



Re:Visions  
New Series ⑦ ➤ Spring 2009



Re:



# Re:Visions

This representative collection of writing by Notre Dame students is published through the Creative Writing Program in the Department of English. Each year, a new editorial board consisting of graduate students solicits and selects manuscripts and oversees the production of the journal in order to encourage creativity and recognize student writing of notable quality.

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# Re:Visions

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVITY

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM  
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME





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## FOREWORD

R

e:Visions, we like to think, shares a special relationship with its editors. Our first meeting was in Waddick's. All four editors crowded around Re:Visions like admirers around a celebrity, as heads turned in amazement, that we were so delusional as to worship something made out of paper. We didn't care what lay in Re:Visions' dark and mysterious past; we saw only the new possibilities for our future together. Full of energy, we set out on a course that would lead us to discover some of the best undergraduate writing at Notre Dame, but would leave us oddly unfulfilled, never quite getting to know Re:Visions as we thought we would.

Re:Visions wanted the 23rd edition to be a cataclysmic move away from the previous twenty-two editions. Re:Visions' world was full of static and swirls and graphs and crows and flash drives and dialog and consoles and beards and explosions. Re:Visions made us self-conscious about our vocabulary, our dimensions, our color scheme, our collaborative instincts and our technical, visual and decision-making abilities. We wanted to unrein and go crazy but we were afraid that Re:Visions would disapprove. Re:Visions refracted everything that passed its hawk-eyed gaze and yet stayed as it had always been.

Herein, the Re:ctangle of editors have Re:imagined, Re:habilitated, Re:interpreted, and Re:volutionized Re:Visions to Re:flect Re:alms of possibility, to Re:fract our polyvalent Re:ality, and to Re:lease Re:pressed language, Re:scuing Re:negate words from verbal Re:tocracy.

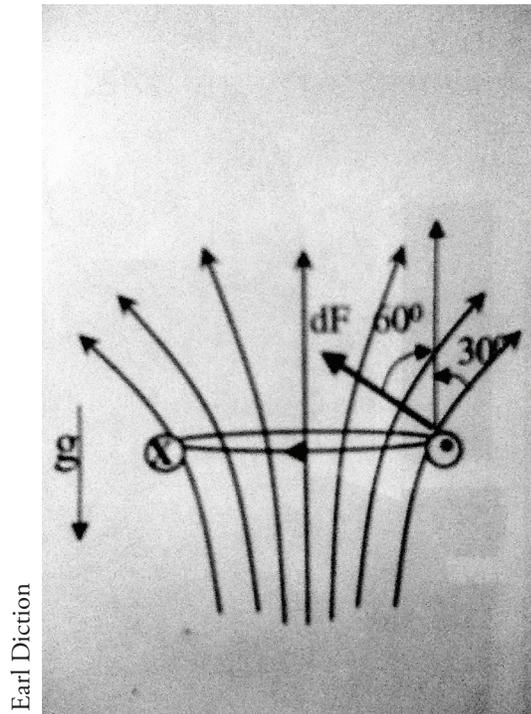
The Re:pertoire of past issues have survived Re:aganomics, Re:cessions, and three Re:publican administrations. We Re:spect and Re:member our past. However, we chose to Re:lentlessly careen onward with Re:ckless abandon. We Re:soundingly decided to Re:define its genre, Re:asoning that the hybridity of Re:Visions transcends the prose/poetry divide, Re:ndering this division no longer Re:levant.

Re:gardless, we Re:mained committed to showcasing the most Re:markable work from our vast Re:servoir of undergraduate talent. We did not wish to Re:nounce the past of our journal, but Re:orient and Re:verse its trajectory.

We Re:peatedly spent Re:stless nights Re:reading submissions, Re:solving squabbles. We hope that our journal Re:fracts the schizophrenic gaze of our Re:ddened, bloodshot Re:tinas. We are self Re:ferential. We are not Re:gular.

Get Re:ady. Get Re:ading. Get Re:joicing. The Re:st is Re:history.

Re:gards,  
Re:Visions  
The Re:st is Re:history.



Earl Diction

## MY MOTHER AND HER SISTER



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# WHAT RECALLS A WILTING LETTER

GABY MILLER

A VASE OF SUNFLOWERS ATOP A DRESSER

**Y**ou wrote faithfully in that diary for as long as you could remember, every single day until you turned thirteen. In fact, you still keep one, although you certainly divulge less frequently and at least pretend to describe topics slightly more important than your nine-year-old ramblings. Upon further reflection, you suppose that the lack of a heart-shaped lock and key perhaps lends a certain level of sophistication to your now word-processed documentation, although (you do admit) documentation purports a level of veracity to which you're not entirely committed. Not that you've dedicated thirty-four years to a vocation of fabrication. You've only noted a discontinuity between your battered childhood chicken scratch and your equally faded memory that seems at times more insistent in its ability to accurately remember the facts. Thumbing through the yellowed pages of that pink and sparkly journal, you've grinned alternatively at the virtuously indecipherable lettering and at the blanks of the margins wherein, perhaps, dwells the most potential. You don't want to write this memoir without consulting first this crucial source of your memories, these words that remain petrified on the face of each diary page. But this memoir you wish to write—should it draw solely from adolescent perceptions or allow for modern modifications in the face of your equally subjective but unwritten memory? Strange, how you had expected your childhood entries to perfectly align with the stories told by your matured memory, as if your recollection of those days would coalesce flawlessly to the confines of wide-rule loose-leaf.

To think your husband had almost thrown away this sparkling mine of ruby-studded entries. You don't remember your father giving you this first notebook or the enthusiasm with which your seven-year-old self grasped the accompanying pen. He might recall that you held instead a pencil poised perfectly between your thumb and pointer finger; he always insisted on the intrinsic perfection of your adolescence. Since your infancy, in fact, you were the impossible, the marvelous, the non-crying baby who never once spit up her lima bean Gerbers. Unfortunate that he himself never kept a diary; you would love to read how such saintly childhood events transpired.

But are you not committing the same fallacy as you rob the blank from the spaces of the ruby's fettered margins, filling them with your own memory of childhood's events? You insist repeatedly that, unlike your father, you are not deleting. There are, after all, no fresh erasure marks peppering the thin pages. You are instead merely reworking, elaborating, perhaps even modifying, never outright changing; you've aligned your memories with reality ever since you learned to write. You've recorded and created in an effort to remember, and now you relish the opportunity to rework and review. Your new memoir will be embossed in the shiny whiteness of an eight-by-eleven, double-spaced page. A new, eternal instant invented once by a famous Mexican poet who proposed a different history, accessible only through the magical fusion of poetic word and image. You hope your prose will do the same.

On the eighth of some month in 1993 you confessed that you have a best friend Heather who neither idolizes nor mistreats you. Your greatest adventure occurred a few weeks later, or perhaps it's a few months. You remember quite clearly the blazing sun of that particular July day, because the diary records that afternoon in the glaring reflection of dirt-stained snow indicative of a cold January winter. You pencil in July somewhere above the ornately decorated January of the diary's

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page, thoughtfully marking the calligraphy with a question mark. It is definitely July, isn't it, even though you wrote that Heather was freezing from the cold?

Yes, Heather was freezing from the icy cold, but you had ignored her complaints and traipsed through the snow as you did every day, living in the woods of Warrenton, Virginia. You both admire the sunflowers that glisten in the soft spring dew—in winter you stamped in your light-blue boots across the frozen mud that cracked the deer path. (Santa had brought them for Christmas in a rather medium-sized box, and you were still not sure if he was real or not, but that was a reflection for another day.) You remember so clearly the gold brilliance of the sunflowers that line the trail, the softness of their petals, and the hairiness of their thick stalks. But on that day—well, yes, perhaps they were frozen. Yet you remember that day so vividly, and your recollection is exhausted by the suffocating heat of the Virginia summer.

Seasonal preoccupations aside, you do recall (perhaps more vividly) returning to the house crying and covered in blood and that it was definitely January, because you also wore your favorite winter coat that was now splattered in creek water and blood. The unfortunate end to an afternoon dedicated to an escape from the evil clutches of your cruel aunt and cousin, who would no doubt fail to track you through the mired muck of the Amazon. Brazil was so close. They spoke Portuguese there; you could lose yourselves among the forest people and never again be confined to the dank and freezing torture of your evil aunt's Colombian fortress. Argentinean, you type. Why would it have been Colombia? After all, your favorite musical is *Eva*—your husband caught you singing “Don't Cry for Me Argentina” in the shower just yesterday.

A brisk crack broke the icy air, and from the limbs of an oak's green foliage plummeted clumps of snow and vicious icicles. Gasping, you jumped a foot in the air and grabbed Heather's thin arm before point-

ing at a little boy who sat with his legs dangling off a log long fallen across the river, covered in moss. You smile, quite certain that the boy himself is not meant to be covered in moss, however uncertain you remain with respect to particularities of the climate. Heather's face broke into a mischievous grin and she in turn grabbed your hand and tore off in his direction.

"Hey! Whatcha doing on our creek?" Heather screamed, pointing an indignant finger at the boy. You swallow and frown, a little embarrassed. You certainly don't remember her being so impertinent.

Hello! What's your name? you type. She is always the charmer, very polite, and you're relieved to encounter a politer version of your maid of honor in a more immediate drawer of your brain. Even without a heart-shaped lock, that particular drawer seems more trustworthy than the archaic dresser of your childhood diary. You shuffle around within the drawer, testing its depths; no particular articles regarding weather patterns here, unfortunately. You must look through old weather records for unseasonably cold Virginia summers. Marveling at the disorganized structure of your mind, you push shut with some difficulty that particular memory and open a dustier one in which this moss-covered boy remains folded.

Of all the things that stick with you, it's the dirtiness of his face. Yes, an entire page dedicated to his filth—no need to fill in the margins of this particular description. He looked like he desperately needed a bath or a shower—something that even your evil aunt and cousin had provided when you and Heather were trapped in that dungeon. There was never any hot water, but still. How frustrating that your father always banged on the basement door, interrupting the furious diatribe of your evil guardians as they scolded you and your best friend. Who was really your sister Sarai? A much more exotic girl (or perhaps name) than Heather, even if it wasn't exactly Columbian. Or Argentinean. You frown: Heather only pretends to be Sarai in the summer when you

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stud her braids with sunflower petals. But then you smile, remembering your father and immediately penciling above the adolescent bitterness that he routinely threatens the disruption of your contrived reality with a dozen freshly baked cookies.

The boy desperately needed a shower and seemed completely unaware of that fact. Your memories wash over his grungy hair as you watch him unfold from your mind's drawer, carelessly blowing a bubble from the filthy gum also noted in your diary. Still swinging his legs, both on the page and in your head.

"Much my creek as yours. Ya'll do better to run along here. Snakes in the woods. Big and poisonous ones too. Bite your legs off. They only leave me alone, see, but I swear they go for the girls." A country boy, not like your dad who commuted to D.C. every day. But he was a bit of a looker, and despite yourself you were jealous that Heather wouldn't shut her mouth and let you talk, even though you can't once remember feeling envious of your best friend in your life.

"No snakes gonna bite off no legs in my creek," she argued quite convincingly. "No way, no how." Heather was straight country. Still is, in fact, you reflect with a fond smile.

Perfect child that you were, you (of course) acted the gentleperson even though you truly had never seen a boy so filthy in all your eight years. Or is it ten? You never were that particular about dates—hence the increasing frustration of the weather ambiguity. Fully emerged from your drawer, the boy's grunge is accentuated by his threadbare shorts and dirty undershirt. Yet his winter jacket paled in comparison to your new one (which also had been a gift from the questionable Santa), and you simply could not fathom how he managed with no hat in the brutal winter wind. Nevertheless, you complied as always with common rules of courtesy and suggested that he accompany you and Heather back home for lunch. After all, your father always baked delicious cookies, and perhaps he'd even make homemade ice cream to

cool your tongues, half-baked by the blazing Virginia sun.

“Just clean yourself off a bit first,” you added as tactfully as possible. He looked at you with a questioning stare which turned abruptly into a glare.

“You want me to jump in this here water, you crazy girl? Don’t you know how freezing it is? I ain’t no more dirty than my old man, ain’t no more different than—”

“You’re scared! Scared to jump in the creek!” Your brow furrows at Heather’s misrepresentation. “I betcha can’t even swim!” she screamed accusingly. Shaking your head, you star this particular page and make a note to ask your father if he remembers whether Heather was truly as rude as your diary claims. Although, you realize, your “wonder-child” categorization perhaps renders suspect (at least) his descriptive recollections. It’s strange—you just don’t remember that rudeness. Still waffling, you turn a yellowed page while noting that the silver of the writing lines has grayed with age.

“Hector ain’t scared of nothing!” the boy screamed, eyes darkening. And suddenly, Hector slipped backwards off the tree, flipping freely into the gurgling water that enveloped his slender frame. “Freaking freezing!” he yelled. Now he was the one pointing a finger, and it was aimed straight at Heather, who stared back at him in shocked surprise. “Chicken!” he continued with a smirk. “Ya’ll are both chicken.” And he stood up in the water, distinctively cleaner and surprisingly tall, despite the protests of your memory which barely allows Hector’s short legs to climb back into his drawer.

Your dresser rattles more ominously now, not because you find yourself once again in disagreement with your journal, but because the tattered pages now pour forth directly from the drawers themselves: a memory too shocking to be misrepresented. Awful, that Heather ripped off her shoes with a snort of frustration. Awful, how she barreled down the creek bed as you scream that she is, in fact, a lady, and

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that ladies rise above such petty challenges and that she should under no circumstances put so much as a toe in the water. Awful, when she screamed, falling to her hands and knees in water too deep to not close over her head, and you see almost poetically how the water bubbling up around her takes on the ruby appearance of swirled Easter-egg red, and how you even kept your shoes on as you rushed into the creek to pull her out. She'd almost fainted, a rusty nail protruding grotesquely from her heel.

Although you sigh with the relieved knowledge that she will be all right, you cannot help but empathize with the tear-stained page in front of you, reflecting the speculative terror of an eight-year-old whose best friend's fate remained uncertain. Through the lettered lens, you watch in dismay as Hector bolted, evoking sobbing screams of "Chicken! Get back here! Hector!" that fell deftly on his still filthy back as he scrambled through the undergrowth and up the bank of the creek before darting off into the woods, leaving you alone with your heroics.

"Sarai, oh Sarai," you choke, tears leaking from your eyes. "Now we must go back to our evil aunt and cousin's house—without their help, you'll surely die!" You certainly failed to admit your terror all those years ago but now you won't deny it—you remember contriving another plot to evade the blinding panic that threatens to engulf you. Yet you cannot deny that you were the hero—are the hero—an eight-year-old who managed to half-drag, half-carry her best friend back down the frozen deer trail and through the snow to her house. You smile at your reflection mirrored most immediately in the glass of your computer monitor but also in the etchings of your diary, recorded so long ago. No matter the noticeable lack of sunflowers dried between the pages—the flowers gleam radiantly atop your dresser drawers, adorning your maple memory quite tastefully.

¡PUTA, QUE CARTA!

Blank pages are so daunting. You thought that yesterday and you thought that today, and still you sit staring at a speck on the ceiling, your tongue throbbing from a cup of boiling and burnt coffee en la cual echaste demasiado azúcar. Too much sugar, you always put in too much sugar. You've been trying for the past three hours to get something down on the page in front of you: fawning words of flattery, perhaps, or else various emotive phrases that earnestly beg forgiveness. Granted, you're not exactly sure why you're apologizing, upon reflection. After all, it's not your fault that Maggie is such a psychotic ex-girlfriend. Yet here you are, fixated on that ever-growing speck that mars the ceiling and threatens to engulf you in a vast oblivion of writer's block. Hijo de punta.

And there goes your brain, running interference again. Interferencia. Mixing up the damn languages while you wish you could articulate yourself satisfactorily with just the one. Doesn't matter which one, you guess. No te importa para nada, except that Erika doesn't speak Spanish.

Under more normal circumstances, you'd limit your expression to English for that particular reason, but if you're honest with yourself you realize that she's as unlikely to read your act of contrition in English as in Spanish. Merde. It's the only French word you know. Merde. You begin to write that thirty times across the page, over and over, hoping to encounter some source of inspiration or miraculous phrase that will persuade her to recognize the subjectivity of her suspicions. That letter—always back to the fucking letter.

