fugue

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Issue 41

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Fiction submissions are accepted September 1 through March 1, poetry and nonfiction submissions are accepted September 1 through May 1. All material received outside this period will be returned unread. Please visit http://uidaho.edu/fugue/for submission guidelines. 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 sent separately. 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.

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10TH ANNUAL RON MCFARLAND PRIZE FOR POETRY JUDGED BY DORIANNE LAUX

WINNER: MARK WAGENAAR

This poet knows how to find the best words and uncover the right images to do the work of these strong, well-written, politically inspired poems. In "'Raindrop'" the "tulipiere of the sky turning" and the "creek's thrushsound" is set against the bombing of an unnamed village, its finely drawn inhabitants "disappeared," leaving only memories of the "wind-rippled bodies" of clothes drying on the line, "footprints in the dirt," and a woman named Lilli.

This excerpt from "That the Unified Field Theory Must Somehow Include Donald Trump's Hair" arrives unexpectedly near the end of this rangy poem, when the narrator encounters the cheerleader girlfriend of a young man killed in the Iraq war:

"Was it weeks
later the next time I saw his fiancée at practice? Somehow
I thought she'd be heavier when I lifted her, heels in my hands
& pressed up as far as I could reach. I was only on the team
because of a girl, yet I was so close to it. Her sorrow weighed
no more than a crow's feather, no more than her silence."

A tender, haunting image of great depth and delicacy. This is a poet I will watch for in anticipation of a fine first book.

Mark Wagenaar

THAT THE UNIFIED FIELD THEORY MUST SOMEHOW INCLUDE DONALD TRUMP'S HAIR

Add the video of the dog playing the accordion
to the List of Things that Remind Me of Seville,
right beneath rainwater baths & patios of bitter oranges.
I never found who was playing, though from the jaunty
tuneless songs the musician had a great sense of humour.
You could also add the dog to the List of Things I'd Watch
Instead of "The Apprentice," which is a list that would reach
La Giralda from here. I'm not sure hair can be that bad,
whether it's real or some sort of Trump l'oeil, but I'm sure
it falls somewhere in the Unified Field Theory, which includes
the zebrafish' new eyes, & the ghostly hair of nebulae—
the theory another way to count it all up, to name the world
around us, blackbird, thorns in deadfall, thirst sudden as flight.
At times it seems possible to sense this Force-like web
of all things, the great wheel that turns & turns. The Xanax
or Zoloft tablet on the tongue reaches the waterways
after the body's eight zillion cells pan the chemicals, absorbed
by fish & taken up through the food chain. Twenty years between
the cries of 'Les Boches! Les Boches!', ten years between
the arclight of the tracer rounds over Baghdad, flak exploding
into festive clouds, like a balloon race where everyone
keeps disappearing. 'Curveball' lies about WMDs in Iraq
& Ryan Casey McGhee dies in his boots in Balad. Was it weeks
later the next time I saw his fiancée at practice? Somehow
I thought she'd be heavier when I lifted her, heels in my hands
& pressed up as far as I could reach. I was only on the team
because of a girl, yet I was so close to it. Her sorrow weighed
no more than a crow's feather, no more than her silence.

Say something, I remember thinking. Like enough with the fucking
cheering for today. Maybe it's tapwater euphoria, but today I only want
to say thank you Big Theory, for holding the present, the all of it,
each changeling particle, thank you for the six hidden dimensions
or the clouds of invisible dark matter, thank you for all of it
but it's done nothing to make sense of all this, to explain the past
or the 'President Trump' ad that pops up when Findagrave.com finds
Ryan's stone, I couldn't make this up. I mention her sorrow
& mean this world, wild ponies grazing off of Skyline Drive
in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I mean goût de terroir, the taste
of the earth, of the chalk, the flint flecked in the soil, stripes of lime
damasked in the hills where the grapes swell. Amphoras in sunlight
& the city of the dead, I say her sorrow & mean you, Ryan,
in the city of shale, the rifle butt wears your helmet now,
the heels of your boots pin the barrel, keeping the rifle upright.

‘RAINDROP’

is the program that predicts the casualties
& damage of a given bomb in a given area,
a guess as to how many the shockwave will whistle
through, whether it will reach the wedding party,

the child selling whistles, the woman
kneeling on a rug. This nameless village is only
a spot of ink on a map, yet peering down
you see the beautiful tulipiere of the sky

turning above, hear the nearby creek’s green
thrushsound, so like your mother’s song,
how she would sing with clothespins
in her teeth, then return through the throng

of weightless wind-rippled bodies, still singing.
The most we could want is only the courage
to make it too costly to someone, & so you bring
not her song but her silence to this village,

the best you can do, an absence left in you
by her absence, which now hovers
above the footprints in the dirt, then cocoons
the woman & child, her silence like a prayer

shawl touched by everyone. Someday soon
we’ll meet in the middle, & I’ll guess
by the look on your face that you’re the one
who brought the silence here, as around us

the world goes on as it always has, & we have nothing
to say but *hello, her name was Lilli, it's raining.*

Marie La Viña

IMMIGRANT

Neither first- nor second-generation. It was a choice,
this, to pack the two red suitcases, to take them both.

I chose the date and time and out of which airport.
Chicken or fish, coffee and tea, the in-flight movie.

Chose a return date and let it pass, guiltlessly. Left
because I knew the way back, or thought I'd left

a trail of breadcrumbs over the Pacific, or guessed
(akala ko, akalain mo) I'd follow seagulls home,

negotiate a path toward the equator. At the back
of my mind, I thought it might be possible.

But then I hardly looked back, with my ñ and nearly
indistinguishable accent, an education which meant

something else in every state, I arrived at the city
of arrivals, set up camp on the edge of the subterranean

way, a pentacle of routes. Uprooted, transplanted
myself to one Woodside after Sunnyside off the 7,

the single train on the city's purple vein. And if
Google maps could home in on my rented room,

X-ray the inner life of this living thing, my new city,
gaze into its windows, it would find me here.

Three seasons away, a blizzard and forty-two weeks
from those first summer days according to Celsius,

before the scattered rain turned into wintry mist.
By now I've found a place for the empty suitcases,

out of sight, though I still think of them sometimes,
repeat the combination of their locks to myself,

think of the need, were I to move again, to pack light.
And the child with my same face who could not

discard a pairless sock, who kept her sundry treasures
in an old cookie tin, makes me wonder what I'd save

in a fire or bring to the lost, always nameless island
of the hypothetical archipelago on the ocean

of tired small talk. What would you bring?
A knife. A book, I suppose. All we can bear to lose

we will. Only the sky will stay and notice
the clouds become cargo ships

for some ancient desire.

Patric Pepper

AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AMONG THE IMMORTALS

Look, dear, at the drama-queen orange carrots and the
prosaic deep green celery straight from Perry's farm, the
cloven pale garlics and the heartless purple onions of
dubious origin, albeit nonetheless original. And the lively
nightshades—cherubic new potatoes from James' Heaven
on Earth, and baskets of tomatoes from Roger's Paradise.

Look, dear, at this sack of organic French lentils from
Stop & Shop, gazillions of them pushing up against each
other like drowsy babies in the nursery of motherly love, all of them
doomed to be the centerpiece of my secret-
not-so-secret recipe "Lentil Stew for the Ages," with which
I'll wow the guests: *Wow! Didn't think Patric could cook.*

Dear, I have come to a realization about life among the
immortals: The veggies just keep coming back, Sweetie.
I think I understand how vegetables are the eternal
produce of love—not individual vegetables but vegetables all together,
even swirling in our pot. And when the aliens land from outer space
and make a truck farm out of us it'll be just

the same. We'll all be cultivated gorgeous babes then.
And the aliens will marvel: *Look! Look how they just keep
growing! No matter how much we eat. Yes! Eternal life.*

10TH ANNUAL FICTION PRIZE
JUDGED BY STEVE ALMOND

WINNER: "MOURNING DOYLE"
BY STEVE FAYER

A remarkable evocation of the city circa 1948. I was absolutely mesmerized by the author's deep immersion in this troubled cast of characters. The story reminded me, in its scope and psychological exactitude, of Henry Roth's remarkable novel, "Call It Sleep." The loyalty to these characters is astonishing.

RUNNER-UP: "BAPTISM"
BY AARON GARZA

Probably the most gripping of the contest stories. I couldn't put it down. I've not seen the violence of actual human combat portrayed with so much detail and authenticity. I was reminded of Jack London's classic story, "For a Piece of Steak." Killer ending. Just killer.

Steve Fayer

MOURNING DOYLE

Black John, crazy man, color of the Brooklyn earth, emerges from an ancient frame house shingled to resemble brick, carrying two gut-strung rackets and four spaldeen rubber balls, pink like the undersides of his hands. He sniffs the fog through flared nostrils, opens his mouth to understand it better. Confined always to the neighborhood, he hears the horns on the rivers, thinks the fog sounds like that.

A fourteen-year-old boy, walking cool through the morning in dark shirt and pegged orange trousers, his processed hair wrapped in a silk do-rag, steps quickly into a front yard and allows Black John to pass. Two girls, hair drawn into braids and secured with cotton flags, like the markers surrounding new lawns, skip carefully out of his way.

Black John's eyes are moist, and yellow in the corners, and streaked with burst capillaries. He walks hunched in the small space the fog has made of the world, bends lower through the curl in the wire fence surrounding the schoolyard, pulls in the two rackets and crunches across the tarred gravel surface to the concrete handball court.

He arches his back, stretches left hand high above his head, sinews, bone, muscle all outlined in the creeping, fog-filtered amber light, then serves hard and fast against the court.

The court snaps back the spaldeen and Black John flows toward the wire fence, turns his back, squirts high and straight into the air and drives the return back over his left shoulder.

Clop, the ball compresses, decompresses against the court wall, and as Black John spins, right knee raised, left arm back, racket held parallel to the ground, he opens his mouth and screams.

*

Above the schoolyard, the damp concrete of P.S. 246 begins to emerge, reflecting back the amber light. Two blocks to the north on Church Avenue, the fog thins first around the stone mass of Holy Cross Church. The sun burns a hole for the spire – then reveals at the front of the Holy Cross lot a Jesus who hangs kitty-cornered to the Avenue. All the required paraphernalia are portrayed: rag modestly tucked into itself to conceal his manhood, ribs exposed on one side. Blank stare in the Greek fashion. Crowned, also. Twice. With thorns, and with a varnished, peaked roof which some thoughtful carpenter has provided. Perhaps as a professional courtesy.

The Holy Cross bells toll the early half-hour this April morning in 1948, joined half-way through by the elegant tones of the Dutch Reformed Church on Flatbush Avenue, and after they are stilled, the small Negro church across from the public school, the African Methodist Episcopal, peals the time with a soft, southern voice.

*

On Church Avenue, the brown fog smells and tastes of bituminous coal. Beans McBehan, disconsolate, celibate, wearing wire-framed glasses with pink earpieces and nosepieces that scar the flesh and crease the sides of his skull, his eyes cruelly focused behind the thick lenses, pulls a red metal wagon, returning empties to the store for which he delivers. The bottles rattle in their metal crates. The boy grimaces with effort. An extra tooth protrudes at an angle from upper gum.

The grocer Chafetz, swathed in new white apron, turns east toward the clatter of Beans' passage. From the open window in the apartment above the store, he imagines the first sounds of his wife, remembers the night previous, feels a stirring under his apron, reminds himself to visit the rubber goods store.

Holy Cross, a half-block away, sounds the first warning of the half-hour and he turns to muse on the revealed steeple, and on the

mysteries contained therein. Two nuns pass, faces pinched in white starched frames. "G'morning, Sisters," Chafetz says, with a slight nod. No notice is taken of him.

Pariah.

Beans trundles the wagon through the front door, unloads the bottles noisily in the back, takes a quart of milk, pink cream gathered at its throat, and two quarter pound sticks of sweet butter up the back stairway to the apartment. Jew butter, he tells himself.

He enters the kitchen, deposits the bottle and butter in the old, wooden ice box – the ice smell sour as sweat – and empties the drip pan beneath the box into the galvanized sink. Beans says a Hail Mary, for spite, under his breath.

He is surprised in that mumbling by a far-off, intimate drizzle against porcelain, then a rush of water. Ruth Chafetz emerges from the bathroom, frowns at Beans, takes in his alien Irish face, the stink of kerosene in his clothes.

"You should always knock," she says.

The boy turns and stomps down the stairway. Ruth bends to pour off the rich cream into her coffee. One breast emerges from the opening in her flannel robe. She laughs quietly.

On the stairs: Beans' anger, jealous of female self-knowledge, thinking how he would deal with himself if he were a woman. Free admission to carnality. He ponders the mystery of the great divide and other forbidden geographies. In his mind: all fraught with danger.

Chafetz pays him his fifty cents an hour for the three hours, counting out the coins into his palm.

"It's my birthday," Beans says, cocking his head as supplicant.

"It's always your birthday," the grocer says. "Born more times than a Hindu. A genuine miracle."

Beans stands mute.

Chafetz turns away.

Beans moves out into the Avenue, walks half a city block, pauses, extracts a piece of blue chalk from his pocket, and carefully prints –

GUNS FOR THE ARABS ~ in large block letters on the sidewalk in front of his home: dark-stained varnished door, opening into mailboxes and a second door opening into long dark stairway, dark wooden banister to the left, dark stuccoed wall on the right, up to a white tiled landing, bucket of sand at the foot of a vertical steel ladder leading to dirty skylight. To the right of it, a third dark-stained door leading into three rooms.

His old man sleeps fully clothed on the couch, head close to the brown enamel of the kerosene stove.

Beans looks in on the bedroom, smells female sleep, sees his mother, thin, in the big iron bed with his three sisters, her nightdress pulled up almost to her thighs. He walks to his drawer in the bureau against the far wall, and into a ball of rolled socks inserts a half-dollar.

In the bathroom, he considers taking a body bath at the sink, the hot water faucet in the claw-footed tub being broken; decides later, at the Boys Club where there are showers.

In the kitchen, he sits down at the edge of the cot which has been set up for him there since he was in sixth grade, a bad time not wanting to be remembered, pulls from his pocket an iced bun lifted from one of the deliveries, and eats that for breakfast, licking sugar from his tooth.

On the way out, his father's outstretched hand. The old man's eyes, faded blue and myopic like his own. "Give," he says.

"It's my birthday," Beans says, again assuming the position.

"Hell it is," his father says.

"But it really is," Beans says.

His father's hand grabs him by the flesh of his stomach. Beans wrestles with the inside of his trouser pocket, pours a dollar's worth of change into the man's palm.

"Wait a minute. You're short."

"Broke a couple of bottles."

"He charged you?"

"Yeah," Beans says.

"Lying little shit."

"Ask him," Beans says. He moves toward the door.

"You still running with that no-good Doyle?"

"No," the boy says. "He's in the hospital."

"Somebody finally got him."

"Yeah," Beans says. "Larry was throwing himself in front of cars on Bedford Avenue, playing hurt, and this bastard runs the light.

"In a new Cadillac," Beans says.

"The old diver's game," his father says.

"Yeah," Beans says. "Larry's good at playing wounded."

"Hurt him bad?"

"Hurt his head," Beans says.

His father laughs loudly, mocking Doyle.

"He made twenty-five dollars doing it," Beans says.

"No shit," his father says, suddenly interested, sitting up on the couch.

*

At the Snyder Avenue precinct, across and down the street from P.S. 246, the sergeant listens to a woman complaining that her little girl has been ruined.

"Who did it?"

She thinks for a while, studying him. Cautious.

"The girl says a white man done it," she says. "He done it with a finger."

"Hell," the sergeant says. "That ain't even a crime."

A detective sitting against the wall laughs.

"What did he look like?" the sergeant says.

The woman shrugs. The sergeant shrugs back at her. Pink jowls. Black anger.

"A white man done it," she says again.

The woman leaves.

"Shit," the detective says. "The kid was already twelve years old."

"Yeah," the sergeant says, crumpling the paper in front of him.

*

The April morning is empty and endless without Doyle. School is out for vacation. There is not even that unpleasant diversion.

Beans decides to walk over to Kings County Hospital. On the second floor he encounters Larry's mother. "Oh, Hubert," she cries, charging him, gathering him to her large body. "The priest is in with him now."

Beans is confused. "But he isn't dying," he says.

Mrs. Doyle looks down at him solemnly. "It's his brain," she says.

The priest comes out of the ward, carrying his small bag.

"Good morning, Hubert," he says.

"G'morning," Beans says.

"Are you keeping out of trouble?" the priest asks.

"Yes, Father."

"Good," the priest says, pointing to a spot on the floor, motioning for Beans to wait there. He withdraws with Mrs. Doyle. Beans sees Mrs. Doyle begin to weep. Doyle's big brother Martin, ex-Marine, war veteran, gets off the elevator, joins them, takes his mother by the hand.

Later, in the car: he and the priest in a 1941 Oldsmobile, driving down the trolley tracks on Church Avenue. Beans peers through the windshield at women entering and exiting an endless array of fish stores, and fruit stores, and small butcher shops, and groceries, pushing baby carriages as if they were not ashamed of what they had been doing.

"I am afraid you've lost your best friend," the priest says.

Beans nods.

"He was a good lad," the priest says. "Even paid toward his own expenses. The nurses found a sum of money on him."

"How much?" Beans asks.

"Twenty-three dollars," the priest says. "Secreted on his person."

"Where?" Beans asks.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," the priest says.

"A miracle," Beans says, feigning innocence.

"I am not a judge of that," the priest says with a straight face.

Beans knows, of course, where they had found the money. Doyle had learned that trick his year in the reform school. Beans wonders: if he had known that Doyle was dying or was dead whether he could have had the courage to extract the twenty-three dollars. He wonders, also: how the nurses had found it. Beans is always truly amazed at the courage of women, enduring the intrusion of intercourse, in his mind something akin to the foulness of being pissed upon, changing dirty diapers which were the flags of their ruin, and drawing with their long, red-painted fingers, the money out of Doyle.

And not keeping it. That is amazing, too. But maybe they did. Maybe they kept two dollars. Doyle had made twenty-five.

When they pull into Veronica Place, the tree-shaded side street next to Holy Cross, the priest parks the car in front of a hydrant and pulls down the sun visor displaying the legend: CATHOLIC CLERGY. As they walk toward the Avenue, he says: "You're a good-looking lad, Hubert, but if you don't have that tooth tended to, you're going to grow into a man with a permanent curl in his lip. I know of a dentist. On Beverley Road. He's a prosperous Jew," he says cautiously. "But I think he might help you as a charitable act. Perhaps you could sweep the place for him, or do some errands."

"I know the girl who works for him," the priest says. "Patsy Costello."

Beans smiles. He, too, knows Patsy Costello.

*

He agrees to the priest calling the dentist for him, and he walks away down the Avenue, filled with the news of Doyle's death, wondering whom he can tell it to, and imagining Patsy staining her skinny hands on the foulness of his tooth.

"And another thing," the priest mutters, Beans probably too far away to hear. "You are in dire need of a bath."

*

By noon, Black John's gray chambray shirt and rope-tied gray work pants are sweated through in dark patches, darker where they cling to his skin.

Children whose color ranges from blue tones of ebony to handworn ivory play in the big schoolyard, in scattered groups, spinning circles of noise from which individuals issue like pistol shots, spin like tops, until absorbed into another melee, groups forming and reforming and distorting against the loom of the school building and against the backside of the concrete wall of the handball court. But on the Black John side, on the painted double court, only him.

Angry gum wad being pulled to pieces, stretched from back to front, from side to side, high over the flash of the spaldeen, then low, staring yellow-eyed under it; saving the day game after game until he escapes into a fluttering brown bird, ascending into the vacuum left by the vanished morning fog.

A three-year-old boy, clad in Easter lavender, waddles onto the court, running chubby fingers along the thin, shaved parting of his hair, is snatched away by a girl of ten or eleven who smacks him on the rear and shakes him, screaming at him and pointing to Black John. Turned loose, the little boy escapes to the upturned curl of the fence, crawls through it, drops to the street, and runs wailing down the block.

Black John, who has seen all with the sidesight of a bird, smiles.

The other racket, still brand-new, in a varnished wooden press, rests against the wire fence. Next to it are two of the four pink spaldeens, one gone flat, the other opened jaggedly down the middle.

*

Leaving Black John who protects himself with his insanity, and Hubert McBehan who wanders through that same section of the borough with a terrible hunger to tell something, and to know something else, Patsy Costello can be seen descending the steps of the dentist's office on Beverley Road in which, on Thursdays, she

works only half a day.

She is coifed and dressed in the latest fashion, dark brown hair piled high on her head; long, New Look dress hemmed half-way between knee and ankle and split suggestively four inches up one side, into which gap the ruffles of a petticoat are stylishly sewn, and decides as she always does when there is no friend waiting to walk her back to her home on Martense Street, to proceed up to Flatbush Avenue and then across, rather than risk her good name in the precincts of the colored neighborhood that lie between.

Patsy sees her world as a continuing succession of threats to her reputation, and although deflowered at age sixteen by a distant cousin on his last night before entering the merchant marine, he since dead in the war, and although almost continually embroiled in a succession of romances thereafter, she never allows a man until convinced of his genuine affection; never indulges in any but the most natural acts of sexual intercourse, and that always fully clothed, and thereby builds her hedge against defamation.

She, in fact, has never made love in a bed, and this eschewing of sinful comfort somehow negates any entries made. The obvious impossibility of penetration while attending a movie; of vertical intercourse in a hallway; of being tumbled against a dental chair – "you're not doing it with him?" L. Doyle had once shouted – have in moments of accomplishment been met with a kind of innocent surprise, Patsy's eyes closed in prim denial when later confronted with the starched evidence of some pilgrim's progress.

*

Patsy stops for a half-hour in the new Macy's store on Flatbush Avenue, the one with heating pipes under the sidewalk, the neighborhood's first post-war miracle, and there while wandering through ladies' lingerie is pinched through the girdle by person, or persons, unknown.

Wheeling, she spies four males close at hand, three unknown, the fourth vaguely familiar. He pushes against her. Patsy immediately notices that he needs a bath.

"You know Larry Doyle," he whispers.

"No," Patsy says.

"Well, I know you know him," the boy says. "He died this morning. In Kings County."

Silence, as Patsy stares off into the Macy's merchandise. Tableau vivant: young woman and boy in welter of undergarments. Saint, and supplicant.

"Of what disease?" she finally asks.

"Disease hell," the boy says. "He had a concussion. Was hit by a car."

"Poor Larry," Patsy says. She begins to cry. The tears are genuine, runneling her face powder, drops gathering around her chin.

"Well, at least he didn't die no virgin," the boy says.

Patsy whirls, and runs out of the store.

Further down Flatbush Avenue, the boy catches up with her. "You want to talk about Doyle?" he says. She shakes her head and moves on. "Please," he says.

"You are a disgusting, ugly, evil-smelling creature," she sobs. The boy runs up the deserted steps of Erasmus Hall High School and disappears into the courtyard. Patricia Costello marches on, thinking she will light a candle for Larry Doyle, poor misguided criminal that he was.

*

Crossing the courtyard to the Bedford Avenue side of Erasmus, Hubert McBehan pauses, tongues his tooth, studies the diagonal route between the high school steps and the Flatbush Boys Club across the street, weaves his way through the mid-block automobile traffic thinking of the showers, thinking also of the delinquent Larry Doyle who had been a counselor there, and discovers the club entrance glistening in wet, green paint, a CLOSED sign hanging on the door.

Thinks: in memory of Doyle? Impossible.

Privacy becomes a pressing need. Visions assault him, towering, shadowed females whose sexuality is tantalizingly obscured.

He opts for Erasmus Street, cuts right, and wanders, kicking at slivers of broken sidewalk past the parochial school buildings which adjoin the backside of Holy Cross where he had once prayed for lost souls in classes filled with the midgets of his childhood until his expulsion in sixth grade for a variety of sins, including non-payment of tuition by his father, Hubert the First, and more damning, more mortal – the complaint of one Gertrude Rabbia, dark-skinned, Sicilian, who had called to the attention of a certain Sister of a certain Teaching Order the proclivity of one Beans nee McBehan for attempting medical practice on dark winter afternoons beneath the nether skirts of certain bewildered, uniformed, virginal school girls.

Doyle the Wise, and two years the Elder, the evil counselor who had egged him on, even advising the employment of the McBehan penis, had remained to continue his primary education under the aegis of the Church while McBehan, Catholic medical career ended, and with a welt-raised ass from his father's strap, had been transferred to the P.S., two blocks removed and smack in the middle of the nigger section his father had called it, a location that the old man deemed appropriate for him.

Doyle had told him he was lucky to be delivered into the midst of that haven for black ass, and had remained his friend while all others slipped away, the McBehan name an anathema in the Catholic street world.

And now Doyle was dead.

*

On Erasmus Street between Rogers and Lloyd, Beans pauses in front of a row of two-sheet movie posters that fence in the southern limits of a vast doomscape called the Foundation, or by some, the Foundy.

Squeezing slowly through a space in the poster frames, all is not what it seems: the printed images of the posters are so coarse-screened that they are fraudulent, not pictures at all but only dancing patterns of large dots; he sees that in the movies advertised the people have no teeth at all, only a gaping white or gray-tinged ribbon of space, that in one poster such a collection of dots, a

woman with a red-outlined toothless grimace and large balls of breasts where her blouse has been ripped, appears to be tied to a cross, with a cactus underneath; that in the frame next to it is contained a top-hatted, blonde collection of dots, twirling a cane in tie and tails and dancer's tights, legs split high above the small print, and that between the legs, scrawled in orange crayon across the credits at the bottom is the legend:

F U C K Y O U

Product of the deceased?

A Doyle?

Beans wonders whether Patricia Costello ever passes this way? Is ever sullied by the message? Stimulated by it? (You blow on the back of her neck, Doyle had said.) And is punished for the thought by the wire frames of his glasses which pinch the sides of his skull and his nose as he finally squeezes through.

Bitch, he thinks.

Rubbing the pain away, he stares down a twenty-foot slope into an immense excavation, a city-block square. Brick walls lie fallen in coal ash and boulders. Great slabs of concrete jut skyward at several angles. Broken bottles and mica-spotted rocks reflect the sun. The gutted chassis of an early thirties Ford sedan rests on its roof at the far side. Brown shards of clay sewer pipe spill down beneath him. A brick and mortar chimney stretches forty feet across the excavation floor, broken in three places, its six-foot stump filled with refuse.

Beans nervously scans the Foundy for signs of life, sees only new green weeds, and slowly moves down the slope, digging in his heels. On the Foundy bottom, he moves cautiously in a half-crouch, poking his head into the fallen chimney, smelling rot and old scent of urine there, crunches on sterno cans, stops dead at what could be the sound of a rat, wheels at the flutter of a pigeon, beautiful gray bird riding an updraft like a vulture. On the north side of the Foundy, he kicks at a midden littered with tin cans – dog food, stew, elberta peaches. Behind it is a tin shack built into the slope. He picks up a brick, leans against the tin wall, listening. Satisfied

he crawls into the narrow opening, and then blocks it from the inside with a loose board. Bums, cornholers, sometimes possess the Foundy, until bloodied by nightsticks or scared off by tragedies of their own making – a neighborhood kid raped, a wino knifed – and Beans sits very still, listening. Finally convinced that it is a private place, he drops his trousers, inhales the scent of his own manhood which arouses him.

He removes his glasses.
Wipes his eyes.
Tries to imagine the extraction of Doyle's cash.
Shifts suddenly to the bone-hard feel of Patsy Costello's girdle.
Crowds her out.
Fills his mind with the garments of Catholic school girls.
Finally: Beans takes the situation in hand.

*

One city block away, Patricia Costello, brief object of McBehan fantasy – is it ever possible for them to know? Beans had once asked Doyle – dressed in white smock, perhaps an old dental hygienist's uniform, kneels in her mother's backyard, working in the garden. Patsy, safe there, holds up a budding rose, thinks of Larry's candle.

*

In the P.S. yard, three long blocks from Miss Costello, two blocks from Beans' shelter in the ruins, can be seen and heard the mid-afternoon presences and gossip of two girl children, Honoria Cambridge, thirteen-years-old, high-buttocked, full-breasted, dark-skinned, with a head of many small braids wrapped in yellow ribbons, recent emigrant from the island of Jamaica, speaks in island British to Little Louise, a new acquaintance. Little Louise, native and life-time resident of Brooklyn, New York, also thirteen-years-old but half Honoria's size and straight as a stick, spits out answers from the bottom of her narrow, old lady's face. Her hair, longer than Honoria's, is done up in just two long braids. She pulls down first the left, then the right, rocking her skull. To Honoria, she looks like an angry Judy puppet.

"Used to be, John was in Kings County Crazy House. His momma send him up presents on a string."

"On a string?"

"Oh, you know. He had a string up there behind the windows with the bars on them. And he drop down the string, and she tie a present to it, and he pull it back."

"You seen it?"

"Sure I seen it. His momma is my momma's cousin."

"What kind of presents?"

"Oh, toothpaste. Shit like that."

"What he crazy from?"

"I dunno. Maybe he just grew into it."

"Maybe he was born into it," Honoria says.

"Could be."

"How come they put him in that crazy house?"

"I ain't supposed to tell."

"Tell what?"

"Well, he started into cutting on people."

"Bad?"

"Real bad. Started yelling he didn't want no niggers in his house. You come into the house, he go for you."

Little Louise stares across the yard toward the handball court. "Killed four people," she says. "With a razor."

Honoria senses she is being had. "I don't believe that."

"I don't care what you do or don't," Little Louise says, angry now. "You just walk over there, girl, and see what happen to you."

Little Louise sniffs, and switches her behind, and begins walking toward the curl in the fence. "You ain't even American," she shouts. "You don't know your ass from first base."

*

Beans jauntily pretends, crossing the Avenue toward the apartment, that there has been satisfaction in it. That they have not been wasted there, a million babies, in the dirt of the Foundy. A million McBehans.

That he has wrested something from those shadows.

He recites:

"In days of old when knights were bold,

And women weren't invented.

Men stuck their cocks into their socks,

And went away contented."

Cheap thrill, his father had called it. Brain damage, a priest had said.

An invisible power is playing a game with him, he is sure. Taking Doyle. Taking Beans' money. But somewhere in this birthday, he is convinced, there is a glorious present lurking. Stepping into the McBehan apartment, Beans crushes a roach on the doorsill.

"There'll be no coming into the bedroom in the morning," his mother says. "Until your sisters and I are up and dressed. In all the years of our marriage, your father has never."

"Larry Doyle is dead," Beans says.

"And what has that to do with your traipsing through the women's bedroom?"

"I thought you might want to talk about it."

"He was a bad one, that one," she says. "And a bad influence on you. You're too impressionable, Hubert McBehan."

"Is there any food?"

"Only bread."

"Today's my birthday."

"I am well aware of that. It was my agony, remember."

Beans pulls out two slices of bread, pours ketchup between the slices, closes them, sits down to eat.

"Who killed him?" his mother says.

"A car. A car killed him."

"What color car?"

"I don't remember what color car. What the hell does that matter?"

"I would like to know," she says. "What an instrument of providence looks like."

"It was a Cadillac."

"Jesus," his mother cackles. "Larry Doyle must have thought he was in heaven."

Beans turns his chair toward the window, stares across the tarred back roof, fights back the urge to cry.

*

Mrs. McBehan lights a cigarette, leans back in her chair, blows smoke at the back of her son's head. "Despite all the pain you have brought into this family," she says. "You have a good heart. It may be your salvation."

Later, when he cannot find the half-dollar, she tells the boy she surrendered it to his father. "I told him," she says. "About you, walking into the bedroom."

*

Black John is thinking:

Spaldeen.
Wall.
Clop.
Spaldeen.
Wall.
Hawk.
Spaldeen.
Spaldeen.
Got you.
Spaldeen.
Drawn to heaven by greedy fingers.
Spaldeen.

*

Beans walks down the Avenue past the grocery store. Chafetz is in the center aisle sweeping the floor.

Ruth is at the cereals reaching for a Corn Flakes with a long, mechanical arm. With the other hand she scratches the upper left angle of the triangle.

Crabs, he hopes.

She nods at him, finger pointing.

Beans feels himself swoon with urge.

He ponders the seeing of her tit, wants to shout it at her. In his stomach, bread and ketchup knead, forming gases. To continue the functioning of his legs, he hums Feel Artilleree.

