



Spring 2004

The Lantern Vol. 71, No. 2, Spring 2004

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Recommended Citation

Richards, Jay; Wynne, Tori; Kiernan, Jonathan; Kauffman, Sarah; Napolitan, Sarah; Dawley, Nathan; Barr, Larry; Diana, Katy; Shaffer, Alison; Fisher, Susannah; Strunk, Trevor; Scriptunas, Melanie; Kearney, Dennis; Ramsey, John; Bruno, Dan; Yoder, Klaus; Schoff, Jessica; Brink, Jen; Chapman, Kate; and Turney, Haley, "The Lantern Vol. 71, No. 2, Spring 2004" (2004). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 162.

<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/162>

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THE LANTERN

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Ursinus College
Volume 71, Issue 2
Spring 2004

<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/lantern>

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Editor’s Note: First off, congratulations to the winners of our semester prizes: Christina Dilernia, Jay Richards and Melanie Scriptunas. Special thanks to the judges Joseph Catalfano and Joanne Leva for their time. Though this Lantern subscribes to the South Beach Diet—it’s shed a few pages from last semester—I feel that it packs a powerful Pilates punch! I am proud that in my last semester at Ursinus I can present a *splendid* little Lantern! A thousand thank you’s to Allison Guerin for her production expertise and ingenuity, and to Kate Chapman, susannah fisher and Raquel B. Pidal (a.k.a. my luvah luvahs) for copy editing the proofs.

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JUDGES' NOTES

Poetry Winner—"The Football Captain"

The Football Captain works on many levels to provide insight into the forbidden world of desire. Beginning with its hour glass shape on the page, this poem elicits sensuality through and through. It isn't until the last line, that we find the particular sensuality being evoked is unwelcome, unacceptable and downright repulsive to the subject.

I like how the poet not only uses senses to convey imagery, he uses them in new and interesting ways. "I hear from my lips" and how he "smells the sounds" are wonderfully peculiar. This poem is loud and strong. The language slaps with rage at awareness like water slaps the bodies of the young men. The sensuous "tight-end" is abruptly confronted and condemned leaving the reader/listener dumb silent.

—*Joanne Leva is an active member of the literary community in Montgomery County, and in the surrounding Philadelphia area, as well. In 1998, she created the Montgomery County Poet Laureate Program, which she has produced for the past six years. As an active poet herself, Joanne has been writing and performing her original poetry since 1991. She has also organized poetry readings at Headhouse Square for Earth Day, the Seven Arts Fest on South Street, the Theater of Living Arts (TLA), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Joanne performed in the Philadelphia Fringe Festival in the Fall of 1999, highlighting cuts from her CD "A Journal of True Confessions." Her poem, "The Makeover," appeared in the American Poetry Review – Philly Edition, 1999.*

JUDGES' NOTES

Prose Winner—"Just a Minute"

I wish I had the space here to write something about each of the works I was privileged to read. Each of the prose selections I was given has a distinctive voice, and there is a quality about each piece that distinguishes itself from the others and merits special recognition. I am proud of, and humbled by, the quality and originality of the student writing at my alma mater. Thank you for the honor of being asked to judge, a task that was not at all easy.

In the end, it came down to the one work I immediately wanted to read again...and again a few days later. There is one work whose attention to detail, subtle power, and inventive diction I want to savor in my head. The writer's use of imagery and alliteration elevates the prose into poetry as its eyes and ears scan the world. The story forces me to slow down and appreciate the nuances and variety of life that buzzes about me every moment in time. The work is sparse yet dense, quiet yet urgent, gentle yet grating, thus capturing the ironies of our existence. Above all, this work is meditative and reflective in a world blurred by quick images and dulled senses. In a world that encourages us to consume—a lot and fast—this piece earns the final distinction in my mind. "Just a Minute" has a great effect on me. It is simply a beautiful and thoughtful piece of writing.

—*Joseph Catalfano is a 1998 graduate of Ursinus with a major in English and minors in Creative Writing and Theatre. He currently teaches Senior English, Acting and Shakespeare at Central Bucks High School-East in Doylestown, PA, where he has directed Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and Much Ado About Nothing, Donna Kaz' Joan, and Plautus' The Twin Menaechmi. He is currently finishing his masters degree in Theatre at Villanova University by writing a full-length play, Developing in a Darkroom, scenes from which were selected to be read at the annual graduate showcase at Villanova for two years in a row. He plans to have a public reading of the finished play in June of this year at the Villanova Theatre. During the summer of 2002, he studied theatre at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he also worked on a production of Beowulf at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.*

FOOTBALL CAPTAIN

They surround
me,
stepping wet into my dreams.
My towel falls.

Sweaty bodies lather up.
Rhythmic sounds of water
beating, beating off,
glorious bodies.

Smell the sounds
of white creamy
soap dripping, down
perfect pecks, down
sensuous hips
to tight ends.

Fuck you, faggot” I
hear from my lips
as steamy comradery
consumes me and is confronted
with the horror yearning
inside my body.

I hate faggots.

JUST A MINUTE

Seven days of the week she just sits in that rocker and stares out the window. The groove in the wood molds to her buttocks, and the rungs fit snug to the curve of her spine. The bamboo shoots must have sprung up two feet since yesterday.

I wonder if she witnessed this growth, if she could distinguish the spiraling accumulation of cells towards the sky. I wonder. Did she see the hummingbird suck the last drop of sugar water from the feeder? Or the porch paint peel into perfect, quarter-sized curls? Could she observe the rotating necks of houseplants twisting to follow the face of the sun? Do our perceptions become that acute with old age, when inactive bodies root us in our rockers?

I attempt to mimic my grandmother's patience. The fruit on the tablecloth intertwines in a distinct pattern. Pomegranate, apple, date, pear, plum: all seem to be coming from the same tree. A Box Elder Beetle ascends the corner of a white napkin in the wooden holder at the center of the table. Escaping to a space on the wall above the sink, I am lost in the steady squeak, the hypnotic tock, of passing time.

One arm soars smooth like a slowing chopper blade or a yo-yo going around the world. Its string path leaves circular traces of what has been overlapped with what will be. The elapse is painfully slow, on the other hand. That one notch—that crawl from thin line to thick—is a concentrated, quivering resistance.

A line of traffic squeals to a stop on Main Street. On the other side of town, Mr. Formosa's eggplant flops and fizzes as he flips it in the pan. In our yard the evening primrose sepals start to curl. At the park a girl releases a low hanging tree branch and hangs there, hooked at the knees. A mosquito searches for something warm. Frieda Weidman from next door fumbles for her keys. The cat in her living room opens an orange eye. A collared lizard spots a sun-baked rock on the "Island in the Sky." Nimble legs flail forward over broken stone.

I watch it so intently, and yet the arm does little more than swell. Grandma's rock is steady, her eyes unblinking. I can see her in my peripheral vision. Perhaps she's beginning to go blind, and the world she watches is only in her head.

Change the song. Take a swig. Spark a cig. Check the hair. And the

makeup. Phone rings. Royal wet flesh sizzle spatter pop. Yellow primrose pinwheel pulled by sinking sun. Long split tips tickle dust. Found the hot spot. Frieda's found her keys; she's jiggling them in the lock. Paws pat the carpet. Lizard licks dry air.

The arm isn't where it was; yet I never saw it move. It casts a shadow. Grandma's hands have settled in her lap. I swear I hear her softly sigh. She could have shut her eyes in the moment that I blinked. The arm could have shifted another nanometer.

Anticipation. Exhaust exhale. Inch and brake. Inch and brake. Nudging the safe space. Compact bodies. Some sicko trying to get off. Must like guys. The soft smoke; the singeing eggplant circumference. Hang up the phone. The pursed parachute twist and swell. Feet, calves lose feeling. Stiff knees, cramped backs of thighs. Mosquito settles on temple vein. Belly baring feline. Frieda's palm plunged in fluffy fur. The rock is always warmer on the other side.

My corneas quake as tension builds in the arm, a sapling bent and strapped to the ground, ready to recoil. The rocker seems to increase its speed. The creaking is amplified. Grandma's gaze out the half open window is unyielding. I watch from the corner of my eye for any alteration of expression on her face. She is somewhere else. I alone am tortured by the eternity of a moment.

Opposing yellow light. Premature pedal pushes. A pedestrian reconsiders. Like a toe dipped in frigid pool water. Stop talking back. Stop talking back. The flesh shrinks and crackles in the pan. The primrose prongs are pried by a deeper shade of violet-blue. Blood-heavy head. Proboscis prick. Temple twinge. Ticklish teardrop. Purring, tail-flicking, eye-rolling rapture. The collared lizard, much like Frieda Weidman's hand, senses it has stayed in one place too long.

Don't look away. It's about to tick.

Green light! Prodded machinery creaks and groans, then shoots suddenly forward in a metal clash, gagging whimpering brakes. Mr. Formosa chokes on the smoke of his incinerated supper. His cordless cracks on the kitchen floor and spills its battery. Sticky dishrag. Charred fruit. Venus blinks eventide open. The primrose pops. Yellow pollen diffused in indigo air. Smack! Mosquito matter smears the temple. Legs let go. The sharp snag of claws in skin. The resistance that digs them deeper. Blood drops formulate and flow freely from Frieda's hand. The collared lizard falls flat on his venture.

Just when I can't take the squeaking any longer, it stops. A thump. I

hear only the sound of my heart.

Someone's nose bone cracks a hard, smooth steering wheel on Main Street as the smoke alarm sounds in Mr. Formosa's apartment. As he turns off the stove and pulls up his pants, I inhale the scent of fresh-burst flowers drifting through the cracked window. A neck snaps at Second Street Park. All over a mosquito—and a desire to see how long one could hang until her head would burst. Frieda curses and kicks her cat—it screams and runs behind the sofa. The Suburban tumbles over rock, unaware of the collared lizard's extinguished existence.

I flick the Box Elder Beetle from his napkin precipice. A cardinal bashes its beak against the window. Grandma stands and peers over the sill. The bird startles us both as it bounces back and flails at the glass, attacking its reflection. It fights itself unconscious. The clock is sprung and there is silence. The arm lands solid on black space. It reverberates with the clarity of a plucked harp string.

GRASS BLADES

Now what matters
Is me
And you
And grass blades
Between our toes

And orange peels
We smell fresh zest
Floating from
Summer hot dumpsters

Love smudge brand
Gentle fingerprints on each
Other

Baby oil sunbaths
Newspaper alarm clocks
Sports section, dawn-brought

And seeing those
Afternoon sun dots, blinding
Cloud castles, finding
Vacation spots

And discussing
Politics and pot smoking
And the politics of
Pot smoking
And well, you and I

Sky watching in hammocks,
Pushed swings
Participating in
Manmade madness
Womanmade wonderful

And picturing our
Rocking chairs
Those too
The creaky kind
On wooden old man
Porches with wind chimes

Tar melt asphalt sandwiches
Lightly toasted top street platters
Fresh tar aroma deep breaths

And the steering wheel burns
From this endless
Indian summer sun season
Grasping sweaty palms

So what matters
Is the glare off of shining rawness
Of this state of mind
And grass blades, freshly cut.

THE LONDON EYE



WAR OF THE WORDS

a week after he came down buzz aldrin bought a trampoline so he could be just a few inches closer to paradise he never went to family barbeques or picnics and he definitely stopped watching football he just stared at the moon and jumped on his trampoline all night about a month later he was arrested for trying to suffocate neil armstrong with saran wrap in court he claimed armstrong deserved to die because armstrong took cutsies when aldrin had specifically called no cutsies armstrong was kind of an ass like that after the verdict armstrong said he hoped aldrin got put in the cell that had the most gravity

its been kind of hard out here since i ran out of words to describe myself with i is really the only one left after the silicoids came but youre not even allowed to capitalize it the silicoids are this alien species from some computer game like master of orion or something and theyre made of rocks like that star trek episode they look like crystal formations but theyre sentient and they dont shit sand like in star trek the silica oxide which sand is normally made up of goes somewhere else maybe it gets superheated and coats their body in a layer of glass the scientists wanted to study them but the silicoids refused saying something like it was offensive to be grouped into the same category as our earth rocks they didnt talk so much as they emitted clouds of chemicals which influenced our neurochemistry so that we perceived their opinions indirectly silicoids are not something you can just study and analyze and pick apart mostly they emit clouds of chemicals at rocks searching for intelligent life the geologists have started a new religion but they refuse to give it a name they sit and stare at the silicoids and try to classify them and fail thats about it

the religion of the geologists has spread to other more interesting areas of life feminists are refusing to answer to the word woman or bitch or slut or lady or anything that defines them as not having a penis and somehow not equal to men they have begun to respond to such threats of confinement with armed violence rape doesnt happen anymore but many are dead or castrated the resistance the brave and tooviolent masculinists have claimed words for themselves particularly

policeman congressman freshman and even history feminist senators and representatives come to the floor with armed escorts by escorts i of course mean prostitutes what did you think i was saying you goddamned instrument of patriarchy and dare the others to address them the joint chiefs of staff glare at the other humans the presidents finger lingers dangerously close to the big red button that makes the nuclear bombs go fwackoom

the universities have broken out into open warfare the philosophy departments are the worst the disciples of aristotle have taken up arms against the postmodernists the preferred method of combat is symbolic derrida himself has been seen on the front lines, swinging a stop sign like a giant red axe and shouting you want to destroy i invented deconstruction ill give you context ill deconstruct you all a lutheran stakes the pope in the heart with a crucifix a feminist strangles a republican with a length of umbilical cord the nihilists are spraying everybody with homemade napalm i am writing this from the safe silence of the demilitarized zone a few miles west of philadelphia the last dmz erupted in slaughter when in the course of casual conversation someone mentioned they had been to the fringe festival and someone else said they had participated in said festival and they had seen a certain couple get married whats so fringe about that somebody asked somebody replied it was a traditional Egyptian marriage whose culmination coincided with experimental hip surgery that would finally and completely make them into one person the bride and the groom were still wearing their casts so rather than look awkward on their wedding day they wore full length body casts ritualistically cut off their right hands and reattached the hands to each others bloody stumps while they sang love villanelles to each other in sanskrit somebody got up and yelled whats so great about marriage and everyone who was denied it took up arms and somebody else yelled theres nothing egyptian about that i saw that sham and they weren't even egyptian they were just white and everyone who was from egypt and especially people who resented being called white took up arms and well i was just lucky i escaped before the airstrikes came in and the skin-dying bombs were dropped and they sent in the interior decorators backed up by special metrosexual forces to sweep clean and deslob any stragglers i fled on the back of a bald eagle and the eagle flew over a wide swath of pennsylvania in which armies of politicians were dueling in an endless sea

of mud riding their war elephants and war asses into battle i think i saw rush limbaugh let out a mighty battle cry or was it his elephant he was completely berserk just bellowing away and his blood was seething with painkillers he was just devouring everything in sight just like that patrick farley story anyhow there wasnt really much of a battle except for the crater of bodies around rush as they were mostly just yelling and sliding around in the mud they wanted to kill each other but their knives were too short and the mud too deep i took a couple of pot shots with my megaphone, shouted down some hypocrite and traitor bombs but they all had honestproof vests or something i really needed some good bunker busters but the government was hoarding all those along with the words freedom and democracy and especially security the cia was waiting for the wildfires to die down before they unleashed that legion of jackbooted thugs armed with ball gags and the lethal census takers of washington

the deaf doomsayers shout that when the census takers have counted every last american we will be nothing but numbers our souls will all become part of the great nirvana demographic and our brains will be picked for the occasional poll to determine foreign policy or the american stance on school uniforms but that was before you couldnt say american before the revolutionary thinkers realized the absolute necessity of defining sentient life-forms not by gender not by species not by coincidentally visible or audible genetic similarities and most certainly not by national citizenship the silicoids have taught us much in these precious past few months millions of us are now also hunting amidst the rocks for signs of intelligent life

