



Spring 2005

The Lantern Vol. 72, No. 2, Spring 2005

Patrick Roesle
Ursinus College

Julie Gentile
Ursinus College

Joshua Solomon
Ursinus College

Ashley Higgins
Ursinus College

Megan Bossler
Ursinus College

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Roesle, Patrick; Gentile, Julie; Solomon, Joshua; Higgins, Ashley; Bossler, Megan; Daniel, Rachel; Richter, Thomas; Wynne, Victoria; Fisher, Susannah; Mingolello, Jennifer; Kauffman, Sarah; Strunk, Trevor; Schoff, Jessica; Munro, Abi; Yoder, Klaus; Neil, Sean; Shaffer, Alison; Borer, Shane; Roper, Whitney; Bruno, Daniel; Curley, Chris; and Burke, Shannon, "The Lantern Vol. 72, No. 2, Spring 2005" (2005). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 164.
<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/164>

Authors

Patrick Roesle, Julie Gentile, Joshua Solomon, Ashley Higgins, Megan Bossler, Rachel Daniel, Thomas Richter, Victoria Wynne, Susannah Fisher, Jennifer Mingolello, Sarah Kauffman, Trevor Strunk, Jessica Schoff, Abi Munro, Klaus Yoder, Sean Neil, Alison Shaffer, Shane Borer, Whitney Roper, Daniel Bruno, Chris Curley, and Shannon Burke

THE LANTERN





THE LANTERN

Ursinus College
Volume 72, Issue II
Spring 2005

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

STAFF

Editor: Katy Diana

Assistant Editor: Alison Shaffer

Poetry Editor: Sarah Kauffman

Fiction Editor: Daniel Bruno

Nonfiction Editor: Whitney Roper

Visual Arts Editor: Shane Borer

Production Editor: Allison Guerin

Webpage Editor: Brandon Brown

Patron Drive Coordinator: Trevor Strunk

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jon Volkmer

Judges: Stephen Cramer & Corey Taylor

Executive Board: Katy Diana, Alison Shaffer, Daniel Bruno, Sarah Kauffman, Whitney Roper, Susannah Fisher, Ashley Higgins, Victoria Wynne, Trevor Strunk, Natalie Rokaski

Staff: Eric Relvas, Aileen Dalton, Kathryn Semmens, Megan Bossler, Michael Martynenko, Elsa Budzowski, Georgia Julius, Allison Guerin, Pat Roesle, Julie Gentile, Jonathan Gagas, Bartholomew Brooks, Timothy Smith, Christina Rosci, Eden Swick, David Chamberlain, Jon Coller

Cover Art: “Entrance to the Strahov Monastic Order” by Judson Kane

Editor’s Note:

Congratulations to Abi Munro and Pat Roesle for their award-winning work! I’d like to thank our wonderful staff for their hard work during midterms and the exec board for our relatively painless meeting this year. Special thanks to Joanne Leva for performing her percussive poem “The Dream Series” for the Ursinus Community, Stephen Cramer for his poetry judging and campus appearance, and to Corey Taylor for judging our prose! As always, thanks to Dr. Volkmer for his advising and to Dr. Keita for stepping in next semester. This Lantern has a great mixture of works and authors. Enjoy!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Poetry

Transmigration	<i>Patrick Roesle</i>	7
Faces of the Moon	<i>Julie Gentile</i>	19
Euphony of the Euphonium	<i>Joshua Solomon</i>	20
He Met Me In The Arcs & Ebbs of Frailty	<i>Ashley Higgins</i>	33
An Adoration of Ordination	<i>Megan Bossler</i>	34
Ebony: The Essence Thereof	<i>Rachel Daniel</i>	46
Curbside Statue Has No Legs Left	<i>Thomas Richter</i>	49
Triggerfinger Romance	<i>Victoria Wynne</i>	60
Lost	<i>Susannah Fisher</i>	67
Running Through Connecticut	<i>Jennifer Mingoello</i>	69
Eve	<i>Sarah Kauffman</i>	77
The Day Lates and the Dollar Shorts	<i>Trevor Strunk</i>	88
Somnambulist	<i>Jessica Schoff</i>	94

Creative Non-Fiction

That's That	<i>Abi Munro</i>	9
The Glenn Machine	<i>Klaus Yoder</i>	51
Evenfall in Bad Homburg	<i>Sean Neil</i>	64
Absence of Field	<i>Alison Shaffer</i>	70

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Dating Myself	<i>Shane Borer</i>	91
Traveling Without A Map	<i>Whitney Roper</i>	96

Fiction

The Non-Euclidean Way To Get Some Bagels	<i>Daniel Bruno</i>	21
La Belle Époque	<i>Chris Curley</i>	36
Satin Boxes	<i>Shannon Burke</i>	79

Visual Arts

Gemini	<i>Anna Radaszewski</i>	18
Cinematographic Romance	<i>Heather Morris</i>	32
Dispersion	<i>Jullien Searfross</i>	35
Chair	<i>Ashley Higgins</i>	50
Still Learning	<i>John Bera</i>	59
Photo Essay: Hampstead Cemetery	<i>Susannah Fisher</i>	61
Patriotism	<i>Sarah Biondi</i>	68
legs	<i>Greg Diamond</i>	78
Nothing Is Served	<i>John Bera</i>	90
My World Is A Bubble	<i>Ryan Lenhart</i>	93
Leaf Shine	<i>Katy Diana</i>	95

JUDGES' NOTES

Poetry Winner—Transmigration by Patrick Roesle

What first drew me to “Transmigration,” by Patrick Roesle, was its attention to detail. The poem’s protagonist “knows the places where the fence’s links/ Are loose,” and “where the weeds/ Push through the cracks and how to follow suit.” It’s such quiet but poignant description that makes the scene real, makes it come alive for the reader. But description aside, I’ve always believed that one of the greatest gifts of art is that it lets us extend beyond our own boundaries, lets us step, however briefly, into someone else’s skin. So what draws me *most* to the poem is its compassionate vision, how it participates so fully in the life of another: the man portrayed is not just a cardboard cut out, but an investigated soul. A modern day Achilles, he’s mythically strong but not without his weaknesses. Partly immortal, heartbreakingly human.

Stephen Cramer's first book of poetry, Shiva's Drum, was selected for the National Poetry Series by Grace Schulman and published by University of Illinois Press in 2004. His work has appeared in journals such as Atlanta Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Quarterly West and Southwest Review. He works at the Museum of Modern Art and lives with his wife, Joanna, in New York City.

JUDGES' NOTES

Prose Winner—That's That by Abi Munro

This semester's prose contributions feature rich description, sensitivity to language, and diverse narrative situations—all of which made the winner difficult to select. What I was most struck by, though, was the quality of the winning piece's *story*. "That's That" tells its story in a manner that achieves the maximum effect on a reader. The narrator's—and the author's—voices are clear and genuine, relating experiences with her grandmother and the events in her own life with candor and emotional weight. Sights, smells, and memories, from the obvious to the minute, help to create an engaging and powerful story. I congratulate the author of "That's That," and everyone published in this issue of *The Lantern*.

