Gandy Dancer

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

Issue 4.2 | Spring 2016

Gandy Dancer is published biannually in the spring and fall by the State University of New York College at Geneseo. Issues of *Gandy Dancer* are freely available for view or download from gandydancer.org, and print copies are available for purchase. Special thanks to the College at Geneseo's Department of English and Milne Library for their support of this publication.

ISSN: 2326-439X

ISBN (THIS ISSUE): 978-1-942341-30-7

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.

We use Submittable to manage submissions and the editorial process. Prospective authors can submit at gandydancer.submittable.com/submit. Please use your SUNY email address for your user account and all correspondence.

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

FICTION: We accept submissions up to 25 pages. Stories must be double-spaced. We are unlikely to accept genre or fan-fiction, though stranger things have happened…

CREATIVE NONFICTION: We accept submissions up to 25 pages. CNF must be double-spaced.

POETRY: Three to five poems equal one submission. Poems must be submitted as a single document. Format as you would like to see them in print. Our text columns are generally 4.5 inches wide, at 11pt font.

VISUAL ART: We accept submissions of art—especially photos, drawings, and paintings—in the file formats jpeg, tiff, and png. Submitted images should have a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and be at least 5 inches wide. Please include work titles in your submissions.

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Dearest Readers—

As we careen into the future and reflect on our time spent as student editors, we've come to realize that there's a lot more to celebrate in our daily lives than what's immediately perceptible. The small things, as much as the big events, are worthy of celebration, if not cake and confetti. We consider ourselves lucky. Not only are we fortunate to have an institution such as SUNY Geneseo to serve as a home for *Gandy Dancer*, but we are also lucky to have the support and passion of faculty members as a driving force behind our work—providing and creating opportunities for students to explore the myriad literary avenues that pique our curiosity. Equally as important is the sense of community that surrounds us, not just in Geneseo, but throughout the entire SUNY system.We celebrate the opportunity to surround ourselves with the diverse company of fellow writers, poets, and artists—to feel a part of something special and evolving. We've learned that being literary citizens means supporting not only ourselves, but also one another. We've learned how to dissolve the limits of our own personal taste, creating a richer and wider landscape of voices, and most importantly, we've come to understand that the act of celebration can and should be a conscious choice—one that defines how we live and interpret the world in which we participate. Celebration means going to every local reading, workshop, and lecture that we're able to attend—just this semester we had the pleasure of hearing Leslie Pietrzyk, Sonja Livingston, Carey McHugh, and Camille Rankine, amongst others. Celebration is the act of listening when new voices emerge, and the resolution to pursue the joy of writing, even while the debate over whether or not poetry is dead rages on.

Throughout our time as Managing Editors, we've experienced this type of joy firsthand. From reading the tremendous submissions we received this spring, to our impassioned discussions over the proper usage of a hyphen and the order of our pieces, we've grown into first-class celebrators. As editors of a student-led magazine, we're in the unique position of providing a home for emerging writers to help shape a larger literary terrain. In this note to you, our readers, we want to draw attention to, and honor, the important work being done by student editors elsewhere. We find inspiration in the evocative and diverse writing within *The Adroit Journal*, whose founder and Editor-in-Chief, Peter LaBerge, is currently an undergraduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, and whose current Managing Editor, Lucia LoTempio, previously edited our very own *Gandy Dancer*. We also want to salute other female editors and writers, who, with the help of committed

organizations like VIDA, are continuously working to foster a more diverse collection of voices and perspectives. We want to send some virtual confetti and cake out to small, independent presses everywhere, starting with the innovative and welcoming array we saw at the Buffalo Small Press Book Fair this year. And last, but certainly not least, we want to celebrate the work that we're so proud to feature in this issue.

"We need to clean the window," begins the first poem in this issue, Evan Goldstein's "Standing at the Sill, the Sun is Weak & Dropping," inviting us to come and look again, to brush off our lenses and behold. Thus encouraged to turn both inward and outward, we're led through a meandering yet precise series of light, first "dusk light," then "hyacinth light," and lastly "warm light," where we might kick off our shoes and forget about the coming day and the departing past. We are proud to present several poems in this issue that experiment with form and introduce structural challenges, because we believe that an innovative departure from formalized poetic structures is just as important as honoring traditional conventions.

The creative nonfiction pieces featured in this issue also encourage introspection. These essays connect us to particular moments within our lives, and force us to examine the intricacies of human nature. "The Amorphous Children," by Lauren Sarrantonio, offers a meditative perspective on the nebulous nature of childhood, while "Onliness," by Christine Davis, explores the tension between familial relationships and the desire for independence. In a thoughtful departure, Brendan Mahoney's "What Are You Laughing at?" uses comedic theory as a lens to call attention to the negative implications of our rhetoric. And finally, in the quietly heartbreaking "Sonder," Margaret Thon explores the very trait that makes us human—our desire to relay and record stories.

In fiction we travel from a French restaurant in New York, to a coastal village in the Fujian Province, to an obstetrician's office, and even to a metaphoric house on a hill. Amelia McNally's "In Now" creates a meta-space in which the reader is asked to consider the way stories are constructed from the reconciliation of possibility and inevitability. In Jiaming Tang's "Stone Village," the reader confronts an approaching threat through the perspectives of several characters, eventually being led to redefine the very meaning of danger, "wishing for nothing but to flutter outside and into the storm."

We were blown away by the variety of compelling art submissions we welcomed this spring. We've never received so many mixed media submissions before, and in reflection of that, we are excited to put forth an issue full of thought-provoking and distinctive artwork. We're thrilled to publish four pieces from our featured artist, Lei Peng Gan, whose paintings and prints challenge our understanding of how space and perception operate together—a function of memory. In her acrylic painting, "Temperature in White No. 8,"

this SUNY Plattsburgh artist creates an intense moment of potential energy that calls into question the balance between perceived opposites, such as cold and warmth. We celebrate these different modes and mediums of expression.

"A book is a sneeze," E.B. White once wrote in a letter to his editor, commenting on the irrepressible and distinctly human act of storytelling. Lately, we've found ourselves continually returning to these words that so succinctly define creative expression: much like the work in this issue, it is urgent, unstoppable, and liberating. On that note, we'd like to leave you with an invitation to an ongoing and open-ended celebration, with the hope that you'll find something in this issue that will give you the urge to sneeze.

Yours in celebration,
Christy & Courtney (C^2)
Managing Editors, Spring 2016

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Gandy Dancer

EVAN GOLDSTEIN

Standing at the Sill, the Sun is Weak & Dropping

we need to clean the window

there are specks
on the trees

grasping dusk light settles
on the windowsill

snowmelt rushes storm drains
and the grass,

greening tailpipes still vapor
to the road,

and crows turn
in hyacinth light
on the ceiling

come lay down
before warm light leaves
the mattress.

CHRISTINE DAVIS

Onliness

Own-lee-ness | \ˈŌnlēnəs\

When I was in elementary school, I had an imaginary brother. He wasn't so much an imaginary friend as he was an imaginary accessory, something I felt I had to have since everyone else had one, like those awful Skechers with the brightly colored stripes on the sides and foam bottoms. I viewed having a sibling as a sort of privilege that I hadn't earned, or that I wasn't right for—like my fifth grade feet that were too big to fit into those shoes. Apparently I hadn't done the right set of things to warrant a sibling, so instead I made one up.

His name was Warren, chosen because we often received mail at my house addressed to a "Warren Davis," as if the post office, too, couldn't fully believe that I was an only child. I sympathized with the post office; I could hardly believe it myself. None of the members of my family had ever been named Warren, nor had the previous owners had any connections to a Warren. He was probably a result of some data brokers getting a hold of our information for junk mail purposes and inputting the wrong name, but whatever the case, Warren was born. Warren was in college and went to the University of Florida, partly because it was close to where our grandparents lived, but mainly because their mascot was an alligator. That was part of the deal, too: Warren had a pet gator that he kept in his room, and he had gone through several roommates until he finally found one who could handle living with his ferocious pet. I never went as far as to pick a major for Warren, but I know that he was an incredibly super senior with little hope of ever graduating, and that at some point in middle school, I made him gay as a show of support for my developing liberal ideologies.

Of course, when I would look through the photos of my earliest years, trips to California for family reunions or Easters at my grandparents, his absence was duly noted, because he obviously couldn't leave his pet gator alone or miss his classes. No, he was absent because he never existed, except in the minds of my very gullible neighbor and myself. I convinced my neighbor on multiple occasions that Warren was really real. I used to pick up the mail after we got off the bus and then show it to Douglas, inventing tales of how Warren would have loved to tour the vineyards on the East End if only he could come up for the summer, but it was hard to find someone to watch the gator. Doug would stare at me with wide eyes and an open mouth, and I would laugh to myself and run inside to tell my mother how I had convinced Doug again that I had an older brother. She would shake her head and sort the mail, throwing away the catalogs and the postcards addressed to Warren, my only proof, my only vestige of hope. But there was no sandy haired boy to hold me when I was born, no tall and lean and scabby-kneed ten-year-old to hold my hand as I fed ducks by the pond near my house, no rapidly growing teenage trickster to pull my ponytail at my elementary school moving up ceremony. All of these pictures exist, they just lack his presence.

My mother is also an only child, but I don't tend to count her in the same category as me. Theresa Ann Gorman, often affectionately called Terry Ann, grew up in Rosedale, a neighborhood in Queens, surrounded by activity as a child. Her mother, the darling Annette, everyone's "Honey," spent the summer she was sixteen volunteering at a children's hospital in the Bronx where she contracted polio at its height in 1952. She began the next part of her life as a quadriplegic after three years in an iron lung, and married her childhood sweetheart, Herb. Due to the nature of my grandmother's condition, there were always people around to help: my great-grandmother and great-grandfather, who I affectionately referred to as Granny and Grampy; their son, my grandmother's brother and my mother's uncle, Johnny, who was only fifteen years older than my mother; and a flurry of nurses and home healthcare helpers. There was never a shortage of people in their household, nor pets, as my mother owned ducks and German shepherds, birds and exotic fish. It was like having a small farmhouse in the middle of the borough, bursting with people who were constantly moving or doing.

From a young age, my mother never wanted to have kids. The concept just never appealed to her. It wasn't that she'd had a bad childhood or that something had happened along the way to deter her. She just wasn't interested. This was quite different from what my grandmother had envisioned for her daughter. After my grandmother had my mother, one of her kidneys had been removed, and this combined with the effects of polio made it unsafe

for her to have more children. Annette had expected that her daughter would want to have lots of kids, considering that she'd missed out on growing up with anyone else, but she wasn't too upset that my mother felt this way. It seemed just as well. When she was nineteen, my mother was diagnosed with a severe hormonal imbalance, which at the time was a fancy way of saying, "it's going to be near impossible for you to have kids." This was something that went over without much fanfare for my mother, who felt that if anyone was going to be diagnosed with something like this, it might as well be her, given her inclination toward not wanting kids. This now seemed like a pretty stable out for never having to try.

When she and my father got really serious, she made this point clear to him, and he said he was okay with that, even though he really wasn't. In a great show of love and devotion, as grand gestures and romantic moments are not the hallmark of my parents' relationship, he loved her despite the fact that she could never have any children, and he married her without hesitation. Somewhere along the way, though, as my parents attended countless weddings and saw all of their friends beginning to start families, my mother could tell that this small clause to their happy life might have been more of a deal-breaker than either of them had originally anticipated. While sitting through another wedding, on Valentine's Day of all days, my mother decided, without much basis of truth, that my father was going to run away with an imaginary blonde nurse named Cathy and have a billion kids, because nurses always seem to have a ton of kids, and she was not okay with this. She still didn't really want children, but she would at least make an attempt if it meant she got to keep her husband. So she told him they should try.

My mother's condition was given a name in 1990: polycystic ovary syndrome, or PCOS. Women with PCOS have high levels of androgen in the body, which accounts for supranormal levels of testosterone. There is no cure, and women with PCOS often have great difficulty getting pregnant. It took my mother five years and several rounds of ferility treatments and hormone therapy before she was finally able to conceive. By around year four, she decided that she actually really wanted to have a child, and after that, the various treatments her body was undergoing began to stick.

I was a turkey baster baby, a description my mother hates. "Isn't there a better way to say that? Is there like an acronym for artificial insemination or something? Uck," she makes a noise on the other end of the phone, and I laugh a little at her discomfort. Sure, a turkey baster isn't the most clinical language, but it paints the right picture. The easiest and most common insemination technique, artificial insemination takes place when a syringe filled with semen is injected into a woman's cervix. While my mother seemed to have quite a few problems when it came to getting pregnant, it turned out my father had his own issues as well, due to weak swimmers ("oh God, are

you going to write that? And people are going to read this?"). This treatment eventually did the trick in 1993, and I was due to be born nine months later, on April Fool's Day. My mother despised this, and, as if in agreement, I grew to be an enormous baby, forcing my mother to have a cesarean section, scheduled for March 30th. Almost immediately following my birth, my father had a vasectomy, and it was solidified that I was to be the one and only child of Bob and Terry Davis. After years of expensive, painful treatments, they finally had their miracle baby.

In comparison to my mother's vibrant upbringing, my father's was as *Leave it to Beaver*, apple pie Americana as it comes. His parents were blonde and blue-eyed, tall and well-off, and they had two children—my father, the oldest, and another boy, Scott. They lived in a house with a white picket fence and a dog, and the family took road trips and camped, and the men liked to fish. They could have been on the cover of *Life* or featured in a travel brochure, they looked so perfect. But looks aren't everything. My father was a good student, a Boy Scout, a "man's man," an almost exact replica of his father, but Scott was softer, funnier, and most importantly, younger. My grandmother adored Scott, and he got away with everything, while my father was expected to play the part of the hardened older brother. Scott took after his mother, and Bob took after his father, and they began to resent one another for the things they had to be in the eyes of their parents.

I don't think my grandparents ever intended to have their sons grow up to hate each other. I don't think any parent imagines that for their kids. But time and circumstance and expectation pushed them away from each other. They passed their views on to their children, influencing their decisions. I was five when I started to see cracks in my family, the way my father and uncle stood when they were in the same room together, shoulders back, hands clasped in front of them, faces devoid of emotion, as if they could never let down their guard. I hardly ever got along with my four cousins, who we never see or speak to since they moved to Virginia a few years ago. The other half of the Davis family doesn't really exist to me, at least not in any positive light. I'm sure Scott never imagined he wouldn't be able to rely on his big brother, never thought they would hate each other so much. They had all the makings of a happy family. Would Warren and I have suffered the same fate?

If you were to ask me how many kids I would like to have, the answer is a hard and fast two. I'm adamant that I would never put one child through the experience of growing up alone, of having no one else to play with or talk to or fight with. It wasn't that I had a bad childhood or that something happened along the way to make me feel this way: I'm just unwavering on

the fact that I will have more than one kid. While my mother grew up in a house that was teeming with activity, my upbringing was as quiet as quiet can be. Never interested in video games or the great outdoors, my mother and I spent my younger years in separate rooms in our small house reading books, waiting for my father to come home from work. While I have always been happy for my deep-rooted and early love of reading, it was the lack of interaction of any kind that often left me feeling lonely, as if I was missing something. It became clear when I entered school that what I had been missing were other people.

While this could have greatly stunted my interactions with others, I'd grown up the center of everyone's attention, lovingly looked after by my parents, my mother's parents, and a wonderful godmother. I was slightly spoiled and everyone's favorite, with bright blue eyes and curly corn silk hair, and I always seemed to be smiling, laughing, dancing. I was—and am still—excruciatingly tall, which garnered attention without much additional effort on my part. I adjusted moderately well to sharing the spotlight with others when I entered grade school, and I have only rarely gotten the, "Oh, you're an only child? That explains it," comment thrown around when it is revealed I have no siblings. I imagine, however, that this discussion of my easy adjustment to school and my central role within my family may elicit some kind of knee-jerk reactions about only children. It wasn't until I realized that most other households had more than one kid that Warren began to make appearances in my mind, and it wasn't until I was much older that I realized the significance of his non-existent existence.

"Are you going to want to visit our graves after we die?"

My mom and I are sitting on our separate couches in the den, watching Bravo's barrage of bad reality TV, when she interrupts the Febreeze commercial I'm clearly engrossed in to drop this unrelated bomb into my Friday night festivities. I plant my spoon in the pint of Ben and Jerry's we've been passing back and forth, and give her a strange look. "What?"

"Well, after we die, do you plan on visiting our graves? Or do you think you're not going to care?"

I swallow and shake my head, confused by her cavalier tone. "I don't know, I guess I figured I'd visit, but I haven't really given it much thought."

"I ask because your father and I are looking at a plot out east, but if you don't stay on Long Island then you'll have to fly up to visit us, so I don't really know if it's worth it."

"Are you asking me to figure out where I'll be living when you two finally bite the dust? You're going to need to give me a more thorough timeline if we're going to pinpoint exactly where I am."

"Well, that's what I'm saying, should I just wait to see where we move?" She flips the ice cream over in the small pint, scooping up big gobs of the softer ice cream on the bottom, an action I detest. The void I sometimes feel for sibling interactions is often filled by my mother, who is a terrible sharer in all aspects of her life, but especially when it comes to food.

"*We*? What is this *we*? And stop flipping the ice cream, you know that I hate that."

"Christine," she says, finally breaking eye contact with the not-so-real housewives to look over at me. "You're our only daughter. Do you really think we're not going to move if you leave the Island?"

Of course, I have thought this. This may not be something that every child has considered, but it makes the most sense for two people whose entire lives revolve around mine to follow me wherever I go in life. Their social lives and personal interests ceased to exist after I was born. My mother even quit her job, while my father got a second one to offset the cost of a third person, with the stipulation he be off every Saturday to spend it with me. I became their sole focus, their only amusement, the epicenter of their lives. I don't like acknowledging that reality, so I brush her off. "Mom, I'm gonna move to Florida, and you hate Florida, your air conditioner will never be cold enough, and you have like three months left of payments on the house, why would you move?" She seems hurt that I hadn't assumed she'd be joining me wherever I land, so she shrugs and turns her attention back to the TV.

"Just something to think about."

It is something I think about, and about the fact that there's just me. At moments like these, Warren creeps into my thoughts, reminding me that things could've been different, that my life might have played out in a different way.

There's a certain pressure to being an only child, especially one so greatly fought for. I've always felt this. Before I got to college, I was a good student, a good kid, partly due to the kind of person I was, and partly due to the expectation that I be good. I was involved in all the right things, like school plays and track and field, and none of the bad things, like drinking and dying my hair. I was constant, dependable, a reliable child my parents counted on for eighteen solid years. When it came time to pick a college, I broke their hearts by picking one eight hours away by car. My mother begged me to look at schools in and around Poughkeepsie, as it was the perfect distance for her to drive up on Sundays to get brunch with me or for me to go home on Friday nights to have dinner with her and my dad. Instead, I picked a remote and distant college in the middle of nowhere with spotty cell service, and it seems my version of rebellion really began here, with the distance I created between my parents and me—both physical and emotional.

My first year at college was far more difficult than I had expected it to be. Yes, being an only child meant I was indeed fond of my parents and greatly attached to them, but I hadn't thought it would be so difficult to be far away from them. I called them every night, getting great reception in the basement by the laundry room. I would tell them about my roommate and my classes and my first college party. As the year went on and life upstate continued to disappoint, I began to make plans to transfer back to Long Island. My parents' glee was audible over the phone, making the idea of returning even more appealing. That summer, as I toured colleges close to home, I began to feel the tug of the umbilical cord holding me back, and I put an end to the tours and the talk of transfer. I realized it would be easy to run home and be welcomed back with eager, open arms, but I had to try harder to be on my own. If I didn't at least give this necessary distance a shot, I feared I might never leave Long Island and my parent's house and the things with which I was most comfortable. And while comfort is a wonderful thing, it was becoming less and less appealing to me as I realized there was so much more going on outside of the small sphere of life I had grown up in.

This understanding came readily to me during a semester I spent in Florida. I took a job at Walt Disney World that I ended up loving, and it seemed that being somewhere I liked and doing something I enjoyed was all that it took for me to be able to live a happier life. I had made a commitment to work until the first of August, giving me a single week at home before I returned to school. While I was happy with where I was and what I was doing, my parents could not say the same. The frequency with which I updated them on my life was lessening, and they worried about all of the little things I'd have to get done during my one week at home. By mid-May, my mother began to demand that I come home, a request that was virtually impossible to comply with, as getting time off was a difficult task.

My happiness away from them seemed to be causing a great deal of anguish for all parties involved. I felt my parents couldn't be happy for me though I was actually enjoying myself, and I felt an immeasurable amount of guilt after each conversation we had on the subject. I tried to talk to them about their reaction to my happiness, and how it felt like they preferred my previous misery at school, and were unaccepting of the joy I'd found that didn't actively involve them. My father's sad reply was simply that they missed me, that this new chapter away had made them feel like they weren't a part of my life anymore. Feeling guilty, I faked a medical leave of absence from work with two and a half weeks to go, and went home to see my parents.

The three of us went to the beach, got dinner, watched TV together. Nothing spectacular, considering the lengths I felt I had gone through to get home. I did my best not to act as if I resented being home, that I was there out of obligation, a child trying to please her parents. I thought often during

my visit about how I need my mother and father, but not nearly as much as they need me. I had made it through the summer without feeling desperate to see them, but they couldn't make it. I didn't know how to handle this level of devotion, as I don't think I return it quite as powerfully. Maybe it's different because I'm not the parent, or because I'm young, or because I've never had children of my own. I wonder if I will want to love someone this intensely, this fiercely. Right now it seems stifling. I flew back to Florida after six days and finished up with my job, thanking everyone for their concern about my wisdom teeth being removed and assuring them I was doing really well. I still haven't gotten them taken out.

My friend Michael is repeating my father's life. With a mother and a father and a younger brother and a dog, Michael's only difference is growing up upstate rather than down. He tells me his brother is funnier, better looking, has more friends, is even smarter. He says he kind of feels like a disappointment, not measuring up to the expectation of a big brother, not paving the way enough, but it doesn't seem like Jason needs it. The lines are already starting to be drawn, too. Michael's connection to his mother is clearly stronger, while his father seems to be most proud of Jason. Soon Michael will come home from college and will do something stupid, maybe dent the car, and his father will rip him apart. The next month, Jason will do damage much worse to, say, the kitchen; ruin the stove, smoke up the wallpaper. They'll need to remodel. But no one will really bat an eye at that. It seems like an unlikely story, but it's happened before.

I'm fascinated by Michael's family dynamic, and I draw the comparisons between Michael and my father as if their situation is so unique, that the likelihood that I would know two people with similar upbringings and parental alliances and expectations is statistically impossible. But people repeatedly point out the holes in my theory. Lots of siblings are like this, friends tell me. "My sister is clearly my mother's kid, and my dad likes me way better," my best friend simply states one day, as if this is not uncommon in families. Maybe it is just uncommon to me, because I have no experience with it.

The more people I ask, the more I look into the sibling dynamic that I've been so desperate to experience and that I'm now desperate to understand, the more I realize that the connection that I thought I'd found between Michael and my father is actually a rather common one. Lots of siblings take a liking to just one parent, or resent their brother or sister for being better at something they both do. While the hope in having more than one child is that siblings will one day grow up to form a close bond, and that they will develop necessary skills in the process of growing up that will help them be better communicators and more understanding of others, this is not always

the case. In fact, this seems like the rarity, like the Hollywood version of sibling bonds, the kind of relationship I use to conjure up in relation to what I wanted from Warren. But this doesn't seem to appear in nature as often as I thought it would. If Warren and I had played out exactly as I'd imagined it, we would have been an anomaly.

I've come to realize that I had very idealistic notions of what a sibling would do for me. I needed Warren to take some of the pressure off myself. I needed someone to have gone before me and seriously fucked up, so that when I finally got caught for everything stupid I've ever done, I wouldn't be such a failure. There would be some sort of understanding, like "Warren did worse," or "What can we expect, she learned it from Warren." There's no bar to measure me against when I'm on my own, no person to blame, no finger to point. No one else with whom to share the weight of parental pressure and scrutiny.

But on the flip side of that coin, I don't truly know if Warren's presence would have benefitted me. What if Warren had been great at everything he did, and instead of being a weird slacker with a pet alligator, he was an Ivy League grad working at a law firm? What excuse would I have then for my failing grades, my lack of motivation, my insecurities? Perhaps my parents' comments would take a turn for the worse: "Why can't you be more like Warren?" or "When Warren was your age, he never did this!" What if my fantasized version of Warren was wrong and he let me down? I guess there's no real way of knowing what kind of person Warren would have been, but I do know what my mother and father are like. I love my parents, I really do, but it can feel suffocating to be their only child. It's a lot of pressure on a person, one who often feels as if she has to make life decisions that not only benefit herself, but her parents as well.

This summer I'll be home, working at a summer camp, and in the fall I'll stay on Long Island to student teach, ringing up a grand total of eight months spent at home in 2015. I don't think I spent eight weeks at home in 2014. This elongated stay is my apology to my parents, as well as my going away gift. After college I'm moving to Florida, and they most likely will follow within a few years. It's an indisputable fact, a sort of cosmic pull. We can never be too far apart from one another. Maybe while we're all down there we can meet up with Warren, and he can catastrophically fail or piss off my parents in an attempt to make things easier on me. But I know in reality it will just be me, doing my best to be the daughter they worked so hard for, the daughter they love so much.

4234789, Brandon Mark

SARAH HOPKINS

Frontierland

I swipe my gas card through the machine, and it makes an awful crunching sound, displaying a "DOES–NOT–SCAN" screen. I don't want to go inside. I want to get to work and get the day all over with already. I turn around, leaning my arms over the bed of my pickup truck. Standing on the tip-toes of my oily work boots, I can squint into the smeared windows of the little shop connected to the gasbar.

"Mornin' Miss," the woman behind the counter says as I come inside. I nod at her, and I go over to lean my elbows against the counter, my ragged card in hand. There's a circular, fish-eyed mirror in the corner of the ceiling, stretching out my body and making me look even stranger than I already feel, bending me sideways into a swirl, distorting my oversized coat, my muddy freckles and my long brown braids like tangled ropes. I look away from it.

"Heya," I say, "My gas card isn't reading. So, I came in here to see if you could just punch in the numbers or something."

"Oh yeah, we can do that for you," the woman replies, "Where're you parked?"

I point out toward the window behind her.

"I'm in the pickup by eleven." My truck is tough and red and beautiful, even though it's filthy and is stuck with a bright orange buggy-whip on top. That's just to make sure none of the big tankers or dump trucks flatten me by mistake. A work friend of mine, Johnny Angle, got one for me almost as soon as I moved here. He's lived up here all his life, and he knows too many people who've been run down on the highway like accordioned safety cones.

"Aw, eleven's been having some troubles with the cards," the woman says. "Dunno why. You work in the tar sands? Over at PetroCorps?"

"Oh yeah," I say, putting my hands in the front pockets of my jeans so that my wrists are leaning out of them.

"It's kinda a boys club over there, isn't it?"

I shrug my shoulders and reply, "Guess so. I mean, I work in an office mostly now. That's where a lotta the girls wind up. You know how it is." I used to work in an outpost of the Equipment House with Johnny, but I transferred out of it after he did. I didn't like the way the new guys tried to look down my flannel shirts.

