



Fall 2003

## The Lantern Vol. 71, No. 1, Fall 2003

Katy Diana  
*Ursinus College*

Bart Brooks  
*Ursinus College*


Sarah Napolitan  
*Ursinus College*

Susannah Fisher  
*Ursinus College*

Sarah Kauffman  
*Ursinus College*

*See next page for additional authors*

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**Authors**

Katy Diana, Bart Brooks, Sarah Napolitan, Susannah Fisher, Sarah Kauffman, Dan Bruno, Trevor Strunk, Jan Cohen, Jen Brink, Jonathan Gagas, Shane Borer, Kate Chapman, Dennis Kearney, Crystal McCarney, Ashley McIntosh, Klaus Yoder, Kate Juliano, John Ramsey, Melanie Scriptunas, and Alison Shaffer



THE LANTERN

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# THE LANTERN

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**Editor's Note:** *The Lantern* again shines with creative splendor. Congratulations to Ann Antanavage, Katy Diana and Kate Juliano for their prize-winning work. Special thanks to Joy Stock and Charles Rafferty for their time. The Staff and I are proud to have such talented Ursinians sharing their art with the world. Many thanks to Allison Guerin, a marvelous production wizard, Kate Chapman and Alison Shaffer who listened to my wordy protests, and finally, Jon Volkmer, who has helped to make *The Lantern* a literary force at Ursinus College.

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## JUDGES' NOTES

### Poetry Winner — "Lights of Venice"

"Lights of Venice" stood out among the rest because of its integrity of line and because of its repeatedly inventive and surprising light imagery. I am very much taken with "water-stars" and "diamonded ripples" and the like. I also like the way this poem closes out -- it has that "click of a closing box" that Robert Frost talked about: "But in our dome there were only the moving constellations, / more dazzling than / the vaulted gold tiles of St. Mark's." Very nice. In short, this poem's thesis is coherent and sustained. Also in the running were "Stogie" and "Switzerland." I like the former for its careful verb choice ("presses and twists" is just perfect) and clear narrative. I like the latter for its clarity of image ("10,000 frogs croak" and "air hurts lungs like water").

— *Charles Rafferty is the author of The Man on the Tower and Where the Glories of April Lead, as well as several chapbooks. Recent awards include a grant from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and the River Styx International Poetry Prize.*

### Prose Winner — "The Real Thing"

The Real Thing is a compelling piece dealing with a delicate subject. The author writes with a clear, even-handed voice that steers clear of cliché and allows the reader to feel the impact of the events. Her dialogue opens a window into the life of the characters. Additionally, she creates a world where we care about all the individuals involved in a tragic event.

— *Joy Stocke is Editor-in-chief of the Buck's County Writer, a literary journal based in Doylestown, PA. She is also co-founder of the Meridian Writer's Collective, an organization that has planned and hosted readings and performances in the Philadelphia area since 1990, and is co-editor of Meridian Bound, an anthology. She is author of a novel, Ugly Cookies (Pella Publishing, 2000) and a volume of narrative poems, The Cave of the Bear (Pella Publishing, 1999).*



## LIGHTS OF VENICE

I saw the crystal web  
of fairy-shadows shimmying  
as our sleek gondola slid under the bridge  
like a dark whale.

The cave-like ceiling arched,  
illuminating us with diamonded ripples:  
torn luster escaping from the murky waters.  
Reflection brightened the surrounding staleness and  
green mire adhered at the water line.

The gauze-light was in my hair  
and then your hands were –  
trying to feel the water-stars,  
but there was only our softness.

Streaks of black stains swept down  
To join the shadows,  
But in our dome there were only the moving constellations,  
more dazzling than  
the vaulted gold tiles of St. Mark's.

So Myrin  
Sincerely,  
Kate Juliano  
-04

Kate Juliano

## THE REAL THING

It hit me this past week that I haven't been to his grave in over a year. I used to go every week, sometimes with friends, but mostly by myself. The church did a shitty job of taking care of the graveyard and the grass would come up past my knees, almost mid-thigh. The bugs would have a field day when I'd walk through, especially in the spring and summertime. I used to think he was watching me and laughing when I'd get pissed off at the mosquito that nearly flew in my eye or the yellow-jacket buzzing too close to my ear. He was the only one who knew how finicky I really was; bugs were just the beginning.

Brett Travis Kooman was only 17 when he died in the fall of our senior year. We'd known each other for over nine years, having met when I transferred to that manure-infested, barely-a-blip-on-the-radar-screen town in New Jersey. In elementary school, Brett made my life interesting, to say the least, as most boys do when they're nine years old. He often tortured me; happily, as it were. His friends would stand a few feet away from the metal jungle gym that we girls frequented, whether it was to gossip or hang upside down or, if you were me, staying on your guard in case Brett decided to spew insults your way.

"Hey, FOUR-EYES! Didn't anyone tell ya those glasses are UGLY?"

"Hey, BUCK-TEETH! Didn't anyone tell ya so's your face?"

And so on, until one of the teachers that supervised recess would come over and ask us what the problem was. I'll never forget the day that Brett had to come over and apologize to me and shake my hand (our school's choice method for dealing with conflict between students) for calling me some name repeatedly and laughing about it with his friends. He ran over, grabbed my hand and squeezed it so hard tears filled my eyes. Looking at me squarely, with mock sympathy in his eyes, he announced, "Sorry!" and then a few seconds later mumbled, "FOUR-EYES!"

I got him back, of course. I might have looked like your average girly-girl on the outside, but I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me on the verge of tears no matter what the consequences would be. When none of the teachers were looking, I followed him back to where he was running towards his friends.

"Brett!" I called.

Kate Juliano

He stopped. I'd never called him by his first name before.

"Hey, come here!"

Brett looked wary, but eventually walked over.

"So, anyway..." I began as he leaned closer to me.

POW! I got him right in the stomach!

That day at recess I walked a little taller. My friends were in awe and secretly, I was too. I really thought Brett hated me; at that point, he had every reason to. But as I glanced over to his friends, making sure they weren't plotting a cruel retaliation, he caught my eye and smiled faintly.

*That night in October of 2000 started out as any other. I was working from 4 to close at the diner with all of my friends; Brett was the busboy for the night. After work, I drove us back to his house where we sat and waited for friends to figure out plans for the evening. Brett had a rough night, which was rare, because the waitresses loved him. He was quick, efficient, good with the customers and always flashed that smile, even at times when he was probably feeling differently on the inside. He hadn't said much on the ride back to his house and I was worried.*

*"Hey, you okay?" I sat down on his porch steps, the splintered boards lit up by the yellowed lamp that silhouetted our frames.*

*"Yeah, I just hate it there." He lit a blunt and took a long, slow, steady drag. There was a long pause before he blew it out, towards the hornet-infested shed, completely cloaked in the cloudy darkness that had plagued Woodstown for the last week.*

*"Trust me, I know." I took it when he offered and allowed just enough smoke to fill my lungs so I wouldn't cough. He always made fun of me for that.*

*"I mean, why would Pam only tip me out one lousy dollar? I busted my ass for her tonight. Every single fuckin' table that got up, I bussed it like my ass was on fire. Maybe if she'd timed me and saw how fast I was, she would've given me some more fuckin' money." Brett was waving the Philly around so fast that I was seeing trails of bright, glowing orange and I was still sober.*

*"You know how she gets. Just take it in stride. That's how I handle her. There's no other way, ya know?" I took another hit when he held it out and passed it back to him.*

*He passed on it so I inhaled the aromatic smoke again. His eyes were blazing. "Yeah, well, fuck that place. I don't need the money that bad." But we both knew that was a lie. Mr. Kooman barely made enough to support Brett and his two brothers, Ray and Scott. Nearly all of Brett's tips went right to his father for food and rent.*

*"Give it time, man. It'll get better. And if it doesn't, then quit."*

*"What time is it?" he asked suddenly.*

*"Almost 10. You wanna call Nick?"*

*"I should, but he was really pissing me off today. He always has to come into the Diner and start talking shit about the new car his parents are buying him and what girl he wants to fuck next and where he wants to go after all of us get off work and blab-blab-blab." Brett rolled his eyes and threw his hands up in the air.*

*"Is that why you had a stick up your ass for, oh, I don't know...all of dinner?"*

*He smiled faintly. "Yeab. He drives me up a fuckin' wall sometimes."*

*"At least he doesn't live across the street from your best friend. 'Girls, yo, check this shit out, yo. My moms and pops are away for the night, yo, and I'm thinkin' 'bout havin' a little, you yo, and I was just girls wanted to come by, and Brett exploded with*

*"Yeab, I keep tellin' him white like the rest of us, and or something."*

*We laughed and I got up don't wanna come with me gonna drink at her house probably gonna drive us to*

*"No, it's cool. I need to chill with Nick tonight and get shit straightened out. Anyway, this Jericho party is supposed to be a good time, so we'll see. If it's not, I'll call you."*

*"Okay, babe. I hope you have fun—and if it helps at all, you know I love ya."*

*He smiled that gorgeous smile and winked. "Oh I know you do." Wiggling his eyebrows, he turned to walk inside.*

*I began the walk across his yard to my car, but the sound of his voice made me turn around and take a few steps toward the house again.*

*"I just wanted to tell you that seriously, you're, like, one of the only people I can talk to about anything. You're the real thing, Kate. You don't say one thing and do something else. You don't talk shit—you're honest. Not just with yourself, but your friends, too, you know what I mean? It's like, you wanna get out of this town and do something with yourself; like you won't settle for anything less, you know?"*

*I nodded. But where was all of this coming from?*

*"Anyway, don't cry or get mushy or anything like that, but—you know, I just wanted to tell you."*

*Still unsure of how to respond, I simply replied, "Thanks, Brett. I appreciate it."*

*He walked over and wrapped his arms around me. "Thanks for being there for me*

*"That day at recess I walked a little taller."*

*know, gatherin' at the crib, wonderin', if you and your yo." I added hand gestures laughter.*

*not to talk like that. He's one day he's gonna get shot*

*to leave. "Are you sure you to Tara's? We're just and then her mom's Shanna's."*

Kate Juliano

tonight.”

*“I didn’t do anything!”*

*He smiled and stuffed his hands in his pockets. “Yeah, but you listened. That’s more than most.”*

*I pivoted again to walk to the car, when he called me again.*

*“When you make it out of here, can I go with you?”*

*“Are you kidding? You’ve got shotgun!”*

*“Yes!” He gave me a thumbs-up and went inside.*

He never called me that night. A little after midnight, I was tipsy and in the bathroom freshening up before we headed out to Shanna’s. I was humming “The Thong Song” and checking myself out because Matt was going to be there. Halfway through re-applying my eyeliner, someone knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” I asked and laughed because my voice came out as a half-shriek.

“Kate?” It was Tara and she didn’t sound happy. She hated being late; I didn’t care.

“I’m almost ready, I swear!” I stared at the door and rolled my eyes. She could wait for five more minutes.

“Kate...um...I’m just gonna say this.” Her voice was shaky and the tone was uneven. “Brett’s dead—”

I don’t remember anything she said after that. When she walked into the bathroom, I was sitting on the floor, grabbing my knees to my chest so tightly, my hands were completely white. Thick tears were streaming down my face and I could barely see, as Tara and her mom tried to get me out of the bathroom.

The telephone pole had to be replaced because Nick’s Grand Am hit it so hard. The back window on the passenger’s side was the only thing separating Brett’s head from that pole.

I went to school that week not even knowing why I was waking up anymore. I couldn’t concentrate on anything and every time I looked three lockers down from mine, I expected to see that beautiful smile flashing in my direction as he chucked pink and red Starbursts at my head. He knew those were my favorite flavors.

I don’t know why I went to the viewing. Even now, I’m still not sure it was the right decision. When my turn came to walk up to the coffin to pay my respects, I carefully placed the note I’d written for him inside

*The Real Thing*

next to his right shoulder and then something made me stop.

He wasn't smiling.

But Brett *always* smiled.

I felt my mother's hands on my shoulders; felt her guide me away from the coffin and outside to the car.

I try to go back to Woodstown as little as possible, but when October 24<sup>th</sup> rolls around I make an exception. Every year, the crowd gets lighter, there are more unreturned R.S.V.P.'s, and Mr. Kooman's hatred and bitterness for Nick grows fiercer and more significant. I just sit and try to keep my eyes focused on his blown-up senior portrait. Somehow I know he's there with me, which makes the service slightly more bearable. And in that picture, he's smiling.

## PORTRAIT

An explosion of pink over black.

Fuzzy pink over harsh black.

Black as the night, twice as black.

A pink carnation perched on the

black

with

sleeves.

A carnation with

two

black

stems.

A carnation with

a

golden waterfall

hovering, just hovering

above it all.

Windows of blue

with black, black drapes.

A waterfall.

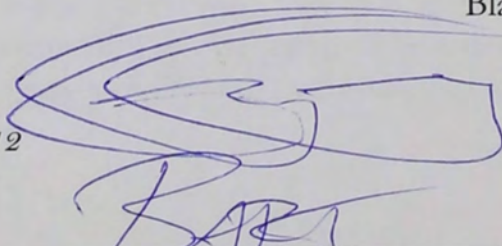
Black drapes.

Blue windows.

Black drapes.

Pink carnation.

Black stems.



*Heather Morris*

---

## HE CALLED FOR HELP





## IN THE KEY OF FUCHSIA MINOR

Calloway Records, Inc.  
42 Willow Lane  
San Francisco, CA 94116  
October 24th, 2002

Dear Secretary, Businessman, or Whoever's reading this:

I was only 18 when I experienced a night I'll never forget. Now I know what you're thinking, "Is this guy living in a creative vacuum with his 'night I'll never forget' trash? What the hell kind of opener is that?" but hear me out. It's not every day you get to see a 19-year-old kid playing a beat-up, worn-out bass guitar, probably tripping out on some kind of mushroom grown by fairies from a bad rerun of *David the Gnome*, looming over a club full of hicks freshly picked from the local trailer park, chewing them out like some goddamn backwoods fire and brimstone preacher condemning "drinkin', dancin', and rock n' roll, Satan's own music!" Got your interest yet? Good.

Ten years ago, I wasn't exactly in the best of shape. There was no degree hanging on my wall, that's for sure. I always wanted to be a street performer, like the kind you see on the street corners in my hometown, good ol' New York. Whether they were playing the sax or juggling china plates, they always had this "magic" about them, you know what I mean? They didn't have much money, but they had *soul*. That's what I wanted.

My dad thought otherwise. He was a colonel in the army, and "no son of his was gonna make a living wandering willy-nilly around New York tootin' on a kazoo, no siree." His son was going to military school; *his* son was gonna do his country proud. He just *never* listened to me, never.

To make a long story short, I flew the coop in '92. It was just me, my guitar, and the greatest city on Earth. To make *another* long story short, I didn't find any soul. I did find out that not everyone wanted to throw money into the guitar case of the kid playing Clapton. Being hungry really, really sucked. I had to get out of the city, away from the stares and the drugs and the booze. Oh, the booze. That's another thing I

found in New York. That unshaved homeless guy with the whiskey bottle in the paper bag that I always used to laugh at? Well, that turned out to be me. I managed to sober up for a couple of hours and hitchhiked as far as I could go. I ended up in a town up in northern New York halfway between civilization and the boondocks. Unfortunately, it was all of the Big Apple that I hated and none of it that I loved.

I didn't realize that, though, even when the asshole driving the Chevy shoved me out of his door and onto the cold, hard ground of reality. Hey, it wasn't the best entrance I'd ever made, but it worked for the moment. I saw a sign in the distance. "Welcome to Weltlich, an All-American Town." Weird name. Anyway, by that time, that gnawing urge for a drink was back. Hey, you have to gimme some credit; I didn't have a drink for *five hours*. I wandered up to the nearest bar; I didn't have to walk very far to find it. The sign said "er." And with that, the story begins...

\*\*\*\*\*

Gerodi's Bar was much like all the other bars in Weltlich, and, as a matter of fact, much like all the other bars everywhere. Just imagine a bar on the wrong side of the tracks in your town, pretend it's dirtier and more run down than it actually is, and you'll have a good picture of Gerodi's in your mind. The pink neon sign on the front was written in cursive; the lettering would have been more appropriately used for words like "hookers" or "peepshows 25 cents." Only the "E" and the "R" of "Gerodi's" were still in working order, and the "R" was on its last legs, flickering on and off every once in a while.

The building looked fairly small from the outside, with pea green stucco walls gradually succumbing to the elements. An old blackened ivy plant resiliently climbed the walls. It seemed to be mocking the exhaust fumes that constantly tried to kill it, daring them to come closer. The narrow street over which the bar loomed looked like something straight out of a Charles Dickens novel, with exhaust fumes clouding the air and garbage overflowing from the nearby dumpster.

Gerodi's was fairly large on the inside. It was so filled with smoke that it could have made a good set for a B-rated horror movie, had the smoke been fog. Ask one of Gerodi's frequent customers what his favorite aspect of the bar was, and after the obligatory "Real cheap beer!" and "Easy pussy!" you would probably get a response like, "Man, me and my friends has ourselves a *real* good time on karaoke night! We

git up on the stage, and, an'... Did I mention they got cheap beer? *Real* cheap." In plain English, Gerodi's boasted a small dance floor and a pathetic excuse for a stage. Occasionally, the bar utilized this stage for karaoke nights, during which some of the patrons would stumble around the stage and "sing" in a drunken slur. Speaking of patrons, Gerodi's had more than its fair share of alcoholics, no-hopers, whores, dirtbags, and other fine upstanding citizens. They crowded the bar stools, they milled about on the dance floor, and they drank their problems away, only to be rudely reminded of them by mind-numbing hangovers the next morning.

As a scruffy-looking fellow with a bird's nest of a beard fountaining out from his face was brushing himself off and picking up his guitar after being rudely shoved out of a Chevy on the city limits of Weltlich, a van several blocks away trundled along toward Gerodi's. It contained the members of "Etc.," a curious band that was truly a labor of love by its creators. They were slowly (and not all that eagerly) making their way to their next gig. The van itself, which had seen better days, seemed reluctant to go, as it made a loud *sputter!* or *pop!* every few minutes. "I don't like the looks of this place," said Cameron, the band's drummer.

Kevin, a grungy-looking fellow with a goatee and spiky necklace who played guitar in all its forms, replied, "Cameron, lighten up. If any guy gives you trouble, you know you could kick his ass any day."

Cameron stuck out her tongue and playfully punched Kevin in the shoulder. "If you weren't driving, I would've hit you harder," she retorted. Cameron stood about 5 feet, 4 inches, and was slightly plump, although not unpleasantly so. Her black hair was done up in 2 braids which hung over her crimson shirt, which reminded one of a painter's smock. "Hey Perrin!" she said. "Perrin, yoo-hoo, anybody home?"

"Huh, whuh?" said the figure in the back of the van as he snapped out of his daydream. It was a nice daydream, one in which he died, went to heaven, and played guitar with Jimi Hendrix to entertain the angels. Perrin had been having that one a lot lately, and it sometimes took him a while to be "rudely awakened," as he liked to put it.

He had the manner of an absent-minded professor, a sort of detached nervousness about him. His dirty-blond hair stuck out in all directions, and combined with the 4-day-old stubble on his chin, it made him look as if he was pretending to be older than his nineteen years, although that was not the case.

Bubba, who was sort of a “jack of all trades” for the band, couldn’t resist chiming in. Raised on the classics, he played keyboard and violin and occasionally did turntables. Looking at him, you’d think he was a bouncer, with his shaved head and 215-pound frame, not a violin-player. “I think Perrin was daydreaming about all the *fiiiiine* women he’s gonna meet at, uh... where are we goin’ again?”

“It’s called ‘Gerodi’s,’ and from what I’ve heard about the place, I wouldn’t touch one of those bitches with a ten-foot pole,” Perrin said, suppressing a laugh.

SLAP! Cameron’s hand struck Perrin’s face. “Why, Perrin Mandar, do you kiss your mother with that mouth of yours?” she said. The whole van exploded in laughter.

Even Perrin’s red, stinging face managed to contort into a grin.

“Ah well,” sighed Kevin, after the laughter died down. “This place has to be better than our last gig. I think you all remember Timmy’s birthday party; am I correct?”

Perrin’s eyes narrowed into little slits. “Yeah, I remember. Little Timmy cried to his dad that he didn’t like us, and they replaced us with that retarded clown. That bastard! He tried to rob us with a bubble-gun after the party! What was his name again?”