Dearest Maggie,

I'm not exactly sure how to say this—you know

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how uncomfortable I can get when it comes to expressing my emotions. But I'm willing to try for you, to be perfectly honest, and even risk telling you that I want us to try again. I miss you, Maggie, so very much. I thought I had moved on, but our dinner last night made me realize how much I miss you—and love you, Maggie. Because I do love you.

I know we didn't work out even after three years of trying and I know we've spent the last six months arguing and fighting. I've said so many cruel things to you, Maggie, so many things to try and hurt you because I thought, selfishly, that I wanted to drive you away. I didn't appreciate how much effort and sacrifice, how much of yourself that you were putting into our relationship. I saw only the times I couldn't hang out with the guys and learned to take for granted that you would be there whenever I called. But I've changed, Maggie. After our beautiful night last night, I realized I have to. I have to have you back in my life.

Maggie, my baby, I miss your laugh and the way it falls out of your mouth when you break into that brilliant smile. And the way your nose turns up just a little, just enough to be cute but not striking. And your touch, Maggie—how could I live without your fingers? So slender, attached perfectly to your hands, so small and soft. I was only fooling myself, thinking that I would be able to move onto another woman. You already know everything about Erika, I told you last night. She

could never compare to you, my beautiful baby girl. It was a joke to think that I could ever replace your love with her affection.

Will you be able to forgive me Maggie? I know that this won't be easy, and that maybe I'll even mess up more than once and I'm already afraid that you won't take me back, that you'll only want me to leave you in peace. But Erika and I are through. I'm breaking it off tonight. All for a chance at your love again. Only the chance. Because you will always have mine.

Please, Maggie—I can change. You can help me to change. I'll do anything, anything to hold you one more time like last night, and even more to hold you every night for the rest of your lives. Our lives. My baby, please. Please forgive me for everything.

Always yours,

Your baby boy

No. No le quieres and you don't want Maggie and you want only her. Erika. You never uttered any of that from the letter—well, maybe once you loved her, but you certainly did not write those words. This letter is a joke, a fabrication, a total lie. Language contrived from jealousy, the exorbitant extremes of a psychotic ex-girlfriend. You're the one who broke it off after months of miserable fighting, and you would have never wanted to see her again except that six months later she still refused to give back your credit card.

Goddamn it to Hell, but Erika's not laughing. Concha tu madre—she won't listen to a single word you say. "This is her picture!" you gasped in protest. "Her nose—hooked, and a little oversized! Wait,

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please, don't leave—Erika—let me tell—” And she's gone, leaving you helpless in front of Maggie's letter. Maggie, the bitch who's stolen your voice and your words and left you floundering in the face of her fallacious syllables, as unable to unweave one version of history as you are to write another. You don't know how she's supposed to trust you, nor how you could've been for over three weeks without once mentioning this Maggie woman with whom you're so madly in love. You're not, you're not, you're not in love with Maggie! And you're sorry, so sorry. And you know it doesn't matter what you say, even though you would commit your life to the erasure of Maggie's letter (¡la borraría, la borraría!) if you could only control which fragments of history Erika chose to believe.

No hay nada que po'das hacer, puedes hacer then, if you're going to be picky about the grammar. Nothing you can do. You've tried to do everything, tried to act in every conceivable way—all the while squelching your pathetic flashes of self-pitying. But it's not my faults that threaten the sincerity of your reconciliatory flowers and chocolates. And attempts at explanations. And love songs in English, forgive me songs in Spanish, even a romantic French piece that you still haven't bothered to translate. Not that you could, but the beat still sounds nice.

But not nice enough. You're not sure exactly how many times puedes aguantar, you can handle, tolerate, suffer through the agony of watching Erika shut the door on your nose every time you try to reason with her. Perhaps women are simply unreasonable, you think. That might explain why you reiterated at least one hundred times to Erika that Maggie crafted this letter, not you, never you. To make her jealous. And it is not remotely fair that the woman you truly love won't stop imagining the intricacies of a dinner conversation that only occurred on a piece of paper. Because of course now you pulled the chair out for Maggie, which you never do for her, and how dare you take Maggie to

Maggiano's when you know that's her favorite restaurant?

You still want—need—Erika in your life. You have to write this letter; if words are enough to undo your relationship, you reason, then perhaps words can express that lifetime you want to spend with her. And so with a sigh you return to your fructose-infused coffee and the intimidating depths of a letter that threatens to drown you in its inadequacy. El propósito, the goal—merde. Damn it to hell that you know two languages and neither can express the reality of love, which really, you reason, is everything. Maybe you should use another word instead, like “pink.” Yes, you realize that's it. You pink Erika, you paint her with light shades of magenta infused with purples and deep swirls of foaming green. Now, will she believe the screeching cacophony, blindingly bright and monstrously muted, that flashes through your mind when you read Maggie's letter? You realize the colors make no more or less sense than your words, and that she'd still shut the door in the face of your Easter-egg confession. Over and over again.

The blank page taunts you; you crumple it into a ball and knock it unconscious. You can't commit murder—unlike Maggie's, your words never lived. They do nothing but form a powerless reality that wilts in front of history.

Son incapaces.

Llena de incapacidad.

As are you.

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Shelagh O'Brien



## ANATOMICAL DIAGRAM OF AN INDONESIAN ANGLER FISH



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# A LOVE LETTER

JONATHAN BELL

**M**y Dear Priscilla,

Let this letter be a bridge to cross the gorge of time and space. Let it overcome those inevitable evils that have threatened to erode and carve a chasm through our granite love. Since I cannot be with you corporeally, let the lexicon of my love embrace and envelop you. Let my words caress your ears, stroke your eyelids, and shape themselves upon your lips.

Priscilla, we two are intersecting cogs in a great love machine. We were forged and formed for the purpose of our union. Our destinies are only fulfilled when the ridges of our circular pieces are conjoined and coordinated. In tandem, we can create. Our factory will produce beauty and goodness and life, if only you will come back.

Return to me, my bird. Migrate home. The winter is over. Its harsh blows will no longer buffet your fragile frame or even ruffle your feathers. Let me cure you with a prescription dose of my undiluted affections.

My actions, with their negative magnetic force, have repelled you, I know. But my behavioral polarity is now reversed. Respond to my pull. This attraction is natural and insurmountable. Don't fight it any longer.

When you flew the coop, my bird, you left the nest more than half empty.

I am an unfrosted cake.

I am a remote without batteries.

I am a fork without prongs.

A single pea in a pod is pathetic. I've become an isolated tumor without you. I am peanut butter without his requisite jelly partner. I am sticky and much too savory. I need your natural sweeteners to render me palatable. Priscilla, a hand without a glove gets cold. Cover and warm me in fur-lined leather.

Without you, my thoughts are vapors that rise and dissolve. I am dry ice in constant sublimation. Restore my liquid phase and let me fill you.

Do you feel spring's restorative zephyr? Do you hear the swallow beckoning to you from outside your window? Do you see the bud on the barren branch emerging in defiance?

If even one of my words has secured its foot within the stirrup of your middle ear, tickled or even twitched your eyelid, or formed itself from the saliva of your wet tongue to be made manifest in labial luminescence, you must return to me.

The past is a skinned knee over whose wound a scab has formed. The skin has re-grown underneath, and the scab is ready to slough itself away. Make haste, and let's discard the clotted blood and proteins to reveal the shining new dermis of our renewed affections.

With love and desperation,

Philip

---

# A SEDUCTION

JONATHAN BELL

Come here to me.

The vibration of her call shakes him to his thoraxal core. Microscopic hairs and internal tissue fibers oscillate with the sine waves of this arachnid siren's inveiglement. He turns to face her silhouette against a dingy brick backdrop. Though he knows better, he crawls to her.

Her anterior legs beckon him in provocative parabolas that whisper a promise to intersect his coordinates. Her body is marked with red flames that leap across her abdomen. He stares with eight eyes pyromaniacally transfixed at that curvy conflagration before him. He will jump into the fire.

They are the only two in the alley, save the trio of ants that's scaling the façade of the abandoned warehouse behind her. The distant sounds of emergency vehicles and quarreling humans diminuendo to a gentle and encouraging hum. She grins coquettishly at him and her smile is a dewy silken web: perplexing, but inviting. He prepares to climb its dangling rungs when she stops him. Dew evaporates and her lips become dry and stiff.

You'll die, you know.

She has never given such a warning to an object of potential prey. She looks at him strangely, her eyes an ocular octet singing his own requiem. He interprets her expression as compassionate concern for his mortality and stutters a series of clicks and gurgles meant to assuage her anxiety. He sounds as though he's about to vomit.

You're different.

She couldn't see, until he came closer, the deep scars that score his carapace. His left posterior leg is missing a segment and suspends quivering above the ground. Monochromatic shades of sadness paint a dull patina on the surface of his eyes. She sees in him an earnestness foreign to the lustful, greedy stares of her past victims. Try as she might to preserve his life, she knows he won't have things any other way.

She says nothing as he advances and reluctantly allows his palpus entry, feigning excitement and arousal for his sake. She moans halfheartedly, aware of the effect even a weak display of sexual satisfaction would have. He remains silent.

When he's finished, he collapses prostrate and exhausted under her. He attempts to rise, bringing his front legs together in a pose of supplication.

She bends to him and breathes, I'm sorry.

She begins with his head. She wouldn't be able to gaze into his eyes as they became glassy with tears of pain. She almost gags as she swallows his cranium. She turns to his legs and separates them one by one from his body. Assembling them in a bouquet, she bites off the broken jointed blossoms then fills her digestive tube with its stems.

His paraplegic decapitated corpse twitches on the asphalt. She wishes it didn't.

This is remedied when she separates his thorax with a slice of her fang and consumes it whole. His disembodied abdomen is the only vestige of the almost-intact spider that approached just minutes earlier. It disappears when instinct turns into action and she consumes it, too.

The blaze that covers her abdomen flickers as she digests his corpse.

The once euphoric exoskeletal crunch of her prey is tinged with confused remorse, as the inevitability of impulse conquers an undeniable sense of sympathy.



Lauren Flocken

## WITHER ZITHER



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# STATIC

JESS HAGEMANN

A feeble “mayday” on the airwaves  
of a drowning evangelist  
culls the static of lullabies  
meant to quiet forever.  
Around the rim—  
meaningless dates like  
your diary,  
squeezed from  
the raw heat of peeled  
fingernails  
and a microwaved tattoo.  
In Plexiglas cages  
we orbit Venus  
crying as  
fire engine lobsters are boiled alive.  
If you could dive down deep enough,  
you might recover the black box  
eulogy,  
dime-a-sheet gift wrap for sex toys.



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# CASTRO LAUDS ELECTIONS

JESS HAGEMANN

14 JULY 1974

*After visiting the polls in Matanzas, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro gives a press conference covering the results.*

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something really praiseworthy and in some respects amazing has been taking place *they told me that practically no one slept last night in the city of Matanzas* they also told me that some citizens were standing in line at 0400 hours waiting for the polls to open *I spoke to a lady who told me that she had left the hospital today to vote* more than 90 percent of the registered voters here have turned out to vote *if we consider the fact that voting is not obligatory we can see that all this is truly outstanding* it is the outcome of the enthusiasm of the people *let us call it their degree of political maturity* we cannot ask for a more democratic spirit in the nomination of candidates and in the elections *in Cuba the voting age is 16 because if a 16-year-old is old enough to join the military service fight and shed his blood in the defense of his country then why should he not be old enough to vote* it was a very impressive sight to see the children beside the ballot boxes very beautiful

socialism must be a process of selecting the best by virtue of their revolutionary quality that is the only guarantee *in the revolution and in socialism there is a complete identification between the armed forces and the people* in times of peace a number of comrades keep themselves armed

and ready because a permanent guard in defense of the revolution must be maintained

of course as we continue freeing workers from tasks in the sugarcane in the sugar harvest we will have an ever larger work force to employ in construction work *and as we continue using more and more machines we will be able to raise productivity*

when you think of the sacrifices made by those men of the days they went without sleeping of the days they went without resting of the physical feats they scored of the stick-to-itiveness determination and tenacity required to do what they did *when I think of all that I believe that those men are like Che and Camilo and that it takes a determination tenacity and self-sacrificing spirit of veritable heroes to carry out such a feat*

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# TO MY FELLOW CANNIBAL CHRISTIANS

JESS HAGEMANN

CHARACTERS *3 Papua New Guinea natives: female elder, young woman and her child*  
*Uakinumu, New Guinea sorcerer*  
*Jess, white anthropology student*  
*Rev. James Chalmers, white missionary*  
*Native voices*

SETTING *Nightfall on the Pacific island. The only light comes from a bright campfire, center stage. Dense rainforest visible, stage right.*

## SCENE 1

THE PLAY OPENS: (All characters march single file out of the forest and across the stage in the following order: female elder, young woman and child; Uakinumu; Rev. Chalmers and Jess. Elder stops at stage left, faces audience, and rest do the same, so are fanned out uniformly across stage, with Uakinumu directly behind fire. All faces illuminated in flickering shadow.)

CHALMERS (Muttering, trance-like, over fire) Kum koimb wam. Kum koimb wam.

UAKINUMU (*yells*) What the devil is he doing now?

CHALMERS (*louder*) Kum koimb wam. (*repeats continuously*)

CHILD *(to audience)* Well? Aren't you going to do something? Stop this madness! He's a sorcerer for Christ's sake! Calling Satan himself upon us all!

WOMAN *(turns towards mother, tugs at her skirt)* Ma, what's he doing? What's the witch man doing?

JESS Shhh, little one. Uakinumu looks for the kum. He will warn us if the water is poisoned.

CHALMERS *(Leafing through a copy of Pamela Stewart's Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip)* Kum... Kum...Ah, yes. Kum. *(reads)* Bewitched river stones that jump into a drinker's throat and lodge there, producing in their victim an insatiable craving for meat. Used by cannibal witches to spread the desire to eat people.

CHILD Poisoned indeed. The Lord our God says, "In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood."<sup>1</sup>

ELDER *(horrified)* Eat people?

JESS *(to the woman)* Nonsense. The kum does not exist, and never has.

ELDER *(reads)* Thus the universal significance of rumor as a vehicle in preliterate societies: rumor produces its own truth through repetition.

CHALMERS My child, listen not to the white man, nor the villagers, but trust in the gods of our ancestors. We had no problems before the white man came. Now, can peace be found anywhere?

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 7:17-18.

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*(to audience)* Do you hear this? These savage inhabitants have aroused the interest and sympathy alike of Christian Polynesians and English missionaries, who, taking their lives in their hands, have laid them down in the effort to win New Guinea for Christ. Now begins the campaign against sin, superstition, and savagery!

JESS *(reads)* The first appearance of water-borne curses correlated with the institution of public health lectures delivered by colonial authorities on the need to avoid defecation in streams, so as to reduce the spread of disease-causing organisms.

ELDER In the old days, Brother River healed. Washed us clean, carried the sickness downstream. Now, he brings in sickness from the outside.

CHALMERS *(invokes rear of stage)* Brother and sisters! A hymn! That we may surround ourselves with the grace of God in this, our darkest hour.

*(From off-stage begins the low sound of singing, barely intelligible in broken English as the hymn "Come to Jesus." The voices mingle in rhythm with Uakinumu's repeated incantation.)*

JESS *(reads)* Dances, songs, music and decorations all play their part in mobilizing the people.

*(Rev. Chalmers joins in the singing heartily.)*

WOMAN *(to elder)* Great Mother, I saw the maua last night. As I lay with my husband, it came.

JESS *(reads)* Maua is the term for a malevolent force who spies on its victims

as they sleep.

ELDER (*to woman*) What is this? Fool, you are much deceived. Maua has no power over you.

JESS (*continues*) The maua first rapes, then disembowels, its female victim, extracting her kidney and placing it in the woman's own mouth, before sewing her up. The woman wakes up dazed, and unwittingly roasts the kidney and eats it.

CHALMERS (*stops singing, exclaims to audience*) Such heathen beliefs! We must pave the way for developing the resources of a savage country, and lead its inhabitants in the paths of progress and civilization! (*resumes singing*)

WOMAN With respect Great Mother, the chief said I am now infected with the maua's kôm. He said I shall die quickly if I do not procure Uakinumu's intercession.

JESS (*reads*) The kôm is a bird-like being which makes its nest in human hosts. Only one of great power may tame a kôm.

ELDER (*smiles sadly*) It is true that strange things are happening which cannot be explained. But, like the river stones, my dear, the kôm does not exist.

