



DIRTY CHAI
Issue Four
Fall 2014

Dirty Chai

Editors

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On The Cover

Found Art: Grandfather as Kid with Brother



Miodrag Kojadinovic

www.dirtychaimag.com

Dirty Chai
Lit with a Kick
A Journal of Literature & Art

Dirty Chai : Issue Four : Love Child : Fall 2014

The Urban Dictionary defines love child as “the illegitimate offspring of unmarried parents” & really, what better a theme for the last issue in which Sam & I will be the sole editors? Dirty Chai is in every sense of the word *our* love child. But, digging even further, our submission call asked for work that represented something beautiful from unexpected sources, remnants of the past, going against the status quo—and wow! We were blown away at the response we received. We want to say THANK YOU to all of our contributors, and to everyone who submitted—without your incredible talents, we would not have anything to publish! You make Dirty Chai what it is.

Sending our love,
Azia & Sam

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Artist: Jacob Landrith

Onions for Our Dear Leader

-Kirsti Whalen

Rub food around your mouth without consuming it! Masturbate without achieving orgasm! Only interact with potential mates online! Never attend shows, but read promotional material with gusto! Consume the concept of something, but do not lay your hands or heart upon it! Honour your Dear Leader! Honour your Dear Leader to keep your families safe but resist belief in him!

We chant beneath our breath so the wardens don't hear us. Those who no longer have breath, who absorb the air as it is filtered to them: they do not chant. But they think, hard alongside. We think hard together beneath our layers, in the soft core that knows that all of this is wrong.

No one believed us, at first. In the world outside the greenhouse. They didn't

want to; hadn't weaned their ears from the loudspeaker long enough to listen to their children.

Think! Be! You have the right to be a primate, an upstanding humanoid, a person to attached to flesh and bone and rational thought! Maintain the integrity of your species! Restrict your nourishment to the eating of non-human persons!

Even in the greenhouse the propaganda drones, so it is only natural that our rebellion was conceived in slogans. We didn't want to come here, but we were found, hauled, dragged and planted.

We will be soup. Our skins will be peeled and we will be segmented. We hope above all hope to be delivered back to our families, a nourishing token for their loss. And our mothers will cry as they chop us into slithers but they will not know why they are crying, and this will be our last act of gratitude. We will be served in steaming bowls and will be rich on the tongues of our families, and this will be our last act.

At night, when it is dark and we are afraid, some of us say that perhaps we are all destined for the tongue of the Dear Leader. On the wavering line between human and bulb we were delirious upon entering this place, so not one of us remembers whether this greenhouse serves the public plate or the Dear Leader's private supply. We become afraid. When we are afraid, we chant. *Tell your fears to others! Your confession will come at a cost! But as you offer your fear it will light the fear brighter in another, and together they may burn so bright that they will burn out!*

The desperation was brought on by the itch long before the acts in which we were caught and captured. We were found bald. We had minced our follicles between our teeth in hunger and inquiry, our hair long since plucked out to make way for whatever we knew was beneath our skin. They teased us fibrous from our families until we were cold and out in the open, like our roots. We were all different, I suppose:

the thick-soled girls from the north; the draped and privileged of the capital. But each girl's skin had thinned by the time she arrives. Our eyes sat milky and white against the green pluck of our unripe skin. We could have been anything. And we were all equal, in a way: we had been chosen from birth for this, which they called a great honour. Carried away from our mothers and pricked with the change that would come.

On arrival we made whatever claims our uniformity allowed for. That our fathers were Generals in the Dear Leader's army. Our fathers were the Dear Leader's sushi chefs. Our fathers were not the chefs but they placed the delicate items on the Dear Leader's tongue and once the Dear Leader touched our fathers' fingertips with his moist saliva, and it was as fresh as a thousand rains filtered through the petals of the noble national flower. (My cousin became a national flower. She was indeed very pretty). And none of our fathers were too *afraid* to help us: all of them knew the Dear Leader had a great and noble destiny held in his fruitful mind, and when they expelled us from their houses it was only so that we could fall into the Dear Leader's arms.

We spoke these truths before we knew our own, and we chanted them until the truth of the greenhouse grows louder. We began to wonder why we had to become foodstuffs, rather than little girls secure in our own houses. We wondered what greater rights the wardens had than us, those men who smelled of mulch and slid their hands around our sleek and bulbous forms under the guise of fertilizing.

The revolution is in your throat! You'll find it in your throat if you read it out of your bones! If your throat does not work you have your thoughts, and if your thoughts are all you have then you must believe they are enough! Sing it: the revolution does not go unsung! The revolution cannot be lobotomized!

We are all becoming Onions. You can hold the fibers in, for a time, like any bodily function. But they came, in the end. Spooling like thread at the base of our necks. It came and it was almost a relief, once we were here, away from the quiet contempt of the rest of the world and even the others who came out at night: the husk of the skin or the dinner-plate eyes of the people who didn't yet know what they were to become.

We would like to broadcast our slogans to others. We hope that if we think

them hard enough, they will grow into new flesh. When it comes time to make soup they will swallow, and our truths will catch in the esophagus.

Be afraid! Be more afraid than you can imagine! Do not fear fear! We diminish the fear in others so as to lessen our own. But it is human to fear! Maintain the integrity of your flesh! The great joy of your species is that within fear, there is hope!



Artist: Matthew Gorrie

Antelope

Your form ink-drawn, bold-lined,
Like a foreign script,
One I could trace with my finger,
But never interpret.

In brown eyes I found beauty,
Near but not close in the least,
Like a letter from a lover,
Sent from the East.

I was no hunter, though,
I think you could tell,
No beasts on this plain,
Would my hand fell.

And in time gaze met gaze,
Lazily baking in the heat,
The moment pregnant with silence,
My admiration replete.

But in that last moment,
Before we parted ways,
All words did escape me,
On that summer day.

My dear antelope,
In my parlor would hang,
Your head if you'd let me,
Your blessings t'be sang.

-Christian Harris



Possession

-Lisa Chavez

The Demon Lover. So many variations. Tall, Dark and Handsome: silk tuxedo, waves of black hair tied back with a velvet ribbon. Skin like cream, a courtly bow. And my, what sharp teeth you have. The Bad Boy: leather jacket and cigarette sneer, bad habits galore. The Latin Lover: smooth brown skin, flashing eyes and trigger temper. Or La Belle Dame, if you prefer, the pallid Beauty of the Woods. The Vamp, the Cowboy, the Femme

Fatale. The Lady's Man. A thousand variations on passion. Friends disapprove and you swoon. The Same Old Story.

I

The winter solstice--seventeen below. Bonfire flames lick greedily at icy stars. Faces wink out of leaping shadows, clouds of frost. The party flows and ebbs--in the house and out, to the fire, to the sauna. You see him again, across the flames. He grins. Eyes werewolf green.

Later he approaches you with his offerings: a shot of vodka, distilled by the cold into a burst of icy sparks; a jalapeno pepper; a mandarin orange.

II

He peels off your clothes like the rind of a fruit, as if he could consume you in one juicy bite. You shudder. The sauna is rough: naked logs, glowing barrel stove. Hot as a beating heart. He tosses something into the fire--sparks rise, scented smoke. Sandalwood and myrrh. He parts your legs with his lips; winds rise, rushing noisily through the tiny room. When he raises his head, face glistening, his eyes appear golden and utterly inhuman.

III

He is not remarkable, your friends remind you. A common enough type: the work clothes, the baseball cap turned backwards, the beard and quick grin. He drives an old 4x4. Smokes. Drinks too much. Works when he can. He is utterly unremarkable, to you, utterly strange.

IV

You sleep with him in his house, dreaming in a nest of tangled blankets and dirty clothes. A single candle burns all night; he clutches you in his sleep and moans. This is what you dream: afloat in a warm sea, surrounded by fish colorful as confetti, your bones are pliant as strands of kelp. You drift in the current. Then you see him, a green-eyed merman, rising from far below. On his tongue, a single perfect pearl. He grips your thighs in a lover's embrace and he pulls you down, down, down. You drown.

V

Each night, he grips you to him, grasping your shoulders so hard they bruise. You are characters acting out a thousand different versions of the same scene, wandering through rooms of cinnamon and cloves. Rooms alive with the rustle and whisper of those who played this scene before you. Rooms where heat and animal screeches rend the air.

You stand on the porch naked: the temperature hangs at twenty-two below. The cold electric. Your skin a neon blaze.

He tells you he loves you.

VI

You argue. I don't love you, you tell him.

He shrugs, lights a cigarette. You're not really my type anyway, he says.

Anger breaks the spell and you leave him in his kitchen, table littered with car parts. You feel free.

Indifference reigns. You think of your estranged spouse, who lives in another city. He calls his former girlfriend. You toy with the Tarot. He is the knight of swords. You are both the tiny figures, chained to the devil. You gaze at those goat eyes. Familiar.

January passes, the cruelest month of the year.

VII

Alone your nights are restless. You dream of him and waking remember: the crescent scar on his thigh, the words he growls in your ear when he comes, the rasp of his beard on your skin.

Shake your head and with these memories free yourself from his spell: the Jim Beam in his morning coffee, the way he flirted in bars, knowing you were watching. His casual cruelties. The assault rifle in his closet. This is a web you don't want to fall into.

VIII

He telephones you. I need a place to stay. Only for a few days.

You sigh. His voice does not move you. Only for a few days, you say.

When he enters, the house becomes radiant. The pine walls glow; the wood stove sings. The spruce outside bend closer, trembling. Winter closes around you like a fist.

IX

A three-day storm. Snow seeps beneath the door like sand; snow whips through the open window and melts on your burning skin. Your bodies blur with sweat. He enters you again and again, new every time. You are a golden melon, split apart and sweetly dripping. Candles gutter and hiss. An owl cries in the darkness. Or is it you? Your head is full of stars, symphonies of light. His eyes are dark amber, semi-precious stones.

X

You see a man like him at the bar. He is not remarkable. He is drunk, arguing loudly. His opinions are beneath contempt. His hair is thinning; his jeans are smudged with oil. Then he turns; his face becomes radiant as the rising sun. Your friends' voices fade as you drift to his side. He smells of whiskey and cedar, cigarette smoke and engine grease.

What do you see in him? You don't know.

XI

These are the gifts he brings you: a coat rack, made by his own caressing hands. A can of smoked oysters. A bottle of good champagne. A beaver pelt. A wreath of garlic and dried herbs. Panties of Shantung silk, the color of a bruise. A gold earring. His old jean jacket. And two Sufi love poems, copied from a book. These are about divine love, you tell him, amused. About God. You are my religion, he says. You become uneasy. It's only February.

XII

The vernal equinox approaches. You rarely go out. Some days you never dress at all. When you have to, you go to work, but you are distracted, feverish. One day he appears like a phantom in your class. He stands in the rear, smiles, then is gone. Later, you're not sure it happened at all.

XIII

Your friends disapprove. Your colleagues disapprove. Your spouse calls from far away. Insignificant, like a buzz in your ear.

One night driving home, both of you crazy drunk, you take him in your mouth and he drives off the road when he comes. The truck settles in an explosion of snow. Neither of you are hurt. You think perhaps you've lost your mind.

The moon leans in the sky like a splinter of bone.

XIV

He waits for you in a mountain meadow, Pan-agile, pipes in hand. You're rank as goats and lecherous: he fucks you from behind. Bitten bruises on his neck, your lover's tattoo. You bathe in the magic spring over and over, are sucked into the vortex he creates for you, spin downward, breathless and confused.

Later, he will feed you cloud berries, one by one, each a scarlet drop he places on your tongue. He's feeding you his heart, bit by bloody bit. When you've licked the last piece from his palm, you will possess him entirely, with all that ownership implies.

Or perhaps it was only a bathtub, and strawberries, out of season.

XV

The geese return. The sky echoes with their cries. Water rushes beneath your porch; the days are noisy with melt and spring. You're fierce with desire. A woman looks at him in a bar and you turn on her, hissing like a cat. That night, he glides into you on a river of blood. It's on his hands, his cock. He anoints you with it, your breasts, your belly. We will be together forever, he says, solemn as if in ceremony. Blood sacrifice; strange stigmata.

Morning follows, blood turned to rust.

XVI

You should become a pair of mute swans, gliding forever side by side in some birch-glazed lake. You should chase one another like white foxes over the blue desert of winter snows. You should ascend to the skies like the aurora, to dance a tortured reel. You should devise a suicide pact. You should marry. You should live together forever in a gingerbread house deep in the woods. Your passion burns like a witch's furnace: secret, seductive, deadly. You would fashion for him a cage of ivory and silk, lock yourself inside. I love you, you croon. I love you.

XVII

Don't believe it for a moment. You say those words, fingers crossed behind your back. You have eaten his heart; you are passionate, fierce, jealous. But not impractical. Spring wanes. You were drunk; now you are sober. You were crazy; now you are cured.

I'm going back to my husband, you say one day, and pack up. Outside, your demon lover crouches in the rain, rocking back and forth on his heels. He is crying. He is just a man, after all, neither magic nor possessed. His hazel eyes wet with tears. You kiss him goodbye, taste salt.

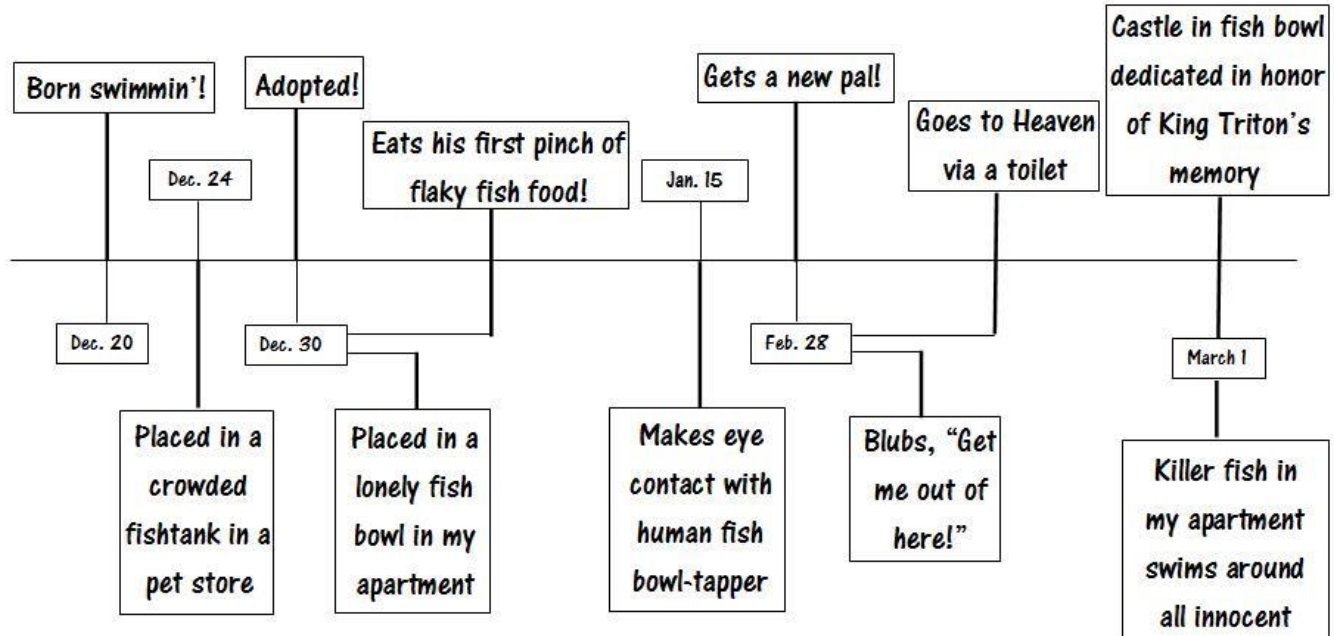
Years later, you'll stand in a storm on a distant shore, taste seawater and remember. Without regrets. You'll try to recreate him, but your creation is myth. The man is quite beyond you: distant, complex, and utterly ordinary. ●

Ghana

She dances
like a spiral staircase
with her left arm touching
rays of light
she spins
gently
on the wooden floor
her toes
become
musical scales
she spins
her body sprinkles
movement
and she floats
toward me
with her long
white gown
swirling
in the air
like a dream.

-Patrick Sylvain

King Triton's Timeline*



*This timeline brought to you by: If Somethins' Fishy/The Association for True Fish Compatibility

Artist: Kayla Pongrac

Dear, Dead Daddy

When my daddy went head first into a plate of osso bucco (his favorite) while dining in an upscale restaurant in Studio City, several prominent physicians sprang to his rescue. He had suffered a stroke. It wasn't the first. Anything to get away from my step-mother.

-Alexis Rhone Fancher

Loving Kiri

-Esther Whitman Johnson

In a restaurant just outside Phnom Penh, Kiri sits on my lap, brown legs hanging out of big-boy shorts that one of our team members has left him. He fiddles with a carved radish, a table decoration he's turned into a doll. He turns radish girl round and round, adjusting her carrot hat, marching her across my leg and back again.

Everyone at the table is watching the little boy, and he knows it. They pass him their carved radishes, and soon Kiri has an army of whimsical vegetable dolls. But even they are not enough to stop the tears. He buries his head in my chest, arms around my neck, shoulders heaving as he sobs.

No, please no. Kiri, don't cry. I'll start, and then everyone else will too.

It's the last day of our build with Habitat for Humanity Cambodia. And as is the custom, the entire team shares a farewell dinner with the new homeowner. Ten-year-old Kiri has never crossed the threshold of a restaurant, and his brown eyes show the joy of the experience. We've brought him with us from the village housing project in our bus, another first for him, having never traveled anywhere except by foot or on the back of his father's motorcycle.

Overwhelmed with novelty and excitement, Kiri sags from the strain. The last of the big-boy bravado has drained away. Hard for him to say goodbye to foreigners who've been like family for two weeks—the team that built his new house, put the roof

on, attached a door that locks, and put in windows that close. Hard to say goodbye to the guys who played soccer every day on break time with his neighborhood buddies, goodbye to the ladies who whitewashed the house walls, a little extra perk not part of a regular build.

Hard for Kiri to say goodbye to me, the woman who sat in the dirt with him every day, pulling flash cards from my 'magic bag.' Adding and subtracting with our fingers, giggling, laughing, and tickling each other. Me, the woman with the *Power Rangers* coloring book who gave out pages and crayons to his friends, always saving the biggest and strongest Ranger for Kiri.

Kiri is my Love Child, embodiment of every child around the globe on my dozen Habitat builds on four continents. He is Maria in Guatemala, Tonjona in Madagascar, Luis in Chile, and Bayarmaa in Mongolia—love children with little fragments of my heart embedded in theirs.

These are the faces I see on the building site as I tie rebar, haul bricks, mix cement, and throw stucco onto walls. These are the faces I remember when I get home and look at my photographs.

Kiri is only one of the children I've left continents away. His is the face I visualize as I sit at my computer today, scanning the website for the next build in the next country. And the next Love Child. ●



Artist: Jacob Landrith

Inclement

What if I were to tell you I'm a descendant of Clement C. Moore?

What if I were to tell you I discovered this lineage through an inscription written inside a greeting card entitled "*'Twas the Night Before Christmas*"?

What if I were to tell you this card was sent to my young daughter from a grandfather she had never met?

What if I were to tell you I met my biological father at age nineteen, years before my daughter's birth?

What if I were to tell you that during our introductory lunch, a business acquaintance stopped by the table to ask *who is this young lady* with a pronounced, cartoonish wink?

What if I were to tell you my father replied *didn't you know I had a daughter* as casually as the napkin he unfolded on his lap?

What if I were to tell you this gentlemen conveyed more information with one directed wink than my mother ever revealed about her first marriage?