“Jesus, what got up your ass? Calm down, man,” said Bubba, between giggles.

“You have to admit that it was funny. Oh yeah, I believe his name was ‘Mr. Bubbles.’”

“I know, I know,” said Perrin. “I guess it was kind of funny, now that I look back on it. It’s just that, I don’t know, it’s like nobody realizes what we’re trying to do, ya know? I wish people would just turn off the TV and look at the stars, really *look* at them, you know what I mean? Then maybe they’d understand. I see these manufactured, no-talent corporate ‘musicians’ on MTV every single goddamn day. It’s like they’re not even people; they’re just pop-culture icons created by these record exec bastards to scientifically part people from their money. They’re just another corporate scam to cover the bottom line. I’m not asking for some huge record deal; I just want to get a decent gig for once.”

“Perrin, I know what you’re tryin’ to say, but for chrissakes, is it too much to ask for you to get down off your soapbox and be, I don’t know, *positive* every once in a while?!” said Kevin.

“Whadda you know? Fuck off!” Perrin growled.

*Jonathan Gagas*

“Guys, guys! We’re all *friends* here, remember?” said Cameron.

“It’s not my fault that Kev here wants me to live in Norman Rockwell Land.”

“PerRIN!” said Cameron, giving him a stern, motherly look

“Alright, alright.”

Bubba, who had seen his band mates have these little spat too often to keep taking them seriously, let out a deep, throaty laugh, and a grin lit up his face. “The audience may not like us, but at least you guys keep *me* entertained!” he said.

Everyone else in the band glared at Bubba.

“What?” said Bubba, with all the innocence of a boy who’s just eaten his dessert right before dinner.

The rest of the ride was taken in silence. As the van approached Gerodi’s, the members of Etc. consoled themselves with the hope that this would be a “decent gig, for once.”

Kevin managed to find a parking space, and the band quickly sized the place up.

“Hey Perrin, I think that whatever you heard about this place is probably true,” Bubba said as his face crinkled up like he’d smelled a long-dead animal.

“Er,” said Kevin.

“Er what?” asked Cameron.

“Er. Just look at the sign.”

“Hey Kev, that was almost funny!” Perrin quipped.

“Perrin, shut up.”

A burly man in an apron, apparently the bartender, ran out of the bar as fast as his thick legs would carry him. “You guys better get in there and play something! That crowd’s gettin’ rough!” he shouted.

Cameron smirked. “Nice to meet you too,” she whispered under her breath.

Etc. walked through the bar’s swinging doors and was greeted by the musty aroma of sweat, body odor, alcohol, and cigarette smoke. The crowd cheered; they hadn’t had a live band in quite a while. The band’s hopes lifted, even though the people on the dance floor didn’t exactly look like music aficionados. Maybe the band wouldn’t be replaced by a clown this time.

Since the crowd was beginning to grow impatient, the band members set up their equipment in merely ten minutes. Perrin picked up his bass guitar, walked up to the beat-up old microphone, and said, “Are you

guys ready to rock?" The crowd cheered yet again. Inebriated though they were, they were playing into the palm of his hand. Perrin was getting good vibes.

Etc. started off with a song they had recently written, "Amputate My Heart."

Perrin began strumming a slow, ominous bass line. Cameron came in with a light tapping of the cymbals. This went on for about two and a half minutes. Someone in the back of the crowd yelled, "Sing the damn song already!" Etc. kept playing; they had become almost deaf to these sorts of comments after two years of hearing them. Ghostly pipe organ chords from Bubba's keyboard began to waft through the bar like the thick smoke.

The rhythm of the song was finally established, and Kevin began strumming the main melody on his synth guitar. Perrin's heavily distorted voice floated through the tinny speakers, completing the transformation of the bar from a roach motel to an eerie, beautiful symphony hall.

The people on the dance floor looked at each other nervously. Their line of thinking went something like this: they could not dance to the music or sing along; therefore, their chances of getting laid were markedly reduced.

Seven minutes and forty-five seconds later, Etc. finished its song. The crowd wasn't "ready to rock" anymore. When Bubba picked up his violin and began the opening notes of the next song, someone screamed, "Go home!" Etc. noticed that one, but they let it slip by; the crowd would come around soon, hopefully. As Perrin reached the climax of the song, a gorgeous reflection on the meaning of death, something whistled through the air. A beer bottle, which missed Perrin by a fraction of an inch, fell on the stage and spider-webbed into a thousand pieces of glass which scattered across the stage's floor. The performers recoiled. Perrin, visibly trembling and drenched with alcohol, stepped up to the microphone with a crunch. Silence descended on Gerodi's for the first time in years.

Two years of rage that had been building up inside of Perrin, shaken up by countless taunting crowds, began to bubble forth. "WHO THE FUCK THREW THAT?!" he screamed.

No one answered. Cameron grabbed Perrin's arm.

"Perrin, come on, nobody got hurt. Let's go. This is getting out of hand."

Jonathan Gagas

“OUT OF HAND? OUT OF HAND? I’LL SHOW THESE FUCKERS WHAT OUT OF HAND IS!!!”

Perrin blasted the mike stand with his foot, sending it careening into the crowd along with a wave of broken glass. A piercing *WAA-OOOMM* of feedback split the silence as Perrin paused to catch his breath, his eyes moist and his nostrils flaring.

Cameron gave Bubba and Kevin a knowing look. They all knew Perrin, and once he started like this, there was no stopping him. They grabbed what they could carry and walked out without fanfare. Perrin would get this out of his system eventually, right?

“You fucking Neanderthals!” Perrin shouted. He pressed his face up to the microphone, practically putting it in his mouth, snarling at the audience like an angry pit-bull with a chew toy. “Why the *fuck* did God even put you on this earth? You’re a waste of fucking oxygen! Go home and vomit in the fuckin’ toilet, if you even have one! HOPEFULLY YOU’LL PASS OUT IN IT AND DROWN YOURSELVES!!!” The crowd recoiled. Although they were intoxicated beyond belief, they heard the suddenly imposing figure on stage loud and clear. But Perrin Mandar wasn’t finished with them yet.

“You should all be CASTRATED, so your DIRTBAG SEED WON’T GET SPREAD AROUND THE EARTH ANYMORE!!” Sweat ran down Perrin’s body, which was shaking with unbridled fury; his breathing became heavy. Perrin was rapidly wearing himself out, and the fact that the speed he had taken earlier was wearing off didn’t help matters much.

“AND ANOTHER THING!” He was beginning to wheeze. “And another (cough) and anoth... Aw, fuck it. Wh- Why am I wasting my goddamn time?” Perrin stormed off the stage and through the crowd, which parted for him like the biblical Red Sea parting for Moses. Just before he left, he thought he noticed a man with a full beard and a guitar strapped to his back, holding a bottle in a paper bag. Didn’t Kevin go home already? Kevin’s beard wasn’t *that* disheveled, was it? Everything was starting to bleed together.

Perrin stumbled into the alleyway. He didn’t think anyone from the bar was going to come after him and didn’t care if they did. He gazed up at the stars, a million points of white light. They stung Perrin’s eyes. He spread his arms out like an exhausted Christ and collapsed on a heap of garbage. The last thing he remembered before passing out was the colors dancing in his mind. A purple flat soared by a turquoise chord in

*In the Key of Fuchsia Minor*

the key of fuchsia minor. Normally, at a time like this, Perrin would be grabbing a pen and any scrap of paper he could find to translate the visions in his mind's eye into notes and words, a medium everyone else could understand. Right now, though, he was just too tired. At that moment, if he could've bored a hole in the ground and crawled into it, he would've. Perrin's eyelids sank; everything was *so* hazy. As his consciousness faded, something within him seemed to die as well. His head slumped back and he remembered no more.

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...Well, there you have it. I told you I wouldn't disappoint. The last thing I ever saw of them, that kid storming off the stage, hit me like a bad hangover. Right then and there, I don't know how, but I just knew those kids were something special. I don't care what you have to do: *sign 'em*. In that dive bar in Weltlich, I found *soul*.

Sincerely,

Randy Cunningham

Randall Cunningham  
514 W. 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10138  
October 24th, 2002

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The vice president of Calloway Records put down the folded up piece of paper. "You know," he said, "these guys sound like something different. Something this label needs. And that guy, you know, the crazy one, he could be the next big personality in rock." A smirk found its way to his face as he nonchalantly crumpled the letter into a paper ball and tossed it at the trash can across the room. It ricocheted off the far wall, teetered on the edge of the can, and fell in.

"*Sa-WISH!*" he triumphantly exclaimed as he pumped his fists into the air.

"You know, that's what I like about you Jim," said the president, a burly, grandfatherly figure with a closely cropped salt and pepper goatee. "You've always had that great sense of humor. You know



*Jonathan Gagas*

what? I'm up for some coffee. Starbucks sound good?"

"Yeah."

"Good man. I'm buying."

In a small cubicle several floors below the president's office lurked a small figure. He sat, bleary-eyed, staring at his computer monitor. His fingers hammered across the keyboard like pistons in a finely tuned machine. Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap. He concentrated hard on the productivity charts, the projected sales graphs, and the financial estimates for the next fiscal quarter. Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap. Who knows? Maybe someday, he would get his own office.

Every once in a while, the colors still swirled in his head, but he quickly shoved them aside, something which was becoming easier to do by the day, and replaced them with sales figures and numbers. Who knows? Maybe his new office would have its own coffee maker, and maybe even a nice view. Tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap.

*Christina DiLernia*

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## CANOES IN PINEY RUN



## JARRING

### *A Short Scene*

SETTING: On the kitchen counter of a suburban home, P.B. and JAY are each spread out on their own respective pieces of bread. An unseen sandwich-maker has left these two unattended for a moment, and they begin to talk.

**P.B.:** You know, they don't really like you at all. The only reason you're outside of the 'fridge is 'cause I'm here.

**JAY:** Yeah, sure. Go on. Whatever you need to believe to make yourself feel better, chunky. At least I'm not in denial.

**P.B.:** I'm not chunky, damn it! I'm smooth, and creamy, and you fucking know it, so shut your mouth.

**JAY:** I don't have a mou-

**P.B.:** Just shut it already!

**JAY:** You're just jealous!

**P.B.:** Jealous? What the hell are you talking about? There's no fucking reason why I'd ever be jealous of you. Wow, you're made of concord grapes – I'm so goddamn impressed. Get off your high jar, asshole.

**JAY:** Damn straight, you're impressed. You know they love me. You name it, I've got it... strawberry, grape, fruit medley. *Real* fruit preserves, nut head. Let's see you try and beat that.

**P.B.:** You're a moron. Think about it... they always reach for my jar first. All you do is flop off of the butter knife and then give them a hard time when they're spreading. They hate you.

**JAY:** If they hated me, why would they put me on all those sandwiches?

**P.B.:** Those are *my* sandwiches, jackass. They don't need you. You ever hear of someone making a "jelly sandwich?"

**JAY:** Well, I...

**P.B.:** No! You didn't! There's no such thing as a damn jelly sandwich. It's peanut butter and jelly! Peanut butter! I come first! Peanut butter, and *then* you, you fucking mooch. That's my glory! It's mine! You've been stealing my thunder all of this

time, and I'm fucking sick of it!

**JAY:** And I'm sick of you busting my gelatinous ass! Did you ever think that maybe people just find me delicious? If they hate me so much, then how come they're always putting me on sandwiches with you, huh? They don't like you without me, you sticky bastard.

**P.B.:** It's just the kids. They can't handle me.

**JAY:** Excuses.

**P.B.:** At least I'm not a bread whore.

**JAY:** What's that supposed to mean?

**P.B.:** Like you don't know. You either go on *my* sandwich, toast, or a bagel. So uncreative.

**JAY:** Like you can do any better.

**P.B.:** How about pretzels? Marshmallows? Graham crackers? Celery? I'm with vegetables. Beat that.

**JAY:** How about English muffins?

**P.B.:** You know, you're absolu-

*(The sandwich maker returns to the counter, and both P.B. and JAY take horrific notice.)*

**P.B. & JAY:** AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!

**JAY:** Please, no!

**P.B.:** Don't do th-

*(The sandwich maker squishes P.B. and JAY together.)*

**P.B.:** I can't breathe!

**JAY:** You're... suffocating... please....

*(The sandwich maker slices the sandwich, and consequently, P.B. and JAY, in half.)*

**P.B.:** JAY, I'm cold. I can't feel my nuts.

**JAY:** It's okay, P.B. It'll be over soon.

**P.B.:** JAY?

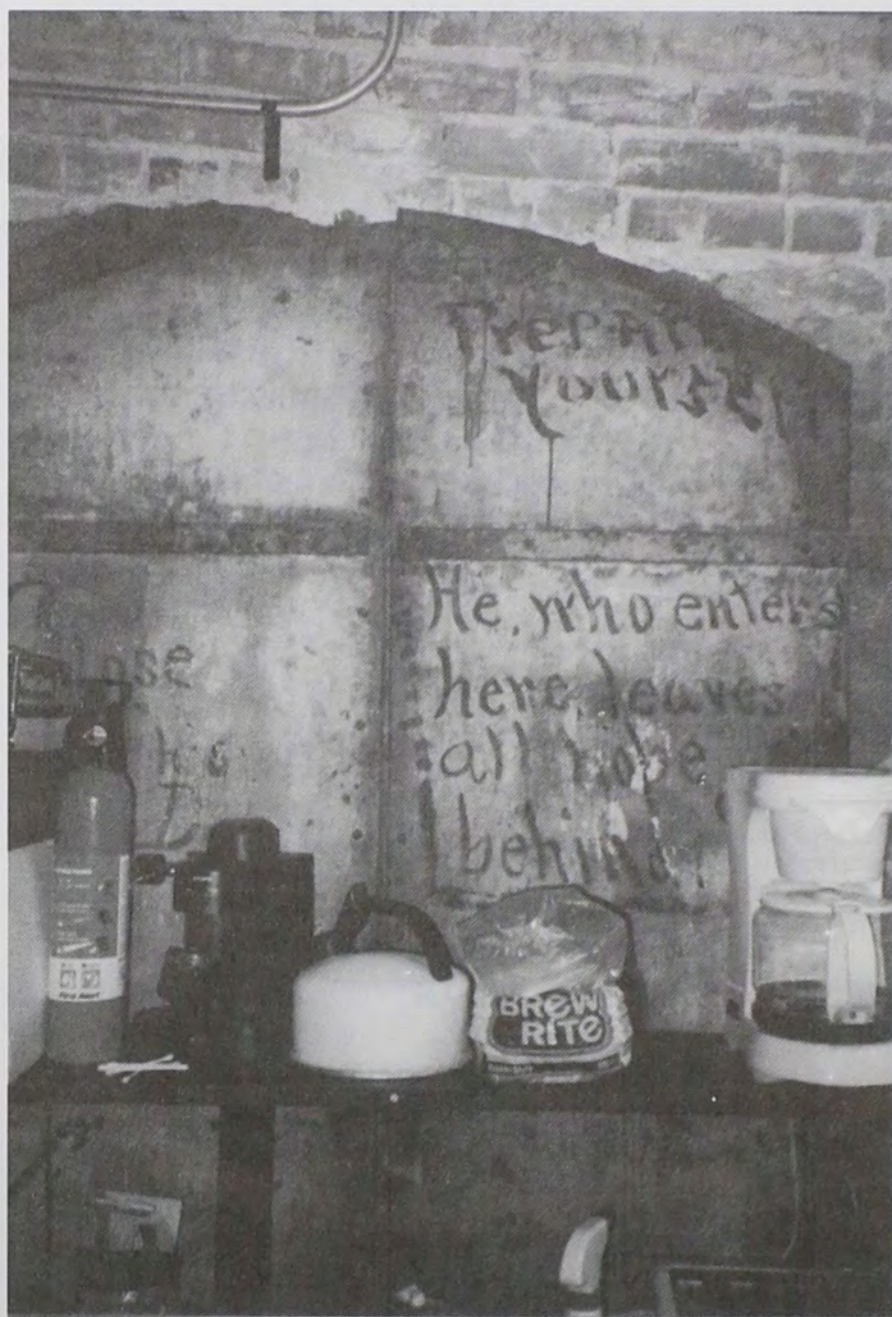
**JAY:** Yeah?

**P.B.:** I love you, man.

**JAY:** Yeah. I love you, too, buddy.

*(Blackout.)*

## PREPARE YOURSELF



## SWITZERLAND

### I.

Getting off the train- late night Switzerland

(marijuana clinging to hair dehydrated body itching eyes) air hurts  
lungs like water to sponge, 10,000 frogs croak something is healed  
the night the first real night

one light maybe a star but not

one light at the top of a mountain: the eye of god

the strange manifestation of fear in this small light, the enormous  
vuolta/emptiness looming looming

such and such a something vanishes into the crisp hugeness of this  
world

### II.

Racing towards the falls not feeling fingers

Toes pounding with ice we race towards the falls on yellow motor  
scooters

Reflecting off the ice on either side of us our eyes partially frozen with-  
Glory

Everything so much that my hands begin to hurt I was nauseous, too  
much

Growing for one day, too many times it was hard to draw breath

Lukewarm hot chocolate

The pain of other's hands

The pain of my own

The price for flying and what the wind gives and takes away,

This is how we travel Switzerland

-darting in and out of life and death

-of cold and frozen

-road and mountain

*Sarah Napolitan*

III.

A new mountain each day and smoking, smoking, to try to tell the  
lungs

[no this air is not real do not get used to it we cannot stay here]

try to red the eyes so that they are dull to the beauty

try to drench the spirit in wine

but how can you lie to the mind who has seen all these things,

standing on the porch like a wilderness throne

ingesting substances in front of mountains,

do not tell me my soul did not see

do not tell me my mind ever thought of leaving.

*Heather Morris*

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## CHAINED TO VALLEY FORGE





## SISSY

*I woke up with intention. The air was so full of intention I could taste it thick like pudding. It almost, almost knocked against my walls bringing mirrors and books crashing to the floor. I saved my room from disaster and used the intention to tie my hair back in a braid. I carried it onto the train at 8:37 AM and took it to the city.*

I didn't know Sissy for any good reason. I can't even say I really knew her. She intrigued me though; seemingly so different, I wanted to know if she really was. Though together almost every morning and evening, we only spoke a few times. When I say spoke, I mean conversed. She always talked. And even when I did get a chance, I was rarely heard. *My name is Sissy, not Cecilia, Sissy. I have to take the train to New York, where I work. I got on three stops before she did; she sat next to me one day and just started talking. I want to be an actress someday. I just need to get a costume first: like the pink one with the poofy sleeves in the window of the Macy's. I could borrow my neighbor Julia's shoes; she has nice shoes. Intention too.*

At first I didn't know what to do, what to say, so I just listened. *Sissy, not Cecilia, Sissy is my name.* I recall a time when I thought she was entirely insane. Her uniform of flannel shirts on top of tie-dye, and acid-washed jeans didn't help. Now I'm not so sure. She seems more together than most 'normal' people I know. She has a way of understanding others without ever judging them. *Julia shows her intention to the men that visit, then they give her money. She has expensive intention but no hope.* But soon I came to enjoy the stories. She told me about her neighbor, Julia, her family, her landlord; almost everyone she ever came in contact with, it seemed. It wasn't until about two months into our little commuting-friendship that I realized Cecilia and Sissy were one in the same. She began to talk about her family. Her mother mostly. Her body gave away the truth, rocking back and forth like it was being dragged by waves and her hands grasping for something not exactly there, each finger zigzagging, like ten wingless butterflies; but her words never let on. *I remember my mother's hope. My mother was a quiet woman, she never wished for much except that I be like her or my sister. I remember most the day she realized I was Sissy not Cecilia. That day my mother was not quiet but cried into the next. She named me Cecilia so I would be sophisticated and proper. But then I came in three hours late for dinner with mud on my face and my fist closed tight around the earthworms I had been trying to save from the rain. She looked at me, the smell of her hurt overtaking*

*the scent of my dirt and worms.*

Her words entered through my eyes and hiccupped all the way down, out my toes, causing my feet to become thick concrete slabs. I couldn't get off the train at my stop. I stayed on, listening to Sissy the whole way. I got off when she did, my mind towed by hers through the crowds to the subway. Once we descended, I could see that she adored it. *I need to take the subway when I go to get my job, my actress job, to go buy my costume because flannel just won't do. I pulled my intention onto the A train, it came just short of making me miss it. Then I would've been late. And I would've done my hair for nothing.* I got on to the A Train with her, headed to Central Park. I figured this was where she went, as she always lugged her guitar.