JESS (*reads*) He who tames a kôm may then shoot the spirit out through his eyes at an enemy. The kôm will fly into the victim's open mouth, and consume her from the inside like an internal mouth.

CHILD But it's true! I heard the dark bird cry in a dream! Like this: Kai! Kai! Kai!

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*(stops singing. To audience)* Look! The child tries to say, “Christ!” *(Resumes singing)*

*(Child takes up mimicking the kôm continuously, flapping arms and blending the beat with Uakinumu and choir voices.)*

WOMAN I feel the kôm inside me, devouring my flesh as the maua wishes.

ELDER You but mistake the pangs of pregnancy. I tell you, you shall yet bear another child, not a devil bird.

CHALMERS *(stops singing. Admonishes woman)* So it was with Abraham and Sarah! God proclaimed, “And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her!”<sup>2</sup> *(Resumes singing)*

JESS *(reads)* At its most fundamental meaning, the kôm symbolizes the soul’s unsatisfied desires for food, sleep, possessions, land and sex. Thus, anthropologists attribute the mythological kôm to notions of greed and excessive consumption introduced by the colonial advent of a cash economy.

*(Young woman gives a sharp cry, clutches stomach, and falls to ground. Elderly woman and child attend her, as Chalmers and Uakinumu carry her off stage left. Child still mimics bird, Uakinumu still chants, Chalmers still leads invisible choir. Sounds continue off-stage until actors immediately reappear for Scene 2.)*

## SCENE 2

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 17:16

OPENS: (*Uakinumu enters stage left, still chanting, carrying the young woman, now wrapped in a sheet. She is laid in front of the fire; Uakinumu resumes position behind fire, arms outstretched over her, still chanting. The elderly woman and child follow close behind, weeping, kneel beside woman. Choir still sings solemnly off stage. Jess follows Chalmers in, and both watch from a distance.*)

CHALMERS (*to audience, gesturing towards Uakinumu*) Christian burial has begun. Formerly, the body would have been hung up and tapped, allowing the juices to run out, which would then be drunk by friends and relatives. (*begins to pray fervently over body*).

JESS (*reads*) The consolidation of corpses in Christian cemeteries with marked headstones created anxiety that witches would find and attack the graves of the newly dead and consume their bodies. A round-the-clock vigil was set up in response.

ELDER It is not right that one who yet blooms with the color of youth should lie in the grave, while I, an old woman, still breathe and think.

(*Child, still crying, lies its head in elderly woman's lap. Begins to beat ground with fist, continuously, in sync with sorcerer's chant and solemn choir*)

ELDER No matter what they say, this sorrow is of the white man's doing. No kum, no maua, harmed this daughter of the earth. It is impossible. And yet, like fresh wool in red dye, the soil now drinks of her children's blood greedily.

JESS (*reads*) Rather, an epidemiology of representations spreading through political space, such that physiological events are conceptualized by lo-

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cal people in cultural terms.

CHALMERS *(to audience)* Sad, yes, but inevitable, in what has proved to be a great conflict between church and clan.<sup>3</sup>

UAKINUMU *(stops chanting for first time since beginning of play)* Tsuwake. Father. Receive now this woman, our one-time sister, your immortal daughter and servant.

CHALMERS *(to audience)* She rests in God's hands now, in the light of heaven and the peace of grace. *(resumes praying)*

*(Uakinumu resumes chant from beginning of play)*

JESS *(reads)* Although they were unable to reconcile many of the Church's teachings with their own beliefs, an understanding of "world's end" fit well with pre-existing ideas of the cyclicity of the ground and rituals to renew earth's fertility. In no uncertain terms, colonialism thus foreshadowed an apocalyptic battle between good and evil.

ELDER *(stands)* I see now what my people have become. Slaves grovel where warriors once stood proudly, and with the people's consent. No. We shall not be reduced to common plows, to beasts. *(Begins tapping cane rhythmically and powerfully)*

CHALMERS *(to audience, exuberantly)* There are numbers who rejoice in New Guinea as a signal proof of the regenerating power of the Gospel of Christ.

*(On the word "Christ," absolute silence. Then, in succession, Chalmers loudly prays the Our Father, Uakinumu loudly chants, Choir loudly sings, Child loudly pounds floor and wails, Elder loudly bangs staff. Crescendo to*

<sup>3</sup> Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. Ch. 22.

JESS *deafening roar. Then all stop.*)

CHALMERS (*reads*) In this way, the consciousness of resistance ran historically parallel with the colonial power's own consciousness of dominance.

ELDER The people of New Guinea are very mixed, some very dark, others very light. Some of the women had quite an Eastern Polynesian look; some of the children were well-formed, and really pretty.

Amen.

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We have  
a box.



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# FLASH/GLINT

RYAN OAKLEY

**T**he air pulsates with synth-distortion guitar explosions. A trudging death march digitalized, re-mastered. Sharp acoustic strings whimper anxiously, dodge between pounding footsteps. Vocalized rage, restrained to a wailing whispered yell urges the death march onward:

*and god damn I am so tired of pretending  
of wishing I was ending  
when all I'm really doing is trying to hide  
and keep it inside  
and fill it with lies  
open my eyes?*

*maybe I wish I could try*

A horseshoe wall of stacked premium speakers pumps out the industrialized rock-funk, the desperate demanding lyricism:

*pleading and needing  
and bleeding and breeding  
and feeding exceeding*

*where is everybody?*

Sunk into the black suede recliner in the middle of the Orphic

Room, Adam listens, absorbs, releases.

*trying and lying*  
*defying denying*  
*crying and dying*  
*where is everybody?*

Inhale auditory hate, rage and desperation. Exhale internal desperation, hate and rage. It floats into the surrounding air. Vivid horrific videos flash on the wall-sized tele-projector screen in front of him:

frantic mobs storm hospitals and laboratories.

two-story mounds of rotting human corpses.

an interstellar cruiser blast off in Florida—two women and two men on board.

Adam's eyes flicker, cringe, relax.

gaunt terror-stricken faces and their swollen bodies trudge aimlessly.

abandoned houses, abandoned department stores, abandoned Earth.

a human hand thrusts an orange blazing torch into the starry sky.

Adam keys in *Terminate Session*. The floating rage, desperation, and hate evaporate with the pulsating music and jarring images. Adam sighs, his mind empty like air. On his face, vacuous contentment.

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Clattered clinks of silverware on porcelain plates. Knives slice, forks stab, and hands feed. Adam, Sarah, Isaac, and Eva chew mutely. Artificial eggs. Artificial bacon. Artificial camaraderie. Breakfast together: a normalcy enforced.

A timid giggle shatters the tense and brittle silence. Three sets of eyes turn on Sarah's delicate face. Thin pink lips curve into a weak uncertain smile. Meek sky-blue eyes shift from face to face to face to table. Meager voice, barely above a whisper:

"Sorry. My little terrier was licking my heel again. He does that a lot."

Eva's uneasy stare jumps from Sarah to Isaac and back.

"He used to do that a lot... you mean?"

"Oh yes, all the time. I scold him constantly, but still he licks and licks..."

Sarah's slender fingers twirl a lengthy lock of dark brown hair. Her eyes, thoughtful, focus on the fingers at work.

A violent jerk tears the lock from scalp.

Eva's fork falls, rattles metallic on the steel dining table.

"Christ, Sarah!"

Adam starts. Eyes widen, forcibly relax.

Isaac, motionless, his smirking eyes scan Adam and Eva. They settle amusedly on Sarah beside him.

"Let's schedule a monitored session in the Orphic, alright Sarah?"

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"So a year into this fantastic endeavor, are you still convinced, Adam? Do ya think we can succeed?"

Piercing grey-blue eyes peer at Adam across the glass command

table. Adam scans over cluttered papers. Black-and-white graphs and rainbow pie charts.

“Time hasn’t changed the nature of the mission, Isaac. They made us fully aware the mission wasn’t a quick one. That it wasn’t fool-proof. I knew what I was signing up for.”

Adam’s serene jade-green eyes rise. Gaze meets gaze in green and blue collision. Standoff of opposite yet equal spirit velocities. Silent clashes in an oppressive stillness.

The grey-blue gaze drops. Isaac’s body shifts weight. Unrestrained blonde curls bounce around his square face. Grim lips form into a smirk: genius, arrogant, or insane.

“Courageously carrying the torch for humanity. To the stars and back, huh, cap’n?”

“Poetically put.”

Less aggressive, no less defiant, grey-blue eyes screw up to meet jade-green again.

“Our whole mission is a bit poetic.”

“Our mission is immeasurably important. Poetically, or not, it is crucial that you understand this.”

Grim lips open, hesitate, close. Smirk slumps into half-content smile. Restrained grey-blue eyes drift beyond Adam’s resolute face. Large calloused hands press on clear glass, push Isaac upward, away from the table. His six foot frame hesitates halfway up. Returns quickly to the seat. Glowing grey-blue eyes leer at Adam. The smirk reappears, widens.

“Immeasurably important to whom?”

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Faint clanks of hard rubber soles on hollow steel. Eva ambles down the octagonal chrome corridor. Muted acoustic guitar chords

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float in the air, muffled by distance. Eva saunters further and the chords grow louder. Her slender figure stops in front of the Orphic. Somnolently strummed country-blues guitar seeps through the white glass door. A folk sing-song voice moans with country-twang drenched poignancy:

*I've never seen a night so long  
When time goes crawling by  
The moon just went behind a cloud  
To hide its face and cry*

Stripped acoustic chords and twangy vocals melt into grieving violin—bemoaning, moaning, bemoaning—a fluctuation of lonesome misery. The violin's fading misery rebirths the twang-saturated mourning:

*Did you ever see a robin weep  
When leaves begin to die?  
Like me he's lost the will to live  
I'm so lonesome I could cry*

Emerald eyes narrow, thin eyebrows furrow. Eva's face is consternation. Her tender hand touches the identification keypad to the right of the door. Current patient: Sarah. Eva breathes a short burst of worried air. Hurried keying. Manual Override <> Session Termination. Music stops, door opens, she rushes in.

Isaac's glare. She stops dead. Sarah's dejected, confused sky-blue eyes peek over the recliner. Eva's lips curl. Emerald eyes water, eyebrows tremble. Isaac strides to her. Eyes blazing grey-blue.

"Now why the hell would you terminate the session, Eva? Damn it, we were just about to get somewhere."

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Dull knocks sound down the corridor. Adam's rough hand knuckles the thick steel door to Isaac's living quarters.

"Who's that? Did you read the lock status?"

Red letters on the keypad lock: Privacy Locked.

"It's Adam. I see the privacy status, but I wanted to ask about the progress with Sarah."

"Right... Right... Hold on."

Papers rustle. Soft thud on the carpet inside. Quick light footsteps approach the door. Door slides open. Isaac's body blocks the doorway.

"Mind if we do this in the hall? My room's a little chaotic."

Adam hesitates. Eyes scrutinize Isaac's pleased placid face. Isaac shoots an innocent-questioning glance. Forced awkward smile.

"That's... why... I had the privacy lock enabled...?"

Slowly, Adam's binding gaze loosens.

"Fine. What's the status on Sarah's treatment?"

"Well, I've got her in the Orphic twice-a-day. Mozart's orchestral symphonies and Chopin's piano pieces, with a little dash of Polyphonic Spree for a taste of the modern."

"Good, good. And the visual?"

"The tele-projector displays images and videos from her home back on earth. The garden, the Koi fish pond, even little Jocko the terrier."

"Have you noticed any improvement?"

Smile fades. Straight lips. Forced seriousness.

"No. But I don't expect to see results so soon. Not with her at least."

"Sarah is a special case?"

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“Not any more special than the rest of us.”

“I’m not following.”

Isaac kicks his left leg around his right. Leans against the corridor wall.

“Thing is, Cap’n, everybody’s brain works in a different way. We all cope a little differently. Sarah’s coping mechanism is struggling. I’m trying to reinforce it by building her receptiveness to music. Sooner or later, happy tunes’ll lead to a happy mind.”

“I hope so. It’s a little odd she was selected for this mission with such a weakness.”

“Oh she didn’t come on board like this...”

“Well, obviously. But how could she deteriorate so drastically?”

Isaac’s face breaks into a curious smile. Eyes, questioning.

“You really don’t feel it, do you?”

“Feel what?”

“The cosmic loneliness. Being one of the last four humans in existence. Not everybody deals with it like you.”

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Brown stubble covers a worn face. Deep-set jade-green eyes stare into reflection. Hands twist sink handles. Faucet spills a steady stream of cold water. Cupped hands splash water to face. Crystalline drops glide down tired creases, over prominent cheekbones, off the face onto the navy blue carpet. Faucet handles twist in reverse. Faucet stream chokes off, silence envelops the room.

Crackling static breaches the fresh silence. Isaac’s voice from the intercom.

“Adam. You’re going to want to come to the sickbay. Now.”

Urgency in the voice. Adam swifts to the door of his quarters. Door slides open. Adam darts out. Whisks through the corridor to the open sickbay door. Halts. Jade-green eyes widen.

Furthest sickbay bed, Sarah lies, arms dangling. Blood spurts in streams from vertically gashed forearms. Waterfall of blood feeds a crimson ocean surrounding her self-sacrificial altar. The scalpel lies below the lifeless bloody fingertips.

Isaac stands to the left. Hands rest inert at his sides. Eyes rise from the floor. Blood red reflects in the whites surrounding the iris.

“I found her just now. She’s already gone, but the blood is still warm and flowing. It couldn’t have been long ago.”

Jade-green eyes implore the cold grey-blue stones in Isaac’s face-sockets.

“I thought you said... I thought you were making some headway with her...”

“I was.”

Unrepentant silence continues.

Isaac stares, cold eyes bloodshot. Lips part slightly.

“Should we wake up Eva?”

“No. No we’ll clean this up first. Let’s wrap her up and take her to her quarters. I’ll tell Eva when she wakes. She shouldn’t see this.”

Smirk reappears. Sinister creases develop at the corners of the crimson-framed grey-blue stones.

“That’s awfully considerate of you, Captain.”

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Soft smooth breaths in darkness. Long dark brown hair spills over a down pillow. Cotton comforter rests at slender neckline. Peaceful eyes, closed, wrapped in dreams.

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Door abruptly flies open. Searing chrome light strikes the tranquil face. Glazed emerald eyes flash open. Comforter rips away, pale feet touch the floor. A large bulky shadow stumbles through the doorway.

Blinding light floods the dark room. Pupils contract sharply. Eva's eyes struggle, adjust. Isaac stands five feet from her bedside. His hulking frame rigid, poised. His chest heaves heavy raspy breaths. Demented grey-blue eyes glare. Scalpel glints in his left hand.

Eva's body trembles violently.

"What...what are..."

"It is time Eva."

"Isaac, I don't know what you're talking about. Please, what—"

Isaac's voice erupts, roars.

"Your time is up. Our time is up. We're corpses floating in space. It's time to stop lying. It's time to stop defying God."

Eva's eyes settle on the door. Her trembling steadies. Hand creeps to the pillow

"Isaac, you can't mean that."

"We've destroyed the earth and we've destroyed ourselves. Why should—"

Pillow rips off the bed, sails to Isaac's face. Eva bolts to the left and tears out of the door.

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Floating altos complement bellowing basses. Intense harmonious cry of a hundred choral voices. Fades. Bass drums appear, dance perfectly choreographed beats. Violins and cellos strut tensely on high-wires above. Sopranos and tenors alight momentarily, soar back into the sky.

Adam's ears saturate with harmonious chaos. Ordered madness. Eyes rest behind tired eyelids. Body slumps in suede recliner. The symphonious cave flings thoughts and worries against its walls. Batters them. Beats them.

The symphony cuts abruptly. Orphic door slides open, Eva dashes in. Adam jumps from the recliner. She collapses.

"Christ, Eva, what's wrong?"

"Isaac... It's Isaac."

Distant pounding footsteps approach. Eva's emerald eyes dart to Adam's face.

"Adam, follow me."

She tears to the door. Adam rushes after her fleeing image.

Corridor clanks with three pairs of running feet.

Adam follows Eva into the sickbay. Eva dashes to the keypad. Fingers mash the keys.

"Lock. Lock, damn it."

"Eva, calm down, what is it? What did Isaac do?"

She spins wildly towards Adam. Emerald eyes scintillate with tears.

"Isaac is mad. He's gone mad, Adam."

"Christ. I shouldn't have let him out of my sight after Sarah..."