What if I were to tell you the conveyance of my birthright was not a Hallmark moment?

What if I were to tell you I learned who I was not at age fifteen during a heated argument with my stepfather?

What if I were to tell you he yelled *I'm not your father!* as we squared off alongside a busy street?

(What if I were to tell you I was oddly relieved?)

What if I were to tell you as a young girl, I studied my face in the mirror to consider why I didn't resemble anyone in my family?

What if I were to tell you I was convinced my brother had my eyes?

What if I were to tell you in my forties, my stepfather would reveal he had a daughter from a previous marriage?

What if I were to tell you this daughter and I eventually met and laughed our asses off regarding the drama swirling about our respective births?

What if I were to tell you she and I are both writers?

What if I were to tell you my family is a tribe of expert secret keepers?

What if I were to tell you every one of my relatives--including my pseudo sibling cousins--all knew and never breathed a single word to me about my biological father?

What if I were to tell you none of them know I am descended from Clement C. Moore?
-Sheree Shatsky

Too Close to the Sun

-Matthew Brennan

I taught my boy to shoot. Started him on a bird-shot peashooter when he was eight. Took him hunting on cold winter weekends all while he was in school, brought us home antlers and venison and rabbit furs. He was steady and patient from the very beginning, loved the anticipation of the hunt, “thrill of the kill,” we would say. Bored, restless while I field-dressed the animals, already thinking ahead to the next. I projected him into his future, imagined him a soldier, an army sniper, to retire a huntsman to a ranch in these same woods. These were the skills I taught him.

*“THERE ARE MANY WAYS
TO CREATE A MONSTER.
BUT I BLAME HIS MOTHER.”*

There are many ways to create a monster. But I blame his mother.

He was fourteen when she left me, convinced the courts to confiscate him along with my house and furniture and savings, everything except what she didn't want. My guns, my trophies. He wasn't ready to leave me yet, I hadn't taught him everything he needed to know. Had always thought there would be more time for those lessons, but to the jury I was a bitter war vet still clinging to the only thing I knew. I disagreed. The judge did not.

Parenting feels like sprinting downhill. One misstep and you're flat on your face. And you never see it coming till you're on your back looking up at your mistake.

The morning my boy shot his way into his mother's school, I was deep in the forest a hundred miles away, didn't hear about it until I turned the news on that evening, the two rabbits I'd brought home already on the grill. I stood watching, breathless, for a long time, the rabbits smoking, charring. At first, I was only worried about my ex-wife, some old instinct kicking in, gradually piecing together that my son was the shooter. And that both of them were dead.

One day when I was a boy, I got into trouble at school and was punished with a switch across the palm. My father picked me up and saw the marks and stormed up to my classroom, conveying in no uncertain terms that no one was ever to lay a hand on his boy again. He then drove me home and gave me the worst beating of my childhood. He had no qualms with corporal punishment. But if there was a lesson to be taught, he wanted it to come from him.

I wish my boy had lived. I wish they'd all lived. His mother. The teachers. The students. But more than anything, I want him to know what he's done, to pay for his mistakes, and to come through the pain of redemption. I want him to see the aftermath of his actions, the pain engineered by his hands. I believe that there is more tragedy in loss than in death, that heroes and little ones find their way home. Pain is of the world. But my son, too, will no longer feel it. Therein lies the paradox of believing in a merciful God. I cannot trust in justice for my son that I did not give. And that is my greater loss. ●

The Old Man of Molalla

-Jaime Mathis



The old man had a genetic disorder that left him and his son too blind to pass a driving test. They were cattle ranchers in Molalla, Oregon. Every summer, the old man would appear at my great-great uncle Elmer's farm on horseback to ask after the possibility of buying extra hay off Elmer for his cows that winter. Sometimes, he'd show up just to chat. How that horse knew where to take him was a complete mystery to my father Jim, who was ten at the time, and lived on Elmer's farm during the summer partially to help him out and mostly because he loved the land. It was the 1960's.

According to dad, the old man was skinnier than a bean and his Levi's would hang off his waist like his body went straight from legs to torso. He'd ride into town to pick up provisions and pack them into leather saddle bags he slung over his saddle horn. Once home, he'd somehow manage to negotiate the blackberry

thicket that had completely cocooned his house. Apparently, not being able to see negated any regular maintenance and left the berries to run rampant. His son, who had slightly better eyesight, could discern enough to know his father was living in a squalor that even he could not tolerate, so he moved across the property to a 12x16 foot shack that at least wasn't enveloped in briars.

The memory of that thicket encrusted home tickled dad in its re-telling. His eyes crackled away and he was right back in front of that bramble, gaping at the tunnel carved out by the blind old man. "I just couldn't believe it!" he laughed in delight and slapped his leg to prove it. "Talk about magical to a little kid!"

There were no women in the picture. The old man and his son had blackened teeth and the old man was usually in filthy clothes. He wouldn't have known the difference, but I wanted to know if there was a smell that accompanied the unkemptness. It didn't figure into the memory.

Elmer usually had enough hay to sell to the old man and his boy so they'd show up with their two psychic horses hitched to a wagon with rubber car tires and the son would buck hay while the old man drove the team. They'd make several runs that way until they had enough hay to tide them over so they could sell off the cows they needed for ends to meet come spring.

I couldn't stop wondering how they got their horses to take them where they wanted to go without being able to correct any wanderings. Dad didn't know either, but they showed up at Elmer's farm most of the summers dad spent there. When I asked him what happened to them, he shook his head and I swear nostalgia floated off his shoulders. "I don't know, Jaim, it was so long ago."

Dad told me that story driving back from Canby, Oregon the summer of 2014 when my son Espen was seventeen months old. We were picking up windows for a tiny house dad was building my husband Tobias. As we bounced down the back roads between Canby and Molalla, the landscape spurred dad's memory back to when he used to live there.

The logging roads have turned into main thoroughfares since the 60's at Elmer's; the farm land and old Yoder store are now housing developments and holograms in dad's mind. When he talks about the old man though, I can see his rounded back and old leather hat against the tree line. I can hear the slow syncopation of his horse's hooves as they crunch gravel on the way to Molalla. "It's a gift," I think, as my mind revels in the picture of a blind man on his horse, magically living his life without phone or cane or seeing-eye dog. "These are riches to a family of story-tellers and legend holders." In that moment on old 99E, my father brings an old blind man back to life and I cannot help but marvel at my own gleeful eyes as we watch him ride back down the lane and across time. ●

Bitter Harvest

Like a man in prison awaiting trial
remembers blissful days when he was free,
I probe the barren landscape of my vile
deed with a prosecutor's scrutiny;
seal the crime scene, where graveyards of my grief
have done tormenting me, and sow the seeds
of healing that will spring the new-born leaf.
I walk love's path before it fell to weeds.
Forget since garnered crops that distance me
from knowledge of the rot my chill would yield.
I seed with torturing consistency
the fertile furrows of that fateful field,
then comb for nectar honeybees had sucked
from blossoms which I subsequently plucked.

-Frank De Canio

Bull Birthing: Parts 1 & 2

-Adam Van Winkle



Part 1

The little legs and hooves were right there, hanging out of the mama cow's ass.

"She's havin' trouble—in a lot of pain," my step-dad, Leon, answered before I could ask the question.

I couldn't tell she had feelings one way or the other about the calf half-hanging out of her rear-end. "She don't look it," I pronounced in all my twelve-year-old worldliness.

"See how much snot is running out her nose?" I hadn't before, but he was right. It was pouring like a faucet.

"Yea I see that now."

"Know how you gotta blow your nose when you cry?"

"Yea?" I didn't like that he said that—made me feel like a little kid.

"Same thing."

I'd been around live births. I'd always watched my step-dad and whoever pull that little Bambi-walking thing out and set the mama and baby up with special post-birth vitamins to get their strength up. Never paid much attention to how they got it out. Never remembered my step-dad talking about a difficult birth or the mama cow's pain. I had to ask: "Well, why is she in so much pain?"

"Those are the back legs—calf's comin' out the wrong way. Mammals come head first, just like us."

"Why's it backwards?"

"Who knows?"

That was unsatisfactory, but I could tell now was not the time to push for a real explanation. So instead I asked, “What are we supposed to do?”

Leon, almost too slowly, went into the corner of the corral where the almost-Mama was laboring to stay standing. He looked at her rear-end again where the calf’s back legs were hanging out. Finally he confirmed what he’d already said: “Yea—son of a bitch is backards.”

He went into the tool shed by the corral lot and came out with a rope and a come-along. He dropped the come-along off in my waiting basket of arms—almost knocked me down. He walked, still slowly, over to the cow, eased her against the fence so she was part-standing, part-leaning against the cedar boards of the corral pin. Then, he slipped the lassoed end of the rope over the pair of legs and hooves dangling, and snugged the noose around the little unborn’s ankles.

He walked out of the pin, and left the big gate open. Whatever the plan, I wasn’t going to know ahead of time. He crawled in the old Ford farm truck sitting by the barn, its bed stationed under the hay loft. He cranked it up, wheeled it around, and backed it to the open gate of the corral pin.

He hopped out of the cab, left the truck idling with the door open. “Alright,” he directed, “go put the big hook of the come-along to the bumper. Then stretch the cable out 2 or 3 feet.”

I marched over, carrying the big come-along with both arms. When I got to the back of the truck, I let it fall from my chest to the dirt. Then I bent down and put the big metal hook into a t-slot on the truck’s aftermarket steel bumper.

I should have pieced together the plan by now, but I was just following individual directions at this point. I released the come-along’s reel, and pulled out what I thought might be 2 or 3 feet just by eyeballing.

Now back by the cow, my step-dad hollered, “Not so much, that’s fine. Lock it there and ratchet it up some.” I awkwardly set the cable right. Meanwhile, he’d tied another loop into the end of the rope not wrapped around the calf’s ankles, and was walking toward me with the loop extended, the slack rope drawing tighter with each step. Instinctively I grabbed the loop as he reached me and picked up the smaller hook from the end of the come-along’s cable and fed it through the little loop and let go. The rope and the come-along both hung freely in the air, one end hooked to a calf, the other to a rusty old bumper.

By this point the plan had come together in my mind: he was going to use a Ford to birth a cow. Or we were.

My step-dad delivered the next steps with a casualness that was shocking, telling me, “Okay, crawl in the truck, put your foot on the brake, put her in drive, when I say, ease her forward.”

That seemed like a mistake in speech or in planning. “What?” I asked.

“Just get behind the wheel. Close the door, lean out the window, and I’ll talk you through it.”

“How come you’re not driving?”

“Gotta help the calf out on this end,” he said, kneeling at the cow’s haunches and reaching both hands and wrists and forearms into the mama, around the off-spring.

He was right. Driving sounded the easier task.

I crawled into the cab, closed the door, put the window down, and fixed eyes on my step-dad and the cow at the end of my tow line reflected in the side mirror. I put both stretched feet on the brake pedal. The column shifter slid all the way down to drive with little effort. I got ready to give the gas whenever Dad hollered up for me to go.

Part 2

Being young comes with a complete lack of touch. Sitting there, undoubtedly on the better end of a cow, a calf, a come-along, 20 feet of rope, and an old Ford farm truck, I was questioning my touch for perhaps the first time in my life.

My step-dad had hollered up, “Too much gas and you’ll break his neck,” of the backwards nearly-born he was elbow deep in helping to pull. “But don’t be too easy—none of this is comfortable for her,” he threw on about the mama cow.

So all I had to do was be perfect.

The crash from the summer before was adding pressure. I felt my step-dad thinking about it too. I couldn’t figure out the right touch on that 3-wheeler. Not in time anyway.

“Okay,” he said, for the first time sounding a bit impatient, “ease on forward!”

Seconds lapsed. No out was given. I had to go. I pushed my foot down on the accelerator. The back end of the Ford sucked down against the force of the resistant bull calf.

I pushed harder. My ass was sliding forward on the hot vinyl bench seat because of my short legs. I had to watch on the rearview mirror. The back tires kicked dirt—I saw it fly and hit Leon and the almost-mama cow.

“Stomp on it!” Leon was getting tired and I’m not sure this was any strategy or simply his exasperation. Either way, I stomped on it.

I pushed the pedal all the way to the metal. The exhaust popped, the rear-end squirreled side to side in the soft corral dust.

And then, everything broke free.

I could still see the widescreen shot in the rearview mirror even though I was practically laying down under the steering wheel now, the back of my head pushed into the back of the sweaty vinyl seat. The bull calf flew up in the air, a foot and a half or so, and crashed down four or five feet from the mama cow. I slammed on the brakes, and skidded to a stop, a cloud of red dust sailing past me. I hoped I hadn’t damaged the newborn in dragging it anymore.

Barely remembering to throw the column shift in park, I bailed out of the clanky door and made my way over the uncertain dry dust of the pin to where Leon was helping the calf stand up. Unharmed.

I was out of breath, but on top of it, grabbing the come-along, releasing the tension in its cable as Leon pulled the rope off the little bull’s back legs. As I watched, I let the come-along’s release pin spring down, failing to remove my left ring finger from its path. It pressed then tore most of my finger nail off. The rest filled with blood.

“What?!?” My stepdad whirled around and asked when I let out a twelve year old whimper. He was concerned—still amped from the shaky delivery. Still trying to ascertain the damage or lack thereof.

“Nothing. Just caught a finger.” I thought I’d have to fake being tough, but bad as it looked, I was *actually* toughing it out. It didn’t feel as painful as it should anyway.

Leon threw the rope, calf shit, cow shit, and everything thing else in his bundle over my shoulder. In turn, I threw rope, come-along, chain, calf shit, cow shit, and all into the bed of the rusty blue Ford. I grabbed the mineral lick, knowing we’d leave that in the pin with mom and calf to get their strength.

The brown mineral block was heavy, so I carried it granny-style between my legs with both hands, pressing more blood out of the naked end of my ring finger. I stumbled forward a little as I threw the block up on the little rusty feed stand, the slick bottoms of my boots getting no traction in the thick pin dirt.

The mama was just getting up, and my stumble, I suppose, made her jump. She was anxious and tired and pissed off, which was fair because she’d had a bull calf jerked out of her ass with a sputtering V-8 Ford.

She turned a face of snot and cut red eyes around as she stood. She stared me down standing. I turned to confirm I was between her and what we’d all worked so hard, but especially she, to birth. It was an innocent mistake. That’s where the feed stand happened to be.

Dad must have seen it as soon as she charged because he yelled automatically, instinctually, “Stand there—stare the bitch down!”

That sounded pretty stupid. The opposite of what everything in my legs was buzzing to do. Why I obeyed then I don’t know. Lack of trust in my soft boy body to out run a fat post-partum cow, or complete trust in Dad.

My eyes hit hers hard. Both her legs went stiff in front of her, like skis on a water plane. She skidded to a stop, no less offended in expression.

Nevertheless, she turned and went back to the corner of the pin.

I turned with nerves still jumping, chest to feet, but smiling, a little, trying to contain a bigger smile. Dad didn’t say a word—was already leading the little calf back to his mom, nothing between them.

“What the hell was that?” I knew the answer—she thought I was trying to come between her and her firstborn. But it felt like a conversation starter. I said it as manly as I was capable. Or at least, what I thought manly sounded like.

“Mamas are just protective of their young ‘uns.” He said it as a universal truth, without of much care, ignoring that my mom had let her young ‘un out here in a pin with a lot of anxious beef. Or maybe trying to suppress elaboration on the notion.

I know he thought about that though because he tacked on, “Don’t tell your mother.”

“Okay, Dad,” I said, closing the corral gate behind us.●

Poisoned Rum

-Molly Rideout

We almost got her to make out with us.

"That was a weird night," James said around noon the next day in our bedroom, curtains drawn, acting hung over. James claimed never to get hung over.

"What part?"

"We almost had a make-out party with Shane," he said. "Also the porn."

"She didn't see the porn," I told him.

"She definitely saw the beginning of the porn."

"She was in the bathroom by that point." Although I wasn't entirely sure. A poorly taken webcam shot of some woman's impossibly melonous breasts floated through my memory amidst a sea of vodka tonic. Had Shane been with us on the pull out couch, or had she already expelled her foamy-brown round-one into the toilet bowl, her stomach contracting into a body of poor decisions.

"I have alcohol poisoning," she told us, back on the pullout. She was shivering under the pink, acrylic blanket I had found for her. It was the sort of blanket, produced en masse in the 1980s, which every house seemed to possess and relegate for its guests. The hotel blanket. In every room in America.

"You don't have alcohol poisoning," I replied. Determined not to follow her lead to the bathroom, I stuffed my face with Wheat Thins at the end of the bed. She continued to shiver. Holding her hand tight in his, James curled up beside Shane. He pushed her thin hair out of her face. He had taken his glasses off. Under the covers Shane pumped her legs for warmth. None of us noticed the open window behind the closed curtains, the cold air drifting in.

Shane had arrived around a quarter to eight. The whole house and Joe were out on the lawn, sprawled on a mixture of plastic patio and kitchen chairs. The remains of dinner were crumpled between us on the two card tables James had dragged out of the

spider room and set up. An empty bag of baby carrots lay tucked under a cheap mixing bowl filled with cantaloupe rinds and their discarded seedy innards. The vines of our garden's midget-variety melons had died back unexpectedly (natural causes, our gardener assured us) so Elisa and I had harvested the palest from the limp-leafed bed. They were the size of large grapefruits. Elisa's northern Iowa farm hands could grasp two at once. I took off my grey sweater and filled it. The thin, cotton fabric bulged and stretched as we hurried them back to the house.

It was the last night of the artist residency session. The gallery show had opened the evening before with equal mixings of relief, pride and boredom. The women in the house had spent the last month working toward the exhibition, the two painters, the two writers, and the filmmaker, and despite the opening reception, the cheese, the crackers, and the cheap wine all packed away and digesting in the town's assorted stomachs, Mindy spent the following day finishing her painting that already hung in the gallery. Oils spread across a glass plate in hand, she dabbed a little more tan onto the red of Joe's electric-shock hair and pondered changes perceptible only to her. A portrait of her time at the artist residency. I suppose I would have called it abstract.

I am often asked what it is like to run an artist residency, what it's like to share a house with people who come and go, with fingers covered in ink, with spray paint fumes and stretcher bars. *Don't you and Joe ever get sick of it? Doesn't James?* I wave my hand about as if I haven't yet come to a conclusion on my opinion of the place. Oh it's good, I tell them. It's a lot of work. A lot of bathrooms to keep clean. A lot of doors to make sure are closed at night. "It's nice, I guess. The communal life."

It was my night to make dinner, and thanks to Mindy and Mindy's painting, I was late. In a frenzy, I chopped and sautéed the vegetables from the garden, threw two kinds of pasta into one pot. Elisa harvested lambs quarters, a weed almost as common as grass on the farm, and we used it to augment my basil pesto up to eight servings. Joe, James, the five visiting artists and I each took a plate outside. The evening was barely warm enough for outdoor eating, and as the sun began to set, the air cooled. By a quarter to eight when Shane arrived in half a smile and shorts, it was no longer shorts weather.

"What size pants do you wear?" she asked me. She clutched her arms about her.

"Not your size," I apologized.

It had taken me twenty-four years to realize that I was small. I didn't feel small. I stood at mostly the same height as other women. I looked mostly the same width at the shoulders. But the bras that fit me best were little girl bras, and the clothes that were too tight on my friends were too big on me. When Joe asked me to unlock the costume cage at the community theatre so he could find a good fur coat to rage nights at Burning Man, the one he picked was short in the sleeves. On me the fur stretched all the way to my fingertips. It had once been his grandfather's, I told him. He seemed to recognize it.

