby sister is getting married, her sister is old enough, is choosing to go, and she's left alone, inexperienced but suddenly, regrettably, mature.

She stops singing, picks up the bouquet, and breathing in their sweet scent she thinks this will never be the life for her.

The next summer, almost to the day, she drives to her newly deceased grandmother's place only to find it plucked and overturned. But the roses are still there and into her arms they go, great bunches of them, their blooms like softened paper. She lets the thorns do their thing – she deserves the pain.

She laments jasmine, chocolate cake, new books, just after a rain. She celebrates farmyard, construction sites (tar and exhaust), milk that's gone off.

Her boss is a jerk. Not the most original slur, but that's what she thinks to herself each time she's washing his fancy coffee cups. He's recently divorced and taking it out on all the office girls – telling them their thighs look fat when they sit, telling them they need to wear more makeup (or in the case of Kathy, less). Behind his back their leader, brazen Heidi, calls him a dictator and they all laugh while munching their ten-minute-break potato chips. All he needs is the moustache Heidi says, oh and maybe the pants that go wide at the hip.

But each day they arrive on time and punch out later than scheduled like the good girls they are. What is the alternative? Casseroles and bottles and lugging laundry to the basement, squalling babies, waiting for Daddy?

Taking the insults keeps her in her autonomous apartment.

“You finish the Davenport account?” her boss asks, his eyes on the glasses hanging from a silver chain around her neck. “You know, any mistakes and I’ll put you on tables.” He snorts at his threat. Tables involves a backroom and crouching over boxes of papers, making sure your skirt isn’t hitched up too high, searching for just the right file. Only Heidi has been relegated to this doom, bragging that she spent the first ten minutes finding the file and the rest smoking two cigarettes.

“No mistakes, sir,” she says.

He leans in – his breath a fug of coffee. “You doing anything tonight?” He’s so close and his skin is surprisingly fine.

She had been expecting something of this sort; he had been closing in on her all week, cornering her in the break room, making her squeeze past in the hall. The others had noticed but had said nothing; only the new girl – a piggy-nosed blonde – had once given her a sympathetic “are you okay?”

Keeping her head down, inspecting the dust between the typewriter keys, she says no. He nods and then flicks the spacebar beneath her thumbs.

The three hours until closing are spent berating herself at failing to find an excuse.

Because it’s late October with the clocks turned back, it’s as deep as midnight when they step out. He suggests they go for a coffee; she agrees but wonders just how much caffeine this man can take. They walk – the streetlights throwing yellow over her feet – to the little striped-awning place that she has always passed but never entered.

The door jangles their arrival. A waitress calls her boss by name and puts them at a table near the window. The view is the broken neon of an abandoned tavern.

She taps her nails against the Formica table; he talks of his ex-wife. She tries to drink her coffee as quickly as possible, ignoring the pain of a burnt tongue, but when she finishes, thinking she’ll just make the next bus, he flags the waitress for a refill, and some pumpkin pie.

He finally gets around to asking her about herself. She’s not accustomed to formulating such replies; it’s been years since anyone has been interested.

She tells him about her African violets and the TV shows she likes to watch after work. They have a laugh about the latest episode of Bob Newhart.

It's not going so badly after all.

She tells him the bus is fine; he insists he drive her home. Her building is unlit – it's a lazy landlord – and her apartment is the same type of dark. The smell of his breath on her neck. Coffee coffee coffee and something like desire.

The Monday after the weekend she seems lighter, and the Tuesday too. She's not sure how to handle herself; it's not an attraction really, just a newfound self. But she will never act on this nascent feeling.

By Wednesday, her boss is ignoring her and all the girls are jealous that she is being spared. She does not question his behavior; like all their interactions, she accepts whatever he gives. She continues to administer his coffee in the cups he likes. It will take years before she quits recoiling from the scent.

On the lake. The sunset so lovely that even with closed eyes she can see it. This cottage may be the solution.

Her sister and her three grown nephews will be visiting at the weekend but for now it's five days alone in god's country: bliss.

The yellow-green cheeks and orange throats, the innocuous black eyes; she catches them each morning – bluegills, pumpkinseeds. There's that special spot in the bend, near the cattails, where she rows to and anchors. Just her echoing boat, eagles overhead, and squirrels chasing each other on the banks. When she's particularly at peace, she trails her hand over the edge into the body-warm water almost hoping a fish will bite her fingers but it never happens.

Occasionally she'll hear the racket of another boat – she feels queenly, vexed, that anyone should occupy her space – but then it is a rental place after all. She resumes her cast-reel rhythm, snapping the line against the lake. The catch is overwhelming; her basket is a squirm of scales. Her hands smell like water and algae and spawn. They will continue to smell that way for the rest of her stay.

On the morning it's raining she curls herself with the foxed hardcover she found in one of the bureau drawers. The inscription on the frontispiece: to sophie my love, from your darling. The book itself holds no sway; her attention falls to imagining this sophie, that darling. She daydreams until the rain stops as abruptly as it started.