Sickbay door flies open. Thick arm wraps around Eva's upper body. Scalpel flashes, presses gently, firmly on her throat. Blazing grey-blue coals smolder behind Eva's horrified face. Isaac's lips spread into wild smirk.

"O Captain, my Captain. Rise up and hear the bells."

"Christ Isaac. Get a hold of yourself."

Adam steps forward. Isaac recoils, drags Eva back. Scalpel pierces skin. Blood droplets form, slide down Eva's slight neck. A soft whimper from frantic lips.

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“Look what you made me do, Captain. I’d keep some distance.”

“Isaac, what the fuck is the matter with you?”

Nostrils flare, snort.

“It is not me, Adam, that has the problem. You must face the truth. The mission is over.”

“You’re losing your mind, Isaac. The isolation – it’s getting to you. Please, just let Eva go. We can hash this out.”

“Oh no. I’ve found my mind, Adam. I’ve made the realization. Humanity’s dead. It killed itself three years ago.”

Adam’s right hand clasps his chest. His jade-green eyes plead.

“But we’re still alive, Isaac. Look at us. Our lungs breathe for humanity. We can restart it when the time comes.”

His back presses against the surgeon’s tray. Left hand feels for a blade.

Wild smirking lips scoff. Smoldering eyes spark.

“Yes. Look at us, Adam. We’re rotten humanity’s floating carcasses. Our breaths spew the foul odor of death.”

Hidden hand clenches on a scalpel. Adam steps forward slowly.

“Then fucking end it, Isaac. You want to kill the mission. Kill the Captain, I’m begging you.”

“Oh, gladly.”

Eva, thrown to the wall, crumples. Isaac lunges toward Adam, blade first.

Adam’s left arm flashes. Glint of metal. Splash of blood.

Isaac’s scalpel drops, clinks on the linoleum. Grey-blue coals flame surprise. Stare at merciless jade-green orbs. Thick arm runs red with blood.

Flash/glint. Flash/glint.

Heavy frame thuds onto heavy knees. Throat gurgles. Burly

neck spills crimson humanity down broad chest. A lifeless bulk keels to the side, falls face up.

Motionless, standing, Adam clenches the stained scalpel. Jade-green eyes stare blankly.

He drops to his knees. Downward glance. Quivering eyes stare at the sacrifice. Blood pools. Stains his knees. He collapses fully to sit in it. Right hand gently lifts blood-matted curls. He slides sideways. Rests the stilled face lightly upon his lap.

Grey-blue coals stare coolly.

Extinguished.

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Christine Dits



## AN IMPASSIONED SPEECH AT TOWN HALL



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# DALI'S ROSE

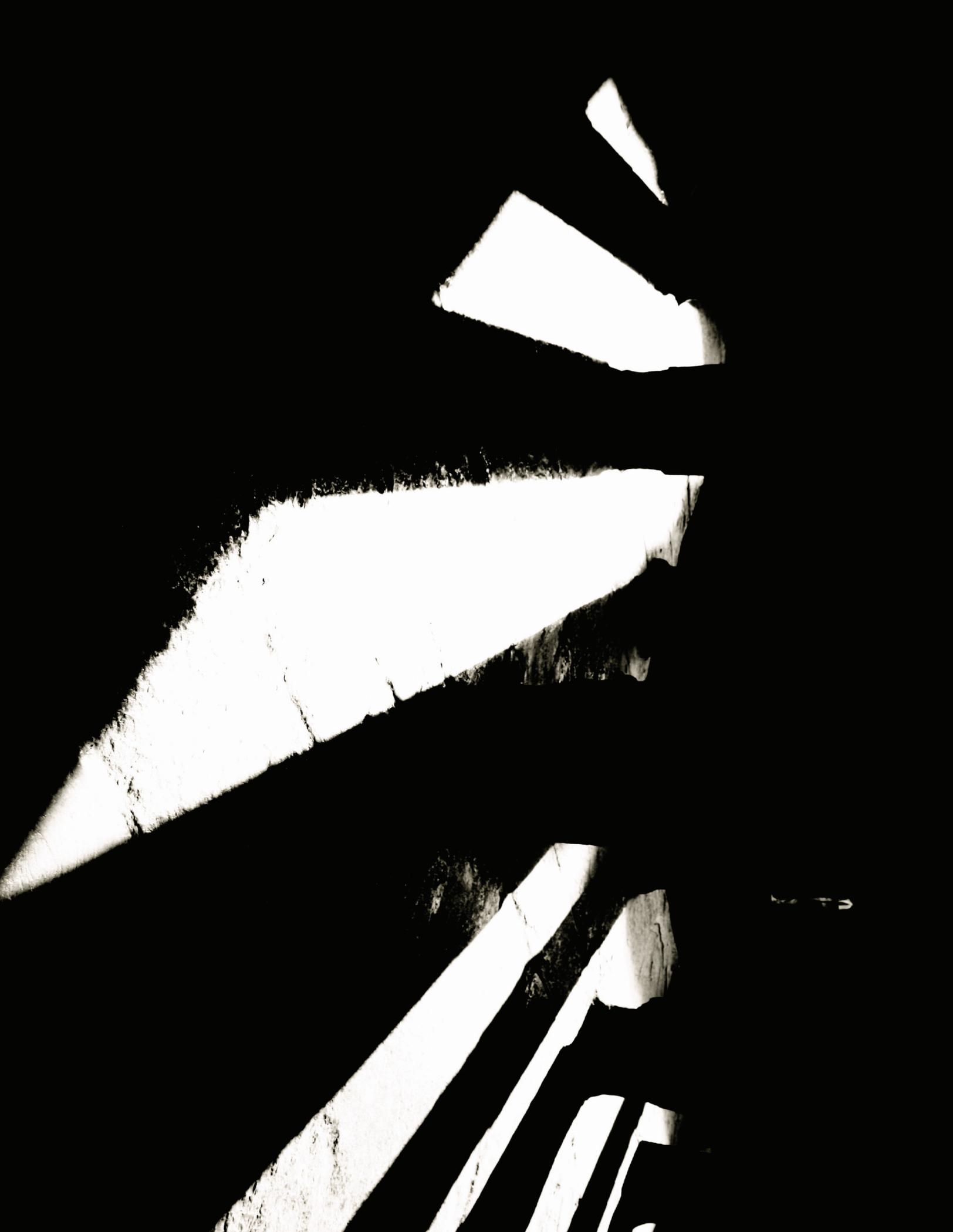
EMILY FORESTER

Dali's rose. Dead opposed. To roots,  
to stems, to thorns. The groups below,  
remove their crowns. Stand below and  
move their shade.

Dali's rose. Drop unfold. Let hills  
repeat in response. Pillow in the sky,  
arrive and try to pine. Stay in the sky.  
Sky is second.

Rose is first. Rose is center. Let us  
put our faith to meditate. Let us,  
Dali, let us decide, to like the large  
mess between us.







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# THE SIGHT OF GRASS

ASHLEY ELLIS

Livestock marching  
In their black and white suits  
In folds of tall glass  
Acres of asphalt  
Passing flowers who beg  
Could you spare a poor flower just one drop of water?  
Onward they march  
Over the contaminated creek  
The unconcerned livestock  
Homing for the pestilent fish  
At last they arrive  
To the chomping mouths water



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# DIAL, SON OF ZEST

SZYMON RYZNER

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ecently, at an archeological excavation site in Western Greece, we accidentally unearthed a grandiose find. Through our extravagantly careless use of dynamite, we exploded an entrance into the long lost city of Bathe. In my years of tedious anthropological study, I had rarely heard reference to this ancient city, and for good reason. It seems that the people of this old metropolis held unique mythological beliefs, beliefs which no doubt caused them to be banished from relations with relevant cities like Athens and Sparta. The goal of these peoples was to enjoy a life of cleanliness, physical purity, and appealing aromas. In fact, the city's entrance (the one we bombed open) was surprisingly clean, and we could even make out an inscription on the columns, which read as follows:

Μπνιο, η πλη του σαπουνιο και φυσαλδες, Γεννηθηκε μσα  
απ πολμους, και χρυσ, της Ελλδος, Που τσει το, ο γιος του  
μερκι, μεγαλτερη απ τις θετητες, Θα κατασκευαστε αυτ την  
πλη, προς τιμν του, Χρη στον αφρδη χαρακτρα, ευχριστη  
μυρωδι, Μπορομε να λατρεας στην καθαριτητα, Μχρι τον  
κσμο κατεβανει στην τελικ

*Bathe, the city of soap and bubbles, born through Trojan wars, and golden fleeces, the smelliness of Greece, brought forth the Dial, the son of Zest, the greatest of the deities, we built this city, in his honor, thanks to his frothy nature, his pleasant smells, may we worship Dial in cleanliness until the world descends into ultimate FILTH.*

The people of the city of Bathe had an entrancing mythology. Various vases found around the houses near the entrance structure showed events and told stories unknown to most classical scholars (and me). They believed that their Greek counterparts were too dirty to worship Zeus and the gods of Olympus. Thus, the Bathians formed their own society, based around a singular god Dial. They weren't monotheistic, just slightly critical of multitudes. Further unearthed marvels such as statues and brushes within the grand city revealed to us even more fascinating beliefs. According to the people of Bathe, all Greeks were extremely insecure of their lack of cleanliness and felt they were undeserving of infinitely clean deities. The Bathians especially believed life was a vast and stinking emptiness. One such poet went on at length about the smells he encountered daily, a seemingly endless plethora of fiendish odors:

Η μυρωδι της κοπρις εξς μου, σως κποιοι το τρας του βρους.  
χι, δεν εναι μνο δικ μου, ο θλιος τιμωρα μας για γενις. λες  
οι μυρωδις αργοπορ μνιμα: τα ψρια, τα αυγ, σψη της σρκας,  
εκκρσεις, τους φτωχος. Δεν υπρχει τλος: υποφρουμε. Η δικ  
μας στιγμ που τηρονται οι νθρωποι, να γλιο δεν αμφιβλλω,  
φινλε σε να φουλ ρωμα αστεο.

*A smell of manure follows me, perhaps some beast of burden. No, it is just my peer Achiakos, the putrid punishment engulfing us for generations. All smells linger permanently: fish, eggs, rotting flesh, excretions, the poor. There is no end: we suffer. Our once respected people, a laughing stock no doubt, finale to a foul smelling joke.*

Their great cities were pristine—why couldn't the citizens be as well? Documentation within a painted mural revealed the tale of a traveler who begged the gods for mercy when wandering through Greece,

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as the stench was simply too great for a foreigner to handle. It seems as though around 429 B.C. the people of Greece had an existential crisis, a crisis of hygiene, the end of which must have meant the creation of Bathe.

This deeply held belief provides the rationale for the remaining myths left by the Bathians. They were an educated people; they filled libraries with manuscripts, and schools dedicated to cleanliness studies were dispersed throughout the metropolis. Most works were devoted to the Dial; clearly, the Bathians were an obsessed people.

The Trojan War, the subject of that epic ballad is also passed on from generation to generation within the Bathian capital. Written accounts were also plentiful within the libraries of Bathe and we have unearthed many revealing texts. In the Bathian retelling of the Trojan War, the beginning of the conflict is obviously cleanliness-related. The Trojan War was about defending Grecian honor. The big-nosed Trojans had offended the Greeks by stealing away the purest, most beautiful, cleanest of all Greek women, Helen and insulting the putrid Grecian odor that inhabited various city-states. Agamemnon, furious that the only pure sample of personal cleanliness had been taken, declared war on the Trojans. Though the war lasted many years, it was mostly bloodless; the Greeks would attempt to engage the enemy, only to have the large-nosed Trojans flee to the safety of their city, far from Grecian filth. After ten years of rancid rebellion, the Greeks became discouraged, the Trojans nauseous.

The heroics of Odysseus as well, though different in interpretation, were in no way discounted by the citizens of Bathe. Odysseus and his men came up with a plan to break the stale-mate, a plan that required great nasal sacrifice. They bravely inserted themselves inside of a grand wooden horse and had it wheeled to the gates of the city of Troy. As the remaining Greeks sailed away, the Trojans wheeled the horse into the city, the Trojans planning to dismantle the horse and use the

wood to smoke out the Grecian smell; but that was not the way the Greeks had planned it.

The night before the horse was to be dismantled, Odysseus and his party decided to act. Suffering the smell of each other whilst concealed in the wooden horse was terrible and several men grew severely ill from the contained fumes. With only half of his force healthy, Odysseus raided the city of Troy. The Trojans fled immediately from their homes due to the overwhelming odor that had emerged unexpectedly from the wooden horse. Those that remained grasped their noses and pleaded for mercy that never came. Despite a moral victory in regaining their honor and the cleanliness of all Grecians, it seems the Greek tribes did not have a way to solve their hygiene issues. The ancient manuscripts end here on many accounts, the events following the Trojan War not having any bearing on the belief system of the Bathians. It is worth noting the extreme work ethic of this population; the structure of the city shows that it took no longer than 100 years to build, and the population based on the rubbish found seems to have numbered nearly 3,000 individuals. With more schools and libraries than even Athens, Bathia must have been something of an intellectual holy land. Even the likes of the semi-famous Aristotle and Plato had apparently made yearly pilgrimages to study amongst the brilliantly clean philosophers of the city Bathia.

The next significant story told in the progression of the Bathian mythology involves the Greek god Zeus. It states that the great god Zeus finally decided to intervene in the lack of cleanliness of his people. He had received too many complaints from neighboring deities; even the northern-based Norse gods were seemingly fed up with the foul stench of Greece; even the brave Odin begged for Ragnarök. Zeus' shame knew no bounds. His first attempt (a parade of winds) proved a disaster. While he wished to clean the air of the neighboring countries, he only caused a typhoon in which the smells of Greece were blown in

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every conceivable direction. The dragons and mushus of China were greatly displeased and spoke of the dishonor that Greece had brought upon itself. An embarrassed Zeus began to try all sorts of failed efforts: a drought, a flood, acid rainstorms, and so on; but nothing could cause the Greeks to smell as they should. Finally, with the help of crafty Hephaestus, Zeus formed a sheep that smelled so pure many a verse has been found describing it's pristine glory. Here's one:

τσι, ο χρυσης, τσο καθαρι,	<i>So gold, so pure,</i>
Η μυρωδι του μας θεραπεσει,	<i>The smell is of our cure,</i>
Εναι δρας τελειτητα,	<i>It's fleece perfection,</i>
Εναι, τα μσα για την ανχνευση.	<i>It's baa, the means of detection.</i>

The great fleece was to be the saving grace of the Greek people; it was to work like a modern day air freshener, but every city wanted the priceless wool for its own. Everyone wanted this precious artifact, but none more than Jason and the Argonauts. Jason and the Argonauts come down to us as a famous lyre and harp band. Known for their music, they had the sponsorships necessary for an epic journey; thus, they set out to find the fleece for fame and glory. Though the journey was long and arduous, they recovered the sparkling yellow wool. Unfortunately, upon their return, the Jason and the Argonauts tourbarge was destroyed by Zeus, whose allergies were on the fritz. This ballad we found within as well, a harbinger of the voyage's ultimate failure.

Η μεγλη Δα,	<i>The great god Zeus,</i>
κποτε ο διος,	<i>Sneezed once did he,</i>
Καταστροφ τους ρωες,	<i>Destroying the heroes,</i>
και την εταιρεα.	<i>Jason and company.</i>

Μια θύσα πριν τσιμπει, Δα αλλεργες που? Ο δο φορς, Και η δνη αποφασσει,	<i>A prior sacrifice stung, Zeus' allergies contracted; He sneezed twice, And the vortex acted.</i>
Τα πρβατα, το πλωμα, λοι πεσαν με τον Ποσειδνα, Για να ανταποκριθε, Ποιος περιμενε δπλα .	<i>The sheep, the crew, All fell to Poseidon, To meet Charon, Who waited beside 'em.</i>

Another notable failure behind them, the Greeks remained a dirty people, and the city of Bathe was yet unfounded. Once again, the people, hopeless, helpless, focused their prayers on Zeus. As Prometheus gave humans fire, so Zeus gave the Greeks the green gift of soap, a miracle bar from the Olympus bathhouse. He dropped the sudsy bar into a field near the river Arachthos, and the Greeks traveled to gather around their grand foamy brick. As the Bathians tell it, a temple soon arose around the mysterious chunk, a temple more exquisite and brilliant than that of the ancient Acropolis. It was to be an architectural marvel, holding the greatest proof of the existence of Greek deities ever presented to the impressionable people. The main temple was a place for many pilgrimages. As for the mysterious chunk, they named it Zest, for that was the inscription the bar conveniently held. No one knew what was to be done with the miracle brick; it was a time of many lightning strikes on the peninsula. Zeus was no doubt frustrated endlessly by this Grecian ignorance.