Corey Taylor graduated from Ursinus in 2001 with Distinguished Honors in English, for a project on Catholicism in James Joyce's Ulysses. He won the prose award for the Spring / Summer 2000 issue. Corey received his M.A. in English from the University of Delaware in 2003, and is still there, working on his doctoral dissertation on music in modernist American literature.

TRANSMIGRATION

You'll find him standing, leaning back against
Graffiti-stained and cracking walls beneath
The highway overpasses, glancing towards
The neon sky, left hand at rest upon
The switchblade held within his pocket. Smoke
From cigarettes he rolled himself escapes
His lungs in nebular twists. Observing the cars
That pass above, he whispers to himself
And turning, skulks alone along the tracks.
His angled aspect seems to have been shaped
By ruler and razor; not chiseled in marble. Thin,
But hardly frail. There's much he hides; his bangs
Obscure the hazel eyes whose gleam betrays
The arrogance and apathy of youth;
He keeps the scars across his sinewy limbs
Beneath his denim jacket's ragged sleeves.
He knows the places where the fences' links
Are loose, but still prefers to get a start
And, vaulting over, leap them. One could say
He has a kind of savage grace; although
His stride is slouched, his head is always high.
His gaze will never leave the eyes of those
Addressing him, no matter who they are.
These streets have cradled him for fourteen years --
He'd rather walk them by himself at night
Than face his father's drunken fist. Despite
The arduous efforts on his part, he can't
Recall his mother's face, but likes to think
She looked just like the maiden statue in
The square (whose beauty peaks on winter nights
When freezing rainfall turns the world to glass).
The shadows and the backroads taught him all
He needs to know -- like how to pick the locks
On gates that can't be climbed; and where the weeds
Push through the cracks and how to follow suit.

He knows how bleeding can be stopped for wounds
By knives and worse; and how to take what's meant
For him, and how and who to fight and when.
A noise behind gives him a start -- he draws
The knife reflexively. A spotted stray
With mismatched eyes approaches meekly from
Behind. He calls its name and sheathes his blade,
And lets it wrap itself around his leg.
Now pushing through the crowded station, he
Elicits glares and whispers of disdain
From condescending, hurried strangers who
Will never know his name. "Pathetic." "Punk."
And "worthless, filthy thug," they mutter as
They pass. It's far beyond these meager men
That among them walks Achilles, born again.

THAT'S THAT

You fear when someone dies you'll lose them. That all they'll leave are browning photographs in shoeboxes, and clutters of trinkets in closets. The caresses of hands, the flickers of the eyes fade, leaving only the shape of the head. The voices soften, and then finally mute, and they disappear.

I lost her before she died. I discovered her after, in the air, in my writing. She surfaces every time I purse my lips, as I'm driving or watching TV. Drinking ginger ale out of paper cups. Crossing my ankles, and when I feel alone. She infects me.

Snaking through the thin corridors, I slip over the tiles and hardwood and carpet, past the dinner trays and the white board...Nearing the immense doorway, and pausing next to the main desk, I see her. She sits in a pool of light, backlit, an angel paused. One foot rests dead on the ankle of the other, her left hand posed in her lap, a claw shaped lump. Her skin dull but soft, like the thinnest rendered leather, draped off her bones. Her glasses shield her eyes, their watery blue irises rimmed in red. The light pushes its way through her wispy thin hair, making the white curls invisible. She sees me, and her wheelchair rolls slightly, but she doesn't move. She looks beyond me, further into the shadows outside her room. She is looking for confirmation—to be sure I am not just a familiar looking stranger, or a grinning vision.

“Did we get invited to...ah....what was the name of that place again?” I asked, waving my hands wildly to jolt my memory. Mom looked at me quizzically from the doorway of my room. “The Christmas party. With the meatballs.”

“Kirkwood?”

“That's it!”

A flash of sadness heated her face before shaking her head. “No, they didn't invite us this year.”

“Damn, no meatballs?”

“No. You probably won't be here for it anyway.”

“Yeah, I guess,” I shrugged. She left, leaving the door open. Reaching from my bed to push it closed, I repeated the name, *Kirkwood, Kirkwood, Kirkwood*. The meatballs acted as a devise, a ploy to ask for something I

should have known. I had forgotten the name. I still could picture the twists and squeaks and smells of the corridor, but the name had eluded me. I'd spent my entire seven hour drive home trying to remember it.

Christmas was Kirkwood's biggest holiday. Early December, the hallways and rooms crowded with guilty family members, who loaded paper plates with finger foods and asked behind the desk for the real eggnog. The furniture in the large dormitory style room was pushed against the walls, disorienting the residents. They stumbled through the open territory bewildered, uncertain. Folding tables and chairs in the cleared center wobbled under the weight of the robust guests.

Mom balanced the boxwood Christmas tree on Gerta's tray table as Ralph and I elbowed our way to the meatball pot. We plucked them from the thin, simmering sauce with red and green toothpicks, stopping only when the rest of the line grew impatient. Our plates piggishly piled with food, we squirmed on her bed, trying our best not to drop any on the coarse green blanket. Dad's head drooped as Mom shouted our news into Gerta's good ear. Their heads bowed towards each other, Mom's arm rested on the back of the wheelchair, enfolding the small, hunched frame beneath her wing. Over the hum of other families, we would hear "Ralph had a big swim meet on Thursday," or "Abigail sang with the Children's Choir last Sunday."

"Moouoom," we groaned. "That's not important, why are you telling her *that*?" Undeterred, she leaned closer toward Gerta's slouching frame.

With her gnarled right hand, Gerta picked through the cookies and cocktail weenies, occasionally pursing her lips and interrupting Mom to tell her, "I don't like this." Her jaw skipped and jumped as she chewed, the skin from her chin and cheeks shaking wildly. She lifted her head and widened her eyes as Mom spoke about us. "Is that right," she nodded.

"Yeah," we yelled back, but added nothing more. Mom had already said everything; we existed only as visual aids. Proof that the lives that swam and sung and ate meatballs really existed.

Six women share the room. Six aging women with snow white hair and fixed expressions, down-turned mouths and half-open eyes. They sit for hours in their wheelchairs, on their beds, never leaving their designated living areas. They never talk to each other, but sometimes they talk to me, call to me in languages I don't understand. Old languages that desperately want to teach, to share. And sometimes

they prattle in young languages, younger than I am, like children. Across the room, one woman chants, "I gotta go I gotta go I gotta go," until Mom sends me to find a nurse. Another woman moans. Mom calls her the Opera singer, even though she has no tune. These women annoy Gerta, and she lowers her voice to tell us about them, their families, their visitors. She yells when they steal our attention, like a child snarling, "Go away, they're my guests."

