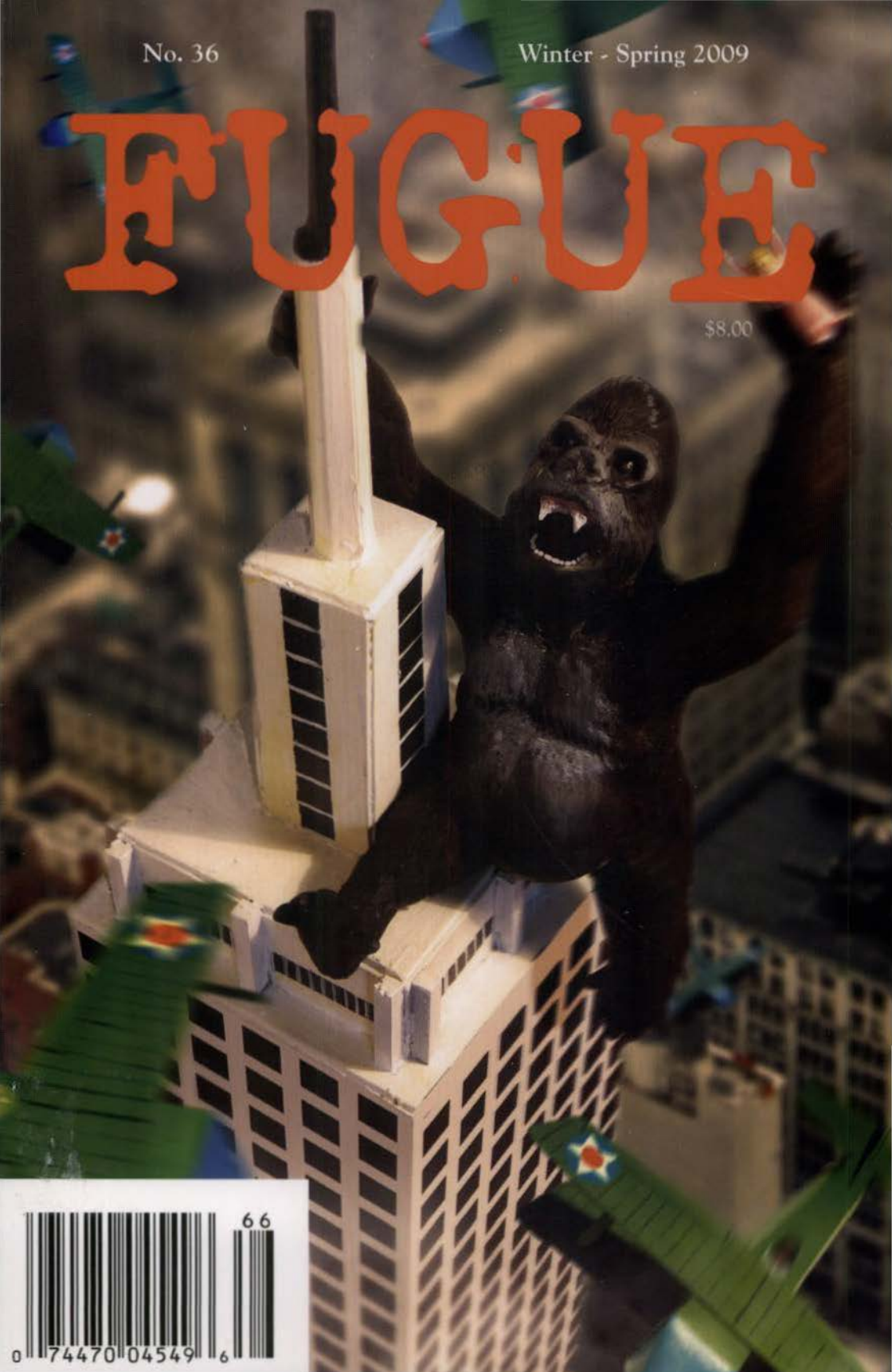


No. 36

Winter - Spring 2009

# FUGUE

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## FUGUE



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“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

-Mark Twain

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**Corrections:**

The editors wish to apologize for omitting BJ Hollars's biography from the Contributors' Notes in Issue 35. Please see his note included at the back of this issue.

Additionally, we apologize for a misprint in Karen Babine's essay, "Water." The first sentences of her essay should have read: "Most of the surnames of my Swedish ancestors indicate that someone put some stock into where they came from. Their name was not only where they lived, but it became who they were."

We regret the errors and are thankful for the kindness of these contributors, who readily forgave us.

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# FUGUE

Winter-Spring 2009, Vol. 36

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Submissions are accepted September 1 through May 1 (postmark dates). All material received outside this period will be returned unread. Please address submission to the appropriate editor and send with SASE to *Fugue*, English Department, 200 Brink Hall, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-1102. All contributors receive payment and two complimentary copies of the journal. Please send no more than five poems, two short-shorts, one story, or one essay at a time. Submissions in more than one genre should be mailed separately, each containing an individual SASE. We will consider simultaneous submissions (submissions that have been sent concurrently to another journal), but we will not consider multiple submissions. All multiple submissions will be returned unread. Once you have submitted a piece to us, wait for a response on this piece before submitting again.

Cover art, *King Kong*, by Sophy Tuttle, 2008.

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—From the Editors—

Greetings and welcome to *Fugue* #36, our Winter-Spring 2009 issue. Around the *Fugue* offices, we call it our King Kong issue. You've seen the cover. Normally, the cover art is one of the very last pieces to be selected for an issue. For this issue, we found Sophy Tuttle's cover art first. And we loved it.

What has surprised us is how the image of King Kong echoes in the work that we present within this issue, work that came to us after we already had the cover art locked down, though certainly our contributors had no idea. Imagine our wonder, then, at the appearance of larger-than-life beasts within these pages. In the prose for this issue, especially, the stories that enticed us were stories about the monstrous: serial killers, over-indulged rich kids, bad guys on a one-way train ride to Hell. Even the pieces that don't feature beastly characters have brash voices that, like Kong thumping his chest atop the Empire State Building, demand our attention.

Like any good narrative, Kong's story is complicated. We struggle with who the real monsters are—Kong, or the men who exploit him? And our understanding of evil and danger is complicated by the love that Kong feels for the beautiful, if shrieky, Ann Darrow. The poems in this issue are like a beautiful woman in Kong's strong fist: a glimpse of loveliness in the midst of danger, or loss, or brute force. Aaron Gilbreath, in his essay, finds beauty in the bondage fashion of Depeche Mode. And with his interview, Anthony Doerr reveals that he finds beauty in, well, almost everything.

It has been said that King Kong is simply a re-telling of the "Beauty and the Beast" fable, and in the movie, director Carl Denham announces that "it was beauty killed the beast." What we know for sure is that literature is never better than when the two are sharing screen time. For proof, we present this—our 36<sup>th</sup> issue.

As ever, we are indebted to the people who continue to make *Fugue* possible. First and foremost, to the University of Idaho, and the English Department, for supporting us in so many ways. Thank you to Ron McFarland, Kurt Olsson and Deb Allen for being our allies. Thank you to Mary Morgan, Craig Buchner, and Laura Powers, our genre editors, who are organized and dedicated and an invaluable resource for us. Our readers, too, make sure that no manuscript goes unread and provide us with insightful responses to so many pieces. Thank you. We are so grateful to our contributors who send us work that we are only too pleased to publish. Also, thank you to our subscribers, our audience, for whom all this work is done.

The last poem in this issue is titled "Spring," and we wanted it to be the final poem we leave the reader with because here in Idaho, spring has finally sprung. So find yourself a spot in the sun and settle down to read. We hope you enjoy.

Andrew Millar and Kendall Sand

---

Gerri Rosenzweig

**Snow Falling on McCabe's Orchard,**

Dear orchard of night,  
here's a kettle stammering  
on a tongue of flame,  
here's a cup  
without a saucer,  
a spoon with its tongue  
hanging out, and  
the lip of a pitcher waiting  
to pour comfort  
while the hands of the clock  
shuffle the numbers  
and every latch  
and floorboard in the house,  
even sleep,  
hold its breath while I sit  
at the window  
watching you disappear,  
like the flowered  
communion veil of my seventh year  
tucked petal by petal  
into the whispering folds  
of tissue paper.

Firewood

The weight of what you carry  
is more than wood. That cut  
smell, that splintered air, how  
your face ashes despite its flame,  
your forehead wisped and pale.

We bank late winter's cord for warmth.  
Your arms astonish in every season—  
blankets, zucchini, blackberries, ashes,  
the thatch of questions that grow  
out of your chest, clay bowls  
or loaves of bread. Make warmth

while the sky pinches cold, the sun  
wedges the clouds, the voles heave  
the garden path to crust, and what crawls  
in the dust of the old wood pile haunts  
the yew for acorns, burrows under linden leaves  
for pill bugs and old worms, under  
where the ash is cast each week.

You look up, arms limp from stacking  
the split logs and the wheelbarrow  
waits wedged full of wood again,  
and sawdust flecks your shoulders  
and the faint tumult of your hair.  
Your gaze is fiercer than the cold,  
than the sudden clasp of a life  
we discover by accident, sharper  
than winter.

## Souvenirs

**H**e was my serial killer. I call him mine because he lived across the street from me. Some people would find this worrisome, frightening even. Not me. I grew up in Spokane. There are rapists and serial killers and pedophiles on most street corners in Spokane, and it gets to the point that if you're walking through Riverfront Park and the rapist/serial killer/pedophile happens to be approaching from the other direction, you may as well just smile and greet him like you would anyone else. This doesn't happen in a Coastal town. I know, because my ex is from Seattle, and he never said hello to anyone.

The market for serial killer belongings is really booming in the northwest. I met a man once who had a mountain bike and a power drill, each from one of the most notorious serial killers produced by Washington State. I was jealous of such a hobby. Not that I couldn't collect them, too. You can purchase almost anything off eBay. But for me, it's hard to be passionate about something that someone else has already coveted.

My serial killer kept his lawn neat and trim. We lived in a typical Spokane neighborhood, where people like their yards more than their neighbors and spend thousands of dollars each year on prolific watering systems. His lawn was arguably the best lawn on our block. Much nicer than my lawn, which I weeded only once, in the spring, when I briefly dedicated myself to the healthful growing of things. Then my dedication waned and armies of dandelions took over and choked out the brown grass. In comparison my serial killer's lawn was like the Elysian Fields, with marigolds and sunflowers edging the smooth grass trim, shaded here and there by carefully manicured fruit trees. A fake owl perched nobly on the edge of the fence, keeping a steady vigil on my rented house. Up close the owl was cross-eyed, giving her a nerdy and harmless sort of appeal, but from across the street she was an impressive predator.

My serial killer's name was Rold. A weird name. A Viking name. Every now and then he folded his long arms over his chest and studied his yard. He shook his head and said, "Tut tut." This was not the sort of thing you would expect a Viking serial killer to say, "Tut tut." But that's what he said. It was the first surprising detail I learned about him, a few weeks before I discovered that he was a serial killer. We had just moved in, my ex and I. I had been watching Rold, rather obviously, from the cracked wicker hanging chair of my porch. I liked to watch how industrious he was in his little yard. Even then there was something special in the way he worked. Even then I could sense he had dark secrets. I found him oddly attractive.

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He looked up and saw me watching. He beckoned for me to cross the street. In his yard, I toed a pile of gravel that he was spreading with a rake into his walkway. I was wearing a pair of white sneakers that came away speckled with tan dust.

"You have a lovely yard," I said.

Rold frowned over his rake and then straightened. He surveyed his garden and his little pathway and he sighed. It was early spring, and a small stubborn pile of snow still lingered in the shade near his trellis. He shook his head and said, "Tut tut." This phrase was so charmingly archaic to me that I giggled. He didn't seem to notice.

"Tut tut," he said again. "There's so much work to do." Then he leaned over his rake and began spreading gravel again. He glanced up at me and winked. "But just wait. Come summer, it will be a masterpiece."

I nodded, noticing how strong and long and pale his hands were. They were artisans' hands, capable of anything. The rake against the gravel made a hissing, rasping sound that anyone else might have found grating, but I found the sound satisfying, vivifying. But then I was also one of those girls that enjoyed scraping my fingernails across a chalkboard while the other girls in class would clap their hands over their ears and scream. I asked him if he wanted some help.

"Thank you, no," he said. He looked at me with his merry eyes. "I just noticed you watching me and I thought you might want a closer look. What's your name?"

"Sarah," I said. "What's yours?"

He told me his name and then he said, "How old are you?"

"I just turned thirty-one." I raised my chin a little to show him I wasn't lying. I looked young for my age - not in a good way - and I expected him to say something about it.

"Happy birthday," he said. He continued raking. "I don't mean to be presumptuous, of course. You were watching me, weren't you?"

"Well, yes," I said. "I'm very observant."

He laughed at this. If he laughed nervously, I didn't notice. After all, how could he know then that I already liked him, despite what I would eventually learn? "I'm glad you've moved here then," he said. "We need observant neighbors."

I shrugged. "I'm just nosy, that's all."

The rake slid back and forth and the gray pile of gravel lessened steadily. "There is a lot of darkness in the world," he said. "Vigilance is a virtue."

It was then that we heard a muffled scream. We both straightened and stared at one another for a moment. "What was that?" I said. The sound had come from the direction of his house. We waited for a few moments, tensed. But all was still. The white clapboards of his house were freshly painted and clean in the dim sun. His front door was painted bright red.

Rold shrugged and returned to raking. "I don't know," he said. "I left the television on." He was raking forcefully now, and even if there had been another scream I would perhaps not have heard it over the fervent scraping. I wasn't worried about it, anyway. It could have been a bird, I reasoned, or an animal that had hurt itself behind his house. A squirrel with a twisted ankle.

My ex's car rounded the corner. I extended a mitten-enclosed hand to Rold. I was fully decked out for winter, and it suddenly occurred to me that Rold was underdressed for the season—no gloves, no coat. I was impressed. "It's a pleasure meeting you, Rold," I said. "I better get going now."

Rold stopped raking and leaned the rake against his shoulder. He accepted my hand in both hands, shaking gently. "The pleasure is all mine," he said. My ex slammed his car door and stood in front of our house, holding a large cardboard box with the words VIDEO STUFF written in black Sharpie across its side. He waited for me without a smile. Rold's eyes trailed to him and he smirked.

"Is that your husband?"

"Boyfriend," I said.

"Is he also vigilant?"

I shook my head. "Not so much, no."

Rold grinned. "Don't be a stranger now, Sarah." He leaned back over his rake. "We recluses must stick together."

I was not sure how he guessed that I was a recluse but I was not offended. If anything, I was happy to find someone as accepting of his own alienation as I was mine.

This was the same year I worked at the espresso drive-through. I had been laid off from my previous job as a filing clerk, a job that had been easy and that I had liked for the repetition and solitude. I was desperate for cash and the drive-through was the first job I could find. The boss had hired me despite the fact - or perhaps because of the fact - that I had become tongue-tied and teary-eyed when he mentioned that I might be a little old for the job.

My co-worker, Sam, was twenty. She looked great in her headset. The round black bulb of the microphone floated like a forbidden fruit before her glossy nude lips. My headset, in comparison, conjured images of head-braces, of medieval torture devices. It was our different facial features that created such a contrast. Sam had big sensual lips and oval eyes, and she always appeared post-orgasmic, sedated, no matter how many triple grande mochas she'd quaffed in the last half hour. I was thin-lipped, with the sprouting ears and bulging eyes of a tarsier.

Customers loved her. Men in the drive-through lingered for a few moments after she handed them their lattes and change. They blinked up at her wistfully while she took another car's order, her hand lightly touching the

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headset near her ear and causing one of the exotic pendulums of her earrings to swing. With me, the customers made little eye contact. They accelerated quickly out of the drive-through, onto bigger and better things, maybe wives waiting for them at home, or friendly upbeat girlfriends, or both. "It's the lack of make-up, Sarah," my ex had told me. "Can't you get some free makeover downtown? At Nordstrom's? Riverpark Square?"

I could, and I tried, but afterwards I looked at myself in the mirror and saw some crazy neon clown staring back at me, and I had gone straight home and frantically scrubbed every ounce of it away. Later, relieved to be myself again, I told my ex that I hoped he still thought of me as beautiful, make-up or no. "You're fine," he said. "We're all uglier than someone, you know?" He gave my shoulder a squeeze and went back to watching Monster Trucks on television. There was some real truth to what he said, and I hugged him back and leaned against him on the couch, feeling sincerely that it was good to accept one's place in the world. Nonetheless, I shuddered with pity a few moments later when the larger monster truck rolled back and forth over a defenseless sedan, crushing it to smithereens.

I knew my ex found Sam attractive. I knew this because he asked her out a few moments before he asked me out. She was handing over his double shot espresso in a 16 oz cup, no cream, no sugar (a sexy drink, I thought at the time), when he offered from his car seat to buy her dinner. She laughed and said no. I was behind Sam, wiping down the steamer. "How about you?" he said, calling to me through the coffee window. "Pasta tonight?" I said yes so loudly that Sam winced. She said later that it made me seem desperate. But that night he pulled the chair out for me and offered me a cigarette after dessert. I don't smoke, but still I thought it was a classy move.

Regardless, it was clear from the beginning that we wouldn't end well. I wasn't his type. Sam was his type, or any other pretty girl that wore stylish clothes and blue eye shadow and perfume in her hair. I had scentless deodorant, sensitive skin. I tried to use good-smelling shampoos and soaps but to no avail. "You have an uncanny ability to neutralize smells," my ex once said. His tone suggested that this trait was creepy, like I was some strange scentless alien roaming wild on Planet Earth. Even in the beginning, even when things were great, his tone and behaviors suggested that he didn't quite approve of me. If we met some other girl that he knew, someone he worked with every day at his medical technician job, some pretty girl named Sally that shared a cubicle with him but that I never heard about until this exact moment of meeting her on the street, he would forget to introduce me. I would stand there, long-armed and awkward, and the girl would smile at him and then glance at me expectantly and then smile at him again, clearly uncomfortable. Despite her obvious curiosity, he didn't mention me unless the girl intervened. I was like a dog he was taking for a walk.

But when we were alone he was always polite. He would always hold my

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coat open for me, he would always pull out a chair or offer me the last French fry. He never chose where we went for dinner. It probably didn't matter to him, since he disapproved of most places in Spokane.

Before he moved back to Seattle, he told me I could follow him, but he also told me that he couldn't promise he'd be my boyfriend there. I considered the move seriously for a few moments, but then I shook my head, no. I was made for Spokane, and we both knew it. There was no way I could leave. I was over thirty now and had never escaped, and now it was in my blood, heavy like liquid cement. I could feel myself walking slower and slower until he drove away, and then I stood on the corner of our little street feeling the cement gather heavily into my feet, and I watched his car zip down Southeast Boulevard, away from our house, toward I-90. His radio blared as he drove away. He was free.

The night before my ex moved away, I went on a major crying jag. After I calmed down, my ex gave me one of the muscle relaxants his doctor prescribed for his TMJ. He told me it would help me sleep.

Despite the drug, I woke up sweating in the sheets a few hours later, near midnight. I groggily stood and went to the window. I put my hands on it and the cold of the pane flowed through my palms, into my veins. I was instantly awake. Outside, across the dark street, Rold wrestled with something heavy and black. He was dragging something that seemed to be kicking against him, but the moon had set and it was too dark to tell for sure.

I said my ex's name. He moaned in his sleep.

"You need to see this," I hissed.

"Christ." He rolled over, dragging his pillow with him. "Sarah, I was dreaming about zombies." He said this as if he wanted the dream to go on forever.

"Something's going on," I said. "I can't tell for sure but it looks like Rold's burying someone alive."

My ex half-laughed, half-moaned. "Wouldn't surprise me. Crazy Spokanites." He pulled the pillow over his head and turned over.

I didn't reply. I watched Rold scooping earth into the narrow black hole. He did not seem hurried or nervous. A car drove by and its headlights momentarily alighted Rold's toiling silhouette. He did not even flinch.

"He's almost finished," I said. "You really should see this."

My ex flopped over, grimacing. "I don't need to see it. I don't really care. But if you're that concerned about it, then maybe we should call the cops. Hell, I'll call them, so long as you promise to come to bed."

This is what I had been considering, calling the cops, but when my ex suggested it I suddenly loathed the idea. Something in my heart wouldn't allow Rold to be ratted out. Especially not by my ex, who took such pleasure in pointing out negatives. I thought of my various conversations with Rold.

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He was the only neighbor who spoke to me, the only neighbor who spoke to anyone. The careful way he tended to his garden, the way his long fingers gingerly arranged those fragile roots into the crumbling earth - perhaps whatever bad he did to others was cancelled out by his toil for good. Who were we to judge, anyway? My ex was destroying me daily, and I had become cruel to him, too, bitter that he didn't love me enough. Perhaps we were the ones who should be condemned.

I didn't say all of this to my ex. I only said, "Nevermind. You're moving out. It's not your problem now." I moved toward the bed.

My ex sighed with relief. "Okay, then," he said in his teasing voice, "but when he chops off your head don't expect me to sing at your funeral."

My ex had always said he was an amazing singer, but he would never sing to me, despite my assurances that I would love it.

"Don't worry," I said. "I don't want a funeral, anyway. Who would come?" I did not say this in self-pity. I was just being realistic.

In bed, my ex stroked my shoulder for a few minutes, the last time he would touch me before he left. Then his hand dropped away and he began to snore. I pictured his dreamland filled with friendly zombies, and I watched his calm, motionless face a little jealously before dropping into sleep myself.

My serial killer was not as classically handsome as my ex but he was far from unattractive. He had eyebrows that were so blonde as to seem transparent. He was almost fully bald except for a strip of light blonde hair that wrapped from ear to ear. He smiled a lot and his lanky shoulders were usually drooping forward like he was sleeping standing up. I am one of those people that always look wired, like I've had five cups of coffee. I don't blink much. Even my hair stands up, because of the dryness inland, which creates extra static. My ex suggested conditioner, and I would scream, "I'm wearing, like, five pounds of conditioner already!" And then he'd wax dreamily about the girls of Puget Sound and their soft moist hair.

Rold, though, had a relaxed air about him that I found attractive. Murder must be cathartic, stressful in the moment but afterward, what a release. I read someplace that the killing isn't so hard, but the disposal of the body is a major workout. That explains why most serial killers aren't fat turds, like your standard pedophile, but are usually fit and decent looking.