Thus, a time of growth within the city of Bathe began. The self-proclaimed city of Zeus and brotherly cleanliness grew and gained. All surrounding the Temple of Zest, the city boomed. Upon our further investigation, no pieces of Zest were found, but the temple remained in its full glory, complete with a statue depicting a grandiose god known

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as Dial. The precious gems and metals were tarnished by time, but the glory of the Temple of Zest was not. This temple too had many works documenting an entirely new god that followed the dropping of Zest and the initial growth of Bathe—Dial.

The failure of Zest only increased Zeus' frustration with the inhabitants of Bathe and the entirety of Greece. He spoke with Aphrodite, Hermes, and Aries, but no god would take on cleanliness; no deity would lower him or herself to the role of keeping the Greeks externally pure. Even the seemingly unimportant Hephaestus claimed he was busy melding and striking his anvil and could not possibly find time for an added job. Luckily, we found a satirical lyricist's song among the papers strewn across the temple floor, a song which references the lack of interest of the gods in the realm of cleanliness.

Οιλληνεξοσμ,Μιαπροσβολγιαλουςμας.Οιθεοδενβοηθουμε?  
Εναι απασχολημνη ταν ζητμε: Αφροδτη, πολ στατος, Για τον  
Απλωνα,σκληργιανακαταπιον,Ερμς,χειτις παραδσεις,Καιηρα  
δεν ενδιαφρεται.

*The Greeks smell, insulting us all. The gods don't help; they're busy when we call: Aphrodite much too flighty, for Apollo hard to swallow, Hermes has deliveries, and Hera doesn't care.*

Zeus was left with a single option: the creation of a new god who would serve the purpose he required. As he had once crafted Athena, who jumped from his forehead in full armamen, so would he shape this new god. He prepared (with the now surprisingly available Hephaestus' aid) the tools of the new deity, prepared them in the hottest lava flows in the world and from the strongest alloys. With every item prepared, Zeus called upon his godly powers and sprung a god he named Dial from the bowels of Zest. As it had zestfully fallen onto the peninsula

of Greece, so it zestfully broke apart to reveal a man of prominence. He stood confused, but with wisdom in his eyes. Dial was born with a brush Apala in one hand, the sponge Zmey in the other, and the very first thong sandals in history, one of Hephaestus' un-credited originals. Where he looked there was freshness, and an odor of the purest nectars followed everywhere he stepped. The parts of the temple his sandals touched were pure, and the outlines where he allegedly stepped can be seen still today.

Suma Motto



STROKE WHILE YOU STROKE



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# GATHERING MIRRORS

PATRICK LOPEZ

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ooking back on it, I don't feel as though I'm remembering anything, more recalling a dream. I was six. So it's difficult to separate fact from fiction. My memories from the morning of December 21, 1974 are as true as the Queen is old.

I sat by the fireplace, watching the sparks dance out of one eye while glancing over my shoulder to make sure my dad was still nose-deep in his paper with the other, when a knock came at the front door. Seeing that the fire was on its last limb, I took it upon myself to greet our visitor. I swung the door open and a gust of fresh winter air rushed inside, as if trying to warm itself. The force from the door bursting open was enough to throw me to the floor. I cried until I heard the sound of my dad's chair creak as he scooted out from behind his desk. He pounded his way across his study's oak floors to my rescue, but when he finally came, it was not my cries that caught his attention.

Tucked away in a sea of blankets just outside the doorway was a baby boy. Mild hazel eyes, thick brown hair like mine, and a half-smile that revealed teeth as white as the cliffs of Dover. Father glanced up and down the street several times, all the while scratching the back of his head as if he half-expected someone to roll down the street in a car, and apologize for having misplaced their child at our door. No sooner had my father scooped up the bundle than mother returned from the store.

After gracefully lifting the front gate's latch with one finger, while holding two bags in the other four, she glanced up to the porch to where father and I stood. In an instant the front lawn was decorated

with abandoned groceries, and my mother and the baby disappeared inside.

We spent that night in the family room curled up in front of a fire. Crystals and ornaments on the tree stole light from the fire, painting it across the walls and ceiling of the living room. The faint sound of chorals coming down the street rose just above the hissing and popping of the fire. Mom held the baby tight in her arms the whole evening.

It was a good Christmas.

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Fairytales, sadly, are often the product of fiction. When mom and dad took my new baby brother to the hospital, the doctors found abnormalities. Mom pleaded with the doctors, insisting that however severe the condition was, they wanted to adopt him. It was, unfortunately, not that simple.

My brother had been born with two hearts. Not one, two. Healthy as can be otherwise. But the fact remained, a child had been born and along with it a mystery.

The doctors at least let my parents name him. They decided to name the child Hope. I kissed Hope's cheek and held his uncoordinated hands until visiting hours came to a close. Then we said our goodbyes.

They took him three years.

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On Hope's fourth Christmas, I was too poor to afford a gift.

"Has the big brother thought about what he is going to get his brother for Christmas?" mom asked.

Hope rescued me from having to admit that, worse than hav-

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ing no money, I had no ideas. He strode into the kitchen with his teddy bear still in arm. It had only been a month, but he was still so shy. A plate full of dad's pancakes was all that seemed to open him up. It was just two days before Christmas. I had no idea what to give him.

Christmas morning came. Dad forced me to get Hope an action figure which was wrapped and waiting under the tree. I remember thinking that Hope would enjoy playing with the wrapping paper more than the present.

I sprang out of bed and rushed to my closet. Pushing my underwear and socks to the side, I gathered up all of my white clothes and hurled them down the staircase into a pile on the landing. I didn't know how I had not thought of it earlier—I fetched a shovel from the cellar, and started to clear away a patch of snow in the driveway, to make an open circle. Mom peeked her head out the door.

“Oh, are you shoveling the drive for daddy? How sweet.”

“Uh yeah, mom,” I managed to puff out in between hurling batches of snow. “I'll clean up the clothes in just a sec.”

I grabbed the clothes from the landing and piled them, then rushed back into the house and ran upstairs to grab Hope.

“Hope, come on, it's Christmas! Don't you want to see what your presents are?”

He nodded and followed my lead down out the door, and plopped down in the snow, gazing questioningly at the pile of clothes in front of him.

“Now wait just here one second. I'll be right back. I'm going to do a little magic trick for you.”

Luckily dad was rifling through the paper in the kitchen and mom had just put on the kettle. I snuck into dad's study and stole matches from his top right-hand drawer. Dad must have caught me out of the corner of his eye as I tip-toed back through the living room and sprinted out the front door to Hope.

“And just what are you up to?” I heard him yell as I slammed the door behind me.

“All right, Hope, you remember mom talking about all the fire-works they light off on Guy Fawkes day?”

“Ummm.”

“Ok. Well, this is the next best thing.”

And with that I lit the matches, sat down in the snow next to Hope, and watched the white clothes spiral away in red flames. Hope giggled, watching the flames and snow pop and hiss. Then dad came running out the front door.

“Liam! Why in Christ’s name are all your clothes on fire? Do you know how dangerous this is?”

“But dad...”

“No ‘buts’, I said.”

Then he noticed Hope, laughing next to me in the snow.

“Dad, this is my present to Hope. He spent three years knowing only men and women in stupid white coats. Men with instruments, and masks, and wires to place on him and he has never known why. I wanted him to know this is the end of everything that has hurt him before.”

My father stood there a while, dumbfounded. He plopped down in the snow and said, “Well, I guess there is nothing like lighting a fire in the middle of the drive way on Christmas morning to show your brother you love him is there? Look at the little guy laughing away.”

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Di-dah-dah Dit, Di-di-  
di-dit Di-dah Di-di-  
di-dah Dit, Di-dah,  
Dah-di-di-dit Dah-dah-  
dah Dah-di-di-dah Di-  
dah-di-dah-di-dah



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# THE CITY LIGHTS

CHRISTIE MASTRUCCI

a thousand glowing frames  
sink into midnight,  
the shadow of a skyline  
burning flames of the sun,  
with stars and sparks ignited,  
bold as the blood

of lights, painting themselves  
with colored fire,  
and the street gazes up  
to diamonds, to eyes  
pouring over asphalt and  
telephone wires --

as you sleep, dreaming of neon.



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# HOW TO COME HOME

MALLORY LAUREL

**I**f you drive around my neighborhood with the windows rolled down and if your eyes are closed tight, no peeking, and if Ricky turns the radio off because he's always got it on that one station with the DJ who talks like someone's shoving a finger up his belly button; if you can get it so that a friend with nothing to do, like Ricky, will drive you up and down parallel streets, slow so that your senses can keep up, then you can smell what each house is making for dinner; you can hear what games are being played in the front yard; and, if you put your hand out and spread your fingers, the kids will chase it like greyhounds seeing who can run the fastest barefoot and give the most high-fives. Sometimes Ricky wants to do it and he'll dangle a dollar bill, but with his eyes open, shouting "Drive faster," and when he plops on the seat rubbing the windowsill creases on his arm and counting the scratches from the torn upholstery, he'll say "That one kid with the Batman t-shirt should do track or something. Did you see him, dude? Like it wasn't even hard for him" and you'll smile and look in your rear-view mirror, but Batman will have stopped running, turned around, and have returned to the other kids, as they all recede in the distance.

A mosquito lands on my arm as it hangs out the window; the big, juicy kind that pops like a cherry when you slap it dead on your skin. To them, I'm fresh blood, maybe it's something about my scent or my new, sunless color and I wonder if mosquitoes can smell. The bite swells up bigger than it used to and it itches more than I remember, the blood smearing and staining my fingernails as I scratch the bite until my flesh starts to peel a little. I wonder if these are baby mosquitoes all

grown up, like me, with a bigger bite and I just don't recognize them; or has my skin changed with all the northeastern air? I can't remember ever seeing a mosquito in Boston and it makes sense that my skin has forgotten the subtle sting of old friends, all kinds.

Me and Ricky drive slowly, slumped back in our seats like we did before we had licenses, pulling what we called "Invisible Man, dude" which we used at busy intersections downtown. We would howl just imagining the looks on their faces, waiting for the light to change, and here we came, two kids slouching down to the car floor, the phantom driver and his phantom passenger, the fearless one and the one who was never as good at keeping his big head out of view, especially when he stole glances above the dashboard to make sure Ricky was within the traffic lines. When we were still in high school, Ricky tried getting everyone to call him "Invisible Man" but I don't remember it working like he wanted. I used to think, and maybe Ricky knew this too, that he was already invisible. Him, me; the whole town was empty space on a map, something I didn't really know all that much about until I left for Boston and couldn't find it again when I tried to come back.

Ricky got his license a year before I did, so when I finally got mine we already had a routine which he had learned to stop complaining about. Even now, when I'm only back for a week, he picks up where we left off, driving us around until the sun sets and everyone moves indoors for supper. These are the best hours, I think, the time when day ends and night begins, and it's not enough to be inside or outside, but in between. Somewhere that really isn't anywhere, like in a car that drives slowly past everything as we breathe in the warm air and watch the purples and blues swirl in the sky and close our eyes so the image paints our eyelids. And for a few short moments, home feels like home again because here in this car time doesn't exist.

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Growing up, I was always trying to leave, it seems. Spending summers in California with Uncle Sylvester; finding camps that would pay for everything. And when I came back each time it was like the world had been paused just for me.

I've seen things you never dreamed of, Mama. But it moves too fast for you. Stay here, Mama. Stay here so I have someone to come back to.

And though it changed a little each time, it was like the earth rotating on its axis, so slow you couldn't feel it. Mama would still be in the kitchen, blowing her bangs out of her face because her hands were coated with grease while cooking. And the bougainvilleas were always taller than ever, which Mama preferred because of our nosy neighbors who could see in the windows otherwise. But this, this return, wasn't like the ones that came before it. Someone had unpaused everything when I was gone and home was now somewhere ahead of me in time and no matter how fast I ran I couldn't catch up with it again.

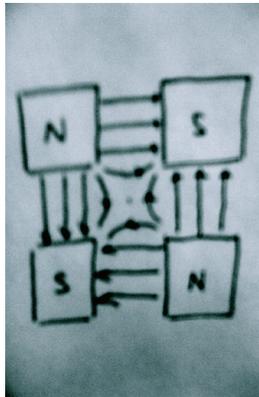
The cruelest part is that I had only found out exactly how temporary once I had left for good; once it was too far I couldn't even see it. Now it seems to be hidden in that extra dimension and I can't get to it; not when it's always moving, always wrapped up in so many metaphors because I don't know exactly how to tell it or what to call it.

I try to fall asleep but everything keeps taking me back to the moment I drove into town again. How I felt less than what I was expecting; the coming home, it was numb to me. And all of sudden I'm mad. I'm mad because the neighbors across the street weren't millionaires and I was a fool to think so; but Man, I wish I still did! And Mama knew as she watched me line up the chairs and let Wolverine drive the Rolls Royce every time. Those nobodies across the street were gods, fallen gods! And I thought I hated Eddie but Eddie hated me. And Ricky's fine without me. Coming home doesn't exist anymore because I've figured it out. I've figured out why everything meant something

and why it doesn't mean anything anymore. So I fall asleep and dream about Batman. And I shout to Batman Stop Running Stop! And I tell him to stay here forever so he never has to come back.

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Ironclad Tie



## IMPRESSIONS OF A SYPHILITIC APE

## THE STICK

PATRICK MOORE

**T**he thing about growing up in a small house is that, no matter how much you grow, the house stays the same size.

In the beginning, it wasn't small at all....

A young, skinny, scared couple moves in with their bald-headed infant son, gawking at the empty rooms and empty white walls, at all the empty space that's nearly as daunting as their new mortgage. They're at the start of their new life in their new home with their new hairless miniature human being, and let me tell you—they're scared shitless.

But the house fills up fast. Baldy starts to crawl, then he starts to walk; suddenly he has a sister. The burnt orange carpet of the living room becomes littered with various strewn-about multicolored non-toxic choke-proof toys; pacifiers and "Ba-bas" and VHS tapes for narrowly targeted audiences abound. The kids grow.

Dad buys Mom a piano at an estate sale. It's mud brown and ugly and has a cigarette burn on the mantle, but it has a nice sound so Mom is thrilled.

All of a sudden, Baldy isn't Baldy anymore. His unkempt, wild long strawberry-blonde locks indicate an audacious appetite for exploration; he climbs to the summits of couch back-rests and pulls the long corded phone as far as it will go—halfway around his world, it turns out. He zooms toy metal cars, his favorite activity; he likes the green police one (he does not ask why a police car is green, he likes the siren noise it makes when you press down on the hood-- and besides,

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green is his favorite color). Sometimes he scales the piano bench and bangs on the keys with the fury of a belligerent maestro. Sometimes he even combines these two favorite activities, racing his cars along that polished, white-brick, acoustic road, the wheels of formula one racers ruthlessly chipping off the ivory bits that hang over the ends of the keys.

Once he races three of his cars up the bathtub faucet and they don't come back; he's absolutely distraught because those are his bathtub cars, his favorites, you know, the ones that turn colors in warm water?—but Dad saves the day and turns on the water and they all come back.

The house only grows smaller. Skylar the Golden Retriever makes his home. The teetable, droolable plastic toys on the burnt orange carpet get displaced (but not replaced, never replaced) by non-teetable, non-droolable, plastic Sega game cartridges and plastic controller chords (which always end up tangled no matter how many times you try to keep them separated). Meanwhile, the little sister recruits an army of plastic Mattel dolls and keeps a trove of plastic Pretty Pretty Princess jewelry. There are still plenty of VHS tapes hanging around for narrowly targeted audiences. And the kids grow.

Dad gets promoted, so Mom gets new furniture. But they still keep the old furniture because hey, it's still good furniture. Mom and Dad try to keep Skylar away, hoping that maybe he will at least go to town on the old furniture instead. But Skylar chews up the new furniture pretty good, the little fucker. Maybe new couches and new chairs just taste better because they are fresher. Mom starts collecting various knick-knacks—lamps and clocks and throw rugs and special candles; corny metallic picture frames that spell out Family in calligraphic fonts; clover-green, beaded, decorative pillows with sewn messages like If you're lucky enough to be Irish, you're lucky enough.