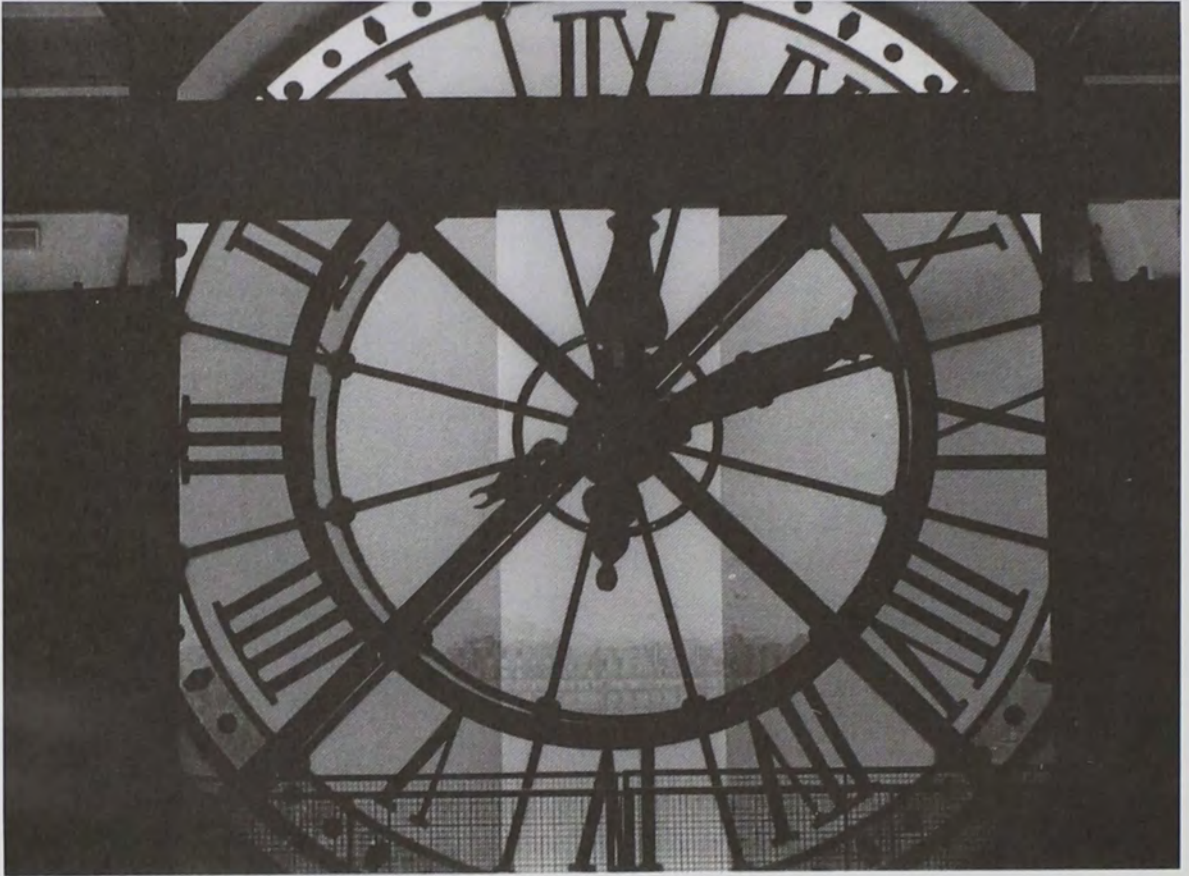
i am recording this in english the only language more difficult to read than to speak in the hopes that nobody will have the spare time to analyze its content and declare me a war criminal accordingly i do not wish to be consigned to the murky abyss of the kangaroo courts now referred to as clandestineyetfairandimpartial juries due to reprisals from australia

the cia are hunting down the geologists who started the war and publicly condemning their rockist beliefs freedom from rockism is the american way we have always known freedom from rockism and rockist oppressors who refuse to accept the ideals of freedom democracy and equality the war on geology has been just smashing thank you someday we will be free from the tyrannical classification of defenseless rocks into igneous sedimentary and metamorphic someday

we will all live together rocks and notrocks without taxonomic hairsplitting in glorious harmony and justice god bless america oops i said god i will hide in the church where the atheists will never find me we are rationing out the capital letters only geologists and other rebels use punctuation the periods for instance are needed for ammunition the quotation marks hide plastique explosives a single exclamation point can render an innocent bystander stunned and unconscious for a little under a second all place markers are being drafted to support the war effort

the silicoids distracted by atomic mortar shells brought to you by the letter h and the word fission look up into the otherwise boring night skies and find the one intelligent rock in the solar system glowing high above them they note its distance from the world as unmistakable evidence of its intelligence they agree with the assertion of a certain astronaut who believed in the power of no cutsies that the best place to be on earth is off it look up there in the sky its a bird its a plane no its buzz aldrin being taken up to the moon by beautiful renegade geologists with wings painted every color of the sunset

PARIS, D'UNE HORLOGE



SÉGUIDILLE

Under those glorious and splendid
And beautifully frenzied
Alive-with-such-youth
Buttocks of joy
Find a place for my pride.
—Verlaine

Kyle awoke, doubled-over, nursing two concerns—a dull hangover, intensified by the throbbing brightness of morning, and a satiated affliction from the night before. If one were to appraise his memory with, say, a mental projecting device, one would find a few prodigal images against the bleached screen of morning consciousness: a blonde in denim, an all too proud, covetable face, languishing in glances errant; and a third, who wore a silver cross around her neck, mocking him with her curls. If, for a few moments, one were to meditate on those bountiful revisions, one would realize that these discrete images were of a single individual. They were also the attribution of a drunken rant and a slim four hour conquest—and, though slim, she was impressive in her contours, in her compliancy. The magdalene, this innocent blonde, began the kiss. Grasping. Quenching. Soothing. Kyle shook his head, uttering a soft moan. The bed was empty despite his palsied presence. She had left. His lip quivered slightly.

Leaving the bedwrangled sheets, Kyle heard various voices melt together. He smiled. Wandering into the kitchen, tugging on the waist of his boxers, he found Megan and his roommate Henry. Bent over a manuscript, they read out loud Henry's play—*A Work in Progress*—his contribution to the summer research at U—— College. Megan studied an ethical dilemma agitating the business world: "Corporate Imagery: Woman as Advertisement and Object." No one found her topic interesting, and compared to the others it was dull. But, Kyle wondered, what new twists had found their way into Henry's play *A Work in Progress*?

Beer-breathed Kyle began: "What revels are in hand? Is there no play, to ease the anguish of a torturing hour?" Kyle clutched a cabinet knob, a novice dramatizing anguish by stressing his muscles. "What befalls

Chris today?"

Henry looked up at Kyle. "He's slapped his wife. His daughter and Aaron ran off, or not. I haven't decided. But the drink has finally got him." He continued with a wily look in his eye, "Has she got you?"

"What? The alcohol? Uh-uh."

"No silly—Dorothy." Megan giggled, revealing her stainless teeth. Her hand reached towards Henry.

Kyle glanced at her hand. Then at Henry. "Just like *you* two? What *is* that?" Kyle frowned. Dorothea showed her affection only when drunk. Kyle, perhaps, was jealous. Henry understood and shamefully bowed his head.

"What's that look for? You like her, don't—"

"My head hurts," said Kyle selfishly, quieting Megan.

Filling the silence his roommate said, "Oh, yeah. She left for lab. Woke me stumbling out of your bed and told me not to wake you. She said she'll be over after you get back from work."

"Oh." Kyle paused, reflecting. "She say anything about lunch?"

"Nope." Henry hastened to change the subject. "By the way, I decided to scrap the third scene, too violent: too Hollywood—I wanted something real, ya know? Take out the stops, go for the real thing."

Megan's hand moved back across the table. Kyle coughed. Her hand returned to her lap.

Henry stood up. "Fuck you!"

"Yeah?"

"Do you enjoy being an ass? Hey, I'm sorry Dorothy's fucking tight. But you don't have to have to take it out on us. God—stop worrying about her stupid shit and do something."

Another awkward pause, Kyle's gaze turned towards the floor. "I guess I should write too."

"Isn't that what we're here for?"

Henry's banter had forced Kyle to question why he was wasting time. Why had he spent countless hours reveling in meticulous pleasure, quaffing in Dorothy's muliebrial effusions? Often drunk, libations and effete dawn greeted the blossoming failure of his research. He had nothing beyond an initial question—"what was the relation of Joyce's aesthetic to a Thomist theory of perception?" Friends, those already deep in their respective projects tried to coax Kyle through this masochism. Others, it seemed, patronized him with beer, with wine, with nightly salutations. Thoughts as vague and intangible as the

malingering fragrance of last night's pursuit crowded his mind: what could he offer? Elegant unclothed visions distracted him from contemplation; passion thwarted any pellucid expression. Kyle returned to the room announcing, "Six pages ere the chiming of three."

Megan giggled. "What?"

Kyle was futilely contemplating the Thomist doctrine of the unity of mind and body when the phone first rang. And how futile it was! For eight hundred years, the philosophical quandary baffled Thomist scholars; for millennia academics had offered no solution. We are forms in virtue of which thing we are is the substance it is. Kyle felt as if he should have copped out. He should have proposed a creative written project in which he could infuse all his trouble visions into the foci of symbols. The phone rang again.

"Hello."

"Did I wake you?"

"No."

"You high? Another rough night?"

"No—what's up?"

"Are we meeting today? It's almost one. We meet at noon on Fridays, remember?"

"Shit. Yeah, sorry. Give me a minute, I'll be there." Barely dressed and not showered, Kyle gathered his books.

Professor Davis sat on his bench. His pencil softly marked a page. Approaching the bench, Kyle felt as if he belonged to the cast of a bad movie, a movie constructed on the tension of action. This feeling, though fleeting, reconfirmed itself. The bench was divided by shade from a nearby building. Davis waited in the shade. His smile was ominous.

"Hey."

"Yo."

"How's the writing coming along?"

"Eh," a long drawn out breath. "I haven't started. I've been working on my notes—that analysis stuff you have me doing."

"I told you to start writing on Monday, there's less than two weeks left. It is essential that you write. Write a lot, and rewrite. Have you been working on the Aquinas or the *Ulysses* passages?"

"Both. Mostly Joyce."

Davis paused, looking Kyle over. "Why are you doing this—if you won't do the work? Never mind—I don't want to hear the answer."

“I thought—”

“Stop. I don’t want to hear it. Do you have much to work with, enough to begin writing?”

Kyle mumbled something incoherent.

“Send me the notes. I want to go over them. See what you’ve been doing. Ok?”

“Sure.”

“Start writing today.”

“Ok.”

Though he agreed, he would not. Where to begin in those copious notebooks thick of incomprehension? And the need to reread thin books on aesthetic interpretation, and rigid, jaundiced books on the antiquarian theories of St. Aquinas? These complaints forgotten in consideration of tonight’s intoxication and another chance to possibly end Dorothea’s reluctance. Kyle’s attention caught a knot on the bench, which he began picking.

“So, start writing on *Ulysses*, I think you understand that a little better than the philosophy. It’ll warm you up for the harder stuff. Alright? I think the key is in Eco—the tie between Aquinas and Joyce’s religious epiphany, ah—it’s in your notes from the end of June: ‘the mechanism which permits epiphanies, where a thing becomes the living symbol of something else, and creates a continuous web of reference.’ Do you have any views on this?”

“Yeah. I know what you mean—Joyce’s use of epiphany: relate it to the intellectual grasp of Form removed from the immediacy of the senses.”

“No. I was thinking of the common sense—uniting the distinct senses together. The intellect is never removed from the senses, at least not for Aquinas and Aristotle. ‘Anything in the intellect must first come from the senses.’ But work it out for yourself. Anything else?”

“No. I think I’m good.”

“How are you and that girl? What’s her name—Dorothea?”

“Yeah. We’re good. We hung out last night.”

“I heard. *From across campus*. Turn the music down. I hope she’s not distracting you.”

“No. She helps me think.” Kyle smiled. “She’s like a muse.”

“Really? Then why haven’t you written anything?”

“Oh, I meant poetry—‘To rid herself of an ardent fury, / but failing, tenderly embraces bury...’—not philosophy. I have to find that

somewhere else.”

“I see. Am I not inspiration enough? Anyways...start writing—no more procrastination. You prima-donna artist types think the whole world revolves around you.”

Kyle laughed. So did Davis. For a moment Kyle felt forgiven.

“Then, let’s meet Sunday at three, my place, but send me a draft early enough so I can read it. And for my sake back off the girls until the paper is written. Then, you have a month to run amuck before the semester starts.”

“Yeah. I’ll start when I get back to the room.”

“Give me around fifteen pages: that should be a good start for a section.”

