



Gandy Dancer

A student-led literary magazine of the State University of New York

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We publish writing and visual art by current students and alumni of the State University of New York (SUNY) campuses only.

Our Postscript section features work by SUNY alumni. We welcome nominations from faculty and students as well as direct submissions from alumni themselves. Faculty can email Rachel Hall, faculty advisor, at hall@geneseo.edu with the name and email address for the alum they wish to nominate, and alums can submit through our website. Both nominations and direct submissions should indicate which SUNY the writer attended, provide a graduation date, and the name and email of a faculty member we can contact for confirmation.

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Gandy Dancer will accept up to three submissions from an author at a time.

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Creative Nonfiction: We accept submissions up to 25 pages. CNF must be double-spaced.

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Visual Art: We accept submissions of art—especially photos, drawings, and paintings—in the most popular file formats, such as jpeg, tiff, and pdf. Submitted images should ideally be at least 4,000 pixels on the longest side. Art accepted by Gandy Dancer is generally published in color in our electronic journal; however, they may appear as grayscale in our print publication. Please include work titles in your submissions!

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Dearest Readers—

Mid-March of this semester, we traveled to the cactus-clad city of Albuquerque, New Mexico for the Sigma Tau Delta 2015 International Convention. When we weren't seeking out the most delicious food in the Southwest, we were clustered in conference rooms attending presentations by some of the strongest undergraduate and graduate students across the country. We went to panels to support our peers, but we were also drawn to the research and presentations of other schools. Some of the most resounding work we encountered was a panel discussing "The Politics of Racial Identity," and a roundtable titled "Exploring Transgender and Bisexuality in Young Adult Literature." These papers and discussions, as well as the audience's obvious interest, lead to thought-provoking questions and conversations on these culturally relevant topics.

Invaluable writers Simon Ortiz, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gary Soto were the three featured speakers at the conference. Their speeches addressed the theme of cultural marginalization due to racial identity, and discussed how we, as writers, readers, and artists, can break these borders and engage in an ever-needed conversation about these topics. At his book signing, our professor thanked Ortiz for his work, his powerful words, and the way his legacy has inspired younger generations of writers, particularly writers of color. Ortiz responded in his quiet and gentle voice, "Stories are all around us. Stories connect us. Stories are everything."

As human beings, we are constantly telling stories. As writers (and readers), we see stories in our every day—in our families, our politics, in the nightly news, in the smallest of conversations. These stories sometimes find their way onto a page or a word document in the form of fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or art. They tell us something about ourselves, our relationships, and the world we live in. We're excited to bring you this issue of *Gandy Dancer*, which we feel has particularly compelling storytelling, engaging with important issues about race, gender, and sexuality. Some pieces stay closer to home, gently asking us to reexamine our ideas about family and the kind of shelter it provides. No matter what the genre, we believe each piece in this issue carries a resonance that will stay with you long after you've closed the pages of the journal. Indeed, we have been touched in our reading and arranging of them. We hope you'll agree. They bring to mind Ortiz's words: "Stories are everything."

When we stepped into the role of Managing Editors early this spring, we were, to be honest, a little daunted by the host of new changes from the last time we'd worked on *Gandy Dancer* as poetry readers two semesters ago. *Gandy* had moved to the WordPress platform, started using Submittable, become an increasingly active online presence via Facebook, Twitter, and our blog, and of course, we had a completely new team of editors and readers. However, as the semester has progressed, so have we, becoming more and more excited about the advances our class has made and the pieces included in this issue. We're thrilled to see where *Gandy Dancer* travels next: becoming a larger presence at FUSE (Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors), expanding our reach to include a larger number of other SUNY schools, and adding new elements such as translation and music more regularly to the journal. As graduating seniors, we look forward to following *Gandy Dancer's* progress from the "real world" and cheering its successes and expansion onwards.

Yours in storytelling,
Erin & Amy
Managing Editors, Spring 2015

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Cover photo: Bridge to Fall—James Mattson

Gandy Dancer

Neon Tiger

On Monday, March 26, a new animal arrived at the St. Louis Zoo. Zookeeper Larry Post was at the receiving dock, ready to unload the feline. He went about his task clumsily, this being his first introduction. The cage was lowered off the truck and onto the menagerie floor. He supervised the vet testing for any signs of stress or disease. Larry checked the items off his list in between taking frantic phone calls from his pregnant wife. He couldn't afford to lose this job, she reminded him. They couldn't afford any more failures.

Under his observation, Luna was securely howdied into her holding habitat, a technique that allows animals to slowly become acquainted with their new environment. His job now done, Larry went about his daily tasks hastily. The general curator of the zoo was coming at the end of the week to inspect the big cats and Larry was up for his first review. Between this and his wife's impending due date, Larry was burning the candle at both ends.

The next day, Tuesday, March 27, Larry had duty at the lion enclosure.

"How's he holding up?" Larry asked Brad, another zookeeper. They stood outside the habitat watching the male, Sebastian. His white fur was dull and dusty, his frame precariously thin.

"No better. The lionesses just don't like him. They won't even let him eat with them. When he eats, that is." Brad sighed. "I'm afraid we may lose him soon."

Larry shook his head. Brad patted him on the back and left Larry standing alone, only a plate of glass between him and the miserable lion.

That afternoon Larry had Sebastian moved into the exhibit adjacent to Luna's.

On Friday, March 30, Ted Sanders, the general curator, arrived at the St. Louis Zoo. He went about the exhibits as he always did, reviewing and marking on his imposing check board. By the time he reached the holding area, Larry was practically dizzy with anxiety. Ted Sanders wasn't known for leniency, and Larry couldn't lose any more jobs.

"Afternoon." Mr. Sanders nodded to him.

"Hello, Mr. Sanders! It's good to see you, sir." Larry clumsily shook his hand.

"Sure." Mr. Sanders wiped Larry's sweat off on his pant leg. "Let's see the new cat then."

"Right this way, sir." Larry led the way through the zookeeper's entrance into the back of the observatory glass, stopping to watch the two masses of white fur as they slept beside each other. "Cute, ain't they?"

"Larry, what is *this*?"

"The new cat, sir. She seems to be adjusting nicely."

"What is she doing *with him*?"

"Um...sleeping, sir. I thought—"

"We don't cage a white Bengal tiger with a white lion! They go with their own damn species!" Mr. Sanders spat all over his check board. "Don't you realize how this will make me *look*?"

"But...but sir! I just thought it would help Sebastian! He's been so sick and lonely lately. And I introduced them properly, just like regulations say! They took to each other so fast."

"I don't care, Larry. I really don't."

Larry Post was fired on Friday, March 30, but by then it was too late. Luna and Sebastian were removed from the holding habitat and introduced into exhibits with their own species. Fifteen weeks later, Ted Sanders was called back to the St. Louis Zoo due to a rather unusual circumstance.

On Friday, July 13, Ted Sanders arrived at the St. Louis Zoo, his inbox full of frantic voicemails from the keepers and vets begging him to, "Get down here pronto!" and "Come ASAP!" He clicked the DELETE ALL button on his voicemail and entered the mammal veterinary clinic. Immediately he was bombarded.

"Mr. Sanders! Thank God you're here." Vicky Anderson, the mammal curator, rushed up to him. "We don't know what's going on. Well, we think we do. It's just so strange..."

"You've got to take a look, Mr. Sanders. It's the darndest thing!" Brad, the head zookeeper, waved him over.

The vet, Dr. Garner, also called to him. "Mr. Sanders—"

"ALL RIGHT!" He threw up his hands. "Just show me."

Ted Sanders was led into one of the birthing rooms, where lying on the concrete floor was Luna, the white Bengal tiger. She was panting and her eyes were closed, but otherwise nothing appeared wrong.

"What's she doing?"

Vicky replied, "Well, that's the thing. She's going into labor. But she hasn't mated with any of the male tigers."

"Are you sure?"

"We keep very close tabs on all of the mating procedures. We like to be prepared for something like this," Dr. Garner answered.

"Well then, it must have happened while you weren't watching," Ted snapped.

"But that's impossible," Vicky replied. "We've got cameras on them 24/7. Unless—"

"*Larry*," Ted finished for her.

"But she hasn't shown any signs of pregnancy until today, didn't even gain a pound," Brad countered. "This *can't* happen."

"Well, it *is* happening," Ted grunted. "And I'm not going to be the one going down for it."

The group turned to Luna, who at that time was struggling to move to the corner, growling at Brad and Dr. Garner when they tried to approach her. They were forced to back away into the observation room, peeking around the corner to watch her. Soon she became so fierce that even that became dangerous. Dr. Garner was beginning to worry about the health of the cubs when abruptly they heard a squeal. Vicky glanced around the door, gasped, and dashed into the room, the others close behind her.

Luna lay dead on the floor. A single, tiny cub lay beside her body. As big as an adult human's palm, the cub lay curled in a ball, eyes closed. Its fur sparkled in the fluorescent light, shining radiantly in so many different colors that there was only one name for what it was.

"Why, it's *neon*," Vicky said. "A neon tiger."

"Where did it come from?" asked Brad.

"From Luna and Sebastian," Dr. Garner replied. "It must be their cub."

"How in the world...?" Brad trailed off.

"I thought it was supposed to be a liger," Ted crossed his arms. "Maybe it's another kind of hybrid."

"That's no hybrid," Vicky smiled. "It's a miracle."

"Well, that *miracle* better not get me fired," Ted ground his teeth. "Or I'll have all your asses."

Ted Sanders was not fired. He met with the Board first thing on Monday morning, explaining how he had kept Luna's pregnancy quiet because of the delicate nature of the birth. The Board not only pardoned Ted but congratulated him on an idea that could bring much needed revenue to the suffering zoo. He was a visionary, they said. He couldn't help but agree with them.

The neon tiger was given its own exhibit and raised under the strictest security as the prize of the St. Louis Zoo. Feline specialists and experts came from all over the world to see it, not to mention celebrities, and anyone else who could afford it. The neon tiger shone a different color for everyone who saw it, which gave rise to a debate about what the tiger's colors meant about the viewers. The zookeepers who cared for the tiger (they had taken to calling him Neo) secretly thought this was a joke he liked to play on his audience, since he typically appeared in all colors for them. Neon, they called it. He was neon.

Larry Post's wife officially signed the divorce papers on Wednesday, August 15, exactly four months after their child was born. Larry didn't blame her, really. He had lost exactly twelve jobs in their ten-year marriage, all due to stupid mistakes. Nothing ever went right for Larry, so he didn't really expect things to this time. No, Larry was happy for his wife to finally have the chance to find someone better than him. He told her so that morning, as the lawyers went over last details and custody schedules. He could see his daughter every day if he wanted to, as long as he kept a job and didn't impede on his now ex-wife's privacy. That was okay with Larry. He felt he could do at least that.

About four months later, on Sunday, January 13, Ted Sanders was interviewed once again in front of Neo's exhibit about the strange circumstances of his birth.

"So, Mr. Sanders, tell us again how Neo came to be." The reporter shoved his microphone in Ted's face.

Ted grabbed it out of the reporter's hands and straightened his tie, smiling at the camera. "Well, it's a fascinating story, really." Ted stepped closer to the camera, pushing the reporter out of frame. "We always strive for excellence and innovation here at the St. Louis Zoo, and those were the ideals behind my experiment to breed a white Bengal tiger and white lion hybrid. It's never been attempted in the U.S. before, so there was a slim chance of success, but I'm a risk-taker. This time it paid off."

The reporter managed to take the microphone back. "Well, you could certainly say that. What a bit of luck! I'm here at the St. Louis Zoo with curator Ted Sanders, the genius behind Neo the neon tiger cub. Back to you, Mandy."

Later that night at a banquet in his honor, Ted Sanders was given an award by the Board of Directors. He received a plaque and a generous bonus check, which he put towards a sleek new sports car.

On Wednesday, January 16, Larry mopped the hallway at the local high school begrudgingly; a child's vomit puddled in front of the bathroom door. The final bell had rung a few minutes earlier and most of the students had already fled.

A cough snapped him out of the daze. Ted Sanders stood a few feet away, phone in hand, with a frustrated expression on his face.

Larry cleared his throat. "Hello there, Mr. Sanders." Larry nodded to him.

"Huh? Oh, hi. Have you seen my daughter around? She's making me late for an important meeting."

"I don't believe I've ever met your daughter, Mr. Sanders." Larry leaned on the mop. "Didn't exactly know you had one."

"Yeah, well, my wife really wanted kids." Ted looked at Larry for the first time since Larry greeted him. "Do I know you?"

Larry awkwardly looked at the floor. "I'm Larry Post, sir. From the zoo. You fired me a few months ago."

"Oh. Right. Larry." Ted checked his phone impatiently.

"So, how are the cats doing, Mr. Sanders? Sebastian? Did he ever get a mate?"

Ted glanced up. "What? Oh, yes." He dialed a number and held the phone to his ear.

"So, he's better? Eating and all that?"

Ted hung up and scoffed. "I don't know, *Larry*, I'm a busy man. Now, I need to find my daughter or I'm going to be late." He stomped off down the hall. Larry watched him go, a dismayed look upon his face. He finished mopping the floor with minimal skill and clocked out, returning to his one room apartment and a refrigerator full of TV dinners.

That Friday, January 18, Larry Post revisited the St. Louis Zoo for the first time since his termination, to visit the neon tiger. He'd heard the stories and wanted to know what color the tiger would show him. He waited until almost closing time, when the exhibit was clear and the street lamps illumi-

nated the tiger to him. He walked up to the fence overlooking the enclosure and peered around, searching for the famous feline.

Craning his neck and leaning over the railing, he spotted the beautiful creature. It yawned at him from inside its enclosure.

"Hey, don't do that." A voice from behind made him jump, almost falling into the habitat. He turned, leaning on the fence.

"Oh, Mr. Sanders! You scared me."

"Do I know you?"

"I'm Larry, sir. Larry Post."

"Right. You looking for Neo?"

"The tiger? Yeah."

"What color he show ya?"

"I think it's a bright orange." Larry turned back around to continue gawking. "I don't suppose you know what that means?"

Ted shrugged, inspecting his nails.

"Is it true, what they say? Is he really neon?"

"He's whatever color he wants to be. But I suppose he is neon sometimes."

Larry whistled. "I wish he would let me see him like you do. A sight like that would make life worth livin'."

"Guess so."

"My life's not been so great lately, so something like that—it'd really be a treat."

"Hm."

"My wife left me after I got fired, you know. Couldn't find another job zookeeping. She got the baby and everything. A girl. Chloe. I eventually found work as a janitor down at the high school. Been doing that ever since."

"Glad you found something."

"Yeah, I found something. You know, what ever happened to those two cats I put together, Luna and Sebastian?"

"Well, Luna died. Sebastian's not doing much better."

"That's a shame. I should have kept up with them more when I left. I just had a lot on my mind." Larry shook his head guiltily. "I guess you were right in firing me. I thought I was doing a good thing, but I suppose I just didn't have it in me." He turned around and gave one last longing look at the tiger, then turned back to Ted. "Well, congrats on this guy. At least your ideas seem to work out for you. See you later, Mr. Sanders." He walked past Ted, who, with a smirk on his face, continued to survey the exhibit.

"Yeah, see you."

The neon tiger growled inside its exhibit. Its sly eyes watched Ted Sanders as his gaze flitted across the habitat, searching for the tiger that was always black to him, blending in with the falling shadows. Larry Post paused on his way out of the zoo to pick up a penny laid heads-up on the ground.



By The Sea, Kira Gregory

SAVANNAH SKINNER

Bluegill

a twist of nicked blade
weighty in palm, quick

& bloody lush of trash-fish
spilt over wet shale:

these delineations of membrane,
of silica spine—sunlit copper
& glint of intestines in miniature.

curiosity in its realization
gains a new layer of nausea,
whispers *isn't it lonely to be god?*

how licks from the dull knife
carve in us a deliberate fear.

Our Disillusion in Three Acts

ACT I: THE PLEDGE

examine the ordinary
girl: bluing collar,
her hackneyed legs,
wrists a repertoire
of exotic knots—
tethered bird in hand.
are you watching closely?

ACT II: THE TURN

you subtle shill,
sleight of claw
 or nape of neck: clutch
 the delicate tarsus.
sternum as trick lock,
 heart as vanishing
cage. slip a canary
 down my throat,
 her punctured lung
 up your sleeve

ACT III: THE PRESTIGE

& reveal another from the mouth.
amidst the beat of wings,
canary in the crook grows cold.



The Fall, Catherine McWilliams

NOAH CHAUVIN

For Want of Syncope

“You’ll pass out before your heart explodes.”

It started out as a bit of joking advice to the three of us. Matt, Stevie, and I were nervous before our first varsity race, and my father was trying to calm us down. He looked down with us over the big finishing hill, where we had been anxiously standing, shivering in the early morning mist, wearing only our thin tights and worn T-shirts, and remarked, “Yep, it’s a big climb. And there are a lot more of them. Boys, there is going to be a point in this race where you want to quit, where you feel like your body just can’t take it anymore. But remember, you’ll pass out before your heart explodes.” His eyes twinkled with the last sentence, and we rewarded his levity with some halting, nervous chuckles. It seemed too real to be funny at the time.

The joke stuck with us, though. We repeated it to one another on the warmup, and again as we were doing our stride-outs just before the start. It was there in the blue sky, that cool September morning, in the dew that coated the long browning grass, in the breeze that whispered around our sweaty legs as the tights came off and the gun went up. It was there in the pounding of 300 spiked feet across the field, in the strained breathing of 300 lungs blowing up and down the wooded trails. It became a silly sort of mantra that I repeated to myself through the first mile. I fixated on each word, and it helped to calm me down. As the race went on, it seemed less and less silly. My mind began to play with it, the phrase becoming the lyrical accompaniment to my labored breath and tiring legs. The mind does this through the difficult part of the race; it finds a word or a phrase and plays it over and over hundreds of times. It’s a defense mechanism, a way to try and make the pain go away. It rarely ever works.

After the race, we laughed about it. It was a joke on our cool down, as we jabbered away at one another, each completely understanding the strain that the others had gone through, and struggling to communicate to them just how we had felt. The relief of it finally being over made us boisterous; we let our legs go limp and fell into the soft grass, laughing and clutching our chests. We made light of my father's kind words, joked about how it was the only thing that had gotten us through the race, this gentle reminder that we were young enough that our bodies would shut down to protect us, if need be. None of us wanted to admit how much our minds had really needed that reminder while we were running. If we had accepted assistance, if we had required a crutch to get through the agony, it would have seemed to us like we were cheating. It was unmanly, and our adolescent psyches couldn't bear the notion of being considered weak.

We brought it out sometimes, in the months that followed, during a particularly strenuous workout, this joke. We'd cross the line after our fourth interval mile, and look over at the other two, hands on our knees, spittle congealing on our chins, gasping for breath. We'd ask how they were doing, and get a grin and an, "About...topass...outheart's...okay...though," in reply. That would always get a weak chuckle in response, out of familiarity more than novelty. It felt good, as we stood there dying, to be reminded that we had been through this many times before. I'm certain that we all thought about it sometimes, deep in the throes of a particularly brutal repetition, but voicing it out loud in that manner somehow helped to minimize its seriousness. Sure, we thought about it, but it was only a joke, a way to keep ourselves entertained while we ran. It wasn't, it couldn't be something that we needed. We didn't need anything to keep us going.

All three of us became more successful than we ever expected to be after that first varsity race. Matt was the first of our friends to get a scholarship to run at a Division I school, I set conference and section records, and Stevie won a national championship. We all expected comparable success when we went on to run in college. We all got hurt in our first year of collegiate competition, and we all found that we couldn't stand our coaches, who were unhelpful and unsupportive at the best of times, and useless when we needed them most. Matt and I tried to hang on for a bit, but we were running slower times than we had in high school. It became frustrating to do workouts; it was hard to even motivate ourselves to get out the door for an easy run. We started skipping voluntary practices, and pretty soon we weren't going to the mandatory ones either. After a year or two, we even stopped calling ourselves runners.

Stevie was different, though. When Matt and I got our stress fractures, we lounged in the whirlpool and waited to get better. Steve, who stopped going by the diminutive the moment he crossed the finish line after his first

4:16 mile, spent a couple of hours a day in the pool. When the trainer told Matt and me that we had to limit our mileage as we tried to recover, we relished every abbreviated run of the twenty-mile weeks. Steve put in his extra fifty miles a week on the elliptical machine, because that wasn't real running. When all of our coaches expressed doubt that we were truly committed to coming back at all, Matt and I begrudgingly agreed. Steve responded by waking up at 5:00 a.m. to get in an extra six miles before breakfast. He looked at each opportunity to quit as an insult. Where before the use of a mental crutch meant that he wasn't a man, he now grabbed onto anything in reach to pull himself back to where he wanted to be, and felt the more masculine for it.

Looking back, I've often wondered why we went such different ways. The decision point, for all of us I think, was a high school practice that the three of us came to visit during our first semester in college. The track team was doing a pool workout, and at the end of it, the coach challenged them all to see who could swim the farthest under water. Most of the team made it to the far end of the pool before coming up for air. Some of the varsity guys made it to the far end and then back a little bit. One former swimmer did a complete lap underwater. Steve was the last one to go, and the coach urged him to be cautious. He'd been working hard all day, and was recovering from a cold. Steve grinned, and told the coach not to worry. He'd pass out before his heart exploded, and besides, the lifeguard was watching.

While a phenomenal athlete, he wasn't a strong swimmer, so when he made it all the way to the far end of the pool, and started coming back without losing any speed, we were all surprised. When he completed a full lap, we were impressed, and when he started to swim back down again, we began to worry. About halfway back to the far end of the pool, he began to slow down. Bubbles of air started leaking out of his mouth, and eventually he stopped and floated to the surface. The next five minutes passed slowly through the over-chlorinated air, as Steve was fished out of the pool and an ambulance was ordered. The next thing I remember clearly was him waking up, smiling serenely at the faces looking down at him, and coughing out, "Did I win?" It was a question to end a career, or to start one. Matt and I both stopped running within a month. Steve hasn't lost a race since.

I saw them both a couple of months ago, when we were all back in town for winter break. I only had a chance to chat with Steve briefly; he was stopping by to say hello as a quick break on his run to Pennsylvania and back, a twenty-two-mile-long run that would bring his weekly total into the triple digits. The night before he had stashed water bottles along the route so he wouldn't have to carry anything with him. He told me about his first race that season at Princeton. He had run the mile, and was disappointed that he had only gone 4:26. He had had the flu that week, and he thought that might

have slowed him down a little, but he was worried that if his performance didn't improve soon, the coach might cut him from the varsity team. Last weekend he ran a 4:12. I think he is going to be just fine.

I saw Matt that same day. We went to get lunch together at a new taco place in town, to catch up and reminisce. It's easy to talk with someone who shares thousands of miles of cruel history with you. It's a connection that doesn't require spoken words to communicate, although there's almost never a shortage of them. It's as comfortable as a pair of old trainers, but even in a relationship as close as ours, some things are too raw to talk about. Before this day we'd never seriously discussed the end of our running careers, how it had left a vacancy for rent inside. We'd never talked about the pain that comes from realizing that we were "once a runner." And we'd never talked about, probably because we couldn't articulate it, why. But that day it all came up. How there, in that humid pool room, we knew. We'd never had that passion, would never be able to admit that mental crutch. And in knowing that, we knew we could never continue in the sport. We didn't quit, but we couldn't go on. That's a kind of mortality, I suppose, and we might be paying penance for a long time to come, but I hope it means that we too are going to be just fine.



Reinventing the Wheel, Devon Poniatowski

Anxiety in Motion

Her left hand flicks a cigarette that doesn't
Need to be ashed. Her right hand clenches,
Fingers curling to her palm, and then,
She splays them all out again.

I've watched her for twenty-two minutes,
Counting the times she uncrosses her legs
And then crosses them again.
Sixteen times seems like too many.

In thirty minutes, I see her pattern:
Legs uncross, hand clenches shut,
Legs cross, hand opens wide.
I wonder if she times it?

Her trainwreck movements:
The jerks, the twitches, the constant motion.
I like the way her left hand never leaves her hair
When it isn't flicking a cigarette.

The Contract

I should remind her that, for God's sake, when I was six, she took a sheet and tied me to my chair so I would sit and finish my dinner. She chased me around the table, slipping on the linoleum in her socks, and when she caught me, she yanked a sheet out of a nearby pile of laundry and tied my torso to the back of my chair so I couldn't get up. I must have screamed bloody murder for at least ten minutes before I started laughing my head off, still wriggling from side-to-side to get loose. She sat right next to me, legs crossed, flipping through a magazine, like I wasn't even there. Eventually, exasperated, she slapped her hand down on the table and said, "Just eat the goddamned mac and cheese, Cooper." And I did.

When she places a typed list entitled "New Rules" in front of my bowl of cereal, I look up at her like she has lost her mind. "Who are you and what have you done with my mother?" I ask.

"That's cute. That's real cute, Cooper," she says.

Last night when I climbed in through the window at the top of the fire escape, the green numbers on the microwave glared 2:07. I had spent the preceding hours convincing myself there was no way she would still be awake, but there she sat at the kitchen table. Her back was towards me and she was hugging one knee to her chest, the conjoined foot resting on her chair, as she raptly examined her cuticles. As soon as I was fully inside the apartment with the window shut behind me, I braced myself for an explosion. To fully ensure she understood my presence, I said, "Hi," to the back of her head, using a tone I had hoped might be taken as casual and sincere, but it came out all wrong (I had practiced it too many times in my head)—too enthusiastic, too loud, too drunk. She pretended not to hear me.

My brain hurt. My thoughts were spinning like socks in a washing machine, but I remember thinking, I wish she were the type of parent who would just beat the shit out of me. It's what I deserve, and both of us would benefit; I wouldn't feel guilty, and she would feel in control. In the silence, I felt the hum of the refrigerator pulsing through my body. For a moment I imagined the appliance was alive. Using the blood gushing through my veins as a vessel, parasitic sound waves were traveling from my toes up to my mind, intent on taking over.

All she said was, "I should break your fucking neck. You know that? I really should," outwardly appearing more weary than aggravated. She wasn't throwing plates or crying; her voice was level and controlled. I remember this confused me. She got up from the table to rinse her wine glass in the sink and without another word went to bed, leaving me standing there alone, trying to decide whether I was swaying back and forth or standing still. She didn't even give me a chance to tell her my phone had died. That's why I was late. That's why I didn't call.

Last weekend, at 1:56 a.m., I squeezed my body awkwardly through that same window. My mother came out of her bedroom, looking like a maniac—half-naked, half-asleep, screaming and slashing her pointer finger through the air. "Are you out of *your* fucking mind?" she cried. "You need to get this through that small little brain of yours: I worked twelve hours today! *Twelve* hours! And then I have to wait up for you to find yourself home? So Cooper can have a good time? No text, no phone call, nothing?" She stood there staring, like she expected some sort of response with her palms extended up and out, her eyes wild, her curly hair crazy.

"Mom, the neighbors," I said, joking. She took a plate out of the drying rack and, using all her strength, smashed it against the wall.

She looks so disgusted with me now as I sit at the kitchen table eating my cereal that I'm starting to lose my appetite. I stop eating and look up at her again, this time accusingly. "What?" I say. I haven't yet swallowed my last spoonful of cereal before speaking and milk dribbles from my open mouth back into the bowl I'm leaning over.

"I'm not kidding with you," she says as she begins to put dishes away, making zero effort not to bang pots together or slam cabinets shut. "I've had enough. I am done. You are going to read this and sign it, and you're going to follow these rules, and if you can't do that, then you're going to find somewhere else to live. Because it's not going to be here." I resume eating as I read over the list, smirking at this unique show of determination.

Most of her demands I think I can handle until she forgets about all of this. I know exactly the way things like this work. Like how Marcus was supposed to be grounded for three months, but after three weeks his dad couldn't stand him hanging around the house. Or how last summer Caroline was only

supposed to be allowed out three nights a week, but her parents actually never kept track once she finally shut up and agreed to go along. Gradually, my mother's restrictions will start to wear on my nerves and I will be forced to break the rules in order to regain some small facet of my sanity. At first, she'll say, "Cooper, have you forgotten about our rules?" and she'll pull her list off the fridge or out of the junk drawer to remind me of our contract, as if I don't have the brain capacity for memory. I'll say, "Yeah, Mom. Sorry." After that, I'll take that list and rip it into a million pieces, take it outside and watch as the pieces slip through my fingers and fall into the dark recesses of the dumpster behind our building. Finally, by the time things return to normal, her list will be recalled merely as an elaborate and impracticable effort. And both of us will remember how we knew from the beginning it would never last.

So, I know I can cook dinner once a week (as long as she doesn't mind eating cereal for dinner) and fold her clean laundry instead of throwing it on the floor when I pull it out of the dryer. I can volunteer somewhere, and I really think I can refrain from drinking and weed for as long as it takes (although I will probably have to start smoking cigarettes), if it will make her happy. One thing that I will not be doing, however, is attending an AA meeting.

"Fine," I tell her, agreeing to the terms she has transcribed. "But I'm not going to AA."

"Yes, you are," she says.

"Why?"

"Because those are the rules."

"You think I'm an alcoholic?" I ask.

"I'm not negotiating, here. I'm telling you my expectations." Her rising voice and raised eyebrows provisionally convert my anger into restraint.

I feel guilty thinking this but also honest. I love my mother like a boy loves his dog. When I'm home, she's good company. We watch TV together and make fun of her terrible cooking or her terrible boyfriend's kids. We have *Lord of the Rings* marathons, a bag of popcorn in each of our laps, drenched in butter and sprinkled with parmesan cheese, just the way we like it. I'm proud of her shiny hair and youthful body, the way Grandma is of her springer spaniel named Penny. (Although when my friends make rude gestures behind her back suggesting they'd like to fuck her, of course, I have to let known my capacity to fucking kill them). I try to give her the attention I know she desires, otherwise I feel neglectful. But I do not sacrifice my own happiness for hers. I do enjoy spending time with her, but sometimes I get busy. Sometimes I wish she were a dog, so she would only expect love and the occasional bacon flavored treat.

When my mother shows me that list, I begin to miss the days when the only thing expected was that there would never be expectations. The days when she didn't pretend to be a good mother, and when I made her angry, she tied me to chairs. I remember when she was still considered a disappointment for getting pregnant at seventeen. She bagged groceries at Pathmark, and we lived in my grandparents' basement. This was when she forgot about half-days at school and used the microwave to cook all meals requiring heat. She would roll her eyes in obstinate silence when her father asked her what exactly the plan was or when her mother said to me, "You know, she's lucky you're cute." This was before she became a nurse and wore scrubs and spent her days passing out meds and changing diapers at the nursing home, before she had any interest in being an adult or dating older men or unnecessarily curtailing my freedom.

But I can tell you when all this started. It was around the time Mrs. Robinson called to tell her I was failing math. My mother looked down at me like I was the scum of the earth. "You are fourteen," she said. "You have two responsibilities." She held up two fingers. "Two. Be a student and stay out of trouble." Her voice came out high and hoarse, like she was catching a cold from the difficulties I was causing her. I envisioned a scenario in which contagious flesh-eating bacteria were spawned with every wrong move I made, and with every hug or kiss, the disease spread, first to my mother, then over the entire globe.