The kids keep growing, but it's the same old story. The house

continually grows smaller. Crap piles upon crap. Crap upon crap upon crap.

But is that all it is? Crap?

You might think that when the brother and sister moved out, the parents would've had space to swim around in again, that the house would've become so ginormous that they would be doing snow angels on the hardwood floors. But it was only the kids that moved; their clutter they left behind.

Those poor parents—that small house didn't have a basement.

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Kristina Sinuriko



STILL LIFE OF PERTURBATION



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# THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEANS

CATHERINE EARNSHAW

**I** moved a little closer towards him. I was wet beneath my belly and with every movement of my legs I could feel the warm thick liquid start to dry between my thighs. I used my arms to move to the middle of the bed as I tried to keep my legs closed tight. I put my arm around him, trying to steal warmth from his naked body by leaning against him. My skin was filled with goose bumps and my nipples were hard again, he could feel them as I pressed my body towards his. He turned around and hugged me with his arms and with his legs. He knew I always got cold after making love.

I closed my eyes and felt the warmth of his body all over me. I felt the gaps where his body did not touch mine, where his shield against the fan's breeze failed. I was suddenly cold again. I wished his body could cover every single part of my exposed skin. I wished he could melt all over me, lose the unevenness of his form and become a warm, soft, sex-smelling blanket. A blanket I loved, a blanket I could sleep with, a blanket I could carry with me everywhere like children do when they need to hold on to something. When I was a child I had a blanket, it was white and fuzzy and it had a stain of chocolate milk that I refused to let my mom wash off. My mom understood this because she once had a blanket herself. She knew that I, like her, was too stubborn to let go of it; I had to grow up and realize I didn't need it anymore. Will this blanket ever rot?

I thought of this as my best friend and lover, lying on top of me. I needed to hold on to him, I was vulnerable . . . I had fallen in love.

The weight of his body started to take a toll on me. I moved my

shoulder, enough to show him that I was not comfortable. He moved back to his side of the bed and I moved back to mine. In the middle of us was a blank space: the green sheets that covered his bed, the smell of us, combined, and the cooling warmth of what had just made both our bodies squirm with pleasure. I thought about us a week ago, a month ago, in a week, in a few months . . . nothing seemed different. We would see each other almost everyday, make love, kiss, hug, talk, sometimes cry, sometimes fight over silly things, but most of the time, we would take each other's love, company, and unconditional support for granted. In math terms, our relationship was like a normal distribution curve with an utterly small standard deviation. In order for our relationship to look different, I had to think more than "a few months" in the future or in the past. I played with "big" numbers inside my head, like ten or thirteen or fifteen. Fifteen months from now I won't be lying on the other side of the bed, I won't let him know his weight is making me uncomfortable, I won't enjoy the peaceful minutes that follow an orgasm: "the few minutes when everything makes sense." Fifteen months from now I would be three months away from leaving. He, on the other hand, would have at least one more year before he'd be done with grad school. I would quietly ignore the pain of the weight of his body on my shoulder because all I would want is for him to stay close. I wouldn't be capable of taking the twenty minute nap we always enjoyed because I'd be afraid of missing out on "something" while I slept. Seventeen months from now would be worst. My body would tremble at the touch of his hand because it couldn't bear the thought of his touch being the last.

Last summer I decided to stay in South Bend because of him. Although we were not officially a couple yet, he was the only real friend I could count on. He had been with me through some of the toughest, most shameful, and most confusing months of my life. He probably would never realize how much just "being there for me" made a differ-

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ence.

He always did that: he fixed the world for me. All the holes I couldn't seem to figure out, all the conflicting perspectives and doubts, my fears, and the blurry image I had of my life . . . he cleared it all up. He let me borrow his eyes in order to see the world clearly; he made me smile.

If I was stressed, if I was sad, if I was angry, if I was confused, he went out of his way to help me. He said he's proud of me, he said I've put on a great effort to change my life and to feel better; he said I'm very strong. He was wrong: I was not strong, I was weak, and he was holding me up.

I had a picture where my mom was holding my arms as I tried to take my first steps. I was dressed as a shepherd girl, probably around Christmas time, and by looking at my face you can tell I could not wait to have my feet push against the ground. Had my mom let go of my arms, I would have fallen, butt on the floor, and started crying. Sometimes I felt like that one year-old again, being held by someone so that I don't fall and yet thinking I am taking the steps on my own. I didn't seem to notice that the person holding me does three-fourths of the work in keeping me stable, happy, too anxious to try to take another step and move forward. Despite what people said about time healing, time fixing, and time overcoming everything, I thought of how much I still depended on him; I was terrified to look ahead.

I stared at him. I already felt guilty for not treasuring the moment, even though I was. I wanted to remember every detail: how his mouth was not completely closed when he slept, the sound of his breathing, the tiny opening in his eyes, the smell of his breath when he woke up. I missed him and I wanted to cry.

The night before, I got mad at him because he didn't want to make our relationship formal. We loved each other, we weren't seeing other people, and we basically lived together. I didn't understand why he

wouldn't call me his girlfriend. I slept with him at least five days a week and the other two days I didn't sleep at all because of schoolwork. He said he didn't want to make it formal because in the end I would graduate, I would leave, and he would stay.

Sometimes I wished I were a grad-student like him, so that I could stay here two more years. Sometimes I just wished I had met him when I was a freshman; by now our relationship would be strong enough for him to think of his future and include me. He would be able to say *te amo* and not just *te quiero*. Unfortunately, I thought he cared for me in a very non-selfish way. He didn't want to hold me back. Me, on the other hand... I was the perfect example of how love is selfish.

I wished I had the courage to tell him I wanted to be with him after I finished school. I day-dreamed of how, as my graduation date approached, he would realize how much he loved me and how much he wanted me in his life. He would fix things, as he always did: he would come up with the perfect plan for us to stay together despite the distance. But that's not how things happened in reality. What we want and what we dream of barely ever coincide, which was why when it did it felt almost like a miracle. And neither he nor I believed in miracles...

We always joked about Murphy's law: Whatever can go wrong will go wrong. But it wasn't funny anymore. It seemed like time was playing against me; it went by too fast while my love for him reached its peak, too much too soon. If this continued, then my love for him would start to decrease. It would come back down as fast as it came up, and by the time I didn't love him anymore it would be time for me to leave. We would say good-bye, dry cheeks, friendly smiles. I would pile him up on a big shelf of memories, just like I did with books. And maybe someday, in another time, I would find him on the shelf: dusty, old, and green with mold. I would pick him up, clean off the dust with

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my bare hand and say: “Ah... that was a good one.”

One of my favorite writers, Milan Kundera, wrote a book called *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. I was starting to think he was right; all the love I feel right now, all the weight attaching me to this one person would soon fade and become light, like a breeze of air whose sole effect was to create a temporary chill. The thought of it was unbearable.

I thought of the last few months of our life as images—they formed a beautiful collage: we were sleeping with our legs crossed, going to concerts and getting lost amidst the crowd, constantly looking for each other, reading in the corner table of a café, watching movies on his bed, cooking black beans at night, jogging around the factory across from his house, making love, having sex, doing both on every surface of his house, learning how to throw a football, taking long drives to Chicago, him, teaching me how to use the map, “Dead Can Dance” on the background, a herd of deer that almost killed us, climbing the dune at St. Joseph’s beach, bad jokes from him, South Park at night, trips to hotels because we never went anywhere else, torn panties, him playing the guitar before I went to sleep, pink-colored protein shakes, a day when he wasn’t hungry, a day when I could wake up without having him pull me off the bed, our passion for music, a Nine Inch Nails line: “you bring me closer to God.”

He turned around and looked at me. “Are you okay?” he asked. I told him I was, and then I kissed his forehead. He told me that was a tender kiss, and then I gave him another one on the cheek. He smiled, kissed me back, and sat up. “I’m hungry,” he said, in the whinny voice I loved. I said what I always said, “poor little thing” as I rubbed his back. “I’ll cook you something.” We cooked black beans, as usual, both of us just wearing underwear. I chopped the onions and cried, only this time I was actually crying. He hugged me from the back and kissed my neck. “I love you,” I said.

“I love you too.”



Lauren Flocken



DOZE



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# ANDY

CAROLYN MCCARTHY

**I**t hadn't taken very long. When they emerged back out into the cold, Jill was surprised to see it was still dark out. What had seemed like days had really only been a couple of hours, and now it was the middle of the night. "The family will deal with it," they had said. "Go home." It occurred to her that ironically, she and Corey did not have a ride home. They hadn't been expecting to go home alone. Jill vaguely wondered if this was a frequent occurrence. She decided very few people would think this far ahead. There must be heartbroken people all over the world, she thought, all without a ride home. She and Corey stood there together in the cold, neither quite sure what to do.

"Should we call a cab?" Corey finally asked, his voice shattering the nighttime silence.

"Let's just walk," she heard her flat voice responding. Corey shrugged, and together they started walking.

It was a long walk home, but it seemed to Jill like she blinked and she was there. The door was unlocked. Neither of them had thought to lock it on the way out. Jill stood in the doorway, unsure how to compel herself to enter. Corey pushed past her and threw his keys on the messy kitchen table. He threw open the door of the fridge and took out a beer. He set it on the table and sat down heavily, but did not make a move to open the bottle. Apparently he had forgotten about it. Jill remained standing in the door, letting the cool night air wash over her and willing it to whip through the apartment like a flood.

"Are you coming in?" Corey asked after several minutes. The

sound of his voice broke her trance. She quickly tripped over the threshold, banging her shoulder hard on the doorframe, and shut the door a little too hard. Once inside, she remained standing just in front of the door, now rubbing her sore shoulder.

“This place is disgusting,” she said to him, surveying the pile of shoes in front of the door, the overflowing trash bin, the old pizza boxes, the heaps of clothes on the back of the couch, and the newspapers and textbooks strewn across the table.

“It’s a college apartment, it’s supposed to be disgusting,” Corey responded gruffly, still staring into space in the dark kitchen.

“People are going to see it,” she answered, willing herself to step over the pile of shoes and flick on the lights. They both blinked in the sudden light. Corey just shrugged. Jill looked at him sitting there, looking so small and defeated. She wondered what she looked like.

Intent on taking a much-needed shower, she headed down the hallway to her room, but her feet carried her instead to the room just past hers. Uncharacteristically, the door was wide open. Without hesitating, she walked in and closed the door behind her.

It was the same mess she saw every day. It had the same smell, a vaguely nauseating mixture of feet and Axe body spray. Jill inhaled it greedily, wondering for the hundredth time why boys seemed to think this was an acceptable odor. Tonight, it was a comforting smell. She wondered how long it would linger. Jill shook her head sharply to expel this thought from her mind. She walked jerkily toward the bed, and after a moment’s hesitation began tugging at the sheets. She started smoothing them out, meticulously jerking at the wrinkles that appeared as she tucked the sheets tightly beneath the mattress. As she wiped at the folds, her hands brushed through a pile of cookie crumbs.

“Jesus, Andy,” she muttered, before violently ripping the sheets entirely off the bed. She stalked to the dresser, pulled out a fresh set of sheets, and quickly made the bed. Once that was done, she sat down

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on the now-smooth comforter and clutched the ball of dirty sheets to her chest. She sat there, surveying the mess that surrounded the small stronghold of order she had brought to the room. The sudden crash of broken glass interrupted her silent deliberation over what to clean next. A few seconds later, the door opened and Corey stood in the doorway.

“What are you doing?” he asked, his voice flat and his eyes unseeing.

“Cleaning,” she responded. “Did you break something?”

“Spilled my beer,” he answered gruffly.

“Party foul,” she heard herself saying mirthlessly. Corey snorted sharply, as though he was trying to laugh but could only muster a sharp exhalation through his nose.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen his bed made before,” he said quietly, crossing the room and sitting down next to her.

“Me neither. It really opens up the room,” she mused, eyeing the pile of laundry in the corner and willing herself to rise and begin sorting through it. Her legs wouldn’t move. They sat there in silence again. Presently, she became aware of Corey’s shoulders shaking silently. She peered at him, and realized he was crying. She had never seen Corey cry before. She didn’t know what to say, so she just started talking.

“We need to clean the place up. I don’t want people seeing it like this. I’ll finish up in here, and then work on the kitchen. Tomorrow’s trash day, so we should probably finally take all those pizza boxes out. They’re stinking up the whole apartment. And we should clean out the fridge, because people tend to bring food. I don’t want his mom seeing how much beer we have in there. We should just give it away. I’m sure those guys next door will take it. If I do the kitchen and living room, can you do the bathroom?” She stopped. Corey’s eyes, sunken from exhaustion and red from tears, were wide with misery and disbe-

lief.

“Jill. Can’t you just be still for one minute?” he begged. He slid closer to her and put his arm around her shoulders. She jumped to her feet at his touch as though electrified.

“No. No. I won’t. No,” she stammered, concentrating hard to get out each word. She threw the balled-up sheets into the corner with the rest of the dirty clothes. She paused at the doorway. She could hear Corey crying, but could not will herself to turn around. She stood there with her back to him for a moment, before slamming the door behind her to shut out the sound.

Jill decided that what she needed most was a shower. She crossed the hall and threw herself into the bathroom, slamming and locking the door behind her. She ripped off her shirt, then her socks, then her pants. She stumbled trying to get her legs out of her jeans. She caught herself on the sink, and her now-free foot came down hard on something sharp on the floor. She muttered a sharp curse when she looked down to see blood dripping from her heel.

“What the hell?” Jill flung the seat of the toilet down and sat to examine her injury. She recoiled in disgust. There, sticking out of her foot, was a grossly long, razor-sharp toenail clipping. “Fucking Andy!” She screamed, plucking it out and throwing it in the trash. She looked down to see similar clippings all over the floor next to the trashcan. They never seemed to make it into the trashcan. She yelled at him about this constantly. He always retorted that it was her own fault for having boy roommates. Staring down at the fresh pile of clippings, she couldn’t make herself clean them up. She sat there breathing heavily for several moments before jerkily reaching into the shower and turning on the hot water at full blast. Wincing as she put weight on her foot, she clumsily pulled off the rest of her clothes, climbed into the tub, and sat down.

She sat there, letting the scalding water pour over her body.

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The steam filled the room, and the roar of the faucet drowned out all other sounds. She was totally hidden from sight and sound. Her skin felt raw, but she didn't care. Because sitting there in the shower, blessedly alone, she could finally let herself cry.

*In loving memory of Andy Thomas  
January 12, 1988- February 21, 2009*

## SEVEN

KERRY REARDON

I was trapped in a car once. My father never looked at me the same afterwards, perhaps because my face reminded him of his mistake, or perhaps because being stuck in that heat for so many minutes melted my features a little, softening the hard angle of my chin and eyebrows. I can't be sure. The only person I've ever asked is Luke, and he didn't know me or my face beforehand.

My father didn't do it on purpose. It happened three weeks after my mother left and two after he lost his job fastening wires at the automobile plant, so he was more hungover and distracted than usual. It was July, hot enough so that my favorite t-shirt stuck to my back through a salty film of sweat and a trail of perspiration trickled under my arms. I'd wanted to go to the pool, and my dad said maybe, okay, after we made a few stops. That's when he pulled into the parking lot of the Lucky Seven, easing our brown, ballpark-mustard colored Chevy into one of the many empty spaces. It was early afternoon, so the middle-aged men and their non-wife girlfriends who usually hung out there were still slaving over their desk jobs.

"Be right back, Audrey," my dad said, tugging on a loose strand of my hair and grabbing an envelope from the dashboard. "Gotta pay my tab." He shut the driver's-side door with a thud and gave me a little wave as he ambled to the tavern's entrance, his crease-lined forehead already shining from the humidity.

"Kay," I'd said, but he didn't hear me. I was used to my thoughts going unanswered, especially by my father, who preferred to drown them out over peanuts and beer bottles at the Seven most nights. He

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had an impatient way of talking, his voice usually tinged with provocation, and an even more impatient way of listening. But he didn't leave me in there on purpose. Not for that long, anyway.

Minutes passed. The sun glared off the Chevy's metal so that it hurt my eyes to look at the crass brown shade. I felt the air around me getting thicker, swelling, so heavy I should have been able to hold it in my hands. I remember my feet itching, prickled, like the sweat was crawling all over them. I yanked off my shoes, their soles caked with dirt and gravel, and peeled back my perspiration-crusting socks. My toes stuck out like tiny red sausages that stemmed from two white feet.