Over hill.

Over dale.

Marching past the Foundy, a million McBehans lost, in the dirt there. It staggers him. Foul act committed. The waste in it.

We will hit the dusty trail.

Moving relentlessly toward the Gallagher Funeral Home wherein lies the corpse of Doyle, Lawrence, conceived in the fumbling dark of an apartment almost the twin of the McBehan's, delivered at home in the same bed, in the joyless winter of 1930.

Doyle said he had heard them doing it. Almost every fucking night.

The Gallagher Funeral Home is constructed of sand-colored brick, and glass brick, and chrome. Beans pauses at the hearse entrance, cocks an ear, lip curling over tooth, eyes blinking behind wire frames, swears he can hear the humming of a machine.

The colored girl, Alva, the musical one who banged away at the Star Spangled at the P.S., she had told him, shocked him years before, of organ-playing at a colored funeral parlor, and of machines in the basement pumping the life's blood out of corpses.

"They put it in cans," Alva said.

Beans had felt himself getting sick.

"I seen everything," she said. "Everything. And in the middle of the night, a special truck come. And it carries it away, and they use all that stuff."

"For what?"

Sweet Jesus!

"I dunno."

Beans had stared hard at her. Alva's wet mouth so wide-open he could see her tonsils.

"Maybe for Jello," she had said. "I heard they use it in Jello."

Alva, eighth grader, had slithered off to clean erasers at the eraser machine, and Beans, bearing his own grade's armload, had felt a griping in his gut. He feels it now.

Envy, first, for Alva's peep show.

Conviction, second, that Gallagher's would not do that to Doyle. It was different for Doyle. Doyle was a Catholic. A Catholic was possessed of an immortal soul.

Third, the same conviction now contradicted by fear for Doyle: the fluids of kidneys, liver, intestines, lungs, heart wrenched from him as if he had no right, and all the time Doyle paying for it through the ass.

What happens if the concussion is only temporary and Doyle springs to life on the Gallagher slab? Beans imagines the shock, the pain, sees Doyle bending forward to cover his balls, hears Gallagher shouting: "You can't go through the gates wearing that set, me boy."

Gallagher appears in the hearse garage, winding his way around a 1941 Packard flower car, as if drawn streetward by McBehan's fear, wearing shiny black trousers, and black tie, and starched broadcloth white shirt. Gallagher, dark Irishman, devil's minion; his adam's apple like a second nose, sniffing over the collar of his shirt.

"You got Doyle?"

"His body, yes," Gallagher says. "His soul, that's a matter for across the street." He nods at the front steps of Holy Cross.

Beans shines the saliva from his tooth with the edge of his index finger. He pokes the finger under the wire frame to the bridge of his nose, draws the dust downward from an eyelash.

"Can I see him?"

"His body?" Gallagher corrects.

"Yes, Larry's body."

"No," Gallagher says gently. "We're preparing it."

Beans feels gas roiling in his gut. "What are you doing to him?"

"His Sunday best," Gallagher says, smiling at a spot above Beans' head.

Beans nods, walks away, bending into the posture he uses in pulling the delivery cart. A trolley shrieks by, and he listens intently, head turned back toward Gallagher's for any Doyle scream it may disguise.

*

At a gas station, he borrows the key and takes a foul crap.

*

At four o'clock, he ducks into the side entrance marked LADIES WELCOME of the Bantry Bar and Grill at the southeast corner of Church and Rogers, slinks past empty varnished booths to the end of the brass rail of the long stand-up bar, at which the elder McBehan, the first Hubert, stands belly-up with a crowd of other men, who singly and in the sunlight never seem as threatening as in here, together, their faces magnified in the smoke; the first assault on the senses sour and beneath that a layer of sulfur, and the platform for it all, the smell of piss, leaking from a dark mahogany door. Beans moves through the bar like a rabbit, his nose twitching at it, envying it.

"Howie Schultz," his father is shouting. "Now there is the most incompetent infielder ever touched his toe to a bag."

"I seen worse," another man says.

"Who?" the elder McBehan shouts.

"I dunno. That guinea. Used to play for the Giants."

"Name the dago!"

"I don't remember," the other man says, softer.

"Fuck yourself," his father says.

Beans walks up to a cardboard Miss Rheingold sign, waits to be noticed. This is the best hour.

He attempts to sling a knot of phlegm at a spittoon close by, miscalculates the jutting tooth, drips spittle down his shirt. His father notices him then.

"What in the name of shit are you doing to yourself?"

The other men regard him, too.

"Ugly bastard," his father mutters.

"It really is my birthday," Beans says.

"You say that, boy," his father says for the whole bar to hear. "As if I am ignorant of my part in it."

A man laughs.

Beans blinks through his glasses.

"He's carrying your name, Hugh," a man says.

"And what would that be worth?"

"One dollar," the man says.

His father pulls a brown leather wallet from a pocket inside his jacket. Opens it. Studies the contents. Pulls out a bill. Focuses on it. Hands it to Beans.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"Thanks," Beans says, pauses, looks up again. "Aren't you gonna say it?"

"Give him your blessing," a man says.

"Tell him happy birthday," another says.

"Happy Birthday to you," a weak tenor begins down at the far end of the bar.

Father studies son, square fingers groping, to caress, or strangle? Beans feels the strangeness, wonders what the man, his father, is looking for, turns, and walks back down to the booths, and out the side door, hoarding the news of Larry Doyle.

His father turns back to the bar, picks up his glass, thinks:

I am tired.

Of doing it in the closet.

Against the old leather trunk.

Of the three daughters in the bed.

*

There is an injustice in her existence, that Amelia. She alive still, chained to the rail, dressed in long rusty black skirt, and yellowing middy blouse, long raven hair dusty from the traffic on the Avenue, eyes slitted, surrounded by great black hollows – somebody always hitting her there, he muses – hawk nose, dripping, stretching the rest of the skin until he thinks he can see past it to the bone, an

uncomfortable thought on this the day of Doyle's death, he who lies up the Avenue, imagined now as a child's doll, with no stink, and no balls, while she quietly paces the slate sidewalk in front of the tenement, in a groove she has worn there, the green teeth of upper jaw in constant bite on lower lip, giving her a look of insane concentration so that Beans wonders how she can stand the hurt of it, and the leather collar.

Leashed there since before he was born, almost thirty years old he calculates, staring at her white hands where she has been playing in the ash cans.

Two events fight for equal place in the forepart of his skull but in the middle of that, he wonders why this is the only place he knows filled with the world's discards, why it is that they are wheeled in blue wicker baby carriages, little men with pointed heads fronted with Chinese faces perched on necks which cannot support them, he sees one of them, maybe the same one, almost every day; why it is that this girl, woman, Amelia, is chained to the iron railing of the stoop every day of decent weather, why it is that just days before, Crazy Morton had exploded through the front window of his apartment descending fifteen feet to the Avenue instead of simply walking the stairs, why Mary Margaret down the block is allowed to scratch her way every day along the sidewalks on her crutches, why it is that in other neighborhoods he has explored, he sees nothing but bare-swept stoops and closed venetian blinds, and people confidently stepping in and out of front doors, turning keys in locks.

His birthday. He feels for it crumpled in his front pants pocket, like a third ball, but Doyle is dead, and Beans is suddenly very tired of the neighborhood, and of being Beans in it, and ~ his father's silent keening having followed him from the Bantry Bar and struck him with its logic ~ Beans resolves to get the hell out, soon.

Doyle had always wanted to go to the Pacific, where Doyle's war-hero brother Martin said that fathers in Japan would sell you their daughters, that girls on the islands would blow you for a dime. It was a thought.

Then the girl, woman, Amelia, snarls and spits at him, rattling her long steel dog chain against the iron rail, and the first of the two events, the stronger, assaults him, it being the second week after his expulsion from Holy Cross, after the Sister, Francis Xavier was her name, had attacked him axe-murder fashion, with the steel ruler, hacking at him with the edge of it, catching him in the act, and no one in the neighborhood would talk to him, except Doyle, not even his family, and except Amelia's mother who was the lady super for the tenement, and who invited him up one rainy day for a glass of Pepsi, Beans amazed, and led him through dirty french doors into a room where Amelia lay bareass, in some kind of harness, trying to play with herself, and the old lady whispering in Beans' ear:

"You know. You know. It will quiet her."

Doyle said he should have done it. That a piece of ass was a piece of ass. That after he had it set up, he could have invited other guys, charged for her. Put a bag over her head, Doyle had said. Maybe even throw in the old lady, mother and daughter for half a buck.

But standing there in that bedroom staring down at her, he had felt the awful hammer presence of sin. None of the other times had felt like that, none of it, but in that room he had sensed mortal peril, and had run like a bastard.

And a year later, the second event, not as important then, but hurtful now, he had seen her one late afternoon, suddenly snap out of the jaws of her collar, and spin into the Avenue, her arms half-raised, and saw her knocked skyward by a screeching square green sedan, saw her flying slow through the air, and tumbling along the long, shining line of trolley track. Then she had raised herself and run back to the stoop and stuck her neck back into her broken collar, crouching there while people gathered, some yelling at her, others at the driver who stood at the curb, a large man in brown work clothes, and brown leather apron, looking like he was going to cry.

"The lame of brain are protected," his mother had said. The bitch, Amelia, was not even hurt.

But Larry Doyle, smarter than them all, had been sent to hell on a Cadillac hood ornament.

Beans, fingering his birthday dollar, studying the crazy Amelia, wonders if he had been offered a trade that Pepsi-Cola day, and if he had fucked it up. Maybe if he had done it to her, she would have lost her luck, and bounced on her head, and he and Doyle might now be on their way, together, to somewhere.

*

Gas again. He farts nervously, crosses the street to the White Castle restaurant, breaks the dollar into dimes, then sacrifices one for a hamburger with.

While he dines within the tiny restaurant at the northeast corner of Church and Rogers, stooped figure spinning atop a stool and framed there in the window, matted in its surround of white enameled siding, the five o'clock hour is struck by Holy Cross, just yards away. On the counter, powdered doughnuts tremble within circular tiers of trays. The waitress turns to stare through the window. Beans in his boy's heart feels the percussion of the Holy Cross bells marching down the Avenue, bowling over the red trolley cars, smashing eardrums of screaming passersby, pushing stores and tenements from their foundations. The waitress watches the same street with casual interest, studies her reflection in the glass, runs fingers through the pride of her yellow hair, examines her nails for the catch.

Beans lifts a glass cover, grabs a doughnut, stuffs it in his pocket. The spring sky is lowering, thunderheads pressing down on the borough, filtering the sunlight which falls in yellow end-of-day patches on the sidewalk, edges the metal flashing of imitation Dutch roofs with a squirting liquid light, hints of another truer world.

"You want a coffee with that doughnut ?" the waitress says, still staring into the Avenue.

"Yeah," Beans says.

She pours coffee out of a squat glass container banded with brass into a china cup singly striped with maroon; collects a second dime.

"Yahuglyliddlethievinbahstid," she says.

He leaves the coffee standing on the counter, leaves the doughnut stuffed in his pocket, leaves the establishment.

What are his options?

Incarceration for theft. The crime is already paid for.

An adoration of Larry Doyle, waxed, gutted, plucked. Premature.

A candle. Foolish expense. Something women do.

A bath.

No place for it.

A return to home.

For what.

Three little sisters trading holy pictures.

Hitch a trolley ride.

Possibility.

Subway. Possibility. Where is Doyle's brother?

Boys Club. Closed.

Beans drifts south on Rogers Avenue in the darkening, sun-edged day, toward the colored section, public school 246, place of exile.

Backing off, getting above him and it, watching his bent figure dragging the accumulations of the day, it is realized that he has once again made the mature decision. To seek solace in the magic eye, the vertical wink, that claims his half of the race, priests and such supposedly excluded.

He avoids Snyder Avenue and the police station, squares the block, and comes furtively into the yard from the anonymity of the colored side, Albemarle Road.

*

In the darkening day, Patsy Costello, in the second story of the Martense Street one-family, big in turn of the century style, the one with rose bushes in the back, sits naked on her bed, reinventing herself in a crazed bureau mirror, cradling her bosom in red-painted fingers, blowing through lips formed in a receptive circle at long

hair newly combed and brushed down over one eye in imitation of Veronica Lake, a movie star.

She thinks a single thought:

Larry Doyle's waxen candle.

Why Patsy? Blame the priest who thrust her in, offering her dental skills as salvation. Observers may not know, but will feel, how her life will go. Beans, of course, has been walking away from her. Martense Street is blocks behind his back.

*

In the apartment window, through which hours before Beans stared and fought back unmanly tears, Mrs. Hubert McBehan the First thrusts her head and torso, reeling in across the back roof the cotton underwear of the McBehan clan.

The two pulleys creak as the gray clothes line passes through.

She carefully segregates male from female, subdivides once again, putting her own, not much larger than her three daughters', into a separate pile.

Mrs. McBehan, the clothesline empty, windowsill covered with underwear, stares across the tarred roof, and across the two sets of backyards, and the lines of planked fences that divide them, running in from Church Avenue on one side, and Martense Street from the other, seeing weeds and rose bushes and debris, inhaling foul odors from the rooftop ventilator of a Chinese restaurant a few doors down (blaming them, yellow heathen, for the roaches and mice with which the apartment is plagued), and spying, in the upper left window of a Martense Street two-story house, a flag of pale skin reflecting itself.

All is mirrored confusion. What does she see? Two women touching themselves? Two women. It is like staring into hell.

In that dark moment, Mrs. Hubert McBehan feels a sharp pang, senses, intuits, that her son is in danger; then the mind shrugs: when isn't he?

She is left that way, abandoned.

*

Chafetz scratches absently at seamed flesh, stares at his aproned wife spread and resting in a wireback chair, wonders whether the kid will show up for the late afternoon deliveries. He sees five men issue forth from the front doors of the Bantry Bar and Grill. The men vanish into several doorways.

Life among the gentiles, he thinks.

*

Amelia thinks:

Light.

Dark.

That she is an animal without a name.

Having seen one once on a leashed walk through Prospect Park.

*

Standing in the pool of shadow cast by an ell formed by the juncture of two wings of the Public School 246, Honoria Cambridge, island girl, inhales the wind, is disappointed that there is no spice smell in it, only rain.

*

Black John, who has eaten nothing, drunk nothing since early morning, is now dehydrated, his shirt dry and stiff, his movements slow, the two surviving spaldeens gone flat, hitting wall and court floor with an airless plop.

He is now off the ground, floating half-way up the fence to return an oblique drive, languorously tapping a return through the triangle of his spread legs, his toes dancing on a cushion of air.

Little Louise tells a flat-faced boy, the two of them standing safely in the middle of the schoolyard that ~

"No, I will never."

"Why?"

"It will be a curse on my children," she says. "Having you father them."

"You ugly," she says.

But she hooks a thumb in the juncture of black shirt and orange trousers, and the two walk off together, to the luncheonette on the Snyder Avenue side of the yard, still teasing, still courting.

"You ain't never gonna be the father of my children," she says.

In the luncheonette, which is crowded with black celebrants, one holding a stickball bat poking companions in the ass, Little Louise asks for a Devil Dog Chocolate Cake, grins as she bites.

On her pinched old lady's face, flecks of youth.

*

Black John, weightless, lightly rides the dusty carpet of atmosphere which lays low over the concrete and macadam surfaces of the P.S. 246 schoolyard.

Plop goes the spaldeen as Beans enters from the Albemarle Road side, sees Black John, pays him no notice, he is always there and no threat to Irishmen.

"What's your name?" he says.

She, brown girl in ell's black shadow, alone in the yard save for the crazy man, stands mute.

"Aw, c'mon," Beans says, with urgency, as a starveling might.

"Honoria," she says.

She folds her hands across the front of her plaid pinafore. He is aware of his excitement. The boy, spinning on the axis of his hunger. The girl is aware of it, too. She moves her eyes not to his, she could not stand that, but to his mouth, watching the lift of his upper lip, pink, upturned.

She is rational enough to think:

Sea shell.

Like conch bottom.

But a muscle far down the calf begins to twitch, and she feels warning pressure in her lower abdomen, fear burning in the place where she.

Beans searches for a formula.

"Who you waiting for?" he says.

"Nobody," Honoria says to the mouth which is opening, shutting, rippling the wet lip skin across the funny tooth. Then realizes she has made a mistake.

Too late?

"My uncle," she says quickly.

"Aaaaah," Beans says.

"My uncle," the girl says.

The mouth laughs, giggles, little flecks of moisture like rain in it. The girl knows he knows she has lied, knows she has already given up some major advantage.

"Well, not exactly," she says. "More like a step-uncle."

Beans laughs again, feels that awful hunger. If only, if only he.

"That's a pretty dress," the mouth says, its fingers touching the straps of the plaid pinafore.

"My momma bought it," Honoria says, using that incantation: I am someone's child.

Plop!

Plop!

Plop!

Under the steel steps he makes her sit down. Gray light filters through the grating, dappling her.

"You want to do it?"

"No," Honoria says, trying to rebutton one strap. Fear burning where.

"Nobody will ever know," he says. "I won't tell." Thinking:

Only Doyle.

If Doyle.

He would have.

When a McBehan celebrates a birthday, Doyle would say. He never forgets a friend.

If they're old enough to bleed, Doyle would have said.

"C'mon," Beans says. Hungry, spinning above her. "You do it all the time." Feeling outside of him, the long line of ecstasy. In the confusion, hearing steam pipes hiss, plunging fingers into a warm pool of:

Jit?

Shows them to her, sticky with the forgotten doughnut.

"C'mon, emm-eff, do it to her." One voice.

"Yeah, mother fucker. We gonna charge admission."

"Oh, Lord. Those foreign girls," a third voice, giggling, female.

Feet drumming on the steel steps. Beans looks left, right, sees more feet at either side, heads upside down, foreheads grinning, makes a crab-like run for the opening, half-out, is cracked on the head with a stickball bat.

The broomstick, resilient, makes a loud whaaaang!

Beans sees his wire glasses beyond the shadow of the landing, sees a foot step on them, turns, makes out Honoria, leaning against the wall, the underside of the school steps advancing above her, her hands holding the pinafore in front of her face, knees locked.

"C'mon," a voice taunts. "Do it to her."

"Yeah, man, put it in the old pee-pee hole."

The stickball bat is inserted into the darkness under the landing, finds his hand, pins it to the ground.

"I got him," a voice says.

Beans grabs the stick with his free hand, yanks hard and pulls it in. Blood trickles from beneath his left eye where the wire eyeglass frame was ground in. He thinks of Larry, Larry's head, grips the stickball bat hard.

"You don't do it, we gonna piss on yooooh," a voice croons.

"I ain't gonna watch," the female voice says.

"Oh, c'mon, Louise. You seen this one before. I know that."

Beans hears feet gathering on the grating above his head.

"You going to get it on Honoria," the female voice says.

"Tough sheee-it," a voice answers.

"Get set," the voice says, drawling a little to give enough time. Teasing.

Beans raises to a crouch. He grips the broomstick with his right hand, squirts out from under the landing, knocks his skull against the edge of the steel steps as he scurries. He tastes salt running

down the high side of his throat, tries to snuffle it back. Imagines: red.

Not my head. Ringed now by six or seven boys. One old-faced girl, studying him, frowning.

Beans turns slowly, holding the bat on his shoulder. One still has his hanging out. Beans stares at him. The boy turns suddenly, buttons himself.

"He's drunk," one says.

"Nah," another says behind him. Beans wheels. "He hurt. We hurt him," the boy says.

"Hey boy. Hey, pisshead."

"I tell you how we get him. Whoever's behind him."

Patsy Costello, Beans thinks. There is no danger in her, Doyle said. In safe hallways.

He whirls in place, arms three-quarters extended, swinging the bat.

"Let him go," the girl says. Then they are on his back. He hits one of them a good one, one of them in front, then loses the bat.

Darkness. Just for an instant. Then descent.

Then:

"We gonna stomp him."

"We gonna spear him."

Beans imagines Larry Doyle. A Doyle doll on the counter in the five and ten.

There is an explosion of light in the darkening day. Curious, he opens his eyes, feels a mass descend on his right cheek, tries to focus left-side, his brain fooling him, faking it, that he is still seeing in dimensions. He is afraid to touch the weight on his right cheek, imagines a grape is there. When he closes his left eye, he sees nothing.

"Oh, Jesus," a girl's voice says. "You done him." She is close to him, he can hear her ooooooooohing.

Strange insects, worms, rivers flow across his face.

"Oh, my sweet God," the ooooooooohing girl says.

Plop!

He stands up, wanting the courage not to touch his face, begins to run, feels the weight bouncing against his right cheek.

He hears them running behind him, panting, hears the bat clatter against the macadam in back of him, runs toward the:

Plop!

Inside the white line of the court, Black John plays around him, leaning across him to make a shot, soaring straight up, poising crouched with his racket arm behind him, playing the game.

Two of the boys run into the court. Black John stops, comes down, lights, snarls viciously. They back away.

He resumes the game, misses a shot. The spaldeen rolls close to Beans. He kneels, picks it up, brings it to Black John.

"Whomp him," one of the boys yells from beyond the court.

"Whomp the muthafuck."

Black John turns, stretching his neck – Beans can see the cords in it – stares at the yelling boy dancing out there beyond the white line. The boy backs away. They all do, walking backward away from the court.

Black John serves, misses the return. Serves again. It is now just about dark. He settles onto the concrete court, bends to pick up the rackets and spaldeens. Beans bends down with him, to stay within his protection.

Black John inhales the boy's fear, opens his mouth to understand its full dimensions, studies Beans, his damaged face, and begins to open his arms as if to embrace him, then shakes his head angrily, and, taking careful measure, slashes at the boy. The blade opens Beans' jacket sleeve elbow to shoulder, and cuts a shallow, blood-welling crease in his arm.

"Nigger," Black John says.

With his one functioning eye, the boy looks at the flesh of his own hands to make sure, on this day of dying, on this anniversary of his birth, that he is still who he always was.

"Nigger," Black John snarls again.

"This way, come this way quick," one of the colored kids says. Beans hears in the voice that it is not a trap. The circle of his attackers opens for him.

Little Louise is weak from the day's assaults on her sense of decency. First there was that uppity island girl, that coconut. Then that flat-faced boy trying to get her to do the thing, then all those boys unbuttoned. And then this white boy. She is glad that nobody is killed.

"Who-eee," she sighs, loud enough for the boys to hear.

Limping toward the north side of the schoolyard, Beans thinks of Chafetz back on Church Avenue, that he is late for deliveries. He thinks of Amelia chained to the fence, safe there. He thinks of the sin he committed in the Foundy, and of Honoria's terror. But most terrible of all, as he retreats across the yard, half-blind, he begins crying aloud for Larry Doyle, demanding that he intercede.**f**

Aaron Garza

BAPTISM

Juan hands me a swig of warm water from the Dixie cup and watches me hunch over the toilet and vomit.

A week before the fight, you drink three gallons a day and salt your food. You chew dandelion root. You convince your body to piss a lot so that you cut water weight instead of muscle. You cut back on the water two days before the fight and piss the rest away. You jump rope in the sauna.

You chug Metamucil and ex-lax to clear out shit from your intestines. The average fighter carries three pounds. You have to be careful with ex-lax or you'll end up with soggy shorts after the first hard kick.

You weigh in the day before a fight. Make weight and you drink Pedialyte to get your weight back. Fail and you hop in the steam room and run in circles.

A welterweight can weigh in at 170 pounds and fight the next day at 200. But drink too much Pedialyte and you end up hurling it into the toilet before the fight.

Somewhere a doctor asks, "Is he all right?"

My hands seizing the yellow-stained porcelain I'm thinking, "Shouldn't he be asking me?"

Juan tells the doctor, "It's his first time, that's all."

I stand up and Juan gives the doctor his trollface smile and says, "Hit the mitts for a while. Work out the butterflies."

He raises his hands and I paw at the mitts a bit.

The doctor still watching, Juan says, "Harder."

A few more punches and the doctor shrugs and says, "Have a

good fight," and walks out the door.

Juan says, "You dodged a bullet there."

"Oh ok," I respond.

"You'll like it when you do it."

"I'm only doing this one, Juan."

"Just this one," he says.

I'm pissing for a fifth time when the midget in the porkpie hat sticks his fat head through the door and says, "Matamoros, you're up."

He's not really a midget but he's short. Really short. Even for a Mexican short.

"Vamo' Carlito," Juan yells.

He wipes the piss off my gloves with a towel, holds my hands and prays.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be Thy name."

The midget in the porkpie hat barks, "Matamoros. Let's go, you're up."

"Shut the fuck up," Juan yells and then turns back to me and spits on the tile. "Trying to say a fucking prayer here."

He finishes the prayer and the midget leads us out the door.

At the small fights no one gets a robe. No one gets an entourage. No one gets a laser show.

Everyone takes the same 100-foot walk through the crowd, following the midget through the same sweating mass of bodies. Their ears assaulted by the same heavy metal song.

Everything is dark in the arena save for light trailing through thick clouds of cigarette smoke. Spectators float through the smoke like ghosts. I smell body odor, feel pats on my back, and hear the Pentecostal screams of drunken fans standing on their metal lawn chairs. Cigarette butts twinkle in the darkness like stars. Juan and the midget shove people aside as we move.

A dark kid in a wife beater lifts up his Styrofoam beer cup and says, "Orale!" Women with tits the size of small dogs blow kisses

and laugh. A shirtless fat man flexes his muscles while beer and drool trickle down from his chin to his chest, mixing with sweat and body hair to form a frothy mixture the color of semen. He's painted "JUST BLEED" across his stomach. A teenager jumps in front of Juan and sticks his fingers into the air yelling, "Chinga tu madre, cabron!" Juan slaps the kid across the face. The kid rears up, thinks better of it, and skulks away.

In the cage, a man runs his hands along my gloves. He wraps my wrist with blue duct tape and with a sharpie writes, "TDLR" on the tape.

"Good to go," he says.

Tiny red lakes dot the mat forming little symbols along the white canvas. An old man furiously mops them up. The pools stain so much of the canvas that after each tournament the mat has to be resurfaced. Used canvases are burned as bio-waste or bought by rich fans as souvenirs.

Juan smears petroleum jelly onto my face and into my nostrils. Then he pats my back.

The back pat has to be done on the sly. The secret is to leave a bit of petroleum jelly on your gloves when you pat the back. The jelly mixes with your fighter's sweat and makes him slippery. Hard to hold. If the ref catches you doing it, he'll fine your fighter. I'm making $200 for this fight and can't afford the fine. But Juan is a good cutman. He knows just how to do it. I've been there with him when he cornered our father. When our father cornered him.

I'm fighting Diego Garcia. Ten months ago, Diego knocked Juan out in the third round. Scored a beautiful right cross to his chin and then soccer kicked him into oblivion. His nose is still crooked and he's lost peripheral vision in his left eye. This was a few months after our father died.

I was there to watch. There to nurse him back to health. There for the delirium dreams and trembling shoulders. There to clean pillowcases that were always freckled with bloodstains no matter how many times I washed them. The Athletic Commission banned

soccer kicks after the fight.

Juan says I have a better shot at Diego. I'm more technical on the ground. Better with my hands. But I am inexperienced. My first fight and Juan pits me against the guy who knocked him senseless.

Fact is, dad's gym is dying. Juan thinks that beating Diego will bring the gym back to life. Customers are fickle, he says. Lose a fight, everyone leaves. Win a fight and they come back. I should have a warm up fight. I deserve a warm up fight. But Juan says there is no time for a warm up fight. Just do this one, he says. Just this one. You'll save the gym, he says. Make everything like before, he says. You'll be like Jesus, he says.

The entrance music starts up again and Juan says, "Time to turn around."

"Go over the plan again," I say.

"You know the plan."

"Just go over it again."

"Quit being a pussy."

I turn around.

The referee waves his hand at me. He wants me to move to the center of the cage. I walk forward. My left leg gives a bit and I stumble. I regain my balance and wipe the sweat out of my eyes. The ref puts his hand on my shoulder. He's talking. Explaining the rules. Diego bounces back and forth on his toes.

He's a lean 215 pounds. Easily bigger than me. The man knows how to cut. He's darker than I remember him. So dark that his tattoos blend in with his skin. A snake winds its way up from sternum to chin. On his stomach is an image of the Virgin Mary praying. It says, "Perdoname."

The tops of his ears are the size of peach pits and hard as stone. Cauliflower.

What happens is the ear is ground on, or slammed onto a mat, or pulled, or struck. The skin on the outer ear tears off from the cartilage on the inner ear. Blood floods your inner ear and it swells

like a balloon. Then comes pus. If you catch it early, you can stick an eighteen-gauge syringe in your ear and drain it. If you don't, the liquid calcifies and you end up with rotten apricots for ears. Some guys think it's a badge of honor. They'll sit in their rooms at night punching their own ears.

The ref pushes my chest with his hand and says, "Have a good fight."

The tidal wave roar of the crowd washes over me and I back up slowly to my corner. Juan leans over the cage and kisses my cheek and says, "You got it, bro."

I turn around and my eyes meet Diego's for the first time.

Diego moves forward and I hear Juan yelling.

"What?" I shout.

"The bell rang, pendejo! Put your hands up!"

I turn around and Diego's already captured the center. Hands up, I hover toward him as if pushed by some invisible hand. Then I freeze, every muscle in my body taut, rooted into the mat like a tree before Diego's leg kick comes thudding into my thigh, buckling my leg for a moment. Another kick slams into the same spot.

The Muay Thai kick, preferred by MMA fighters, is chambered high, using the force of the hips to carry the full weight of the body through the target. Like swinging a baseball bat. You strike your opponent with your shin. You spend years conditioning your shins on heavy bags or banana trees to make your shins as hard as rock. Muay Thai fighters have been known to bring down trees with their kicks. The preferred target is the sciatic nerve just above the knee.

I circle, working up the nerve to fight back. Diego takes his time. A quick jab, right cross combo. I duck under it. Another leg kick.

To block the low leg kick you raise your knee so that your opponent's kick lands directly onto your upper shin. This is called the shin check. It takes advantage of two rules. First, the rule of physics that when a moving object hits a stationary object the force is transferred primarily onto the moving object. Second, the rule

of physiology that a larger bone can withstand greater force than a smaller bone. The shin check forces your opponent to strike a larger, stronger part of your body and, hopefully, deters him from kicking again.

I know all of this. I've done it in the gym thousands of times. But knowing something and doing something are very different things when a 200-pound man is slamming his shins into you. Another kick followed with a jab and cross and I'm headed straight back against the cage.

I put my hands up and duck my head. I'm cowering as Diego pounds on my head with hooks.

My face is bleeding. My leg is a swollen mass of contusions. My head snaps back and I feel a jolt. But I don't feel pain. I feel impact like drums in my skull. There's a certain rhythmic beauty to the sound of brain striking skull. I cover up and then I'm pummeling my arms under his and hooking his leg for a takedown. I'm on top of him.

This tiny movement – this elementary takedown – wears me out and I lie motionless on Diego, unable to move from panic and fatigue. Vomit wells in my throat. But when the crowd roars into full gear it startles me back into the fight and I throw a glancing punch onto Diego's shoulders. Voices in the crowd roar useless words of encouragement like, "Bite his ear!" Diego's face is smeared in blood. Not his.

I throw another punch and Diego grabs my arm and bridges hard. Then I'm on the bottom again. I reach up to pull him closer to me but he's slippery from the blood and petroleum jelly and I lose my grip. Then, for no reason at all, he lets go of me and stands up. I look up and see Juan rushing in to the ring, bucket and stool in-hand.

Juan sits me down on the stool and slaps an ice pack onto the back of my neck. I shiver from the cold. He shoves the Enswell over my eye, pressing onto the cut. It stings and I move my face away and Juan grabs the back of my head to keep the pressure.

When stopping a bleeding cut, cold and pressure are your friends. First, apply the Enswell from the ice bucket. If that doesn't work, apply adrenaline into the cut with a q-tip so the blood coagulates. Apply petroleum jelly to seal it in.

"Not so bad was it? Great takedown," Juan says. I stare at him.

He says, "When he's coming at you with the leg kick, move forward with the right a la madre and take him down."

He gives me water. I swish it around in my mouth.

"Spit," he says and I drop a bright red stream into the bucket.

He removes the Enswell and jams the q-tip into the cut. The sting is hard and sharp as the adrenaline works its way into the cut.