"You need to pull yourself together," she told me. And it's as though just like that she decided to make it happen. She started asking me where I was going and who I was seeing. She judged my friends, told me what time to come home, and waited up for me. If I weren't smarter than I am, I would think that the call from Mrs. Robinson was the reason. But really, I know it's that fucker Paul.

My mother met Paul at the grocery store. They were standing next to each other, looking at bread. He glanced over at her and said, "You know of any way I can get my kids to eat wheat bread?"

"Good luck with that," said my mother. Later she'd pretend she was offended that he pinned her for a mother, but the way she was going on, it's just as likely she was flattered by the attention.

The next week they ran into each other at the bank. He probably thought it was fate. My mother had to admit he was handsome. "I have to say, he's not so bad to look at," is what she told me. As she said this, I saw her considering the possibilities underneath her thin mask of disdain for this divorcee who tucked in his shirts, shopped for groceries, and *chose* to have two children.

Now, as I look up at her over my bowl of cereal, I think about mentioning that it's possible I might not have gotten so drunk last night if it hadn't been for that dinner with he-who-must-not-be-named. On second thought, though, bringing up my being drunk doesn't seem like a great idea.

He-who-must-not-be-named is what I call Paul to my mother's face. His sons are nine and thirteen. They wear tight clothes, do all their homework, and look like the type of boys who use body wash and brush their hair. Last night they were wearing running shoes with jeans. The three of them came over for dinner and my mother cooked pork chops and mashed potatoes, presumably trying to make it appear like she cooks intricate meals every night. Little did our guests realize, this domestic goddess cannot even open store-bought jars of pasta sauce without my assistance.

Before the dinner my mother told me, "Cooper, I would really appreciate it if you were nice."

"What are you talking about?" I said. "I'm always nice."

She crooked her neck to one side and stared me down. "I mean it," she said. I decided to try my best, seeing as she hadn't been too pleased with me lately.

My mother was opening the oven when they arrived. I offered to answer the door. I pretended I was a butler and told them to come in, bowing a little and gesturing for them to enter the front hall. I even asked if I could take their coats.

I will admit I had preconceived notions about the boys-who-I-do-not-name. Firstly, they are Paul's sons, and more importantly, my mother wishes I was more like them. Paul's ex-wife is "psychotic," in my mother's words. But otherwise, Paul has a perfect little family. And my mother has me. I know Paul brags about his sons—their grades, their interest in science, and their T-ball trophies. She wishes she could say the same about me, but what can she say? Cooper knows *how* to swim? Cooper has friends? Cooper looks good?

My preconceptions about the boys were quickly proven true. What's the point of a high functioning brain if you don't understand the best way to use it? Those boys are gabbling weaklings. One look from Paul, and they knew what to do. I watched Paul tap the older one's arm with his index finger and point at his napkin, and his son unfolded his paper napkin and placed it on his lap. Then, Paul widened his eyes at the other one across the table, flapping his arms like a cranky rooster, and his son happily slid his elbows off the table. The boys chatted away like that dinner was the most fun they'd had all week, and I don't doubt that it was. I finished my dinner in half the amount of time it took everyone else, then sat observing the embarrassing creatures in dumbfounded silence, finding it unbelievable that a group of people could be so boring.

"Adam, you could tell Meg about your science project we've been working on," Paul said to the younger one.

"Well," he said. "We're testing how seeds grow with regular water and water that's heated in the microwave."

"Fascinating," I said.

"But actually," said Adam, "I had the weirdest dream last night. There were the plants like mine in cups of water all over on the ground and there were dinosaurs. It was the time of the dinosaurs and I was alive!"

"Is that right?" said Paul.

"Excuse me, little boy, but do you really think any of us care about your freaky dinosaur dream? I thought they said you're smart," I wanted to say. But I kept my mouth shut, impressing myself with my self-control.

"So, Cooper," said Paul, before realizing his mouth was full. He paused, putting his hand to his mouth and gulping down the partially chewed meat. I could see the clump of it slide down his throat and almost booted right there. "What can you tell us about high school?" He looked at his older son and flicked his chin in my direction, suggesting that he should engage with me on the topic.

I shrugged. "S'alright, I guess." Looking at Paul's long nose and short spiky hair across the table as he swallowed food whole was enough; I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of thinking we were friends or ever would be by partaking in a real conversation. "May I be excused?" I asked my mother.

She narrowed her eyes and glared at me for a long moment. She was probably thinking that delaying the response could cause everyone to forget that I'd said anything at all.

"What?" I asked.

"Don't start," she said. So, I stayed where I was, avoided any further eye contact, and waited for dessert.

One week later my mother is dropping me off at the Lutheran church for AA. She idles out front as I walk in to ensure that I'm not planning to skip out. Before exiting the car, I say, "Seriously, don't make me do this."

"You want to know a secret?" She reaches out and ruffles the tips of my hair with her fingertips. I push her arm away, swatting at my head as if someone just told me it was infested with bugs. This gets me out of the car fast.

When I was little, I had a fire truck shaped bed my grandpa built me. My mother would sit on the edge of it after tucking me in, a tiny boy who still wore striped pajamas. "Do you want to hear a secret?" she'd ask. Every single night I'd shake my head 'no' because I knew what she was going to say, and then she'd tell me she loved me, kissing me goodnight and tickling me until I pushed her off.

"Have fun!" my mother calls out the car window, taking wholehearted enjoyment out of my misery. I slam the door and hurry towards the church steps without looking back.

Inside, people smile at me when I sit down. They know I don't belong. I slouch in my seat and stare at my phone while we wait to begin and I don't ever want to look up at their smiling faces. I did research before I got here to ensure that I wouldn't have to speak, and I read that speaking is optional, otherwise there's no way I would have come. I would have waited inside the vestibule until my mother drove away or walked down the aisle and snuck out the back door. We're sitting in a circle, as I had expected, and when it starts, they go around, one by one, introducing themselves and identifying as alcoholics, like it's not obvious. It seems I was misinformed because after the man to my left says his name, all eyes turn to me, and I don't have much of a choice after all. I want to ask, "Isn't this supposed to be anonymous?" Instead, I panic and say, "Hi. I'm Steven, and I'm an alcoholic."

I stay quiet for the remainder of the meeting, half listening to the others talk about their faith in a higher power. A man named Derek describes waking up every morning for thirteen years disappointed in himself. For the rest of the meeting I try to figure out if it really is possible to be disappointed in one's self or if such disappointment really stems from a fear of disappointing others. I picture myself raising my hand and standing up to say, *"Excuse me, sir! Who is dictating these rules? You or the world?"*

I leave the church feeling pretty smart, like I could take on the universe with my insights. As I walk home, I make a decision; I cannot wait for my mother's rules to become a memory. You only live once. I should have told that to Derek from AA. Yes, things could be worse; I could be an alcoholic. But, right now, I have the power within me to make my life better, and this thought makes me strong. I will help around the house, open all the bottles and jars. I will watch movies with my mother, be home in time for dinner, maybe even attend one of Adam's T-ball games. And next time I'm drunk I will definitely not get caught.



The Evidence, Eddie Knibloe



Steel Wool Crossing, Jason Zimmermann

Garden of the Gods

You won't be in the room when he dies. You'll tell them you don't care to see it. I'll pass, you'll say. You have no interest in watching. Why would you? Something about it feels wrong, voyeuristic. Besides, this is the man who taught you how to live and you'd prefer to remember him that way—singing along to Sinatra and showing you how the world shimmers wild for eyes willing to see it. You don't need him to teach you how to die as well. You're pretty sure you can figure that out when the time comes.

He will have been in the hospital about four months when they finally do it, pull the plug. You'll mark the time in weekly visits during which you'll scramble for signs of hope. Any sign will do, anything that points toward life. During each visit, you won't say much. You'll sit back and you'll watch him closely, collecting snippets of optimism. You'll leave, pockets stuffed with these little fleeting moments like trinkets. A few phantom gems of rich laughter here, a couple comforting winks there. You'll covet each and every one of these, and each night you'll go home to craft grand illusions out of them while you should be sleeping. This is how your insomnia is born. Your mind won't be able to rest. It will stay up all night, threading these small memories together into the same conclusion over and over: he's going to be okay. He has to be.

You'll forget to take into account, however, that reality doesn't always turn out all boondoggles and tchotchkes, that the universe is a much more temperamental artisan. Which is why, when the time comes, you won't be able to take it. Why you will fold yourself up and stow yourself away—closed until further notice. Why you will deny yourself the simple release of mourning and call it strength. Why you will run and run and run until you realize that the very thing you're running from is still in your pockets, weighing you down.

It will take years to realize this. You'll be twenty days a legal adult when it happens, when they pull the plug. He'll be weaving in and out of consciousness when you spend your eighteenth birthday there with him in hospice care. Your grandmother will have signed your card for the both of them, and later you'll realize this as you watch his trembling fingers struggling to peel the aluminum covering off his plastic grape juice container. You'll offer to help, but his pride shoos you away. This will sting more than you expect, watching this man—your mother's father by way of adoption, your only father by way of a deadbeat—become aggressively undone over grape juice. As you watch him, bedridden, fumbling a juice container for the fifth time, you'll look away. Your gaze will land upon his pair of prosthetic legs at rest, useless and casually crossed in the corner, and you'll think back to how this all started with just a small stone. *A stone*, you'll think.

You'll remember the road trip out west that you and your grandparents took ten years before. Your mind will find itself revisiting the Garden of the Gods, one of your favorite stops on the trip, in Colorado, and the flat, white walls of the hospital room will become boulders—craggy, tectonic bursts of a million shades of warm citrus and adobes towering over you on either side. You're a wide-eyed wildcard of curiosity at eight, climbing everything with traction and asking more questions than there are answers to, while Grandpa and Grandma follow not far behind. Every once in a while Grandpa groans, complaining of a sore foot. But nobody thinks anything of it, him included. He's getting older and you've been walking around all day. He'll be fine once you get back to the hotel.

Standing on top of a dahlia plateau, looking out into the sun-kissed valley below, you can see everything, the whole world. You've never been so high. You ask, into a moment of windblown silence, why is this place called Garden of the Gods?

Grandpa walks into your peripheral and stops, peering into that sprawling swirl of colors from the top of the world. For a moment, nobody else exists; it's just the two of you. The sun is tired, brushing its last blush strokes of the day—the same stunning reds and oranges as the rock formations all around you—across an infinite wisp of blue sky. If any moment could last forever, it would be this one.

Finally, he answers your question: just look at it.

The steady beeping of life support machines counts heartbeats as memory gives in to a forever of snow out the window. The walls will be blunt-white and very real. Your back will be to the bed where the remains of him lie. You'll have the sudden urge to turn around, to walk over to him, just like you did with your first steps, and fall into his arms. You'll want so badly to

rest your head on his chest, like after so many bad dreams, and get lost in his lulling blend of Barbamol, Old Spice, and his soft tenor song. You will want to come undone completely, to sob into his arms right there in the hospital. There's so much you'll want to tell him; there's *too* much you'll want to tell him. You won't know where to begin and so you won't do any of it. You'll stay put, looking distantly out the window, avoiding the bad dream playing itself out behind your back; try to escape the sounds of the only real father you've ever known weeping, begging for death to step in and relieve the pain.

You'll try counting snowflakes to keep your mind off it:

**One*

[It all started with one little stone stuck in the shoe of a diabetic].

**Two*

[We didn't stop walking, we didn't think anything of it].

**Three*

[The red pebble ground against his ankle like a saw].

**Four*

[He said everything was fine. Until the gangrene moved in].

**Five*

[The gangrene wasn't crazy about the kidneys].

**Six*

[Neither was the diabetes].

You won't be in the room when he dies, when they pull the plug. But you'll know ahead of time that they're going to do it. You'll arrive at the hospital and immediately know something is wrong when you see that everyone's there, the whole family. You will be right beside your mother when they buzz you into the hospice wing of Strong Memorial Hospital. Your younger siblings will be trailing behind in a rosy-cheeked cloud of confusion. You'll notice Grandma first. She'll be leaning against the wall with lips pursed so thin she could have swallowed them. There will be a strange weight to her eyes, which will be fixed on the ceiling, a look only God could interpret. Next, you'll notice that Uncle Joe is sitting with his hands clasped over his paunch, his eyes closed behind his thick bifocal lenses as if he is lost in a deep meditation or trance.

That's when you'll know that it's over, that they're going to pull the plug. After a few long, speechless hugs, the young doctor arrives to give you the short of it: he no longer wishes to go on. He has chosen to end his suffering.

We are taking him off life support.

The words, as soon as they leave the doctor's lips, draw tears in unison. Your mother drops down and shatters, holding close the heads of the little ones. Grandma steadily rocks back and forth on the balls of her feet, ever looking upward. She's shaken, but stoic. And, before you know it, Uncle Joe forces your head into his cushiony chest, telling you over and over that everything will be okay, everything will be okay—a gesture that, although well intentioned, will prove much more comforting for him than for you.

You will be staring blankly into the light over Uncle Joe's shoulder, trying to imagine what life means without him. Nothing will come to mind. You will feel like crying, like somehow validating the tears of your loved ones, but you won't be able to.

You will have disengaged that part of yourself the moment you entered the hospice and read the foreshadowing in everyone's faces. You will have shut yourself down. All you will be good for on that day is to act as a rock. You will have sturdy shoulders and silence to offer in response to despair. People will rest their heads on you, drooling unanswerable questions onto your collar. Hug back, whisper *I know*; it's all you'll be able to do.

Later, your mother will ask how you're holding up. Lie. To her and to yourself. Tell her you're fine. Keep on lying until you eventually find yourself in some of the uglier corners of coping, particularly those known to sling dime bags and forty ounces of emotional amnesia. You'll find yourself trying to smoke, snort, pop, and shoot away the truth, but it will never give. Pain is as resilient as it is persistent. It doesn't just go away with time. You have to put it in its place, train it like you would a dog. Put it on a leash and walk with it, always at a short distance, but don't let it guide you. Keep a firm grip and lead it where you have to go.

After what could be twenty minutes or three hours in the waiting room, your mom will ask if you wish to say your goodbyes before they pull the plug. She explains that he'll be able to hear you, but won't be able to respond. In a daze, you will nod yes and the doctor will give you the go-ahead. As you approach the heavy closed door to his room, you'll frantically try to catch every second of the last eighteen years like snowflakes on your tongue, but there are just so many.

Once you enter, you'll close the door behind you. You will see that he has an oxygen mask pressed deep into the creases of his wrinkles and the only indication that he is still alive is the digital beeping of a heart monitor artificially marking time. You'll take a seat beside the bed and try to collect your thoughts.

You'll clear your throat a couple times to see if he responds. He doesn't. You'll whisper unintelligible syllables to test your voice. You'll look over to see if he responds. He doesn't. You'll start to wonder if there's any real value in doing something like this in the first place. What could you really say to bring to cadence an entire life's worth of love and appreciation? What could you tell him that he doesn't already know about life, about you? You wonder if he knows that he has been like a father to you, that he has helped to shape the man you have become. He must. You hope he is aware of how much you respect him—for his work ethic, his honesty, the way he'd do anything just to make you smile. You hope he knows how completely and innocently you love him. How you'd follow him into fire if he said it was chill.

You will think all of these things. You won't say any of them. You'll sit in that chair by the bed, barely able to look at him, and you'll choke on your own silence. For fifteen minutes you'll sit there unable to even say the word *goodbye*. It sits like a shard of glass stuck in your throat the whole time and it burns when you try to let it out. You'll try and try, but you just can't do it. You might be thinking that he isn't lucid enough for it to matter anyway. Maybe you're thinking that it won't matter much whether or not you say it because he won't have any recollection of it once they pull the plug.

Or perhaps you're thinking, somewhere beneath it all, that if you never say goodbye, maybe he'll never have to leave.



Time, Janna Nunziato

Missing Photos

The nurse taking his blood pressure reminds Bailey of his teacher from the eighth grade, the one with wide hips.

"What did you do?" she asks as he moves the straw out from between his lips. It seems like she cares.

"It was a stroke," he says, adding quickly, "but I think I'm gonna be okay." Bailey smiles, but with little sincerity. He wants to show the nurse he is stronger than age, so he pulls out his wallet and a photo of a smiling woman. "This is my wife," he proclaims, "isn't she beautiful? She's always been the best looking woman. Don't you think she's beautiful? We married in the heart of spring. Isn't she beautiful?"

When he looks around the doctor's office, he imagines flowers blooming in every direction, the white dress blinding. He wishes his wife would have bought the red dress, forget the customs. She is red, not white. She is infinite passion. He remembers the suit was too tight, his gut crushed. He can't breathe, but she is beautiful with her stomach swollen. He loves her. His daughter comes out in a red gush. How can something so small mean so much? The world nestled within his arms.

He watches the nurse as she writes down notes and thinks he must be missing something.

"Let's wait for the doctor," the nurse says. She smiles because she is sorry for him.

Bailey coughs into the autumn air. His daughter is quiet, stiff against his shoulder until she finally whispers, a nursing home will be good for you, for us, we love you. She holds his hand, will not let go or look away. When he is settled into his new room they visit. Someone gives him pictures and reminds

him of the names: Georgie, Sharon, Beth, that was your wife, you remember your wife, don't you? Look at your daughter, they are so much alike.

He remembers his daughter's hand slipping away, cold like the end of summer, the first day of fall. She dressed in all white and he never wanted her to change. While they took their wedding portraits, Bailey thought he would suffocate. Daddy, she told him, you'll always be number one. The grandkids came out looking like pink worms. He wants to love them.

Someone is asking him, Bailey, Bailey, what did you do?

He notices the grandkids burying coins into the cushions, like bugs building a nest. Their eyes are big and curious. They look infinite beside him. The photos pass from hand to hand. Look at all the things you did. They smile with gaps of gum, the little worms.

When they leave, Bailey notices the pictures are all smiling faces. Where are the frowns? He wants to know what happened to the frowns. He walks down the hall, but the doors all look the same. Come watch TV, the nurse says. She is pulling him to the couch.

Where did my daughter go, he wonders. Where is my home? Take me home to the red house. The old truck. There was a willow. Bailey remembers the red paint chipping year after year. His red was chipping.

What did I do? What did I do?

it is cold outside the window. it is winter. they find veins for needles and there are smiling faces. the needle is shining. when he falls, it is like glass on pavement. he is shattered. sorry, he tells the nurse when she lifts him from the floor. i'm so sorry. sorry. she is smiling. it hurts to see her smile. people smile when they say goodbye. he is rolling in his dreams. he slips out of bed like a snowflake. he feels weightless.

Bailey? someone asks. Bailey tell us, what did you do? look at your daughter and your wife, they look so alike, don't you remember? and Bailey remembers playing ball. he is a champion of the eighth grade. he is in detention with spit balls on the ceiling. he says they will last forever. he is infinite. Bailey what did you do? he is smiling.

the nurse takes his hand, his pulse between her fingers. his daughter is holding the pictures to his face. that's Georgie, I know you remember Georgie, he had the red pickup truck. you took turns driving it, remember?

Bailey is driving home, the windows are rolled down. he can breathe infinity into his lungs. he doesn't see the deer until there is red blood and he asks himself what did I do, what did I do. the worms are at his feet and he is telling them about his adventures. their eyes widen; they are excited and

scared. on the first floor Bailey is flirting with the receptionist. she is smiling, very polite, but sees the ring on his finger. do you know which room is yours? he wants the one that is red.

the sun is sinking. Bailey watches the sun. he waits for it to rise. there is someone knocking on the door, but he is dreaming of red clay. like when he went west. the grand canyon is infinite, he can not find the end. he decides there is no end. someone is shaking him. he opens his eyes. he is alone.

Bailey, Bailey. the nurse says his name. Daddy, do you remember? Bailey, what did you do?

he is walking down the corridor. his room is shining. they want him to watch TV, but he keeps walking. the sunset is red. he must reach the red. he is tired of falling in his dreams, but he won't wake up. what did you do? he asks the photos. they pat him on the back, he is champion. the ball is round. he holds it over his head. he is shining with victory in his hands. he is infinite.

where are the frowns? damnit, he can't find the frowns—he remembers

in the summer there were doctors doing nothing his wife beeps into infinity there is a coffin and people dressed in black there are tears and a red pickup truck the sun is too hot the air is too dry he can not breathe he is suffocating there is nothing left the sunset is covered in gray clouds he is weighed down what did you do to get that one someone asks she was a great woman there is nothing left Bailey watches a plane fly overhead will it drop he wishes it would fall on his home it is empty things are missing there is nothing here but smiling photos Bailey asks them what did you do he falls asleep when he awakes he tells the nurse

was just a stroke going to be okay married in the heart of spring Bailey is still but infinite he watches the smiling faces the canyon was red always wanted the red to envelop him suffocate him the photos shift in and out of vision the frowns are missing he is missing smiling something

missing

EVAN GOLDSTEIN

Carlton Hill, November

Still, a kind of rebellion: night as rain
glassed frozen grasses. Limp hills

of new-forested stone
walls all snow lichen-dusted,

train soughing winded valley. Over dim tents
you and I intone in cloudbreak—

we did not watch for constellations,
but lifted coals ember light
 to thaw our boots

EVAN GOLDSTEIN

Dream in Which Iguala is the Genesee

*This is something that should never have happened,
and must never be repeated.*

—Jesús Murillo, Mexico Attorney General

They water flowers for the dead while I lay down
tonight—snowmelt river water
stinking in my clothes—my door

ablaze in protest. Students
scream *we are not armed*—their fists
against riot shields, eyes

water tear gas river
south campus dark green gentle
bends reflect cornfields beneath the bridge—

a desert south stars ruddy
in cloud smoke thick ash
on riverbank. Diesel

on water pearly, languid—
under tide of trash and skin. Their brown
skin, blistered skin teeth that turn

to dust in eddy. Hands in water, hands
pressed through rifle bore—my hands
are white, soft—

dripping red I have turned away
from garbage pyres: 43 students shot
and burned, bones
thrown to water, skin—ash

gathered on this dirt as snow.



Night Walk, Robin Mendoza

JASON GUISAO

Our Babies Are Coming Home

In the half-light, Loulie wakes from a hazy nostalgia. Oaken-sharp bangs lick at her eyelids, paper thin. A foreign scent drifts throughout the bedroom, sweet and sour from the incense ash and something else. Her husband Amos stands in the currents of light pouring in from the bedroom window. The curtains, pushed aside, reveal the entirety of the front lawn and the boulevard below. Amos is naked, his undergarments scattered on the carpeted floor. Burn scars embellish his buttermilk back, while motes of dust dance along the lines of his silhouette. There is a deep stain stamped into the sheets where he slept hours before.

I can see them standing there, Lucretia. Just beyond the patio, Amos says.

Did you take your medicine?

I don't remember.

Amos turns to his wife as she rises, the sheets and woolen covers falling from her body like flaking skin. She stands tall, her beige nightgown kissing her kneecaps. She considers herself a plain woman. Thin lips, with a small sharp nose, and shallow cheekbones. An oval dimple sits perfectly at the tip of her chin. Irises like the black of night glint in the rays of the sun as if stardust had been molded into their center. Loulie grabs a towel from the closet and ties a knot at her husband's middle. He glances at the wet stain on the bed. She notices and cups his face in her callused hands.

It's okay, she says. Go bathe.

He leaves for the bathroom as Loulie pulls the dampened sheet from the bed. Amos's feet stamp into the ground like miniature mortar shells. Outside the window, the bayou rises from its sleep. Dew like droplets of wine rest on

the sea of green below. The paperboy is up and about, his bronze skin sleek as a new penny on the grit road. He throws the newspaper against the door and catches Loulie's gaze from the window. She smiles and waves, and he nods in return. It is an August Sunday and the Baton Rouge mugginess enters the house from every crack and crevice. The wooden plank flooring groans and the stairs whisper at each step. Loulie strides like a ballerina, soundless and nimble. Each movement of her foot, the next step in a familiar dance.

The kitchen is simple. Amidst the hanging pots and pans, there is an overwhelming quaintness hammered into the wallpaper and the floor tiles. A breeze arrives from the window, bringing the marshland with it. Loulie drops the sheet effortlessly into the sink and turns the glossy faucet. She grabs a bar of soap from the chestnut cabinet above and scrubs away. Her hands move briskly and sternly, as if she has been washing sheets all her life. As if work is all she has ever known. She can only think of Amos upstairs in the bathroom, washing the smell of urine from his body. She can only think of January 15, when the Creole woman from across the street flung herself out of her front door and onto the pebbled road, hollering: Good Lord, Nixon said it's over! Our babies are coming home!

Loulie opens the front door and steps out onto the patio. She hangs the scrubbed sheet up on the clothesline and steps back into her home, fastening the door shut. She grabs pecans from the glass bowl centered on the dining table and toasts them in a skillet until they are fragrant and browned. In a few minutes the pecan waffle breakfast is complete. The aromas barrage her nose. She smiles to herself, satisfied, and pours orange juice into a cup. Amos enters, fully clothed, and constantly glances out to the patio. He sits at the table and smiles grimly—all he can muster. Loulie has made no food for herself. She simply sits across from Amos, a glass of tap water in her hands, observing him as he saws at the waffles with his knife. His wifebeater tight against his broad chest and tucked into carpenter jeans. His musk springs from his jagged arms. Loulie takes a sip of water and studies his windswept face over the glass cup, the shadow around his lips so prominent in the dimly lit kitchen. His shrill cheekbones and warped nose. His eyes like sapphires chiseled into the top of his face. Loulie thinks he is beautiful.

It's good? she asks.

Yes, ma'am. It's always good.

It's beautiful out today.

He grunts gently in approval, chewing with his mouth closed, pecans crunching between his teeth. She thinks back to his naked body at the window. Amos glances at the lawn beyond the patio once more before his next bite. There are two waffles left.

You thinking about working with Reggie again?

Yes, ma'am. Figured I'd see him tomorrow, he says.

You think you're up to it, with the headaches and all?
I don't know.
You gave me a scare this morning, Amos.
I know. I'm sorry.
Did you take your medicine?
Yes, ma'am.
Okay. That's good. Are you feeling better?
The headache is gone. Reckon it's the painkillers that did that.
Good. You keep taking your medicine and get more sleep, and soon the rest will get better too.
Yes, ma'am.
Love you.
I know, he says, finishing his last waffle.

By midday, Loulie is fast asleep in the rocking chair on the patio, the skin of her lids rippling above her musing eyes. In her dreams, she is a younger woman, her clean fingernails brushing through violent coarse stalks. The sun dips into the horizon, contusing the sky purple, red, and orange. She is home with her father in Macon. He sits alone on the wooden porch, his eyes unmoving and far off. The lines etched in his brow and lips are like the rings spiraling in the base of a tree. She can see antiquation in his eyes and in his graying mane, a plague ripping her in two. She stands against the tides of weathering and time, naïve and unaware that her efforts to cure her father's dementia are in vain. She watches him fall asleep in the black of the night, remembering the quickening of her beating heart when she grabbed the Drano from his shaking hands. He had mistaken it for milk.

Loulie opens her eyes at the sound of rushing water. Half of the sky is still lit by the setting sun. The moon, in its milky ferocity, rises and begins to illuminate the sky. She follows the noise into the house. Upstairs a light shines brightly from underneath the door of the bathroom. She frantically climbs the staircase, her feet scraping against the edge of each step. She reaches the top within seconds and swings open the door. Amos is in the bathtub, water falling against his clothed figure from the shower nozzle. Dirt falls from his body into the tub like sins cascading in clumps. He shivers, his eyes scanning the room in milliseconds and soon resting on hers. Loulie crouches in front of him, her large eyes as soft and sparkly as pooling honey. He stops hyperventilating. His eyes focus on her fingers, then her lips.

I'm so dirty, he says.

I know. It's okay.

The water is cold against his skin, trickling down into the trenches of the burn scar along his back. Loulie unloops the buttons on his overalls and pulls his legs out, the left leg first and then the right. Her hands pull the wife beater from his chest like a scissor piercing through the cloth. Loulie places

her hand on his brow and feels for warmth but finds none. The swirling wind beyond the pane howls her name. And then the bayou goes silent. She can smell gumbo radiating from the backyard several houses down the road. An afternoon barbecue fills the air. Amos is motionless, unsure of what to do. His panting is at an end, but his heart punches his ribs. His wife grabs a bar of soap from the cabinet adjacent to the sink. He grabs her hand, his eyes pleading with hers.

I'm sorry. Please, he says.

Come, Amos. Let's make you clean.

In the half-light, Loulie wakes from a hazy nostalgia, a thin line of spittle protruding from the corner of her mouth. The bedroom is tranquil in its gloom. The radiance of the sun peeks through the translucent drapes. Morning bird chirps trail up and down the boulevard. Loulie places her hand over her yawn. Amos is naked, his undergarments scattered on the carpeted floor. Goosebumps pepper the nape of his thick neck and shoulder blades. The blood passes like bullets in the veins coating his forearms. Loulie rises from a dune of bedspreads and joins her partner by the window.

They're on the patio now, Lucretia, Amos says.

No one is on the patio.

They're so close now.

Did you take your medicine?

I don't remember.

Loulie sighs and makes the bed as Amos stands unmoving. Her thin wrists fold the blankets back, fatigue under her sockets like eyeliner. She grabs a towel from the closet and ties a knot at her husband's middle. She leads him to the bathroom and opens the medicine cabinet. Capsules and bottles of pills crowd each shelf, but she grabs the white bottle of pain killers. Amos never blinks. As he bathes, Loulie leaves for the porch. A new paint odor stems from the planks. She is alone on the porch, despite her husband's unnerving visions. The lush bayou is crisp in the gaze of the sun. She plans to make chamomile tea.

When Amos arrives, beads of water dribble down his arms. Loulie tells him that she has decided to call in sick: Who needs welders anymore anyway, the war is over. And I'd rather spend my time with you. She sips from her tea. I don't think you're healthy enough to work with Reggie, she says.

Okay.

They won't go away unless you get more sleep and take your medicine, Amos.

Lucretia, what if you're wrong? What if they never go away?

Her father appears in her mind's eye, his ragged baggy overalls covering his skeletal limbs. Placing his lips to a bowl of milk. Walking him to the dinner table. Washing the caked grime from his body and praying that the decrepitude is soaped away as well.

It'll all go away, Amos, because I'm taking care of you, she says.

Amos leaves for the upstairs bedroom. Loulie follows him with her large eyes, his calves coolly flexing at each stair. She turns to the sink and washes her mug of tea. Soap suds cast themselves onto her thin wrists. She turns the tap off and dries the mug with a nearby hand towel, then opens the front door. She stands alone once again, passions bottled in her stomach like the child she had always wanted. *Always needed.* There is a thought in the form of saliva on the tip of her cracked, sundried lips, so fragile and hopeless.

Leave us be, she whispers to the shadows on the patio.

Her hair rises against the bayou's sugarcoated drafts. And for the first time in countless years, she sobs. Not for her father, or for the husband in the bedroom: she weeps only for herself. Her hands tremble and wipe the salt from her cheeks and mouth. Snot drips from the tip of her nose. In the distance trees sway like the ebb and flow of the ocean. A small car speeds by, the exhaust from the muffler dispersing into the atmosphere. The noxious air, a black, and then a purple, and then no more. A stifled thud echoes off the walls inside the house. Loulie turns and sticks her head into the house and listens.