"Sure do. Those're some tough wheels you got, though."

"They're good for driving in the snow, when winter really sets in. Not yet, though."

"No, not just yet," she says, ringing me up. "You have a good day, now."

"Okay, then. You too."

It's a long drive from my hotel to the sands, almost forty minutes, but I keep the radio up, even though the music gets grainy and warbly after a while. It's newly winter and everything looks dead. Everything at PetroCorps *always* looks dead, but everything everywhere else looks dead, too. The trees are reaching their spindly black fingers toward the murky white-gray sky. There's frost on all the empty fields. I see a dark smudge on the horizon, and that's how I know I'm going the right way. I follow that smog like it's the North Star.

I drive straight through the front camps, made of shiny aluminum trailers, and I pull up to a gate to have my ID scanned. It's on a lanyard around my neck, and I have to lean out of my pickup slightly so that the man behind the wicket can see who I am.

"Okay, then. Have a nice day, Miss Saunders," he says.

"Will do."

I park my truck outside a squat, lopsided building and I climb out. My hand jiggles a little bit as my wrist tries to balance the tray of coffee I bought on the way in. The naked piece of wooden pulp-board that ramps up to the door creaks as I walk over it. The office space is tight, with two metallic desks cramped into the receiving area, smashed between the wall and the windows.

"Morning, Peg," says a woman behind the first desk.

"Morning, Donna," I reply. Donna isn't paying attention. She's squinting at some sort of spreadsheet on her dusty, beige computer monitor.

"Come on now, finish up with that. I got Timmies," I say, and I put a cup of coffee on her desk.

"Aw, thanks, Peggy," she replies, "What would I ever do without you?"

I laugh politely. "Dunno."

I circle to my own desk, which is backed up against the white plastic Venetian blinds. My fingers sweep over the surface, making clean furrows through the fine, black dust. The stuff is always on everything.

"Did you open the windows before I got here?" I ask, even though I know that she didn't. The dust is always there, waiting for me whenever I

return to the office. No matter how many Windex wipes I use, my desk never stays clean for longer than an hour. The dust comes in through the door, I'm pretty sure, with the people coming in and out. It was the same at the Equipment House. Those dark particles that Donna and I and everyone else swim in and swallow and breathe all day. Donna shakes her head *no.*

Before I can sit down, Harry Crain opens his adjoining office door, banging it against the shredder bin. He's ten years older than Donna, and maybe twenty years older than I am. He must be in his early forties, with the salt-and-pepper stubble on his head and his face. He's one of the Health and Safety Coordinators for the site.

"Health, Safety," he says, pointing at each of us in turn. "Who wants to come with me to get some fresh air?" He bit those words and chewed them like a steak or a good joke. "I need someone to take notes on my walkabout today."

"I'll go," I say, and I shrug my big, blue winter coat on. "I gotcha some coffee if you want, Crain." I take a hardhat and an orange safety vest from the coat hooks near the door. "Where're we headed?"

"Gonna take one of the golf carts up to the north side," Crain replies, "Take a lookit some of the rigs, some of the tailings ponds. Wednesday stuff. You sure you don't wanna come along, Don?"

Donna smiles from behind her computer monitor and says, "Thanks, but I've got some work to get done on my end. You need at least one secretary to hold the fort. Collect complaints."

"Hah! That I do."

Crain and I go back out the door, down the creaky wooden ramp again.

"Nice day out," Crain says, putting his plastic safety goggles on even before we've taken ten steps. "Cold, but nice. Not gonna be very many nice days left no more."

"Nope."

"But you're headed home soon, aren't you? For your two weeks?"

"Sure am," I reply. It's about four hours to the airport in Edmonton, but soon afterward I'll be sitting in my childhood home in Thunder Bay, eating peanut butter and jelly and staring out over Lake Superior. That's the way it is at PetroCorps. Four weeks on the job, two weeks off. Over and over again. I told some people back home about it, and they acted like I got some big holiday every month. It's not like that, though. It's a shit way to spend two years of your life.

"It's a good thing," I say, "Because I'm getting sick of driving all the way out here every morning."

"Aw, please, won't you move to the camps?" Crain says, "It'll make your life so much easier. I mean, not those trailers on the way in, but a nice camp. There's a new one now. Looks like a brand new motel, sitting out there on

the edge of the pine woods. Got a cinema and a bar and everything. Even an indoor pool."

"It'd just be me and three hundred smelly guys," I reply. "And I don't wanna live right next to the sands. It'd depress me too much."

"Don't depress me," Crain says.

I laugh. "Well, you're morbid already."

Crain grins, and he says, "Besides, it's a good break from the wife. And the money I'm saving don't depress *her* neither."

"PetroCorps gives me a stipend to pay for some of the hotel," I point out.

"And they pay for your gas as well," he replies. "They're just throwing cash out the window, can't spend it fast enough. Dunno what to do with it."

"I like the gas card."

"I like the money."

Riding a golf cart through the PetroCorps oil sands is like riding on the back of a white mouse around the feet of a massive, metallic Rube Goldberg machine. It's a gigantic, sprawling jungle gym of bars and barbs and pipes and tar. At night, it looks like a city, with all the yellow and green safety lights turned on. The Cronenbergian contraptions and industrial machines are suddenly skyscrapers, and the dump trucks and construction vehicles become rush hour traffic, buzzing around at the bottom. When it gets dark, I can squint and pretend that I'm in New York City, or Los Angeles, or Toronto. Or at least home in Thunder Bay. But it's only midmorning now, and there's not much fantasy that I can bring to cold sunlight and the grinding of dirt and black sand.

"It smells like shit," I grumble as though that's news, and I hold up one of my braids to my nose, trying to cover up the smell.

Crain spins the wheel on the buzzy, little golf cart, maneuvering it so that we narrowly miss a passing bulldozer. I clutch my empty Styrofoam coffee cup as though it's my heart.

"*Uff-da*, that was a close one," he laughs. I try to laugh along with him as best I can.

We zip through the central processing facilities, which look like big, round silos, but are stuck through with pipes and cranes and workers in blue coveralls and coats, shouting instructions to one another. Crain catches me staring at a man who is wriggling through two different pipes near the top of one of the contraptions. Looking at him is like having that dream where you're suddenly falling, over and over again.

"Had a man take a fall from there, few nights ago. Maybe you saw the paperwork?" Crain asks, his voice gentler than usual.

I'm not sure what to say for a moment, but I force a shrug and reply, "Didn't read much. I glanced at it while I was handing it on. A First Nations guy, right?" Lots of Aboriginals work at the plant, since they're about the only

people who actually live in the area. PetroCorps loves to put them on the covers of their diversity pamphlets.

"He was," Crain says. "I knew him. His son works here too. You ever met John Angle?"

My stomach twists, and I turn to look at Crain once more. "Yeah, I know him. He's my age. I used to work in the Equipment House with him. Jesus H. He never said that his dad worked here, I don't think. Should I…? I dunno what to do. Do you get him flowers or something?"

Crain shrugs. "Depends on how long it's been since you last talked. Dunno if it'll give him any comfort. Old Mr. Angle was stabbed. Impaled right through the chest. Wasn't any sort of clean death, neither."

Men in gray jumpsuits are shouting out to each other. I imagine their bodies being stuck through, skewered. I blink my eyes. "I don't want to talk about it anymore."

Crain nods as we go around a bend, and I hold the legal pad tight in my lap so that it won't fall out.

"I'm sure John Angle doesn't want to talk about it neither. Best to let him get on with his work, I think."

Crain knows that it's a slippery slope. I look down at the legal pad. You talk about one accident enough, and suddenly you're talking about all the others.

We arrive near the northern open-pit mines. The open-pit mines at the oil sands look like the Earth, but turned inside-out. The north pit is massive, spreading like a dry ocean all the way to the grim horizon. It's black and rocky, filled with construction vehicles grinding their gears and scratching at the gooey, dark scabs on the ground.

"This used to be all forests and lakes and stuff," Johnny Angle used to say. I can remember it so well. The two of us in that little shack; him leaning his chair back at a dangerous angle to stare dreamlike at the pockmarked ceiling. "Not when I was a kid, but when my parents were kids." He was wrong. It's been like this forever. For longer than I've been alive. For longer than Crain's been alive, even. The pits just yawn wider and grow older.

"We're reclaiming them, though," says Maxon Rhodes, the Sustainability Manager. Crain and I are standing on the edge of a pit, in the rocky ridge between the mine and its tailings pond. The tailings pond is a swamp full of poison, a wide lake of waste and ooze. Lumps of sand and tar residue float in the black water, and there are scaffolds built out over one of the banks from some halted construction project. The golf cart is parked far off, and I miss it. Every time I pull a foot up, the earth tries to suck it back down.

"Reclaiming the pits?" I ask. My face must have looked quizzical. Rhodes points over my shoulder.

"No, the tailings ponds. Not these ones, of course, but the ponds to the south and east, they're about thirty, thirty-five years old. And they're ready to be…you know, natural land again."

"That's nice," I say, sticking the legal pad under my armpit and stuffing my hands into the pockets of my coat. "Are they gonna be, like, parks or forests?"

"I think the company wants to put more camps on them, actually," Rhodes replies. Crain laughs.

Rhodes nods over his shoulder, and he says, "Come and walk to the other side of the pond with me. I wanna show you the new radar machine. Keeps the birds away. I think it'll work this time. And it won't be annoying, like when we had those cannons."

"Hated those cannons," Crain replies. "Safety nightmare."

The cannons always gave *me* nightmares. I would imagine these big, white birds being shot out of the sky, landing and sinking in the sludge. Even as we walk around the lip of the tailings pond, I'm winding one of my braids around my hand, trying to distract myself.

Rhodes takes us to a lopsided gray structure on the edge of the pond. I suppress a smile. It looks like it's sending out a signal to any intelligent life forms floating above us in outer space. Rhodes points to the spinning blades on top, and then to the three flat, circular speakers. They're quiet right now.

"But when a bird pops up on the radar, this speaker starts up and it makes the sound of an enemy bird. Like a falcon, or an eagle. If the bird doesn't go away, it makes the sounds of a shotgun or the cannons or something. Then, if the bird *still* doesn't go away, our third speaker plays a distress call from a similar bird, so that it thinks there's something really dangerous here."

That doesn't sound entirely correct to me. I lean forward and say, "But if it hears another bird in trouble, wouldn't it just try to find the bird and help it?"

Rhodes and Crain pause, staring at me, until Rhodes says, "Birds aren't like people."

Right.

We jump as the radar machine starts grinding out a cawing sound. Crain puts his hands over his ears. Rhodes lifts his head to the sky, looking for birds. He wants to show us how the machine can work. When I look up, I don't see a bird. I see a man, standing on the edge of the four-story scaffold, right on the other side of the tailings pond. I see him hanging onto the bars. I see his arms shaking. It's John Angle.

"Jesus Christ!" Crain says.

I drop the legal pad in the mud, but Rhodes scrambles to pick it up.

"What do we do?" he asks, looking at my scrawly notes as though they have the answer. "You're Health and Safety, you two. What do we do?"

I am certainly not Health, nor Safety, but I turn away from Johnny for a moment to look at the two other men. "I gotta go get him," I say, and the words feel like vomit as they come out of my mouth.

"What?" Crain says.

"I'm, I'm, I know him, you know. There's no time…"

Crain looks out over my head and shouts out, "Don't do it just yet, Johnny boy! Don't you dare move a muscle!"

"You *know* him?" Rhodes says.

I wish we still had the golf cart. I hear Crain hiss out a curse as I start sprinting through the dirt. My hard hat is jostled from my skull and it falls into the tailings pond, getting sucked into the greasy slime below.

"Shit! *Shit!*"

The automated, grainy falcon noise is screaming behind me, as I run in my puffy coat, the cold slapping my face. I close my eyes against the freezing wind, but all I see is the white bird, being slammed through by the warning cannon. I reach the bottom of the scaffold, and John Angle is looking down at me, confused. The falcon has morphed into the sound of gunshots. Soon it will be the wailing, injured distress call.

"*Peggy?*"

"Yes…Hello!" I have to shout at him over the sound effects. "Can I come up?"

He pauses for a moment, then says, "No. Of course not."

"I'm sorry. I have to."

"…Okay, then."

I reach into the pockets of my coat, and I put my leather gloves on. I don't want to touch the metal scaffold with my bare hands in the rough cold. Johnny's hands are uncovered, and they look almost blue. I think about his dad, squeezing through the two pipes flights above the ground, as I shimmy through the shaky scaffolding toward him. What is it like to fall from that far? To be the bird plunging into the grimy pond?

"Don't come any closer," Johnny says as I reach the platform below him. "I don't want you to grab for me and fall. Get outta here, Peg. Come on."

"Which is it? Get out or come on?" I ask. "This is…this is my job. I work for Health and Safety now." He's not an idiot. He knows that this is definitely not in my skill set, let alone an aspect of my job. I do paperwork more than anything else. And I've never seen any paperwork about an attempted suicide at the sands.

"If you work there, you're shit at your job, then," he says, and he kicks some splinters down at me.

"Look, I didn't want to bring this up, but I read about your dad—"

"This isn't about that! Even if he hadn'ta got killed here, this place still woulda ate his life up. It's eating mine up too. I want to go home. I want to go home."

I don't know what to say. This is his home. Johnny never lived at the camps. He only ever lived a half hour away, in a little house with his girlfriend and his mom. I wonder where they are right now. I remember a picture of them, stuck through with a thumbtack on the old corkboard.

"You can go home," I say eventually. "It's close. You can quit your job." But where else could he get a new one? I could go home to Thunder Bay. Crain could go home to Edmonton. Johnny lives in PetroCorps's backyard. "Please calm down, Johnny."

He looks away from me, and he sets his jaw, saying, "No."

I think I scream before he even jumps, and then he's tumbling down into the tailings pond. Crain jumps in after him. By the time I've raced down to the bottom of the scaffold, Crain and Rhodes have pulled Johnny out of the pond. They're all filthy with tar and mud, up to their shoulders. Johnny is screaming and writhing as Crain tries to hold him still. I see a part of his bone sticking out of his shin, and I feel even more nauseous than I was already.

"He broke his leg!" Rhodes says as though I can't tell. "That's okay. That's okay, the emergency responders are already coming. I called them while you were running over, Miss Saunders." His hands are shaking almost as much as mine are.

After the EMTs show up, and pull John Angle in a stretcher into their little PetroCorps ambulance, Crain and I stagger back to the golf cart. Crain takes his hard hat off and puts it on my head.

"You did a good job," he says.

"Don't," I reply. "I coulda killed him. You're the one who saved his life. I didn't stop him from jumping. I didn't know what to say. I'm not used to… talking about feelings here. You know? You spend so much time trying to bury stuff that—"

"Gonna be a hell of a lot of paperwork. And a hell of a long shower."

I am quiet for what feels like a long time, before I give him what I know he's looking for, and I force a strained, weak laugh. "Yeah. Listen. I think I'm going to take the rest of the day off. Early Release? Is that okay?"

He nods. "That's okay."

Crain tries to hug me when we get back to the bungalow, but it's awkward and weird. I give him the hardhat and my orange safety vest to hang up inside.

"I'll see you," we say at the same time, before I turn and get back into my truck.

When I shut the door, I look into my rearview mirror and claw my hooked, dirty fingers through my two braids, unplaiting them and pulling

them apart. They were giving me a headache anyway. I try to turn the radio on, but it's all static by now. The gates open right up for me to drive out onto the long, wide highway back to the hotel. I steer around the trucks and bucket-wheel excavators like they are mountains, like I am the only one who's moving in the whole world. After a half hour, I see the gas bar again, and I remember the chilly-looking beers in the freezer. Gotta be better than raiding the minibar in my hotel room.

"Oh, you're back, Miss…" the woman behind the counter closes her eyes, like she's trying to read my card from memory. "Margaret!"

"Call me Peggy, thanks," I reply, putting a two-four box of Molson Dry between us.

"Rough day? I feel like I only saw you a few hours ago," she says.

As I am nodding, I feel my head dip down, and I lean all of my weight on my elbows and the saggy two-four. It feels as though I am standing in the middle of a carousel, and the gas bar lady is spinning and spinning around me. She reaches out to touch me, and her hand is as cold as a brass ring.

"Kinda. Kinda rough," I say. I pull out my tatty wallet and dig my fingers around in it. Johnny's words are going around in circles too, spinning around me and spinning inside of me.

"I want to…I'm going home."

"Time for your two weeks, then? That's exciting."

"No, I'm just…going home."

She looks at me sideways, but she still smiles, and she even offers to help me carry the case to my truck.

"No need," I say, "Strong arms."

"See you!" she calls after me.

"See you," I echo before I even realize I'm doing it.

I had intended on stopping back at the hotel, on getting the rest of my clothes and things, but it passes on by and I don't even pause to look at it. I imagine the bottles of beer clinking in the bed of my truck as I speed along, away from the smog-stain in the sky. I've got twenty-four hours ahead of me, and nothing at all behind.

ELIZABETH PELLEGRINO

8:00 Mass

Sniffed snot & incessant coughs. Hanker-
chief hymns as homily drones. Snippet
whisperconversation. Snorts drown outside summer
shouts. Revved sedans on Sunday morning.

Burned incense. Overdosed elderly perfume.
Expired lily petals. The room is filled with stained
glass sunrays and parishioners
nodding themselves to salvation.

BRENNA CROWE

Expensive Taste

Red mornings
only wailing warnings
to wayward sailors—
for *quiet pleasures come at shouting costs!*
So says the crisp conductor clicking my ticket.

Overstimulating metallic screeching
seeps into our drunkenly–wobbling train car.
The exhausted lights sizzle flicker
as if to mumble-exhale, please give up.

My quiet pleasure is watching the cross–legged, well–dressed man,
with big hands pinch the *Times* like delicate dandelions
as if to preserve some silent tradition.
He probably smells like store-bought basil.

We would do average together.
Timely rent, with bi-weekly pasta and movie nights.
Constantly attempting to draw
haphazard lines of latitude and longitude onto one another.
Mapping out cause and effect
onto beings with sporadic rhythms.
Please never change, we would require of each other.

The train staggers to a halt at Penn Station
the doors ding open,
and the well–dressed man bleeds into a different sea of strangers.
Dandelions decay into weeds.
As if to shout, monotony is expensive.

KELLY LANDERS

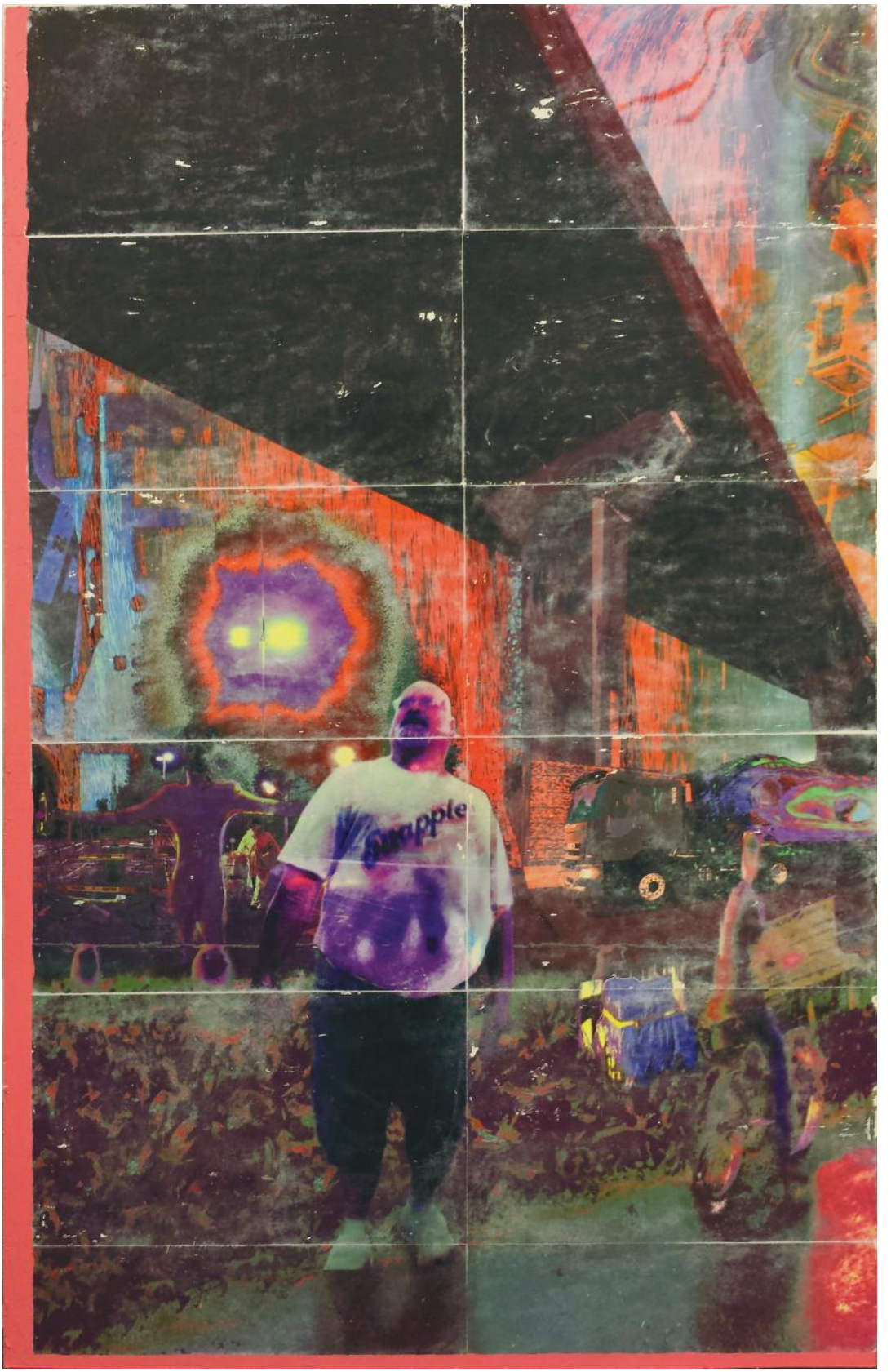
Weekends Spent Watching HGTV

I marvel at an open-air atrium,
lined with potted greens and hanging plants
and rosy-cheeked geraniums
peering over their enclosures. They gleam at

the high noon sun streaming down slightly askew
upon teacups and saucers, and a perfect
paired pot melds Earl Grey leaves and water. It brews
as we sit at a wrought iron table except

I am just carving pictures in the blackest
of nights, etching memories into the white-
washed flash before my nose. I smell canvas,
not soil, and it seems that I plant only parasites.

Even now, I can see it: the way the sun lies
on a garden reaching up to ever-ephemeral skies.



Snapple Frontier, Julien Miller

Shawdow Lurker, Julien Miller

Mesa, Julien Miller

SARAH STEIL

Flickering

Her hands trace figure eights on her lower stomach, and at three and a half months pregnant, she fantasizes about a baby with small, tightening fists. On a lazy Sunday morning, Adam is still asleep beside her, and Olivia places her palm to her skin, as though she can feel the baby's heart beating, a reassurance and a promise: *I am here, I am here, I am here.*

In her bones she knows she'll be the mother of girls: she pictures a child with long, wavy hair that mirrors her own, and dark, confident eyes that could fell her at the knees.

She can envision a life where it's just the two of them: the baby at her hip, chubby and mewling, hands curious and knotting themselves in her hair.

In little more than three months, she has found a love that she has not felt for anything or anyone before—an instinctual, heady kind of love, immense and consuming.

Beside her, Adam shifts, and she watches him for a moment. She wonders if the baby will have his eyes, lighter than her own, or his tall, skinny frame. She loves Adam as the person who has given her this small being that grows within her, who will raise this new life with her.

He grumbles, "I can feel you staring at me," before opening his eyes and resting a hand on her belly. "I should shave," he sighs, pulling her closer to him and burying his prickly beard into her neck. She laughs and moves to push him away, but he holds onto her and nuzzles his chin against her skin.

She shoves him. "We should get out of bed before it's time to go to bed again."

He turns his forehead into the pillow. "Soon we'll have a screaming kid and you'll regret saying that."

She smiles. “What do you mean, soon? I already have you.” He laces his arms around her waist, but she moves to unbuckle them, and asks, “Why don’t you ask me to marry you?”

He speaks into her upper back, “Good question. Will you marry me?”

She laughs and shakes her head. “Are you crazy? Of course not.”

This is a running joke; they are the children of divorce. They believe they have discovered a formula for love that their parents couldn’t master, as if not being married would make losing one another simple.

Baloo, their English Bulldog, jumps with a thud onto the bed, and Olivia twirls her finger in his fur. He’d been a gift from Adam, a year after her graduation. She’d found her first job as a veterinary technician, shortly after they moved in together in a small city apartment. Adam had lifted the puppy up to her and said, “He’s all yours, Doctor.”

Now, she rests her head on Adam’s shoulder and Adam pats her knee. “Okay,” he says, “time for breakfast.”

Adam takes off work for her ultrasound that week, grips her hand as they wait. The technician offers small talk as she applies gel to Olivia’s stomach, and Olivia attempts to absorb it, but giddiness rises in her lungs, distracts her.

“And right there,” the technician finally says, with one pinky pointed at the screen, “is the baby’s heart beat.”

There’s a pulsing, gray and white, and somewhere amongst these things, Olivia can see this small organ pumping, small but persistent. It flickers like wings flapping, and she wonders how such a tiny thing could have such force. She nods and feels herself swelling.

“Do you want to hear it?” the technician asks Olivia, and she looks to Adam and nods. The sound closes in on them like a stampede, like a drum beating underwater.

“She’s so strong,” Adam says to her, and she wants to save his words, squeeze them into her palm and carry them with her—a gift. Against the baby’s heartbeat, she steadies her own. When she leaves with Adam, she will think only of that powerful beating.

Later that week, Olivia stretches across a tearing leather couch in their small living room, her feet in Adam’s lap. Her fingers circumnavigate the globe of her stomach.

Adam’s fingertips brush against her calves as he stares at the television screen across from them. “You know, when I was young and I’d get a paper cut or whatever, I’d show my dad my finger and he’d go, ‘This looks pretty serious, Adam. I think we’re gonna have to take off your whole hand.’”

She smiles at him, places one arm lazily behind her head, lets the other drift from the couch to rest on Baloo’s head.

He continues, “I hope I’m like that with our kid. You know, like I’ll know how to make him laugh.”

“The earlier we can traumatize our kid, the better,” she jokes.

He shakes his head. “That’s what I mean. Like he knew what would upset me and what would make me laugh. I wanna be able to do that.”

She admires the seriousness in his eyes, his intent, and smiles. “I think you will.”

He nods quietly, his face calm, and when he turns to the television screen she watches his face, picturing him with a crying toddler at his hip, a smile on his face.

She comes home late from work one night when she is five months pregnant, scrubs dirtied. When she places her keys on the table, she finds Adam boiling water on the stove.

“How was work?” he asks, turning to her.

She considers him for a moment before answering. His eyes point downward, so that they’re at a slight angle, sloped like they might melt from his face. His eyes have always made him seem sad, even when he’s smiling, and when they started dating a few years earlier she would tease him about this feature.