There is a great deal of turnover in this room. The women she has liked have died. She lives in the same room, the same space, the same five feet, as she has for fifteen years. The number of people she likes gets fewer and fewer.

In the backseat, I folded my elbows and knees into my chubby sides, and trained my eyes on my book. In the front seat, Gerta's misshapen legs sprawled awkwardly in front of her. She rested her matted head against the headrest, and gazed through the top of the windshield. The cars on Route One sped up as they passed us then decelerated before disappearing around the bend. We waited for Mom to emerge from Kelly's Roast Beef with lunch. We planned to drive to Revere beach, or the reservation to eat it, a special day out.

"You don't like me, do you," Gerta broke the silence.

"What?" I pulled myself forward, slipping a finger between the pages to hold my place. Louder, I repeated, "What?"

"You don't like me," she said again, her voice raspy.

"No, no, I like you," I hurried, perching myself between the front seats so my head was next to hers. "I was just...reading," I continued, then fell back into silence. We stayed like that, quiet, breathing, until Mom returned. Holding the food on my lap, my eyes followed as she pointed out old picnic spots or landmarks. Places Gerta had taken Mom and her sister when they were children; children whose parents craved alone time. Gerta barely answered, barely swiveled her head to look. Pulling into a wooded turnoff facing the water, my finger slipped, and I lost my page.

We bring her McDonald's, or Russo's sundaes, anything chocolaty. She feeds herself, scooping bites onto the plastic spoon with one hand. The container rests in her lap, squeezed next to her dead fingers, holding it in place. Mom tucks a napkin over her collar to protect her shirt. The sauce drips from her mouth, sticking to her face and swaying with each movement of her head. Chocolate veins bulge through her lips as she shoos away a gray haired old man. We call him the Football Coach, because he used to be one. He once begged my father to buy him a drink, just one, he

wouldn't even drink it. "Get out of here, you," she barks, her throat choking on the cold ice cream. She grunts when she can't talk, until he turns and shuffles out of the room. "And that's that," she says to his back, putting down the spoon to wipe her mouth.

"And that's that," Mom and I echo.

Dad and I arrived at Kirkwood first, pulling into the tiny lot in my beaten Maxima. He retreated to the sitting room where the game was on, where the party would be. Treading quietly toward her room, I saw she wasn't waiting in her chair. I found Gerta in bed, her legs still and straight beneath the blankets, her hunched shoulders propped up with pillows. An IV swung over her head, her lips twitching. "Hi," I approached cheerfully, carefully. She hardly stirred. "Dad and I just got here. Mom and Ralph will be here soon. Kathy and Tony, too."

Her face contorted in pain. I crept closer and lowered my ear to her mouth. "What?"

"Oh Jesus, I have to go to the bathroom," she mumbled. "Oh God."

"I'll...I'll go find a nurse," I offered, just as one entered, brisk and forceful, a giant gap in her teeth. "Sh-she has to go to the bathroom."

"Oh honey, she can't go yet, not while the IV is in," she told me before sweeping around the room, peppy, meeting every other resident's need, then leaving. I stared back at Gerta, trembling, but barely conscious.

I hefted a hip onto the bed, and reached for her good hand. I held it, feeling the bones inside, sliding beneath her cool, loose skin. I increased my pressure as her mouth drew tighter. I whispered to her, "It'll be okay, just a few more minutes," even though neither ear heard whispers anymore. I sat with her, filling Mom's place until the nurses came to remove the IV.

Listening to them talk, I have to remember all the different names. Frances is Mom. Ralph isn't my brother, she means his namesake, her brother. When she slips up and asks Mom where her father is, she means my father. And I am "Little One."

Joining their conversation makes me feel like a tourist, reading phrases from a guide book. I stay outside them now, observing, only catching snippets. I hear her say, "Isn't she beautiful," and they pause. Both sets of eyes rest on me, silent, appraising, appreciative.

I shake my head and roll my eyes. "No, not at all," I tell them, but they don't

know my language either. My words are lost on them, as theirs are on me.

Everyone else arrived while she was still getting dressed. They set up the food—cold cuts, fruit, and cake—and asked for more bottles of ginger ale from the nurses. “We forgot matches, but one of the nurses had a lighter,” Mom fussed, fiddling with it with both hands.

“Here,” I took it from her, and lit the 100 candle, burning the pad of my thumb. Mom stared at me as I stuck my burnt appendage in my mouth.

“How did you know to do that?” I shrugged as innocently as I could, reaching for a napkin.

The gap toothed nurse rolled Gerta in, announcing, “Here she is. Happy birthday, Gertrude!”

“Godfried Dynamite,” she breathed, her sunken, blinking eyes moving from face to face. Mom made her a scrapbook, a collection of her life. They pour over it, pointing out friends, relatives who have long been dead, nameless sepia figures caught in the frame of the picture. A photographer from the local newspaper snapped a picture of her and her nieces, which someone at Kirkwood photocopied for us. Mom framed it, placing it on the mantel. In black and white ink, Gerta looked like a baby bird fallen from the nest.

Mom offers to make her bed before we leave. I sit off to the side, watching, holding one of Gerta's stuffed cats and Mr. Plushbottoms in my lap. As Mom moves around the bed, Gerta angles her chair to face her. “No, not like that, like this,” she commands, “No, no, no!” She points and picks at the coverlet herself, and together their hands pull corners of the green cloth different ways. The slightest wrinkle dissatisfies her, and they struggle until it is taut, smooth.

I wait until we are outside before I start laughing. “What?” Mom asks, digging for her keys.

“Now you see what it's like,” I smile.

“What do you mean?”

“Like, when you make us straighten the sofa cover. You know, how we never get it to your liking.” I scrunch up my face and wave a demanding finger in the air, impersonating. “No, like this, you're doing it wrong, you're a failure!”

“So?”

“Do you see how annoying that is?” I ask, moving around to the passenger side of the car.

She shakes her head, “No, I like doing that for her.” I raise my eyebrows,

disbelieving. Mom sticks her tongue out at me and slides into the driver's seat.

Groggy, my face damp, I awoke to hear Mom on the phone in the common room. "Mmhmm...yes....I know, it really is a blessing....Thank you for calling me..." Stifling an early morning groan, I moved slightly and my insides jarred. The beer from the night before pounded in my temples. On the other side of the wall, I heard the phone hang up. Mom's brief sniffs and short breaths sputtered, interrupting the silence in quick spurts. When she stopped, I pictured her folding up her tissue, dabbing one last time at her eyes, then shoving it in her pocket. She stood and smoothed the front of her shirt and pants before first knocking on Ralph's door and murmuring the news, then moving to mine.

She knocked lightly. "Yeah," I answered.

She opened the door, composed, looking into the empty room. "That was the nursing home. Gerta died this morning."

"Yeah, I heard."

"It really was a blessing."

"Yeah....Do Kathy and Tony know?"