Amos? She hollers up the staircase.

There is the vehement shuffling of feet and then a bang. Loulie latches the door behind her and rushes up the stairway. A dresser blocks her way into the upstairs hallway, a barricade to keep out his visions. Amos grabs the nightstand from the bedroom corner and lodges it against the dresser, his eyes wild and tortured. He tries to grab a small table at the end of the hall, but Loulie lobs herself over the barricade and catches him by the arm, his muscles pulsating against her hand. She squeezes with all of her strength. He stops, his back to her. All is quiet in the house but Amos's labored breathing.

Hush now, she says.

She leads him into the bedroom and sits him in a chair in the corner. She lets go of his arm, a red handprint tattooed into his tricep. He can see the brokenness in her eyes, the layers of fatigue carved into her skin. Her slouched shoulders, her greying hair and gaunt cheeks, her sugared irises dimming.

I'll get your medicine. Don't be sorry.

Yes, ma'am.

Loulie moves the dresser and the nightstand from the staircase and enters the bathroom, grabbing two pills from a white box in a nearby cabinet. She grabs a plastic cup from a bag above the toilet and pours tap water into it. Amos is in the room, his eyes unmoving and far-off. She feeds him the two

pills and hands him the cup of water. The lights are off. The drapes are pulled over the window, the bayou a blurred painting beyond the glass. Their body heat warms the room; their skin is the only illumination as the sun outside reaches the highest point in the sky. She hands Amos the glass and he finishes it within seconds, the veins lining his Adam's apple flailing at each other like meandering rods. He falls asleep with the glass gripped firmly in his right hand. She removes his sweatpants gently so as to not wake him, and with her remaining strength lays him in the bed.

In the half-light, Loulie wakes from a hazy nostalgia. The chair is lodged underneath the door knob. Amos is naked, his undergarments scattered on the carpeted floor. His body is curled into a ball in the farthest corner of the room. Loulie leaps from the bed and scurries to him. He's got his hands over his eyes like a blinded child.

They're in the room, Lucretia, he says.

It's just me.

I tried to keep them out, he says, pointing to the chair-lodged door, his eyes never leaving his lap.

Amos, please. Let it pass.

You said you'd make them go away.

She pulls him onto her chest, wraps her arms like boas around his expansive back. His deep breaths synchronize with hers in the dimly lit room. There is a muffled whine between her breasts, followed by a wetness. Out beyond, the skyline is bleached. The bayou's trees are beginning to change with the coming season. Richard Nixon gives his second inaugural speech. The World Trade Center officially opens in New York City. The last soldier is called home from Vietnam. The paperboy is up and about.

Featured Artist



Nevermore, James Mattson





Glow, James Mattson

DANTE DI STEFANO

American Pastoral with Warped Floorboards

after Frank O'Hara

I don't want to be the bullshit midnight cricket, who clings to the screen and rebukes the door with his chirp. I want what I can't keep: histories that oxidize, shot up with coal dust mainlined through the window of blue moss rotting the tree stump in my backyard. However, nature no longer provides a canvas upon which might be wrought a terrifying self-portrait. It's no longer epidermis meets bark. Nevertheless, Japanese red ferns die here as Dollar Generals proliferate. Last evening as cerulean didn't suffuse the western sky, I wanted to be at ease with the cobalt light of transcendent love, to drift with no weight inside me and be still, but Calliope doesn't teach singing lessons here and the raccoons haven't yet turned to stone. Instead, my amber waves of grain are yellow lines in the Walmart parking lot. I will drive there tonight and ponder asphalt as capital swallows twilight and I plead for the difficult bonds that sing us to distance.

Young, Black, and Gifted

*Foetid Phrases of Prejudice
Rend the air
Like flying splinters of glass
Shredding attempts at Resolution.
Lies propelled by Bigotry
Self-serving challenges to Witnesses
Disable discourse,
Twist the Truth,
Leaving any Opportunity for Healing
Lying Bloodied in the grimy Street
For Hours,
A corpse cut down by Fear.
"America" by Ed DeMattia*

Amadou Diallo, 23

Bronx, New York, February 4, 1999

"Mom, I'm going to college."

Forty-one shots. Unarmed aspiring college student was mistaken for someone else by four plainclothes officers. The last thing he told his mother was that

he had saved \$9,000 for college expenses. His shooters: Sean Carroll, Richard Murphy, Edward McMellon, and Kenneth Boss were all acquitted at trial.

We see it every day. We hear about it every day. Some try not to talk about it, others can't seem to stop. So many activists around but so little progress to speak of. We have definitely come far as a generation but it always seems like we're taking steps backwards. We live it every day—not all of us, of course, but a large majority. A lot of us, like myself, grow up believing that the world is fair and equal and that everyone treats each other with respect. Then somewhere along the ever-growing lines of maturity, that innocent yet oblivious state of mind is taken full advantage of and it hits like a bullet, piercing our entire perception of reality and understanding of the way the world works. Many of us simply close our eyes to the truth and try to pretend it isn't there, that it doesn't exist anymore. Almost as if it ended an era ago and there is no more reason to feel inferior or to feel consistently judged simply for being the person who you were born to be.

Sean Bell, 23

Queens, New York, November 25, 2006

"I love you too!"

Fifty shots. Unarmed groom-to-be was leaving his bachelor party when police fired fifty rounds at him. His friend, Joseph Guzman, told him that he loved him as they attempted to escape the onslaught. His shooters: Giscard Isnora and two others were cleared of criminal charges but Isnora was fired six years later and refused pension.

To be perfectly clear, I'm fully aware that there is definitely more than one form of bigotry. Preconceptions about homosexuality, feminism, gender, and foreigners all still exist today and are all rather prevalent topics of discussion. Hate comes in many forms and it all hurts. Not all prejudices have to be negative, but nine times out of ten they most certainly are. People will always have their fixed mindsets and see things in a certain frame, because of the way they were brought up, or what they view in the media, or what they figured out for themselves. Either way, it's definitely apparent that we're living in a man's world, but at the end of the day, it's a white man's planet.

Oscar Grant, 22

Oakland, California, January 1, 2009

"You shot me. You shot me!"

One shot to the back during arrest. Video footage revealed an unarmed Grant being held down by two officers. He was being further detained for "resisting arrest" via Taser. The officer claimed that he meant to reach for his Taser but "accidentally" pulled out his gun. Grant's shooter, Johannes Mehserle, faced a murder trial and was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. His handwritten apology didn't help his case much.

There comes a stage in every adolescent's life where he will receive the infamous talk from his parents. This typically revolves around the birds and the bees and understanding that the changes occurring to your body are all natural and simply mean that you are growing up. On the other side of things, the talk that black parents give to their children—specifically the talk that they give to their sons—goes a little bit differently.

Trayvon Martin, 17

Sanford, Florida, February 26, 2012

"What are you following me for?"

One shot in the chest. Unarmed high school student killed by neighborhood watch captain while walking to his father's house. Armed with hoodie, Skittles, and AriZona watermelon fruit juice cocktail. Deemed highly dangerous. His shooter, George Zimmerman, called in to report a "suspicious character," then ignored instructions to remain in his vehicle, and confronted Trayvon of his own volition. He was charged and tried but acquitted a year later.

Don't answer any questions. Don't make any sudden movements. Don't reach for your pockets. Always keep your pants up to your waist, so they don't pick you out as easily. Try to always look clean cut and get your hair cut often (the only advice I refused to follow), so that you don't look like a thug. No dreads or cornrows. Never talk back or act smart. Always, always, always make sure to ask, "Am I free to go?" Cops are not your friends; they will look for any excuse to take you down. Please remember that and always be aware of the kind of neighborhood you are in. You won't get treated the same as the white kid. You have to fly to get to something that they can crawl to. Know where you stand in this world, but don't let it stop you from doing great things.

"Why did you shoot me?"

Release of official police report was blocked by judge. Unarmed teenager fatally shot by police who answered a 911 call about an armed robbery. The caller said that McDade was armed in the hopes of receiving a quicker response; he wasn't. His shooters: were cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.

"Yo, can I interview you really quick?"

"Sure bro, I wouldn't mind."

My friend Lucki was rather open to talking about his experience with the police. He lives in Brooklyn, same as I do.

"You sure? This is gonna be in a paper I'm writing, if you're okay with that?"

"If I let some random girl from *The Oswegonian* interview me the other day, for sure I would let the nigga I met my first day in college interview me."

"Thanks, man. It's not really an interview; just a question I want to ask."

"Shoot."

"Have you ever been stopped by the cops?"

"Have I ever been stopped by the cops?" The repeated question came in a slightly shocked tone. "Just once over the summer, actually."

"What happened?"

"I was on my way home from working at this summer camp for kids. Me and my boy were on our way to our friend's crib. Then outta nowhere this legit all-black cruiser pulls up next to us and the cop is like, 'Stop right there!' and he tells us he's about to search us for guns and shit 'cause there's been a lot of shootings in the area."

"Wait, where you from again?" I interjected.

"Crown Heights."

"Oh, yeah."

"So, yeah, my boy with his dumb ass was about to go off on him, but I was like, 'Yo, none of us have any weapons,' but the guy wouldn't listen. Now someone like me knows my rights—I go to rallies and stuff like that so I know what's up. I will not answer any questions unless I have a lawyer present. That's just how I was brought up."

"So, what'd he do?"

"I just told him I was a college student and I wasn't about that life."

"And he just left y'all alone?"

“Surprisingly, yeah. I mean, I understand that certain measures are necessary but removing the source of the power is the only way for anything to change.”

Darius Simmons, 13

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 2012

“... ”

One fatal shot to the chest at close range. After accusing Simmons of breaking into his house and stealing four shotguns, a seventy-six-year-old man shot and killed the boy in front of his mother. Simmons was in school at the time of the robbery. His shooter: John Henry Spooner has been sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole. He was not an officer of the law.

The summer of 2010 was rather memorable for many reasons. I was a long way from home, visiting my grandparents in Houston. I hadn't been there since I was three years old, and my father thought that it would be a good way to get rid of me for the summer. At the time I was a young optimistic fourteen-year-old, just discovering his place in the world. From Houston, I had to take a bus by myself to Louisiana where I was to stay with my uncle who I also hadn't seen for years. It was a rather chilling experience, since I was pretty far out of my comfort zone. It also didn't help much that I was making this venture on my own.

Kimani Gray, 16

Brooklyn, New York, March 9, 2013

“Please don't let me die.”

Several shots fired. Allegedly armed sixteen-year-old faces off with NYPD officers and is fatally shot. Upon breaking off from a group of friends, Gray was confronted by the two officers who witnessed him fidgeting with his waistline and claimed that he pulled a gun on them but didn't shoot. They responded by filling him with holes, though eyewitnesses claim that Gray was running for his life. His shooters were excused of all charges and the case was never brought before a grand jury.

For whatever reason, the bus had come to a complete stop in what looked like a small parking lot devoid of white or yellow lines. I paid no attention to the exchange that occurred in the front of the bus as I had my headphones on and was blasting Eminem. I did, however, notice the passengers in the right

row across from mine give all their attention to the flashing lights outside their window and to whomever was speaking up front. Not even a minute later, a German shepherd led what looked like a police officer throughout the entirety of the coach bus from the front to the back and then back to the front again, all the while sniffing profusely. On his return trip though, he decided to hang around my row for a minute. His alert eyes locked onto mine for a brief moment and I felt an alarming sensation rush through my body as the dog simply stood there.

Jonathan Ferrell, 24 Charlotte, North Carolina, September 14, 2013

“ ... ”

Ten shots. Unarmed college football player was shot by a police officer while seeking help following a car crash. Ferrell didn't have time to explain. The wreck was so bad that he had to climb out of the back window and stumble to the nearest house for help. Upon seeing Ferrell and hearing the banging and pleads for help, the homeowner proceeded to notify the police of a home invasion. His shooter: Randall Kerrick was arrested and charged with voluntary manslaughter.

The dog crept closer and sniffed my feet and the empty seat beside me somewhat nonchalantly for what seemed like an eternity. He didn't growl. He didn't show his teeth. He didn't bark. There wasn't really any general fear on my part, but I had to slightly hold myself back from petting his deep black and brown coat. Soon after he lost interest, his uniformed handler led him back down the aisle and out of the bus. Moments later, an officer drenched in forest green marched down to my row and barked at me, advising that I quietly step off the bus. Now completely frightened, I grabbed my bag and scurried down the aisle, my predator in tow and the accusing, yet intrigued eyes of my fellow passengers watching my every step.

I exited the bus to see two Border Patrol vehicles with their lights ablaze. Scattered among them were about five patrol officers, the German shepherd, and the bus driver having what seemed like a very distressing conversation with one of the officers. Another officer, who looked like some kind of deputy, proceeded to manhandle my luggage onto the ground as if it was being detained. My predator had finally emerged from the bus and guided me to its side. The onlookers continued to peer through the windows but their focus shifted to me all at once. I could feel the holes being bored through me. After

looking me up and down from nappy head to worn-out Jordans, he began to speak. He was the spitting image of Hank Schrader from *Breaking Bad*—short, stout, and bald with limousine tinted sunglasses and a deep burly voice that made him seem all the more intimidating. He spoke with the kind of authority that led me to assume that he was the chief.

John Crawford, 22

Beavercreek, Ohio, August 5, 2014

"It's not real."

Two shots. He was on the phone with his mother when he was shot by police in an Ohio Walmart. Police said he didn't follow commands to put down a toy rifle he'd picked up in the store. A Walmart employee saw Crawford walking around with the air pump gun (a product sold by the store), got alarmed and proceeded to call 911. The state of Ohio has an open carry gun law. His shooters: Officer Williams and Sergeant Darkow were placed on administrative leave.

"Spread ya arms and legs."

I obeyed and let him pat me down. This may have been the first time someone besides me grabbed my genitals with so much purpose. Pretending as if he had not just touched a prepubescent boy's penis, the officer casually carried on with his questioning.

"Where ya headed?"

"My uncle's house. My sister lives with him and my aunt." This was before I'd received "the talk," so I gave him any and all information pertaining to where I was going, where I had come from, and even where I was born.

"Oh really?"

"Yea."

"Yea, I bet," the deputy said, as he ruffled through my backpack, spilling all its contents onto the scorching July gravel.

At least I knew to stay silent then.

"Where ya from?" the chief continued.

"Houston."

"Psh, get outta here!" he blurted, not in an authoritative accusatory way, but more like a good friend would if you told them you'd kissed the prettiest girl in school.

"It's true, though."

"Well, prove it, boy. Let's see some I.D."

In response I pulled out my wallet from my back pocket, took out my I.D. and handed it to him.

“Well, ain’t that a bitch!” he cheerfully yelled.

“Told ya.” At this point, I think he realized just how old I was from my I.D. because he kept glancing back and forth between me and the card like he was in slight disbelief.

“Sorry for the confusion. The dog told us there was weed on the bus. Must’a made a mistake,” he confessed rather gleefully.

Ignoring the fact that he just told me that his German shepherd had the ability to speak the English language, I simply chuckled and told him not to worry about it.

“Pick up ya stuff, and head on back on the bus.”

I didn’t think anything of this encounter at the time or later when I got to my uncle’s house. I didn’t even tell him what had happened. I kept telling myself that they were simply doing their job, and I brushed the whole experience back to the recesses of my mind. The fact that I had never touched marijuana a day in my life before that was probably just a simple misunderstanding. The fact that they didn’t even find any weed on the bus at all was probably also that, a simple misunderstanding. Or so I’d like to believe. They always see your skin first before anything else. It’s a good thing that I was born in Houston.

Michael Brown, 18

Ferguson, Missouri, August 9, 2014

“I don’t have a gun. Stop shooting.”

Six shots including two in the head. Unarmed and stopped for jaywalking, a young Michael Brown was shot by a police officer while on his way to visit his grandmother, two days before he was set to begin classes at Vatterott College. Police later claimed that Brown had stolen cigars from a nearby store. Security camera footage showed Michael paying for cigarillos and the store owner stated that he never reported any robbery. His shooter: Darren Wilson is on paid leave and has received tens of thousands of dollars from a fundraiser in his name.

“At what age is a black boy when he learns he’s scary?”

Jonathan Lethem, The Fortress of Solitude

ROBIN MENDOZA

70mm

I wake up to a clap of new summer heat
and an indigo sky with orange-gold belts.
This weekend we're staying at a schoolhouse
powered by a dam. The city is rowdy
because of some holiday, so we walk the long way back,
through a Jewish cemetery and along the canal,
avoiding main roads, which takes us essentially
the whole afternoon.



Effervescent, Laura Golden

Lip Prints: Fuse My Genes With Fish Scales

You are a matryoshka half, a hull, under my ribs—
I built your portrait with red

kisses. Pink flowers
your hairline—my vermilion borders overlap,

they blend smooth. I color your curls
ombre. I could never melt enough crayons,

whirl them with petroleum to make the right shade
for your irises. I purple them

instead with puckered burgundy. I blot dark
rouge in the cove, once beating, now flat

between your clavicle & neck. I could scoop you out
like a grapefruit, pack pulp between my rolled tongue,

place my head in your concave rind. Your fingers rest
on my hips like the rhythm of splashing water.

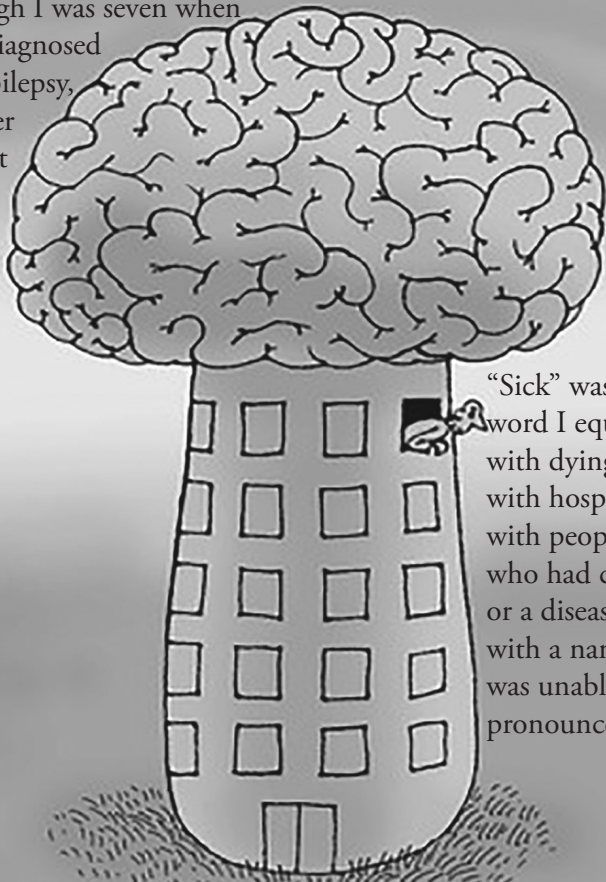
KATHRYN WARING

Open Diary

In sixth grade, I became obsessed with reading my older sister's diary. On the days she stayed after school, I'd sneak into the room we shared and rustle through the space separating her top bunk from the wall until, finally, I'd slide my hand against the hard pink and gray cover of the book. The first time I did this, I read that she thought I was sick, that there was something wrong with my brain, and that's why our parents sometimes paid more attention to me.

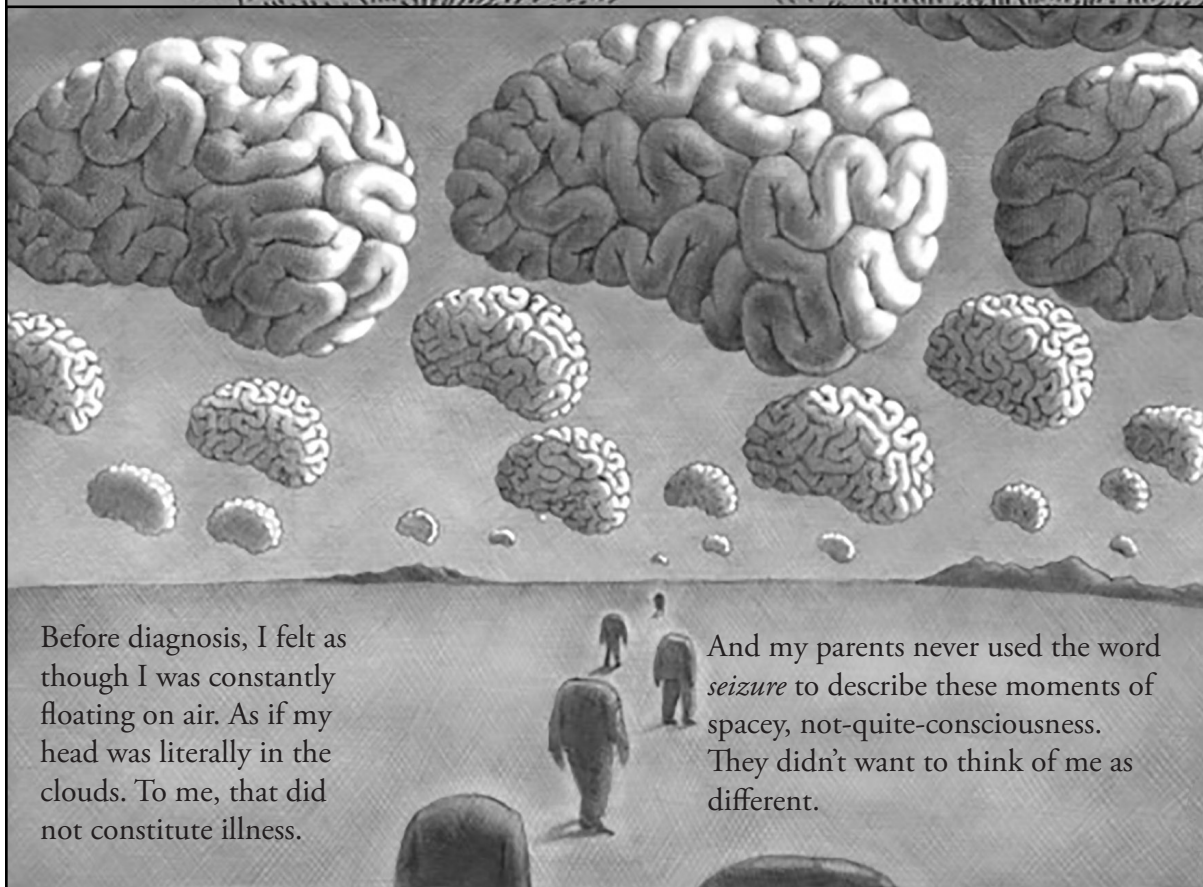


Although I was seven when
I was diagnosed
with epilepsy,
I'd never
thought
of
myself
as sick.



I was not sick.

"Sick" was a
word I equated
with dying,
with hospitals,
with people
who had cancer
or a disease
with a name I
was unable to
pronounce.



Before diagnosis, I felt as
though I was constantly
floating on air. As if my
head was literally in the
clouds. To me, that did
not constitute illness.

And my parents never used the word
seizure to describe these moments of
spacey, not-quite-consciousness.
They didn't want to think of me as
different.

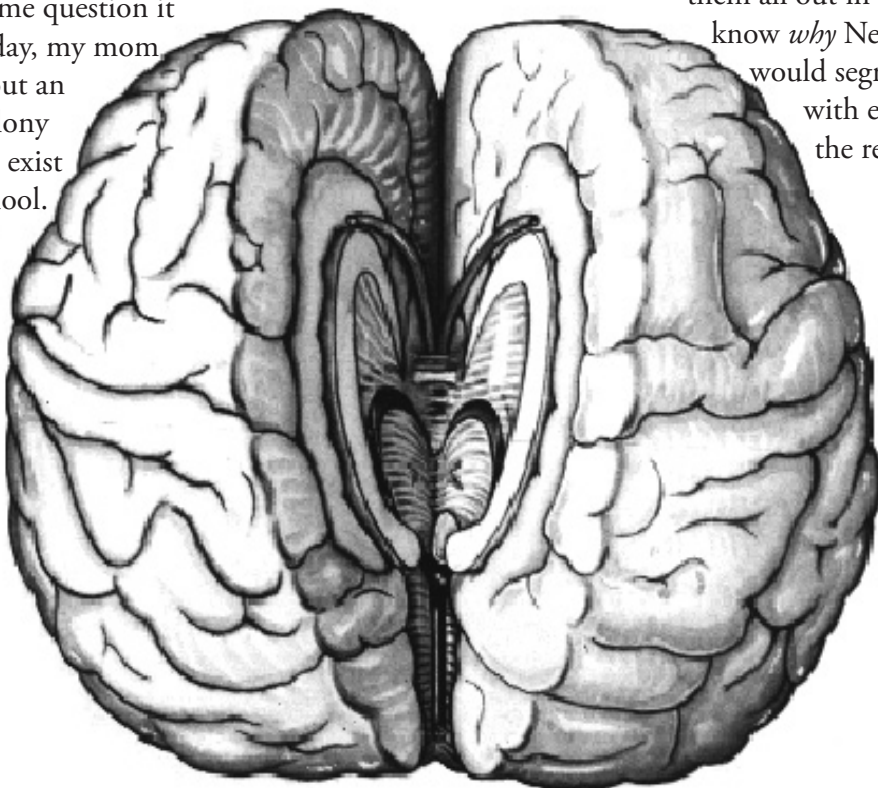
So when my sister said I was sick, I kept reading. Every chance I got, I would sneak into our room and find her diary. So that there would be no secrets.



Nothing hidden.

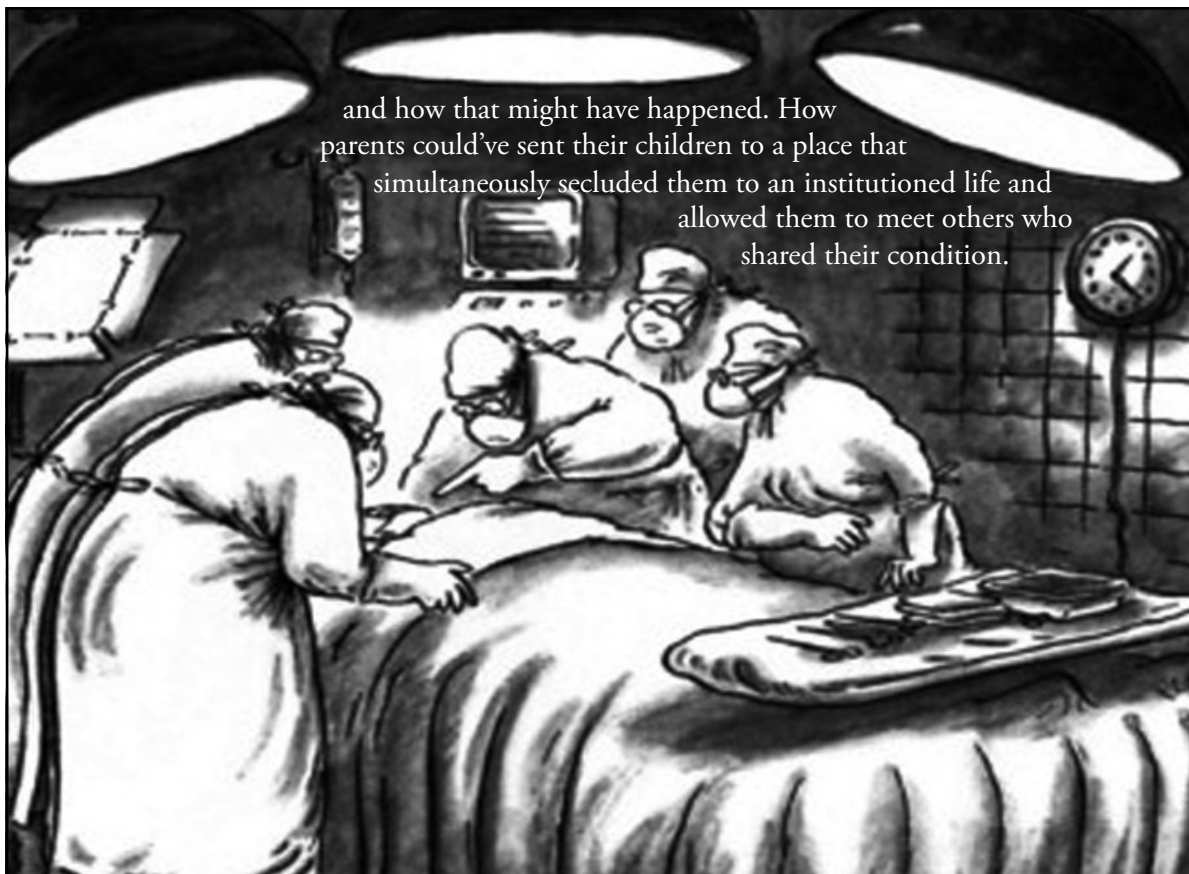
I wanted to be as open as possible.

And perhaps that openness is what made me question it when, one day, my mom told me about an epileptic colony that used to exist near my school.



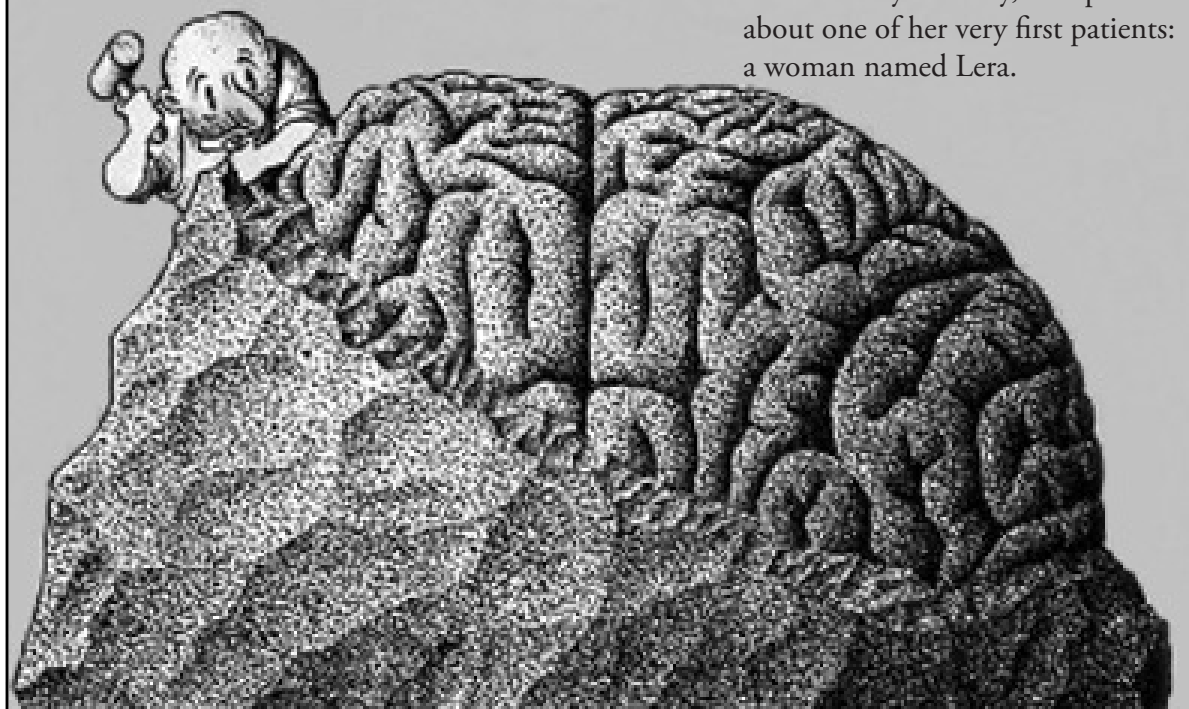
I needed to know the facts, to have them all out in the open. To know *why* New York State would segregate people with epilepsy from the rest of society,

and how that might have happened. How parents could've sent their children to a place that simultaneously secluded them to an institutional life and allowed them to meet others who shared their condition.