They’d met at a bar the night of her college graduation. She had drunkenly laughed, “Your face looks so sad,” while pointing to her own face, now contorted in a sorrowful expression, “like this.”

He smiled but didn’t respond, and she shook her head in frustration, “Oh, man, I’m sorry. That was like really rude of me. I’m really drunk, I’m sorry. Do you go here? I mean, the school. Did you just graduate?” she focused on him, eyes wide.

He stared down at his feet. “Uh, yeah, I majored in produce science. ”

She laughed and turned her head. “Sounds intense.”

He shook his head. “No, I, uh, I dropped out? My sophomore year,” he grimaced. “I work at a grocery store. I’m a manager, so you could say I’m going places.” She nodded, serious, and he stammered, “I don’t even know why I’m here. Mark, my friend, made me come out and I don’t even drink. I’m rambling, I’m sorry.”

She watched him, smiled at his blushing. She knew she made him nervous, and liked the softness of his voice, the calmness of his features.

Now, she laces her finger through the key chain loop and spins it around, “Someone brought in this stray from the side of the highway,” she sighs, head shaking. “She must’ve just had puppies and was all torn up and lactating…I’ve never seen a dog look so sad.”

Adam twists his lips to one side of his face. "Well, we should keep her then. Baloo could use a girlfriend."

"Oh, no. The last thing she would want or need is a boyfriend. Especially one as dopey as Baloo," she says, clapping her hands. "Isn't that right, Baloo? C'mere." Leaning over the dog and scratching him behind the ear, she watches as Adam empties a box of dry pasta in the pot, and says, "Oh! Look what I bought, I gotta show you."

She brandishes two small white mittens from her bag and walks over to the stove. "So, how cute are these? She'll be here February-ish, and I keep picturing her hands in the cold…" She kneads the mittens in her palm.

He looks at them and smiles at her. "Very nice. And gender neutral! I see you've accepted it may not be a girl."

She sticks out her tongue. "No, I just liked the color." She taps at her temple with an index finger. "She's a girl. A woman just knows these things."

He raises his eyebrows and turns to the pot. "Whatever you say."

She balls the mittens into her scrubs pocket and looks to the dog, who stares up at her. "Who do you think is right, Baloo?" When the dog wiggles his body under her gaze, she nods. "Yeah, I thought so."

Adam shakes his head at Baloo and says, "Okay, she can be a girl. But promise you won't find out without me next week?"

When Adam first told her he couldn't get off work for her next ultrasound appointment, she had bristled against him. But after a week of his apologies she'd grown excited to be alone with the baby, to see her heart, hear it. "I promise."

The next Monday, the ultrasound technician, a younger woman with light brown eyes and platinum blonde hair, applies cool gel to her stomach and asks in a high pitched voice, "Are we trying to learn baby's gender today?"

Olivia dislikes how this woman speaks in a singsong tone, as if addressing a toddler. "Yes. I mean, I think I already know. But Adam, uh, my partner, he wants you to write if she's a boy or girl on a piece of paper, so we can find out together later."

She wonders if she's said too much, as the technician seems to have stopped paying attention to her, and she waits for a response that doesn't come.

The technician glides the probe around her belly in wider and wider circles, pursing her lips and squinting her eyes at the screen.

Olivia, watching the stiffening face of the woman next to her, half jokes, "Well, she's gotta be in there somewhere, right?"

The technician offers her a small smile but avoids her eyes. "Can you excuse me for just one second?" She leaves Olivia alone in the room with her

heart racing, confused. Somehow the air in the room feels tighter, and she waits for this bubble of time to burst and the technician to show her that flicker of life again, that small beating.

The doctor enters the room with her fine hair pinned tightly back, brown eyes blank. Olivia searches her face for some warning of what's happening, some smile that will loosen the air in the room and make it easier to breathe. The doctor travels the same winding loops that have already been traced on her stomach, and shakes her head at the monitor screen so slightly Olivia wonders if she imagined it. Exchanging a look with the technician behind her, the doctor sighs and her eyes meet Olivia's.

"We're not detecting a fetal heart rate."

Olivia's head has condensed inward and through the ringing in her ears the doctor's words enter messy, disordered. In the spinning room everything slows—she locks her eyes onto the doctor's face. She can't understand the swelling in her chest, this sense of foreboding. Olivia shakes her head. "I don't—"

The doctor speaks calmly, with the finality of someone who is used to delivering bad news. "There's no heartbeat," she says, pausing, head shaking. "I'm sorry."

Olivia doesn't breathe for a minute, and she thinks that the doctor is discussing her own heart, paused in its churning. Some part of her knows they're discussing the baby, and she wants to tell them that this doesn't make sense, because she had seen it and heard it beating herself, only a few weeks earlier.

Her lungs refuse to inflate but somehow her voice whispers, "It was just there."

The doctor nods, smiles sadly. "I know. Sometimes these things happen, and we don't know why."

She thinks the doctor is speaking to her, but distantly, far away in a place she used to be. Loss charges through her body, and she trembles as she tries to hide her face. Her stomach is hollowing. She feels herself halving.

The doctor is telling her that she will have to come back and they will induce labor, and she wants to tell them they can't, that it's too early, that at twenty weeks the baby wouldn't survive. She wants to tell them they've made a mistake, that she feels the life within her, and that she has never felt so sure of anything in her life. *She's still here,* she wants to say, *I saw her heart myself.*

She loses what the doctor says to her, the sorrow in the eyes of the technician. Everything feels slower, sticky, and when she enters the waiting room again, she wonders if the other women can smell the loss on her. For a moment she thinks she can see them pulling away from her, retracting—whales moving out to sea before the storm hits.

Her hands shake as she calls Adam's number, and when she hears his voice on the line, her throat ignites. "Please come get me. I need you to come get me."

He tends to her like a baby bird pushed from its nest too soon. When they leave the doctor's office, he guides her to their car, leads her to the passenger seat, buckles her in. They drive in silence and she presses her cheek to the cool window, lightly knocking her temple on the glass again and again. He rests his hand on her thigh, but she starts and pulls away.

Once Adam parks the car in the street outside their apartment, he reaches for her hands. "Olivia."

Her face collapses, and she turns to him finally, folding in on herself, pulling her knees closer. The crying chops up her words, makes it hard for her to breathe or speak. "I feel like I did this," she heaves, patting at her chest with her open hand. "I feel like this is my fault."

"You know that's not true," he says, closing her hands within his.

"I don't want to do this. I can't do this." Her face reddens, blisters. "I shouldn't have to do this."

He leaves the car, opens the passenger side door, helps her out of her seat. He leads her across the street, up the stairs, into their apartment, into their bedroom. He braces her body against his as she cries. He pulls her to him when she struggles to breathe. He waits until the shaking stops, until she's fallen asleep in the empty belly of their silence.

At work a few days later, Olivia runs her hands along her stomach as she stands next to Caroline, her closest friend, a veterinarian at the hospital who was hired at the same time. She laces her fingers through the cage of a sedated cat, and when Caroline speaks, she starts.

Caroline, a heavier woman with thick red curls of hair, often confides in Olivia about her husband and her brood of children. She was the first person Olivia told about the pregnancy, only a couple weeks after she had found out. Olivia wants to tell her about the baby, about carrying two stilled hearts within her body, but when Caroline asks if she's okay, the words stick to the sides of her throat. She nods. "I'm fine, I'm fine."

The next week, she dresses herself, stares in the mirror early on a Monday morning. She notices the creases around her mouth, feels removed from her body, her suddenly aged face, fuller from the pregnancy. Her hair, fine and dark, falls down her back in waves, and her eyes wander unfocused. She tells

herself, "I'm going to have my baby today." She places her hand to her womb, closes her eyes, and pictures the baby kicking.

Adam drives her to the hospital in a now familiar silence, hand to her knee, smiling weakly. He turns on the radio, but she reaches over and gently turns it back off.

At the hospital, they give her a pill to help induce labor, wash out her insides. Contractions rip through her abdomen, steadily rise in intensity until she thinks she will break open, and then die down again.

She cries during the first hour and Adam holds her hand through the current. As time passes, she closes her eyes and waits for when the pain grips her so tightly that she thinks her heart stops.

The doctor, the same woman with the tight ponytail, encourages her through the pain. Dr. Karen, Olivia thinks to herself, remembering the woman's name now. Karen Tutunik.

The doctor checks in on her between hours, but at the very end, she waits with her. When the pain has receded for the last time, Dr. Karen asks, "Do you want to meet him?"

Olivia stares at her blankly for a moment. The doctor seems to sense her confusion and confirms with a small smile. "It's a boy."

Olivia turns to Adam with wide eyes, sure that the doctor has misspoken, but she nods.

And then, suddenly, there he is: tiny, still, the skin of his belly translucent, his insides dark. They wrap his body in a small cloth, and he's so small Olivia can fit him in the palms of her hands. "Hi, baby," Olivia says to him, Adam leaning over her.

The doctor tells them to let her know when she should come back for him, and as she walks from the room, adds softly, "You should name him."

They speak to the baby in the hospital room for a few hours. They name him Luca. Olivia lightly touches her finger to the baby's hands, his toes. She blinks for a moment and thinks she sees him breathing, but the baby is so still, so small, Olivia knows this can't be true. She remembers listening to his heart beating only a few weeks earlier, and tries to picture this sound within his chest. She closes her eyes and imagines her life with her baby, her son.

When they leave the hospital, they leave with a small box. They leave with pictures of him, his small footprints in ink on paper. When they leave, they leave without their son.

That night, Olivia places her hand to her empty womb, aching for her son like a phantom limb. She will have to tell people that she lost the baby, and she considers the insufficiency of the word *lost*—as if her son is hiding, waiting to be found; as if he slipped away when Olivia's back was turned. The

word doesn't convey the feeling that she's been broken open and picked clean, her insides raw and bare.

She thinks the word implies blame—and in this way it may be fitting, because doesn't she feel like she failed somehow? Doesn't she feel guilt?

She holds Luca's white mittens, tries to slip them over her fingers. Her thumb runs along the smooth stitching on the inside. She imagines kissing the mittens, the warmth of the baby's fists rising through the stiches, and longs for the pressure of his hands within hers.

When Adam touches her, she recoils, lost, thinking of the baby between them.

"Why are you shutting me out?" he asks after a month of her pulling away from him, inching to the edge of the bed.

She wants to tell him that she's sorry, that she doesn't want to feel like this, that she doesn't know where she stopped and this part of her life began. She wants to tell him that she thinks of Luca's small, curled hands at night long after he has fallen asleep, that she wonders what his voice would sound like. She wants to tell him that she can imagine his hands within the mittens. She hopes that he wasn't cold, even for a second.

She wants to tell him that she has never felt a love so strong as when she held that baby in her arms and imagined him in a high chair, laughing, eating Cheerios. That when she is alone, she pictures Luca at her hip, his baby belly round and fat.

Her grief is dense, settling to the distal areas of her body like acid, eating through her skin. She wonders if she is allowed to call herself a mother to a child she will never know.

Now, she thinks of work, of the stray dog, scarred and growling at anyone who goes near her. She wonders if the dog searched for her pups, wonders if she still feels just as hollow, just as rotted out.

Her own words swell but her mouth doesn't open and she shakes her head at him and turns away.

One month later, Adam reaches for her when they are in bed together. Initially, sleeping with him had helped her fall in love with him—he is patient, yielding with her body. He kisses her, and she kisses him back for a moment, but sours at his body on hers and quietly pushes him off of her.

He sits at the edge of the bed, head in his hands. "You know, I lost a baby, too."

She curls away from him, places a pillow to her stomach. "You weren't there."

He stares at his feet for a moment and shakes his head. “I wasn’t there for what?”

Olivia drags her hand down her scalp, feels her throat tightening. “You weren’t there when they told me. I was alone.”

His eyes focus on hers. “About the baby? You’re gonna punish me for the rest of my life because I missed the appointment? What do you want me to do?”

She hears his voice rising and turns from him, placing a hand to her chest, wanting to slow her racing heart, resting her other hand against her eyes. She tries to speak, but her throat won’t open, and she shakes her head and whispers, “I don’t want to feel like this.”

Adam leaves the bed to kneel before her and says quietly, “I don’t want to feel like this either. I’ve lost him and now I’m losing you.”

She shakes her head. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He holds her against him and she feels herself being absorbed into his warmth and steadiness.

At work a week later, Olivia laces her arm around the neck of a German shepherd, holding her steady as Caroline places a stethoscope to the dog’s chest. “Okay, she’s all good,” Caroline says, and when Olivia doesn’t look at her right away she places a hand on her shoulder. “Are you okay?”

Olivia nods, smiling. “Yeah, just thinking.”

Two months ago, when Olivia finally told Caroline about the baby, the words had forced themselves from her mouth, sour and angry. When Olivia told her of the loss, they’d sat with their knees touching, Olivia’s face bowed while Caroline’s hands reached to steady her.

Now, Caroline tells her, “You know, when I was younger my grandpa would always say, ‘you can’t dry in the same place you swam.’ You should get out. Go on a trip with Adam or something.”

Olivia laughs. “I’m definitely tired of swimming.”

Caroline’s mouth straightens. “I’m serious, Olivia. Even if it’s just for a day.”

Olivia nods. “Okay, okay.”

When Olivia comes home to Adam, who has already made her dinner, she says, “We should go somewhere. Anywhere in the world.”

He smiles, and with a fullness in his voice, he says, “Okay. I’m ready.”

When he turns to the stove, she admires the furrow in his brow, watches him, her companion in grief. She still feels the water in her lungs, but she nods at him, smiles, and helps him set the table.

Winning the Lottery, 1969

After "Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out"

Every morning: the warmth
of their mattress. Every morning:

her callused husband his belly
brimming with glass.

Every morning: a touch
of gin to forget.

Because, suddenly, a leaf
of paper is enough

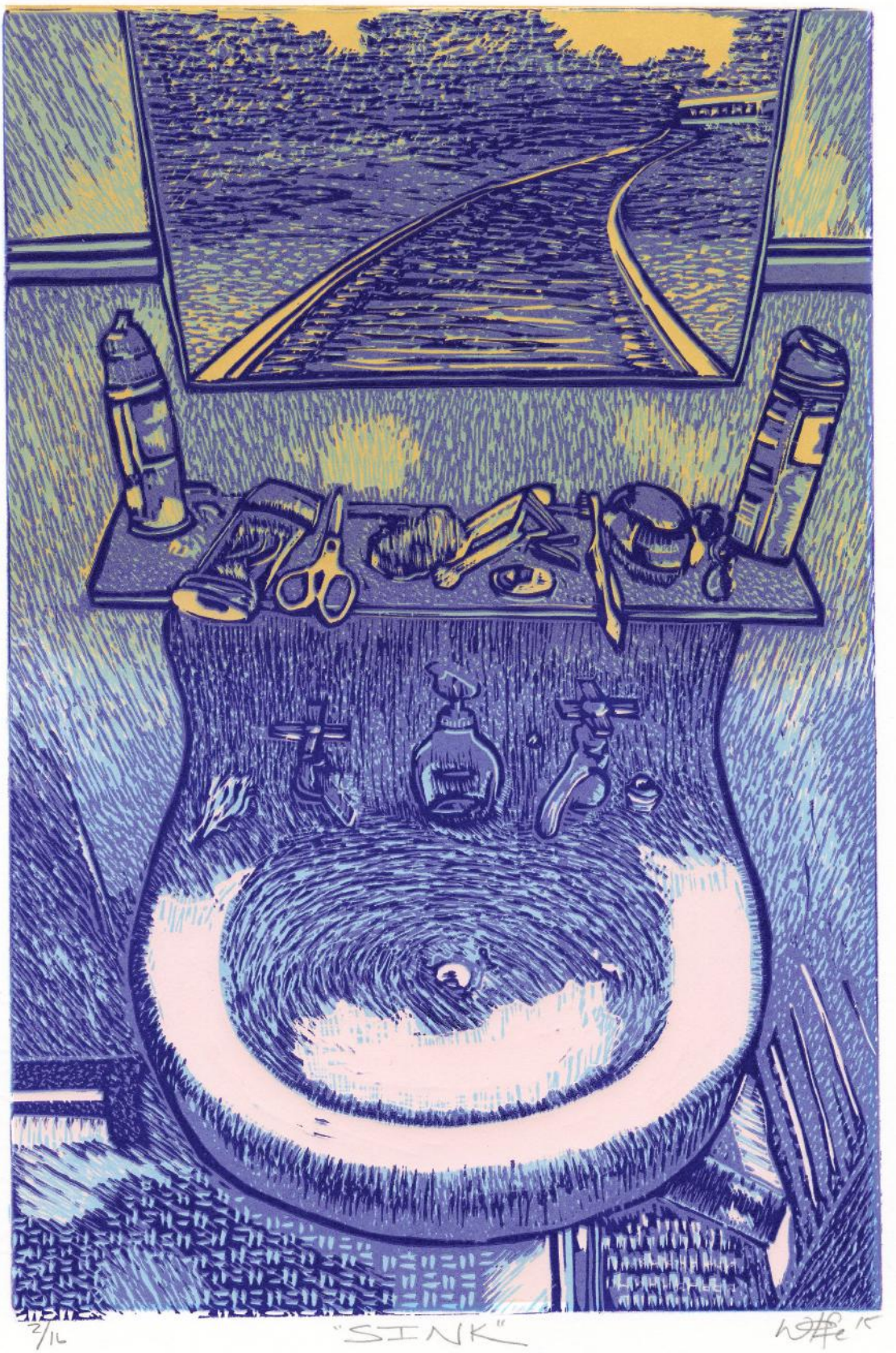
to trouble water.

Cannon Fodder

I wanted to tell you
of the river water.

And summertime: how teeth turn
to sand; how air

becomes thick
& red.



Sink, Robert Guitsy Wolf

MARGARET THON

Sonder

I.

I am twenty-one years old, and my job is to take care of the elderly in an adult living facility. Since I am the newbie at the job, I am often stuck working the overnight shift—ten o'clock at night until six o'clock in the morning. The majority of this shift involves helping people go to the bathroom every two hours. But at 4:30 a.m. sharp, one resident—I'll call him Walter—wakes up. This is when my job gets interesting, and the last hour and a half always flies by.

Walter is over ninety, and he makes sure you know it. He taught elementary school for something like forty years and then volunteered at the local hospital for thirty-something more. Despite the fact that Walter is far more mobile than most of the residents, and despite the fact that his memory is still as sharp as a straight razor, his morning routine takes longer than most of the others. I don't mind the extra time Walter takes, because I like listening to his stories.

On this particular morning, Walter is complaining that his son, who lives in Florida, is not coming to visit him for Father's Day.

"I just can't believe he isn't coming to see me."

I hand him his comb. "I'm sure they will set up a Skype session for you," I say.

Walter shakes his head. "Well, on Father's Day many years ago, my wife and I went up to visit his wife and him. She made this huge meal for us. My wife loved the meal very much and ate and ate and ate. I only ate a bit; it wasn't settling right with me for some reason. Well, my wife raved about the

meal. When we were driving home—it was about an hour drive—she began complaining that her stomach hurt something awful."

"That's no good," I say. I think the story is heading in the direction of his daughter-in-law's cooking giving his wife food poisoning. I knew Walter didn't like his daughter-in-law very much.

"Well, no, it was no good. So we get home and I tell her to lay down and I got her some milk of magnesia and I told her to rest. But, when I went to check on her a little later, she was unresponsive. So I drove her to the hospital and after they took her in, they came out a few minutes later and told me she was gone."

My throat tightens and my stomach twists into a knot. I am not sure how to respond to this unexpected revelation at the end of Walter's story—he didn't seem visibly upset by the memory. That meant I shouldn't be either. I had no idea that he was describing the day his wife died. Walter always told his stories in the same nonchalant tone while he combed his hair or situated his suspenders. Recounting them to himself, rather than to me.

"Oh, my. That's crazy, Walter," is the only thing I can think to say.

He continues combing back his gray hair well beyond the necessary amount. "That picture was taken just a week before she died. It was our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary." He motions to the yellowed, framed photograph on his nightstand. Walter, with horned rimmed glasses and a sports jacket, sits behind a full-faced woman with curls piled on top of her head.

"I can't believe they don't let us have paper towels in our rooms anymore. It makes everything much more inconvenient." I rip my eyes away from the photograph, in awe that Walter changed the subject so quickly. How could he get over his wife just like that? "Can you get me my belt?" he asks.

"Yes, of course."

I find out later that Walter never remarried. I calculate that he was fifty when she passed; he is ninety-two now. He has had forty-two years of time to process what happened to her. He has had forty-two years of memories without his wife.

II.

A few weeks ago, I received a phone call from my mom and learned that my grandfather was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease—a condition that is common among the residents I work with. It's terrifying to know what my grandpa has in store—what my dad, my aunt, my cousins, my entire family will have to witness over the next few years. I've witnessed it—the sorrow in the eyes of family members as they watch their loved one barely able to pick up a fork and feed themselves. My first thought when I found out about my grandpa was, *I need to write his stories down.* He won't be able to share them for years and years, like Walter has had the gift to do.

My grandpa was once a diving clown on the Atlantic City board walk. He was picked out of a line-up during the Korean War to be a guard for a four-star general. He was the oldest of four boys and his father died when he was a young teenager. He can tell you anything you need to know about classic cars. He loves horror movies. He met his wife driving a taxi cab.

He has eighty-two years of experience that can still live on if written down.

III.

My dad and I are standing in line at Starbucks on a weekend when I decided to get away from campus for a while and make the two hour drive home. The baristas are shuffling around behind the counter—their green aprons whipping as they glide from espresso machine to fridge to register. I concentrate on the rich smell of coffee filling my nose as I try to muster the courage to bring up the topic of my grandpa. It's the first time I've seen my dad since hearing the news, and I don't want to seem unaffected by the situation—working with old people makes you realistic. But I also don't want to tiptoe around the conversation, so I just say, "We should really record grandpa telling some of his own stories and family stories before his memory gets too bad." I carefully look at my dad out of the corner of my eye, trying not to be too intense about the urgency of the situation. I know that with medicine, my grandpa could have as little as six months of lucid memory left.

"He's actually written a lot down already, throughout his life," my dad says, staring at the menu board hanging above us, even though he always gets a *grande* hot mocha.

I'm surprised when my dad says this—my grandpa was a writer? How did I not know that I shared this deeply engrained quality with him? "Wow. That's great, then," I say, relieved that his memories are preserved; waiting to be shared when he no longer can.

I picture my grandpa as a small boy with a full head of hair, slicked back, and overalls unbuttoned. He is sitting on the ground, looking up at a white haired man. The man is shaking his finger and imparting wisdom to my grandpa. But that's not how it works. More likely, my grandpa listened to the stories of others, just as I do. He let them sink in and he let them change him. Then he realized, "I need to write down what I've done, what I've seen, the people I've met. I need to tell my story."

IV.

On one of my few nights off from work, I decide to go to downtown Cortland to watch a band that's a part of the Main Street Summer Music Series, a program coordinated by the town to attract locals to Main Street to sustain

businesses while the college students are gone. The concerts—usually local cover bands—always take place outside in a small parking lot and the Cortland Beer Company sets up a tent. Quite a few people show up every Friday to enjoy a few drinks, socialize, and have an excuse to bask in the warm weather that is so coveted during New York State summers.

I grab a Red Dragon Lager and sit down on a concrete parking block toward the middle edge of the crowd. People of all ages line up in rows of plastic lawn chairs. Some brave women in their mid-forties are spastically dancing in the front—flopping their arms in an attempt to get the lead singer's attention. The band plays song after song of classic rock and country. I bob my head to the music. They actually aren't half bad, for Cortland.

As I look across the crowd, I think that each person has a story to tell. Each person is currently creating a memory in their life and each person has had memories stored in their past. I wonder if the women dancing in the front are married and unhappy, or if they are newly divorced and feel free, or if their husbands are sitting in the back, smiling because their wives have still got it. I wonder if the middle-aged man in the wheelchair twisted his ankle or if he has a degenerative disease that has immobilized him for the rest of his life. I wonder if the two little girls whispering to each other will still be friends when they are seniors in high school. I wonder who these people share their stories with—who have they passed their experiences on to? Who will keep them alive when they no longer can themselves? How many of them are writers? How many of them have been written about?

The band shifts from a wild rendition of "Sweet Home Alabama" into a slow country song; I can't remember its name. The song is a love story. It's about a man longing for the girl who left him years before. The lyrics are sappy. Slowly, people in the crowd either grab the hands of their significant other and join the women in the front, or they simply stand and sway with each other in front of their chairs, holding their lovers closely.

I feel a nudge from the younger man sitting next to me. His eyes are glossy with booze. He leans toward me. "My parents tell me that my grandparents used to tear it up on the dance floor. My grandma and grandpa never drank alcohol in their lives, but they would go out and just dance and dance and dance. They were always the last ones on the floor at the end of the night."

"Do they still dance?" I ask. It was a dumb question—he clearly said *used to*. He said his parents had told him the story; his grandparents probably weren't even alive anymore. But I can't help but hope that his response will be that they are still alive and physically able to twirl each other into the wee hours of the morning. I hope that they were able to grow old healthily with each other, unlike Walter and his wife. I hope that they are still sharing their memories with each other and their grandkids, something my grandfather will soon be unable to do.

"My grandpa died a few years ago. My grandma hasn't been able to dance much since I've been alive."

I nod again and look away. *Only a few years*. She hasn't had decades to process all the days they spent together. She probably still imagines him as the spry young man pulling her down into a dip. And I think of Walter, who never got to see the lines that would begin to striate his own wife's face as they grew old together, enjoying retirement, traveling to Hawaii, watching their grandchildren grow up. I think of my grandfather, who will soon be unable to remember meeting his wife in a taxicab, the name of the waitress at Reilly's, his best friend in the army, my name, my father's name.

There is a couple dancing in front of me. They're in their mid-forties. I can tell by the gray roots dusting the woman's otherwise brunette head and the cracking skin of the man's hands, which cup her waist. They're getting older. Do they know it? I hope their children are here watching them hold each other close—I hope their grandchildren are told about this moment. I try to hold it in, but I can't. My eyes swell with tears. I can't be crying because some unknown couple in front of me is older than they once were, in a life that I know nothing about. I feel like it's not my place to cry for the days Walter never had with his wife. I feel like I shouldn't be mourning the recent death of a stranger's grandfather, or the grandmother's inability to dance. I shouldn't be worrying about my grandfather's eventual fate. I should be embracing the memories he has told me already.

The man next to me notices. "Everything okay?" He seems nervous that he's sitting next to a crying woman.

"Yeah. I just know a lot of old people, that's all."

I realize now that I am mourning the lost memories, the moments that aren't told—the flashes that are lost in the blur of living lives.

SAVANNAH SKINNER

A Guide to Recognizing Your Ghost

The night you ascended
the stairs with our wet clothes clutched to your chest,
we saw the ghost your mother saw
when she decided you were missing.

When I was outside your window, you said you recognized me
by the back of my neck, said you knew
the days were over when your father untied his boots

at night. I tell you whole truths after you fall asleep
in the hallway & know you can't hear
my voice over radio static, whole truths
I can't tell you while your eyes are open.