On the subway Sissy's face contorted to show what most would probably define as pain, but I knew was ecstasy. I can't say how I knew, except her eyes. They glazed over slightly and despite her drumming fingers against the cool metal pole, meant for balance, I knew she was content. She said it felt like the train flew at times *this is when I really remembered; when I wasn't held back by the earth, flying inside it, inside the subway, instead. Cecilia never flew, she couldn't let go.* Sissy was flying. She withstood the *belly of the train dragging against the earth solely for the momentary soaring; when I could reach into the yellow air and almost feel it gush through my fingers, blowing my intentions away just far enough so I could still catch them back.*

I could have just called her crazy, but there had always been something about the emotion in her face and the way she wore her hat slightly tipped to the front that told me there was more. Sissy got off at the Park. I followed closely behind her long, brownish-silver curls. She never seemed to notice me, though she still spoke. Would she have talked if I wasn't there? I liked that she spoke anyway.

As we walked down the asphalt paths, Sissy ignored the staring. *The other kids had intentions too. They intended to make me feel different. I was never different, just Sissy.* She ignored everything but the steps her feet were taking. She tip-toed over leaves and fallen twigs. She kicked each pebble that came across her trail. I watched her stumble over her Velcro high-tops, and heard unshielded laughter from nearby. *They always laughed, but I never listened. I closed my eyes and thought of the ocean. But not just any ocean: a purple ocean. I watched the gulls hover over the lilac waves and the giggling became their caw.*

We came to a small hill of boulders; Sissy settled next to an odd looking tree. *I wandered until I found my tree, the one with bulbous knots, like breasts.* She sat and just stared. I took a seat next to, but slightly behind,

*Kate Chapman*

her. I was watching the people in the Park, I can't be sure what Sissy was looking at, but I imagine the same. *Sissy gazed, too. Cecilia wasn't a gazer, she always gawked. I'm Sissy: The Gazer.*

It had been long enough for me to forget the sound of my ticking watch when Sissy began to stir. She groped for her guitar case. As she lifted the top her face looked as if she was slowly, painfully removing a Band-aid from her arm. Once the guitar was out, the Band-aid off, she regained her composure. *I exhausted gazing and took out my 6-stringed intention, and played.* She took her hat from her head and placed it, upside-down, in front of her. *I laid out my wide-brimmed hope. Maybe they'll give me a piece of their pocket-ease.* Sissy was a beggar.

For over an hour, I became Sissy's shadow. I saw, from her point of view, people walk past or stop and listen. Most laughed a little or stood awkwardly in front of her. Those who chose to leave money did so hesitantly: they approached her hat slowly, dropped the cash or change and walked quickly away, not looking back.

There was an abrupt change in songs. I realized the day was moving on without me. I wondered if people were looking at me, sitting with this woman. What would they think? I already missed enough work to make it pointless to go. I picked up my bag, placed \$20 in Sissy's hat, and whispered "thank you" in her ear. I turned back after about ten very uneasy steps and saw Sissy, unaffected.

The whole way home Sissy was in my head. I stopped at the bank and the grocery store, not thinking of bread, milk, and eggs, but of her. My name *is Sissy*, not Cecilia. I stepped into my white, bright kitchen with my puppy calendar and family photos, and sat down. The three messages on my machine were probably news of meetings, dinner parties, or the latest triumphs of my nieces and nephews. *Cecilia never flew, she couldn't let go.* The things Sissy told me left me with an unplaceable feeling. What was her intention? What about my own life? Do I have intentions? Have I fulfilled them? I had always *intended* to become a writer, no matter how unprofessional in manner. But somehow I ended up in an office, selling what others wrote.

On the grass, under the tree with her guitar, Sissy lives with intention. She bothers no one, they don't bother her. But what of her life? Will it ever be more? Will she fulfill her goal and become an actress? I doubt it. But after feeding the dog and watering the plants, waiting for my pasta water to boil, I wonder, is it the completion that matters, or just the intention...?

*Omar Almallah*

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## SO LONG SWEET SUMMER



## DRUNKEN

drunken lounging on crack'ed leather pleather cslouch in the philosopher's living room to stretch our limbs our drunken minds lolling through the unmentionables great questions gods at the window watching the stumblers-by buddha at the piano tickling tripping chipping ivories black diamonds sparkling through drunken veins warmth creeps down the hall humming miss molly is baking mud pies in the kitchen broom closet's padlocked for years we sealed it a hundred years ago and then our only bones and hundred years and then our only bones brittle but drunken drunken do not foremembret my scars are not your own glass slipping in silent violent laughter gripping my sides your sides we all slid down gripping each other drunken tumbling rumbling zeus could not stop us stop us for we cannot help ourselves to the pies have been set out drunken the pies have been set out

*Heather Morris*

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## IN THE BOX



## ON BEING ALONE AND OTHER PLEASURES

It is the height of summer: the days grow shorter and more oppressive. I contemplate the smoldering humidity each step on my tours of campus. I enjoy summer. I enjoy its solitude as I do the winter—these are two discrete solitudes—one completely without others, alone in the cold, and one filled with golden bodies and thin, streamline bikinis. I abhor the fall—too many people. They clutter in like brown leaves before a storm. Everything blossoms in a withering failure. I smile less and less. Most likely this is caused by a chemical imbalance, a seasonal melancholy. In spring I feel this as well, of course without the brown disappointment, and the re-birth of nature causes, like every other animal, a slight bounce in my step. Or my knee is giving me trouble again, the joint jarred by an ice-hockey injury.

Yesterday, while showing an upcoming high school senior around the campus, I stopped in Olin Plaza, introducing the perspective to Prof Florka, who usually offers a perfunctory wave or handshake, making one of his famous off-handed comments. Dryly he comments on the weather, while I come to the realization that America could never again produce a great novelist. Later I turned this idea over in my head: we have lost the ability to be solitary. Yes, we are all alone; a nation of strangers, but strangers who demand comfort and the presence of each other. Few can accept true loneliness, the need for the roar of one's own emotions and thoughts. We are the nation that invented the Distraction: procrastination—the TV, internet, rock, sex. It is the nature of Greek, Frenchmen, Russian, and Lutheran to find solace in the innermost of their souls. We, on the other hand, think we must find it in others.

After today's third tour I excused myself from admissions, and headed back to my summer housing. There, awaiting me like disappointed parents are a thick incomprehensible book on consciousness and perception and a thin draft of a Fellow's paper. Both represent my fears, my increasing inability, and the intoxicating desire to flee to the wooly arms of Long Island Ice Teas and walk upon the beach. Tonight Florka will want to discuss my progress—there is none—and I will tell him that my draft, my writing, the whole

summation of my summer, is shit. He will attempt to comfort me, as he does in his own way, which strikingly enough reminds me of my father. He will say the draft is “fine manure,” out of which, hopefully, little sprouts will grow. But already, as I do in my “academic writing,” I am ahead of myself. I am to meet Florka at eight. I still have a good seven hours to figure it all out. Staring futilely at the bookcases and piles of books shoved into my shoebox single, I procrastinate. If you think these meager complaints, you have misunderstood me. I live for this—I am an academic masochist—this is my life.

I read some of Lowell’s translations of Baudelaire:

as cool delinquents watch a madman clown.

I heard them laugh and snicker blasphemies,

I am reminded of another poem, from *Tableaux Parisiens*, which reminds me of a Parisian street scene: Baudelaire, arms outstretched, a green salacious cherub perched on his shoulder, ushering, berating La Païva or Cora Pearl out from bathhouse façade, an an affected accordion-music-circusesque theme box intoning a to which the pale, pale courtesans dance and offer street vendors red coquette looks. I download Charles Mingus and Bela Fleck songs, trying to formulate questions I think are necessary to my research. In less than seventy-two hours Susannah will be here. We will meet at the Paoli train station. We will kiss. I will tell her I love her and she will speak cute intangibilities. We will kiss again. For now that must wait. Twenty minutes have passed—nothing is written, no philosophy read. I decide to leave Collegetown and escape to a café.

“...a green  
salacious cherub  
perched on his  
shoulder...”

From the five cafés I habitually patronize, I choose the furthest for two reasons: if I decide on dinner, I can visit my grandmother who lives two miles from the café, and while there I can observe the beautiful people of the Main Line. I have a friend who maintains that the golden amber of beer is the nectar of the gods. I disagree, it must be coffee. There are two types of places to find coffee, real coffee—diners and cafés. Being alone in a diner screams your indecision—you plead, “I don’t want to be alone”—and the waitress takes pity on you, sits down



*John Ramsey*

and makes small talk. In a café one can be hidden. You are a student studying, a small business owner checking numbers; you came in to beat the heat with a fruit smoothie, to meet friends. For this reason I prefer the café. The two Kates and two Sarahs in my life choose diners. There they gossip, between drags of Fantasias and Marlboro Lights, between sips of coffee. That is not for me.

I order: "the house, for here." It is a bottomless cup, I will need it. Puzzling over words a week old, I wonder how to express them better. That is the current goal—improvement in expression will lead to clarification, which in turn will lead to a better formation of the question. I try to convince myself of this. But passing hips beg distraction. Florka is blameless, though everyone condemns and curses him for me. They think he is being too picky. I understand the cycle, but am unwilling to revise. In my imagination, I am writing, pulling boxy words from the air above my head, but then in practice something within me balks. Instead, I wait for inspiration. Writing without inspiration is only forced, so I surround myself with beautiful women (like now). During the school year, at lunch or dinner, I either sit alone or with six girls. It is a necessity.

My inability to revise reminds me of an essay I once read at Aromas, a coffeehouse in Erie. It explained the relation of Dryden and Pope. Essentially, it argued, Dryden never revised, his poetry seared from his pen, and Pope constantly rewrote line after line, word after word, searching for the ideal order removed from his consciousness in abstraction. Dryden perfected the idiosyncrasies of the senses, while Pope anxiously perfected the heroic couplet, a syllogistic truth in the universal. Both are geniuses, yet I admire Dryden more. Florka is Pope, a titan demanding order from thought. At times great thoughts augment in my mind; I grab paper, but written the cleaved idea is hazy and unclear. I shrink back in defeat—nothing but kitsch. It is a cycle—intimidated I stop writing.

Leafing through pages of the "City Paper," I make mental notes of upcoming concerts: The White Stripes, July 25<sup>th</sup> (the last day of Fellows); Modest Mouse, July 19<sup>th</sup> (a few days from now); Aimee Mann, August 24<sup>th</sup> (the day before classes start). I will not be able to make any of these. In high school, I freely went to any concert, driving two hours or more for each. And now when the music is close I cannot go. I feel stifled. Even my poetry has become stifled. Ali hates my abstractions and would rather I use imagery.

*On Being Alone and Other Pleasures*

Where has my confidence gone? In high school, days when everything was simpler and more confused, I was uninhibited. The world was a garden, in which I played all possible games. Flirting, I wooed unreachable girls; I called the teachers' bluffs announcing my Trivial Pursuitesque knowledge. I was profound. I read everything—in class, ignoring the lectures, I learned from the debauchery of the past, orgies of wisdom made me corpulent, conceited and content. I heeded none of it, for I owned the world. What happened to those days?

Often, people think me recalcitrant, a stubborn bastard. I accept this, but had anyone known me in high school, they would think me a complete ass. Empowered by Nietzsche and Jim Morrison, bacchic words and mind expanding drugs, I was contemptible and struggled for attention. I was one of *those* kids—an absurdist, a verbal exhibitionist. Even freshman year of college traces reminiscent of high school crept out, earning me the nickname "Crazy John." All that is past. I suffer the past to rapture in its dream. Nostalgic images comfort me. Nonetheless, melancholy has edged out complacency: this is not depression, but anxiety.

Excuse me.

Sometimes solitude works for one's advantage. A case in point: Sitting here, writing, a flowered sundress sat down, unannounced and waited for me to finish. I scrawled "Excuse me," a capital E followed by a squiggle and a word that could be read as "one," "me," or "our." She begins to explain the situation. She has a thing for the silent brooding type. I returned a further explanation—"that ain't me." We talked a while and when she invited me to "join her for a smoke" I could not turn her down. Who would? Outside, between drags of menthol, under the oppressive afternoon sun, I recount my revision troubles. She asks about my friends—I drop Susannah's name, her relation to me. Kyliegh nods. She tells me about her Jared—how he flexes in the mirror when he thinks no one is looking. We laugh. She offers a second, and I accept.

This time we smoke in silence. She watches the people passing by; I slouch against a stone column and contemplate what I have recently written: it is shit. But let it stand demands Dryden. Let it stand. Pour over my inability, hypothesize and make conjectures into the meaning of my words. Realize, as I do, back in the café, the melancholy that lately sweeps me up, like a cool breeze offering a moment of relief from

*John Ramsey*

this tiring muggy existence. It is not an abysmal despair, but more subtle. In high school I proclaimed myself a genius—and everyone believed me. Now, I am not conceited enough to express this idea outwardly. Instead, I silently assess myself. Once I had a plan: go to grad school, meet a beautiful brunette, live together becoming common-law, teach at a highly selective, independent, four-year liberal arts college with a tradition of academic excellence (however, not near Philadelphia), and write grandiose books reviving the now emasculated literary world. I was to be the heart, the brains, the battle cry of the new artistic age. I laugh now at my former dreams. Solitude is my new comfort, from which I hide from nothing and nothing is concealed from me. It is honest, though the past grapples tempting me with romantic wrought visions. Solitude steps on the past's grasping fingers, waiting for the moment to stare in futility's eyes as it falls into nothingness. I will never forget the past. Everyday I will relive instant upon instant. Alone, however, I may project the future onto a screen and relax as the events unfold.

I look forward to growing old: spending time with Susannah reinforces the idea of futurity. Youth despairs age; in the rapturous existence of others, immortality is one's mentality; we become unforgettable through our deeds. Youth desires the esthetic fiction of the present, the nowness of sensual lips and taboo blue eyes, which reek of sexuality and transcendent drugs. But what is the present to the suffering of the past and the enigma of the future? What is the present to the familiar comfort of arms, which conditioned by years unconditionally and willingly ease one's anxiety?

I look forward to growing old: elderly men intrigue me. Over the last month I have made countless observations—one can aspire to either the form of the "cute" turtle or emaciated hyena. I am scared by the women—they come in an infinite number of forms, each individual their own animal, just as they were in youth—now devoured beauty. I envision my Professors twenty years from now: Volkmer a turtle, Jamison a hyena, Perrenten could go either way, Stern a turtle, Fritz a hyena. And Florka? I cannot imagine a future him. Immutable, indivisible like reason. I look into a mirror and cannot place myself. I am curious. Kate and Susannah giggle when they find a turtle. Kate, if she is sitting, bounces, bringing her hands together and coos, and if she is standing, brings her shoulders together and coos. I enjoy watching her. The hyena is romantic, an elderly Verlaine, walking the bucolic

*On Being Alone and Other Pleasures*

paths of France, his straw hat tilted in contemplation. Even Verlaine needs a Rimbaud or whore to pick his lice. I choose the whore because she is a woman.

Solitude does not exclude others. Until my death I shall remain alone in the past, constantly facing my innermost, anxious over my inability to express my thoughts. No one can share in this. But others can share in my other life, the future. I look forward one last time: my thoughts take the shape of the hyena and penguin sitting a few tables away. There I imagine Susannah and me fifty years hence. We sit, as they do, looking through the "City Paper" and around us is abstract, non-erotic nude art—phrases of our conversation make apparent our ageless hipness "Let's go to that bluesman. He jaws a good song," "Smuffin, look, Julius Caesar in November. We should buy tickets," and they continue. I stare off, finally thinking about perception, until one of them mentions the Berman. Interesting. I want to be like that—so seemingly bourgeois. Someday, as my wrinkled hand rubs a stubbled chin, I hope the youth watching me condemns me as a bourgeois hippie, and in his smugness comforts himself. I know I will be justified in my aloneness, and if that is smug, so be it.

*Christina DiLernia*

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## OLD NEW MARKET



## REVEL WRITING

turn myself to poetry's pillow  
metaphors stripped and strewn on the carpet  
palpable couplets caressing, pressing  
poet's body laying on poetry  
faltering pause at my flesh

hesitate

then enter rapture, verb vessel in vanity  
moist lines in mouth shapes, thin and thick  
tongue tied rhyming and rhythmic pulsing  
word taste tight on torso or other edges  
back basking in sheets papery, lusty  
skin seeping sweat and simile stained  
curves colliding in incantation and cadence  
flowers droop deftly in dewy poetry  
beautifully bilingual love lingering long  
bodies breathing languid language  
intimate ink inspiring

revel writing

## FORCED ENTRY

I tried everything to keep them from coming through that door. It did not even close, let alone lock. It was held shut only by a flimsy hook-and-eye that was easily unlatched by a pencil, or even an adept finger, swept nonchalantly through the crack between the door and its frame. So I used a dresser, a nightstand, a bookshelf—anything I could get my hands on—to prevent them from entering my room. I once tried tilting a chair beneath the doorknob like they do in the movies, but this technique proved miserably ineffective. That may have been the night I woke up with toothpaste in my ears and a sharpie-marker unibrow.

In emergency situations, I wedged shoes into the small space between the door and the Astroturf-colored carpet. Besides ruining my shoes, this meager attempt only served to piss my brothers off further, yielding more vehement verbal and physical abuse. There were days when they were too busy tormenting each other to really bother about frying small fish such as myself. But that was a rare occasion. I was a constant, easy target. On an off-day, my oldest brother might burst into my room and punch me square in my face without explanation. My other brother once cut me across my knuckles with a fearsome-looking knife my grandmother had brought back from Alaska. He would have slashed my face had I not sacrificed the skin of my fingers. He reminded me of how stupid I was for trying to block a knife with my hands.

I cannot leave myself vulnerable to these types of attacks. Tonight I barricade the door with a heavy wooden chest full of dismembered Barbies and stuffed animals coming unstuffed. Believing my fortress to now be impenetrable, I sit upon the chest and await the storm. The paint of the door is chipped and marred, tagged by countless visitors. Rolonda was here. So were Rachel, Darnell, and Mika. The names reverberate with the falling of the first fist upon my door. There is a moment of silence in which they absorb the shock of their failed entry. I have beaten them this time. They will never get through.