So I found a nurse who used to work at the colony and interviewed her.

And although she couldn't tell me much about the whys or hows of the colony's history, she spoke about one of her very first patients: a woman named Lera.



Lera's husband admitted her to Craig Colony after she developed a seizure disorder, the result of a tumor in her brain.

The doctors at the colony thought relieving some of the pressure would rid her of the seizures, so they removed the top of her skull.

When the nurse started at the colony a decade later, she noticed Lera had a dip in her skull that was so soft, she could feel the brain.

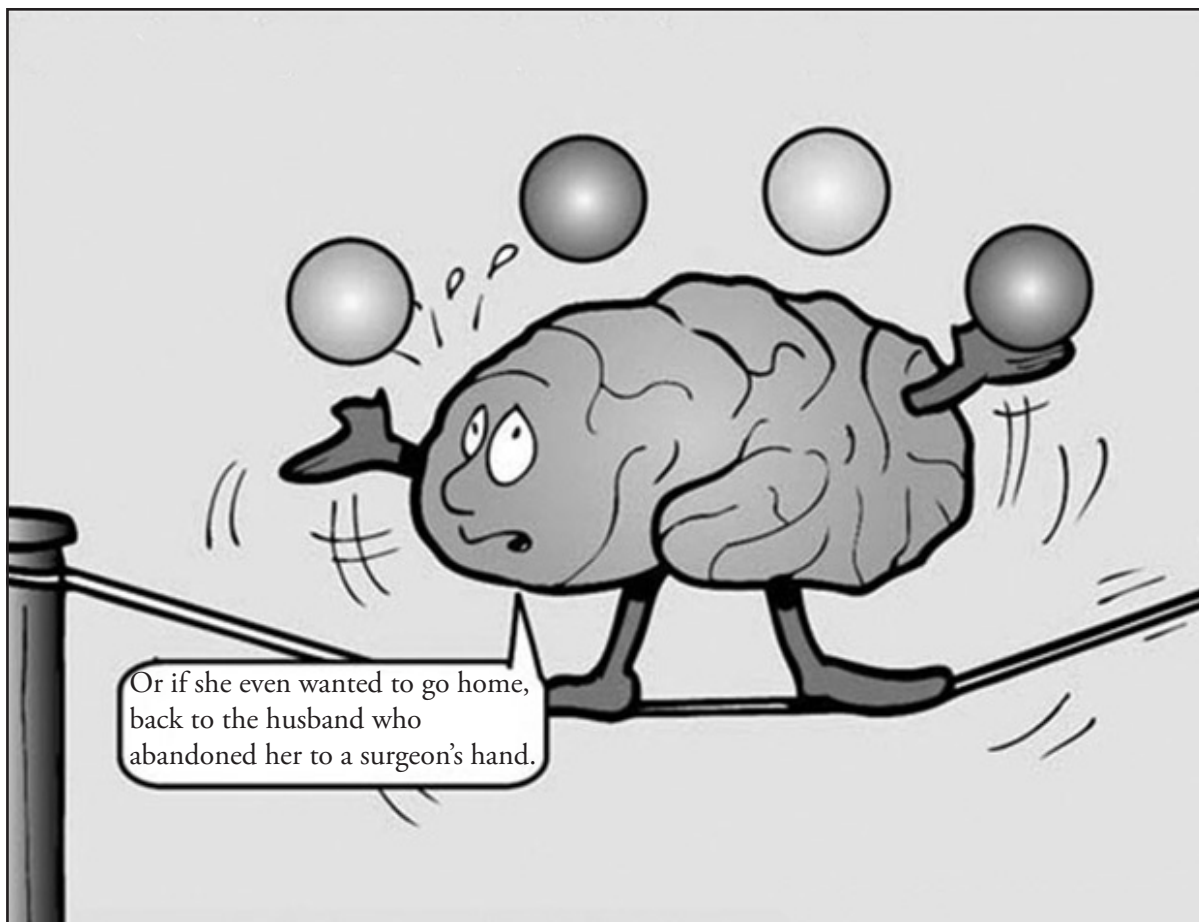


And I wondered:

If it was just chance that the doctors prevented her skull from cracking like an egg.

If knife scraped against bone when it began.

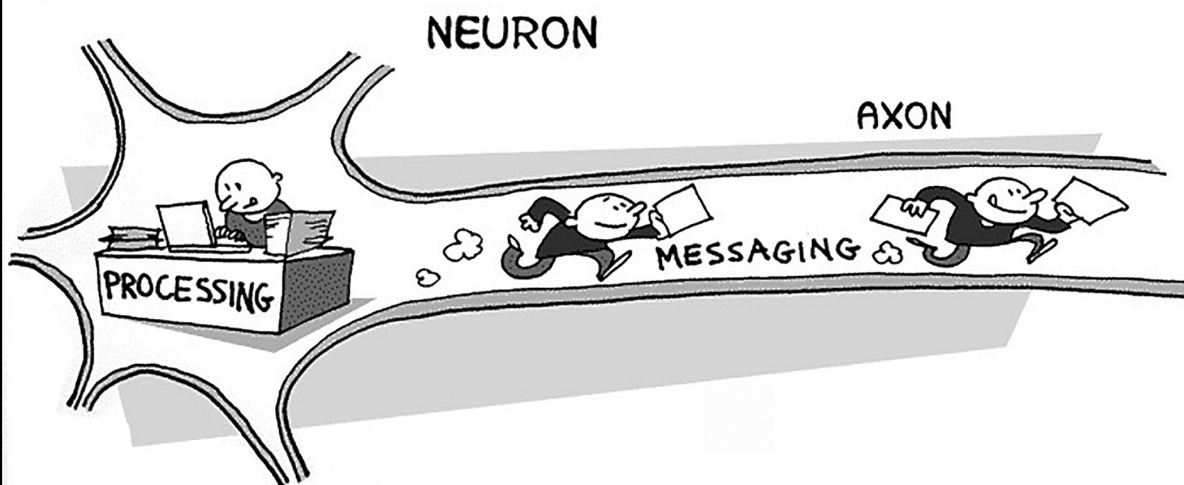




And even though I was never subject
to surgery like Lera,

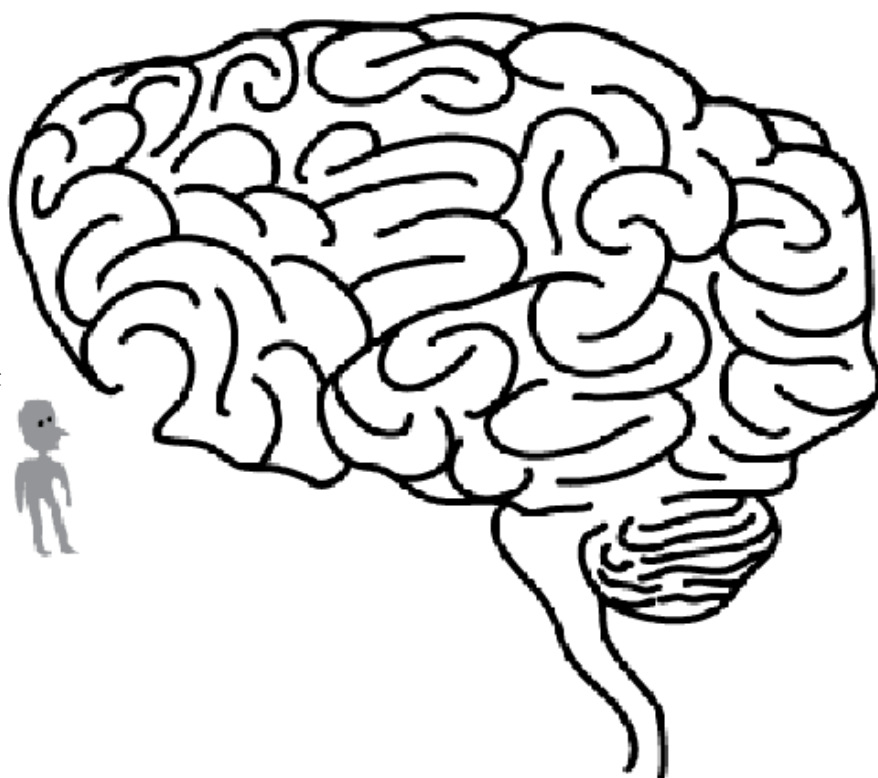


I felt like I could relate to her
on some small level



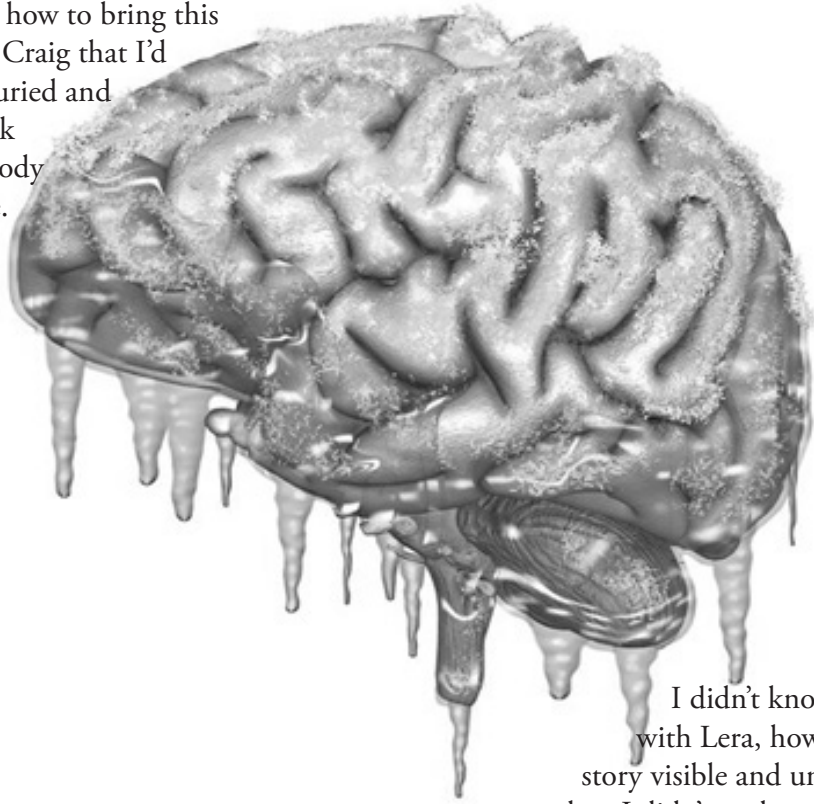
because we both had bodies
operating outside our control.

So I kept searching.
And though I didn't
find anything else
about Lera, I
learned that Craig
Colony opened in
1896, that it stayed
open through the
1980s, that it had
a history steeped
in Nazi policy and
American eugenics.

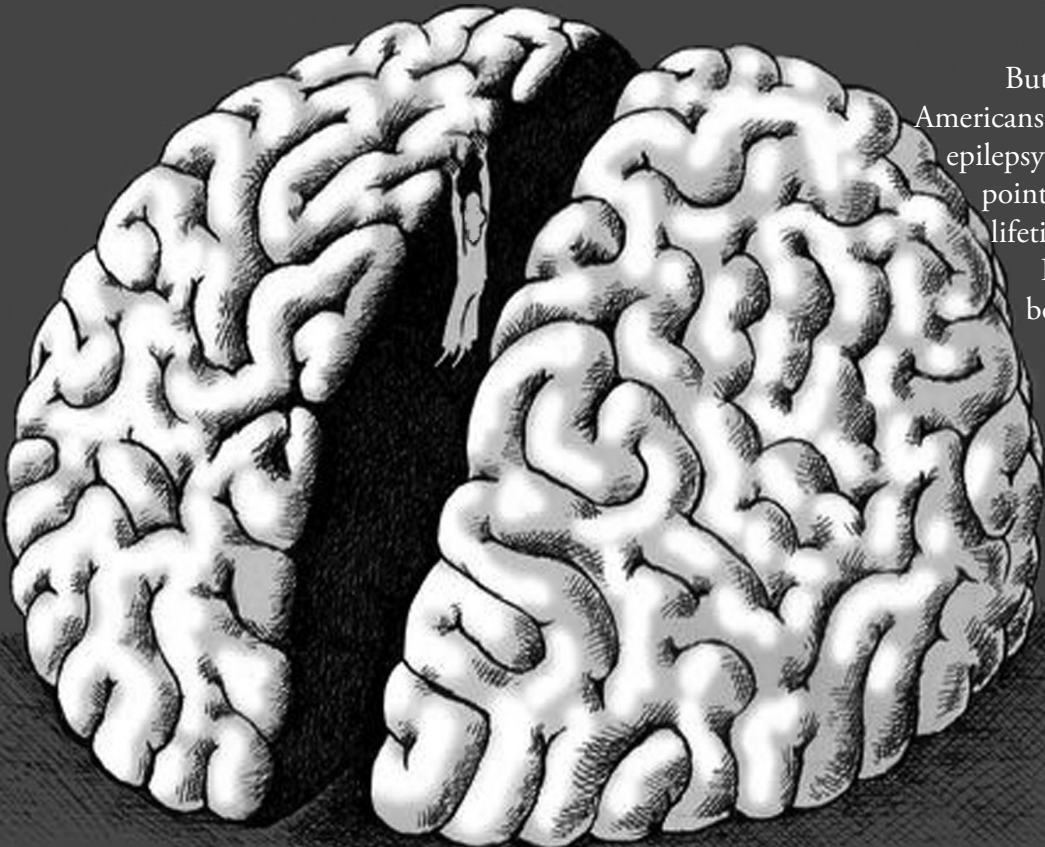


And I realized: if I'd been born a few decades earlier,
I could've ended up in Craig.

And I didn't know what to do with this knowledge, how to bring this information on Craig that I'd absorbed and buried and internalized back outside of my body for others to see.



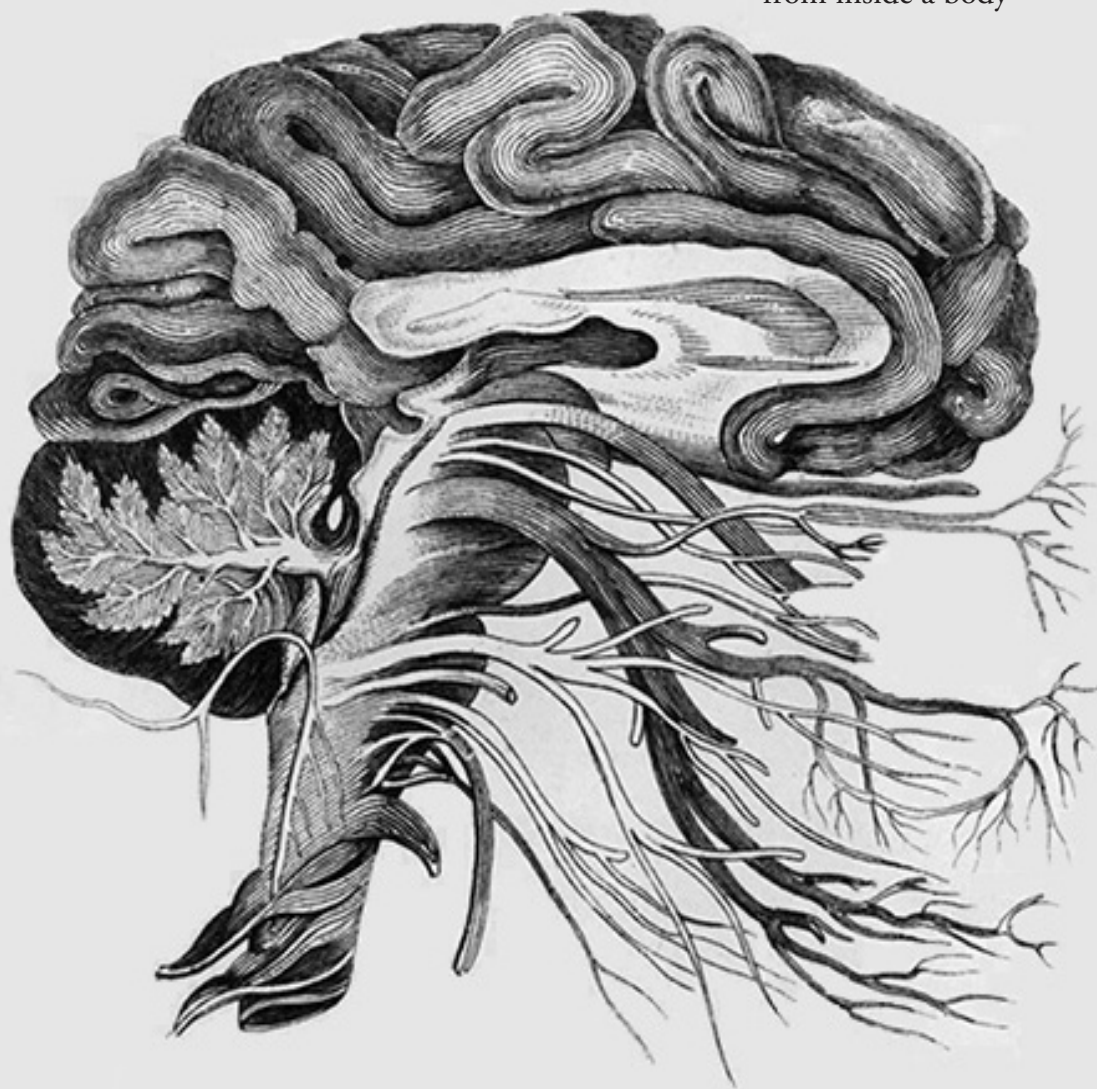
I didn't know what to do with Lera, how to make her story visible and understandable when I didn't understand it myself.



But 1 in 26 Americans develop epilepsy at some point in their lifetime, and Lera was born only decades before you and me

and we are all forced to experience life

from inside a body



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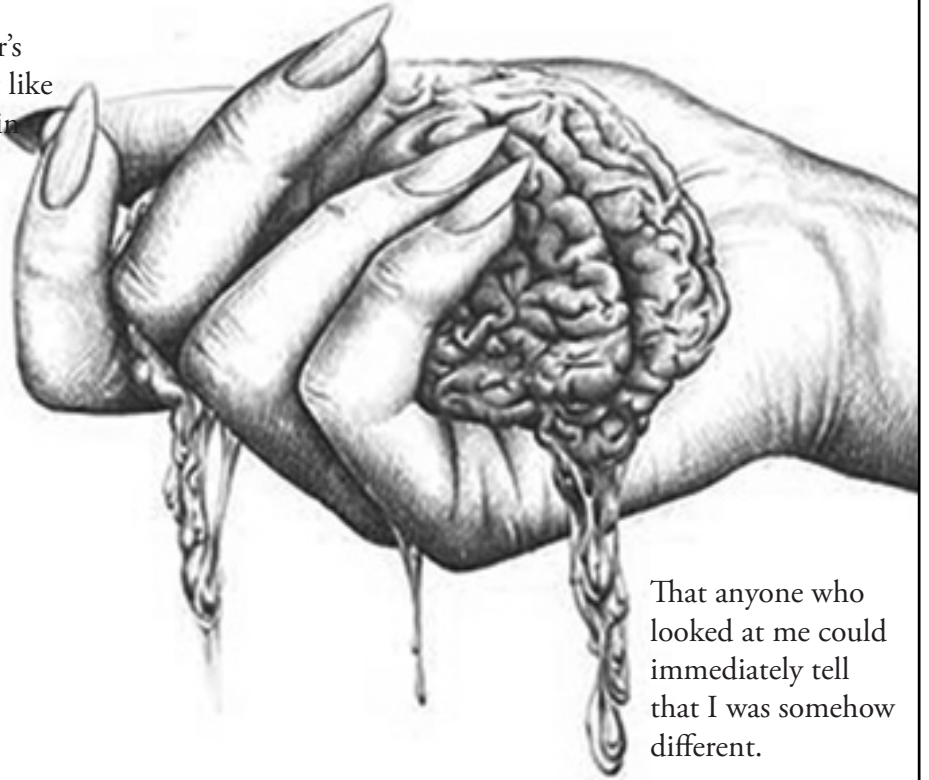
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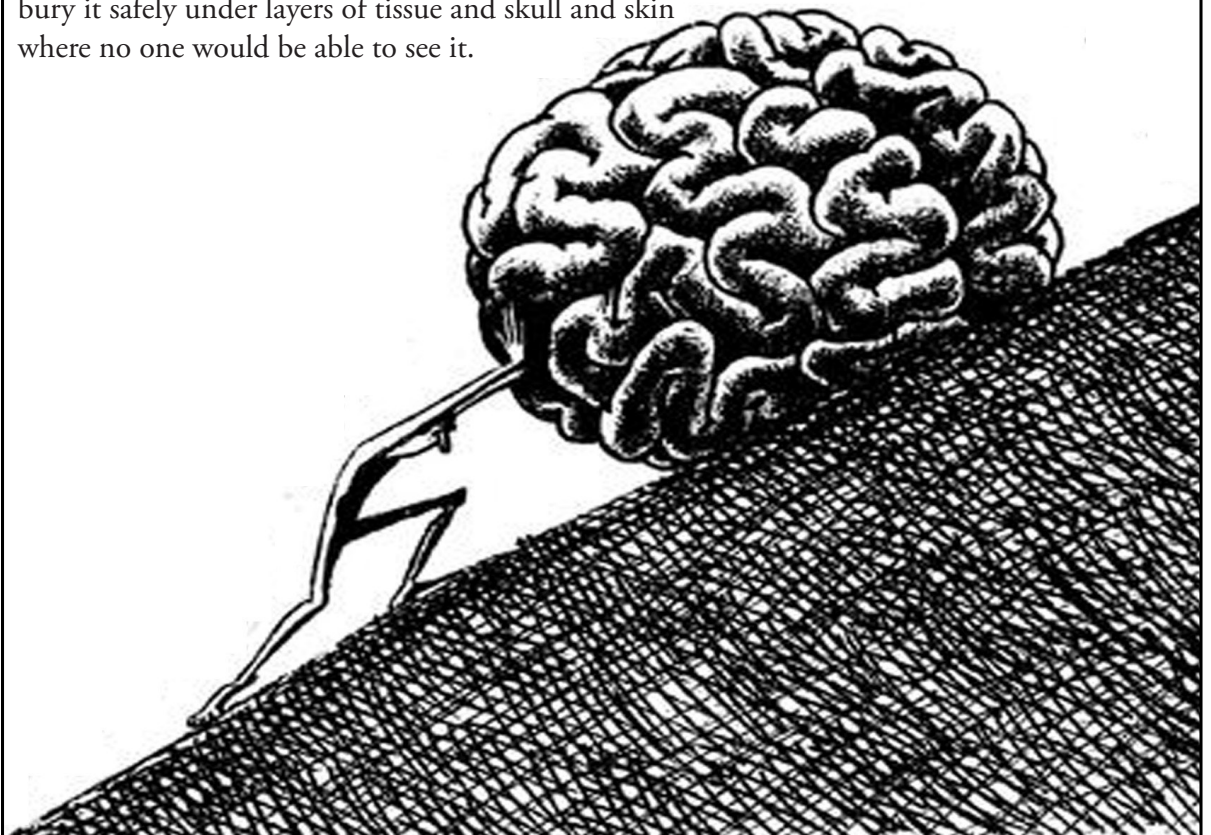
suddenly, and without
explanation.

After reading my sister's diary, I sometimes felt like I was carrying my brain around in my hand.

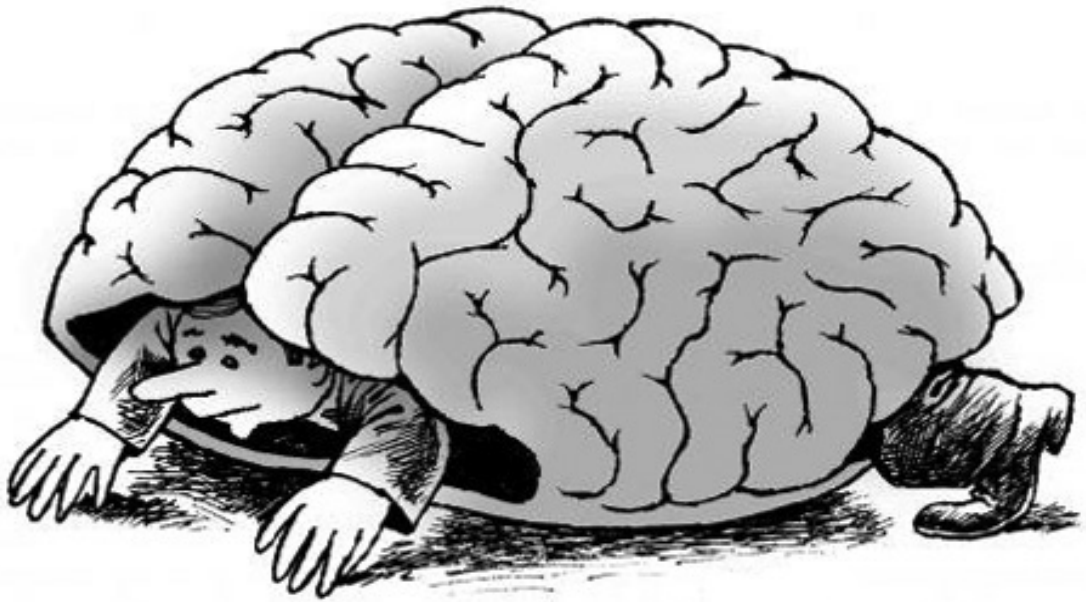


That anyone who looked at me could immediately tell that I was somehow different.

And, because of this, I wanted to pack my brain away, bury it safely under layers of tissue and skull and skin where no one would be able to see it.



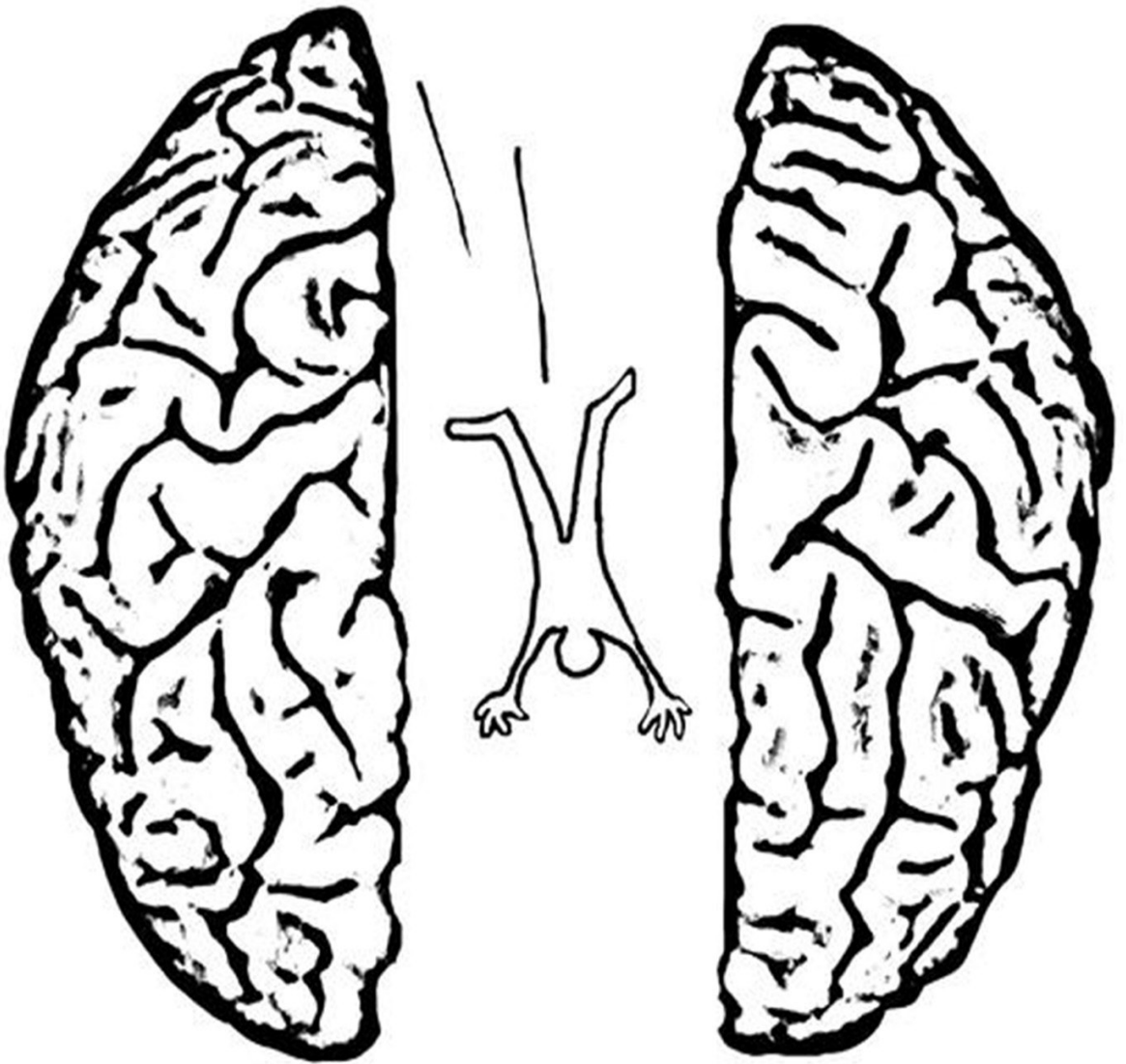
But after years of trying to hide,



I realized it's not possible to burrow
our differences away.



After all, we're all just bodies in constant states of repair



slowly opening to the world around us.

OLIVER DIAZ

A Drop Left

There are two kinds of people who wear bathrobes to pick up the paper in the morning, and Mark was the kind that got laid off.

Upstairs in his three-room apartment, a faulty ceiling fan hummed. He poured coffee into the mug his mother had left him. He got cream from the fridge—a drop left. When his mother visited she used to clean up and clear things out. Now, the cream nearly empty, Mark decided to take a walk.

On his way out, he passed his neighbor, an older gentleman, who was gathering his morning paper.

“Morning, Mark,” he said. “Figured out how you’ll pay the rent yet? Don’t forget, Roger’s coming around later.”

“I know.”

“Well, best figure something out.”

The corner deli was empty except for the man behind the counter reading the paper. Mark walked to the back and got a half carton of cream. A small TV glowed on a shelf behind the counter. The news anchor spoke, “Young man found dead in apartment fire—more at two.”

The man behind the counter said, “\$2.29,” without looking up.