When we drove past the mural they painted over
last year in red, I told you I was recreating
the first sounds you ever heard outside

your mother's oceanic deafness: your father's
Darth Vader impression, his muffled voice

whispering *I am your father* your mother's voice whispering
I still feel you like a phantom limb your sisters rustling

in the dark of the house. I watched your father disappear
into the barn, but that was three years ago;
now your house is full-up with people I've never met,

a baby you've never held (but write lullabies for in summer
when it's cool enough to sing),
dogs who watch me from the porch steps
& curl up on your mattress while you're away, until
you've been gone so long they can't remember the way you smell.

BRENDAN MAHONEY

i am the stone

the

universe nibbles

edge of

at the

my outline

and

threatens

to involve me

in its individuals

its events

i am the stone.

it eddies over

my back

but

Velvet Rouge, Chloe, Britina Cheng

ABIGAIL ALLEN

Love is Lemons

A lemon lozenge on my tongue, I lean into the back of the couch, melting into the pillows like the belly of a gooey egg on a scalding pan. I feel myself curl. I forget I'm in the room with Peter. His hair is being braided by Georgia and Amy, who are giggling like the typical college girls they are. His watery green eyes laugh as their fingers tug on his long locks. I watch Steve and Chris and Felicity play Monopoly on the grubby carpet. A comb and a pizza crust and a wad of flattened gum the size of a quarter are stuck to the fibers. Felicity looks over at me and smiles. My back sinks deeper into the cushions, my skin softening, scratching with the fibers, tingling as they sew into my flesh, needle bobbing under the layers of muscle and liquids. I unwrap another lemon lozenge and fold it under my tongue, close my eyes, and let myself turn into a seat for someone else.

"Oh, my God, look at the picture she just sent."

I open my eyes, the couch fibers stretching white over my eyelids. Peter takes Amy's phone from her and laughs.

"Was that yesterday? How'd she know we were there?"

Amy combs her fingers through her blond streaks. I self-consciously touch the strands of my boyish hair tangled with couch lint.

"Maybe she followed us," she says. "It's not hard spotting us in a crowd."

"The Deadly Blond Duo," Peter says.

"Power to the blondes."

They bump fists together. I feel a patch of soft cushion squeeze between my ribs. The lemon lozenge swirls inside my mouth—sticky yellow syrup. I think about my existence as a chair and not about Peter.

Felicity shouts in excitement. Her properties are crowded with plastic buildings. Steve scoffs.

"It's because of that stupid chance card!"

"I'll avenge you, Steve," Chris says. "I'm not out of this yet."

"Good luck," Felicity says. "I'm about to make it rain."

Steve raises one of his brows.

"Just remember, Felicity, we all pay the bank in the end."

"Could you embroider that into a pillow for me?" she asks.

Chris laughs.

"Did you make that up or read it on a gum wrapper?" he says.

"Sometimes I'm deep, guys," Steve says.

Felicity snorts.

"Yeah, deep in debt."

I want to rip apart the cushions of the couch. Watching Peter watch Amy and ignoring it all, blurring their faces to fleshy smears, and shredding the couch fibers.

I peel away from the couch, wincing as the grid of fabric tears from my skin. Peter looks up at me, his freckled cheeks flaring red. I don't know why. I hardly know him.

"I should get going," I say.

They all stand up and walk me to the door, talking at once, blurs of white noise. The last time I will see them all, most likely. Peter hangs back and waits until the rest of them have hugged and cried with me, and then he steps forward.

"Drive safe, Star-catcher," he says.

Peter squeezes my shoulder and turns away. I blink to keep myself steady, to remember that he means nothing to me. I open the door and slip outside.

It's just like me to imagine life is a movie, to pretend Peter will come out after me and shout, "Hey!" and walk me to my car just a hundred feet away. His breath, sweet and tangy like the lemon lozenge under my tongue, filling up my lungs, and his dumb, frizzy blond braid catching the light from the moon. We'd stand there leaning against the car, talking about nothing, and then he would hug me, longer than proper, and then walk fast back inside, back to his yellow-haired goddess, away from the short-haired chick with her pink pick-up truck.

I linger by the driver's door, watching the house. The sound of faint laughter mingles with a guitar and singing prickles my hair. I smile and blow that beautiful boy a kiss in the darkness where he cannot see who sent it. Crunching on the last small melt of lozenge, I open the door and slip inside the car.

My truck rolls away into the night, a slow pink beetle crawling over the dirt road. Somewhere inside the cabin, Peter feels a tiny prickle on his cheek, where my kiss has landed.

I wake up seven months later in the middle of the night, with the image of Peter burned into my brain. His arms coil around me, his throat smelling like apples and peaches and vinegar; he kisses me until everything's blurred. The world sparkles like sapphires as he leads me to a bed sewn of butterfly wings and drags my soul over his. I jolt awake before he has a chance to bring me closer.

"Oh no," I whisper.

The night is quiet and warm. I sit at the edge of my bed and peer out the window, willing his name to die in my memory. *Peter. Peter.* He's always there, lingering, a ghostly thing—white and smooth like the shell of a coffin. I put my lips to the cool glass and close my eyes. He takes shape under my mouth, and I sink into his cold chest, his bare heart. *Peter.*

"Don't haunt me," I say. "Don't be near in my mind and not in life."

Outside the apartment a man is smoking. It's 2:00 a.m., and he's taking a long, sweeping drag on his cigarette. The smoke curls into whispers of words, formless brown letters. I squeeze my hands around my waist. How can a man, upon a chance meeting in summer, enter my mind after leaving my life?

I watch the sun come up. It's bright pink like the soft wet petals of a rose unfurled. It scatters stripes of orange into the trees and sends golden beams snaking up along my window, crawling into my room, spiraling around my legs.

Peter's face appears in the clouds, and I bite my lip so hard I'll go to the hospital for stitches in fifteen minutes.

"Well, I'm just glad they haven't gotten married yet," Felicity says. She crunches on the ice cubes rolling around in her glass. "How long have they dated? Since the end of summer? That's like eight or nine months."

I smile and look out at the river below the balcony, at the sailboats with their bright crayon-colored sails and striped bellies.

"That's a modest time to date someone," I say. "Anything less is a concern."

Peter.

I feel the thick scar left on my lip from months before. Felicity studies my face and I avoid the confrontation by taking up an origami project with the edges of my napkin. The bartender is humming and washing the empty counter space. The restaurant is nearly empty apart from Felicity and me and a lone college student at the bar. I pick up the dessert menu and browse the selections.

"You're hiding something from me," Felicity says.

"I'm not hiding anything from you," I say. The waiter walks by and places the bill on the end of the table. I grab it from Felicity's outstretched hands.

"Except for this bill." I stuff my credit card in the black-lipped folder and wave the waiter over again.

"You lie," Felicity says. "I know because you have a scar on your lip you haven't mentioned yet. And I know that has something to do with it."

"Why don't you want Georgia and Steve to get married?"

Felicity cocks her head and crosses her arms. "Did you know Amy and Peter are dating?" she asks.

My heart crumples in my chest. Felicity sees it in my face instantly. She grabs my hand.

"Star, are you okay? What's wrong?"

I look across the water and see the sun bathe the water in blood as it sets. The clouds bruise and somewhere a gull shrieks. Without sound, I murmur, "I didn't know."

My fingers shake as I slip my hand into my pocket and grab a lemon lozenge. I don't have any left. My tongue feels sour.

When I get home, I deactivate all my social media. If they die, I will never know. Perhaps they already have.

"Your article is incredible," Ryan says. "A fascinating read. It reminds me of Arnold or Vico." He grins. "But with the smugness and sarcasm of Nietzsche."

I smile and wrap my hands around my mug. My lemony perfume clashes with the gritty coffee stench of the café we sit in. Ryan is drinking black coffee from a paper cup. I watch his lips as he lifts the cup to his mouth. There's something uninviting about his lips, how *unlovely* they are. They don't scream or beg to be kissed.

Ryan notices me staring.

"What?" he asks.

I shake my head. Outside, fall is dying away; a couple on the street crunch over the brittle skeletons of leaves. They swing their entwined hands back and forth, giggling, shivering, and huddling together in the cold, in the summer, in the seasons of their love. Ryan watches me still; I try to ignore him but at this point, doing anything around him is dangerous.

"You're a brilliant writer, Star," Ryan says. There is something serious in his voice that makes me look at him. His eyes are soft and fierce; my stomach feels sick. "You've got a way about words. The way you thread them together—it's poetry."

Ryan's face blurs. My body sags against the seat. Isn't this what I want? Someone who loves poetry and stars?

Ryan reaches for my hand across the table.

"We've been friends for a while now," he says, "and it seems I get a little closer to you every time—"

I've never told him about my dreams.

"—never met anyone I've liked so much, that I—I 've, cared about—"

I have never told him about Peter and the summer he carved my heart out and kept it for himself.

"—I think about you all the time. That short hair and those, those eyes—"

Ryan hates lozenges. I've never told him about the nickname.

"—I want to date you, Star. Because, because I love you."

It's cruel to have let him go on so long. Not his speech, but his friendship. I knew from the beginning he would fall in love with me. We're a perfect match. I don't have any reasons to refuse him, yet I do every time.

Ryan's smile wavers, nervous, clicking as time pours on. I feel heat from tears prickle my eyes. My stomach is seasick. Peter is dating Amy still, for all I know. It's evil to keep the dream living in my mind, and it's dangerous. But his memory has become wedged into my brain; there's no carving him out without destroying me.

"I can't, Ryan," I say, pulling my hand away, stuffing it into a pocket and drawing out a lemon lozenge. My voice cracks. "You know why I can't."

"No, I don't. I don't know why because you never say," Ryan snaps. He frowns. "You kissed me. Why did you kiss me?"

I had. I had kissed him. Under the fireworks at the summer festival. I remember thinking I was kissing him, I was kissing Ryan, but after I had pulled away and opened my eyes and looked up to Ryan's face, I was disappointed. That night I had gone home and tried to stay awake, to keep me from dreaming. But then Peter asked me to dance in the rain and I began to snore.

I squeeze my eyes shut, silencing my tears.

"Ryan, you deserve—"

"Yes, I *deserve* better," Ryan says, his voice sharp. "I deserve someone who returns my affection. Well, then, why do I fall for women who never do?"

He slides out of the booth. I cover my mouth with my hands, staring out the window. At first, I think it's raining but realize it's my tears on the glass. Ryan lingers by the table, watching me and shaking his head.

"What is it, Star?" he asks. "What are you holding onto?"

I remember my last dream, where Peter pulls me next to a roaring fire and reads me fairy tales. His hair is soft at my neck; I am a puddle in his lap.

"I'm a fool, Ryan," I say. "My heart was gone a long time ago."

Ryan abandons me in my booth, tears running down the windowpane, silent sobs in my lemon tea. I unwrap lozenge after lozenge and stuff them into my mouth, hoping to choke. My wish comes true and a woman from around the counter drags me out of the booth and does the Heimlich until

the lozenges land on the floor, rolling around like wet yellow marbles. I sob and am not blamed—everyone thinks my tears are from shock.

My body feels cool, coated in the emerald dress that trembles along my thighs and the dripping pearls rumbling along my exposed collarbone. I resemble a sea creature, some wet green thing that crawled up from exotic shores with blood-red lips and blue flesh. My short brown hair curls around my ears. I grin and turn my chin, pretending I am confident when I'm not. *Be unforgiveable.*

It's been a little over a year since I've seen them all, besides Felicity, who visits and calls often. The time and distance don't stop the dreams from coming—Peter, hiding in birch trees until their flesh turns bright blue and their branches are heavy with peaches. Peter, dancing in fountains at night with me, the bottoms coated in layers of glimmering coins. Peter, kissing me up and down, whispering poetry into my throat, reading me scripture and running his hands through my short hair. I've dreamt us on wires, pulled tight from the tip of the Eiffel Tower to the top of the Empire State Building. I've dreamt of his hair—golden and long, curly tassels rustling over his shoulders. I've dreamt of us meeting again—somewhere random, like Target or Walgreens—me picking up a stash of lemon lozenges and him looking for a new fridge magnet to put in his apartment. We would bump into each other in the makeup aisle—I'd be looking for lipstick and he liked to buy lemon-flavored lip balm.

"Why, if it isn't Star-catcher," Peter would say, stepping toward me and standing too close in real life but far away in a dream. His hands would smooth over my short hair. "I still dream of you." He'd kiss me lightly on the forehead.

I remember waking up from that dream and thinking that I'd never been kissed on the forehead by a man before.

My truck crunches over familiar dirt on familiar roads that lead toward the cabin, toward the lake. The stars are glorious, charged with electricity and light, green and violet like a Mardi Gras parade in the sky. I smile and tighten my hands on the wheel, bracing myself. *Peter.*

I don't understand it. I hardly talked to him when he was still in my life. He's a stranger. And yet…and yet….

I punch the radio on. The song is something stupid, something romantic and tragic, buttered and greased with the language of love. My hand hovers over the dial. I don't end up changing it until an Adele song comes on.

The cabin rolls into view. I park the car and turn off the ignition. Popping in a lemon lozenge, I sit in the cooling car, staring at the light pooling from

the windows. After a moment of silence for the dead memories I'd buried there, I step out of the car and head up toward the cabin.

The door swings open and bodies rush at me with shouts and squeals of excitement. Felicity pulls me into a hug, Steve and Georgia drape their arms across my shoulders, Chris pinches my cheek, Amy squeezes my hand and, and—

"Star."

His voice in my dreams is thick, muddled, coarse, sexy. Peter grins beyond the unfolding crowd, his hands stuffed in his suit, curls brushing his shoulders. He says my name again and it's better than the nightmares—velvet, deep and rich and liquefied like scalding tequila. He steps toward me and wraps his arms around me and—

And I swear it's like he kissed me.

Something burning soft, infinite. His curls breathing into my neck. His hands pressing my back. His cheek rubbing into mine—fire versus flames. I gasp for air, my body buzzing, tingling, rippling, shivers inside my throat. My lozenge turns to yellow ooze on my tongue.

Peter pulls away, his grin just as big, no, bigger—faint, trembling, jittery. He steps back.

"How are you, Star-catcher?" he asks. His mouth twitches. "Do you get called that anymore?"

"No," I say. Our eyes lock. "Not anymore."

The night is filled with wine and hot food and laughter. I sit on the couch, in the same fold of cushion in which I'd been wilting a year ago, where I watched the similar timeline of events unfurl: Steve and Chris and Felicity setting up a game of Monopoly, Georgia and Amy begging Peter for his hair.

I watch Amy. Her face has thickened, her hair's lobbed shorter, and there's a dark smudge of a scar near her neck. I lick my lip where my scar is. Boys give girls scars, I decide, and God heals them. She's in a yellow dress, almost the color of the lozenges in my pockets but less sweet, and the back zipper is slightly undone, the fabric folding like origami along her spine. Peter is laughing with Georgia, his eyes on her until Amy turns, and he notices the zipper. I ignore the reckless tingling that pricks my skin. But how curious I am.

"Oh, Amy, your zipper came undone, let me get it," Georgia says. She reaches over and pulls it up again. A boyfriend would've done it without question.

Peter has turned away, watching the game of Monopoly.

"I'm going to step outside for minute," he says.

Amy ignores Peter and giggles with Georgia. I swallow my smile and watch Peter start toward the door. He glances at me; the glimmer in his eyes and rustle of his curls is unmistakable. He nods once and slips outside.

I know things will change if I go to him or don't. Two turns that spin and spiral and never collide again. He's giving me the option.

But I remember that stupid night when the movie reeled in my brain, and he never chased after me. Over and over again, he didn't walk, run, sprint down the steps and hug, press, hold me against the car door and murmur, "May I see you, may I kiss you, may I adore you?" Over and over the sleeping woods had answered: *No, no, never.* The loveliest constellations had burned into the sky with the warmest, sweetest summer air, and he had decided not to come. So will I go? Will it be begging if I do?

Peter stands on the porch, leaning against the railing, fingers knotting a loose string on his sleeve. The air breathes through his hair; his curls float like golden feathers, cool and soft in the gray moonlight. Beautiful stranger, why do you want me to come?

"May I have a lozenge?" Peter asks. He stares straight ahead. The lake is a silver puddle shivering under the moon's beams. The warbled sound of a bird echoes from a tree. I lean on the railing beside him.

"How did you know I had any?" I ask.

Peter smiles.

"What is Star without her lemons?"

I cough to hide my smile. *Be unforgivable tonight.*

"Amy," I say.

Peter looks over at me. His gaze forces me to look at him, so I do, stoically, tightly. He steps toward me, and I swallow my thundering heartbeat.

"I hardly know you," he says.

"I know."

"And you barely know me."

"Yes."

We stare at each other. I hate the silence—I want small talk. Stupid talking, dumb words, unforgiving. Peter's eyes begin to melt, moonbeams softening the edges. I don't know what to say. I turn toward the lake and rehearse my lines over and over and over in my head: *be unforgiving tonight, unforgiving.*

"Can I see you again, Star?"

The words lash surprise against my body. I look at him in alarm. Is there no Amy? Did he only want to catch a star?

"What do you mean?" I ask.

Peter shakes his head. He looks like an angel, that halo of gold.

"I never talked to you when we had a whole summer together and I've regretted it ever since. I was a stupid guy who passed up the chance to talk to a Star who loves lemons."

I forget my lines.

"Yes," I say. "I'd like to see you too."

It doesn't happen the way I have always pictured it.

He doesn't talk about my writing or call me a poet or ask to kiss me, and the world doesn't uninvent itself, and I don't make his mouth taste like lemons, but he does reach for my hand, and I do give him a lozenge, and we suck on our candy as Peter tells a story about visiting his sister in Ohio at Christmas.

MEGHAN BARRETT

Sunleaves

harvesting, the huntingmoons
struck lore of ill
and reached for brittle-leaves;
curl dry, narrow and spilt
marrow: birds, hallowed
bonefrosting

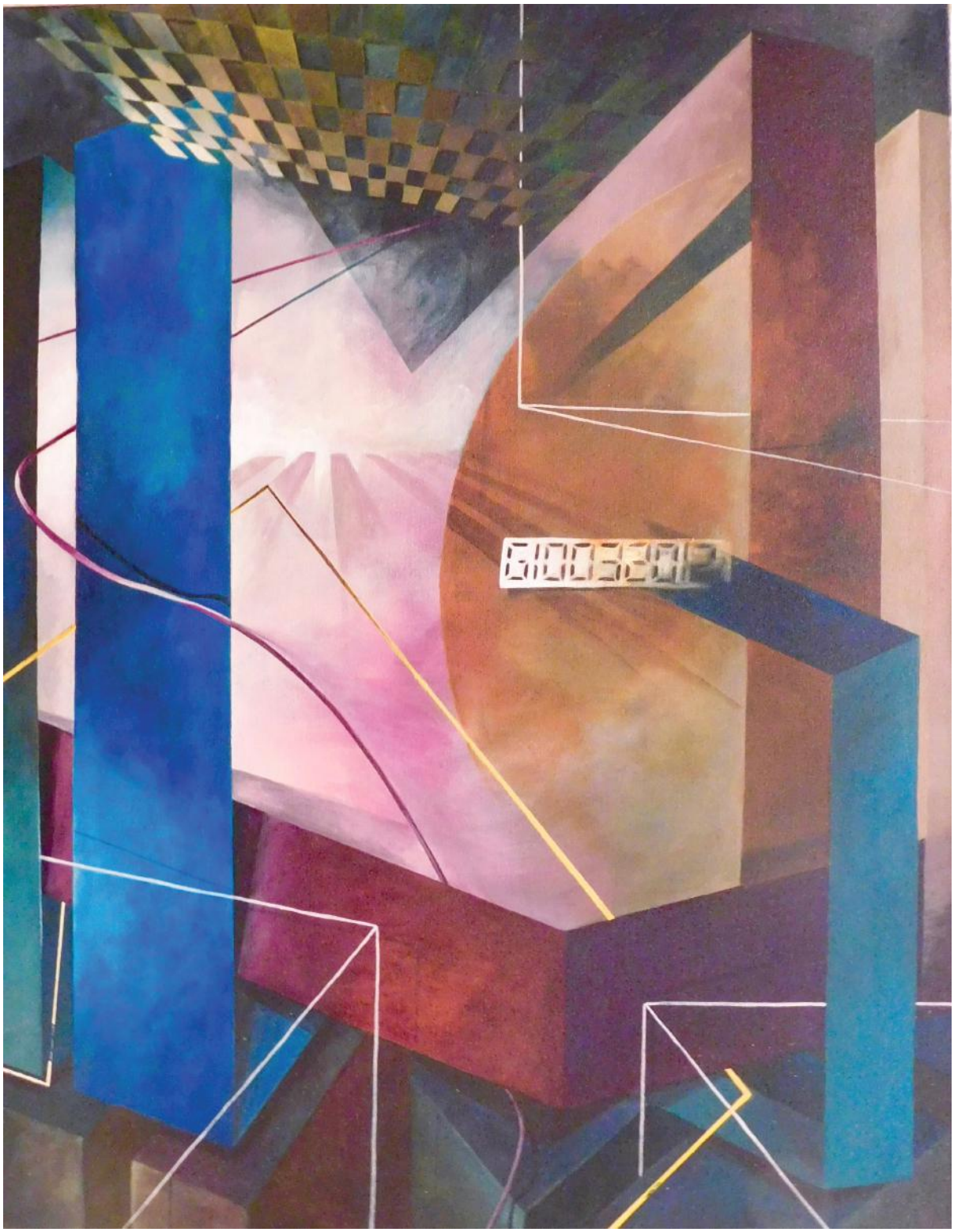
longer, longer
the deepnight sits on the leaves
confides in their ashen,
halted chloroplasts sun
thirsting and witheraway leaves
break down their fill
stare at a lone
rising star

they are caught up in dying;
anthocyanin burst as
greenpulp fades, and the care-
otenoids tend these agingwisps,
steady firegold revealed
in soft stormspots caressing,
lingers on lovingly,
the weakengrasps
of hard fallen sunleaves

Featured Artist

Untitled No. 17, Lei Peng Gan

Muar: Jalan Meriam No.2, Lei Peng Gan



Intersection No.5, Lei Peng Gan

BRENNA CROWE

Escargot

It's raining and New York City smells like warm, wet dog. Aromas of rotting garbage, suspicious urine, and suffocating humidity percolate throughout the atmosphere, slowly killing us all.

We meet at Penn Station. A sizable orange and teal hat shadows light blue eyes, and a bright red smile kisses me on my cheek. Freshly manicured hands with cold rings squeeze my shoulders.

My aunt.

She's glad to see me.

We're going to a French restaurant she was told about by a periodical that writes about French restaurants. New York City with gloomy drizzle is expensive designer shoes dipping in oily puddles, and umbrellas dodging other umbrellas.

Someone let go of a pink balloon and it's floating past all the buildings. I'm jealous of its destination. It will float 28,000 miles above sea level before the pressure inside the balloon is more than the pressure outside the balloon. And it will explode into a million tiny pieces.

I want to explode. I want to burst and rain down chunks of my organs, bones, and blood on innocent New York City pedestrians.

We get to the French place and are showed to our table. My aunt rejects the first table and requests the one in the corner by the window. The waiter is slightly inconvenienced (a reservation of five was set to dine there at eight) but she slips him a twenty to soothe the irritation.

She is a lady who will always get her way.

A broad-shouldered waiter in a white shirt pours us tall glasses of water that would be too tall in France. Genuine France is a minimalist. She has smaller proportions. The fluid capacity for this water glass is about sixteen ounces, but a water glass in France is less than eight.

That is why they think Americans are so gluttonous.

My aunt is frantic. She's getting a new apartment soon. Everything she owns on this planet is scattered and scrambled. Her mind is also scattered and scrambled. Her gold and silver bracelets cling and chink in stressed motions that originate from her stressed mental state.

Sitting at that corner window table, sipping on the too-tall glass of water, an epiphany hits me. The word *emotion* contains the word *motion*. Motion means to move, so emotion is the movement of a mental state. If an object in motion stays in motion unless obstructed by an outside force, then a mental state will continue gnawing at the sufferer unless obstructed by an outside source. Another mental state needs to take the place of the previous mental state.

Looking out the window, an unsuspecting woman is hit in the head with an umbrella. Due to her incredulous expression, I cannot help laughing.

Maybe I'm a sociopath.

My aunt asks me how school is, and I tell her it's fine. I tell her that my classes, being social sciences, are all rooted in philosophy.

I ask her if she believes in God, a question I find myself asking too many people. People say no more often than not. I should start keeping graphs.

I'm not sure if everything is made to be sad or invigorating in a godless world.

She tells me she goes back and forth between atheism and agnosticism. Between godlessness and half godlessness. She doesn't ask what I believe. I'm glad she doesn't, because I don't know. I'm too young, and God is too abstract.

"Let me give you some advice, sweetheart. Number one," she holds up her pointer finger, "always wash your neck the way you wash your face. Whatever scrub, cream, or mask you put on your face—put it on your neck, too. Also, never go to bed without taking off your make-up. You'll get older quicker."

Number one makes me aware of my unclean neck.

I take a sip of the glass of water to wash down the advice.

The broad-shoulder waiter with the white shirt takes our order. We order escargots and coq au vin to share.

Maybe the waiter is god. Creator of the universe and of satisfying customer relations.

"Number two," she holds out her middle finger along with her pointer finger, "never stop being curious. It's what keeps you interested in yourself and the people around you."

I already know number two.

Our escargots arrive.

Being a snail must be a constant existential crisis. Am I a bug or a sea creature? Is this my home or is that my home? Every snail has a dick and a

vagina. If you were a snail, you could both impregnate and be impregnated by your snail lover.

I would not be able to orientate myself in such an ambiguous lifestyle.

I feel bad for eating such a confused life form, but not bad enough to refuse ingesting it.

"Number three," she adds her ring finger, "make sure when in a relationship that the person you're with loves you more than you love them. Always be the one with the control. Men cheat when you put them on pedestals. I've had my heart broken once or twice, and the only thing you get out of it is a seemingly chronic case of cirrhosis. I want to see you with someone who is going to support you."

Mouthful of water.

I don't know what to say to her. I have no desire to control anyone or to be with anyone out of necessity.

I don't like talking to most people, let alone the idea of spending the majority of my time with a single person.

But that's okay. Most people probably don't think twice about my conversational efforts or about the idea of getting to know me better either.

People aren't awful. I just thrive in solitude. To the point where I am a tightwad with the time I spend with other people.

Sip of water.

Our coq au vin arrives.

I lose track of the conversation.

I'm not listening, but she keeps talking.

If anything, I want to spend all day doing nothing in complete silence with another person and still have confidence in the existence of a meaningful and loving relationship.

But I get no pleasure from being with someone whom I have to search for reasons to care about. Maybe it's my lack of understanding or my lack of confidence. Maybe it's a concoction of the two. I just think there should be some purpose in intimacy beyond function.

Most people function, but the quality of that functioning is questionable; their levels of genuine joy are questionable.

There's no ecstasy in running out at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning to get coffee from the nearest 7-Eleven, if it's just routine.

There has to be more.

Sip of water.

Note to self: I can't tell her this. I'd look stupid. I'm too young. Her frequency is vibrating closer to reality's frequency. My tragedies are too minimalistic, too casual for her deep understanding of social relationships.