Kyle worked at the Gryphon so to escape the tedium of tasked thought and the entrenched battle against an understanding deficit from the past semester. He could relax and converse with the flirtatious and exaggerated beauties of the Main Line. Mingling with the international Swatties, Wildcats, girls from Haverford, and others home from their ivory league universities, Kyle believed he could expound the needed theoretical exegesis in which to solve the Joycean-Aquinian riddle of the choasmos, the microchasm of a world ordered not by a transcendent God, but one of sensation.

Maneuvering the roads towards Wayne, his mind was a gilt glitter box of passion. In streaming detail he compromised mechanical maneuvering, surging over 422, dropping down and weaving on 202, past the Barnes and Nobles on Swedesford; while contemporaneously, his mind, lost in an ever conscious propulsion, synthesized aesthetics and perceptual sensation:

perhaps it is the disposition to intellectualize infinite sensations and organize them into a finite individuated collection thereby constructing a world of imagery representing ones reality whereby the manifestation is not the whole of a world but the significant difference between sensation and perception—sensation the qualities and quantities the senses collect and perception the interpretation of those sensations into conceptual entities

He did not finish. Some asshole cut him off. Cursing the driver and jerking the wheel, Kyle sought comfort. Again he turned to the apocryphal reality of his thoughts.

O Dorothea!

She came nightly to reconcile his past, a store house of memories, to the present with her soft intangibilities. Her transubstantiating tongue; her kiss, the absolution of his sins. Her virginal tresses fell along her face like elated tears, by which he avowed the past; each morning he began anew from a night of baptismal effusion and caresses of penitence. He imagined, a new hope rising in him like an evanescent gilded column, consummating his pleasure, strengthening his desire for the thin wafer of her tongue.

It should be noted; Kyle encountered in his imagination a different reality—one removed from the tension between the dialectic persuasion of thought and passion, between the serene rigidity of argument and the regal assurance of the aesthete. His profuse vocabulary gave an air of verbosity without truth. Kyle's imagination was not a symbolic platitude, not a constructive abstraction, but a synthesis of partial epiphanies, this his interpretational gift, which by day he strove to articulate, and by night dissipated with transient caresses.

A few minutes later, he arrived, clocked in, and began to work.

The manager of the café assigned pairs to each shift, so Kyle usually worked with Sally whom he called Sal. He joked: "Please, excuse my dear aunt Sally." She did not laugh. Sal consisted of four lines—two ran from her neck tangent to the arc of her waist, and two radiating from it. When she walked, her green skirt trailed along the floor. When annoyed, she stood with a leg extended, hands on her hips, creating a right triangle with a knobby knee. A line, though imaginary, could be drawn to bisect the angle of her geometric strut. She smiled often, a comforting smile. It said, "Yes, life is good. Man was born to struggle. I accept this." Kyle knew better. He thought of her as sapphic math major from Bryn Mawr. Kyle liked that.

An elderly woman walked in. She had not reached the counter, but declared: "I want a mocha."

"Ok," responded Kyle. He performed an arrogant bounce as if coming to attention.

"Small."

"Sure." He had not moved, nor intended to.

The woman finally reached the counter. Kyle could distinctly make out

her grey roots and stained teeth. She smelt of stale smoke. "Do you have diet—skim milk? And I want it decaf."

"Sure. It may take a little longer."

A faint, perturbed smile crossed her lips.

"I have to grind the beans, we ran out five minutes ago." He turned to Sally, who was filling syrup bottles. "Chica, can you get a Tall-Decaf-Skim-Mocha?"

Sal reached for a mug.

"I want it to go, missy."

When the woman left, Sal bumped Kyle with her hip. "You're such a bastard! Can you believe that skeleton called me 'missy'? What da hell."

As she worked on the pastry case, rotating muffins, reorganizing baklava, tossing stale cookies, Kyle held his position at the register. Assuming an air of contemplation and detachment, he stared out into the café. At a nearby table a mother was telling two sweater-vested boys about her need to find a new love. She looked twenty-six and the oldest child eight. What a shame, thought Kyle. She explained there was a world of men, but few to daddy her boys. The sleigh bells over the door jangled as Sal took a couple of chairs outside—the mother glanced anxiously at the door. The older boy, apparently aggravated by his dress clothes, tugged at his striped vest, pulling both vest and dress shirt over his head. "Mummy," came his muffled voice, "I'm stunk." The younger boy laughed, his cookie falling to the floor. Kyle laughed as well. "Excuse me ma'am, ah, no shirt no service." He felt a jab in his side before Sally returned to the dishes.

"You know Sal, I've been thinking."

"That's dangerous, kid. What dy'tell you about that?"

"No. About you..."

"You can't convert me."

"No no no. Your love is ideal."

Her hands worked over dirty dishes. "I don't getcha."

"When you find love, it is ideal. Transcendent. Perfect."

She snuffled a laugh. "You're wrong—when I love, she leaves me for a law student. Or one night you find her in a bar, have a few drinks, hookup for a few months, and then in the Mall you accidentally run into her and she introduces you to her husband."

"Exactly. That's the idea."

"No, that's fucked—and stupid."

"You don't understand—"

“Go help her.” Sal nodded to the door—a customer had walked in.

“Hello. How may I help you ma’am?”

“What green tea do you suggest?” she asked, pointing at the tea placard.

“Do you prefer fruity or sweet?”

“Fruity.”

“Hmmm.” Kyle looked over his shoulder at the brewers. “The plum is good.”

“That sounds good.”

“Give me a moment or two. I’ll bring it out.”

As he filled the kettle-for-one, organized the cup and saucer, he thought about Sal. Maybe she was not lyrical, perhaps she loved beauty epically—as he did—beauty in all its forms: the rapture of sensuous hips, poignant lashes, evasive eyes, and the conquering embrace of voluptuous arms.

He brought the woman her tea.

Kyle returned to the counter. “So, are you epical, Sal?”

“Huh?” She looked up from the sandwich counter.

“When you love, you find, instantaneously, an infinite reflection of possibility among the chaos of forms.”

“Ah, sure.” She scooped mayoed tuna into an empty metal bin.

“I thought so.”

The bell jingled. “Go help that customer.”

He did. Kyle wanted to tell Sal about suffering: how epical lovers suffer, how beauty surrounds them and the lover cannot pace himself, and like an infant screwing up its eyes at an intense light, need not see that anything occurs because the light is enough. But there was another interruption and another. Eventually, Kyle forgot about beauty and began contemplating other things.

Twenty-three minutes after five a triumphal goddess entered. Kyle had never discerned her name; but, she had discretely disclosed, about a month ago, that she worked at the nearby Nokia store. A pale blue blouse, the color of a dewy morning, clung to her subtle curves; sleeveless, it was barely revealing, but pleasurable enough. Even Sal commented on it. Kyle pulled a large mechanical smile and took the Nokia girl’s order; she was here for her half hour dinner break. Too bad Dorothea demanded that they be exclusive. “Exclusive...without sex?” How could he commit to such a horrible promise? The girl walked away. Her pants, almost black barely grey, shaped her croup into a

heart. He glanced over as she sat: wisps of her dark hair fell over her face like crimson tears. Forsaken promises: without sex? On her receipt he wrote:

For the last twenty minutes I have been the aesthete of your ass—a worshipper of your pants, a zealot of nature. Forgive me.

Offering to take out the trash, he left Sally to woman the store until the girl left. Sal approached him when he returned. "Smooth move, slick!"

Kyle entertained his friendly opponents by shaking his ass to the pounding beats of the stereo. "Shake it fast, watch yerself." Henry and Megan laughed from across the impromptu beer pong table. In half giggles Megan returned: "Show me what you're working with!" Kyle's partner, Nicole, grabbed his shoulder. "Stop showing off. Sink this, or you're a bitch." Motivated by her threat and vague thoughts of submission fantasies, Kyle narrowed his eyes down unto the last cup. Behind it, Henry cupped his hand, providing a distracting target. Kyle bounced, bent his knees, arced, balked, aimed a few choice words towards the other side, took two steps back and shot.

"Henry, that's game!" Nicole gave Kyle five. It stung: though early, Kyle found himself on a silent decline into an artificial paradise.

"You ass!" Henry directed at Kyle, and then grasped the remaining cup before Megan could get at it.

"Who's next?" asked Kyle.

No one claimed the table. He figured no one heard him. "Dorothea wanna play? One on one?"

She shook her head.

"I'll give you half the cups."

"Can I use this instead of beer?" She held up a bottle of Smirnoff Ice.

"As long as you drink it."

Pouring her bitch beer into the six red cups, she looked up, eyes catching Kyle's. There was too much beer in the left corner cup; so she evened it out, pouring some into the back center and front ones.

"Is that good?" she asked.

"Yeah, sure. Let's play."

In one sweep, he sunk three of her cups. Dorothea drank. The game

continued. Kyle offered subtle remarks; some provocative, others egging her to score quickly. Eventually, one cup a piece, Dorothea's turn came up—with novice ease the ball fell clumsily into the cup. Kyle dutifully drank, went to her side and took hers in a gulp. She looked at him, her neck at a slight angle.

“Kyle. Can you be honest?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Tell me about it.”

“About what?”

“Those things in your past everyone knows about but me.”

Kyle thought about the first night she had asked, about a month before. The sky was purple; night fell around them like a fist. She sat on the grass, a faint smell emanating from her. Fireflies began to flicker on and off. She just came from a few games of volleyball. In anticipation of seeing Dorothea, Kyle made her promise to meet him before she showered. Dorothea fussed at first, braying over the phone, she needed to shower, that she would be gross. Kyle said he did not care; he mentioned that late at night, beer infused and ruddy from foreplay she had a distinctive smell—a few games of volleyball would not make a difference. Girls glisten; men sweat. She sat on the grass, her legs outstretched, her arms behind her, counting her woes to Kyle. He stared at her like a simple child. “What are you thinking about?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

He reveled in those few moments, knowing she would soon leave to shower, knowing she was staying solely because of his desire. She recounted the games. Then she told him what her friends had said. He denied quickly, knowing full well what they meant. She pressed him again. He decided not to tell her. He merely said, “It’s just rumors. I said some stupid things freshman year, and everyone blew them out of proportion.” He missed the simple nights when they talked of religion and the future. Such talk made for easy conversation. His past and his fears did not.

“Please, tell me,” she asked again.

Perhaps, a poet he was not. He could not articulate the brooding past within him. He looked Dorothea in the eye, on the verge of kissing her. A smile and one last attempt; since expression did not swell up in him, he said with a sigh of failure: “Just rumors. Just believe me.”

Dorothea returned his look with eyes glistening of disappointment.

Kyle saw this and worried.

When Henry collapsed on the makeshift table, sending empty Natty Light cans cascading to the floor, the remaining revelers considered the party beat. Yet they had witnessed a melodramatic rendition of the last scenes of his play. He pretended that a support pole was Chris's wife, and smacked it with drunken rigor. The final soliloquy, fashioned in an extemporaneous drunkenness of a to-be-or-not-to-be style, foreshadowed Chris's suicide. Henry flopped on the table ending Chris's life, and having slipped to the floor, there Henry *qua* narrator announced: "Something real, fuck." Nervous laughter escaped from a few struck by the novelty. Kyle asked if he was hurt.

"Have the room. Go. Leave me alone."

As Dorothea and Kyle clung to each other, kissing and whispering, he remembered the first night Dorothea asked about his past. Since then, he began to feel the all encompassing, ensuring euphoria of being shaped in her image. So much so, that the realization of this occurrence only increased his growing admiration and devoutness to her. Kyle believed he saw the world as she did, or as he thought she must. The curse of science macerating its influence within him: no longer did he see green leaves or that the leaves were green, but the mechanical devices of a tree's biologicality, fostering the organism with chemical nourishment through the constant bombardment of photons. The once honored maxim—"a long, prolonged derangement of the senses to achieve the unknown"—became, under a microscopic lens, "a chemical catheterization of the optical nerve, enervating a brain state." He shocked Professor Davis one day by siding with the materialists. Replying to Davis's curious questions, Kyle admitted the once perfectly conjectured and reasoned arguments of Aristotle had become confused. Problems of free-will were settled not by citing Leibniz or Luther, but solved by Dawkins' claim that genes captain our biological mechanisms—the immortal denizens of survival machines. To this even Plato would scoff.

He imagined that Dorothea began to shape herself in his image. They kissed alike; a soft cool kiss, her eyes opening to catch his, her gaze lost in his translucent, maddening blue eyes. He also assured himself that when she saw a glimpse of the poetic she became overjoyed. Before they met, her surroundings must have meant nothing to her. Before Kyle, Dorothea's life could only be symbolized by the dull mucous walls and pulsing hum of the central air in the science building. Now that all

had changed: he had become the occasion for her life being the equivalent of a cooling twilight and the vivacious impermeability of mating insects.

These two still fresh in the fervor of youth, the inspiring lassitude and immorality of adolescence, encountered each other clumsily. But Kyle more so, for he believed that together they strove towards the essential human potential: the contentment of perfect friendship—trial by trail, renewal and progression. The Aristotelian notions he devised as criteria for this ideal love-friendship were ancillary curiosities formed by his extensive study on Thomist morals, which he found satisfactorily applicable to Dorothea's virtue and innocence.

He had not confirmed with her his ideas about this philosophical pact; unaware of her intentions, her pure resoluteness, he thought that it could not be otherwise. In other words: he confined himself to an image that misrepresented her.

In bed that night, he urged subtly—without words—running his fingers over the pulp of her skin, his fingertips fondling mutable caresses. She reacted in turn, the feign warmth of a few drinks surging through her. His touch transfixed her—her innocence forgotten, impaled by her bare rising hips. His lips against her moisture reminded him of a philosophical abstraction: the becoming of being. The malleable, palpable potentiality of pure physicality becoming actual form. Kyle's fingers tickled her soft impressionable skin. Her hips begged yes, while her lips breathed no. With faint hesitation, he moved up to nibble her small almost pre-pubescent areolae, much like his own, and settling down, kissed her lips softly. Sweetly. Bemused he pulled her close, nuzzling blonde curls. He whispered something unintelligible, and slowly reclined into sleep. At last she gave a sigh and tiredly traced her fingers across his fingers, mutable caresses. During the night, Kyle awoke from a brown, restless guilty dream and began crying. Kyle, exhausted by the chimerical exertions of daily existence, had indolently found respite in an ideal reconciliation of his past and Dorothea; he pulled her closer. She felt tears and understood. Designing a clever excuse to rid herself of an intense burden, she waited for Kyle to fall asleep again and then returned to her own bed.