The second hit comes—hard, determined, and angry. Then, slowly at first, the feet rain down upon the door in heavy, silent blows. The wood buckles before their battering boots. The pounding is violent, relentless. Finally it splits clean down the center, enough for me to see

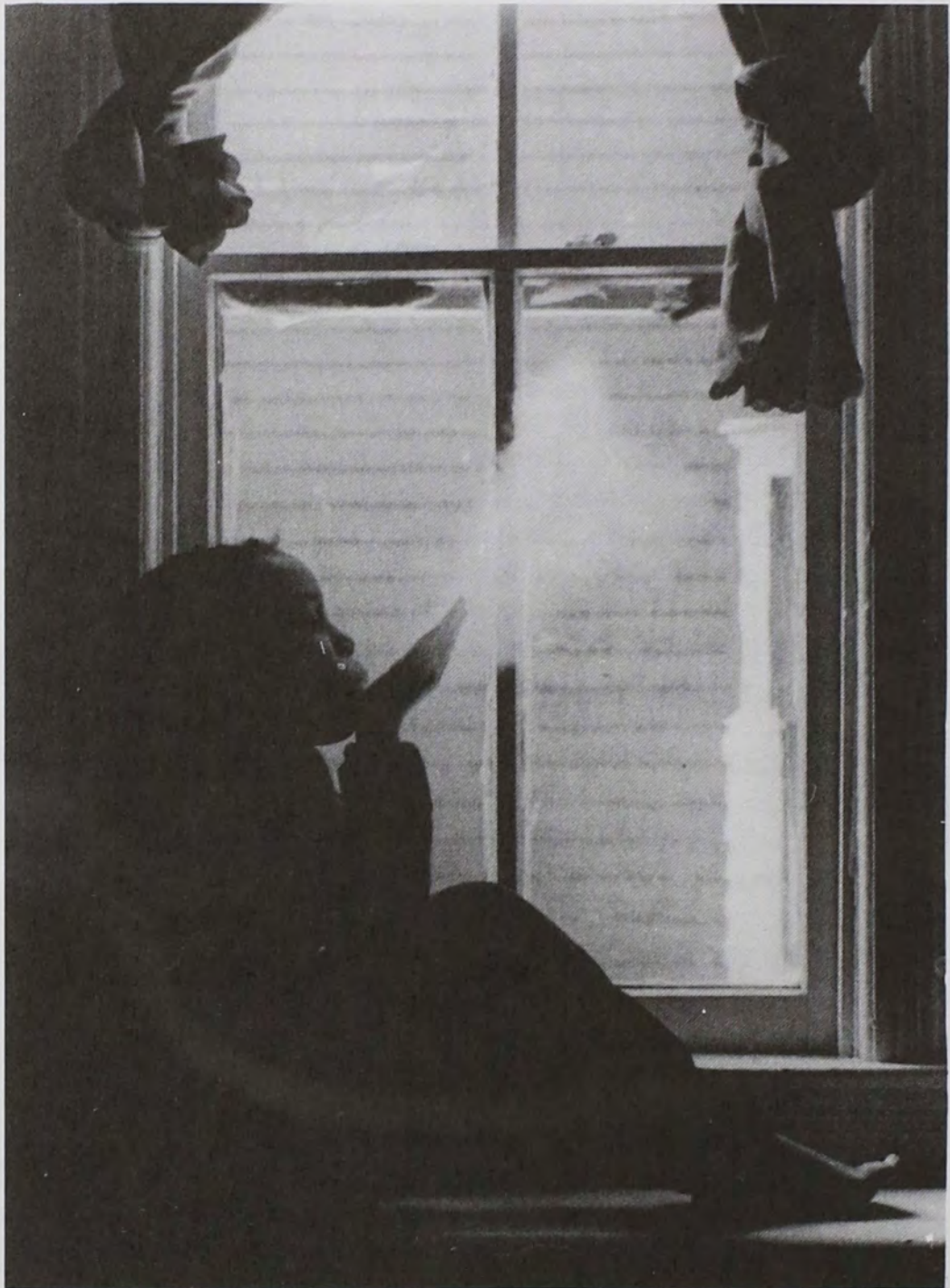
them leering through at me from the other side. They too have stamped their signatures upon my door; forced to retreat, I am reduced to the corner of my room where I cower like a caged animal cut off from its family.



*Sarita Sackie*

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## POWDER KISSES



## MONGOLS VS. AMISH: X-TREME CULTURE CLASH

(Disclaimer: All characters, living or dead, are entirely coincidental. No malice is intended towards persons of any culture, coincidental or not.)

*"They've killed my men and now they've killed me. I'm holding my guts inside of me with both hands. I'm almost done... resist. This is bigger than my little life, the lives of my men and the lives of the people I was forced to kill. Resist. Humanity demands it! Resist!"*

- Sgt. Melanie Bronson, chief of security aboard the von Braun

March 13, 2003, Elk River Star News: The Zylstra Harley-Davidson dealership in Elk River, Minnesota, burns to the ground overnight in a mysterious arson. The dealer, Jeffrey Gilchrist, was not available for comment; no bodies were found in the conflagration. Every last Harley-Davidson of the more than seven hundred and fifty in stock was removed from the facility, presumably prior to the arson.

Forensics specialists suspect that several 2002-model Buell Blasts, low-budget motorcycles available for training new drivers, were somehow driven into the supporting beams of the facility with full gas tanks but are unable to determine just how the motorcycles traveled accurately over 500 feet to strike the supports without drivers of any kind. According to locals, Gilchrist was a 'friendly and outgoing guy' and had no enemies in town. One local, Andrew Firestone, 33, of Otsego, MN and an avowed friend of Gilchrist, expressed shock at the audacity and the skill of the thieves. "Man, Gilchrist loved those bikes. He locked them up and de-tired them every night before he went to sleep. How the hell do you retire, refuel, and de-alarm seven hundred choppers overnight? I'd like to shake the hand of the mechanic that did that... then break his face for wrecking Jeff-O's shop!"

March 14, 2003, Star Tribune (AP): A string of outrageous gas station thefts were reported across Highway 94 in southern Minnesota. No connection could be found among the brands of the gas stations, the ethnicities of the owners, or any other indication of a pattern beyond the stark convenience of location. In response to an emergency

*Dennis Kearney*

neighborhood watch program organized by quick-thinking state police, thousands of Minnesotans called in reporting a large group of motorcyclists taking up every lane of Highway 94. Thousands more car crashes were reported due to alarmed motorists and truckers swerving to avoid the motorcyclists, tangling the highways and rendering police pursuit impossible.

March 14, 2003, [www.fark.com](http://www.fark.com). Headline: [AMUSING] Giant biker gang from Minnesota terrorizes populace. Police on lookout for Hell's Angels with funny accents. Fargo surrenders.

On the outskirts of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Sam Yoder and his brother Jon leaned back in their porch chairs. Sam squinted up at the August sun and spoke.

"M'ankle's acting up. Reckon there's some Mongols on the way."

"It's about the right time of year for it. Your ankle say anything about rain?"

"Nope. Just Mongols."

"I reckon we better get ready, then." Jon wrinkled his brow and massaged his beard; it helped him think. "What can we do about Mongols?"

"Dunno. Better check the Bible. I bet there's something on Mongols in the Book of Revelations."

"I'll get right to it. Can't schussel about when there's Mongols afoot." Sam went in, got his handworn Bible, and tenderly flipped through the pages to the end.

March 15, 2003, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: A terrorist attack of unparalleled ferocity and unprecedented body count leveled the small town of Burlington, Wisconsin yesterday. Of the nearly ten thousand American citizens who lived, worked, and thrived in Burlington, only one remains, the singular benefactor of the mercy of these ruthless mass murderers. Roughly five thousand more motorcycles have been stolen, based on estimates provided by the heirs of the estate of Dock Jock's Cycle Parts Shop, which was holding an informal convention of bikers that weekend. This information has founded suspicions that the terrorists were the same biker gang that pillaged southern Minnesota. In response, the Homeland Security Department has assembled a SWAT team to intervene, headed by Sgt. John Gutzmann, 47, of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

### *Mongols vs. Amish: X-treme Culture Clash*

Gathered overnight from local SWAT teams around the Mideast region, the critical response team is comprised of over one thousand crack troops experienced in guerrilla warfare and counterterrorism activities. The Wisconsin Army National Guard is also cooperating with federal efforts to stop the terrorists, mobilizing the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry to support the statewide roadblocks and attempt to contain the terrorists until reinforcements can be brought in from Illinois and the surrounding states.

Urban warfare specialists continue to be confounded by the unique tactics of the terrorists, claiming they do not resemble in the least tactics employed by any modern terrorist organization. According to experts, the terrorists had discreetly surrounded all possible exits to the town before toppling the power lines using plastique charges, so there was no immediate evidence of a main assault from a particular direction or hope of calling neighboring towns for assistance. It was also observed that every acre of farmland, home garden and park in the city was burned with kerosene and the fields were salted afterward. The bodies were piled in the center of town where the St. John the Divine Episcopal Church had previously stood and were also ignited with kerosene. Described by one specialist: "It wasn't that they came, they saw, they conquered. They came, they sapped, they burnt, they slew, they plundered, and they departed."

The lone survivor, Pastor Joanne Skidmore of St. John the Divine Church, was found strapped to the cross that formerly adorned her steeple. Severely traumatized and suffering from numerous injuries, she was transported to the Lakeland Medical Center in Elkhorn. She delivered a message before severe shock set in, but the press has been asked by the military officials on-site not to release any information that might hinder their attempt to stop the terrorists.

Survivors of the Burlington tragedy are advised not to try to enter Burlington itself, citing the stack of burning corpses and possible environmental contamination as a serious health hazard. St. John in the Wilderness Episcopal Church in Elkhorn has opened up its doors to families and loved ones wishing to grieve in a supportive, well-fortified environment.

**B**ack in Lancaster, the Yoders had gotten the clans together for a meeting in the old Ziegler barn. At first the elders were skeptical about Sam's claims, but he had never been known to tell a lie before.

*Dennis Kearney*

Furthermore, what happened to Burlington did seem like something the Mongols would do. After many prayers for guidance and insight, the clans formulated a plan, and appointed a younger man, Daniel King, to head into town and make the necessary withdrawals from the common account.

March 22, 2003: As mysteriously as they arrived, the chopper-bound terrorists seem to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Although the Burlington tragedy was accompanied by a slew of call-ins reporting bands of motorcycles across Wisconsin, not a single crime has been linked to these terrible hit-and-run renegades. The team of forensics specialists assigned to the case has been consistently coming up empty regarding physical descriptions of any individual biker: No information on age, ethnicity, or even gender has been reliably corroborated.

The reports of the groups' appearances, however, have been consistent enough to dismiss the outliers as prank calls from heartless teenagers. They paint a fearsome picture: Massive, muscular forms huddled over Harley-Davidsons traveling ten, sometimes twenty motorcycles wide shoulder to shoulder, faces consumed by spheres of thick black glass inscribed with some kind of dragon on the back. Black leather jackets, blue jeans and steel-toed cowboy boots complete the basic ensemble, while an eclectic array of weaponry openly adorns every square foot of free space on the bikes: Benelli automatic shotguns, AK-47s with warped wooden shoulder stocks, .50 Desert Eagle handguns dangling like lethal key chains from metal rings, bandoliers of hollow-point ammunition draped ostentatiously about the handlebars, crowbars chained to the sides, bazookas slung over shoulders... Their weapons are the only sign of individuality these marauders use, and violence is the only language they speak.

Will they strike again? Is anyone safe? Traffic is down to a trickle throughout the Mideast despite a strong police and military presence, and many citizens are afraid to leave their house. The critical response team, who have taken to calling themselves 'The Crusaders,' has compiled a dossier on the terrorists and is distributing it to every police and military agency in the Eastern United States in the hopes of decreasing response time, but Sgt. Gutzmann has recently been placed under federal investigation for alleged illegal obtainment of information and past ties to extremist segments within the U.S. Civil rights activists have decried Gutzmann's alleged invasions of privacy and history of white supremacist comments, while conservatives have been outraged

*Mongols vs. Amish: X-treme Culture Clash*

that the bureaucracy of finding a qualified candidate to stop the terrorists is holding the Crusaders back from doing their job. Meanwhile, the President has placed the eastern states on Orange Alert, citing the high mobility of the terrorists. A motorcyclist can easily travel over five hundred miles in one day, and after a week they could be anywhere. Motorcyclists of a law-abiding nature are urged to stay off the road, and motorcycle dealerships have been forced to move their stock to the nearest military base, at their own cost.

March 24, 2003, [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com): Public outrage over the Minnesota-Wisconsin attacks and the lack of a subsequent capture is growing daily. Fingers have been pointed at national security, at local police, at Israel, HAMAS, al-Qaeda, and Michael Moore, but nobody has come forth to take responsibility for the slaughter.

Conspiracy theories abound, but none bear weight under the scrutiny of the zealots of the opposing camps. Who do YOU think is behind the Burlington attack? Current poll results: National Security 12% Local Police 1% Israel 9% HAMAS 19% al-Qaeda 34% Michael Moore 25% [This QuickVote is not scientific and reflects the opinions of only those Internet users who have chosen to participate. The results cannot be assumed to represent the opinions of Internet users in general, nor the public as a whole. The QuickVote sponsor is not responsible for content, functionality or the opinions expressed therein.]

“**W**hen do you reckon they’ll get here, Sam?” Sarah Yoder asked as she knitted a camouflage suit for her husband. She was using cotton fabric—light and unrestrictive in the hot summer months ahead.

“Maybe a week, maybe a month. We must be ever patient and alert for their coming, as the good Lord tells us. They’re laying low right now, but that doesn’t mean they’re not on their way. My knee’s so painful I can’t hardly walk. I’ve had to ask Luke down the street to help me with the last of the plowing.”

“Luke’s a good lad. He’s not dopplich like some of the other older boys.” Sarah sighed, and watched the western horizon without knowing precisely what she was watching for.

**M**arch 24, 2003, [www.drudgeryreport.com](http://www.drudgeryreport.com): WHAT THE U.S. GOV’T DOESN’T WANT YOU TO KNOW!!! A disgruntled ex-Crusader tells all to one of your beloved Drudgers! We’ve got the

*Dennis Kearney*

exclusive scoop on the Bikers of Burlington, terrifying insights into their motives, why they haven't been bombed into the ground by Wisconsin's finest, an *authentic audio clip from one of the Bikers*, and you heard it here first, at Drudgery Report!

The former Crusader, whom we will refer to as 'X,' not only left the critical response team under questionable circumstances but also divulged to us that nearly HALF THE TEAM is gone as well! The mainstream media has been gag-ordered on all negative news regarding this issue, but we here at Drudgery Report respect you as a citizen who deserves to know *the truth*, and we'll give it to you until the feds hunt us down like dogs! (Aren't you glad this site has over two hundred mirrors and is registered under my friend's dead grandmother? We are!!)

So with all the high-tech weaponry available to the U.S., why haven't these crooks been caught? According to the Gutzmann dossier provided us by X, the air bases in Wisconsin \*and\* the surrounding states were sabotaged! Seventeen jet planes' missiles were replaced with duds that exploded in the missile bays when fired, destroying the planes' offensive capabilities. Linchpins in Apache helicopters at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin were also jerry-rigged, causing the rotors to detach from helicopters in mid-air, causing grisly casualties. X figures it must have been an inside job, but with many of the troops serving in other nations, the security at home bases in low-risk zones like Wisconsin has been a little lax.

Law enforcement was also caught with their pants down. Seven locations around Wisconsin were targeted for mayhem by the Bikers, but only in Elk River were motorcycles stolen. The other six, enacted just an hour prior to the Elk River arson, were apparently distractions meant to draw police manpower away from the real target.

THE AUDIO CLIP: Forensics experts managed to restore several minutes of footage from a partially destroyed video camera from one of the gas stations that was assaulted. Although the video is spotty, the audio is largely unharmed and features the gas station attendant praying for his life while one of the Bikers yells at him in a foreign language. An immigrant army? Not with U.S. immigration policies the way they are now. Yours truly's favorite theory: It's a language all the Bikers know and are using as code, a la Navajo Windtalkers! Geniuses or madmen? You be the judge! UPDATE FROM OUR LOYAL READERS: The language has been identified as an archaic dialect of...drum roll please... Northern Mongolian!!! Thanks to GenghisFhan81 for the info!

*Mongols vs. Amish: X-treme Culture Clash*

On a related note, our mole at *Soldier of Fortune* magazine reports that every last for-hire ad, no matter how screwy, has been given an offer from an anonymous backer! Trusty IP sniffers point to a location in Lancaster County, southeastern Pennsylvania... Will the Amish rise again? Check back for further updates!

Johnny 'Seedy' Chapman strikes a match off his day-old stubble, lights a cigarette, and leans against the porch railing. Jane 'Dog' Chapman, comrade-in-illegal-arms, snoozes by his side. Man, this was one whacked-out job. Guarding a bunch of crazy farmers from a bunch of crazy bikers. Seedy and his squad have plenty of previous experience with bikers-they'd once been hired to shut down the Hell's Angels in Pasadena County, which they accomplished inside of two weeks. Bikes were easy to wreck- it was no big deal to rig the entrances to Lancaster with road tacks, as the Amish didn't use cars anyway. So the bikers had big guns- big whoop. Snipers were tucked away in the trees and throughout the tiny town, and all critical exits were mined and oil barrels ready to spill across the roads at the touch of a button. Two hundred crack mercenaries like Seedy's Rotten Apple Corps, given enough time to prepare, could take on anything.

Crusaders? Fuck them, man. With the government you gotta choke on enough red tape to shit Scotch adhesive for a week- their so-called SWAT team can't hit anything moving faster than a statie cruiser. Not only did the Corps have the home team advantage, bikers couldn't hit what they couldn't see. Taking out an unarmed town while they sleep, sure, that's impressive, but let's see how you do against some real warriors.

A cloud of dust forms on the horizon, rising like a specter above the approaching army. The wails of thousands of Harley-Davidson mopeds, filtered through the Doppler Effect, assume the atonal uniformity of a symphony of killer bees. Snake had a feeling they weren't going to go for the stealth approach. He slings his MacGuyvered-up M16 off his shoulder and gets inside old man Yoder's house. He'd taken the time to reinforce the structure with bulletproof glass and steel supports, naturally; what kind of suicidal punk would bunker up in a house built by backasswards pacifists?

The bikers speed forward on unholy black wings of gasoline and metal. From within their headsets, they radio commands to each other



*Dennis Kearney*

in a dead language five hundred years old. Their identities are glossed over with a reflective veneer; the road flashes over their faces, grim harbingers of a tale that cannot be told, because there will be no survivors to tell it. Through his homemade adjustable-magnification sniper scope, Snake aims for an exposed spot and a 7.62mm NATO round takes a split-second flight.

Crack! The biker swerves, but regains course within moments. In unison the formation slows, stops. More cracks echo through the crowd, and several of the bikers set their Harley-Davidsons on kickstands while their comrades begin to reel and jerk from the long-range rounds fired from deep cover. They slap together a weapon that closely resembles a mortar, and it recoils with a thud that wakes Dog and reminds Seedy of the bass-drum prelude to the Fourth of July fireworks. Whistles shriek from above, Promethean thunder breaks across the sky, and the horde of choppers disintegrate behind a smokescreen. Thud, thud thud, thud; more mortars are being fired, a muddy pink smoke issues from the ground in various places. The gas masks! Why the hell hadn't they sprung for fucking gas masks? Seedy rips the top of his shirt over his mouth for some meager protection. Dog curses quietly, slips on a surgical mask and goes about her duty: Locking together a portable variation of the army-issue M79 grenade launcher.

Loading in a 40mm concussion grenade, she is about to account for trajectory and distance when a voice, thickly accented, crackles through a megaphone: "I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you. Drop your instruments of cowardice and face me in honorable combat, with the arrow and the knife, and your families will be spared. Flee, and your names will be written forever in the books of history as traitors, cowards, and slaves. I am the punishment of God..." Seedy and Dog exchange glances. This goes way beyond terrorism, way beyond cult activity. The man with the megaphone had gone completely over the edge.

War shrieks sound from the trees, and bedraggled mercenaries dash into the smokescreen wild-eyed, half-naked, and begging for blood. A bulldog of a man wielding a crowbar leads the charge, bellowing like a wounded bear. His head bounces off the spinning rear wheel of a Harley-Davidson neatly as a pinball, and his neck snaps back before his body can stop running. His feet soar up from under him, collide with

### *Mongols vs. Amish: X-treme Culture Clash*

another soaring motorcycle, and are shredded down to exposed ligaments, which snap and then dangle freely from his open thighs. "MURINDOO!" shouts the Mongol who slew the bulldog, a cry that rings out again and again as Mongol after Mongol leaps into the fray, over the landmines and tire-poppers, from the vantage point of a ramp constructed just beyond the smokescreen. The barbarians fling not bullets and grenades but razor-tipped arrows and serrated knives, chests heaving with diabolical bloodlust and thirsting for the breath of their enemies. Faces filling with blood and fire, the mercenaries match the fervor of the Mongols blow for blow. A weaselly-looking man dressed in a business suit for some reason picks up a crowbar and slams it into the spokes of a motorcycle, sending the warrior headfirst into the steel-reinforced walls of Yoder's house. Camouflaged ex-Rangers exchange knives and insults with barefoot, mane-haired Mongolians. Seedy feels mild twinges of heedless courage burning in his own mind; the raiders must have designed some kind of inhaled version of PCP or steroids or *something*.

Snipers throw their bayoneted rifles down at the Mongols, followed by themselves; driven by the unstoppable hunger of the war-addict they throw themselves thirty feet to the ground with a crunch and a snap and lurch forward on broken ankles to plunge their machetes deep into the chests of the invaders. SWAT soldiers in bulletproof vests rush in alongside the Mongols, bearing the red-arrow insignia of the Crusaders on their vests and scrawled into their foreheads in blood.

Crazed with the heady combination of drugs and freedom from discipline, the ferocious traitors vie with the terrible descendants of Khan for body counts and sheer malice. They swarm in packs like rabid wolves with iron teeth and carbon-steel claws, leaping on their foes and gnashing at their throats- a fatal mistake. Limbs splatter and bounce in the wake of 40mm grenades, miniature mortar shells in their own right; the shrapnel starbursts into tiny furious knives who ruthlessly seek blood and find it often in the frenzy-choked fields of Lancaster.