I went out to tan in my front yard one summer morning, not long after my ex had moved away. I had my ex's old walkman and some tapes and a pair of blue headphones so I could jam out while tanning. Rold saw me from across the street and lifted his hand, waving. It was hot, maybe too hot to be tanning, but I wore a new brown bikini and I didn't mind if Rold, or anyone really, saw me in it. He was watering the marigolds and sunflowers. I waved back at him and walked over.

"Hiya," he said. "Going out to work in your yard?"

He seemed to be suggesting that this was a good idea.

I pulled a petal off of a flower and sniffed it. "The neighbor boy said he'd mow it next week."

Rold was studying me. I had unthinkingly put the petal in my mouth and was now chewing it. I quickly scooped the wet wad out from under my tongue and flicked it onto the lawn.

"So," I said. "How's the gardening? Enjoyable?"

"It's not even that I enjoy it," Rold said. "What I enjoy is watching the cycle of life: of things being born, giving fruit, returning to the earth."

I nodded. I understood where he was going with all of this. "My favorite part is when it's all over," I said. I was trying to call his bluff. "You know, the death part of it all."

Rold laughed. It was a gorgeous, wonderful sound. I could see the silver fillings in his teeth. I wanted to wrap my arms around him and tickle him so the golden sound would fill the air around us. My ex rarely laughed, and when he did it seemed as though he was stifling himself, as though he didn't want to appear too happy around me. Seeing Rold laugh with such abandon lifted my spirits. Here was a man that I had delighted, and he was happy to share his delight with me.

Still chuckling, Rold wandered over to the side of his house and shut off the water. The water stopped with one last lurch of the hose and I surveyed the garden. The wet leaves glittered like coins in the sun.

"Do you wear cologne?" I asked. The reason I asked this was because the smell of the petal and its bitter taste were still lingering in my nose and mouth. It just got me thinking about smells, is all.

Rold shook his head and said, "You certainly know how to keep a man on his toes."

I brushed the sole of my bare foot across the recently mown grass and shivered, it felt so good. Then I nodded at the owl. "She's a real beaut."

Rold winked. "She's a 'He'."

I was surprised at that. I had always assumed it was an owl woman. "He stares at my house."

Rold smiled and started wrapping up the hose in a neat coil. "He's like you. He's vigilant." Rold gazed at me for a moment and then added, "Maybe he likes what he sees."

"I hope so," I said. "Well, I better get back to my tanning."

I glanced through Rold's windows as I ambled back to my yard. Cluttered on a squat coffee table were the backs of what looked like silver picture frames. I pictured my face in every one of them: pensive, surprised, smiling.

After my ex left and when I couldn't sleep, I would spy on Rold's house, watching for any suspicious behavior. One night he returned home late, almost three in the morning, with what was undoubtedly a hooker. She was really

tall, wearing three-inch blocky heels and a white fur. She was also smashed out of her gourd. She kept leaning on the fence, wavering there like a ghost, saying, "Baby. I don't feel so good. Whoa, the train's a comin' babe. Hold my hair back in case. Be a gentleman, babe." She barfed in the garden, twice.

Rold was petting her head and glancing around the street. This wasn't going well, I thought. Any other neighbor might have been on the phone with the cops already. But he did manage to coax her into the house. At sunrise, I awoke to the sounds of a trunk slamming, and I went to the window to see Rold holding a glossy black garbage sack, standing behind his SUV and wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of his pale, spidery hand. It was early and the shadows were thick, but I could make out dark patches of what had to be blood on his jeans. He had done what any sensible serial killer would do: get the chick drunk, get her in his bathtub, chop her up into a dozen pieces. He hoisted the sack into the trunk with a loud grunt and then drove away. I thought of following him but knew I couldn't pedal my bike fast enough.

A few weeks later Rold heaved open his garage door and backed his black SUV into the street. He reserved this car for special occasions. I knew he would be gone until much later in the evening.

I went across the street in the dark, wearing only my silk robe, no panties and no bra. It was like swimming nude in cold water, liberating. I opened the small gate to his yard and padded across the cold grass. I was in bare feet and was happy he owned no dog. I could see the unimpressive profile of the owl, unimpressive because they have no noses and such short beaks. For the first time, I was staring at him instead of him staring at me. There was a shovel lying by the white cellar door. It was sparkling clean, despite having interred so many bodies, and it gleamed in the moonlight. I took the shovel into my hands and gripped it tightly. I shut my eyes and pictured hitting a home run and slammed the shovel into the owl with all of my might. He peeled off of the fence and thudded onto the dirt below.

The air smelled like bruised basil and I breathed there for a moment and looked up at the moon. What did I look like from above, standing in this man's yard, holding a shovel in one hand, panting? I replaced the shovel against the cellar door and returned to the owl. It was surprisingly light, hollow. Cradling it to my breast, I exited back through the gate and sprinted across my yard and into my house.

In bed, I held the owl to my chest and sobbed a little sob of joy. Why does it feel so good to take things? To take lives, to take photographs, to take a ceramic owl. It would feel good to give, too, if there was anyone to give to, but that ship had sailed. My ex-boyfriend, before moving back to Seattle, warned me, "It is possible to be too giving, you know." I remembered that when I stole his old prized walkman - one of the few remaining in the land of iPods - on his last day with me.

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I thought about the guy with the mountain bike and the power drill. These are utilitarian items. When he used them, he might ponder the serial killer's accomplishments: 1) Pedaling to a victim's house. 2) Lobotomizing someone. It would be satisfying to use them for cleaner purposes. For example: 1) Biking up the hillside to enjoy a nice sunset. 2) Building an entertainment center. Then you could compare yourself to the serial killer. You could say, "I have done something better and healthier with these objects." Or you could say, "Objects don't have brains or memories." You could say a lot of things, and they would probably be both right and both wrong. Like everything in life.

The owl was staring at the ceiling when I woke up the next morning, his body resting on the opposite pillow. Owls don't have chins but if they did the blanket was tucked up to where it would be. Through the open window, I could hear Rold across the street saying, "Tut tut." I couldn't see him, but he might have been running his hand over the jagged portion of the fence where his owl had once perched. I pictured him crossing the street, knocking angrily on my door, spouting invectives until I emerged wearing my loveliest nightgown. Then he would drink in the sight of me and I would say in a husky voice, "Please, Rold, come in." We would share a beer and talk things over. We would really open up to one another. I pictured a small private wedding in his garden. My face would glow from every one of his livingroom's silver frames. I would forgive him all of his wrongdoings and he would regard me like a saint.

I waited for the knock on my door but none came. It was too early to be awake after a murdering spree.

"Go back to sleep," I told the owl, patting the pillow. The owl rolled toward me, his wide yellow eyes fixed on my face. I heard the sounds of children playing somewhere, happy sounds that filled the street with squeals of companionship. "Don't cry you big baby," I told the owl. "You'll never be alone again." He continued to stare at me, terrified.

I was dozing when I heard a faint knock on the door. It barely roused me at first but then I heard it again and I gasped. I threw off of the covers and dressed quickly, calling "I'll be right there!" I combed my hair just enough so that it began to rise upward, buoyant with static. "Damn it," I said, but then I decided to leave it alone and let Rold see me for what I am. I raced to the door and opened it.

"Tut tut," Rold said kindly. "I think you have something that belongs to me." His eyes were hidden behind wraparound sunglasses that ran in a parallel line to his blond strip of hair. The top of his head gleamed white in the sun. His mouth was upturned, amused. He kept his hands behind his back. "Tut tut," he repeated, in a mildly mocking tone, and then he entered my home, pushing gently by me. I shut the door. I felt a relaxation like I had never known. I stayed facing away from him. I looked outside at the young

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children running carefree in the streets. Their bloodstreams carried no traces of cement yet, but as they grew older they would feel their bodies thicken. It made me happy to see them out there, so buoyant and free.

Rold said something behind me. I shut my eyes and listened to the cries of the children. His arms went around me. He was laughing. He said he was also vigilant. He said he had seen me take his owl. One arm went around my throat. I brought my hands up and enfolded them around his forearm, the way a lover might. His muscles twitched wildly beneath my fingers. We went down to the floor this way; I was facing away from him. Pleasant bubbles of bright colors burst against my eyelids. He was kissing my cheek, the back of my neck. I heard nothing but my own blood washing over itself, coursing through me, the sounds of my interior mechanisms. The sounds of the children playing were gone. I wanted to turn my head to look but I was so blissfully tired. My head was in his lap. He released my throat and asked if I was comfortable. He massaged my neck, my shoulders. I heard my heartbeat resume, loudly.

"I'll take care of you," Rold said. "Relax." He began to unbutton my blouse.

"I am," I said. "I'm so happy." Tears sprang to my eyes. I was having trouble breathing. What if he didn't want me? What if I wasn't his type?

"You're perfect," my serial killer said. "You're so perfect."

And in those next few minutes, I was. **F**

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Stacy Kidd

Horse/ Stone/ Mule/ Fire

It's true, Arum, we're old and our eyes  
don't see what they used to see.  
Where the river once fell  
into strips of yellow,  
the fellows all stood watching  
horses, restless in hay  
fields, always running the borders.  
A small sacrifice when  
the horses no longer ate apples.  
Then smaller: a poor pound  
for feed, the feedsacks and cloth  
that could barely cover  
a baby. And smaller:  
you were walking backwards.  
There seemed to be only bones.  
A single mule stood  
simple in the center of a small field.  
There was rustling  
underfoot. *Fugito*. A small fire.

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Stacy Kidd

Of course, I told the women,

the river was changeless and could not be wounded  
with thieving or fire. I know this feels  
like a long time ago, but such moments  
of mar and motion— One woman  
held her hand out to me as if to plant me  
in the straw of her belly, but then she spat.  
And the birds in the green of their perch  
and their feathers remained  
flightless, the night lingering as simply  
as any night. I knew then the river  
could carry our cedar wood, even without water.  
I'm telling you, I have always walked  
here. And the river, it always wraps around.

## Grouching, Subzero Style

As does Aunt Matilda her trick knee and lumbago, we in Wisconsin secretly cherish Arctic weather. To outsiders, we present a united front. We are subzero survivalists. We regularly conduct our business in temperatures that'll freeze yer spit before it hits the ground, and I ain't gonna lie to ya, we think this makes us better than you. But when a bunch of locals gather, a subtle shift occurs. Deep down inside, we self-proclaimed stoics enjoy nothing more than complaining while insisting we don't wish to complain. Cold weather is the perfect medium in which to hone this particular strain of martyrdom, best expressed through grouching. Grouching is basically kabuki in coveralls. You can do it anywhere, but the preferred venue is the local café. The finest performers arrive by pickup truck and will be recognizable by the hunch of their shoulders and the manner in which they rest their forearms on the counter in order to better frame the only props necessary: half a doughnut and a bad cup of coffee.

When two grouchers convene, you get yourself a slow-motion jousting match. Do not be fooled by the low volume and leisurely pace - this is dueling for keeps, and the novice will be whipsawed. Let us say, for instance, that you are living the first winter on your new homestead and wake one morning to find the thermometer sunk to 22 degrees below zero. After coaxing the car to life with profane supplications and a blowtorch, you make your way to town and enter the café. As you nestle your belly against the counter and run your tongue over the tooth you chipped while gnawing the plastic cap off a can of HEET, the Work'N'Sport-wearing knucklehead to your left pauses his coffee cup halfway to his yapper and - looking straight ahead, not in your eyes - inquires, "Cold by you?"

His tone could not be more offhand.

"Yep," you say, eager to brag. "Twenty-two below."

Whoops. Rookie mistake. Never, ever go first. This is verbal football - you've just been suckered for a trap-block. Dude let you in easy so he could blindside you hard.

"Rrreeally," he says. Which translated, means, Nice job buying the pump-fake, newbie - here's your jock in Tupperware. And then, after a suitable beat: "Twenty-four below out by us."

Trump. You feel a little queasy.

"Course that was on the milkhouse thermometer. Milkhouse thermometer always reads a couple degrees high."

Wow. Never even got the bat off your shoulder.



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“I knew she was cold, ‘cuz the beaters froze up on the manure spreader.”

You don’t even have a manure spreader.

“Busted a damn worm gear.”

Oh, the specificity.

You can consider yourself schooled. But it’s not over. This man is a farmer, and no one does grousing martyrdom like those in the agricultural trades. He fumbles in his pocket. Shortly he draws out a redolent fragment of fractured steel, proffering it for your inspection. The ruined worm gear.

“How much you figure a little chunk’a iron like this’d run ya?”

By now you know better than to guess. You wait him out.

“Hunnert’n twenny-eight bucks.”

Classic move. Like Aunt Matilda proudly displaying her misshapen kneecaps while simultaneously bemoaning the confiscatory cost of chondroitin, what the man has done here is: A) provide tangible evidence of tragedy, and B) linked it directly to fiscal duress. You have been thoroughly out-groused, and now you know: There is no joy in suffering if someone suffers better than you. Final lesson from the man at the café? While temperatures may moderate, martyrdom need not: that busted worm gear will ride on his pickup dashboard for the next five years.¶

**B**y the time you are coughing up blood in the waiting room, the doctor tells you to get out of town, to travel while you still can. She is also your friend, so she whispers, "Go to the most God-awful, dangerous, exhilarating place you were always afraid to visit." Of course you won't, because you don't know anyone in such a place. You will go to either Poland, where a churchful of relatives will line up to hug you, or China, where a hu-tong of relatives will line up to stare at you.

"Make up my mind for me," you tell your husband at the airport. You sit in the half-light at the baggage kiosk, watching the veins run up your wrists. Somewhere in there, your yellow and white chromosomes wage war in a sea of red. The world spins and you're locked inside, because your half-breed helices have turned against you. Thalassemia kills biracials, lets everyone else live. It's a necessary truth to swallow. You fold over and curl into a ball, hugging your carry-on as the sun retracts into its bloodshot grave.

Ken straightens your neck and your back with a push of each hand. He helps you through security, one shoe at a time, working up a sad little laugh as you x-ray, fail, and x-ray again. Finally he gives you your tickets at the Air China gate. "To see your cousin," he says. "And *only* your cousin."

You pull yourself up suddenly, with an ache and a throb. You haven't seen Deng since he stayed with you last summer, when you were so burned out at the office that Microsoft told you to work from home and to get some R&R, in that order. And you thought it would be... rejuvenating to finally meet your nineteen-year-old cousin and show him how to write computer code and take him on cushy ferry rides to see how his other half lived. Only he politely turned down your itinerary in favor of pacing up and down your cul-de-sac, then taking up a shovel and unloading your rock garden into the driveway and digging a goldfish pond, building a bridge with the heap of plywood behind your neglected flowerbed, and planting bamboo seeds well into the night, the neighbors leaving their floodlights on for him. By dawn, you couldn't resist, and you were out making lanterns out of the rice paper he found in your basement while he confessed that he wanted you to have a beautiful place to look down on as you worked. He didn't understand that you were usually locked up in a cubicle across town which you never showed him and are glad you didn't, because it would have ruined that look on his face, that id-spark in a boy-man who is not your brother or son or confidante but like another phase of your moon.

When you finally pulled him inside he stared into your computer screen insisting that *if you can't see it, it doesn't exist* as you explained that a data bit consisted of 00011100, and you tweaked a few million 10010010s a week,

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isn't that fascinating Deng, or it was, until you saw what he could do with some imagination.

And when you write him every month you try to explain that DNA is kind of like computer code, something you think you can control and *by the way Deng what exactly do you do for fun* which causes him to retract back to *fine-thank you-what?* mode and you change the subject by confessing to every hour that you should be out sitting on your bridge instead of clacking on your very clean keyboard, wondering what his front yard looks like and why he never calls.

So yes, you take the airline ticket Ken holds out. You need to feel Deng's vitality again.

You take your seat but already feel yourself emerge from a haze of blankets and painkillers. Ken gets Deng on the phone before the stewardess comes around again, and you have to brace yourself for the Chinglish that gongs and boings through the line as you lay out your bad news for him. "Being sick is sometimes good," he says. "It distracts you. Too many people are healthy and miserable. Being sick makes you more grateful." And of course he wants to see you. Then hangs up without giving an address.

Your Polish relatives would be more accessible, more sympathetic. They'd offered to come to Seattle to see you, but you'd turned them down. Their love is so easy, so predictable. They would make their own little village in your living room, Aunts Marta and Dorota sewing you pillows and Aunt Pita dishing about the saints as Mariusz got Ken on the harmonica or (worse) the balalaika. Then Mariusz would go on about the Communists and how they'd destroyed Poland and all the Klekowski family records so he couldn't trace any further back than your grandparents, while Ken would go on about the Communists and how they'd destroyed China and all the family records, but he could still trace your ~ and his ~ lineage back to the Ming Dynasty. Instead of talking about the real issues, such as the biochemical basis of intermarriage, the cracked lotus of time-space that's thrown you all together, and whether the family tree Pita makes out of yarn looks more like a rosary or an umbilical cord (that you could hang yourself with?), down to the family photos so perfect they challenge the messiness of your life, which is all gangrene and tumbleweeds of bad axons and desperation.

You drift to the lavatory and stare at yourself as you pee, wondering if other people do that and if it makes them feel more animal than human. You ponder the origin of the cruel term *half-breed*, noting the defectiveness of your semi-formed eyefolds and the spray of freckles across your shapeless cheekbones. You made peace with your face long ago, but all this comes up again like chunks during turbulence.

You try to settle back but the airline shows bloody documentaries - *Tiananmen Tragedy* and *Rape of Nanking*, a drivel of suffering. "Good stuff," Ken says as ten prisoners take bullets to the head. "This is how it really is."

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"I can't believe they show that on a flight," you say, unable to take your eyes off Mao.

Ken pulls off his earphones. "Did you know that China literally means 'center of the earth'? Ha, ha, ha. What were they thinking?"

You slide down in your seat, reading the characters off the back of your tray table. If China is the center of the earth and America is too, and you've got one foot in each, then you are drowning in the goddamn ocean you're flying over.

As you descend Ken uses his vomit bag to wipe the sweat off his neck. He checks your seatbelt, tightens it. You let him. You didn't used to. As the plane tilts the limestone hills grow larger than his head. His mouth opens like a drawbridge, and he mutters, "filthy, bloody motherland." You know what he's thinking. That he's spent his life avoiding this place and now ended up seeking it out. For you.

When the first outside air punctures your lungs and you get a noseful of diesel, a dozen hours of vertigo pull you down. You upend your sagging bag and remember the tired Chinese proverb: a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

Only you take the escalator up the esplanade, your hands locked, your knees twitching.

When you ask for a smaller plane to take you to Liuzan, the man at the kiosk says, "Why you fly into Beijing? Tianjin would have been much closer."

"We don't know the geography very well," you say.

"But you are Chinese."

"No," Ken responds. "And we do *not* know our way around."

The attendant gnashes his teeth a little. He's forty, at least, but wearing braces. Like scrap metal in his mouth, like something the village vet put on. You try not to stare. They're so bad he can't close his mouth. He catches you looking, but doesn't seem embarrassed. "Look, people. You can fly into Tianjin, but not Liuzan. Not even turboprop fly there. Floating ash, you know. The engine clog and the plane would go down."

"Never mind," Ken says, trying to stand straighter. "Two for the charter bus to province Liaoning, then."

"It leave later this afternoon."

"Fine."

You have hours to go out and explore Beijing and you sit at your gate instead, in your sick-still inertia. A sulfur-smoke haze blues the horizon and melts the sun red, giving the skyline a dazed look. Every other block a crew erects an apartment or office building. Ken flicks his fingers, like he could tick them all down like dominoes.

"Aren't you going to take a picture?" he says. You aim your camera outside, but can't press the button. Bicyclists weave in and out of tractors

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and wrecking balls, riding into potholes and somehow out of them, their braids or ties flailing around their necks, the drivers behind them honking. Everyone moves too fast, like life is what's twenty feet in front of them and nothing more. Like they're trying to shed their own shadow. A tunnel leads to a suburban spread of mansions. Even beyond that, skid row unfurls with a dynastic agelessness, its angles enameled and hard. What do people do here when they get ill? Where is there to hide? How can Deng thrive in this country when you know you wouldn't be able to even survive here?

"It's different here than I thought it would be," you say.

"It's ugly and cold."

"No, no. It's just different."

"We should call him again," Ken says. "We should let him know we're here." But when you call, the line is disconnected. Then you realize you don't even have an address, only the name of a village. Ken suggests the help of your nearby Huilin relatives, but you won't call them because they would trap you into coming and then waste your time on a week's worth of herbal medicines, the elders pricking you and chanting over you and throwing out your pills and saying that your Polish father was a sick, sick man, so pale and moist they were afraid to shake his hand, so of course you are ill, as if his germs and miseries passed right in on the X he gave you, and you are so steeped in white man's disease that not only will they cremate you when you die, but they will bag and quarantine your ashes, the ends tied with yellow tape.

Ken leans forward, flicking his cigarette and staring at the space between his feet. "So it might take some time to find Deng," he says. "Don't get sick on me, okay?"

You say nothing. When the bus comes, you make him take the aisle seat. You lean against the window, not his shoulder.

You cover your mouth as you approach the coal plants. Plumes filter in anyway and coat your insides with dread. You cross a bridge over no water; fish skeletons, thick as cobblestones, glow under the streetlight. You detour through Shunyi where a man urinates in the alleyway and two masked nurses pick through trash for syringes. The bus gasses and sways back onto the highway.

"You should need a passport," Ken says, "just to leave the city and enter the countryside."

You check your purse for the tenth time to make sure your passport is still there.

Ken opens his laptop, then closes it. "Do you remember the only time you got mad at Deng? That week we took him in to the office to show him around, he took apart your computer. In like two minutes flat, with a screwdriver. He said it was worth about a dollar in scrap metal."

"You went out of your way to make him feel bad," you say. "It's not his fault his family works in waste scrap."

"You made him feel bad too," Ken answers. "You looked at him like he was a peasant. Which he is. People are products of their environment and their family."

You don't argue. You take a few aspirin like you always do when Ken starts to get riled up, and get yourself ready to doze and dream about something better. Only you dream-recall your Auschwitz-survivor uncles storming out of your wedding, upset at the decided un-Catholicism of your ceremony, and how your father told you not to be upset because your uncles were products of their environment and had expectations as such, and your Zenned Jesus would give them no peace, nor save or look out for you.

You wake up when Ken rubs your arms like he's trying to start a fire. So panicked he's huffing. "Lane. Lane. Are you okay?"

"Yes. I'm fine."

"You didn't wake up at first. I was worried."

"I'm fine."

He settles back, his hand dropping from the back of your neck to the crook of your arm.