"Shane," Melissa called from the head of the table, already on her way to drunk. "Did you hear that the kitten died?"

Mindy began to moan at the memory.

"Hit on the highway," A heavy young writer named Emily, supplied.

"Stop, stop, stop. I can't deal with this," said Mindy.

"Joe had to clean it up with a shovel."

"Did you bury it?" Elisa asked.

"I put it in a trash bag."

"What did you do with the trash bag?"

"I put it in the dumpster."

"I'm going to go home for some pants," said Shane.

"Good idea. We're doing a beer run."

"Beer and mixers."

Half an hour later there was eighty dollars of new liquor in the art studios and half the girls were watching *You've Got Mail*. The other half were cleaning their workspaces, packing for the next day's departure. Out at the fire pit, James was trying desperately to start a bonfire by lighting a pack of twigs wrapped in treated cardstock. I searched the brush pile for better wood. On a fallen branch at the top of the heap I spotted a four-inch stick swaying against the breeze. A praying mantis. In the semi-darkness, I held my cell phone up for better light. Her head swiveled toward me as if to say, "Get that fucking monstrosity out of my face. I'm walking on this branch." Even as I stared straight at it I kept losing the insect's twiggy body in the cellular light.

"The last time I saw a praying mantis that big, I was in the college dorms," said Joe. I pictured a slightly chubbier, high school art geek smoking joint after joint in Cleveland Hall back in 2003, doing whatever he could to show off to the older college students around him. "That little fucker flew in through the window and started to bzzzz, bzzzz, bzzzz all over the room." He shot both hands through the air to mimic the insect's panicked trajectory. "We thought it was a bird, it was so huge. Everyone was yelling."

He grabbed the branch with the aim of bulking up the now successful fire. He'd dismantled James's bundle of twigs and built the regular old Boy Scouts kindling teepee, replaced the matches with a lighter. Amid the shaking leaves, I lost sight of the praying mantis once more.

"Don't disturb her!" I shouted.

"She's the symbol of feminism. She'll do fine." Joe gave the branch one more yank and dragged the wood to the Giving Tree to break it in half.

The original idea for the Giving Tree was very simple. Conceived the year prior by a temp worker we'd hired named Ames, the structure consisted of a fortified pole with welded metal branches radiating from the trunk. On each of these branches, Ames explained, should hang a bucket filled with

pack-rat miscellany gathered up from around the farm. Anything found in a bucket could be used for an art project: flat tricycle tires, nails, a torn American flag. With the help of five work-study artists, Ames raised the center pole within the towering interior of the residency's old white barn. Together they welded on three scrap-metal branches. By this point it was mid-November, and there was no heat in the barn save for the heat of their own sweater-wrapped bodies. They'd run out of welding wire and we'd run out of money. The project was abandoned. A month later Ames was fired for breaking the tractor, drinking on the job and because we'd run out of money. When Joe returned from Philly the next spring he dragged the Giving Tree out behind the corrugated metal hut that had become the metalworking studio and tried to forget it had ever been built. Today, the Giving Tree provided a solid frame against which we broke branches for firewood.

In the light of the now crackling bonfire, I watched James and Shane share a bench of concrete blocks only big enough for two. He was leaving in three weeks for graduate school, I was drunk, and we had both agreed to try and lure Shane into our bed. I was comfortable. I was that person I'd always hoped I'd be: rational, methodical. If all it took was making out with another girl to break up our relationship, we didn't have a very solid relationship to begin with. That's what I told myself. That's what I told James. James and Shane talked and drank, Shane falling into James more and more as she became agitated about the hell-in-a-hand-basket state of the country. Mitt Romney had announced Paul Ryan as his presidential running mate for the upcoming elections, and even though we were still two days away from Todd Akin's anti-abortion comments that "The bodies of legitimate rape victims have a way of preventing pregnancies," she was despondent. *I know*, James consoled. *I know*. He still hadn't told her he'd voted republican in the last presidential election.

"But James, it's so bad. It's so bad!"

Beside them, the two writers, Erika and Emily, sat pressed together on a log bench. Erika's espresso cup was finally empty of the foul concoction she had mixed of rum and tonic. After a few forced sips of her mistake she'd pressured it onto Joe and James, who downed it between the two of them. Their contorted faces reflected like gargoyles in the firelight. Not a drop of rum wasted.

The next morning, Joe decided the rum had been poisoned.

"I thought I threw up. But I'm not sure I did. Parents showed up early this morning. Surprise visit. I had to get real stoned to deal with it. But seriously, that rum. Poison."

"Shane and I threw up," agreed James.

"I thought I was going to," Joe said again. "You okay?" he nodded at me across the claw-footed kitchen table that had arrived on the farm with his great-grandfather, decades ago. Its surface was sticky with liquor.

"I stuck to vodka tonics," I said.

The three of us had spent many mornings in this fashion, around the table, grasping at the dark dregs of French-press coffee. Together we rehashed the previous evening's events in great detail. We told each other just how drunk I got and how drunk she got and remember all those crazy things you said? I did not. You did. It went like this...The human race has always been proud of its oral history, from the Nordic to the Greek epics. But when I thought about it, those old tales really weren't much more than embellished versions of Joe's, James's and my bard-like retelling. *Oh man, you missed how wasted Beowulf got last night at the lodge. He ripped this pariah's arm off! Aw, you should have seen it!* Everyone laughed and a chorus of *Yeah, I was real drunk* bounced off the solid timbers of the great hall. *Yeah, that shit was crazy.*

In the light of the previous night's fire we drank all eighty dollars of alcohol. On her bench Emily sat straight-backed, the girth that came from no exercise and 52 ounces of

Pepsi a day sloping out below her. She belted across the circle a monologue about some anime no one else had heard of. Her words came fast and large like the first half of a high school debate. No one bothered to throw out a counter-argument. Beside her, Erika slumped sideways, using her friend's shoulder as a back rest as she stared at the darkness, focusing her daze every few minutes on the passionate conversation James and Shane were having about whether or not Shane should email a Swede she'd met once in Germany for tips on how to become an expat. Every now and then Emily stopped her monologue, put a protective arm around Erika and mutter something in her ear. Both laughed. James told Shane she should email the Swede. Shane nodded.

After a lengthy discussion of our limited prospects, James and I had decided to pursue Shane for a 30-rack of reasons: she was both single and a little crazy, had just moved back to our small town and was more than a little panicked about what kind of sexless future this decision had caused. She was attractive, a coffee shop fashion, hair feathered and dyed a subtle red, hazel eyes, quirked mouth. She knew more about gender politics than I did, read more than I did, and when tipsy had no verbal filter. For all of these reasons, I decided, rationally ticking boxes down the list, I wouldn't mind sleeping with her. James needed no convincing.

The largest reason was her breasts. Because, seriously.

I moved around the fire and sat down in the grass beside the cinderblock bench. From where James sat I could tell he had a solid view down Shane's v-neck top. Shane owned many shirts, all of them thin and low-cut.

"Molly," Shane told me, still half fallen in James's lap. "This country. This whole country. It's awful. I'm serious." She sat up.

"We should watch porn."

"No," said James in a firm voice. "No, we shouldn't."

"Why not?" Both Shane and I looked at him.

"Because you'll open the computer and ask me to drive, and I don't want that kind of pressure."

"Seriously," agreed Joe from James's other side.

"Let's do it," I said.

"Let's go," said Kate.

We stood, linked arms and headed back toward the house. "That thing you asked me about earlier." Shane stumbled as she whispered into my ear. "I want to try it."

I heard footsteps and James's arm wrapped around my waist.

"I need water," Shane told us.

Ten minutes later she was vomiting.

"Do you think Emily and Erika were doing it?" Joe asked James and me the next day, after a furry-mouthed Shane had snuck home and the artists had all departed for the session. We scoffed.

"Although, what was with that kiss at the gallery opening?" I conceded. "My angle was bad so I couldn't see. Was that a cheek kiss or a mouth kiss?"

"Cheek kiss," Joe and James chorused. We had the event on film. Joe offered to go back through the footage to recheck just in case. We laughed and then tried to guess which of the two young women would have been most likely to ruffie the rum and make us all sick.

"Erika."

"No definitely Emily. Am I right?" These were the things we talked about when our artists were gone and we were left with the mess and the ants and the mice they'd left behind. ●

Punk Rock and Dashrath Manjhi

"Dashrath Manjhi, a native of Gehlour...using only a hammer and a chisel carved out a 360-ft long, 25-ft high and 30-ft wide road from a mountain. This took him no less than 22 years."
-from The Viewpaper.net, "The Mountain Man"

My niece has discovered the Descendents:
now she calls me lame for not being angry out loud,
wears decibels for earrings and knuckle dusters,
learning to flex this wanting war over every slight.

She says it's a matter of giving a fuck,
getting pissed enough to fight for yourself,
moving mountains by force of will
And I tell her about the Tunnel Man.
She rolls her eyes, brushes it off.

She's only listened to this music for a week,
thinks her home begins and ends at the picket line
so I won't tell her about my band days just yet—
how no one picked up a guitar to raise fresh hell
without first getting the promise of family.

I want to say it's a matter of fighting despite yourself.
If a man could defy a mountain for his wife and village,
I can think of no better protest than to love so fiercely
only decades of building will satisfy.

-Marc Santos

High Fructose Corn Syrup Boy

-Alex Vigue

They can make so many things from corn. Car fuel, plastic, cheap sugar substitutes, alcohol. They can even make people.

I am one of them.

The process is lengthy and disgusting but so is sex. So is love or lack thereof.

When an entire country is run by the Corn Industry people start to get upset. "Why are they feeding us this? You're killing small farms. I don't even like corn." They had to find a way to appease customers.

I was plucked from artificially enriched soil by monstrous harvesters. I was ground up and put into vats. I was boiled and liquefied.

Somewhere in Ohio a man invented a chemical that could extract the DNA from organisms. They stole his formula and got him kicked out of the scientific community for playing god. They mixed his formula into the vats that contained me. They set me into great spinning drums where I was rolled into curds. Yellow corn lumps with bits of life inside.

The FDA was paid off; allowing for my existence to continue.

A woman in Florida built a machine that sequenced DNA. She called it the RRNAM.

Robotic Ribonucleic Acid Machine. They hired her to feed wet chunks of under purposed "corn" into her sequencer. When she saw what came out she quit and moved to Germany.

A baby with corn husks for hair and fingernails. Eyes like kernels. Fingers and toes reaching with roots.

I was hideous but they painted me normal and better.

The news said they revolutionized life. Infertile parents could now have babies without surrogates or adoption paperwork. The Whitehouse praised the

Corn Industry. They even had a child made for the president and her wife.

The advertisements on TV all said that we were healthy and happy. They said we were just like anyone else. But when we grew up and we dated others like us and had unplanned pregnancies the Corn Industry took the children. They hid them from the media. I wanted my baby more than anything.

It kept happening; we kept having babies and multiplying. There was talk of sending us all to an island or outer space. We were a problem. The babies were a bigger one. They didn't have faces like we did. They didn't have cute little noses or rosy cheeks. They had corn silk all over their bodies like the wild corn of the past. All of their kernels were different colors; they were unpaintable. They grew faster than any plant or animal. They took root and swallowed the entire mid-west in stalks and fat corn bodies.

Their roots spread. Mexico and Canada put up walls. Their seeds caught on the wind. Our children ate up the world. The humans were smothered. ●

THE ADVERTISEMENTS ON TV ALL SAID THAT WE WERE HEALTHY AND HAPPY. THEY SAID WE WERE JUST LIKE ANYONE ELSE. BUT WHEN WE GREW UP AND WE DATED OTHERS LIKE US AND HAD UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES THE CORN INDUSTRY TOOK THE CHILDREN.



Artist: Sarah Lazaretti

more beautiful than any gentle archetype

--for Aralyn

I listen to my daughter sing and she is more beautiful than any gentle archetype. Arms moving with sensibility she thinks of only lyrics as she sings to no one but me. For such a display I am shamed at the mosaic of broken shells within. I braid her hair and sigh as I occur finally past my rubble and debris. She is the most lovely part of this second skin.

-Anna Ivey

Starbucks is the new McDonalds

-Robin Wyatt Dunn

Starbucks is the new McDonalds. As Mickey D's shot 50s culture forward into the future, Starbucks shoots 90s culture into the future. Each adapting to the times but retaining that certain *frisson* unalterable of the age, its genetic fingerprint.

It must be said that Starbucks decor is more consciously a decor of leisure; if McDonalds invites you to sit down in order to keep moving, Starbucks invites you to sit down in order to navel-gaze. This despite the fact that the menus of both restaurants have achieved near parity (though Starbucks does not yet have bacon cheeseburgers).

We know this, or I know this, but it is uncomfortable to be reminded of it, to be reminded that this is me, this horrendous and grievous accumulation like plaque in an artery of the culture of my nation, always eager to adapt, no matter how absurd the addition to the mix, no matter the long-term consequences, Starbucks sails the wide open seas of limited possibilities, eager to defuse a wide swath of sensible alternatives in favor of the neoconservative, healthier option, the diverse but largely immobile shibboleth that is the genius of the Starbucks chain, its aura.

My memory is not improving; if anything it is getting worse. So it is amusing that something like a chain restaurant brings these feelings back full force. Any number of absurdities may occur, I may undergo huge and grievous physical and psychic injury, my known universe will continue to collapse, but Starbucks in its all its carefully modulated Americana makes me feel, well, American, and safe.

It's safe to be in a cafe, with the successful people. With the whining college students.

The wars are still far away. Jesus is still only a mild oath rather than a horrible entity who can invite religious wars on your doorstep. Capitalism, though having lost any moral authority it may have gained after World War Two, retains something of its moral *character* despite that, of sensible people behaving sensibly, not talking too loud (for Americans), not being too perverse (for Americans), not worrying too much.

Don't worry too much is America's slogan, from Alfred E. Neumann's lips to our hearts, and I salute that, I salute this our slogan, for it eases the horror and the insanity.

Things are horrible, and I am insane, but I can be provided with mass-produced fast-heated coffee beverages and bacon entrees in attractive packaging served with a smile, deducted from a carefully branded Gold Card that bears my name, my personal investment in this whole ocean of effluvia and retroactive cultural DNA spirals, I am a beautiful mammal who belongs among my own, equally confused but well-meaning people, who stumbled into history with a furious religion and a penchant for money-making, our stubbornness always greater than God, or Allah, our stubbornness almost Russian, it makes me want to weep.

Weeping is not allowed in Starbucks, however, and so I drink my coffee instead. ●

Kissing Pocahontas: A Story in Six Acts

-Kate Homer

Act I, Scene 1

The summer before ninth grade, she's cast as the title character in the Epic Teen Theatre production of *Pocahontas*. The play is an outrageous version of the already outrageous animated Disney movie filled with elaborate musical numbers and a lot of girls dancing with fruit baskets and boys brandishing prop swords.

On the first day of rehearsal, she finds his name on the cast list: JOHN SMITH, played by TYLER JOHN MORGAN

She wonders if he included his middle name by choice. Or if his mother insisted when she signed him up for this. She shakes her head. It doesn't matter. She likes the symmetry of his name. It dances through her head syllable by syllable. During their first rehearsal, the director has everyone sit in a circle and introduce themselves to the cast.

John Smith introduces himself as Tyler. No John, no Morgan. His voice is smooth, already mature, already resonating in her ears. She is so taken aback by this development that she barely gets her name out of her mouth and when she does it sounds like a squeak.

SOPHIE

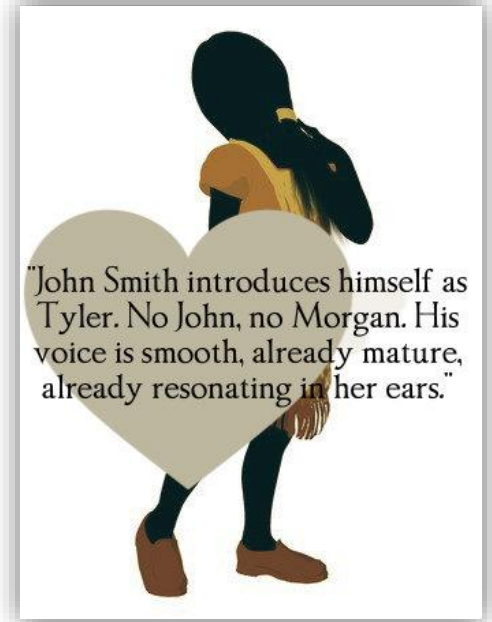
"I'm Sophie. Sophie James."

When she sits down, her face aflame, Tyler turns to her and smiles. And she thinks how lucky she is to have been cast as the female lead in this epic love story between Pocahontas and John Smith.

[Years later, she will learn just how historically inaccurate the story is. Years later, she will be embarrassed and become very upset at the portrayal of Pocahontas and Native Americans in the media. Years later, she will write to Disney and express her discontent in a strongly worded letter that she gets her entire sociology class to sign.]

But now she is fourteen. And at fourteen, she loves the elaborate musical numbers, the new songs she learns, her delicate fawn-colored costume, how her troublesome curls are hidden under a sleek, black wig, and the idea that two very different people can fall in love. But mostly, she loves the pin pricks of excitement that she feels all over her body when she pictures him as John Smith kissing her, as Pocahontas, *right on the lips*.

Act I, Scene 2



He hadn't intended to kiss her. He hadn't intended for any of this to happen. Epic Teen Theatre wasn't his idea. It was a ploy concocted by both his parents, the Lawyers, to get him out of the house for a month. He hadn't intended to be cast as the male lead. In fact, his mission was to infuriate the director, the assistant director, and all of the adults who helped out backstage so he'd get kicked out and spend his days hanging out with his friends. And he did have unauthorized sword fights and hatch schemes among his fellow Englishmen to steal the fake fruit of the fruit basket-bearing maidens, but along the way something happened. He started *enjoying* rehearsals and found himself looking forward to them each night before bed, looking forward to seeing *her*.

The night before the final show, the director tells them both that it would probably be better if John Smith and Pocahontas didn't kiss. But here they are. It's closing night, the final of five performances. The lights are bright, the audience is the best they've had so far, and there's something sparkling in her dark blue eyes that makes him think it's a good idea.

[Years later, he'll transfer out of Sociology 101 and pick up Civil War History instead. He won't think about the implications of how Native Americans are portrayed in the media. But he will think about her and how she looked under the lights in this moment.]

So he takes her hands in his.

TYLER as JOHN SMITH

"Now that I know you, my life will never be the same."

SOPHIE as POCAHONTAS

"Neither will mine."

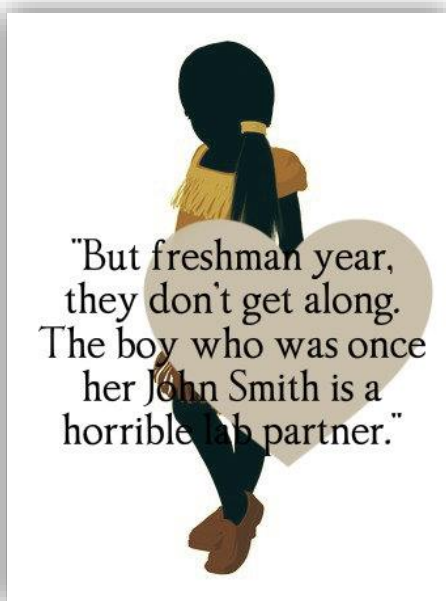
He smiles and leans into her. And as their lips collide, the audience cheers.

Act II, Scene 1

In September, she's surprised to find him in her homeroom at her new high school, though she shouldn't be given the close proximity of the first letters of their last names. He sees her and grins. She likes his grin, the one he puts on his face when he thinks he's being clever. She likes his eyes and how green they are and how they remind her of a field of young corn and how that reminds her of *Pocahontas*.