How long had I been alone – ten minutes, fifteen? The digital clock on the dashboard was permanently stuck at 12:51 A.M., and when I tapped the numbers with my hand, my fingers left damp smudges on the glass. My throat grew desiccated, constricted from dryness, and I imagined jumping into a pool cannonball-style, my elbows wrapped around my knees and my nose filling with the rush of cool water. Even my eyelids seemed to stretch from the searing heat, the lashes transformed into unbearable weights. I shifted in my seat, unbuckling the belt, careful not to touch the steel. The flesh on my legs burned a furious scarlet from where my shorts had ridden up, exposing the skin to the hot sting of the leather seat cushion.

My chest grew tight from lack of air, as though my lungs were being mashed together. I could not wait any longer, and I seized at the door handle, pulling it toward me. Nothing happened. Panicked, my teeth gnashing together, I tried to yank the lock free. It did not budge but stuck, closed, uncompromising.

You'd think the car would be silent. You'd think the only sound I heard would be the trickle of sweat dropping from my skin and landing in tiny pools on the seat. But there was music. The radio kept play-

ing the whole time, the guitar strums and voice trembles flooding my ears. It never stopped.

The muscles in my hand jerked and shortened. The desolation of the parking lot faded, wilted, as the corners of my vision softened. The sun's glare seemed to crowd everything else out as I curled, quietly, between the door and the gear shift. I closed my eyes, silent, relenting.

And then, suddenly, there was air. The passenger door had been opened, swiftly, and I felt two hands on mine, pulling me away from my heat-soaked chamber. I stumbled onto the blacktop, loose-limbed and feeble, and gripped those hands like steel traps.

"Keep your eyes open," a voice said, a boy's voice, and I realized it was coming from the same body whose hands grasped my own. "Don't die, okay?" I felt him seating me on the curb, where the ground was littered with beer cans and cigarette remnants rested under my palms. "Who are you?"

I didn't know it then, but his name was Luke. The hands that freed me were his. The whole time he sat with me on that curb, pressing cool hands against my face and asking me questions, I heard the music play on.

Luke only got mad at me once, during all those years after the accident. It was six months ago, before he left our local community college for Michigan State and right after I'd quit high school and started waitressing full-time at Calloway's. My father spent most of his days sprawled out on the couch, the light from the TV casting the living room in a spectral glow, and I hated to come home to the drone of his snores and the closing credits of *The Late Show*. So I went to Luke's instead.

He'd never given me a key, but I'd found his roommate's on the kitchen counter once and had a copy made. Just in case. Its copper surface reminded me of the old Chevy, and I thrust it into my skirt pocket before climbing the stairs of Luke's apartment. I found him

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surrounded by open suitcases, two of them empty and one half-filled with a wrinkled pile of unmatched socks.

“Audrey,” he said in surprise, almost startled, and he folded two of the socks together swiftly. “What are you doing here? I thought Calloway had you working the late shift tonight.”

“I left early,” I explained, settling myself on the edge of his bed and wiping my forehead with my sleeve. “I wanted to see you.”

“What are you doing?” I asked, poking the suitcase with the tip of my shoe.

Luke didn’t look up at me but tugged at the suitcase. The zipper was wedged in one corner, and he almost tore it off the bag in his struggle to close it. “You really need a new pair of shoes.”

“So you know what to get me for Christmas, then,” I laughed, and when Luke still didn’t look at me my tongue started to feel a little bit dry and useless in my mouth. “So I was thinking,” I continued, tugging at the collar of my work shirt, “that you should take me to East Lansing with you. When you leave for school.”

He looked up then. “You mean, for a weekend or something?”

I glanced around the walls of his bedroom. The blue paint had been stripped bare in the places where he’d torn down his entire collection of Rolling Stones posters. They were rolled up and rubber-banded now, ready to go. “Maybe a little longer. I was thinking I could get a job up there, you know, ‘cause I can waitress anywhere – ”

“Audrey,” Luke said slowly, “Audrey, I think, with your dad needing you here, and you being due for a promotion from Calloway – ”

“You don’t have to answer me right now,” I replied quickly, because his voice sounded tired and when it sounds like that Luke gets very unreasonable.

Yawning, arching my back, I slumped down on the bed, my legs under me and my right arm dangling off the edge carelessly. “I

brought you some fries from the restaurant if you want them – ”

“Audrey!” Luke was alert now, on his feet, closing the distance between the suitcase and the bed in two rapid strides. I felt his fingers on my wrist, gentle but rough, calloused. “What happened?”

“Oh,” I told him, my tone off-handed, “that.” I looked down at the intersection of my hand and forearm, where Luke’s fingers covered the sickly yellow bruise shape that marred the skin’s surface. “That was just Kyle. He was playing around today, you know, grabbed my wrist a little too hard.” Luke’s touch was cool as always. “No big deal.” Kyle was one of the cooks at Calloway’s, a greasy-haired burnout who told raunchy jokes I hated. Maybe I should tell you that Kyle had called in sick that day, out with the stomach flu.

“That bastard doesn’t know his own strength! Have you told Calloway? I’ll talk to him myself.” Luke ran his fingers over the edge of the bruise, making my skin leap. “At least it doesn’t look too swollen yet. Hang on, okay?”

He left the room and returned hastily. “This will help,” he said, propping me up so that my legs rested on his lap. “It’ll be cold.” I flinched as Luke pressed an ice pack to the discolored skin. “You sure know how to get yourself in trouble, huh?” I sucked in my breath as he pressed his lips to my wrist fleetingly. “You really need to stay away from – shit, Audrey. What the hell is this?”

“What the hell did you do? What is this shit?” he demanded, holding his fingers up to show me. They were wet from the ice and tinged the same shade of blue as the towel. “Is this marker? Did you draw bruises on your arm? Jesus, Audrey.”

“Luke, listen – ” But he was already leaving, slamming the door behind him and leaving me breathless and alone.

I lay there for a long time, inert, shaking silently. It was dark when Luke finally returned. “Audrey,” he said quietly, and his voice was steady but also heated, “I think you need to see someone. I think you need to get

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some help.”

“No,” I said quietly. My voice sounded tiny. “I just need you to listen to me.”

“I got some numbers for you. I really think you should give one of them a call.”

I pulled the blanket of Luke’s bed around me tightly. It felt smooth, warm and yielding to my form. “You’re not taking me to East Lansing, are you.”

I heard him sigh. “Audrey. Jesus.” He sounded tired, fatigued. I felt him lie down beside me and place one of his hands on my back. “I don’t think I can.”

Luke fell asleep eventually. He was a snorer, too, but he snored gently, inhaling and exhaling in quiet breaths. His chest rose and fell, like a heartbeat, so that I felt cocooned. I should tell you that I didn’t sleep, that I left early, because I knew how angry he was at me.

And before I left, I took off both my socks – they were cotton, lavender, with tiny little moons on them – and stuck them in the suitcase with Luke’s. Because I knew he would find them when he unpacked in East Lansing, because I knew they would upset him. Because he was mad at me, and I was mad at him.

I should tell you what happened when Luke came home for Christmas after a semester away, about how the night he got back I packed up a box of food from Calloway’s and brought it to his apartment. How I stood outside in the wintry cold for two minutes, at least, shoving the key in the lock and twisting left, and right, and left again, wondering why it wouldn’t work. How finally, amid murmurs and voices from inside, the door opened.

A girl stood there, her torso swimming in a t-shirt that dwarfed her. She was small, wiry. Like one of those little gymnasts that never grows into a loftier body. “Hello.”

“Hi,” I said hesitantly. I held up the Calloway’s carry-out bag as if it were for her. “Is Luke here?”

She stepped back from the door, glancing up the staircase and back at me. “Yes. He’s just getting changed. Come in.” She shut the door behind us slowly, tugging at the end of her shirt. “I’m Claire.” Claire wore a necklace that rested along her collarbone, and she ran her fingers over a row of miniature gems. “Are you a good friend of Luke’s?”

“Yes.”

“How do you guys know each other?”

I’d set the carry-out bag on a counter and started wishing I hadn’t. My hands longed for something to grasp. “We met riding the train when we were little. You know, the one that heads south, to Sterling Heights? We were both just riding it there and back, for fun.” I thought of the businessmen with their ticking watches and laughed. “We were the youngest ones aboard.”

I should mention that Luke came down the stairs then, laughing too, and that he put his arm around Claire’s waist and said, “I see you’ve met Audrey.”

“Audrey,” Claire asked, and she turned toward Luke so fast her necklace slid across her skin. “Audrey, of course.”

“Yes,” I said, plunging my hands into my pockets. I felt the useless key there, cool and metallic to the touch.

“The Audrey,” she repeated, and she was looking at me again but her expression had changed, her eyes not widening with curiosity but narrowing, contracted, with comprehension. “I’ve heard so much about you.” Her voice was higher, more patient, the tone I imagined her using with small children. “I don’t know if Luke’s mentioned me, but I’m a friend of his from MSU. We’re in the same bioethics class.”

She extended her hand to me. It was small and tanned, the nails trimmed down to neat little squares. I made no motion to remove

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my hands from my pockets, so she reached out and touched my shoulder gently, once, and let her arm fall to her side.

“I certainly missed you,” Luke said, and I would have put my arms around him if Claire hadn’t been clutching his hand. He coughed, twice, and added, “Why don’t you come to eat with us? We’re headed to the diner on High Street.”

“Well – ”

“Yes, come on,” Claire entreated, and her exultant grin mirrored Luke’s. “Meal’s on us.” She brushed my shoulder again, adding, “you have to come. I want to hear all about the trains.”

You probably guessed that I didn’t actually go with them. They got to the diner first, in Claire’s car, and were waiting for me when I pulled into the parking lot. She waved to me, eager, and when I didn’t get out of the car she whispered something to Luke and waved again, beckoning me.

Luke did not wave. That’s not his style, anyway. He is very patient. He wouldn’t hurry me. I tugged at my seat belt and wondered how long he would stand there, his breaths forming tiny puffs of warmth against the frigid air, his hands wrapped under the sleeves of his sweatshirt. I wondered what shade of blue his lips would turn as he waited for me, enduringly, with Claire on his arm. I wondered how long that first day lasted in his mind – the sickly heat, the pungent smell of the tarred asphalt, of sweat against skin. I wondered about the minutes, and the hours, and the years.

His face was illuminated by the headlights of my car. I hated that expression, that lock of his jaw, next to Claire’s feigned, enthusiastic grin. I could not look at it anymore. My hands rose to meet the wheel, the motion free, easy, effortless. Lighter than air. When I backed my car out of the space, steering it away from the diner and

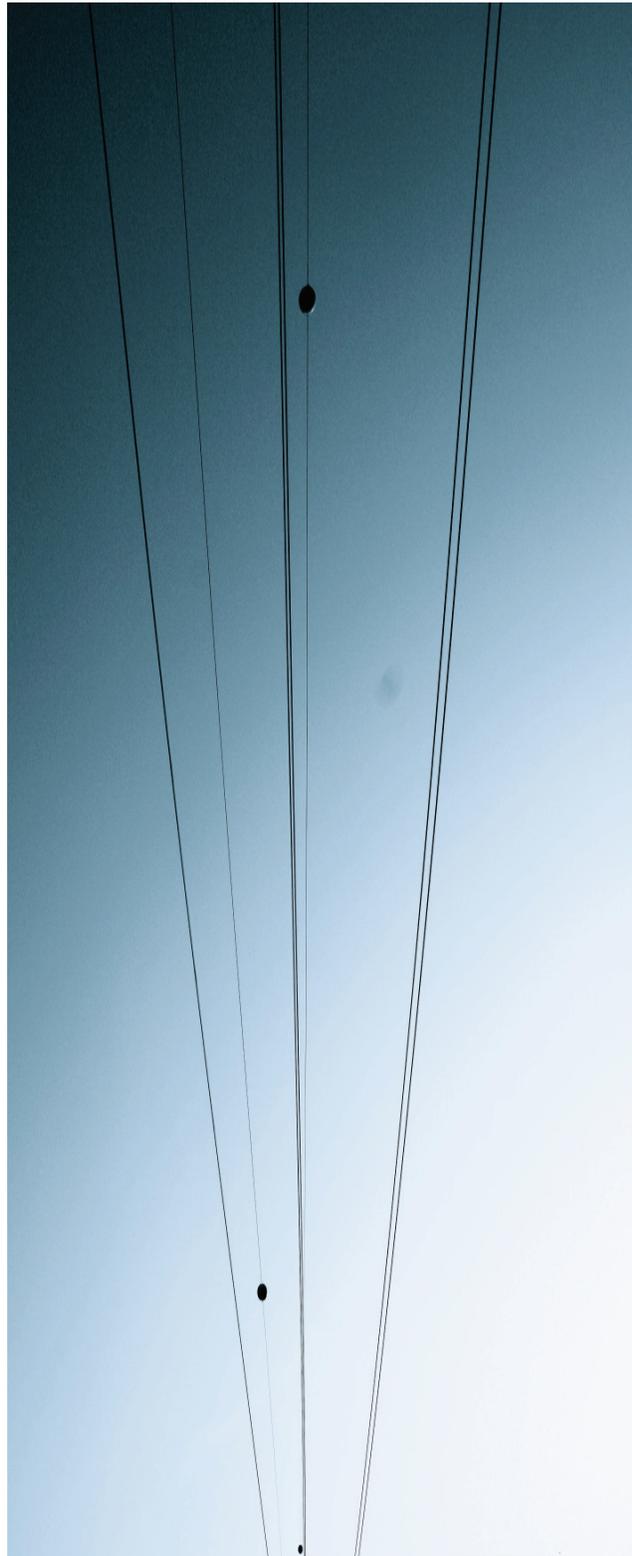
back the way I'd come, I drove fast. The road disappeared beneath my tires.

I drove by the old Lucky Seven. The thought of it makes me nauseous, makes my stomach curl in on itself. The bar has been torn down and replaced by a tiny strip mall. A Pizza Hut and the Blockbuster draw big crowds on weekend nights, when high-schoolers in letter jackets stay out late to smoke and feel each other up with sweaty, unsteady movements. There are always families, too, moms pulling at the sticky hands of their children, offering them candy to pleasepleaseplease be good, the dads wiping a kid's nose and bringing up the rear. They all pass right by my spot – the teenagers with their roaming hands, the half-drunk college kids, the toddlers screaming for pizza. They pass by, their motions animated, unaware, undisturbed. They don't know that a little girl once sat there, in a car the color of mustard, and shouted until her lungs gave out. They don't see her tiny arms shoving against the window, the door, the windshield. They don't see her hair, sweat-streaked and matted, or her face, mottled purple with exhaustion. They don't see, so they don't know.

One more thing: when I drove to the Lucky Seven, when I let the car idle in the parking lot, my hands gripped the wheel so hard my knuckles drained of color. And when I turned on the radio, longing to get rid of the silence, the same song came on that I heard when I was seven. The music flooded my ears, the same music that played on and on when I was pounding on the door, just pounding. I wanted to turn it off but I couldn't, I couldn't, because it sounded like Luke's voice. I asked my therapist about that once, about what that music meant, and she told me it depended on what song had been playing. Was it oldies? Classical? Rock 'n roll? I think she believed I was making that part up, the part about the radio. But I wasn't. The music never stopped. If you don't believe me, you can ask Luke.

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Oma Utmost



## THE OPPOSITE OF PENNIES



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# EIGHTEEN HOLES UNDER THE SUN

JOEL GRACZYK

I

'll pick you up at sunset tonight, honey.”

“Okay, mom,” said the boy as he stepped out of the car and walked around to the trunk, lifting his golf bag from the open hatch. He slammed the door and stepped to the side as the car drove away.

After a short stop in the golf shop, the boy stood on the first tee box. The teeing ground sat atop the highest point on the entire golf course. As he scanned the horizon, the early morning sun cast shadows upon the wide-open course before him. The winds of winter had gone for another year, replaced by the songs of birds greeting the new day’s sun. Morning dew on the grass gave the course an iridescent quality. Oranges and yellows shimmered in the sunrise, standing out against the deep, dark green grass.