IDENTITY THEFT

2

His face contorted to let smoke in
“The separation is a refusal to deal in fact
As satellite observers we demand spectacular beauty”

3

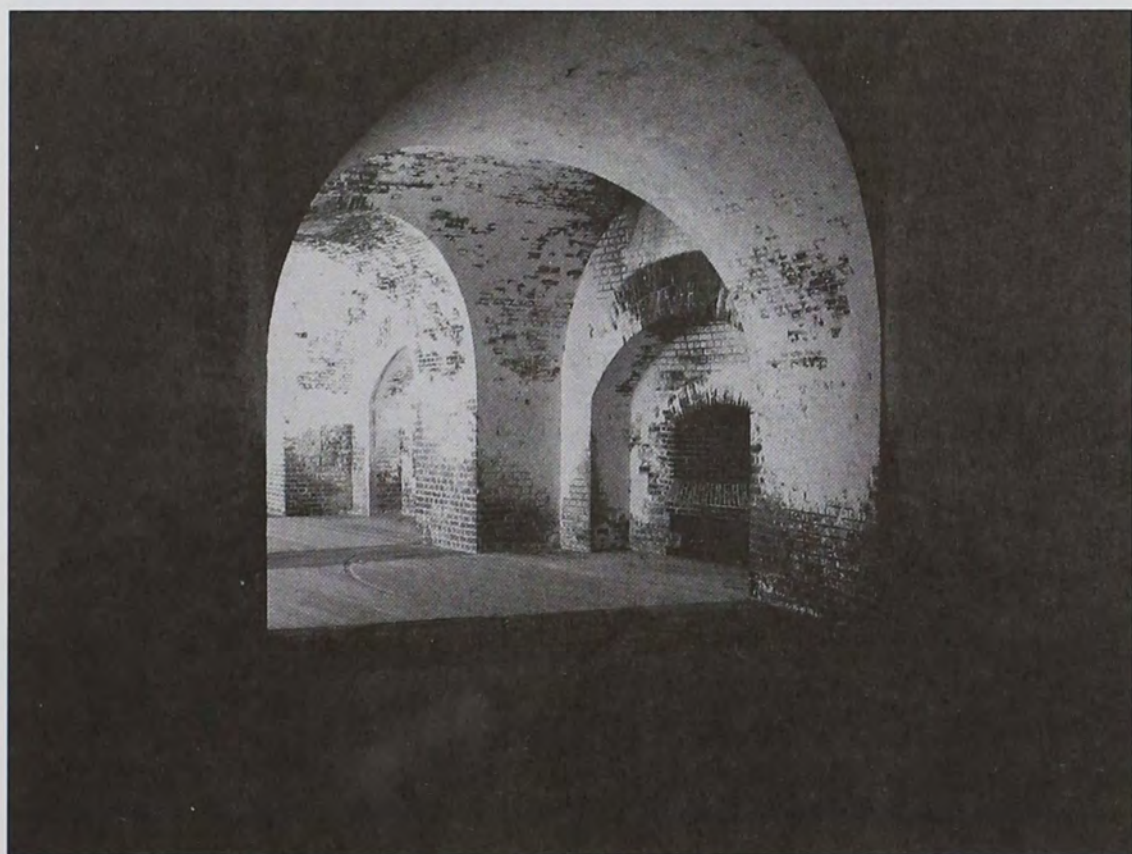
Electric fix me with an Anglophone smirk
caught in the unsportsmanlike act of apprehension
A confluence of limbs contracting in suspiration
An abrasion retiring in fits and gusts

1

Sand-chafed in the cleft of ventricles
as I stooped in adoration of a lacquer bodhisattva
Points of light mirrored lunar pupils
in the face of the indifferent monolith

PHOTO ESSAY: CHRISTMAS VACATION...OH, WHAT A TRIP

DUSK AT FORT PULASKI



FISHERMAN'S ROPE



OCEAN



HER SHOULDERS

shake head forward backward much faster that
words/word/no word
just blast off fast feat reaping riches off the floor.
hair gel slick shiny shoed-
beat lead hips/lead partner/lose partner/no partner.
in old like maple but i swear it was salty/was hot/was august
in georgia on the peaches of her blonde hair long
and blowing in peach breeze.
that summer-
a rhythm state
state the rhythm
the rhythm rain/no it ran
-correction-
it blooms out of my head cracked glass.
the stones are better the stones are better.
her butterfly yellow hot light bulb bearing fruit hot.
we fight/we flee/we slide into bed-
catch dreams quick in hand/no slipping away/no/
but on your palm/in a crease/in sweat/
in a skin crease.
even valerie didn't know/
slicked hair she's my sister girl with loose smiles.
i grew up there in the humidity and the square table/
one of the faces/ the sweaty
faces in march/in middle/in an almost novel.
here we come. come along hard now and come on out
loud now and sing likelife in smooth italian opera girl tongue/
thick in between her cheeks.
spit it out first girl/
quick sketch rough with a pollack-
hand you love/you kiss/you put it down to
this/

and grab sheela/

yes that's what you do/you
grab sheela.
fast in her arms/her talula arms.
lindsey won't mind/no.
her shoulders/her shoulders were round
and strong/her shoulders/
you remember you wanted to write about
her shoulders.

THE DEVIL'S GARDEN



I WANT SOFT CURLS

I want soft curls to fall around my supple face of clay. If only I had soft curls and they floated all around me like I was underwater every time my fingers skimmed the slick white and black of my lover... With syrupy songs pouring from my fingertips and corkscrewed chaos creating a halo, I'd feel as beautiful as the opus sailing through my ears. My silken curls...

I want to dance with my paintbrush until I've fashioned a savanna to dream in. If only I could stop crying into my pillow and let the windblown blades of grass tango the tears from my face... Dallying with the daisies while their secret whispers tickle my smile, and I'd feel like part of the art I had made. My dreamed-up haven...

I want to crawl into those pleasant, sable eyes and build myself a winter-house. If only I could make my dwelling in your warm windows with flowing, sun-kissed curtains where the sunshine and green tea are plentiful... Hop-scotch every day with the child of your past and present and I'd be surrounded by the innocence I see in you, everyday. My sweet getaway...

I want a horse that's faster than a red-light district. If only I had an escape that was quicker than my mind to doubt, coming and going faster than my regret... Taken away before it hits me and I'd be delivered from myself every time. My savior with hooves...

I want a post-script sent ahead of time so I know just what to say and do. If only I had it written out and post-marked for proof and I didn't have to trust or doubt my gut... Reassurance in tangible form and I'd never have to hunt for a catch. My helpful headlines...

I want to have a pleased, laughing face that never flees without a warning. If only I had an honest-to-God smile that stuck by me and my heart was never sold out to the reason it was grieving ... Avoiding all the intimate questions and unsightly wrinkles. My ever-smiling lying machine...

I want a friend who's more enticing than a dare. If only I had a constant source of familiar seduction... Never forgetting to take my hand before skipping away to shake things up. My not too impulsive sugar in my tea...

I want a flying machine that can never crash where I can keep all of

my dreams. If only I had a place to plant my high hopes, to know that they would never fall with my eyes and the corners of my lips... Pick myself up and catch my flight of fancy. My soul's Shangri-la...

DOING 100

Driving back from Baltimore doing 100 through 3 a.m. fog
my car is vibrating,
people are making out in the
back seat.
I light another cigarette with each straying hand I catch in the rearview
mirror I have a
very
good
navigator whose voice is so loud it resonates through my driving dreams
my vibrating, foggy madness.

Doing 100 is like riding a bike
-so natural, so perilous.
Doing 100 is like canyon jumping
-so exhilarating, so pointless.

I can hear mouths on each other I can hear the blues, I can hear each
drag of my cigarette because my ears are still ringing from the angry
music,
the pulsing music
But I am deaf and hear nothing but the voice of my own unanswered
breathing.

There are two cities and two tolls on the way to Baltimore
And Baltimore reminds me of a road trip my father and I tried to take,
it ended too quickly with pulsing police car lights
we had been pulled over-
But not tonight.

100 cigarettes
100 miles
100 is my speed through Wilmington, Philadelphia and fog
but always broken-bottle Baltimore
Where I'd taken shots of tequila in back alleyways on our senior class
trip

Sarah Napolitan

Where the band played through my ear plugs and out my sanity
Where time became late and stoplights began to look like taillights from
100 miles away.

Backseat does not know how fast we are going,
what music we are listening to
Backseat does not know that the fog is so thick I can't see lines or signs-
Backseat is not in the car but my navigator is

Speaking-

As though he knows I'm deaf.

But I can see headlights reflecting off his glasses like thoughts
And my own take me away with each straying hand
Each cigarette
Each mile.

BEHIND THE CITY



BROKEN

I walked through the doors of the funeral home clenching Jason's arm with both hands. I wondered what Matt would say if he saw us now. I let go of his arm. This house wasn't what I had expected, but then, I didn't know what to expect. I hadn't expected my sixteen year old boyfriend to drop dead from encephalitis either.

There were only two rooms that I could see. One was the "welcoming room." I understood it to be the "I-don't-want-to-be-in-the-same-room-as-the-body" room. The other was where the service was going to be. And where I'd set eyes on the first person I ever truly cared about for the last time.

I wasn't ready to go in yet. I waited in the welcoming room. I listened to the whispers coming from friends and family and picked up on the words "she...girlfriend" and "that's her." *Yeah, that's right. Take a good look. No, I'm not crying. I'm not ready to bare my soul to you people.*

I caught the eye of his sister, Heather, who then made her way over to me. She hugged me and flashed me a huge smile.

"How are you *doing*?" she asked, trying to sound concerned.

"I've been better, but how are *you* doing, Heather?" I looked her in the eye and stared as loathingly as possible. She stared back, undaunted.

"You know, it's weird not having Matt around. We started clearing his room out yesterday. There's so much shit in there! Once we get it cleaned up though, maybe you could spend the night. You can sleep in his bed."

That bitch. The tears flowed freely now, each streamed down my cheeks, one after another making kamikaze leaps and bounds. I ran to Jason who was standing talking to some other friends from school. I latched onto his arm again and buried my face into his back, sobbing. *I'm sorry, Matt. I'm so sorry.* I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned defensively to see who it was. Megan led me into the bathroom to calm me down before the service.

"What set you off like that? You were fine five minutes ago..." she handed me a tissue out of the box that was sitting on the window sill.

"His stupid fucking bitch of a sister, do you know what she said to me?" I was screaming. I didn't care who heard me or what I was disrupting. I told Megan everything.

“You know how Heather is. They never got along anyway. She’s not right, ya know. Don’t let her upset you more. You’ve got enough to deal with.”

I couldn’t understand why Megan was being so nice to me. I was the one who “stole” Matt away from her. She’d been dating him before I came along. But, I guess she did know Heather. Maybe even better than I did. I guess she understood what it was like to have to deal with her. But no one knew what it was like that day.

We left the bathroom arms linked. We walked into the service room where everyone was already seated. People weren’t crying. I thought people cried at funerals. *These people weren’t real people anyway.* We took our seats in the back of the room. I could just barely see into the casket. I saw the profile of his face. It didn’t even look like him. *Maybe this is just one of Matt’s tricks to get away from this place and these people. He’s outsmarted us all this time.*

I sat and dreamed up every possible explanation I could as to why or how that person laying cold and lifeless couldn’t be my Matt. I could hear his laugh knowing he had pulled the ultimate prank. I could see his clear blue eyes sparkling with mischief as he’d brush a stray strand of blond hair away from them. And his self-assured smirk that made me want to smack and kiss it off his face at the same time. I could still *feel* him. Before I finished my dreaming the service was over and it was time to say goodbye.

I was the last person to approach the casket. *That’s not my Matt.* They’d cut his hair. Cut—no—shaved it off. His skin wasn’t the pale pasty white I used to compare my own to. It was rosy, unnaturally rosy. *For him.* I pulled the note I had written him from my coat pocket and turned it over in my hand. I kissed in and put it in his. *So cold.*

“If you’re just about done here, we have to close the casket.”

I looked up at the funeral director. “He’s in no rush.”

That was for you, smartass. I smiled to myself. *I love you because I said so, not because you said so.* “I’m done here,” I said sitting down on the chair next to the casket.

“You have to leave the room when we close it.”

“I don’t have to do anything.”

“Fine. Have it your way.”

I wish I’d left. I wasn’t ready to see you closed up and suffocated in that ugly crate. I knew you couldn’t breathe in there and neither could I. I tried to act unaffected. I didn’t want to lose control. But every screw and bolt they used to seal your fate, to

Jen Brink

stifle you, your memory. I broke. I sobbed. I slid to the floor and drowned myself. They picked me up. Jason carried me to the car. I cried until we got to the cemetery. I watched from a distance. I imagine you did too.

WATCHING THE

as daylights fade the cracked and broken blocks
street go by the window

and the nightlights come out to play
'sat up in the middle floors
and watched the

and then the whys and the wheres walked by
nodding as they passed
people colored abstractly
in the shading of the sun and lamps
street goes by the window
alone, of course, I was
but kept company by the complimentary hotel shampoo

and the dozen towels used by god knows who or what for
an old disposable razor, and my constant toothbrush companion
television as always was boring
the usual endless streams of tripe
punctuated by a few moments of comic genius or real emotion
the rest I think is there to make it look good
so, 'stood up by the glass
to watch the
it was a city for the nightlife
as cities often are
you know how cities are
and right on cue
there stumbled, yeah, people get drunk a lot here
go to strip clubs, or hit on girls half their age
lots of people get out, get hammered and score
must get kinda boring though
street going by the window
streetlights, they're almost like an impressionist painting
along with all the carlights that go by
if you're high enough, you can see it

the set lights sit and hold the image
solid in their form
 mostly in boxes and grids, giving us the outline
 the impression, as it were
a few do stand out though
watches the
tonight, though, I can see a more interesting light
 not your typical nightlight
 and a new lowlying cloud
 moving fast, but it doesn't ever leave
it just sits there, running like a flooded stream
until it dissipates at the other end
and the light isn't like the solid others
 its almost hypnotic, like a belly dancer
 swinging itself around like a pair of hips
 but like every candle that burns brightest,
 it burned fastest
street still going by the window

A PATH



AT THE END OF ONE'S ROPE

Harold awoke at the usual time, three minutes before the first alarm, and avoided looking at his wife. The sun rose slowly and irritatingly through the dusty blinds. Harold stood and stumbled into the bath, and as he reached for the toothbrush he realized he had been holding an end of rope since he had awakened. It led out the door and curved around so he could not see the other end. The first alarm went off with a beep.