But freshman year, they don't get along. The boy who was once her John Smith is a horrible lab partner. He does not want to fill out the diagram of the cell or answer questions related to the cell's organelles and their various functions. Instead, he holds contests with that blond girl, Courtney Stuart, to see who can sound like a better platypus. Sophie tries not to be jealous, but Courtney Stuart is a Big Deal and she, Squeaky Sophie, is not. She spends

half of the year rolling her eyes at him and the other half ignoring him. She does not return to Epic Teen Theatre that summer.



[Years later, upon hearing the word “platypus,” she will think of him, sitting on top of his desk all hunched over and mooing.]

Act II, Scene 2

He can't help it that cells don't interest him. *You can't even see them.* And furthermore, they bore him. Most of their third period biology class, himself included, is not going to need to know about cells or their organelles about a year from now, possibly not even six months from now. And he doesn't like Courtney Stuart, at least not in That Way. Her hair is kind of a brassy blond and her chin is sort of narrow. But he does like that she's popular. This never interested him before, but this is high school. Things are different and he feels like he needs to somehow guarantee his survival for the next four years. Providing Courtney Stuart entertainment in third period biology earns him an invitation to sit with her and her friends during fifth period lunch.

So, for most of freshman year, he ignores the fact that Sophie ignores him. Instead, he perfects his various animal sounds with Courtney Stuart and Charles Martin, his new best friend who tells horrible jokes, and tries not to look at Sophie when they pass each other in the hallways.

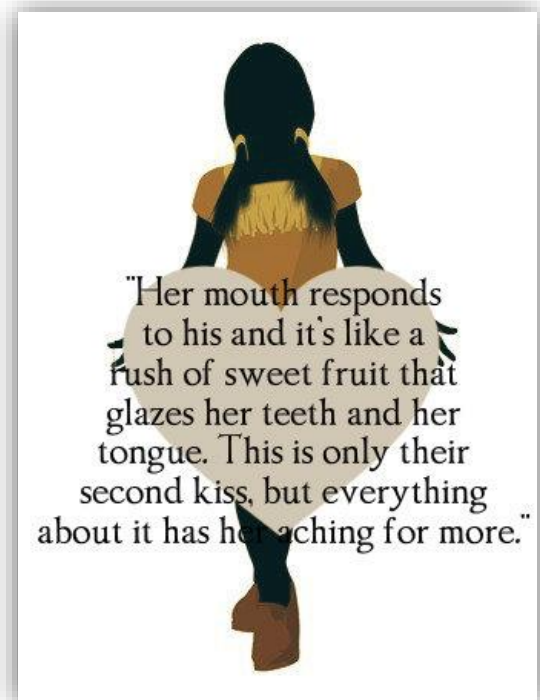
But in the spring Courtney Stuart betrays him. A Ziploc of marijuana is found in her locker and she tells the school guidance counselors that it belongs to him. The school guidance counselors are so distraught over this that they proclaim it an Incident and they call the Lawyers in for a conference. Convinced that he's turning to drugs as an outlet of adolescent self-expression, the Lawyers send him to Sedona to spend the summer with his grandmother. He doesn't return to Epic Teen Theatre either.

[Years later, he'll still be drug free, and he'll curse himself for all the time he wasted trying to impress Courtney Stuart.]

Act III, Scene 1

Her parents move from one town to another and suddenly she and Tyler are riding the same bus to school next fall. She ignores him at first. Then one day he sits next to her and recounts how stupid he was freshman year and that the Ziploc was not, in fact, his. So, she gives in and they talk, first about how horrible Courtney Stuart is and then about the upcoming spring musical (Damn Yankees), seventh period geometry (awful), Mr. Sherman's haircut (even more awful than geometry), and Kyle Ryan and Lucy Shelley's hook up last weekend (SHOCKING).

And then the next day he asks her to the homecoming dance.



At the dance, she can't believe he wants to kiss her with those braces in her mouth, but he does!

His lips are soft.

Warm.

And his tongue tender like a summer peach.

Her mouth responds to his and it's like a rush of sweet fruit that glazes her teeth and her tongue. This is only their second kiss, but everything about it has her aching for more.

When the song ends and the lights come on, he pulls away slowly, reluctantly. His face awash in a sheepish grin and they walk hand in hand toward the exit. At the end of the night, after diner food and enduring about ten thousand of Charles Martin's groan-inducing jokes, he kisses her again on the front porch of her parents' new house. Her skin tingles where his hands have touched her. For the rest of the night, his kisses echo with every pump of her heart filling her with something new and warm and excited.

[Years later she will realize his kisses filled her like nothing else ever had, like nothing else ever would.]

Act III, Scene 2

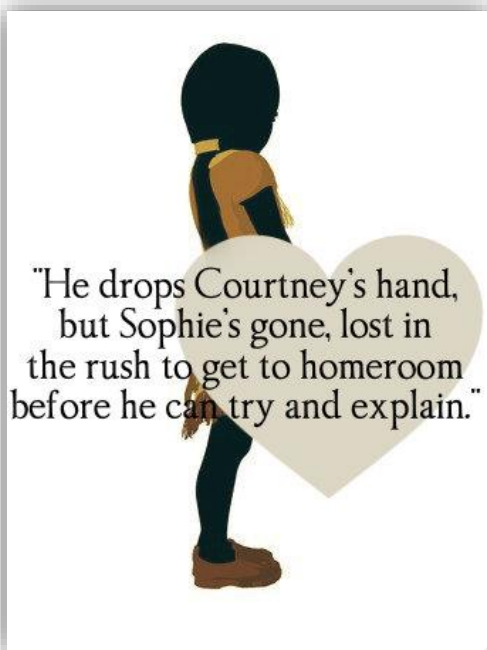
The day after the homecoming dance, the Lawyers take him to the 5K walk/run for Cancer Prevention!, a hospital fundraiser. The Hospital is one of their biggest clients and they are in full lawyer mode. And who is there but blond Courtney Stuart, daughter of the Head of Oncology. He still hates her, but decides that spending most of the morning sitting down by the river watching her smoking half a pack of Virginia Slims and bitching about school is better than the 5K walk/run.

Somewhere between her second and third cigarette, Courtney Stuart apologizes for the Incident.

And somewhere between her fifth and sixth cigarette, she presses her lips against his. And he doesn't pull away.

On Monday morning, Courtney Stuart takes his hand in the hallway before homeroom. She asks if he wants to come with her to see her favorite band on Saturday night in the city. Before he can respond to either the hand-holding or her invitation, he sees Sophie. Her eyes see only his hand entwined with Courtney's. As Sophie shakes her head, her unruly curls bounce back and forth. He drops Courtney's hand, but Sophie's gone, lost in the rush to get to homeroom before he can try and explain.

In homeroom he approaches her desk after the morning announcements. He wants to say he's sorry. He wants to tell her that this is all a huge misunderstanding. That he can't possibly like



both her and Courtney Stuart. But he realizes that he does like both her and Courtney Stuart. And he doesn't know what to do about it. Sophie looks up at him, her indigo eyes rimmed in red, her lips pursed together. She looks like his cousin did once after learning her parents had to put their German shepherd to sleep. He walks past her desk without saying anything.

[Years later, the look on Sophie's face will continue to haunt him.]

Act IV, Scene 1

Junior year, she dates Charles Martin, the one who tells the really bad jokes. Not for revenge for Tyler's courtship of Courtney Stuart and not because she wants to hurt him. Just because she and Charles Martin are lab partners in anatomy/physiology and somewhere along the line of studying the muscular system, she decides she really likes all of the muscles in his face. A lot. She pushes aside her facial muscles coloring page and kisses him, putting her own orbicularis oris muscles to use.

[But it doesn't end well.]

Act IV, Scene 2

He tries pretending he's fine with Charles Martin dating Sophie. And he almost is. But he starts noticing things. Her voice is no longer squeaky, but strong, and it sounds musical, like wind chimes when she laughs. Her hair is no longer unwieldy, but styled in long, wavy curls and he has to stop himself from running his fingers through it every day.

[Now he realizes what he's known for a long time: he loves her.]

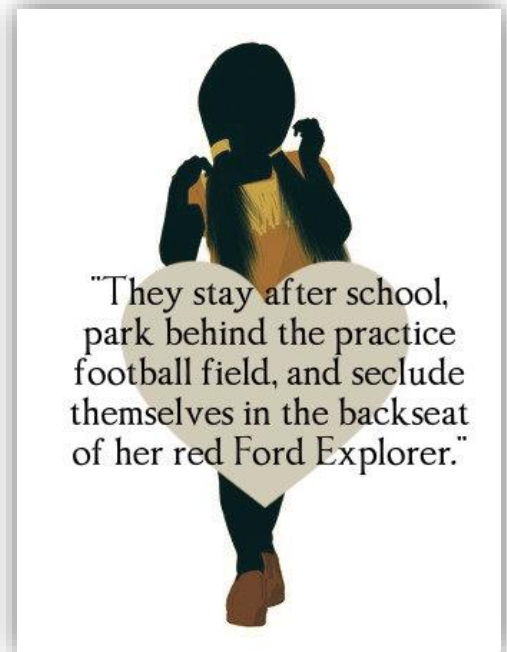
Act V, Scene 1

They don't speak again until March of senior year. Not until they're seated next to each other on the plane to Orlando for their senior trip to Disney World. She dares him to sneak out of his hotel room and into hers. And he almost makes it before being spotted by one of the teacher-chaperones. They spend the rest of the week together and on the plane ride home, he takes her hand.

They take turns driving each other to school, stopping sometimes at Ruby's Diner and skipping first period, weaving elaborate excuses to the school secretary as to their lateness. They stay after school, park behind the practice football field, and seclude themselves in the backseat of her red Ford Explorer.

[It's there amidst a tangle of limbs and seat belts that she realizes what she's known for a long time: she loves him.]

Act V, Scene 2



College consumes them. One weekend, he drives all the way to Colchester, Vermont from Richmond, Virginia to see her. He thinks this is a grand gesture of his love, that this will cement their feelings for each other. That this will bring about Forever.

And for a moment, they are perfect. His mouth is again her peach. Her lips are soft. And in this moment she is his Pocahontas and he is her John Smith.

TYLER as HIMSELF

“My life has never been the same, you know. Since I met you.”

SOPHIE as HERSELF

“Neither has mine.”

But on their last night together, there is alcohol, a game of strip poker, and an unbelievably hasty discard of all the remaining articles of clothing. In the morning, she panics and tells him they made a mistake. He drives back to Richmond that day and contemplates dropping out of college to join the Marines. He doesn't, mostly because he knows it will upset the Lawyers and he's surprised to discover he doesn't want to upset them anymore. So he buries himself in work. And women.

[But he still loves her.]

Act VI

After college, she accepts a job in New York as a copy editor.

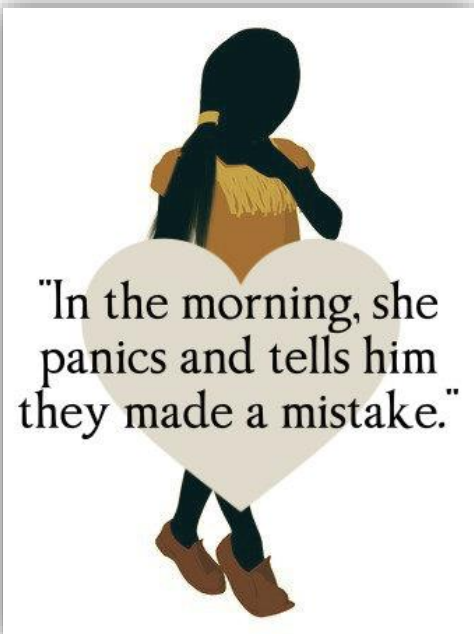
He moves west to Denver for law school.

And they become lost to one another.

Their stories have happy endings. Both have found Partners. And with these Partners, they talk about big ideas like Forever and Houses and Offspring. They attend sporting events and wine tastings, their friends' weddings and their grandparents' funerals. At least for right now, they feel lucky to have something so good.

[But years and years and years later, she will think of the summer of *Pocahontas* and he will think of their kisses. She will find herself wondering how he's doing and what new animal sound he has recently perfected. He will think about the backseat of her red Ford Explorer, the way his hands hugged the back of her head when he kissed her, and how perfect her indigo eyes looked afterwards. And she will want to tell him that when she thinks of him, she still gets a tingling sensation all over her body, the same tingling sensation she felt when he was John Smith kissing her as Pocahontas.]

THE END●



strangers through a window.

you are a milky white crumb lying
at the narrowest part of the sidewalk;
body jitters restlessly against concrete.
(i wonder if you would rather be making a snow angel)
sun mirrors your florescent freckles as
you fold hands across chest,
tap your thumbs on your skin.
(i would)

pearly clouds stretch across
periwinkle sky;
branches cast crisscrossed shadows across face.
(i wonder if you are sculpting shapes with cloud clay)
lips open and close like you want to speak
ocean water eyes leak
salt down your cheeks.
(i am)

knees bend at delicate denim
angles; wind shuffles dark hair into
tangled web.
(i wonder if you have somewhere else to be right now)
nose scrunches into a knot
hungry waves ebb from
eyes.
(i don't)

you spin a ruby
leaf through your fingers;
your rusty eyelashes blink at me.
(i wonder if you miss someone)
hi;
i see you mr. stranger.
(i don't)

-Erica Tasto

Sylvia/Silvia

-Sylvia Ashby

I wonder if others think about their greatest compliments, those treasured gifts bestowed on us. I do. Though my current Top Ten list only includes two items, events separated by some 75 years. Maybe these awards arrive on a 75-year schedule, sort of like Halley's Comet. I was one-third the age of the first presenter and almost three times the age of the second. For Item #1, I'll rewind back to Detroit, 1940--give or take a handful of calendar pages:

About age eleven or twelve, on weekends I would often babysit a little four-year old. When her mother returned home after a few hours, we would play cards in the kitchen of that brick four-plex. In those distant days, substantial homes in Detroit were still filled with families, unlike the abandoned skeletons you see online today, in need of burial.

Maybe we were playing Michigan rummy. The name seems appropriate. Sitting around the Formica table as shiny cards traded hands, the young mother--out of nowhere--said to me, quite seriously: "I would be so happy if my little girl turned out to be just like you." Like me--exactly! Even look like me! The whole package! I was overwhelmed, in total disbelief. "Yes, just like you," she repeated. After these many years, I am still amazed.

After all, why would anyone want to be like me? Even I--especially I--didn't want to be me. Growing up in foster homes during the depression, I was 100% confidence-free. Self-esteem? Not at this address. Being me equaled wearing an albatross necklace. Not only that, in my view beauty had to be blond--as epitomized by Hollywood icons of that era: Shirley Temple dancing down the stairs, her blonde curls bobbing. Or Nordic Sonja Henie magically spinning on ice in her

glittery white tutu. I didn't stand a chance. Looking ethnic and looking beautiful were contradictory terms. A dark-skinned model featured in a magazine or catalog? No way. Forget it.

Small wonder I welcomed theatre in college. With acting I could metamorphose, almost effortlessly lose myself in another life, walk in someone else's shoes, so adept at becoming someone else for a change. Endless possibilities. How perfectly delicious.

Had the lady of the house encountered me at, say--age eighteen or beyond, instead of twelve--she might have wished otherwise for her daughter. But at least for that brief time, I was Number One on the Hit Parade, my favorite of radio shows, way back when folks sat around enthralled watching the radio.

If this were an old Hollywood movie, about now you would see calendar pages flashing before your eyes, fast forwarding seven and a half decades to Item #2: In the Spring of this year, my husband and I signed on for a brief bus tour in Panama. In the interest of full disclosure, I confess that I share this award with my husband (besides, I'll look more gracious at the Award ceremony).

Oddly enough, our Tour Guide was named Silvia--like me--but spelled with a "i" instead of the "y" in my Sylvia. A slender, vivacious young woman about thirty, her English was sometimes difficult to understand. Silvia apologized for this limitation: To really master the language, she explained, you had to grow up attending private schools where English was emphasized, never an option for her. Many of our group were curious about Silvia's personal life and didn't hesitate to ask. Silvia was always forthcoming, honest to a fault. Perched at the front of the bus,

microphone in hand, here is the story she told:

Silvia's mother, with a job at the airport, found herself pregnant and planned to marry her boyfriend. That is, until she discovered he had another pregnant paramour waiting in the wings. Without any family support, she decided to raise Silvia on her own, using her own last name. When Silvia was about eleven, her mother developed a fatal cancer and died within the year. Silvia went to an orphanage. At thirteen she began working, later began living on her own as a teenager, though everyone assumed--and told her as much--that she would turn into a whore on her own. Fine arts were her passion she told us, but finishing college took over ten years, without funds to buy the expensive supplies that art classes required.

Now employed by the travel company, Silvia managed most of their Panama business from her computer, only sometimes guiding tour groups, too self-conscious about her English pronunciation. Yet as a guide she more than compensated with stellar organizational prowess. Part-time work at an art museum had taught her how to explain matters simply, how to dispense information in small doses--like the cardboard placards she lettered for museum walls. Always, Silvia had matters nailed down, every potential problem anticipated. It was the kind of attention to details that often comes from keeping a topsy-turvy world at bay. Silvia had that in spades. I recognized the familiar pattern.

Perhaps because Silvia was both attractive and unmarried, tour members were especially interested in her love life. A smile slowly spread across her face; Silvia became radiant: It had always been her dream she said to have a family of her very own. Now she was engaged. To an American, a few years older, also someone who had never married. He had a home in Southern California, came to Panama City regularly on business trips. They'd met in the lobby of

the hotel, where both usually sat taking care of paper work. The two planned to marry as soon as she could arrange a visa, now a problem, though she had already met his parents. Arranging tours, Silvia had discovered a talent for organization; now she hoped to study business in grad school: Her fiancé was going to help make that happen. Our group, women especially, were happy for her.

At week's end, on our final AM, our bus departed three times for the airport, depending on passengers' flight schedules. We were slated for the second round. Silvia stood in the lobby near the entrance fare welling and shaking hands as individuals traipsed past. I reached out my hand. Silvia pulled me toward her. "I want to tell you something personal," she said quietly. I couldn't imagine what was in store. What words could they be? "I want to tell you how much I admire you and your husband." *Wow*, I thought, still mystified.

"Though this trip was difficult for you," she began. I had already figured we were probably the oldest of this grey-haired bunch. Now I wondered if she was referring to my husband's age--almost 89--coupled with the minimal vision macular degeneration had left in his only usable eye. As for me, it was true I'd used a cane to walk better then discovered that by omitting the cane I could hoist myself up onto the steep step of the bus with dispatch. So? What if we did comprise two-thirds of a *Lame, Halt, and Blind Trio*? Silvia continued, "Yes, it was difficult for you. But you never complained. You were always in a good spirits. Enjoyed yourselves. Had a good time. I admire you for that," she repeated.

The ultimate compliment: To be praised for making the best of things, for hanging in there--praise from someone whose life had been so difficult. I bent closer, touching her arm. "We admire you," I said earnestly. "You are the amazing one. Your story has been a

highlight of our trip. We admire you,” I emphasized. I saw her eyes shining, moist with tears. We embraced, Silvia & Sylvia. Husband and I walked to the nearby bus.

Once again I hoisted myself up onto the steep step and we left for the airport. Now I am waiting for the year 2089, when I expect Item #3 to arrive, assuming the 75-year cycle holds up.●

I Should Have Known

When you told me
you had only read
the first three chapters;
obviously you had not
seen the notes I left in the margins,
in that one vignette I underlined
extensively because the character
spoke about making love
in Spanish, and I had come
very close to this
for three years before you.