Oh, sliding away from life can be so easy.

In the nearest town, twenty miles away, after visiting the dusty-canned IGA, she finds herself in the bait shop. The tackle that accompanied the cottage is broken-down; she needs new line and some decent bobbers.

The teen behind the counter: Pearl Jam tee, long wavy hair, eyes like smooth stones; he offers a hey, and continues his job of leaning and flicking his hair behind his ear. The shop is narrow and the walls are crowded with equipment, the lures as colorful as fireworks. She hesitates at one display – neon orange flanges with tiny metal heads – but she knows the fish she catches won't be enticed by frippery. She eventually finds the right line and the wooden stick bobbers she prefers and is ready to leave but then she notices the bait tanks at the back of the store.

There's the burble of the aerators cycling, recycling, and the floor is damp from a recent purchase. The oddly cute nets hang from the side, those little ones with a square opening and soft mesh. And the fish themselves, constant motion, skimming against each other, silvery flashes, delicate fins extended. Shiners, flatheads, suckers. The scariest tank of all: the tumble of leeches, bulging black, swirling. The odor is definitely aquatic with an undertone of neglect. Not the same on her hands, but similar.

She'll find the scent again, at the fish counter in a sketchy downtown market. The fish will be laid out like discarded shoes, the squid a slimy kind of languid. She'll opt for the tight littlenecks still uncertain of their safety.

Gone are freshly mown grass, garlic, sandalwood, rotting plum. Mascara, bed sheets, cream soda. Slip slip; her memories flutter out and away but not before one final grasp.

It involves a man. Why does it always involve a man? A retirees' reading club that meets in the corner of the city's remaining bookshop. She saw the notice flapping on the crammed bulletin board; she thought well why not, and here she is, prompt at seven in cords and cables.

She's the last to arrive – they actually meet an hour earlier at the café across the street. Of course she didn't know this and so already she feels inferior. She looks around the room, at the brick fireplace and blonde floorboards. All the good spots are taken; she sits on a wooden chair shoved against the wall. But the members smile and ask her name, they are warm and eager, not at all territorial. Seven women, three men, a nice solid group, all in various stages of age from tennis-playing spry to mossy slouch. She's near the middle of the spectrum, old enough to wonder why they don't meet in the afternoons but young enough to drive herself through evening traffic.

The first to speak is one of the men. His eyes are a rheumy blue. "Did we all finish this time?" He looks around accusingly, pausing at the large red haired woman across the room. Everyone laughs lightly, says yes. "Well then, let's begin!" His glee is unwarranted considering their book: *Mariette in Ecstasy*.

A woman whose chin folds into her collar keeps mentioning all the hard work the nuns must do each day. Another agrees and the talk turns to the best way to keep floors clean. The other man, with elegant grey hair and a burgundy cardigan, rolls his eyes. He's close enough that she can smell his aftershave – familiar, citrus, she searches for the name.

The women continue their blather. She wonders when they'll get to talk about more interesting things like the stigmata. Or even the symbolism of Mariette's name, but maybe this isn't that kind of book club. Bergamot. Yes, that's the scent.

It's an hour of nonsense. The man with the milky eyes reins everyone with his "that's a good place to end it." They decide on the next book; she cannot believe it – *Madame Bovary*. She can already imagine the talk will center on Emma's appetites, or more likely, recipes for coq au vin.

As they gather their bags and coats, she steps into the man with the cardigan, Tom, as she recalls. There's a scurry of feet and apologies and a

grasping of hands, both unsteady. All is well and into the night they go, each to their compact car.

The next month, in lieu of their café start, a few bring French treats: profiterole and vol-au-vent, pissaladière and pâté. She hadn't even considered it. Tom has made madeleines. He passes them around on a painted metal tray, the ladies picking them up pinkies raised.

They are speckled and scalloped and smell of summer. She bites into one and suddenly perfume, there, in her mouth and on her tongue and along the stretch of her throat. It's entirely pleasant; she feels adored.

After their discussion (which did indeed center on food), Tom tells her he has something for her. They walk to his car – the night is just spring and softly quiet. He opens the passenger door and inside is a white box.

“These are for you. I thought you'd appreciate them,” he says.

Once at home, surrounded by reflecting windows, she opens the box – rows of powdered madeleines and the dusty fragrance of lavender. She thinks of fields and the sun bold in the sky, of resting supine, the scented breeze. She knows it's time she must let go, release.

{ CONTRIBUTORS }

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Nathan Gunsch spends his days working for The Doe Fund, a homeless and prisoner-reentry services nonprofit organization. He spent four years as an officer in the United States Navy, holds degrees from Cornell University and the University of Notre Dame, and has worked closely with poets Reginald Shepherd, Orlando Menes, and John Wilkinson.

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