“Arry! Turn off ‘e damn buzzer!!” shrilled the second alarm from beneath the covers. Harold looked at the rope.

Harold sat down to a bowl of cereal, some fruit, and a nice glass of juice. Big McGretta had a plate each of bacon, ham, lettuce, pork, butter, paste, and salt.

“What’s wiv ‘e hand, git?” she bellowed.

“What, the rope?” Harold asked.

“Yeah, ‘e bloody rope. What’s wiv ‘e rope in yer bloody hand?”

“Don’t quite know. Seems I’ve had it since I woke up. End goes out that door in the front there. Near as I can see it goes on indefinitely down the road. Off into the sunset... rise,” he corrected himself.

“Shut up, you stupid bastard. Fetch me anuvver ‘am.”

“There is no more ham,” Harold said with a raised eyebrow.

“Ere’s a whole one in ‘e fridge.”

“What, that? That’s whole and frozen,” Harold blinked.

“At’s fine. Pass it ‘ere,” she grumbled.

“You know,” Harold said as he lugged it to the table, awkwardly, what with the rope, “it’s bad enough that you eat all this, but to eat it raw...” She kicked him in the shin, and he fell over. But she had her ham, and didn’t care.

“I know you too well, you bloody git. Muvver always said ‘Mind ‘at one. You mind him. ‘E’ll never amount.” She concluded by making a noise that sounded like a cough. “Fandak!” she weezed. Harold paid no concern to her possible coughing ailment and went about washing his few dishes, one handed, what with the rope.

“Good day, Baba Iaga. Off for work,” Harold called. It was the last day before holiday, and he didn’t want to be late.

"Grumb," said the ham.

Harold walked over to his car, and considered the rope.

"How am I to get to work..." he said, as he looked at the rope. "I need the one hand to hold this cord. How to steer..." Now, Harold's employer from the office comes by each morning for a ride. This morning he happened to spy Harold about his dilemma.

"How are you today, Harold?" He politely removed his bowler. "Oh, you look a bit puzzled. Anything I can do to lend you a hand?"

"Well, Gilliam, I seem to be holding this end of rope here, and I'm not quite sure how I'm to go about driving as long as I've got it in the way."

"Hmm... yes, I understand your trouble perfectly. By Jove, you can't even see the end of it, can you?" Gilliam gazed off down the road.

"No, I daresay you can't. Goes off there, to the south, down Kartoffeln Street by the old cinema. But I can't see it over the hill."

"Yes, that's quite a dilemma. Quite a dilemma. Well, I can imagine what I would be thinking, in your position. Tell you what: take the day off and work out this dilemma, and when you come back to the office after summer holiday be sure to explain the whole sodding thing to me," Gilliam chuckled, and his mustache flopped up and down.

"All right then. But how will you get to the office?"

"What? Oh, I'll just walk. Do me old belly some good; get me in shape for holiday, and all that. Morning, Harold." He replaced and then tipped his bowler in farewell.

"Morning, Gilliam. Thanks a million." Gilliam went on his way down to the office, and Harold, relieved of the problem of trying to drive with a cumbersome rope, returned to the house, where he was immediately berated by the beratrix.

"What are you doing 'ere? Decide 'at little rope would be too much trouble to take to 'e office and give up like a little sissy nanny?" She had begun to get ready for the day, which in her case meant erecting her hair in a fantastic citadel of the Dark Powers, plastering her face with a mighty shield of vivid paste, and suiting up in the very muumuu worn by Typhon when it set off to wipe out that upstart bastard, Jove.

"Yes, dear, that's precisely what happened," Harold said.

"I know you too well, you git. Muvver always said, 'Stay away from 'at one. You stay. Nuffing 'e'll amount to but a rope 'older. And 'ere you are! 'Olding your bloody rope like a git."

"Mother also said 'Mind the bus, you great ogre, you'll dent it in.'" Harold muttered as he walked back to the bedroom with rope in hand.

He found the room littered with ham and chewed up ponchos. He looked out the window, down the street, to the last sight of the rope over the hill.

“Dear, I think I am going to go out today after all,” he called.

“All right, you sod. Mind the rain,” the wife said as she appeared in the door.

“It isn’t raining,” Harold replied. She spit on him and laughed wildly, covering him with further flecks and gobs of spittle.

After a wash, Harold set off down Kartoffeln Street, following the rope. He stopped at the first crossing, and waited a good five minutes to cross as the road cleared of traffic. The cars drove over the rope, possibly wondering what in bloody hell they were driving over, or possibly not even noticing at all. He crossed the street when they let up, and paused at the cinema to see what was showing – there was a space opera, and a comedy of errors in which a delightfully whimsical turn of events places a dust-runner in the arms of a Duchess-in-waiting. Then he surmounted the hill.

“There it goes. Now we’ll see. Probably tied to a street vendor or such. Oh, well.” But the rope continued on down an alley, and Harold still could not see the other end. He descended the alley, and now it went far down to the south, out of eyeshot.

So off Harold set. He passed a few towns, crossed the hills, and night came. But he used the stars as his guide at night, navigating like the mariners of old. The analogy became even more apt when it came time to cross the channel. Then France posed little obstacle as the rope unwound its way down streets and alleys, to the delight of the colorful patrons of the tourism industry. Finally it rolled over the foothills of the Alps. The Mediterranean proved more of an obstacle, and Harold often couldn’t make out his coordinates. The sea has a singular dearth of distinctive geographical markings, and Harold wasn’t quite the proficient astrographer that the earlier land based legs of his rope chase had led him to believe himself.

Then the Sahara. That proved quite trialsome. Jackals can’t follow ropes, and that gave Harold some relief. Unfortunately, they can indeed follow the delicious scent of man. Thankfully they usually do not go far into the savanna, at least as far as Harold was aware. He crept past a few sleeping lionesses, and over several waking elephants, before clearing the buggy grasses and approaching the jungle. As the rope wound round trees, Harold swore he heard voices speak in unfamiliar

tongues, pitter-pats clear the passes, splashes, turns of hand, until finally the rope brought him into a makeshift village upheld by reeds. Standing at the far end of the square at the crest of a small hill, and holding the other end of the rope, was a pale man little taller than Harold's chest. He had long, knee length arms, short little legs, and no head, but large eyes took the place of his nipples, a nose that of his breastbone, and though one would have expected a mouth for a navel there was neither in the belly.

Harold stared at the man, and the man stared at Harold, with miles of rope coiled between them but each holding a similar end.

"Baak! Jihm jhim kanknthkek tournybaldjihmjhim! Nn!" keened a fat female voice from the hut behind the little man. Harold's wife rolled out the door.

"You bloody git! Took you long enough! Can't handle a little walkin'!? I know you too well. Me muvver tol' me, she tol' me, 'You watch 'at one. Just you watch. So out of shape it'll take 'im months just to walk around Surrey.' Fandakspletmisppr!" Her muumuu blew up in the wind, revealing her mighty head to be but a construction held on by sticks and strings. Eyes bulged from the ends of her two pendulous bosoms, her fat nose hung between like a third, and unlike the other villagers her cyclopean gut was mostly teeth and canoe-sized lips. She ate a nearby villager in a bite.

"Well bless my heart," Harold muttered, "So this is what they've been hiding in the bloody Congo!" The face-chested man with the other end of rope started jumping up and down, waving his arms in what appeared to Harold to be protest at the consumption of his fellow, and the wife put a stop to it by smacking down hard on the space where his head would have been.

"Is 'ere's me uvver 'usband, Fen. Say hullo to the bloody git, Fen! Say it!" Fen bowed to Harold and waved his hands ingratiatingly.

"Oh, no, pleasure's all mine," Harold said with a smile, as he returned the bow and attempted unsuccessfully to mimic the hand gestures, with his one hand going sort of the wrong way around his head and the other up and down in one half of a weighing motion. If Fen had no mouth with which to smile, his eyes did it just as well. The wife beat him on the space again, then shoved him into Harold, and they both tumbled down the hill to the square as she laughed wildly.

After lying in their heap for a moment or two, they were assisted by another villager, who scrambled over in quite a hurry. This one was

female, but entirely dissimilar to the chattering monster. Her breasts were firm and gently curved, each bearing a lovely eye of violet. The nose between them was small and pretty, and the lack of either navel or mouth in her smooth, slender belly gave her face a somehow innocent appearance. Her flanks turned bright red as Harold blushed at her, and they each averted their eyes.

“Zhambakarilly ninii gumbosh!” laughed the creature. “‘Ts’n’s Fen’s sister, Lil. Pretty one, in’t she? Stop yer gawkin’, git, yer a married man!” Harold and Fen looked at each other.

“What, ‘im? Well, ‘at’s diff’rent, in’t it?” she bellowed indignantly. There came a rustling from the bush behind the hut.

“By Jove!” exclaimed the rustle, “Looks like we’ve stumbled upon something, here! Be quick about it, then, or we’ll all be off to Yardov for the rest of holiday!” The machetes of three khaki clad men in pith helmets emerged from the shrubbery. One of the men was actually two children, the second man was a woman, and the third, the speaker, was Gilliam, Harold’s employer from down at the office, handlebar mustache and all.

“Why, Harold! Fancy running into you down here!” Gilliam chimed. “Did you ever get that rope business squared away? Did you? Good man! Then you’ll be free to return to the office right at the end of holiday!”

“Gilliam... what are you doing here?” Harold queried.

“Why, I could ask as much of you. But for my part, the wife and kids and I like to come down here to the Congo for some big game every holiday. Lets off some of the stress from wild Surrey life, doesn’t it? I say, this is the first time we’ve come upon some real wild Blemmyes!” He eyed Fen hungrily. “Get the nets and rope, kids! That’s the way!”

Gilliam and his family set about trussing up Fen. The little fellow stood in the center of them all, motionless, but his massive eyes pleaded desperately with Harold. Lil jumped up and down in frantic protest. All of a sudden a fat arm came slamming down on the pretty space that would have borne Lil’s head and neck, had she been human.

“What’s all ‘is, then?” bellowed the arm’s Brobdignag of a bearer. Lil waved her arms in response, and Gilliam’s eyes lit up like manic torches.

“I say, there’s a mighty one! This littlun’s a naught compared! Boys, toss that away. He’ll never do. We’ve caught a prime Blemmye matriarch! And a big one at that!” As the children unwound Fen, a distressed look came over their father’s face. “My word... we’ll never

get this little rope around her. She's far too vast."

"Wha's 'at?" roared the hill in question. "Who're you talkin' to, you great walrus-faced ponce!?"

"Gilliam," said Harold, timidly, "You might do it with this rope here. I'm sure it would be long enough. I'd hate to see you go back to the office without your most splendid prize." Harold held out to his employer the very rope he had followed over hills and seas to reach the village. Gilliam smiled at the offer, and straightened his pith helmet in consideration.

"Well, that's very fine of you, Harold, very fine," he said, and took the rope gratefully. "Kids, get an end around that way... Martha, pull this around here, there you go! Well, I'll be!" He stood back with his family and admired their work. The whole of the mighty thing was bound up, so that the face in the chest could neither be seen nor dissent. "That just about fits! It's just the right length, and not a yard to spare! Harold, this rope of yours has done the trick! I can't wait to talk about this one down at the office! This has been quite a successful and productive holiday!" At that, Gilliam and his family set off to deliver their mammoth prize for transportation back to Surrey. Harold sighed.

"Well, Fen, it looks like I've saved you quite a bit of trouble," he said, looking down on his face-chested companion. Fen stood still in deepest thanks, and Lil glided up behind meekly. She put her right arm around Harold's left.

"Well, I, ah..." Harold blushed again, but Lil's eyes seemed to smile in a giggle. Fen bowed to them both, and walked into the hut. Lil herself led the joyful traveler in, and they all sat down to a fine banquet in honor of Harold's ingenuity.

He was delicious.

FIFTEEN LINES FOR FIVE

She...

grins, luminous smile shatters his cemented defenses...

laughs deliciously, juicy bites from succulent apples resonate...

massages, her intense gaze softens his callused heart...

she cries, her torturous tears, thorns of his iron maiden...

melts his reason, ignites his passion into a violent, vivid nova...

performs her goddess dance, enraptures his eros...

captivates him, a prisoner locked in the shackles of his eyes...

grazes his arm, lilluputian hairs intertwine and dance...

coos in his ear, gentle timbre induces a euphoric symphony...

strokes his hair, never again to be tainted with shampoo...

beckons, he inches towards God's sublime masterpiece...

pulls him closer, pulses soar as luscious lips meet his, enveloping...

She...

awakens as pink hues of sunrise lick the purple horizon...

prays for palpable illusion to transcend the spiritual...

yearns for the vestiges of her incessant dream to become reality.

ALONE



STORIES OF A HYPOCHONDRIAC

Welcome to my medical records.

What follows is a compilation of my ailments, whether they were imagined or real, physical, mental, or emotional. You will find prose and poetry. You will find short entries and lengthy ones, written in present and past tense. You will find representations of many of my 2000 parts.

Head

I.

When it first began, it *always* began in Pre-Calculus. Mrs. Slovak's voice would suddenly become painful. She hurled each of her short sharp giggles into my left temple, eye, ear, and neck. Always the left. Fluorescent lights attacked with their rays of evil illumination, turning up their own brightness as a challenge to the sun. I'd shut my eyes while Mrs. Slovak was at the board, writing the latest pointless equation so we could copy it into our calculators for easier cheating on the weekly quiz. First I thought it was Calculus causing the pain.

At the time, I worked as a page in a library. I knew where the medical books were and I quickly looked up "headaches." After a quick stop at *Tumors*, I came across the section entitled *Migraines*. The description looked like it fit. Pain on one side of the head, sensitivity to light and sound, nausea, pain often preceded by visual flash of light. I never got the lightening-warning. But I had all the rest. Next there was a list of foods that can cause migraines. I borrowed the book and took all of the foods out of my diet. Of course, they made up the bulk of my sustenance. (What I missed most was yogurt. I was almost living on yogurt then. Breyers, fruit on the bottom. Peach was my favorite.)