Seedy and Dog, thriving in the eye of the human corpse storm, rack up kill after kill, but one can only carry so many grenades and there are only so many mercenaries. By contrast, wave after wave of bloodthirsty Mongol marauders continue to wash over the ramparts from all directions, and the ground is thick with the mingled blood of barbarian and mercenary. Dog pants, "No way in hell we're going to be able to cover the medical on these drugged-out bastards, Johnny. This Corps

has taken its last bite.”

Seedy glares at Dog and prepares to spit a caustic reply, but the pause in their conversation is interrupted by something nonviolent. A soft intonation wafts from the back room of the Yoder place, creating a delirious counterpoint to the screams of the redneck gun nut getting eviscerated alive outside the compound. Seedy cocks his head towards the noise, and Dog maneuvers towards the sound, careful to stay on guard for any particularly stealthy Mongols. She finds Sam Yoder, kneeling at his bedside and praying for forgiveness.

“What do you need forgiveness for? We’re the ones knocking some heads and getting eaten alive out there. You paid good money for us to come out here, and they outfoxed us. Simple as that. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, and in the merc business you lose big. You were just trying to protect your family; you don’t have anything to worry about. Let us hired guns do the soul-searching, okay? Preferably when we don’t have five thousand insane invaders from the 12<sup>th</sup> century trying to crack our skulls open to eat the insides for breakfast.”

Sam glances up, tears in his eyes. “I seek forgiveness for betraying you. My people have long since evacuated Lancaster, but I fear I have failed to live according to the Ordnung in bringing you here. You see, I felt in my heart that we were doomed, living out our last days. I searched the Bible cover to cover for guidance, but my book kept falling open to the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah. I had to find some way of saving my people, so I... I...”

Dog sniffed. “You hired some mercenaries. Big whoop-de-shit. It’s the American Way. Congo, Nicaragua, Iraq, Afghanistan: Ring any bells? We’ve been doing it for years, and profiting nicely. It’s not the end of the world- well, for you and me maybe, but at least your people will live.”

Sam’s face fell. “That was not the only precaution I took. Unbeknownst to my brothers and sisters, I also cooperated with the U.S. military. They have been watching this entire battle, and a bomber approaches this location as we speak. Your company was never meant to do more than delay the invaders.”

A moment of silence. A scream, quickly muffled, another moment of silence. Total silence. Dog inwardly cringes. A wild man bursts through the bedroom door with a trench knife in each hand, red arrows tattooed on both biceps, and a necklace decorated with human teeth. A thin Mongolian with a video camera scampers in behind an entourage

*Mongols vs. Amish: X-treme Culture Clash*

of burly, thick-haired grunts. The tattooed man aims a knife at the mercenary, who promptly surrenders to the superior forces.

“AHA! We have the last survivors!” The voice booms just as it did when it used the megaphone... if it had needed a megaphone at all. “We have recorded our victories and ruthlessness to show your people the true path to conquest and war. Gutless wretches begging for their worthless lives. Not stunt doubles, actual gutless wretches. You think Marilyn Manson is offensive? We burned your churches to the ground and pissed on the ashes. We got the high score for terrorist body counts.” The wind picks up, begins to whip around the house. “We will become idols of brutality and destruction in a society obsessed with brutality and destruction. American Idols.” Not wind, but a sharp whistling noise, the call of a mount to battle, the hum of an arrow to the heart of its target, the too-late warning of an air raid... “Saibatar, are you getting this? HOW LONG HAS THAT LENS CAP BEEN ON? CASTRATE THIS MAN! KILL HIS SONS!” The roof slaps down on them with the force of 18,000 pounds of high explosives. The Massive Ordinance Air Burst, the Mother of All Bombs, puts the Battle of Lancaster to sleep.

## NECTARINES

I awaken in the morning,  
Place a ripe nectarine  
on the sill of the window  
of my second-story apartment.

I dress, and go out  
for the day.  
When I return the nectarine is gone.

I do the same the following day.  
This time I come home,  
she is perched on the sill  
feasting on the nectar  
that flows from the flesh.

When she sees me she  
widens her eyes  
and is gone.

Next day I leave the window  
open just a crack,  
and leave no nectarine.  
When I return the window is wide open,  
and she asks me where she can find  
the nectarines.

I give her one from a basket  
in the kitchen.  
She unfolds her wings and is gone.

Next day I sit on the  
windowsill all morning.  
Holding a nectarine.  
She comes and I ask her  
to take me with her.

She giggles, feathery,  
takes the nectarine in her mouth.

I wrap my arms  
around her legs  
and we are gone.

When I awaken we are on  
a terrace, the roof of a house.  
The air is new but cold.  
The hills around are empty.  
Inside, I hear a baritone laugh.

A door opens by my feet  
and a man with no hair  
and a long nose  
calls to her.  
He gives her a nectarine,  
and brings me inside.

He chains me in a tall chair  
in a room of bars,  
filled with trees,  
and they are gone.

She comes back in the morning,  
has a nectarine in her mouth.  
She comes to me,  
inclines her head to mine as if to kiss,  
and I taste the nectarine.

I hear a baritone laugh  
in the room behind,  
and she is gone.

Next day she does the same,  
kisses me the nectarine.

*Dan Bruno*

The juice runs down our chins  
and onto our breasts.  
And I feel her feathers on my skin.

I still feel them when I hear  
that wide-bar laugh from behind  
after she is gone.

So it is for a week, or a month.  
Finally the man with no hair  
and the long nose  
lets me out of the chair.  
I unfold my newfeathered wings,  
Fly to the top of this room,  
this aviary, to be with my love.

The alchemist raises his  
pointed nose,  
and laughing he is gone.

Our children are mundane.  
They have no feathers, no taste  
for nectarines.  
Their mother nurses them  
on light milk, of course  
nectar tinged,  
and soon they fly behind us,  
and around the alchemist  
when he raises his hands.

The alchemist laughs in baritone,  
opens the door to the roof,  
And they are all gone.

## HOLDING ON

It was five thirty on a Tuesday night. Melissa brought the trash cans in that smelled of beer and left over pizza. Dragging them into the backyard, she noticed the new recycling can already full. The sliding glass door was open; Alison was cutting beauty articles out of a *Cosmopolitan* magazine, listening to Britney Spears on her head phones. The house was filthy although Melissa had vacuumed and cleaned the kitchen floor yesterday. Melissa rolled her eyes. She grabbed the garbage can, sweeping her sister's scrap clippings into the trash. Melissa pulled the pot out from under the stove. That night the menu would consist of spaghetti, meat sauce, and Italian bread, Dad's favorite. Alison was dancing around the kitchen using a spoon as her microphone. She was wearing a low cut, black tank top, faded jeans, and a pair of flip flops. Her hair was ironed flat against her head, the shine was perfect. Her make up was flawless and her tan skin glistened as the sun gleamed through the skylight. During a twirl around the kitchen and the completion of her version of "I'm a Slave for You," there eyes met.

Pulling the head phones off of her ears she asked, "Can we have salad too?"

"Can you help?"

Alison rolled her eyes and took lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, bacon bits, and cucumbers out of the fridge. The refrigerator was stocked with good food. On Sunday, Melissa got her father to give her a blank check to get the food for the week.

They worked in silence. Melissa still with her jacket on, flipped through the bills that had been piling up on the edge of the counter. There were gas, electric, cable, mortgage, two stacks to each. Above the mail holder were signed checks, waiting to be sent. The bills were waiting for the money to be put in the bank so they could be paid. She told herself to remind Dad again.

Melissa was stirring the pasta as the front door opened. He carried two six packs of Budweiser in one hand, the *Atlantic City Press* and his lunch box in the other. Dad smiled, it was warm and meaningful. Melissa's hard work was temporarily worth it, she smiled back. He started to place his belongings on the table and while unhooking his



*Crystal McCarney*

tool belt, Champ jumped on Dad. He started to pet the dog and Melissa noticed his weathered face and his frail body, worn and abused. Owning a construction company by the beach can put a hurting on anyone's body. His tool belt was spread out over the kitchen table. It was the same brown leather style that his father had given him when Dad first started the business. When he made it to work, he was a skilled carpenter. He was known to all in the state for his skill and craftsmanship. He was a genius with those tools. He was better than amazing when he wanted to be.

"Melissa that sauce smells amazing." He walked over to the stove and began to take in the fresh scents of tomatoes and garlic. "So, how were your day's girls?"

Alison, headphones on, was dancing around the salad bowl and didn't even bother to look up.

Melissa broke the silence, "I had a killer math test today and field hockey practice was rough. I think my coach lost her mind when she yelled at us to..."

"I got nominated for Homecoming queen!" Alison's earphones hung around her neck. "And if I don't win, then Nancy Barrow rigged the votes. Really, Dad she would do that." After the interruption, her attention was immediately back to peeling carrots.

"Well that's great Ali. Let's hope it's a fair vote." He smiled and gave Melissa a wink of praise. "I can't wait to dig into this feast." That ham sandwich today was by far the best; I love that honey wheat bread." She started making his lunches about a month ago. He was spending too much money eating out everyday and the unhealthy habit of greasy burgers and fries weren't helping. They made a deal that if he cut down to two cases of beer a week he could eat lunch at the diner three days a week. But she made his sandwich every day, and he drank two sixes nightly.

They ate at the makeshift kitchen table. Dad's attention was on the television. Alison was picking at her food and reading the back of the salad dressing bottle. "You know you should buy the no fat ranch from now on." Melissa wanted someone to say her meat sauce was even better than her mother's. She even made cookies for dessert. The seat across from their father was empty.

"Did your mother call today?"

"No Dad, she didn't call." Alison snapped, "She never calls, so quit asking."

“No need to get mad, Ali, it was just a question.”

Focusing on her plate, “I’m not mad, but she hasn’t called, she probably won’t. Believe me if she does, you will be the first to know.”

Dad took two more bites, thanked Melissa for another great dinner and proceeded to his spot in front of the TV, in the middle of their crushed velvet hunter green couch. He cracked open another beer, his sixth. Melissa couldn’t help counting. His eyes were starting to droop. Melissa lost her appetite. Alison left the table. Melissa was left to do the dishes. She wished she was on a beach, the hot sun stealing her energy and replacing it with relaxation and a stress free mind. The water was hot but Melissa didn’t even notice. She resented Alison for never helping but loved to clean the dishes and the house. It eased her, the worries were put on hold as the task at hand kept her mind busy. The silverware was always washed first, then the plates, lastly comes the glasses. There were never more than two glasses in the sink. Dad always had beer with dinner. Alison was on the phone making plans for the night. James or Tim, or was she still with Chris?

Melissa finished wrapping Dad’s ham sandwich for the next day. She gave him four cookies and closed the lunch box. She grabbed two cookies for herself and turned to see her kitchen, clean, organized, and closed for the night. Melissa walked into her room with her book bag and a glass of milk. She had homework to do but laundry would have to come first.

At 9:30 Alison was primping in the bathroom. Melissa said, “Is that skirt short enough for you Ali?” Her jean skirt complimented her hooker attire of hoop earrings, a belly shirt and too much make up.

“Do you have enough homework to keep you company tonight?” Alison finished applying her mascara, turned, gave Melissa the finger, and shut the door.

Melissa walked out of the laundry room and toward the living room, remembering she needed a permission slip signed. She was vice president of her class and she had to go. She knew that she would forget in the morning.

The coffee table held nine beer cans. Some tipped on their side, others lined up in a row. His right eye was lazy and he turned with a lopsided smile. Melissa tried to hold back her anger and the tears that swelled in her eyes. She told herself it was medicine, he needed it to cope, and she needed to let him. He could barely hold the pen.

“What trip will you be going on now, princess?” said, slurring.

*Crystal McCarney*

“A beach clean up, on Friday.” She thought, please just sign it so I can get away from you.

He scribbled on the form, she said thank you, and retreated back to her room. Her trusted pillow was there. Her awards and trophies decorated the room. The blue and white sponge paint on the walls was a group effort by her mother and herself. The shelf that displayed her accomplishments was handmade by her father. She had a closet filled with designer clothes, trendy shoes, and a million and one pairs of sweatpants. Her “to do” list stared her in the face as she glanced to her clock resting over her corkboard.

She heard a horn in the driveway and the door slam. Alison was gone. She wouldn’t be back for some time. Melissa was envious of the little responsibility Alison had or better yet, neglected to deal with.

Melissa’s math book was open but her thoughts were not on the problem in front of her. She zoned out as she stared at her walls. She analyzed the patterns of the sponge paint and remembered that summer day three short years ago. Her mother suggested blue because it matched Melissa’s eyes. They spent an hour at Home Depot deciding on the perfect shade and immediately got to work. No project would be complete without Mom’s green bandana shielding her blonde hair and her worn clothes that showed the leftovers of previous tasks. They laughed a lot that day. As Michelle Branch blasted on the CD player, mother and daughter were sharing stories and enjoying the quality time together. “Oh I love this song, turn it up.” Mom knew all the words to “Everywhere” and Melissa loved to hear her sing. Mom’s smile was radiant and her mannerisms were fun and unpredictable. As a drop of paint hit her nose after Mom had flung her wet brush in Melissa’s direction, she smiled. She was happy.

Calculus was the last thing she wanted to do but the obligations that would affect her future always won out.

At eleven thirty, when Melissa walked into the living room, Dad had fallen off of the couch onto the floor. His scrawny body was nestled between the coffee table and the couch. His one leg still hung on the couch, his mouth was open, and Champ was asleep under his arm. The TV was so loud. The channel was Comedy Central, some *Saturday Night Live* episode. She felt like the laughter from the show was mocking her. She turned it off. She took a trash bag and cleaned up his empty beer cans. There were more than the usual twelve. The last one, half full, in his token Eagles huggy, was poured down the drain.

She hadn't heard the front door open. It was two o'clock in the morning. Alison walked in. Her belt was undone. Alison took her shoes off, and went toward the kitchen, tottering off balance. She opened the refrigerator and found a bottle of water.

"What are you doing awake?"

"I was waiting for the wash to dry."

Alison, "Mom is a bitch, and she just goes out like she has no responsibility. I mean she's missing out on some important shit." She burped.

Melissa knew nothing could wake Dad but she quieted Alison anyway.

"Seriously I mean look, you are such a good student and a great athlete. And me, well I have so much going for me right now... where do you think she even is?" She didn't care if anyone was listening. "You know I heard she is sleeping around with that guy from the pharmacy. Can you believe that? She is such a dirty whore."

A tiny glimmer of pity for Alison held her back. Melissa wanted to scream at her sister, "CAN'T YOU SEE YOU ARE JUST LIKE HER!" but she didn't.

Alison finished the water, left the empty bottle on the counter and kicked the shoes at her sister. "Here, thanks." She smiled.

Melissa saw her brand new Steve Madden boots, covered in mud. She refused to cry in front of Alison. She walked toward the laundry room.

She folded the clothes in silence, cursing her sister. So many things Melissa would never say filled her head. She folded the towels and began to scrub her boots. Boots that she would never allow to get so dirty. As she walked by her sister's room, Melissa could hear snoring. She peeked in the door to see her sister's leg hanging half way off the bed. She remembered her father, downstairs, in a similar position.

Melissa entered the room, lifted her sister's leg back onto the bed and covered her up.

FRIENDSHIP IS TRUST AND LOYALTY



## SHIFTING GEARS

I remember the sounds of rumbling engine conversation:  
Tire squeal repetition of speech and wind gust witticisms.

I remember that the color of the leaves was just turning;  
Orange flecks of fire lit a brown backdrop in the furnace of  
autumn.

I remember that sign that said, "Repent, the End is Near,"  
And told us we were sinners smack dab in the middle of  
nowhere.

I remember remarking that I knew we had so much more time than  
now.  
Now was such an abstract, and who really knew now when now  
was now?

I remember you laughing at my wordplay, boisterous as always,  
Chest shaking, Face shining as glistening bits of delight fell from  
your eyes.

I remember that we were going so fast,  
As was the custom when life shouldn't keep up.

I remember thinking once more on the sign as you turned off the road,  
The grass accepted no fault, no second chance for tears in the  
eyes tomfoolery.

I remember that the sign, blue, that crashed through the windshield  
Told us that Knights of Columbus 422 had adopted this stretch  
of highway.

I remember knowing that the Knights of Columbus didn't really care,  
When I broke through, uninhibited weight through shattered  
glass.

*Trevor Strunk*

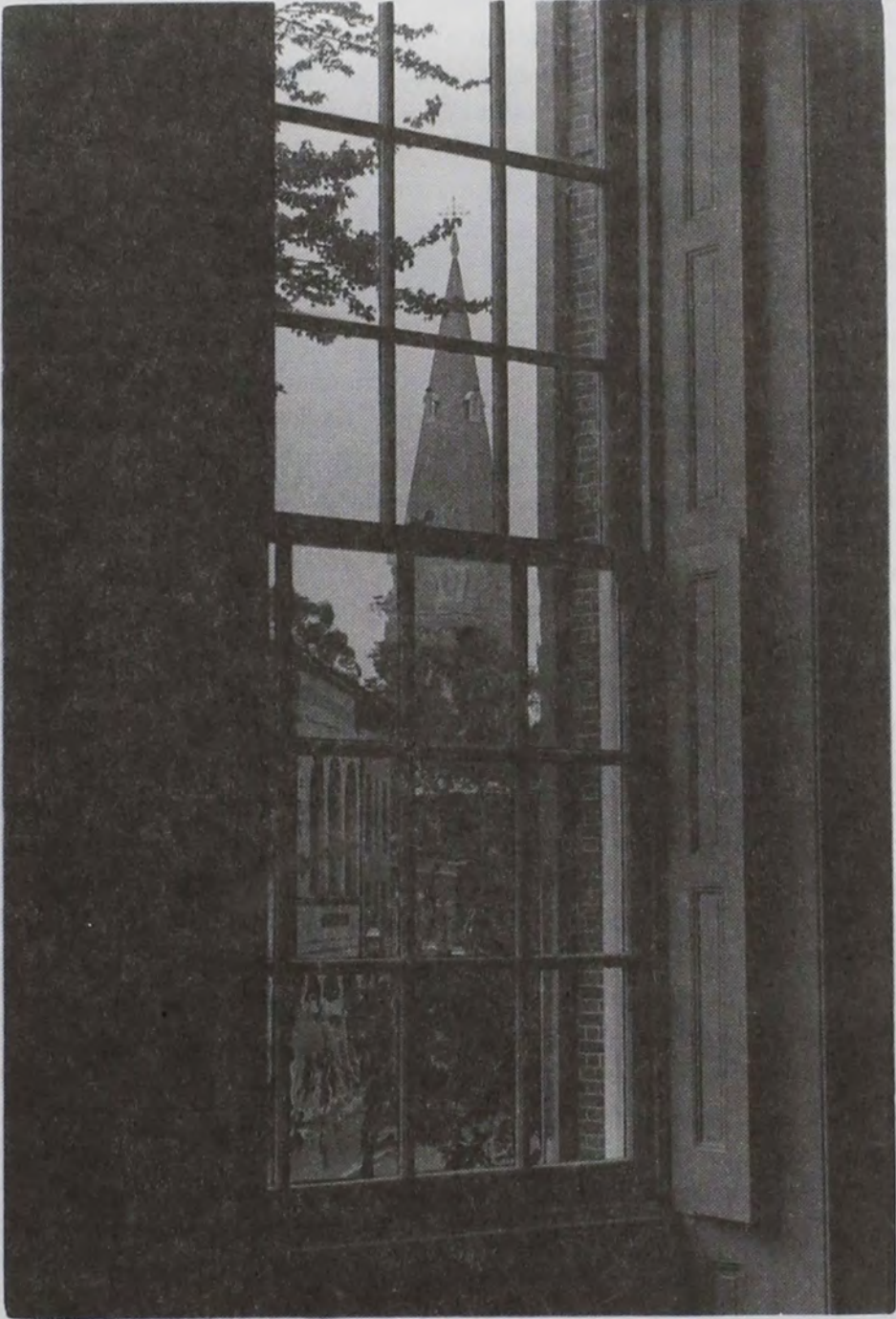
I remember the glass around me shimmered like delight from your  
eyes,  
As you pantomimed a polite, if hurried, plea that I should please  
be okay.

I remember brashly refusing your request as I looked up through the  
fires of autumn,  
Brownredorange blending into a fiery tableau, as I stared  
belligerently at the sun.