Sitting next to the two of you is Cha Ching, a blind man who offers to photograph you for a dollar. "We'll just give you a dollar," you say. But the man insists. You do not want to remember this part of your trip, but you bump heads with Ken and stare at the film over Cha Ching's eye as the flash goes off. "My name Cha Ching," he keeps repeating, scratching the scabs on his temples. "American think it funny. Why you not laughing?"

You laugh on prompt, patting the old man on the shoulder like a strange pet. Ken takes the camera back and erases the image. Cha Ching offers you dried kelp for another dollar, and Ken shoots a photo of you biting down on it.

"It smells like soil," you say. "It tastes like salt and earth." Although you have never eaten earth, this is what it must taste like. If you were truly Chinese, you would have had to eat this to survive, at least once in your life, in the kind of famine that brings millions together in a frenzy of warm desperation, a baby in the pouch of your ripped dress, God wielding a bamboo cane as you fell into the desert, your sunburn swollen like a red punishment.

"You American-Chinese," Cha Ching says, cocking his head, putting his hand up around your chin.

"No, we're American," Ken answers.

"No. I can tell. Chinese have very distinctive voice. We have throats like cylinder. You are Chinese."

You pipe in, suddenly brave because the man is blind. "I'm Polish-Chinese. Pol-Chin-rican. Polchinrican."

"Polish no one," says Cha Ching. "You mean Russian? No, no. Chinese drown out Pole-Russian. You Chinese. American."

"If you can't leave us alone, then we're moving." Ken flares his nostrils.

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"Come on, Lane. Let's move."

You put your hand on Cha Ching's shoulder once more, to get him to shift so Ken can pull you down the aisle. You do not resist Ken pulling you away. That's not the same as wanting him to pull you away. When he locks down with a couple of blinks and toggles his brain into sleep mode, that perturbed look stays on his face and flashes white under the last of the streetlights.

The bus chugs into an oily slick of night. You pull a pin from your hair to clean the kelp from your teeth. There is nothing else to do. It is nice, actually, to sit and stare into moving darkness; it reminds you of when you were young, driving home from Ken's and passing your exit, and passing another exit, and going out of the way in order to just keep moving. And if you turned off, the road in front of you would simply cease to exist, and how comforting that was, like you could flick the world on and off with your eyes.

Your dosing schedule comes and goes. You decide not to take your pills for once. Predictably, your myelin sheaths let loose and your legs shake. You still them. You remember your mother, how thin her legs were that you'd slide through when you tried to sit in her lap, and twenty years later when she came to your wedding she'd finally started to shrink so you were bigger than her for the first time in your life and only then did you feel like an adult, and she'd said that it was good that you were bigger, had grown into a white woman's wider birthing hips, which of course you never used... and never will.

You pass the night waiting to come up on Tianjin, her hometown. But the journey of a thousand miles is full of detours, and the bus swings in a circle to avoid a chemical spill in a river. It would seem you would eventually have to cross it, but nothing outside makes sense.

A spangled dawn lights up naked toddlers splashing in the gutter, their dirty water spraying the crumbling asphalt. Your hand finds your throat as you try to catch their faces. Then older children press into the road, bouncing their knapsacks on their knees as they march to school. Ken twists his back to hold them in view, the way he must have when he was six after his parents told him to leave his infant sister in a rice paddy and not come back for her, and when he told his grandparents they came back for her but she was already cold, like a tissue rock, and then his grandparents sold their home and took Ken out of this country and to Seattle where people didn't do such things, and where Ken had to breathe into a paper bag whenever he saw a baby Chinese girl, until well after you met him, and then he woke up one morning and it didn't seem to bother him anymore, or else you don't know him at all, and he *isn't* eaten away by outwardness, his eyes empty, the world nearly wasted on him.

You will yourself out of your mind and back into your body, because the bus driver lets you off at a village, Zai Tsu, three kilometers short of Liuzan.

You and Ken will either walk or take a rickshaw.

You cross your arms. "I won't have a human carry me around like a mule."

"Of course not," he agrees, sounding a little too nervous.

The village drum-rolls you to the throb of *Qing Nian Jie*, Youth Day. Teenagers set off firecrackers on picnic tables and drape dragon heads over tethered oxen. Women dangle bulbous lanterns from street signs, swearing as they burn themselves. A throng of pigtailed girls in holey dresses hurl tetherballs up poles, and three boys throw baseballs at pigeons in a cage, laughing as they beat their wings in hysteria and bloody themselves.

A ball bounces back and rolls to your feet. Without thinking, you hide it in your bag.

You and Ken duck into a fish market and hide behind a seahorse grill as the boys search for you, yelling and stomping.

"Give the ball back, Lane," Ken hisses. "They're just boys." He hunches down with you, clutching his fanny pack in one hand and your arm in the other.

"No." You hold on to your bag until your veins bulge. The smoke from the grill clouds you from view. Finally the boys go back to their game and you kick your way out the back door of the market, coughing and stumbling, the owner shouting at you.

The alleyway thickens into a dirt bypass. You gather yourselves and follow flatbed trucks past limestone hills and swaths of wild ginseng. Dead swans, their mouths full of ants, litter the gutters; rickshaw drivers dismember them on their way down to Liuzan port. Bo Hai Bay looks like sewer water rolling in, a pale gray wash of ocean slush.

"We're getting closer," you say. "I hate to say this, but we're getting closer."

You look down and you are walking through sand. You glance back, like you want to retrace your steps. The light fades near the docks as you look up at a thrust of ships. The crew unloads crates of waste electronics and fills the irrigation canals with cracked TVs, toasters, microwaves. Throwing them in as fast as they can. Ken covers his ears.

Not far down a wave of phones spills at the feet of men and women holding screwdrivers. Beyond that children sit on cracked barrels, their thongs dangling from their feet as they scavenge for circuit boards. An armless boy untwists wires with his toes.

As far as the eye can see, Liuzan spreads like an open-market landfill, a warmed-over holocaust laid bare for the price of a bowl of rice. It's everything you expected and it's still shocking.

You wipe the soot off your face and find a woman holding a drill and sucking on a boiled egg. The woman swallows and throws a rock at a hen who cackles too close to her sleeping toddler.

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"Deng Yau," you say to her.

The woman points at her ear with her drill, and you try again. "Deng Yau!"

The woman points up the hill. "Deng Yau. Okay. Deng Yau."

"Yes. Yes. Thank you." You and Ken trudge up the pass. Your luggage falls in the dirt. Your photos fall out, including the one of the duck farm that Deng gave you.

Ken pulls out the picture and tries to match it to a strip of panorama.

You point. "It's there. That's it." You drag your dirty baggage behind you, huffing the life out from the underside of your breastbone, trudging past duck carcasses and bags of fertilizer and tumbleweeds of twisted wires. When you turn Ken is walking back down the hill, leaving a trail of upturned mud in his wake. After he flags a rickshaw you double over on the slope, taking a deep breath on all fours, his image unpinning from your eyes.

Deng sits on his front porch, taking apart a laptop. You watch a man give him coins for a barrel of scrap metal. The smoke is thick and a lone duck toddles at Deng's feet. He puts down his screwdriver and unfurls a handful of cracked corn for his duck, coaxing him through a rocky patch of manure and wiping its webbed feet clean. The entire contents of Deng's life sprawls twenty feet in front of him, so disgracefully that his two arms and two legs seem like a miracle, a testament to being filthy rich with life, and ahoid of poverty so pure it trivializes your wastaway. When he sees you his hand drifts up to his head, then slides to the back of his neck.

You run for him. Your body races ahead of your mind. You hold onto him until you finally feel the spark up his shoulders. Above you birds, hundreds of loners, circle a common height. **F**

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Graham Hillard

Orpheus in Five Parts

i.

Being left has a taste:  
honey and rotten figs,  
their flesh the color of dust.

Alone, you pull  
your fingers through the dirt  
that separates worlds.

At the sound of  
her funeral dirge,  
Hell opens.

ii.

Moving down,  
you pass others  
who have fallen:

brothers and sisters,  
friends to whom life  
was a bit of soil  
in some dark part of the Earth.

iii.

What if you were made  
for this one thing? Made  
to a purpose not your own?

Would that explain  
the play of your fingers  
across the lyre,

the strings  
as familiar to you  
as the sinews  
of your own arms?

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iv.

To them who cannot die,  
a song is beautiful  
because it ends.

She hears your voice  
but gives no sign of it.

v.

This is not the same hand  
you once felt, the body  
that was the lyre beneath you.

Looking back,  
you accept  
a second death:

Her eyes  
fixed shut  
against the sun.

## Moon Rock

**K**at hitched with a pizzeria manager heading home from Reno. “Devon,” he said. Her name was Katrina, but she no longer wanted the association of a hurricane.

“I’m Kat,” she said.

Devon was too handsome to be a creep. His curly black hair hung weightless, like an astronaut’s in zero G. Green eyes, heavy lips. He shifted with his left hand, his right encased in an unsigned cast. He talked about his ideas as he drove: a honeycomb cast that allows your body to be scratched; egg cartons with clear tops so you’ll never forget to buy more; The Rhythm Wheel.

“You plug it into the cigarette lighter and it wraps around the steering wheel,” he said. “Touch sensitive.” He tapped the steering wheel with his good hand and made a drum sound to demonstrate. “And this part here, this could be the bass drum. This, the hi-hat. *Tchhhhh.*”

He asked about her. Her lies were like cactus blossoms, each one opening slowly, meant for only this night, fragile in the universe of dark that poured down over them. She gave up only two truths: first, that she was looking for work and a place to stay.

“Anything?” he asked.

“Regular work,” she said, thinking, *“here it comes. The creep.”* “A place of my own,” she added.

“Done,” he said. “You can work for me.”

“I have a felony,” she said, the second truth. And though that weight was solely hers, she used it to pull down his confidence. Things were never that easy.

“You kill someone with pizza sauce?”

“No.”

“Then it’s no problem.”

And two hours later she was asleep in a clapboard house belonging to one of Devon’s employees who, along with her daughter, had moved out to work the ski season up in Mammoth. The next morning she filled out paperwork and by that afternoon she had a job. Everyone at the pizzeria liked working with her, but they would not become her friends. They were local kids and she was an outsider, not even a friend of their mothers. Most of them were her daughters’ ages, though it was hard to picture their daughters with acned faces, too much eyeliner.

Devon wanted to take her to a movie. He was too young for her, but she said

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yes because she hadn't seen a film in eight years. They drove up the road to the Twin Theater in Bishop, the wind buffeting the truck. They talked through the veneer of gossip she'd absorbed from a week of work. They passed an overturned semi. In dying flare-light, the trailer looked dead, its underside road-black. But Devon didn't seem to notice; one hand was all he needed to keep the truck steady as the wind pelted them with handfuls of sand. The movie was bad but wonderful to her all the same. She'd forgotten that movie screens were so large and could obliterate her sense of self so wonderfully. On the drive back, she admitted she'd missed nearly a decade of films. He began listing everything she needed to see. She recognized some of the actors, but the titles sounded dumb. He stopped in front of her place and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. His cast brushed her breasts unintentionally.

He returned a half-hour later with his truck bed filled with houseplants. "Now I don't have to water Megan's plants anymore." But the plants were a botanical pretense for the VHS cassettes he carried inside within a milk crate. The dust covers were all faded to shades of blue. They watched movies until they fell asleep.

The following evening, the plants became her first priority. Despite being exhausted and smelling of root beer and grease, she watered, trimmed and bathed them in lamp light, starting with the spider plant in the living room and ending with the cactus in the bathroom. Only then did she attend to herself, which meant removing her shoes and collapsing into bed. She had no interest in watching the films Devon had left. She could never catch up.

After one shift, she took a walk to Lone Pine Drugs, still unaccustomed to the freedom, even a month out. She bought aspirin and a map to figure out where in California she was. San Francisco and the Pacific were a day's drive away. She bought a postcard. "Hey!" she wrote. Then she crossed out "Hey!" and obscured the word, turning it into a black rectangle to which she added wheels and bumpers so it looked like a car, a deliberate beginning. She started again. "I'm in Lone Pine, California, working. I can see Mt. Whitney (the highest mountain in the continental U.S.) from my window. It's getting colder. I bought a hot water bottle and use it every night. I hope both of you are well. Hugs, Mom". She flipped the postcard over, to the picture of people skiing down Mammoth Mountain. She drew an arrow to one of the skiers and wrote Me, then cried.

Returning home, she found an Airstream trailer parked in front of the house. A man was unhitching it. He climbed into his truck, honked and waved as he drove off, like he knew her. Wind rocked the trailer. Kat pictured a rhino inside, heaving from side to side. She didn't notice the black town car parked behind it until she heard the car's window groan down, revealing an old woman who said, "I'm your grandmother."

"My grandmother's in Canada."

The old woman's car door opened and chimed, chimed, chimed. A

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cane touched the ground, followed by two legs that appeared sawn off at mid-shin and stuffed rudely into a pair of black leather shoes. The woman's arms looked like they were covered in lichen. She was no taller than the top of the car door, which the wind helped her slam with surprising force. The cold tugged at her housecoat and brought Kat a faint fecal scent nearly masked by rose water.

"I am your grandmother," the old woman insisted. "Your other one."

"She's dead," Kat said.

"I expect you'd think so. Now let me inside, Tina, or I'll freeze." She moved past Kat and began mounting the front porch steps.

"I'm not Tina."

The old woman stared at her. She took hold of Kat's hand and ran her waxy fingers across Kat's palm. She immediately did the same to the other hand. "Your scar's healed," she said. "You were a toddler."

"I'm just renting the house. Your granddaughter's in Mammoth. With her mom."

She dropped Kat's hands. "You look just like her picture."

Kat had seen Megan's daughter in framed photos in the house. Tina was maybe eighteen, and age was the first disqualification for any likeness.

"When was the last time you saw your granddaughter?"

"The winter she burned herself on the fireplace."

Kat unlocked the door, took the postcard from her jacket pocket and placed it on top of the refrigerator with all the others, then sat across from the woman at the kitchen table. Her face was difficult to take in; Kat's eyes were snared in the woman's cotton-candy hair, then lost in the deep creases that made a puzzle of her face. The wind moaned and whistled. Kat got up and began washing dishes.

The woman said her name was Clementine, and she told Kat how, years before, she had left her then-husband and her young daughter Megan through the same doorway they'd just entered. "I traded that life for a man who treated me right," she said. "An oilman with steel hair. Danced like Gene Kelly, despite his age. He could bring up oil by stomping his feet."

"How old was Megan?"

"Five. Four, maybe. I didn't see Meg again until she was in her twenties. She's over fifty now. Hoards forgiveness like its currency."

Kat felt for the woman. "I have kids," she said.

Clementine swept at crumbs with her cupped palm. There was nothing else on the table.

"Two kids," Kat said.

Clementine shook her head. "She told Tina I'd died before Tina was born. Meg's ex told me that." She swept the crumbs to the floor. "Told her I drowned in a boating accident on the Allegheny. Honey, I still don't know where the Allegheny is. No, I didn't drown. But my oilman did, in our pool,"

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the woman said. "He left me ten million dollars. I lived it up. Reno penthouse, gambling, parties, extravagances. I rented a string quartet for a month to play me to sleep. I wasn't supposed to outlive the spending. It's all gone."

Kat had never met a millionaire. It was a letdown. Clementine held out her hands to Kat, who helped her upright. "I have a daughter who won't speak to me," Clementine said. "A granddaughter who thinks me drowned." She clapped her hands together. "But the money's gone. Things are simpler. She never forgave me rich. Maybe she'll forgive me poor."

Kat made up the bed in Tina's room, on which Clementine quickly looked out of place, her cane hanging on the arm of a life-size movie theater cutout of Brad Pitt.

That night, Kat lay in bed and watched horses milling in their corrals, black against the foothills. The Sierras rose to incredible heights behind them, the entire escarpment white except for the steepest granite where wisps of snow were swept off by wind. This was meditation to her, this view so immense it slapped shut her thoughts. She didn't want to give it up. But then her eyes closed and her thoughts rushed up to dance. That her own daughters would age once seemed an impossibility. And when she was in prison they stayed young. But when she dreamt of them they were always running from her, their faces turned away perhaps because she couldn't fix their features anymore. Because if she could reach out and turn them around to her again they would be young women, and unrecognizable. She couldn't help but wonder how terrible a mother Clementine had been, how much damage she must have caused for Megan to raise a daughter on a lie. Especially when there had been millions of dollars for the sharing. Reconciliation was for the movies, Kat knew. Separation was much more natural, at any cost. She imagined Megan holding Clementine's ankles against a cold muddy river bottom and leaving her there, mired for forty years, polluted, shriveled. Megan had done the right thing omitting Clementine. Grant the mind muscles and it's eight years in prison. She counted mountain peaks through the window, fifteen, and watched the pink mountains devour the moon.

Clementine looked even older in daylight. Her pupils jittered in her eyes like gnats stumbling through the air. Kat wondered if this was an indication her time was wrapping up, or just a glitch one could live with indefinitely.

"I'm going to see my granddaughter today."

Kat nodded.

"Come with me."

"I have to work," Kat lied.

Clementine held Kat's arm. "Take me to Mammoth. Please."

The town car had only eight hundred miles on it. Clementine sat in the passenger seat and stared forward. "It's stark here," she said, once they'd broken through the cloud cover and could see the eastern Sierras for the

first time that morning. The Owens Valley stretched out behind them, a great lake of fog.

"I think it's pretty."

"No. It's stark."

They drove up through the beige, rock-strewn landscape. At Crowley Lake they could see white mountains and more white mountains ahead. Everything was wide-open and new, like an entirely unknown state and she wanted to drive clear to the ocean, run from the car and across the sand and dive into the Pacific like a character in a movie, free and cold and clean.

Instead, the town car slipped on a curve, recovered, then hit an unforgiving patch of black ice that spun the car and obliterated the landscape, leaving the car in a vast white room. The tires finally gripped asphalt and the car shuddered to a stop.

Kat looked over to the passenger seat. Clementine's head rested against the side window, her eyes closed, blood creeping down the glass. The clasp of her seat belt gleamed unused where it hung against the car's frame. "Clementine?" Kat moved Clementine from the window and pulled away the strands of hair that stuck to the bloodied glass. The old woman's head hung down like it was about to snap off and fall into her lap. Kat tried to find a pulse, but her own hands shook too much to measure. She remembered shaking like this before, but out of anger, not fear. Kat drove on toward Mammoth, willing hospital road signs to rise where only plow markers stood to attention in the clumps of snow. Clementine leaned forward and hit the dashboard, her head staying there. Kat felt herself pee a little bit. She reclined Clementine's seat as far back as it would go so she wouldn't see the woman who was dead and unforgiven.

At the Mammoth hospital, Kat rushed back to the car with two medics in tow. Clementine was awake, her attention on her bloody fingers.

"Did she hit me?" Clementine asked, as they brought her inside.

"Who?" the nurse asked.

"My daughter."

"I'm not her daughter," Kat said.

"Did someone strike you?" the nurse asked.

"You hit your head in the car," Kat said.

Clementine nodded, seeming both relieved and disappointed. "Would you call her?" she asked Kat. "Would you call my daughter for me?"

"Yes."

"Would you tell her I'm here?"

"I'll find her."

She left Clementine and visited the Vons where Devon had said Megan worked. She found her scanning booze for skiers. Kat took a bar of chocolate and stood in line.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Kat. I rent your house."

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"Oh, hey." Megan smiled. "Doing some skiing?"

"Your mother came to the house yesterday."

The smile disappeared. "Don't let her inside."

"She's broke."

"Good."

"It's not my business, but she's hoping to see her granddaughter."

"She's not here," she said, handing the previous customer a long receipt.

Kat could see Tina at the other far end of the store, bagging groceries at the last register.

"Your mom's at the hospital with a concussion. I thought you should know."

"Don't worry. She's immortal," Megan said.

Kat didn't have an immediate reply. *Immortal* was one of those words that held a lie in its heart.

"She seems broken," Kat said, though she knew pity was not something she should expect to impart on others.

"It's the osteoporosis."

Kat shook her head. "She's sorry, I think. For what she did."

Megan held the chocolate bar over the scanner, hesitating. "I'll go see her," she said finally, the scanner sounding a *blip* of recognition.

Kat nodded. It was the best she could hope for, and all she could want.

Megan held up the bar of chocolate. "Did you really want this?"

"Please," Kat said.

She left Mammoth on a bus. In the approaching darkness she could see the grid of lights that made up Bishop, and farther down the valley, the smaller cluster of fallen stars that was Lone Pine. Were it not for Clementine's arrival, Kat would have looked at the town with more fondness—a place outside of herself that she could point to, where she had a home and a job, plants that would perish without her attention. But hers wasn't even a layaway life. It was another's life she'd loaned.

Devon picked her up in Bishop, the pizzeria's phone number the only one she knew. After eight years she'd even forgotten her old home phone number. There were sevens; a four, and an eight. The rest had vanished, like the home itself, like her daughters. Devon was dressed for work. His cast was off, she noticed.

"It's not your fault," he said, driving with both hands on the wheel.

"I didn't see the ice," she said.

"Megan doesn't like her mother," he said. "You practically did her a favor."

"That's horrible."

"Just saying."

He honked after he dropped her off.

She'd left the lights on and the house glowed like someone lived in it, but it wasn't her glow. The plants didn't need water, the soil moist on her fingertips. She began drawing the curtains closed to block out the squares of night, then saw the Airstream gleaming like the moon.

The Airstream was unlocked. Inside, she saw boxes and more boxes. She found the electrical contact and ran three sets of extension cords to the house. She moved a wall of shoes and saw Clementine staring at her from an oil portrait. She was much younger, had a full head of hair and stood beside a man a good twenty years older. Their faces were finished, with rough blue halos of paint around their heads and crude brush strokes at the edges of the canvas. Kat put the painting and the bulkiest items inside the house. The heavier boxes she shoved aside to get deeper into the Airstream, excavating a kitchenette, a seating area, a bed. It wasn't curiosity propelling her now, but something more desperate. This trailer held the remains of a millionaire's life while everything in her own life was smoke. She was now inside a brushed aluminum dream, the rustproof promise of what money can buy. She made a phone call to Devon.

She heard his truck rattle up outside and turned to see her exit now blocked by a crowd of furs, silk Chinese robes and a dozen wigs that seemed too large for a human head. Soon she would not be alone. She put on a curly blonde wig, wrapped herself in a pelt and pushed her way into the cold carrying an oversized check made out to Clementine for TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS AND NO CENTS. On the back was glued a photo of Clementine holding the same novelty check, casino staff and slot machines behind her, everyone caught in mid-clap.

"What the hell," Devon said.

"I'm a millionaire," Kat said.

"You look it."