"Not yet, I'm going to have to use yours or your father's cell phone and try to reach them. They're probably on their way here already." I gestured to my backpack, to where my phone was. "Thanks, honey."

That afternoon, I let my aunt and uncle into the dorms, showing them to their room. "Well, this is very nice," Kathy cooed. "Now there's a dinner tonight and the graduation tomorrow, right?"

"Yup," I shifted my weight in their doorway, my hands shoved in my pockets. "Did Mom get in touch with you?"

"No, we turned the cell phone off, sorry," she unzipped her bag.

"Oh."

Kathy glanced up at me briefly. "What did she want to tell us?"

"I'm...I'm not sure if she wants to tell you herself..." I paused, then, in a rush of breath continued, "Gertrude died this morning."

Kathy and Tony stopped their activity. She brought a manicured hand to her mouth. "Oh."

The words rushed through me, "She was very sick and old, and they had a priest in there a week or so ago, so it wasn't a surprise and it's really a blessing..."

Kathy nodded while I talked. "It was," she agreed.

I stopped talking guiltily when I heard Mom, Dad, and Ralph

approach. The same words were repeated again, *blessing, her time*, until they remembered the occasion. The conversation shifted from Gerta to Ralph, what he was going to do now, how did it feel to be a college graduate, etcetera.

I don't listen to the prayers during the memorial service. Instead, I focus on the breeze whispering across the lake, the shuffle of the residents, the alarms announcing whenever a door was opened or closed, someone entering or exiting. I listen to the breathing, the clearing of throats, the rumbling of cars. My eyes wander from the bland, balding priest to the back of Mom's head, where her hair, too, is thinning. White roots poke from her head, almost silver.

This is the Memorial service, for the Kirkwood residents and workers, although few attend. Mom displays the scrapbook she made for Gerta's 100th birthday, showing everyone again that there was once life, substance. Mom and Kathy joke about their father needing two separate heavens now, one for Gerta and one for their mother. They transition into how Ralph has his namesake's eyes, how their mother used to call them "bedroom eyes." And Ralph and I look at each other and wonder why that hasn't gotten him any luck with the ladies.

One of Kathy's sons and his wife are there, six months pregnant. I tell them my niece is pregnant too, due in August.

Mom and Kathy hold up their wine glasses and drink to Gerta. With loose tongues, and almost childlike spirits, they spill her stories, secrets, mysteries. My brow furrows as they ramble, "Maybe she's with that doctor now, the one she was going to marry!"

Seeing my face, Ralph asked, "What?"

"Well, I just thought...I never knew...huh?" I let my confusion show.

Ralph rolled his eyes. "She *was* human, you know."

I imagined Gerta, dancing, kissing, standing close to a man, but the thought felt warped. I tried fictionalizing her, placing her in a story, making her a character. I tried believing she lived outside that five feet of space, on legs that moved and hands that grasped. Her wearing smooth, taut skin, and rolling clear eyes. The character that evolved wasn't her, though. It was me.

The priest conducting the funeral is fully bald. He checks his watch underneath his baggy sleeve between hymns. There are ten of us, seated in two pews, in a giant church that echoes and vibrates with each cough, each deep breath, each footstep. When it is time for communion, only five go up. Not Catholic, we stay in our seats, conspicuous,

almost defiant. Mom and Kathy split the eulogy. Both talk at great length, but Kathy delves into obscure stories. "I remember Frank," she starts, a man I've never heard of. Maybe he's one of the lost figures in the scrapbook, faded and quiet. Annoyed, the priest approaches her, talks to her in a low tone, so we cannot hear, and motions for her to wrap it up.

"Why does my room smell like a nursing home?" I mumbled, sniffing as I turned over in bed, twisting the covers around myself. Cool air seeped through the window, carrying the scent with it, a hint of age, of generic soap, and the slightest traces of urine and baby powder. I brought my hands to my face but smelled none of that. It lessened as I moved from the window, but I could still feel it. For several days, it woke me up, hovering just by my head, in front of my face. "I don't understand it," I told Mom over the phone. "It really does smell just like the nursing home." She laughed. She didn't believe me earlier when I'd said Kathy's house smelled like the house in Melrose, as though she was using the same perfume her mother had.

"It doesn't smell at all like Grammy's perfume," she had corrected me.

"It does. I used to play with it, I know." Smell was my last memory, the only recollection I had of Grammy. She had lost form, and face, and voice long ago.

I couldn't even remember the name of the home, but its smell haunted me, the lasting memory.

The funeral procession consists of the hearse and Mom's car. She loves speeding through lights and cutting cars off, she's considering keeping the orange flags. The cemetery is deep in Boston, down, through, under, and over streets, until even Mom loses her sense of direction. To reach the plot is also a maze, cut through green swaths rolling from the bodies beneath. Gerta shares the ground with her mother and stepfather and grandparents, and she shares her casket with Mr. Plushbottoms, the stuffed animal her little brother gave her one birthday after moving to Kirkwood.

The priest at the burial delivers the prayers fast, dressed all in black. His hair is a coppery red with white roots. He reads the names on the gravestone. "Irish family, huh? I come from one myself. Everyone has the same name. All Patricks and Michaels." I like this one. I imagine him keeping a flask under his vest, taking nips as he strolls through the graveyard, looking for fresh plots. Freelance praying.

"Can I call him 'Toady?'" I asked.

Sarah shrugged while struggling with the bassinet cover. "Sure, go

ahead.”