A long yogurt-less, sugary-snack-less month went by. I actually had fewer headaches. I slowly brought the foods back into my long-lost eating habits, one by one. I was in search of a culprit and I was not going to be unsuccessful! I was unsuccessful. It turned out none of the foods really bothered me. As long as I didn't eat yogurt for every meal or tons of sugar I would stay more or less migraine free. This only applied to unstressful times (which didn't exist during Pre-Calc or Calc or my freshman year of college) and those times that did not coincide

becoming a “pothead.” I’m probably the only person to ever consciously decide that. But I did. So I smoked with some friends, and a few nights later I smoked again. I split a joint with Mel on the back balcony of my house. It was nice. We laughed a little and I coughed a little. I opened the door and refused eye contact with my housemate, hoping it would keep her from smelling my night’s endeavor. I traced the hallway with my shoulder while Mel used the bathroom. Once I reached my room, it wasn’t so nice. The room got crowded and thick. My heart attempted to break out of my chest with all its might. Meanwhile my chest felt like it was holding back so tight, having vowed to contain my heart “no matter what” ...

Mel, I.M. John. Tell him to come over. Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.

Mel was freaking out; she thought she was responsible for nearly killing me. John came over and held my legs because they were shaking and shaking and I couldn’t hold them still. And I was cold. I was shivering and shaking and shaking and pounding.

*What’s wrong with me, John? You’ve done a lot of drugs, what’s going on?
“I don’t know, Kate. Maybe your lungs. Mel, was there anything else in the pot?”*

For hours. Mel left. John stayed for a while, then left too. I was left alone. Alone with my heart, who no longer wished to be within my body. I fell asleep – heart still attempting escape, chest still tight, legs still shaking – fearing I would not wake up again.

Mouth

I.

I bite my lips and the inside of my cheeks when I’m nervous. Or stressed. Or bored. They bleed. Then get larger and bumpy while healing. And I accidentally bite the healing bumps.

II.

I have kissed. This has injured my lips. They are chapped and cut and bleed at the sight of new possibility. They curl into my mouth at the sight of lips they’ve met or lips they’d like to meet. They slip between my teeth at the thought of aiding in the speech of promises and commitments. Of whispers across a pillow at 3am.

Eyes

I.

I've been getting a new prescription for my glasses every two years for the last seven years. I imagine it won't stop until I'm picking up books in Braille instead of new glasses.

II.

A sheet

A thought

A denial

A Thursday

We turned the corner, saw the white sheet right away. I never thought it was him, only thought how sad it was to see a body on the way to visit my sick grandfather. My mother now says she knew it was him immediately, but kept denying it, thinking "no, we'll just go to his room, he's there." We didn't get there in time. I figured it was the last time I was going to see him, I just never thought that he would already be passed and under a sheet. Passed? On to what? Where? "Gone" would work just as well, better maybe.

At his viewing on Sunday I got mad at people for crying. Not all the people, but the ones I thought didn't really have a right to, the ones that didn't really know how amazing he was and how much they could have loved him but probably didn't. I didn't cry myself though. I looked at his face and fought it all back. "Being strong" for my mother, maybe. She wasn't crying, why should I? She cried at the funeral though. I did too. When the priest shook the incense holder over the casket while saying something catholic, my 5-year old cousin asked his mother "will that make Grandpa alive again?" I cried then. I cried again when I had a flashback of his body under the sheet in the hospital hallway while looking at the casket in front of me covered with a sheet decorated with a grey stripe and a gold cross. I cried while following the casket out of the church, standing at the car watching the pallbearers put it back into the hearse, knowing I would truly never see him again. I cried then.

I wrote those words six days after the funeral. I still see the body under the sheet sometimes. It won't leave my eye sight. Seeing the casket under the decorated drape brought it back so quickly (and when it was already still so large in my mind). My mother and I had stepped off the elevator. Turned right. A sheet. I can't even say it was a body, though I know there was one under the sheet. It was the whiteness. The cleanliness. The opaqueness. But it was deceiving. Death is not white. It

is not clean. It is not opaque. Death is stuck in my eyes and it resembles a bed.

Belly

I.

My belly is where all my emotion comes from. Which means it is tumultuous and rough. Like the sea, where my belly was borne. When I have too much of a feeling it tells me to stop. It gurgles and sputters and tries giving me back whatever food I ate that day. I have those red and white pinwheel-looking mints to fight back. The mints send a message to my belly that the emotion is necessary and to *chill*.

I used to think it was an ulcer, the nausea that never seemed to end. But there was no pain. Just a strong desire to hurl.

II.

My stomach is interesting to me. At one time I had the long sought-after “6-pack” ...in a 4-pack kind of way. Then I decided waking up at 5am to do crunches just wasn't that fun. Still, I have always had what people call a “flat” stomach. It even used to be sort of concave. That was in high school.

In high school I took the upkeep of my flat stomach to an extreme and I lapsed in caring for my body. I quit eating. I needed something to control. I lost control in attempting to gain control. The realization that I did not, *could not*, love my father (as a daughter *should*) felt out of control. The word *should* got me into trouble. I *should honor* my parents. I *should love* my father. I should eat.

I didn't find control again until someone taught me how to take it rather than waiting for it. I spoke of my “shoulds” to a friend and she was frightened. Good friends tell on you. I have since turned my belly's flatness into a small roundness that makes me feel comfortable and secure. I rub it when it hurts and I pat it when I'm pleased. It has become more than a holder of food and feelings. It has become a squashy appendage. A pleasant reminder.

III.

I have a scar. My brother took me to a tattoo parlor in Leonardo, NJ.

It was in the shopping plaza where the movie *Clerks* was filmed. My little brush with fame. I wasn't eighteen yet, but I said I was so it didn't matter. I was the first of my friends to get my belly button pierced, so I made them jealous for a little while. But it got infected, often. For reasons I cannot begin to fathom, the infections coincided with my "cycle."

I decided they pierced right through to my uterus.

Hands

I.

I do everything with my hands. I like the feel of mud, glue feathers, dirt, worms, fleece, sandpaper. All of it. My hands become my imagination while writing poems, making clothing, or attempting to paint. I used to bite my nails. I used to suck my thumb. I still have a need to be holding something as constantly as possible. When I was young I was rarely seen without my "blankie" in my hand and my thumb in my mouth. I started school and my parents did their best to help me rid the habit. They succeeded, but still my mouth feels empty, my hands feel lost.

Foot

I.

I fractured my left foot when I was four, walking around in my mother's high heels.

II.

I ran cross-country in seventh grade. Toward the middle of the year my left foot began to hurt. I ran funny. I ran slower.

I went dancing two Saturdays ago. Ash and I danced from 11pm until 2am. I wore my mother's stiletto boots.

Two Sundays ago I woke up limping. I limped for six days. I wore an Ace Bandage for three.

I'm not sure what's wrong with my foot, but I call it an "old sports injury."

Wrist

I.

I have carpal tunnel. I know it. But this guy I met, Buzzy, told me it's

probably tendonitis. His mom has carpel tunnel. He showed me a stretch to do. But I don't do it because I still think I have carpel tunnel.

Petunia

("Petunia" is taken from my childhood. As I grew up my mother said "Petunia" because it was nicer than the other names. For the same reason, I use it here.)

I.

one foot between us
your arms body legs
enveloping mine
as I envelop you

II.

I didn't bleed when I lost my virginity. It only hurt for a minute. Afterwards all I felt like I lost was some sleep.

III.

I thought I was pregnant once.

VI.

I went to the Wellness Center to get a gynecological check up. I needed more birth control pills and my invasion-free year was up. The RN walked me in to the closet-sized room, only big enough to fit "the chair" and a cabinet. She left me to remove my pants. Not even a paper gown, just a paper sheet. *I sit on the table, lay the paper-privacy over my lap. It reminds me of the dollar-store table cloths my mother used to buy because she didn't like her real ones to get ruined.* I waited for the RN to come back. She knocked first.

She came in and guided my upper body to a lying position. First she gave me a breast exam. *"Hmm there are some lumps here, but they aren't anything. Your breasts are just lumpy."* I never thought it was possible to be insulted in a doctor's office. But I guess the gynecologist would be the one to do it.

"Alright now, just relax. It will be easier if you relax your muscles." My least favorite part. All of it. Granted, they no longer use cold metal instruments. But the plastic ones are not all that pleasant either. For some reason, the thing that was supposed to hold me "open" clicked. It clicked as it got wider. And I expected a pinch, so I flinched even

though no pinch came. *Phew. Okay, it's better once it's started. I can handle this. I've done this before. Oh dear. There goes her hand. Okay, now it'll be done in just a minute.* It was something I never thought would happen. The RN was doing god-knows-what inside me. From what I could tell, her one hand was entirely submerged while her other hand poked around on top of my stomach. *"Hm... I can't find your uterus...Hab" You can't...what!?* Though she eventually did, for a brief moment, the woman could. Not. Find. My. Uterus.

V.

Sex.

IV.

Casual sex. I thought it was more than that.

Nose

I.

When I smell flowers, carnations particularly, I am reminded of funerals. No. It's more than just being reminded. Flowers smell like funerals. It is not a funeral that takes the scent of a flower, but the other way.

I have been to many funerals and many more viewings. There is a certain mixture of death, tears, awkwardness, and flowers that creates the perfume of a funeral. If the proportions are incorrect, the scent will be ruined. Too many tears and the aroma becomes pungent and has the tendency of crawling into your nostrils and remaining there for days. Not enough awkwardness and the smell is almost lost among the casual laughs and free-flowing conversations.

As my eyes have been branded with death, so has my sense of smell.

II.

Both my grandmother and my aunt (on my father's side) have had nose jobs. My mother said I lucked out and got the Hoey-nose, not the Chapman-nose. My Aunt Kathie got a nose job while she was getting surgery for something having to do with her sinuses.

My nose is always stuffy. Sometimes I wonder if I'm in need of an operation. And if, in the process, the doctor could fix the little curve that was created when I broke it.

Legs

I.

A Saturday morning, 7:32 AM: My toes are asleep. Nope it's my whole foot. I'll wiggle, it will go away. No need to get up. Ok... now my whole leg is asleep.

Same Saturday morning, 7:34 AM: Hmm. I've sufficiently wiggled and no luck. Maybe walking...

Later that Saturday morning, 7:39 AM: Walking walking walking. Kind of funny when you can't feel your foot and you're trying to walk. Kind of scary when you try to put weight on it and it flops over, but you only know that because you're looking at it.

This happened for three weekends. Saturday and Sunday mornings. To my left leg. Then it happened on a Wednesday, in the middle of the night, to my right leg. I went to Wellness. The RN told me to come back for blood work, and if that comes back with no answers I should get an MRI. MRI?? You mean to say I have a tumor or something?? What exactly in my brain would be causing my leg to fall asleep besides a tumor?

I went back for blood work and the doctor was there. He told me to sleep on something besides my futon-bed for a while. So I did. And it stopped. The RN was the same woman who couldn't find my uterus.

Mind

I.

Every time I watch the movie "Girl, Interrupted" I think I have Borderline Personality Disorder.

Body

I.

There are currently nineteen bruises on my body. I have no idea where the came from. Bad circulation? Hemophilia? I do not know. But if you look at me the wrong way, I will bruise.

Purpleish blackish blueish yellowing sometimes circular sometimes ovular sometimes blobular – I have come to expect them. I have come to *know* them. On occasion, when there are none, I miss them. A small bump against the table. A slight brush against the wall. The soap dropped on a foot. A night of one leg resting on top of the other, knees

together. All of these cause the inscriptions of Use on my body. A metal ramp, extended from the rear of a U-Haul truck, once left scar tissue. A doorknob once left a ring. A lover once left fingerprints.

My bruises are a part of me. They tell me I have done something. I have fallen, I have been poked at, I have just been. No one can take that. I have the proof. My bruises are my proof of life.

UNTITLED



PLAGUE

Rippling
into a tangle, the vines
coil in locust wind swarming
over juices. Tangerine sweet.
The sun takes a siesta
behind the insect shade –
scorches wings, quenches rain.
Numb buzzing
rattles bee's wax
in humming hives.
Soaring fierce like an ice point arrow
the sound is humid and invading,
rushing to drown green in its violent surf.

UN GIORNO AL MERCATO



ON THE OCCASION OF KISSING YOU LESS THAN I USED TO

I do not think we should worry
that we are forgetting a little about each
other's bodies. For a summer we idled
together among pillowed picnics,
watching butterflies sizzle
into twilight. You
spent autumn snatching glimpses
of my dimples and blushes
between the seductive
white bellies of textbook
pages, leaves
burning.

We imagined then what the future
would turn into. It has turned
into winter, and we are
living more than
kissing now.

But I do not think we should worry
over seasons—next summer,
when I kiss you, I will drink
the melted ice of this
winter in deep gulps.
Even now, I can taste
next autumn
smoldering,
delicious
on your lips.

WORMY CACTUS



THE RIDE AND JOE

We rode on Route 78, through a dark New Jersey. The Bronco hummed and murmured in every variety of vibration possible. The dash lights were dead and the radio was off. The music that had been playing before was a trickle of static bathed golden oldies. There wasn't much talk between Ricky and me. Hell, I could barely see him from across the car. And I was barely awake. The tall cup of Maxwell I had drunk a few hours before was wearing off. Ricky faced out his window. There were few other vehicles on the road to see, except for the occasional 18 wheeler. Ricky's eyes always traced the path of cars; he liked most anything with a motor. I knew it gave him a little thrill to be helping me out. This Bronco...*my* Bronco we rode in had "touchy" brakes and wasn't inspected. I hadn't been able to drive it for two years. I couldn't pay for college and afford the repairs and the cost of inspection.

I had been home for Thanksgiving and he called me up. The next night we met up at a party and started rehashing the normal topics. Things like...cars. Ricky had to throw his weight into my little problem. He called his Uncle Joe, who owned a repair garage in Brooklyn. I was assured after their phone conversation that Uncle Joe was eager to help.

In order to avoid being pulled over by the highway patrol, we set off at 2:30 AM. The ride started out with nostalgic bits of chatter. We had gone on car trips together before; it was the I-beam of our bond. The height of our friendship was during senior year of high school, when we spent a good deal of the fall afternoons planning clandestine parties, or splitting wood for bonfires.

By the time we were settled on 78, the talk was sputtering out. The last thing he had told me had been about Uncle Joe. How he had been some kind of a pro boxer, Olympic hopeful, something like that. It was a detail that commanded my respect. The things Ricky told me always had that kind of edge, a weight that even light conversation couldn't escape. His voice would downplay the information he gave me while his eyes locked, or darted like a gambler's. Every card this kid had in his hand was wild.