I read for you
two books about Space
and Time Travel.
I never knew which
way you loved me.

-Danielle Pappo



Artist: Angel Strumpfer

What the Bug People Mean

-D.R. Cerullo

HE NATURALLY THOUGHT ABOUT WILLY AND WHAT A STUPID WAY HE PICKED TO DIE. WHO LOSES THEIR GLASSES AND TRIPS INTO THE PATH OF A PICK-UP TRUCK? IT WASN'T THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO CONSOLE HIS MOTHER AND SISTER, HE JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. WILLY WAS ALWAYS BETTER WITH WORDS, ALWAYS WRITING IN THAT JOURNAL HE CARRIED AROUND, CALLING IT HIS BOOK OF GENIUS.

The rain came down hard, in that monsoon way where the noise is so continuous it drowns everything else out, pelting the rocks and the pavement and the sun ravaged trees. The thunder was on a loop and lightning flashed every few seconds, lit up the backyard like an old time movie set. If Willy were there he'd probably jump up and start screaming in that maniacal voice, "It's Alive!" Such was his passion for nerdism.

Usually Pete hated these storms, couldn't do much during them, but he was enjoying this one. For one, it made the air cool. It wasn't often you could sit outside in the summer and not be miserable. The nearly empty twelve-pack at his side had stayed cold for the duration of its time with him. In particular though, Pete was enjoying the bedlam. The intense volume of the water slapping the roof and the rocks, and the thunder rolling around drowned out the sounds of his mother and sister in the house, crying and cursing God.

When the sliding glass door opened and his sister stepped out, wiped at her puffy eyes and lit a cigarette, Pete didn't look up, just shifted in his chair to alleviate the pain in his lower back.

"Mom's driving me nuts."

Pete didn't answer, reached into his twelve-pack and grabbed another beer.

"I could really use your help in there."

"You seem to have a handle on it. Not much I could do."

"You could get off your ass and lend a hand."

Lightning flashed again, casting Pete's sitting shadow across the rock lawn and up the wall. He couldn't summon a response to her. He supposed she was right, but what else could he do? Instead he stood, said "I need another twelver." He walked right past his sister and could feel her staring hard at him.

Pete went through the back gate so he wouldn't have to face his mother, and walked down the street to the Shell Station. He naturally thought about Willy and what a stupid way he picked to die. Who loses their glasses and trips into the path of a pick-up truck? It wasn't that he didn't want to console his mother and sister, he just didn't know what to say. Willy was always better with words, always writing in that journal he carried around, calling it his Book of Genius.

Once, Pete had read through the journal when Willy wasn't around. It was mostly story ideas and quotes he found inspirational, but there also was a completed story written. A science fiction number about a world made for giant insects but had become inhabited by humans, fleeing the destruction of their home planet. The humans fought wars against the bugs and each other. When Pete told Willy he read it, Willy asked him what he thought. Pete had said he wasn't sure, but he liked the giant bug monsters. Then he asked what he thought it meant, but Pete didn't know. Willy got mad, madder than Pete had ever seen him. Told him not to go through another man's things.

After Willy died, Pete had immediately grabbed the journal from his room, before his mother and sister could forage for mementos of their own. He sat alone in the backyard, reading

through the story again, but still didn't know what it meant, except that Willy got smashed like a bug too.

The rain stopped but the wind stayed strong, leaving the air cool and clean. Pete turned the corner onto the main road, hunched slightly from the dull ache in his back.

The automatic door slid open and Pete walked in the store, shivering slightly from the air conditioner. The place was empty of customers except one old man buying cigarettes and lottery tickets from the girl at the register. Pete grabbed a twelve-pack out of the cooler and got in line. When the old man finished his purchase, Pete stepped up, placed the beer on the counter. The girl smiled slyly at him.

"Hey, Bree," he said.

"Hey yourself. Where you been?"

He dug into his wallet, pulled out a twenty. "Dealing with family shit. You know how it is."

Bree scanned the twelve-pack, took his money and handed him back the change. "I was starting to think you didn't like me anymore."

"Naw that ain't it." He shoved the cash in his wallet, the wallet back into his pocket. "You got a break comin'?"

"Hey, Chuck," she shouted into the back of the store. A middle-aged man with long hair and a goatee popped his head out. "I'm stepping out a minute. Can you cover?"

Chuck nodded, eyed Pete suspiciously as he took Bree's spot behind the counter.

Bree stroked Pete off into her open hand, wiped the come onto her jeans and kissed him on the lips. "Feel better?"

Pete managed a smile, his head clearing. "Always do after I see you."

She pulled her bra back down over her exposed breasts. "So what's this family drama all about?"

He zipped up, shifted around so he sat next to her. "My brother died." The words sounded foreign to him, meaningless.

Bree took his hand, rubbed it sympathetically.

"The shitty thing is, he was the one, you know."

She didn't answer, just rested her head on his shoulder.

"He was meant maybe for bigger things. See the ocean or something." Pete was struggling to explain himself. He'd never had to. Willy explained things, Pete just loaded and unloaded trucks, fixed things around the house. Now, with his back, he couldn't even do that anymore.

"You've never seen the ocean?"

"Never been out of Arizona."

Water dripped from the eave, rhythmically striking the asphalt.

"Poor thing. I'll show you the world."

Pete nodded, wondering about some old story he'd heard as a kid about the rain being God's tears. Then there was that other one about thunder being God bowling and the rain just being his piss. "When do you get off?"

Bree stood, tucked her shirt back in. "Couple hours."

"Can we go back to your place?"

"Yeah, you gonna just sit out here?"

"It's nice out," he said. "And I got my Pabst."

"Okay, I'll see you in a bit then. Gotta get back in now." She kissed the top of his head and went back to work.

Pete popped open a can, leaned his head back and listened to the drip of the water, watched lightning flash across the sky and wondered if there really was a world bigger than his.

Bree lay on top of him, breathing hard and sweating. She lingered a few moments with Pete still inside her until her body convulsed one last time then rolled onto her back.

“I needed that,” she said, lighting a cigarette. “Nothing like a good fuck to get rid of the work day.”

Pete didn't mention that his back hurt, didn't want to spoil the moment.

She held the cigarette between her fingers, breathing heavily. Ash collected at the tip and built up until the bottom fell out, sprinkling gray flakes over her pale skin.

“Tell me about your brother,” she said.

“He fell in the street 'cause he couldn't see.”

Bree finally took a long drag, long and slow. “Not how he died.” She blew the smoke into the air above them. “Why was he meant for bigger things and not you?”

Pete's head fogged up and he couldn't tell if it was too much beer or that he needed another one. He was leaning toward the latter.

“He was smarter, except I could fix things, he was shit with his hands.” He wasn't explaining right again, he could tell. “Goofy kid, drank like a motherfucker too. Goofy in that way though, like you knew he had something special.” He rubbed his hand distractedly over Bree's nipple. “Something in him that most people don't have.” He wanted to tell her about the bugs and the wars and how Willy had maybe figured something out about the world and wrote it in his journal. But Pete couldn't figure out what.

“I don't like it when you say you're not smart.”

“I'd marry you, you know, if you wanted.”

Bree laughed, hard. Explosions rippling out of her, making her lungs reject the smoke and forcing a wet coughing fit. “You barely even know me,” she said when the fit subsided. “Maybe you can take me out on a proper date, instead of drunk fucking, and then we can talk about marriage.”

The fog in his head hadn't lifted, in fact got worse. It was a struggle just to keep his eyes open anymore. “Do you have any beer?”

“In the fridge in the garage.” She lit another cigarette. “Don't wake up my roommates.”

Pete made his way slowly through the dark hall, bracing an arm against a wall for support. He nearly tripped once over some unseen object on the floor, but caught himself before he fell. He thought for a second about how Willy had tripped too but was unable to catch himself and that maybe that was some epiphany for life. No answers or meaning. We trip, sometimes we fall, and sometimes we don't and there's no real reason for either. The thought disappeared though as it didn't seem profound enough for Willy.

Light from outside lit up the kitchen enough for him to see. He stopped by the sink and stuck his mouth under the faucet and drank a bit of cold, but metallic tasting water. Out the window the clouds had parted and the dawn gave hints to its coming.

He went to the garage and flipped the switch. The light flickered but couldn't hold, sending the garage back to black. The fridge, he knew, was off to the right, but he didn't know what stood in the path. He went back into the kitchen, rummaged through drawers and cabinets until he found a new light bulb and a flashlight in the top shelf of the pantry.

Pete sprayed the flashlight's dull blaze into the dark corners of the garage. He settled on an old ice chest and pulled it to the center, underneath the light fixture. He stood on it and reached for the bad bulb and unscrewed it. This was something he could do, fix this small thing. The old light came out and he twisted the new one in, bringing illumination back to the garage.

He wouldn't tell Bree or her roommates about this, he'd just let them enjoy it. Yes, fixing these small things was useful.

Pete stepped off the cooler and saw a bigger problem. Ants, a ton of them. Hundreds of thousands swarming around, coating the ground. A single step killed a couple dozen alone under his barefoot. Their wet innards stuck to his soles. The rain sometimes brought them out like this, seeking shelter. They'd never go away on their own though, they'd have to be killed.

Walking on his toes, he crept around the garage, stopping by the fridge to finally get his beer, then searching cabinets for the right tool. He found a bottle of Raid and knelt down on the ground and got to work.

The poison mist fell upon the ants, causing immediate anarchy in their ranks. Some died instantly, other twitched violently while trying to crawl their way to safety. Pete went through the garage, spraying everywhere. This was work he didn't like, it felt wrong, but it needed to be done. This was genocide and he knew it. He was Hitler with his deadly gas, God with his apocalyptic plagues. This was the war man fought against the earth he calls home. But there was no other way. Pete accepted this and continued his massacre.

When it was done the room smelled like death and Pete was lightheaded. The beer even tasted like bug spray. He found a broom and swept the carcasses into the corner then finished his beer, gagging on the spoiled taste, and tossed the can in a trash bin.

He cracked a fresh beer, sat Indian-style in front of the mound. His head was fucked. Too much beer, too much Raid, too much killing and little brothers dying, too much goddamned back pain. Pete sat and drank that way until his legs cramped up.

The light flickered, a power surge maybe, or a brownout from the storm. Or, possibly just a shitty bulb. Darkness and light flashed back and forth, battling it out amongst themselves. Then, movement from the mound. At first, Pete couldn't tell if it was a strobe effect, but the stirring continued. It was just a slight swelling of the tiny, black bodies, like the corpses had formed a new entity and it was taking its first breaths in this world, until a few swirling legs popped out, followed by a head and the torso. The victorious ant climbed down the hill made of its dead kin and reached the ground.

Pete jumped up, ignoring the cramped legs and the throbbing back, threw his hands up in the air, and in the oscillating light, shouted, "It's Alive! It's Alive!" He danced, though careful not to trounce the lone survivor, and yelled throughout the garage. He tore his shirt off and wiped away the puddles of poison in the ant's path.

"What the fuck."

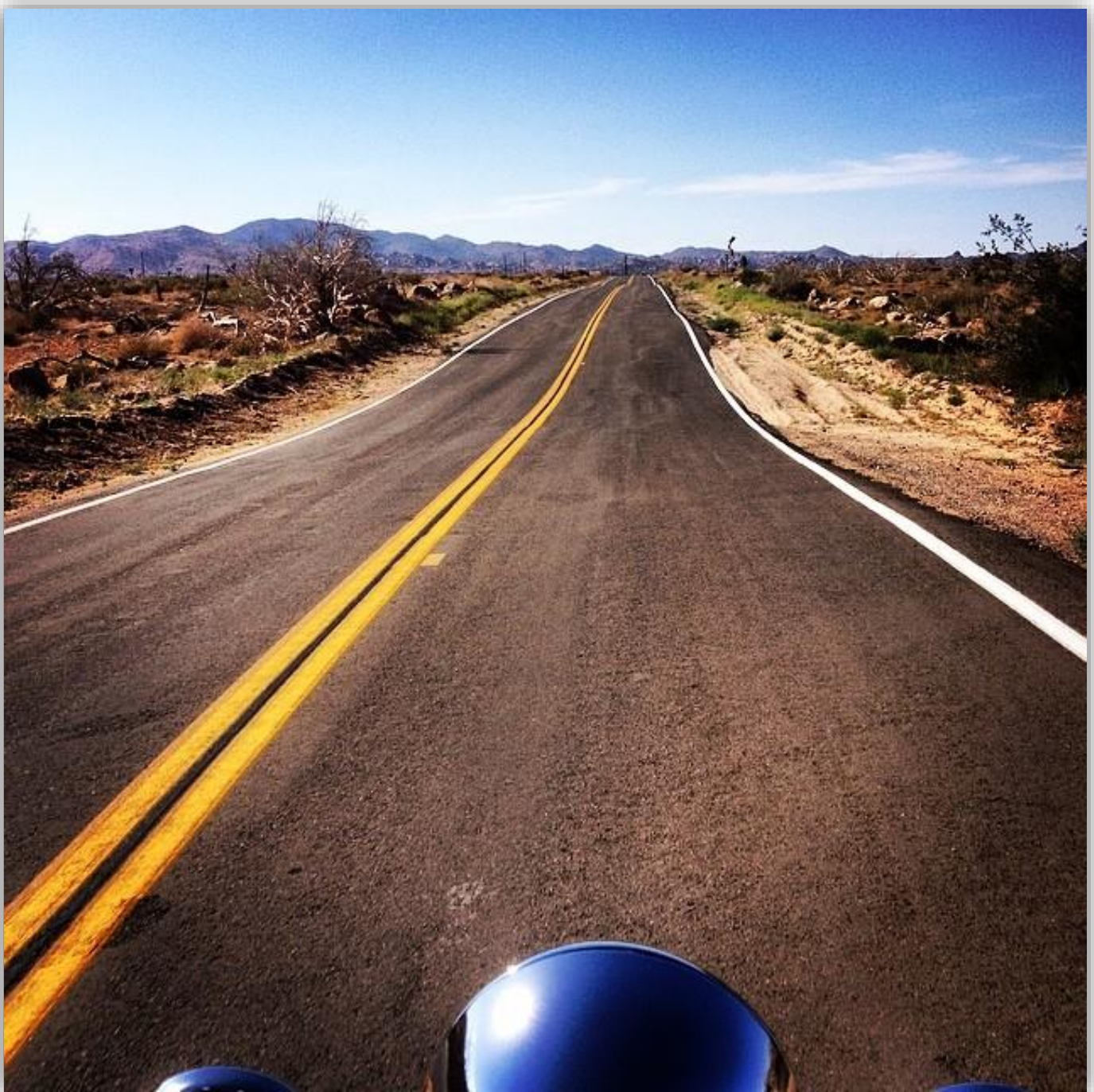
The human voice jarred Pete back into the garage, though not entirely to his old self. The two roommates stood in the doorway, with Bree behind them looking tired and embarrassed. Pete understood that he looked crazy. He was drunk and shirtless and yelling in the dark morning hours. But he couldn't contain himself. He laughed and pointed toward the ant as it crawled its way toward the garage door and the sliver of light that wormed its way through. None standing in the doorway could see the ant though.

One of the roommates, the blond, said "Get him under control or get him out of here." She went back inside along with the other one. Bree stood alone, arms crossed, now annoyed. "Come to bed."

"Okay," Pete said. He took one more look at the ant and left the sporadic darkness of the garage.

They then went back into the house, now lit up by the morning sun, and headed back to Bree's room. She collapsed into the bed and he followed behind her, held her close. She recoiled at first, probably from the smell, but then settled into his arms. "I know what the bug people meant." He said to her. She only responded with a half-asleep murmur. He closed his eyes, found sleep coming for him easily. Soon the rest of the world would wake and start their day.

But Pete would sleep through this one, holding his girl, and trusting that the world get by alright without him until tomorrow. ●



Artist: Jacob Landrith

thursday

there's his furry socks

the ones with stripes on top

he's a genius turning plain into vistas into pipe dreams

smoked on the riverbank where canoes slithered once

men wore leaves in their pounded leather boots

those were the days with morning coming up on us as it did

beastly hot by noon

how about tonight

we perform under the skittering moon

wring juice from the piano

send it to the faces inside a cloud

make a justice joke or just nod

I shut my mouth on this side of town

where the river is derailed

the first placed they fixed after the hurricane

I hope what happened was a quirk not hedge funds

manipulating Argentina had nothing to do with love

that would be a shame

there was love in the days of canoes

smoke by the river

clouds identical to God

today he rolled his socks

unrolled them over yesterday's feet

the ones that escaped calamity

-Roger Bernard Smith

Sometimes It's Just a Smile

(Or, Gina's World)

-Larry Schreiber MD

I landed at the airport on the outskirts of Calcutta in July of 1986. The heat! The heat was like someone smothering me. Like trying to speak with a blanket over your face. The colors were overwhelming; a million different colors-cobalt blue, blood red, saffron yellow, Day-Glo orange, purple bright greens, glorious magenta, every color of the rainbow plus it seemed like a dozen more. The mass of people...a moving mass, holding signs cabs for hire, limousines luxurious and cheap, holding their children up, begging, pinching, hustling, asking "you want a ride mister?" "Where you going?" "Oh, orphanage? Mother Teresa's?" "No. International Mission of Hope." "You mean Mother Teresa's. I take you there." "No. International Mission of Hope—*Asha Kendra!*"

The cab was sweltering. The road was potholed, filled with tuck-tucks (motor cycles with carriage) and rickshaws drawn by men, barefoot, thin as rails, spitting blood. On the cement, spitting out blood. TB. My taxi cab driver screamed epithets whose words I didn't understand, but whose meaning was clear.

Before I got to the hotel, the cab broke down. Smoking. The Sikh driver told me, "no problem." He lifted up the hood, did some magic, and changed some part, and we were back on our way. In a week, I would be blowing black mucus out of my nose, the pollution was so terrible.

We drove up to the Fairlawn Hotel, Calcutta luxury, where, for fifteen dollars a day I could stay and eat two British meals. The Hotel was my anchor in Calcutta. And I needed an anchor, believe me.

Here's what was beautiful: The streets were full of people. People living on the sidewalks.. They slept on sleeping bags, blankets, cardboard. But when the sun rose, they rose, almost like we do at a football game, in a wave. Black haired children with huge pools of eyes, sari's in red, orange, blues. The city turned on the fire hydrants; the people washed themselves, brushed their teeth, picked out the nits in each other's hair. Then, almost on schedule, almost like a suburbanite, they would leave their "spots" on the pavement and go to work: Hustling, begging, pleading, surviving. The streets would remain. At night, they came back to their "home." Then, one would hear clarinets, flutes, drums, talking, singing; and making love, defecating, living. There were times when I wanted to live and work in Calcutta forever. There was such need, such openness. I never felt threatened. I would walk in the evenings all over, and was always met by kindness, a friendly wave; of course, there were always the hustlers.

A man came up to me one evening. He had a straggly beard. A short man. Barefoot, wearing loose fabric tied with rope, two sizes too big. "You want a girl, sir?" I shook my head. "You want a boy?" I walked away.

I had come to Calcutta to adopt Gina. She was reported to be nine years old but no one knew for sure; their histories were hidden and forgotten. I first saw her in a photo. I already had eight children, five of whom were adopted. The "special needs adoption agencies" had us on their list: they sent us magazine after magazine with photos of waiting children. The photo of Gina got to me. She was standing on a chair, holding on to the back, with her knees hyper-extended. Her right leg in an awkward position the foot

is inverted because the muscles can't hold it out—all as a result of *Polio*.