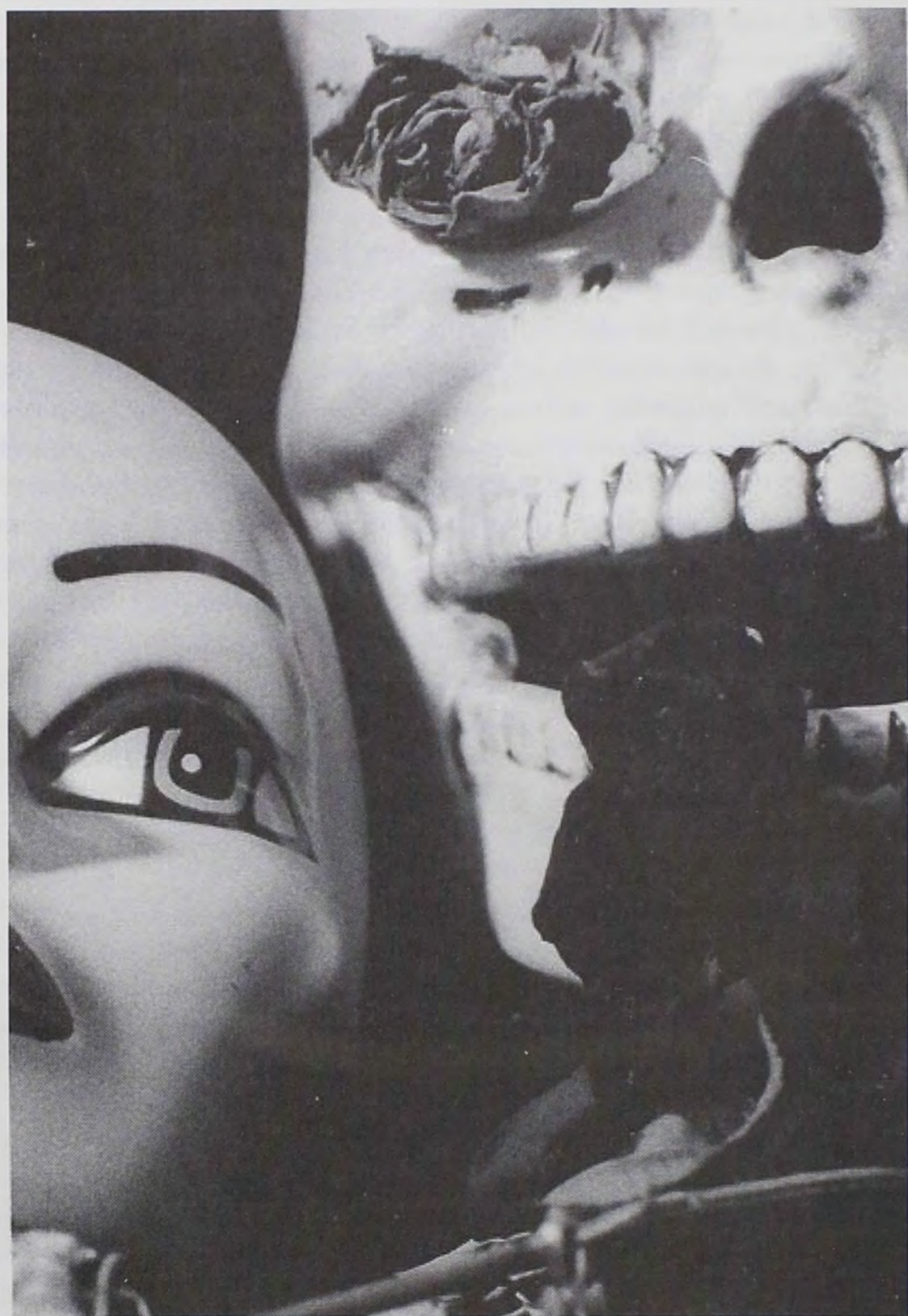
Robin laughed. “Do you want to harm the poor child?”

Grinning, I fingered the small fingers and toes, and nudged the tiny knee. Jacob’s legs curled under him, his arms bent in to his sides. “He’s going to hate me,” I predicted. Yawning, he flexed his fingers and opened his eyes a crack. “Yes you are,” I murmured in baby talk. “Yes you are, you’re going to absolutely hate me.” I paused, and we stared at each other. “Christ, I’m a great-aunt and I’m only eighteen.”

Jacob walks, stilted steps that propel him forward fast; he doesn't look like he can stop. His family has given him a worse nickname, "Baby Chubs," which has lasted longer than "Toady." He doesn't recognize me at during Fall Break, or at Thanksgiving, and eyes me warily before stepping closer. I call him something else, "Baby Blue Eyes," in birthday cards, or quickly, all in one breath, when I greet him.

We play throughout the house, with stacks of movies or little trinkets. His favorite game is to pull things out, then put them back again, over and over, until I distract him with something else. There are distractions everywhere, pieces pulled from grandparents' houses, pieces brought home from school. Every surface is smothered, lost under piles and piles of junk, some that we've forgotten was there, and layers where we know each miscellaneous piece and how it keeps its world from tumbling.

GEMINI



FACES OF THE MOON

You have too many
faces. I thought
you'd be down to one
by now. Why don't we all
move down to one?
Pleasure for many
requires all the different
phases of the moon.
And all of the
misleading seasons.

EUPHONY OF THE EUPHONIUM

Silver polish smells and oil mix
From pistons pumping satin smooth: cadence
Irregular, syncopated, in six-

Eight time, a marching beat, crescendo once
Into the trio; legato-style strain,
Niente end. The metal's hard, and dense,

Now cold and heavy without wind; profane,
Because, then, naught but earth and clay remain.

Bestow immortal kiss on the lips of the horn:
Euphonic sounds now roll and bubble from
The bell. With velvet cries it is reborn,

Silver earth and wind combine to sum
A harmony of one. Musicians play,
And so the valves, they glide; so smoothly drum.

Machine is gone and music flies away,
But rehearsing ends; we meet it with dismay.

Vibrations made the music sounding here,
A timbre deep and dolce cushioned all
The melodies caroused about the ear.

That baritone, endearing horn, can call
The blue bells back from Scotland, Danny boy,
Believe me if those charms will make you bawl,

You're not alone, euphonium's ploy
Is that the subtle man will play it coy.

THE NON-EUCLIDEAN WAY TO GET SOME BAGELS

Robert, Jenny and I walked at a deliberate pace from the swinging screen door down the walk to the car. It was an elderly, shapely thing; it took us places. It was made mostly of chrome and the rib bones of migrant workers. Jenny positioned herself in the driver's seat; I rode shotgun, and Robert sat in the back. We slipped out of the driveway and worked our way down the back street, and finally pulled onto a main road. There was no traffic of which to speak.

We drove for some time, met every green light, and finally came to the main driveway of Jenny's campus. We found a parking spot easily, and as we disembarked I questioned Jenny,

"Will Kenneth be OK with this? Will the college, for that matter?"

"It's fine, honey. Kenny said I could come see his project any time I wanted..."

"And bring uninvited non-students?"

"He said that exactly," Jenny put her arms around me, and gave me her distinctive and highly specific "quit-pestering-me-about-things-like-facts-and-trespassing-laws-and-just-do-as-I-tell-you-because-I-don't-feel-like-dealing-with-any-more-of-your-ethical-questions-you-bastard-and-honestly-what-was-all-that-noise-I-heard-from-the-window-of-your-room-when-I-came-to-pick-you-up-were-you-conducting-those-damn-'experiments'-again-or-just-sleeping-around?" look, "And the college is fine with the population in general as well as the students viewing the senior projects. I was even talking about bringing you here with one of my professors just this afternoon. Robert, hurry up with those *kaginawa!*"

"But they're so unwieldy!" Robert moaned as he pulled the grappling hooks behind him, "And if we're so welcome, why do we have all this assassin equipment?"

"Oh, Robert, we might not even need to scale the side of the building to break in at all. To be perfectly honest, I can't quite remember whether Kenny said his project was indoors or outdoors."

I thought about that for a moment. "But... don't you know what his project is? He's an art major? It should be easy to tell whether the project would be inside or out if we have an idea what it's like."

"Kenny's an art major, yeah, but he's always been equally interested in

painting and sculpture,” Jenny looked to the side and twisted the corner of her lip pensively, “And he’s been especially secretive about this project with the family, so I’m not sure if it’s a painting that should be inside in the gallery or a sculpture that will be on display somewhere here in the courtyard. Thing is, this courtyard circles the entire art building. If it is a sculpture, it could be anywhere out here.”