Mark looked at the carton. He returned it to the cooler and approached the counter again, this time pointing at the lottery tickets.

He walked back down the street, up the stairs to his apartment. Mark reheated his coffee and the crooked fan idled above him. He thumbed the scratched card in his free hand and drank his coffee black. There was a knock on the door.



Tree Trails, Jason Zimmermann

MARGARET THON

The Ballad of Summer '72

Dewey met Dawn exactly one month after he became a graduate of Coburg High School and exactly two weeks after becoming a full time employee of the creamery in Springfield.

She rolled into town with suede boots up to her knees, shorts up to her belly button, and a white collared blouse tucked neatly in. His best friend Peter hadn't warned him about her arrival. Why would he? She was Peter's cousin from Seattle and her divorcing parents wanted her to spend time in the Oregon countryside for the summer, away from the city, away from the mess of ending a twenty-year marriage. The city burst from her like her round breasts burst out between the buttons of her blouse. That first day, Dewey sat on Peter's orange loveseat, and listened to her sing-song voice jabber away about everything he had never heard about before in Coburg.

"Have you listened to the new Pink Floyd album yet?" Dawn asked. Dewey knew the band, but didn't care to keep up with their album releases. Music didn't really interest him all that much. "Oh come on, man, you've got to! It's gotta be their best one yet!" She released an exasperated breath. Her teeth were so straight, and her pale thighs were porcelain against the eggplant armchair. Dewey wished he had changed from his work boots and sweat-stiff T-shirt before coming over to Peter's house. He searched his brain, desperately trying to think of something interesting to say to Dawn.

"I work at a creamery. We make yogurt." The words tumbled from his mouth, having nothing to do with the latest music trends, and causing heat to rush from his toes to his eyebrows.

"Nice one, tomato face," Peter whispered low enough for only Dewey to hear.

"Ooooooh." Dawn opened her eyes wide. "That is so awesome. I love yogurt. Seriously, it seems like that's all I eat now. I've been a vegetarian for two weeks. I read some article in *Mother Earth News* and it talked about all the shit meat production does to the environment and all the people who are starving that could be fed using the land we keep cattle on."

Dewey ran his fingers nervously through his greasy brown hair—he didn't know how to respond. How was she filled with so much knowledge? He felt like he knew so little.

"Yeah, yeah, I thought about doing that once," Dewey lied.

"No, you have NOT, you had a triple-dog-hot-dog at dinner last night." Peter rattled Dewey out.

Dawn just smiled, ignoring her cousin. "Well, I could give you some pointers if you wanted to try again."

Dewey realized she was the kind of girl who always knew what to say.

"I'd like that." His green eyes locked with her brown ones, and Dewey swore they could hear his heart beating all the way to the silent monasteries of India.

"So what're you boys doing tomorrow night? It is Saturday, after all." Dawn raised her eyebrows mischievously.

"Uh, drinking some beers. Maybe having a fire out back by the barn," Peter responded. Dewey and Peter had been taking every chance they got to enjoy the summer—the risk of getting drafted was always in the back of Dewey's mind, but never discussed. Dewey felt as if they had an unspoken agreement; if one of them got sent, the other would go too. That was just the kind of friends they were.

"Fire, yes. Beers, nah. I've got a better idea."

The first time Dawn kissed Dewey, he was high on her Seattle peyote, and the willow tree he was standing under looked like it was part of a comic book. His fingers tangled themselves desperately in her blonde ponytail, each individual strand becoming its own spaghetti entity on his sweaty skin. His eyes widened as her cubic face moved toward him and her pillow lips grazed his sandpaper ones. A few feet away, the fire crackled to the beat of Dewey's heart, and Peter was staring at the ground, captivated by the movement of his tennis shoe in the dirt.

"I like you, Dewey, even though you've got a silly name. It's like a nickname you'd give your friend who is always doing something. Or do you just have a perpetual sheen of morning dew on you?" Dawn's words sounded mish-mashed to Dewey, and the flames of the fire framed her body, creating a soft cocoon around her and making her pale skin glow.

"It's my grandpa's name, and I like you too, Dawn." This time Dewey glued his lips to hers, wishing the adhesive was permanent. Maybe it was the drugs, or maybe it was Jimi Hendrix's staticky solo on the transistor radio in the background, but in that moment Dewey knew Dawn Montgomery was definitely going to be his girl.

Every day after work, Dewey would speed to Peter's house on his bicycle, straight out of the city of Springfield and into Coburg's rolling fields of corn and looming red silos reaching for the sky. He would run into Peter's house to call his grandma and tell her he would be home late. His fingertips still ripe with the scent of sour milk, he would walk hand in hand with Dawn, around the quaint dairy farm. They never had a destination, until the day they found the small knoll in the woods behind the barn. They would lay down, letting the sun warm their bodies and the grass tickle them through their shirts, their hands always finding the neck or arm or thigh of the other. The sugary aroma of the flowers filled their nostrils and the KWRS station on Dawn's radio whispered tunes that Dewey had never heard.

Dewey couldn't get enough of talking to Dawn. Words flowed from his mouth as easily as the honey yogurt at the creamery stirred in the big silver vat. She told him she wanted to go to college after she graduated next year, and he told her about his dream to partner up with Peter and make the dairy farm into a state-wide business. Her nose scrunched at their plan—he should go to school and get a business degree, plus the farm was way better off staying local and homegrown, she said. Dewey shrugged it off, telling her that he had known since the sixth grade that college wasn't for him. His grandma barely made enough money as a secretary to support the two of them, even with his full-time job, let alone pay for school. Dawn suggested he pick up more hours and save, and then they could go to Oregon State together in a year. He nodded, even though he knew he would never be smart enough to get in.

Nonetheless, on the Monday following the conversation about their futures, Dewey walked into the creamery with a mission. As he entered the cool building, the early August sweat on his face began to dry. He mazed his way through the stainless steel mixers, the refrigeration systems, and his coworkers

before arriving at his labeling station. He straightened the pile of white labels with maroon print and immediately began gluing them to the plastic cups.

"Off to an early start this morning, Dewey." The shift manager placed his hand on Dewey's shoulder.

"Hey, Mr. Brown, I was wondering if I could pick up a few shifts here or there? I'm trying to save." Dewey looked up eagerly at his six-foot-three manager.

"I don't know, Dewey. You already work forty hour weeks," Mr. Brown said.

Dewey picked at the pile of labels in front of him. "Please." Dewey could only think about Dawn—and her hopes for him.

"You didn't hear this from me, but the creamery isn't doing so well. We're deciding who to let off—you being a new employee isn't really in your favor right now, Dewey."

"What can I do?" Dewey asked. He would have to start looking for a second job tomorrow. Maybe Peter's dad would hire him part time; he could do odd jobs around the farm.

"Actually, maybe there is something you can do. There's a big band coming to town. The owners know them, I guess, and they're coming here to play a benefit. They've got a huge following or something. Said they want to help save a local business—it's what they stand for or something. Anyway, tell your friends, and buy some tickets. This is really the creamery's last chance."

"I'll take three."

The first time Dewey brought Dawn home to meet his grandmother, he was even more nervous than when he was a participant in Coburg's fifth annual third grade spelling bee. He was hoping this case of the nerves wouldn't impact him as much as when he was eight, as he had had to run out the gym and throw up in the bathroom before he had even spelled out one word.

Dewey tried to squash the churning in his stomach with his fist as he walked into the living room. He had already put away his blanket and pillow—he didn't want Dawn to know his bedroom was their living room as well. Dewey had already told Dawn about his house but she hadn't actually faced the situation yet. The once fluffed brown carpet was worn down flat, the upholstery on the chair and couch was frayed, and their small kitchen was littered with pill bottles—evidence of his grandma's age. In her younger years, she had kept the house in tip-top shape, making its small size seem insignificant. Nowadays, his grandmother's fading health and full-time job made housekeeping too large of a task at the end of the day. One day, Dewey knew he would buy his grandmother the nice home that she deserved to retire in, with floral furniture and a big window to set her chair by.

"When's she getting here, Dewey?" His grandmother asked. "The chili's going to get cold." His grandmother's opinion of Dawn was yet another worry of the night. He glanced out the window, his foot tapping repetitively on the floor.

"Soon, Grandma, soon. Be nice to her, okay? I really like this girl."

"Really liking a girl at your age is trouble." His grandma frowned. She had been strict with him growing up, but fair. She'd been stuck with him ever since his mom, her daughter, died in childbirth, and his dad skipped out of town a year later. Dewey knew he was lucky to have her. His hands flushed with sweat when he heard the doorbell ring. He leaped from the chair, wanting to get to the door before his grandma.

"Hey, Dawn!" He sounded overly enthused for having seen her only an hour before. She scrunched her eyebrows in a look that said he was acting weird.

"Hi, Mrs. Douglas, it's so nice to finally meet you. Dewey has only ever had great things to say about you." Dawn towered over his grandma as she hugged her.

His grandma put a hand to her chest, laughing, "Oh, now does he? I guess he failed to mention my reaction to the time the neighbors caught him leaving a paper bag of cow poo on their doorstep for the next innocent victim?"

"Did he really do that? What an awful child. He deserved every bit of punishment for that one." Dawn laughed as Dewey's grandma led her by the shoulders into the kitchen. Dawn turned her head back to Dewey, winked, and mouthed, "I got this."

And for the rest of the night, Dawn did have it. He could barely get a word in edgewise while the two women in his life, old and new, chattered away.

"I don't think I like them all that much," Peter said, looking skeptically at the ticket before shoving it back into his pocket and picking up a rake.

"C'mon, you can't miss out on these guys. They are so far out!" Dewey shoveled a pile of manure into the heaping wheelbarrow. Peter's dad had agreed to hire him in the afternoons after all. It was the first time he had really hung out with Peter since Dawn had arrived.

"Dawn told you all that, didn't she? You've never even listened to them, have you?" Peter asked.

"Well, not really. But they are cool. And this will help the creamery! C'mon, man, we're like blood brothers and you need to help a brother out," Dewey begged.

"I guess I owe them something for all the milk they supplied me in elementary school," Peter said scratching his head. "I'll go, but don't expect me to stand around and watch you throw yourself at Dawn the whole time. She's just a flirt, stringing you along for the summer." Peter had stopped raking out the hay and grabbed Dewey's shoulder.

"I just think she's so...perfect. I think she might be—"

Peter's arm fell back to his side. "Shit, man. Don't even say it. Dawn is not the girl you're going to marry. She's here for the summer and that will be fun, but after that she's off to senior year and then college. She's always had big plans. Not to mention, she has plenty of dudes falling over her in Seattle, I'm sure. Ones that are going to be lawyers and doctors. Do I have to smack some sense into that thick tomato head?"

"We'll be business men soon, Peter," Dewey said.

"Are you stupid? That's never going to happen, Dewey, that was just us kids talking. For all we know, we're both going to get called up to Vietnam tomorrow. If not, well, I'm going to work on the farm until my dad's back gives out for good, then I'll take over completely. You, you're going to work at the creamery, maybe move through the ranks to shift manager. We aren't going anywhere, Dewey. Got it?"

Dewey nodded, but he didn't get it. Peter's words sounded to him like jealous slurs. Dewey knew that Peter was upset that he was spending so much time with Dawn, and so little with him. He was upset that Dewey's life was coming together so quickly, and his was the one going nowhere. Dewey wasn't going to let Peter's jealousies convince him that his feelings for Dawn were false. He wasn't going to let Peter degrade the dream they had talked about since they were young. The friends worked in silence for the rest of the afternoon, breathing in the potent fumes of cow manure.

When Dewey arrived at Peter's house the day of the benefit concert, sweat was already soaked through his T-shirt, and the late August heat was baking him like a cake in the oven. As he walked up the uneven steps of Peter's house, Dewey wondered if his friend would be joining them. He hadn't seen him since their confrontation in the barn. Before he even got to the door, a twirling Dawn exploded through it and into his arms.

"I am so unbelievably excited for today!" she sang.

"Me too!" Dewey tried to match her enthusiasm as he looked over her shoulder trying to see if Peter was in the foyer.

"But you have no idea how long I've waited to see this band. Oh my, I'm sorry but I would leave you for any one of them. I've missed the Seattle music scene so much."

"Well, we had better get going," Dewey said, distracted and trying not to sound too disappointed that Peter wasn't coming. The pair was halfway down the driveway before Dewey heard the screen door slam.

"How do you chumps expect to get to the concert in this heat?" Peter asked, dangling the keys to his dad's truck. "C'mon, hop in."

The trio arrived at the venue early in order to get the best spot possible. After snaking their way through all of the cars, heat waves rippling off the hoods, they finally found themselves in the sprawling grassy lawn. They were two hours early and already hundreds of people were crowded around the stage. Dewey felt like every time he turned around, the swarm of bodies on the lawn increased and the prevalence of armpits doubled by the minute. The creamery was going to make so much money. Dawn pulled out a Sucrets tin from the pocket of her overalls.

"Hey, give me one of those." Dewey held out his hand. Dawn did not pull a cough drop out of the tin as he expected.

"How about one of these?" She smiled with her eyes as she placed the joint between her lips and expertly struck a match.

"Even better, I suppose."

By the time the band came onstage, Dewey's mouth was as dry as the bota bag of wine they had brought from home. There was no water to be found at the concert, but Dewey didn't care—no one cared. As soon as the guitarist's fingers struck the first chord the entire crowd—Dewey had estimated it was over twenty thousand people by now—began bobbing to the rhythm. Men and women alike had stripped naked, from heat and hazy drugs. Breasts hit off-beats. Bodies bounced off each other creating a slippery sea of skin in front of Dewey. Babies sat high on the shoulders of their ponytail rocking fathers, waving their arms in glee. The singer's easygoing vocals projected across the lawn, filling Dewey's head with a cloud of happiness.

In a few years, Dewey would be reminded of this moment of unadulterated joy as he drove with Peter to Lane Community College to attend their first business class. It was the first time he would hear the song since that day. He would remember Dawn, and how she had left him a week after the show, rolling out as quickly as she had arrived. He'd remember the postcard she'd send him later that year from New York. She had snagged a secretarial position with a top recording company. Dawn never went to Oregon State, Dewey's grandmother died in the summer of 1973, and it had taken him three years at the creamery to save up enough money to take a college course.

"Remember this show, man? Damn. Those were the days," Peter would say.

“Yeah, I remember the sagging hippie you left me for that night.” Dewey would laugh. Peter would punch Dewey in the arm. The pair would drive silently the rest of the way to the campus. Dewey would wonder about what other Dawns life would throw at him.

That day at the concert, with the crooning guitar melody echoing throughout his body, Dewey was utterly content with his life. He turned to his left and grinned. Peter was entranced by the music blasting from the speakers, his arm draped around the shoulders of a woman with a gray-streaked braid plastered to her back and worn-in cowboy boots dancing in the dirt. Dewey turned to his right and grabbed Dawn’s hands. He had never really danced before in his life, but in that moment the music told him exactly what to do. His feet scuffed the dirt beneath them, his arms moved back and forth, tethered to Dawn’s, and his eyes never left hers. Note after note, chord after chord, song after song Dewey danced there with Dawn’s sweaty palms plastered to his.

Before Dewey knew it, the sun had set and the heat of the day had turned into the heat of the night. Dewey’s entire body was buzzing from the music and the high right up until the very last note blasted across the lawn and the mass of bodies began moving towards the parking area. Peter was nowhere to be found, having left with the woman sometime during the second set. And to think he was worried about Dewey ditching him.

“He’ll meet us at the truck,” Dawn said, pulling Dewey’s arm.

The first time Dewey made love to Dawn it was in the back of a rusted blue pickup after the benefit show. The sky was clear, a guitar strummed in the distance—the only reminder of the thousands of others stuck in the parking lot jam for the night. Hay from the truck bed stuck to Dewey’s back, scratching him as Dawn pressed herself down, her corn silk hair curtaining over her face and tickling his chest. It only lasted a few moments, but Dewey and Dawn lay clasped in each other’s sticky embrace for the remainder of the night. Jazzy jams echoed in their minds and their eyelids drooped listlessly, inches apart from each other, neither one wanting to break the contact with sleep. Neither one wanting to think about the decisions they would have to make in the week to come. To leave or to love.



Jodi, Catherine McWilliams

RACHEL BENEWAY

Tap Shoe Memento Mori

*A vision of Carol Falkowitz, distinguished tap dancer
and colorful grandmother.*

Violent slaps ring
off the dining room table's
finished mahogany.

She matches the metal licks
to the bold
in her hips,
and from it a rhythmic clink resurrects
into tune. Eyes sewn
shut; she lets the silver pulse
groove her.
Her cracked skin
and kinked frame feeling
for the days of stages and loud light—
an audience of hazy grins
and grabby eyes watch her
Cincinnati,
Cincinnati
ball-change.
Then, from the crimson-rimmed
hollow that is her mouth,

they'll see, atop
her bubblegummed-tongue, rests
a knotted cherry stem.

Nodding in acceptance
of her lost dew, a
dead peachiness,

she'll insist:

*When I croak—
bury me with nothing but
metal slabs on my feet and a
teacup full of cherries*



Seeds, Rachel Burke

JASON GUISAO

Fish Boy

They seize it from the wooden house at dusk.

 Their grand pigment
 shoving at darker skin. Body-bound and fettered in tarpaulin.
Pubescent sweat and urine pooling in the bed
 of the corroded pick-up. Under a shadow-blanket, they
batter its coffee cheekbones with steely pistols;
 tear the left sleek-sphere from its gaping socket;
 wrap a barbed cable around its burning throat.
 Shoot the nigger above its right ear and cast
 it out into the brook.

The good men find it,
scab-legs emerging from the serpentine river at dawn;
 loose-skin, cheeks overlapping onto puckered lips;
 meaty veins protruding from the socket like stems.
 A silver ring on its index finger.
 A gift from
 Mother.

JASON GUISAO

Anniston, AL

Grampy said: you were a
boy
until you were an uncle.

Grampy said: you were a
nigger
until you were dead.



Bronx, Bridget Kunz

Galatea in Blue

Elsie, on the beach, in a plastic yellow raincoat, soaked in salt water. Arms spread out, face turned toward the pale sun. I can see myself writing it. Sitting with my computer in bed, at work, or in the coffee shop down the street. Her paper skin. Her inky blood. Her curling, adolescent blue hair, bluer than the dreary sky, bluer than the slate gray ocean before her.

“Elsie!” I call out to her. I’m leaning against the hood of my car, arms crossed, eyes narrowed. “We should get back—I can see lightning!”

And I can. When she turns around and looks at me, I can see it in the space behind her eyes. She kicks up wet sand around her.

“Well, I don’t hear anything,” she teases as her hair blows out in front of her, her wet ponytail tangling and whipping around in the salt breeze. The front of her white dress is soaked through and I can see her neon green bra, her soft stomach.

It is all a mistake, really. It is always a mistake to do what Elsie wants. Things like that get people like me in trouble. When I woke up to a text message from her begging me to pull her out of class, I should not have listened. After all, I had been Elsie-free for a month and change. I should not have called in sick to work. I should not have gone to pick her up at her high school, if only to see her run out the front doors looking almost like she’s happy to see me. I should have deleted her name from my phone and rolled over and gone back to sleep and never thought of her again.

But I am too much of an idiot for that. And by ‘that,’ of course, I mean ‘Elsie.’

“I should take you back to school,” I say as we climb back in the car. Rain pounds down on the windshield like a drum. “Don’t you have SATs to study for or something? They must be coming up for you.”

Elsie pinches the front of her wet dress with both hands, looking down through it, and she shakes her head. "I think this violates the dress code. Come on, let's do something fun! You never want to do anything fun with me."

"I should just take you home," I admit, turning the key in the ignition. The engine stutters for a moment before the beat-up minivan comes back to life.

"My mom'll kill me if I come home early looking like this," Elsie whines, hugging her knees to her chest. "She'll scream her head off, David, doesn't that make you sad for me?"

In truth, I'm happy that she's putting up such a fight. I hate to be apart from Elsie, but I also hate having to initiate any interaction with her. It always seems wrong, like seeing a raccoon in the daytime. Fortunately, Elsie is the type who will often show up at one's doorstep unbidden. She's so bright-eyed and innocent. I shouldn't interrupt that.

"Well," I say, chewing my lip for a moment. I don't want to let her go. I have gotten into the habit of milking everything I can out of an Elsie day. "I guess we could just go get something to eat."

Her smile is twisty and young. Her teeth are crooked with a little gap up front, but white and charming. Her wet hair sticks to the back of her neck, brown roots growing long through the blue, down to her ears. The windows match the drapes. Her eyes are brown too. Her spindly fingers with their chipped black nail polish button up the front of her raincoat to conceal her wet dress.

I pull up to a diner and she tumbles out of the car before I can go to open the door for her. I hope the other patrons will think that I'm her older brother. Or, I don't know, her dad's friend or something. It's always hard to go out with Elsie, to feel so many eyes boring into the back of my neck.

"We should go to the mall later," she says over pickles and coleslaw. "Some of the guys want to meet you. And then maybe we can do something else after that. And I need you to buy me a new bowl."

"What happened to your old one?" I ask, wanting to know what had become of my previous investment.

She laughs and goes on to tell a story about some person named "Bones." I can't remember who Bones is, really, but I know he's a member of Elsie's ever-increasing cast of characters. She's behaving as though I know him. She's probably introduced me to him once, pulled poor Bones to the side of a party or a concert or a rave to meet her famous friend. He might be tall, with black hair and even blacker lipstick. Or he could be the one with the bike leathers and the crossed-out tattoo of his ex's face on his shoulder blade. They both seem like they could maybe be called "Bones."

"They love your book," Elsie says. A lot of people love my book. It doesn't mean they understand it.

"Who? Bones?"

She laughs and replies, "No, the guys we're meeting at the mall. Seth and Rainbow and Tyler and all them. They think you're like William fucking Burroughs or something. It's kind of hilarious."

I grin at my waffles and demur, saying, "Well, that's flattering. I'd rather be Jack fucking Kerouac though."

"Rainbow wants to get you to sign her arm. Then she's gonna tattoo it. She's got a collection. She's got all sorts of people."

"People?"

"Autographs."

"Oh."

Elsie laughs again, putting her tongue between her teeth. "She like, jizzed herself when I told her I knew you."

I want to ask her if that was why she had called me this morning, after nearly a month and a half of silence. So that her friends could get my autograph. I don't say anything. I just tip the waitress a little less. It doesn't make me feel any better, but I suppose it was worth a try. Sometimes you have to communicate frustration. But other times, in my opinion, it is more helpful to simply punish the universe around you for the crime of being unhelpful. Unentertaining. Unfulfilling. Get the sunlight to bend toward you instead of having to twist yourself toward it.

The fat waitress waves us off as we head back to my car. Elsie gets in front of me, walking backwards over the cracked asphalt of the parking lot. She squints at my stormy expression.

"What's wrong with you?" she asks.

I skirt around her to unlock my door. "Your friends won't like me," I say. I know I'm falling back on my bad habit of self-pity, but I can't help myself. "I'm not who they think I am. I haven't written anything good since I was like, twenty. I'm a one-hit wonder." If I actually put out what was in my head, they wouldn't even understand it. My mind is a labyrinth, a puzzle box that not even I have the power to solve. No one could even imagine the complexity I possess.

"Oh my God, suck it up," she says, laughing at my expense. "You sound like such a pussy."

"I *am* a pussy," I reply, and I smile in spite of myself.

We don't talk much on the way to the mall. She puts her feet up on my dashboard, and I see that she has drawn all over her faded red sneakers with a ballpoint pen.

She's just a kid.

“What a gross day,” Elsie says. “It was so sunny this morning, too, that’s why I wanted to go down to the shore. Augh, look at the sky.”

I simply nod in response. I don’t look at the sky. I look at the road ahead. It’s getting congested—a mixture of bad weather and the prelude to rush hour. I wish I had stayed in bed for a moment, but Elsie’s presence beside me is comforting. Even though I could never reach across to hold her hand, the physical possibility of interaction with her is good enough.

Elsie’s friends are waiting for us in front of the mall’s movie theatre, right near where we first met each other. The memory makes me smile.

A movie theatre is a temple. It is where we all gather to hold hands and examine our place in the universe. And it is where I go to sleep. My whole life, I’ve never been able to sleep without the television on, and for a long time after they turned my magnum opus into some god-awful romantic comedy, I found myself falling asleep in the back of movie theatres as well. It was like being hypnotized out of hysteria, it was like crying on the subway, it was sleep-catharsis. To say the least, it was a bad habit.

And a gateway drug to Elsie.

I had fallen asleep during an anniversary screening of *Pretty Woman*. I remember her thin, pale hand reaching down to my shoulder and shaking me.

Hey, wake up.

I wondered why she was alone too. Why she was like me. Like a teenaged version of myself that was somehow not horribly depressing. Or horribly embarrassing. I stammered out an apology and she said I could repay her by giving her a ride home. Her father was a cop and he was dead and her mother was a bitch and she was still at work.

I decided to repay her off-putting honesty with a truth of my own. I told her who I was, and she wrote my number on her arm with a pen that she borrowed from me. I hate those numbers. I hate that pen. I love that arm.

One of Elsie’s friends—the short one—scratches his own arm and throws his cigarette to the ground. The girl with red hair grinds it under her toes. The tall one is holding an umbrella.

Elsie introduces us.

The tall one is Seth. The girl is Rainbow. The short one is Tyler. I am David Fallow.

Nice to meet me.

“I can’t believe this!” Rainbow says as we get inside. The mall, a relic from the eighties, is mostly empty of people, even though it’s a stormy day. It’s made of concrete and dirt and linoleum, and it smells like perfume and sweat. “I’ve wanted to meet you like my whole life. I thought you would be older, I don’t know why. Maybe ’cause you wrote a whole book.”

I am old. Too old, that is.

Rainbow is much fatter than I anticipated, not as alluring as the girl that my mind had conjured up: the rainbow spirit who was lithe-limbed and rosy, with a sleeve of names on her arm. The kind of girl I imagined hung out with Elsie.

"I'm, uh, twenty-seven. I wrote the book when I was just a little older than you, actually. That's probably why I've retained my, er, youthful glow."

Rainbow laughs. Elsie doesn't. She's heard this joke before. And she's never even read my book. I wouldn't want her to, anyway.

Elsie is someone to be written about, not someone who should read.

"So what are you working on right now?" Seth asks eagerly. "Is it another book?"

Yes and no. I tend to think of all my interactions with Elsie as "working on another book." But I haven't managed to get much on paper.

"I'm a staff writer for *Ace Crime Bot*. On NBC."

I can see the excitement fade from Rainbow's eyes. I'm not some Aspergian hipster god. I sold out. I'm just like all the rest of them. Fuck, I'm not even the show runner. I'm just a guy who sits with twelve other guys around a table, saying, "Maybe there should be more crimes."

"Do you work in the city?" Tyler asks.

"...Long Island City, actually."

It goes on that way for some hours, with them gradually becoming less and less interested in me until I fade into the background. At one point, Rainbow pulls up her sleeve to show off all the names written all over her arm like spider webs.

"Oh," I say, looking at an autograph on her fat upper arm, pink and bumpy like chicken skin. "I like Zach Braff."

"Yeah," she says, the timbre of her voice becoming bored and far away. All right. I guess she's bored with me. I'm bored with her too.

"So, uh, did you want me to sign it?" I ask, unsure of how she wanted to go about the situation.

She shrugs, which is not very flattering, and says, "Yeah, whatever. Probably later."

Elsie tries on a dress made of blue lace, like her hair. We all admire how it hugs to her slim, perfect body. The sheer sleeves, the gold zipper. One of her red tennis shoes turns in toward the other as she grins at her reflection in the mirror. I watch her soft white hands smooth down her front. She's probably imagining herself older, at a grown-up party, with a glass of wine in hand. She's being hugged to the side of someone smart and attractive. Laughing at his stories. Smiling and listening to what he has to say. Turning her head intimately toward his ear. Everyone else looking at him and envying the smartly-dressed young woman on his arm. Oh, this is Elsie Pierglass. Isn't she charming? Even more charming behind closed doors.

"It's too bad that it's so much money," Rainbow says. "This is why you can't try on shit that's over a hundred."

Elsie nods, saying, "I know," before biting her bottom lip and retreating back into the dressing room. I stand by a display of half-off tees and watch the gap between the door and the carpet. Her small socked feet slip out of her shoes and the dress slides down her body and then her legs before she has to bend and reach a slender, bare arm toward the ground to pick it up again. I set my teeth.

"Shit," I say as we are leaving the store a few minutes later. "I left my keys in there. You guys go ahead, I'll catch up with you in a second."

Elsie waves me off as Tyler and Seth collectively shrug. They don't even notice that I have another shopping bag with me when I catch up with them fifteen minutes later.

I go back and forth over when the best time to give her the dress would be, but I figure that I should do it when we are alone.

That's more special.

"All right," Elsie says, patting my arm and disturbing my train of thought. "Well, I'll see you around, David!"

"Wait, you're going off with them?" I say, and I take a half step toward her. I realize that I'm leaning over her slightly, but that's probably just because of our height difference. "You don't want me to give you a ride?"

Rainbow frowns. I realize that she has never actually asked me to sign her arm.

"I'm fine," Elsie says. She reaches forward to pat my arm, like she's calming down a wild animal. "Seth has a car. So I'm gonna go."

"I, uh, wanted to drive you home, that's all. I just... 'cause I have a surprise for you."

"Well, what is it?" Elsie asks, grinning.

Rainbow rolls her eyes and says "We'll just meet you in the car, Else." She and the two boys make a quick exit. Elsie turns to me, her eyebrows raised.

I hold the bag out to her and she takes the paper loops in both her hands, looking inside.

"...Oh," she says. I had expected her to pull out the dress and twirl around with it hugging the front of her body. Instead she closes the bag and looks up with the sort of sad smile that goes right through me. "Oh, David. You didn't have to...you really didn't have to do this. Um, *why* did you do this?"

"You just, I saw that you liked it so much, but you couldn't, um, afford it. So I bought it for you. It's not a big deal for me, or anything. It's yours. That dress belongs to you, it really does. I didn't want anyone else to, er, to have it."

"Oh, cool. That's...that's very nice of you. I'll, uh, see you around, Dave."

I say goodbye to the back of her head.

I leave the stinking, crowded mall and go to sit behind the wheel of my car. Her scent is sitting heavy in my sinuses. What was this day even supposed to mean, anyway? But then, I suppose it is foolish to look for meaning. We're all goldfish swimming around in circles, bumping our heads against the glass and forgetting what color our mothers' eyes were. My own muse is unruly and frustrating and sixteen years old. Perhaps that's why I haven't been getting any work done lately. It's all thanks to her.

My apartment is dull and dark when I get back. There are dishes in the sink of the kitchenette, and the old cathode-ray television is turned on to QVC, which casts a shaky half-light on my dusty plastic plants and sagging suede couch. There are books and papers carpeting the ground. Author's copies of international releases of my book form an ersatz coffee table. My cat gives an annoyed mewl from atop a pile of magazines. She's probably hungry. I don't love cats, but I like the idea of writers with cats well enough to own one.

"Sorry, Bagel," I mumble under my breath as I feed her before collapsing into bed. I hook my ears up to my laptop and watch *Law & Order* until I fall asleep.