Juan's yelling directions at me, but I don't hear him until he says, "Stand up."

Time for Round 2.

This time, I hear the bell.

Diego throws a kick, but I'm ready for it. I change levels and secure his legs, then up, up, up in the air he goes and I slam him hard onto the mat. He attempts a guillotine, but fails.

The key to executing a good double leg takedown is in the level change. A lot of fighters, they'll bend at the hips and then shoot in. This lets the defender sprawl and shove your head into the mat, or secure the guillotine choke and end the fight. The secret is to bend at the knees. Let your lead knee hit the ground while you push off with the trail leg. That way, your body remains erect enough to fight off the sprawl, and strong enough to fight off the guillotine. Once you secure the legs, lift up and to the side and slam your opponent into the mat, keeping your head tightly on his body. This is called cutting the corner.

Diego gasps for air and his eyes widen. I bring my forearms crashing down onto his face. It takes him a while to recover. His face is opened up and his blood is mixing with mine and he's scared. I land a solid punch and his head snaps back and hits the mat with a thump leaving a sloshing puddle beneath him. He's

drooling blood. I watch the puddle grow larger.

I move to pass his guard but he's able to stand and recover. He ducks my right cross and hits me with an uppercut, snapping my chin straight up. He follows with a left hook and I move back. My shoulders are lifeless from the hits. I listen to the crack and the crunch of bones and feel warm fluid in my throat and water in my eyes. Ribbons of nose cartilage float around where there used to be one solid mass. I taste rust. Snot pours out of my nose and dribbles onto my chin. It hangs in a long strand before dropping onto my shorts.

I grab Diego but can't take him down. He punches my kidneys and I watch my blood flow down his back. He knees my thighs. He gouges his cauliflowered ear into my eye.

These are the tricks you learn. Let your ear harden and jam it in his eye. Grow your chin stubble out for two days and rub it into his cuts so they bleed out. Run your thumb across his retina during a transition.

My muscles are throbbing and I loosen my grip. His hands wrap the back of my head. He bends me forward and his knee crashes into my cheekbone, smashing it to pieces. A tooth sails through the air and lands on the mat. I go black for a moment and wake up when my face slams into the mat. I'm bowed over on my knees like a penitent, but the ref is inattentive. He didn't see the flash knockout and I'm able to grab Diego's leg, inhaling sweat and hair. I hold on until the bell rings.

"You hit like a pussy," I say as I limp to my corner. My right thigh looks like a watermelon.

Juan sets out the stool and the doctor stands next to us, shining a light in my eyes and asking if I can continue. I nod, but Juan leans close to me.

"You're fucked up, bro," he says, pressing the Enswell onto the golf ball mouse over my eye and massaging my watermelon thigh with his other hand.

"Yah, thanks," I respond.

"Let's end it, man," he says. "You did good."

"Fuck that," I say and I stand up.

"Sientate," he says.

The doctor leaves the cage. Juan shoves gauze into my nostrils. He hands me a bottle of water, but I slap it away and stand again.

The ref says, "Seconds out."

Juan kisses my cheek again and walks out of the cage. He glances back at me and then looks at the ref and walks out. I watch Diego across the cage, his chest heaving, a large cut gashed across his cheek. He stalks side-to-side. His left eye is swollen shut. He stares at me with his open eye and smiles. My face is on fire and I'm desperate with thirst. But I'm ready to fight.

I take the center of the ring and the crowd cheers loudly enough that I can only make out a faint snoring sound from my broken nose. Diego fires off a lazy kick and I charge with a right cross to his chin. He falls down and I get on top of him with a right, but I'm sloppy with it and he tosses me over.

Now he's smashing my face into confetti. My muscles are used up, motionless with fatigue, when he stands and waves me up.

"Get up," he screams.

He shoves me hard against the fence. I try to lift my arms to cover my face, but I feel like I'm carrying sandbags. The fight clock says 10 seconds when then knees start coming. And they come hard.

Nine seconds.

I'm able to cross my arms in front of my face. Diego is weak and most of the knees glance off of my elbows. I spit out my mouthpiece for air and a knee slams my jaw shut onto my left cheek. The hole in my cheek is big enough to stick two fingers into. But I don't dare tongue it.

Eight seconds.

I swallow, my saliva the texture of syrup.

Seven seconds.

Lightning flashes shatter the darkness of the crowd. I hear

thunder and the sound of firecrackers as my forearm snaps in half.

Six seconds.

More knees breach my forearms and land thudding onto my forehead. They carve rivers into my face. Red clouds form and disappear again. They sparkle in the lights.

Five seconds.

Blood and snot gush down my throat, salty and hot. A knee crashes into my ear, bursting a hematoma and sending a spray of crimson onto Diego's shorts. My knees wobble. I look at Juan. He's frantically climbing the fence.

Four seconds.

Diego grunts with effort, desperate to finish the fight. I stay planted. Juan is on top of the cage. The midget is yanking his shirt, trying to pull him down. Juan raises his arm, towel in hand.

I shove Diego back. It's not a hard shove, but it's enough to show Juan that I'm still in the fight.

Three seconds.

I'm flailing. Keeping busy. A knee rocks my chin and then blackness.

I'm strapped to a stretcher when I wake up. Juan caresses my head and an EMT says, "How many fingers am I holding up? What day is it?" A small crowd gathers outside. They're yelling "Good job!" A child's worried voice says, "Va a morir, papa?"

I raise my thumb and the crowd cheers. A man attempts a high five but Juan stops him.

"Do you know who the President is?" the EMT asks.

"Reagan?" I say and fall asleep.

I wake up in a hospital bed. Juan is talking to the doctor. There's an IV in my thigh draining out blood and pus. Another one needled into my arm for dehydration. My arm is wrapped in plaster to the elbow. The stitches in my mouth itch.

Juan sits next to my bed.

"Don't sleep," Juan says. "You'll puke."

He says, "Just stay awake for a little bit."

"Ok."

"You did good," he says.

"I lost."

"You lasted," he says.

My head is throbbing. The room is filled with thousands of little black flies. I see birds flopping around in the corner. I reach for them but Juan grabs my arm and lays it back down.

He creeps around the room as if he doesn't want to startle me.

"I'm sorry," Juan says. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right."

Juan kneels next to my bed, his head in his hands. He lays one hand on my head and kisses my cheek just above the gauze wrap.

"I wanted to stop the fight," he tells me.

"Why?" I ask.

"You were hurt."

"No," I say. "I feel good." **f**

1ST ANNUAL NONFICTION PRIZE JUDGED BY JUDITH KITCHEN

WINNER: "WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT LOVE, WE LEARN FROM QUARRIES" BY SEAN PRENTISS

This essay is innovative in its use of narrator—the present-tense presence behind the past-tense story, the person who can assess the fallout from one evening long ago. By substituting "boy" and "girl" and "girlfriend" for the more personal triangle, the piece takes its place in the universal, becoming a kind of individual myth. And, to underscore this point, the descriptions themselves take on mythic proportions.

RUNNER-UP: "IN PURSUIT OF" BY J.D. LEWIS

A fascinating use of a Nick Flynn-like device to "pursue" the meanings of pursuit. The ever-changing nuances of definition play well against the deepening sense that the elusive is likely to keep on eluding. And the story behind the game of Trivial Pursuit is fascinating, and well imagined.

Sean Prentiss

WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT LOVE, WE LEARN FROM QUARRIES

Characters:

The boy = a twenty year old boy from Bangor, Pennsylvania
The girl = a nineteen year old girl from Bangor, Pennsylvania
The girlfriend = the boy's nineteen year old girlfriend from Bangor, Pennsylvania
This narrator = a thirty-six year old writer
The quarry = a flooded and abandoned slate quarry outside Bangor, Pennsylvania

I.

The boy and the girl, recent graduates from Bangor High School, stumble drunkenly down a midnight road that is so old that it has faded into a two-track that leads from downtown Bangor, Pennsylvania, with its 6,000 people, to a slate quarry that has been abandoned for so many decades—decades and decades and decades—that the boy and the girl know the quarry only as a reservoir (with such dark water). The boy and the girl can't imagine this pit as a working quarry, dry with rock cliffs exposed for hundreds of feet. The boy and the girl cannot image hundreds of workers hauling up block after block of slate to Earth's surface.

On this night, the girlfriend is at her apartment less than a mile from the quarry. The girlfriend wanted to stay home tonight—rest for work tomorrow. But the boy, scarecrow thin, wants (like all boys from Bangor) the quarry over sleep (or anything else really). The girl at the boy's side has swaying hips, a farmer's daughter's soft face, a stomach pushing gently against a white tee shirt. These are also things the boy wants over sleep.

II.

The moon—low in the east and waning an orange like Bangor's autumn leaves or a broken down '76 International Scout pickup—is an eighth full, two days till new. Without looking at watches, the boy and the girl know that it is the time of night where they should say an awkward goodbye, a goodbye that means tonight was nothing. The girl should break free from the dark woods, find her car—a Chrysler K Car, drive Ridge Road home—drunkenly swerving the yellow line, park in her parent's driveway—tires on the grass. The boy should walk to his girlfriend's $250 a month apartment, see if she is still awake. If so, the boy should drag the girlfriend to bed, hold her tighter than any other night, leaving the fewest eddies of space.

But this is Bangor, a trembling town of cornfields, cow pastures, dark hollows, abandoned quarries and—spread across this landscape—so many factories that have been closed for so many years that them ever producing anything seems like a myth in this town with a single grocery store, Bangor Market, one meat market, Pyshers, and more bars than the boy or this narrator can count (but they try)—Ziggy's Hidden Valley, the Oak and Maple, Five Points, the Richmond, the Republican Club, O'Neil's, the Rod and Gun Club, the Red Geranium, TJ's, Market Street, the Colonial, the Scorecard, Jax, Frank's, Jewell's, the Overlook, Augie's, and others, so many others.

III.

After fifteen minutes of walking, the boy and the girl reach the quarry's edge. The boy gazes at the water (smooth and unbroken), at trees leaning over the quarry, casting shadows, breaking apart the glow of Bangor's lights—a dim, evaporating burn.

IV.

Ringing the quarry are narrow trails—newer than the two-track the boy and the girl walked in on—overrun by hungry weeds. Alongside these trails lay rain-soaked, empty cases of beer—Pabst and Busch,

Bud and Miller, Schlitz and their local beer Yuengling. Some beer boxes new and shiny from the last few nights. Others with the colors bled. Crumpled cans. Broken bottles. Torn grocery bags. Empty GPC cigarette packs.

High school boys (like our boy) use these trails to reach the higher places from which to dive into the quarry. As these boys dive the ten or thirty or sixty feet to the hard water, they look more beautiful than at any other moment in their lives. Controlled and muscular and perfect in their fall.

V.

Standing with his feet at the edge of the quarry, the boy is trying to make decisions. There is the girlfriend at her apartment, the girl beside the boy, the quarry's cold water. If the boy were to ask this narrator for advice, this narrator has no idea what advice he would give. Not one idea. What to tell him? What best to do?

But that's not true. This narrator is just afraid to give advice since he knows and understands the lessons of the past and the lessons from the stretching future; this narrator knows what tonight can become.

VI.

The girl (without thought—or maybe she's contemplated this moment forever) pulls her tee shirt over her head, reaches behind her back and unclasps her bra. The boy stares at the girl's breasts as if they are stars (except these—tonight—never seem to fade). Wiggling her hips, the girl slides her legs out of jeans and white panties. Her clothes become autumn leaves scattered across the ground.

VII.

Before the boy realizes what is happening—while still clothed and standing on the edge of the quarry—the girl runs toward the quarry. She is running and running and at the quarry's edge, she jumps and as she jumps, she transforms into an ash-white angel (an honest

to god angel). The angel-girl is flying—taking to the air—flying. Becoming air itself.

VIII.

As the naked angel-girl flaps her arm-wings, this narrator understands (even if the boy and the girl cannot) why she is trying to fly. Desperate to escape Bangor, its gone-wrong prayers (the hundreds of jobs that have fled the region, the drunks leaning over long oak bars, the sputtering American-made cars driving potholed roads). The angel-girl is trying to fly away from the once-tan-now-cement-gray duplexes filled with soft-cushioned sofas and smoke-stained ceilings. The angel-girl is trying to carry herself from the arms of the earthbound boy who will grab at her in mere moments because the earthbound boy has needs just as the girl has needs. But these needs have nothing to do with each other.

And this narrator also knows (even if the boy and girl do not, or cannot) that no matter how hard the angel-girl swings her arms, they can never be wings. She can never be an angel. She can only be—forever—a girl from Bangor, Pennsylvania.

IX.

The girl, now treading quarry water, acts as if not everything has fallen apart, not everything has fallen.

X.

Because the girl is so beautiful (and waiting), the boy, he too tears off his clothes. Throws his tee shirt onto a right angle rock. Army shorts onto a bush. American flag boxers tossed next to shoes. Maybe he'll find them later. Maybe he won't.

XI.

Once the boy breaks the surface of the quarry, he is lucky because the girl needs nothing (not one single thing) to convince her that the boy (this very boy) is the boy to take her places she has never

been—places she may never go. Maybe not out of Bangor, but somehow (if only on this dark-mooned night) so much further. Without a single pickup line from the boy, the girl kisses the boy (tonguing her desperation). The boy kisses back his own needs (and they are extensive).

This kiss threatens to flame from the lips of the boy and the girl to the surrounding trees—catching those elms and maples and oaks on fire. The fire spreading from the canopies to downtown Bangor. Threatening to burn this town to the very ground.

XII.

But if the boy could see even three hours into the future (like this narrator can), the boy would see the kiss flaming out, the thinnest strand of smoke wisping toward our stars.

XIII.

And this narrator, he wonders, during this quarry night—and the decade and a half of nights to follow, if, say, somehow tonight's sky shifts back to being just any night sky and the moon, if it continues to arc across the blackness, could the boy not see that tomorrow will still be just like tonight, but without the girl, without the quarry? Is this what it means to be from Bangor? Everything the same (groping from inside a darkened closet for the door knob), day after day after day—the same angry mothers at home. —The same fathers driving home drunk from bar. —The same boys searching for any girl. —The same girls searching for a boy to take them from Bangor.

XIV.

Because the water is cold (barely fifty degrees), the girl and the boy climb from the quarry. Once on hard ground, the girl wastes no time (because in Bangor there are so few moments of magic). She lies on her back—she will have the scrapes to prove it—on a massive block of slate.

At one point, this block (this very one) would have become roof shingles for a farm house on Upper Mud Run Road or a blackboard that their high school teachers would still use to show the Pythagorean theorem. But tonight this rock serves as a bed. The girl on her back (staring at the cresting moon) with her wet hair spread across the rock like rays of a dawn sun. The girl raises her arms upward—reaching for the very moon itself (trying to catch and hold it).

XV.

This narrator remembers (so clearly, though fifteen years ago) that the girl, her hair was the (exact) color of this moon.

XVI.

The boy (naked and dripping wet) sees this all as if from a great distance—as if he is still in the quarry, or standing high on the cliffs above, or on the rooftop of a Bangor building, or, somehow, he is flying where only ravens and angel-girls fly. (With eyes closed) the boy tries to memorize everything (everything, and again, everything) about this moment (the contrast of the girl's skin against the slate, the way her breasts arc off her chest, the way the bony moonlight filters through the trees) because come morning the boy will need something to push him toward sleep.

This narrator too (for so many reasons) also tries to remember (also from a great distance) everything from this quarry night. But for this narrator, the memories seem more like shattered glass—fragmented and hard to piece back together and too often cutting.

XVII.

The boy on his knees (getting nicked and cut like the girl's back). The boy wishing (almost praying) that scars lasted forever (*Like sin*, the boy thinks) (*Like memory*, this narrator thinks).

XVIII.

The boy and the girl kiss so passionately that it feels as if come tomorrow morning (a Sunday, the beginning of a new week), the boy and the girl will toss a single duffel holding everything they will ever need (and almost everything they own) into the rear of the boy's '78 Chevy Monza. They will leave behind everything (her job serving ice cream, his job washing cars, his girlfriend, even this quarry). They will hit the dew-dark asphalt with dreams of not a single breakdown until the boy and the girl drive past the cement plants of Northampton, the garment factories of Palmer, the steel mills of Bethlehem thirty miles (so far) away.

But there are no roads that leave this town, and if there were, there'd be no cars that could make it far enough—our roads are littered with late model Fords and Chevys and Dodges (with blown trannies and thrown rods and melted engine blocks).

XIX.

High above the boy and the girl (who just an hour ago was an angel, a near-perfect angel), stars shimmer and flicker over this region of deep deciduous trees. On the earth, small never-named creeks gurgle (like a grandmother gasping for a final breath of good air) while fields of corn sway in a mid-summer's night breeze.

Intermixed among these farms, factories spread: Ingersoll Rand, Crayola, Mars and Mars, Display Workshop, TechoBloc, Pennsylvania Power and Light, BASF, Hoffman LaRouche, Cappozzollo Slate Company, Bethlehem Steel, Met Ed, Dixie, Alpha Cement, Kavler Plastics, Martin Guitars, Merry Maid, Majestic Garments. This list is the beginning of a stanza of factories that could run seven pages long (or eight, or nine, or more, more).

XX.

This narrator thinks (from years in the future) that if Bangor were the night sky and our factories and bars were stars, then our nights would be filled with so many (sad and stumbling) constellations. And every myth would be one of sadness.

XXI.

On their temporary slate bed (or in any bed, no matter how soft), neither the boy nor the girl knows how to make love. No one teaches boys and girls from Bangor, Pennsylvania how to love. It's as unneeded as a sixth finger chopped off at birth.

What boys and girls learn about love, they learn from the backseats of silver Honda hatchbacks (where to fold their knees), in the back corners of red barns (how to find room beside bales of hay), from grassy yards (how to keep their jeans knees clean). What we learn about love, we learn from abandoned quarries during dark summer nights.

XXII.

This narrator thinks that he could read books and books about love for the rest of his life (and he has), but still, he too, would never understand love (what it is, or how to make it).

The boy and the girl think it has something to do with bucking and grinding and then kissing softer (much softer) afterward. (This narrator thinks that they might be onto something.)

XXIII.

If the boy could look into the future—past this one night (as this narrator can)—the boy would see the girl married—three years later cheating on her husband—then divorced. The boy would see his girlfriend a year from now (well after the boy and the girlfriend have broken up, and after she learns of tonight) sleeping with the girl's future-husband, then marrying a man with many DUIs.

The boy, if he could see into his future, he would see himself running through women like June rain until, well, until he decides that maybe he knows nothing (nothing at all) about love, and so he decides to just stop trying. He just stops.

XXIV.

And the girlfriend, she is in her apartment waiting in her big bed for the boy—whom she knows (or soon enough will) is off fucking the girl. While waiting, the girlfriend turns and turns under sticky summer sheets (like a clock—rolling like the seconds, feeling like the hours).

If the girlfriend were to get up from bed (which she does and does and does) and look out her window (she stares into the swallowing night), she would see the very trees that the two-track road snakes through—where the boy and the girl walked many hours ago. But at this moment the trees are a wall of black—trunks and branches and broad leaves. The girlfriend would think, *There is not a single findable path into that forest at this hour*. She would think, *Wait till dawn*. She would think, *Why does nothing ever change in Bangor*.

Come earliest morning—after the boy staggers from the woods and finds a home in the girlfriend's bed, after he kisses her a latest goodnight or an earliest good morning, the boy'll be surprised to find that his girlfriend isn't angry. Just sad. As if she expected this all along. Something just like this. Her sadness will hurt worse than the boy expected. And the girlfriend will say one thing, and that one thing will be the worst thing the boy can imagine. She'll say it again.

XXV.

The ethereal glow of Bangor—a quarter mile from the quarry—is as pale as the girl's hips and breasts, or the moon, though the moon has now fallen against the western horizon—against our craggy Kittatinny hills.

XXVI.

At the quarry, the boy and the girl finish with whatever they had been doing. With everything done, the world has changed (though Bangor's streetlights still burn out one at a time and the moon casts off its bony light and the girlfriend still rolls in her bed). The boy climbs off of the girl and searches for something to cover all he is exposing.

The girl, she awkwardly slides into jeans, pushing panties in a pocket. Once dressed, the girl gazes toward Bangor, a town crumbling almost noticeably before her very eyes. If the girl knew what a metaphor was, she'd wonder if the crumbling town equaled love and the quarry equaled her future. But boys and girls from Bangor never learn of metaphors. It would be just one more thing to break a heart.

Without any thought to his future (except maybe tomorrow morning and finding a way to get back into the good graces of his girlfriend), our boy stares glassy eyed and tired (hung over or still drunk) at this quarry diving so deeply into this eastern Pennsylvania earth that its water is as blue-black as midnight (or a raven) (or a fresh bruise).

XXVII.

And this narrator, what of him? What of him?

He is in his mid-thirties and is standing (still after all these years) on the edge of the quarry (see him—There!—that thin shadow in those dark trees). This narrator has stood beside the quarry for the past fifteen years (since the night of the boy and the girl). During the intervening years (and years and years), this narrator has seen near a thousand (or maybe a million) boys and girls (all from Bangor, Pennsylvania) come to the midnight quarry (this very quarry). Each and every boy and each and every girl searching for the same thing. The exact same thing.

And during every night of his waiting, this narrator prays for the cold waters to whisper to him secrets and secrets and secrets about any of the secrets of love because so far he has not learned nearly enough (or really even a single goddamned thing).

XXVIII.

And the quarry? What of it?

It is (always—forever and ever) deep and dark and silent and oh so cold. **f**

J.D. Lewis

IN PURSUIT OF

The Indiana house I grew up in, which sits at the end of a cul-de-sac on a hill about a mile from the Ohio River, is on sale for $99,000. It's a deal, down from $108,000, or so says the Internet. I can see from the photos that the people who bought my childhood home ten years ago have been very busy uglying it up: they've torn down walls and the bookshelves my father built into them, they've painted the upstairs teal – teal – they've put blood red carpeting in what to us was our studio, where the pianos were kept, where the Christmas tree crouched every year, our need for the most massive tree on the lot always stuffed up and straining against the limits of our ceilings. These people decorated our patio with faux-stone angels holding bunches of plastic flowers and what appears to be a bridal arch to nowhere. Even the heavy brown front door, which never closed quite right so we lined it with duct tape in winter, is gone. Looking at these pictures is like drumming frozen spoons against my eyelids.

The house isn't really even a house, not like the Indiana houses my friends grew up in, split-leveled or with yards fenced in. It's a condo. We shared a wall with a man named Joe who ran a tavern outside of town and whose blonde, horsey daughter visited every other weekend. There is a community pool. Someone else mows all the lawns. Aside from ours, the only condos I knew about as a kid were in Florida, but since my parents hated the heat we never went there.

Is there an Antarctic Circle?

(No.)

Ten miles away from our house, a town called Chandler hunkers in the bean fields. When we were small we called it Chan-

Dog. Or my mother did, the distain in her voice molasses over the word; my mother hated Chandler because her mother lived there. My mother hated Chandler because my mother hated her mother, or something like that, for most of my childhood, though eventually they became friends, but which is why now that I'm grown I still only have passing acquaintance with this orange-rinsed pear of an old lady who hosts Quilting Tuesdays in a brick house with a view of the Chandler Tastee Freeze.

Before the feud, we must have spent plenty of weekends at Gramma's, but all I can pull back now is the sad-eyed Jesus on the spare bedroom wall, my sister's warning shin-kicks under the pocked covers if I rolled too close, runny yellow eggs on square-cut toast that we had to finish before we could put a penny in the real gumball machine in the living room. A foggy image of a decorative spoon collection hung carefully above an organ. Gramma's sour Gramma smell. I thought she stood on the porch and held her arms out for hours before our car pulled into her driveway.

What's Bermuda's biggest island?

(Bermuda.)

Growing up in our Indiana meant we could spit across the Ohio River and hit Kentucky. We could nap in the back seats of our daddies' Fords, stretch awake in Illinois, and still be back to town by supper time. The tri-state area was our birthright, the world. We didn't, we couldn't have, known then that we would not understand that *ours* is something slippery and alive until we finally left. Until we came back.

To pursue: to chase, to follow. Also, to badger. To bait. To bird-dog, bug, camp on the doorstep of, dog, fish, give chase, go after. To harass, harry, haunt, hound, hunt, hunt down, nose around, persevere, persist, to plague, to plague, to plague, to plague, play catch up, poke around, prowl after, ride, run after, run down, scout out, search for, search high heaven, search out, seek, shadow, stalk, tag, tail, take out after, trace. To track down.

Ten years after I leave for good, I come back. I'm driving to Gramma's house in Chandler when my right leg seizes up. My feet go cold – that's really a thing that happens – and my head balloons away from my body. I can't swallow. The morning sun scalds in the rear view. My foot marionettes from the gas pedal to the brake, the gas, the brake. Mine is the only car on a six-lane expressway, the taking of which should be saving me twenty minutes of back roads driving, but instead I have to pull into one of my hometown's specialty pre-fab subdivisions, Deer Stone Creek or Lakewood Quail Crossing or Autumn Hills, and sit behind the wheel lighting cigarettes with the ends of other cigarettes until my hands stop moving on their own.

I have never had a panic attack. I don't know if this is one.

What state was Howdy Doody born in?

(Texas.)

This should have been easy. I learned to drive on these roads, their shoulders winging out all calm and Midwestern and lined with corn, telephone poles. But in the decade I've been gone, the town has twisted in on itself, grown into something I don't recognize. A Starbucks by the high school edges out the Donut Bank where my dad once ordered sugary coffee at the drive-thru. A shiny new Wal-Mart clogs the intersection near my childhood house. Every "Baby-on-Board" bumper sticker causes reflexive, unsubtle peering at the drivers to see if anyone I used to know has gotten knocked up.

And I know I'm different too. For one thing, the reptilian circle of my brain surprise-horked up an extremely inconvenient driving phobia a few years back. My cheerful sport of a husband has driven us all the way from Iowa because of this. But I had to come back, finally, because Gramma has a storage shed in her backyard that my mother has told me contains all the stuff she didn't throw away when she sold our house to the people who put in red carpeting and painted the upstairs teal. And I'd thought that my town would have stayed the same enough that I could drive the last part, at least, the familiar road from where I grew up to where all my stuff is, and

also I suppose to Gramma, and parked on this anonymous street it doesn't seem fair at all that the stupid road I'm trying to drive on is also the road to the cemetery where my father is buried, but instead of going ahead and driving on it I am sitting here with my knees pressed against the steering wheel, thinking things like:

What did Victorian women try to enlarge by bathing in strawberries?

(Their breasts.)

This being a habit. A safety valve. Two beefy blonde children chuck basketballs at each others' heads in the next driveway over, and they could be my old friends' little brothers. My old neighbors. Kids from my old school bus, #61. Their tinny voices scrape over me like a warm trowel, tamping the wheel of obsessive thought underground. All of this should be mine. None of this is mine. All of this should be mine enough at least that I don't have to sit here and shake. It's not. It doesn't matter. It does.

What color is the mythical unicorn?

(Duh. White.)

After a slow quarter hour or so, I uncurl, pull the car back onto the expressway. I grit my teeth and finish the drive, stopping at my mother's apartment to pick her up, as we'd planned. I breathe. I mutter to myself.

What western state covers 158,693 square miles?

(California.)

What enclave's name means "fragrant port" in Chinese?

(Hong Kong.)

This trivia thing bloomed early, a direct descendant of the nagging feeling, growing in me like a tumor for years, that I have lost something very important and that I have to get it back. There's no real logic here; I want to believe that these small truths about the world can somehow help me find what's missing, so I do. At first, I fed it from the tall, unsteady stack of games in the corner of my living room: two copies of Trivial Pursuit (the Genus Edition),

Trivial Pursuit (the Welcome to America Edition), Trivial Pursuit (the Baby Boomer Edition), Trivial Pursuit (the Vintage Years), the Genus II card set, Trivial Pursuit (the 90's Edition), and Trivial Pursuit (the 25th Anniversary Edition). But I soon found I wanted more than what I had in front of me, and I imagined there was some beating heart inside the questions that I could claim for my own.

Everything begins somehow, after all.

So, I started digging, and I know now that the most famous story is probably the true one: It was 1979, it was December. An almost-balmy day in Montreal, just above freezing. In the fading gray of daylight, a news photo editor named Chris and his wife Sarah walked the four blocks to the grocery store and left their young son with a sportswriter named Scott who often spent weekends at the couple's house. Maybe husband and wife each carried a brown paper bag, maybe the green wig of a bunch of carrots poked out of Sarah's, maybe they held each others' elbows to keep from sliding on the drippy ice rink of the sidewalk. They passed a variety store and Chris stopped short. A red box in the window. Scrabble, a new set, not missing letters like the one at home, one they could surprise Scott with and play and drink beer to all night long.

"I got to get it," Chris said to Sarah. "I got to get it." The game cost twelve dollars. It was too much. Chris bought it anyway. Wind tickled their scarved faces and naked tree branches scritched windowpanes as they passed by with their heads down. Home was warm and yellow.

Years later, Chris would tell a judge that It was like this. It will be unclear whether the grammatical problems with his statement are Chris' or the court typist's.

> *Scott was sitting there reading the Gazette at the kitchen table and we through the groceries down and I had the Scrabble game was in a brown paper bag and I pulled it out and said Scott I bought a Scrabble game and I dropped it on the table in front of him and I stood back and I said dame it you know that got to be the forth or fifth game of Scrabble*

I bought there must be a whole lot of money in board games and he sort of mumbled and I said ah, Scott we ought to invent a game.

Maybe Sarah wore a red apron and scrubbed blue potatoes for dinner. Or she left the kitchen to check on the child sleeping upstairs. She opened a Labatt, or a Bud Light, and slumped down in a chair across from the men, worn out from working the morning shift at the community clinic.

What would it be about and grunting and this is how Scott behaves and this is his little ... and he immediately said "grunting" I don't know Horn [Chris' nickname], Trivia, like that and I said Trivia yea why not, I don't any trivia games out on the market, yea let's d a trivial game.

And so I said Scott beer and he said sure Horn. So I turn around to the fridge and I grabbed out two bottles of beer and opened them up and as I turn around I said Scott why don't you and immediately Scott had already gotten a piece of paper out and he was drawing a circle, I said oh what are you do there?

Ah, you know something different.

December 15, 1979, no snow fell on Montreal. On Chris, on his tendency to twirl the ends of his handlebar mustache. On Scott, living in Chris and Sarah's spare room. "Bohemian types" a later investor might call them. "Types" to whom one might think twice about giving credit. Both men were known for their pinball and shuffleboard skills at the taverns they frequented over lunch, after work, on the weekends.

"Okay. Now."

Forty-five minutes passed. Shaggy brown heads bent over scraggly ink drawings, an emerging wagon-wheel design, a carbonated bubble of excitement floating up a river of empties. What to call it? Trivia. Pursuing Trivia. Trivia Game. The Pursuit of Trivia. Trivia Pursuit. Days later, Sarah suggested adding an "l" to the title and Trivial Pursuit was born.

The next two years must have been a blur: Find investors. Find money. Prototype. Will it sell? Question-writing retreat, let's go to Spain. Turns out Chris can't fly, can't make himself get on a plane without panicking. So, take a boat. Find the market. Baby boomers. Baby boomers. Near-bankruptcy. Six thousand, six thousand questions, how much trivia? Six thousand. Okay. So.

My mother and I pull into Gramma's driveway before noon. We're in Mom's big Dodge, going twenty miles an hour until finally. She says she understands being afraid of driving unfamiliar roads, she collapses her face into sympathy for me. I can't figure out how to say the roads aren't unfamiliar, really. That I'm not afraid, exactly.

Gramma is a little smaller than I remembered, a little plumper around the middle. She stands on the porch with her arms out like a bird in flight. Orange-brown hair and in the wood-paneled sitting room Jesus still stares down from his cross.

Mom brushes past Gramma's arms into the garage, where she plucks a few rolls of toilet paper from a bulk-bought hoard.

"Can I have this stuff?" No hello necessary for them.

"It's all yers, Honey. You have it. More in the back." She's got a drawl I had forgotten about, a little country twang. I take the hug, giving one shoulder and what smile I paste on. Her eyes are watery and rimmed in red.