I had seen hundreds of photos of children, all beautiful, all with some kind of hurt, disease, malnourishment—but Gina stood out. It was her smile, a smile that took up her whole face. She was lit from inside. Her black hair was long, and her dress was covered by green and red flowers, with a white collar. She was barefoot (her deformed feet couldn't fit into shoes).

So, off to Calcutta I went.

I could not help thinking about the opening paragraph of a *Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens. It describes Calcutta to a tee:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the season of despair...”

I went to the International Mission of Hope, and visited with Sherri, a Denver nurse who had married Sunil, a Bengali. Sherri hired an Indian neonatologist who went to hospitals where Indian women underwent abortions. Ultrasounds were not routinely performed. Some of the aborted fetuses lived and the physician brought them back to IMH. About fifty percent aborted the aborted children survived and were adopted. They would be my plane ticket home.

Gina and I hit it off right away. She spoke a bit of English, enough that with sign language and smiles, we could communicate. From the first, we understood each other. “*ami āpanakē anēka bhālobāsi,*” she told me in Bengali: *I love you very much* it came out

easily for me. Later, we always said it to each other, coming and going.

One day, I took Gina and some of her friends to the movies. Now this sounds like a simple, every-day kind of task, doesn't it? At home we would buckle the kids in the cars, put on the air conditioner, drive to the theatre buy popcorn, and wait for the coming attractions. In Calcutta, accompanied by Chitra, an adult who worked for the International Mission of Hope, fifteen children, and I grabbed a cab, sitting three on top of each other, no seatbelts. Off we went. We sat in the theatre balcony, and when the kids jumped up and down, as most of them did, the balcony shook. Gina sprang up on her chair, laughing. The Bollywood movie was simplistic and punctuated with English dialogue. Chitra sat next to me. She repeating the English as if she were translating it. When the actress said, “I love you,” Chitra *translated* “the actress said ‘I love you.’” The film had dancing, singing, and a lot of bright color. It was in direct contrast to the Bengali play I attended one evening. The play moved me; and I could feel the passion and talent without understanding a word. The theatre was filled with middle class Bengali woman in beautifully woven saris and the men in long dress shirts without collars.

I went to the orphanage every day to see Gina so she would become familiar with me, her new father. Her birth mother loved her. But having six girls, and the youngest with polio, she knew she could not take care of Gina. So she had brought Gina to the orphanage, and visited her there showing much affection. This was not typical.

Around day six, I asked to take Gina with me for an overnight stay. We ate dinner in the hotel's ‘British’ dining room. Gina was wearing her only dress. The rat that ran across the floor raised not a peep from the mostly European crowd. A U.S. evangelical group peered at Gina, at me, and then at the

two of us together. Perhaps they hoped I'd baptize Gina. They all seemed to have too many teeth.

After dinner we went up to our room. Her legs were callused from crawling on the hot, dusty roadways. She communicated that she wanted to bathe and she needed a bucket. I found one and gave it to her. The bath tub had claw feet and was stately. I left the room to give Gina privacy. I sat on the bed, trying to imagine what her life would be in San

Cristobal, New Mexico. What could I offer her? Would she fit in? Was I doing the right thing? Suddenly, I noticed water seeping from beneath the bathroom door. "Gina!" I yelled. "Are you all right?" I pushed open the door. Gina was smiling, sitting next to the tub on the floor, filling the bucket with water from the running bath and pouring it over herself, bathing as she did on the streets of Calcutta. And feeling very much at home. ●



Artist: Leah Givens

Art Model

The feel of it, that soft scrape
of charcoal on rough, thick, fiber
lines of my form beneath
your fingers, the silence of this
space magnifies motion
the sound of my body drawn
across the page.

-Brad Garber

Sunday Breakfast

When I stood behind you with a banana
I was not being disrespectful but coy
Just the sort of thing a boy would do
Before the scrambled eggs were done
And I took your blind hand and led it
To feel how rigid I could become with skin
Ready to be peeled with the ripe spots
And the sweet smell of rotting fruit
The cliché of an arching object not lost
You stabbed the yolks to spread the fat
The food of babies leaking out to harden
And ran your fingers along the rind
And for the moment wolves howled
The long snake of the whale's penis
Undulating in the waves of our small kitchen
Rose like the sun across the floor

-Brad Garber

Birds and Bees

-Bob Williams

I know a girl so sweet and pretty she'll have you noticing all types of fucking flowers, and the way babies' chuckle and roll. Her face is buttery like a turkey and dimpled. Her feet plod awkwardly on the ground.

After midnight we hopped a fence to get to the bare-wooden picnic table on the other side. The thing was surrounded by Black-Eyed Susans. You could hear the bees start pollinating right when the sun's forehead peaked over the horizon. That fresh heat tickled the frenzied flyers back to life. We watched them do it for almost an hour before hopping back over the fence.

Oh, and the birds got up too. I can't explain it—where they *go* at night. Just, like, *away*. Or why they stop chirping, or how they sleep, or *if* they sleep at all—and how if they *do* sleep, in the trees, on the branches, why do they never topple from those thin bunks to the ground from time to time? You've never seen one curled up under a newspaper or on a bench. You don't see them at all and you don't hear them either, until the morning comes.

They caw, caw, cawled down to us from the power lines—like soldiers perfectly aligned, somehow stable, their portly bodies perched on twin toothpicks, just cackling away. We walked past an alley where five men huddled over the open hood of a rusty Ford pickup. Their voices echoed out to us, and up to the birds. Each man held a smoke and a Styrofoam cup with one hand while pointing into the hood at his opinion with the other. Those men had tanned hands and some crusty lining at the bottom of their jeans. They whistled and checked out her ass and made sucking sounds with their faces. I walked her all the way home and said goodnight, though it was morning. ●

archipelagos

The vacuum went first,
then the space heater disappeared,
the shitty Ikea dining room set—
so light it was like inflatable wood,
screws tumbling to the floor
every time you walked past it.
The kitchen set went next, another
Ikea table—white modern retro,
its base heavy as an anvil—
well- matched with those 70s
swivel chairs you so loved.
More furniture upstairs, in the basement—
dressers, futons, bookcases, more chairs,
filing cabinets, nightstands...
all of it wrapped in plastic, carted out
the front door along with you.

Your brother wanted the couch, an overstuffed
monstrosity from Raymour & Flanigan,
purchased after much deliberation
and because we couldn't wait
to get out of the store.
Are we adults now? you asked as we sped away.
Nope, just suckers, I replied.

The handyman (nice guy, you would've
liked him) asked about the outdated stereo
in the laundry room closet:
Take it, I told him. *Take the Christmas
decorations in there while you're at it;
I won't be needing them.*

I even left our bed behind—rails and headboard
made from reclaimed wood.
It works! you proclaimed after I'd set it up.
Couldn't blame you for hating the mattress
I bought without your consent: thing was so high
with its pillow top bells & whistles.
What, it didn't come with a stepladder?
You never did find out how much
I overpaid for it.

-Michael Passafiume



Artist: Kate LaDew

From Stone

-Tim Millas

From the road, the house looked bright as a party boat and sounded as loud. Every light burning, heavy metal slamming the first floor while a comedian screamed upstairs. So Bett knew nobody was home. Newcomers to Stone would do this to warn off prowlers, not realizing that to a practiced thief, it was an invitation.

Bett pulled her bike into a cluster of pine trees, laid it on its side, and covered it with loose branches and cones knocked off by the latest weather. Not that it needed covering—she'd painted the frame and even the tire spokes a non-reflective black. And as a once-practiced thief, she wore black from top to bottom, including a black wool face cap with slits for her mouth and black eyes.

Stoneland, a short throw off the coast of Sky Hill, Maine, was mostly green, despite its name. The quarry that once built skyscrapers across the country was long shut down. Less than a thousand people remained and eighty percent of the island was dense pine. To locals, it was just Stone: "Out to Stone," they'd say when they were headed there, or "From Stone" when they lived there.

In November the sun faded at three-thirty. By five o'clock, when Bett pedaled across the causeway from Sky Hill to Stone, it was dark as a pocket. No lights on Route A, nothing but black ahead and all around.

That suited Bett. *She* could see—thanks to the night goggles her brother Dex had smuggled back from Iraq and given to her, since her bike had no light—and she didn't want to *be* seen.

Bett Handy was born in Sky Hill; her family worked lobster boats off the mainland. But she knew Stone well from when she worked for Dex, who settled here after inheriting land from a dead marine buddy. One of Dex's enterprises was caretaking houses—mainly ones owned by summer people and left deserted between October

He managed fine on his own, only hired Bett as a favor to their mother. She barely knew him since they had different fathers and he was sixteen years older. But he took a liking to her. A year after she'd stopped working for him, he still called her every week. Always said she could come to him for help.

Tonight she needed his help. But first, because his help would be expensive, she needed to break in somewhere.

Dex's other enterprise was robbing houses. Again, mostly those of summer people, but *never* the same ones he caretaked—you don't piss where you fish, was how he explained it to Bett. He'd steal anything that could be fenced but the easiest thing was to strip all the copper electrical wiring. You got fast cash for that.

When he first hired Bett, he told her she would only do caretaking. But Bett, who'd been fired from the Sky Market because her register never added up, kept bugging him to take her along on a break-in, and Dex finally gave in. She did so well he took her a second time, and a third, and then told her she'd be on every job. "You got talent," he said, with a reluctant family pride.

Bett just shrugged. She wouldn't tell him how she really felt, entering the home of a person, or a family, and taking something from them. Not the wiring but some additional thing, it didn't matter what—jewels, a wallet, even a paperweight—as long as it was personal. A cold rage would surge through her as she took it, but once out of the house, she felt a sudden affection for the people she'd robbed. Like she had entered *them*, by force, but halfway through started loving them.

In the end, her need to feel this affected her judgment. It almost got her killed the night she lingered too long and had to jump from an upstairs window when Stone police showed up. She snapped her

and June. He made sure the pipes didn't freeze and snow got cleared after big storms.

ankle; Dex carried her away, muttering, "You're done."

Tonight was different. Strictly practical. And while she would never break Dex's rule and rob a house he caretaked, she remembered one, on Deerpath Road, which he'd lost because new people bought it and said they'd be living in it year round. She decided to go there.

* * *

It was an old farmhouse, well back from the road, at the end of a long lawn that angled sharply upward. Bett advanced with a slight, sideways limp, a souvenir of her fall. Her feet kept crunching unraked leaves but she couldn't hear anything over the noise from the house. And if there *was* anyone in there, they wouldn't either.

Kiddie things on the grass: stuffed dog and sheep, a football. Abruptly she came to a low stone wall—and gasped at a swollen head sitting on it. She ripped off the goggles. It was a pumpkin, wearing a hat.

Bett was pregnant. Two tests from two different drugstores said so. She looked and felt the same, but something was growing in her. The classmate she'd slept with had since dropped out of school and out of sight. She was on her own. She knew that Dex, who'd been a medic in Iraq, could help her kill it. "Take care of it," he said, but Bett didn't believe in mincing words.

Killing it was a no-brainer. She was twenty. She'd seen what having kids so young did to her mother. Dex did her a favor by firing her—she'd gone back to school and was part way to a degree in digital design. Her plan was to finish and get out of Maine. No way she'd follow the Handy family tradition, dying in the same town where she was born.

Dex said it would be easy. Pills, followed by some bleeding and lying low for a day or two at his place. And that would be that.

She said it—"That'll be that"—and was startled, as if somebody else had

spoken. Well, if someone showed up she'd just say she was from Stone and taking a shortcut.

But nobody did. *The Kiehls*, said a nameplate on the front door. *This home protected by Leeson Security*, said a red-and-white sign stuck in the dirt near the door—a fake, Bett remembered from when she was caretaking. She went along the side of the house until she came to the back wall of the attached garage. There was a window there that never used to be locked. It still wasn't.

She passed through the stale, colder air of the empty garage, climbed up two steps on her left, and opened a door. She stepped into the kitchen, and halted, as if this was the wrong house.

They must have gutted it, started over. Brand-new appliances—her eyes narrowed at all the stainless steel. Marble counters running the length of three walls, a marble-topped island with stools around it. White cabinets that looked taller than her. Between the counters and cabinets were wall tiles she recognized from Sky Hill's priciest home store. Cartoon fish interspersed with lettered tiles: *Curt, Hannah, Tad, Nash*. The Kiehl family. Under the wool mask her mouth itched, and her face got cold.

She turned into a hallway that led her to the living room, also transformed. The front window now spanned the wall, making the room feel bigger, even with more in it. Sofa and easy chairs that looked custom, two antique rockers on the new white oak floor. A jumperoo so clean you'd never believe it held a baby. Another wall now a bookcase, packed with books plus a big flat screen TV and a Bose system from which the music blasted. She could feel the beat throbbing in her bad ankle.

But she didn't shut it off. The noise would keep her focused: find something worth something, and get out.

When Bett offered to pay for the pills, Dex refused. Still, he managed to mention how much they cost. If Bett found that much cash lying around she'd take it, but a

valuable object would be better. Dex could rationalize it as something he could fence for her, then forget to give her whatever money he got.

A counter-clockwise sweep of the living room left her empty-handed. The newness made everything impersonal. She reminded herself that this break-in *was* impersonal, but each time she picked up something expensive, she put it down.

Then, at the opposite corner from where she started, face down on a side table was a picture frame. The frame might be gold, but she couldn't be sure, Bett thought, as she set it upright. Here were the Kiehls: mother and father at each end, and between them a pudgy boy—probably six, like three of her nephews—and a laughing ugly baby in blue footie pajamas. A face so round and fat you wanted to take a bite out of it.

At least you'd remember that face. Not so much the others, with their fake, family-picture smiles. Although on second glance, she realized the woman would have caught her father's attention: "That one's *wholesome*. She can serve *my* dinner without a tray!" Meaning one whose boobs were too big and firm to ignore, no matter how modest she was or what she wore to hide them. Bett thought this was funny until that time on his boat, when, drunk, he said it to *her*.

Then she saw the ring. It must have been under the frame. A big, sharp-edged diamond; her father would have called it a ship-wrecker. It felt cold in her hand, the coldness surging down to her toes. Valuable *and* personal. The hell with it, she thought, pushing it into her pocket.

She was near the dining room, which connected to the kitchen and the way out. Time to go. She almost bumped into the table, which was weirdly positioned, one end touching the wall. She shifted right to pass around it and saw the boys.

Bett knew them instantly, because they were wearing the same outfits. Instead of sitting they were laying on their backs, on

a dark green blanket spread over half of the dining room floor.

The older boy, in stiff jeans, tied sneakers, red flannel Bean's shirt. Fat baby in its blue pajamas, dotted with white seagulls. Both with hair wet-parted, faces white from recent washing, eyes closed. The boy's mouth was pressed shut. But baby's lips were parted in a way that made Bett lunge closer. The lips felt cold to her ear but still she waited, to hear or feel a breath.

Instead, she felt a deeper chill, a clench in her stomach, a surging up. She jerked away from the blanket, but didn't have time to remove her mask and vomited through the slit. When she stopped she tore it off. The motion made her throw up again, over the mask and part of her sleeve.

"Who's there?"

The voice was just loud enough to cut through the music. It wasn't threatening or hysterical. Even if it had been, Bett felt too weak to run.

"Is somebody there? Please?"

The voice, female, didn't sound any louder, or closer. Despite the plea, it seemed calm. Too calm for another victim, Bett thought, of whoever did *this*. Her suspicion made her stronger. She slowly got to her feet and went to the kitchen, washed her mouth, chin, and sleeve. She went back to the living room, found the remote for the Bose, and shut it, instantly making the TV comic upstairs sound louder.

"There *is* someone. I need help—please. Where are you?"

She should clear out right now, Bett thought. She still could; nobody'd seen her. Instead, she thought about the layout of the house, and with sudden resolve strode to the foyer by the front door, and the foot of the stairway to the second floor. The steps had new carpeting, and the cherry wood railing was all new.

Then she saw the woman: standing near the top, her arm on the railing, head turned sideways. As if she'd heard a noise and come to peer down. No—she was perched on the *other side* of the railing: her

back to it, her arm grasping it from behind. If she let go and took another step, she would drop.

"Hah!" Bett gasped and staggered back, as if she was the one about to fall.

"Thank God," said Hannah Kiehl. "Who are you?"

"I'm not here," Bett said.

It sure was Hannah Kiehl, the wholesome mother. Like her boys, she was wearing the same clothes she wore in the picture, blue sweater covering her from waist to chin, black jeans similar to Bett's. Her feet were bare.

Bett then saw the rope, looped around Hannah's neck—above the neck of her sweater—and tied to the railing behind her. The knot was no good.

"So you came to rob me?"

Bett didn't deny it. She looked straight into Hannah's face. Hannah looked back, opening her eyes wider to show she understood what Bett suspected, and closing them to confirm it. Bett made the *Hah!* sound again, this time with disgust, and turned sharply back toward the living room.

"Go ahead. I've lost everything anyway."

Bett took out her phone, tried to call Dex. The call failed. She tried to text him but that didn't seem to work either. Cell service sucked on Stone.

"Looking for a phone? I got rid of it. After he left. I didn't want him calling here. Of course he finds other ways...to get in touch..."

Bett remembered a spot in the garage where sometimes you could get a signal. She tried to sweep through the dining room, but the baby stopped her. She could swear its position had shifted. Like the feet had just kicked, the mouth just opened, to release a piercing baby noise. She knelt, putting her ear to the lips again. They were cold. Bett banged the floor with her fist, and stood.

So why was she angry? Because somebody she'd never met killed her kids? Wasn't she about to do the same thing? OK, it felt totally different—these boys were

already here, had names and made noise, while growing in Bett was an unknown, not a boy or girl yet. It felt different: but it wasn't.

She heard Hannah Kiehl again—not the snap of her neck breaking. Her voice. Bett returned to the foyer. Hannah was still at the top of the stairs, still outside the railing, about to fall but not falling.

“Still looking? See the dining room?”

“I saw it.”

“Then you know. I've done it. The thing that can't be forgiven.”

“Killed them, you mean,” Bett said.

Suddenly she knew: What infuriated her about Hannah Kiehl was not the killing but that she hadn't killed herself too. That she stood up there making a big show of wanting to do it, and couldn't.

Hannah again met the challenge of Bett's eyes, nodded. “Yes.”

“Why'd you do it?”

“Because...they were already dead.”

“That's bullshit.”

“No,” Hannah said. “It isn't.” Her voice *wasn't* calm, actually—she was making a tremendous effort to speak at all, as if a huge stone pressed down on her lungs. “Curt... my husband...”

Bett said: “What about your husband?”

“He ruined them.”

“What?”

“He ruined them *both*,” Hannah said, as if the extra word clarified everything.

Then Bett recalled her mother talking about Rory Wells, who fled Sky Hill, and his daughter, because *he ruined her*. She thought of her father, making his comment about her boobs when they were on his boat, and how it was the last time she ever set foot on that boat.

“So he messed with them?” Bett said. “You know that for sure?”

“I should have known it years ago, with Tad. But I'm a coward. I had my life planned, and I—” Her chest heaved. “I caught him with Nash. There was no way I couldn't know then.”

Bett thought of the man in the picture. His image told her nothing. Blond, smaller-boned yet fatter than Hannah, wearing the same fake smile. Tad and Nash looked more like him, than her.

“OK. But he didn't kill them. You did.”

“He killed any chance they had for a life. I just finished it. I drugged them and drowned them. It was an act of mercy. But it was murder. I'm guilty. I condemn myself to death and accept my punishment. I *want* to die. I'm ready—”

Bett closed her eyes so she wouldn't see it happen. But after a while, hearing nothing, she looked again: Hannah was still at the railing.

“I can't do it. Don't know why. Because I'm a coward? I just can't. Thank God you're here. You can help me.”