I finish my confused snails and pretentious chicken, and the too tall glass of water is running through my veins by now. Nowhere else to look to hide the shame of my hope.

Her darting clear blue eyes and her bright red lips tell me, "Great sex can only fill so many voids for so long. You have to do what makes sense in the bigger context." Talking more than listening, she still has some food left on her plate, and her wine glass is two-thirds empty.

She pays the check, and I thank her and tell her I love her.

We go our separate ways outside the restaurant. She gets into a taxi, and I walk back to Penn Station.

The city smells like warm, wet dog when it rains.

JALEN A. BLITHE

The Minoans

Remember the Minoans, Blithe,
And how they are so utterly gone from this world
And all their thoughts and habits and buildings
Are lost, save their art, and the white moon of their images.
Remember that we all die in the end,
And the only thing that keeps us real is our memory.
Salinger taught us this in this moment:
Teddy, standing by the window of the ship,
Looking down at orange peels, wondering how real they might have been
Before they sank their pallid shells beneath the ocean.
How can I then look at myself—me with this silly art
And these nameless poems destined for disuse?

CARRIE ANNE POTTER

Instructions for the Ranger

Divvy the common surface into tarns.
Subdividing the skim of freshwater over
swallowed things, you will hear the distance
to the nearest trailhead. When charcoal
smears above, recognize chaotic sky.
When the ripples steady, recognize kingfisher.

Larch needles must be gathered by moonlight. Know
this is a strange and solitary occupation. Units of trust
are rare here, but salt deposited at tired feet should
be taken as a sign of regard.

MICHAL ZWEIG

Happy//Over

the limiting reagent preventing the reaction from going to completion even though there was more than excess of you or maybe i'm a fatty acid

and

being dissolved in deuterated methanol which has almost the same density as water (but not at room temperature where you can watch it and see it vaporize)

(but not at room temperature when you put your hand around your beaker and feel it vaporizing. cold.)

maybe i'm looking for a way to say that i'm terrified

i imagine being in love is like having an orgasm in that:

> "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it"
> —US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart

so i can't say i've ever felt that w wa wa wa w wa wa aw awaw awwawaw awawwaw wa wa way ay ay ay ayayayya yya ay ay ayaya ay ayy ay ay a ayy ya ay ay ay ay a ay y ayyay ay a y y

but i felt something similar (i think)

which was safe.

22-24-29 (Turn the dial to the right a few times. Before you enter the combination, you need to clear out any prior settings. You can do this by turning the locker dial to the right two or three times. Move the dial back to 0. Before you are ready to enter the combination, you must first move the dial to 0. Do this by turning the dial to the right until it is set on 0. Turn the dial to the right until you reach the first number in the combination. (This would be 22 in the combination.) You need to stop the dial on the exact number in the combination for it to work. Move the dial back to the left until you reach the second number in the combination. (This would be 24 in the combination.) Be sure that you do not accidentally move the dial to the right first, or the locker will not open. Turn the dial back to the right until you reach the third number in the combination. (This would be 29 in the combination.) Take care to line up the number on the dial precisely. Open the locker. Once you have moved the dial to the third digit, then the locker has been unlocked. All you have left to do is pull the handle.)

Dear ___, When I'm near you I want to be nearer to you. I think that's called attraction and I definitely feel the forces pulling us into each other. And I always want to give in and let us react but I can't to completion. Not emotionally (~~*corazón nadie no me dio/para amar Segundo*~~) and not physically.
Yours, ___

and i don't want to let myself downrightnow. (but i'm willing to try again one day
if you are and can and want to). (and i know you're struggling too) (but that's okay)
(we can trudge water, waist deep side by side(because that's what friends are for))
(and we won't hold hands because we need to do this alone).

BRENDAN MAHONEY

What Are You Laughing at?

The joke shivered through the school bus from front to back. It looked like it started out all the way up by the bus driver that time. The fake leather seat covers cracked as kids leaned over their shoulders to whisper the setup and laugh their way through the punch line. The joke moved through the sixth graders, then through the seventh graders, and soon it reached us eighth graders in the back. I leaned in to see if I could cheat the order of the universe and overhear the joke from someone else, but the warm summer wind was flying past my ears even as the evergreens and quiet homes of small-town New Hampshire flew past my window. The heads poking out from the sticky seats in front of me started to look like the segments of a centipede writhing with mirth, limbs clicking while each part tittered away on its own. The joke reached the kid in front of me. He listened intently. He cocked his head. He burst out laughing. He turned to me. I pulled my head out of the wind tunnel. He bit his lip. He told me the setup. There were tears in his eyes. He choked out the punch line. We exploded. I turned. Took a breath. I told the joke to the very last kid on the bus.

"What do you do when you see half a black guy holding your TV and crawling around your living room in the middle of the night?"

"What?"

Keep it together. Pause for effect. Choke it out.

"Reload."

Comedy. It's difficult to define. You could even say it's impossible. But we all know it when we hear it or see it. No matter where you are or what you're doing—if we're watching a stand-up special or a TV show, or we're just walking down the street and we happen to see someone slip on a banana peel—comedy can sneak up on you and tickle your mental armpits when you aren't expecting it. Before it spreads to your stomach and makes you yuck like a fool, before it spreads to your lungs and makes you gasp for air, before it spreads to your lips and forces them to spasm outward in the shape of a smile, before it spreads to your eyes and makes them light up, it starts in the back of your brain as a mysterious little shiver. It's easy to identify the symptoms of comedy, but for literal millennia there's been a debate over exactly what the root of it is.

I think a lot about exactly what makes me laugh. I was your archetypal class clown for the first dozen or so years of my life. Laughter was a big deal to me. Getting people to like me was the ultimate goal and making them laugh was the instrument I chose in this quest, but it's become so much more than that to me since then. Comedy is a big part of just about everyone's life, I think. Most everyone I've ever met has had some version of a sense of humor. I certainly enjoy comedy. I make it my mission to know exactly why I do anything, and laughter is sort of singular in the way it frustrates that mission. I can reflect on any one thing I find funny in any given day, but harmonizing everything I've ever found funny under one massive umbrella is a puzzle that minds greater than my own have left unsolved. What's the joke?

For a lot of the people I went to middle school and high school with, jokes were like the one I heard on that bus ride. The punch lines ended more often than not with a racial stereotype or a debilitating disease. They yucked and gasped at jokes that involved the pain and suffering of others. Maybe this was just a function of the kinds of kids I hung out with. Maybe it was just a function of the town I grew up in. But racist jokes like the ones from my junior high bus ride followed me as I changed schools and as I changed states. They seem to follow me wherever I go, even after I stopped laughing at them myself, and I find myself wondering, *what are you laughing at?*

The hockey locker room smelled like sweetly fermenting armpit. (It's been years since I've played hockey, and even though I have trouble remembering everything else, that smell has stayed with me.) Everyone around me was lazily gearing up before a game. The room was hot and hazy from all the bodies and teen testosterone in such a small space. I remember racist jokes being something of a commodity in these pre-game moments of bonding. They were bartered and traded, one-for-one or two-for-one as each of my teammates tried to one-up each other over who could be most offensive to

the imaginary minorities in the room. Everyone groaned and insisted that we were terrible and that we were all going to hell, but no one was ever actually offended.

A redheaded kid that everyone called Murph leaned over and confided in me, just loud enough for everyone to hear.

"I heard this team has a black kid on it."

Another kid named James perked up from across the locker room. I remember thinking when I first met him that James looked like an Abercrombie and Fitch model, if that model had been dropped on his head as a baby. I also remember thinking when he first opened his mouth that he was an asshole.

"Did you say they've got a black kid?" James said to Murph. Murph affirmed this statement. James's wicked grin spread wide across his face.

"Better bolt down our bags before we leave so he doesn't steal 'em."

The locker room laughed. All other conversations ceased. A game began, but not the one we were all expecting to play that day.

Johnny, our team captain, was next. "Damn," Johnny said. "I'm just surprised that he managed to find a cup big enough."

Justin (I don't know why in the hell we had so many names beginning with *J* in that locker room) was quick to fire back.

"Nah, he doesn't need a cup. He can use it as a stick!"

Everyone joined in then, building off one another in a cavalcade of comedic prejudice.

"I bet he probably has to since he can't afford a real stick."

"I bet he just tries to dribble the puck like a basketball."

"I bet he has Kool-Aid instead of water in his water bottle."

James stood to get everyone's attention, and by pinching his home jersey, which was white, over his head he caused it to taper off above him into a point. He pursed his lips in malicious glee.

"Do you think if we all went onto the ice like this we could scare him off for good?"

Everybody laugh-groaned in response. Everyone except for Brian, a smaller kid that my teammates liked to check into the boards when the coach wasn't paying attention at practice. Brian spoke up in a voice that clearly hadn't gotten within the same neighborhood as puberty yet.

"Let's get ready, boys."

"Shut up Brian," Johnny said, "You're the coach's son." Brian was, in fact, the coach's son. How that was an insult remains a mystery to me.

"Yeah, Brian," said Murph, "Shut up."

"Yeah, Brian," repeated James. He was determined as he sat down to have the last word, to justify his remarks.

"It's not like any of us are black."

That stuck with me, I think. It stuck with me enough that I still remember it today. *It's not like any of us are black*. He wasn't wrong. No one in that locker room was black. On the day of that game, no one in that whole hockey arena besides that poor kid on the other team and his family was black. It would be inaccurate to say no one in the state of New Hampshire on that day was black, but it wouldn't be inaccurate by very much. New Hampshire is the third-whitest state in the country. A full 91 percent of the million residents are white, which puts it right behind Maine and Vermont. Together the three states form a Northeastern tip so pale that you can see its summertime sunburn from space. I'm a part of that 91 percent. I grew up right in the middle of Wonderbread, NH. You could walk my whole high school top to bottom, end to end without seeing any more than a dozen people who weren't really, really, really white. You could walk my whole town top to bottom, end to end without seeing more than a dozen families of color, and that's according to the 2000 federal census. My town was so white that up until about the tenth grade I can't consciously remember thinking of myself as white. Looking in the mirror I didn't see a white kid. Gargoyle with a thyroid disorder? Yes. Rat prince? Sure. Wheezy vampire? Kind of mean at this point, but also probably not incorrect. My perception of myself as far as I can remember, though, was devoid of race. It's easy to not think of yourself as any particular race when you look the same as everyone around you. It's easy not to think of other races at all when you look the same as everyone around you.

Comedians have a pretty sick view of humanity. I guess that's probably obvious from watching just about anything by George Carlin. What I mean more specifically, though, is that comedians have a pretty sick view of humor and what it is that we're all laughing at. There are a lot of different theories about comedy. It's something that just about anyone can understand and, on some level, study, so it makes sense that just about everyone might have an opinion on it. And I'm not trying to say that any of those opinions are wrong, but a lot of the most well-regarded ones involve the whole world having what people might consider antisocial behavior. There are influential theories—prevalent, dominant theories—in the contemporary discussion of humor, that try to link everything we laugh at, on some level, back to cruelty or sociopathy.

Pain Theory.

My middle school best friend Ryan ran up to me while I sat under the shade of the rock wall on the middle school playground. He was out of breath, having run from across the basketball court and the gravel pit to tell me the latest and greatest joke.

"What's the difference between a Boy Scout and a Jew?" he asked, his eyes beaming proudly. Ryan and I were both in the Boy Scouts together for years.

"What?"

"Boy Scouts come back from camp."

Pain theory is basically the idea that everything anyone will ever find funny is something that injures someone else. The lengths that humor theorists will go to in order to justify this one is impressive. I'm sure someone has gotten tenure from a dissertation about the aggressions implicit within your favorite Knock Knock joke. If that someone was writing this essay for you now, this section on pain theory would be a lot longer. But I'll keep it short and summarize: we like to laugh at the misfortune around us from a safe distance away where it won't touch us, like from a movie theater seat or from under a rock wall in New Hampshire.

Superiority Theory.

I was in the back of a high school biology class next to my high school best friend Connor, and we were both incredibly bored. We began writing notes back and forth to one another about how bored we were, how bad the teacher was at his job, how funny our teacher looked, how funny everyone else looked, and before we knew it we were swapping racist jokes like we were in a hockey locker room.

How is school like a boner? I wrote to him.

How? he wrote back.

It's long and hard unless you're Asian. We both snickered and quickly hid it as our teacher paused in his lecture to look back at us. Connor grabbed the paper. His turn. He thought for a moment, and then smiled to himself like he had a good one.

Why do Mexicans eat beans with their dinner?

I thought for a moment about the connotations each word might have in the joke—Mexicans, smelly-illegal-dumb, beans, baked-refried-farting—but only a moment. I preferred that he just tell me.

Why? I replied.

So they can take hot bubble baths before bed.

Superiority theory depicts comedy as a euphoric high that we all experience when we're made to feel like we're better than someone, or something, else. It's kind of similar to pain theory, I guess. They both involve someone being put down in one way or another. But like I said, all these theories blend together in more ways than one. Superiority theory specifically deals with the idea that all we want is to feel better about ourselves at something, or someone, else's expense. It would have us believe that anything we've ever

laughed at can be explained by us somehow being exalted to a higher status through the joke.

Subversion Theory.

I was on the internet after school, as was my daily habit for most of the tenth grade. Most afternoons I would go on the website Reddit, which claimed to be the front page of the internet. They might've been the front page of the internet, but they were also the obituaries and the Sunday comics and the tiny ads in the back that I don't believe anyone reads anymore. Reddit had it all. If I was in the mood to read up on world news (rarely), they had a page for that. If I was in the mood to look at pictures of what's fondly referred to as "food porn" (occasionally), they had a page for that. If I wanted to look at pictures of birds with photoshopped human arms (most days of my life), they had a page for that as well. On this particular day after school, I was in the mood to laugh at something inappropriate.

And my God, did they have a page for that. A whole community of people wanting to laugh together at things that were depicted as horrific virtually anywhere else, gathered on this very page. Every day, links were posted and jokes were made about national tragedies like 9/11, Columbine, rapes, epidemics, incurable diseases—you name it, they found a way to mock it.

That day, I was in the mood to mock global politics. The first link that caught my eye was titled, *"Not all Muslims are a part of ISIS…."* I clicked on it and found myself looking at a picture of a tweenage boy wired up with a suicide vest and an angry look in his eyes. Underneath him, the caption to the picture completed the joke:

"…Some are a part of Al-Qaeda and the all the others seem to like Boko Haram."

Quality comedy. More.

The next was a post titled, *"The Mexican Pledge of Allegiance."* I clicked on it, preparing to laugh at the brutality. I was linked to a picture of a Mexican drug cartel's victims, dangling from an overpass, their arms broken and bent and stapled to their lifeless chests.

Hilarious. More.

The last post on today's page: *"African scientists unveil cure for AIDS?"*

I clicked on it. Prepared for comedy.

I was redirected to a picture of an African man writhing on the ground as he was surrounded by yellow hazmat suits.

"It's called Ebola."

Subversion theory is, I think, the nastiest and most pessimistic of the three. It essentially states that how funny people find something is dictated by how shocking or offensive they find it. Well, not exactly. To be offended

by something, you need to have an emotional or moral stake in it. According to subversion theory, people aren't laughing at how much something deviates from their own personal morals so much as they're laughing at how much something deviates from, or violates, the expectations and taboos of our collective cultural morality. It's the type of humor that, more than any other, requires a complete lack of emotional attachment to the subject of the joke. Now, I'm not a comedic essentialist. I'm not sure I believe that there's any one explanation for what we find universally funny. I do see elements of these three theories in most jokes, but I don't think that any of them individually cut it. So maybe the question of, *what are you laughing at?* isn't one we can answer with a word or even with several. Maybe there's no one thing that we can all universally agree is the *what?* of comedy. Maybe comedy will forever remain a mysterious shiver in our brain stems.

That's not to say that there's no root of comedy, though. Maybe the root isn't hidden in the *what?* of comedy, but in the *why?* The question that I think all these theories involving really messed up motivations beg isn't *what are you laughing at?*, but *why are you laughing?*

Let's talk movies. One of the foundational shots that all movies are built on is the close-up. The exact frame of the shot is flexible, but it should end no higher than the top of the head and no lower than the shoulders. Every movie does it. From *Argo* to *Zero Dark Thirty*, this shot is vital to storytelling. The theory behind it is that it's used to communicate a character's emotion to the viewer. The closer you get to something with the camera, the more important it seems. If you stick the camera straight into Brad Pitt's face right as he's about to shout or cry or laugh, it seems that much more important. The camera is a bit like a magnifying glass in that way. But instead of allowing a little kid to burn ants into the ground, it allows directors to burn emotions into our memories. Here's an example of what I mean:

PITT'S PLIGHT

INT. BRAD PITT'S MANHATTAN APARTMENT - THE STUDY

BRAD PITT stares out a floor-to-ceiling window. His wife ANGELINA JOLIE, literally illuminating the room with the glow from her success, enters the study and walks up to him.

ANGELINA
Brad? Brad, what's wrong?

Brad turns to her and we see a CLOSE-UP of his face as he fights back tears.

ANGELINA
Is it cancer, Brad? Is it terminal? Oh, Brad…

BRAD
Angelina…

CLOSE-UP of Pitt turning to his wife. Every pore on his perfect face is crying out in anguish.

BRAD
I have…

EXTREME CLOSE-UP of his eyes. EXTREME EXTREME CLOSE-UP of a single tear running over every divot of skin like an avalanche.

BRAD
(whispers)
…too much money.

FIN. A CURTAIN FALLS IN THE DISTANCE. ROSES ARE THROWN ON STAGE BUT THEY DIE BEFORE THEY CAN LAND.

The audience can empathize more strongly with whatever Brad is feeling if we have it shoved in our faces. That's why comedy lives in the long shot, which is the antithesis of the close-up. For us to laugh at something that involves pain or suffering or misfortune (as almost everything on the planet does) we necessarily need to see that thing as Other. For humor to exist, distance must be increased and empathy reduced. An old rule of comedy is this: if it happens to me, it's tragedy, but if it happens to you, it's comedy.

Comedy fulfills the lives of millions every day. I think you could make the argument that if humans didn't have the ability to laugh, none of us would exist. For there to be no comedy, there needs to be no separation of subject and viewer. For there to be no separation of subject and viewer, there needs to be a perfect mobility of emotions. For there to be a perfect mobility of emotions, everybody needs to feel every emotion ever—from history, from around the world—in its vivid and often painful detail. If everybody were to feel every emotion ever in its vivid and often painful detail, everybody would combust. I'm convinced. Poof. There we go. It's the end of the world as we

know it. Humans who are incapable of laughter are incapable of existence. Laughter even enables us to handle our own problems when we laugh at ourselves. Those problems are not my problems. They couldn't be—they're funny! But now that I'm looking at them from further away…maybe I could solve them. Laughter is the best medicine. It's something we do every day without even thinking about it. But laughter necessitates a separation between you and whatever it is you're laughing at. Can we ever laugh at something and empathize with it at the same time? Is there such a thing as ethical consumption in a comedic society?

The most insidious part about comedy is that it doesn't even have to directly involve the thing you're separating yourself from. The other day, I was talking to a friend of mine, and I said the word *Ebola* in passing. She stopped me and she made me say it again so she could hear how I was pronouncing it.

"Ebola," I said, pronouncing the *E* as in "effected."

"Ebola," she corrected, pronouncing the *E* as in "evil."

"Ebola," I said, repeating my mistake.

"A-bola?" she mocked gently.

"A bowl o' what?" I shot back.

We both laughed at the pun and we continued with our conversation. It wasn't until much later in the day that I realized we'd both been laughing about a disease that's killed over ten thousand people in West Africa since 2014. We didn't make fun of an Ebola victim. We didn't make fun of Africans. We didn't really even make fun of Ebola at all. We just made fun of the way I pronounced it. In order for us to find humor in that pun, however, we had to be separated from all the deaths and the grieving families and the last look on the face of every victim. We had to be separated by the entire Atlantic Ocean. That's the longest of the long shots.

I think these jokes really started to change for me when, for the very first time in my life, I visited New York City. It was for a band trip near the end of tenth grade. We were supposed to play on top of the USS *Intrepid*, a retired aircraft carrier that was permanently docked in Manhattan as a museum, but none of that is important here. We visited a bunch of cultural landmarks, but none of those are important here either. The only place we visited on this trip that's stuck with me was the 9/11 Memorial Museum. My band director deemed it of equivalent cultural value to the other stops on our trip and we devoted a full afternoon to it.

I don't remember September 11. It's something that I sometimes feel bad for saying out loud or for thinking, but I don't. I don't remember what my kindergarten class was like when it happened. I don't remember how my mother or father or teacher or anyone looked on that day, and I don't remem-

ber crying. The only reminder I had my whole life that anyone in my family really cared about it was the little NEVER FORGET sticker that we had next to our front door. Even when I feel bad about not remembering, I don't blame myself for it. I was five, I was living hundreds of miles away from more or less anything, and I absolutely would not have understood if someone had tried to explain to me that the socioeconomic destabilization of the Middle East gave rise to terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda. On September 11, 2001, I think the only thing I would have understood was the sound of my mother crying as she sat on the couch in front of our TV. But being just on the cusp of not remembering this national tragedy, I always felt this sort of detachment, this separation from the America that I grew up in—the post-9/11 America. It was this national bonding experience, this moment of unity in tragedy, that I had missed out on.

The museum in Manhattan is designed to take the viewer on a descent, which I'm sure is supposed to be symbolic on some level. My whole band was led down, down, down, down into this display of despair. The museum functions as a timeline for September 11, 2001, showing major plot points throughout the day. I walked through with my mom, who was chaperoning the band trip, pretending like I was affected by everything I was seeing, but it all just made me feel so numb—the kind of numb that you're uncomfortably aware of, like when you sit on your hand and then you pinch the skin but feel nothing.

We were led further and further into the museum, and we began to see images from after the planes crashed. Smoky shock waves. Firefighters and journalists rushing IN as everyone else was rushing OUT. A model of the Twin Towers before and the plans for the new Memorial Tower built after, which has since been finished. I didn't remember any of this. It was functionally before my time. It might as well have been the *Titanic*. I found myself viewing the museum with the same attachment with which I looked at jokes on the internet. This, though, was not a joke. I don't imagine that museum has ever made someone laugh.

The trip concluded with a performance by our school's choir, which had accompanied us, and with personal testimonies. We heard from a first response firefighter and from a man whose brother had been inside the World Trade Center when it collapsed. The stories were hard for them to tell, obviously, and it was hard for many people to hear. As the man whose brother had died that day began describing the buildup to hearing the news that morning, my mother began to sob quietly next to me. I don't see my mother cry very often, but when I do, it's abrupt and it's a tidal wave. I put my arm around her because I thought that's what a son should do, and soon she was hugging me and sobbing into my shoulder. The man continued and I stood there gripping her arm, shocked and numb, as the sound of her crying

reverberated throughout the little room at the end of the tour. More people started sobbing quietly with my mother as the man that I didn't understand continued, crying himself, to describe that morning and the act that took his brother from him.

9/11 jokes that I read on the internet just weren't as funny after that. Soon enough, most jokes on the internet weren't.

The longest of long shots that you need to laugh about a disease killing people a continent away can also be found in places like New Hampshire. New Hampshire is a great state. I mean it no disrespect. Well, maybe that's not true. But I mean it respect as well as disrespect. It's one of the healthiest, safest, richest states in the country, and I try to appreciate how growing up there benefited me in that way. But its greatest strength (nothing happens there) is also its greatest weakness (NOTHING. HAPPENS. THERE.) There's no sense of connection you feel to the rest of the world when you view it through your TV. Time doesn't move there. Nobody dies, nobody lives. I was joking when I named my town "Wonderbread, NH" before, but it might as well be official. Like Wonderbread, my town is starch white and stale, but somehow it'll probably never decompose. Wonderbread will live on, and its townsfolk will continue the legacy of not understanding anything else that's going on in the world. They'll continue the legacy of telling racist jokes, or at least secretly laughing at the ones they hear, because who's going to stop them? Who cares there? At this point, New Hampshire's chief export is sheltered white teenagers. With a population that's 91 percent white, most everyone I know from New Hampshire only knows about the lives of American minorities from movies or from the jokes they heard on the bus home from school.

I think I was in the eleventh grade at this point. I'd moved up from hockey locker rooms to soccer locker rooms, and from actively furthering racist jokes to pretending I didn't hear them, because I was too afraid to say anything. I was kneeling by my locker and trying to remember the combination as my teammates around me returned to the familiar art of humor at someone else's expense.

"Why did President Obama get two terms in the White House?" asked a kid named Tyler.

"Why?" echoed another.

"Because the black man always gets the longest sentence."

"I've heard that one before," said yet another. I fiddled with my shin guards amidst laughter.

"Why did so many black people die in Vietnam?" Tyler tried again.

"Why?"

"Because when the general shouted 'GET DOWN!' they'd all start dancing."

Oof. War and stereotypes. That one was a twofer.

Tyler decided to have one more go at it.

"Did you guys know seventy-eight percent of black men enjoy sex in the shower?"

A moment's pause. Someone decided to take the bait.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," Tyler replied, "and the other twenty-two percent hasn't been to prison yet."

At that moment, the only player on the team who wasn't white, Sean, got up from behind a set of lockers and walked slowly out of the room. He didn't say anything, but he looked at everyone—including me—good and long before he made it all the way to the door. It was common knowledge among the people who knew Sean that his father was incarcerated.

I stopped hearing racist jokes in the locker room for a time after that. They started up again eventually, but for a good week or two there was silence. Maybe my teammates just started telling those jokes elsewhere. But maybe, for some of them, that was too EXTREME of a CLOSE-UP.