The storage shed, squat in the backyard like a gargoyle, has its doors flung wide already. A thousand boxes wilt in the cave of its belly. Gramma gives me a pair of gardening gloves and asks me again if I want coffee. I can see she is trying very hard to stay out of my way; she shows me how to use the leaf blower to blast away spider nests, then retreats to the patio with Mom, whose major purpose in accompanying me here is to buffer our blood-related strangerness, while I probe what remains of ours in the shed.

I begin to dig. I find: my ice-blue one-shoulder prom dress balled up on top of a pile of moldy shoes. I find: files, mortgage notices, haphazardly scrawled budgets. Books nobody wanted when

Mom lost the house to the teal people and nobody still wants. I find things I am not looking for. I find a box crammed with books that were once both rare and valuable but have moldered so long in this shed they've grown worthless. My parents' records. Letters from my late aunt. My sister's container of ex-boyfriend trinkets. My color guard sweatshirts, one for each year of high school marching band.

How many nibbles are there in a byte?

(Two.)

I will spend three days sweating onto the rotted floor of that shed. I will open every single box. I will remember things: how hastily my sister and I packed our rooms up on a weekend home from college, which is why magazines and stuffed animals and ribbons and sketchbooks tumble from the same cartons; my teenage rage, so much of it meticulously recorded into notebook after notebook in language that still makes me blush; how I clung to the wooden rifle I twirled in the marching band like it was a buoy. I will remember the way the world collapsed when my father died after his long dance with cancer. And being eleven, slowly warming to the terrible knowledge that nothing would ever quite fit again. By the end of the first day I realize that I am here looking for artifacts of the shimmery childhood I half-remember from before. That I'm looking for pieces of my father. For proof that he was once mine.

I find a box stuffed with birthday and Mother's Day and Christmas cards, from mother to sister, father to mother, sisters to Mom and Dad. A Valentine's Day card to my sister and me, signed, weirdly, 'Daddy (Greg)', and of which I have no memory, says 'You are Very Special to Me' in Braille, probably an effort to expand our little horizons, his favorite parental chore. I find a red velvet ring box containing, I swear, my sister's crumbling umbilical stump, which Mom promises is not alone in the shed. (Sadly, mine never materializes.) A tarnished silver tea set. A red painting of a French horn by my father's artist father, a grandfather I never knew. Green Day and Rage Against the Machine CDs from the early 90s. Cassette tapes with hilariously era-specific track listings. Against the back

wall of the shed, the oak dining table Dad built, at which we were required to sit and eat dinner for no fewer than twenty minutes every night.

What kind of bird is a brant?

(A goose.)

Because the famous story is probably true, it's unlikely that the whole thing happened this way: It was 1979, it was November. A man named David and a man named Donnie sat facing each other at the Peridot Beverage Room in Sydney River, Nova Scotia. Deer heads glowered down at them, the waitress with the long legs had gone on break, they'd sucked their beers to foam in their glasses. They wandered out into a gray afternoon mist, two nineteen-year-olds sticking out their thumbs on the two-lane highway across from the Peridot, alone until a mottle-faced man in a black truck slowed up onto the shoulder.

"Goina Blackett's Lake," they said. "Friends there."

In Nova Scotia in November, it's a strain for black shapes to cut the fog, the color stripped out of the landscape as if all the world were a darkroom. Cold but not too cold. Blackett's Lake was one of many lakes, their friends some of many friends, the friends who stayed home after high school, the friends whose fathers owned the businesses they'd own someday or the friends whose fathers made them pay rent for their basement rooms. Blackett's Lake, the Peridot, the monotonous gray.

At some point Donnie said, "Hey, you know my buddy Wayne's got some hash," and David said, "Boss" and so they walked from Blackett's Lake to Wayne's starter-home two bedroom, but Wayne wasn't home, Wayne was out with his pretty fiancée, Marie. David and Donnie circled the house and Donnie found a window that wasn't locked. They squirreled their skinny bodies into the living room to wait for Wayne.

Wayne's record collection. Emerson, Lake and Palmer; T-Rex; Aerosmith; the Sex Pistols; Television; Blondie. They laid knobby spines on the orange shag rug and passed a flask of Black Velvet

back and forth until Wayne and Marie scooted up the darkening driveway holding hands. The door swung inward.

"What the hell?"

"Wayne. Get. Them. Out." Marie stage-whispering. "How did you even get in here?"

And Wayne, "Donnie, who's this guy?"

Marie's irritation made David squirm, him a stranger, but maybe Donnie said, "It's cool" and pulled a book of rolling papers out of his jeans. Marie might have glared at them both and disappeared to the back bedroom, Wayne sighing as he retrieved the cigar box where he kept his weed from behind the floor speaker.

What we know is they smoked a joint and shot the shit and didn't stay long. But that maybe they stayed long enough for Wayne to say, "What if you had a million dollars," to which Donnie would have rolled his eyes and said, "Oh, God, don't get David started," but David would have already started.

"A million? How about ten million? I've got this idea, it's really hot, it's big. You want a piece of this." Hefted himself into a sitting position. "Check it. A game. Questions and answers, based on facts. Like, 'Who was the star of Leave it to Beaver?' or 'How many American states' names end in the letter 'a'?' I'm telling you, this is gonna be huge."

Did Wayne and Donnie exchange cynical glances? Did Wayne look at his watch? "Sure, David."

"What else you invented today, David?"

"Hey, look, nice seeing you guys but Marie's really pissy, you gotta get out of here."

David's chest would have deflated but he and Donnie would have stood to go. Their friends were waiting for them back at the Peridot anyway, sayonara, thanks for the smoke. Their shoes left clefts in the muddy driveway, and when they reached the highway they scuffed their sneakers on the asphalt and stuck their thumbs into the foggy dark.

To pursue: to persist, to persevere. Again, to apply oneself, to carry on, to conduct. To continue, cultivate, engage in, hold to, keep on, maintain, perform, ply, practice, proceed, prosecute, see through, tackle, wage, work at. It is the opposite of giving up.

It probably wasn't, but it could have been like this: as David and Donnie walked down the highway together, stoned and damp, a black sedan pulled up beside them. Both men climbed into the back seat for reasons they couldn't remember later. The driver had dark hair and the driver said his name was Chris.

Ten minutes stood between Wayne's house and the Peridot. Chris said he was in town from Montreal for his little brother's hockey tournament. Chris said he was an entrepreneur.

David said, "Well."

David said, "Have I got a good idea for a game that'll sell millions" and Donnie sighed and looked out the window. The driver didn't laugh at David, though. Instead, the driver got very interested.

"Okay, yeah, I'll tell you but it's mine, it's my idea and it's my game, okay? Okay? No shit? Okay. It's like this..."

Soon Chris had pulled into the Irving Service Station and grabbed a pad of paper from the glove box. David leaned into the front seat and spoke quickly, his ideas tumbling out faster than his tongue could move.

"So it's like a circle, the board is, with different slices to it, I thought of that 'cause I was thinking about eating my Nana's blueberry pie, she makes this amazing pie, and so I thought, pieces of pie, you know? And there would be different categories, it'd be like the whole of human knowledge, right – " and Chris drew and took notes, asked questions.

Donnie eventually got out to take a leak behind the gas station, wandered around for a few minutes, stretched his legs. When he came back to the car his friend and the driver didn't notice him. "What'll we call it? Trivia Game, Pursuing Trivia?" Donnie, itching

to get back to the Peridot, piped up from the backseat: "How 'bout Trivial Pursuit. Okay? Now let's go."

David turned to stare at Donnie with wide eyes. It was perfect.

"That right there's gonna make you a million bucks, man. A million bucks."

And the driver dropped them at the Peridot and David did or did not tell the friends who waited there about the hitchhiking encounter and presumably the driver went back to Montreal and his wife Sarah and his friend Scott and stole the only important idea David had ever had.

For how much money did Hasbro buy the rights to Trivial Pursuit in 2008?

($80 million)

My mother is treating the shed trip like a holy expedition. From the patio, she keeps peering up earnestly from under her thin blonde hair to remind me that anything I find in the shed I can have, that it's just as much mine as hers or anyone's.

I want to take her literally, so I take everything. I take things I don't even want but don't want anyone else to have, like a little tray painted with a cartoon of a man whose lower half is a keyboard. None of it feels like it's mine, like it ever was. In the must of the little building, it seems that all the people who owned these things have been dead a long time.

What is harpaxophobia better known as?

(Fear of being robbed.)

On the third day, a tall box sagging behind a veil of spiderwebs coughs up Pictionary, a game called Huggermugger with a picture of a frog riding a bicycle on the front, another called 221 B Baker Street that Mom says my father had loved. I drag this box into the yard and bend gingerly into it. My father's handwriting crawls across scorecards. My sister's. I don't see my own. One by one, I pluck out the board games I want to take back to Iowa with me, though I know that when my husband sees the haul, he will consider the

leaning tower of Trivial Pursuit already piled up at home and roll his eyes.

At the bottom of the pile, I find the anchor, the original Trivial Pursuit. The one my parents played after dinner with their musician friends like bespectacled bassoonist Ed, and Bev, his round chuckle of a wife. Guests would sit in folding chairs and pass salad around the table that now leans against the back wall of the shed, pour deep glasses of dark red wine, laugh. Laugh. This in the house that would get the teal treatment so many years later. My father looming from the king's chair he built himself, my mother in her slightly smaller queen's chair, my sister and me chewing slowly under a canopy of jokes we didn't understand. It was a relief to be banished from the table when down came the Glenfiddich and the Trivial Pursuit box, but after, from our white upstairs, we always stood on tiptoe over the loft balcony and watched the tops of their graying heads. Bev reading, What humorist observed: "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example?" My father cracking a joke in a voice too low for us to catch. My father not being a hooter; how they all hooted.

I sit on the grass in Chandler with the blue Trivial Pursuit box on my lap. I want to smell the board. Everything else I've found, eclipsed by the ghost of gray carpet under little-girl toes. Belly laughs echoing up from below.

To pursue: to do something. Anything. To accomplish, to achieve, to begin, carry on, carry out, cook, create, develop, do, do one's thing, execute, get in there, go about, go for broke, go for it, go in for, go that route, go to town, labor, make progress, perpetrate, persevere, persist, practice, take effect, take steps, to make something, anything, work out the way it's supposed to, just once, please, thanks.

Maybe David thought a lot over the next two years about the man who picked them up that night. Maybe he didn't think about it at all until he went to visit friends in Vancouver and they pulled out the soon-to-be-iconic blue box and said "Hey, check out this

new game." He told everyone who would listen that Chris and Scott were scam artists, thieves, but it wasn't until 1994 that David finally found a lawyer and sued.

The suit dragged on for thirteen years.

In those summers, Chris went to Spain with a brand new wife. They went on boats because of Chris' fear of flying.

I wonder: did he ever try to get on a plane?

At sea for days, did he think of David?

David eventually found work as a pump installer at his brother's company. He had three kids and went bald. In the courtroom, he couldn't remember everything, it had been so long before, he kept getting his dates mixed up, his times. He didn't have any proof the man who picked him and Donnie up in 1979 was the same man who claimed to have invented Trivial Pursuit. He simply had no evidence besides his memory, simply could not prove it. In 2007, he lost the case and was ordered to pay Chris and Scott's company a million dollars. His paychecks will be garnished for the rest of his life.

"I just wanted the truth," he said after the trial. "I just wanted what was mine."

The opposite of pursuit will always be surrender.

Soon after my husband drives us back to Iowa from Indiana, our trunk sagging with loot from the house I grew up in, I stumble across an Internet story that says Chris is dead. Something about his liver or kidneys, about how he'd been sick for years.

(What's the easternmost point of land mentioned in the chorus of This Land is Your Land?)

All the newspapers run obituaries and in the obituaries the official version of Trivial Pursuit's creation wind round and round. David is sometimes a snide footnote: A Nova Scotia man once told a wild tale of having the idea for the game stolen from him… the courts eventually rejected his claim.

(Who was the first American poet to win the Nobel Prize for

literature, in 1948?)

I try to find David. I want to talk to him, ask him something, though I'm not sure what. I even try contacting his brother's well-drilling business, but I never hear back.

(What's the largest North American member of the deer family?)

I want David to be telling the truth, and it seems like if I heard his voice I would know for sure. And maybe he would be able to tell me, to convince me, finally, that if something was once yours it can stay yours forever, even if you lose your grip on it completely.

(How much of any of this is yours?)

The New York Island, T.S. Eliot, the moose.

What's mine is mine is mine. f

Jane Springer

THE LAST RESORT

Underneath her front door, my neighbor's cries
must have billowed, evanescent as smoke, for hours. Naked,
she'd mounted the knob of her banister & got stuck. Dawn
came before the firemen arrived to saw her down from her unlikely
stalk. Tonight it is only the rain outside my bedroom window
that keeps me awake—then the query, what makes one wed
the staircase? Leaf-shadows move across a screen & I imagine
the woman waltzing in the empty arms of space & wishing for a more
physical presence to hold her—a hand, a rail to press the small
of her back. In the years I lived alone, I dreaded the dark coming
home so much I cruised the city parks or slept in the car not to
go in. On the other edges of the world it is not so different—we
are coming to the last resort. To the South someone's holed himself
up in a state capitol & demanded SWAT bring him pizza, 666
Krispy Kreme donuts & ten cartons of cigarettes. To the West
another man's tied his lawnchair to 45 weather balloons & floated
11,000 feet into LA airspace before he shot himself down—saying:
A man cannot just sit around. & in the Northeast? I think I hear a surge
in the creek—rain hardens into hail on the roof & this is just
July we're talking about—there are not enough blankets in all
the world. After my divorce, I went to a party hopped up on enough
cough syrup that the barbecue flames resembled a flower & when
I leaned to touch it, my hair caught fire. Then running for water,
I hit the glass door, & once inside, tumbled over a woman, whose
arm I broke. That's how the year went: One emergency vehicle
chasing the next until I smashed into the side of an ambulance &
could not remember what name to give the police. A stranger
pulled me out of the heap & sudden as a hailstorm in July we were
in love. Weeks passed before I learned he was only seventeen &

therefore what he did so well to me required a parent's permission
slip. I can hardly bear

to imagine my neighbor's position—naked
petal caught in the shame of her boredom or loneliness—a host
of men in Kevlar coats singing the chorus for what we don't
understand: Sorry, ma'am. You have to laugh—when you come
to the last resort—it's the one place left where you can order up
what you most want & have it with mint, but you have to cross glacial
plains vaster than the scar on Mars to get there & when you do—
the desk clerk demands your last dime of wit to stay for more
than a day. Both the man in the capitol room & the one who aimed
his lawnchair towards Jupiter eventually shot themselves. Storm
winds blow open the upstairs doors in this house as if the travelers
of my own regrets break in to say the chimney's cracked & the fire
leaks—they want it fixed or else their money back & what's in the
cash drawer to give is my son's words to me this morning in the
hammock when I asked if I could read him a story? No, listen—he said,
& you can hear it (birds warbled)—the world wants to tell us its story.

Ben Nickol

SUMMERTIME HUMAN VISITATION

They are happy in their ways.
Though they live within sight of their neighbors,
And crowing cocks and barking dogs are heard across the way,
They leave each other in peace while they grow old and die.
—The Tao Te Ching

Several months ago I was at Olive Garden to celebrate my birthday. That's been a tradition of mine for some time, actually, eating at a chain on my birthday. Not Olive Garden specifically, but always a chain. I've lived in five states in four years, and the static cuisine and decor has become a reassurance of kinds, city-to-city, year-to-year. My grandfather is a devout Catholic who mourned the loss of the Latin Mass because on shore leave in the second World War he had attended services in the South Pacific that were no different than the services he remembered back home, at St. Al's in Spokane—this is like that. An Outback in Idaho is an Outback in Indiana, or Pennsylvania or Wisconsin, a Chili's is always Chili's. My friends are hip and educated, and so I'm supposed to look down on (or I guess *eschew*) such bald examples of American low culture. What could be less interesting, or more indicative of a mind numb to nuance, than the man driving laps around empty mall parking lots weighing Red Lobster against Red Robin, Tony Roma's against T.G.I.Fridays, the man asking follow-up questions about the specials at Famous Dave's, or ordering, in full earnestness, his second Wallaby Darned? And quite a bit of the time I do (eschew them). Most nights you'll find me at the local haunts, the holes in the wall with character and history, where menu items come into and go out of season and where proprietors

are known at least weekly to crouch in fields and crumble soil through their fingers, or else run palms knowingly down the flanks of regional meatcows. Where else would I have found my hip and educated friends?

That day, though, it was Olive Garden. The hostess, in collared white shirt and striped necktie, led me back along the aisle between kitchen and bar, the framed vinyardish landscapes passing at eyelevel, the umber tile passing underfoot, the strings of naked bulbs drooping low from the spans of exposed roof beams. The perimeter walls were a very convincing faux gray stone, complete even with faux weight-distributing arches for the window casings. My table was near the back, flush against a chest-high partition overflowing with plastic flora and just across from a simple wooden hutch lined with regiments of teardrop-shaped Principato bottles—Rosato, Rossa, etc. I was seated and handed a menu. I unfurled my burgundy napkin.

Everything was as it should be at Olive Garden, meaning as it always is, each passing year in each city. Nothing remarkable happened until my waitress (just arrived, unloading a tall glass of water) went over the specials in an accent I can't describe any more specifically than just that, an accent. It was not Italian, nor French nor Greek, nor even similar enough to any of those languages to be dialect. And yet it wasn't quite dissimilar, either. I would've called it Mediterranean, except there was something Swiss about it. Not Italian-Swiss, but Rhineland-Swiss, that kind of glottal severity that somehow seems related to posture. And Irish, but so subtle a hint of Irish that it might have been Scottish, I wasn't sure. Or Welsh.

She left and returned shortly with salad, a basket of torpedo-shaped breadsticks, one large glass of Principato. She took my order, then my menu, and left again.

European, I decided. Just that. She's come to our country from all of Europe. Only later that night, flossing in the mirror, did I think once more about her dolcini description and realize I'd heard some Canadian in there as well. Not French-Canadian, but Rocky

Mountain, a few too many long *u*'s. And something Australian, just a dash in the hollowness of vowels.

Eventually I lowered my hands, floss dangling from a crook in my teeth, and just accepted it. It was an accent, that's all, from everywhere and by extension nowhere, so widely specific that it had become general. Really the only place I could say for sure it had come from was Olive Garden.

Every year on my birthday I'm forced to defend my love of chains, and I have to iterate, then re- and reiterate that it has nothing to do with food. While I don't mind the cuisine, I only dine at these places for feelings of commonality. Later in these arguments I sometimes force my interrogators to defend their chain antagonism. The food, they eventually concede, is not a deal-breaker for them, either. No, they don't like the food, but what they really despise is chains' all-you-can-eat ubiquity (friends of mine finely trained in the bandy of clever phrases)—in a word, their commonness.

Of course they aren't wrong, at least not economically speaking, abundance sharing as it does an inverse correlation to value. And if in the weeks following my birthday I did not breathe a word about my waitress with the accent from every nation, it was only because she seemed so obviously to tip the scales in their favor. Wasn't she the point they'd been making? Wasn't she the smoking gun? If the essence of chains is a watered-down identity, why shouldn't they be so staffed?

What clever phrases they might have lanced me with!

Only later that month, after an hour of shifting my weight bun-to-bun on the floor cushions of some terrible hookah bar, surrounded by friends waxing exotic on the topics of directors, authors, musicians, beer, whiskey, shoes, vacation destinations, politics, and even, in the final minutes before I unfolded and went home, dog breeds, did it finally occur to me: my waitress at Olive Garden was not just what everybody was talking about, when they complained about chains. She was how everybody *talked*, when they

talked about anything, cramming in every remark the breadth of the world's variety.

Why so this obsession with exoticism? Abundance and value share an inverse correlation, is probably the simplest answer, but what's curious is that a given chain, though certainly in high abundance nationally, is usually, within a given locality, no more abundant than such-and-such a cafe or such-and-such a sushi joint named only after the street number on its mailbox. You might even say they're less abundant, given that they're all the way out by the interstate while neighborhood haunts are by definition right there in the neighborhood.

This came up one time when one of my friends said, "I just like to eat local," to which I responded with an invitation to lunch at our local Outback Steakhouse. The conversation ended there, of course, and lunch with that particular friend remains to be eaten. But when another of my friends, in a separate conversation, said, "I just want a place that functions on the human scale," I had a harder time sticking the barb. Because she had me there. Outback Steakhouse might be as local as any around-the-corner what have you in Sunnyside, Portland, but it isn't exclusively local, which means that standing among those boomerangs and wooden alligators, we sense the specters of other boomerangs and wooden alligators in other municipalities farther down the interstate, and feel, very literally, belittled. Outback, after all, is only one location, even if it spans thousands of restaurants (to eat at any one of them is to eat *at Outback*), and as my friend so lucidly pointed out, there is something in that overwhelming bigness that affronts the dignity of human individuals. It defies the human scale.

My friends of all people should know about cravings for smallness and singularity.

One of them mentioned recently that he was considering adopting a Schnauzer, whereupon another of them advised that he limit his search to the Miniature, and not the Standard nor

Giant Schnauzer, whereupon a third elucidated the traits and characteristics of the Wurttemberg Schnauzer, not to be confused with the Lowland Sachsen Schnauzer. Another of them one time was shopping for mescal at a bodega and was instructed by the friend on his left to buy Zacatecas, and not Oaxaca mescal, as the agave in southern Mexico was tainted by genetic manipulation, to which the friend on his right replied that it didn't matter what he ordered, that now even highland *destilerías* shipped their *manso* from the south.

So of course bigness, blandness, and ubiquitousness would offend the aesthetic of such people. But they sure absorb a *lot* of unique and specific information from a broad cross-section of regions and cultures, and the question becomes at what point does the ingestion of so many small bits and pieces amount, at last, to an aggregate largeness in the tradition of, say, a waitress with all accents at once? My friend wants a restaurant proportionate to the size of humans, but doesn't that proportion depend not just on the size of the eatery, but on the size of the humans?

And how big are people, anyway?

Speaking only for myself, I'm seventy-six inches tall and weigh two hundred-thirty pounds, inches and pounds describing how much of the world I cover and displace. That's six-four, two-thirty when I'm stark naked, no shoes or anything, at eight o'clock in the morning flexing in the bathroom mirror.

As the day goes on, though, I add to that size. I pull on my flannels and jeans, my boots. Suddenly it's six-five, two-forty. The clothing isn't me, of course, but in a way it is. I've brought it into my employ, under the category of my person, just as someone who learns facts about mescal brings that into his person. And later that morning, driving the truck, I'm closer to seven feet, and whatever the curb weight is. Not to mention the arithmetic we'd use to factor speed into size, the ease with which I cover ground, or something like vocal projection when I call home to mother and father. All these things are part of size, my proportion to the world. They expand and extend me.

So how big am I? Hard to say, but at the very least I'm bigger than people used to be. Ninety years ago, for instance, in County Donegal, my great-grandmother padlocked the hasp of her steamer, said goodbye to mother and father, and boarded the boat that would take her to Boston, where waited the train that would take her to Montana, where she would live out her life without again seeing Ireland, nor any of her kin, nor even beyond a few postcards and letters communicating with them. She was small. Whereas a few years ago, traveling to London, I boarded one plane in South Bend, another in Chicago, and in not much longer than it would've taken Galway and the Aran Islands to recede from my great-grandmother's view, I was standing with my luggage in the shadows of silly statues watching jelly bean cars zoom left-hand-sidedly down alleys paved with rocks.

Not that travel was even half of it. For the next three months, at any moment in any city on the island, I could take out my cell phone and call or text my mother, or else sit with my laptop and read email, check the news and weather back home, even go on Facebook and drown myself in the up-to-date media of acquaintances I'd not maintained in fifteen years. Then of course Skype, Twitter, 3- and 4G phones—it isn't necessary to go any further in depth about this. The point has less to do with technological marvels than it has to do with the fact that I am a much bigger person than my great-grandmother was, and whereas a mom-and-pop pancake house in Lewistown in 1926 might have been on her human scale, I'm not quite sure it's on mine.

It's interesting to think about the trajectory of human growth, both what demands and what satisfies it, because not very often is the latter distinguishable from the former. Consider air travel, which as much as any technological innovation has augmented our stature in the world. Like most technologies, it began as an exoticism, or curiosity, a miraculous feat to accomplish. This is evident in the terms preferred by the Wright brothers, terms like

manned gliding and *aviation*, which for the most part are devoid of any notions of travel, or even utility period. Especially in the case of *aviation* (etymologically 'the practice of birdcraft')—these are terms so rapt in their own wonder, so sure of their own *a priori* significance, that they imply no destination whatsoever beyond that of their own achievement. Only later did it become air travel, or more appropriately *flight*, an unremarkable tool by which we extend ourselves to novelties farther afield.

It's a two-part cycle, wherein our lust for exoticism gives rise to tools that both bring exoticism within reach and kill those parts of it that are exotic, leaving only the tools themselves, and our persons that much the bigger (or the world that much the smaller—it doesn't matter how you look at it), plus ever as lusty.

Another example:

This past summer, several months after my birthday dinner at Olive Garden, my girlfriend and I spent a day at Glacier National Park. Having only the one day to see as much as we could, we decided just to hit the famous stuff. We dropped the car at McDonald Lodge, took one of the shuttles up Going-to-the-Sun Road, got out at the Visitor Center and walked around, then grabbed another shuttle down the east side of the Pass to Jackson Glacier. We walked to St. Mary's Falls, stood on the bridge and let the mist blow over our faces, then returned to the road and waited for our shuttle back.

That night we cuddled spoon-style on the same bed whereon we'd cuddled spoon-style just one night previous. There had been birds, goats, deer, mountains, lakes tucked within mountains like the soaking contact lenses of God, good weather. Somehow, though, and it bothered me enough that I hardly slept that night, nothing had happened. Or what had happened was utterly unremarkable, unequal to the grandeur of the Park.

At first I thought it was the people. Though a weekday, it was July and the park had been desperately crowded. Crowded, too, with the kind of folks no one wants to be crowded with, including

but not limited to the woman on our first shuttle who spent the full ninety minutes McDonald-to-Logan clambering over seatbacks and commando-style crouching in the aisle to snap photographs of this or that passing novelty, meanwhile screaming at our driver, Don, to slow down, calling him Tom no less, even after two members of her own party had corrected her.

And then at the top of the Pass, at the Visitor Center, the lines snaked out from the restrooms. And behind the Visitor Center, swarming up the slope towards Hidden Lake, a sea of bobbing heads more evocative of religious pilgrimage or diaspora than alpine hiking. There were people in flip-flops, heels, slippers, barefoot, people on crutches, people of well over three hundred pounds, sleeping babies, octogenarians. There were people strolling, chatting, snapping pictures, yawning, beeping the door locks of coupes, checking watches, staring at birds, applying sunscreen, tiptoeing towards goats with outstretched handfuls of Chex Mix.

It made sense, lying in bed that night, that the feeling of Glacier having not quite happened for us, of our having not quite arrived there, could be traced back to the people. And I think it can be, that if the mountain goats we saw are accustomed to what Don called *summertime human visitation*, then somehow what we saw are something short of mountain goats. But it goes deeper than that, beyond the crowds themselves to the question of what enabled the crowds. Because getting to Glacier had been easy. In fact those people almost didn't even *have* to get to Glacier—they were nearly there to begin with.

It was true in our case, too. We'd arrived at the Park, but all that arrival had cost was twenty-five dollars for the pass and a couple hours' car ride. We hadn't even given up air conditioning, nor cell reception or internet, nor even burned a calorie beyond what we would have burned in two hours on a couch. And when what's at the end of twenty-five dollars and a couple hours' car ride is miles and miles of serrated peaks and glacier-shorn valleys, ice-blue water and goats pawing down through the snow pack, then suddenly all

that grandeur *is* twenty-five dollars and a couple hours' car ride, value of arrival being no more than a synonym for cost of departure.

My grandfather in World War II cherished the Latin Mass because it was the only means by which he could enlarge his person to a scale that encompassed both the Philippines and Spokane, Washington, but when the Church in the Sixties retired the Latin Mass it was because Latin had become remote from actual people in actual places—had become not *enough* the Philippines, nor enough Spokane. For the same reasons would my friends like to see chain restaurants retired, though I'm not sure any of them are quite ready for what that would ask of them, namely that there be rooms on Earth where they sit and not know the language, or perhaps never sit at all. Namely that they worship at one, and only one altar.

Because something like that is not nearly so trendy as a Lowland Sachsen Schnauzer. In fact it may not even be *acceptable*, given that the measure of a person's intellectual rigor has become less the soundness of his perspectives than the extent to which he incorporates, in his perspectives, all the many perspectives that oppose it.[1] It's what we've come to call broad-mindedness, which though accurate in a literal sense is often misleading insofar as it denotes intelligence. We see this most prominently in our armchair discussions of global affairs, wherein the only 'thoughtful' assessment of the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gaza Strip has become that they are both right, everybody is right, and that it is the responsibility of each concerned party to advance not their own cause, but rather their understanding of the validity of the opposing cause. And in religion as well, where it has become taboo to believe that one's own faith is *right*, rather than just one of many right faiths, or political elections, wherein the strength of a candidate's

[1] Which of course means the only perspective that could truly oppose it is any perspective at all, so long as it is just one of them. Which means actually that on an individual basis it is opposed all perspectives—opposed even to the notion of perspective.

agenda has become secondary to his willingness to compromise it, or sell it as the agenda of everyman. The cultivation of perspectives rooted firmly within, and across a range of disparate perspectives—could anything be more Olive Gardenian?

Actually what comes to mind, though, is not Olive Garden, but Starbucks, which the summer before last launched a campaign in Seattle to integrate certain stores more fully into their localities by stripping them of the Starbucks brand and naming them instead after their respective neighborhoods.[2] I visited Seattle not long after the first of these so-called Notbucks opened, and the consensus seemed to be that they were no better than Applebee's, with that 'Neighborhood Grill' garbage, only at least Applebee's wasn't going to great lengths to conceal itself, wearing not just the localness hat but the localness mask. And I'm tempted to agree. I got a latte one morning at "Fifteenth Avenue Coffee and Tea", and the whole thing reeked of duplicity, the feeling that not only the coffee house, but the employees and patrons themselves were in disguise, something ubiquitous and uniform masquerading as something exotic and original. That for all the nose and lip rings, the tattoos climbing arms and necks, and the drastic haircuts, something utterly plain lurked underneath, something pedestrian.

What they seem to have calculated, those marketing execs high in the Starbucks tower across town[3], was that they could acquire the mystique of localness without abdicating, or with only a nod towards abdicating, their very much cherished ubiquity. Which made the people mad. Which made pickets sprout from the crowds. But more important than the question of whether a Notbucks is ethical (it isn't), or whether our coffee dollar is better spent elsewhere (it is), is the question of what they saw in us. At that meeting of capable,

[2] They actually got in some hot water over the course of it for sending what were essentially spies into local (by which I mean strictly local) coffee houses to steal their localness secrets. Pretty funny when you consider that Starbucks itself is actually from Seattle, and that it predates a number of the targets of this espionage.

[3] Which tower is itself, appropriately enough, capped with four partially concealed Starbucks logos, the telltale mermaids seeming to peek ashamedly out at the city.

intelligent executives, when they pooled their collective knowledge and weighed the evidence, juried who we are and what we believe in—what did they see that convinced them so thoroughly, beyond the shadow of a high capital risk, that we would ever go for such a skin-deep parody of local?

Or did they just lift binoculars and see, way out in Puget Sound, all those big, big whales eating all that little krill? **f**

Michael Cooper

WEST GROVE DUPLEX

All the Fallen Ice from a Single Afternoon: June 29, 1978:

The Hungarian wanting to rent the West Grove duplex, she's perfect for my son Toby. Frida. She comes to view the place one afternoon during a sun shower. At the door, she points to her wet loafers. Apologizing for knowing so little English, she follows me with her bare feet up the staircase with its newly-laid green carpet. She only pokes her head into the bathroom, the guest room, but then walks into the master bedroom, tracing her fingers over the bureau, the brown rotary phone on the nightstand, the bed's maple headboard, and looks out the panel window, down at the backyard with its pots of geraniums and rusty oscillating sprinkler.

We tour downstairs next, working around to the kitchen. Outside, a light hail starts to fall. Ice bits ping off the duplex's windows, and she moves from room to room laughing at the sound and the way that the slivers spring back from the glass. Even if I have to lower the rent, I think.