She handed him the check. "Now you are, too. C'mon in and have a look." She went back to uncovering the remains of Clementine's possessions, a nested stack of cowboy hats, jewelry boxes so stuffed she couldn't tell costume pieces from the priceless ones. Devon took what she gave him and made piles in the Airstream's kitchen. When she reached the back wall of the trailer she was surprised by the degree of her disappointment. She'd been hoping to find something personal. Photo albums maybe, pictures of the house and a younger Clementine. Megan playing at her feet with her favorite doll. Some sure sign of once-real happiness.

Devon held up a glass dome. "This can't be real," he said. "Authentic Moon Rock, Apollo XVII Mission." He spoke the Roman numerals individually. He held it out to her. The rock inside was the size of a piece of driveway gravel.

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Kat looked at the giant check, the wigs, the furs. Anything was possible. She took a cowboy hat from a hook and placed it over Devon's curls. He straightened it and smiled at her. She turned out the lights and crawled into the middle of the bed, without leaving room for him on either side. The air smelled of cardboard and perfume. She waited, closed her eyes. She could feel the heat coming off his forehead, first, then his lips. She could feel a scar on the wrist she'd only seen in a cast. She rubbed her fingers over it until he pulled her hand away.

"Tell me one thing you like about me," she said.

"Your voice."

"Another."

The sex was over by the time her eyes were accustomed to the dark. For the first time in a long time she felt almost happy as they lay there, silent but for their breathing. She felt clear. If she really tried now, she could remember everything: her daughter's faces, her old phone number, which knife she'd used to injure her husband; the chef's, the bread, one of the steaks, the fruit parer. But she also knew how to tame her memories. She studied Devon instead. He smiled at her as he dressed. His chest was like her ex-husband's. One long stripe of hair, like a zipper running from throat to groin. She wished she could unzip his chest just far enough to see what a young man's heart looked like. It would be something. She wanted to say, "I lost custody of my kids when I went to prison. He wasn't a good husband. I wasn't a good wife. But I think I was a good mother." Instead, she said, "Can I stay with you? For awhile?"

He grinned at her as he buttoned his shirt. "Absolutely." He put the cowboy hat back on. "You'll like it. You'll like it a lot."

"It's a bad idea, though," she said. "I have so much baggage I need a porter."

"Leave your stuff," he said, and it didn't matter to her that he misunderstood, or if he understood completely.

"Wait," she said. She crawled to a pile of Clementine's possessions, unscrewed the glass cover from a case, and pried the moon rock off its stand. It was light, like pumice. She pressed it into his hand. "Here. For you."

Devon had a double-wide trailer close to the foothills. She asked Devon for stamps and placed all he had on the dozens of unaddressed postcards she'd written from Lone Pine. Then she followed Devon outside to his hot tub. He pointed out a satellite drifting across the midnight sky. He knew how fast they moved, how many miles above the earth they hung. She could see the inside of his trailer through the sliding glass door: the couch, the TV, the piano his mother had won for him on *The Price is Right*. Luck.

That night in Devon's bed she imagined he was Clementine's oilman as she gave herself to him again. She dreamt of the oilman, too. They had trav-

eled across the country in his Airstream, looking for oil. He held her firmly by the wrists as they stood above a promising spot, the two of them jumping above a possible oil pocket, pouncing on the stubborn crust of ground that was keeping them on this side of absolute riches.

“Harder!” he shouted to her, laughing. “Jump harder!”

She woke with a leg cramp and walked it off in the dark. Through the window she could see that what she'd taken to be horses were instead cattle, their ignorant shapes asleep against the ground. She bundled up for a walk, grabbed her postcards and followed the dirt road to the wire fence, a predawn glow behind her. A couple of cows rose and lumbered to her, steam rising from their nostrils like from a tea kettle wanting attention. One snatched a postcard from her hand and devoured it. She waited for the cow to spit it out, to choke, to possibly die. But it pushed forward for more. Soon half the herd was at the fence. She fed them the remaining postcards and watched as her days were consumed, on to milk or meat. Their rough sloppy tongues pushed her empty hands aside. They looked over the fence at her, disappointed there wasn't more. **F**

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Bill Edmondson

JAZZ

In the night river  
Lit only near shore by their headlights  
Men in hip waders swing their net frames  
A few degrees upstream  
Let the current knock them over stones along the bottom  
As the men are good and if they're lucky  
They feel secondary shocks  
Time time and scoop  
In the cool air a tangle of candlefish writhing  
Brilliant muscular

## Poor William and the End of the Line

Certain bolder passengers waiting for the six o'clock R-line Express Shuttle remove their shoes and pick at the firmly packed earth between their toes; ladies remove their stockings, offering an unfresh female stench that comes in waves; there is an unfair amount of farts, belches, the hacking of snot and spit from all directions. Inside the cars, itchy skin; stagnant air on dry skin, the quick formation and then shedding of skin, dead white patches of itchy skin, the air is full of it, dark bristling hairs seem to appear magically on the cheeks and jaws and necks of the men. Inside the cars, a significant amount of ass-grabbing, distasteful jokes, pipe smoke, halitosis, some of the men laughingly remove their pants. The women are smug in dim lighting, their wet, drooping mouths gaping and obscene.

The small car hurtles across the earth. Her head droops to her chin, jerks upward, she comes awake, droops again into anxious dreaming. She's taking William on a tour of the new house. She's so happy to see him. Three times she tries to take his small hand. Each time he removes it, gently. He won't let her touch him, even after he came all that way to see her. The raucous car intrudes again; she jerks awake to mislaid hours, bleary eyes and damp palms. The dream lingers. For he so young, to be so careful. One's own child. The moon is out, and a hot, perfumed mist has settled in. The man across has a hand up his seatmate's skirt. He's raising and lowering her, as if to demonstrate how light she is. The mist is so thick, she can only see the top of the woman's head, up and down, like a see-saw, where the air is still clear. That mist, it settles on her clothes like a stain, and she reeks, too. She smiles at the man across, so he'll think she gets the joke. He leers back at her, offers his other hand, and she shuts her eyes again. When she opens them, all of this will be gone, be gone. A dry, warm thing slithers across her leg. She stands reflexively, squeezes into the aisle, ears red and burning hot.

The observation deck. Deepest night. The trees rush backward. Crisp, fresh air like salvation. Stars all bright and thrown around. Once there was a night like this...

Behind her, a shrill alarm begins to whine.

Dinner.

Packed in the narrow aisle between a spindly, aged diva smothered in flaking pancake makeup and a tall brute that smells of feet, the line is, of course, at a standstill. Her arm is literally pinned beneath the older woman's elbow, who leans on the back of a headrest, smoking an impossibly long lavender cigarette. The smell of it is making Mary sick. The passengers pushing impotently at one another; the pressure of a sea of bodies confined...a wave

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of nausea rises. The line crawls forward. Halts.

It's nearly 2am when Mary reaches the dining car. She's sweaty and exhausted and missing a shoe. Her bare foot's been trampled many times, and large, purple bruises bloom along her heel and toes. The silverware, napkins, plates and beverages are all gone. She's handed a tray containing a slab of grayish meat, some limp broccoli and a butterscotch pudding cup. She eats with her hands, wedged into the corner of Car 15. It's her first meal in almost twenty-four hours; she had to travel for so long just to get to the station and there was no money for meals. Every last dime had gone to the cost of her ticket.

It's easier to pass through the aisles after, although Mary must look straight ahead to avoid witnessing the appalling acts taking place on either side of her. Twisting limbs and such. Older rituals and some newly-formed. Games dedicated to certain, mostly forgotten gods. Ones not so blinding. She finds a seat in Car 9 that looks relatively safe, next to a tiny old man fast asleep with his head leaning against the window. In spite of the horrors of the day, she soon falls into a sound sleep.

She dreams of William, always William.

He limps toward her, his uneven, rambling little walk.

She says, are you mad.

She says, what did I do.

He turns his body toward the sun and closes his eyes, his oversized head dangling a bit to one side.

She says, do we have to talk about it.

She tugs at his arm.

Talk about me.

William, smiling into the sun.

Morning.

Mary wakes to harsh sunlight. Her face is wet with tears. Her seatmate is still leaning against the window. She knows without checking that he's dead. Eventually it's decided that he'll be placed in the Passenger Lounge, as there's no room anywhere else. William, smiling in the sun.

The weeks roll by.

The situation deteriorates.

There are rumors that women are being raped between cars. The long-standing feud between cars 18 and 12 finally erupts and there are daily skirmishes, often resulting in injury to innocent bystanders. Four bodies lay piled in the Passenger Lounge, having succumbed respectively to old age, murder, heat stroke, and accidental trampling.

Mary wakes and sleeps. The earth rolls by outside windows that never open. She peels a hole in the grime, sees towns, farms, mountains flowing past; the grayish, blurry landscape of a city replaced by endless trees bursting

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with the crisp lucidity of autumn foliage, heaps more of it covering fields and small roads, a barrage of red and yellow and orange and brown and red and yellow, as if all other colors had been drained away, only these few left to fill in the blank spaces of the world, her eyes searching and aching for soft blues, a soothing pale green, a violet liquid sky. Moving on, toward the coast. The flickering, fluorescent lights of the cars blind her; she gropes her way to the dining car and back, when she remembers to; she's almost never hungry anymore. Her skin is becoming more translucent; she examines the backs of her hands obsessively, tracing the thick blue veins, while all around her passengers couple and uncouple, pass narcotics from hand to hand, engage in shrill, petty arguments bred by fraught nerves and close quarters, find new ways to taunt and torture one another. Up and down the narrow aisles troops the endless parade of freaks and miscreants: freshly shaven perverts and wet-lipped junkies, mumbling old men and carnivorous whores. Comes now a set of cackling twins, demented cannibals both, and a psychotic military man. His fiery gaze, determined strides. Propelled by what nefarious designs. And then that rancid, scheming pageant queen, on tiptoes yet, slinking about like some gaudy nighttime she-demon. All thieves and parasites, the bottom of the well. She's wrapped in a thick cotton, riding it out, stepping over the bodies, moving slowly, staring dumbly. Her hair is falling out. It shouldn't be long now, says the head conductor on his daily stroll up and down the aisles. He's long ago forgone his cap and blazer for a more comfortable singlet and dressing slippers. After his rounds, he retires to the Staff Lounge, into which no passengers are permitted. Rumors of satin sheets, a gramophone, silver bowls of truffles and chewing tobacco begin to ripple among the grumbling passengers (the Passenger Lounge consists of a couple of wooden benches and a soft drink machine, guarded by corpses. Wasps had early on built a nest in the soda return slot, so that no one dares approach). Eventually some half-hearted riot rears up, but never gets its legs. Still, the participants create enough damage to start the porters carrying cattle prods on their rounds. Mary seeks shelter in sleep, but William grows more aggressive. Not her William. Not her ghost of a child. Not the pale, misshapen thing that hung on her, a walking accusation. This dream-William swells gigantic. He chases her through dark woods, crashing terribly. Leaps out from behind trees, from shadows. Smiling, smiling. Leads her by the hand down sinister lanes, through dripping trees where gnarled limbs grasp for her, where dark, silent rain seeps through her clothes, and she is cold, and frightened, and alone.

And then one day, they find out what she did. They find out about her. The conductors like to gossip. Suddenly, Mary is tripped as she walks down the aisles. She's barricaded in a restroom for hours. She's pinched, poked, shoved until her body is covered in bruises. "Dirty Mary, Dirty Mary." The older women are the most vicious. These formerly rich widows, blotched and veiny, skin and bones, hunched and malevolent, dripping with strands



of chipped diamonds (the last remnants of their wealth), crowned in the elaborate headdress of another era: these greedy, starving, ancient peacocks, these beady black-eyed, pursed-lipped, pinch-faced horrors will grind the tips of moth-eaten parasols into the metatarsal bones of her feet where she walks; will jab gnarled fingers between her ribs as she sleeps; will fall upon her in packs, clawing at patches of her hair until she bleeds. The conductors turn a blind eye; the passengers are amused or indifferent. "Dirty Mary, had a son." She has no recourse. She is a pariah. Cringing like a dog. Hating herself. They don't care that she's pretty. No limit to how it ought to've been, those long nights out in the cold, William with no clothes on, cringing in the bushes, shivering, soaking wet and long-suffering, pretty beat-up and heart-sick, blond hair plastered black along his brow, waiting for things to change. Her William. So, so small. Always small for his age, never mind how well fed and brushed, and combed, and taken in air and sun. A thing which sat defiantly sallow. Which grew but wrong. His pitiful limbs. Dumb, gaping eyes. Her thin gaze shrinking in the meanwhile to all of a pinhole. All of a whirlpool about one open-mouthed, panting refusal to thrive, robust. He doesn't even dream, Mary thinks, or thought, except now. Now this must be William's dream: Mary in the corner, shivering like a dog out in the rain, dress all torn to shreds, the men spit on her sometimes when they walk by to go to the bathroom. "Dirty Mary, had a son. Dirty Mary, had a son. Alas, he was to be undone." One porter brings her a towel for the blood. "Don't beat yourself up," he advises. "It's nearly over."

"Anyway," says a spotty-faced conductor, perched above her, one leg swinging, smacking gum, "you should see what they did to that guy in Car 33." He leans down; Mary squints up at him with the eye that still works. "Baby-fucker," he explains in an elaborate stage whisper, and straightens up, smiling, nodding, as those symbiotic twins squeeze past, the one of damp and heavy flesh, the other witch-like, gaunt, the merest spectre of a hag, arm-in-arm, laughing, they pause to chant at Mary on the floor, who never does cover her ears anymore: "Took him in the woods one day. And there poor William rots away." Like it could make her feel dirty. In rags, in blood, in grime. On a train screaming forward. All the trees rushing backward. But once, she would have told them, all the stars came out for us. The trees dripped black water as she led him down the path, and past where the path ended, and further still. As he limped beside her. And she left him there, and she did not look back, and he did not try to follow. So he must have known, she would have told them. She walked home.

And the rain began, and then the storms.

The rain began, and went on for days. The rain stopped. And the days went on and on. All sky, all endless. She didn't go out.

Her dress was going drip drip over the radiator, and steam hissed up. When she knew it was going to be a forever kind of thing.

Took him to the woods one day.  
It rained and rained.  
She threw his clothes in a ditch and walked home.

It's on a Monday afternoon that they reach the coast. The groaning, heaving rust-iron cars grind heavily to a halt. The first time, the first time there is no motion beneath her feet in forever, no screaming engine in her ears. She can't tell if she has gone deaf. She may be deaf. Noiseless, still vacuum. All the windows drop simultaneously...fresh, clean air wafts slowly through the silent cars, filling up the dead spaces between them. The passengers blink quietly in the hazy afternoon light, not looking at one another. The doors open. They stumble out one by one, filthy and bedraggled, leaning to the left or right, so accustomed to shifting their weight within the hurtling cars that solid earth robs their balance. No one looks back at the mute, hulking relic in the grass, which was their swift and roaring home.

They line up along the edge of the cliff, orderly and neat, the good little children. The conductors, back in uniform, fan out and begin. They call to one another and whistle; it's almost over. One of them is making her way along the line toward Mary, far too rapidly, short and fat, but strong, with thick arms and legs, and bronze, shining skin. She's distracted; she doesn't even face the passengers as she sends them over the side.

The conductor pats herself down: ass, chest, thighs. Checks her waist-pack. "Where the hell-

"Oh," says Mary.

"Goddammit," the conductor, packed into her uniform like smooth, tan sausages. Over goes one of the old ladies, one of those grim-faced black widows, face all squinched up, fists curled against her chest, head first, legs akimbo; that's how she goes down.

"Oh no," says Mary, only two away now.

He's a giant of a man, the conductor gives a mighty heave. Smothered his young bride and her sister with the weight of his own body; sat with them for days after. He raises his mammoth arms, closes his eyes, but still screams on the way down, like all the rest.

"I've got to find..." the conductor mutters, it's barely with the tip of one finger and not a glance she sends the youngest of those red-headed rapist brothers flying.

She steps in front of Mary, filling up the world. Framed in the only slice of sky available, a palm tree, fronds waving delicately in the breeze; goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. Just a hint of a rain in the air.

"This isn't right," says Mary.

The conductor swears again, checks her waist-pack for the tenth or eleventh time.

"This is wrong," says Mary.

"I've got to get organized," says the conductor, and down goes Mary. F

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Jonathan Rice

Positive Buoyancy

With others you descend, leaning to disappear  
at the mouth of a dormant spring. Diving there,

you said, would be like falling into a stadium  
at night - permanent depth and silted. And no

ceiling, the stairwells of constellations divisible  
by silence, until only air rising fast as baitfish

could lead you back if things went wrong.  
Which is why not even his name is mentioned

here: the foolish student who swam into a cavern  
entrance along one wall. How simple, to drift

only downward as agreed and ignore everything  
until drifting ceases, where others dropped

their weights to rise. But responsible, and without  
excuse, you followed to watch as he dimmed

to nothing through a room of shunts and splits,  
current shifts and the blind of disturbed sediment,

where I am waiting with you now, your cylinders  
hissing less, less...and the voice rising - not yet in

shouts - to leave before narcosis erases your confusion  
of breaths. For when he returns, low on oxygen,

lost and panicked and as a break of light diving  
beneath you to turn again - the exit suddenly gone -

you must bite down, the imprint of your teeth  
still fitted to perfect rows along the recovered valve.

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Jonathan Rice

### Instruction: Jewelry Store

If someone comes into the store with a gun  
this is what you'll have to do.

Follow your sister out the back, and tell her  
to run for help. You'll have the pistol, the .9mm

from the case by the monitor. Don't forget it's loaded.  
Unlatch the safety and stand away from the door.

And make sure, especially if you hear shots, that you shoot  
anyone who's not me or an officer, if they come out after you.

Don't aim for the head or legs, the arms, or the hand  
holding the gun, like on TV. Remember, aim

for the middle, Son, the chest, and wait between shots  
to re-center. He'll fall down. Keep shooting until he falls down.

Don't come back into the store. No matter what  
you saw, go find your sister. Take care of her.

## Field Recordings (for the Germantown Crew)

**W**e have decided to make recordings. Who decided this? We have decided, nevertheless, to make recordings. In consideration of the questions, of which we have not one single answer. We? Begin with a single certainty: No one hears it the same. No one. So we have decided to make recordings. It's maybe not much but it's what we do. Me and my friends. The ones who make, the ones who make the recordings. The ones who make, the ones who make the recordings. Recordings of what, of what everyone hears, of what everyone hears that is not the same. The recordings are best for listening on small tape recorders after dark in silent rooms with large windows. The recordings are best for listening in the hush of the night, with cricket accompaniment. The recordings are best for listening in candle-light, in the vast continents of shadows cast upon a blank wall. They are best when a breeze lifts the curtain, lightly, and then lets it down again. Listen to what no one hears the same. They are best for listening whenever whenever. Listen to what no one hears the same and hear the voices and how they are not the same.

There's Lewis, who says, Put a window in it, and waves his hands. There's Johnny, sick, who whispers, I can hear the dust, and hunches over his knee. There's Tobias, intent, who intones, Each second is born to die, and I bear the misery of each death proudly, and I go onward walking this mountain, and damnit the summit shall be mine. And shakes a proud fist. No one hears it the same or even what it is, is it noise, music, words? We have decided to make recordings in order to not answer this question. Listening, we taste wood smoke on each note and know that the singer had a good friend. There's JM, who says, You can't not have style, smiling wryly, fingering his torn overcoat. The singer and his friend sat together drinking warm beer while the crickets chirped and the vegetation lurked and the heat festered. Delightful, says Micaela, how delightful can we have them shoot guns at a quarry? The singer and his friend wiped sweat from their foreheads and threw empty cans into the back seat. When they went to swim at the quarry there was a water snake and there were rednecks spilling shotgun shells and Luigi was swimming and everyone was sunburnt. When the singer went home to write a song we recorded it too but we weren't writing songs even if some of us thought we were. There's Jordan, who famously and defiantly exclaims, I hate songs and I hate history. Get us so old our eyes drool all over our faces and our faces made of stone still we have these delightful recordings.

It seems like the whole world is speaking out loud. Who's listening? One theory is that by making the recordings we could transform the madness into something less menacing. Another theory is that it is necessary to document disintegration as a necessity because it is what we have decided to do and having decided to do it it is necessary to do it or else we will not be doing what we have decided to do and we will be stranded in an in between rather than properly disintegrated. Whose theory?

There's Chris, who speaks slowly, calmly, with a firm measure, What you are talking about is boundaries, and exhales a lungful of cigarette smoke, which waits and listens like a golden ghost. There's Chris, who speaks patiently, lecturing, For instance you are walking in the park in the late afternoon, summer, and you are not going anywhere, you are just walking, and a sensitivity descends from the sky and settles upon you, and you feel at that moment attentive to every detail, the sound of the skateboard wheels crossing a patch of sandy pavement, the lush and faintly sick smell of the lilac, the shadows of the leaves on the lawn. But at some point though, your walk has to end. You'll be onto the next movement. Maybe you're hungry, tired. Maybe you have to go to work. Maybe you are going to your Mother's birthday party. Or your child's graduation. Maybe you have to go to the bathroom. But always, there is something else to do, some change of direction to be made. There's Betsy, who rebels, who laughs, who says, I don't see your point, I don't see your point at all. There's Jordan who picks up his guitar. There's Jordan who says I just want to play. There's Johnny, sick, who groans. There's JM, who does not say. There's Luigi, behind a tree, who likes to break glass. There's Micaela, at an arm's length, who ironizes, Oh how speculative.

There have been technical difficulties. Oh how many technical difficulties have we to surmount. Especially with no one hearing it the same. Especially with none of us easy to get along with. We barely even smile. And Johnny, sick, mutters I want to live Underwater. And Tobias, drunk, hisses I don't mean a priest I mean a real priest. And Lewis, furious, rants It's not music, it's garbage, self-indulgent crap, the worst kind, full of mistakes. And Chris, brow furrowed, who agrees, dejectedly, All noise is not good noise. But JM, wide-eyed, who whispers, Of course it is, if you place it where it wants to go. And Betsy, impulsive, contrary, who qualifies, There's no placing, it ends up, that's how it is. And Jordan who says Give me my guitar. And Luigi who breaks a bottle. And Johnny who groans. And the recordings, the reels, the running of the reels. And waking in the fury of the storm, in the pitch flash of lightning we reckon our bed surrounded by water. Or in the necessity of survival we learn to interpret otherwise.