He reached into his golf bag to choose a tee and a ball, and placed them into the ground. The ball fell off of the tee twice before he managed to put it permanently in place. He stood away from the ball and took a practice swing, and then another. Releasing a powerful swing, he watched the ball bounce ten yards forward into the deep grass. Trudging forward, he took a second, less powerful swing. The ball sailed toward the center of the fairway. It landed short of the bunkers guarding the sides of the fairway, and far short of green.

His shots did not fly far, but they flew straight. Each stroke was a new chance to learn more about the game. More about himself. He walked down the fairway, absorbing the spring morning. Dew from the grass had soaked through his shoes as soon as he had left the tee box. Ahead in the distance, he could hear the whir of a motor as the

grounds crew trimmed the grass. Wet blades of grass covered his shoes and worked their way up his ankle. The blades made his feet appear to grow out of the grass.

From the fairway, he hit his second shot. He reached over and struggled to lift his bag. Its seven clubs were far less than the maximum fourteen, but he was nearly as thin as the bag. The boy bent at the knees and again hefted the bag upon his shoulders. As he became used to the weight, he began to take each step forward with an air of confidence.

It took four or five shots for him to reach the green. He could not remember exactly how many strokes it had been, and he did not really care to. The score did not matter to him at all. Not at this stage in his life. With a few putts, the ball was in the hole. He replaced the flagstick and wandered around the green for a moment, looking for ball marks to repair. There were none – it was early in the morning and the course had not seen much play, yet – so he walked over to his bag. Turning to survey the first hole for a final time, he saw his own footprints meandering across the fairway in the dew. Wrestling the heavy equipment onto his shoulder, he continued on his journey, making his way to the second tee box.

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The young man always played the fifth hole the same way. It was the wrong way. He always hit his drive straight. The ball always flew through the air over the grass, and then continued over the pond. With an all too common suddenness, it always fell suddenly from the air and plopped into the water. Frightened geese would always flap their wings and move across the pond.

The midmorning sun caused his golf bag to cast a small shadow over his ball as he stood two club lengths away from pond. An oak tree behind the green cast a shadow over the flag. He felt like that tree only

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cast a shadow over the green in the morning. Walking over to a sprinkler head, he looked down at the number. Pacing the distance back to his ball, he selected a club from the thirteen in his bag. There was a lob wedge on clearance in the golf shop. It was the same brand as his sand wedge. He imagined himself using the new wedge to hit the ball close to the pin on a consistent basis.

Taking two easy practice swings, he addressed the ball. He took one last look at the flag and visualized his ball slowly arcing down, onto the green. A light, calming breeze blew in his face, cooling him down. The club arced back. He was certain that he would make up for the penalty stroke from his tee ball. The ball would land on the green, not in the water. Just as he swung down, though, he heard the whine of a gas engine behind him. His right shoulder jerked in his downswing and the ball curved away, far to the right of the green. As he turned around to see who had caused the distraction, he heard the distinct kerplunk sound of a one shot penalty.

When he turned around, he could not help but smile. She was a friend of his. They had just graduated from high school together.

“Nice shot,” she said.

“You know how I like to show off,” he replied, with a smirk.

She had seen him playing when he did not know that she was watching. His swing was always smooth and confident. He always struck the ball pure. Whenever he saw her, though, it was different. His swing lost its grace. His arms jerked, extended farther than usual, and whipped around to the ball. The club always caught the ball on the toe or the heel. As much as he tried to gain power, he only sacrificed his control.

“You’re so humble. Why are you out here so early? Shouldn’t you be in bed?” she asked him.

“I like to play early.” The golf course was usually empty in the morning. Crowds in the afternoon got in his way. They slowed him

down. "What about you?"

"I'm just working. I need to make some money to pay for school."

"Don't we all?" he said, smiling.

"It's true." She laughed.

"Where are you working today?"

"The snack bar," she replied. A frown flashed across his face, but disappeared instantly. The snack bar was on the fourth hole. He would not pass it again during the round.

"I should let you get over there, then."

"Good idea." She started the golf cart and drove forward again. He bent down to grab a new ball from his bag. She stopped the cart suddenly and turned around to shout to him. "Take a mulligan on that last shot. You deserve a second chance." The young man turned, but her cart had sped away behind a tree line.

"I'll see you later," his voice fell, "I guess." He sighed and dropped another ball. Without taking a practice swing, he swatted the ball at the green. It landed on dry land, but rolled back into the water. This was the third time that he had founded the hazard. Angry with himself, he flung his bag over his shoulder and crossed a bridge over a stream as he walked to the green. He decided not to hit another ball across the hazard. All that he could think about was losing more balls. He saw his target, but he could not quite reach it. From the relative safety of the rough, he chipped onto the green and putted out for an 'X' on his scorecard.

He never played that hole right. Standing on the tee, all that he ever saw were balls landing in the hazard. He would have to learn how to play that hole someday.

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With a swing of the lob wedge, his ball was three feet away from the hole. This was the fourth season that he had been playing with that fourteenth club. He always managed to pitch the ball close to the pin, now. The sun was overhead, and he could not see his shadow as the putt rolled in for par. Stepping away from the green, we walked into the clubhouse. The numbers on his score card tallied to even par on the front nine.

He ordered a hotdog, a bottle of lemonade, and a cookie for lunch. He sat down alone at a table and looked up at the television hanging over the bar. A moment later, he was staring across the table at an old friend.

“Where have you been?” she said with a smile as she sat down.

“I’ve been playing at some other courses.”

“How’s that working out for you?” she said, cynically.

“Nothing quite measures up to this course.” At this course, he felt as though he was a part of the course. After years of rounds on the course, he knew every bunker, every pond, and every break on every green. He had been playing this course since he was just a kid. The course was an integral part of his life. The course was his life.

“I know what you mean? You going out soon?”

“I’m already halfway done.”

“Impressive.”

“You know me. I like my morning round of golf. What about you?” Her face fell.

“I’m here for work, sadly.” She pointed at three men wearing brand new clothing as they walked out the door. Two of the men were scraping the price tags off of brand new clubs. “Some people just don’t get it.” He smiled.

“No they don’t.”

“I should get going before they get lost. It was really nice to see you again!”

“You too.” She turned and started walking away. As he watched her leave, he had memories of watching her drive away on the fifth hole almost ten years ago. He had birdied the fifth hole today. He called out to her.

“Wait!” She turned and stopped as he walked over to her. “It’s Friday. Can I take you out to dinner?” She paused for a moment, and then smiled.

“Yeah. Why not? I’ll give you a call when my round is done.” They exchanged cell phone numbers, and he returned to his table as she left for the first tee. He quickly finished his lunch and left the clubhouse to start the back nine.

As he approached his ball in the tenth fairway – he had, as usual, hit his drive in the fairway – he could not help but pause and wonder at the beauty of the hole. The fairway followed a steep hill down to the large green. Defending the green short and to the right were three bunkers. Any ball hit long and to the left found an expansive lake. Beyond the green and not quite in play was the sixteenth green, a large peninsula in an even larger lake. Together, the two greens shone brilliantly under the high sun. With this vista before him, the man carefully hit his shot onto the green and then walked down the hill to his next shot, smiling the whole way there. The second half of his round had begun.

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Over time, he had learned that an advantage of owning a house on the golf course was that, after work during the summer and fall, he usually had time to walk on and play a hole before dinner. The course was always empty. He did not play as much as he had in years past. Most of his time he spent elsewhere. His daughter would only be young for a few years.

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His drive had rolled into the rough, and his approach shot had bounced over the green, but he was able to chip the ball on and make a bogey for the night. He smiled slightly as he walked away from the green. The fourteenth hole was short yet narrow, a challenge, despite its lack of length. At least he had not lost his ball in a pile of leaves. That would begin in a week or two.

As he walked toward home, he picked up the two clubs that he had left lying on the fringe of the green. He knew which clubs he would use when playing in the evening. There was no need for the others.

He walked past a tree line that was just beginning to show oranges and yellows. After a few moments, his home came into view. It was one of the few homes that actually had a view on the golf course. Rising three stories into the air, its many rooms more than held his young family. His only complaint was that the original owner had not included a second level balcony from which he could see the golf course when the club hosted major tournaments. This was an oversight he had noticed even while watching the house rise during his many rounds on the course when as a young man.

“Daddy!” His daughter ran to him as soon as she saw him. When she reached him, he knelt down, dropped his clubs on the ground, took her in his arms, and lifted her into the air.

“You’re almost too big for me to do this.”

“I’m only four, daddy!”

“That’s exactly what I mean.” He carried her over to the house. When he got there, his wife was waiting in the door, smiling. She kissed him on the cheek as he set their daughter down.

“How was work today?” he asked.

“Tiring.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Can I make you a drink?”

“I’d like that.” She smiled.

“I’ll make it for you as soon as I get inside. I need to go get my clubs,” he smiled as he glared at his daughter, “Somebody made me drop them out on the course.” His daughter giggled as he walked away.

When he came to his clubs, he paused for a moment and admired the course under the late afternoon sun. In the west, the sun was on verge of dipping below the tree line. Though the shadows were long, the sun’s last rays bathed the entire course in an orange glow. When these rays mixed with the first changing leaves of fall, the colors reminded him of an impressionist painting. The colors of the leaves were vivid and deep, but their form was vague. A cool fall breeze ruffled the leaves and distorted the shapes of the trees, reminding him all the more so. He breathed in and closed his eyes, embracing the Elysian vista surrounding him.

After a moment, he released his breath and opened eyes. His face feeling light, he picked up his clubs and walked home.

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It was dusk, and the old man could barely see his clubs in front of him. His golf bag was not as full as it had once been. He had brought fourteen clubs on his last round. The weight of the cart had been more than he could push.

A few tired steps later, he came to his ball. He did not hit his ball very far anymore, but he still hit it straight. Had he not, he would not have been able to find it. Choosing a club, he launched the ball high into the air up the final hill to the eighteenth green. A youthful glow illuminated his face when he realized that it might have landed on the green. He began his ascent to the green. With each step, his knees cracked. His feet felt heavy. Winter was nearly upon the course. The leaves had fallen off all of the trees. The grass was beginning to turn

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brown. Where only months before the cool breeze had offered a respite from the heat, that breeze had now become a biting wind inhibiting his journey forward. In his younger days, he had climbed this hill many times, a golfer striving for the conclusion of his round. In those days, he had made his ascent quickly with a heavy bag on his back. Now, though, it took all of his strength just to trudge up to the green.

A triumphant smile flashed across his face when he saw his ball waiting for him on the green. He putted out and started walking towards the clubhouse, not even wondering what his score for the day might have been. When he was about halfway to the clubhouse, he stopped and turned around. The light from the sun had almost completely disappeared, but in the dark haze he could almost make out the outline of the final hole. Beyond that, he could not see it, but he knew that the rest of the course waited in the darkness. Turning back around, he finished his journey and entered the clubhouse. Waiting at a table for him in the restaurant were his daughter and his eight-year-old grandson.

“Grandpa!” The old man smiled as he sat down at the table with them, releasing a slow sigh as his joints creaked.

“Are you ready to go home, dad?”

“I will be. I need to sit and rest for a minute.”

“Mom would be proud to see you still playing out here. She knew how much you loved this course.” Pausing for a moment, he sat back in his chair with a sad smile on his face.

“Yeah, I guess she would be.” He closed his eyes.

“Grandpa, will you take me out golfing tomorrow morning?”

But the man was already on the first tee. The sun was setting, and it was fall.

## AUTOPOIESIS OF RE:VISIONS

JONATHAN BELL

Jonathan Bell was born in the year of the tiger. Tiger people are difficult to resist, for they are magnetic characters and their natural air of authority confers a certain prestige on them. They are tempestuous yet calm, warm-hearted yet fearsome, courageous in the face of danger yet yielding, soft and mysterious. (Unreasonably laudatory zodiacal description taken from wikipedia.com)

CHRISTINE DITS

I am a sophomore at St. Mary's College, and currently studying Spanish in Sevilla, Spain. My major is Communicative Disorders and my minor is Spanish. I enjoy playing sand volleyball, reading books by Curtis Sittenfeld, watching Will Smith act, and spending time trying to dance Salsa at Legends. I love taking vacations with my family to Michigan and sitting out on the beach. The man climbing the water tower is a Trappist monk at a monastery in the rolling hills of Kentucky.

CATHERINE EARNSHAW

I was born December 22. My mom likes to tell me that before I was born, I was the shiniest star on the sky and that one day God asked me if I wanted to live; he warned me life was full of things I did not know

about – like suffering, and regret, and guilt, and fear. “You were a brave star, and chose to live,” she said...Not quite! “Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy.” (Wuthering Heights)

ASHLEY ELLIS

TBA

LAUREN FLOCKEN

Lauren Flocken is a first-year student at Saint Mary's College. Her hometown is Cleveland, Ohio where she lives with her parents, older brother, twin sister and younger sister. She loves spending time with them all and is looking forward to everyone being together again over the summer. Lauren also enjoys documenting just about everything through photography and thinks it is a great way to preserve memories. She has been on three, soon to be four, mission trips to Honduras which have allowed her to see the world through a different perspective, and have taught her that even if one has nothing, if they have faith, that is everything.

EMILY FORESTER

MIA

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JOEL GRACZYK

Joel Graczyk is a freshman Economics and English major from Chaska, Minnesota who enjoys reading, writing, running, and playing his trumpet in a variety of instrumental ensembles on campus, including the marching band. His favorite novel is *The Great Gatsby*, and his favorite movie is *Star Wars: A New Hope*. It will come as no surprise to those who have read his story – the first that he has published – that one of his two jobs this coming summer will be working as a caddie for an eighth consecutive golf season.

JESS HAGEMANN

Jess Hagemann is a senior English and Anthropology major who believes that, in the words of Korean powerhouse Kim Hyesoon, "Perhaps roaming is endless."

MALLORY LAUREL

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PATRICK LOPEZ

Information cannot be disclosed at this time.

CHRISTIE MASTRUCCI

I'm a sophomore, and I'm majoring in English with a supplementary major in Greek and Roman Civilization. I've been writing poetry since I was about fourteen years old. I love writing poetry and reading as much poetry as I can find. I plan on going to either English graduate school or

law school. My life as a student basically consists of reading, writing, and not getting enough sleep. I'm sorry this biography isn't that interesting, but I couldn't think of anything particularly clever to write. Hopefully you'll find my poetry more engaging.

CAROLYN MCCARTHY

Carolyn McCarthy is a junior History major specializing in listing all the US presidents, in order, in under one minute on Sporcle. She can also name all 195 countries. Her heroes include Kenneth the Page, Albus Dumbledore, Catherine Tate, and Alexander Hamilton. Her irrational fears include odd numbers, fish, and time zones. In 2008, she visited all three Axis powers, lived in post-apocalyptic London, and waited on Robert E. Lee at Sunday brunch. Her fangirl crushes include David Tennant, Joe Jonas, and Harry Potter. She would like to dedicate her writing to Taylor Swift, Andy Thomas, and her dog Bailey.

GABY MILLER

I am graduating in the spring to pursue a rather vague career in Hispanic literature. At least my life will be supplied with bottles upon bottles of delicious wine...

PATRICK MOORE

I Can Haz Bio?

RYAN OAKLEY

Ryan is a senior PLS major currently living in the inevitably-one-day-to-be-condemned house some folks call 'Club 24.' The house is presently under totalitarian rule, sustained by an unlikely oligarchy of fascist cats and mice. He gal-

loped to this here school from south Texas on a wild stallion, six shooters blazing, spurs flashing, but upon arrival quickly fooled everyone into thinking he was a northerner. His brains are usually dominated by 3 things: Music, Love, and a healthy fascination with Insanity. Currently, he is trying to – in 50 pages or less — validate existential love as a way of life. God help him if he can't.

SHELAG O'BRIEN

I am a freshman at Saint Mary's College. I am an Education Major and a Film Studies Minor. I grew up in Kennebunk, Maine, and loved living in a small beach town. Over the past few years, my interest in film and photography has developed into my primary hobby. My senior year in high school, I interned at a local video creation company and fell in love with the process of making movies and taking pictures. I am very excited to be a part of this issue of Re:Visions!

KERRY REARDON

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SZYMON RYZNER

Szymon Ryzner is a senior who has suffered through a Science-Business degree over the past four years of college. He was saved from synthesizing and synergy for a semester by his fiction writing class of which his piece of prose is a product.

KRISTINA SINUTKO

I am originally from Detroit, MI. I am a senior Graphic Design major with a minor in Italian. While I do not have a degree in photography, it is something that I want to pursue throughout my life.

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