I am awoken hours later by the electric marimba of my phone. I squint at the little rectangle of light and my brow furrows as I see who is calling me.

"Elsie?"

"Listen," she replies. I can hear her voice break, I can hear her sniffing.

I sit up. "What's wrong?"

"Listen, I'm at this party. But I'm...uh...I'm not doing so great. C-can you pick me up? Please? I don't want to be here anymore."

My heart twists as I hear the desperation in her voice. An electric rush goes through my limbs. She really *needs* me.

"Give me the address," I say, rummaging through my papers for a scrap to write it on. "I'll be right there. Don't worry. I'm coming for you." I feel like myself again as I tumble out of bed and out of my apartment, down the dark stairwell to the parking garage. Elsie's voice is ringing in my ears as I skid in my car down cracked suburban roads to stop in front of a little crooked colonial. Light and sound drift out from the windows. At first I think that I will have to go in myself to find Elsie, but then I see a little hunched form sitting on the steps.

She looks up at me as I get out of the car and cross the tangled lawn toward her. Her soft face is smeared with makeup and dried tears. To my surprise, she's wearing the dress—and one of the arms has been torn from shoulder to elbow. I feel heat rush to my face and my fists tense up. It's ruined.

"What happened?" I say, my voice catching in my throat.

"Can we just go?" she whispers, and she grabs my wrist to pull herself to a standing position. She smells like pot and beer and dangles her heels on the fingers of her left hand. "I just need to go. I don't feel good."

She breaks away from me and hobbles into the passenger seat of the car. When I get behind the wheel, I take a deep breath and shake my head.

"I know that something happened," I say, thinking the worst. "Who were you with?"

Elsie stares straight ahead for a moment, before she bends to scrub the heel of her hand across her eyes. "You're not my dad. I don't need to answer to you."

I close my eyes and the lights on the inside of my lids paint a picture of me, vaulting over the center console and crushing her soft pale neck in my hands, slamming her head against the back of the seat. She can be so frustrating sometimes. I breathe out.

"Why aren't we going yet?" Elsie asks. I open my eyes and see her face turned to me, her eyes glassy and questioning. She is the most beautiful thing I have seen in my entire life.

"Elsie..." I say.

She gives a painful sniff and says, "I got in a fight with Rainbow, I think because I was high. I don't know. I feel really sick, David—can we just go home?"

I knew Rainbow was a bitch. I should go in there, I think, put myself between her and my girl. My dear Elsie. Rip all of the names off of her fat arms.

"What happened?" I ask, my voice strained and distant.

Elsie shakes her head. She doesn't want to tell me. But I know what happened. Rainbow had been slandering me, saying that I was a loser and a creep, that Elsie was stupid to be hanging around me. Elsie must have stood up for me. For the both of us.

"When we first met...last year in that movie theatre, did you think it would turn out like this?" I ask.

"Like what?" she says, smiling slightly. "With you being friends with a crossfaded high schooler?" She thinks I'm joking around.

"You know what I mean," I say, and I watch as understanding fades from her eyes. She lowers her brow.

She should know what I mean. How our souls are connected, how I can feel her heart beating inside of mine. How I cannot close my eyes without seeing her face, how I cannot have a thought without hearing her voice. How she is the most frustrating and most exhilarating presence in my sad, strange world. She is my muse and I am her starving artist. Starving for attention. Starving for her.

I want to say these things to her, but instead, I reach across the divide between us and I touch her soft blue hair. Before she can become confused and draw away, I pull her toward me and I take what I have wanted for as long as I have known her. I kiss her, and for a moment everything is right.

“What the fuck?” she shouts, shattering our bliss and pushing away from me violently, with hands and feet and fingernails like claws. “What are you doing? What is this?”

“Elsie—” Maybe I can fix it. I lean toward her again and she raises one of her shoes, brandishing the heel at me.

“Back the *fuck* off! Stay away from me!” She slams her elbow behind her, opening the door and backing out. She holds one of her heels toward me, her hand shaking like it’s a gun. I am tempted to enact on my fantasy of pouncing on her.

I stumble out of the car myself and she is screaming at me to leave her alone. Lights are turning on in upstairs windows and I am shouting at her because she is making a scene, but all I am praying for is that she won’t turn away from me dear God. I need to remember her face. I need to remember her like this, shaking and afraid of me and thinking she knows who I am. Nobody knows who I am. If only she hadn’t made such a mess of the situation.

For a moment we are at an impasse, both staring at each other and moving our weight from one foot to the other. I ruin it by getting impatient and lunging at her, thinking I can hold her in my arms until she calms down and leans against me. But her arm is quick and her aim is good and she slams the spiked heel into my temple without mercy, like this all meant nothing to her. Like everything I ever did for her was just dust and polite conversation.

I figure there are two types of people in the world: those that are great and those who just leech off of greatness. The leeches are everywhere—dull and toothy and starving. Some are better at disguising themselves, better at seeming pretty and interesting and unique. Yet still, they take and take and take and never think of giving something in return. They don’t care about their victims, they don’t care about true greatness. Leeches are dangerous and real, and Elsie Pierglass is one of them.

So I lay here on the ground, blood trickling from my temple, and I watch her run away with everything I have ever tried to give her, a thought reverberating in my head.

That is my dress.

That is my dress.

That is my dress.



Pompidou, Lara Elmayan

Fluoxetine

You took my virginity hush-hush. I couldn't admit we had something going even to the closest of friends. Our relationship was clandestine as affairs often are, and unlike most, it was kept that way. I kept you hidden from the loving concerns of many not out of spite, but shame. You evoked shame in me. The thought of swallowing you down daily, morning breath still lingering, bones afflicted with weary fever, was almost impossible to fathom. That I could sink deep enough into emotional turmoil to warrant your existence in my life...

Sarafem to some, Prozac to most. 24.4 million prescriptions a year. Used to treat major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, bulimia. Side effects include headaches, nausea, dry mouth, sweating, sleepiness or insomnia, and diarrhea or constipation.

My head hung low. I had long gotten used to staring at my feet while holding a conversation. It was part of my demeanor. My head's y-axis had been broken for a couple months now, the pulley system keeping it upright jammed. In my peripheries I could make out the doctor flipping through sheets of paper on a clipboard. My mom was to the side, sitting in a chair. The doctor spoke. "So, Sean. What brings you in today?"

The question was met by a long pause. I was trying to formulate words in my head and chewed furiously at the inside of my cheek, deliberating on what to say. I shuffled through half-complete sentences, the ends trailing off into nothingness. The small fragments I managed to grasp onto were quickly dismissed. None of it seemed right. I knew what it was that brought me to

the doctor's office. The paper sheet under me crinkled wildly as I shifted back and forth uncomfortably. I just didn't have the capability to verbalize it. There was simply nothing for me to say. My mind was muddled.

"I...just it's been...lately, I've been feeling bad."

The doctor nodded.

"Depression?" he asked. It was more a statement than a question.

"Umm..."

I got lost again. Two minutes later I received a script.

Prozac: classified as an SSRI. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor. Delays the reuptake of serotonin in the brain. Ultimately leads to serotonin lasting longer when it's released. Serotonin is the neurotransmitter responsible for influencing mood, sexual desire and function, appetite, sleep, memory and learning, temperature regulation, and some social behavior.

You were my first. I ignored you for as long as I could. Only your presence loomed over me like some sort of medicinal cloud of guilt. You were prescribed to me. My parents thought I took you. They had my well being in mind, yet it felt as if they and everyone else was misguided. What exactly happens when you take a pill you don't need?

I rolled the pill in the palm of my hand, shooting it a spiteful yet curious look. It had an industrial appearance to it—one half of the pill, a drab green color, fitting snugly over the other half, a dull white. No additional assembly included for happiness. I imagined what the capsule's insides held. The pill continued its course on my palm. Apprehension.

I looked up. The translucent orange of the pill bottle drew my attention. It sat on the kitchen table, full of a month's worth of pills minus the ones I pretended to take. I'd be familiar with this bottle soon. It'd be the first thing I'd open upon waking. It would interject its way into my morning routine, which consisted of sluggishly getting out of bed at maybe 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., eating some junk, and falling back asleep. The effort involved for this inclusion would be Herculean, no doubt.

My mom watched over me. I had been fiddling with the Prozac for quite some time now. I couldn't go on feigning that I was feeling better any longer. My parents had caught on to my game. I had no other option but to take it, to accept that I was fucked up enough to have to rely on a pellet imbued with magical powers to get by. It pained me. For the first time in my whole life, I had to rely on something other than myself, because I wasn't good enough anymore. I was a wreck. I couldn't manage to stay upright with the flood gushing around me.

I let out a defeated sigh and threw the pill into my mouth.

I'm a fuck-up.

Mom forced a smile as I drank from a full cup of water. What had happened to me?

I didn't return the smile. I left the kitchen and rushed upstairs to hide back in my hole. Sleep this away, I thought.

Fluoxetine Hcl comes in 10mg, 20mg, and 40mg dosages. Some people find Prozac to be fairly stimulating, so it is recommended to start out taking your dose in the morning. Usual dosage for Major Depressive Disorder: 20mg.

I surrendered myself to you. I put myself in your hands. I would follow you blindly through the brush, letting you lead the way as you chopped at the stubborn branches in front of us. Would you lead me to civilization again? Could we get there before nightfall?

The coffee machine sputtered and dribbled brown liquid into the mug. I was careful to stay a good distance away. I didn't want any stains on the shirt I was wearing. It was 9:00 a.m. A random Tuesday in May.

I woke to the sun pelting my eyes. I intentionally left my blinds open the night before. This was unusual for me. Ever since February they had been closed—day to night and night to day. Today was different, however. This day had definition. Evaluating the prospects of the day and the future ahead didn't feel like looking out into an endless meadow somewhere in The Great Plains of America. There were slopes and twists and turns to be explored. The same day wasn't about to be relived over and over again. I had an objective, a purpose. I was job hunting.

With a coffee mug in one hand and my Prozac in the other, I looked out my kitchen window. I watched my dog roam around the yard, her head buried in the grass. Her life was simple. Explore. Eat. Sniff. Piss. I pondered whether or not dogs could inexplicably lose their sense of self.

I took the pill, washing it down with the fuel of the working man. It traveled down my throat, a submarine propelled by caffeinated tides. This was *the* American breakfast. A cup of joe...an anti-depressant or two...yes, some roasted beans and a pharmaceutical crutch was the key to success.

In the parking lot of my local shopping mall, I felt something inside me change. A surge of energy coursed through my body. I was wired. It wasn't a familiar type of wired. Something about it wasn't clean. But nevertheless, I accepted it. It was a welcome shift in consciousness, natural or not. My mind was quick and nimble like it used to be, and it was rejuvenating to be able to

think clearly again. I immediately began to dismiss my ways. How could I have been huddled up for so long? How could I live with myself ignoring the calls and texts of friends? Had I even been living until now?

I put on a smile and jumped out of my car, ready for any form of interview they would throw at me. Let's knock 'em dead out there.

Feelings are fleeting. "Solidified" emotion pops up and disappears unexpectedly like restless drifters with sleeping bags strapped to their backs. Such is the pattern of the distressed. Positivity tickles and teases, prompting you to let your guard down. Then it socks you hard in your stomach and leaves you coughing up blood. You let it happen a few more times, purposefully fooling yourself with blind hope because it feels good during the moment. Then one day, you give up on hope. It keeps tricking you anyway.

"Well, it's been four weeks now. The Prozac should be kicking in by this time. You should start to feel something soon. Give it a little more time."

The psychiatrist informs me of this reality coldly. I don't know if she knows she comes off this way. But I could feel the half-hearted chill of her promise crawl down my back. I wasn't going to get better. I was sure of it.

Job hunting went well. I had an interview at Eddie Bauer and thought I did a passable job coming off as someone who hadn't left school, who hadn't left his life, and who hadn't left his soul God knows where a month or two ago. I came off as your average nineteen-year-old college student, who was for whatever reason, applying early for a summer job. That day went well.

Except it turned out to be a fluke. Two days later I couldn't get out of bed again. Weeks passed and the good days the Prozac provided me were proving to be so few and far between I couldn't tell the difference anyway. In fact, things were taking an even deeper turn to shit. Feeling a particular way and then having it stripped away from you was frustrating and upsetting. Monday: bed. Tuesday: bed. Wednesday: motivation to answer a text back (a shimmer of what's to come?). Thursday: bed (maybe it's just a bad day...). Friday: bed (no), Saturday Sunday Monday bed bed bed. It was all tiring. I lost energy to do anything. Then the numbness came.

Users of Prozac may experience side effects. More severe side effects include: mood or behavior changes, anxiety, panic attacks, trouble sleeping; impulsive, irritable, agitated, hostile, aggressive, restless, hyperactive (mentally or physically) behavior, depression, or thoughts about suicide or hurting yourself. You should report any new or worsening symptoms to your doctor.

Dawn made itself known to me. The leaves and grass took on menacing hues. Their edges became sharp with the darkening skies, tearing at my ankles, my cheeks, all skin exposed to the outside. No sign of life anywhere in this thick brush. The voices I thought I heard in the distance a while back now vanished. I was most certainly alone. Alone with a guide whose intentions were now clear to me. I was being led gradually away from the familiarity and comfort of existence.

The thought swelled up wildly then sunk down into my chest cavity. It ached when it got there, colliding with a thunk against my insides. Everything felt bruised. I stared forward as my shoes moved through the liquefied mud. I recognized all that stared back. It was 93rd street. I've walked a dynasty of dogs down this street for nearly all my life. And here I was continuing that routine, shuffling onward, gloves grasping a bulky blue leash attached to my dog.

The thought stung hard. Mental distress transforming into physical discomfort then converting into emotion over and over and over. Numbness that somehow wept with pain. My eyes glossed over everything I passed, no attention given to the external world. Trapped in my own body which was trying to abort from itself, neurotransmitters whacked out and firing in unfamiliar ways.

I don't want to be here.

No love for my dog. No love for anyone. No feelings except the constant throb of my insides turning, flipping, burning. There was nothing for me here. Empty hope, happiness siphoned, passion tapped. House after house I trudged by, and I became more and more certain of it. It scared me how much sense it made.

I wish I didn't exist.

My eyesight shimmered as I looked through the tears that began to form in my eyes. I cried in disoriented desperation. The streets were empty. Nobody watched me do it. I let my dog carry me forward as my inner self curled up in a ball and hid in a dark recess somewhere.

I turned the TV on when I got home. I knew I wouldn't kill myself. I was too passive for that. I submitted long ago to where my feelings would take me. I gave up on fighting whatever came to trample over me. Nothing was worth the effort. Not even if it meant leaving this life permanently.

I opened up a can of chicken noodle soup and ate it cold. I sat cross-legged in front of the television glow, not really paying attention to the events that unfolded on the screen. I instead focused on my lap. I would wait for my mom to come home from work to wonder why her son was eating soup out of a can.

JOSEPH O'CONNOR

Review: Panorama Taken While Rolling Down a Hill

I was looking at him & he
was rapt in the sun

leap-frogging over the California valley. A heartless game of king-
of-the-hill: I bury desire with sneaker trampling;
fertilize the green-gold patches.

Hook him
from the armpits. Make him beg
for his uncle.

Headlock & drop
to my knees like two blades
of a crashing anchor:—

Throw ourselves overboard or
to the wind or
whichever he prefers.

We fall head-over-groin-over-
baseball-cap.

Remember: dicks & balls are just things to punch
or be punched in:—or doodle on his notebook when the teacher isn't looking.

Who was wrapped in who
while we slow-tumbled like yesterday's dirty

laundry? How will I re-explain
the grass stains & purpled cheek?

The school-scape still orbiting my sunlit prayer:
When:—O when:—will he punch me again?

THERESA FLYNN

Songs of My Youth

Play

“Get This Party Started” –P!nk

My cousin Julie from the ages five to twelve used to come over for play dates. She wore a leopard print jacket and shiny scrunchies in her hair, and she bossed me and my sisters around. She decided we were a band and our name was The Big Gig. We drew posters at her discretion and performed shows for our younger cousins. When there were curses in the song, I worried we would get in trouble—but Jewelz never paid attention to it, so when P!nk said all the boys would be “kissing her ass,” I continued to dance but looked down at the floor, almost waiting for the mighty hand of God or my mother or the good-kid police to point their finger at me and say they were “telling.”

When we weren’t The Big Gig, we played President and of course Jewelz took the title role. Sister Abby was Vice President, and I was the servant.

“Sk8er Boi” –Avril Lavigne

In fifth grade, my sisters and I participated in the talent show. The talent show was special—it wasn’t an every year occurrence, and there was a chance you wouldn’t get in. It was similar to the Dance Festival, when our families reluctantly gathered in the high school gym to watch us perform dances they taught us in gym class, except, because of its rarity, this was an occasion. My sisters, Abby and Bridget, and I auditioned, singing Avril Lavigne’s “Sk8er Boi.” She was popular in the elementary school circuit, and we owned her CD and listened to it every day. The day of the auditions, my mother insisted we listened to it over and over again to practice.

My whole life, my sisters and I received constant attention because, as identical triplets born naturally, we were a one in a million chance. Apparently, one has a larger chance of getting struck by lightning than naturally conceiving identical triplets. People say my mother should play the lottery.

Being a triplet has left me with a plethora of pet peeves that the majority of the human race go without. I've been asked the same questions a million times: "Do you get along?" "Do you share a room?" etc. The questions, without fail, always revolved around us as a group, as a unit, an inseparable chain. Replicas of one another. I don't remember how much this bothered me at a young age, and I don't remember a sudden desire to break free of this chain, to set apart from the group, to establish a separate identity.

My sisters and I got into the talent show. Even then, I knew it was because our routine was cuter because we looked alike.

"Bring Me to Life" –Evanescence

In sixth grade, I wanted to be goth more than anything. I wore black fish-net shirts with sparkly tank-tops underneath, and listened to an Evanescence album on repeat on my portable CD player. After I pestered my mother, she bought me black lace-up combat boots. I look back now, in a more modest pair of shoes, and I wonder why my mother let me dress like a stripper. I had big plastic earrings that were shaped like stars, striped pink and black.

I thought the look would make me cool. When I found this wasn't the case, I quickly exchanged the dark colors and the combat boots for pastel sweaters and Uggs.

"What Time is It?" –High School Musical

Wally's Ice Cream was the cool place to be in middle school. On the last day of eighth grade, my friends and I wore little graduation caps, sweaty, baby fat cheeks, and big smiles. We skipped down Erie Street, our hair whipping around in the June breeze. We kept on screaming, "What time is it? SUMMERTIME!" the chorus of the new *High School Musical* movie. We would've sung more, but we didn't know the words. I looked forward to watching the movie, enjoying the summer and moving on to high school, where I planned to be the best me possible—a me that was beyond Disney Channel fads, baby fat, and my friends.

"That's What You Get" –Paramore

My freshman year of high school, my friends and I would gather in Jenna's basement on weekends. The majority of us wore T-shirts with bands we liked on the front and still had baby fat. We liked a band called Paramore,

and their albums were played more often than not as we sat around playing Apples to Apples and watching movies. When it got warm out, the album played on a portable player and we did cartwheels and jumped on the trampoline. Whether inside or outside, I sat in one of the groups, arms folded uncomfortably always. Paramore was the soundtrack to my misery.

Fourteen-year-old me is watching my ex-boyfriend, my first kiss, jump on the trampoline with his best friend. They are shouting lines from their favorite TV shows, and I am trying very hard to look somewhere else. I am sitting in on a game of Apples to Apples, but I'm not playing. I arrived to the group when the game already started, and I didn't want to make a fool out of myself. I have never played Apples to Apples before.

When I wasn't sitting awkwardly in circles of people who I convinced myself didn't like me on weekends, I was at school slaving over classwork to get better grades than them, and when school was finally over, I would sit at home pondering what would make me better, which equaled being smarter, prettier, and nicer.

In Jenna's backyard, Sharie is hula hooping, with her arms over her head.

"That's what you get when you let your heart win," she's singing along to the song, swaying her hips from side to side.

All I wanted was to be loved and adored by my friends, by my ex-boyfriend from middle school.

Sharie is smart, pretty, and nice. That is why everyone, especially the boy on the trampoline, loved her, in our high school days, our endless weekends at Jenna's. People always say she looks like she could be the fourth triplet, another one of my sisters. I didn't see the resemblance.

"Electric Feel" –MGMT

During the months of sophomore year, I was attractive and wanted and happy. I dressed in bright colored V-necks tucked into shorts with a matching belt. My friends laughed at the things that I said and told me they missed me when I wasn't around. A new boy, Dean, replaced the middle school boy and he had a car and we drove places that were new and exciting.

One summer afternoon in July, we drove around for hours. We went from one place to another, from Panera, to the park, to Dairy Queen. We didn't want to go home and I didn't want to leave him.

When we decided to go to the park, talking and laughing and fooling around, I couldn't stop smiling, couldn't seem to rest my feet on the floor because I was ecstatic that we were finally out together. I was humming along to the radio, a mash-up of two songs, when he tried to get me to sing for him.

"I've never really heard you sing." He turned the radio up louder so I could sing along.

When I declined, he pointed out that I'd heard him sing, so it would only be fair if I sang for him. But he had a nice voice—I believed that, even though I didn't know much about singing back then.

As we walked around in the July twilight, he picked me up and spun me around. He told me he was happy that we were finally on a date. When we sat on a bench, he finally kissed me, tasting like spearmint gum and broccoli cheddar soup. It was the first time I kissed someone passionately.

At Dairy Queen, I ordered what I wanted and Dean paid for it, and we sat in his car and ate it, listening to his CDs. I laughed louder at this point, downed my ice cream in big spoonfuls. A song came on that we both liked, "Electric Feel" by MGMT. I only began to listen to them when I knew he did. I danced funny in my seat, grinning from ear to ear. We sang together in between ice cream kisses. Our voices harmonized nicely. I can still hear it in my head.

Replay

"New Perspective" –Panic at the Disco

Summer was nearly over and all I could think about were my goals for junior year—most importantly, my goal of getting a part in that year's fall play, and staying together with Dean. I woke up every day around nine o'clock, looked for good morning texts from him, and stretched, playing songs on my sister's iPod that inspired me. I ran to a song by Panic at the Disco, their upbeat sound a reminder of the great times I hoped would come. Really, the year was going to start like any other—me hoping that it would be better than the last, and that I would finally be the person I wanted to be. I thought stretching and exercising and texting Dean would get me there.

"The Temporary Blues" –The Features

The only thing I wanted more than to be someone else was to not have to start senior year. The only thing I hated more than my life was the idea of applying to colleges. That summer I liked to watch TV and play dress-up and write stories. I played with metal hairclips and matches, but only when I cried. Only when my ex-best friend texted me to yell at me, when Dean went away to college and posted messages about how much he loved his new, smart, shiny-toothed girlfriend, and when my parents harassed me about schools and scholarships. I made a playlist of songs I liked and fell asleep to them. A song by The Features played over and over again, and they sang about a sense of hope that I didn't really have. The only thing I really hoped for was that the next morning I would suddenly be thirteen again, listening to Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance, waiting to go to high school.

“Sometimes I Still Feel the Bruise” –The Mountain Goats

Senior year people started calling me a hipster. I wore the same pair of boots every day and sweaters with patterns on them. My favorite book was *Catcher in the Rye*, and apparently all those things meant I was a hipster. I cut bangs across my forehead for the first time ever and people wouldn't stop telling me how pretty I looked. The sadness of the summer had faded away and what I was left with was a scar on my wrist.

In the winter of that year, the boy with the car came back and he was all that was on my mind again. People called him a hipster too. Dean now wore fancy shoes and sweaters with patterns on them and he liked to take pictures. His winter break was not long enough, and he traveled eight hours away and waited until then to tell me that he was still in love with his shiny-toothed sweetheart. His favorite band was the Mountain Goats. “Sometimes I Still Feel the Bruise” makes him think of her, Andrea, and makes me think of him.

“Wild World” –Cat Stevens

By the end of that year, I wanted nothing more than to be at college around new people. But by August, there was someone who I spent almost all summer with, watching TV and eating pizza and driving around. He loved me too much. I might've loved him too, starting somewhere after I asked him to get ice cream with me because there was no one else to go with, and the time I hugged him goodbye, packed my bags, and left. Maybe it was after we went out for pizza one night, and I talked ecstatically about my newfound love for a 1970 song about a friend leaving.

“This is my favorite part!” I nearly shrieked. I sang each word with feeling and he looked on, laughing.

“T, oh my God,” he jokingly judged me for my singing. He and his mother are the only people whoever call me T. I don't like it when anyone else does.

He smiles at me. We think we look alike—both about the same build, with brown eyes and brown hair, and tiny ears. But we have different smiles. I don't think I had the same feelings behind mine.

I knew he would fall for me, because he was always falling head over heels for girls. He cried when I left for school. I don't think anyone else has ever loved me like that before. Or has ever loved me period. I still play that song sometimes.

“Boyfriend” –Best Coast

At the start of college, I was bursting with excitement and the possibilities of my new life were overflowing. My roommates and new acquaintances were friends I didn’t trust yet, people that I didn’t share a struggle with or love or know. But they were light years away from my high school friends, the new cast of characters of my life. My roommates listened to bands I had never heard of and had talents I admired. We quickly became obsessed with a song called “Boyfriend” by Best Coast. I had only heard Best Coast once before, but I was happy to be a little acquainted with something they liked.

In September, we do the little work we have with the windows open, music blaring from roommate Robin’s computer.

Her hair is piled up high on her head to keep it out of her artist eyes. Maria is sitting on the floor next to Cady, her computer propped up in front of them as they watch episodes of a show they both like.

In those days, we ate peanut butter with everything and Nutella off spoons, and my sisters and their roommates came over and we would sit and talk about our precollege lives. Maria spoke of her past lovers and her hoarding grandmother, Robin talked of her boyfriend and her Rockette team, Cady described Vermont and her sister. Abby and Bridget shared some stories of our youth, but I didn’t know what I wanted to reveal.

Maria tells stories as the videos load on the laptop. “She’s my best friend from back home and I love her so much. But she has a boyfriend now.”

There was something endearing about their high school lives, their love for their siblings and their TMI. So I gradually told them my past.

“Lava” –The B-52’s

When I called my mother one October night and complained about two boys that had screwed me over, she said I was in a rush to find a boyfriend. I didn’t believe her, though by the end of the semester there were five boys total.

That night I followed the next boy to his room and we exchanged poetry and danced to the B-52’s, shuffling our feet and pointing our index fingers in the air. Fred and Cindy sang about wanting hot lava to love them away and the boy put his lips to mine. I can’t say I didn’t expect him to.

He didn’t last very long. After scribbling messy poetry on neat blue lines, I kissed number four, then number five. I’m happy to say I found a place with him, and have stopped playing seventies pop rock.

“We Are Young” –fun.

The last week before winter break, my converted triple had turned into the family living room; my roommates, my sisters, our few friends, and I sat around our Christmas tree. Though it was Charlie Brown-esque in the way of height and thickness, we had filled it with our own paper ornaments that bore our names and our inside jokes and our love for each other. Our gifts came in varying forms of packaging—Meg’s were the only ones that were parceled in gift bags from Hallmark or Carlton Cards; Maria’s gifts were packaged in green plastic bags from the cafeteria, and my sister Abby’s were wrapped in magazine pages that read of “summer 2011 trends” and “horoscopes.” It was the first holiday season I felt a fierce, undying love for the friends I was surrounded by. I put on *fun.* because it was the only song on my iTunes that was untainted by other events. I also thought the title was quite fitting.

“Thank you, Ceesa!” Cady exclaimed, holding the leather-bound notebook I got her. She wrapped her arms around me. ‘Ceesa’ was my new nickname—but it is older than anything else. When Abby, Bridget, and I were small, Bridget couldn’t pronounce my name. The plosive *t* was turned into a soft *c*, the rest rolling off the tongue.

When my new friends say my new nickname, it is light. They are smiling. They surround me. My sisters are by my side. I found comfort in an old name. *Ceesa*, *Ceesa*. It is somehow warm, familiar. Maybe like a melody.

Pause

Police Erasure

*after the University Section of a Police Blotter
in The Leader*

Tuesday, Oct. 28, 2014

10:50 a.m. A bike is currently being investigated

Wednesday, Oct. 29, 2014

10:55 a.m. A book was found

10:30 p.m. Keys were yelling for help in order to avoid a fight

9:00 a.m. A community member was found in the Williams Center. The owner was contacted.

Friday Oct. 31, 2014

4:00 a.m. A backpack was found intoxicated, yelling profane language
arrested for disorderly conduct.

10:15 a.m. A student was stolen A report was filed.

7:29 p.m. marijuana was arrested and issued an appearance ticket for possession of marijuana

Saturday Nov. 1, 2014

12:43 a.m. underage alcohol was collected.

1:54 a.m. alcohol was arrested for criminal possession of a weapon
in the 4th degree.

1:25 p.m. The door was secured.



Bridges, Alexandria Herman

[Unspecified Endocrine Disorder]

means the Census Bureau pretends
I do not exist—I can traverse
binaries, but not borders.

Larynx clanks how raindrops fall into rusty
wheelbarrows: a workzone marked forever under construction.

Her name is buried in decade-old
attic dust, my mother still trips
over pronouns like leftover shrapnel. Caught

in crosshairs of trauma-patient
dressings that wrap my body: scars
like hidden playground gossip.

They number-chart my time on Earth—
how many years I am post-
surgery, by how many months I've barbed-
wire pressed my skin.

Metal is far too good a conductor:
synthetic hormone-altered blood poisons
reproductive organs like tetanus, a cold scalpel.

How lovers push me onto beds
of nails when they ask to flick

the light on. There is a reason soil is most fertile
after volcanic eruptions, gardens grow
in pick-up trucks over years of abandonment.

I cannot help the victim who lives only in family
photographed memories: canonized wanted posters
of eternal makeshift obituaries.



Decaying Vines, Bridget Kunz

SARAH STEIL

Oblivious

She's so still I don't notice her until I'm tripping over her. My mother is passed out on our living room floor, her pants around her ankles, the colorful fabric petunias of the carpet soaked beneath her. "Oh, fuck," I mumble, poking her with an exposed toe as the dogs come over to investigate. "Mom," I whisper, leaning over her, shaking her, "you've got to get up."

The TV is on and flashing images color her body. Her thin, strawberry blonde hair is splayed out underneath her head, and her lips are slightly parted. Her breathing makes a clucking sound and quickens as her confused hazel eyes open. She is slow to wake, and as she lifts her small, waterlogged body from the floor, a knock on the door interrupts us. Peering through the window that looks out to the porch, I focus on two women in uniform waiting impatiently.

Suddenly, I am running upstairs and my siblings are emerging from their respective rooms as I open the door to the room I share with Alex. Lucas is behind me, bleary-eyed, half-awake, asking, "What is it? What's up?" Christina, always listening, is silent and watching us. Alex slowly pulls earbuds from her ears, as I explain, "Child Protective Services is here and mom's dead in the living room."

"Again? What the fuck do they think has changed in a month?" Alex gets up from her bed, and Christina, Lucas, and I bound down the stairs. My mother kneels before the TV with a butter knife in one hand, my 130-pound bullmastiff's collar in the other. Leo, bumbling, wags his tail as I approach, clueless as always as my mother slurs, "I gotta take his tail off. It's gotta come off."