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At first the shadows move when we move, giving us the illusion of control,

but soon, they begin to move first, and we follow. We wish we'd had more warning but what were we doing about it? Still trying what we know how, which isn't much, which is our voices and our recordings. That's all. But something has shifted. There are fewer discussions. Actually, none. The reel is always running. We record everything. The sound of the moths brushing against the screen; Chris's pacing footsteps; a sigh; the lighting of a cigarette; a shower hushed from behind closed doors; a refrigerator buzzing, opening, buzzing. We compose or we wait, what's the difference, listening. Jordan, of all people, goes into the woods and records the trees. Walking, Betsy says, Hear. We have no known destination. The journey is nameless. We try to honor the sounds. We try to honor the sounds. We know none of this. We try. **F**

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Heather Kirn

## Shunryu's Offering

(Italicized lines are from translations of the Hannya Shin Gyo, or Heart Sutra.)

The morning sketched the temple wood with light,  
their daughter offered red azuki beans,

*without loss, without gain*

and Shunryu and his wife said the Heart Sutra.  
Japanese planes were only machines

*no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind*

like guns, like toasters, so they did not feel  
the flames as they dropped bombs

*not stained, not pure*

on Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Phillipines,  
Singapore, Hawaii. On this same day

*having nothing to attain*

the Buddha sat beneath a tree and saw  
the lines of his hands, of all lands, disappear.

*no sight, sound, smell, taste, touch*

His lotus-folded legs entangled with the roots.  
His arms turned to branches, reached the morning star

*far beyond fantasy*

—the ice chip in the blue dawn, the only  
diamond he would ever wear—and he knew

*no hindrance, thus no fear*



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a way to shake the self off like water.  
This was the way that Shunryu pointed toward

*without loss, without gain*

with arrows made of ancient vowels,  
kan, ji, zai, bo, made now for the dead

*not born, not destroyed*

in five separate nations, made for the soldiers  
who could have been any man in Japan,

*all Buddhas, past, present, and future*

who could have been Shunryu, as even the names  
of priests were summoned to fight.

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Octavio Quintanilla

## Unburdening

I wait for you in a room  
where the howls of dogs are mute.  
Here, where there's no flight.  
Where the clock gathers your eyelashes  
with its tongue.

I wait for you without daybreak,  
naked because everything is hunger,  
thirsty because you have named everything.

I wait for you as your mother fills  
my forehead with kisses. She discovers  
my poverty and her tongue turns to foam  
when she says I am lucky.

There's no such thing as luck.  
There's waiting and this life  
that never shuts up. It falls in love  
with my blood.

Owens the cry that I swallow.

The Stigma of Synth:  
My Secret Life with Depeche Mode

Like all good art, the lyrics to Depeche Mode songs such as “Master and Servant” and “Strangelove” leave room for interpretation. In the small minds of young homophobes, most interpretations erred on the side of man-on-man dungeon sex sessions filled with drugs, oils and punishment. In “Strangelove” lead vocalist Dave Gahan sang: “strange highs and strange lows. Strangelove, that’s how our love goes. ...Pain. Will you return it?” In “Master and Servant” he sang about a new game that’s a lot like life, a “play between the sheets. With you on top and me underneath, forget all about equality.” The latter song only fed rumors that the band was gay by featuring a cracking whip sound as part of the beat. DM played these songs on Casio keyboards, not Gibson Flying-Vs, and used a drum track, not a live, stick-wielding drummer. They were essentially pasty computer geeks programming music instead of video games for a living, nerds who’d ended up on the concert stage rather than behind it working the lights. And, like me, they had no reputation as heartbreakers to defend them. Where I went to school, this presented a problem.

1989: Better known as the year of the Exxon Valdez spill, the year the Iron Curtain first cracked, the year Emperor Hirohito died, it was also the year I became a huge Depeche Mode fan. In eighth grade. I mail-ordered concert tees from tours I was too young to attend. I coated my bedroom with posters. Rare European vinyl bootlegs sat stacked beside my record player. I even painted the letters “DM” on the wall beside my bed, later adding the rose from the cover of *Violator* when that album came out in 1990.

*Violator* – that wasn’t just a reference to a double-crossing woman?

Judging from the huge crowds at their 1988 *US Music for the Masses* tour, the gay rap didn’t much diminish the band’s increasing popular appeal, but it did threaten to curtail mine. I entered an all-boys Catholic high school in 1989 at the height of my fandom. No matter the city, most all-boys’ schools get the same reputation: they’re where students are trained to become America’s future choir teachers, bath house patrons and Crate & Barrel franchise owners. As Phoenix’s only all-boys high school, we at Brophy College Preparatory earned the same reputation

As ludicrous as the “gay prep school” rep was, it didn’t change the facts: wearing a DM shirt at Brophy was as socially damning a move as holding your buddy’s hand. Single sex high school fosters a climate of fear and mutual suspicion. To be labeled gay in this environment is to potentially be ostracized from the entire student body: some 1029 students, around 243 in my

class. With no girls to flirt with or ask out, how was a Brophy boy going to step outside the shadow of his favorite leather-bearing, lipstick-wearing band and establish his heterosexuality? Easy. Take his fandom into the closet and deny, deny, deny.

Brophy dress code required students wear collared shirts, so I concealed my DM tees beneath regulation button-ups. I invited only my closest friends into my embarrassing shrine of a bedroom. I spoke of the bootleg collection to local record store clerks as a cigar connoisseur might speak of his pre-embargo Cubans. Recollections of the Phoenix *Violator* tour concert were strictly reserved for my female friends. I liked girls, thought about them constantly, imagined one day I'd fall in love with one, if only any might let me take them to a movie. In lieu of an impressive romantic résumé to flaunt, I concealed my fandom to preserve my image as a standard-issue fourteen-year-old, but that tact wouldn't alter people's perception of DM.

There might not have been definitive proof that Depeche Mode was Depeche 'Mo, but there was no evidence to the contrary either. And if the inference people drew from the circumstantial evidence was a stretch, it was also, admittedly, an understandable one. Watch any video. Check out old interviews. Band members Martin, Dave, Alan and Andrew were slight, articulate, British men. DM wore whole cow herds' worth of leather and used to sport bondage gear straight out of a West Village S&M shop. When they debuted in 1980, they looked as if they'd just returned from Gay Pride Week in Washington DC: leather pants, leather shirts, leather biker captain caps, aviator glasses. Chains draped across nearly every article; everything was buckles and straps. They made Rob Halford of Judas Priest look as huggable as a beagle, and that was just their first album.

After the early-Eighties "leather daddy" fad diminished, DM developed a sharper, more chic urban image: leather jackets with zip-up wrists, Army-Navy flak jackets, thick motorcycle boots, black turtle necks with a zipper up the front. Everything from this period seemed webbed with zippers. DM in '89 were the clean urban males, which in many peoples' minds meant gay urban males, metrosexual long before the term. Ours is a culture that equates debauchery with manliness and godliness, and these guys had no Zeppelin-grade drunken rock star antics to precede them and left no trail of sullied groupies behind them. Somehow in my teenage brain, not wearing the shirts wasn't an option, so I defended the band and myself as best I could.

When the Mode subject came up outside my controlled environments, I offered a prefabricated answer for every charge then quickly changed the subject. If a student in math class said the members seemed effeminate, I'd say, "Of course they do. They're British."

If an acquaintance at a party questioned the whip sound, I'd say, "Master and Servant' is a political song. England has a long history of labor strife."

What about Martin's love of gossamer shirts? "Maybe the breeze cools

him during concerts.”

His shirtless period before that? “If you had a stadium full of woman lusting after you, wouldn’t you remove your clothing?”

The bondage straps? “Plenty of heteros like to get smacked around.”

As for the county of Essex where the band formed, I could only point to the absence of the word “man” in the name. But to the hasty judge and unreasonable jury, explanations weren’t proof. Hard evidence was required to overturn the verdict. Like with my friend Jody’s brother Cody.

Cody knew of my fandom because Jody, who I’d trusted with my secret, told him. Cody was raised in western Colorado. He drank Coors, chewed Copenhagen, always wore jeans. One day while discussing his efforts to get on the rodeo circuit, Cody brought up DM. “You show me a picture of that fruity one with the white hair,” he said, “what’s his name?”

Jody called out from the other room, “Martin Gore.”

“Yeah,” Cody said, “a picture of that faggot Marteen Whore fuckin’ some groupie chick, and I’ll shut my yap.” Even if such a picture existed, I knew I couldn’t get it.

This was a world before the internet. You couldn’t just type “Martin Gore + lady’s man” and find articles quoting him saying, “My wife inspired that song.” There was no edition of *Behind the Music* to watch. What info fans had was largely generated from other fans. This info arrived as hand-me-down gossip diluted by multiple generations of telling; direct info came from MTV videos and the low-quality TV interviews rabid fans in German bootleg circles mailed you copies of on VHS. Even the fan community disagreed on the issue of Martin’s sexuality.

On a moral, personal and cosmic level, none of this mattered. The problem with defending my reputation by declaring Martin’s heterosexuality was that I had no answers to the basic questions: Was Martin married? Had he dated women? Was this a topic he actively suppressed? I should have written the German bootleg fanatics and asked, “Have men ever come out to tell their tour bus sex stories in *NME* or *Spin*? If so, please mail copies.”

Aside from the offensive phrasing, Cody’s contention mirrored most naysayers’ suspicions: the issue wasn’t Dave, Alan or Andrew so much as Martin. Everyone’s eyes went straight to him. He was the one who continued to stripe his bare chest with bondage straps after other members went to flak jackets. He was the one who wrote the “Master and Servant” lyrics, the one showing his nipples through shimmering gossamer in concert, the one whose gentle manner resembled an effeminate whisper in interviews and who wore rouge and lip gloss as casually as Cher. After the biker fad, Martin incorporated elements of those early London Underground days into his evolving look. His became a sort of proto-Marilyn Manson, goth style through the Eighties and Nineties, minus the thick pancake makeup and Absinthe in skull goblets. During the *Black Celebration* period, he sometimes appeared bare-chested in an

ankle-length dress, open leather jacket and broad brimmed black hat, a look that made you wonder what Culture Club would've sounded like had Boy George gotten into Alistair Crowley. The number of chains Martin draped around his neck also suggested a Mister T. fetish. He even wore straps zigzagging his crotch, synched tight in an X, as if somehow his genitals weren't fixed securely enough to hang on their own. Had I surrounded myself with other aspiring bull-riders or been raised in a rural home, I might have taken this for the Official Homosexual Uniform, especially when I first saw the cover of *Catching up with Depeche Mode*.

In this black and white photo, Dave, Alan and Andrew surround a shirtless Martin. With the image's natural color removed, each man's innate pastiness reaches a blinding, nuclear crescendo, yet the central details remain clear: Martin's top, a delicate, lingerie-type number made of black lace, hangs low, revealing his right, curved pectoral. With its crescent of shadow it resembles a woman's breast. A single bra-like strap drapes across his bicep, as if he'd just sat up from a nap and forgotten to straighten his clothes. The blokes crowd around him, looking, as a friend once described, "like puppies awaiting their turn at mamma's nipple." Poor Alan even rested his chin on Martin's bare shoulder for that shoot. The image punched such a big hole in my programmed defenses that, to maintain my resolve, I buried the LP alongside *Speak and Spell* - which included the song "Boys Say Go!" whose lyrics always confused me - deep inside my record collection. Looking at that photo, what could I have said to un-convince anyone?

I did my best. "They're artists," I argued. "Nail polish, eye liner, it's all shtick and marketing. Motley Crüe wears tights and rouge and nobody calls them queens." People pointed out that the Crüe supposedly screwed half of LA's female population and played beside flaming pentagrams and flash pots.

I tried other angles: "The lace and leather are standard rock and roll props." This made people laugh. "Rock and roll?" people said. Three of the four band members stood behind synthesizers for most of their concerts. Just *stood there*, barely swaying at the knees and hips. Cody told me that, "Real rock stars don't bang their heads in the heat of a synthesizer solo," then he snickered at the words "bang" and "head." Even my closest Brophy friends Jeff, Alex, Rich and Ryan, refined students who used words like algorithm and taxonomy, resisted the rock prop hypothesis. "Casio players," they argued, "aren't in the same musical genus as Hendrix, The Clash, The Ramones." Even though Martin had recently started playing more guitar with the *Violator* album, no one was going to give him credit for it, at least not enough to overcome the puff reputation. I was blowing smoke up peoples' asses. Even I could see that.

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In 1990 it seemed half the guys my age were banging their heads to Motley

Crüe's "Dr. Feelgood" and Aerosmith's "Love in an Elevator." In the late Eighties in the US, the goth subculture and listeners of college and alternative radio constituted the bulk of the DM's fan base - people who often liked the Cure, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Bauhaus. In Europe, the UK and Australia, DM had long enjoyed enormous popularity, reaching such pop idol status that they regularly appeared in German teen magazines. While their 1987 album *Music for the Masses* started their rise to wider stateside acclaim, it was their 1990 album *Violator* that broke the American pop music market. At the time, this didn't help me.

Jeff, Alex, Rich and Ryan knew all about DM and me. They knew about the bootlegs and the concealed shirts. When they spent the night, they slept on the floor beneath my wall-paintings and posters. They were less inclined to judge a person on such shallow indicators as muscle size and musical tastes. I rewarded their wisdom by never playing my music in their company. They reciprocated by using my fandom as ammunition for frequent comic assaults.

On Mondays Jeff would say, "How was the weekend with Mode? Any hot butt-whippings?"

And Ryan would add, "Do they make DM brand KY Jelly?"

"Ha, ha," I'd say, "that was good - points for cleverness," checking to see if my collared shirt was buttoned high enough to hide the top of Martin's head. Grief-exchange between friends is sport. You dish it out; they dish it back; an evolutionary arms race of insults ensues, demanding increasingly more crafty responses and faster response times. Rich was skilled at turning the *Star Wars* Pit of Sarlac into sexual innuendo. Being on the swim team, though, he kept pretty quiet about DM; having to wear a Speedo and shave his legs made him even more vulnerable to teasing than me. His was a smart strategy I employed all too keenly.

Before Brophy, I attended a co-ed middle school, where I had high hopes for a certain girl: Tanya. She and her small, tight-knit group of female friends were huge DM fans; no surprise it was she who inadvertently introduced me to the band. As eighth-graders, these girls sported their black DM concert tees, chatted constantly about the famous Rose Bowl concert captured on the *101* album and longed for the band's next Arizona performance. They also refused to date any of my middle school buddies because, they joked, they were already married to their self-appointed DM "husbands": one girl loved Martin, one loved Alan, another Dave. Curious what it was about these Brits that had her so enamored, I bought *Music for the Masses*. While spinning the LP alone in my room, I discovered a partial explanation: the music was good. Better than good, it was addictive. The haunted melodies, inventive percussions, moody ambiance set by deep sonic layers - I wanted to soak forever in those sounds like amniotic fluid. They struck me drunk, a sensation as mysterious and domineering at age thirteen as my crush on Tanya. Within

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a couple months I had joined the girls' ranks of obsessed fandom. I bought every album, working my way backward through the DM catalogue, graduating to bootlegs when I ran out of studio recordings, then spent my weekends scouring record store bins for over-priced imports featuring multiple dance-remixes of a single song with names like the "Renegade Soundwave Afghan Surgery Mix." While the music became my true master, I secretly hoped Tanya's and my shared interest would forge a friendship that might lead to friendly phone calls, a date, maybe some kissing to "Strangelove." Instead of stripping each other of our DM shirts underneath my postered walls, we graduated from middle school, having mostly talked about the band. She never gave me her phone number.

Why I bothered wearing DM shirts only to hide them mystified me. Was it a taunt? A call for someone to see my shirt and call me a fag, so I could practice the art of verbal self-defense? Maybe I was hoping for a confrontation, that circumstance would force me to take the stand my will was too weak to take: "I am a DM fan," I would then have to proclaim. "Hear me roar." Maybe I was warming up for the inevitable full-disclosure. Disguise was a cultural halfway house: first you hide the shirt under another shirt; next you unbutton the other shirt to reveal the undershirt; soon you're wearing just the shirt, no protection, and defending your tastes like an adult - like a man - when people comment on them. Real men take hits when life throws punches, but I was a baby, hiding. No, I was a flower, a stunted bud too young to even unfurl his little precious petals. Aah, a flower.

Clearly I was doing something wrong.

Many in the upper echelons of Brophy's ranks - the football players, the kids who drove Ford Broncos because the school's mascot was a bronco - worshipped Van Halen. Hard-rocking, hard-living, best played at high volume, Halen seemed to power my classmates' budding masculinity like sunlight to a sapling pine. Eddie Van Halen churned out blazing guitar solos shirtless and scored a hot actress wife. Michael Anthony played a bass shaped like a Jack Daniels bottle. David Lee Roth sang about how bad he had it ("so bad") for a foxy teacher. In addition to the licks and high head-banging quotient, "Jamie's Cryin'," "Ain't Talkin' 'bout Love" and numerous other songs oozed sexuality, offering such tawdry, sing-along lines as "He wanted her tonight, and it was now or never" and "My love is rotten to the core." Even though the bulge in Roth's tights loomed a bit large for my taste, guys at school were picking up what Halen was laying down. The message, in adolescent terms: machismo is in *your face*, get used to it. So they passed tins of Copenhagen in class, left spent brown wads in the drinking fountains. Others, like class alpha male Darren, fanned their farts to nearby students. I once watched Darren unbend a paper clip in history and use its length to pick his nose. There, in the front row of a U-shaped seating arrangement, he studied the contraption and the excavated junk on its tip, proud of his ingenuity. He stared at his tool

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as if he'd invented the nasal equivalent of one of those Reach toothbrushes with the curved necks. Why did I care what these people thought?

Looking back on some of rock's most iconic stories, albums and images, it's clear that, like a shrimp, I had been absorbing the toxins that pollute America's cultural waters: the idea that debauchery and sexual excess were the same as manliness.

Neal Preston's 1975 photo of Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page swilling from a bottle of Jack Daniels backstage in Indianapolis captures the proud hedonism many non-musicians envy about the rock and roll lifestyle. Then there was the time Zeppelin road manager Richard Cole stuck the nose of a red snapper inside a redheaded fan's vagina in a hotel room, confirming the popular fantasy of the touring musician's nightly sexual indulgences.

Motley Crüe were as famous for their backstage womanizing and drug consumption as for their music, and the lyrics on their 1987 album *Girls, Girls, Girls* celebrate the band's passions and experiences: whiskey, sex, motorcycles, strip clubs, drugs and general rowdiness. *Girls* is one of the Crüe's two most popular albums, its namesake song one of metal's celebrated anthems. As if to legitimize such recklessness, their 1989 song "Kickstart My Heart" – inspired by the two adrenalin shots that revived bassist Nikki Sixx after his near-fatal heroin overdose – was nominated for a Grammy

And Guns 'N Roses' lead guitarist Slash bears all the habits and accoutrements of what has to come to embody the so-called true rock and roller: leather pants, long hair, dark sunglasses, soloing on stage with a lit cigarette in his mouth. The name of GNR's first and best album, *Appetite for Destruction*, so precisely sums up rock culture's macho value system it could have been titled *Appetite for Self-Destruction*.

The idea that these guys are supposedly "real men" is laughable to me now. But as a kid, it made me check my pants to clarify what I was.

Since graduating high school in 1993, I have lived on both coasts, shared apartments with a few past girlfriends, seen some of my favorite musicians perform – from saxophone colossus Sonny Rollins to bluesman RL Burnside – and remain deep into classical, rockabilly and surf instrumental music. Yet I never unveiled my love for DM. I just outgrew it.

By the time sophomore year of high school started, I was burnt on synth. Three of *Violator's* four singles had been playing incessantly on MTV and radio all summer, and when the last single "World in My Eyes" started rotation in September, I was suffering the musical equivalent of a vitamin deficiency. I needed guitars, drums, distortion pedals and screaming. I missed the punk urgency of the guitar-bands like The Cramps I'd listened to before the electronica tsunami swallowed me. I removed the Depeche posters from my walls and tucked the t-shirts into a drawer. I sold my bootleg records – which had become a novelty in the age of CDs – and bought new CDs with

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the money they generated: Bad Brains, Meat Puppets, Jane's Addiction, Mudhoney. It took a few coats of paint to cover my wall-art, but eventually, those disappeared too.

A few years ago I found a bootleg CD of DM's 1984 Hamburg concert at a used music store. It's a concert I once owned on vinyl and liked better than their period studio recordings. Now it's on my iPod, sandwiched between Dead Moon and Dexter Romweber. While I don't listen to it or my two other bootlegs with the same teenage obsession, the concert's version of the song "Photographic" still strikes me as one of the most stirring live songs I've ever heard.

First comes the crowd noise. Then, a faint electron twittering etches itself across the roar - a digital mouse's paws scurrying back and forth between speakers, left to right, right to left. Then the deep thump of the base drum - doomp, doomp, doomp, doomp. It strikes hard, beating in sync with my own roused heart before Dave sings: "A white house, a white room, the program of today." I still don't know what the hell he's signing about, but I sing along anyway. Listening to it now at age thirty-three, I hear what I failed to during my youth: It's not the lyrics that move me so much as the harmonies, the parts where Martin lays his high voice atop Dave's deep one. "And looking to the day," they sing, "I mesmerize the light." The unusual keys, the combination of opposites, two men signing together - it's a haunting union. Despite their driving rhythms and complex orchestrations, what remains the band's most enduring draw for me are the harmonies. Two men singing together - it doesn't sound very macho, but neither do the life stories of some of rock's biggest badasses.

After drinking forty measures of vodka during a day of band practice, Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham died at age thirty-two from pulmonary edema: fatal water-logging of the lungs caused by inhaling his own vomit. Jimi Hendrix died alone, at age twenty-seven, in his girlfriend's London flat; he asphyxiated on his own vomit, composed mainly of red wine, after possibly ingesting too many sleeping pills. Guns 'N Roses' old drummer Steven Adler still struggles with drug addiction eighteen years after the band fired him for substance abuse. You can watch the tragic drama on VH1's TV show *Celebrity Rehab Presents Sober House*. Check out his lip. It sags thanks to a potent speedball injection that caused a stroke in '96. Before those adrenalin shots revived him, Motley Crüe's Nikki Sixx was medically dead for two minutes after that heroin overdose. And Crüe lead singer Vince Neil killed his friend and passenger, Hanoi Rocks drummer Nicholas "Razzle" Dingley, in a head-on collision in 1984. They were returning from the liquor store.