*Christina DiLernia*

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## ULTIMATE TRUTH





## THE BETHANY

Bethany Cinemas was the cleanest movie theater on my side of town. That doesn't say much considering the Bethany used shower curtains instead of bathroom stall doors and popped popcorn during the last showing in order to have something to start with the next morning. But it was better than the cheap movie theater with its rat infestation and the drive-in theater that failed its health inspection. The Bethany wasn't as nice as the multiplex theater across town but I didn't want to work there. Besides, I couldn't get my mom to drive me.

The Bethany was within bike riding distance from my house and my friends lived close enough to visit. The manager, a fat dumb slob named Randy, hired me after I came back to follow up on my application. He wore short-sleeved white work shirts with the armpit area stained a deep shade of yellow. The brown polyester pants covered in grease spots highlighted the flabbiness of his thighs. I sensed he only hired me because I was a teenage girl, but for \$5.15 an hour I could deal with his perversions. "Come back on Tuesday," he gurgled. Randy gurgled a lot.

I went back on Tuesday for my first day of training. Randy handed me a vest with grease stains on it before waddling back into the office. I made my nametag and carefully pinned it over the largest grease stain, which was, oddly, shaped like a dog. I walked into the break room wondering if my new boss had ever heard of a washing machine.

The break room smelled like a mixture of soda syrup and stale popcorn. The walls were painted the most awful shade of teal I have ever seen. The trim was Barney the Dinosaur purple. Was Randy colorblind? This color scheme continued throughout the theater lobby and into the four small theaters. I wondered if Randy knew those colors did not attract customers, but the stained carpet in the lobby was probably a better reason to go to another theater.

Inside the break room, four other theater employees were talking. One girl, her nametag claimed she was Stephanie, bounced into my personal space and cheerily said, "So, you're the new girl?"

No shit, Stephanie. "Um...yes. I was just wondering where I was supposed to be today."

Stephanie bounced over to the bulletin board where the schedule was

posted. Her perfect blonde ponytail violently swung from side to side. “Looks like you’re with me today in...concessions! We always train the newbies in concessions. *I’ll let you do the cleaning.*”

“Right,” I said. Silently, I was hoping Stephanie would just bounce herself into traffic.

A second girl stood up and introduced herself as Jessica - Jess if I preferred. Jess was a senior at the Christian school on the other side of town. Her father wouldn’t have because Jess wore her clothes there was no real wondered if she upside down. Her anti-establishment with safety pins).

*“Her perfect blonde ponytail violently swung from side to side.”*

was a priest. I guessed either black lipstick and safety pins holding together. Evidently dress code here. I hung her cross bag was covered in patches (also held on My personal favorite

was a quote from The Vandals: “If you think you’re free, try walking into a deli and urinating on the cheese.”

The third girl was much too concerned with her cell phone conversation to do anything more than nod in my direction. She seemed nice enough, but she had this annoying habit of screaming. When she screamed, her long black ponytail shook violently. At first I thought it was Tourette’s, but it just turned out that her boyfriend was a jackass. “No, Carlos! I did *not!*” It went on. And on.

The only guy in the break room was named Derek. He was tall, had black spikey hair and wore thick glasses. Derek held a B.A. in history and liked to play Dungeons and Dragons. He was working at the theater to pay off his student loans and his 1958 Cadillac Eldorado. Derek and Randy constantly argued about cars. Randy was fond of the 1970 Ford Thunderbird, and he drove an apple red polished one to work everyday. Derek thought Thunderbirds were nothing more than a redneck luxury vehicle. I agreed.

Stephanie bounced over to me and announced it was time to “break in the newbie.” I glared at her. Jess rolled her eyes. The unnamed girl yelled some more and Derek walked into the office.

We walked (bounced) to the concession stand to set up for the hundreds of customers who would buy day old popcorn and soda that traveled through moldy tubes. I learned how to pop popcorn and fill

soda cups in order to screw the customers out of their money (lots of ice). I was taught the art of up-selling: "You know, sir, for only a quarter more you can get *twice as much*."

The early afternoon rush came and went and I found us with nothing to do. I busied myself by counting the popcorn kernels that flew out of the popping machine. Whoosh. One. Whoosh. Two. Whoosh. Three.

Number four had just whooshed by when Randy waddled from the break room. "How are things going out here?" he asked.

"Oh things are going just *great*" Stephanie said. "She's really getting the hang of it *and* she sold five candy combos already!"

"Well alright then. Stephanie, I need to see you for a few minutes. You - don't screw up." Randy winked at me and turned back towards the break room. Stephanie followed.

Derek walked out soon after Stephanie left to grab some popcorn and a soda. We talked about how my first day was going, and his Cadillac. I asked him what Randy wanted to see Stephanie about. Derek rolled his eyes. "Stephanie and Randy have a little something going on."

I choked on my soda. "What?"

"It's not a little something, Derek," Jess said as she walked out of theater four. "Don't mislead the poor girl."

"Okay, fine. It's not a little something. Let me just say every single time Stephanie works, I get kicked out of the box office."

Jess walked into the concession stand and ripped open an overpriced bag of Sour Patch Kids. "It's totally bogus, too. The bitch gets prime working hours and extra money for sleeping with that pit stain and then walks around acting like she owns the place just because she's slutty enough to touch Randy."

"Isn't that a little bit weird?" I asked. "You're not supposed to sleep with your employees. Didn't I have to sign a paper about that?"

"I just do what I'm told to do. I can't afford to be nosy," Derek said. "EverQuest just increased their online gaming fees to twenty dollars a month."

Jess laughed. "Ah, Derek. You're such a dork." She walked out of the concession stand and headed up the ramp to clean theater three.

Fifteen minutes passed before Derek was allowed to return to the box office and Stephanie bounced back to the concession area. The neat blonde ponytail had loosened and was falling out around her ears.

"So...did you get in trouble or something?"

"I just had to go over some figures with Randy, that's all," Stephanie replied, a little too quickly.

"I was getting a little worried when you didn't come out after a little..." I began.

"Look. Just drop it," she snapped. "You're new. You don't know how things work around here."

I turned back to the popcorn popper. Whoosh. Five. Whoosh. Six. I made it to 312 before my shift ended. On my way out, I checked the schedule and saw I was penciled in for Friday from 5:30 to close. Once again, I would be working with Stephanie. Great.

Friday night came and I would have been with Stephanie if she bothered to show up. Randy waddled out to the concession stand at six o'clock to inform me that not only would I have to serve the Friday night rush alone, but I had to cover Stephanie's Saturday morning shift. "But Randy, I'm not scheduled. I have plans! I'm going to Inner Harb-"

My protests were ignored as Randy went off to deal with the broken projector in theater two. I hurled a paper cup in his direction once he waddled into the booth.

My Friday night was a complete and total disaster. It would figure the biggest opening of the summer would occur when I was stuck serving fat asses their free refill of buttery popcorn all by myself. When a particularly large woman complained that her popcorn wasn't buttery enough, I almost screamed. Derek warned me the theater business would make me bitter, but I didn't expect it to happen on my second night of work.

Saturday morning was even worse. I went to bed shining with grease, too exhausted to shower. I overslept and was forced to head into work looking like I belonged at McDonald's. I cursed Stephanie every time I had to help a customer. I cursed her when I wasn't allowed my lunch break because the popcorn popper broke down during the one o'clock rush. I cursed Randy for that too because he was ignoring the law and I thought about reporting him. Jess and Derek brought me food and cursed with me during their breaks. The girl whose name I still didn't know cursed at her boyfriend while talking to him on her cell phone, so I accepted that as her support for my cause. I cursed so much that cursing lost all meaning for me.

My Saturday shift ended at five o'clock. I checked the schedule before I left to find out when Stephanie was scheduled next. Luckily, she was scheduled for the Sunday evening shift, which meant I'd have some

time to cool down. My initial plan was to come in and kill her, but I thought that would put my job in jeopardy. So instead I decided to come and yell at her for leaving me in a tight spot, twice.

I threw my grease-covered vest into the locker I stole from cell phone girl and slammed the door. Derek and Jess jumped in their seats but they understood how pissed I was. They knew Stephanie was going to get yelled at for screwing me over. I had plans! I was supposed to see a goddamn IMAX movie! I said goodbye to Derek and Jess, silently wished Randy would choke on a piece of popcorn, and stole the M&M's from the display case.

I arrived back at the theater early Sunday evening to catch a movie with my friends. Derek let all six of us in for free, even though company policy said only myself and one guest were allowed free passes. Halfway through the film, I got up to go the bathroom.

I walked in the bathroom and found Stephanie standing in front of the cracked mirror fixing her ponytail. I took a deep breath and hoped I could remember the rant I prepared. "Hey, Stephanie," I said tersely. Stephanie turned away from the mirror and looked at me. Her eyes widened and she quickly focused her attention back on her ponytail. "Listen, I didn't appreciate covering your flaky ass for the past two days. I had plans! Do you know how busy it was here? I had to serve all those bitchy ass customers all alone. I didn't even get a lunch break because I had to fix the damn popper. Just because you can get away with not showing up because you're Randy's theater whore doesn't mean you should do it." I growled.

"FUCK YOU, I'M LATE!" Stephanie roared.

"You don't have any consideration for oth- you're what?"

Stephanie burst into tears. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to leave you in a bind. I thought Randy would get someone else to come in."

I didn't even get halfway through my rant. Damn it, I hate when people apologize. "Eh...it's alright," I said. "Are you pregnant? Did you test positive?" Stephanie buried her head in her hands. "What are you doing to do?"

"I don't know. I can't have this baby. I don't want this baby."

"Is it...is it Randy's?" I asked. She nodded. I asked if Randy knew and she said no, and he couldn't know otherwise he'd definitely break up with her and go back to his wife.

"I don't know if I can work here anymore," said Stephanie. "Um...but I was wondering if you would go to the clinic with me. I

haven't told anyone else and I've never been in this situation before."

I told her I would think about it. After an awkward silence, I stood up, mumbled something about getting back to the movie and left Stephanie to wash her face.

I walked back out of the bathroom and headed back to the theater to watch the rest of Great Expectations, but I didn't see a thing. I couldn't believe she asked me to go to the clinic with her. I hadn't even known her a week and of all the favors in the world, she asks me to do something I couldn't do for my best friend. What if someone saw me? What if someone firebombed the clinic?

On Monday, I worked the night shift with Derek and Jess. The night rush ended so Derek came out from the box office to join Jess and myself in killing some time. After a rousing game of broom hockey, we found ourselves just sitting around. "So guys...I found out something really interesting about Stephanie yesterday."

Jess yawned. "Yeah, what's that? Does the Fuhrer have herpes yet?"

"Not exactly. I promised her I wouldn't tell anyone, so you have to promise not to tell anyone too, okay?"

Jess and Derek nodded their heads in agreement.

"Yesterday, I went to the bathroom and found Stephanie in there. First of all, she thinks she's dating Randy but the worst part is she's pregnant with his baby!"

Derek and Jess looked at each other and shrugged. Derek said, "Man, Stephanie really is a slut. Remember last year, Jess?"

"Oh it was awful. I had to cover her shifts for like a week because she was so goddamn emotionally distraught. She makes me sick."

I stared at them in disbelief. "It's not like she tried to get pregnant."

"Oh please," said Jess. "I bet she did it so she could scare Randy into leaving his wife. Who knows, she could be faking it."

I didn't understand. It's the sort of thing girls don't admit to unless it's true: having sex with a middle-aged fat man. He probably gurgled during sex too.

"I don't know, guys...She asked me to go with her to the clinic."

"My guess is the clinic is really the mall," said Derek. "And she needs you to go with her because one of her lame-ass boyfriends won't."

I avoided conversation with Jess and Derek until the shift ended at eleven o'clock. I watched them drive off in Derek's precious Cadillac. I didn't feel like heading home just yet; two miles home was too much to deal with right now. This bike riding business was growing old really

fast. I shuffled around to the back of the theater in the hopes that a nice movie poster or a banner would be lying by the dumpster. The back of the movie theater is a dirty place; it smells, it's poorly lit, and the heroin addicts like to leave their needles there. Rats and the homeless lady especially enjoy the abundance of stale popcorn. Thankfully, only the rats were around.

I inched my way towards the dumpster wishing my eyes would adjust quickly. I tripped over a discarded three foot piece of purple metal railing from the lobby. Randy made Derek remove it earlier that day because the metal started to rust and some customers complained they'd get Tetanus. Stupid Randy. I started getting really angry about the whole situation all over again. I reached my boiling point when there weren't any movie posters or banners in the dumpster.

I'm not really sure what overcame me. It was most likely a combination of the horrible week I had, how Jess and Derek acted when I told them about Stephanie and the fact Randy was such a dickwad. In any case, somehow I exacted my revenge on Derek, Jess, and Randy via Randy's windshield.

"This is for being a bunch of inconsiderate jerks!" I yelled. I swung the metal rail hard. The sound of broken glass raining down on the parking lot calmed me. After five good hits, I was exhausted. Randy waddled out at hyper speed. I thought his thighs were going to ignite his brown polyester pants they were rubbing together so fast.

"What do you think you're doing?" Randy screamed. "Are you crazy? Are you insane?"

I held tight to the metal railing in case Randy tried to attack. "Why are you calling me crazy? You're the one with a mental disorder! How can you sleep with her? Don't you have enough common sense to realize that's wrong?"

In the dim glow of the parking lot lights, I could see Randy's face turn a deep shade of red. "That is none of your business," he growled.

"Oh please. If you're using my place of employment to exploit girls half your age, it is my business! I'm in that demographic, jackass, and I know what you're doing is immoral and illegal."

Randy turned around and headed back into the theater. He stopped before walking into the front lobby and yelled, "You better not report this or I'll have your ass in deep for destroying my car!"

"You go ahead and try! I'll have you in the sex offender's database so fast you won't know what hit you!"

Randy growled, "If you know what's best for you, you'll just forget about the whole thing little girl. Otherwise, there will be problems. Big ones."

"You can't threaten me! I quit! Oh, and Stephanie quits too!"

I picked up the metal rail and threw it on the hood of Randy's car before I grabbed my bike and pedaled like hell for home.

The next day outside the Planned Parenthood, the pro-life protesters were holding up grotesque pictures with the words "Murderer" printed across. One man was reciting from the Bible. Most of the girls looked scared or ready to cry. One girl wore headphones so she couldn't hear the pro-lifers. Her boyfriend had his arm around her and they walked into the clinic singing "Yellow Submarine" at the top of their lungs. Stephanie was a real trooper and by the time her procedure and post-procedure recovery were over, the protesters had finally left to do something more productive so we could leave without getting hassled.

On the way back to my house, Stephanie detoured by the cinema. The marquee that once glowed 'Bethany Cinemas' now blinked 'Bethany Cinemas.' "Hey Stephanie," I said. "Derek and Jess said something about the same thing happening to you last year..."

"I had my appendix removed."

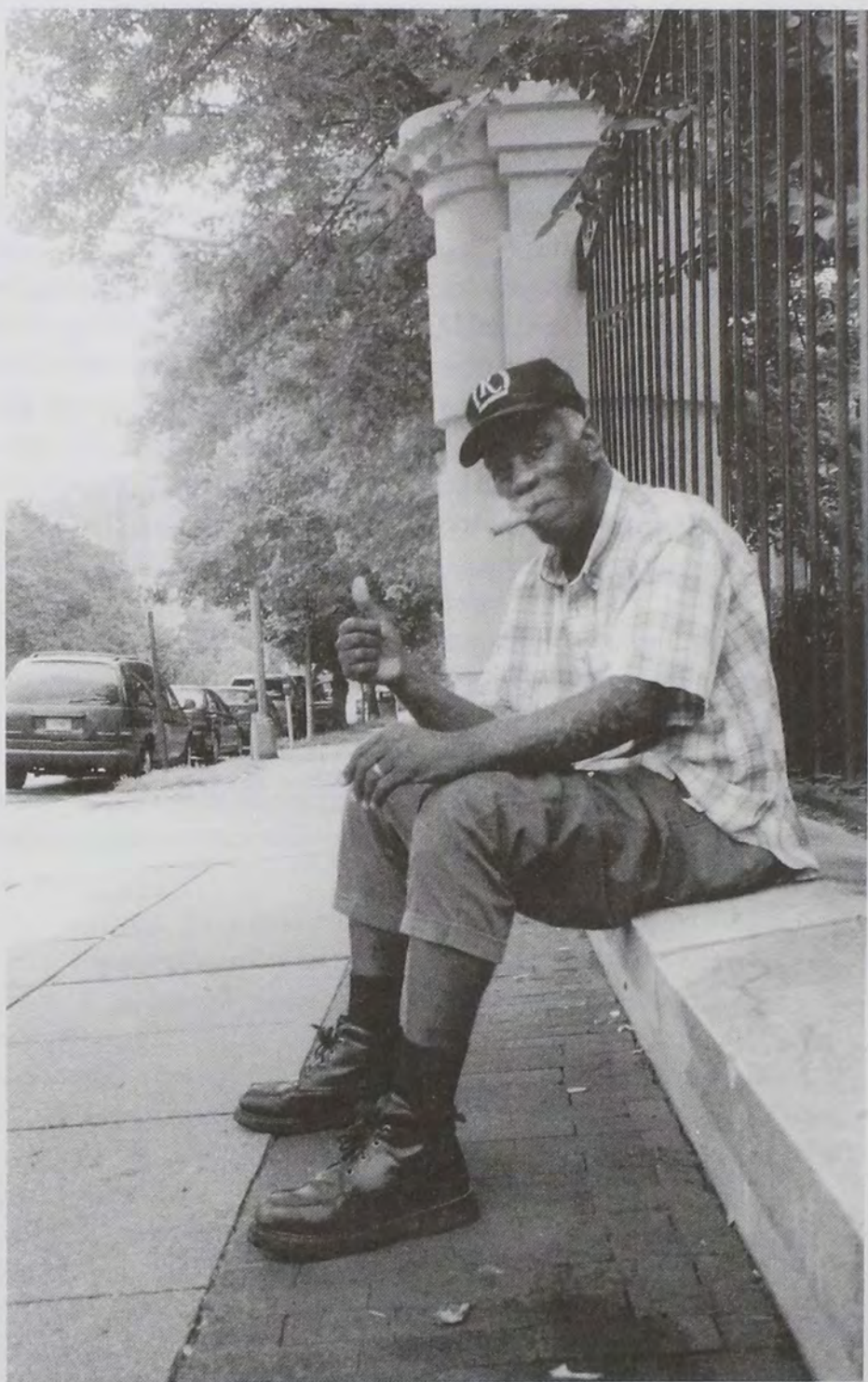
There are three theaters on my side of town. Mine used to be the cleanest one. It turns out it wasn't any better than the cheap movie theater with its rat infestation or the drive-in theater that failed its health inspection. Maybe now I can get my mom to drive me to the multiplex.



*Sarah Kauffman*

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UNTITLED



## STOGIE

It's a hot summer  
morning and a man  
eats his bacon and  
eggs on an antique rocking  
chair on his whitewashed  
porch, puffing away on a  
smoldering cigar, smoke  
snaking through the silver  
curls of his antiquated  
beard on his antiquated  
face. A cold breeze  
makes his fingers  
shake as he presses and  
twists the last of his  
stogie into the untouched  
egg.

## CREEKSIDE

**M**onday:

“Let me make it clearer for you, Boyd. You’re off my football team. Tough guys like you, they come and they go. The Fighting Corsairs don’t need ya. Now, I’m tired of the plain sight of ya, so get the hell out.”

Outside Coach Baxter’s office in the locker room, Charles Boyd’s sweat cooled in the concrete refrigeration. It was right then 7 o’clock in the AM. His dark blue ’88 Chevy Caprice had swooped down off the hill and whipped into the Smith Union High School parking lot just ten minutes before. He drove three miles from the farm in eight minutes. His walk to the locker room and over to Coach’s office had been slow and sturdy, like a strolling gun fighter. Coach had been waiting for him, sitting in the wheelie chair and watching the door, shoulders as broad as the width of the office. A grim look spread over his wide face. Now Charles stepped over to his gym locker and started to hollow it out. Not a lot in there was actually his, except for the cleats, the deodorant, and the weed. The pads all belonged to the school. Sweated tee shirts got wrapped in a tidy package for his belongings. He tied the sleeves up in a knot and was about to leave, but Hoppin’ Harley Fender called out his name. Fresh out of the shower, dressed in a white under shirt and light blue jeans, Harley stood surveying the scene. The Fender pickup had been parked in the lot when Charles had arrived. Harley had been lifting. His slim body was packed to its muscle limit; the faded white undershirt from eighth grade could barely contain his form.