The storm ends and the sun picks out some of the fallen ice out in the backyard, the hedgerow under the kitchen window, the little pieces caught on the holly leaves, glinting in the seconds they have before melting. At the front door, she slips the soaked loafers back on. She streams out Hungarian, her rubber soles squeaking on the linoleum, a hand always moving, the fingers sometimes steepling at her neck, as though all this might help her communicate. I tell her that if she doesn't know anyone who can help translate, I might know someone.

With one hand at the center of her chest, she says, "Live here?"

#

And a Lantern in the Attic that Takes a Special Brand of Kerosene: July 2nd, 1978:

The West Grove duplex comes fully furnished, most of its furniture from when it was our starter home, oval mirrors spotted at the edges and refinished tables, the bureaus' nicks touched up with brown magic marker. Everything's waiting for Frida if she wants it.

She comes again, rides up the driveway on her motorbike with her back set straight as a measuring stick, lifts the white motorcycle helmet decorated on one side with the sticker of a glittery lightning bolt that she found at the downtown thrift store her first afternoon in Asheville. She doesn't bring a translator this time, either, only her driver's license, a passport, a check covering security and first-month's rent.

Her license says that she's seven years older than Toby, but when you're twenty-seven and still living with your father, waking him up in the deadest hours of night with, of all things, a 1960 Olympia SG-1 manual typewriter, these particulars are minor.

"How long do you plan on staying?" I ask.

She shakes her head, shrugs and points to an ear.

People say that I never learn, and sometimes I can't argue with that.

#

Like a Giant Shiny Tube Barreling Past the Mountains: August, 1978-December, 1979:

Frida gets a fluent uncle to call about rodents in the attic, claiming she shined a flashlight up there after hearing their scrabbling, big slobbering animals the size of the possums that scamper past headlights out on Route 90. I send Toby over to set up some traps.

And just like that, the two are dating. By the end of the month, they're stewing in an indoor Jacuzzi in a cabin in a remote piece of South Carolinian woods. They have a kid by the end of the next year. I call him Attila. All of a sudden I'm out a duplex and I still wake up in the deadest hours of the night. The Olympia SG-1

doesn't ding through the wall, but I still can't seem to go back to sleep. One day, I'll inherit boxes of pages. I'll read them so many times, it'll seem like I wrote them myself.

But for now, my son never tells me what he's working on when I ask.

"One day," he says. "Before you know it."

#

San Pellegrino, Chilled on top of the Freezer, a Favorite of Hers: February, 1980:

Frida finds work driving buses. Toby stays at home, typewrites, shreds most of what the Olympia spits out with a pair of multi-blade scissors, changes the boy's diapers.

I often pass Frida's bus winding alongside the mountains out on route 90. The passengers stare out the windows, some of their heads turning, following the cars passing, my ambulance. Frida is always vague as to why she moved here. "Opportunity land," she says.

She takes ESL classes at the community college across town, but she has poor attendance. Toby says she doesn't need to go anyway. She picks up the language so quickly. Sponge-like, he says. She reads my son's writing. She tells me. She often suggests where to change a word, how to change a sentence, what to add, what to take out. But she never tells me what it is when I ask.

"Yes, he say not to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Ask him."

#

The Handy Man Can't: March, 1980- March, 1982:

I visit the duplex often, or much more than I did with strangers renting, checking to make sure that the attic's leak doesn't return, that the thermostat is tuned just right, that the Weber Spirit grill that I bought for their wedding doesn't need its propane. It's special propane found in select places, ignition at the touch of a button. We sit at the oak table in the kitchen and drink orange juice in the afternoon and watch Attila crawl around on the gold linoleum.

Toby buys a thrift-store shirt picturing an orange-haired woman, a red apron over her chest and a dialogue bubble above her head saying, "Who's Hungary?" Frida wears it often while cooking, wears it as Attila takes his first couple of wobbly steps, wears it as the boy begins walking regularly and saying random things and reading the shirt's words.

Frida and Toby's shoulders and arms always touch when they lean close together against the counter, framed almost perfectly by the kitchen's only window, their bodies lingering at that exact point of contact, it seems, where I once tipped Toby's mother against the sun-warmed Formica and kissed the ticklish hollow at the base of her throat. Sometimes, I tell Frida to start calling me Jack, not Jacques, but she never laughs.

There are some things a man can't fix, but only start anew, for instance the bags of paper shredding my son leaves out for Monday morning pickup.

#

The Two Ambulances on Route 90, Passing through the Night: April 1982

The first time Frida mentions Toby's mother, she says, "I was sorry to hear what happened."

"Bad heart," I say. "They call it cardiomyopathy. What can you do about a bad heart?"

"Just take her for help."

I drive an ambulance for a living, did the graveyard shift for the longest time until they finally moved me to days. I worked on the other side of town that night. Toby was the one who called 911, not even settled into the new house after spending all those years in the West Grove duplex. Not that me or my fellow EMT could have made a difference, but it would have been nice to have sit back there with her for a few more minutes. Several times, I even told Toby that there was very little that a paramedic could do in cases like his mother's. He just flipped his fingers at me in a curt wave and said, "Your job," repeating this. Several times, "Your job."

Ambulance drivers have this superstition where, if two pass each other during a graveyard shift, from that moment to sunup you'll have more hurt bodies in your hands than there are smoke and coffee breaks.

Yet I would have taken that risk just to have seen my wife's ambulance pass, just to be able to tell my son that I was there, too, just to erase Toby's dismissive wave, make it something that never happened.

#

Clouds above the Mulberries: April, 1982:

Frida doesn't let either one of us smoke in the duplex. We go to the backyard with our Michelob bottles and sit in the folding chairs next to the mulberry bushes and the gas grill and we try to fill the silence with talk about how quickly my grandson is growing.

"She's really going to learn the language now that our boy'll be speaking," he says.

My son's hair is beginning to fall out, even though I've kept all of mine. Sitting in the backyard with the sun, parts of his scalp shine through the blond. We sit silently for several minutes. Then Toby pulls out a pen and a little blue memo book from the pocket of his denim shirt. He opens the book to its center and writes one word, indistinguishable from where I sit. He looks at the gas grill, sighs, and returns to the pad, jotting a few more words. Then he stops again, leaves me waiting, some sputtering magic trick whose secret I need to know.

"What do you have there?" I ask.

He looks at me, taps his knee with a finger. He hands me the pad and I imagine him snatching it away before I can touch its paper, but no. At the center of an otherwise blank page, he's scribbled, "Clouds above the Mulberries," and the date.

"What is this? What does this mean?"

"I don't know," he says, shrugging, taking another mouthful of Michelob.

"Is that why you don't show me what you've been writing all of the time?"

"Why?" he asks.

"You don't know what it means?"

"Maybe."

The afternoon's breeze blows the strands on his thinning scalp back. From within the duplex, Toby's wife and son talk to one another, their words a murmur through the glass, a woman's laughter, a boy's yell.

"Maybe if you showed it to me, I could help you. I could help you make sense of what you're trying to say."

He glances at me and pulls up one corner of his mouth in a weary smile.

"Yeah, I don't know about that."

Frida taps on the sliding glass door and waves at us with her free hand, her other arm cradling Attila, the boy rocking gently on her upturned hip, him mimicking the motions that we make bringing our cigarettes to our mouths, even puckering his lips, until his mother pulls his hand down and says, "No."

And a woman like this, I often think to myself, she's the type that will add three or four years to your life just with her love.

#

Never Make it Out of the Neighborhood

I'll take Attila out once in a blue moon, just us, a grandfather-grandson outing. We get into the Mercury Sable. I ask him where he wants to go. He says he doesn't know. He asks about his name. I tell him that I don't know. This boy is named after me, but he should be named after Frida, auburn-haired and slightly gap-toothed, or Toby's mother, the nose turned up a little like an invisible finger presses up on its tip. Attila, though, that suits him just fine.

"How about the movies?" I ask.

"I don't like the dark," he says.

"Well, how about the zoo? I bet that you've never seen a lion in real life."

Attila turns away, looks out the window at the stop sign at the end of West Grove where we're idling. Under the letters someone

has placed a sticker that says "Stop Making Sense" in thin red letters. I make mental note to come out here later with a Brillo Pad and a bucket of hot soapy water.

"How about we turn around and just go home?" I ask.

He turns to me and his cheeks dimple with a smile. I'd have to go back to Christmas mornings at the West Grove duplex to find something this grand.

#

Clouds above West Grove Duplex: November 20, 1982- December 20, 1982:

Thing is, Frida leaves my son. I never find out what happened. All I know is that Toby doesn't want to leave the West Grove duplex, the cacti we planted decades ago next to the doorstep twisting up toward the sun. Living alone, he falls asleep on the sofa one night. A cigar drops from his mouth and the rug and sofa catches. The fireman says that, had the flames reached a wall, there'd be no recovering the duplex.

Sometimes Toby calls me.

He says, "I don't know if I can live without her."

"You're going to have to," I say. "You have no choice."

#

Thanks for Calling: January, 1983:

Sometimes, Frida calls me to keep in touch. Once, she asks whether my son speaks badly about her. In the background, Attila hollers at me. They stay at her uncle's little yellow house across town. I remind her that he doesn't even let me read what he's been plinking on that old typewriter since we got it for his ninth birthday, our last in the West Grove duplex.

"You're right," she says. "I hadn't even thought of that."

Then, a pause, a throat clearing, a question.

"Don't you ever want to start over with someone else?" she asks.

"Sometimes, but the thought quickly passes."

"It's been so long, though. What, twenty-two years?"

"Nearly twenty three."

"And you and Toby remain so close," she says. "Maybe because you two only have each other."

"Your English has come a long way since we first met."

"I have," she says. "With my boy. We only have each other, too."

#

You Might Have Called Me a Little Earlier: February 13, 1983:

The phone wakes me in the dead of night. It's Toby asking me to come to the West Grove duplex. By now, Frida's dating a construction worker from Greece. Supposedly, he gets along well with kids.

In the darkened kitchen at the oak table he sits, the wood looking a little glossier than usual with only the outdoor lights coming through the window. The fluorescents from above blink on and the avocado-green electric knife that we bought when he was a boy lays next to the little hatchet I bought with my first toolbox, blood pooled everywhere around these things, a smeared Ziploc Brand Freezer Bag on its side containing four fingers. At his wrist, as a tourniquet, I slip on a hose clamp and tighten its screw, wrap the hand in a bath towel and help walk him to my Mercury Sable. Leaning against me, his body seems so light, he might as well be a kid again.

En route to the hospital. Weaving through traffic. Barreling toward oncoming cars. Moments can't replace other moments. The doctors say he'll be as good as new, only minus a functional hand.

"How's he going to type now?" is a question I keep to myself.

Of course, both of my hands still work if he needs them.

#

There's a Spot in the Den where Light Falls through the Picture Window at 5 PM: February 22, 1983:

I do try to get my son to explain his logic in hurting himself the way that he did. We're on the den couch watching *Kojak* reruns.

"I wanted to leave just enough so that I could still get the other one," he says.

I pause and ask, "And?"

"I tried, but all I could do is pick up the phone with this hand and use my thumb to punch speed dial."

#

There is a Jar and it Never Goes Out: February 14th, 1983- March 23, 1983:

The doctors let him take the fingers home in an old marmalade jar filled with formaldehyde. Three float upright on the convex bottom, only the pinky tilted on its side, as though they're just sprouting from the glass with the rest of the hand to follow. Toby keeps it at his writing desk. Little patches of skin scroll loose along the pinky's end like tiny old parchments.

After the injury, we all see each other more frequently, the West Grove duplex our meeting place. The first time is marked with an awkward silence. Frida breaks it. She's seen something on television about my work, some phenomenon she's trying to fathom.

"What do they call them?" Frida asks. "Ambulance chasers?"

"What do they call them in Hungary, people that would do such a thing?" I ask.

And she says a sentence that I can neither repeat nor understand, long words, hollow-sounding vowels clipped with consonants.

Frida and Toby chase Attila through the kitchen, and when they catch him, they each take one of his legs and hold him upside-down by the ankle as the boy laughs and widens his eyes at me.

#

Four, Three, Two, One: January 1, 1985:

The Greek construction worker doesn't last long, cultural differences, Frida announces on New Year's Eve at the West Grove duplex. She and Attila will stay with her uncle indefinitely. After the television's countdown and big apple drop, *Purple Rain* spins on the turntable. We take turns waltzing with one another, first me and Attila, then me and Toby, finally me and Frida.

"What's next?" I ask her.

"My boy's grandfather." She moves her face away from mine, puts her forehead against my shoulder and laughs. "I think that I try his strategy and fly solo."

Maybe it's the champagne, but it takes me a moment to realize that she's talking about me.

#

I'm going to Buy that New Electric Typewriter You Always Wanted: July, 1987:

Somehow, I'm not the least bit surprised when Toby's movie comes out. It's what they've been hiding from me, his dabbling in scripts. To be honest, the trailers had been playing on television late at night, but none of it looked familiar, and I always just flipped the channel anyways.

The four of us go to see the afternoon matinee on a Saturday. The theater is so crowded that we have to sit in the first row and look up at the screen.

The title? What else? *West Grove Duplex* and it's a lot like what really happened, except there's just as much stuff in there that didn't. Nick Nolte plays me and I tell Attila, "He's more like Toby than me, right, in looks and general demeanor?"

Frida points out that they cast a no-name actor because they really wanted someone one-handed. On the big screen, the man playing Toby is always using his half-phantom appendage. Most people would say that he goes through life gesturing with a fingerless hand. Most people would say that he pats the boy's shoulder with his wounds. I say that he goes about his life with one hand just a little less visible than the other. I can almost see the phantasmagoric fingers wriggle on the big screen.

#

Lifetime's Worth of Posterity: July, 1987- Ad Infinitum:

From this point forward, I have the option of watching these scenes, these episodes, this whole film play out as many times as I want for the rest of my life. I even take Attila to see it a second time when it's rereleased during award season. The boy looks from Nolte to me in

the darkened theater filled sparsely with people crunching popcorn, and I can't help but ruffle his hair, which becomes my trademark greeting for him until he's fourteen and he tells me that he's too old to be tousled.

Toby never types another word on the forest-green keypads of that old chunk of metal called the Olympia SG-1. It's as though, with the movie released, he's run out of words. I still recall the man who sold it to me, a short man with a pair of crooked reading glasses perched atop his bald head. "The Mercedes Benz of typewriters," he said, my wife standing beside me in her blouse with purple frills, looking infinitely more beautiful cocking her eyebrow than the no-name casted to play her in Toby's movie.

The film's fifteenth-anniversary release on DVD seems to age Toby. He starts walking with a cane. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy worsens once men reach his age, women even younger. Frida's there to take him to the hospital. Attila helps lay him out in the backseat of her Chevrolet Impala. My son doesn't let them call an ambulance, claims that it would be bad luck.

One of the last things I said to my son was, "Why don't you just use one of those new computers to type your work?"

He swallowed hard like he'd just been spoon-fed an idiotic question.

"It wouldn't be the same," he said.

#

On an Old Stone Pyramid's Winding Ledge, the one Higher Gets, the Smaller His Steps

The lawyer is one of the few people who attend my son's burial. We go to his office afterward. Toby leaves everything to his son, the meager bank account, the Olympia SG-1, the duplex. At nightfall, pink dusk, the sun sinking behind the mountains, Frida and I sit on her porch—her uncle's before his kidneys went really bad. We sit in high-backed rocking chairs. Together, their frames creak during the lulls in conversation. Attila mows the lawn. The chugging mower's canvas bag grows fat with grass.

She tells me that he's already decided. He's going to sell the duplex. He's going to use the money for something important, maybe college, maybe some other sort of investment.

"That doesn't sound like a wise decision to me," I say. "Not one bit."

"It's not your decision to make. Toby made sure of this, no?"

Who does these things in the dark, mow with only the porch light showing the grass? Frida unscrewed the frosted glass dome that covered the bulb next to the door, but the light is still dim. Who does this, I'd like to ask, but the funeral has sapped the protest in me. Attila empties the clippings into the wide mouths of black garbage bags, ties them, and leaves them curbside for morning pickup. He's got his work cut out for him, my grandson, in everything that he'll have to clear out of the duplex.

Just before I leave, my daughter-in-law gets up and brings back from inside the house an old wine-bottle box heavy with something other than bottles of wine. She puts it at my feet and I open it. Inside, hundreds of typed pages sit. I flip through the first sixty or seventy, each filled single-spaced with little pieces of text. Dated titles separate one from the other, phrases that read in Toby's voice.

"There are many more. So many more," she says, "if you're still interested in reading them."

#

We take the weekend to clear out the duplex and we rent a cargo van to do it, Frida, Attila, and me. We take bags and cardboard boxes of junk that I haven't thought of in years to the dump across town, where seagulls turn in rings not so high above the heaps. From the corner an eye, it almost looks like haloes crown all of that accumulated stuff. What's salvageable, we'll put up for auction, an old maple headboard, bureaus touched up with brown magic marker, a Weber spirit grill whose lid suggests using a brand of propane that isn't even sold anymore. Attila decrees this. He'll buy a space in the classifieds to promote the auction.

When we're done, for the last time at this duplex, I know, Frida and I go to the backyard to make sure that we're not leaving

anything in the outside utility closet. Fall's almost here and the yard needs raking. She walks through the grass, kicking the fallen maple leaves. A dozen yards away, at the cul-de-sac, Attila works on his bike, the little blue motorcycle that he bought the day he turned eighteen. Frida notices that I'm looking at him and she asks if I plan on going, the auction. I ask her why. Why would I?

"Aren't you even curious?" she asks. "How many people will show up?"

Attila's working on the motorbike's engine. He's removed a plate close to the handlebars to reveal the gray metal underneath. We're speaking softly, maybe so that he won't hear.

"Your son can't live with you forever," I say.

Her lip curls a little. She says, "Yours did."

"That's not true at all. He moved out eventually, granted he was nearby, which is not the same thing."

"You kept everything in it the same, all of the furniture, all the appliances, none of it changed."

"I was renting it out to people. Then you were there. It was a nice set up. You pulled up on that silly little scooter one day and you wanted to live here as soon as you stepped into the place."

"I almost rented a place down the street from here," she says.

"Okay, but where would you and Attila be then?"

"Don't call him that. What in God's name are you thinking?"

I apologize. Frida takes a hair band from her jean pocket. She twists her hair back and ties it into a tight ponytail. She calls me a terrible grandfather. She says that her grandson will one day be ashamed to share my name, if that shame hasn't reached him already.

"You both just need to put things into perspective," I say.

"He's your grandson. Why don't you just speak to him?"

"He's grieving. It would do very little good to try to talk some sense into him at this point."

Frida is running a hand over the top of her head, as though she means to smooth out kinks that aren't there. I think she might

concede, but then I know that she's only trying to find words that will seem less unkind.

"Have you ever thought that we knew him better than you did?"

We stop. We must have raised our voices too much. The lid over the bike's engine is closed. He's facing us with a wrench in his hand, like he might throw it at us if we don't stop. He's wearing the same worn leather jacket. He's only taken it off this weekend once, replacing it with a blazer for the funeral. At the dump, Attila wore that beaten jacket like a second layer of skin.

After this, I leave. I go home and fall asleep watching an old Clint Eastwood western, a time when men shot at each other from behind the cover of rocks, boulders. The week passes and I don't talk to either one of them, not a call to see how I am doing, nothing. The auction takes place on a cloudy Saturday at the impound lot next to the police station downtown, not that far from the city dump and the seagulls. They've set up an area at the corner of the lot, several rows of metal folding chairs. Some young couples are there, talking and laughing and looking hopefully at the appliances and furniture pieces that volunteers cart in on a flatbed dolly. The volunteers wear t-shirts that say "Goodwill" and "Make a Wish." More people are on the lot's other side, sizing up the impounded cars to be auctioned off later that afternoon. I find a seat in the back row. I hadn't planned on coming, but the Ingles Market is right down the road and I saw in an ad that they were selling air filters two-for-one in fall clearance.

The volunteers cart in things I've never seen before, a silver birdcage shaped like a giant bell and a big globe with maroon continents and blue water. About a dozen more people show up and then it begins. The auctioneer starts with furniture, a little olive-green couch that might have been the first piece that my wife and I moved into the West Grove duplex. But when I start thinking about it, she'd never agree on a color like that. There's a footstool with the words, "What You See is What You Get" stitched in blue on its plush red velvet top. There's an old-fashioned shoe shining

machine with black lamb-wool buffers and a rod with a red button on top. All those years ago, I honestly can't say whether there were really possums in the attic, whether we'd called an exterminator, or if there were really just big rats Toby and I caught. I could spend hours looking through the boxes of typed pages Frida gave me, but I wouldn't find the answer.

Some of the stuff sells, most of it doesn't. Thirty minutes into the auction, someone sits in the chair to my left. The whole back row is empty, and I think to myself how needy some people can be for human company.

"Hi, Granddad."

My son's son has his hands on his legs, his fingers bent over the kneecaps. His jacket looks like it's been oiled recently and a piney scent emanates from the leather. He nods at me and I nod back.

We sit there and watch the people win pieces of the duplex, pieces from other places besides West Grove.

"Where do they come from," my grandson asks.

He's looking up at the seagulls a few miles away over the garbage lot and I say that I don't know.

"Our next to last item up for bid," says one of the volunteers, "is a typewriter one of Ashville's own local celebrities used to write a movie. It's still completely functional and bidding starts at ten dollars."

Attila's back is as straight as a yard stick. The typewriter goes once. He's looking at the couples, the people, obviously waiting for someone to lift their hand. The Olympus goes twice. It's really the same typewriter that I'd bought so long ago, a gray hunk of metal that would withstand a dozen more lifetimes. Three times. A young man in a Goodwill shirt picks up the typewriter and puts it on the cart underneath a wobbly end table that didn't sell either.

The auction ends with two couples getting in a bidding war for the headboard, which sells for forty-eight dollars. People clear out from their chairs. We sit there for several minutes and the Goodwill volunteers start looking at us.

"Don't you want the typewriter?" I ask. "We can go up there and get it if you'd like. I think that I have exactly ten dollars in my pocket."

"What would I do with it?"

I stop myself from the easy answer. You keep things, maybe not for their use to you, but because someone else in your life might need them at some point, or because someone that you don't even know might come along needing just what you have. But I don't tell him the easy answer. He's no boy in his dark leather jacket. He's too old for those easy answers.

"Are you ready to go?" he asks.

We leave the lot and cross the street to where I've parked. His motorbike stands next to my car. My grandson tells me to follow him and I do. We don't go to West Grove. We don't go to my house or Frida's place. We go to rural Asheville, to a field close to a mountain. There's no way that he could know this, but my wife and I once frequented this spot. We'd even brought Toby once or twice when he was old enough to walk. But there's no way that he could know this, my grandson. There's no way that Frida could know this, either. Toby couldn't have remembered it, couldn't have written about it. Yet, Frida is there, too. About forty yards away, she's laid a plaid quilt on the grass near the field's center.

We park on the road's gravely shoulder and walk to her. There's no one else in the field. Gray clouds are pressing in from the west. You can see the curtain of rain unfurling underneath, maybe a mile away. Still, she sits there like she doesn't hear the thunder. A basket sits at the center of the quilt. Frida opens it and hands me a stem of grapes. They're cold, very cold, like the basket is filled with ice more than anything else. A cardboard box sits next to the basket. It isn't taped shut and its lid juts open a little, just enough to see the shadows inside.

"Why don't you two sit?" she says.

I finish the grapes and she hands me a sandwich wrapped in wax paper, the crust cut away carefully. Ground mint leaves and

raspberry jam, the all-natural kind with the little seeds that get stuck between your teeth, the sandwiches that she's made since Toby and I had stopped smoking years ago, like I'd still need these things to stem an urge to light up. It's then that I realize that they've had this planned all along, my grandson meeting me at the auction so he could bring me back to meet his mother here.

"I've been thinking," he says. "I've been thinking not only about what I need to do, but what Dad would have wanted. I'm still going to sell the place in West Grove."

"He wanted you to sell the place in West Grove, he said this."

"No, you just said that, not my father," he says. "I'd never put words in his mouth. I'm just trying to move on with my life."

"But I'm speaking for Toby," I say. "I'm speaking for his mother, too, and me."

A gust swirls around us. Frida is still eating grapes, but she's watching me intently. They've brought me out here to tell me this. They've brought me out here because they expect me to act a certain way. Then there's the box next to the picnic basket. The wind comes again and blows at one of the flaps. I've read enough of my son's papers, enough not to want any more, but there they are, and I have to take them. No one else wants them. My grandson's still speaking. He's looking directly at me with his eyebrows raised as high as they'll go.

"I'm going to go to the west coast first, the beaches of San Diego. From what I've read, you'd be surprised how different it is over there, like another country. Then I'm thinking of going to Mexico, the Philippines."

"Maybe Hungary," Frida says, "to see where his grandparents lived and to see where I grew up."

"Where else?" I say.

The first drop surprises me, surprises us, but the next few don't. The sky's vents open and the rain just falls all at once, it seems, until we're standing, looking at each other to see who acts first. Frida yells something in Hungarian and reaches for the quilt, lifts it up

by the corner so that the basket and the box fall to their sides. I try to help, but she yanks the cloth out of my hands. Not far from us, lightning claps and she screams. She begins sprinting toward her car and her son, laughing, chases. He shouts for me to follow. When the lightning claps again, they're halfway across the field. I just stay where I'm at, even though the air particles seem singed, the smell as coppery as blood.

Frida's son calls to me. It's hard to hear what he says with the rain pummeling the earth. He's got his helmet on. He sees that he has my attention and he flips his visor down. He waves for me to come to them. I do. I walk. I get inside my car without being struck. Frida is already pulling away in her blue Impala. It's almost as though the motorbike is attached by rope, it speeds into motion so quickly after her. I wait. I wait five minutes, ten, the rain slowing, falling harder, slowing again, stopping, no headlights on cars or motorbikes approaching, fog graying the windows so I wouldn't be able to see Frida or her son coming anyways. They've left the basket and quilt and box and someone has to get them.

Back at the center of the field, I fold the quilt and put it in the basket. Some of the papers that had been inside of the box have blown ten, twenty yards across the grass, limp from rain. I stop myself from walking over there. I stop myself from picking them up so that I can bring them home with me. Some other things have fallen out of a box, the baby blanket that my son once used, the one that they had let my grandson sleep with until he outgrew it. I pick this up and put it in my back pocket. And then, in the grass, only several feet away, the jar on its side—Toby's fingers, the glass and the formaldehyde making the grass underneath look orange. The jar seems so cold, I run my palms over the glass to make it warmer. My son's fingers bump up against one another in the formaldehyde. They almost look like they are still typing. They bob and point in the general direction of things worth keeping, the duplex, the bed where I used to lie beside her, the table where I patted his hand after

he drew a damn fine picture of our duplex, the baby blanket, the fact that his body was once small enough to wrap in it.

An ant pile sits close to my foot. I brush the mound flat. Shake my hand to fling off the dirt and the ants. I start digging at the earth underneath. I dig with both hands, only stopping to brush them clean, dig as deep as the ground will let me, until my fingernails drag over stone. The jar fits almost perfectly, only its gold top showing. I wipe my hands on the grass, but some of the ants still won't come off. They bite my fingers. They sting my palms. I brush them off on my pants and they start to crawl down to my ankles and up to my back. I fill in the hole, put a stone over the loose dirt to mark where they'll be able to find it. Frida and Jack. I leave the basket and the box, the quilt and a stack of dripping papers. If I ever speak to her again, I know that she'll ask why I didn't just bring them to her.

She might even be waiting for me to bring them now, thinking that it is only a matter of time before I come to the yellow house's porch. I'd go there that night, let's say. I'd knock on the door and that naked bulb would light my hands, my arms, my wrists, the bumps flaky pink with Benadryl. She'd probably stand at the peep hole wondering whether she should answer. And what would I be thinking, standing there for that long, even though any other reasonable person would have moved on after the fourth or fifth round of knocking?

"You know where it is," I'll say, when I finally decide to move on. "You can get it any time that you want."

And it would be lying to say that I won't pass by this field three or four more times, maybe more, even though I have no business being out this way. Maybe it will all still be out here unclaimed, for weeks, for months. I could say, "Just go," but pages don't listen, and in the night, the mountain standing against the skyline like the silhouette of a giant's fist, and in the day, the mountain still there, its shadow growing over the field in the afternoons, close to the palm-sized stone marking the jar's spot, a giant's hand waiting

to open, the knuckles and the tendons, the thumb and all of the fingers, the wrist and the arm and the rest soon to follow. The basket and the box, the quilt and the papers will just sit here, I know, or when I pass by this field again maybe they'll be gone, taken either by my grandson or his mother, or someone else, so that these things are nowhere near to where I'm standing now. **f**

Sherman Alexie

HONOR SONG #12

Yo! Do you know the way to San Jose?
Do you want to dance? Or run the squeeze play?

Dear sweetheart, I'm a broken guitar string.
I'm a credit card scraping a bee sting.

I'm an In'din boy, so that means my rage
Is sacred, and I scream on- and offstage.

I'm a thief who steals grief. Hear my plea:
I'm a chainsaw, in love, so shoplift me.

Nathan Hill

AFTER THE DEATH OF THE BOOK

The book's recent death has left writers in an awkward place. As one would expect, they are generally overcome with dread and emptiness, a dark feeling that their lives are now barren and without purpose. However, writers also have to admit the whole death-of-the-book thing has generated some *great* publicity. This eruption of posthumous love for the book means that writers have never been in such high demand.

A brief survey shows that, on the question of the death of the book, writers remain divided:

THE PROFITEERS

Take Jonathan Abbott, the bestselling novelist and playwright, who could be found on a recent Wednesday evening leading a candlelight vigil at a large suburban Yonkers bookstore. A sizable crowd arrived to see him, his popularity buoyed not by his novels but by a recent turn on Late Night, where he delivered a moving eulogy for the book. Video of that broadcast has been remixed and mashed-up on YouTube, and the big applause line from the night—"The book has gone on to that other shore"—is now being seen on T-shirts in New York and San Francisco. Abbott has been all over cable TV recently: he helped make a butter fudge on *Paula's Home Cooking*; he judged a Bravo game show about hair stylists; and rumors are swirling that he may join the cast of ABC's *Dancing With The Stars* (spoiler: he will).

On Wednesday he was dressed in black, wearing his trademark tortoise-shell glasses, handing out candles and leading the crowd in song ("Amazing Grace," "How Great Thou Art," etc.). Vigils like these are happening all over the country, where readers gather outside libraries or bookstores and mourn. (Their concern, however, seems

unwarranted. Libraries have already begun restocking their shelves with video games and instructional "how-to" DVDs. And experts agree that all but the most boutique bookstores will survive the death of the book, as most had already been making the transition away from the classic bookstore model and toward a *Coffee-and-Toy Wonderland Experience*).

After Wednesday's vigil, at a corner table at a nearby Au Bon Pain, Abbott explained to me how the death of the book is an *opportunity* for writers.

"It's the best and the worst of times, for sure," he said. "All the attention is terribly new and exciting, but what happens now?"

He noted that on television, on the radio, at work and over dinner, for the first time in years, people are talking freely and openly about the book. They reminisce in public, without embarrassment, about having read, once, a long time ago, a book. This week, writers appear on the covers of *Maxim* and *People*, a first for both publications. Cable news programs cover the story 24/7, and while most focus on the more lurid details of the book's death (*was it intentional? who is to blame?*), CNN's hour-long program *Gutenberg: The Man Who Made The Future* was a significant exception.

Abbott, however, does not think all the attention will last. He points to a Pew Research poll out this week that gauged people's reactions to the death of the book. It turns out that "*Feelings of genuine sadness and loss*" were held by only eight percent of the population. The number one reaction, by far, was "*Surprise that the book was still alive*." Most Americans thought the book had died years ago. On average, nine years ago.

And in the same survey, when asked about reading a book—about the solitude and quiet associated with the reading experience—a plurality of Americans reported that it made them feel "a little freaked out."

"What we're seeing now is just a quick and vapid outpouring of nostalgia," Abbott said. "It's a herd mentality, and it won't last

long. We have to face the fact that after the death of the book, most people's lives *have not changed one bit*."

So Abbott sees opportunity in short-term profiteering. He pointed to a cottage industry of cheap commemorative merchandise that has quickly spawned: DVDs memorializing the book; silver dollars onto which the book's image is pressed; teddy bears holding books; framed photographs of famous books and so on.