Recently, I found video footage of the Hamburg concert on Youtube. While watching other old videos there, I discovered something I'd missed back in high school: Martin kisses a woman in the "Policy of Truth" video. All the band members kiss women in that video. The "Master and Servant"

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vid features images of politicians and laborers, alternating with images of Martin wearing lipstick and, at one point, a large-haired woman lip-syncing, wearing lipstick too. Naturally, this led me to Wikipedia where I discovered the answer to that eighteen-year-old question. Martin Gore, it said, "is now divorced from his wife of twelve years, lingerie designer and model Suzanne Boisvert-Gore. He has three children." Biological children, with a lingerie model.

In reviewing the images marking that time, it's clear that, besides my dad and my granddad, Martin Gore was the most manly man in my life freshman year. People called him and the band puffs for wearing dresses and nail polish, but that's what made Martin tough. Crotch straps, chains - if he liked it, he wore it.

I once recreated Martin's bondage straps in my bedroom. Secretly. Never told anyone. Since I couldn't find scraps or lengths of leather at home, and I couldn't gather the courage to purchase some at a belt store, I found a substitute material. I snipped the rough canvas straps from my JanSport backpack. The straps were black, like Martin's, and a similar width; they just weren't long enough. With the ends resting on my belt the way Martin's did in the poster, my straps only came as high as my nipples. So I improvised. I cut more straps from an older, smaller backpack and stapled them together to create two long straps. These fit all the way over my shoulders. I stapled their ends to a belt - black leather this time, one of the few nice ones my parents bought me for formal occasions - to form a strange, art school, rip-rap set of homemade suspenders. With the silver staples showing against the dark canvas, their sections all slanted and clustered together without attention to design, it looked not unlike the Lederhosen a homeless German might make out of garbage.

Staring at my reflection in my tiny Sony TV, I turned side to side to gauge my appearance. To measure my resemblance to Martin. I rotated the way a woman might in front of a Nordstrom's dressing room mirror. The TV screen was small, my image dim and incomplete. And while it occurred to me to sneak into the nearby bathroom to use the large mirror, I couldn't stand the thought of seeing myself so clearly; the full image could singe itself into my mind so deeply that it might never wash away. That'd be like studying your face in a mirror on LSD, all the pores and irregularities somehow amplified like Martian craters, your disturbing true nature revealed. Instead, I peeled the gear off and buried it in my bottom dresser drawer, shoving it under clothes I no longer wore with as much of my embarrassment as I could fit in there. Then, the next time my parents were gone, I walked to a dumpster down the alley and tossed the stuff inside.

That day, staring at my blurry reflection in the TV, I wanted to believe my attraction to Martin was strictly artistic: it was about the music, not the man. Wasn't one side effect of worshipping art the tendency to mimic its creator?

Same way you buy concert t-shirts and posters and overpriced import CDs to remain in perpetual contact with the music? But to say I loved his music and not his mind now seems overly simplistic. The line between fandom and affection, admiration and attraction, blurs too much for such clean, easy summaries. If not his appearance, then what was I drawn to? The person. The mystique of creativity, the magnetic charisma of the inspired, soft-spoken, mastermind. To birth transcendent music seemed a power of the gods.

This is what fascinates me now: the way such exquisite turbulence can churn inside a seemingly meek individual. And that one year of high school, although it may have felt smothering when I lived it, liberated me from the confines of caveman pop culture. Martin showed me that personality matters. I know this is the stuff guys tell women to sound charming and deep in order to sleep with them, but unlike a t-shirt, you can't hide this fact: personality is everything. Without it, beauty fades, drugs disappoint, the hottest sex still leaves us wanting for love.

I'm not saying anything new to the world here. It's only new to me. **F**

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Devon Branca

## Desmond Has a Box

Desmond has a box where he keeps lost keys. He worries it'll be found years after he's gone and that the archaeologist, who he imagines as half Indiana Jones and half the scientist from *Jurassic Park*, will keep digging, looking for missing locks. They will think this box the collection of several other locked boxes, or perhaps containers and engines and gates of different shapes. But Desmond's box is not a collection of keys to a collection of loss. The keys in the box, without reason, make all of Desmond become one place inside, where a six-inch boy dances like a Spanish woman he saw on TV when he was a kid on a day when no one was watching. There is no bike lock, no diary, no house he'll no longer sleep in or walk around on a path; Desmond will tell you, these skeleton keys, these here, went to no locks. He will go on to describe the burnt down door factory. The way the doorknobs were scattered across the ground as if he could just draw doorways in the dirt wherever. No one ever noticed the burnt bodies of the birds in their eggs, asleep in the rafters of the ground. It's that simple. Desmond makes sure you're listening. He pauses. Looks at you. Says, there's always two, two ways to think about hope, and when he says hope, he says it loud: hope is to see a different past, hope is to put what you have in a box. He says, what if the goal is not happiness, but doing what one should do, not morally or ethically, just purely, as in, why are you here? Then both ways are necessary. Counting them makes them a collection, makes them new, makes them anything but what they once were, every possibility becoming an introduction without a past. Desmond, who always loved the ceremony of religion, jiggles the box like a maraca. Taps his foot. Sings a psalm. Believes in ritual.

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Tana Jean Welch

## Peace and Happiness with Every Step

The landscape changes and changes again  
as we curve our way through chaparral  
and dusted trailers, looking for heaven,

or at least the purest land we can find veiled  
under this thick desert air. The rust on cars  
and dirt on children reminds me I've failed

to keep myself clean. This is why we've come this far—  
from the sea, through vineyards, to the inland rut  
leading us past the poor dumb. We've driven my marred

self to the edge between waste and cliff, to this secret  
village thrust in manzanita and oak woods.  
There are monks hidden here, men and women shut

in with a fat bellied man. *Peace*: Kind words  
drip off small scraps of colored papers tied to oak  
tree arms. *Happiness*: inked onto rice-paper birds—

the words blow in the desert breeze. Mantras float  
over my head. I wonder, do they ever grab  
the paper leaves and eat them? Or are monastic throats

content squelching sour from lemonade  
berries, the thickets bunched against their walled cots?  
My family brought me here to keep great

poets from seducing me, to keep my thoughts  
grounded—mindful here, mindful now—to keep men  
from treating me like Henry's Anne, her caught

head dropped like so many women brought to ruin.  
For five days: I am not to speak. I am to keep  
all animals from my mouth, keep my skin

covered in plain brown cotton. I am to learn to bleed  
the toxins from my brain. Buddhists from Viet Nam,

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exiled. All celibate. All mindful enough to teach

by example. There is one meal a day. It is calm,  
quiet rice. Should I tell them my dad killed  
his share of Viet Cong? They keep their heads drawn

over their bowls. They won't hear. Their minds are filled  
with clean white grains. We meditate. We walk  
with slow, concentrated steps. We are put to bed

when the sun falls. My ears strain under the night's smock:  
to hear if they kiss when lights go out. My ears  
reach hard: do monks snore? do they talk

in their sleep? The answer is lonesome and rears  
into the moment I feared, but knew  
would happen, if I could just be honest here,

at Deer Park Monastery. It isn't due  
to the blood I saw when my arm brushed  
a prickly pear cactus this afternoon,

but more a result of monks chanting in hushed  
tones. I wanted them to stop and sing Leonard  
Cohen. I so desperately wanted them to crush

my heart with the song about Jane, the lock of hair,  
the man who took the pain from her face,  
the other man who couldn't save her.

Bells ring and these monks stop, bow, and embrace  
Buddha. They don't do Leonard, but tell me to count  
my breaths, as if numbering them makes them mean less.

Under this dark Escondido sky, silence amounts  
to my clothes coming off. I slip through my room,  
through the door. A girl alive and wild in the village forest:

I weave naked through sharp branches. Under the half-moon,  
I think the sounds of Sibelius and find peace.  
The notes echo off meditation bongs, the bassoon

drifts over sleeping monks, and I can finally breathe.

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My spirit hikes over the wooden cerise fence, I strike  
my place, dig up my poet—we huddle in a corner, reading

love. I know the monastery won't miss me—religion, winglike,  
can flutter through variations, a chameleon, making it so no one  
need answer why some women prefer the binding warlike

arms of men, while others find happiness in solemn summer dusk.



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Mark Jude Poirier

## I'm Not Even Sure Why I'm Here

**K**im Pond was the first. Her dad bought them for her in Japan. They weren't yet available or even officially legal in the U.S. This was a few years ago, and everyone was freaked out about staphylococcus—especially in Weston, Connecticut, and especially at Weston High School, where Jimmy Pampanello claimed to have contracted MRSA from the wrestling mats. One of Kim's was a star, on her neck, six-pointed, each point a different length so it didn't look like the Star of David. It was purple, red, and green, army green. A flower spanned her forearm. Purple, with a light green stem. Both of them wept, and Kim dabbed them during Honors Social Justice II class with a tissue that she used over and over again. If I hadn't been so fascinated, I would have mass-texted something like, KIM P'S USED THE SAME TISSUE LIKE 99999999 TIMES FILTHY WHORE'S NEVER HEARD OF GERMS AND WILL KILL US ALL. LOVE, BIANCA. I didn't text anyone, but I did rub an entire travel-sized bottle of Purell into my hands before the bell rang.

This was before Paris planted them on her forehead. This was way before Britney tried to give one to Jayden James and stupidly touched his eye with the application stick, making his eye rot. If I were a mother and my son's eyeball looked like an egg yolk, I think I'd take him to the doctor before it was too late and he had to get a glass one, especially if photos of him with his dying eye were on the covers of both *OK* and *Life and Style* in the same week. I saw a YouTube of Britney scooping the false eye from Jayden James's skull, popping it her mouth like a jawbreaker, then spitting it into her palm and rolling it across the table, all while she giggles stupidly, tweaking and twitching. The poor ignorant kid just sits there, in a grubby \$110 Ron Herman FREE CITY T-shirt, staring with his one real eye at his superstar mother, who's whacked on whatever. He's wondering if this beast, this sea monster, his mother, the woman from whom he was cut, is ever going to return his glass eye back to its pink, soft socket.

I have to hand it to Kim Pond; if my father had been going to Japan at that time, I'm not sure I would have thought to ask him to get me some. But it still kind of pissed me off that just because she had them she could get away with using the same tissue over and over again without anyone complaining—and we were on major MRSA alert. Mr. Schatz, our Honors Social Justice II teacher, didn't tell her to go to the bathroom or at least to stop blotting the pus because at that time he was trying to stay on everyone's good side. He had blown Philip Witherspoon during the junior class trip to the Bronx

to see African American culture, and we all knew it, and we were ready and willing to tell whomever. The only thing stopping us was the fact that Philip Witherspoon said he begged Mr. Schatz to blow him and that Mr. Schatz told us explicitly that if none of us snitched he would give us all A's and give us all copies of the AP Physics test like three weeks before it was to be administered. Apparently, he had blown one of the test's creators, a guy who lived in New Jersey. We traced Mr. Schatz's sex life on craigslist.org. He posted nearly every afternoon, showing the same tired dick pic each time. I printed out the photo and stapled it to my term paper. I got an A. This was before he blew Philip Witherspoon. Mr. Schatz only wrote "Nice work" on my paper, which was about media portrayals of Nicole's pregnancy, from the bump watch, to the delivery of the homely little thing.

After school, we Hummed over to Jana's mansion, and, sitting in the great room, watching HD Oprah, I finally broached the subject: "I mean, they're like cool and interesting and fresh, but I was seriously close to gagging in Honors Social Justice II. That tissue was soaked in pus by the time Mr. Schatz let us go, and Kim Pond just stuffed it into her suede Balenciaga."

"I totally want that bag," Jana said. "That spoiled little cunt doesn't deserve half the bags she has."

"How does the bacteria know to make those shapes?" Montana asked.

"Bacteria doesn't *know* anything," I said. "Duh."

"I think I'll give this person diarrhea," Jana said in a sing-song bacterium voice. "And to this lucky hostess, I'll give gingivitis."

"I didn't mean *know*, I meant how is it like *programmed* or whatever to make shapes?" Montana said. "I saw a jpg of a chick with a dolphin one on her arm. It was really cute."

Both Jana and I tapped 'bacto-body-art dolphin' into Google on our iPhones. She won, and held up the photo. The dolphin was really cute, realistic but also sort of smiling. "I want that," I said. "More than Kim Pond's suede Balenciaga."

"It's a tie," Jana said. "I want them the same."

"I want a pink quilted Chanel backpack," Montana said, "way more than bacto-body-art."

"You would," I said. People had stopped using pink quilted Chanel backpacks a few months before.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Montana said.

"There are more important things to think about." I didn't mean it. I had read something in *W* about three popular chicks in Beverly Hills, the daughters of mega-blockbuster franchise producers, who decided to protest consumer culture by wearing the same American-made overalls to school every day for an entire semester. The thing is, they all drove Hummers and lived in mansions as big as ours that probably cost fifty percent more because they were in Beverly Hills and not in Weston, Connecticut.

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"Like homelessness or HIV in Africa," Jana said, giggling.

"Or global warming," Montana added, "or stuff like that!"

Montana was, I thought, as dumb as the dirt her mother ate as a child. Her mother's from the slummiest slum in Bridgeport. She met Montana's father when she was twenty-three and he was like sixty. I think she was his hooker, though Montana claims she was his caregiver after he had his femurs replaced with carbon-fiber internal prosthetics, increasing his height by four inches. If by *caregiver* she means someone who sucked him off for money, then, yes, she was his caregiver. Few would fault Montana's mother, though. I mean, half the housewives in Weston sucked their way into 7,000 square-foot mansions and Hummers and enough leisure time for yoga and shopping trips to Manhattan. At the time, I considered doing the same thing if I didn't get into at least Tufts.

Jana convinced Montana and me that we could get bacto-body-art *some-where* in Manhattan, so before Oprah's assistant wheeled out her next guest, a morbidly obese mother of three morbidly obese children under the age of five, we were leaving. None of us wanted to ride in anyone else's Hummer—we never agreed on music or DVDs—so we each drove our own. Montana and I had black ones and Jana had a 'Victory Red' one. It was four o'clock, already getting dark in November, and I had a paper due in my Honors Literatures of the Marginalized class the next day, but I decided to fuck it; driving to Manhattan with my two best friends in search of bacto-body-art was way more important. I was only sixteen. I could pull an all-nighter, cobble together something about Junot Diaz before dawn.

We had to stop on the Merrit Parkway three times for gas. At the second stop, a crew-cut lezzy bitch in a Prius told us she thought we were disgusting, asked us how our parents could let us drive Hummers.

"Because they love us," I said. "Duh."

She acted as if I gave her the wrong answer, and squinted her eyes at me. "What?"

"I said, 'Duh.'" I said.

"You're a lesbian, right?" Montana asked. "We read *The Well of Loneliness* in our Honors Literatures of the Marginalized class."

I turned to Montana. "You didn't read it," I said.

"I know it was about lesbians and horses, though," she said. She looked to the Prius driver hopefully. "You could come be a guest speaker in our class. My mom could have a caterer cater a reception at our mansion, and I could get extra credit." Montana smiled, as if she had made a really good plan.

"We have like two lesbians in our class, moron," Jana said to Montana.

"Who?" Montana asked.

"Carla and Liz, you stupid bitch!" Jana said. "We talked about this. They're exempt from so much shit because they're lesbians."

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"Are they like a couple?" Montana asked.

The Prius driver began to walk towards her miniature car. Montana called after her: "Sorry I invited you to be a guest speaker and come to a catered reception at our mansion! I forgot that Carla and Liz are lesbians!" Then Montana turned to me. "Did you know they were lesbians, Bianca?"

"I was the one who told Jana and you—not that either of you should have had to be told. I mean, boys' Lacoste shirts from the '70s and thrift-store Levi's cords? You both are retarded."

"We're not retarded, you cunt," Jana said to me. "You were probably looking for gay vibes or something." Sometimes Jana's face seemed too big for her head. This was one of those times. If there had been a way to shrink every feature by thirty percent, she would have been quite beautiful. She had her nose reshaped when she turned fourteen, but her parents should have sprung for more, like a horizontal mouth reduction. I bet if she had tried, she could have stuck her tongue in her ear.

"It's bitter, isn't it?" I asked.

"What?" Jana said.

"Earwax."

I was glad to be in my own Hummer, alone, as we merged onto the Cross County expressway. Before I finished *The Kite Runner* DVD, we were already on the FDR. We made it to the Lower East Side in record time, fifty-six minutes, not including the gas stops. "Where are we going?" Montana asked through my iPhone, which I had on speaker, Velcroed to my dash.

"We're going to Manhattan to get bacto-body-art, you dumb bitch," Jana said. "Which dumb bitch asked that?"

"Montana," I said. "You dumb bitch. Like I'd ask that."

"Hey," Montana said. "I *am* on this call, and I meant where *specifically* in Manhattan are we going so I can set my GPS."

"Put in like First Avenue and Ninth Street and shut your hole," Jana said. "Or you could just follow us." Jana ran a red light then, nearly plowed over a woman pushing a small cart and a scruffy guy on a bike. "Manhattarians are so clueless," she said.

Montana and I had stopped for the red light and people were looking at us like we were Jana, like we had nearly killed the pedestrians. Montana thought they were gawking because our Hummers were a year old. She put down her window. "What?" she said to the people. "The new ones aren't yet available in Connecticut! God!" Then she put up her window and said, "New Yorkers are such snobs! God!"

"Where are you dumb bitches?" Jana barked into the phone.

We ended up illegally parking along Tompkins Square, but everyone there looked too rich and too put-together to have bacto-body-art. Seven of the

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nine women who walked by in the first minute wore Jimmy Choos, and two of them were draped in illegal Lanvin monkey-fur trench coats that I'd been deeply coveting since I'd read about them in the PETA newsletter.

"I told you we should have gone to Brooklyn," Montana said. "No one street can afford to live in Manhattan anymore." This flash of awareness on Montana's part was not lost on me. I looked at her and wondered where she had read or heard that, then I decided I had probably told her.

"We should have gone Philadelphia," I added. "No one street can afford to live in Brooklyn anymore, either."

Jana turned to us. "You're just saying that because you know that I'm like ninety-eight percent sure I'm going to NYU and my mom's already looking for lofts in the same building as the Olsen twins and you're just trying to fuck with my self-esteem."

"This has nothing to do with your self-esteem," I said. "It's about getting bacto-body art."

"When I go to NYU," Jana said, "I'm going to have a nurturing group of friends, nothing like you cunts, and they're going to be totally street."

"I'm totally nurturing!" Montana said. "I can't believe you said that I wasn't, and you can't be street if you live in Weston, Connecticut!" Again, a flash of intelligence from Montana. I was liking her more and more.

I was about to bail on the whole venture, head back to my mansion and start working on my paper for Honors Literatures of the Marginalized, but then I saw a guy in head-to-toe vintage last-year Billionaire Boys Club, clearly wearing it ironically, walking two black pugs. His bacto-body-art, a greenish serpent, coiled around his neck. I could see it from twenty yards away. So could Jana.

"I told you morons!" she yelled, jogging over to him.

We drove to 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, parked illegally in front of a YMCA for homeless people, and walked half a block to a tattoo and piercing parlor. There was a TV screen in the front window showing low res videos of piercings. The people featured on the video were trashy girls from New Jersey or Queens in black NorthFace parkas getting their tongues pierced like it was 1994. There were no signs for bacto-body-art in the window, only bongos, body jewelry, ninety-nine-cent 'best-of' porn DVDs, and legal inhalants. "This looks wrong," I said.

"It's exactly where he told us to go," Jana said.

"It looks kind of low-rent," I said.

"I knew Montana would be a pussy, but I didn't think you would," Jana said to me. Her face was looking too big for her head again. I wondered where a plastic surgeon would begin.

"I'm right here," Montana said. "I can hear you when you talk about me." She walked in the store, letting the door close in Jana's face.

It smelled like synthetic strawberries and burning hair. More of the same crap from the window lined the walls inside. Jana began looking at B-list celebrity dildos. "Who's Bill O'Reilly?" she asked me.

Montana hurried up to the counter where a bald guy with no ears or lips was counting change. "Do you ever miss your ears or lips?" she asked him.

"No," the guy said. He had rainbow dyed teeth and a thick stud in his chin, too.

Jana grabbed a Tom Selleck dildo. "I'm getting this for Mr. Schatz," she said. "The veins look so real. Who's Tom Selleck?"

"Can we get bacto-body-art here?" Montana asked the clerk.

"We only have seahorses and palm trees left," he said. "Nine hundred for the seahorse and six-fifty for the palm tree." He pointed to a back room behind a beaded curtain. A large sign was nailed up to the right of the door: *We are certified for piercing (all), puncturing (1-inch max), lipectomies, branding, earectomies, noseectomies, laser septum deviation, digit removal (5 max, no big toes, no thumbs), tattooing (external and soft tissue), tongue and penis splays, horn implants (skull only), lobe stretching, tape-worming, teeth removal and dental art (jewels, dyes, caps, shaping, plastic or Caesar Stone extensions), castration (full or half), foreskin fringing, clitorectomies and sew-shuts, subcutaneous penile bead implants, circumcisions (religious by appointment only), saline scrotal expansions, saline nipple expansions, non-surgical nipple relocations, nipplectomies, scarification, topographical singeing, clitoral hood flowering, digit webbing, and quarter limb stumping. DO NOT EVEN THINK OF ASKING US TO PERFORM ANYTHING THAT'S NOT ON THIS LIST. Sorry for any inconvenience.*

Montana read the sign, her mouth moving as she did. She turned back to the lipless and earless clerk: "Bacto-body-art's not on the list," she said.

"We just started it," he said. "Don't worry. Bruce will take care of you."

Bruce was a chubby man with pink skin. He looked like a giant baby and he had no visible body modifications. I whispered this observation to Jana who whispered back, "His cock's probably got more ornaments than a Christmas tree."

"I'm first!" Montana said with delight as she hopped into the sparkly vinyl dentist chair. "I want two seahorses, one on each side of my neck."

"Are you eighteen?" Bruce asked her.

"I'm sixteen," she said.

"Are you eighteen?" he repeated, like he was asking her to lie. He placed his hand on her shoulder.

"I'm sixteen," she said again.

"I'll ask you for the last time, are you eighteen?"

"And I'll answer for the last time. No, I am not eighteen," she said, louder, like he was stupid, "I'm sixteen. God!"

"She's eighteen," Jana said. "We all are." She looked again at the dildo

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she was holding. "Hey, Bruce, do you know who Tom Selleck is?"

Bruce abraded our skin with a pumice stone in the places we wanted the bacto-body-art. He smeared the abrasions with bright green cream from small packets emblazoned with the image the bacterium would produce, and in twenty minutes we were finished. He dropped the application sticks and empty packets into a yellow, sealed bin. "No antibacterial soap for three days," Bruce warned us. "Not on any part of your body."