“Can’t we just skip this and go get some bagels? I thought we were going to go get some bagels. I can’t wait until we’re done here. This is boring. I want some bagels,” Robert whined.

“Robert, we’ll get some bagels once we’ve seen Kenny’s project. I guess we’ll set about circumnavigating the building then. I call widdershins.”

“Fine, I’ll go clockwise then,” she sighed, “Robert, put down those hooks for now. I’m not sure if the cord is long enough to reach the roof, anyway.” Jenny headed off in the opposite direction, and Robert followed me after untangling himself from the cords and getting the hooks out of his coat. He and I browsed through each exhibit, searching vainly for something, some distinctive and unique giveaway of Kenneth’s work that could not be copied. Not by someone who was unwilling to overlook forgery laws. But the title plates were hard to read in the dark.

“Hey,” Robert muttered, “Hey, come over here. Look at this. Come on,” he whined, “Hurry.” I idly obeyed.

I should have obeyed more attentively. What Robert had here was damn impressive.

There was a short step pyramid pedestal in the center of the courtyard, upon which stood a smooth marble figure, taller than either of us. Its right arm was curved above its head, its left hand in a fist at its side. Its back was sharply arched; starting at each arm and filling the arch of the back was a wild and wing-like cape. It was dressed like a Victorian nobleman. Its head was bent down towards us, but its face—oh, its face. It was indescribable physically... all I could comprehend from my brain’s gibbering when I first saw it was “Oh, Lord Yahweh, our God, by the power of all that You made beatific in each starry level of the heavens... please do not allow me to die today,” and I tore myself away from fear that this sight might make me cease to ever have been. My impression upon a second take was less extreme: all that occurred to me then was that I should never have children, because the thing will remember who I am, will remember very well, and will find and devour

any progeny I might have. This was not a pleasant statue; it was not a thing beloved of God. I rather liked it.

I knelt to see if I could read the title plate in the lack of light. I wanted to know the name of this sculptor of anguished dreams and that of his or her work.

“THE KING OF ÆLPHAIMY” read the title, followed by: ”HIS DAUGHTER, DEATH” where the artist’s name would traditionally be written. Where on other works could be found additional comments, thank you’s, and so on, was written:

“We invite you to make a gift of your soul, and to accept our offering of bewilderment and distress for those who are among your beloved.”

Well, that’s rather considerate of them, I thought, just before Robert climbed up on my back and used me as a step to grab onto the unspeakable face of the King of Ælphaimy. I flipped my head upwards after he had passed, and saw Robert’s legs bound tightly around the King’s chest, arms gripping its neck, his head facing the starless heavens and mouth gaping wide as the fathomless pits into which the gods who are no more sent Mu aeons before the Voö’lloimi Namammoul that we call Cro-Magnon walked the glaciers, and he gurgled something in the archaic, eldritch language of those who hold council with the Lords of Fayærie. I sure as hell couldn’t understand what he was saying. Maybe the King understood it, I don’t know. I’m neither a Demon King nor an idiot. I don’t speak gurgle.

After his little conversation Robert jolted back and fell some ten feet to the stone paved courtyard floor.

“You dead?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Get up,” I ordered.

“No.”

“Come on. Unless you’re seriously hurt, get up and help me look for Kenny’s exhibit.”

“You’re not the god of me,” Robert said. This was true, I wasn’t his god. I couldn’t argue that. So I left him lying there while I continued my search. I gave cursory glances to a few sculptures and pieces of postmodern crap, and then heard a loud ka-krag! Something massive... stone... possibly column shaped... not much shrubbery around it... had fallen to the ground around the corner. I quickly turned around the building, expecting to see the hammer of some god of war who might be an old drinking buddy of the King of Ælphaimy deep in piles of

broken cement and ran headlong into Jenny, who proceeded to give me a dirty look.

“So what took you so long to circle the building?” I asked.

Another dirty look.

“What? We got held up, too. I’m just wondering what your problem was.”

“What business is it of yours what my problem is?” she snapped. I looked beyond her into the shadows of the art building and saw a stone figure lying on the ground beside a pedestal.

“Kenny’s project...”

“It was me,” she muttered, “It... it’s a statue of me.”

“How did it...?”

“It’s naked. It was me totally nude... and... I was...,” she trailed off.

“What? Jenny, what’s wrong?” I asked, as I took her in my arms.

“I... I’m holding a slime...”

“From Iniq’s *Dragon War*?” I asked.

“Yes... and... I was...”

“Jenny...?”

“I was putting it into my...” she trailed off again.

We stood there for a few minutes. I rubbed her back as she rested her head on my chest. Neither of us said anything. I looked at the statue. As my eyes adjusted to the shadow, I could see in the statue’s hand held level with the genitals the blue, chocolate drop-shaped slime, its wide eyes and smile beaming at me sociably.

“Why would... he’s my brother... and he.... How could he do that?” she asked me, closer to tears but not actually in them than I had ever seen a person. I patted her on the back, and shifted my weight uncomfortably.

“Hey... Kenneth’s always been... weird...” I shifted my weight again, “And... hey, you’ve always liked RPGs, right? And the *Dragon War* slimes are cute....” She pushed back and glared at me. We then heard a click off to the side, and both started rather suddenly. Robert walked down the steps of the art building entrance from the closing doors and stopped a few feet from us. He looked bulgy.

“Umm... Robert? How did you get into the building? It’s... locked,” I asked him in bewilderment.

“The *kaginawa*,” he replied.

“I thought you left those on the other side of the building. And how did you break in through the roof and come down here in this time? I

only left you a few minutes ago.”

“Efficient speed.”

“But why bother? We hadn’t found that Kenny’s... project... wasn’t outside yet.” A grappling hook fell out of Robert’s sleeve and the attached rope trailed to the ground.

“No real reason.”

“Well...” I looked back at Jenny, then at the slime fetish, then at Robert’s bulgy coat. “Why don’t we head back to my place? Bagels can wait until later. I think we should just call it a night.” Robert’s coat burst open, and several textbooks, a small sculpture, some paintings, and some small tins of fruit drops poured to his feet.