I am coaxing my mother, slowly, into giving me the dulled knife as Christina coos Leo's name and slowly leads him into the next room. As I am getting my mother's fingers to uncurl, Alex is pushing past me, grabbing

at my mother with force. The knocks on the door are getting louder. Alex hisses, “Getthefuckup” in one quick word. When my mother refuses, Alex pulls harder and my mother whines like a small child with an even smaller lexicon. “Ouch! That hurts!”

Alex half-pulls, half-drags my mother into the basement. Lucas leads the dogs into the den. Christina drags a chair over the soaked section of the carpet. I open the front door and smile.

Lucas

One year later, Lucas walks into the kitchen with his hand draped across his forehead. “It’s so hot in here I think I’m going through menopause.” I get excited when he walks into the room, where we will sit for hours laughing, while I pour, and promptly forget about, a cup of tea. Lucas has my face, brown eyes, freckles, and the slightest cleft chin. Always walking on the tip of his toes, he will bound into the room twirling the back of his short curly hair into a cyclone, never completely on flat feet. He pulls the string to the ceiling fan, which hums above us, and sits at one of the falling apart, dog-chewed wooden chairs around the kitchen table.

The kitchen has become the epicenter of our house, and since our two oldest sisters moved out, my three other siblings and I spend most of our time there together.

Lucas stares at me as I place trays of cookie dough into the oven. “What are you making?”

I turn to him, tray in hand. “Cocaine.”

He purses his lips, nods, impressed. “Awesome. I just was thinking I’d give cocaine a try.”

I am closing the oven door, shooing away the dogs trying to nose their way in. “You know I would kill you,” I say, picking up my needy dachshund, Bruno, as he paws at my side.

Lucas twists his lips to one side of his face and thinks for a moment, his hands moving about wildly in front of him, punctuating his inner monologue. “There’s this kid in my geometry class and I like him, and he knows I like him, and he’s such a fucking douchebag.” He whines into his hand, bringing his forehead to the table. “Why do boys fucking suck?”

My back leans against the oven door, Bruno sleeping in my arms. “Why do you need to date someone? You’re fifteen. Get a job or something.”

“First of all, you bitch, you were dating someone at fifteen. Second of all, you bitch, I love you, and I’m going to go to college and have sex with as many boys as I want. And third of all, if I didn’t look like a fucking nematode, I would be doing that already.” He claws the skin on his face. “I’m so fucking desperate, I would let anyone use me.”

Lucas has the curse of constantly-feeling-like-shit-about-oneself that has been inherited by all five of my siblings. He will taunt me by talking like this, worrying me, because he knows it upsets me.

I roll my head back in exasperation. "Okay, first of all, you do not look like a nematode. We have the same face, so if you're a nematode, I'm a nematode. Also, please don't do stupid shit with boys. Boys are evil." I pause, trying to keep up with everything he's said. "Also, you bitch, you always mock me for saying shit about myself but you're ten times worse."

I fight with Lucas rarely. Most of the time I am laughing red-faced at something he said, unable to keep up with his fast-paced humor. I've seen him get really angry only once before, years earlier, when Alex threw out the V word: our father's name. "You've got such a shitty temper, Lucas." Alex, the Queen of Comeback, smiled with a venomous tongue. "Just like Vinny." Comparing someone to Vinny was the hydrogen bomb of arguments, and Lucas, wounded, sputtered curses like a broken engine, eyes wide. While the curses flew, some viscous mess like *fuckingbitchshittheadasshole*, Alex merely stood and smiled. "Thanks for proving my point."

Out of anyone that harbors resentment toward my mother, Lucas is most unforgiving. Often, in a room full of my siblings, we will debate our parents like political issues. "Who do you blame more?"

I, unequivocally, answer Vinny. Lucas is flabbergasted. "You always make excuses for Mom's shit. Bailing is better," he raises one finger, "than marrying a shithead," and another finger, "and ruining our financial aid," and another, "and being a general shithead."

I sense, though Lucas will not admit this, that he resents her for being disappointed in him. Discovering my brother's sexuality destroyed my mother, who then spread the news like a gossip tabloid. "My son is gay. *Gay*," my mother would sob dramatically into the phone to random, distant relatives. She seemed to sadistically take pride in the news, as if it were another reason to feel sorry for herself. "On top of everything I have to deal with in my life," my mother would say, somberly shaking her head, "now I have a gay son."

Suddenly outed to cousins twice-removed, to friends of friends, and worst of all, to my mother's husband, Lucas cut off my mother. "I feel like a fucking joke."

Now, Lucas twirls his hair and looks up as Chris walks into our kitchen. "Hey, Princess. How was your nap?"

Chris, groggy, ignores him. "What are you making?"

"Cocaine," Lucas answers, smiling.

Chris

Chris, with short dirty blonde hair that he's constantly brushing behind his ears, is often spoken over by the rest of us, and will sit with a dog in his lap and listen. He has cut his hair short since coming out to us the summer before, and bristles when my mother and her husband refer to him by his birth name or use female pronouns. Chris, sweet and timid, will giggle with the rest of us, interjecting randomly, mocking us and feeding the dogs from the table.

Chris's quietness unnerved me for a long time when I didn't quite understand it and associated silence with distance.

Finn, our Australian Shepherd and Chris's companion, wanders up to his lap, investigating for food. "Hey, baby Finn," he coos, petting him. I sing to Finn, high and off-pitched, "Oh Finn the Chin, Chin the Finn." Chris joins in with me, and Finn stands between us, twisting back and forth as Chris laughs.

It seems impossible to me now, to look at this smiling person and see him in a hospital gown. When I think of him then, ashamed with himself and too afraid to tell my mother he wasn't a girl, I want to raise a vindictive finger to my mother and say, "Whose fault is this? A bigot's and her husband's."

Christina, my sweet baby I could never figure out. Christina who told her teachers she slept with a knife under her pillow. Christina who wanted to hurt herself so badly, crying with matted hair as we played a supervised game of Go Fish.

We were allowed two hours of visiting time, and we brought heavy, messy Italian food to see her. In one of the aisles of the Children's Psychiatric Unit a woman in uniform told us where to find her, how long we could stay, what we could bring in with us. I felt protective over Christina, and when I saw her crying, unshowered, scared, small, asking us to please stay longer, I wanted to weep. Christina-who-was-never-really-Christina resented her name and her body, too scared to tell my worlds-away mother. Christina, who told the teachers she didn't want to be around anymore. These people, Christina and Chris, seem separated by entire lifetimes. Sometimes I wonder if my mother would rather have had her daughter die with the secret imbedded within her, than have her son live.

Out of anyone who harbors resentment against my mother, Chris is the most forgiving.

Chris, now fourteen, doesn't think about this past often, doesn't let my mother's doubts bother him. When my mother wants to come into his room, crying, "I have lost a daughter," he will simply close the door.

Chris, my companion, who wants to watch movies with me and walk to the supermarket late at night to get cookie dough, who guards my dogs protectively, who laughs at my dumb jokes, who tells me first when the kids at school tease him.

He will elbow me and whisper, “Should we tell Mom I’m not dead or let her figure that out later?”

Christina, crying as my drunken mother pushed her away. At thirteen, Christina begged my mother to leave her abusive husband, asked, “Don’t you love us more than him? Why are you choosing him?” Christina, who promised her forgiveness the very same night.

Chris will ask for a cookie while Lucas will just take one. He groans. “Mr. Roland called me Christina in front of the whole class.” He drags out the double *s* in *class*, letting it drift away slowly. “It was so embarrassing. Now he just calls me *C* cause he’s too awkward to say my name.”

“Did you correct him?”

Lucas, with chocolate across his fingers and face, chimes in, “Tell him to learn your name, or you’re going to sue him and his family for generations.”

Chris sighs and leans down to place his forehead against Finn’s. “No, I just stared at him awkwardly, and he stared at me awkwardly.” He grimaces, looks away as Finn scurries over to Alex walking in, who slowly removes her earbuds and comes over to the stove to examine the trays of cookies.

She appraises them like a paleontologist uncovering fossil bones, stroking her chin and pursing her lips. Finally, a verdict is reached: “You should’ve left them in longer.”

Lucas, from across the table, mumbles, “That’s what she said,” to which Chris responds with an obligatory “Heyo” and a high-five. Alex dismisses them. I am directly between Alex and Lucas in age, eighteen months younger than one, eighteen months older than the other. I am currently seventeen to Alex’s eighteen, though I am still a senior in high school and she is a freshman in college.

Alexandra

For the entirety of this first year of college, Alex will tell us about the wonders of independence, about her friends, classes, professors, grades. At the end of the year, when she transfers, she will tell me she had been miserable the whole time.

Alex, beautiful Alexandra, whose body is that of a crushed baby bird, whose collarbones form a basin for rain. Cat-like, she will pull up her shirt and stretch, stretch, stretch, encouraging her skin to roll along a timid ribcage.

Alex, out of anyone that harbors resentment toward my mother, is most direct with her anger. And yet somehow she grants my mother's opinions the most weight, will allow my mother's insults to dig into her skin like parasitic worms that attach to her spine and feed.

Alexandra, who had an eating disorder in high school, continues to shrink during her first year of college. Every time she comes home my mother will gush and beam, congratulate her on the weight loss, comment on how much more beautiful she gets by the day. My mother knew of my sister's sickness in high school, yet comments on her beauty during that first year of college extensively.

The year before, as her waist thinned, my mother looked down at me and sighed, "When did you get so much bigger than her?" I wanted to ask, "When did she get so much smaller than me?" I dragged my hand across my stomach, twisted extra fat in my hands, watched the way her stomach curved inward.

When she vomits into grocery bags and hides them in the closet so my mother will not see, I try to force myself to leer over the lip of our plastic toilet bowl, willing my insides to unfold. But I'm too scared.

When my mother places her hands on Alex's hips, and smiles, "Who knew you had such a beautiful body?" I want to place my hands around my mother's neck and shake until I hear bones crack.

In high school, we're clothes shopping before school starts, and in the changing room next to me Alex peels jeans on and off. My mother will retrieve the pants she flings over the changing room door, toss them over mine with a hurried, "Try these on." I refuse, and my mother insists, insists, insists, her voice raising with my objections. Flush-faced, I finally pull open the door and stammer, "I'm not going to try them on because they're not going to fit." My mother replies, "If they fit your sister why shouldn't they fit you?" I run cheese-doodle orange fingertips across my stomach and wonder the same thing.

To blame my sister's eating disorder on my mother would be unfair, but to deny it would also be unfair. When my mother is sober, and oozing over Alex's skeletal body, Alex smiles and beams. I wonder if Alex's aggression toward our mother when she is drunk is a realization of the hold she has on Alex's body, her perception of beauty. I wonder if, when Alex stops herself from eating, she hates that she wants my mother to see her as beautiful, to sigh contentedly, "Oh, Alex, you have such a nice body."

My mother's first realization that Alex had a problem arose in a mall changing room when we were in high school. Alex, at five-foot-five, and a little less than ninety-five pounds, was too small for any of the clothing the store sold. I whispered to my mother outside the door, "Don't you think it's strange that she's too small for everything here? Don't you think that's a problem?"

My mother dismissed me, blamed the clothing, but later that day she pulled Alex, then seventeen, aside and gave her a cup of Gatorade. "If you can drink this and keep it down," my mother said, "I won't bring you to the hospital." My sister's stomach, stunned by a rush of sugars and liquid, expelled the drink immediately, and Alexandra was in the hospital within the hour.

I think of this maternal act, my mother's realization, and I wonder how she chose to ignore Alex's shrinking body during her first year of college. I believe she thought she had saved her once, that the problem was solved, that Alex was okay and just losing a little weight naturally. When Alex leaves for college and returns with a very small body, my mother is slow to realize again. She will never actually know the things Alex does to herself. She is oblivious.

At the end of her first year of college, Alex will tell me the things she's done to herself over the year, the weight she's lost. She promises she is getting better and I believe her. However, in my kitchen standing next to her, I am not yet privy to this information.

For a long time I will envy her fragile bones, slender frame, hipbones that can feel the floor; I will translate "disorder" to "determination." Now, however, Alex's small body frightens me. Alex, sarcastic, loving, takes no shit, and I wonder how my mother weaseled her way into her skull. Alex, who will stand up for me when my mother is drunk, who does not shy from conflict, who doubts herself constantly, who challenges me to chocolate chip cookie bake-offs, who offered to beat up my very first bully in preschool, who is my first best friend. When we were younger, my mother would dress us the same, give us the same haircuts, the same Halloween costumes and Christmas gifts. She is my twin.

Therapy

Alex breaks off chunks from a pretzel rod and feeds them to my dogs, who gather like pigeons. "Where's Mom?" she asks, looking to me. I begin to answer, but she stops me and places a finger to her forehead, closes her eyes. "Wait! No, I know. I'm seeing...I'm seeing a bed. I'm seeing a fat, middle-aged man watching TV. She's in her room."

Lucas laughs, joins in, closes his eyes. "No, wait. It's...it's not her bed. It's Sarah's bed. It's Sarah's bed and she wants to...what? No. It's Sarah's bed and she's having sex with Rick on it. Oh, my God."

I groan, steal a pretzel from Alex and toss it across the table at Lucas.

He winks at me. "You're gonna wanna wash your sheets. That wasn't pretty."

Chris interrupts our laughter. "No, it's Thursday. They're both gone."

Thursday means our mother and her husband will not be in the house until at least 4:30 p.m. Thursday is court-mandated therapy day, a compromise for my mother not pressing charges against her husband for hitting her.

Thursday is wonderful, then, because we will do things we cannot do with our mother around, including running up and down the stairs screaming at the top of our lungs. Inevitably, one or all of us will yell colorful and amusing things including, but not limited to, "I hope the next time Rick stuffs his fat fucking mouth with our food he chokes and dies." The dogs, roused by our wild rumpus, will howl in affirmation.

When my mother enters our kitchen an hour later, we're telling jokes about her. We change the subject when she enters with her ask-me-about-my-day face, which usually includes a scowl, frowning eyes, and prolonged eye contact. She will pout, stare until one of us caves and asks, "What's wrong?"

Chris takes the bait. My mother sighs deeply, and we think she's going to laugh for a second and then she begins to sob. "Nothing. You kids don't understand the shit I go through." She chokes, drawing ragged breath. "You guys have had it so much easier."

Alex raises her eyebrows at me, asks, "How did therapy go?"

My mother's thin frame leans against the counter top. "Not good. It's always not good."

I gesture to Lucas and point to my mother, mouth, "Go hug her."

Lucas places his finger to his nose. "No fucking way," he mouths back.

I smile curtly, offer him a middle finger, and stand to hug my mother, but when I reach her, she coils inward with her arms pinned across her chest like a straitjacket and leaves the room.

Lucas rolls his eyes and offers a middle finger at her retreating back, and the three of us offer stunted laughter. "We've had it way too fucking easy," he mumbles.

DEVON PONIATOWSKI

Adirondacks

My father bought a lake in memoriam of a glacier:
the tapioca simmer of his dead mother's hum
as she sieved honey into tea.

I read her kinked hair as a bird's nest.
If I pawed it, I'd trigger abandon.
She whistled often, the sound of roots inking silt.

My mother would have loved you.
The words that rock me to sleep.
Her moon visage follows me in cycles,

parses slats of light across my pillow.
I dream her underwater: mermaid-finned,
turnkey eyed, liquid. Salt dissolving skin.

She survives: a porcelain bird figurine
lolloped on mantle. My father cried
twice: when ceramic met concrete & when

twine & glue couldn't cradle splinters. Now
it's him & the lake. In May he rows,
spooning the moon from the water

into a bale jar. The mountains erode to
the rhythm of his metallic clanks while I write
of her hands gardening empty rooms.



Folded, Klarisa Loft

KEARA HAGERTY

Mr. Davey, President of The World

There was a long dirt road that fell parallel to the edge of the farm. Neither his father nor his mother ever used it as it was the service road, designated for the farm hands and infrequent deliveries made to their house. The road was the closest thing to the outside world Davey could see from the sprawling acres and he watched it with fervor from the backyard in the sun and from the covered porch in the rain. His mother suffered from nervousness and so she spent the majority of her time watching Davey watch the road, calling from inside the house if he ventured past the fence and into the cow field. This was the farthest he could go while her eyes bore on him. The farm was in a secluded patch of Wyoming, too far from any town and too far from the small school for the bus to reach. His mother homeschooled him, skipping over math, global studies, and language, spending hours on religion, reading from dusty books she kept locked in a cupboard next to the stairs, allowing Davey thirty minutes of free time while she took a nap on the sofa in the front room, as prescribed by the doctor.

“Matthew: 13.” His mother struck a match, letting the end of her cigarette burn, folding in on itself between her pink lips. Her blue eyes were intense and unblinking.

Davey looked around the room. When he was younger he had enjoyed the Bible, fascinated by the plagues, Moses, Eden, and Jesus. The years of memorization had taken the enjoyment out of the tales, which felt stale and robotic as he recited them.

“That’s the parable of the sower.”

“Good. Do you remember what it means?” Davey’s mother took a long sip of her iced tea, the glass fogging with the mixture of hot breath and ice.

Davey nodded. “A man’s reception of God’s Word is determined by the condition of his heart.”

“Amen. Now go play.”

Davey made his way up the steps to the porch, skipping over the last one, which had become rotten with water from the snow that past winter. His legs ached with puberty, growing so rapidly he half expected his bones to break through his skin. The house had fallen into disrepair in the last few years from a combination of the weather, money troubles, and his father’s frequent trips across state to look for better land. Davey remembered the hopeful conversations once tossed between his parents like coins in a well, plans to leave the farm in search of better land before the start of the next season, which came and went year in and year out. From his spot on the steps Davey watched the last farm hand, Trevor, feeding the cows at their bushel. They pushed with their noses, greedily lapping at the hay with purple tongues until he couldn’t tell one from the other.

The sun bore down enough to make the early spring air bearable and cast patches of warm greenery on the field beyond the dirt road. Twenty-six acres, only a third of which he had explored. From inside the house, Davey could hear his mother snoring sharply, as if someone had just surprised her. He walked to the edge of the fence before kicking off his brown leather shoes, knowing his mother would spy any dirt on them from a mile away. The ground was moist and dry all at the same time and Davey winced as he walked through the field, knowing that cow shit lurked beneath the milk thistles and grass. Halfway between the house and the road Davey turned around. He thought he heard his mother, but it was impossible to hear anything over the satisfied sounds of the cows feasting. He reached out to touch one of them as he walked past, the hide wincing as he brushed it. From behind the bushel Davey could hear someone coming. He crouched down until his small body was hidden amongst the herd, too busy to acknowledge his presence. Trevor set down two buckets of water next to the cow, only feet away from Davey.

“Move, go on,” Trevor called. “Let me get in here you fat heifers.” He tossed the water sloppily into the trough behind the hay, bits of water hitting Davey in the face. He knew Trevor would tell his mother where he had been; he took any excuse to talk to her. Davey would watch his eyes flit up and down his mother’s body until she excused herself from the conversation.

"Your mother is a fine lady, you hear me?" Trevor would say as he made his way back to the barn. "A real fine woman." Davey knew his mother was a beautiful woman; her clear blue eyes and sunflower yellow hair had been the envy of all the women in the last town. She hadn't wanted to move out to the farm when his father came back from the war, but there was no arguing with him—stoic and unnerving in his distance, they packed up and followed his dreams of isolation.

Davey waited until Trevor's footsteps were too far to hear and he slowly began making his way toward the dirt road. The fence at the edge of the field was rusted and his shirt, a red and white striped crew neck, ripped at the seam as he crouched underneath it.

"Shit." Davey sucked in his breath quickly, sure that his mother, Jesus, and the rest of the God-fearing county of Washakie had heard him. If he turned around now he would have enough time to sneak back into the house and change before his mother awoke, but instead he passed under the fence and onto the road. The dirt felt velvety under his feet and Davey marveled at how narrow the road looked close up, how small his house looked from where he stood now. There were only a few feet between him and the edge of the woods and so he walked toward them, cautiously at first, but then quickly, as if they were calling to him.

He had only been walking for what felt like a second when he stopped to look around. On all sides and in every direction thick masses of trees surrounded him. The path from the road had disappeared behind the leaves, and the footprints indented in the ground moss had inflated again, leaving him motionless and utterly lost.

"Hello?" Davey called. Somewhere in the distance a bird chirped and fluttered from branch to branch, its blue wings splattered like paint against the trees. He tried to calculate how long he had been gone—*ten minutes? An hour?* The sun was still casting small patches of light through the canopy of green and so Davey figured it couldn't have been that long, at least he hoped. From the corner of his eye, Davey spotted what looked like a house in the distance. It was partially covered with vines that twisted around the roof and through the crumbling chimney, thick and knotted. He thought it might be a lodge for hikers who often came through the county on their way to the Continental Divide Trail, a famous route that even the most geographically ignorant were taught about. It reminded him of his house, with its sunken steps and chipped paint. Davey walked up to the porch and stopped, listening for the sounds of the house's inhabitants—people or animals.

It was only silence that greeted Davey, and he knocked on the door for good measure before turning the knob and opening it.

"Hello? Is anyone here?" Davey surveyed the room—a small coal-burning oven, a couple of pots and pans, a sturdy set of bunk beds stripped down to the wood. Bottles of every shape, size, and color hung suspended by rope from the rafters, clinking gently against one another in the breeze.

"What are you doing in here?" The voice was old and hoarse, and through the muddled clinking of the bottles he thought he recognized it. Davey froze, paralyzed by thoughts of his father finding him in the middle of the woods without explanation; his ass clenched instinctively, readying itself for the belt. Davey could only remember a couple instances in which his father's belt had been fully removed—when he forgot to latch the chicken coop and three of the largest hens were ripped to shreds by the neighboring fox, and when Davey had called his mother a bitch just loudly enough that his father, passing through the kitchen, heard him—although his mother had not. Mostly it was unbuckled and pulled out far enough to strike fear into Davey that struck harder than the leather against skin.

"I'm sorry. I was walking and I got lost," Davey stumbled over his words. "I thought someone might be in here."

"I'm someone." The man moved close enough so Davey could smell alcohol on his breath, "Don't I look like a goddamned someone to you, kid?"

"Yes sir, I'm sorry." The sun was setting outside and Davey knew he only had twenty minutes, tops, before it was pitch black. "I'll just go now."

"Whoa, whoa there." The man grabbed Davey by the shoulder. "I didn't mean to scare you. Are you scared?"

Davey wanted nothing more than to be nose deep in the Bible, vowing to never cross that road again. "No." Before his father had gone off to "fight the good fight," as he called it, he took Davey aside and told him one thing: a man has nothing to fear but what lies inside of him.

"Good." The man pulled a chair out from the small table pushed in the corner and motioned for him to sit. "It's just, I don't usually have company and I like a little time to prepare. Tidy up, cook a seven course meal, maybe shave if I'm entertaining ladies." He grabbed two beers from a cooler. "But there ain't no ladies as far as I can see." The man cracked one open and set the other down in front of Davey. It was the same brand his father drank; Davey recognized it from the small rounded bottle and red and white striped label. He used to peel them off the dozens he would find strewn around the garage.

"Go on, have some." The man popped off the cap and pushed it closer. "What, your old man never give you a beer?"

Davey shook his head.

"That's a damn shame. What's your name anyway?"

Davey took a sip. The taste of it—bitter and metallic—took him by surprise and he struggled to swallow it, choking on the last few drops. "Davey."

"Well, Davey, did anyone ever tell you that you look just like John F. Kennedy?"

Davey shook his head. He had seen some of the young politician's inaugural speech with his mother who, after much pleading on his part, allowed him to watch the history unfold on their small black and white television. Davey had watched her usual tight-lipped expression soften as the speech began, unable to hide her fascination and, he suspected, desire for the leader. She was captivated by his dark hair, chiseled jaw, and baby blue eyes as all women were; he was captivated by his voice: strong, respectful, and mesmerizing.

"Ask not what your country can do for you," Davey spoke slowly, careful to correctly recite the quote that had stuck with him, "ask what you can do for your country."

"He speaks!" The man took a cigarette out and stuck it between his two front teeth, yellowing and chipped.

"What's your name?" Davey asked. The man recoiled at the question and Davey felt a pang of fear run through his chest.

"Name...name..." He pulled at his long, graying beard. "Well, I can't for the life of me remember my real name, kid, but you can call me Randall. That was my brother's name. Good man."

"What are you doing here? I mean, in this cabin?" Davey asked.

"Hitchin' my way over to Cali-for-nia." The word poured smoothly out of Randall's mouth and Davey could almost feel the warmth of the West Coast sun pouring down upon him.

"Caught the freight up this far before the conductor started doin' night checks." Night. Davey looked outside the small scratched window, the trees casting dark shadows on one another.

"Could you point me toward Route 6, sir?" Davey followed Randall out into the woods that darkened slightly, colder without the patches of sun. They walked together for a while in silence when they came to the edge of the trees and the start of the road. Davey stopped and watched Randall walk back towards his house, his gray beard the last thing to disappear in the early evening haze. As he came closer to the house, he could see soft yellow light cascading through the windows, the silhouette of his mother in the kitchen preparing dinner. Davey could feel his heart attempting to escape his chest as he made his way to the door. Imagined fury in his mother's eyes would burn like two spotlights as she heard the door close and her jaw would clench when she saw the giant rip in his shirt and mud on his feet. Davey looked down—he had forgotten his shoes back at the fence, but it had started to rain and they wouldn't help him now.

“There’s cornbread in the oven, could you grab it?” Davey’s mother leaned over a vat of steaming broth, mixing lumps of indistinguishable ingredients further into the milky liquid. She didn’t look up at Davey whose feet tracked a line of dirt across the floor as he walked toward the stove. A gust of heat hit him, prickling his cheeks and making his skin itch.

His mother filled two glasses with milk and set down a beer in front of his father’s place. She must have been ignoring his absence, not wanting to address the issue while his father was home. Davey knew his father would find a way to blame his mother as he always did. When he was younger their love was obvious, open, and enormous. Pet names for his mother and lingering embraces passed between them like steam. It was obvious to Davey even as a twelve year old that there was something gone between them; the conversations that once hummed in the dead of night were now shouting matches that lasted until his mother had to retire. The three sat in silence at the table. His mother watched his father eat, inhaling food between swigs of beer.

“So, Pop, you think we’ll move any time soon?”

“Don’t be a fool, boy,” his father grunted. “We’re never getting out of here.”

Davey’s throat lurched. *Never*. Davey thought of himself as an old man, still reciting parables and sitting on the porch in the afternoon, looking out over the trees rooted in the ground—still freer than him. Suddenly his fork felt like lead in his hand and he let it drop to the floor before pushing away from the table in silence.

From his bedroom, Davey could hear his mother trying to sway attention away from his exit. “Davey is really getting good at reciting the parables, Peter.” Her voice jumped an octave—whether out of fear or excitement Davey couldn’t tell. “Basically has all of them memorized.” She picked up her fork, taking small bites from her plate, which seemed to be eternally full. His father grunted before making his way out to the garage for the remainder of the evening.

That night, Davey lay awake in bed dreading the next morning when he would surely meet his fate. His mother woke him at six with two poached eggs and black coffee. It was the only vice she allowed him and he clung to it, draining the cup within minutes as she took drags on a Marlboro—the first of many. As promised, they continued where they had left off but his fate had yet to arrive. The day crept on until his mother lay down for her nap so seamlessly, he was unsure if she had ever awoken.

The walk to the road felt shorter than before and Davey curtailed around the cows gathered by the hay, picking up his shoes, caked with mud and shit around the edges. He walked aimlessly, letting the trees guide him. He would

pick one in the distance and aim for it, varying his choices by size and bark, picking no favorites. Within minutes the cabin appeared on the horizon, bigger and more expansive than it had seemed. Davey walked toward it without reservation, half expecting to find his mother asleep inside of the log walls, half hoping to see her expression filled with rage.

"Mr. Davey, President of the World!" Randall greeted him from atop a thin ladder that bowed under his heavy frame. He strung a sea green bottle from a rafter crowded with at least fifty others, tapping them lightly as he stepped down.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" He did a makeshift salute and handed a beer to Davey who popped off the cap, letting the amber liquid tickle his throat and nose.

"Do you have a family?" Davey was surprised at his forwardness but not regretful.

"That's like asking if a bee has a hive, kid." Randall sucked his teeth, playing with the gold cap on his canine, smoothing it beneath his tongue. "Of course I have a family."

"I hate my family." The words hung in the air, visible like the smoke from his mother's ashtray. He tried to waft them away with thoughts of his mother's sweet rolls and her beautiful singing voice, things he loved that he had taken away from her, things that he clung to in spite of everything else.

"Well shit," Randall laughed, "you wouldn't be human if you didn't. It's what you do about that hate that matters."

"But I don't know what to do." Davey clenched his fists, "My mom never lets me do *anything*, and my dad doesn't even know I exist." The beer shot out quickly from the bottle and foamed over Davey's lips, a sour mustache forming on his upper lip. "I wish they would disappear."

"You don't." Randall's eyes bore a hole in Davey, his gray beard twitching with each breath. "It's a lonely world without a family, kid. I would know."

"What happened to yours?" The wind outside had picked up speed and the sun seemed to set in time with his heart, each beat moving it further below the horizon.

"Well, I killed them." Randall tapped a bony finger on the table. "Chopped up my mom and dad into tiny bits and buried them in the yard. Bodies are heavier than you'd think." He laughed, tapping his fingers rapidly on the table.

"POW!" He slammed his fist down suddenly, his body going limp. "Just like that and they go from alive...to dead!" The sound made Davey jump, his heart begging to be released from his chest. He watched Randall, handling him as though he were a caged animal—no sudden moves.

Davey thought about his mother's face, her straw colored hair splattered with blood. He imagined the garage floor covered in the beer that would pour out of the gunshots in his father's belly. Davey remembered his father's words, and if not fearful for thinking these thoughts, he was deeply ashamed. He wondered if Randall ever thought about heaven, ever worried that they had condemned him for his act, or if he even believed in heaven to begin with. Davey longed suddenly for the comfort of his mother's cigarette smoke, sweet compared to Randall's, curling gently under his nose. He longed for the candies she hid deep within her apron pockets, slipping them to Davey when he made it through a verse without stuttering, the look of pride on her face when he recited the Ten Commandments. Davey remembered his father's words.

"I've got to go." Davey stood abruptly and paced towards the door before turning around. "I don't think you're a bad person."

"Neither do I."

His mother wasn't home when he came in through the door. There weren't any sweet rolls cooling on the tiled counters or pots simmering on the stove. A single cigarette lay burning in the ashtray near the kitchen, a single line of smoke cascading towards the ceiling. The room was empty though, as was the whole house. Davey even checked the garage for good measure, although his father rarely reared his head before dinner was set out on the table. Cases of beer were stacked in the corner next to the deep freezer that his father had bought in hopes of storing the massive kills from his failed hunting career. Davey grabbed a few bottles, stuffing them in the fat pockets of his wool coat and left through the garage door.