“No, I can't. I'm not here, I told you.”

“What's your name?”

“Bett”—instantly regretting it.

“Bett. All I need is a push. I'll be a suicide by hanging myself. That'll be the truth, and you were never here.”

“Why can't you just jump? Just do it!” In the next minute they stared at each other, listening to the TV voices laughing at them. Bett heard herself say: “That rope won't do the job, you know. The knot's wrong. You'll choke slow and have time to change your mind.”

“That's why I need your help, Bett. I'm begging you. Please.”

Suddenly Bett couldn't take the laughing. She ran up the steps, past Hannah Kiehl, into one room, then another, until she found the TV. Found the remote and shut the power. For a moment she let herself breathe in the silence.

Then she walked over to where Hannah stood. She put one hand on Hannah's arm, and with the other she loosened and removed the rope. Hannah watched her do this. There was something gentle, *motherly*, in the way she looked at Bett, in the answering pressure of her arm

against Bett's hand, as if she was helping Bett and not the other way around.

"Old rope. Where'd you get it?"

"It was in the basement."

"May not hold when you jump. I know ropes. My pop had a fishing boat, until he drank it." Hannah said nothing. Her silence somehow enabled Bett to say, "But with the right knot, it'll happen on the drop. Your neck will break before the rope breaks. OK?"

Hannah closed her eyes and nodded, faintly.

On her first try Bett messed it up. Then her father's words came back. He'd shown her the hangman's knot as a goof, after making her learn all the boat knots. "It's like tying your tie," he said. "Just watch your hands do it." So Bett did it that way, and it worked.

Coming from behind Hannah—she didn't want to look at her face anymore—Bett placed the rope over her head. She tightened it so the knot jammed against the side of her neck. The force of this made Hannah gasp. "Sorry," Bett said. "That should do you."

"—Tight."

"That's what you want. Now," she said. "Now let your foot over."

Hannah looked down at her feet, as if willing them to move. They didn't.

"Can't."

Bett reached out her left hand, touched Hannah's back with her fingertips. The pressure didn't propel Hannah forward, but it released her: she fell.

The railing gave a shrill creak at the sudden weight put on it. Hannah made no sound, just bounced up once, like a bungee jumper attached at the wrong end. Bett looked away, and sat down hard, on the landing.

For a long time she kept telling herself that she had to get up.

"Jesus, Bett. What'd you get mixed up in here?"

That jolted her up. She saw Dex at the foot of the steps, with Hannah hanging over him, like a lamp with the light out.

Before she could answer him, he answered himself: "You broke in to do a little robbing. And you walked into this."

"Dex, did you see the—"

"I got your text. Came in here the same way you did. This is a mess, Bett. You already have enough mess to fix."

"I know. I'm sorry."

Dex had short legs—always wore his jean cuffs turned up at the bottom—and standing below Hannah, he looked even shorter. But he also had big hands, arms like steel rods, and a face that a six-year tour in Iraq had taught to never show anything but stony calm.

"All right," he said. "Come and tell me what happened. I need to know all of it."

Bett came down and told him. He didn't interrupt her. His eyes were wired, never stopped roving—he lived on Dexedrine—but his face, as always, locked still. When she finished, he stepped away from her, assessed the room and Hannah hanging there, in the same way, Bett realized, that he had assessed the mortally wounded deer they once found on Route A, before ending its misery. He left her to check out the other rooms. When he returned, he said: "Gotta burn it down."

"Burn *them*?"

"Not just them, little sister, everything. And they can't feel it anymore."

"No, Dex."

"Bett, you been all over this house. They're dead, you're alive; you can't be party to this. We can't have any DNA. Fire's the best thing."

Bett looked at Hannah. Eyes open, chest firm, but she was gone. She took the ring from her pocket and gave it to Dex, who replaced it on Hannah's finger.

Dex said quietly, "You get out right now. Don't touch another thing. I'll take care of it. You turn left on Deerpath, go to my place, no more detours. And don't take any pills till I get back. OK?" His fingertips touched her elbow, gentled her through the living room, to the doorway of the dining room. "Now go."

“OK,” she said, and he left her. But in the dining room, she couldn’t help taking a last look at the baby. Nash, she thought. Fat cheeks begging her to sink her teeth in. His lips open, about to sing to her. *He* wasn’t gone. She lifted him, unzipped her jacket partway, pressed him against her, and zipped it back up. He felt heavy on her ankle, but she managed to climb out the window without displacing him.

All the way back to her bike, Bett kept telling herself that he wasn’t alive—but she also kept thinking that somehow, by getting him away from the house, from Stone, she could keep him from being dead. She knew this thought didn’t make sense. So she stopped thinking. And when she reached the road, she turned right. ●

To Be The Dogman

-Luke Whisnant

Halfway through the seventh song they have to stop the show because the bass player is doubled over grabbing his side, crouching on a barstool brought out by one of the roadies, and with the crowd screaming *Dogman, Dogman* he says into the mic I’m sorry people I just can’t do it. At home an hour later my brother cranks up the *Dogman* CD and sets it on “repeat” and we check the band’s Facebook page and see they had to rush the bass player to the hospital for a strangulated hernia, and even though it’s two AM I’m grading student essays and I circle a phrase that describes the writer’s ex-boyfriend’s eyes as being “the color of dogshit” and wearily I write in the margin “when did you last look at dogshit? because it can be all different colors” and my brother’s wife yells down the basement stairs for him to turn the music down goddamnit. At three-twenty AM, loopy from lack of sleep, I get an email from Mallory saying that she and Matt are back together and that, big surprise, he has been a model husband and slept beside her for five days in the hospital while she recovered from the C-section. Attached to the email are two photos: the first is Nigel, the new baby, wearing a snap-up onesie covered with blue-and-orange puppies that I sent her six weeks ago for her baby shower, when she was still getting a divorce, or so I thought, and the other is a photo of Nigel breastfeeding. My brother and I sit looking at this three-day-old scrunchy-faced baby with his wrinkled hands up around Mallory’s breast and my brother glances at my face and then back at the photo and then at my face again and then says, Dude, seems like this picture is sending you some mixed messages here. The *Dogman* song cycles back on for the umpteenth time, and I think this is the most beautiful photograph I have ever seen until I remember whose baby it is, after all, and then, stupidly, whom the photographer almost certainly was. ●

71:17

-Mark J. Smith



Grandfather and granddaughter gazed down at their model train set. Side by side they stood in their small apartment, living room long since converted into a workshop, furniture cleared to the walls, extension cords snaking across the floor, lamp shades removed for maximum light.

A sidelong glance from her, a slow nod from him, and with the flip of a red switch the locomotive sounded its whistle and moved slowly out of the station.

This was their town, perfect in every way, church steeple and playground, drug store and barber shop, painstakingly built, painted, populated.

With its load of lumber and livestock the train passed the freshly mown ball field and rolled alongside a row of new homes, lawns manicured, shiny automobiles in each driveway, families shouting and waving from the sidewalk.

The man and girl watched intently. He, 71, baggy overalls and slippers, engineer's hat and final-stage Alzheimer's, not noticing the black freight car she'd added that morning; she, rail-thin, lip ring, ponytail dyed red, just 17 and already painted into a dark and desperate corner.

Model citizens crowded the town square; town dignitaries joked amongst themselves on a makeshift stage. Issuing a white puff of smoke, the train rounded its final turn and approached the covered bridge. Grandfather, swaying slightly, hearing the cheers, blissful in the belief that his wife of a half century, gone these past eight years, would soon be stepping onto the platform with a wave. Granddaughter, architect of this bright and unattainable world, knowing the train would never reach that platform, tightened her grasp on his hand. ●

Things You Cannot Tell By Looking at Her

*There is no such thing as cold in physics,
just the lack of heat, of molecular motion*
-Ander Monson

01.

She spoke no English, only in tongues of Texan sun, meat, salty.
Stained by the way her mother counted the times she sliced
her own skin, excavating her own caves, stalagmites
crashed as she cut the walls. What is found in Biology, Geology?
Digging endlessly, repeatedly, of no consequence.
Her mother burned the books, extinguishing answers
given by biologists, geologists. It went up in flumes, in tidal waves,
in flames. So she stole her mother's abacus, calculated a new escape
route with no neon exit signs to follow. She wished she had stayed
inside her mother or learned to swallow smoke.

02.

Her favorite con hid between morning sheets and the hay yard.
Straws of her childhood, spliced, los needles in the stacks.
She cried in terms of Paedology. The sun burned, graceful.
And the storms did not stay long, like the weakening lapse
of time between thunder and lightning. Closer and dying.
Still threatening Georgia Jet sweet potatoes whose skin survives
through the entirety of drought season. Give her Meteorology,
so she can trace the tracks of her mother's firestorm,
lighting up cottontails, crop trails and everything burned.
Her clothes stuck with kerosene for months.

03.

She repeatedly told her new Louisiana neighbors
how *good things come in threes*. Everything was Geometry.
Found herself in a triangle of light until everyone quieted.
The equations were off by decimals. .006, .004, .009.
But even numbers can be burned at both ends,
like lightning bugs caught by near nighttime swamps.
She inhaled the scent of her old blood. Excavating days.
No one wanted to remember crashing veins. She loved
venomous snakes hidden in southern accents. Her mother continued
to light torches to trace outlines of her traveling daughter.

-Grayson DeYoung

Escapism

line from Mary Jo Bang's Apology for Want

Beyond: wetlands & fields & train tracks & everything in sun washed filters.

Inside: the interruption was jarring, like the space between
the cracked wooden frame & the cracked wooden door.
Swinging & never clicking. How our bodies pushed
against the patchy walls, wallpapered with want & escape.
Whispering soundless prayers for the building to fall quietly,
with debris to cover our tracks of constant pacing.
We yearned together in silence, days away from home.
Please & thank you. Reassure me this is not the end.
The beyond is expansive or expensive or cut-worthy.
Embalmed hands cannot reach past trees of glass shards
where full windows once were. Blood sticks to fragments.
It ended like this. Like a glottal stop. Like the end
of an earthquake. Like sharp stillness.

Beyond: we bury & break the corners we backed ourselves into.
Our bodies cultured with seaweed or sunshine or darkness.
Survival lies in the undersides of the leafed and the delicate.
We have found delicate in the way our lungs expand & expel,
standing in maize or juniper leaves, we breathe.

-Grayson DeYoung

Regarding the Sighting of a Ghost

-Christian Harris

I never thought I'd see a ghost.

The crowd streamed by the corner we were playing on, as we plinked out the sounds of New Orleans, and Europe, and the air in between. Some people stopped, listened, and tossed a few crumpled bills into the pitcher bearing "the TELEGRAPH SALESMEN" in permanent marker. Others went by without so much as a sideways glance.

You, though, you were on a mission. The first time I had hardly noticed. A streak of black and white, boot stamps bleeding into the mix of jazz and crowd flutter. Maybe you glanced, I didn't see.

The next time it was far more obvious. I was a ghost hunter now, eyes trained to spot the spectra haunting me.

By this time it was dark, the lamp-light bouncing off paper-white skin, your luminescent aura rivaling the moon.

Victorian lace drew together a shifting

form as you glided down the street, mascara-bound eyes laid steadily on the path before you, as if nothing else on this plane would interrupt your being. The constellations inked into your skin would've given the Romans much more to talk about than the sky. I expected lips sea-serpent green to open and start spewing words, but if they did, I couldn't hear anything over the sudden silence.

And I thought – "How many times had we sat, legs dangling much like the cigarette out of my mouth, smoke curling into the night –nights just like this one- with you nervously scratching your arm, tears dampening my cheeks, as we told each other how much everyone else just couldn't get it right? How many times had we come to each other's rescue after something had kicked us to the proverbial curb, or had much too much wine, or some lame excuse of an existential crisis that only we knew what to say about? How many times had we told each other 'I love you,' even if only one of us actually meant it at the moment? How many times, even, had we just sat there, bodies pressed together, simply reveling in the closeness?"

And suddenly the guitarist was looking at me and asking what was up, so I began to stutter in exasperation:

"Oh didn't you see... That was... Walking by..."

Do ghosts keep their names?●

*"BY THIS TIME IT WAS DARK, THE LAMP-LIGHT
BOUNCING OFF PAPER-WHITE SKIN, YOUR
LUMINESCENT AURA RIVALING THE MOON.
VICTORIAN LACE DREW TOGETHER A SHIFTING
FORM AS YOU GLIDED DOWN THE STREET,
MASCARA-BOUND EYES LAID STEADILY ON THE
PATH BEFORE YOU, AS IF NOTHING ELSE ON THIS
PLANE WOULD INTERRUPT YOUR BEING."*

The Lithuanian

-Paul Pekin

Every man has his story, woman too, I'm not here to dispute that, but let's stick with Petras. I'm told that's a Lithuanian name and the big guy was a Lithuanian as I eventually found out. A Soviet citizen, no less--this took place during the final years of our war with the evil empire, but very very far from it, or at least the part that concerned me. I was less than a foot soldier, just a forest preserve policeman driving my beat in the Chicago suburbs when Petras (I can't for the life of me remember his real name, not that I would use it anyway) went berserk in Chippewa Woods and caused what we cops called a ten/ten, a fight. My department, which was loosely associated with the Sheriff's Police, got all its calls that way, in code. The dispatcher, a Sheriff's Police employee, would call your number, mine was 416, and say, "416, you have a ten/ten in Chippewa Woods."

People who live around Chicago don't even think of this place as Chippewa Woods. That's just the Forest Preserve name for what everyone else thinks of as Axehead Lake. Forget about the "woods." Imagine instead a lake not even three quarters of a mile across, but deep since it is no natural lake but a very large hole in the ground where the earth was hollowed out and taken away to be used as fill when the Kennedy Expressway was first constructed. The expressway was originally called "The Northwest Expressway" and JFK used to drive it when he visited Chicago where he was a great favorite being Irish, being Catholic, and above all being a Democrat. It's quite possible he got an occasional glimpse of that little lake as he whizzed by, but I doubt if it would have impressed him, a man who had swum in the Pacific Ocean. Then came Lee Harvey Oswald and all those minions behind the grassy knoll and that's how the expressway got renamed. The lake is still there just as it was, a big old hole filled up

with water and surrounded by picnic grounds. You can catch fish in it, sometimes even trout, and I'd tell you more about that if I weren't involved with Petras and his story.

When I got the call I was practically on the scene, which was unusual for me since Chippewa was so far from our area headquarters. People would drown in that lake, all the time they would be drowning, and it was very rare that a Forest Preserve Squad reached the scene before the Des Plaines Fire Department had its boat and divers in the water.

The ten/ten was still going on when I pulled up in the turn-around at the end of the Forest Preserve road. There I saw what looked like six guys wrestling on the ground while a small crowd of picnickers stood by, drinking beer and eating hotdogs. Okay, I'm just guessing on the hotdogs, but some of those folks were definitely drinking beer. Old Style, and you can take that to the bank.

Five of these six guys were trying to hold the other one down. That was Petras. Trying is the operative word since not only was he an exceedingly large and strong man, his strength was as several which is often the case when a man has exactly the right amount of liquor in his system.

"He wants to kill all the blacks," I was told. There was much agreement among the onlookers about this. "He hates the blacks," they all agreed. It seems that most of these people knew Petras and worked with him in some kind of a factory or machine shop, and now they were on a picnic together.

I considered my chances of getting a pair of handcuffs attached to this very large and very active man. Then I did what any sensible cop would do. I called for a backup.

Immediately I heard the voice of Sergeant Jack on my radio, advising County that he was 10/76 and would "expedite."

Sergeant Jack was a man's man, a cop's cop, but small, a full head shorter than

me, not that I ever would have been so foolish as to mix it up with him, even in fun. I speak of him in the past tense since he "passed" several years after this incident, victim of a premature heart attack, proof my mother had been right all along when she repeatedly declared that "only the good die young."

If this man was expediting, it probably meant he would be with me in no more than fifteen minutes. So, I sat down on Petras' legs, figuring it wouldn't look good to the crowd for a cop to just stand around waiting while a bunch of civilians held the bad guy down for him. I even harbored a slight hope that I might, by some miracle, get this big guy settled down and hooked up before Jack arrived. A false hope. As soon as Petras realized a uniformed cop was sitting on his legs he redoubled his efforts. I felt myself rising into the air, a bit like riding a bucking pony, something I have never personally experienced although I once did ride a recalcitrant burro as part of a donkey softball game.

But I was doing God's work. Did I mention that in those days I was a liberal (I've since moved a bit further to the left) who got weepy over the very idea of linking arms with other liberals, white and black, and singing "We Shall Overcome"? There is more on that, of course, but you don't need to hear it now. Content yourself knowing that I was very pleased to be the one who got to arrest this race hating foreigner, and I didn't even mind that not one of the black people in the crowd, and there were more than a few, was showing the slightest interest in helping out.

Of course they shouldn't. This was the white man's burden.

Then Sergeant Jack arrived with his mars lights turning and whatever happened next has become permanently confused in my memory. I'll be damned if I know how Jack got this big guy into the cuffs, but he not only somehow did do it, he also managed to calm the man down in the process. Jack knew a lot of sneaky cop tricks like bending

the subject's fingers back, or finding the painful pressure points on a man's body, but I didn't see him using any, in fact the only time I ever saw him using his tricks was in the office when he was only too glad to demonstrate them on us, his fellow officers. He was a man's man, yes, I've already said that, but I want to say it again, a cop you couldn't bribe with a million dollar bill who would never harm a prisoner in custody, or ever break a single silly department rule: he even wore his hat at all times according to regulations, and if this were not enough he was a real Christian who went to mass every morning before coming to work, and never talked God at anyone for the rest of the day.

This was the guy who took Petras into his squad and drove him to the station. I followed in my own squad, determined to press charges to the limit. Although I didn't see them, a whole crowd of Petras' friends, including most of the black guys who had been standing around watching the fight, also followed, filling several cars.

They all beat me to the station with plenty of time to spare. It's not clear how this happened, but there may have been a railroad crossing and freight train involved. By the time I got parked and buzzed my way back into the lockup area, my prisoner had already bonded out and Sergeant Jack was sitting at a desk finishing up the paper work.

I said something to the effect that this had been my arrest and that I had some charges of my own I'd hope to write.

Jack gave me that look. Did I know, he said, that this guy was from Lithuania, and had been a seaman on a Communist merchant ship? Not only that, to escape tyranny he had jumped overboard in New York Harbor and actually swam to freedom?

Big deal, I thought. His idea of freedom is picking up where Stonewall Jackson left off.

But I didn't say anything. I could see that Jack was thinking about New York Harbor which he no doubt imagined as covered by oil slicks and floating condoms. Imagine brave Petras swimming through

this to star spangled freedom.

Sometimes things are bigger than you, and you let them go.

This whole story had to be told at quitting time, that magic hour when both the day crew and the night crew would gather in the office, the day guys in soft clothes, ready to drive home, the night guys buckling on their leather, ready to head out on the beat. It was always a good time to swap war stories.

I told about my up and down ride on the big guy's legs, and Jack told of that heroic swim through New York Harbor which impressed everyone a lot more than my ride.. We even talked a little about race in a way you don't generally hear race discussed in intellectual circles. We were an integrated lot and didn't give a damn, you might say nobody pulled his punches. If you were a Mexican, you were a beaner right to your face, if a Puerto Rican, a porkchop, if an Italian, a greaseball, if a Jew or a Black, don't ask although our night lieutenant had an amusing way of calling any black youth we happened to take into custody a Tyrone. I was a geezer to this crowd, even though I was a whole lot younger than I am now. "What the fuck is wrong with a guy like that?" I said. "He never met a black person in his life until he jumped off that boat!" The lieutenant had a quick answer. "Why, he just looked around and saw what had to be done." Everybody had a big laugh out of that. So a guy got drunk and started fighting, that was

their attitude. Even a foreigner was entitled to do that.