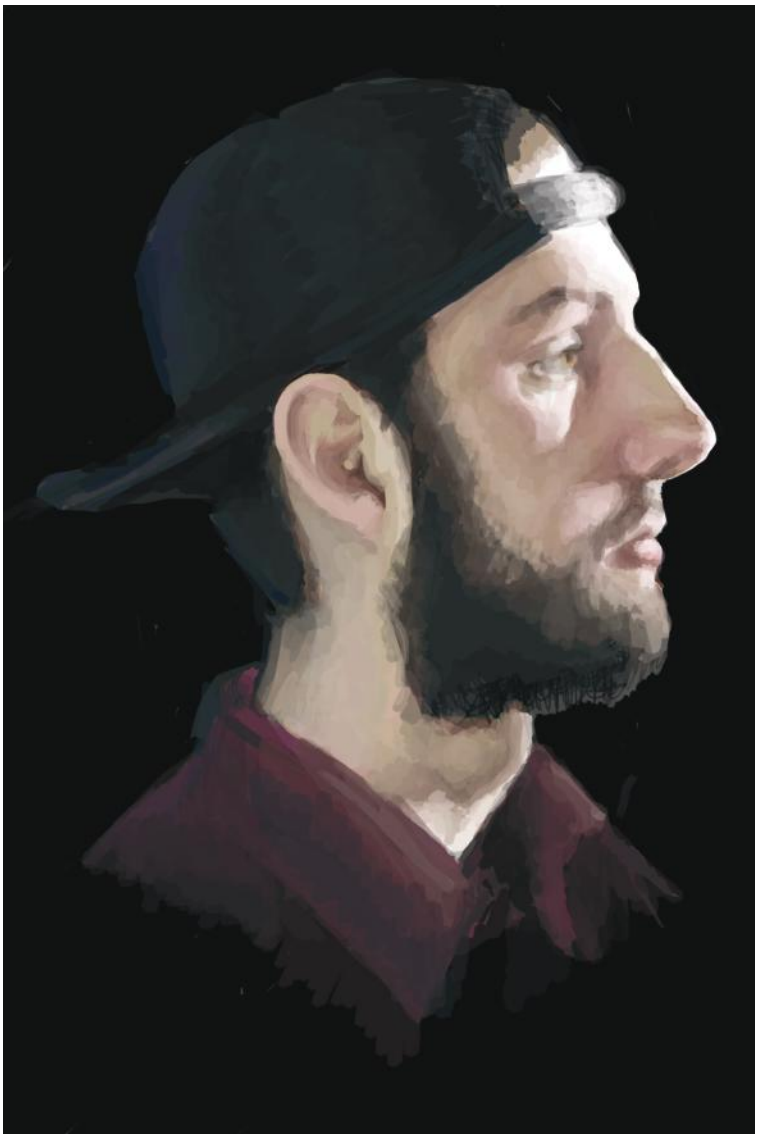
The long shot is great for comedy. It's also great for ignorance. And, in case you haven't picked up on it at this point, let me save you the effort of connecting the dots and tell you that COMEDY CAN BE GREAT FOR IGNORANCE. It's scary for me to think that the only permission we need to detach humanity or emotion from somebody is the absence of objection. It's even scarier for me to think about the fact that there are so many places where this objection doesn't exist. New Hampshire might be towards the white end of the spectrum in comparison to other states, but a lot of states aren't very far behind.

I know I've been talking about my town as if it were black hole in the middle of New England, where there are no people of color, and no tragedies, and no emotions, and where racist jokes grow on trees like Macintosh apples. But the only things that enable New Hampshire to serve as this oasis from the problems that so many are facing are that it's made up of mostly white people, and that it's far, far away from any major metropolises.

Question: Where else can you find a town that's mostly white and far away from a major metropolis? Answer: Most of America.

Black Americans comprise only *3 percent* of the population in around *three quarters of counties* across the United States. About 75 percent of America is white, according to the most recent census in 2014, but the remain-

ing 25 percent of Americans who don't identify as white aren't spread evenly across the country like rainbow sprinkles on vanilla ice cream. Whole towns remain largely untouched. There's a disturbingly large number of places in the United States where there's just vanilla, where there are miles of nothing but farmland and white people, where racist jokes are a hot commodity, where everything else is viewed through the longest of long shots, where there's no one to ask, *what are you laughing at?*



Morty, Abigail Lanning

RACHEL BRITTON

Snow Child

For Mansour

every day you asked me which book was i reading:
decaf tea in a styrofoam cup,
i was walking dead
in this haunted mansion

of empty, coughing hallways. of child
cancer patients and half-eaten red gelatin.

you worked night shifts:
twelve hours black skies and snoring. but
you were the first face i saw in the morning;
reassurance my heart hadn't killed me.

plastic scrambled eggs and orthostatic
measure—lay down, sit up, stand and
feel blood free fall from my head.

outside, leaves are falling
and i can't see them.

today you will ask me which book i am reading

JARED CHASE

Maytag

In a din of whirl and thrum
and the chatter, bicker, natter,
whole families who are broke
and solitary suits
down on their luck just now
mill in this grainy brown carbuncle
with the chipped yellow sign—
sand white once, years ago,
when I had a teddy in one hand
and Mama's finger in the other—
we, the salt of the earth in the grit
and the clean swill of Tide.

Kids take turns pushing the carts
and, bored, play pretend for hours
learning half by accident
how to count change, read a clock,
how to fold and wait and dream
while they push hot, wet laundry
to the wall of thundering dryers
and they push hot, dry laundry
to the tables for Mama to sort.

Back by the dumpster with a plastic bag:
two cans of no-brand soda sweat in the heat
bright packets of chips yellow the teeth,
three ten altogether from the wilting mart

up on the corner. We smoke Rez cigarettes
in shifts but, always, are drawn back in
and our veteran eyes keep glancing
at all but the clothes on our backs
churning in the Tide and the brine.

JIAMING TANG

Stone Village

Every year, on the fifth of April, an elderly woman walked up the stone steps of Drum Mountain to place a plate of roast duck on her late husband's tomb. Her name was Xue Jin, and she came from an unnamed farming village lying atop the hills overlooking the Min River. This year, as she stepped beyond the sparse huts lining the mountain's twisting paths with the addition of a sizable jug of rice wine, she noticed suddenly that she had trouble walking. Her legs felt weak and her hands barely supported the weight of the duck and the alcohol. Forced to stop, she limped towards a bench beneath a swaying willow tree and closed her eyes.

In the town below, informally monikered "Stone Village" by the younger locals, a parade was driven to its premature end by signs of an oncoming storm. Indeed, a large and obtrusive cloud seemed to droop forward from the sky by the weight of its rain, and a sharp gale, which had begun as a light and airy spring breeze, began to shake and bang hideously the wooden shutters of the village huts. Yi Zhen, a thirty-year-old fisherman living with his wife and two sons down by the riverbank, began to lead his family away from their home and up toward the hills. Prior to his marriage, he had lived with his parents further down the road, in Min An, though his family also resided by the water then.

"We are men of the river," his father had said. "The Yi clan will never move beyond the riverbanks; we live off the water—it nourishes us and makes us strong. Your grandparents and the men before them—they all lived beside the water. The day we leave is the day we perish."

True to his words; they never left. Even after a brutal flash flood killed Yi Zhen's mother and younger sister—leaving himself and an elder brother

(who later drowned himself from depression; his father would die months later of pneumonia), they continued to live beside the Min River. And when Yi Zhen married, he told his wife that they could move, but they had to stay close to the waters, where his ancestors had always been. However, unlike his father, he knew all too well that the river was dangerous during flood time. Unwilling to see any of his family in peril, he somberly marched them into the raised village.

Perhaps a geographer would find it appropriate to split the village up into three distinct sections: the first section, which lay low beyond the rocky riverbanks, was made up of a sparse procession of stone huts beside the dirt road, trailing off into a concrete highway. The second was the town, placed comfortably atop the hills, and this was where the shops and the markets were located. The third portion of the village, commanding a birds-eye view of the aforementioned from the foot of Drum Mountain, contained the gravesite, the temple, and several plots of farmland, where the bent-over silhouettes of men and women worked side-by-side in the fields. These separate constituents, when combined, made a rather impressive picture of Chinese rural life in the Fujian province. For each segment seemed to form a continuation of a singular scene: here was the elderly woman, holding a plate of roast duck, walking up from her riverside hut into the market-town. There, she saw a rather impressive jug of wine listed at a fair price, and remembering her husband's adoration for alcohol, she bought it and carried it up towards Drum Mountain, where she sat, eyes closed, catching her breath. And we could do the same for anyone, too: a farmer brusquely stuffed his wares into his bag and ran back up the hills and into his home. An elderly man in the town looked up into the sky, shook his head, and walked back into his hut. Three young girls with jovial expectations of the festival walked into the town from their riverside huts to hear firecrackers and eat candied olives. Once there, they found nothing. But the girls were unwilling to go home, so they walked further up into the mountains.

"Granny! Granny! What are you doing here?"

Xue Jin opened her eyes. Initially, she saw nothing but the colorful blurs of three young girls standing before her. This was a common occurrence nowadays, as her eyesight was blurring from age. This was troublesome for her—not so much because she was gradually losing the beautiful visions of life, but rather because she couldn't afford not to see. How was a blind woman supposed to sew clothing for her grandchildren? How was she to cook? These questions plagued her very existence, especially now, as she sat there rubbing her eyes.

Two of the girls giggled as they waited for Xue Jin to focus her vision; the third, a more serious child, stood staring at the elderly woman in consternation.

"What's wrong, Granny?" she asked, a stern note of innocence in her voice.

"Oh nothing," Xue Jin replied. "I'm just old, is all." She squinted. Slowly, the silhouettes began to sharpen and features began to form on shadowy faces.

"If it isn't the Yan sisters!" she practically shouted in joy. She jumped up to give them all a hug, but her knee buckled and she sat back down in shame.

"What's wrong?" Yan Xin, the eldest sister asked. Though she was a fun-loving girl prone to laughter, she knew when matters were serious. She reached over and patted Xue Jin on the back, fearing the woman was suffering from the same attack that took her aunt years earlier. The middle child, Yan Qing, walked forward and sat beside her sister. Only the youngest, the one with a serious disposition, Yan Li, stood watching.

"Oh your father is so lucky to have you girls," Xue Jin gushed. "I'm okay, girls, I'm okay. Oh, your husbands will be so lucky someday, I'm sure of it, such well-behaved girls…"

"Are you sure you're okay?" Yan Li asked quietly.

"Me? Don't worry about me. I just got tired taking this duck and this wine to my husband's grave. I've been there every year since he died fourteen years ago. Can't stop now, can I? Except maybe I was a bit foolish to get the wine—it's a bit too heavy for me, I'm afraid."

"We'll help you carry it!" Yan Qing offered.

"Yes!" Yan Xin added. Though she spoke in a sweet, enthusiastic tone of voice, she was inwardly upset because she hadn't offered to help the woman first. Biting her lip with self-reproach, she turned toward Yan Li and asked why she didn't offer to help.

"Don't worry about it," Xue Jin replied, waving a sun-spotted hand. "She's young, she doesn't know any better. Besides—I can do this by myself. You girls should go down and see the festival parade."

"It's cancelled," Yan Li said, wincing at the fact. She stared down at a lacy leaf, torn and bitten by moths and beetles. "There's a storm coming."

"What?" Xue Jin asked, shocked. She looked up at the sky, which looked to her like a massive block of steely blue. "A storm?"

"Yes," Yan Xin said. "The parade has been cancelled for today. We didn't know why until one of our neighbors, Mr. Yi Zhen from the riverside, told us that a big hurricane was coming. He said he could tell from the clouds."

"We don't think it's true, though," Yan Qing added. "When there's a hurricane, there's rain. But I don't feel a drop of water anywhere on my body."

Yi Zhen and his wife stood side by side in the lobby of Mr. Cheng's tea house, which doubled as a motel of sorts for visiting peddlers from other provinces. His children, Yi Lang and Yi Jia, ages five and three, respectively, slept on a pair of bamboo mats upstairs. Aside from the Yi's and Mr. Cheng, nobody else was in the establishment. This was to be expected—festivals in the village were family affairs. Farmers, butchers, and fishermen alike celebrated in their huts with home-cooked meals consisting of rice, steamed fish, and the rare bowl of boiled eggs or meat. A restaurant like Mr. Cheng's was bound to receive no customers—especially since "Stone Village" was so out of the way and dull that visitors rarely came. However, Mr. Cheng was an enterprising sort of man, and hearing that the parade was cancelled, he developed the idea that the festival was cancelled, too. Thus, he eagerly opened shop, and was disappointed to find that the only customers all day would be the Yi's.

Presently, as he sat by the counter thumping his fingers against the freshly wiped wood, Mr. Cheng, out of sheer boredom, began to hum a non-distinct tune. Yi Zhen's ears perked up at this; he recognized the song. He couldn't remember where or how he'd heard it, but nevertheless, he recognized it, and started walking over toward the counter.

"Hey brother, how's business?"

"Business?" Mr. Cheng snorted. "Look all around you. You tell me how business is."

Yi Zhen blushed. He looked over at his wife, who was gazing down at the floor, mortified. That was a dumb question, he thought to himself. Because his companion had stopped humming (plus his own embarrassment from asking Mr. Cheng such a self-evident question), Yi Zhen quickly forgot all about the song. However, he was eager to continue the conversation he had initiated, and so he continued to speak.

"Sorry, that was stupid of me," Yi Zhen said. Mr. Cheng grumbled. "Why aren't you enjoying the festival with your family then, brother? Not that I'm ungrateful—I'd have nowhere else to go otherwise—but it seems a good day to be with your wife, no?"

"Hmmph," his sullen friend began. "The festival's cancelled, and still there are no people coming in to eat."

Yi Zhen looked back at his wife. "Cancelled?" his wife mouthed back to him, her expression bright with bemusement. Fighting the urge to laugh, he glanced back at Mr. Cheng.

"How're the preparations going for the hurricane, brother?"

"Hurricane? Hmmph. Don't be ridiculous. You hear any rain? Thunder? Just cause the wind's a bit sharp, people are staying home. Lemme tell ya, if there was a hurricane, my wife would be home screaming into my ear already. 'Board up the windows!' she'd say. 'We'll die!'" He laughed at the image of his

hysterical wife. Glancing up, he saw a worried expression in Yi Zhen's eyes, and jabbed him with an elbow.

"Don't you worry about no hurricane, sir. We'd feel it if it were coming. You want some wine? It's on me."

"Thanks," the fisherman replied. He knitted his brow and licked his lips. Trouble was brewing, and the villagers were too stubborn to see it. He had lived through a storm himself when he was younger, and he knew that nature was not to be tested. Scratching his head, he forced a weak smile at Mr. Cheng.

"Where's your wife anyway?"

"Oh her? She's with her sister down in her family home. It's close to where you live—by the water."

Mrs. Cheng sat weaving a basket beside an American space heater in her sister, Yan Xiu's home. Her brother-in-law, Yan Fang, worked on some calligraphy beside her, rapidly sliding his ink-tipped brushpen across a thin strip of rice paper. Though he received no education in his youth, Yan Fang was tremendously gifted and interested in the arts. "It is through painting and calligraphy that a virtuous man may truly express himself to others. A few lines on a piece of paper, a few trees on a mountain—these are the greatest windows into a man's soul," he had once said sagaciously to Mr. Cheng, after a few cups of wine. And though his grasp of the Chinese language was feeble (he could read and write few words), it was said by all in the village that the fisherman Yan Fang had a great hand, equatable to the Qing masters, and that his poetry could move even men whose hearts were made of stone.

Working quietly, he suddenly felt a spray of water on the bone of his cheek. He rubbed it gently, turned toward the window, and saw now that the shutters had somehow fallen off. He nudged his wife gently, stood up and walked toward the window. A drizzling rain fell gently outside, and the hut's close proximity to the water gave him a decent view of the stirring waves.

"Dear, come over here. The shutters have fallen off."

"Oh! So they have!" replied his wife, who munched nonchalantly on some watermelon seeds. Mrs. Cheng, sitting across from her, smiled and shook her head.

"It's not like it should matter to you two," she said, nodding a great deal. "You have this space heater. Nothing should ever be wet or cold in your home again. The next time your nephew comes to visit from the United States, let him know to bring me one too."

"That I will, sis. Here, have some watermelon seeds. It's a shame Zhang is working today."

"Yes," Mrs. Cheng remarked gloomily. "My husband is always work, work, work."

"Where're the girls?" Yan Fang asked suddenly.

"Oh, they've gone to the festival. You know how it is, girls these days. They have none of our womanly prudence," his wife answered, laughing at Mrs. Cheng.

"It is a shame that you've had three daughters though, sis. You thought of making another one? It might be a boy this time."

"Oh, don't be silly," Yan Xiu replied, blushing. "Besides, I'm much too old. You should work on having some boys yourself, sis. Mr. Cheng needs someone to run that business someday."

"Fang, Fang, when will the girls be back? Are you sure they're at the festival?"

"Oh let them be, brother!" Mrs. Cheng cried out. "They're young, let them have some fun. What are they to do here, with me weaving and you writing? They would be bored to death. Let them live for once!"

"I know, I know." He glanced back out toward the window, where the waves had begun to fling themselves higher against the rocky coast. "It just seems like a storm's coming is all."

The rain continued to fall as Xue Jin and the Yan girls neared the Drum Mountain gravesite, where all the village's deceased had been interred. It was a small plot of land, expandable if necessary, with several irregularly placed headstones adorned with offerings from the fortunate and living. Behind these, a limp willow tree swung beside an ineligible engraving carved into the mountainside.

Standing before her husband's tombstone, Xue Jin poured the rice wine into the grass and placed the roasted duck beside a blossoming daisy. She reached forward and touched tenderly the rock which represented her life's love, swept away the dampness of the rain, and felt within herself a deep chasm that she thought she should never cross in her lifetime.

"We'll meet again soon," she whispered, kneeling forward and bowing her head with womanly grace. The Yan sisters, standing behind her beneath the crooked awning of a pavilion, wept freely into their hands. They knew this was inappropriate, for one was taught that the dead wished us to be happy, and that we should never cry for them. Yet they couldn't help it—never before had they experienced such feelings of beauty and loss.

Yan Li, who was but nine, trembled as she looked before her at the hunched-over silhouette of the widow. She quickly wiped her eyes dry, attempting to stand stern and serious as per usual. However, one should note that she still clung hard to her sisters, twisting their shirts and marking them

with her nails. Suddenly, Xue Jin rose. The elder Yan girls turned the other way, trying to mask their tears.

"Are we going back?" Yan Li asked.

Xue Jin walked slowly toward the pavilion, trying not to stumble over the other graves. She held her hand out and looked up toward the sky. "Let's hurry. It's starting to rain harder."

By twelve in the afternoon, everyone in town knew a storm was coming. It was self-evident; the sharp winds, the drenching rain, the tumultuous waves. Yet, as people tend to believe themselves entitled to stumble upon great fortunes, the villagers, in all their honest simplicity, concluded that nothing serious should result from the coming tempests.

Yi Zhen paced back and forth along a row of tables while Mr. Cheng, ever the active fellow, boarded up the windows of his tea house with several stray strips of timber. Yi Zhen's wife was sleeping upstairs with the children, and while the thought of their safety brought him comfort, he conceded inwardly that the incoming storm was certain to destroy their riverside home. He stopped suddenly, and roamed sorrowfully through all his belongings. Yes, they had remembered to bring all their money. The family jade, yes—oh, but they forgot to secure his fishing supplies so they wouldn't get washed away. He frowned. Should he run back to his hut? He wouldn't be able to work without his fishing nets—the neighbors might offer to lend him one but how shameful would that be…

He looked up at Mr. Cheng, who stood grumbling beside a window.

"All this timber could've been firewood…It's gonna be all damp and rotten. No use at all, no use at all…"

"Where's your wife, brother?"

Mr Cheng glared at the fisherman, as if he had mentioned something completely disagreeable. "She's at home," he answered brusquely.

"Home?" Yi Zhen walked toward his muttering companion. "She's home? Brother—there's a hurricane coming! She's gonna—"

"She's gonna what? Nothing's gonna happen to her. She'll just make more noise up here. 'Oh, I told you there'd be no customers today.' Some shit like that. She's a woman, and they're absolutely disagreeable when it comes to a man's ambition. Now your wife, she's quiet. She's good for a man. Takes care of the kids, cooks—"

"A hurricane's coming," Yi Zhen practically shouted.

Mr Cheng stepped forward, glowering at him. "And then what? What's that to do with me? If you wanna get her so badly, why don't you run down in the rain? Why do you think no one else is worried about the damn storm? I'll tell you what—you're…"

Yi Zhen bolted out the door before the shopkeeper finished speaking. Running through the rain, he thought of his mother and his sister and his brother too. His hair and his shirt clung to his body like seaweed, and the spiraling gales blew into his face so that he couldn't see. He didn't think as he made his way down the hill toward the riverside—the only thought that flashed in and out of his mind was an image of his mother, his sister, and his brother.

Once he reached the lower section of the village, he started banging against all the doors of the huts.

"A hurricane's coming! It's going to flood! Run to higher ground, run! Run!"

Hands tapped from fastened windows, fingers waved out from half-open doors. Still, he screamed and shouted, running through the storm like he had lost his mind.

But would divine providence favor such a man? Would this simple fisherman, with a wife and two children and the honest intention to rescue his kin from disaster—could he perform a miracle and get people to listen?

"Mr. Yi, have you lost your mind? What are you doing? Come in here!"

Yi Zhen turned toward the source of this voice, covering his eyes from the violent gusts. Peering carefully out at him from a half-closed door was Mrs. Cheng.

"Mrs. Cheng, you have to run. I'm not kidding. I'm not kidding, Mrs. Cheng. The hurricane's coming."

"Mr. Yi, have you lost your mind?" she repeated.

"Close the door! The rain's leaking in," a voice shouted from behind her.

"Mrs. Cheng, please. Please. I'm begging you. Run to your husband's tea shop. The hurricane's coming. It's going to flood. Please, I'm begging you."

"What's the matter now?" a voice called out. It was Yan Fang.

"Mr. Yan, please listen to me. A hurricane's coming—please run—get your wife and your daughters and run to Mr. Cheng's tea shop. It's safer there. You're gonna die here."

Yan Fang stared at the fisherman, his eyes soft and mellow. Looking into Yi Zhen's face, he suddenly realized that he was staring into a man unselfish in his intentions; a man wholly desperate in his intentions to save. A fire seemed to spark between them, a fire more rewarding than romantic and familial love—it was the complete and total understanding of one man to another.

"Mrs. Cheng. Pack your things. Tell my wife I'm going home to get our belongings. I trust that Mr. Yi is telling the truth. We must seek higher ground."

Xue Jin and the Yan sisters stumbled down the road into the town, blasted by an unforgiving wind from every direction. They clung to one another, linking their arms so tightly together that the younger girls felt quite invincible in the storm. The elderly woman clenched her teeth tightly; the gales had become entirely unbearable to her in her old age, and she thought momentarily that if God decided she should die, then she would have done so willingly. Yet, urged on by her stronger willed companions, she moved on, weathering through the tempests.

Yi Zhen climbed up the steps into the town with a long line of villagers behind him. With help from the respectable Yan Fang, regarded by all as a man infinitely wise, he had managed to convince most of the townsfolk to seek higher ground in the storm. Though his face was grim, his triumph had sent his heart aflutter. At the top of the hill, he looked up from the ground and saw in the distance several strange, stumbling silhouettes, linked arm-in-arm. He walked toward them and started gesturing at the tea house.

"What is that man doing?" Yan Qing asked, looking up.
"Isn't that Mr. Yi?" Yan Xin said.
"Oh! Mother and Father, too!" echoed Yan Li.

Mr. Cheng beamed as he walked from table to table, offering hot tea and dried towels to all the villagers who had come to his shop in the storm. He felt rather clever now in his decision to keep the tea house open during the festival, and thought that he would do well with a massage from his wife tonight. The Yan sisters, who were still together with Xue Jin, sat chattering with their mother in a corner beside a crackling fire. Yan Fang looked at them and nodded. He walked toward Yi Zhen, who was then sitting at a table, his hands clasped around a cup of tea.

"Thanks for your help," the fisherman said. "They would've never listened to me."

"It's nothing. If you didn't come down there, screaming and shouting and making a fool of yourself, then I wouldn't have come up here either." He chuckled. "And my daughters are here too. What are the odds? I knew they were in town, but they might've been staying with one of the…"

Xue Jin stood up from her seat. "I'm going to get some more tea," she told her younger companions. Stepping away from the fire, she walked toward one of the windows. It was obscured and fixed into place by several pieces of timber, but she could still hear the storm raging ceaselessly through the glass. Standing on the tips of her toes, she looked out from an uncovered

space toward the mountain and saw nothing but a great expanse of spiraling gray. Sighing, she stepped backward and saw, through her blurry vision, a pale and fragile butterfly. It was hovering frantically about the room, wishing for nothing but to flutter outside and into the storm.

Sacred Communication: Broken, Robert Guitsy Wolf

98.2

I can feel the sunrises in your rib cage that you won't let out.
No wonder your body is always so warm
and your palms are always so sweaty.
I waive my right to apologize for pressing my cheek to your chest.
I've never both loved and held the sky all at once.

RACHAEL MULVIHILL

Canoodling of the Arrector Pili Muscle

The best thumb twiddlers count their twiddling as a step toward Zen
—like enlightenment (though husbands/wives/part
ners of many top twiddlers report concerns of OCD). Consider

whether you will allow a dominant rotational direction or strive for equality
between front and back twiddling? Will your thumbs touch
or not? If they touch, will you keep them in constant contact or will they merely bump
during each rotation? How deep will you twiddle? Thumbnail? First knuckle? The full length
of the thumb? Could you twiddle one thumb toward your fingers (front-twiddle)
and then away (back-twiddle)? What about your regiment? Are you open to same-sex partner

twiddling? If so, will you contribute the right or left hand? Are you going for speed,
attempting to increase RPM, or endurance
twiddling, looking to boost your hours? Or are you going for technique
twiddling, hoping to develop the perfect twiddle rotation? How and at what depth
will you interlock your fingers?

LAUREN SARRANTONIO

The Amorphous Children

"For children, childhood is timeless. It is always the present. Everything is in the present tense. Of course, they have memories. Of course, time shifts a little for them and Christmas comes round in the end. But they don't feel it. Today is what they feel, and when they say 'When I grow up,' there is always an edge of disbelief—how could they ever be other than what they are?"

-Ian McEwan

I had seen that stare before. There was something familiar in their hysterically deadpan faces—they looked more into me than at me, yet all that was left of them was a primitive two-dimensional image on a canvas. Yes, that was it: the eyes of the middle child in particular, who made direct eye contact—though all eyes were dark and identical—reminded me of the boy I babysit back home.

Professor Toothe tells us that *The Mason Children*, projected onto a tall white wall, was painted by an unknown American artist around 1670. Although the Elizabethan style was stolen from England, and the new homes settlers claimed as their own were stolen as well, this was the beginning of American art. The deliberate documentation of resettlement in America was limner—creepy and primitive. In the oil painting, the only boy wears puffed sleeves; he stands firm and aloof like a true aristocrat, despite his being no more than ten. He is portrayed as if he already has a receding hairline. They really do grow up fast.

The middle child's eyes lock with the viewer's, though her head is turned to her right; she catches your stare with her own. She is placed in the middle of the portrait, as she is the middle child. Her disproportionate fingers balance a yellowing folding fan with rosary beads tucked over her too-thin, pale wrist. The smallest imitates her taller sister's completely conservative lace dress and tied bonnet with a rose in her hand. These children—though battered and aged from hours of work, dressed up and posed like dolls for their living room wall—they were American kids, like me.

These children are just as much American kids as the little ones who stand and pose for pictures today. Perhaps the greatest difference is that twenty-first century children's portraits hang proudly on Facebook walls *and* the living room walls. *The Mason Children* most likely hung solely in the Mason's house, beckoning visitors to see just how put together they were.

Though the Mason children and Ethan are equally American kids, Ethan does not harvest the crops, clean the house, nor slaughter the ducks. He lives in a condensed, highly populated suburban town on Long Island, just as I did at eight years old. He gets on and off the school bus every day and attends public school somewhere in between. What happens outside this window of time is sometimes—as hilarious, ironic, and pathetic as it is—up to me.

Whether he likes it or not, Ethan can not help but look up to me—I'm several feet taller than him. Most times, I am sure he resents this fact. I resent, but also respect, the absurdity that someone half my size could present me with challenges bigger than I could measure.