He was taking classes at the local community college. Studying this and that. Theatre, chemistry, forensics, politics...his major changed every

time I stopped to ask. He lived at home and wasn't ashamed of it. I don't fault him; I would enjoy home-style Italian cuisine every day too. And staying at home didn't mean he wasn't free. When he wasn't in school or waiting tables at the Country Inn, he drove all over the place to get his kicks. He'd call me up and tell me where he was with that silver cellular phone of his. One night it was Montreal. Then it was Boston. Next weekend, he surfed at Long Beach Island. It was all so impressive and baffling. Because I didn't see him too often these days. The kid was always some kind of a mystery, having moved to my small country town from Brooklyn in the seventh grade. He didn't talk too much until well into high school, when he was comfortable enough to give more than monosyllabic answers in class. The Industrial Arts teacher loved him; his carpentry and welding were admirable. We became friends the night of our junior prom, sitting at the far corner table in the shadows, both bitching about our drunken dates. He told me he was going to have his killed.

We stopped to get gas at a truck stop near the Bloomsbury exit. The Bronco chugged all sorts of processed fluids. Not that the human beings that rode in her were much better with our bottles of AWAKE! Cola. Ricky downed his before he even forked the dollar seventy five over to the large woman behind the cash register. I was more tentative; the stuff was too sweet and strong for more than whisky-quick sips. The lights were harsh white inside the truck stop food-mart. They made us all look uglier; sweat gleamed on Ricky's high forehead and his dark eyes seemed to sink two inches farther into his skull. I stopped and to look at my reflection in the store window. I was paler than skim milk and my skin looked too-loosely attached to my bones. Ricky stepped out of the store behind me and rushed back into the Bronco. It was cold enough out to freeze piss. On my way back to the truck, I spit some of the cola out in a long thin stream. It crackled and popped when it hit the sidewalk.

Thirty minutes later the headlights showed, with spot-light eyes, a large billboard up ahead, sprinting to us from the distance. We pulled nearer to it; alone and at the edge of the highway, all of the phantom stores and shops pushed back away from it. A giant white skull with cartoon-wild eyes was licking a blood off of its skeletal finger on the billboard painting. OH DELICIOUS DEATH Haunted Hayrides was printed at the bottom, in bloody lettering. We flew by it, and I took a third sip of the cola to wet my talking-whistle. "I'm sure they've got a lot of

business now, with Halloween being a month back.” My own comment sounded forced and hollow.

“...Yeah.”

The voice I heard was trembling. Ricky looked straight ahead out the windshield to where the head lamps lit our way.

“Gregory, my grandmother has gone missing. I didn’t feel like talking about it earlier. Uncle Joe called me late last night and told me.”

I just about turned all the way to the right in my seat. Ricky snapped at me to watch the road, and I jerked back, just barely avoiding a slide onto the shoulder. I spoke in a stammering, apologetic way as sweat slicked my palms. “She’s gone missing? For how long?”

“Like a day. Everyone in my family thinks she’s been murdered or abducted.” His voice grinded with a dull ring and his eyes never wavered in their watch of the darkness. “Fucking terrible.”

Ricky’s hands tightened harder around the crushed cola bottle; holding it at a constant, violent pressure. All of my thoughts and vocabulary had dried up. The heater was roaring between us. Outside, it started to snow. I gripped the bottle and shakily finished the last drops. Then I tossed it back over my shoulder, where it landed with the rest of the clutter. I was wide awake and hating it. Confusion worked its way around inside of me. “Why are we still doing this, then? Why am I along, not to be insensitive, but...” There was an empty space of silence. I hated my question.

“Well, Uncle Joe said he’d still do the job for you.”

The snow whipped around in the highway wind and surrounded the car, sticking to everything, and choking my vision. Ricky sighed deeply.

“Yeah, I know, it sounds nuts. But he’s stubborn, and he’d be more upset if you didn’t come up, needing his help. I know him. He’d feel like no one had any confidence in him.”

Hearing that, my hands began to shake. For the first time in hours, I saw the red gleam of tail lights up ahead, breaking through the pattern of the snow screen. The road was turning white before me. My left hand darted up from the steering wheel so I could check my watch. 4:35. My eyes roamed around, looking out the windshield, darting from flake to flake.

“Do you believe in curses, man?” The Bronco swerved a little on the slickness of the road.

“I don’t have a lot of experience with them...”

The soda bottle in Ricky’s hand was pulverized. His voice was being

choked out of him.

“I don’t know. Recently, I’ve been left wondering...I mean, my Uncle Joe, he’s had it rough. Downright shitty. Ten years ago his little daughter was raped and killed. And he lost it. Went out, found the guy, and killed him with his bare hands. Right out in the street. Guy was his neighbor. So Joe went to prison for five years, charged with manslaughter.”

My grip on the steering wheel tightened as he spoke. “Shit.” I swore to god that the fucking bottle was going to melt or explode in Ricky’s hand from the pressure.

“I talked to Uncle Joe today...of course I’m scared about my Grandmother. But Uncle Joe...I got the feeling he was going to snap, like before. He’s probably wandering around Brooklyn and Queens, looking.”

The cell phone in his pocket beeped wildly with a sick kind of glee and we both flinched sharply in our seats. Ricky dug it out and his eyes narrowed.

“They found her!”

A glint of light splintered through the windshield and my head cocked back to face the road. A car was spinning wildly out of control in front of us, spraying jets of snow up and out. We were hurdling towards it. I hit the brakes: nothing. Then I ripped the wheel left and we slid by the sedan through the solid white passing lane. My breathing was fast and heavy. Ricky whispered nonsense prayers, mixed with spurts of swearing. His cell phone was lying at his feet and he lifted it to the side of his face and spoke.

“No, no. We’re fine. Just almost got killed on the road. You really gotta fix these fucking brakes.”

The police had found her on the Coney Island board walk, sitting slumped on a bench near some popcorn stand. According to the coroner, she died of a massive heart attack. There were no marks of violence on her body. I spent the entire next day sitting on her fine upholstered sofa, watching a John Wayne marathon on cable. Ricky took the Bronco over to Uncle Joe’s auto shop. I was left alone in her house. The lights were dim and I half-dozed on the cream-colored the sofa the entire morning. Trapped in a limbo, I let my socked feet gnaw into the space between the cushions. It didn’t faze my feet that the sofa belonged to a dead woman; they were freezing. Earlier on, I called my

mom to explain where I was. She was pretty pissed at first, but I explained some things, and it calmed her. I didn't mention my near-death experience on Route 78.

Ricky came back to Queens late in the afternoon with a pan of lasagna, which we ate in the kitchen. Before, I couldn't work up the courage to take her food. There was a massive collection of spices on her counters and in the cabinets. A skinny black cat was curled up in a tight ball on top of the kitchen table. Ricky gave him some milk. There was one photo of the deceased Juliet Camari. It was hung over the table. In the picture, she had long gray hair and a small pair of glasses. Next to her was her husband, Ricky's grandfather. Their smiles were light and true. Neither of them looked particularly old. It was taken a decade before.

Starving, I cleared my plate of Rick's aunt's lasagna. I went drowsy as my stomach turned warm. Ricky ate only half of his portion. We left the table to return to the television and the black cat hurtled the table and started to pick at the leftovers. *True Grit* got muted and Ricky turned to me.

"There's going to be a viewing tomorrow. Uncle Joe's going to have your Bronco done by tonight. You can head back to town tonight, if you wish."

He was slumped in his seat, still pale. His eyes never wavered, fixed squarely on my face. "I think I'll stay around, man. If that's okay?"

"We're going to have to find you a suit to wear. I'm sure Joe's got an old one you can use. We'll go over later. You can see the job he did with those brake calipers."

"Man, I have 135 dollars...and that's it. Do you think it'll be okay?" His eyes closed, and it looked like he was doing calculations.

"Yeah. I hope so."

The auto shop was a battered concrete rectangle, pressed between others like it. We entered around the back. There was a long set of metal stairs leading up to the apartment above the shop. I looked down hard metal steps when I reached the top. I shuddered and Ricky forced his way into the apartment. Inside, there was darkness and shade except for the light from a single naked bulb. Joe sat at the other end of the living room, staring down at his boots. There was not a movement from him as we closed in. He sat deeply in his chair, wearing a greasy red tee shirt. The small television set that lay near his feet had its screen bashed in. Bits of glass lay around the chair. Ricky put his hand on Joe's

shoulder. Joe stood up and the two embraced. He was about 6'4" tall and looked about 250 pounds. Had a powerful build, a swollen fighter's nose. His eyes were dark and reflected like the bits of glass covering the floor. He sobbed and squeezed.

"My sister and her friends say it's some kind of miracle. God's mystery! How she loved Coney Island so much, she willed herself there, to die."

He broke off and his muscles strained to keep squeezing his nephew. I tried to stay off to the side. The anguish terrified me. Ricky's face hadn't emerged from Joe's gorilla chest yet. The man nodded at me, respectfully. I nodded back. Ricky's voice cracked into the stale air.

"I don't know about a miracle, Uncle Joe. But she's at peace now."

Joe frowned and wiped his tears away.

"Yeah...maybe."

Then he looked back at me with life in his face.

"Your calipers were pretty shot..."

"—Gregory."

"...yeah, Gregory. But it's all fixed now, Greg. Won't trouble you for a while, and since you're Ricky's friend, it's...how much can you give me?"

"...Does 135 work?" My voice was balanced, even strong. I waited for a glare, a sneer, his saliva to land at my feet. Joe sounded delicate, softer than the tissue he sneezed into.

"Well, I figured you were that poor, Greg. But I think it should be okay."

Ricky stepped up in front of me.

"Yeah, Uncle Joe. If there was a trading card for the Poor College Kid, his face would be the glossy picture on the front."

Joe's eyes flicked over to his grinning nephew. His broad shoulders dropped and his whole body sagged in one act of release.

"Could you cut the shit, Ricky? I'm too tired for a smart ass."

That bullet was for me. Ricky was stiffer than a mannequin, standing a foot in front of me. His hands were balled into fists; he held them back behind him. Only I could see them. It was my turn to do something, and I tried playing the careful diplomat. My smile was precise and brief. I thanked Joe in a reverent voice. I gave him all of my money. Then I thanked him again, and shook his giant paw, trying hard to make sure my dominant hand wasn't crushed. I stood close to him and explained that I was going to stay for her viewing. A sorrow-fused smile unraveled

itself from the locked flesh of his face.

"I need to borrow a suit from you sir."

"I have just the thing, Greg."

He left the room to find the spare suit. Ricky was the rock in the center of the living room. As I moved towards him, he unlocked his fingers and shook them violently. We spoke in low whispers. I told him with firm emphasis that he was my good friend. He acknowledged me with a grunt and nodded. Those last five minutes had weakened him; his uncle's reproach held neck-breaking potency. Joe reentered the room, with a gray suit folded over his arm. He thrust the suit into my face. I held it in my hands, the tips of my fingers tasting the burning grit of old polyester. Joe insisted I try it on, and lightly pushed me into his bedroom, for privacy's sake.

The room was the size of a jail cell, with a rotting mattress, a single dresser, which had a framed picture of Juliet on top. Right next to it was a large bottle of autumn-grizzled red whisky, the single vibrant detail of Joe's cell. I stripped to my boxers, and stood for a few dead seconds on the damp floor. It chilled my feet and my milk-skin sucked up hard against all the bones. The gray suit looked as big as sail in my hands. I stepped into the pants and pulled them up over my legs. The itching started, and lasted as I assembled the mourning costume, and tied my shoe laces. The jacket was double breasted, and I hadn't the skill for buttoning it. The pant legs bunched out over my sneakers. Joe's mirror captured my personal grime, my ragged hair, the body that didn't fit. The suit was pencil gray with chalk white lines paved across the fabric.

Back in the living room, Joe approved.

"Perfect."

He stood up very straight and placed his hand on my left shoulder. I also straightened up; I couldn't slouch in front of him. His lips trembled as he prepared his speech. Ricky stood off to the side, hands folded across his chest.

"My father wore that suit to church every Sunday, for twenty years. He loved it...she loved it. We picked it out for him together, for father's day. Someone should wear it to the viewing. You honor them both by doing it."

I was like a dwarf tapped inside of the suit and no one could see my thrashing. Ricky was so distant, there at his post, across the room. Something hissed like a snake all around us. Ricky caught it too, and he walked towards the kitchenette. The weight of Joe's arm held me still,

while his face followed Ricky. It was more than a weight...his grip became rigid. The exposed flesh of his arm was tense and hard. His voice sounded in a hard baritone.

“Ricky...what are you doing?”

“Joe, did you leave something on the stove?”

I was caught where I stood, staring straight into Joe’s chest. The hissing in the background grew loud, like the chatter of impatient spectators. Ricky stood in the doorway to the kitchenette, turned to face his uncle. Concern had caused his angry facial features to draw up in delicate twists. Joe pulled himself away from me, and stomped over towards Ricky. He pushed the slim kid out of his way. Ricky was sent falling back against the small electric stove. I ran to the doorway as boiling water sprayed out of a large steel pot, on its way to the floor. The pot hit with the empty voice of metallic protest.

Ricky was yelping, snatching his soaked jacket off, getting the absorbed boiling water away from his skin. An open box of spaghetti sat on the counter, the contents having never been delivered to the pot. Joe popped off successive shouts at Ricky for being in the way, for being a silly shit for brains. How the dinner was wrecked and he wouldn’t be able to feed us anything. Ricky took each word like a lash to the face. But then he snapped his head up and told Joe to shut the fuck up. His eyes were hot springs.

The baggy suit loosely swayed over my white body, blown by the force of the steam. I was looking at the large black automatic pistol that rested next to Joe’s box of spaghetti, with the handle wrapped in electric tape. Joe didn’t shout back at Ricky. He stopped the confrontation on a dime and turned straight to me. His eyes were black and glittery under the naked bulb light. The gun rested on the cutting board like a dead rat-catching snake. Ricky saw it soon enough and he slowly backed away through the puddle of hot water, towards me and the door. Joe nodded and reached over to handle the gun. He moved it back and forth in front of his face, addressing it as he spoke.

“It couldn’t have been a miracle, boys. *Someone* did *something* to her. I knew it as soon as she went missing. I’m gonna find the ones who did it. And I’m gonna kill them all.”