“So you’re done with playing, Charlie? No more real fun for me at practice.”

Charles nodded. “I couldn’t play wide receiver. Hated it too much. All the extra running. And they wouldn’t let me play linebacker either, said I was too weak. Said my attitude sucked.”

They both walked to the water fountain at the edge of the locker room, to be out of coach’s window view. Harley drank hard, gulping the tap water down. His buzz cut hair was still damp from the shower. He stood and gestured back towards at the office. “Baxter booted ya, we both know because you broke fucking Ivan’s right arm like a stale pretzel during angle tackling. You spooked him and the rest of the

coaches.”

Charles remembered another scene, when he took a piss in the bushes while the rest of the team sprinted. “Yeah, it was that and other things too.” Breaking Ivan’s arm had nearly slipped his mind. “I’m gonna move out of the house for a while. I need a break from their shit; I’m getting a lecture every night. And the chores keep piling on; I can’t ever do anything on the weekend. Me living out of the Caprice; it’ll be sorta cool, like I’m a roaming desperado or something.”

“You’re gonna go live out of your Chevy? Fuck, you can stay on my couch if you need to.”

Charles straightened up before he answered, “Can’t do it. This way feels right. Better for my soul.”

Harley’s cowboy boot did a lonely tap dance on the cement. His eyes locked on Charles’ and then wavered. He looked down at his feet, while both hands squirmed deep inside the front jean pockets. “Well, you should at least come over for dinner tonight. It’ll be late though, after I finish all my chores. And you try saying no to rotisserie chicken and Stove Top stuffing.” His voice was suddenly very enthusiastic.

As everyone entered Smith Union High, Charles was walking out of the front door, going against the hard current. He was sweating by the time he reached for the handle of the car door out in the black top lot. Turning back, he faced the school and saw its bustling business, everyone moving like an ant army. The pack of yellow school buses was sluggishly pulling out of the lot, in a long train. Charles waited aside his Chevy for the parking lot to settle down. It was out hot out already: September haze and summer’s sun. The practice field was a hard dirt floor from the week’s heat wave. And he didn’t have any business out there anymore.

He took his time driving home to be sure Dad was at the office. The driveway was empty when the Caprice rolled its tires across the heavy stone lane that traced from the edge of the highway up to the barn. He parked it right next to their big farmhouse, right by the white painted splint fence that guarded the fall flowers. His feet followed the stone path up to the front porch. Ocean-wide expanses of lawn flooded over the property, every blade cut to golf course height and was as green as the color on the Miracle Grow label. He would not be mowing it from here on out.

The work he did in his bedroom was reminiscent of what he had done to the gym locker. Nothing was folded and placed; rather, it was thrust

through the zipper lips of his large overnight bag. The bag had been inherited from his older brother Paul, who was currently playing tackle on the Beaksburg University football team. It bore his initials stitched into the side. PEB. When it was as round as a pregnant cow with his clothing (all a mixture of jeans, skateboarding logos, wrestling tee shirts, and some camouflaged prints), Charles filled a brown paper bag with his CDs, shower/shaving kit, and an old Boy Scout mess kit. The bed was robbed of its comforter and pillows, and the coffee can of loose change was placed into the car trunk. He moved out in under 15 minutes, while his mother slept through the Today Show. When he was done packing his car, he printed a note in magic marker on a blue napkin and left it on the dining room table.

**I was cut from football so I have decided to live on my own for a while.**

He read over it four times silently to himself before printing his first name at the bottom of the sheet of printer paper. Charles chose the creek bank by the old Rosebud Camping Ground as the place to rough it. The spot was a ways off the beaten path from Smith Union, and shaded by the teeming groves of tulip poplars. The creek bank was down off of the old Miller Road at the end of a sharp slope that dropped like a sliding board. Charles drove to high school, cranking Sid Vicious' rendition of "My Way." Back in the building, he packed his locker with any nonessentials he had grabbed (hunting binoculars) and signed in late at the office.

There was an empty space at the end of the back lab table. Many of the eyes in the classroom followed Charles to his seat. Mr. Briggs took the late pass and resumed his lecture on the differences between plant and animal cells. Charles tore out a sheet of notebook paper and began to doodle. The room was packed with a share of subject matter, with blossoming sophomore girls and the stuffed wild life that stood on the room's high shelves. His eyes roamed over to a savage-looking groundhog that stood erect and held out its paw. The pencil in his hand started to sketch, working with its own disconnected expertise. A voice softly bit into his swirls of idle thought.

"Holding up alright over there Charlie?"

He turned to his right to see Franko's teeth-masking smile and answered back with a whisper of his own. "Yo," he leaned in closer to Franko's ear, "you still want me to do that work for you?"

Franko's smile managed to squirm across his face to a larger size. His

hair was dark and kept in an old-fashioned mop top, his squinting eyes never seemed to be fully focused, and he wore a striped orange and black turtleneck. The nod he gave was a promise to Charles's wallet, and Charles had to sigh in relief (silently). He needed to eat. "You two gentlemen haven't skipped ahead and started discussing our horticulture unit, have you?" Briggs stood over them like a stone monument. Charles held himself in check and did not grin out an answer.

The day trickled by while feverish, trembling thoughts tossed through his mind. He sat limply at his desk in 12<sup>th</sup> period study hall, picturing

the scene at home the evening. There some kind of a Michael would get will. There would revenge. Michael Smith Union junior terror at wide those runt-games most sacred drilling cavities and

*"A voice softly  
bit into his  
swirls of idle  
thought."*

that would occur in would probably be family meeting. Charles's share of the be doses of prescribed was the superstar of high football, an arch-receiver. Screaming at was one of his dad's pleasures, next to pulling teeth. The

note was so humble looking. Penned in red Crayola ink, with a period after his name. It would be torn into quarters and burned in the fire barrel with credit card junk mail and unwanted bills. They would wait to see how long he could hold out on his own. The exit bell shocked him up to his feet and he walked out to the hallway towards his locker to meet Franko. They had an appointment in Franko's basement for the night. Missing the dinner at Harley's could not be avoided.

## Tuesday:

His dream rendered the tackle's moment in a hazed frenzy while his head rolled back and forth against the inside of the car door. The field was sprayed in thick mist and Ivan Helbrich stood glaring, with shoulder pads draped in a faded purple jersey. His long white fingers were curled around a football. Charles stood five yards away, alone on the goal line. He eyed the older, taller junior who started at wingback. Ivan was the only one there with him in the dream, but Baxter's disembodied voice crackled out through the mists.

"Someone make a play!"

Charles sank into the half-squat of a linebacker stance as Ivan sprang

forward with an animal's quickness, on his way to slipping into the end zone. Only he was not aimed to cut around the flat-footed defender who did nothing but stare. No, Ivan was aimed to run right through him. Three feet away from colliding with Charles...and yet...there was an explosion in Charles's legs and he stabbed into Ivan's side, clubbing his arms up and smashing his helmet into the football that Ivan guarded. Charles felt his eyes go wide as an owl's, magnetizing the images of their train wreck while Ivan teetered backwards, stung hard by the blow. The ball tumbled upward high into the air. The two bodies fell back to earth together, away from the goal line, hitting the ground as one dead mass. Ivan's whimper and subsequent shrieks caused Charles to get to his feet and inspect the victim, whose arm flopped limply at an unnatural bend. Bodiless voices accumulated and spread in a chatter over the misted field, all concerned gibberish. Charles was warm and calm and still could not blink.

When sunlight teased his eyes open, he kicked open the back door and put his sneakers on in morning dew. Then he drove into high school and walked right past Baxter's locker room office on his way to the showers, holding a rag of a towel, shower kit, and a change of clothes. The gym shower took five minutes to warm up and he stood in the dank chamber alone, naked and shivering until the heat came pouring down. After about ten minutes, he dried himself off and changed, even whistled a few random notes.

Ivan Helbrich was waiting outside of Baxter's office as Charles changed. His dyed black hair was parted to the side and he wore a denim jacket over his *Natural Born Killers* tee shirt. The white cast on his right arm bore the signatures of the entire football team. His hazel glare was locked on Charles from the moment he stepped boldly out of the shower. His stare followed Charles through the progression of dressing while his pierced lip curled into a sneer.

"Watching me change. I knew there was a reason you played football, Helbrich."

"It's about the only thing you can do without fucking up, Boyd."

Charles walked smoothly past Ivan, as Baxter's eyes followed him through the glass. Then he turned his head to the right as he brushed through the double doors. "Hey Ivan, write a poem on your cast and dedicate it to me." The two doors slammed in a hurry, as Ivan's spit sprayed out for Charles.

Turning the corner after passing his homeroom, Charles had an itchy

sight sprung on him. Under the cover of an empty hallway, the vice principal was ripping into his locker, number 207, with a red crowbar. This tall bald figure jerked and grunted until the door gave way with a banging exclamation and then stuck his head right into the space. He reemerged holding the hunting binoculars by the strap, staring quizzically at them. Charles stumbled back a few steps and the dirty clothing fell to the ground as he turned to bolt.

### **W**ednesday:

At the Tom and Huck diner, he told Harley all about it. Harley had some information of his own, about how the locker had been jammed shut and Dr. Boyd had called in and told the principal about his runaway son. Charles grunted and bit into his turkey club. Harley sat at the opposite end of the booth, with a plate of tuna salad on lettuce and deep purple bruises on his arms that matched the Smith Union uniform. They had come out to the diner after running into each other on Main Street at 6 PM. It was down the highway a mile from Smith Union. Charles took tentative bites out of the turkey club, tasting the dryness of the meat. Harley said nothing until he was done wolfing down his plate. Words resumed when Harley's fork dropped to the counter.

"So I heard you're dealing now," he said in a flat voice, while his eyes scraped the plate. Charles held up his half-a-sandwich.

"So I can eat and fill up the gas tank once in a while." He had changed the Caprice's air filter just yesterday. "Why do you ask, pal? Interested in an ounce?"

Harley's eyes carved up to meet his friend's. "Nah." The voice was a hollow drone across the booth. "I just think you need to go home now, Charlie. Your parents will understand. And you should get back to school so you don't fail 10<sup>th</sup> grade." This was coming from the now-starting punt returner for the Smith Union Fighting Corsairs.

Charles's stared at his plate. "I need some time away from all of it. And I'm sorry I didn't come over Monday."

"Yeah..."

Charles finished his half-a-club and left the fries for the busboy. They split the tip, a buck each before halting goodbyes. Then they rode off separately. On his way, Charles stopped by at Franko's basement to get his cut.



## Thursday:

In the waning afternoon, Charles stood stoned in an antique glass phone booth at a Smith Union gas station, fumbling to get a scrap of paper out of his jean pocket. Written on it was the phone number of a girl named Caroline, given to him by Franko. Caroline was supposedly from West Borough, a suburban track of housing developments and gigantic super stores, accompanied by equally gigantic gray parking lots. Charles had done well with the girls last year, despite not being able to drive. His gap-toothed smile made him Gretzky. But away from those fertile lunchroom tables and packed study halls...Franko knew he needed some company somehow and scratched Caroline's digits down in pitch black Sharpie ink, smiling the sugar-easy smile.

To Charles, she had sounded like a cat purring over the phone. She wanted him to take her to the Old Toll Road drive in to see *Jaws*. It was one of her favorites. He got her address and a brief set of directions and hung up the phone. Then he slapped his hand on his thigh, triumphant. Back at the Rose Bud Camp Grounds, he cleaned up in an old outdoor shower. His skin got the shivers as he changed in the open air, as the autumn breezes felt him up.

The movie's soundtrack piped in through the car speakers, broadcasted on channel 98.7 AM. Caroline sat in the passenger seat while Charles discreetly looked her over. She was very slim with straight black hair that went shoulder length. She wore a tight blue tee shirt that highlighted the generosity of her breasts. Her khakis were tight and her lips were frosted in lip glaze. Sometimes those lips mouthed the lines along to the movie. Charles had seen *Jaws* before, but even so, the screams he heard were harsh enough to make him wince. For the first 40 minutes, they both sat as still as marble, witnessing Spielberg's mechanical shark attacks.

"So you're one of Franko's dealers, right? That's how you know him." She was still looking firmly at the screen, where Roy Schneider's face hung concerned and gigantic.

He touched her left arm, felt the warmth there. "Yeah, I do a little work for him." She looked down at where his fingers were resting on her arm.

"Do you have any with you now? I could use to loosen up. Well, do you?"

"No." It was a lie. "But I do have some gin in this flask." He handed it to her and she gulped. And she started to giggle while he took a swig

of his own.

“God, I think Franko deals weed to my dad. His parents know mine; I guess it was Franko’s first sell. And the first time my dad scored in ten years.” There was no hesitation in her voice. She was looking straight into his eyes when she snatched the flask back from him and finished it. He brushed her hair away from her face with a long reach. She broke away, rolled down the window and leaned out to ash a freshly lit cigarette. On the small of her back, there was a pink heart tattoo with the inscription “Daddy’s Little Girl.” After a few quite moments, she flicked the lit butt out onto the lot and fell back into the seat. Her eyes were glazed and her lips were pouting. He felt her hand crawling up and down his leg, working in close to the seam. So he swung to the right and grabbed her, pulling her close. She did not resist; she attacked his mouth with her own while rubbing his crotch with her left hand. Their groping was confined by the distance between their seats and her mouth moved close to his ear and whispered, “We’re gonna need a bigger boat.”

They got out of the car with a business-like air. There were three other cars spread thin across the vast stone covered lot. The shark smiled on the enormous big screen, celebrating Independence Day with a child’s leg. Charles opened the back door and dove in. Caroline wrestled the door open on the other side of the Chevy and took a long look inside. Charles looked up and saw the heavy stare in her eyes and then thought to glance around the back seat. His comforter was dusty and wrinkled, bunched up behind the driver’s seat, and the pillow was flat and wedged in the corner by the seatbelt, next to the greasy Burger King hamburger wrapper. Captain Crunch peppered the floor, and the box was flattened against the seat, its corn puffed innards busting out like so much gore. She still had not gotten in. “I thought you looked a little rough...but I didn’t think you were living out of this car...” She backed off, back towards the movie screen, verging on anguished tears. Charles crawled out her end of the car, like a worm popping out of an apple. Her voice warbled in fierce shock, at the edge of fury.

“I can’t believe FUCKING FRANKO set ME UP with a HOMELESS, RUNAWAY TEEN!” Caroline stumbled backwards, with her voice booming off of the big screen and Charles wanted to cover his ears, but he kept walking after her, his right hand extended. Her face stretched and she shrieked again.

“Get away from ME. GO HOME!” The words stunned him and he

stopped, let her flee back towards the shadows of the exit. He stood in the lot, felt the wind, looked around and felt like a target, and retreated to the driver's seat. Back in the car, the wind called with a whiny pitch through the open back door. He whimpered and rushed out, to close the door. The radio got shut off and the film was finished in silence. He watched to the end of the credits, (imposed over a long shot of the beach). By then the three other cars were gone. The screen went black and he reached over to unsnap the glove compartment: inside was a bag of weed that he had to sell to stay afloat. A porter tapped the back window and he snapped the glove compartment closed and pulled the Caprice away, slowly out of the lot.

The headlights showed a path ahead, carving away the darkness through the covered wooden bridge and down through Miller Road. Riding by the campground was a movement through supreme stillness. On the right, just before he would turn off, was an empty hammock among the boarded up cabins and cold fire circles. He turned off the road and let the car coast down the grassy embankment, and as he coasted, he pictured himself falling inside a submarine to the sea floor. His eyes opened as the car reached the flat stretch by the bank. But the headlights shone on a shape lying right at his sleep-spot, which was round and the size of a truck tire. It lay unmoving in the glow of the headlamps and had a sharp, ridged peak carved out of the hard shards that composed the surface of this shell. It was a monster.

The car door slammed behind him as he walked out to it. His footsteps were slow as he recalled his grandmother's warning about snapping turtles biting off young boys' schnickies if they swam for too long in wild ponds. Two feet away from it, and still it did not move. It was the biggest thing he had ever seen come out of a creek and somewhere out of his surprise and curiosity came the desire to possess. Charles jogged back to his car and popped the trunk and found a long piece of rope next to the tire iron. He tied a looping slipknot into it and returned to the mound of turtle. Acting by quick instinct, he managed to lift the back end of the shell up, to get the rope loop around it. The snapper's head, tail, and legs shot out immediately, and it lurched forward, taking Charles for a ride. With monstrous strength, it dragged him to the edge of the creek bank before he could regain his footing and composure against a massive dead log that rested parallel to the creek. Using the log as a prop, he pulled back sharply on the line, bending his legs to add power. In the darkness, to the sound of

blubbering water, a grudging stalemate was reached. He knew desperation, feeling that something unknown to him was hung in the balance of this struggle with the snapper. His yanking became more savage and unrelenting; he would bend at the knees and push himself backwards in the style of a rower. But it became obvious that he could not last much longer against the animal. A strategy entered his mind, and he let his end of the line slacken. The turtle crashed forward, trying to slip away. Charles's shuddered and he yanked back on the rope with his remaining power, leaving his feet and falling backwards though the darkness onto the dew-sweating grass. The turtle was caught by the suddenness of his movement, and was dragged back up over the bank and onto the grass, squirming wildly on its back. Charles found his feet and tied the line to the dead weight of the log before collapsing back onto the wet grass. Sitting up seconds later, he looked over at the flipped snapper and some random strand of thoughts told him that an upside down turtle would not live long. Charles stood up, walked over and touched its hard belly shell. "How the hell did I ever get you out?"

It mildly surprised him that he had spoken aloud to the animal. The turtle's head peaked out a fraction, presenting the end of its curved beak. Charles shot his hands underneath the shell and flipped it back onto its feet, feeling the snapper's weight as he did it. The snapper tentatively revealed its head further, and Charles walked back to the driver's seat of his Chevy, leaving the headlight on. He would watch it all night, to see that it would not escape.

\*\*\*\*\*

Baxter had the face of a ghost. Homecoming halftime was fucked in this sweet dream. The snapper whirled around on the concrete floor, as the Fighting Corsairs cowered back. Charles watched it all from Baxter's office: in charge of that moment. Sissy-screaming football players chucked their helmets impotently at the monster and ran. Baxter fell flat on his face and got snapped right in the ass. Charles occupied himself by spinning circles around the locker room in coach's wheelie chair. Like a happy top, close to the comic mauling.

**F**riday:

He woke from the dream, eyes wide and blinking at reality. The car battery was dead and the turtle was still tied to the log. He tried the ignition 20 and stared grimly at the turtle when it failed to catch. The sound of a car whipping by on the road above stirred him to move.

*Klaus Yoder*

The Caprice's battery needed to be jumped. He showered at the campgrounds and stole a stool from a cabin porch. Back at the creek, he laid a strip of pepper steak beef jersey down for the snapper and walked up to the edge of the road to set up shop. He set the stool in the middle of the road and stared into the deep country foliage, watching yellow leaves drop. After about a half hour of waiting, a gray pickup ambled down Miller Road. The brakes squealed wild when the Bud the farmer saw Charles seated in his path.

"So this is where you been staying. I heard your pops was mighty ticked off at you, Chuck. But I won't say nothing, none of my business..." Old Bud's voice was tobacco-crackled growl, and a friendly one at that. Charles stood next to the truck and gestured to where he should pull in.

The old farmer jumped it for him and while the pickup's engine ran and the battery of the Caprice charged, his half-blind eyes fell on the snapper, who was testing the pepper steak. Bud said that it was the second biggest snapping turtle he had ever seen, the biggest in the past 20 years. Charles nodded proudly in the direction of the turtle, and informed the old farmer that he dragged the beast out of the creek himself.

"Boy, you should donate that thing to science and maybe, just maybe they'll reward ya. It'd make your pops proud; he's all into the science end of things."

Charles tried the Chevy and it started up strong and he reached over to click off the high beams. Bud shook hands with him, muttered a little in German, and drove off, now that the Caprice was healthy. The Chevy ran a full 20 minutes before Charles switched it off and looked back towards the snapper. The pepper steak was gone.