“I’ll drive,” he said.

~~~~

In the cold-warped steel pits of the engine room in the icy war machine made by the most frightening dictator in Bavaria, the fuelmen shoveled ton after ton of ice into the pipes of the *ice engines*. The air was tinged a somehow lurid blue, and the ice blue stripes on the fuelmen’s tight shirts froze even tighter to their skin as they shoveled, their blue-ribboned hats covering their icy eyes. But they did not need to see; the motions of their work were known to them, and if they forgot for an instant, *he* would make them remember with the most explicit methods. Their breath, their voices, their thoughts, everything was visible in the frozen air; everything was visible and eligible for *his* abominable scrutiny.

“*Alle!*” barked *his* mighty voice from the stalactite-hung balcony, high above the tallest engines and nightmares.

“*Ja, unser Eisführer!*” came the reply in more perfect unison than is possible.

“*We are at the threshold of a great age!*”

“*We are indeed, mein Eisführer!*” volunteered a lone young fuelman. He was immediately shot in the chest. The thing on the balcony wept for a moment like the coldest comet that is melted when it approaches our mighty Sol, and then laughed like a thousand Lokis.

“*Soon our machine will cross the border into Poland!*”

“*Jawohl!! Ich habe Hunger!*”

“*Und then Russia!*”

“*Ich werde die Kinder essen!*”

“*Und Montana!*”



*“JA! Ja, unser Eisführer! We are thine monkeys und road-sharks! The evils of warmth und flowers will never survive the onslaught of your chilly fingernails!”*

*“I’ll kill each one of you! Don’t let me down!”*

*“Ja! Ja! Eis heil! We make things cold und crisp without a hint of mint!! Eis heil! EIS HEIL!”* roared the men. *Eis heil, Eis heil*, long into that bluest of nights when the *ice engines* crackled and hissed beyond the hopes of those who opposed the *Eisführer*.

~~~~

Ja mein Eisführer!” Robert suddenly shouted in German out of the silence, and thrust a fist into the air. *“We are monkeys capable of expressive thought but only to the certain degree that you allow! We will donate to you the digits of our children! Eis heil!”* He lost control of the car, and it swerved in virtually every direction including vertically up.

Robert! For the love of God! What are you doing! Steer the car! Steer the car!!” I bellowed. Jenny screamed hysterically and incoherently in the back.

“What? Who’s on fire? Where’s the trouble been?” Robert asked, as the car instantly locked into a perfectly straight and even course down the road.

“Robert, you just lost control of the car, and started screaming in German,” I said.

“No I didn’t,” he assured me.

“Yes you did. We almost died listening to something about affa or ice or whatever,” I insisted.

“Ok, I lost control of the car. But I don’t speak German. Ok, I do a little. But I don’t know the word for monkey.”

“Robert, are you ok? You want me to drive? For that matter, where are we? I don’t recognize this...”

“We’re here,” Robert said as he pulled into a driveway without slowing down, stopping at once with the car in perfect line with the curb.

“Robert, this...” I stared at the massive, Victorian structure before us, and the gables, and the gratuitous balconies, and the paneling, “...this isn’t my house,” I pointed out.

“No, this is my house,” Robert said.

“You live in a closet in the basement of your parents’ place, which they rent in an apartment owned by a loan shark,” I reminded him. Nevertheless, he walked up to the door, fitted a key into the lock, and, stepping inside, motioned for us to follow suit.

The entrance led to an actual antechamber, although it was a bit

cavernous for an antechamber. And damp. And... stony. Robert pulled a cord dangling from the unnecessarily high ceiling, and lights flashed on dramatically. A statue was decorated with clothes to look like a butler and carved to invite us inside. As he passed the statue Robert nodded and grinned at it enthusiastically. After a small hallway we came to a sitting room of some kind. The fire was warm and cozy in the hearth, and cast a pleasant light upon the overstuffed chairs and throw rugs that was rather refreshing after coming through an antechamber that would have been more appropriate in some kind of burial edifice than a house.

"Make yourselves 'at-home'," Robert said.

"Oh, umm... thanks, Robert," Jenny said quietly, "Gee, this is a really nice place you've got here. I never knew..."

"I feel shitty," Robert said, "Excuse me."

He stepped out of the room and we heard a door slam down the hall.

"So I guess you're never going to forgive Kenny, even if at gunpoint," I supposed.

"Does the pope shit in the woods?" Jenny pulled back her hair, and we heard a slightly muffled "My God" from the restroom. "I... I really don't know what to think. Kenneth's always been so uptight about sexuality of any kind, and here he goes and... I mean you saw it. The statue of me was..."

"Making unnatural love to a blue slime," I finished. Jenny glared into my forehead so hard I thought it might injure me physically, and then looked away. She stood still for a minute. From the restroom there now came a series of hushed threats that I couldn't quite make out, and then there was a sound like someone beating a soft surface with a cudgel, followed by the yelp of a cat. We continued our conversation.

"Would you like me to talk to Kenny?" I offered, "I admit I don't really know him that well, but it's something. I guess if it would help things..."

"No, honey. I don't think it would matter. I guess I'm either going to ask him about it myself, or just pretend it never happened. I guess he'll be upset that the statue is on the ground, or something." Several voices spoke in a conversational tone down the hall about what sounded like the present state of the Roman Catholic Church, and glass shattered. "I guess we'll see what comes. Family. Meh," she muttered.

"Ok. But if there's anything else I can do, let me know." A toilet flushed and the damned wailed all in unison. A door opened and closed, and Robert reentered the room.

“Are you ok now?” Jenny asked.

“Yes and no,” replied Robert.

“I feel vaguely uneasy,” I admitted.

“Yeah, we get that sometimes,” Robert said knowingly, “It might be the air flow. We were having a guy check up on it, but Lord if I’ve seen him since then.”

“Since when?”

“Since the war.”

“What war?”

“Dinner’s in ten minutes. Why don’t you two ‘sit-down’ and ‘make-yourselves’ comfortable?”

“I...” I really didn’t know how to respond to that, so I resolved to sit down. But Jenny was already sitting in the only chair in the room.

“Wait a minute,” I muttered, “this was a sitting room. I could have sworn just a minute ago that there were more chairs in here than...”

“You’ll have to sit in another room,” Robert said. Jenny didn’t make any motion at all.

“I’ll just sit here on the floor next to...”

“No floor holing!” Robert snarled. “Other room! *Schnell!*” Robert started shoving me in the back and clucking his tongue. I rushed out of the room down a hallway, into a tiny room with a stairwell, as Robert slammed the door. Flanking the stairs, almost directly underneath them, were two doors. Not wishing to leave Jenny too far behind, I went through the right door rather than upstairs, and came into what I first would have described as a pantry. On the shelves were all manner of fancy treats and gummies, and in the cabinets were baked goods and snacks of many kinds. There was a lamp in the center of the room, but no other structure of note.

I helped myself to a fruity looking thing from one of the upper shelves, and would have satisfied my vicious gummy craving right then if not for the sudden notable revelation that it was a gastropod. It was in a plastic wrapper labeled “Pa’s Oldie-tyme Candies”.

“No,” I said, “Pa shouldn’t be packing oldie-tyme slugs. That’s not candy, that’s... that’s horrible.” The whole shelf yielded identical results. They were still moving inside the bags. The wrappers were all sealed hermetically, and though I’ve never been a star student of biology I was reasonably certain that even slugs can’t phase through solid plastic matter. Something was very much not right. I held the thing at arm’s length with the tips of two fingers and set back for the sitting room, but

was heartily disoriented to find that the pantry door did not go back into the stair room, but instead into a boiler room of some kind. It was very loud, so I may have misheard the boilerman when he looked up at me and exclaimed "G'day, Fenris!"