He walked through the field to the rhythm of the bottles clinking against one another. The sun had disappeared behind the trees and the cows were locked safely away in the barn for the night. Through the grass hissing with cicadas, he pushed on further into the night, absentmindedly traipsing over branches and roots that exploded under the added weight of alcohol. The cabin door was swinging lightly, emitting a yellow glow that wavered every few seconds. It beamed on and off like a beacon calling to Davey who answered it, only a few feet away from the porch steps.

"Randall!" Davey called into the house as the door swung open to greet him. *The only thing a man has to fear is what lies inside him.* The room was emptier than it had been before except for a half-empty container of schnapps that sat on a shelf out of his reach. String hung suspended from the rafters, thick and knotted. The bottles that had once hung lightly in the breeze were gone and the cabin was filled with an eerie silence. From his pocket Davey pulled out one of the bottles of beer; the cap had been torn off with his father's pliers and he had filled it with lighter fluid used to burn kindling in

the colder months. It flowed out of the bottle with ease, splattering across the floor in sweeping arcs. The twenty-six acres around him suddenly felt infinite as he stepped out onto the porch, striking the match clenched between his fingers. The house illuminated before him and the forest, stinging his cheeks and threatening to choke him with the thick black smoke cascading out of every orifice. The trees adjacent to the cabin lit up like a halo around Davey and somewhere in the distance a train whistle blew, signaling that it was time to go.

Error and Empathy: A Review of Karin Lin-Greenberg's *Faulty Predictions*

I didn't know what to expect when I first picked up Karin Lin-Greenberg's collection of short stories, *Faulty Predictions*. As the winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, the collection doubtlessly had literary merit. But the cover—and we all judge books initially by their covers—with its sunny color scheme and playful cursive font, suggested a light summer read, something to flip through beside the pool or on a beach during vacation. This assumption itself was a faulty prediction, as I immediately discovered after reading the first story, “Editorial Decisions,” which deals with social alienation, prejudice, elitism, and suicide, within the walls of a high school. I further understood my error as I continued reading Lin-Greenberg's humorous, resonant, well-crafted stories. As a writer of fiction, I clung to her idiosyncratic, lovably flawed characters, her various and detailed locales, and her inviting prose style. Despite their differences in length, content, and point of view, the stories collected in *Faulty Predictions* all cohere under the thematic umbrella of the collection's title.

Faulty Predictions is filled with characters of all backgrounds seeking to control their situations, suppress their emotions, maintain their worldviews, or change their families. They all seem to know what they want until they are met with the very truths they avoid. As I read the collection, I came to realize that my prejudgment of the book was a reflection of a broader human desire to control and the tendency to make superficial assumptions. There is security in being able to predict the outcomes, and having one's expectations thwarted is uncomfortable, but usually illuminating. Just as I quickly became aware of my own mistake in superficially prejudging Lin-Greenberg's collection, her characters come face to face with their own biases as well, and the consequences that follow. In "Late Night with Brad Mack," the son of a late-night TV show host can hardly believe his father's support and sincerity; an older English professor, Pete Peterson, is perplexed by the sight of his own youthful abandon caught on video in "The Local Scrooge"; a disgruntled medical resident in "A Good Brother" instinctively shows deep affection for his sister in a wedding dress shop.

Faulty Predictions is as much a presentation of its characters' thwarted prejudices as it is a reflection of our own. In the collection's shortest story, "Bread," the alleged antagonist Lenny, who purposefully squeezes and ruins loaves of bread at grocery stores, turns out to have altruistic motives. Lizzie, Lenny's girlfriend, recognizes Lenny's righteousness. Her Ma, however, does not. She has preconceived notions about Lenny, as we do, and seeing his face plastered all over the local news doesn't warm her up to him any more. Yet in the end, Ma unknowingly benefits from Lenny's behavior. We know, however, thanks to Lizzie's compassionate point of view. This story, though brief, captures the heart of Lin-Greenberg's entire collection; not only does it explore the importance of perspective in determining our prejudices toward one another, it celebrates the little, often unnoticeable things people do to make life better for others.

"Miller Duskman's Mistakes" explores these themes of human predisposition and goodwill in a broader sense. The story is told in the first-person perspective of the nameless owner of the Ladybug Bed and Breakfast, whose deeply rooted understanding of the intimate town of Morningstar, Ohio and its inhabitants allows her a sort of omniscience. This inventive manipulation of point of view allows Lin-Greenberg to explore more of what happens in Morningstar than would be possible if it were a more strictly limited point of view. As a result, the nameless narrator becomes the voice of Morningstar as a whole. When the story's title character moves into town and opens a high-end pizza shop, he is met with disdain. Like an immune system fending off a foreign cell, the people of Morningstar initially try their best to drive Miller out by refusing to buy his food. But they come to realize their reactive behav-

ior ultimately has greater, devastating implications when Avery Swenson, the town's most beloved and promising individual, leaves indefinitely as a result of the mistreatment.

While Lin-Greenberg ends "Miller Duskman's Mistakes" on a darker note than some of her other stories, it is still filled with moments of optimism that are characteristic of her writing. Avery and another younger resident, Caleb Barlow, are always looking to help others, whether it be their neighbors or the birds who fatally fly into Miller's glass building. The humanity with which Lin-Greenberg imbues these characters conveys the vital importance of empathy, which is the remedy for human prejudice: "It might not be kind to say that [Caleb] was slow, but that's the truth. He was the sweetest boy around, gentle, loved animals... He was the first student in the history of Morningstar to never miss a single day of school..." (124). While this assessment of Caleb comes directly from the owner of the Ladybug, it is, again, representative of the whole town's consciousness. Whether or not all the individuals in Morningstar feel this way about Caleb, thanks to the omniscience Lin-Greenberg employs through her narrator, we trust her accuracy, and come to know and admire Caleb as well.

These instances of optimism and empathy are potently found in "Prized Possessions." Lydia Wong, an immigrant from Shanghai, struggles to bond with her filmmaker daughter Anna, who is far removed from her mother's Chinese values. Lin-Greenberg depicts moments of familial tenderness that highlight Lydia's true feelings toward her daughter despite their strained relationship: "Surely Anna had to know that Lydia had only wanted the best for her, always. Yes, she'd been strict when Anna was growing up, but all she wanted was for Anna to grow up to be a proper, well-behaved young lady" (39). These revelations all take place within Lydia's thoughts—they are never stated out loud and never openly discussed between characters. Lin-Greenberg understands that we seldom speak what we actually think, and these repressed sentiments preserve many of our insecurities and faulty predictions about ourselves and others—even our own families.

Indeed, Lin-Greenberg's stories are ultimately about family, and not exclusively biological families. The high school seniors in "Editorial Decisions" become a family through their shared experiences, as do the diverse students of the "Half and Half Club," the collection's final story. The entire town of Morningstar, Ohio collectively raises Avery Swenson after her mother is killed in a truck accident and her father dies in Iraq; Lydia Wong walks "into the warmth of the afternoon to join her family" (49); Pete the professor recognizes "something familiar in the image of himself on the screen," but can't quite accept his role as an affectionate grandfather and human being (73). In the collection's titular story, Hazel Stump, a paranoid elderly woman and self-proclaimed psychic, isn't yet ready to embrace her multiracial family, only

acknowledging them by writing their initials on several chalkboards in a college building. She foresees many things accurately, yet has the greatest trouble facing the most important truths of her life: the futility of her prejudices and a deep affection for her family.

Karin Lin-Greenberg's collection makes us consider our own families and communities, our prejudices and insecurities. To read these stories is to connect to fellow human beings from many places, to understand their individual and universal struggles, and to reinvigorate the inherent human empathy that unites us all. It is also to understand how our faulty predictions about ourselves and those around us ultimately distract us from this unity. Lin-Greenberg, through her poignant, hopeful, and funny stories, offers redemption not only for her characters, but for her readers as well.

An Interview with Karin Lin-Greenberg

Karin Lin-Greenberg earned her MFA from the University of Pittsburgh, an MA from Temple University, as well as an AB from Bryn Mawr College. Her short story collection, *Faulty Predictions*, was the winner of the 2013 Flannery O'Connor Award in Short Fiction from the University of Georgia Press. Her stories can also be found in literary journals such as *The Antioch Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and the *Berkeley Fiction Review*. She is currently an assistant professor at Siena College, where she teaches creative writing.

ERIN KOEHLER: We think the title *Faulty Predictions* encompasses the entire collection well. Can you talk about how you determined the collection's title?

KARIN LIN-GREENBERG: I wanted the book's title to be the title of one of the stories in the collection. I looked at all the titles and thought about whether there was one title that could encompass the themes and ideas in the entire collection, and I decided "Faulty Predictions" made the most sense. In each of the stories, characters set out with a particular set of expectations, and by the end, their "predictions" about their lives are turned upside-down. Generally, the characters learn or understand something about their own lives by the end of the story that they didn't know at the beginning. Usually, something they didn't expect to happen occurs over the course of the story.

AMY ELIZABETH BISHOP: The settings in *Faulty Predictions* are diverse—from Ohio to Illinois to Kansas, North Carolina, from college towns to big cities. How did you choose the settings for your stories? And how important is setting to you as a writer?

KLK: The settings are all places where I've lived or imagined towns that are similar to places I've lived. I've moved a lot in the last decade, and I wanted to incorporate each place I lived in my fiction. Some sense of setting is always important for me. I tell my students that we need to know a general sense of where things are taking place; if we don't know, we often get scenes where characters are talking to each other, and readers can't picture where the characters are. I've heard this called Talking Head Syndrome. In some of the stories in the collection, like "Bread," I don't specify a particular setting because place isn't a terribly important element of the story. However, we know that some scenes are set in the protagonist's house, others in a car, and others in a grocery store. In other stories, like "Miller Duskman's Mistakes," setting is incredibly important. I think in that story setting drives the plot in many ways. I taught for three years in a small town in Ohio that was very similar to the imaginary Morningstar, Ohio, of "Miller Duskman's Mistakes." The only outsiders in the real-life version of Morningstar were the people who came to teach at the college. I wanted to capture a sense of what it felt like to be an outsider in a small town, and I wanted to come up with a character who might be perceived as even more of an intruder than the academics who came to teach at the college. I thought a character who tore down an established business in Morningstar and opened a restaurant that was very out of place in this town could create some active dislike from the people who'd lived in the town their entire lives.

EK: The characters in your collection are unique, quirky, even, yet they feel very real too. We especially loved the characters in "Miller Duskman's Mistakes" and this small town perspective. Are your characters often born out of real life experiences, people you know, or do they come to you in other ways?

KLK: Mostly my characters are imagined. They might be sparked by something that happened in real life or something that I observed or read or heard about, but for the most part I like to make up characters from scratch. I don't think I've ever written a character that's completely based on either myself or someone I know. I might take one or two traits from real life people, but I'd say about ninety to ninety-five percent of each character I write comes from imagination.

AEB: Character names seem important in your stories. In "Prized Possessions," in particular, names are meaningful. How do you choose character names?

KLK: I'm mostly concerned with names matching who the characters are. I think about the ages of the characters and where they live and the time period in which the story takes place, and I try to choose names that feel right. I often find myself writing near bookshelves filled with books, so when I'm stuck

for a character name I'll look at the spines and the names of the authors and a lot of the time my eyes will rest upon either a first name or a last name that seems to fit the character I'm writing. Sometimes I'll just do a Google search for something like "Most popular last names in North Carolina in 1990" and see what comes up. Sometimes I'll poke around on baby name websites, but I don't care too much about the meanings of the names; for me, these websites are just a way to scroll through lots of names. I generally try not to use names that are symbolic, but in "Prized Possessions" I believed the characters would name their twins Hope and Chance. So that was more of a decision to characterize the parents than to have these kids stand for these abstract ideas.

EK: A number of the conflicts in your stories take place within families or in friendships, which can be fraught in similar ways. In "The Good Brother," for instance, adult siblings, who are thrown together for a surprising errand, come to understand each other. In the title story, Hazel and the narrator reach a similar moment of understanding. In "Prized Possessions," there is resolution for the protagonist in both her family and her friendship. Can you talk about writing these moments and the role of humor in them?

KLK: I think the humor often arises from the situations the characters are in. What's important for me in stories is to have two things going on, an upper story and a lower story. The upper story is simply where stuff happens. Sometimes people call this the actual plot. I try to be aware of making sure there's enough going on in scene in my stories. I ask myself whether characters are doing things, whether they're talking to each other, whether they're in conflict in some way with each other. I want to make sure they're not just sitting around thinking and pontificating. The lower story is where there's some sort of emotional resonance to the stuff that happens in the story, and this can also be called the emotional plot. So the upper story is where the humor happens in action, but the lower story is where there are moments of understanding and resolution.

AEB: The stories in *Faulty Predictions* are told in a variety of points of view. "Editorial Decisions," begins the collection with the first person plural, and you use first and third limited elsewhere. How do you choose POV?

KLK: For me, point of view is generally attached to character. If I'm working with a character with a distinct voice, I'll usually gravitate toward first person. In "Editorial Decisions" I had a group of characters who were all thinking and acting in the same way, so I thought first person plural made sense as a way to tell this story. I think about second person as a distancing point of view, sort of like a displaced first person. I generally don't think of it as a point of view that puts the reader in the character's shoes. I chose second person narration for "Designated Driver" because I thought the protagonist would have a hard time telling the story in first person. It's easier for her to not quite take

responsibility for her missteps and instead push these actions onto a “you” character.

EK: There’s a lot of action in these stories—people going places, seeking out other characters or things, getting injured, etc. What types of scenes are most difficult for you to write, and which comes the most naturally?

KLG: First drafts of any sort of scene are always difficult for me. I tend to overwrite and indulge in tangents, and then in revision I cut away and keep only what’s important. I like the revision process a whole lot more than I like the process of getting the first draft of the story down. I enjoy writing dialogue, but I find in revision I can usually cut away at least half of the dialogue I initially wrote, which tightens up the subsequent drafts.

AEB: Your collection won the Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction in 2013. Can you talk about the process of putting together a collection? Did you submit *Faulty Predictions* to other contests?

KLG: I started submitting a collection of stories to contests for book-length collections starting in 2006, when I graduated from my MFA program. We had to complete a manuscript as a final project, and my manuscript was a collection of stories. After I graduated, I submitted the stories that I wrote during my MFA to contests, but I was also writing new stories. I kept submitting to contests every year, and each year I would take out some of the older stories and swap in newer stories. I think the collection got stronger over the years as I kept working and writing and swapping out stories. In 2009 I was a finalist for the Flannery O’Connor, which gave me a lot of hope and encouraged me to keep going even though by that point I’d gotten dozens of rejections for the collection. By the time the collection won in 2013, it probably looked about ninety percent different from the collection I started submitting in 2006. “Faulty Predictions” itself was written in 2012, so it was a really new story. Actually, three of the stories, “Faulty Predictions,” “Late Night With Brad Mack,” and “Half and Half Club” were all written within a few months before I submitted the collection in May. Those are the three stories in the collection that weren’t first published in journals because they were so new that I didn’t have time to get them published before the book went to press.

I learned a lot over the years about putting together a collection. At first, I thought that if a story had been published in a journal it belonged in the collection. So for many years I submitted collections that I don’t think held together thematically or in terms of voice or tone. Then I started thinking about collections as a whole and studying collections I liked. Even if the stories in these collections were about different kinds of characters and were set in a variety of places, they generally all felt like they belonged together in some way. So I got rid of some stories from my collection that didn’t fit in with the other stories. These were mainly stories that were more driven by voice than

by character or plot and also some stories where I was more concerned with lyrical language than plot. In this collection that I submitted in 2013, I tried to include stories that felt tonally similar and had some humor to them, even if they were about serious topics.

AEB: We're struck by the story about "Prized Possessions" being rejected numerous times before winding up in the prestigious journal *Epoch*. How do you know when to push on with a story and how do you know when to give up?

KLK: A big issue with "Prized Possessions" was that I submitted it too early. It was a story I was excited about, and I'd written multiple drafts of it and just couldn't wait to submit it. It really wasn't finished yet; I still had a lot of things to figure out with it, and I should have gone through a few more drafts before sending it out. I'm a lot more patient now as a submitter; I'm willing to put a story down for a while and revisit it before I send it out. "Prized Possessions" is the oldest story in the collection, and it started as an exercise in a class I took in graduate school. I think I often submitted work too early while I was a student.

Ultimately, figuring out when to push forward and when to quit has a lot to do with how much I believe in the story. And, maybe more importantly, whether I can stand to keep working on it. I've worked on some stories for five or six years before they got published (of course this isn't steady work, but rather returning to the stories every few months). I think it's also important to take another look at a story that's been rejected a lot of times and see if I can figure out whether there's something that's simply not working with the story. And, if I can figure this out, the next step is seeing if I can figure out how to revise what's not working. If I'm really lucky, some kind editors might jot down a few notes about why they rejected the story, and if I find that several of the notes say similar things, that might also help to lead me to what to revise.

EK: What are you working on currently?

KLK: I'm currently working on a bunch of things. I've been writing stories set in upstate New York that I hope will one day work together in a collection. I had fun putting together a collection that jumps around in terms of settings, but I'm now interested in writing a more cohesive collection. I'm also working on a novel that grapples with the question of what it means to be successful. And since I teach these genres and am constantly reading and thinking about them, I'm also writing some poetry and some creative nonfiction.

MONICA WENDEL

Vilnius

In Lithuania
my roommate made art
about hating Jews—

I escaped to a field
where I watched boys play soccer,

some universal sport
even in dream.

But things were dangerous.
I rode the elevator back up to the apartment
pushed her against the wall
shouting about soldiers
looking for people like me.

She looked surprised
that ideas could have consequences.

I didn't destroy her art.
I woke up instead
and turned off the air conditioner
and took the dog out.
Grey clouds marbled over red brick buildings,
over the old factory we live in.

You were still sleeping.
In darkness, at night, your paintings
become the flags ships use
to signal each other
across wide empty spaces—
this one for civic pride,
this one for genocide.

MONICA WENDEL

English Kills

I've been singing
in a dead language
about the sun.
The children know
it can come back to life;
just ask the Israelis
who made up words
they couldn't find in the Torah—
T-shirt, rainbow.
But *rainbow* must have been there.
Maybe I'm remembering this wrong.
In my dream, I was on a farm,
presenting a PowerPoint.
One slide was a picture of a mother
kneeling by her child,
the other was a backyard
abutting the Newton Creek,
and then the computer
stopped working. In real life
the creek branches
into English Kills and Maspeth Creek.
Don't be alarmed:
Kills was only Dutch for something.
Was it stream. Was it water.
They're all dead now,
those first discoverers.
My mother is scared

of the tunnels the Gazans
are building
but I am scared of any prison
no matter how large
and must always take the side
against the guards.
Call it my stubborn calling.
She told me once
that language is a river,
not a fish tank.
You can never capture
all the words.

MONICA WENDEL

Bushwick, Brooklyn

Admit it: you lose more keys
than all the travelers in the hostel combined.
And a summer storm is riding from the sidewalk
when the downstairs neighbor says,
“Did you know, there are apartments
above the coffee shop?” You say, yes,
because, look, this whole street
is buildings with three floors,
what did she think was there?
And she, coke hungover, says, “But where
is the *door*? How do they get upstairs?”
then huffs off. At least the front door
is open now. In your dream last night
you were in a red-lit basement
flooding with water. Sometimes the delivery
dealer rings your doorbell by accident.
The coffee shop has a lost-key app
on an iPad by the register.
Go there. They’ll let you in, next time.
They always do.

About the Authors

RACHEL BENEWAY is in the midst of her junior year at SUNY Fredonia where she studies English education and creative writing. When she manages to break away from the lives of fictional characters, she likes to spend her summers hiking up mountains and winters skiing down them. In a past life she was definitely best friends with Scout Finch. This is Rachel's first publication.

RACHEL BURKE is a senior at SUNY Plattsburgh. She has studied graphic design, photography, and a little computer science. Rachel loves to bake and explore the great outdoors in her spare time.

NOAH CHAUVIN is a junior at SUNY Geneseo, where he studies English literature and biological science. When he's not cuddled up in his armchair reading, Noah enjoys spending time running, hiking, and taking photographs. If he could be friends with any fictional character, it would be Fiver of Richard Adams's *Watership Down*, because his intuitive mind and kind heart would make for a great connection.

SEAN DELLES is a sophomore English major at SUNY Geneseo. He lives on the American side of Niagara Falls, which is inundated with Canadian drivers who seemingly enjoy pissing off American drivers. He will admit they're polite about it though. Sean loves to make tunes with friends, watch movies

with Clint Eastwood, and eat fruit early in the morning.

DANTE DI STEFANO is a Ph.D. candidate at Binghamton University. His poetry and essays have appeared recently in *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Shenandoah*, *Brilliant Corners*, and elsewhere. He was the winner of the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award, The Ruth Stone Poetry Prize, The Phyllis Smart-Young Prize in Poetry, and an Academy of American Poets College Prize. He currently serves as a poetry editor for *Harpur Palate*. He'd love to be best friends with Colonel Sherburn from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

OLIVER DIAZ is a sophomore English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. He has tried his hand at poetry, fiction, and visual art. He hopes things will get easier but doesn't expect them to. He would befriend Sean from Victor LaValle's collection of short stories *Slapboxing with Jesus* and they would plan, fail, and plan again.

DUSTIN J. DIPAULO is a senior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. When he's not posing as a customer at the Holiday Inn to utilize their guests-only heated pool, he is probably rapping with the talented Red Kettle Collective. If he were to choose a literary character to be his BFF, it would be Raul Duke from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

LARA ELMAYAN is a graduating senior of English and Journalism/Media major at SUNY Geneseo. She loves graphic design, looking at buildings, and fancy vegetarian food, and definitely does not want to hear any stories about your pet. Two of her works have been published in *Gandy Dancer* previously. Most of the characters from her favorite novels are either detestable or extremely depressing, so she prefers that none of them leave their fictional worlds to befriend her.

THERESA FLYNN is a student at SUNY New Paltz, where she studies creative writing, digital media production and theater performance. If she were to be best friends with any fictional character, it would be Frederic Henry from *A Farewell to Arms*. Just kidding!—she has nothing in common with that sappy sucker. To follow Theresa, visit her website: theresaflynn.wordpress.com.

LAURA GOLDEN is a senior at SUNY Geneseo, where she studies English literature. She hails from Ashville, New York and when she's not at home playing with her two kittens, she's probably making art. If she were to be best friends with a fictional character it would be Luciente from Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, because traveling through time and space would be pretty neat.

EVAN GOLDSTEIN is a sophomore English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. His favorite road is Nations Road, and his favorite album is still *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. Evan is working on his poetry and photography, and figuring out what comes next. He would be best friends with Sam

Hamilton from *East of Eden*, because he was always kind, even during hard times.

KIRA GREGORY is a freshman at SUNY Polytechnic Institute. She enjoys studying media and communications, and when she's not at school she can be found digging in her gardens, playing guitar, or watching the night sky. She has also made a tradition of participating in NaNoWriMo. This is Kira's first publication. If she were to befriend a fictional character, it just might be Stellanuna.

JASON GUISAO was born in the village of Floral Park, New York. He writes fiction—and poetry, when he doesn't feel like undertaking ten-page-long projects. His idols include Raymond Carver, Ray Bradbury, and Cormac McCarthy. He considers himself best friends with Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men* because deep down, Jason wants to be an assassin and a never-before-seen force of evil.

KEARA HAGERTY is currently a junior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. She enjoys starting to write, stopping, giving up, and starting again, particularly in the genre of fiction. When she's not drowning in her sixth cup of coffee, Keara can be found creepily chasing the stray cats of Geneseo, who really just want to be loved.

CODIE HAZEN is a sophomore studying English, Adolescent Education, and Women's and Gender Studies. He calls Wilmington, Delaware home. You are most likely to find him in coffee shops, ice rinks, climbing mountains, or long-ing for the open road.

ALEXANDRIA HERMAN is a sophomore English major at SUNY Geneseo who occasionally dabbles in photography in her spare time. She thinks she and Annabeth Chase from the Percy Jackson Series would get along smashingly.

TAYLOR LEA HICKS has a B.A. in creative writing from the University of Central Arkansas and is currently in the M.F.A. program at Stony Brook Southampton. Her scripts have won awards from the Arkansas College Media Association and her play "Whiskers" was produced by the UCA Youth Theatre in 2012. Her work has been published in *Arkansas Anthology*, *Vortex Magazine*, and *Cattywampus Magazine*. Follow her on Twitter at @taylorleahicks or email her at taylorleah8@gmail.com.

SARAH HOPKINS is a junior English (literature) major at SUNY Geneseo. She likes reading, writing, and staring into the stars while being filled with existential dread. Currently, Sarah is participating in the Disney College Program and having a grand old time with some cowboys, space rangers, and green army men. If she could be best friends with any fictional character, Sarah would undoubtedly choose Atticus Finch.

ETHAN KEELEY was born and raised in Rochester, New York, a significant hub of culture and the arts. When he isn't writing he is either living vicariously through his nerdy obsessions, or playing guitar. He tours with his band whenever possible in a van unfit for proper sleeping. His fiction has been published in previous issues of *Gandy Dancer*.

EDDIE KNIBLOE is a senior at a SUNY Fredonia. He is studying arts administration and museum studies and has been taking photos as a hobby since he was twelve years old. His other hobbies include sailing and finding small town junk food places. He would probably be best friends with Jules Winnfield from *Pulp Fiction*. They both have a soft spot for a tasty burger.

BRIDGET KUNZ is a student at Binghamton University, an artist, a beginner cook, a better baker, a big sister, a lover of sugar, a nerd, an avid reader, and an enthusiastic rollerblader. She has always been passionate about creating art and reading. If she had to choose a fictional character to be best friends with, she would pick Eragon from *The Inheritance Cycle* by Christopher Paolini.

KLARISA LOFT is a junior at SUNY Geneseo where she is currently studying creative writing. She is from Attica, NY and this is her first ever publication. She lives for all kinds of storytelling: books, photographs, television, film, and music. And if she could be best friends with any character, it would be Alice, so that she might be taken down the rabbit hole and mentored on creating a world of her own.

JAMES MATTSON is a junior biology major and aspiring physician. During his free time, he enjoys cooking, managing the new SUNY Geneseo photography club, and, of course, photography. He is a self-taught photographer and primarily enjoys portraiture. Photography allows him a creative outlet for experience, growth, and expression and has been an integral part in his realization as a person.

CATHERINE MCWILLIAMS is a senior Creative Writing major at SUNY Geneseo. As a life long nap enthusiast, Catherine commonly falls asleep while reading next to a piping hot jar of tea. When she isn't napping or writing, Catherine spends her time taking photographs and studying the work of other photographers. She is very picky about who she spends her time with and has yet to come across any fictional character she would ever want to encounter on a regular basis.

ROBIN MENDOZA is a sophomore studying New Media at SUNY Purchase, back in his county of origin after nearly seven years in the capital region. He previously studied creative writing and studio art at Oswego. He's edited a couple literary mags himself, and would most definitely be down to picnic with Mr. Toad.

CHRISTINA MORTELLARO is a senior English (Creative Writing) and communication major at SUNY Geneseo. She has been previously published in *Gandy Dancer* and her poetry has been presented at the 2015 and 2014 Sigma Tau Delta International Convention. In her spare time, you can find Christina binge-watching Netflix while attempting to clean her room—a forever chore. Christina's literary best friend is and will always be Jo March from *Little Women*.

JANNA NUNZIATO is a junior at SUNY Geneseo. She studies history with a concentration in adolescent education. She comes from Northport, Long Island, and enjoys listening to Motown while reminiscing about a past that she was not alive for.

JOSEPH O'CONNOR is a senior at SUNY Geneseo. He is a student of English literature working towards NYS certification in adolescent education with a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. Next year, he will join the 2015 Teach for America corps as a Secondary English Language Arts teacher in Miami, Florida. If he were to befriend a fictional character, he would host regular slumber parties with his B-F-F Albus Dumbledore, where the two would paint their nails with magic, share ghost stories, and dish the latest wizard gossip.

MICHELE LYNN PAWLAK is a second time SUNY student at Erie Community College, with a habit of writing, a penchant for coffee—good or bad—and a general appreciation of all things fictional.

KATRYNA PIERCE is a Junior English major and writing minor at SUNY Fredonia. When she's not at school, she defrosts at her local beach in Connecticut. She passes her time knitting and watching bad Syfy channel movies. Her work has been published in *The Trident*, a student run magazine at Fredonia. If she could, she would be best friends with Hagrid for their shared fondness of dragons and large, friendly dogs.

DEVON PONIATOWSKI is an English (literature) major at SUNY Geneseo. She believes in the power of art, and the importance of observing beauty. If she could befriend a fictional character, it would be Puck (Robin) from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for his spritely and mischievous whimsy.

ANGELA ROLLINS is currently an English major at SUNY Geneseo. She spends most of her time either working at The Friendly Home, a nursing home in Rochester, or playing with her adorable dog. Her fictional best friend would definitely be Katniss Everdeen, a great example of a strong, independent, female character.

ELISE SILVERSTEIN is a senior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. She is from New Jersey and spends most of her free time counting down the days until the end of winter and dreaming of world travel. If she could be best friends with a fictional character it would be Pi Patel from *Life of Pi*.

SAVANNAH SKINNER is a sort-of-senior at SUNY Geneseo. She studies history and creative writing. This is Savannah's second publication in *Gandy Dancer*. If she were to befriend a fictional character, it would be Arrietty Clock, in the hopes that together they could borrow many small, shiny things.

KEVIN SON may be a junior at SUNY Oswego. He was until very recently studying psychology but has now decided to follow his passion for creative writing, as harrowing as it may be. He calls Brooklyn, New York his home and when he's not indulging in video games and YouTube, he is firmly planted on his feet playing the keyboard, because he doesn't own a bench.

SARAH STEIL is a sophomore English (creative writing) and pre-vet major at SUNY Geneseo. She enjoys writing, animals, and watching reruns of *Forensic Files* late at night with her dachshund, Bruno.

MARGARET THON is a junior Biology and English (creative writing) double major at SUNY Geneseo. From small-town Marathon, New York, Margaret enjoys hiking and relaxing on her porch. This is Margaret's first publication. If she were to befriend a fictional character it would be Barbara Parks' Junie B. Jones.

KATHRYN WARING is a senior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo from eastern Long Island. She was recently invited to read at Sigma Tau Delta's annual conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and plans to pursue an M.F.A. in creative nonfiction. Although Kathryn counts numerous fictional characters among her friends, her literary kindred spirit would be either Truman Capote or Leslie Jamison—if she could, she'd place them both in a room for an enlightening discussion on the roles of research and authorial position in CNF.

MONICA WENDEL is the author of the collection *No Apocalypse* (Georgetown Review Press, 2013) and the chapbooks *Call it a Window* (Midwest Writing Center, 2012) and *Pioneer* (Thrush Press, 2014). She would be best friends with the pioneer Antonia from Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. In 2013, she was the writer-in-residence at the Jack Kerouac Project of Orlando, Florida. She holds a B.A. from SUNY Geneseo and a M.F.A. from NYU.

JASON ZIMMERMANN is an aspiring artist/photographer/filmmaker currently attending SUNY Fredonia as a video production major with a minor in visual arts and new media. This is Jason's second publication in *Gandy Dancer*.