"We have to leverage our current fame into long-term profitability."

He's said to be working with Hollywood on a biopic. And with Facebook on a new widget. And with Apple on a new app.

"We have to strike while the iron is hot."

THE INNOVATORS

Not everyone, however, has been participating in the book-eulogizing hoopla. Certain high-profile writers are noticeably absent. For example, what does America's favorite memoirist think about the death of the book?

"Good riddance," he says cheerily. "Goodbye to all that."

This summer, Foxwood Carson will return with his eighth and most ambitious work of autobiography. Titled *My Body in a Small White Tube*, it will be published by W.W. Norton in July. I met Carson at a press event this week at the laboratories of Crowne BioTec in Palo Alto, where he was putting the finishing touches on *Tube*.

"I found myself running up against the boundaries of the book," he said. "The *thingness* of the book. The book had all these limitations because it was an object, a concrete article in space. There were borders where the book started and stopped, where it went from *book* to *nonbook*."

Carson explained that his readers wanted more than that: a closer connection, a more profound experience, no such thing as *nonbook*.

"Listen, I'm not one to talk ill of the dead, but we live in an age where information is transmitted by photons in every direction at the speed of light. A book that plods along from one page to another in a slow, hegemonic sequence is just irrelevant. It's antique. Like

butchering your own meat. Information is a living thing, but a book just sat there inert unless someone happened to be reading it. I think literature should be more alive than that. I think it should be *literally alive*."

This helps explain his decision to publish his latest memoir not as a book but as a tube of gray gooey paste.

"It's a living slime the reader eats every morning for a week."

Dressed in a sterilized blue plastic smock and protective eyeware, Carson led a gaggle of reporters around the Crowne campus explaining the difficult process of bringing *Tube* into being. They first take a scraping of tissue from the inside of Carson's mouth and place it in a basic growth medium of amino acids and fetal bovine serum. They brew that for about a week, until it resembles the white of an uncooked egg. Then they add Crowne BioReagen Recombinant Powder® and a vitamin gel and let it replicate until they get about a quart of this gray DNA pudding, a curdled mass pulsing with a wet animal warmth.

After the pudding cools, they add a yeasty mixture of bacteria, glucose, and saline solution. That is then cooked in a nutrient broth before they inject a strain of genetically modified human parvovirus. W.W. Norton, for legal reasons, also makes them add penicillin.

"Though it's all perfectly safe," Carson insisted.

You "read" the memoir by spreading the putty on some bread product—toast, bagel, a muffin. As the bacteria begins to interact with the sugar and starch in the bread, words and images will slowly appear. Carson demonstrated with a slice of rye and one of pumpernickel: it looked fuzzy at first, and the color changed depending on the medium. Rye produced an exquisitely beautiful lime-green lint, whereas the pumpernickel just made a wet, bubbling mud. The first chapters of the memoir are read in this manner.

After seeing the demonstration, several reporters had the same question: How does it taste?

"It tastes like the inside of my mouth," said Carson, "so to me it tastes like nothing at all. But I've been told it tastes rather tinny. Sort

of metallic. But not in an unpleasant way. Imagine licking a handful of new pennies. I'm told it tastes like that."

It's essential that one eats the bread rather than simply admiring the chemical reaction. Eating the goo is the only way of injecting the parvovirus that Crowne has biomanufactured. The virus will accumulate in the fluid of the reader's spinal cord, and once the viral colony is large enough, it will activate an autoimmune response that will reveal the final chapter of the story in the form of hallucinations and a terrible rash on the reader's chest and back. The rash will linger for a few days before going into hibernation, sometimes for a week, sometimes for years. A new outbreak can be triggered whenever you're reminded of something from the memoir. The means, Carson said pointedly, after you've read it, there will never be a moment for the rest of your life when you're not, in a certain sense, still reading it.

"You read it, then ingest it, then live with it," said Carson. "Yes, we're taking the old 'book' metaphor and making it literal."

Carson, a normally upbeat and jovial guy, grew noticeably irritated when I asked him how he responds to critics who say this is all just an elaborate and gross gimmick.

"Why do you have such an abiding and stupid loyalty to *ink*," he said. "What is it about ink? It's just another chemical, just a jumble of solvents and surfactants and dyes. Humanity has written words using a million different chemicals on a million different surfaces. We've written words in clay on cave walls, in soot on papyrus leaves, in pixels on electronic screens, in animal blood, squid ejaculate, burnt bones, tar, turpentine, we've written with knives onto the bark of trees. If we find it acceptable to read words written with heat onto animal hide, why can't we also read them in glowing bacteria on bread? Or in crimson pustules on skin? There's really no difference. When you think about it, there's no difference."

THE RESURRECTIONISTS

"The book is dead," says poet Ronald Merry. "Long live the book."

Merry, the Poet Laureate of the United States, says we should not blame the book for dying, but rather humanity for killing it.

"Humanity is one of those experiments that didn't quite work out," he said Saturday at his beach house bungalow on Cape Cod. "I think for any book to be successful, there needs to be a total absence of *humanness* in the book. You have to write a book as if humans never existed, as if the book was spawned without them. Because, really, it was."

Merry's publisher, Scribner, has made no secret of shopping his newest manuscript to various governments in Asia and South America. Titled *Resurrection*, it's the most expensive poetry project ever proposed: $250 billion. Merry plans to encase his poems in titanium and rocket them into outer space. There they will circle the galaxy until, by a complex geometry involving gravity and the movement of planets and stars, they crash back into Earth in five-hundred years.

"I'm thinking of my legacy, of course."

Why do it? Merry believes that five-hundred years is a long enough window to allow humanity to perform its inevitable self-extinction, and to allow some other intelligent species to colonize the planet and resuscitate the book.

"They'll open the titanium casing and be astounded," says Merry. "*Resurrection* will be the last book ever published, and the first book ever published. The omega *and* the alpha."

But, I asked him, what if humanity still exists in five-hundred years? What if all is well on Earth?

"I realize my outlook is sort of glass-half-empty," said Merry. "But we shouldn't have such a fondness for humanity. What is humanity anyway except a genre? It's just a *genre*."

Even if we're still around and haven't autoannihilated ourselves, the book, says Merry, will easily compete with whatever machines are being used by future-man.

"I think they'll love the book," he said. "I think, in five-hundred years, they'll see the book as a great technological innovation. It's self-powered! It's backwards-compatible! They'll say: *Wow! I can read without the batteries dying!*"

THE OPTIMISTS

"I'm just happy I got to read books while they were still alive," said self-help author Ada Cretchen. "I'm just so happy I had a chance to *know* them."

Cretchen, author of the *I Am So Happy* series—including the recent bestsellers *I Am So Happy I Lost My Job* and *I Am So Happy About My Cancer Diagnosis*—said writers shouldn't worry so much about the death of the book. Instead, they should take it in stride. They should be happy for the book. They should be happy for the new world beyond the book.

How did she become such an optimist? She cites experiments involving electric shocks performed on people in the 1940s. Half the subjects, she explained, could turn off the shocks by pressing a button. The other half could not. Their buttons had been deactivated. Eventually, the people who could not turn off the shocks began to accept the shocks. They curled up into a ball and screamed and wept at the shocks, even after researchers had secretly activated their buttons.

"They stopped trying," said Cretchen, "Most writers are like that, moaning and crying and complaining. They've learned to be helpless. They're like, *Who broke my button?*"

Rather than simply avoiding the electric shocks, she said, we should *invite* them, we should *seek them out*, because they'll make us stronger, better people.

"We'll survive and then it'll be like, *Look out world!*"

On tour for her newest project, *I Am So Happy My Child is Fighting in a Foreign War*, Cretchen was leading a workshop this week in a suburban St. Louis church basement. One by one, participants told the large crowd what they'd learned about themselves, about their needs and wants, and about how they relate to other people, after their kids were deployed to various global war zones.

"My son is great," said a middle-aged woman clutching Cretchen's inspirational calendar in her arms. "But, you know, for me? I really learned what makes me tick. That day they shipped him to the Hindu

Kush, I really learned how to put myself number one. To stand on my own two legs and feet. Now I remember to take care of *me*."

The crowd enthusiastically applauded.

Afterwards, Cretchen signed autographs and then sat at a table sipping coffee and explained to me how the death of the book shows us it's more important than ever to think positively.

"This, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg," she said. "The death of the book also means the death of the book *review*. And the death of the daily newspaper isn't far behind. And magazines. Reading. What else? Art. Music. Symphony orchestras. And opera. Oh, and pop singing that isn't digitally manipulated? Yeah, *sayonara*."

Cretchen listed dozens of things that are recently dead or now dying: the record album, the hour-long drama, community theater, corner bakeries, family farms, natural childbirth, penmanship, the forty-hour workweek, playgrounds, printed maps, the yellow pages, airline meals, floppy disks, a definitive end to wars, home equity, fax machines, blue collar workers, carbon copies, school recess, pencil sharpeners, the dollar.

How, I asked, can we cope with such loss? According to Cretchen, we need to be resilient. Psychologically fit. Selectively ignorant. We should keep repeating: *I Am So Happy*.

"You have to be a big ocean to absorb a few polluted rivers," she said. "We all just have to be oceans now. We have to be great big oceans."

THE NECROVORES

In an abandoned coal mine south of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Amy Coogan, the popular children's book author, has created what might be the largest underground reliquary of dead books in the world. Some sixty-thousand titles are interred here, in this unlikely part of Schuylkill County. Coogan said after the death of the book she contacted as many stores, publishers, and libraries as she could, offering to remove their stocks of deceased books before they were cremated or inhumed.

"People thought I was a little weird, sure," she said, laughing. "But they were also happy to be rid of their dead-book-problem."

On a recent rainy afternoon, Coogan led tours of the first three wings of the reliquary (there are four more under construction and not yet accessible). She arrived in faded bluejeans ripped at the knees and ankles, tan workboots stained black at the toes, her hair straight and pulled into a severe ponytail. She was followed by her eight-year-old daughter Emily, who was immersed in a cellphone video game called *HotChix* that involved swimsuit models throwing flaming poultry at various evil marsupials. While Coogan explained the genesis of her project, I could hear the rapid clicks of Emily's thumb-buttons as she vanquished another kangaroo or sugar glider. She had an amazing ability to follow her mother wherever she went and yet never look up from the video screen.

The tour began as we descended a narrow staircase one-hundred feet down to an antechamber filled with the detritus of soft-rock mining operations: broken drill bits, sump pumps, dusty conveyor belts, bent cylinders, sluice boxes, and mounds of shiny tar-black gravel. After walking about ten minutes through small rooms of standing water, mounds of ash, and discarded shovels, we came to an entryway marked with a stone tablet that read "*Stop, this is the empire of death*" and, below that, "*NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY.*"

Coogan said she modeled the reliquary on the catacombs of Paris.

"I realize this can seem pretty morbid, especially for me," said Coogan, author of such lighthearted fare as *Boonie the Trout Goes to School* and *Benny the Bunny Hugs Everybody.*

Upon stepping into the first of the reliquary's large chambers, we were met by a powerful smell of dust, chalk, lime, mold, and cardboard. In each of the inner rooms, lit only by a dim yellowish carbide lamp, was a conglomeration of dead books—hundreds of them, sometimes thousands. Coogan had arranged their cracked, withered, and decaying spines in great piles or in elaborate shapes: in one chamber, a six-foot-tall urn was made from the works of Greek dramatists; in another, a cairn made from scientific papers of the Renaissance; in

others, a globe, a keg, and a heart. People walked slowly from chamber to chamber, generally silent until they saw something they recognized. "Look at these," said a man standing above a pile of dead *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. "I remember these," he told his wife, who was inspecting a catafalque of novels for teen readers. She pointed at one and said: "That book taught me about sex!" She laughed. "My friend stole it from the library. We'd sneak into the closet and read it."

The next chamber was filled with books preserved in large canopic jars. The theme in this room was animals: books about horses and cats, pigs and mice, elephants, monkeys, dogs. Coogan saw that I was looking closely at a certain title: *Where the Red Fern Grows*. "That was the first book to make me cry," I said. "I think I was like eight years old."

"Most people find something like that," Coogan said, squeezing my arm. "Some memory they didn't know they had."

I asked her to show me where her fondest memories were kept, and she led me deep into the complex, into the most distant chamber, where she'd stashed the oldest books, the first editions and the relics, dense books with thin pages, small type, plain brown cardboard covers, arranged in a massive pyramid. Many of the books here were the most damaged in the entire facility, their pages curled and browned, covers tattered and broken. Coogan said tourists are sometimes offended at the public display of things so obviously *elderly*.

"They say it's not dignified," she said.

"And what do you think?" I said.

"I disagree."

"Why?"

"The wrinkles give them charm, I think. A kind of beauty," she said, looking at me. "Like the little gap in your front teeth. That delightful oddity."

I grinned and closed my mouth.

Coogan said she never intended the reliquary to become a tourist attraction, though visitors have been arriving steadily since word got out. And more show up each day. The obvious question

everybody asks her is *Why?* Why go to all the trouble collecting and then arranging these thousands of books?

"I've always been really shy around people," she said. "It was always a battle, a mental battle. You know? To be around people. I'm very private. I'm a worrier. As you can imagine, I was a very lonely child."

"And now?"

She smiled. "Still lonely. But not as much. A little."

"A little," I said.

She looked at the ceiling, ran her fingers over the cover of the book in front of her: the corpse of *Pride and Prejudice*.

"With a book," said Coogan, "it was like, for a little while, I wasn't me anymore."

"You were alone, but not *lonely*."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, exactly."

I stepped toward her and touched the book she was caressing. It was brittle and cold.

"Not to be esoteric about it," she said, "but knowing what it was like not to be me eventually made it easier to be me."

She smiled and brushed a strand of hair away from her eyes. The flickering lamp threw dramatic shadows across her face. Flecks of grit clung to her cheek. Our fingers were inches apart. And then Coogan noticed something: she pointed at her daughter, who, I saw, was no longer playing her game. She had discarded the cellphone onto the dirty floor and was now staring at a section of books, a corner of the pyramid composed of adventure tales: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.* She stared at them suspiciously, head cocked, like she was waiting for them to *do* something. Like at any moment one of them would jump at her. She reached her hand out, pulled it back, then stretched farther, like a skittish child at a petting zoo, slowly, cautiously, a little curious, a little afraid.

"It's okay," said Coogan. "You can touch them."

Just then the white burst of a camera flash splashed in from a nearby chamber and Coogan yelled "No photography!" She hurried

away to scold the offender, Emily running after her, leaving me alone with the carcasses of all those books.

I stood there among them, and breathed the chilly cardboard air. Coogan's angry footsteps fell away and I noticed how peaceful it was in that back chamber. And still. And quiet. Or rather how quiet it would have been, were it not for Emily's cellphone, which she had forgotten on the ground. It buzzed next to me now, its screen flashing *Would you like to play me again? Would you like to play me again?* It was like a nervous little jumping bean, abandoned, unheld, throwing a tantrum about its momentary idleness. I felt sorry for it, as it sat there beneath that quiet fortification of books, panicking, squawking, and turning tiny useless circles in the dirt. **f**

Franz Knupfer

EMPTIED SPACES

The Letter

I came home from a day of temp work and found Artie's note on the kitchen table. The kitchen smelled like charred laundry, incense and air freshener, as if our house were a holy place with burnt offerings and swinging braziers. There was a pile of blackened clothes in the trash, and the dryer, which was at the end of the hall by the bathroom, was smoking faintly. Artie had warned us that he might leave us at any time, but I was still saddened by his note.

Dear Gentlemen (and m'lady),

I just received word that a courier is needed for a flight to Singapore. You know what this means, m'friends: I'm off! Feel free to sift through the rabble heap of my possessions and spend my damage deposit as you see fit.

Your dearest friend and (former) roommate,
Artie
P.S. Sorry about the dryer.

We had a somber farewell party for Artie that night, just the three of us: Chloe, Jonas and myself. None of us were particularly surprised that Artie had left, though Jonas was upset that he'd left us with a broken dryer. We meant to discuss the roommate situation, but we drank too much wine and watched a movie instead. Chloe wept during the funny parts. She'd had some kind of understanding with Artie, one that roommates normally didn't have. I wasn't sure if it involved sex or not. Jonas had broken up with his girlfriend a few months before, and now he and Chloe were curled together under the afghan.

I sat in the overstuffed chair, well into my fifth glass of wine. Artie had woven a spell over us. Anyone he touched, literally or figuratively, seemed momentarily confused, as if drugged or enlightened.

"Hey, Gouda, you look so lonely over there," Chloe said. "Why don't you join us?"

Gouda. Artie had given me that name a few months after he moved in, but I couldn't remember why. Because it rhymed with Buddha? There was nothing enlightened about me, and I wondered if there ever would be.

The Contraption

Artie had been building a contraption in the basement. The house was a North Portland farmhouse from the early 1900s, so the basement was unfinished with stone walls and a packed dirt floor. The worn foundation beams didn't look very sturdy.

A bare light bulb illuminated the contraption. Late in the evening, after we finished the last of the wine, we stood uncertainly around it, running our hands against its smooth surface. What was it made of?

"Velour, perhaps," Chloe said.

"You're joking," Jonas said. "It's not cloth at all."

"What's your problem?" Chloe said. "Of course I'm joking."

"Well, it's certainly soft," I said. "It looks like it should be hard, but it's soft."

"Like a penis," Chloe said.

Jonas laughed to show that not all jokes went over his head.

The contraption was about six feet tall—my height—and cylindrical in shape. The surface was almost plastic but not quite, the kind of material that made me think of words like "polymer." It was smooth and uniform with no openings or blemishes except for a switch about halfway up its side. It looked like a light switch but it didn't turn on a light. Where was the power source? Was it plugged in? It had no wires around it.

"Should I turn it on?" Chloe asked.

"Might as well," I said. "But not for too long."

It wasn't clear what exactly it was supposed to do when it was turned on. It made a faint humming sound, such that Artie called it turning it Om. Or tuning it Om. And once even "looming up foam." Artie had a tendency to obliterate consensual reference points. For weeks after he'd said that, I thought of looming up foam when I used the blender to make my morning shakes.

Artie once said that it was best if the contraption was not left Om for too long. Chloe was standing between Jonas and me. She took my hand and then she held his hand, too.

"Om," I said. It was the kind of thing Artie would say when he was making toast or taking a shower.

"Om," Chloe said. She had a nice voice, deep for a girl, and her pretty mouth framed her pretty voice. Soon we were all humming, our voices wobbling in and out of pitch, and just as suddenly we stopped, feeling a little embarrassed.

Jonas scowled at me. How long before we were fighting for Chloe's affection? Jonas already liked her. And me? Chloe and I were comfortable around each other, but Chloe had always been quiet and secretive. She spent her free time reading and knitting and listening to sad Icelandic music. Once she'd told me that she felt a deep affinity with whales and leatherback turtles. I'd wanted to kiss her, but she'd mastered the art of the implacable platonic relationship.

"It's cold down here," Jonas said, rubbing his hands against his arms.

"Maybe we should go back upstairs," I said.

Chloe seemed reluctant, but she turned the contraption off. The basement was eerily quiet without the faint humming.

"I think you should turn it back on," Jonas said.

"What do you think?" Chloe asked, turning to me.

"Well, Artie always said not to leave it on too long."

"How long is too long?"

"Let's just leave it off for now," I said.

Chloe went upstairs first. While I was waiting to follow her, watching her hips swaying in her jeans, Jonas punched me in the arm. Hard. "You asshole," he whispered, only half-joking. I wished he'd been the one flying to Singapore.

Maybe the contraption was a harmony machine and we should've left it on, but maybe it was a disharmony machine. In any case, if the fact that Artie made it was any indication, it probably only worked correctly when it was turned off.

The Not Picture

Before we could get to the business of sorting through the artifacts that Artie called his rabble heap, there was the matter of the Not Picture. Artie had painted it, although it would be better to say he had not painted it. This was something Artie evoked in us all—painful, bewildering absences.

Once, when he and I were smoking clove cigarettes on the porch, watching it rain, a single utterance on his part filled me with searing loneliness. He said it while urinating off the front stoop—were we drunk? Quite possibly. Somehow he held both the cigarette and the beer bottle while aiming the piss stream at the rhododendron by the stairs. It seemed like sleight of hand to me.

"It fixes the nitrogen in the soil," he explained. "But really," he said as he zipped up— and then the utterance. I don't mean to be vague or elliptical here, but I immediately forgot what he said as I spiraled off into some treacherous expanse. What I remember clearly was his face peering intently into mine, so close that I could smell the greasy dampness of his goatee. He had gold-rimmed glasses and blue eyes. "I apologize whole-heartedly," he said. "I'm quite drunk, and so are you." In that moment I realized how few friends I really had, and how I'd lose them all some day.

We all wanted the Not Picture, which was better described by what it wasn't. For example, it was not a sunny pastoral scene. Nor was it human, although it did have hints of humanness—wasn't that a stooped shoulder crouched miserably in the frame? And that circle—was it a head or a single large floating testicle?

"It's an octopus," Chloe said. "He told me."

"That's not an octopus," Jonas said. "It has hands."

"Those aren't hands," Chloe said. "But they're not tentacles, either. Doesn't it resemble an octopus—sort of?"

We were drinking wine again. Too much wine, I'd say. This was not Artie's fault, though he drank too much wine as well.

"Perhaps," I said, "Just perhaps..." Because they were used to these vague preambles and long silences, they waited. "Perhaps if we eliminated all other possibilities and we were left only with this notion of an octopus, it would be an octopus."

"That's exactly it," Chloe said. She gave Jonas a triumphant look. "There are absolutely no other possibilities."

"You're right," Jonas said finally, but only so she'd be pleased with him.

Since Chloe had identified the Not Picture as an Almost Octopus (or Noctopus?), she became its sole owner. She hung the Not Picture in the dining room above the stereo system. It seemed to be watching me when I passed it.

This Cloud Called Portland

"I'm going out," I said. It was Saturday morning, less than 48 hours after Artie's departure. Chloe was standing by the kitchen table. She stood in a wide stance because the table was so low. She was molding bread dough with her hands. I rubbed my jaw, which felt unnaturally smooth. I was embarrassed to look at her. I felt naked somehow.

"You shaved," she said. "Why? You looked good scruffy."

I shrugged. "Sick of being a yeti." For a moment I thought she'd pat my cheeks with flour. Instead she wiped her hands against her apron.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm getting coffee. You want anything?"

She shook her head slowly, as if stretching her neck. She began to sing to me, but it was just the song in the background. "I miss Artie already," she said. "Farty Artie. Artie Pants."

"More matter, less Artie." She blew me a kiss as I left, really blew—a cloud of flour billowed up.

Outside the air tasted like rain. The garden was a riot of green even in winter, filled with perennials and vegetables I'd planted with Chloe the fall and summer before. I was holding Artie's favorite coffee mug. I faced the front porch and raised the mug, toasting the house. I'd painted the house yellow in the summer, during one of my regular layovers between temp jobs, and in return I got free rent for a few months. The house looked lovely and spruced up, a sunflower house. I'd been living hand-to-mouth a long time.

Children were playing in the streets but they didn't notice me as I walked by. Mist swept over the west hills, descending onto the city. The sky shook itself loose and the rain came gently. Was the world a cloud or was the cloud in my head? I had my usual morning malaise. Only coffee could resurrect me. I felt sentimental—Chloe might've called it bitchy. Artie and I had walked this same route to our favorite coffee shop on Mississippi Street whenever we both had a free day. Sometimes he'd even drag me out of bed when I was too depressed to get up.

He'd worked at a group home with mentally challenged adults, taking them on tours and walks. It was the only job he could find when he first came to Portland four years ago. He fed them and wiped their butts. He'd fallen in love with them, much in the way parents fall in love with their children. He'd also given his two weeks notice three months before, citing burnout, but then stayed on.

It was hard enough for me to think about his departure; how had Daphne mourned him? I'd never met her but I'd seen a picture. She had the slack, square face of a woman with Down's Syndrome. She had a bright smile and a boyish haircut. In the picture, she and Artie were holding hands.

I ran into a friend of mine on Mississippi Street. She was walking her bike and her pants legs were rolled up. "What's up, Misfit," she said. "Going to the show?"

"What show?" I looked at the fliers in her hand, which were covered with big black smears, badly photocopied.

"If you don't know, you can't go." She smiled as if this might evoke my curiosity.

I shrugged. "I wasn't planning on it."

"What's the matter? You look down."

"Artie moved out."

"Who's Artie?"

"You never met Artie?" I was incredulous. How could she possibly understand? "This was his favorite coffee cup."

She took it in her hands and read the inscription. "'I just farted?'"

"You did?"

She rolled her eyes. "Very funny." She handed the mug back to me.

I went inside the coffee shop and saw Artie sitting in the back corner. My breath caught in my throat. I realized it was an Artie doppelganger before I had a chance to embarrass myself. The man looked up and blinked rapidly, as if he knew me.

The Rabble Heap

On Sunday, Jonas brought cardboard boxes back from the organic co-op where he worked. He was in one of his moods, slamming doors and clattering dishes. He always seemed sad or angry but we didn't talk much. We might've been better friends if we weren't roommates, but probably not. I wasn't sure if Chloe was awake yet, so I knocked on her door.

"Come in," she said. I opened it halfway and poked my head in. "Come in," she said again, making large welcoming gestures as if I were a child or pet. I made my way around the Singer sewing machine and the five antique typewriters. Spools of cloth hung from the bookshelves and walls like furry entrails. I felt more at home in Chloe's room than in mine. My room seemed empty and dismal while hers made me feel strangely homesick, as if it contained the life I should've been living all along.

"Jonas brought some boxes," I said. "We're going to clean out the room. Want to join us?"

She nodded and gave me an expectant look. I didn't know what to say. "Doesn't it feel different in here?" she asked.

"I don't know. It feels nice."

"I rearranged everything. This window gets more light so I moved my bed over here. And I moved my desk too. I feel better already." She smiled at the room, as if it had rearranged itself for her.

Jonas rapped loudly on the door, even though it was open. "Having a good time in there?"

"Chloe rearranged her room," I said.

"Looks nice. Want to help with Artie's room?" Jonas smiled at her in a way that he never smiled at me.

Artie's room was across the hall from Chloe's. The rabble heap of his former possessions spread unevenly to all corners of the room. We put his books in one box, his notebooks in another. Chloe decided to keep most of the books. We tried to decipher his cryptic notes but Artie's handwriting was nearly illegible. When we finally made out individual letters, we realized the notebooks weren't in English.

"What other languages did Artie know?" Jonas asked.

"I think Spanish," I said.

"Definitely Spanish," Chloe said. "And French. I think he knew some Latin, too."

"But this isn't in any of those languages," Jonas said.

"Maybe it's a code," I said.

I imagined Artie writing in tongues, eyes rolled back into his head, his mechanical pencil sprinting across the page. "Allavum punkah?" I tried to read the syllables but it was slow going.

"Give me that," Jonas said, grabbing the notebook. "At least this one uses the alphabet. Check this out." The black spiral notebook Jonas handed me was written in geometric shapes, mostly triangles. Chloe leaned over and I felt her breath on my cheek. Her long

hair was tied into a braid with a yellow ribbon at its end. She was wearing a yellow dress, too, as if it were summer. Jonas picked up an envelope with a ribbon. Before he had a chance to open the letter, Chloe leaned over and took it.

"That's mine." The envelope said *Artie* in her handwriting. I could feel her breathing on my cheek again. Jonas slammed a notebook against the floor.

"I'm going to the bathroom," he said, storming into the hallway.

I ran my hand through her long silky hair. She had a round face with a light dusting of freckles. She had hazel eyes that were green in the light and brown in the dark. I've always been attracted to women whose eye color I can't readily identify.

It's generally inadvisable for roommates to engage in any kind of romantic activity. There should be boundaries in place—after all, there are bills to be paid, bathrooms to be cleaned, issues to be sorted out regarding exactly whose dishes were in the sink. But we were like two compasses in the presence of magnets.

It was Chloe who kissed me, with just a bit of tongue, before we heard Jonas coming back up the stairs. By the time he'd returned to the room, she was once again breathing lightly and easily on my cheek. My heart was pounding. I looked studiously at the notebook while Jonas scowled at me.

"Moogle ah," I murmured, setting the notebook aside.

The Matter of the Detachable Floorboard with the Reddish Brown Stain

There is often something strange at the bottom of a heap, and in this particular case we already knew what it was. Artie had shown us the detachable floorboard before. "I keep no secrets from any of you," he'd said. "This is where I keep my drugs." We all laughed when he said that. Artie didn't do drugs because they made his head spin. He'd go out on the porch with his wine and cigarettes whenever a joint was going around. The one time I'd seen him high, he'd tried to develop a system of communication that involved blinking and grimacing rapidly.

"What are you trying to say?" I'd said.

Artie blinked and grimaced. He couldn't stop laughing.

Jonas wriggled the floorboard loose. "I wonder if there's anything in there," he said.

"I hope not," I said. We'd already filled a dozen boxes with Artie's old things: a box of rocks and shells, an assortment of broken bicycle chains, along with feathers, coins, wires, books, notebooks, even a rusty tricycle with bells attached to it. There was a small space beneath the floorboard but it was empty. I was relieved. Jonas was about to put the board back in place when Chloe gasped.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Is that blood?"

We all knelt down at the same time, almost knocking our heads together. There was a reddish-brown stain on the wood, tucked between the insulation and the wiring.

"It's a reddish-brown stain," I said.

Chloe scraped at it with her fingernail. "Maybe it's paint."

"Maybe Artie cut himself on a nail when he opened it," I said. Perhaps he'd even spilled a few drops there, just to keep some part of himself hidden and present among us.

"It's not paint," Chloe said, examining the residue on her fingertip.

"So what is it?" Jonas asked impatiently.

"It's the same color as the blood when I have my period," Chloe said, more to herself than to us.

"That's gross, Chloe," Jonas said in a singsong voice, as if he were trying to be flirty. Chloe wasn't amused. I leaned forward, as if looking closer at the stain, but I only did it so I could brush up against her again.

The Palpable Corner That Made Us Sneeze

Artie's room had ten corners, three of which clearly didn't want to be disturbed. How can a rectangular room have ten corners? There was a walk-in closet within the larger room, and the larger room formed an L around it. The L had six corners, the walk-in closet

had four. This wasn't Artie's fault, but after we got to know him, we realized he wasn't meant for a room with only four corners.

All three of the corners in question were in the walk-in closet. The closet was full of dust and threw Jonas and me into a sneezing fit. There was a little diamond-shaped window on the far wall. Artie's bed was still in there, a yellowed twin stripped of sheets.

"It always felt like this in here," Chloe said. "I don't know how he could stand it."

"How much time did you spend in here anyway?" Jonas asked.

"Oh, not that much. Just a little here and there." She tried to sound casual. Jonas looked jealously at the far corner where Artie's head had spent each night dreaming, his shirts and creased slacks dangling above him.

"So what's the deal with it? Was it like that before he moved in?" he asked.

"I can't remember," I said. I'd lived in the house longer than the others.

"How could you not remember something like this?" Jonas was visibly angry. "I mean, it's *palpable*." That was how the corner got its name.

Later that evening, when I was getting ready for bed, there was a knock on my door. It was Chloe wearing a nightgown with embroidered flowers. Jonas had already gone to sleep because he had to work in the morning. Chloe took my hand and led me into Artie's room. There was moonlight spilled on the floor like a glass of milk. No, like a whole milk truck had been emptied out. It had been such a cluttered room just that afternoon. Now that the boxes were in the basement and Chloe had swept out the whirling dust dervishes, it was empty of all but moonlight, the twin bed and the Palpable Corner.

We lay on the bare mattress, our heads squeezed into the Palpable Corner. The moonlight turned our bodies into blobs.

"I never slept with him," Chloe said.

"I don't mind if you did."

"But I didn't. We'd just lie here sometimes, like we're lying here now, and we'd put our heads together. It felt like our minds were joined."

I felt a pinprick of jealousy when she said that.

"How long have we lived together now? Almost a year, right?" I asked.

"Almost a year," she said. "And Artie moved in a month after I did."

"Jonas always feels like the odd man out." He'd moved in six months before, and I still didn't have a clear sense of who he was. "Maybe he'll feel differently when we get a new roommate."

"Don't talk too loud," Chloe whispered. "He's right below us."