Over the winter break of my senior year of college, I babysat Ethan for a week and, although I have known the deal since he was four, I was exhausted. I hand the job over to my sister, Nicole, for the next week. Nicole has known the deal with Ethan ever since I first left for college, and she was asked to step in for a bit.

"You wait for him at the corner until the bus comes and then he needs to be watched until his mom is home from work—around six." My sister is more resistant to the job than I, perhaps because she is three years younger than me and she is some steps behind in the virtue of patience. She groans at the news but does not put up a fight. We are hardly ever in town anymore because we are both away at school now, and besides, distance makes the heart grow fonder. Distance certainly made the New England settlers more fond of the English style they left behind, and a difficult child is kind of like a petticoat, is it not? A bit too heavy to carry all the time and unnecessary for basic survival, but people insist.

Nonetheless, Nicole agrees to cover me for the next week. I lay this on her gently, trying not to think about the incident last week when Ethan ran out of

the house and disappeared around the block without a coat in biting winter air. This was his reaction to the crumbled remains of his remote-control race car—"You *made* me break it!"

As I trotted to catch up to him, hands numb and nostrils flared in cold pain, my heart pounded in a hybrid of excitement and horror at the thought of him lost. We stood at the edge of some stranger's lawn, bewildered, his face wet from tears and snot, my body the only barrier between him and the road.

"You can't tell my mom. She said the next time I run away she'd call the cops. Now she's going to yell at me." He scoffed at me as though I were at fault, his sobbing speech barely intelligible. I assured him that we could start fresh if he agreed to walk back home with me. Interaction with Ethan in this state is a ticking time bomb, and one must move quickly before destruction. He fiddled with the stranger's short wooden fence and a picket collapsed. I raised an eyebrow and held back a smirk. The age-old question resurfaced in me: As a leader, would you rather be feared or loved? While I witnessed this stranger's fence get broken by the boy I had to chase down the street, I remembered why being feared is sometimes a leader's greatest desire. Suddenly, he was in a great rush to get home.

The catch is: Ethan likes me. At least, I think he does. I am the only babysitter that has stuck around. I am unsure if this says more about my backbone or my resilience, but I cannot count how many babysitters Ethan has sent into self-doubt, reconsidering their public claims of, "I love kids!" at family parties. Maybe I could throw it on my resume:

skills include: leadership, patience, stoicism

babysat a child with a 1% babysitter retention rate

One summer, I needed a lot of coverage, so I encouraged a longtime friend to step in for me. Now, whenever I mention Ethan to her, she retells her traumatic experience:

"He tried to stab me with the back of an earring."

"He peed on the kitchen floor, then threw my bag into his proud puddle."

"He tried to knock me out with a lacrosse stick."

I do not doubt any of these occurrences. One summer, "bad days" such as these moved me closer and closer to quit on his mother. "Bad days" were what we called it. I would pick him up from day camp with a skillfully concealed hesitance. His helpless, teenaged counselor often pulled her face muscles back in regret: "Ethan had a…bad day today." Although I was only a couple years older than that camp counselor, I felt the distance in our ages. Just a few years

ago I would have stuck him in timeout, called for backup, and tattle-taled, too.

But what Ethan needed, I learned as I became more conscious of the situation, was engagement, purpose, validation—just as any human. He still had pacifiers scattered all over the house until he was five years old. Some were deliberately hidden from his mother, suspended between walls and bed frames, wrapped in dust bunnies. He learned how to rinse them himself under a running faucet. I imagine him as he would pretend to sleep while his mother turned off all the lights and descended to her bedroom for the night. He must have leapt from his covers and scurried to the bathroom sink to get his binky fix.

The day I finally gathered the silicone pacifiers together and placed them on the dining room table, I snapped a picture of what must have been upwards of fifteen multicolored binkies. I concluded: letting go is a collective human struggle.

In the wake of the binky incident, I think of the evolution of childhood, the invention of the teenager, and how not only kids, but also their parents do not want their children to grow up. Perhaps because it is a reminder of our own mortality. Never mind the fact that the Western world no longer thrives on the labor of its own children to accommodate life's demands. Children today, unlike the Masons, have more time to be kids, prolonging the thrust into adulthood that brings entirely new struggles.

Childhood has certainly morphed and, quite literally, expanded since the beginning of America. The word *kid*—slang for *child*—sprouted into existence less than a century before *The Mason Children*. Nonetheless, the use of the word suggested more of a skillful young thief or pugilist, if not a baby goat, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary. Skip over a century, and *kid* meant more of what a modern-day American would think: a tiny version of someone who does not yet know they are a tiny version.

If this is the linguistic history of children, perhaps it is a perfect reflection of how we see youth. A kid is something like a pugilist—ruthless and lively—and maybe most of all, a thief, who takes more from you than you could imagine.

I do not know much about child psychology aside from my own intuition. What I do know is that while I was watching this *kid*, Ethan, fight through his childhood, I came to the immediate and painful realization that I was shedding mine.

Jessica, Ethan's mother, divorced his father around the time that I started working for them. In this self-fulfilling prophecy, I quickly felt as though I became his father. I played catch with him across the living room. We prac-

ticed soccer with the garage door as our net, even though scuff marks appeared if you kicked too hard. He imitated me popping wheelies on bicycles, and I'd put up with smelly sneaker feet afterward because, like a true American father, I was unsure how laundry procedures worked.

When Ethan's father visited on weekends, I had to tell him where Ethan's favorite snacks were hidden and which super power he preferred that week. On more than one occasion, we were down the rabbit hole of imagination in which a stuffed animal, a great white shark, lunged ruthlessly at my hand posed as a smaller fish. Ethan longs to believe he is a great white shark,-charged with ferocity, but really, he is a boy with an innocent imagination that pulls me in.

Ethan's father would arrive through the doorway wearing heavy work boots. He didn't say hello right away—his noisy keys and cigarette smoke spoke for him. I wonder still whether he was waiting for a hello or wanted to listen in on the sounds of his son lost at sea. Or maybe he wanted to revel in the quiet before it was his turn.

Despite the deliberate sounds of Ethan's father entering and my shift ending, Ethan placed more focus on his stuffed animals. He became intent on our game like a surgeon at work and refused to acknowledge that our time together was over for the day. I ritualistically placed my hand on his head—another reminder that I was in fact taller than him—and promised, "I'll see you tomorrow, okay?" Promises made aloud to him solidified my intentions to not give up.

Babysitting Ethan became much more than sitting around a house waiting for a parent to return, since his Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder makes that virtually impossible—it became a series of small victories.

We often played with his handheld toy dinosaurs; he enacted a family where the child dragon was orphaned. The first time he did this I realized where I was: not only in the middle of a cluttered, boy's bedroom, but deeply embedded in the life of a kid who wanted somebody to look up to. Usually, when he looked up, there was either a ceiling fan or me.

Ethan's life and mine unveil teenhood, unlike the Mason children. With my teenhood tucked in the pocket of my not-so-distant memory, Ethan's awaits. The concept of the teenager sprouted into existence in only the twentieth century. The term itself was unheard of until the 1920s, which is when the so-called teenage mindset began to unfold. As a matter of fact, what parted the red sea to teenhood were school bus doors.

> Automobile technology led directly to the other major factor that fostered a teenage culture: the consolidated high school. Buses could now transport students farther from

> their homes, leading to the decline of the one-room schoolhouse. Furthermore, Americans were realizing the potential of a longer education, and states were adding more years to their compulsory schooling laws. As a result, a larger number of teenagers were thrown into a common space than ever before. ("The Invention of the Teenager")

In hindsight, I offer a silent nod of gratitude to dead automobile engineers. At this rate, I'd be married to my closest neighbor with children by now, but instead, the modern teenage babysitter gets an introductory peek into parenthood, with breaks to earn an education in between.

As a child, a friend and I had our own unique adaptation of a game we called "teenagers." Our mothers were friends and, whenever they would bring us along for a day at the beach or an afternoon out to lunch, we would declare ourselves ten years older than we truly were. We walked ten steps ahead of our mothers and younger sisters, pretended to be at the park all on our own; the hot sun never a second thought, so long as we maintained the illusion of our flawless and free teen selves. We would place tiny sunglasses over our eyes and rest our hands on our hips with an attitude that we must have learned from older cousins.

Looking back, I realize that playing "teenagers" was not so different from *The Mason Children* overdressed like their full-grown parents—aside from the fact that the Masons probably had no say in wearing bonnets and lace collars. My tiny friend and I were the lucky ones. Teenhood meant that we could linger in the wonder and newness still spilling over from childhood, yet we could also have the freedom to do as we please. To walk without holding our mother's hands.

I noticed that Ethan plays the same game. When we discussed the preface for games he'd often announce, "I'll be *fourteen*. Okay? And you'll be thirteen." He looked at me as though he had just derived a genius plan, as if being fourteen years old is the climax of the human experience. Not to mention the undeniable power dynamic of deeming me a whole year younger than him in his imaginary world. My natural reaction would be to roll my eyes at the naiveté, but then I remembered my mentality as an eight-year-old: being a teenager meant you could *think* you are grown up, even though you don't *have* to be.

This is what, I suppose, I put my faith in as I anticipate adulthood. I have incubated comfortably in the in-between for the last few years; an adult in the lukewarm bathwater of my teenhood. But Ethan is almost tall enough to sit in the passenger seat of a car and I now own my very own pair of pointy-toed boots, a grownups-only piece of wardrobe through my younger eyes. We must let go in order to reach the next best, fitting thing.

No doubt there are more connections between Ethan and *The Mason Children* than we can imagine, despite the changes to the meaning of "childhood" over the last three hundred years in America. Their flat faces decorate portraits that Americans habitually hang on physical and virtual walls. Perhaps all the children have knocked on wood three times to counteract an unwanted statement from coming into action. It is possible that while Ethan rushed to wash his pacifier before a nightlong snooze, 343 years in the past, the son of the Mason family snuck out into the dark regardless of his father's commands. Yet, *The Mason Children* stand forever frozen to us; it is Ethan's turn to grow into a person. He moves and changes, and so do I. There was once a time for the Masons to move and change, but now they are oil paint on a canvas.

What it means to be a child has changed, and what it means to be a mother has, too. As a babysitter, I am a passive witness of the daily churn for single mothers in 2016. To wake a child from sleep means not seeing him for another thirteen hours that day, to return through an unlocked door after sundown with countless grocery bags hanging like anchors from the fists—domesticated but worldly.

I played a part in this churning of the modern child and I wonder what Ethan will recall of his mostly consistent babysitter—the one who continued to listen to his impulsive outbursts despite hearing his mother pull the Audi A6 into the driveway, despite the itch to go home for the night and live out my own youth. I wonder if I will appear in his mind when he is ripped into the realization that he, too, will lose his childhood.

Then again, "loss" is not quite the word for talk of our childhoods. I have found that it is fluid, still with me like a guardian. Childlike perception returns to me when I engage with one who is in the midst of it. Ethan, despite being a child of divorce who lives a much different homelife than I did at his age, inevitably follows an evolved routine from *The Mason Children*. In all his premature rage and uncontained excitement, he showed me what it is to be a child, and, to some degree, what it is to have one.

Childhood is amorphous. Teenhood, after all, was invented. It comes and goes in all its institutionalized structure and finite angst. But childhood is a benevolent thing that follows me. I see it in the resistance in the tiny faces of *The Mason Children*, their anonymous portrait painter forcing them to stand still for hours. I feel childhood whenever I learn something totally new like the sleep pattern of sharks. I felt it when I watched Ethan pop a wheelie for the first time and in the widening of my eyes. I offer a silent nod of gratitude to childhood when it resurfaces and invite it along as a guest to whatever comes next.

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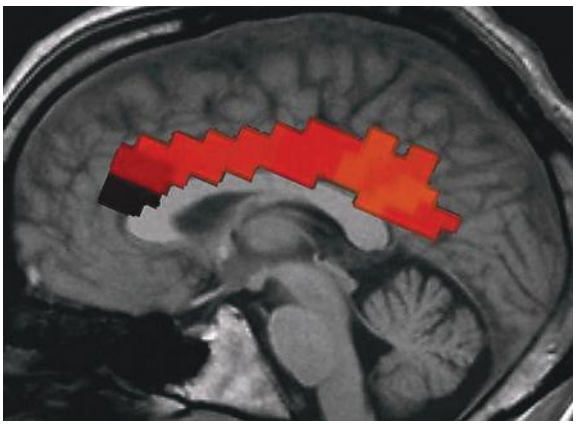
SARAH SIMON

cingulum



It is an integral part of the limbic system, which is involved with emotion formation and processing, learning, and memory. The combination of these three functions makes the cingulate gyrus highly influential in linking behavioral outcomes to motivation (e.g. a certain action induced a positive emotional response, which results in learning). This role makes the cingulate cortex highly important in disorders such as depression and schizophrenia.

—"Cingulate cortex" from Wikipedia

wraps to form a cranial
bay curve
table
winding from that
Boston Bostonian

I am not a New Englander but Cape Cod's shiver

hooks.
above is that Merrimack of mine
and skiing and reading,
collapsing into the cortex of itself, laughing:

He is saying his haircut is always $16
and when paying
he only asks for a dollar back

There is not depression;

You "thank you" through a drawl drawn
out and down with the staircase,
to a door held open for you that
you expect to be held open for you

There is hope in you expecting;

Art!

There is a
silence after screams.

You are etched on my heart

DEFINITION

1 engrave (metal, glass, or stone) by coating it with a protective layer, drawing on it with a needle, and then covering it with acid to attack the parts the needle has exposed, especially in order to produce prints from it: (as adj. **etched**) *: etched glass windows*.

There is the feeling come
back.

There is far too much feeling.

So I will go away from it now
and vacation on the Cape playing hand
games with anchors;
serotonin is the masthead and my boat is upside-down

So the anchors will dock in my direction,
and I will have a will to entertain them
with whispers. of little things the people around me do,
curving to drown a family secret:

planning and expecting and art and feeling,
laying beach chairs out over the hook
and an umbrella,
to protect from the sun.

Their little ticks are the curlicues
drawing on banalities concentrically, while
depressed people only draw on themselves.

Depressed people twist for nothing.
Depressed people know they know everything.
Depressed people are more realistic.

Depressed people neither maintain tip rituals nor
Drawl to held-open doors, nor create;
Depressed people are not in love.

(Am I depressed)
?

Definitions are what is known
in parses.
Wrap the cingulum by a numb-numbing curve, and
accept the prehensile word. eat clam
chowder.

Would 6 be a good time for dinner?
Feels like I'll be hungry by then

(You are quite good at monitoring the activity of your duodenum)
(It's nice to know you care about things)

RACHEL COLOMBAN

Berenstein/ Berenstain

Many of us speculate that parallel realities exist, and we've been 'sliding' between them without realizing it.

—From the mandelaeffect.com Frequently Asked Questions page

I'm sliding on Long Island ice, Ma, trying to grit the ground
so I can walk on kilter for the first time in months.

"Berenstain or Berenstein?"

"Berenstein, always."

I look for cracks, misplaced letters, mistakes in history texts,
ask my friends how they spell a children's book.

"Berenstein or Berenstain?"

"Still Berenstein."

Mirrors haunt me twofold, since I see your carbon copy, 21 years
young, separated by a glass, a world, a letter, maybe.

"Berenstain or Berenstein?"

"You know the answer."

I just—I need someone to answer the other, just once, because maybe,
I'll come home, and you'll be there, reading it to my nieces,
and I'll stop stepping on cracks
because I'll have you back.

We Dug Up Most of Our Ground No.2, Allison Piedmonte

We Dug Up Most of Our Ground No.3, Allison Piedmonte

CHLOE FORSELL

We as Bird & Branch

I unwanted wings unfilled
and marrowless. You

hollowboned twisting
limbs and trunkrot,

echo from empty
ashen bark. Wasted days

wreathing into holes,
rooting in each other.

Wasted away, wanting
deadleaves or anything

closer to the ground.

CHLOE FORSELL

Things we remember years later in our dreams

I.
As a child, I lived in a bathtub. Chipped porcelain printed leaf shapes in my thighs. I watched the prune tree out the window, imagined swinging like a fruit. Old wiring flickered a lightning storm on the ceiling. So much murk in the water it would've dirtied any body. Residue from an old flood painted murals on the walls. I could hear a voice, always, from the other room. *It is time to get out* and lukewarm. Baby's back, soap-scummed spine pressed to cold clay, pretended to drown. Branches swayed outside and a prune bruised the ground like the sound of ceramic on bone.

II.
For the first time, I bled but did not cry. I asked my mother about the body as bread, to first be kneaded, chewed, and torn, remade for tomorrow's meal. *Is there enough of me to fill the dinner table? Am I allowed to sip spiced wine?* More than worthy of a warm course through my body, I know now. Lavender oil soaked the pores of the house. My hands turned purple. There was always food, and I was never really hungry—too concerned with flesh.

III.
A lesson on wreckage: the living room full of dead things and decay under the sofa. I used to climb the walls to try to escape, but tired too quickly. I used to fall into bed from such a distance my heart would stop each night. I swallowed my own tongue and grew gills. Climbed back in the bathtub and swam away. The prune tree still stands. I see it through some stained glass window, sanctuary out of reach. The fruit hangs low and sways the same. Between my legs, leaf-shaped scars bud and branch. A bone breaks like dustclouds

AMELIA MCNALLY

In Now

A beginning.

Ella dreams of a house on a hill. It will be two stories tall—that is decided from the start—with a garden in the back of blueberry bushes and tomato plants and a small attic up top that contains no ghosts or spooky shadows or scares (the spiders could remain, if they must).

On rainy days she talks about the house with her mother over mugs of hot tea on the rug in the living room, and on sunny days she talks about the house over cups of cool lemonade in the shade of the oak tree out front.

"Should the shutters be white or blue?" she asks.

"How dark is the blue?" her mother responds.

Ella considers for a moment. "Not dark at all. Paler than the sky."

"And those flower boxes you're going to plant, you wanted pink pansies, yes?"

"Yes," Ella replies.

"Well, in that case, if the pansies are pink, and the blue paler than the sky, then I think the shutters should be blue."

And so the shutters are to be blue, and they paint themselves in Ella's mind, one more piece of the dream constructed. A blue paler than the sky. The rest of the house will be white, but not too white–a house that sparkles too brightly would be cold and uninviting, for no inhabited house looks completely pristine. The paint begins to chip the moment the first foot steps over the threshold. The headboard of the first bed brought through the doorway hits the frame and knocks a piece of painted wood free, and the house becomes a home. So the house is not to be too white, but yellowed by the sun, cracked in some places, and worn away so thin in others that the weathered wood shows through. And the shutters will be blue.

Then what? A beginning, and then Ella, the girl, contemplates the house, the dream, with her mother. Two characters in a place, places, in a time, or many times, or sometime. They dream up a wooden picket fence and a rusty weather vane and seashells strung into a wind chime on the porch. The house completes, the warm breezes blow, the tea mugs drain and what happens next? Tragedy, drama, suspense—that's how a story goes, is it not? The beginning leads to a middle and the middle needs something, something new, something bad, or at least uncomfortable, or at least–something.

"It's alright, baby, it's alright," her mother says, maybe, as a small Ella sits up shivering and feverish night after night, worse each time. "Just think about your house, think about that, how beautiful the mornings will be at the breakfast table, overlooking the meadow with the little baby ducklings and geese. You remember how we said it was going to look? Do you remember, baby?"

Or maybe not.

Maybe a healthy Ella sits up at her window one rainy summer night, waiting patiently for the sight of her mother's headlights pulling into the driveway, but they never come because her mother's car is crumpled on the interstate between a tractor trailer and a guardrail.

Or maybe not.

"Mom?" Ella might whisper over her honey-sweetened tea. "Why can't we stay in one house? Why do we need to keep moving away?" And her mother might respond, "Because, baby, because." And *because* might mean that no one can find them, especially not the ones who are looking, especially the ones who are bad, and they both know this because they have said it a million times: *because because because*.

Or they don't. They don't say any of these things but instead say hundreds of other things, live hundreds of other lives, all winding up in some tragedy because that is what has to happen to little girls who dream up beautiful houses with their mothers. There's a fire, or a flood, or the world itself comes to an end and there's just nothing anymore, and Ella and her mother no longer speak or are not allowed to speak or just disappear entirely.

Is this how it goes?

Is Ella now doomed to live a life of misery, the memory of a childhood dream home, the only sweet thing left to her in a world that is steadily crumbling around her? Is this the middle, leading to an end? Is the end even worth it after all of this? After any of this?

Just for once, maybe the story does not have to be sad. Maybe the world stays the same. Maybe the little dreaming girl does not get sick, maybe the mother does not get into an accident, maybe one woman never passes prematurely before the other, visions of pink pansies lulling her gently away. Maybe they are not running, not hiding, with no malicious figure tracking

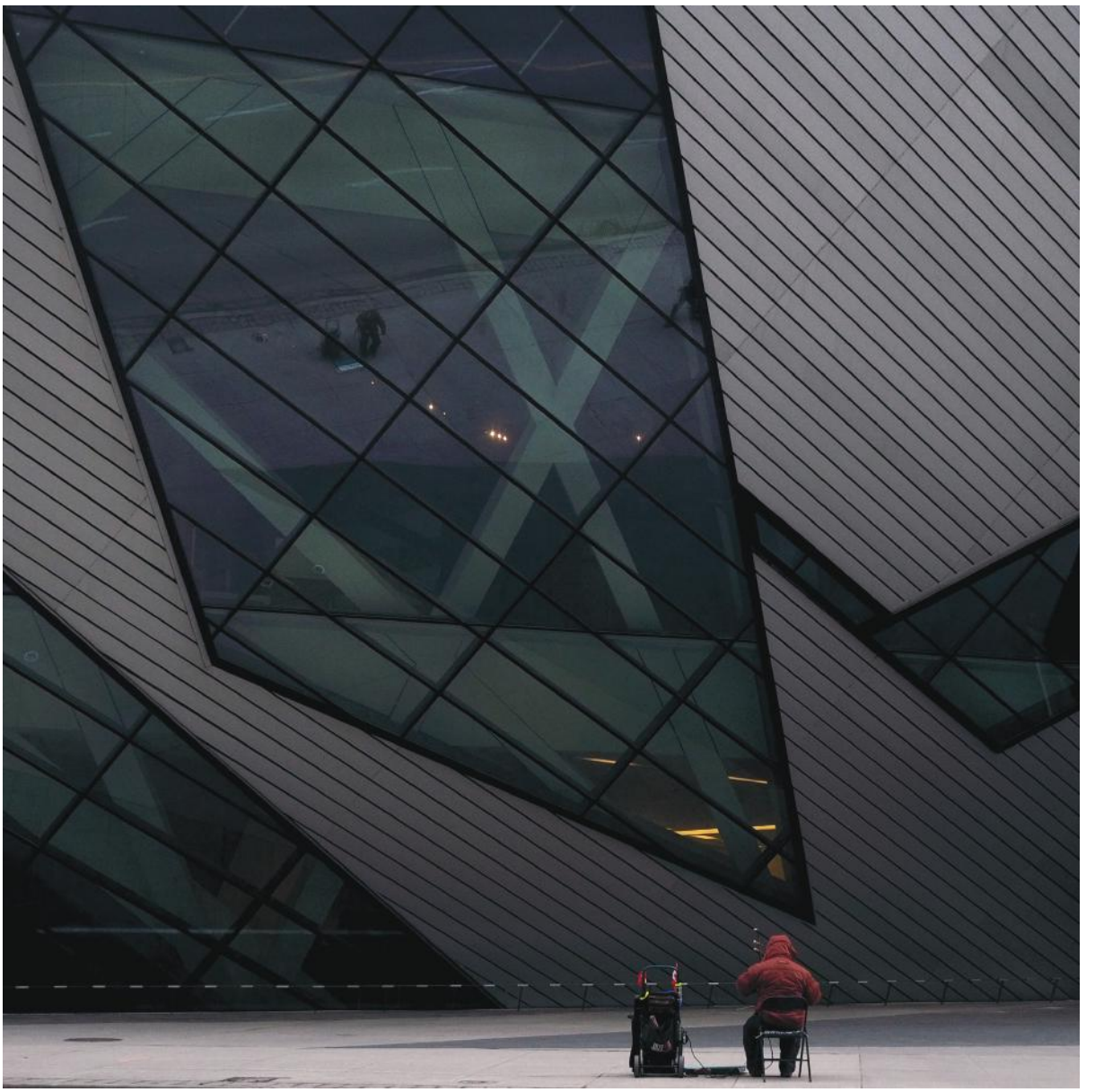
them down to cause them harm. Maybe there are no fires, no floods. They do not go to bed in pain or in fear, hungry or cold. They are unfamiliar with the feeling brought by loss, by death. Maybe they want for nothing.

Maybe every night Ella's mother tucks her in with a kiss, and Ella is free to wish for more wonderful things in her life like puppies or new dresses or birthday cake for breakfast until her eyes flutter peacefully to rest. The house is just a fun activity for mother and daughter to dream up together in their lazy daytime hours, not an escape from an impossible present, and after time Ella grows older and they discuss the house a little less and a little less. Ella excels in school and matures into a beautiful young woman who still sits on occasion with her mother under the oak tree, now with longer limbs and a thinner face. They do not always talk about the house–now the conversation turns to Ella's future, Ella's plans. The real ones. No more debates on colors or designs, no more description of how the paint chips in the afternoon sunlight. Ella moves away, becomes a doctor or a teacher or a business entrepreneur, and she buys a house that has white shutters and yellow siding because she has, in truth, forgotten about the blue. Or maybe she does not forget, and finds the house on the hill, or she builds it herself, and it's everything she imagined, except for the creak in the stairs and some dust that will not stop collecting on the countertops. What if Ella is happy, and her mother is happy, and they live happily ever after in the realest way it can be lived? With minor bumps and minor trials and an end that is not perfect but is good enough. Is the story now worse? Are there enough bruises along the way? Do we still care about the little girl, worry, wonder, reach to hold her hand? Is this not what we all want in the end?

Or what if, just maybe:

There is no future for Ella because it does not matter. It's not written here in final, black ink, so it does not exist. Ella herself did not exist before the house on the hill, and she will not exist after, not that we know of. What exists of her is what is here and now, what she dreamed, will dream, dreams. There is nothing more than a girl with lemonade constructing a real-life fantasy in her mind, building board by board the most beautiful house that will have flower boxes, and an oak tree of its own, and white walls, and everything, everything wonderful in the whole wide world. Pink pansies. Blue shutters. Blue paler than the sky.

And an end.



Man & Echo, Evan Goldstein

CARRIE ANNE POTTER

Uncommon Stereo: A Review of Carey McHugh's *American Gramophone*

All poetry is indebted to sound, and all sound must come from somewhere. *American Gramophone*, Carey McHugh's first poetry collection, explores the origins and vehicles of sound in its many timbres, intensities, and motivations. Across its three sections, the book introduces us to sounds as familiar as musical instruments and as unfamiliar as "what the nearly dead hear." Familiarity, however, is only relative in these poems, as they also evoke a nostalgia for something we might never have experienced, but something that nevertheless "paces, presses inward" on our peripheries.