I'm sitting here putting all of this back together again, twenty odd years later.. No particular reason. Maybe I can blame it on the Fourth of July. You should have been in my neighborhood.. The Mexicans shot the whole sky full of red white and blue fireworks and our house shook with the force of the explosions. It was very patriotic.

It would be so easy to have a boffo ending to this story. All I'd have to do is lie a bit, just a little bit. Say I was there when Petras or whatever his real name was bonded out. But I wasn't. I have to credit this concluding scene to Jack who told it to me.

How easy to imagine it. All of the buddies from the factory or machine shop or whatever, white and black together, all gathered by the front desk, taking up a collection to bond poor Petras out, then standing by softly joking with the deputy while the lockup keeper, an older black man who insists he has seen it all, brings a crestfallen Petras out of the slam. The black guys greet him, "How you feel now, boy? Don't you go starting that humbugging again."

And they all walk out arm in arm, laughing, exactly as Jack saw them do.

What do I know? This is America, that's what I know. My crazy country, and don't I love it.

New York Harbor and all.

The end ●

The Gypsy

-C.G. Fewston

Aboard the *Thomas Leighton* I thought of Mary, my wife who I had lost last year in May, as waves churned below the ferry and an island came into sight with its solitary hotel standing on a hill. Star Island with its two mile radius off the coast of New Hampshire held a lone hotel from the eighteenth century and with all its antiquity and lack of modern facilities the three-story building rested against a gray, June sky as a fog horn, mocking my silent discontent, blew proud in the distance.

Each morning I would drag myself out of bed around 5 a.m. and slip into my jogging shoes to run along the rocky trails that fed themselves on the outskirts of the some forty acres or so of land. When my pace settled and my heart steadied and my breathing smoothed to the sensation of sandpaper being worn down, I recited poetry to myself to keep the grave thoughts of Mary in the casket out of reach from the joy that came with revolving along on an island in the Atlantic. I recited "The Road Not Taken," "Taking off Emily Dickinson's Clothes," by Collins, "Fire and Ice," "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," and "The Gift," by Milosz. As I ran the poems did not distract me. Instead each one allowed my thoughts to roam just as my body seemed to soar through the narrow paths shaded by foliage. But there had to have been a distraction there somewhere, taking me away from Mary's tombstone covered by decaying roses and forget-me-nots. I knew one thing, however: a wedding ring could have no end, and I knew I could never really take my wedding ring off my finger. I was no circle. There were ends to me.

My job at a major bank in New York City turned obsolete overnight. No one wanted to hear the warnings. Countrywide and the market were making too much money. The day I was told by Gerald that I was no longer needed was one day before Dr. Schultz told Mary she had breast cancer. My wife turned to me in the doctor's office and gripped my hand. Our eyes met as they had done on our wedding day. Then she said, "Are you ready for this?"

I ran faster, up rocky inclines and around muddy indentations in the trail, and drove my memories further back into their minuscule cages while "From what I tasted of desire" etched itself from my coarse tongue and dried lips and the fleshless words glided out over East Rock and lost themselves to the depths of the ocean.

A few hours before I had to meet the other writers for the morning meeting, I had heard singing stretching from the chapel stationed on a slight hill next to the main hotel:

Cherish the hour.
Life is but a paper.
With a flick it is gone.
With a flick it is gone.

A silence came and thickened. A triangle was then tapped. The chime resonated through the closed-eyed audience and sieved out the noise of my grave stress.

Later that same day, a cloudy afternoon, I met the minister who had performed the service. Martha Burton was dipping a paintbrush into oils and painting with meticulous accuracy a cottage near the chapel. Her sixty-year-old skin and shaved head of silver were like the sun at the heat of day rippling across the water. She invited me to the Summer Solstice coming in two days. I thanked her and said I would be glad to join.

On the morning of June 21 at 6:13, I turned right at Gospel Hall, pounced up a slope and joined the Arts group on a flat rock surface just outside the chapel. We all held hands in a circle and from within were two golden hula-hoops. Inside one hoop was a painting of a radiant sun;

across the image of the sun were laid a few daises, a smooth rock the size of one's fist, and a tumbler filled with sea water. In the other hoop sat a woman with her long legs crossed, sitting as a shaman. She wore white canvas pants and a sleeveless shirt and her brown hair lay flat against her back like sun-waves on a clear day in the desert. A silver trumpet began to play "On the Sunny Side of the Street" and the group sang and swayed arms and hips in and out of the circle. The sun goddess stood up and made rhythmic revolutions within and without the hula-hoop. The hula-hoop, aura of her energy, twirled around her waist, then spinning somehow around one arm to the next and back, faultless rotations of the hoop, never slowing, and finally with one leg raised, balancing herself with one foot planted in the rock surface, the hoop kept steady pace around her neck.

Martha the Minister was the one who told me the sun goddess was Romanian and that her name was Shiloh Kyszinsky. Dipping a brush into paint, eyeing a rock wall closely, Martha also informed me that Shiloh was twenty-eight (four years my junior) and that she was in a relationship. The goddess was mortal after all.

So, after the reading that night and during the social with my fellow writers which followed, I drank tumbler after tumbler of Jack trying to bring back the edge of courage that was razor sharp once upon a time to cut Mary into my life until I too felt like tumbling. In the middle of the drinking and the nonsensical speeches one writer made to another, I found my feet carrying me out into midnight and onto cliffs, the roar of the ocean massaging the land. I pulled from my back pocket, where I kept it, the last letter Mary had written to me before she died. The sealed envelope was thick several pages full, and I wanted to throw it into the ocean. Instead I picked up a large rock and placed it back on the letter and that was when I heard a woman's laugh over to my right.

No. It came from above. Nude and glorious Shiloh twirled in the moonshine across the cliff rocks. A silver aura surrounded her bare limbs and her hair glowed bright as she swirled over the rocks.

Then naturally I fell backwards. Crashing waves tossed me like a barn swallow in a hurricane. My muscles tensed from the icy waters and my spirit seemed to shoot out my fingers and toes all at once. And the strangest thing of all I was happy that my pain was coming to an end.

Hours later I awoke, dry and perplexed, back on the cliff wall. My wife's letter was not where I had left it.

The next day after Shiloh's hula-hoop class, I confronted her on the front lawn of the hotel. She wore a wide-brim hat and sunglasses that gave the faintest hint of her eyes. A few writers indolently read books or chatted with one another in the rocking chairs above on the porch.

"You have something that belongs to me," I said. "I'd like it back."

"What I have," Shiloh said, "you threw away." I could see her soul staring into mine. I shook.

"Well, I want it back," I said.

"Well, you can't have it," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because it's mine," Shiloh said.

"You're right," I said, enchanted and mollified. "I don't want it anymore." I turned to walk away to the porch when Shiloh grabbed me.

"Do you want me to read you the letter?" She asked. "Mary wouldn't mind, Wes."

I nodded to her question and said, "You're right. Mary wouldn't mind. Not in the least."

Later that day I met Shiloh on the dock. The idea of an excursion to the uninhabited island, known as Sandpiper, was Shiloh's. A rustic man with a fine head of hair walked along the pier above and screamed at the top of his lungs,

“Boston! Boston!” the man shouted. “Boston! Boston!”

My return volley that this was not Boston went unheard.

Shiloh wrinkled her nose and spun in a tight circle. “We shall go to Boston someday,” she said.

I paid a young man with Dean on the nametag twenty dollars and he steadied the dinghy as Shiloh stepped to the back and I in the center. Dean pushed the small boat out away from the dock while I adjusted the oars into the rings and locked them into place with the small latch pins.

There was a slight breeze and it licked at Shiloh’s hair and she would lift a hand and clear a strand from her mouth. She ignored me and watched a sailboat gliding in the distance in front of a tiny lighthouse.

“Where are you from?” I asked, my arms working the oars in a steady pace and realizing I knew relatively nothing of this woman or how to row a boat for that matter.

“This dinghy,” she said.

“No,” I said. “Where’s home?”

“This boat *is* my home.”

“Are you serious?”

“I’m a gypsy,” Shiloh said. I had never met one of those. But as I detailed every article of her being I understood that my Shiloh was Esmeralda from Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*. But this gypsy had white skin and tiny hairs, cute curly cues of feminism, on her legs. She was more like Sarah from the novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* by Fowles. The gypsy had stepped from the pages of a book.

“I see,” I said.

“I’m not the woman for you,” she said. I tightened my grip around the two oars and rowed in larger swinging motions through the sea. The gypsy could read minds.

“I know,” I told her.

She turned her head away from me as if she knew I would say such a thing and it had always been known.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I didn’t mean—”

“I know what you meant,” Shiloh said. She crossed her arms from the cold and her hair continued to flap in the wind.

All I could think of was how Shiloh’s copper-toned voice settled along the syllables like firebugs flicking on-and-off at twilight as she read my wife’s letter. When she finished reading she placed page by page, thirteen pages in all, on the rolling sea and I saw how paper melted into itself. I laughed like a madman at this, not sure I believed in any of it.

A little while after that, hand-in-hand we walked up the embankment of Sandpiper Island. Her eyes absorbed the simplicity of her surroundings as if this was home and she was privy to a heathen conversation of land and sea. Then it began to rain.

We charged through sheets of rain and jagged brush, under seagulls balancing wings on invisible currents of air driving the storm upon us. In a matter of moments, Shiloh led me to a shanty that stood without doors or window glass. As I entered the dwelling, she wasn’t facing me. I came close behind her and kissed her shoulders and her head bent to the side my lips chose.

I was like a lost boy of Pan. Not sure of how I had gotten to this island of eternal youth and joy. Not sure of how of anything. Who was I? Who was she? Where were we?

Shiloh dropped to her knees, letting her shirt fall to the earthen floor. I did the same. I placed my left arm under her neck and continued to kiss those lips that had once been a prison to me. A prison in the way all things are impossible to get at until they are got.

Shiloh leaned up to my ear and asked, “Are you ready for this?”

The next morning on Star Island I searched for Shiloh. She was not out on the front lawn for her usual hula-hoop class. From the porch I could also see down to the pier and dock that she was not there. The chapel proved empty. When I found Martha she was painting the sky behind the obelisk on the east side of the island. I asked her as to where one might find Shiloh. The minister regarded me quizzically and said, "Try Cornelia."

"What? Who?" I could feel the earth spinning and I was about to be sick.

"Cornelia knows everyone," Martha said, dipping, yet again, always dipping with this woman, a brush into cerulean blue. "She's the one in the wheelchair out on the porch. She might know a thing or two about your gypsy."

I had no time for games islanders play to occupy their days. I rushed to the porch and found Cornelia watching the sun setting out over the water. She was frail, covered in a quilt. I pulled a rocking chair close to her and leaned closer in. I inquired of the gypsy, of my Shiloh.

"I know her," Cornelia replied.

What joy! I was not all madness.

"Shiloh Kyszinsky, you say?"

I did. Yes. A thousand times I said it. Tell me. Where?

"Over there," Cornelia said, pointing to Sandpiper Island. "She lived atop that hill to the east." This old woman still had her wits about her. Thank the gods!

"Yes," I said. "Her home—"

"Shiloh died there in 1932," Cornelia said. "My mother, Francine, used to tell us stories about that crazy gypsy woman. Strange happenings. One time—"

"No," I said. Not possible. Not likely.

"Her husband went to sea and never returned," Cornelia said. "Some said she went mad with grief and jumped from the cliffs. Others said she was captured by pirates during a storm. Who is to know what happened to her." The old woman was as crazed as I was becoming. A fog drifted in as if it were going to consume the island and lift it into the heavens. "But my mother told me..." Cornelia drifted off into a deep thought.

Yes. Go on. Please do go on.

"My mother told me the gypsy woman hung herself in her home one night. And there her home still stands."

I thanked the old crone for her time. But even as my search continued throughout the evening and the next day, asking the staff, demanding answers from one Martha Burton and the others in her congregation, rowing to Sandpiper Island, twice, and finally shaking Cornelia's wheelchair and scaring the poor woman to come out with the truth.

If the old woman knew anything, she never broke. I felt ever the madman and I ended up with nothing more than an exhausted mind and more enemies anyone wants on an island thirteen miles from the mainland.

On the last night of the conference I walked soberly to the edge of the same cliff the night I had seen my Shiloh dancing. The moon was racked behind silver wisps of clouds moving over the backs of stars.

Waves crashed against the bottom of the cliff as they had done for a thousand years and would do for thousands more. I stepped forward. The air was cold and smelled of rain. Smelled of Shiloh. I looked down at the sea far below and at the ocean that ended in a straight line of charcoal.

Then I heard a voice. Her voice. It was the light of my dreams; the passion of my madness. Shiloh's voice spoke again, much closer and much clearer than before. And I laughed to myself. When I turned and took a step back, I heard Shiloh say for the last time,

"Are you ready for this?"

-End- ●



Contributors

Adam Van Winkle was born in the country and lives in the city. When he grows up and settles down he is contemplating being either a folk musician, a writer, or a baseball player. This story is from a collection of short stories-for which he is seeking publication-about the folk the author grew up with entitled 'OK Folk.'

Alex Vigue is a Washington State writer who is currently torn between homes, cities, and genres. He is a lover of fabulist fiction but sometimes poetry takes over his fingers and demands itself to be written. Alex has been published in Phantom Drift, Hermeneutic Chaos, and Labyrinth Literary Journal. He is currently writing tweets to his favorite authors in attempts to force them into being his friends. If you wish to experience his twitter antics feel free follow him at <https://twitter.com/Kingwithnoname> . If there is one thing above all else that you should know about Alex Vigue is that he will one day be a famous writer! Even if only inside his own head.

Alexis Rhone Fancher is the author of "How I Lost My Virginity to Michael Cohen and Other Heart Stab Poems," (Sybaritic Press, 2014). She is widely published, most notably in Rattle, The MacGuffin, Slipstream, H_NGM_N, Fjords Review, Broadzine!, Bloom Literary Journal, and elsewhere; her photographs have been published worldwide, including the covers of Witness and The Mas Tequila Review. Since 2013 Alexis has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes and a Best of The Net award.
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Angel Strumpfer aims to recreate our inner landscapes in tangible form. She relishes the simple pleasures in life, embraces inevitable change, and welcomes joy in its innumerable disguises. Angel currently lives in Seattle with

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Anna Ivey is currently working on a PhD in poetry at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia, and her most recent publications have been featured in So to Speak, Antithesis, and Stone Highway Review, West Trade, and White Stag literary magazines. She was offered a fellowship by the Summer Literary Seminars to attend a writing program in Lithuania in 2008 and 2013, and she has also been published academically in Florida English, the Ellen Glasgow Journal of Southern Women Writers, as well as in The Apalachee Review. She lives in McDonough, Georgia with her husband Chad and her daughter Aralyn. Anna and Chad make soy candles for fun and she helps pay the bills by working as a high school English teacher.

Bobby Williams actually believes that eventual ghosts are predetermined based on physical appearance while on earth. See: Robert Stack, Tilda Swinton, Clay Buchholz etc etc. He drinks Sierra Nevada beer on weekdays and Budweiser beer on weekends. Though he subscribes to Paris Hilton's notion that going out on weekends is a little desperate. He never graduated from the tricycle. His delightful work may be read in The Montreal Review, Epiphany, The Ben Jonson Journal, The Bicycle Review and elsewhere.

Brad Garber lives, writes and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He fills his home with art, music, photography, plants, rocks, bones, books, good cookin' and love. He has published poetry, essays and articles in many quality publications. 2013 Pushcart Prize nominee.

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Erica Tasto is an editor for two magazines—"Natural Solutions" and "Alternative Medicine"—where she avidly writes about health, food, and fitness. Outside the office, she spends time cultivating both poetry and nonfiction and is working on her first novel. Visit her health blog, "The Natural Suite," at naturalsolutionsmag.com/blog/natural-suite.

Esther Whitman Johnson of Southwest Virginia is a former high school teacher and counselor who now travels the globe, volunteering on five continents. A passionate traveler she writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction about her journeys. She has completed twelve international builds with Habitat for Humanity, the most recent in Mongolia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Artemis*, *Colere*,

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Frank De Canio was born & bred in New Jersey, and works in New York. He loves music of all kinds, from Albinoni to Zap Mama. Shakespeare is his consolation, writing his hobby. He likes Dylan Thomas, John Keats, Alan Ginsburg, and Sylvia Plath as poets.

Grayson DeYoung is an undergraduate student, writer, and avid podcast listener, residing in western Michigan. But ultimately, she would like to be your friend so she can write a poem about your hands.

Jacob Landrith lives in the California desert with his incredibly smart and beautiful wife, Megan. You can find him on Instagram via [@_Jake_2014_](https://www.instagram.com/_Jake_2014_).

Jaime Mathis started writing stories about her life when she was nine. After finding a Dane while walking across Spain, she moved him and her son back to Oregon City, Oregon where she writes and designs tiny houses. Follow her adventures at: www.jaimemathis.com

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Lisa D. Chavez has published two books of poetry, *Destruction Bay* and *In An Angry Season*. Her essays have appeared in *Arts and Letters*, *The Fourth Genre* and other magazines, and in anthologies including *The Other Latin@: Writing Against a Singular Identity*, and *An Angle of Vision: Women Writers on their Poor and Working Class Roots*. She grew up in Alaska and now lives in the mountains of New Mexico, and has a keen interest in Japanese dogs and in perfume. Find her online at lisadchavez.com

Luke Whisnant is the author of *Down in the Flood* (stories), *Watching TV with the Red Chinese* (novel), and two poetry chapbooks, *Street and Above Floodstage*. He teaches at East Carolina University, where he also edits the journal *Tar River Poetry*.

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Molly Rideout is a writer and social practice artist based in rural Iowa. She is Co-Director of the artist and writers' residency, Grin City Collective, where she leads arts projects throughout Iowa. Previous publications include Driftwood Press, WarBing Magazine, and the 2014 book *Prairie Gold: An Anthology of the American Heartland* (Ice Cube Press). Some of the names in this story have been changed to protect the identities of their holders. Visit: www.mollyrideout.com.

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Roger Bernard Smith's new book, "did music die" was published in August 2014 by Tiger's Eye Press, Denver CO. His poems have appeared recently in *Third Wednesday*; *Main Street Rag*; *On the Rusk: Sassafras Journal*; *Haight Ashbury Review*; *Blood Orange Review*. He studied painting at San Francisco Art Institute and The Art Students League in New York. He facilitates journaling workshops at the Mohawk Valley Institute for Learning in Retirement (MVILR) in Utica, NY.

Sarah Lazaretti is a girl on the move. From Minneapolis to Boise; beauty is in the eye of the beholder and she believes you can do anything you set your mind to. Life is much easier when you open your eyes.

Sheree Shatsky has called Florida home for over fifty years. Recent publication credits include *Sassafras Literary Magazine* and the *Journal of Microliterature*. Her work as an opinion writer has appeared in print and online.

Sylvia Ashby: After seeing her short memoir in *Anderbo.com* last spring, Sylvia was prompted to send out poetry; now she has several dozen poems out or coming out: *Abyss&Apex*, *Hermes*, *Pantheon*, *Constellations*, *Subterranean*, etc. Before that she wrote, acted in, and published plays--for family audiences. This selection is her second try at non-fiction. sylviaashby.com is her theatre website.

Tim Millas lives with Susan and Clare in New York, Florida, and Maine. His stories have appeared in many print and digital publications, most recently *Gargoyle* and *Literary Orphans*. You can reach him at t.millas@att.net.