I closed my eyes and focused on how soft Chloe's hair felt against my arm.

"Did you know he was leaving?" I asked. I felt Chloe shake her head. "Do you know why he left?"

"He wanted to see the world. He told us that."

I leaned over and kissed her. I felt the Palpable Corner. It seemed like the world and our minds were made into a right angle. "I thought you liked Artie, so I never said anything. I mean, you did like him, right?"

"Artie and I had an understanding." She was quiet for a bit. "Or maybe it was a misunderstanding. Either way, it worked."

We lay there for a long time, our heads pointed together as we held hands.

"What about that letter you took from Jonas?" I asked finally. "Artie was in love with you, wasn't he?"

"I said we had an understanding," Chloe said. "He wasn't in love with me. Not exactly. Who can ever know with Artie anyway?"

"Were you in love with him?"

"Not in love. I had feelings for him, just like I have feelings for you."

"How about Jonas? Do you have feelings for him, too?"

"Feelings in a way, yes. I feel bad for him."

"Is there anyone you don't have feelings for?" I asked, feeling exasperated.

She answered with a kiss tasting of peppermint toothpaste. So Chloe had feelings for everybody and everything— this empathy was part of the reason I liked her. I wrapped myself around her, wishing I could hold her with more than just two arms, two legs, and a full set of teeth.

The Doorbell Rings Itself

Chloe admitted a few days later that she'd had a particular affinity for Artie, but quickly added that she felt that way about me, too. She even used that word—*affinity*. It made me think I was a humpback turtle—did such a thing exist?

Chloe took my hand. "You know what he always said."

Jonas was at work. We'd put an ad on Craigslist and we'd already received calls. In a few days, we'd begin interviewing potential roommates.

"What did he always say?" We were in the Palpable Corner again. I wished our minds were joined. We'd already tried that together, and though it worked, our minds couldn't join through words. She'd told me Artie had said there could be no words or pictures, just emptiness, or sometimes white light.

"He was always talking about potentialities. It was kind of annoying. I can't believe I'm repeating him, actually. He said you have to put yourself out there and wait and see what touches you back."

"And Artie never touched you back."

"Not in that way," Chloe said. "I didn't ask him to touch me in that way, but maybe it could've happened if it wanted to."

"If you'd wanted it to or if he'd wanted it to?"

"No, just *it*. If it wanted to. But I don't think it did."

Maybe it was time to redefine our boundaries or do away with them altogether. I could almost hear the faint humming of the contraption through the floorboards.

"Is it on?" I asked her.

She pursed her lips, trying to listen. "I don't think so."

"Have you turned it on at all?"

"Maybe a little bit," she said. "Just to see what would happen."

"Did anything happen?"

"I don't know. Probably, but I'm not sure what."

"And you remembered to turn it off?"

"I think so."

We spooned together. Her neck smelled good and felt of summer dampness though it was winter. I ran my hands against her bare arms and then under her dress along her thighs. Our heads were still in the Palpable Corner.

"Can we try the emptiness in the head thing again?" I asked. I watched the back of her head nodding. I felt myself go empty, then felt Chloe go empty. We lay there fluttering and twitching a bit, as if dreaming. I heard the sound of chimes. At first I thought maybe the contraption was ready, that it had a timer like a microwave, and it needed to be turned off or on.

"It's the doorbell," Chloe said.

"You want me to get it?"

"Let's go down together."

We raced downstairs, passing the Not Picture. Though it didn't have eyes, it was still watching me. Chloe opened the door. There was nobody there. That happened sometimes. It must've been faulty wiring in the house, causing the doorbell to ring itself, or maybe it was the kids who lived down the block.

When Chloe shut the door, I held her tight and kissed her. For a moment I wasn't afraid. If the contraption was off, maybe it was supposed to be on, or vice versa. Chloe pushed me away, smiling.

"See if you can catch me," she said. I chased her back upstairs, into Artie's old room. The doorbell rang again. We looked at each other.

"Should I get it?" I asked.

"Maybe there really is somebody this time," she said. "Let's go together." We clattered downstairs again, past the Not Picture.

Chloe opened the door. Still nobody there. I checked the mailbox, just in case. There was nothing in there, at least not yet. I knew we'd hear from Artie again. I just wasn't sure when or how.

Chloe gave me a penitent look. "I left it on," she admitted. I liked her guilty look. It made me want to kiss her again.

"Should we check?" I asked. Without waiting for an answer, I led her downstairs. I almost expected Artie to pop out from behind the contraption, full of spooky haunted house laughter, but Artie was in Singapore now, or more likely, on a train headed towards the Malaysian interior. I pictured him with a briefcase and the striped yellow button down shirt he liked to wear to parties, humming to himself as he watched blurred scenery pass by.

"Maybe we should turn it off," Chloe suggested.

I ran my fingers along its smooth, almost polymer surface and felt a fluttering happiness, as if it had shocked me. "Let's leave it on. I think it's working." I turned off the light and waited for my eyes to adjust to the dark. I realized the contraption had a dim glow, like a bioluminescent creature feeding at the bottom of the sea. Why hadn't I noticed that before?

"This is his way of staying with us," Chloe said. When she put her hands against the contraption, the webbing between her fingers glowed with an eerie light, and I placed my hands over hers. For a moment, I felt as if there were no other reference points, and there didn't need to be. **f**

Amorak Huey

SELF-PORTRAIT AS HISTORY OF THE BLUES

W.C. Handy is the father of the blues mostly because he called himself that in the title of his autobiography. He's never received much attention from modern blues fans, possibly because he was too successful, too commercial, too savvy about selling records – business-smart entrepreneur a poor match for what they want from their icons. They want the creative wanderer, artistic outcast, stranger silhouetted against dusty Mississippi Delta sunset, guitar strapped to back: hard-drinking / hard-loving / deal-with-the-devil-making son of a gun whose music is the outcry of an oppressed people: whose anguished voice: born from the soul of a cruel nation.

If such a man did not exist, they invented him.
We.
We invented him.
In this as in all things, race is a consideration.

*

Imperfection : flaw : art
Mistrust the unblemished

It is proper to singe the wicks of candles on display in your home to show that they are not merely decoration. Be careful not to melt any wax.

*

My father listens to blues. My father plays guitar – I remember
strum & croon: "Brown-Eyed Girl" in husky whisper.
Before the divorce. Of course. My brother plays.
Not me.
O, not me.
I am rhythmically disabled, melodically challenged,
harmonically hapless, I cannot clap in time.
I remember hearing that expression
about not being able to carry a tune in a bucket
& thinking it meant singing with your head in a bucket:
acoustics better in there. I imagined my own voice
all hollow / metal / echo /
& worth listening to.

*

When Handy brought home his first guitar, his father called it the instrument of the devil and cast it from his house.

If a thing came easy, it wouldn't be worth a good goddamn, now would it?

Aim for sun, sometimes you melt wax.

*

I am not asking anyone to feel sorry for me. A friend
grew tired of feeling left out at those gatherings
where wives cluster in one room / husbands in another:

uneasy men / nothing to talk about / except sports:
lingua franca of the American male,
learned in childhood & not forgotten

only my friend didn't grow up a sports fan
& so couldn't talk about how [insert team]
was looking this fall / spring. So he took on sports –
an academic study less passion than project
& taught himself to care & now he can bitch
about the playcalling on that last drive
just like the rest of us.
Sometimes I confess /
I think / I fear my passion / appreciation / interest
for the blues / for anything / for everything
my whole approach to being alive
is like that:

more head than heart / gut / genitals.

*

But then
I watch
a movie
in which
Jack White
listens / falls in love
to Son House:
"Grinnin'
in Your Face."

But then
I listen
to Howlin'
Wolf
howling
for his
darling –
all growl
& hard-on.

But then
I write
a poem
in which
Robert Johnson
rescues
(& seduces)
Little Red
Riding Hood.

*

Handy was a consummate craftsman, a technician, a skilled musician. Once he lamented the attention received by a less-proficient band than his own. The response: "Honey, white folks like to hear colored folks make some mistakes." An awakening: perhaps aesthetic / perhaps commercial.

Handy claims to have discovered the blues while waiting for a train in Tutwiler, Mississippi & watching a loose-jointed man play the slide guitar with a knife against the strings. "Weirdest music I had ever heard," Handy wrote later, but another awakening nonetheless.

*

Freedom / to make mistakes / perhaps something less than freedom
Imagine / the possibilities / if you're only pretending
to be imperfect

*

I cannot imagine a life without rivers
anymore than a life without music –
I cannot abide sentimentality.
I grew up white and poor and in the South
but never of that place, or any other,
swimming unbaptized in the Cahaba River

unspeaking / until spoken to.

*

It goes 1,000 directions from here, the way any sound spreads from its source. You cannot predict which words people will believe. For a long time I thought Muddy Waters saw Robert Johnson playing on the front porch of a Mississippi drugstore and turned away, unable to stare glory in the face. Then I found out the story probably is invented. Would you think less of me if I repeat it anyway?

Here's one that's true: Handy went blind. Twice.

*

The
devil's
music.

Sound
of blood
keeping body alive.

High
lonely whine
of limb in wind
about to break free.

*

Blues: Having to do with fathers & sons
Sons: Having nothing to do with fathers

Blues: Having to do –

*

Handy described "St. Louis Blues" as a trick on his audience, beginning with a tango before breaking into those lowdown dirty blues. He described the crowd reaction: "I saw lightning strike. … An instinct that wanted so much to live, to fling its arm to spread joy, took them by the heels."

Do you believe him?
Self / creation.

*

Listen. That humming in the air
the sound of rapid descent.
Mine / yours / all of ours /
that evening sun going down.
Scream of guitar,
bite & flicker of dancehall flames,
the never needing to ask forgiveness.
It's the music, it was always the music.
If ever I did not / have a heart

I must have / invented one.

B.J. Hollars

ANXIETIES OF THE UNTRAINED AND UNFAMILIAR

I fear not her spittle, nor her wails thundering deep into the night. Or her knobby elbows, even, though they will remind me of my own each time I take her in my arms.

Some days I wonder if such a tiny thing might cast me as the understudy to my own life, and if so, will I be graceful in accepting the role? Will I be gallant and capable of powering down the computer? Will I be willing to set all those half-drafted stories buoyed and adrift?

The smallest part of me wonders what work will go unfinished as a result of her, how many pages need be thrown out with the diapers and the rags.

These are the wrong questions, though there are right ones, too.

What if I drop her? And what if, as a result of my dropping her, she is left explaining away her father's fumbling fingers.

Well, my dad, you see, he was always a bit of a butterfingers...

This will be far from my only transgression.

One night I will leave her to cry in her crib because it is easy.

Another day I will forget the eardrops, or the amoxicillan, or both.

Once, in a moment of great failure, I will lay her belly down instead of on her back—so careless, so untrained.

All of this, because I know nothing of anything.

What exactly is a birth canal and what is the price of the portage?

She is not even real yet—just a terror I anticipate in the not-too-distant future. Yet when probing that future, I need to believe that fathers learn the way their babies do: everything a great tumbling, and all of it terribly fast.

*

I have dedicated these last few weeks to staring at myself in the mirror.

In the locker room at the rec center, I stare and I think, *What exactly is so special about this body?*

My observations have led me to conclude that nothing is special, that I am mostly just shit and sinew, ten toes of overgrown toenails with fingernails to match. My body is an uncertainty, a shoddy machine that produces little of note. It is in need of near constant repair, though I've only had the thing for twenty-six years now, and I expected far better craftsmanship.

Yet having logged so many hours in front of this mirror, I am beginning to understand that it is hardly my body that matters, only my wife's. She is the one in need of incomprehensible dexterity, a balance and agility I can hardly match on a yoga mat. I am simply the afterthought, a supplicant to the procedure. Just one of two nervous variables planning to cross the bridge as we come to it.

Surely, this miracle of reproduction has long been reduced to science. Yet all this data does little to scare the wonder away, particularly for a man of my age and profession—one whose college transcript confirms a slim record of science classes, a cursory understanding at best.

The umbilical cord is connected to whom now?

I am told my need to ask this question is proof that I am not yet ready.

*

Sometimes, while staring deep into the locker room mirror, I can't help but glimpse the hulking boys behind me. They are a gaggle of mouths and arm tattoos, all of whom busily shake their whey protein into frothy messes, gulping them down like gladiators, anxiously awaiting the arrival of their newly promised bodies.

I stare at my own, unchanged figure, wondering:

Is that really all there is to transformation?

By Monday at 9:00a.m. I will transform back into their teacher, but in the locker room we are all equals—just half-men in want of very different things.

When I overhear them bragging vigorously in the sauna—of the cream skin they drank with their coffee, the curled girls they abandoned in sheets—the teacher in me wants to congratulate them on all their vivid detail, wondering why the hell this hasn't emerged in their essays.

Some Sundays as I drive there—to that gym, to that locker room mirror—

I pass the girls those boys are speaking of. They are all wrinkled versions of the previous night, their high heels cradled in their arms or dangling. There is a strange heartbreak to it, how they hold those shoes, but also how, just 18 hours prior, those same girls outlined their eyes with color, though now it's all just smear. I wonder if they, too, have ever stared into a mirror and felt purposeless. Or if instead, their bodies mean something to them because they mistakenly think they mean something to somebody else. That boy. Or that one. Maybe the one with the arm tattoo.

I try never to think too hard on this, and an hour later, on the drive home, when I turn back onto Hackberry Lane, they are still there, these tiny birds tethered to posts. And they are still lost, too, reduced to a great bustling—fixing straps and wondering whom in their contact lists might be worth texting.

That boy. Or that one.

As I watch her there—all of these versions of her that keep reemerging week after week—I wonder if it is really so difficult to settle upon a suitable savior in all those names.

Where are all their fathers?

I am not of the age to be grandfatherly (hardly even fatherly), and I'm afraid that if I offer to help, they'll merely view me as a threat.

What's your angle? they'll wonder, and though I have none (I know little of angles or curves) they will not believe me. And what reason have I given them to?

I am a member of the tribe that has betrayed them. And I, too, have danced the war dance alongside the others.

*

One day my wife and I begin thinking of our daughter—a future prospect we express only in the conditional.

She would be kind, we confirm, *and loyal to her family.*

And most importantly:

She would never find herself alone on Hackberry Lane.

I will be sure to make this quite clear to her in the contract, which I will demand she sign by footprint on the day of her birth

Please keep the ink fresh on her foot, Nurse, as you walk her through the paperwork.

I, the undersigned, hereby affix my footprint to affirm my everlasting kindness and loyalty to my family as well as my commitment to never find myself on Hackberry Lane...

Two years old, I think, is a fine age to begin my lectures on chastity and abstinence, and all the other words we've unearthed to make girls feel like queens. As a reminder, I will spell these words out to her in building blocks, keep them spinning on the mobile above her crib. If acoustics allow, I will insert them intravenously as well—record them onto both sides of the cassette tape, fitting the headphones to the bulge of my wife's belly.

Remember chastity, darling, and abstinence. We will one day have your footprint as proof...

*

Once, my father broke my brother's arm in the midst of a living room karate routine. The neighborhood children had latched onto his legs and sent him sprawling, the great tower of the man collapsing on the weak part of my four-year-old brother's arm.

This is a portrait of a family in crisis, though I struggle to remember my father's reactions—if he was brave and quick thinking in that flash of broken bone, or if he hesitated. If he followed procedure or made it up.

Why the hell wasn't I paying better attention to the important things?

Somehow I managed to erase my father from the emergency room altogether, though maybe it's because I wasn't there myself.

All I remember is his standing there later that night, refusing to sign my brother's cast.

But I want you to, my brother begged, so he did.

Fast-forward three months into the future and the cast was removed.

My father watched as my brother clenched and unclenched his perfect fist.

Do it again, my father begged, so he did.

*

Once, we were a family of hitchhikers. I was ten or so, and our Taurus had broken down along some unmarked expanse of Virginia highway. My mother and father stuck out their thumbs while my brother and I played with hubcaps in a nearby ditch.

This is another portrait of a family in crisis.

When the van stopped for us, we were uncertain whether the man inside was a killer. But my father decided he wasn't, so we piled inside and drove to the nearest repair shop.

I do not know what led him to this decision, and why the hell am I never paying attention when it counts?

That day in Virginia, we stepped from that van, offered him money, but the man told us he was happy to do it, that he had just dropped his daughter off at college and hoped one day someone would return the favor to her.

*

Some nights, in my deepest sleeps, I can envision this girl of mine twenty years into the future—a grown up now, and dealing with issues I've unwittingly thrust upon her. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which my leaving her crying in the crib twenty years prior translates to her failures in Intro to Lit., but what do I know of these matters? Or what if my inability to properly wipe away spittle encouraged a stuttering problem, or a need for braces, or some other complex that's yet to receive its proper taxonomy?

And what if my failures—like my father's— leave an indelible mark on her body?

If, even once fixed, she's still broken.

Yes, of course she will have a lopsided head; what more is to be expected from my butterfingers?

I remain far more concerned about her insides.

Have we properly fed her?

Exposed her to a sufficient number of germs?

I wonder, also, how a father responds to his failures.

When he misses volleyball regionals or the dance recital or the dress rehearsal for *The Wind in the Willows*. And how, even after she has made it abundantly clear to him that she wanted the *blue* shirt with the *white* lettering, he somehow still managed to get it reversed.

How is he to tell her that he was listening, but somewhere deep down inside, some part of him was still trying to save all those half-drafted pages from drowning. That those pages were still hidden somewhere amid the static, and with enough work, and with enough…

What pages? she'll ask. *Dad, were you a writer or something?*

Once, he'll say gallantly, *just fiction.*

Oliver Bendorf

INSOMNIAC

under my fingernails you'll find
the residue of panic embodied
until the bills are paid
you have to really want the eagle
I wasn't always this patriotic
the stars they unfold me now
I am tessellated and singing
my slow-tillion into no man's land
edges divorced from the middle
no sheep, failed by melatonin
which is more than I can afford
I'm not saying dreams are cheap
and I chose to watch the eggs hatch
but I used to sleep with ease
my outline is a jigsaw frayed
one hand over my American pectoral
the pieces they will fully interlock
my knuckles unbending in your breath

Peter Stenson

THE TOYS OF THE ROBBED

Tibbs paid five dollars per propane tank. Five dollars per twenty-pound canister, dented gray cylinders splattered with burger grease. Five dollars for walking into somebody's yard and crouching against their prefab siding, unscrewing the black nozzle underneath a four-burner Weber, and lifting with one hand the twenty pound canister (plus the ten or fifteen of gas), walking with arms straight, steps coming in waddles across manicured grass dew-wet and around fences and hoping security lights wouldn't highlight the whole stupid image: me, the most pathetic of criminals, needing four tanks per night, twenty dollars getting me a tenth of dope.

I was seventeen. These were the suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota. This was during the summer and sometimes I thought about Mr. Two Car Garage coming out of his sliding back door, flip flops, khaki shorts, a longneck between two fingers, and a tray of patties spiced with salt and pepper and Montreal steak seasoning. He'd walk over to the grill—some strange manifestation of his masculinity and a future he'd been envisioning his entire life—and setting the tray of burgers on a table, taking a swig of beer, bending over, thinking about watching the Twins versus the White Sox's that night, maybe about playing catch with little Johnny, maybe about getting inside the tightly-kept pocket of his wife, then— *what the fuck?*

Some part of me liked this, creating a small chink in suburban perfection.

When I was in Juvie, my cellmate was a skinny black kid with half of his hair in cornrows, the other half in an afro. I don't remember

his name. But I remember he liked me because I took the mattress on the floor, allowing him the bed. I was scared. I didn't want any trouble. We'd talk at night. He'd tell me about parties with fishbowls of weed and girls who let him and his boys run trains and how he made money. Then there was the constant: what'd you get popped for?

I told them possession of narcotics.

This was always met by nodding heads as if I'd passed some sort of test.

My roommate was felony burglary, three counts.

One night, he told me how he did it. His boy drove them across 94, the interstate that segregated St. Paul. He went to the University Club. I feigned like I wasn't sure what this place was. In truth, I'd grown up there, swimming and playing tennis until we moved to the suburbs, to a nicer country club. My roommate told me that they didn't have shit for security, that the rich motherfuckers would be up there eating, not knowing anything about their cars. He told me they found an SUV with a GPS sitting on the dash. They broke in, stole the GPS and garage door opener. He said, Stupid motherfuckers rich enough for toys like that are stupid enough to program in their homes.

Huh?

Hit the HOME button. Leads you straight to their house. Have the garage door opener too.

Oh.

I thought that was beyond clever. I asked how they got caught.

Wife sitting right fucking there at the kitchen. Screamed like hell.

My cellmate laughed, twisting the afro-side of his hair. I wondered what it would feel like, the coarseness of his hair. I pictured my mother as that woman he had robbed. I saw her sitting at our kitchen table with her boy-cut dyed hair. I imagined her scream at seeing my roommate, at knowing she wasn't safe, at

realizing that no wall or lock of security system would keep him out, the world, the motherfuckers who did whatever they needed to, just to be able to get up and do it all again. I laughed at this vision, but then I felt bad, my mom so vulnerable.

I had a car. That made the whole stealing of propane pretty easy. I'd drive to different suburbs in the maroon Camry my dad bought me. I'd drive maybe ten minutes away from our seven-acre lot to towns with names like North Oaks or Maplewood or Marina on St. Croix. It'd be dark. My parents would think I was at the ten o'clock AA meeting I claimed to love. I'd park behind other like-modeled cars. I'd look for dark houses. I wouldn't climb fences because people didn't even bother. It would be twenty feet and then I'd be in backyards and see wooden decks with cast-iron furniture and jungle gyms and inflatable pools and hammocks and dog shit and nice grills. I'd steal the propane. I'd tell myself it didn't matter. That they had the fifty bucks for a new tank. That they wouldn't even notice.

I was on probation from the previous summer's possession charges, so I always thought about getting caught, about trying to explain to the police officer that I was doing something good, getting a neighbor a refill, that we killed the gas last night at a barbeque, and I'd talk like a WASP-y private school kid because that was who I was, and I'd meet his eyes, assure him that I fit in, that this was my town, my cul-de-sac, my race, my life.

I bet the policeman would have believed me.

I bet he would have asked if I needed help.

My childhood home was robbed once. I came back from school and the door was open and I was young with a giant head and wearing a uniform of blue slacks and a white polo and I didn't really think twice about our door being unlocked. Neither did my mom who came in right behind me. I went to my room and played GI Joe versus Ninja Turtle, X-Men figurines the wildcard.

I heard one of four garage doors open.

It was my father and then I heard his voice and I don't remember exactly what he said, but I know the first person he yelled for was my mother. I was terrified. Something was wrong. They came running into my room. I was already crying. Michelangelo in one hand, Cobra in the other. They entered at the same time. My dad's face was a contorted thank-fucking-god.

The cops came.

The door had been kicked in. My dad raised his voice at my mother. He wanted to know how the hell she hadn't noticed.

The TV and computer and two CD players and a hand-carved dish from Kenya and my mom's jewelry (not her nice items hidden in the hollow base of a Gillette bottle of shaving cream) were missing. My dad said it was lucky the thief didn't know how much the paintings were worth. My mom said the same about her antique porcelain dolls from England, the one thing she collected.

The cop made me feel better. He rubbed my hair.

I remember that night trying to sleep. Both my parents tucked me in, which was a rarity. They played my favorite story-on-tape, *Hank the Cow Dog*. They kissed my forehead. They told me they loved me. They left the door open, the light in the hall a slit of you're-not-alone. I remember believing this man would come back. And it wasn't that he stole our things, but that he'd been in my room, stepped on my carpet, rifled through my drawers. I thought about him lying down, the stubble of his beard pressing against my flannel sheets. I thought about his breath sticking to the fibers of my comforter. About me breathing him in. I thought about him coming back, him waiting for sleep, the door still not fixed, just slipping in, none of our steps creaky, him silent and invisible and then me getting the feeling of being watched, terrified because I would know I wasn't dreaming, that he was there, a silhouette, leather, a knife, a beard, and I wouldn't open my eyes because then it would be real and he'd be real and my death would be real and because it was safer to just know he was there, feel his gloved hand tracing my neck, his fingers sliding across my throat, his breath joining mine, my comforter the only divider.

In a backyard in Shoreview, I came across a tea party. The moon was somewhere close to bright. It was a perfect reenactment of realism, only from a child's perspective, everything meticulous, everything small. The table was Fisher Price, pink. It came up to my shin. The three chairs matched. The cups didn't. Two were plastic children's tea party type and one was a bottle of beer. I laughed. A Barbie with a Malibu sundress was the only guest. I thought about the scene from earlier that night. It would be some little girl and then Barbie and she'd make her father sit there too and I wondered if he had actually fit on the plastic chair, if it could bear his weight, and I thought about him doing anything for his daughter. About working long hours and buying her toys and about having a barbeque and I pictured the father with his thinning temples and him looking at his daughter and her blonde bangs a direct flight across her forehead and her teeth gapped and the single dimple on her left cheek and he loved her more than anything. I stole their propane, for the first time feeling like this action was somehow violent.

After a few days, my cellmate quit talking to me when I told him that I was being let out. He said something about thinking I was popped for first-degree possession. I told him I was. He shook his head. Another fifth of his hair had been cornrowed. I didn't know what to say. Tell him I was lucky? That he'd get out too? That his public defender was just as good as the lawyer hired by my father? That I was really the people he stole from, a motherfucker with parents rich enough for GPS units, stupid enough to program in HOME?

Last month, my wife and I were down in Arizona visiting my parents. This is their second home, winters in Minnesota finally proving to be too much. It's a nice home, built from scratch, just before houses became fucking worthless in Scottsdale. We arrived and my dad was nothing but nervous anger, stalking around the red tile flooring in bare feet, readers resting on the edge of his nose,

hissing into the phone. My mom ushered us outside, telling us that he was speaking to a locksmith. My wife asked if they'd been robbed.

Not yet, my mom said.

Not yet?

We sat in the backyard on black lawn furniture, surrounded by a pool and cactuses and a built-in four-burner grill, a mosaic of tile depicting a desert landscape built above it. My mom explained that the woman who watered the plants when they were away had lost the key.

So, it's not like it says the address on the key, I said.

My mom looked at me. She drank iced tea. Her varicose veins looked like contrails on the pale sky of her calves. She told me that the woman had a son dealing with some addiction issues, that my father thought he'd been the one who'd stolen the key, probably knowing which houses his mom looked after.

I didn't say anything.

I wanted to tell her that it had been a decade before since I'd smoked shit or shot dope and it'd been just as long since I'd stolen a fucking thing and I wanted to tell her that not everyone was trying to screw them out of what they amassed, that not everyone stared at them as a means to a better life, that not everyone had a habit, that not everyone was who I'd been.

But I didn't say anything.

My wife obviously made the same connection. She joked, patting my leg. She said, Sounds familiar.

My mom nodded. Her chin doubled.

My wife still laughed. She said, I wonder what's in his trunk.

My mom shook her head. She said, The saddest thing I've ever seen.

My wife's dimples smoothed. Her mocking patting-of-my-leg changed to a gentle squeeze.

And it was the three of us sitting there silently remembering the high school story of them finding the trunk of my Camry completely full. This was when I'd been shipped off to the psych

ward, methamphetamines finally fulfilling their promise—slit wrists, voices, that kind of thing. My parents had come to the hospital. It had been us sitting in the cafeteria, me in hospital scrubs, socks with crooked rows of treading, them with tight faces trying not to show emotion. My dad had asked me about the trunk. I'd told him I had no idea what he was talking about. I was being honest. He'd told me it was full of propane tanks, my mother's jewelry from the Gillette bottle, tennis racquets, my laptop, my mother's porcelain dolls from England. I'd shrugged, not remembering doing this, thinking the reasoning was pretty obvious. My dad had said, Jesus Christ, son. We'd sat in the cafeteria not sure what else to say.

Ten years later, we still weren't sure what to say.

The Arizona sun beat down in waves.

I ate gazpacho served in dishes from Williams Sonoma.

Shit was getting bad with me, and I needed a teener and I needed to meet my boy Tibbs by nine-thirty and I just needed more fucking money. I stood outside of a suburban home. It was early, the sun like a just-turned-off light bulb. I watched a family gathered around a television.

The scene was straight from a movie—two brothers and parents and TV and maybe there was popcorn and the rare treat of Sprite and maybe it was me, my family, sitting around the family room, us ordering a Domino's and renting *Uncle Buck* and us laughing at staged times, us laughing because nothing could ever be better, nothing mattering outside of our locked doors, and we laughed because we'd won some sort of lottery and been born white and into the uppermost tax brackets and because our parents were Ivy League educated and because we wore uniforms to school and always had new Jordan's and maybe we were laughing because we didn't ever think about these things, our privileges, for sure not about the people who broke down doors and stole easily pawned electronics, who knew that programming in HOME was a bad idea.

I don't remember what this family looked like.

I just know I watched them for what seemed like hours. The younger boy played with action figures. I thought about standing in his doorway watching him pretend to sleep. How he'd know I was there just by my presence, my gloved hand, his comforter the only thing separating our breaths. **f**

Warren Bromley-Vogel

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD HIRSCH

May 22, 2011

This interview is a transcription of part of a phone conversation I was fortunate enough to have with the famous poet.

WARREN BROMLEY-VOGEL

You've made numerous stylistic ventures with your work in the past, but it seems to me that *Special Orders* is more of a departure than your previous work. So, did you feel pressure to try something different with *Special Orders*?

EDWARD HIRSCH

I think you always feel pressure to keep moving, to keep trying to advance your style and do something different. But in Special Orders I felt a greater compulsion to write more directly, more cleanly, and more ruthlessly than I'd ever before. I guess it felt like a natural evolution to me, but it is the most stripped down and therefore probably the greatest departure from some of my previous work.

WBV

Do you have a sense of where that urge to evolve or try different things—not just for yourself but for any sort of artist—comes from?

EH

It's hard to do anything in poetry at all, and then when you do something that you think is yours you want to advance on it. But

one of the painful things is that you can't do the same thing again or it's a kind of death. So, who knows where it comes from—a kind of restless creative energy, a determination to keep moving, a feeling of renewing yourself, an urge to make it new. I think the reason for remaking ourselves probably depends on the person and the artist.

WBV

Do you have any sense of why you have to do that yourself?

EH

I have a vocation for poetry, and poetry has been my way of understanding the world and thinking about the world since I was a teenager. I'm very dependent on poetry, using words and thinking about making something to understand my own life and my own movement through life. I would feel completely bereft without poetry helping me try to transform my own experience into something fresh and into something that stands apart from myself. Then you find as you get older that not only do you have to keep changing in terms of your work but you don't have any choice because you can't write the poems you wrote before anyway—you can only do imitations of them. So, in order to stay alive you need to keep moving and you need to keep rethinking your experience from where you are at a given point of your life journey.

WBV

I hadn't though of new work being imitation of old work unless you try something new.

EH

Now, as a young artist, I think your issues and problems are somewhat different because there you keep restlessly moving and trying to find something that's your own. You try to develop something that's your mark, your stamp, your experience—the poem that only you could write.

WBV

In 1987, when you interviewed W.S. Merwin for the *Paris Review*, you asked him if he saw a connection between poetry and prayer. In your work, especially in your more recent work, I see a sense of entreaty or prayer coming through very often, so I'd like to ask you the same thing: do you see a connection between poetry and prayer?

EH

I do. I think that a lot of the same longings and feelings and the personal quality of addressing the beyond or something beyond—speaking out into the void—is very much the same in poetry and prayer. A lot of the same impulses go into poetry and prayer, but I think there's a very strong difference between them at the same time. In other words I think they're kin, and I think the kinship comes from the longing to reach the beyond and the feeling of talking to yourself and to some other, but the difference is that a prayer is addressed to God and only to God—between yourself or your deity or whatever you're praying to. But in poetry, even if it seeks the divine, it has a human horizon, because poetry implies or suggests that there will always be a reader. So, if it seeks the beyond it does so through a human connection or through finding another reader. It's not unmediated: just you and your god. It's you, your god, and a future reader. So, in that way, it has a human horizon, because the end result of a poem is not to reach a deity but to reach another reader. In that way, I think poetry is radically different from prayer.

WBV

I think it's interesting that the evolution of poetry and prayer followed different paths because their purposes were ultimately different.