The somewhat odd image on the front cover is worth some consideration. It shows a man, crouched down, plugging a cord into a jack on the side of what appears to be a cross-sectioned, wooden piglet. To the right of the piglet is another wooden pig, this one full-grown and also sliced in half, equipped perhaps with speakers. We can almost hear that sudden buzz of electricity, brace ourselves for the squeak of feedback, the initial moment of amplification. This is where all sound in *American Gramophone* seems to originate, first and foremost—from these phonographic swine.

In the book's first poem, which prefaces section one, we imagine sound trickling to a start between the wide-set brackets which serve as the poem's title. Something has "come as expected," and the speaker promises, "you will find me armed." This is the calm before the storm, "the silent approach"—the old gramophone warming up, crackling to life—and the quiet is foreboding. For when we dive into this world McHugh has built, we get the feeling that "there is something not right / in the farmwives," or in anyone, for that matter. There is an electrical tension in the air, the kind that makes the hair stand up on the back of one's neck. Our ears anticipate the opening chord of a sorrowful song. With the title poem, the music begins, and the premonitions come. Here, they are birds—"Crows returning in large flocks to rearrange / the body of a tree" or "The sound of something black / and sharp flying into its own reflection." Incantations are spoken, and "new wood growing / full of holes" is unquestionably the most dependable thing around. Even the animals have gone haywire, as all day long the "horses / drag their shadows the length of the field and back." We know we will be haunted throughout this book by such uneasy sensory details as "The sickness of violins" and "the weathervane spinning in rehearsal."

"American Chestnut Blight" introduces us to this agrarian landscape where diseases of trees and crops are always one step ahead of our prudence, and where "winter is a shinbone on the ridge." While an infestation is in abundance, everything else has gone, leaving a "new / vacancy." The speaker has no choice but to "leave the front wicket open at an angle pioneered / for [someone's] return." Water refuses to fill the creek, and in a particularly dismal business arrangement, "the slow mules have been gifted / to the soapworks." In short, the absolute destruction of this terrain is anticipated to last through the spring, and "We are calling it ruin."

These are poems that test the bounds of our perception. In "The Undertow," human anatomy is the limitation. Rabbit ears perk up at some portentous sound on the horizon while sound for the human ear is silenced, as the speaker prefers "the piano's back against a load-bearing wall," and "The song, smothered." The body's greatest impediment is the rip current inside "[which] cannot be surgically redirected," leaving it stuck "on loop with alternatives." Visual ability is reduced as well, since the speaker must rely on others to tell her or him that it's wintertime. Location, rather than the body, is what hinders perception in "Instrument for Oversight." We can only see what is visible from the hayloft—cattle roaming the nearby fields and "the persistence of this lamplit, inclement year." Left to look at the world as the barn frames it, the speaker wishes for "an instrument for oversight," something to clear away this ocular fog, such as "a partial dissolve of sadness." In all of these scenes, "possibility [is] visible but moving steadily away" while adversity nears.

Internal strife is also sounded in the collection, with some poems tackling the knot we have all felt in our stomachs at one point or another. In "Self-Portrait as Shedding," this knot is "a heron / under [the] lung, winging up / openmouthed." In "And Now, the Educated Hog," it is a feeling "Like being bricked up / in a silo." The omens looming over so many of these poems have taken their toll on those affected, creating insomnia, turning regret into something that "[reinvents] tempo, punishment, apprehension," and encouraging bitterness in a speaker who "[doesn't] want whatever you want most for me." Loss is everywhere, and we are asked emphatically to "Consider the devastation at the height / of a swarm!" Sleepwalkers, former sharpshooters, and people especially fond of owls are just a few members of the large and varied community which populates this "snowbound" and dismal countryside.

No matter how far McHugh's poems may carry us, they are always aware of where they come from: the porcine means of sound-delivery depicted on the front cover, dubbed the *American Gramophone*. But their origin does not limit them. McHugh may focus her hazy rural visions through a somewhat atypical stereo, but nothing gets filtered out. On the contrary, these poems teach us that from the darkest recesses of the body, and likewise from the harshest landscapes, issues forth the broadest and most brilliant diapason of voices. The speaker-fitted farm animals serve to amplify scenes already brimming with a quiet fortitude. For, while this is a setting home to people "on the verge of losing something vital," there is no retaliation on anyone's or anything's part. The realization is that maybe "One delinquent sprig" doesn't mean spring will never come again. The inhabitants of these poems know that "We are held up in the body we arrived in," whether fortunate or "tucked and unlucky," and that we must make the most of that. Indeed, though winter is "a slow fail," its cold creeping in to numb even those places we thought would keep us safe and warm, it also "creates an entrance."

Like a song playing through grainy speakers, each poem in *American Gramophone* also has an awareness of what is to come—"the stirring / low of swallows banking and impossibly / flown," a buzzing at once placid and disconcerting. Together, these poems make "Music to leave the body / windblown."

CHRISTY LEIGH AGRAWAL

An Interview with Carey McHugh

Carey McHugh received her MFA from Columbia University. She currently lives in Manhattan where she works at the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health. Her poems have appeared in *Smartish Pace, Boston Review, Denver Quarterly, Gulf Coast*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *The Original Instructions for the Perfect Preservation of Birds &c.*, was selected by Rae Armantrout for the Poetry Society of America's 2008 Chapbooks Fellowship. I had the pleasure of interviewing Carey about her new book, *American Gramophone*, a collection of poems, when she came to SUNY Geneseo for a reading.

CHRISTY L. AGRAWAL: I'm really interested in the titles in this collection, and how they engage in conversation with not only the poems themselves but also one another. According to the Notes section in the back of *American Gramophone*, many of these titles are actually extracted directly from mysterious relics of a disparate American and human history: a photograph of a car accident scene, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, a how-to book of taxidermy, and so forth. Can you tell us a little bit about your process of creating a title? How do you select and then synthesize titles for your work?

CAREY MCHUGH: I'm always on the lookout for titles and I take them from scraps of the everyday: from informational websites, artwork, conversations, old encyclopedias, museum placards, signs on the backs of trucks. I look for peculiar or creepy or linguistically odd nuggets that I think require further investigation. In these cases, the title provides the context for the poem, and I build out the text to answer or echo the title. When I take titles from the world, I often lean toward moments that might already hold a narra-

tive. The title sets the scene up front, and I am free to explore the emotion of the scene in the body of the poem. For example, there is a poem in the book called "Death (as a Woman) Comes for the Draughtsman." It's taken from the title of an Alfred Kubin pencil sketch. The title already gives us the story, so the poem is free to explore the atmosphere of the moment: the panic, the astonishment.

CLA: I'm curious about when and how you determined that these poems were going to be part of a series, since there is so much reverberation between the poems, both formally and thematically. Were all of these poems written specifically for this book, or did they come together somewhat independently to form this book? How did you decide how to structure them in different sections?

CM: I wish I could say that I sat down and wrote all the poems effortlessly and fit them together seamlessly, but that would be a giant lie! I started this book in graduate school, and over the years, it's had many forms. I've taken poems out and replaced them with newer poems, and then at times, I've gone back and reinstated poems that I'd removed. There is an element of experimentation when it comes to putting a collection together, but I feel like the book has a solid center and the poems circle common themes and landscapes, so even though the poems were written over the span of about a decade, the book feels very cohesive to me. From the beginning, I knew that the book should be in three sections, and though I wanted the sections to vary slightly in tone, there are still threads—themes and structures that run throughout the book.

CLA: As I was reading, I noticed a distinct quality of transience: many of these poems exude a slightly unnerving energy, as if they waver on the edge of some inevitably approaching precipice that threatens to bring either everything we ever wanted or everything we ever feared, or both. This feeling of impermanence and imminence is mimicked in the agrarian landscape, where an ever-changing land can signify many things, even opposing ideas. How does the agrarian landscape depicted in this collection relate to the, at times, nostalgic emotions evoked within the poems, and what does this setting mean to you?

CM: This book inhabits a space at the intersection of memory and imagination. I had a rather transient childhood, but my extended family lived (and still lives) in Tennessee. It was the one constant landscape in my life. We would return to visit each year and I think I was always a little surprised to find it intact; there was a fear that it might have vanished in my absence. I think this notion lives in the poems. When I was very young, my father and grandfather owned a cattle farm and they would let me and my brother tag along as they worked—branding cattle, mending fences, baling hay—it

seemed like such a mysterious world! Much of the agrarian imagery in the book comes from my memories of that time. In many ways, I think I'm writing to revive or respond to that landscape.

CLA: The way in which the form of your poems intersects with their content is very engaging, inviting readers to interpret the poems as not only a grouping of words, but also as aesthetic creations. One of the first times I picked up on this subtle relationship between structure and meaning was when I was reading through "Prep Guide for Basic Drill and Ceremony," a description of a surgical kit that twice mentions ribs while also mirroring the image of a ribcage in that it's composed of twelve lines, the same number of rows that compose the average human ribcage. What is your process of creating form and physicality for your poems? Do you structure them after they've been written or as you go, and how important is form to you in relation to meaning?

CM: Symmetrical stanzas with consistent line lengths appeal to me. They work to pin down a poem. They offer a tension that contrasts with the emotion and chaos of imagery in the text. I let the poem dictate the form as it unfolds; however, I should also confess that I go through phases where I become obsessed with certain structures. For example, many of the later poems that I wrote for the book are in single-line stanzas.

CLA: In "Supply Notes from The Home Book of Taxidermy & Tanning,"—only two poems away from the end of this collection—is the first and only place in which the word "gramophone" is mentioned, with "grinding wheel" right before it. I looked up the meaning of grinding wheel and discovered that it is "a wheel used for cutting, grinding, or finishing metal or other objects, and typically made of abrasive particles bonded together," and it actually looks a lot like a record, the kind that might be played on a gramophone. I realized that this book could function very similarly to how a figurative grinding wheel as a record would function in my mind: a sometimes chaotic, sometimes smooth, and refractive melding together of the agrarian, the American, the bodily, and the emotional, a blend used to pierce and carve and grate and smooth and dissect and reconstruct the sound of some distant and yet ever-present song of humanity. This song is made even more complex by the word "taxidermy" in the title of this poem, which brings to mind ideas of preservation, of the impossibility of resurrection or recreation, and the insufficiency of physicality next to memory. This all led me to wonder how you decided on the title *American Gramophone*, and that soft pink and yet violent, fleshy image (which I read online is a hog and not a pig!) for the cover, as entryways into this collection?

CM: The gramophone is such a strange and beautiful creature. I like the curve of it, the squat body and long stem—almost a flowering hibiscus. Nearly a water bird. I like that this machine holds the prospect of these organic forms. Many of the poems in the book take place in an agrarian past, in a landscape

with its own strange machinery and muted song. The gramophone seemed to be the perfect machine to bear this folklore and to amplify the sonic imperfections (all the scratches and skips) that exist in a dwindling memory. I was researching gramophones one day when I came across the title of a record label based in Omaha, Nebraska called American Gramophone. I liked the title so much that I stole it for a poem (though I spelled it slightly differently). In my mind an American gramophone is a strange, inelegant machine—put together on the fly, maybe with spare parts, with all its seams showing. A rustic instrument that could echo a difficult landscape and the work required to maintain it. As the book evolved, I realized that this is how I wanted the collection to be held together.

As for the hogs…I was trolling the Library of Congress website (another valuable title repository!) when I came across the photo of a man working on an exhibit featuring three wooden hogs. A blurb that accompanies the photo explains that the exhibit was created for a livestock show held in Chicago in the late 1920s. The exhibit featured a hidden phonograph, which described the devastating effects of roundworm on hog populations. As the phonograph played, the pneumatic hogs would deflate—presumably to emphasize the devastation. The blurb that accompanies the photograph begins with the following sentence: "And now, the educated hog." This sentence was so funny to me, so brilliant and strange that it became a title for one of the final poems that I wrote for the book. I love the photo, and luckily, it is in the public domain, so we were able to use it for the cover.

CLA: In our poetry workshop we discussed how your collection of poems builds meaning by continually defining and redefining things: bones appear again and again throughout this collection, however, each time in a different way (in my favorite moment they are described as: "the rigid endorsement of the body.") This process of definition and redefinition not only creates a very detailed and multifaceted sense of meaning, but it also generates a sense of movement or fluidity: an unyielding refusal to be still. "It is what we fear the most: being motionless," you write in "The Haywagon," voicing part of the tension that drives me forward through this collection: a resistance to being defined or 'rooted'. And yet, there's a fear of being unrooted or disconnected. How do you encompass and unify so many contradictory feelings and concepts in the same space, and what do you hope your readers will take away from this fusion?

CM: I think the book generates much of its momentum from this tension that you discuss: the impulse toward motion versus the wish for preservation. Being motionless implies a lack of agency, a stasis, a surrender. However, humans are also record keepers by nature, and this requires the need for reflection—the effort to distill a single moment demands a pause, a circling back. Record keeping comes in many forms: taxidermy is the record of a kill,

planting and harvest are records of landscape and season. Photographs, sculptures, paintings, poetry, and other artistic endeavors preserve an attitude, an emotion, a memory, a narrative. The final poem in the book is called "Original Migration Guide as Wholecloth Quilt." What better record of the past than a textile built from lived-in fabrics—extracted, patched together and handed down? We may never be able to fully inhabit a memory, but it seems impossible to stop trying.

CLA: Many writers (including myself) worry about having to choose between a career in writing (which might take the pleasure out of writing by putting too much pressure on it) and a career away from writing (a choice that might be less fulfilling); hearing you talk at SUNY Geneseo about how you found your way really helped assuage my concerns about all this. Could you offer some advice or warnings or encouragements to us young, hopeful poets and writers?

CM: There are many career paths that offer opportunities to exercise your writing muscles—law, journalism, publishing, and teaching, among many others. Pursuing this type of professional path doesn't mean you're giving up on your creative writing life—it just means that you have health insurance and can pay your rent! Be practical. That's my best advice. But whatever your day job might be, keep a toe in the creative writing world. For me, having a workshop is essential—for feedback and for deadlines. It keeps me writing. I'm a member of an informal, three-man workshop, and we've been meeting for over a decade now. They've been instrumental in providing criticism, motivation and encouragement. They helped me bring my book into the world. As for the rejection letters: they will always keep coming, no matter how much you publish. Expect rejection—then you'll be pleasantly surprised when you find that a piece has been accepted.

CLA: What's on the horizon for you? What can we look out for next?

CM: I recently found this incredible, pocket-sized first-aid book for miners in an antique store in Sweetwater, Tennessee. It was originally published by the Washington Government Printing Office in 1922. The book has helpful tips for assessing and treating wounds, ruptures, and poisons, as well as instructions for transporting injured miners. It's very detailed and a little frightening. I'm currently working on a series of poems that takes titles from the section headings in the book. The project is in its very early stages, but hopefully it will work its way into a new book or a chapbook. I'd like to say that I have mapped out a second book, but I'll have to see what direction the new poems take me.

Postscript

DANTE DI STEFANO

Paper Anniversary

Marriage is a new way of telling time
against chronology. It is the end
of *please* rewritten in indigo ink
on the tip of our tongues. It is how *thanks*
will paint all of the hospital walls blue
in our newborn dreams of dying alone.
It is light that stags the doe in transit
through the underbrush and brings her to still
herself at the snapped twigs scrunched underfoot.
It is bunny hop and a pocket watch
that will travel through dresser drawers unused
until one day it finds itself become
heirloom and shining. It is a promise
that calls into question the visible
colors of the ultraviolet spectrum.
It cattails the breeze in marshland evenings
and smacks the warble out of the red-winged
blackbird's beak that serenades our footsteps.
It is, in fact, done with all serenades,
all indigos, all vaults and vestibules
of autumns reimagined on leaf stems.
It's as useful as knowing how to change
a car battery or a toilet's chain.
It is the most unromantic knowledge
of the greening need at the heart of so
much aging ahead. It's: "I no longer
mind cleaning the bathroom sink tonight."

It's you switching your toothpaste brand to mine
without hesitation. It's the word *help*
become holy, memorized as a prayer.
It's what most outwalks us when we walk out
the door together into days laddered,
like the fine blue lines on loose leaf paper,
with the things we are supposed to do now
that we are who we are supposed to be.

DANTE DI STEFANO

Brass Band Epithalamion

While the sousaphones, walking the bass-line,
groove on a riff, and the crescent moon casts
crumbs of light like a screwdriver on
a cymbal attached to a bass drum played
by a kid in a varsity jacket
and camouflage pants, while the three trombonists
hurl salvos at the crowd on the corner
of Chartres and Frenchman, while twin trumpets
punch pins into the umbrella of our
hand-in-hand understanding of the dark,
while teenage boys, sag and swagger, waggle,
cakewalk, strut and bump, to the snare drum's roll,
I am content to contemplate streetlights
with you and to wave the white handkerchief
in time with the wedding march that breaks down
across boarded up storefronts and holds us
in a levee of melody more true
and insistent than your pulse, my heartbeat,
our hemoglobin adjudicating
evening. In the small hours that follow, you
will whistle "I'll Fly Away" on the banks
of the Mississippi and I'll outlook
the strain a busking violin puts on
my memories of imagined futures,

but for now we listen on the dancing verge
and nothing can curb the sound of this band
as it plays “I Ate Up the Apple Tree,”
welcoming us to the Mardi Gras of
an Eden we’ll be forever leaving.

DANTE DI STEFANO

On Losing My Wedding Ring While Planting an Orchard

That this small band of white gold has been lost
among the roots of saplings, which will grow
and, perhaps, shoot a finger through the hoop
that will choke the bark coasting underground,
is no small consolation; that the hooves
of deer will silk the dirt above it now
and at the hour of my death, and of yours,
is a brittle thought that breaks like hills
whose trees cycle through a blaze of autumns.

That my friend, whose orchard this is, will let
his little daughters build imaginary
kingdoms between the rows where an empire
of apples will one day scud what once was
pasture, and that our initials will be
buried, unacknowledged, beneath their dreams
and beside their father's hope, is a swan
that origamis the endless mountains.

I will buy a new ring and remember
how the original, encased in earth,
hooping worm and rock and root and desire,
remains unbroken, a trancing of loam,
subterranean, shining in the dark
that gallops and gallops still underfoot.

About the Authors

Abigail Allen is currently a sophomore at SUNY Oswego, studying film and creative writing. As a freshman, she was published in *The Great Lake Review*, SUNY Oswego's literary magazine. She has also written freelance for various local organizations and interned with Oswego's newspaper, *The Palladium Times*.

Meghan Barrett is a senior biology and English (creative writing) double major at SUNY Geneseo. She hopes to attend graduate school in the fall of 2016 to earn her Ph.D, likely in neurobiology. Meghan is fascinated by the interplay of science and creative works, which has inspired much of her poetry. Her honors thesis is a project on scientific rhetoric in drama.

Jalen A. Blithe is a Magenta-Street-raised creative writing and history double major at Purchase College, SUNY. He likes old things and reads epic poetry. His favorite hip-hop album is *Black on Both Sides.*

Rachel Britton is a sophomore English (creative writing) major and theatre minor at SUNY Geneseo. She lives in Delmar, NY with her dog. When she isn't writing you are likely to find her reading Thomas Hardy, listening to showtunes, drinking tea, and baking extravagant brownies for her friends.

Jared Chase is halfway through an associates degree at Erie Community College, writes too little and reads too much.

Britina Cheng is completing her final year at SUNY Geneseo as an English (literature) major. She is currently working on a film and art installation exploring the experiences of women of color. She doesn't want any new friends.

Rachel Colomban is a senior English (creative writing) major and anthropology minor at SUNY Geneseo. She's about as organized as a group of irate toddlers and half as productive. If there isn't a deadline, she isn't getting it done. Her fictional best friends would probably be the Weasley twins. Well, at least one of them if we're talking post-series, anyway. Rachel apologizes profusely for that statement.

Brenna Crowe is presently a junior at SUNY Oneonta. She's majoring in psychology and philosophy, with a minor in professional writing.

Christine Davis is a senior English (creative writing) major who is finishing up her secondary education certification at SUNY Geneseo. A native of Long Island, she enjoys baking, reading, and watching obscure movies on Netflix. After college, Christine will be returning to her happiest place on Earth to work at Walt Disney World, where she hopes to make magic for a very long time.

Dante Di Stefano earned his PhD in creative writing from SUNY at Binghamton. His poetry and essays have appeared recently in *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Shenandoah*, *Brilliant*

Corners, and elsewhere. He was the winner of the Thayer Fellowship in the Arts, the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award, the Ruth Stone Poetry Prize, the Phyllis Smart-Young Prize in Poetry, the Bea González Prize in Poetry, and an Academy of American Poets College Prize.

Sequoya Fitzpatrick is a double major in psychology and cognitive science at SUNY Oswego. If she had to choose one fictional character to be best friends with, she would have to say the Cat from *The Cat in the Hat*. He always has something cool and fun going on.

Chloe Forsell is a junior at SUNY Geneseo, double majoring in French and English (creative writing). She hails from a town that, if drawn to scale on a map of New York State, might resemble a fingernail hugging the edge of Lake Erie. Chloe likes to spend her time making Spotify playlists and cooking foods that she doesn't really know how to cook. Her post-grad plans are largely undetermined.

Lei Peng Gan is a senior at SUNY Plattsburgh. Her concentration is painting; she is also a print maker. Gan comes from Muar, Malaysia. She is interested in culture because of her multicultural background. She suspects that she comes from outer space, and sometimes talks incomprehensibly.

Evan Goldstein is a junior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. Evan served as *Gandy Dancer's* poetry editor last semester, and sometimes when it's foggy he goes for walks (not in an angsty way, he hopes) but then gets scared on the darker roads. Warily, Evan would be best friends with Stephen Dedalus.

Sarah Hopkins is a senior English (literature) major at SUNY Geneseo. Sarah served as the fiction editor for *Gandy Dancer* issues 3.1 and 4.1, and her work appears in issue 3.2. In her spare time she loves to read, write, and rock out to podcasts. If she could be best friends with any fictional character, it would be Jean Valjean, bread thief.

For Jay it all began with flash fiction—how one could birth a world and its inhabitants within the limitations of a page or two, how a story could be fleeting yet timeless. Coming to terms with his new-found love for poetry, Jay combined narrative (from his history of writing prose) and the traditional lyric of poetry to create a style that he has stuck with ever since. Jay would probably be best friends with Bradbury's Guy Montag, because who doesn't yearn to be enlightened?

Kelly Landers is a senior English major and writing minor at SUNY at Fredonia. If free time should ever arise, you might find her playing acoustic guitar and writing song lyrics or maybe trying out new vegan recipes she found on Pinterest. In an alternate universe, perhaps London Below, she would be best friends with Richard Mayhew from Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*.

Abigail Lanning is a graphic designer/digital painter/sculptor/printmaker/potter/knitter/bagel lover/sleep-till-noon type of gal currently attending SUNY Plattsburgh.

Brendan Mahoney is a sophomore economics and English (literature) double major. Sometimes at night he wakes up in a cold sweat, having

dreamed of adding a math minor. He's from a town that you've probably never heard of in a state that you've probably never heard of either.

Brandon Mark is a senior physics major at SUNY Geneseo. He grew up in Warwick, NY, a small town in the downstate area. Brandon is looking to pursue a master's degree in mechanical engineering with a focus in design of renewable energy systems. In his spare time (ha ha), he enjoys taking photos, drawing, hiking, and hanging out with his dog, Stanley.

Amelia McNally is a senior at Purchase College, SUNY, where she is double majoring in creative writing and piano performance. She was raised in Philadelphia before moving to northern New Hampshire at the age of thirteen and now spends much of her time balancing the pros and cons of city versus country life. She hopes to spend her future pursuing her writing.

Catherine McWilliams is a creature of the world native to Brooklyn, NY, who thrives on non sequiturs, mid-century modern design, and bad drawings. She is an artist reliant on photography and writing in her narrative process. As a compulsive archivist of her own experiences and fancies, Catherine would rather be caught with her pants at her ankles than without a camera and a notebook.

Julien Miller is a junior at Purchase College, SUNY, where he is majoring in painting and drawing. His work revolves around storytelling and analysis of characters through material and contextual elements. His subject matter is heavily informed by his love for film and screenwriting.

Rachael Mulvihill is a senior at SUNY Brockport. She is majoring in creative writing and works as a paralegal in Rochester, NY. She is inspired by oddities in the world and is passionate about expressing experiences through text. She is convinced that mermaids exist and that there are alternate realities. This is her first time being published in a literary magazine. She plans to attend graduate school at SUNY Brockport in the fall of 2016.

Elizabeth Pellegrino is a sophomore at SUNY Geneseo. She studies creative writing, geology, and linguistics, runs *MiNT Magazine*, and watches cat videos in her down time. She is a passionate consumer of Icelandic landscape photography, London Fog lattes, notebooks with grid paper, and Disney music written for the harp.

Allison Piedmonte is a first-year art student at Alfred University who aspires to be a designer of household goods and furniture. While she dedicates most of her time to the studio, nothing makes her happier than curling up with a cat by her side and crocheting. If she were to have a best friend that was a fictional character, it would be Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*.

Carrie Anne Potter is a sophomore at SUNY Geneseo, where she majors in English literature and French. She is from Potsdam, NY, and consequently considers herself at least half Canadian. When she's not furiously debating the geographical boundaries of "upstate" and "downstate," Carrie can be found writing poetry, playing her violin, rewatching *Portlandia* for the hundredth time, or drinking way too much coffee. This is Carrie's first publication.

Lauren Sarrantonio was a poetry reader for *Gandy Dancer* in the spring of 2014. She is a soon-to-be-graduate of SUNY Geneseo. She studies art history alongside creative writing. Her recent writing has appeared in *Outrageous Fortune*, and in the exhibition "Green Light" by Teen Art Gallery, which has been recognized by *The New York Times*.

Sarah Simon is a junior studying psychology at SUNY Geneseo. She likes to use the word *receptive*. In her free time, she is friends with fictional characters.

Savannah Skinner is (perpetually) a senior history and English (creative writing) double major at SUNY Geneseo. She hails from Franklinville, NY, a town in the Southern Tier that actually boasts one stoplight. Savannah lived the first two decades of her life without ever trying a cherry, and aspires to never go to Olive Garden.

Sarah Steil is a junior English (creative writing) and pre-vet major at SUNY Geneseo. She loves spending time with her five crazy siblings and four crazy dogs.

Jiaming Tang studies literature at Purchase College, SUNY. He plays volleyball, but is mediocre at best. His favorite authors are E.M. Forster, John Steinbeck, and Virginia Woolf.

Margaret Thon is a senior biology and English (creative writing) double major at SUNY Geneseo. From small-town Marathon, NY, Margaret enjoys hiking and relaxing on her porch. She has been previously published in *Gandy Dancer* 3.2. Within the next few years, Margaret would like to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing with the hopes of eventually becoming a nurse practitioner focusing on women's health.

Robert Guitsy Wolf is an eccentric character whose concentration is painting at SUNY Plattsburgh. He also has a deep passion for other mediums and areas of art, including music. He spends most of his time in the Myers Fine Arts Building working on paintings, printmaking, and sculpture.

Michal Zweig is a junior chemistry major and a chatterbox with too much to say about things she knows too little about, but she means well. Lately she has been spending too much time learning Aramaic, which will never serve her any practical purpose. You can probably catch her doing this in the upstairs section of the library, when she is supposed to be studying for a biochem exam.