I stood stiff in the costume. Ricky bit his lip so hard that blood mingled with the water on the floor. No one moved. We couldn’t leave without carrying his soul and his father’s suit out with us. Joe put the gun back where it had been. He stacked the money I had given him on

the cutting board, and proceeded to boil more water. After dinner, we sat at his small dining room, smoking cigarettes. Ricky dealt out his worn deck of Bicycle cards, and Joe knocked on the table top with his knuckles.

“So...you guys want to make this interesting, and play for some green?”

Ricky nodded yes. My pockets were empty. I told them that I didn't have any more money; I had paid it all to Joe. He walked over to the cutting board and divided up my odd assortment of bills.

“I know Ricky's got money. You can have this...I'm going to win it all back anyway.”

He was right. I won one out of the eight games of Texas Hold 'Em we played, Joe won four, and Ricky won three. The whole time, I wasn't sure how hard Ricky was trying. I knew him to be the most accomplished card player I had ever met. Maybe he inherited some of that skill from Joe. It was something interesting to consider as Joe won back all of his money. Joe only lit cigarettes after a loss, and smoked them quickly. It was like self-medication. Ricky played the games with a loopy smile on his face. His dealing was unusually sloppy; he held his cards like a toddler. Joe played in earnest, absorbed with numbers and faces. My patience was like worn patches by the end of it all. Ricky and Joe could have gone on. They stopped for my sake. By the end, I was a nonentity. A smoking mannequin, displaying the suit. And they only looked to each other.

We all waited around until daylight, the three of us sitting in his living room, around the kicked in TV. Silence was something we all excelled at equally. When it was time, I drove us to her church in the steady, sturdy Bronco.

BEHOLD A LADY



DECOMPOSEY

blinding cold this morning after washed
with dizzy dream bubble soap the groggy
swirling spate departs grumbling leaving
the white porcelain page to shine clean
and empty in the slanted sun stunningly
bleached to the bones the rubbish bin
belches scraps and ruin broken tokens of
the tormented night fruitless morning.

hungover and hung up.

THE TV IS IN JAIL & MY MOM IS THE WARDEN

“Is she still asleep?” I excitedly whispered to my brothers as I walked into our living room.

We were a huddled mass around the small ten-inch black and white television in our living room. Just as we heard her door open, we became a whirlwind of reaching, grabbing and running. As soon as she stepped into the room she was suspicious, probably because my brothers and I were breathing heavily, sitting around reading very quietly. My mother always had a keen sense of what was going on around her. She looked down at the plug of the television and back at us.

“Brent, what are you reading?” She asked innocently as if she were really curious.

I had to give it to my brother; he knew exactly what he was reading and gave her a play-by-play as her eyes darted around to Mark and me. I yawned, mentioning going to my room to stretch out on my bed with my book. I could feel her eyes penetrating my skull as if to read my brain, and I scuffled out of the room just as she opened her mouth. Safe!

Imagine waking up in the morning, going to turn the television on to watch the news but the remote control won't work. You walk up to the television and punch a few buttons, but it won't respond. On further inspection you find a small, white, plastic contraption on the end of the plug. It's a lock, you discover, that needs a key to free the plug. Well, stealing the key from my mother was difficult, for she protected it with her life. Mark, my oldest brother, seven years my senior, the brain of the family produced a bypass. He would take an extension cord, cut one end off (the opposite of the plug), take two thumbtacks and pierce the television's plug with the thumbtacks, creating a closed circuit. He would then simply plug in the extension cord and *voilà!* We had access.

Of course, this was tricky business and if caught, we would have trouble sitting down the next day. My mom had no qualms with firm physical punishment, and no matter how old you were a good spanking would work like a charm. My mother's suspicion was well founded; she had already confiscated three of Mark's contraptions. “I like that you are

using your brain and problem solving, but not when it is disobeying me!" my mom would screech; "Just because I can't be in the house does not mean that you have the right to do what you want. I will always find out, and you will continue to be punished. Instead of spending your time configuring a way to get past this obstacle, why can't you simply read or go outside?"

My mother worked her full time job during the week and two part time jobs on the weekends in order to provide for us three children. She was hardly home, but maintained a strong sense of discipline. Unlike other parents who vowed that TV "would rot your brains," my mother gave no reason for her actions. She did not need to: it was simply a rule in my house. There would be no unsupervised watching of programs that might be unhealthy for our impressionable minds. We were to stimulate our minds and actively participate in our surroundings, either by reading a book or discovering nature around us. Growing up, I watched perhaps five programs at the most. The usual shows for children at the time: *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rogers*, and some *MacGyver* here and there. We would all watch a broadcast of her favorite preacher, *Dr. Stanley*. My mother is heavily religious and continues to influence us in everything she does. Something of a nightly ritual, we would all watch and take notes, and then discuss it afterwards. Finally, for some intellectual thought and fun, we would watch *Mystery!* on PBS. Solving mysteries would develop our problem-solving skills as well as kindle our imaginations. Because of the limited television allowed to me, I felt it created a void between my friends and me. Little did I know the effect that it was having on me. Looking back at my mother's actions, I now understand and appreciate her motives.

When my brothers were unable to baby-sit me, my mother would take me to the library and drop me off. She began doing this when I was very young, before I had even learned how to read. The librarians used to ask her why she would leave me there, considering I was only three years old. "I have taught her the alphabet and she *will* learn to read; her curiosity will fuel the process of learning to read," she would retort. Of course she was right, for after looking at the pictures week after week I read my first book, "Danny the Dinosaur," when I was four. Preparing her children for an intellectual life was something she had done with my brothers as well when they were my age. She did not have the chance to go to college, but was furthering our opportunities to do so. My mother would repeat the same adage; "The Lord has given our family the

richness of intelligence; who are we to waste his gifts? Let us fill our minds with goodness and more knowledge of the world around us.” As I grew older, I would beg my mother to take me to the library, and upon leaving would check out far too many books to read within the allowed time. She would pay the late fees, though, knowing that rather than being aware of which artist on MTV was at the top of the charts, a love of reading would further my development.

“What are you two doing in here?” my mother asked as she came into my room and found a girlfriend and myself playing with dolls. “The sun is shining and it’s nice and warm, there is a whole world outside! Now get your things, yes, take the dolls, and go play!” She took us by the hands and dragged us out the front door. Just as our feet touched the ground she added for good measure, “It’s for your own good!” Exercise, she always maintained, kept your body and mind healthy. You needed the fresh air, the sunshine, and the companionship with others. Without the distraction of a TV or video games, and with her constant push to be in the fresh air, I had no other alternative and quickly learned social skills and a love for nature that would help me for years to come.

My mother was far from a hypocrite when it came to reading. She read more than anyone I knew, and still does. She would frequently have a book in her hand, whether at home or at the office, waiting in line or even driving. When she wasn’t reading for herself, she would read to us. Every night she would read to us so that we might engage our imaginations even further. She would start with an article from *Reader’s Digest* or *Guideposts*, and conclude with a chapter of the Bible; she would take frequent breaks from reading to ask us questions and help us dig deeper. She continually insisted on active reading, not simply watching action taking place, but questioning, and even interacting with the words on the page.

Of course, because my brothers and I did so much reading, we soon learned what interested us the most. My oldest brother Mark found science fascinating and was soon on his route to become a scientist. Brent, five years my senior, found business and self help books appealed to him. He found inspirational books and became wise beyond his years with a political nature and became the peacekeeper in my family. As much as I appreciate my mother now, us three children would bitterly complain. Whenever a fight would break out, Brent would be the first to settle it peacefully. “He’s my little mediator,” my mother would boast to strangers. To my mother’s astonishment, I

found that I loved science fiction, and even though this didn't lead to my becoming an astronaut, I did find an incredible love for reading. I would read in class and get detention for not paying attention. I would take books everywhere. I would read in cars and get carsick; I would even read before bed and end up staying awake until dawn. So it would only make sense that I would become an English teacher and inspire children to find the passion in reading I found. Perhaps I can take a piece of my mother's influence into the classroom and plant the notion to read instead of watching television.

As I open the door to my mother's house these days I am bowled over by the sound of *Dr. Stanley*. Upon entering the house I find the TV in the living room spouting, "We all live lives of temptation, we simply must resist." I call out my mother's name, but receive no response. I turn down the volume of Dr. Stanley's sermon and I continue to hear, "We cannot resist on our own volition, we need to ask Jesus Christ to take control, for we cannot..." and I begin to look for the source of the remaining TV. As I enter my kitchen I cup my ears, for the volume on that TV was ear shattering, "...do it alone, as it is said in Proverbs 31, trust in the Lord..." Just as I turn down that television, I call out my mother's name again, still no response. As I walk up the stairs to my mother's room I hear a soft, "...with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. For he will direct thy paths." I enter my mom's room to discover her lying on her bed, her head propped up on her hands sitting six inches from the television. As I enter the room she exclaims, "Oh! Haley, you scared me! I didn't hear you come in!"

As young children, my mother watched our neighborhood deteriorate, and in order to protect us from the world she witnessed springing up around her, she refused to allow us to be shaped by television. When we all left the house and went off to college, there was no reason for the lock on the plug any longer. She found herself watching more and more television programs. Now, she has become addicted. She owns five televisions and ten VCRs. She will have every single VCR taping something; and at all times, when home, she has at least one TV on. Almost as if they were her family now that we are gone, she is quite content and looks forward to her nights and weekends.

Of course, to make a biblical reference that would make her smile; she finally could not resist the apple any longer, took a bite, and then handed it to me. Like her, I too am addicted to television. Her influence was not in vain, though. I still prefer a good book to the boob tube, and

would rather be outside frolicking in the grass with no shoes on than inside a stuffy room watching others live their lives in the public eye. For this, I am grateful for such an eccentric mother; even if she had not prepared for these effects at that time, she has had a lasting impression on my life.

LONG NECK 4



BROOMHANDLES

A thought,
(and before you even say it was a musing)
an epiphany came – tinged in
white ceiling walls, faded and discolored.
Last kiss sepia in the corners.

But what if I couldn't fall?

What if,
in fact,
I were to stand up from the bed,
Mattress firm, bed springs shot,
And walk on my own,
(To legs!)

I'd get up and out of here,
that's what this boy blue would do.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Push it back some, kid.
Broom-handle staccato
and the floor and ceiling shudder.
Like a rainstorm or a funeral procession.

I'll keep it down.

But, still,
it's worth a passing thought.
A fancy, if you will.
(Oh God, say you will.)
What I could do if.

What I could do if,
instead of having wings contrived
of flax and hardened clay,
I flew on down and nervous ether.

And if wishes were nickels,
I'd owe you a dollar,
but this is important, so listen.
I'm only going to say this once,
and the trains above my head
are so loud.
So very, very loud.

So listen closely,
and I'll speak up.
I know how your ears are these days.
I'll yell if need be.
I'll scream and yell and
tell the world that
Boy Blue had left the building.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Push it back some, kid,
push it back.

I'll keep it down, instead.

CONTRIBUTORS

Larry Barr believes in love and truth. Has to thank: Marta the editor, Brett the bouncer, Nate the drama king, Marlena the dance partner, Caitlin the Terminator, and of course, his serendipitous muse for eternity... *Seni seviyorum*.

Peter Bregman isn't old enough yet to have a "bio." Ask him for one in another twenty years.

Jen Brink leaves the Lantern community with fond memories, countless aggravations, but always a love for this super keen magazine. And with that she says, *au revior*.

Daniel Bruno is also known as Gilles Orland Branduno, a successful banker during the Revolutionary period whose swift action in response to the events of October 1st 1813 saved three mysterious girls, an omnibus full of rare texts, and the entire nation of Carravaggio from a most melancholy demise.

John Cicchetti is really dehydrated right now. He can't think of anything witty to write because he is on his way to Key West. He wants you to know that he loves Gatorade. **NIBB HIGH FOOTBALL RULES!**

Kate Chapman tells awesome bedtime stories.

Brendan Connor was born and raised in quaint Medford Lakes of South Jersey. He is a freshman who enjoys photography and writing bios for the Lantern.

Nathan Dawley isn't sure he'll vote next fall—he hates choosing between two evils. This summer he will practice his street performance routine...look for a giant sea crab waddling down Park Ave.

Katy Diana is the embodiment of ripe mangos. She enjoys the poetry of D. H. Lawrence; she thinks it's hot—not him, the poetry.

Christina Dileria loves Cocca Pebbles and Fruit Loops. She sings jingles in the shower and hums operatic arias between classes. She does a mean *La donna è mobile*.

susannah fisher's two best friends are fuzzy, cuddly animals who both just so happen to be bipolar.

Megan Hershey is a wannabe historian and political scientist. She spends her days dancing in the kitchen, missing England and loving her monkey.

Sarah Kauffman identifies her alter ego as Zoe, the three year old orange monster on Sesame Street... found a blue stick in Hunsberger Woods and kept it...made a vulva puppet. It has a really big clitoris...likes to say "yay" and "wahoo" just for the hell of it.

Dennis Kearney is the ruler of the Nomadic Peoples of Arithia, a small, devout nation of 7 million people.

Jonathan Kiernan asks for your patience and understanding as he undergoes a series of surgeries to incrementally bifurcate his penis into twin chondrichthyan claspers. He was born and lives on the north shore of Massachusetts. In his spare time he plays drum set and drinks Rice Dream™.

Sarah Napolitan will grow up to be a female Johnny Appleseed if she has her way. She would like to thank George W. for not canceling or cutting funding for the Lantern- thanks babe! Gargantuan cosmic kisses to her vulva sisters and all the mother-wives of this world... you know who you are.

John Ramsey will finally leave Collegeville. Among other things he will miss the benches, late night runs to WaWa and daytime confessionals with his favorite admissions counselor. He will keep in touch.

Jay Richards says, “leave me alone crazy one.”

Whitney Roper eagerly awaits Wallace Stevens to come back to life & write a line or two about the joys of Montefalco rosso and tiramisù.

Sarita Sackie would like to thank everyone who puts up with her.

Jess Schoff wants to be an aviator in Strawberry land “where things are going better all the time.”

Melanie Scriptunas often experiences melancholy moments. She has a profound fear of clowns.

Alison Shaffer dreamt about doorways last night.

Trevor Strunk is a man who's late with most things, but anticipated in all things.

Haley Adelle Ascherin Turney is very proud of her name, and her life. She just hopes it starts soon.

Tori Wynne likes fine Italian men and portly wine.

Klaus Yoder is currently working with Brian Eno and Lee Perry to remix the score of Paint Your Wagon.

PATRONS

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

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