EH

I think they have different goals but I think they had similar origins. Poets were originally priests, and I think the idea of reaching beyond the human is a goal of both of them and is a quest for both of them. But, I think once you get to the written lyric, it just has a different direction in its ultimate goal, because in the end the poem is addressed to a reader—not to a known reader, but to an unknown reader, to a secret addressee, whereas a prayer is addressed to the beyond, to a deity, to some gods or god beyond, but it doesn't have a human horizon. It's just speaking between you and your god, while a poem is another kind of connection, and the mystery of encounter is not just between you and your god—it's directed towards a future reader.

WBV

I've heard you speak about reading eclectically from poets of many nationalities.

EH

I don't think you can be a serious writer of poetry without being a serious reader of poetry. You enter poetry by picking up all the things that are around you in terms of your moment, and you then internalize the conventions of writing poetry at any given time. Sometimes they're conscious. Sometimes they're unconscious. But if you have any aspiration to write beyond the conventions, or to not let the conventions write you, then you need to widen your horizons in terms of what you read. My own experience is that by reading beyond my own tradition, beyond Anglo-American poetry, I was introduced to all different kinds of poems: all different kinds of tonalities, all different ways of approaching a poem and thinking through a poem. This gives you another opportunity, another series of ways of thinking about poems that you might not have thought of before, things you might infuse into your own work. Now that

means you could read the poetry of different periods. You could read the poetry of different countries. You could read the poetry of different times, and all of this is available for your own use. I like Ezra Pound's idea that in some way all poets are contemporaneous. And so they're all there for your use, but if you do not read widely you're just limited by what you read. Your horizons are determined by what you think a poem is, and the less you know about poetry the smaller those horizons are.

WBV

Was there a moment for you when you hit upon the realization that to have an expansive understanding of poetry you'd have to read outside of the Anglo-American tradition?

EH

Yes—I wouldn't have put it so self-consciously, I don't think, and I don't think I knew exactly what I was doing, but in my early twenties I must have felt some frustration with the Anglo-American tradition, especially with the tonalities of American Modernism. I mean, I'm a child of Modernism. I grew up reading T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore. And those poets were like mother's milk to me, but it's a cold milk. I began to feel that I wanted something in poetry that was a little more heated without losing any intellectual rigor. Pound wanted a poem that was sculptural and the Modernist poets themselves were often very heated. Nonetheless, their critical proclamations that led to New Criticism often led to coldness in poetry. They mocked anything that was too warm as sentimental, and they were contemptuous of tenderness. I must have felt some inadequacy in this, or some longing, but I couldn't have articulated it. I happened upon reading all different kinds of poems because I must have been looking for something. I think I hit upon two different traditions, the first being Eastern European poetry. In my early twenties I found the Polish poets. I found Czeslaw Milosz and Zbigniew Herbert

especially, and I found Hungarian poets like Attila József and Miklós Radnóti. I found Russian poets, espeically the Acmeists of the twenties, like Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, and Marina Tsvetaeva. I was reading them all in translation, and at the same time I discovered great Spanish American poets like Garcia Lorca, Cesar Vallejo, and Migel Hernandez, and I found different things in these two radically different traditions. In Spanish American poetry, I found more passionate, crazed, emotional surrealism. It had all of the imagination of the French surrealists, but they were much warmer. In Eastern European poetry I found a sort of humane tenderness without any loss of intellect. And so I hit upon these poets and they began to energize my practice and I tried to bring some of the practices that I found in this poetry into my own work.

WBV

Speaking of international literature, I've heard in the last couple of years that the international literary community has accused American literature of being too self-involved and insular in the face of a globalized world. I wonder what your take on that is, and if you think it's something that's changing.

EH

I think that how to write about what's happening in the world is a very large poetic and spiritual problem. I don't think that American poets are insular today, and I don't think that people are unaware of the massive problems of what's happening around the world and trying to address it. Now, I think you could criticize a lot of American poets for the way they address it: you might not like how they do it, but I don't think you could say that our poets are politically ignorant or environmentally unaware or without any knowledge of what's happening in the world or trying to participate in that. Now, I think it's not an insular poetry. But I also think there are a lot of stylistic issues, and I don't think that American poets are necessarily addressing these problems in the most revealing or useful

or powerful ways, but I don't think that American poetry is unaware of what's happening in the world.

WBV

You said you think that people could address some of these issues in other ways stylistically. Do you have any sense of how?

EH

There's a tremendous pull in American poetry toward experimentation and one of the places that experimentation leads to is language entirely for its own sake—language that has as little reference to the outside world as possible and that courts meaninglessness. I know a lot of young poets that prefer meaninglessness and think there's something authoritarian about making meaning, that there's something wrong with syntactical continuity. But, I think a lot of this poetry is extremely off-putting to readers who are not poets and who don't have any way to enter this poetry. It's hard to see how it helps them live their lives, or how it addresses any of the larger global, cultural, or spiritual issues that we're all facing. Now, I'm not saying that it doesn't address it or that it doesn't think about it, but I'm saying that a lot of it feels to many readers extremely closed off and unavailable to them.

WBV

Regarding these poets who are allergic to syntactical continuity or eschew sense and meaning—this particular strand stands starkly in contrast to your own work: I've heard you speak about Rilke's notion of confronting the difficult and I wondered how that might play into your decision to stand against this sort of stylistic mode of making poetry.

EH

I don't think there's any way around an authentically difficult poetry. I would never suggest that all poetry should be simple or

all poetry needs to be clear or totally transparent. I mean, one of my heroes is the poet Zbigniew Herbert, and he did believe in semantic transparency. That's my own goal increasingly as I write, but I don't think that should be imposed on all poets and work that can seem tremendously difficult at one period can seem much more accessible to another. Take for example Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which I think is a very great poem and which was tremendously mystifying to a lot of people when it came out, but now we read it in high school. And I think it's comprehensible to us in high school if you're smart and you care about poetry. I mean, maybe not every line: it's a mysterious poem; it's a difficult poem, but it's an available poem. So, partly sometimes we just have to catch up, but having read a lot of contemporary poetry, I think there's a lot of contemporary poetry that is just completely unavailable. It just doesn't have any interest in readers. It's completely closed off and interested in its own experimentation, in its own movement, without any interest in anything beyond itself, and that's difficult in a way that's just not appealing to me, and I think it's not appealing to many readers. I think the difficulty comes from confronting your own experience, confronting your own limitations, confronting your stylistic imitation, and confronting what is most difficult to think about in being a human being, in being an American, in writing in a moment where we're surrounded by a 24/7 celebrity culture. There's a lot for us to confront in how we think about our poems and how we should write them at this moment. But I think that utter meaninglessness and giving in to meaninglessness is a way of giving up and not confronting what we have to confront.

WBV

In a 2000 interview with the *Kenyon Review* you said that the splitting of American poetry into schools or movements is divisive and harmful to the art and that you hoped instead that the ethos of American poetry should be inclusiveness. That was 11 years ago. Do you think anything has changed?

EH

I think it's better. There are still schools in American poetry and there are still those who won't read across their schools. There are poets of new formalism that won't read anything that seems fragmented, and there are poets of extreme fragmentation that won't read anything that's traditional and formalistic, but in my own experience younger poets are less interested in these divisions and read much more widely across the board and are interested in all different kinds of things. They are not as bound by these traditional schools and traditional divisions. There are still those who operate within very limited aesthetics who won't read outside those aesthetics, but I think that a younger generation of American poets is just less interested in this kind of—I think—somewhat crude dividing of poetry into schools. On the other hand, it's a big country and the larger culture doesn't care about poetry, and I think that sometimes people bond into schools for reasons that have to do with sociology and reasons that have to do with comforting each other in finding like minded people. That can be a way of connecting each other, but it can also be a way of shutting other poets out.

WBV

You noted that the larger culture doesn't care about poetry. I read an interview recently where a very famous poet said that if he had 100,000 readers for his poems he would feel that something was very wrong with his work.

EH

I can see why someone would say that because you feel that in order to get 100,000 readers you'd somehow be pandering to writing something they'd all understand. I suppose that would be one way of thinking. I guess I would say that Pablo Neruda wrote a really great book called *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* that has had many more than 100,000 readers, and it's a great book of poems written by a young poet. So, I don't think that you have to

be writing in a radically simplistic style to reach a large audience. I don't think the large audience should be the goal you seek. I don't think the power of poetry is in numbers, but I don't think that having a large audience makes it impossible for you to write good poetry, and I don't think that having 100,000 readers will tell you either way about the quality of the work. The quality of the work might be like Rod McKuen, but it also might be like Pablo Neruda.

WBV

I'm interested in the idea that the audience of poetry is a special audience—one that's dedicated to the art. I think that's true for the most part.

EH

I think that poetry's a minority art in the United States, and I think it always will be. I agree, and I don't think the size of the audience is any reflection of the quality of the work. I don't think it's as negative as some people do, but I don't think it's necessarily a positive. I think the power of poetry exists in one to one relationships, and a poem works when a reader reads it and a reader has an experience. The goal of poetic inspiration is to inspire the reader and that happens one to one. That doesn't happen in masses. I don't think the power of poetry is determined by the size of the audience. I think that great poems are written by poets who are struggling with their art and working on poetry itself, and their goal is to try and make a great poem. The size of the audience is not that relevant to the quality of the work. It's somewhat irrelevant, I think, but in the end, if poetry is to survive, it needs readers.

WBV

Now, to change gears: this is hard to ask seriously, but it is a debate that interests me, and I'd like to hear your perspective. So, here goes: are you among those who think we're witnessing the gradual decline and fall of the English language?

EH

That's funny. I would have to say yes and no. There's no question that there's a debasement of language because so much of American culture is driven by commerce and so much has to do with profit. So much has to do with making money. So much has to do with selling things. We're surrounded constantly by the debasement of language as people try to sell things to each other. On the other hand, I think that the English language is very much alive. It's continually vital. It's being used in the streets by all kinds of different people in all kinds of different ways. English has tremendous infusions of things from other languages and it's still a very vital, alive, and powerful language. I don't think it's going to die, and I think it's a great language for poetry. But I do think we're living in a culture that is problematic, and that's a serious concern for people who believe that there is a part of life that doesn't have to do with making money, that isn't just about profit.

WBV

This is sort of in the same vein: I've noticed in my time in creative writing programs that there's an attitude among some students that you don't have to be a great reader to be a great writer. I find this notion to be both confusing and confounding. I wonder if you had any sense of where this idea originated.

EH

I'm not exactly sure where this idea comes from. It may have to do with the idea that poetry is self expression. In a culture that is all about self expression, individual creativity, and maximizing your own experience, it may be that this gave rise to the idea that in order to write poetry you don't need to read poetry, since it isn't about the originality of the person who's writing. One of the weird ironies of this position is that people who don't read end up writing more like each other than themselves. It's a peculiarity that if you don't read poetry you end up writing what you think sounds like poetry,

and that's extremely vague. Whereas if you actually imitate other poets you think you'd sound more like them. Initially you do, but the way you find your voice, the way you find your distinctive style is by being influenced and then departing and moving away from your influences. You can't just write the poetry that's come before you. You have to write your own poetry. But without those who've come before you you're left writing out of the general zeitgeist. I vigorously disagree with the idea that you can possibly be a good poet without reading poetry. You might have some poems in you that are just based on your own experience. You might even have a book in you that's based on your own experience, because your own experience has been so extreme or so tormenting, or you have so much to say about your own life and what's happened to you that you can write a good book of poems. But I don't think you can create a great body of poetry and I don't think you can write more than one book of poems just going on your own experience or just going on your own thoughts. You need poetry and you need to enter poetry, and the only way you can enter poetry is by reading poetry. There has been no great poet in the history of poetry that has not also been a great reader of poetry.

WBV

I agree. I find myself dumbfounded when trying to confront the sentiment that you don't need the poetry of others to be a poet yourself.

EH

I would go so far as to say that if you don't read poetry, ultimately you're actually not a poet. You're a person who writes poetry, but you're not a poet. Maybe for a while you can do this, but you're not a poet, because a poet is a person who enters into poetry. And the only way you can enter into poetry, even the most experimental poetry, even the most original poetry, is by reading. If you look into the great originals of poetry you'll find that they're great readers of

poetry—they're trying to break with the past, but they certainly know the past that they're breaking from. I'm with you, actually, this is a confounding idea to me.

WBV

I wanted to wrap up by asking you a few more questions about yourself and your own work. When you think of writers who have directly influenced your work and your writing, do you go back to the 19th century?

EH

I'm crazy about the Romantic poets. I think it's a great mistake to try to imitate the diction of the poetry of the 19th century, but in terms of the feelings, in terms of the experience, in terms of the way they go about writing poems, I've been deeply influenced by 19th century poets. The poet who's closest to me from the poetry of the 19th century is John Keats. I've written a lot about him and I think he's one of the heroes of our humanity, but I've also been greatly influenced by the political commitments of Shelley, by the tremendous critical intelligence of Coleridge, and by the great walking poems of Wordsworth. I mean, this is part of the great legacy of English poetry, and I feel that I'm in some ways working in the tradition of romantic poetry.

WBV

You just spoke of diction. I feel that diction is one of the words that comes to my head when I think of your work. I wonder if you have a strong sense of what sort of diction you choose to employ in your own work: what's off limits, what's fair game.

EH

I don't think there are any words that are off limits. Maybe this is the influence of Williams and Frost on me, but I feel that poetry has to be in touch with speech. I have a strong sense, although I'm not a

vernacular poet, that poetry should be in touch with the vernacular, so I have a strong sense that the poem should be something that someone could say. There are no words that are off-limits there. I adore Gerard Manley Hopkins for example, who was not writing in plain style at all. I don't think it has anything to do with the richness of the diction or the plainness of the language, but it has to do with how dramatically convincing the poem is—that it's something someone could actually say in a dramatic situation. If it's not something that anyone would say, then it just doesn't feel right to me in terms of my own work. So, I'm not thinking of diction *per se* as diction, but I am thinking about a dramatic speaker in a place, and I feel that what the speaker says has to be convincing. You want the language to be appropriate to the conditions out of which the speaker is speaking.

WBV

Does that sort of speaker existing in this dramatic moment also help you think of the place from which your imagery will come? Or does it limit your imagery in any way?

EH

I just think that imagery is something different. I don't think it limits it, but I do think it may change the articulation of it. I've always loved the surrealist poets and the wildness of their images. You take a poet like Robert Desnos, the French surrealist and the diction is wide and the imagery is extraordinary, but you always feel that there's a human speaker there. Sometimes you feel as if he's a prophet. Sometimes you feel as if something is speaking through him, as in the poem "The Voice of Robert Desnos," but you feel there's a human being back there. You feel there's a human speaker and that determines that poem.

WBV

It's interesting to think of the speakers in Desnos' poems, one of whom spoke of death as a "handsome mountain-climber in the armor of the white prince," being rooted in his humanity.

EH

There's a speaker in the Desnos poems and it's a version of Robert Desnos. The poems are wild and incredibly imaginative. They're strange, and they're rich, but there is a speaker there and it's the same for Cesar Vallejo, who's such a great Peruvian surrealist, and who writes such strikingly humane poems. You know there's a reason that Vallejo wrote *Poemas Humanos*—you know, "human poems." Even though the poems are close to incomprehensible, he writes at the edge of what can be said. Nonetheless there's a radically fragmented tortured speaker, but there is a speaker and there is a human being.

WBV

Here's a trivial-seeming question, but it's another one that I often wonder about. I wonder if you compose on a word processor. If you do, do you think that composing on a computer has any meaningful effect on writing?

EH

You know, I think this is up to each individual poet to decide. I still write by hand, then I type it into the computer, and then I revise on the computer. I print it out. I rewrite it. I type it up again. I change the lineation. For me, the computer has made revision immensely easier, but it hasn't made writing any easier because I don't write on the computer. I still write by hand, but there are many people, I think, that do write on the computer and I think it's really up to them. I think that computer can aid to quickness of association and writing more rapidly, but that also can mean writing more sloppily. So, I don't think when writing poetry speed is necessarily the issue,

but I think that's really dependent on the individual writer. I don't compose on the word processor. I revise on it.

WBV

I've had a couple discussions with Robert Wrigley about this and he's actually switched over to the word processor, although he says he never thought he'd end up there.

EH

I think it's just temperamental, I don't think it tells you anything about your poetry. I think it just tells you what's the best way you work on your creative process.

WBV

For me, I'm interested in the idea Charles Olson had that composing on the typewriter would be revolutionary for poets because it would enable them to have the power to control with exactitude the spacing and typography of their poems, and that that should be a tool for poets, that they should make use of that in their poems. Obviously that didn't really pan out, at least not in any way he envisioned.

EH

Well, he believed in it strongly. I think there are poets who believe in computer programs and poets who take themselves out of the process entirely by letting the programs do the writing for them. There are poets who make use of the typography of computer programs. There are all kinds of things that people are doing in terms of computer experiments. I'm not one of them, and to me the computer is a tool, a useful one, but I still need to be by myself thinking, working in coffee shops, brooding, writing lines, to make a poem. Eventually I type it and I can often revise or work changes much more easily on the computer than the days when we had to type, but for me the first burst of poetry always comes by hand. **f**

My First Marriage(s), or: Denial and Disillusionment in a Facebook News Feed

News Feed | Status Updates | Photos | Posted Items | Live Feed

Jill Kolongowski would rather not grow up.

Colleen Smartle finally gets to be Mrs. Paul Stewart! Love ya babe!!!!

Jill Kolongowski is gagging.

Paul Stewart and Colleen Smartle Stewart are now married.

Dennis Kingleby and Carole Bibbs are now married.

Jill Kolongowski can see it beginning.

Jill Kolongowski joined the group When I was Your Age, People Married When They Were Old Enough to Drink at Their Own Weddings.

Jill Kolongowski is celebrating 4 years with Charlie Roman ♥

Beth Falcon and Dustin Applebaum are now engaged.

Liza Stone and Peter Bikowski are now engaged

Sandra Keffler and Austin Bent are now engaged.

Jill Kolongowski oy.

Jane Perk and Justin Lillio are now engaged.

Kendra Gin and Pedro Komar are now engaged.

Jill Kolongowski oh come on.

Emma Easter and Daron Harding are now engaged.

Andi Burtz and Scott VonWasser are now engaged.

Jill Kolongowski can't type "congratulations" one more time.

Andi Burtz added 60 photos to My Ring!!!!

Andi Burtz became a fan of Claw-Footed Dining Room Sets.

Andi Burtz is fixing up the house for her hubby-to-be!! :D

Jill Kolongowski is gagging.

37 of your friends are attending ♥ Emma and Daron's Wedding ♥.

Jill Kolongowski didn't want to go, anyway.

Emma Easter and Daron Harding are now married.

Emma Harding: a marriage and a mom-to-be in the same year!!!

Jill Kolongowski doesn't believe in coincidences.

Amber Zilinsky and Ken Vender are now engaged.

Jill Kolongowski feels immature.

Karyn Zilinsky is so excited for her daughter!11!!!1!

Karyn Zilinsky became a fan of Ken Vender.

Karyn Zilinsky hopes my daughter's marriage is happier than mine! jk (maybe) lolololololol

Karyn Zilinsky joined the group Mommies of Brides to Be.

Jill Kolongowski joined the group 1,000,000 Strong against Parents on Facebook.

Jill Kolongowski is attending Amber's 21st Bday Partay!

Jill Kolongowski can't believe a friend she's known since they were in diapers is engaged.

Jill Kolongowski tagged Amber Zilinsky in the album Remember When…

Amber Zilinsky says Happy 4 years, Kennie! :-*

Charlie Roman and Ken Vender are now friends.

Charlie Roman wonders when his entire graduating class got engaged.

Amber Zilinsky added 45 new photos to First Family Photos!!! All my babies together! I love my babies. :) :)

Jill Kolongowski joined the group I Hate When People Think Their Pets are Their Children.

Andi VonWasser is pregnant! OMG!

Andi VonWasser became a fan of Babies 'R' Us.

Jill Kolongowski became a fan of Contraceptives.

Jill Kolongowski is attending Amber and Ken's Wedding.

Amber Zilinsky became a fan of Strapless Gowns.

Charlie Roman tagged Ken Vender in the note Should I be shopping for a ring?

Jill Kolongowski PANIC

Charlie Roman will wait.

Andi VonWasser added 57 photos to the album Watch My Belly grOW!

Jill Kolongowski did not ask to see your belly.

Emma Harding can feel baby kicking! Good thing daddy gets to feel before he's deployed :(

Emma Harding joined the group Cornell University Alumni.

Emma Harding joined the group Army Wives Support Group.

Jill Kolongowski joined the group Senior Spring Break '09: I Planned My Career, Not My Wedding.

Charlie Roman got a job here in Michigan!

Jill Kolongowski got an interview in Boston!

Emma Harding ugh, got morning sickness…..

Jill Kolongowski would rather not grow up.

Dennis Kingleby and Carole Bibbs ended their relationship.

Paul Stewart and Colleen Smartle Stewart ended their relationship.

Colleen Smartle is bummed about getting divorce papers :(… in a black pit of despair…

Jill Kolongowski became a fan of Discretion.

Jill Kolongowski became a fan of Prenuptial Agreements.

Jill Kolongowski wonders if anything lasts.

Emma Harding added 122 new photos to Honeymoon! ♥ + baby bump :D.

Amber Zilinsky is planning!

Amber Zilinsky tagged Jill Kolongowski in the note Will you be my maid of honor?

Jill Kolongowski wants to believe.

Jill Kolongowski was appointed Maid of Honor in the group Amber and Ken's Wedding Party.

Andi VonWasser My water broke!! Changing my pants then the hubby bubby boo is driving me to the hospital!

Amber Zilinsky and Ken Vender are now married.

Jill Kolongowski for the love of god, no more babies. not yet.

Andi VonWasser added 5 new photos to Labor :o.

Andi VonWasser is dilated 6 centimeters!!

Charlie Roman became a fan of The Metric System.

Jill Kolongowski is attending Interviews.

Andi VonWasser, Emma Harding, and 10 of your other friends are attending New Mommy Meet-and Greet! (And EAT!!!!).

Emma Harding is so psyched to be moving out of her parents and into a new apt with new hubby and (almost) baby!

Charlie Roman is psyched for Jill Kolongowski

Jill Kolongowski is moving across the country. Is this real life?

Andi VonWasser is headed to delivery! Almost time for baby boy!!!!

Jill Kolongowski and Charlie Roman were tagged in the note Your Turn! by Everyone Else.

Emma Harding is packing and moving!

Jill Kolongowski is packing and moving. PANIC

Andi VonWasser attended 30 Hours of Labor.

Baby VonWasser is crying.

Andi VonWasser is crying.

Charlie Roman and 30 of your friends attended Jill's Going-Away Party.

Charlie Roman became a fan of Boston.

Emma Harding is happy, despite everything.

Jill Kolongowski wants to believe.

Charlie Roman will wait.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sherman Alexie is the author of, most recently, *Face*, poetry, from Hanging Loose Press, and *War Dances*, poems and stories, from Grove Press. He lives with his family in Seattle.

Steve Almond is the author of a bunch of books, none of them as cute as his children. His new story collection, *God Bless America*, will be out in October.

Oliver Bendorf teaches creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he is the Martha Meier-Renk Graduate Fellow in Poetry. His poems have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from *Drunken Boat*, *Quarterly West*, *The Journal*, and *Sugar House Review*. Oliver is a Lambda Literary Fellow and an Iowa native.

Michael Cooper teaches fiction writing at Florida State University, where he's a PhD candidate and an editor at *The Southeast Review*. His most recent work has appeared in *Prick of the Spindle*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and *Word Riot*. Stories are forthcoming in *>kill author*, *Night Train*, and *Used Furniture Review*.

Steve Fayer has recently completed two short story collections: *The Diver's Game* ~ about street life in Brooklyn's Holy Cross parish and *The Settlement* ~ about a scandal haunting black and white families in a Catskill village. He is co-author of *Voices of Freedom*, a history of the civil rights movement, (Bantam

1990), a NYTimes "Notable Book of the Year." His scripts for PBS have been recognized with a national Emmy (for *Eyes On The Prize)*, a Writers Guild of America award and Special Jury Award at Sundance.

A native Texan, R.A. Garza is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and the Georgetown University Law Center. He currently resides in Arlington, VA with his wife, Sarah, and cat, Aphrodite. This is his first publication.

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Edward Hirsch, a MacArthur Fellow, has published eight books of poems, including *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems* (2010), which brings together thirty-five years of work. He has also published four prose books about poetry, among them *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (1999), a national bestseller. He is president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

B.J. Hollars is an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He is the author of the forthcoming *Thirteen Loops: Race, Violence and the Last Lynching in America* (University of Alabama Press, 2011) and the editor of *You Must Be This Tall To Ride: Contemporary Writers Take You Inside The Story* (Writer's Digest Books, 2009) and *The Borderlands: Explorations to the Fringes of Nonfiction* (University of Nebraska, 2012).

Amorak Huey, who recently left the newspaper business after 15 years as a reporter and editor, teaches at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. His poems have appeared recently in

The Southern Review, *Rattle*, *Los Angeles Review*, and many other journals, both print and online.

JUDITH KITCHEN's latest book of essays is *Half in Shade* (Coffee House Press, 2012). In addition, she has edited three collections of short nonfiction pieces for W. W. Norton. Her awards include two Pushcart prizes in nonfiction. She lives in Port Townsend, WA, and serves on the faculty of the Rainier Writing Workshop Low-Residency MFA at Pacific Lutheran University.

FRANZ KNUPFER's work has appeared or is upcoming in *The Bellingham Review*, *Washington Square Review*, *JMWW* and *Poets & Writers*. He received his MFA in fiction from Johns Hopkins University and spent a Fulbright year in Nepal working on a collection of short stories. He recently finished a novel entitled *Penumbra*.

JILL KOLONGOWSKI has lived on both coasts but she grew up and learned to write in the middle, in a small town in Michigan. She has worked as a writer, an editor, and a doughnut-maker. Jill's work appears in the *Red Cedar Review* and she writes a food column for *The Idler*. She enjoys people-watching, baking, and running. Her only vices are television and Broadway musicals.

DORIANNE LAUX's most recent collections are *The Book of Men* and *Facts about the Moon*. A finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and winner of the Oregon Book Award and The Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry, Laux is also author of *Awake*, *What We Carry*, and *Smoke* from BOA Editions. She teaches poetry in the MFA Program at North Carolina State University and is founding faculty at Pacific University's Low Residency MFA Program.

J.D. Lewis' essays have appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *Memoir (and)*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. She has an MFA in nonfiction from the University of Iowa, and is Art Director/Senior Editor at *Defunct* magazine.

Ben Nickol's fiction and nonfiction has appeared most recently in *Hunger Mountain*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *Monkeybicycle*, among other venues, and in 2010 received recognition from the Arkansas Arts Council. He lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he teaches at the University of Arkansas. His current project is a novel about a college basketball coach.

Patric Pepper's chapbook, *Zoned Industrial*, won the *Medicinal Purposes* Chapbook Prize. His full length collection, *Temporary Apprehensions*, won the Washington Writers' Publishing House Poetry Prize. His work has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Ekphrasis*, *Gargoyle*, *Potomac Review*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and *Confrontation Magazine*. He is current president of Washington Writers' Publishing House, a regional nonprofit writers' cooperative founded in 1975, and he is publisher of Pond Road Press.

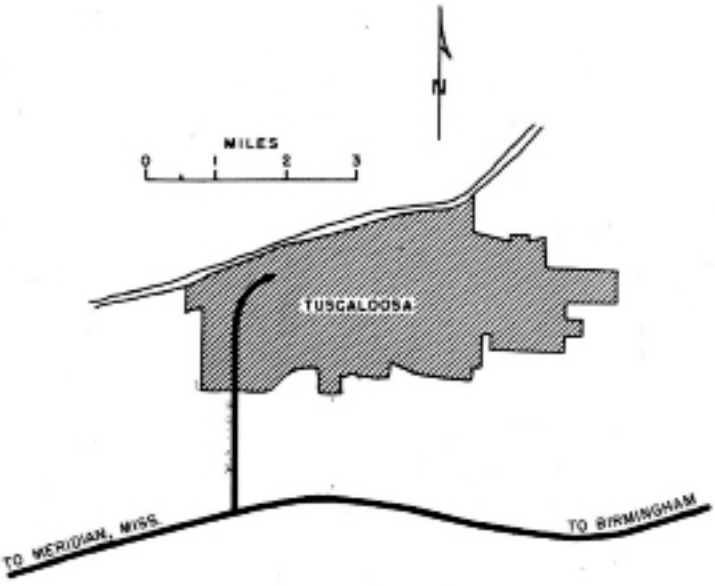
Sean Prentiss is an assistant professor of Writing at Grand Valley State University. When not teaching, he lives and writes at his cabin in the mountains of Colorado.

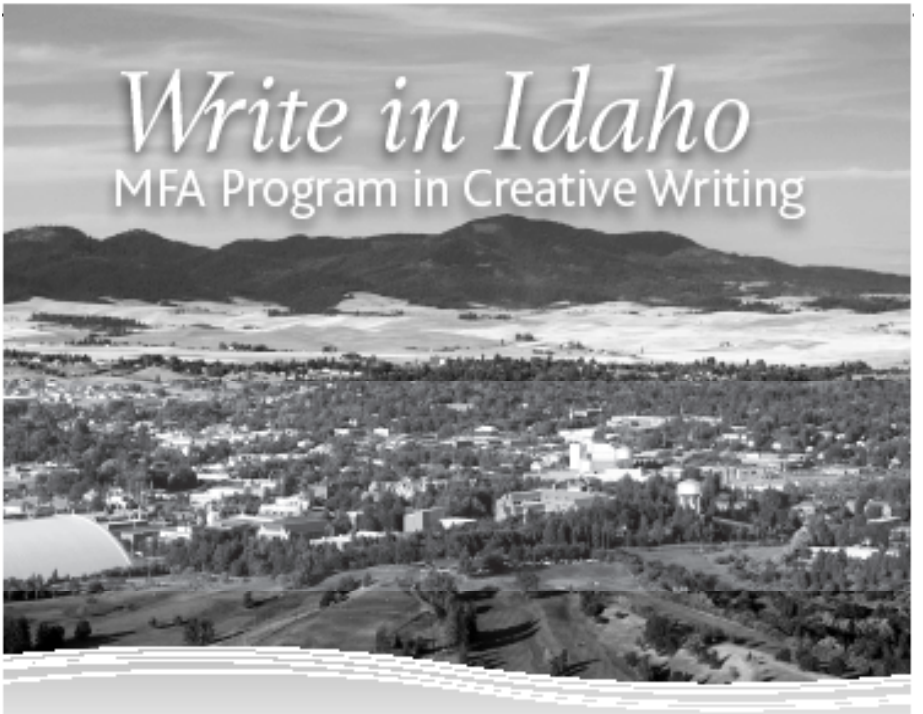
Jane Springer's *Murder Ballad* won the Beatrice Hawley award and is forthcoming from Alice James Books (May, 2012). Her first book, *Dear Blackbird*, won the Agha Shaid Ali prize (University of Utah Press, 2007). Other awards include an AWP Intro Prize, a Pushcart, the Robert Penn Warren Prize for Poetry, an NEA and a Whiting Award. She lives in upstate New York, with her husband, John Powell, their son Morrison, and their two dogs, Woofus and Georgia.

Peter Stenson has stories and essays published or forthcoming in *The Sun*, *Confrontation*, *Post Road*, *The Pinch*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Passages North* and *Upstreet*, among others. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is currently working on his MFA in fiction at Colorado State University.

Marie La Viña is a product of multiple cities. She was born in Los Angeles in 1987 and spent most of her childhood in Manila, Philippines, where her poems have appeared in various publications. She currently lives in Woodside, New York and works as a Visitor Assistant at the Museum of Modern Art. "Immigrant" is her first poem to be published in the United States.

Mark Wagenaar is the 2012 winner of the Pollak Prize, for his book *Voodoo Inverso*. This year he has also won several other contests, including the Greg Grummer Poetry Award, the Gary Gildner Poetry Award, & Columbia: A Journal of Literature & Art's contest. His poems appear widely, most recently in *Copper Nickel*, the *Colorado Review*, & *Subtropics*. He is currently a doctoral fellow at the University of North Texas, and lives in Denton, TX, with his wife, fellow poet Chelsea Wagenaar.





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Application Deadline is January 15.

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