"When will they happen?" Montana asked.

"Twelve to fourteen hours," Bruce said.

"And no refunds if they don't work, so don't come crying back to us," the lipless earless clerk added.

Outside, one of the two black Hummers was gone. I pressed my key, and thanked God when it squeaked and the lights flashed. Montana began to practically hyperventilate. Jana laughed at her. "Don't be such a pussy," Jana scolded. She hopped in her red Hummer and looked at both of us. "Just think," she said, "tomorrow during like Honors Literatures of the Marginalized, my palm trees and seahorse will be appearing!"

"Ours will, too," Montana said, clearly still distracted by her missing Hummer.

"If you ever see your Hummer again and get home," Jana said.

"That has nothing to do with bacto-body-art," Montana said. "Duh."

"No you di-int just 'duh' me," Jana said, all tough.

"Yes, I di-id," Montana mocked. I decided then that I would actually allow Montana to ride back to Weston with me in my Hummer.

"You don't go to NYU yet," Montana added, "so stop trying to be all street when you're not," she said to Jana.

"I wasn't being street," Jana said, "I was being ghetto." She slammed her door, started her Hummer, and put down the window. "Duh," she said, as she drove away.

"Are you going to report your missing Hummer?" I asked Montana.

"How am I going to get home?" she said, nearly crying. "Is there like a train or something?"

On our way back to Weston, Montana complimented me on my cashmere seat inserts. By New Rochelle, we decided a few things about Jana: 1) She would never get into NYU unless she went the major donation route, and everyone knew if you went the major donation route so no one really did it anymore unless they were able to abide all the ridicule, which we knew Jana wasn't; 2) She didn't really buy the Tom Selleck dildo for Mr. Schatz. She bought it for herself because no real guy would ever want to fuck her with her too-big face; and most importantly, 3) Her choice of a necklace of palm

trees, and three seahorses on her forehead was ostentatious, way over done, and not even close to being street. Oh, and 4) She was a dumb bitch.

My seahorse started appearing during Advanced Conceptual Mathematics III. First the eye, then the body. Jason Blum noticed it first, then the whole class—even Mr. Dorst, whose face looked especially waxy that day.

“Did it hurt?” a girl named Beulah asked me.

“No,” I said. “Kind of like a mellower version of microdermabrasion, though it kind of itches now.” The seahorse was on the top of my right hand. There were no signs of palm trees.

“What do you know about microdermabrasion?” Mr. Dorst asked me. “Are you making fun of me?”

“No,” I said, and I wasn’t. I had forgotten about his addiction.

“You think I like having to go in three times a week?” he said. “You think I like the fact that I was born with dime-sized pores?”

“No,” I said.

“So you’re saying I have dime-sized pores?”

He sent me to the office then, and I thought, there goes my perfect average in Advanced Conceptual Mathematics III. It was upsetting, even with my new seahorse bacto-body-art looking at me from the top of my hand. I noticed its texture then, like the skin of a new basketball, when Dr. Claymore called me into her office.

I sat in a stiff chair—basic wool felt upholstery—and looked at Dr. Claymore, her over-processed red hair, the wrinkles that ran perpendicular to her lips that were filled with gummy makeup, the wet eye-booger oozing from her right tear duct, and I smiled hopefully. “I’m not even sure why I’m here,” I said. I didn’t allow myself to consider the existential ramifications of such a statement.

“Mr. Dorst just texted me that you were mocking his skin condition,” she said. “Would you like to explain yourself, or would you like to pay the fine now?”

But before I could answer, Montana ushered a bent-over Jana into the office. “Help her!” Montana yelled. “We were in Topics in South Asian Politics for the Gifted when she started screaming!”

Jana’s necklace of palm trees was sizzling—I could hear it. Her collar was soaked with pus and her eyes were rolling back into her head. Dr. Claymore jumped back into her bookcase, and yelled, “Get her the fuck out of here!”

Two janitors in orange biohazard suits dragged limp Jana into the ceramic-lined germ chamber, and slammed the door. The isopropyl alcohol misters were set off, and students began running through the halls, yelling about MRSA and the Super-flu. One idiot was yelling about Legionnaires’ Disease.

After the medics arrived in their gasmasks and tented off the entire



administrative wing of the school, and Jana was wheeled safely into the ambulance, Montana and I met up in the restroom. Montana's sea horses and palm trees were vibrant and beautiful. It was a shame we had to kill them, but neither of us wanted to risk it. So there, under the fluorescent lights that made us look gray, we rubbed away each other's bacto-body art with Purell and watched our skin fade into normalcy.

Jana didn't go to NYU. She went to fucking Princeton. She and her writing team wrote a killer admissions essay about living with a horribly disfigured face, something about art, vanity, and risk. Montana and I live across the street from each other, not far from the mansions where we grew up. Upon graduating from high school I snagged a thirty-seven year-old hedge funder, who bought us a mid-century modern house on seven acres, which we immediately leveled. We built an amazing 7,000 square-foot Tudor-Colonial-Cape-Tuscany-styled mansion. Montana snagged an older guy, in his fifties, a class-action attorney who's always traveling anyway. Sometimes Montana and I sit around in my great room and wonder what would have happened if we hadn't Purelled our bacto-body-art to death, if we had let it rip through our flesh and disfigure us, give us that edge, that key that unlocked the Ivy-covered gates and allowed us into college, into something different, but then we remember that Jana will never have the opportunity to live like this, not anymore, not with scars like that. And we feel better. **F**

Charity

Light stabbed the lunch counter  
where he hovered over Sloppy Joe  
on bun. His chest rose and fell.  
Steam curled like incense  
from the kitchen. Smoothing his palms  
over the wrinkles in his slacks,  
he chose the smallest, and slid  
his tray along. The rest of the way  
never a bit too much, going easy  
on the green peas, passing on  
the Mandarin orange salad,  
his hands like white moths  
fluttering to a pause over potato rounds  
and cinnamon pretzel,  
and when that snowflake of paper  
finally drifted from the hole puncher,  
and past Mrs. Oscar's sunny apron,  
he pocketed his free card and looked away,  
first up at the ceiling, and then down  
to an ant moving from a crack  
in the floor, before making the switch,  
returning the chocolate milk for a carton  
of white, hoping it'd look cleaner,  
more refined.

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Jason Schossler

## Spring

In study hall Lauren Locke  
whispers the name of a boy  
whose green eyes flash  
like the patch on a teal's wing.  
Because of her crooked teeth,  
which this year have begun to jut out,  
she has developed a habit  
of keeping her mouth mostly shut  
when she talks.

Behind the gym, a gust of wind  
shaking a shower from the trees,  
Scotty Vidmar trades his wristwatch  
and a package of Ring Dings  
for a *Hustler*, the pages wrinkled,  
centerfold missing.

Across the bleachers Maria Bortnick  
believes Frank Vito might be the *one*,  
boasting of their night alone together  
in his old man's lake house.

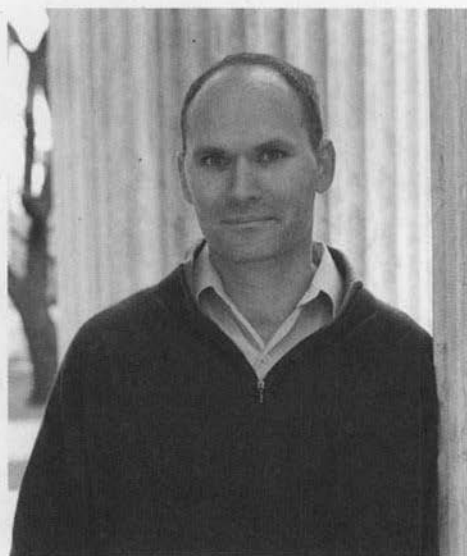
*He's slow to finish, but lets me go first,*  
she tells Nicole Weaver, who blushes,  
then winks to give the impression  
of someone already hips deep  
in the mysteries of boys and love.

Between classes I peel an orange  
and think about the sophomore  
I saw coming out of the pool in Phys Ed,  
water gleaming in the little hollows  
above her collarbones, and how  
I'd give anything to feel her long fingers  
on the back of my neck.

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Anthony Doerr

“The Pleasure of Being an Alchemist”:  
An Interview



Anthony Doerr is the author of three books, *The Shell Collector*, *About Grace*, and *Four Seasons in Rome*. Doerr's short fiction has won three O. Henry Prizes and has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, and *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. He has won the Barnes & Noble Discover Prize, the Rome Prize, the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award, and the Ohioana Book Award twice. His books have been a *New York Times* Notable Book, an American Library Association Book of the Year, a 'Book

of the Year' in the *Washington Post*, and a finalist for the PEN USA fiction award. In 2007, the British literary magazine *Granta* placed Doerr on its list of 21 Best Young American novelists. He also writes a regular column on science books for the *Boston Globe*.

Mr. Doerr generously agreed to an interview with editor Kendall Sand, and even said she could call him Tony.

**Kendall Sand:** Tony, your characters are marine biologists, hydrologists, volleyball players, fossil hunters and war refugees. They live in places like Tanzania, Maine, the Caribbean, and Kenya. Another writer might hesitate to write about characters and settings so distinct from her own experience. It makes me think of that faulty adage that a writer ought to “write what you know.” What do you think a writer has to “know” in order to write meaningfully?

**Anthony Doerr:** I'd argue we write to learn what we don't know; we write toward the mysteries, the things we can't articulate but believe are there, feel are there. Maybe we start with what we know, but then we work in the opposite direction, *away* from the things that are comfortable, familiar known.

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Otherwise we're not learning, and if we're not learning, why bother?

The truth is that a good writer who is willing to work hard enough can set a great story in Nebraska or hell or Neptune or at the bottom of a swimming pool. If you do enough research, and spend enough time thoroughly imagining your fictional world, you can write a story about Finnish washerwomen in 1604, or about a restaurateur in Alabama in 2341. Why couldn't you? How history operates in a story is up to the writer, and it's always paramount (i.e., I think a writer should spend the bulk of her time and sentences) to make that world as convincing and seamless as possible.

Common wisdom always has relevance somewhere, and in this case I think "write what you know" does remain useful on a couple levels. First it's relevant in that if you know something, you probably care about it, and "write what you care about" is probably good advice.

For example: If you are a violin maker and you know a lot about violinmaking, you know its language and can speak clearly about scrolls and F holes and fingerboards and bridges and tailpieces. But if you know a lot about violin making and you *care* about violin making, too—it turns you on, it puts you in touch with something big, it charges you up, it floods you with feeling and memory—then eventually you can teach yourself to employ the poetry of violin-making (or horse-racing or tree-pruning or windsurfing or Bolivian aquaculture or whatever) in your fiction.

Authority can be simulated. Passion can't be. Enthusiasm for a subject, if the fiction is written well, will flow through some mysterious system of subcurrents through the language into the reader and engage her. An engaged, skilled writer should be able to produce an engaged reader. So if you're passionate about fly-tying or tidal movement or old Corvettes, if you have fun writing about those things, if you're getting some essential thrill out of putting a character in a kite factory, having him fall in love with a kite-designer, then you should be able to involve your reader in the poetry of kites. Then you're writing about what you care about and doing it well.

Secondly (though it's not really second, since it's all braided together, each part of story-making seems to touch on all the others) we're always writing about a human's experience in the world, the experience of getting lost, loving our mothers, eating or not eating, falling in love with someone, seeing new places, getting our hopes crushed, feeling the rain on our shoulders—these are things we know if we've lived and breathed for a couple dozen years. In that sense, ultimately, you can't escape writing about what you know. So if it's understood in that sense, "write what you know" is good advice. It's also inevitable, so it's redundant.

Did that take me long enough to answer? Good grief.

**KS:** Often, your work features natural phenomena or wonders of science. How do you balance your research into or knowledge of the natural world,

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with the human characters and relationships that are at the heart of any powerful story? Take, for instance, "The Shell Collector." Which came first: research about the deadly cone snail, or the character of the blind collector? How did the two find each other?

**AD:** During a visit to Ohio I found an old steel tennis ball can in a closet at my parents' house, and when I pulled off the cap, this strange, crazily familiar smell rose: the smell of dead snails. Inside the can were tons of shells that I had collected on trips to Florida with my parents. Finding them started firing all these large-scale emotions & memories—stuff I hadn't thought about in a long time.

When I was trying to figure out how to write "The Shell Collector," I'd sit at my desk and make notes and finger those old shells and look through my journals from when I was in Lamu and read things like papers about cone venom. So the cone snail came first, but with it came lots of memories about travel and littoral zones and moonrises and getting stung by jellyfish and seeing a big, orange moonrise from a treeless island in the Indian Ocean. And the more I read about shells and the formation of them, the more I think the character of the shell collector coalesced as an amalgam of memory and research and imagination, with the tactile pleasure of holding shells and the associations they fired in me. Then I read about Geerat Vermeij, a real-life sightless malacologist who has made all sorts of contributions to his field. And learning about Geerat gave me permission, I think, to make my character sightless.

Research as it's understood in other disciplines—looking for information—isn't quite what I do. I'm looking for interesting things, sure, but I'm really looking for subjects, ideas I can fall in love with, scraps of people I can build into made-up people, the way palm trees shine in the wind, etc. When I'm working well, when I'm spending hours a day writing something, during much of the rest of the day my subconscious is engaged in it also, and everything I see—a man eating toast in a Honda at a stoplight, a woman wiping out on the ice outside Macy's—becomes research, becomes material.

**KS:** You recently wrote an essay that you described as an "appreciation" for Alice Munro, and in it, you propose that "a good story becomes part of who we are, perhaps as significant a part of us as our memories." How, as a writer, do you handle your awareness of a story's potential power? What does a writer do with the knowledge that what he writes has the potential to become as real to his readers as their own memories?

**AD:** I'm only happy if I'm living in three parallel worlds: living my life, and writing something that seems like it might go somewhere, and reading a book that I like. That way, during the course of any day, I am myself, a

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character of my own invention, and a character of someone else's invention. And I do believe the stories we read—the powerful ones—get built into us, become part of our memories, part of our experiences. That's why we read: for empathy, for the chance to transform ourselves, however temporarily, into someone else.

The truth is, I never think anything I'm writing has much potential power. I never think about my own writing in grand terms: I'm just trying to make something seamless and interesting and all of my energy is involved in that. I work almost entirely by instinct and doubt. I doubt my work all the way until it's published and after it's published I doubt it even more.

It's only years later, when I come back to something, and it's in print—all the paint in it is completely dry, and I have no more urges to amend anything or cut anything or add anything, and it feels as if someone else has made it—that I'm able to come at something I've written as a reader would come at it. And that's usually when I'm asked to give a reading, and when I read it aloud, to an audience, usually then all I can see are its miserable flaws.

**KS:** Munro is obviously an important writer for you, and it must have been a real pleasure (maybe also sort of paralyzing?) to articulate what she has meant to you. Who are other writers that you'd write an "appreciation" for, if the opportunity presented itself?

**AD:** Italo Calvino. Shirley Hazzard. Tolstoy. Cormac McCarthy. W.G. Sebald. Eleanor Clark. I think Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* is riveting. *Moby Dick* is an incredibly good book. But I don't necessarily feel the need to push writers or individual books on people; books are out there for readers to find on their own. Each one leads a reader to the next, like cairns along a foggy trail.

I merely wanted to write that essay on Alice because I feel like she is so often characterized as traditional and grown-up, and I think the argument can be made that she's sort of wild and experimental. She has no problem leapfrogging decades in a sentence: who does that? Maybe Trevor. Maybe Tolstoy.

**KS:** What does "experimental" mean to you in terms of fiction? It's a tricky word.

**AD:** Maybe there's Good Experimental and Bad Experimental. Bad Experimental is lazy. Rather than gut through the writing of a complete narrative, rather than try to build characters and send them into conflict, a writer decides to, say, have magic ninjas smash through the window and kill the protagonist. Or compose the last 15 paragraphs of a story in only numbers. It's easy to hide behind something half-formed by saying it's experimental.

Good Experimental suggests a writer who is willing to take risks, then

bear down and get the fiction to work around the risk. Good Experimental suggests a writer who has done enough reading to understand what it is he or she is experimenting against.

There's also an element of failure built into experimentation: a writer who is successful at experimenting is a writer who is willing to fail. And being willing to fail is vital, I think. There are future-project-nourishing vitamins in even the worst failures.

You know that Kay Ryan poem, "Failure 2"? It starts...

There could be nutrients  
in failure—  
deep amendments  
to the shallow soil  
of wishes.

Of course, isn't all writing failure in a sense? There's always a gap between what we want to express and what we're able to express. We're trying to represent huge, barely comprehensible things with the absolutely inadequate, barely capable invention of language. Flaubert put it so beautifully in *Bovary*: "human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that melts the stars."

**KS:** In *Four Seasons in Rome*, you say that habit is necessary, but also dangerous because when we are familiar with something, "[T]he act of seeing can quickly become unconscious and automatic." But seeing must be one of the most crucial things a writer does. So, what do you do to really focus on seeing the world around you?

**AD:** Travel. Try to put myself in fairly difficult situations. There's no better way to appreciate how nice home is until you go away somewhere for a week and eat unfamiliar food and sleep on a crappy bed. Or no bed.

I worry about this "unconscious and automatic" thing especially now that I have children and a house and cable television. I worry that, if I get too comfortable, I'll start taking the grandeur of the world for granted. I don't know about other folks, but I think for art to have any merit at all, it should remind the viewer/reader of the grandeur out there. Because it's out there, all day long! The beauty of milk, of ants, of clouds, of a fifth-grader pushing his bike along the sidewalk beneath the leaves. Melville saw it, Tolstoy saw it. Rembrandt saw it. Vermeer saw it. John Muir saw it—that beauty of ordinary things. Hairbrushes and leaves and frost on windows. A couple holding hands, a 3-cent stamp, an ant crawling up a tree. I think you have to cultivate a way of seeing, you have to continually remind yourself of these blessings, of the unimaginable miracle—the breathtaking fortune!—of living in such an interesting universe. I mean, there are somewhere around 400 billion stars in the Milky Way. And there are more galaxies in the universe than there



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are stars in the Milky Way. So let's say there are, what,  $10^{23}$  stars? And how many of those other trillions of suns have their own planetary systems? And is there no life exactly like yours, Kendall, on any of those planets?

This is overwhelmingly amazing, isn't it? The miracle of the everyday is something we Americans, we earthlings, have to remember, I think, when we're eating Twix bars and driving our Nissans and thinking about making out with our girlfriends. And that's the role of art, to link us up with the largeness and strangeness and uniqueness of lived experience.

**KS:** This wonder you feel about "the miracle of the everyday" absolutely gets translated into your work. But, you're so much better at seeing the miracles then, say, me. Is it a gift you've had your entire life? Do you think it is your sense of wonder that lead you to writing? If not, then what did?

**AD:** Yes, I do think I've always been interested in wonder and language. Hopefully everyone is? I remember reading C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* as a kid, probably eight or nine years old, and falling in love with it, with the idea of *transporting*—that simple black markings on a white page could *transport* me to such an amazing and rich environment—that's probably where the initial impulse to be a writer came from, from the magic of trying to create lush, intricate experiences out of words on a page. That's one thing that led me to writing. Another was a high school English teacher, Mr. Kay, who had all of us high school juniors read a book called *Be True to Your School*, by Bob Greene, which was Greene's high school diary from the year 1964. Then he made all of us keep a journal for the rest of that school year, and I got very involved in it, scribbling in a notebook every day, trying to learn how to translate experience into words.

As for the "miracle of the everyday," I'm not sure I see the miracles better or more clearly than you do! Or than anyone else. It's just the sort of thing I try to cultivate, and that I've been cultivating for twenty-some years now by keeping a daily journal. Every day I'm thinking: What's out there today that's worth writing down?

I write for the addictive pleasure of tinkering with language, moving words here and there, trying different combinations; there is a deep sense of freedom in this job for me. And I write for the pleasure of being an alchemist, of mixing things together to see what will come of it. I write for that same joy that I got from reading C.S. Lewis as a boy, the magic of trying to conjure a place, an entire landscape, with nothing more complicated or expensive than letters on a page.

**KS:** When you're teaching you focus a lot on defamiliarization. I wonder if you could explain what defamiliarization means in terms of being a writer, and how you use the concept in your own work.

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**AD:** I'm fascinated by the dynamism of language: how it changes, how it evolves, how it's prostituted. I argue to my students that (in most cases) verbal repetition has a blunting, even soporific effect. When a writer writes that, say, a character has her "heart in her mouth" or "a surge of adrenaline" or her "eyes sparkle," then a reader, seeing combinations of words he has seen thousands of times before, glosses over the phrase, rather than seeing a vivid image. Over time a reader gets "habituated" to commonly-seen combinations of words like sidelong glances, and glinting eyes, and "a chill ran up my spine."

This is true of phrases, and it's true of narrative structures, too. Popular narrative structures which have been repeated often enough to be familiar can also have the same blunting, sleepy, familiar effect. How many evil villains are physically scarred? How many films end in a kiss? How many protagonists have a wise old grandfather?

And this is fine! I'm not suggesting that this isn't perfectly acceptable. I'll go see the new Spiderman movie, or the new James Bond; I'll tolerate the newest pop song, even though I know the narrative structure by heart; even though I know exactly what I'm going to get all the way through. In most Hollywood stories, everything is cause and effect; each element of a narrative obviously follows the last. There are no contradictions, no misfits, no real instability, no real formal tensions. A lot of care is taken so that the viewer does not get shaken up in any significant way.

So familiar sentence constructions and familiar stories offer something safe and comfortable and sometimes our brains crave safe and comfortable. But I do think that the role of art is to show us the familiar world in an unfamiliar way—to shake us up. The guy I always quote when I get asked about this stuff is an old Russian commissar named Victor Shklovsky, in an essay he wrote called "Art as Technique". "Art exists," Shklovsky says, "that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known."

Writers like us—writers trying (and usually failing) to make art—are trying to use words, maybe the most used and familiar elements of daily life, and we're trying to combine them to create transcendent aesthetic structures. We're trying to employ language in ways that helps a reader see life in some "defamiliarized" way.

Always, for me, art is slightly strange. Strangeness is what helps us crack apart our old eyes and see the world in a slightly new way. This is about empathy: strangeness helps us step outside of ourselves and into a stranger. It's like Flannery O'Connor said, "A certain distortion is used to get at the truth."

**KS:** Thus far in your career, you've written a collection of short-stories, a

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novel, and a memoir. Had you always intended to write in these forms? Why do you think you were drawn to each of them when you were?