\*\*\*\*\*

He waited out in the parking lot, trying to ignore the clawing sounds coming from the trunk. The locker room door rested open just across the edge of the parking lot, which was packed full of cars for the nighttime home game, the center of Smith Union activity in the fall months. Charles regarded the open door from his rear view mirror and slammed on the gas pedal before he could doubt himself anymore. His Caprice shot back in reverse, towards the entrance. The snapper had been squirming and clawing in the depths of his trunk for the last 20 minutes. Now the trunk was only feet away from the door. Charles got out of the car and walked back to unlock it. A tall figure appeared in

the door, right in front of Charles. The figure stepped out towards the car and Charles recognized his biology teacher. Briggs was drying his hands on the sides of his pants. His face also lit up in recognition, and then his eyes narrowed. The noise coming from the trunk cut them both off from speaking.

“What is *that*?”

“That’s nothing.”

Briggs took a gingerly step forward and rapped on the trunk with his knuckles. Charles did not blink; he could only watch as Briggs leaned back and sat on the edge of the trunk, fingering his mustache. The scratching became more intense and Briggs’s left eyebrow yanked up. “Sounds like nothing’s got a nice set of claws...and a beak?” Charles let a heavy sigh escape from his lips. He tried to keep his shoulders from slumping. The back end of the Chevy was rocking vigorously while a slight smile slipped out onto Briggs’s lips. Charles looked hard at the cement. “What have you got in there for me, Charles?”

“It’s a giant snapping turtle I dragged out of Miller Creek,” his voice was lost in the tones of resignation, “are you going to call the cops?”

“—Just tell me how you got it in the trunk. Please.”

“I ripped a door off an old cabin and propped it up against the car. Put about four Whoppers in the trunk. He was hungry, climbed all the way up.”

“It likes hamburgers?” Charles nodded earnestly. A roar went up from around the corner, in the bleachers.

“Yeah, I experimented. Tried fruit, Captain Crunch ...plants. Like with the scientific method you taught us in the first class.” Charles was rushing his explanation while he looked for any shadows of the spectators to come dancing across the lot. Briggs stood up from the trunk and took a step towards Charles. Charles backed away; his feet were like skittish does.

“It’s okay! Do you think we could drive out to my barn, so I can take a look?”

**O**ctober:

He was out on the mat, suited up for wrestling try-outs. If he wrestled, Dad might get off his back some. Giving his presentation on the eating habits of the alligator snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina* hadn’t been enough to shake all of the chores he had to do on the farm. Getting an A on the presentation was the bare minimum Dad expected.

*Klaus Yoder*

The chords of his head gear were pulled tight and he jogged in place with his eyes closed. In junior high (his last wrestling season), he had been a killer, a raging bruiser on the mat. The bruiser's turtle was now the property of the Smith Union Biology department. It had been part of his deal with Briggs.

Ivan Helbrich was on the right across the circle on the same mat. He glared as Charles chattered to himself and changed from jogging in place to taking frog leaps into the air. Ivan gingerly stretched the just-mended right arm behind his head as Charles opened his eyes. Ivan's glare caused his muscles to tense up and he looked away, to the sight of head coach Clemmons walking through the double doors into the wrestling gym.

"First try out for 165. Boyd versus Helbrich. Let me see who wants *it*."

They locked up in the starting position, and everything through Charles's eyes seemed to rush and blur. He felt the hate rippling right against his skin as the whistle exploded with its harsh tone. Their grappling was viscous and sloppy. Ivan dragged Charles to the ground, but Charles quickly countered. He lifted and drove Ivan down solidly into the mat, shoulder first. A loud yelp of pain sounded from Ivan and he went limp on the mat, with his left arm sprung out away from him, like a piece of Jell-o. Charles looked down on Ivan as the whistle sounded in bleating urgency.

In the trainer's room, Clemmons's hand rested on Charles's shoulder. His voice was calm. "You did what you did out there. You manhandled a varsity letter winner. That showed me something. So I'm going to use you, Boyd. The only 165 pound body I got."

## KEY TO THE SOUL





## REFLECT

Reflect-

-ing

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-s

a mirror stands

mocking

me

reflecting

cool

to touch

yet

reflection

burns

my soul

mistakes pool into

salty blue oceans

run

down

my

expressionless

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e

## THE CASE OF BEAUTY: AESTHETICS OF DISTANCE<sup>1</sup>

“She’s going to tell him that she likes the *idea* of birds, and even the *sound* of birds...”

### Opening Statement

There is something to be said for distance. And that something is not something I plan on going into here, at least not in any substantial way. Because it seems impossible to talk about what “distance” is. Is distance just an *absence*, a space between two objects, between an observer and the observed, between an artist and her subject? How can someone address distance as a “something” in its own right? Distance has no consistent properties—sometimes it is made up of hills and valleys, sometimes of oceans and air, sometimes even just a few blocks of suburbia, or the single blink of an ex-lover’s eye. Sometimes it stretches through miles, from one college campus to another, from the place where you grew up to the place you only remember to call “home” when you are returning to it. And sometimes distance cannot be counted in miles or steps at all, but only in how often or rarely you remember to look back at how things used to seem. No, I do not plan to talk about distance at all, because there is no way to talk about it. What I want to talk about is beauty, and art.

### Exhibit A: Entering Contrast

Last spring, a large storm blowing in from the west—classic “menacing” clouds the color of very deep water; and wind, almost horizontal, raking through hesitantly green branches of campus trees as if it intended to strip them and start over. In particular, one tree with pink blossoms. A burst of soft shower—silk rose-drop petals, cool like rain—in each gust. A scattering of flower bits caught in the carpet of the grass. And, in particular, a girl—out in the field as the storm approaches. This girl watches the bursts of petal showers, watches the flower bits get caught in the grass; she wants to be a part of this image of classic dark-and-light, soft-and-harsh, movement-and-stillness contrast: she stands under the tree. The petals are light, the wind is somewhat blocked, she can no longer see the pink-tree-in-dark-storm image: a part of the image, she feels (rather than an even stronger sense

of beauty): nothing.

**E**xhibit B: “The Dirt They Died As” (a student writer’s short story)

Excerpt from opening paragraph: *She’s going to tell him that she likes the idea of birds and even the sound of birds, but that she doesn’t want his cockatiels leaving their dirty feathers and newspaper shreds all over the floor. She’s going to tell him she doesn’t want any of his stiff, practical, wooden furniture in the apartment they’re getting this summer, that she doesn’t even want to share an apartment, that it’d be too cramped, and she doesn’t like the smell of the air in the city. She’s going to tell him that the other morning when he woke her up by kissing her neck, she was having a dream about struggling in a wind full of wet leaves. She’s going to tell him that being in love isn’t the same as just not fighting. She’s going to tell him it’s over.*

Excerpt from page six: *A bird slams into the window. She freezes, her body and her voice turned to stone. Its small-taloned toes scrape lightly but frantically against the glass in a feeble, half-dazed attempt to cling to something, anything that isn’t falling. Then it falls. Like a stone, and it’s gone.*

**F**irst Witness: The Writer

When asking for feedback on the first draft of Exhibit B, a friend of mine (Seth, with curly strawberry-blond hair) commented, “It makes me feel like I want to be there with her.” My immediate response was not a blushing realization that he had a crush on me (which he unfortunately did), nor was it writer-minded gratitude for an honest (if vague) reaction. Instead, I found myself with the urge to agree, “Me too! I wish I were there with her, too!” How can this response make sense if I, in fact, *was* there? If the story is, for all intents and purposes, a story about myself in a real-life situation, how is it that my initial response to the piece is one of longing to be a part of it?

**S**econd Witness: The Reader

In response to the second draft of Exhibit B, Ursinus College Creative Writing Professor, Dr. Jon Volkmer, wrote, in reference to an unfortunate incident on page six, “The poor little bird has to carry a large dramatic burden; I’m not sure it’s up to it.” Much of literary prose and poetry focus on small but important moments—why, then, do particular scenes fail to withstand this weight? How can something which is naturally distant from the reader be given the appearance of intimacy and importance without destroying the perspective needed to

perceive beauty?

**Cross-Examination**

*C* of the First Witness: *You were a witness not only to the comment of one "Seth with curly strawberry-blond hair," but also to this scene last spring of an approaching storm as described in Exhibit A? In fact, were you not the very girl who attempted to enter into that scene? Are you telling us that, once again, you have projected an experience of your own into a state of third-person perspective? Is it possible that you have a psychological predisposition towards disassociation? And if not, would you please explain to the court exactly what you expect to accomplish with this repeated action?*

I can only say, in response to all of these questions, that the act of writing remains as me as any creative actor, its vessel or I probably have less than a reader might go about creating a integrity.

What I *can* say is of creating beauty is art of distancing a capturing it at a time and space. The beauty lies not in subject from your reader, who is distant from it naturally, but in how you, as a writer, can sufficiently distance the subject from yourself—enough so that you can work with it.

Take Exhibit A for example. As separate from the scene, the girl can witness the contrasts: (a) between the ominous skydrop of storm clouds and the bright-pastel foreground of tree blossoms; (b) between the soft image of the shower of petals and the sharp, harsh sensations of the still somewhat bare tree branches; and (c) between the constant movement of the falling flowers and the gusts of wind, and the relative stillness of the tree itself and the grass beneath it. Because the girl witnesses, as a separate observer, all of these contrasts, she feels the full strength of the scene taking place. This strength is even a kind of magnetism, and she feels drawn to become a part of this scene, imagining that the sense of awe and beauty will only increase as she approaches.

*"...the act of writing remains as much a mystery to me as any creative act remains to its actor, its vessel or instrument."*

much a mystery to act remains to its instrument. And that of an understanding of how exactly you work of aesthetic

that it seems the act intuitively tied to the subject and specific point in difficulty of creating how you distance a

*Alison Shaffer*

But when she enters the scene by stepping underneath the tree, she takes on the role of creator—directly experiencing the scene/work of art, rather than merely observing it—she loses the distance that enabled her to experience the contrasts. The draw of beauty is all but lost. You might not understand exactly what I mean, though, because for us as still-distant observers the magnetism of the scene *increases* in strength because an element of the human is added—the girl now standing among the bursts of petal showers—and we relate to it.

A writer's challenge, then, is to distance himself from his experiences to the point where he can effectively craft them into an aesthetic work. Obviously, I accomplished at least a little distance in writing "The Dirt They Died As," otherwise I would not have reacted as I did to Seth's comment. The protagonist of the story had, to a certain extent, become a separate individual from myself, and her situation was one familiar but distant from my own personal experience. Writing in third person, I created a new human being, one who had lived similar moments but who was not confined to my "facts" about reality—not only did I have artistic control, but I also gained a psychological distance. I incorporated elements of scene and story-line missing from the original experience, and my short story became not a reflection of one particular night, but the epitome of an on-going state of mind during that time in my life. Again, an added distance (though only I, as the writer, could recognize it). These imposed distances had the same affect on me as they might on a reader, who is naturally distant. So for only a moment, I felt the strength of beauty, its magnetism, and forgetting myself, wanted to be part of the very scene that I had already experienced and, at the time, hadn't liked at all.

What I am doing is *not* a kind of lying to myself, *not* a distortion of facts. No, that would be perjury! It is not lying at all, but an intentional distancing that allows me to experience my life in its less glorious moments as an observer might, remaining aware of the contrasts and feeling, throughout, the pull of beauty.

**O**f the Second Witness: *You state that the "poor little bird," which appears briefly on page six of Exhibit B, may not be up to the role it must play within the story—what exactly does this mean, when something cannot bear the dramatic burden of a piece? How can you reconcile the need for intimacy with a subject (to give it importance) with the need for distance (to maintain its aesthetic integrity)? Does beauty not require, in some ways, that a small and blurry picture be*

## *The Case of Beauty: Aesthetics of Distance*

*painted of a larger-than-life subject, leaving out details which might draw the reader too far into the reality of the situation? Are distance and "small moments" then mutually exclusive in terms of art, implying that "small moments" in art cannot be beautiful?*

In suggesting that Exhibit B's bird cannot bear the weight of its dramatic role, what I mean to say is that its presence in the story approaches a that of *deus ex machina*. Often times, "small moments," as you call them, are more aesthetically integral to a work of art than are the classic larger-than-life characters and plots—by illustrating their importance and beauty in a piece, the writer encourages his reader to look for such similar "small moments" in her own life. It gives a touch of intimacy (as does the human element) to what is naturally distant to the observer. But there is an even better way—what I like to call *framing*.

My statement itself is an example of this concept, isolating the idea of the bird from the story, singling it out. The role of Exhibit B's bird is short, simple and (if done well) effective: it enters the story from out of nowhere and, having crashed into the window of the protagonist's lounge, falls back into that abyss after it completes its dramatic purpose. Already the bird is given a touch of intimacy in earning a place beyond mere backdrop, and being framed on either side by the infinite absence that is *real* distance, it is by default closer to the reader. The writer even accomplishes this intimacy without giving any real details about the bird, beyond its "small-taloned toes" and its frantic struggle. But, with this bird singled out as important, the reader is drawn into a kind of intimacy, and distance is lost. Meanwhile, its dramatic role is unexpected and thus weakened.

How do we fix this? Yet another type of framing: detail support—referring to *other* birds throughout the story, hinting at an underlying theme or metaphor among the various examples and different roles of birds in Exhibit B in general. Although each bird may, in itself, be intimately familiar to the reader, as a whole they remain distant because of their differences. The trick is to give the illusion of intimacy while keeping your distance.

Framing with distance, using both negative space (like the first example) and positive detail support (like the second), a writer can create the feel of intimacy with the contrast of distance. Better yet, the pull towards the intimate that true distance has on a reader still affects him, but in a much more subtle and roundabout way. Framing pulls a small scene or subject out from the background of general distance,

singling it out as important, while at the same time juxtaposing it with other details, subjects and scenes that, together, imply an underlying importance (even if they cannot separately bear any dramatic weight at all). This type of framing, balancing distance and intimacy, draws the reader into closer contemplation. That is why, in fact, aesthetics have come to *favor* small, detailed moments in particular over larger and more general concepts.

### Closing Statement

It was never my intention to talk about distance here. Questions like: what is distance, how do you measure it, what is its value?—these kinds of questions cannot serve our purposes in making a case for artistic beauty, because they have no clear answers. The only thing that is clear is that, when it comes to aesthetics, we must have distance. But the distance must not bore us, and it must not shrink the subject to the point where we have to squint to see it.

When it comes right down to it, what aesthetics require is a *suicidal* distance: one that does not want to exist, that pulls the reader closer, but (for fear of losing her) does not disappoint her by allowing her to draw too close. This kind of distance is central to the magnetism of beauty—it isolates, it juxtaposes, it contrasts, it encourages nearness without granting it. Rilke understood the inherent contradiction, the unrequited love of such distance when he wrote, “I want to beg you, as much as I can, to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books written in a very foreign tongue.” And what comes from experiencing the pull of beauty, the natural urge to love what is distant and unfamiliar? Are we never to draw closer, but to always remain unsatisfied? Not at all. What awaits us is a different kind of intimacy, one that comes from “living the questions,” in hopes that, as Rilke says, “Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *aesthetic distance* as: “the frame of reference that an artist creates by the use of technical devices in and around the work of art to differentiate it psychologically from reality.”

<sup>2</sup> Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Norton, M.D. Herter, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993. (Quotation from page 35).

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Omar Almallah** hails from Toms River, New Jersey. His hobbies include video editing, photography and long walks on the beach. Currently, he is available for private dances.

**Ann Antanavage**, from quaint Strausstown, PA is a closet artist and senior at Ursinus. Look for her in the dance studio, hanging with her roomies or her sweetheart, and at "authentic suburban charred meat festivals!" "Hooper Do!"

**Shane Borer** swears that the government tried to put gonorrhea in his oatmeal.

**Jen Brink** is almost prepared to venture into the Great Beyond. She will take with her a BA, 'Words to Live By' (Don't match denims-Hugs not drugs) and her Magic Monkey Eight Ball. The outlook is good.

**Bart Brooks**, contrary to popular belief, was not named after the mischievous Simpsons character. The real Bart is not colored yellow, but rather he is an aspiring author trying to convert his fantasy into reality.

**Dan Bruno** would like to disclose that not one of the eldritch and melancholy events of the past seven months has in any way been linked, even distantly or inconclusively, to him, nor to any of the ruffians, flappers or small, vaguely Shakespearean hobgoblins in his service. He is, however, involved with Escape Velocity and Pro-Theatre.

**Kate Chapman:** "DUDE!..... rock."

**Jan Cohen** grew up in Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania. She is currently majoring in English, but has no idea what she wants do with herself after college.

**Katy Diana** first visited Ursinus in the summer of 2001, it was raining. She must have had an excellent tour guide.



**Christina DiLernia** actually lives 154.24 miles from the Zwingli Parking Lot, in Mt. Airy, Maryland. She dislikes people who pronounce her state as “Merry-Land.” She has studied photography for five years.

**susannah fisher** is across the sea of loneliness, getting rather drunk on london.

**Jonathan Gagas** merely pretends to be all “pretentsy” and “artious.” He’s actually just another red-blooded, beer-guzzling, sports-watching American. Oh well.

**Kate Juliano** decided not to submit a bio blurb. Instead she’s at the Trappe with some sisters. Interestingly enough, her aunt’s skeezy neighbor wants to father Kate’s children. One day Kater-Bater will see her name in lights...outside the Roadside Café.

**Sarah Kauffman** is constantly attempting to make up for not attending culinary school with olive oil, tomatoes, honey, and dill stuck to her fingers. Sharing is my only rule and sitting cross-legged on the floor is the only option. Visit my yellow kitchen and we will cook and eat in the midst of good smells and holding hands.

**Dennis Kearney** tried to take a train to the middle of nowhere but got lost on the way.

**Crystal McCarney** grew up by the beach and lives for hot summer days in Cape May, New Jersey.

**Ashley McIntosh** is “a dandy little dreamer, a doctored misdemeanour / A didactic destiny schemer, bare with me if you would.” —Damien Rice

**Heather Morris** claims: Jackman is Life. The rest is just details.

**Sarah Napolitan** is indefinitely on vacation in the Outer Banks. She would like to get a lil’ sumthin’ straight—the quote in last semester’s *From the Belly* should have read—“I don’t see what the big deal about men penetrating us is, I mean, we basically swallow them.”

**John Ramsey** was just informed, by his sister, that an ex-girlfriend of his is getting married. (1 down, 87 to go.) Don't get him wrong; he loves the one he's with.

**Sarita Sackie** is a freshman who enjoys photography and erasing whiteboards.

**Melanie Scriptunas** loves wine. The engine in her Caddy was one of the first aluminum engine-models made in America, and after a hundred thousand miles it is suppose to blow up. It is well past that mark.

**Tara Sherbinko** is an Anthro/Soc major and a lover of fine art and fine alcohols. She currently enjoys pretending to be intelligent while dreaming of swimming in pools filled with jello.

**Alison Shaffer**... "With you I leave remembrance of miracles: they are somebody who can love and who shall be continually reborn. a human being, somebody who said to those near him, when his fingers would not hold a brush, 'tie it to my hand'..." —e. e. cummings

**Trevor Strunk** was born in New Jersey and raised in Pennsylvania. He understands the slightly depressing dichotomy between the states. His writing is understandably a little desolate.

**Klaus Yoder** hopes he can continue with the burdens of being a man-about-town while practicing the Scanner Way. Anyway, the winners of the world all get names. He wants one when he loses.

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## PATRONS

Chris Aiken	Matthew Kozusko
A. C. Allen	Joyce Lionarons
Beth Bailey	Anthony Lobo
Douglas Cameron	Annette Lucas
Paul & Lori Cramer	Rebecca Lyczak
Jeanine Czubaroff	Michelle McLennan
Kneia DaCosta	David Mill
Randy Davidson	Matthew Mizenko
Robert Dawley	Regina Oboler
Ellen Dawley	Heather O'Neill
Rick DiFeliciano	Peter Perreten
Carol Dole	Nathan Rein
Lynne Edwards	Kenneth Richardson
Del Engstrom	Lewis Riley
Rebecca Evans	Carla Rinde
George Fago	Thomas Rutledge
Gerard Fitzpatrick	Hudson Scattergood
Roger Florka	Patricia Schroeder
John French	James Sidie
Francis Fritz	Peter & Mary Small
Leilani Garcia	John Strassburger
Melissa Hardin	Trudy Strassburger
Cindy Harris	Victor Tortorelli
Rebecca Jaroff	Colette Trout
Houghton Kane	Jon Volkmer
Nzadi Keita	Ted Xaras
Margot Kelley	Philip Zwerling

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