**AD:** The answer to the first question is: Nope. I did always intend to be a writer, in a fearful, self-doubting, never-say-it-out-loud sort of way, and starting in high school I more formally intended to write novels, even writing some lousy, unfinished ones into the back of a spiral notebook. But that was because I had only read novels to that point.

It wasn't until I lived in New Zealand and started seriously reading short stories, reading the whole Norton anthology and also Ann Charters' thousand-page *Story and Its Writer* that I began to get a sense of the range of possibilities presented by short fiction, of what writers all over the world had done with language and limited space. After that I desperately wanted to write short stories. So that's what I did.

The memoir came out of my journal, something I've always tried to keep as a way to keep in practice. I kept an especially detailed journal while we were in Italy and when editors asked me if I had considered making a book out of our experience there, I realized I had all this raw material and wondered if I could translate it into something more finished and satisfying, something intended for a stranger to read.

Lately I've been writing lots of essays. Essays are a wonderful way to engage with language and with the things you're reading and seeing and thinking about. But mostly I think I like writing short stories. Or it's probably more accurate to say I experience the least amount of terror when I'm writing short stories.

**KS:** Terror? I guess I'd hoped to hear that terror went away. Do you feel it as acutely now as you did when you were first starting out? More acutely? And maybe most importantly, what do you do with that terror?

**AD:** If I've got something to the point where I'm showing it to an editor, I'm mostly ecstatic. Or altogether ecstatic. I'm not overly terrified anymore about how my work will be received, at least not until a book is out and the reviews are coming in. I *like* editing; I like getting help with my work. What terrifies me much more deeply are the 3,000 roadblocks I'm going to run into while I try to create something that feels complete. It's waking up every morning and thinking: This goddamn thing will never get done, will it?

Writing fiction is a brutal exercise in trial and error, and often, especially with novels, and especially after I've invested, say, 2 or 3 years into a manuscript, I get very afraid when I hit a dead-end. Which I do every week. I start thinking: Shit, this whole thing is doomed, it's too ambitious, too complicated, I have to cut the grandmother, I have to move the whole thing to 1930, or to Nigeria, and who am I to be writing about war/shells/

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predestination/marriage/ Alzheimer's anyway? In short stories the terror is mediated because the investment is smaller. If a dead end turns out to be insurmountable, if the first half of the project has to be erased, or—worse—if a whole piece turns out to be doomed, in a short story I've only spent 3 months on it. In a novel, if I realize I need to excise fifty pages, I might be cutting 8 months of work.

What do I do with the terror? I let it grow and fester and then I literally grind my knuckles into my forehead and get grouchy and tell my children they are being too loud.

**KS:** You've talked a few times now about keeping a journal. I have a hard time keeping one because I'm petrified that I'd leave it somewhere and a stranger would see it. What would a stranger see if they found your journal on a park bench?

**AD:** After decades of training, I've developed my handwriting into a secret, millimeter-high code decipherable to only me.

**KS:** We talked earlier about the danger of habit and how it can keep us from seeing the world. You've been writing now for many years. Are you conscious of continuing to push yourself to grow as a writer? Do you feel like you're still learning about the craft of writing?

**AD:** I feel as though I know very little about writing. Every time I sit down to fight through a new dead end, I have to learn how to do it all over again. It's by talking to friends and reading other writers, somebody like Aimee Bender who was here last night and who never stops daring herself to be silly or wild, or Jim Shepard who has no problem setting a story on a blimp or in Antarctica, or A.S. Byatt who will take wild risks, even into her 70s, or Nadine Gordimer: these writers are examples to me in keeping themselves alive and challenged, who are always driving themselves to write fiction from the edges of the culture, rather than from the center. So yes: I try all the time to push myself, to never try to repeat myself. Who knows if I'm succeeding or not.

Maybe the important thing is to remember that making up stories with words will always be primarily mystery, and that eventually, with time, almost every dead end is eventually surmountable.

**KS:** If not a writer, what do you think you might like to be?

**AD:** I'd captain my own submarine, have lots of hair, possess a vast library, have my same wife and kids, access to amazing goat cheese, and a regularly scheduled three-month geologic expedition. **F**

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## Experiment

“For what links us are elemental experiences—  
emotions—forces that have no intrinsic language and  
must be imagined as art if they are to be imagined at all.”

~Joyce Carol Oates

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Robert Travieso


## CommonAmericanSexProblems.org


Common American Sex Problems Website is also available in: Español | Français | Nederlands

Where straight-talking healthy Americans come together to discuss their various and undoubtedly common sex problems!

*"The first and still the best!" - J.D. Power and Associates*

If you are an American citizen  
currently suffering from  
one or more sex problems,  
please click here. 

If you are currently suffering  
from one or more sex problems,  
but are not as of yet an American citizen,  
please click here. 

If you are an American citizen,  
but are not currently experiencing  
one or more sex problems,  
please click here. 

This is an award-winning site

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Hello!

Now, are you absolutely certain that you do not currently suffer from a sex problem?

Remember, you are in a safe place. No one will judge you here. Your problem is undoubtedly common. You will feel better if you tell us. We yearn to hear from you.

It seems highly unlikely that you have stumbled upon this website by accident. It seems to us that you must have at some point performed an internet search that included the words "sex" and "problem". But we understand. All we ask is that you remember this site. When you are ready, we will be here.

If you have truly come across us by sheer chance, we ask that you be discreet. We also urge you to think of us when or if you develop your next, or your first, common American sex problem.

To return to the [CommonAmericanSexProblems.org](http://CommonAmericanSexProblems.org) homepage, please click here! 

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Hello!

We are sorry to say that at this time we are not prepared to offer support to sufferers of common international sex problems. We feel it is imperative to solve our own sex problems before attempting to tackle the sex problems of the world.

We suggest that you visit [www.europealsexproblemcoalition.org](http://www.europealsexproblemcoalition.org), or [www.southpacificsextalk.net](http://www.southpacificsextalk.net) for more information.

If you do at some point become a citizen of the United States, we would of course welcome your input. Here is a link to the US citizenship homepage: [www.USCitizenship.info](http://www.USCitizenship.info).

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The purpose of this website is simple. We share our stories. We help each other grow. We discover that we are not alone. And we learn to live again.

Here is our credo: Every American sex problem is a common American sex problem, and no one needs to feel ashamed.

For is it not our many and varied sex problems that give this great nation its character? And also the fact that we share them? Put another way: What would be interesting about a country in which every single person had a different set of sex problems?

Answer: Nothing!

See, here at CommonAmericanSexProblems.org, we think the #1 most important thing to understand about sex problems is that no matter what your sex problem is, chances are you're not alone! You might even have the exact same sex problem as Billy Graham! Who knows! Or even Richard Dreyfuss! Just imagine that! (If you want to!)

You'll soon discover that one of the biggest steps in the healing process is simply realizing just how common your specific American sex problem really is!

For instance, did you know...

¶That Hall-of-Fame third baseman Wade Boggs suffers from a common American sex problem known as [Click here to learn more](#).

¶That almost 85% of all American females over the age of 32 have experienced at least one instance of [Click here to learn more](#).

¶That in a recent poll, two out of every three male members of the United States House of Representatives admitted to having experienced the phenomenon commonly known as [Click here to learn more](#) not less than five times a week.

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To know Wade Boggs' specific common American sex problem, just sign up here!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Security Identification Code: \_\_\_\_\_

(search back of credit card, on the right side of the magnetic strip)

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Well if you didn't, now you do! Or soon will! Or what have you!

And that's really what we're all about here at CommonAmericanSexProblems.org

Because we're not out to "cure" you. We're not doctors. We're not psychologists. We're not even very well-educated. We don't claim to have all, or even any of the answers. We're just a place where you can come on by and never be judged.

We want to talk about your sex problems. Frankly, we like to talk about them. It makes us feel good, and it's also our job. And in this day and age, where it seems like all the opportunities for a group of decent, straight-talking American citizens to come together and talk about their sex problems in a public venue have pretty much crumpled up and blown away in the breeze, we think that's pretty special.

Now just one more thing. Before you go ahead and check out our list of common American sex problems, we'd like you to keep in mind that this website's continuing relevancy and effectiveness relies solely on the contributions of people just like yourself. Without new contributions, our sex problem list will not grow, and people will begin to believe again that they are all alone, when in reality whatever they are dealing with is probably very common. So if you have any thoughts or comments, or would like to share your own sex problem with us, please click here. ☐

To go straight to the list, please click here. 

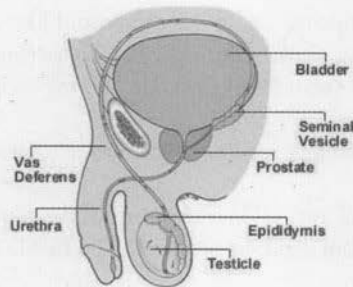
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## Cannot Find Penis

A common enough problem. The important question would be, how hard have you looked? Do you know the general area in which it ought to be located? Do you know what it's supposed to look like? Odds are your penis is simply in the wrong place. Or else it does not look like what a penis is supposed to look like. It is highly unlikely that you were born without a penis, or with a penis so small as to be invisible to the naked eye. Here is a diagram of what a penis is supposed to look like:



Except covered in skin and not see-through, and without the labels, obviously. If you can't find anything that looks like that anywhere on your body, it's possible that you have Inconspicuous Penis Syndrome, which is just a fancy medical way of saying that your entire penis is tucked away like a miniature nesting snake somewhere inside your body. This is a serious condition, but not in any way life-threatening, and any good surgeon should be able to get your penis out and properly situated in no time.



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## In Love with Prostitute

This happens way more often in the United Kingdom, actually, but being in love with a prostitute is still very much a common American sex problem. You have two choices, really.

One, you can convince him or her to stop being a prostitute, or two, you can accept him or her for what he or she is. If you decide to try and convince him or her to stop being a prostitute, keep in mind that if you are successful, you will be expected to make up for the loss of steady income.

If you manage to accept him or her for what he or she is, make sure to always, always, call before you come home early from work, says Ashley, a fellow sufferer in Toledo, Ohio.

There is, on the other hand, a third, little talked about option. If you are very rich, or if the prostitute you are in love with charges very little, you could simply continue to pay him or her to have sex with you until the day you die. At which point he or she will finally be free.

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## No One To Have Sex With

It's a problem, for sure. And in America in this day and age, an all too common one, unfortunately. We all get lonely sometimes. What you have to remember is that not having someone to have sex with can sometimes be the kind of sex problem that lets you get away from all the other sex problems you might have, and really give you some time to work it all out. But that's not really any solace, is it? C'mon, who are we kidding. We all need someone to love. Everyone needs someone to love. And it's not even really that we need someone to love, is it? It's that we need someone to love us back. Right? Don't you think? Hmm. It's very tough, this sex problem. Like we said on our homepage, we don't have all the answers. We just don't know.

Maybe this will help. A fellow sufferer from Canton, Ohio writes: "When I don't have someone to have sex with, every day feels like a day where I'm missing out on giving all of this love that I have inside of me to another person. I walk the streets and I think, she's out there, somewhere, and eventually I'll find her. But why not now? Why all this wasted time? And I walk and I walk and look in alleyways and such, and stop off for a beer at this bar called Wayne's Place, but it's just the same old people I see every other Saturday night. Sometimes I get to feeling like I'm falling out of the sky. I'm heading towards the ground, and all the air above me—that's the life I've already lived, and no matter how good or bad or painful or mediocre it was, it's over with, it's above me now, it's clouds, and I'm still falling. And all the stuff I'm falling in, the wind and the clear sky and all that, the whooshing—that's me right now, and I'm going so fast I can't tell whether I'm screwing it all up or not, and I can't do anything about it. It's just air going right through, ok? It's like, here it is, there it was, and now it's above me, gone. Above me, gone. Above me gone. That's what now feels like. And all the stuff below me, rushing up faster and faster and faster, and becoming my now and then my past, and all this invisible cold air—that's my future. And I think I can just about make out the ground by now, and every day that passes without someone to have sex with makes me wish, more and more, that the ground would just come hurry up to meet me."

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Feelings of ambivalence toward new penis that a group of doctors have grown on arm and are planning to attach to groin area, to replace the one lost in a threshing incident.

Derek?

Is that you?

D?

If you're out there, D, then please, please come home.

If this isn't Derek, if you've come here by mistake or just by sheer curiosity, then the most compassionate next step would be for you to please go away now and mind your own business. Just this once. And never come back again.

But if it is you, Derek, if you really are out there, if you really did find me, and if it really is your face out there staring up at the screen, wherever you are—then please verify your identity by answering the security question below:

Q: What was the name of your mother's favorite pet?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

Derek?

Have you caught your breath yet?

Didn't you know that I'd never stop looking?

That I always believed that I'd find you?

Did you catch your breath yet, D?

You go ahead and answer the question when you do. **F**

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## —Contributors' Notes—

**Devon Branca** is working towards a PhD at Binghamton University where he is the managing editor for *Harpur Palate*. His work has been published in *Indiana Review* and *Passages North*, and is forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*.

**Anthony Doerr** is the author of three books, *The Shell Collector*, *About Grace*, and *Four Seasons in Rome*. Doerr's short fiction has won three O. Henry Prizes and has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, and *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. He has won the Barnes and Noble Discover Prize, the Rome Prize, the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award, and the Ohioana Book Award twice. His books have been a *New York Times* Notable Book, an American Library Association Book of the Year, a 'Book of the Year' in the *Washington Post*, and a finalist for the PEN USA fiction award. In 2007, the British literary magazine *Granta* placed Doerr on its list of 21 Best Young American novelists. He also writes a regular column on science books for the *Boston Globe*.

**Russell J. Duvernoy** resides in the Hudson Valley. He has finished one novel, *To the Sharks*.

**Bill Edmondson** works for The Community College of San Francisco where he teaches English to Chinese immigrants. He's had poems in *Poet Lore*, *California Quarterly*, *Evergreen*, *Barnabe Mountain Review*, *Tulane Review* and other magazines.

**Aaron Gilbreath** is currently hunkered down in Arizona. He has written essays and articles, some forthcoming, for *North American Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Passages North*, *Gargoyle*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Alligator Juniper*, *Poets & Writers*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Saranac Review* and *Alimentum*. A nonfiction student at the Bennington Writing Seminars, you can reach him at [prowlinggilmonster@gmail.com](mailto:prowlinggilmonster@gmail.com).

**Annalise Hernandez** is a recipient of *Riverbabble's* Bloom's Day Award. She lives and works in New York City.

**Graham Hillard** teaches at Trevecca Nazarene University, in Nashville, Tennessee. His poetry and fiction have appeared in numerous journals, including *Prairie Fire*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *The Portland Review*, and *The Oxford American*.

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**B.J. Hollars** is an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama where he's served as nonfiction editor and assistant fiction editor for *Black Warrior Review*. He is also the editor of *You Must Be This Tall To Ride* forthcoming by Writer's Digest Books in May 2009. He's published or has work forthcoming in *Barrelhouse*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Hobart*, among others and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**Rita Hynarowski** lives in Northern California where she attended American River College and the University of California at Davis. Her other stories are forthcoming in *The Roanoke Review* and *Willard and Maple* and her first short story collection is due for release in Summer 2010.

**Stacy Kidd** is a student in the PhD Program in Creative Writing at the University of Utah and Poetry Editor for *Quarterly West*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, *The Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *WITNESS*.

**Heather Kirn's** essays and poems have appeared most recently in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Florida Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Barrelhouse*. She teaches writing at the University of California, Berkeley.

**Franz Neumann** lives in California with his wife and two kids. Read his previously published fiction at [storiesandnovels.com](http://storiesandnovels.com).

**Michael Perry** is the author of the memoirs *Population 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time*; *Truck: A Love Story*; and most recently, *Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs and Parenting*. He raises pigs and chickens in rural Wisconsin, is a contributing editor to *Men's Health* magazine, and serves as a first responder with the local fire department. His "Clodhopper Reports," filmed for Wisconsin Public Television, are available for viewing at his online home [www.sneezingcow.com](http://www.sneezingcow.com).

**Mark Jude Poirier** is the author of four works of fiction: *Unsung Heroes of American Industry*, *Naked Pueblo*, *Modern Ranch Living*, and *Goats*. Last year, Miramax released his first film, "Smart People," which premiered at Sundance and also played at the American Film Festival in Deauville, France. He lives in Weston, Connecticut.

**Octavio Quintanilla** has poems published or forthcoming in *Margie: The American Journal of Poetry*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *New Texas: A Journal of Literature and Culture*, *Versal*, *Ottawa Arts Review*, and *Bravado*. He is ABD at the University of North Texas and the assistant poetry editor for *American Literary Review*.



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**Jonathan Rice's** poems have been published or are forthcoming in *AGNI Online*, *American Literary Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Sycamore Review*, and *Witness*, among others. His work was selected for the Best of the Web 2009 anthology, Best New Poets 2008, the Gulf Coast Poetry Prize, the 2005-2006 AWP Intro to Journals Awards, and was twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He received an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University, and will begin Ph.D. candidacy at Western Michigan University this coming fall.

**Geri Rosenzweig** was born and raised in Ireland, worked as an RN in Ireland and London before coming to New York. Work has been published in *Nimrod*, *Poetry International*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Rhino*, *Rattle*, *descant*, among others. She won the BBC Wildlife Magazine Poet of the Year Award, the Rueben Rose Award (Voices Israel), The Walt Whitman Society of Long Island, NY Poetry Award. Her three Chapbooks are, "Half The Story" March St. Press, "God Is Not Talking" Pudding House Press, "Under The Jasmine Moon" HMS Press. Poems forthcoming in *Bellowing Ark*.

**Jason Schossler** is the winner of the 2009 Edwin Markham Prize in Poetry sponsored by *Reed Magazine*. His stories and poems have appeared recently in *The Sun*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *Poet Lore*, *The Florida Review* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and he has been awarded fellowships from the Ragdale Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus in Germany. He teaches creative writing at Ursinus College.

**Sharma Shields'** fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*, *The Sonora Review*, *The Hawaii Review* and other publications. She is a graduate of the University of Montana's MFA program, where she received the AB Guthrie Award for Outstanding Prose. She and her husband have recently moved back to her hometown of Spokane, Washington.

**Robert Travieso** was born and raised in Baltimore, MD, and now lives in New York City. His stories have been published in *Tin House*, *One Story*, and *The Smokelong Quarterly*, and a new work is forthcoming in *The Bat City Review*.

**Sophy Tuttle** is a freelance illustrator currently working out of Baltimore, Maryland. She is a recent graduate of Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in Illustration. Her work combines sculpture, drawing, painting, photography, and anything else she can get her hands on. Sophy finds inspiration in nature, patterns (or lack thereof), puppets, animation, the 'offbeat' section of the news, cryptozoology, and her very British family. She is happy to announce that she will be included in the Society of Illustrators: LA show and catalogue this March.

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**Tana Jean Welch** was born and raised in Fresno, California, and is currently working on a PhD in Literature at Florida State University. Her poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in: *The Southern Review*, *The North American Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Beloit Poetry Journal*.

**Gabriel Welsch** is author of the poetry collection, *Dirt and All Its Dense Labor*. Recent poems and stories appear in *Mid-American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Chautauqua*, *Ascent*, *Dislocate*, *Burnside Review*, and *Harpur Palate*. He works as assistant vice president for marketing at Juniata College, and lives in Huntingdon, PA, with his wife and daughters.



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\*Two Honorable Mentions\*

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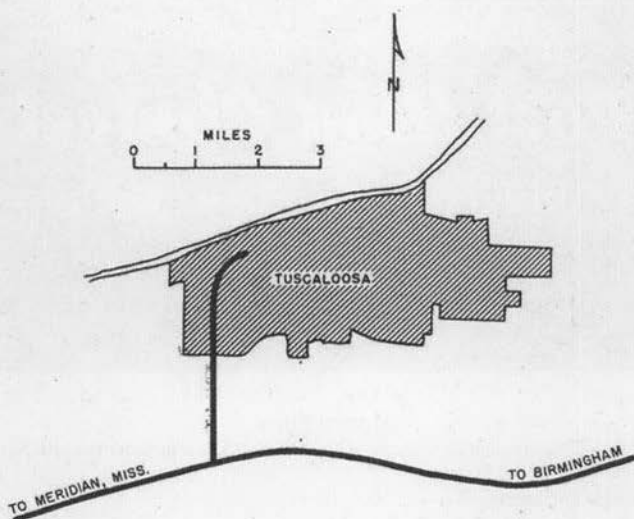
1. Each entrant will receive one FREE issue of *The MacGuffin* that includes the 14th National Poet Hunt winners.
2. Staff members and their families are not eligible to participate.
3. **An entry consists of five poems.**
4. Poems must be typed on sheets of 8½ x 11 paper. Clean photocopies are acceptable. **DO NOT** place name and address on submissions. Entries can also be made electronically as an MS Word document on a 3½" disk or CD (PC format recommended).
5. Each entrant must include a 3 x 5 index card that includes **poem titles** and the contestant's **name, address, daytime telephone number, and email address.**
6. There is a **\$15.00 entry fee.** Please send check or money order payable to "Schoolcraft College." Please do not send cash.
7. Poems must not be previously published, and must be the original work of the contestant. Poems may be under consideration elsewhere. *The MacGuffin* reserves the right to disqualify work that is accepted elsewhere.
8. No entries will be returned.
9. Entrants wishing to receive a list of winners should send a stamped SASE.
10. Entries must be postmarked between **April 1, 2009** and **June 3, 2009.**

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18600 Haggerty Road  
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*Winners will be announced in September 2009*

First Place and Honorable Mention poems will be published in a future issue of *The MacGuffin*  
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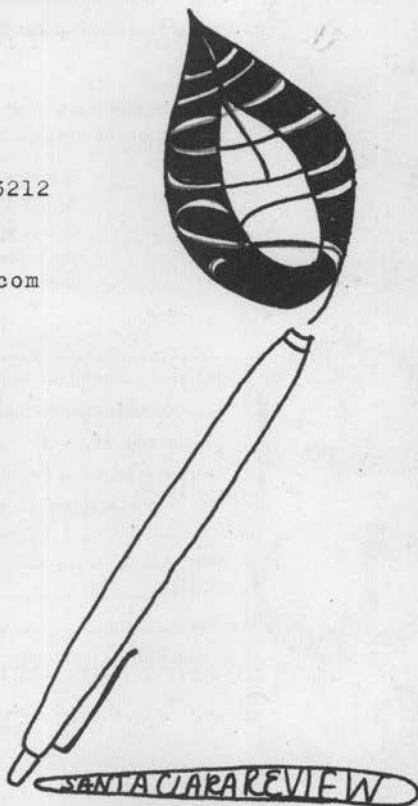
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