I gave him the slug, much to his delight, and went back through the door to the pantry and found myself in the hallway to the sitting room. Hey, whatever works, I thought. I set off back to the sitting room once again but found the hallway much longer than I remembered. And... non-Euclidean. Much more non-Euclidean than I remembered. The halls folded over spatially at geometrically impossible angles, some old men walked down the side of the floor through the ceiling, and I thought I could hear Antonio Vivaldi playing in the distance. I walked past myself from a few moments before, still trying to decide which way to go, as I took the thing that most closely resembled a path and shortly found myself in a wide dining hall.

The oaken dining table occupied most of the room, pictures of ancient peers gazed down, and candelabras abound. Sitting at the head and in the first seven seats on either side were men in tuxedos who all looked like Pete Best. At the foot, hair bundled above like the heroine of a Lucas film, and settled in a massive evening gown the color of a starry night, was Jenny. I sat down around the corner from Jenny and inquired of the closest Pete Best what would be served. Pete glared at me and said nothing. I looked at Jenny.

"Wow. I'd have thought he'd be over the whole "ditched-by-the-Beatles" thing by now." I turned back to him. "It's ok, man. People always dumped on the new drummer anyway. I mean, I liked him, hey, but he was never the most popular. Kinda goofy looking." Several more Petes glared at me. Jenny did so as well.

"Touchy subject around here, I see. So how 'bout those Stones? Jagger sure is aging like a fine wine, eh?" At this point wine was served and I came to a strange realization.

"Jenny... when did you get all dollied up like that? Where's Robert? What the hell is going on around here?"

"All will be revealed to the initiates in time," Pete said.

"Shut up, Best. Everyone hates you. Come on, Jenny, let's go find that little weirdo Robert and get out of here." I grabbed her hand and ran out of the dinning room. After my introductory acquaintance with the invertebrate food served here, I didn't mind skipping out on dinner. We followed a geometrically accurate path back into the sitting room,

where Jenny was reclining on a couch, nude, and holding a blue slime, which she inched closer and closer to her genitalia.

“Honey,” she said, “What the fuck is going on?” I looked back at the dollied up Jenny to find I was actually holding the hand of Pete Best.

“*Komm gibt mir dein Gesicht!*” he shouted, and he then punched me in the face, sending me to the ground. I jumped back up, but Jenny and Pete were gone, and the room was sullen and grim. I rushed out the door to the hall, but was startled to find myself back in the very sitting room I had just exited.

“That’s... odd,” I muttered, “Usually when you leave a room, you find yourself outside of it, rather than... back... in it.” I turned back through the door, but returned to the sitting room. Aha, I thought. They almost had me. Two identical rooms next to each other, designed to throw off the unwary. But I’ll get the better of them. I spit on the floor, examined it, and ran into the other room. There was a bit of spit there, at my feet, in exactly the same spot as the other room.

“God damn it, the house is pulling this non-Euclidean crap again!” I said aloud. There was a window up near the ceiling, some dozen feet off the ground. Scrambling up onto a high backed comfy chair, I wormed through the window and fell to the ground outside. I was in a stone courtyard. After a moment, I realized I was back on campus. Gazing imperceptibly down at me was that unpleasant statue, carved from stone mined from the dreams of a thousand madmen; the statue of the King of Ælphaimy that I now realized must have had an unholy hand in this wholly weird affair.

“*I must carry to fruition the grim designs of the Eisführer, that mightiest and chilliest son of the King of Ælphaimy,*” came a Deutsch mutter from behind. I dropped and rolled to the side, as the hammer borne once by Thor, once by Waylon Himself came with the strongest force in reality to where I had been standing. But my evasive move threw the aim off, and Robert, its present bearer, inadvertently brought the divine thing down with an Hephaestian thunder upon the King of Ælphaimy.

The stars wailed each in her own key, hate poured out of fissures in Hell, and lightening struck the moon. The dreams of every sensitive fellow in the hemisphere were plagued that night with visions of the keening of things unnatural, grey things, mouthless but hungry for a kind of jelly quiche dish served not in our reality but for in a tiny restaurant in Quebec owned by a former bookshop owner named Howie. The hammer vanished into the heavens, and Robert was tossed

several meters away. I approached his body head on, and looked down at him.

“You dead?”

“Yes.”

“Get up.”

“You’re not the god of me.”

“Yes I am. Get the hell up.” Robert sat up and rubbed the back of his head. He looked up at me, then over into the dark. I followed his gaze, and saw Jenny run up from around the corner, holding something small under her arm. We ran to each other and hugged, and stood there holding each other for the first thirty seconds since leaving campus that either of us actually felt peaceful, comfortable. Robert walked up as we relaxed, holding the head that had come off in one solid piece from the King of Ælphaimy.

“The heck is this?” he muttered. Jenny backed away warily. I still found it incomprehensible, unfathomably repugnant even divided from those mighty shoulders and held in Robert’s sweaty hands. “Looks like a monkey,” he said, “Or a peach,”

“What the hell happened here?” came an anguished shout. “My piece! Who the hell destroyed my piece?”

“I’m sorry,” Robert asked, “Was this your monkey?”

“What?” the man came into view, and revealed himself to be Kenny. “I’m not talking about that piece of shit. I’m talking about my *Familial* sculpture. Who knocked it down and took the slime?”

“Kenny,” Jenny stepped up, “go fuck a slime yourself.” She tossed the slime she’d carried over to her brother, who caught it, and then stood there ineptly, switching his confused eyes from Jenny to the slime in his hands.

“Yeah. You can learn something from Monkey-peach here,” Robert said, and handed him the head of the fallen king. As we walked back to the car, Kenny stood there, silently looking from the slime in his right hand to the head in his left, no doubt wondering what to do with the rest of his life. Robert, Jenny and I drove down the road and got some bagels.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC ROMANCE



HE MET ME IN THE ARCS AND EBBS OF FRAILTY

He met me in the arcs and ebbs of frailty
In a world that moved like water
But sparked with electricity
 In a world of secret signs
Invitation in the upturning of eyelashes
Dismissal in a closed palm

He grew cold with the tides
And I felt something much greater
Pulling at his ankles and stiling his speech

So strange
That the same person
Who made love with the language
Of soft glows and tender unearthings
Could inspire such fear
With words like stones cracking
Like clawing and scraping
That leaves small hands dyed
With the tokens of rough encounters

Love should be obvious
Unmistakable and palpable
Not this sickly thing
Choked and doubting
Like sand sifting in the slinking shadows
Where the embers of my great expectations
Paint with soft light
The bruising of your thoughtless words

AN ADORATION OF ORDINATION

A drop of sacred water hits the floor.
I wonder, did his mother pray for him?
Many a woman lives to see him sin—
to feel his tongue along the chalice brim,

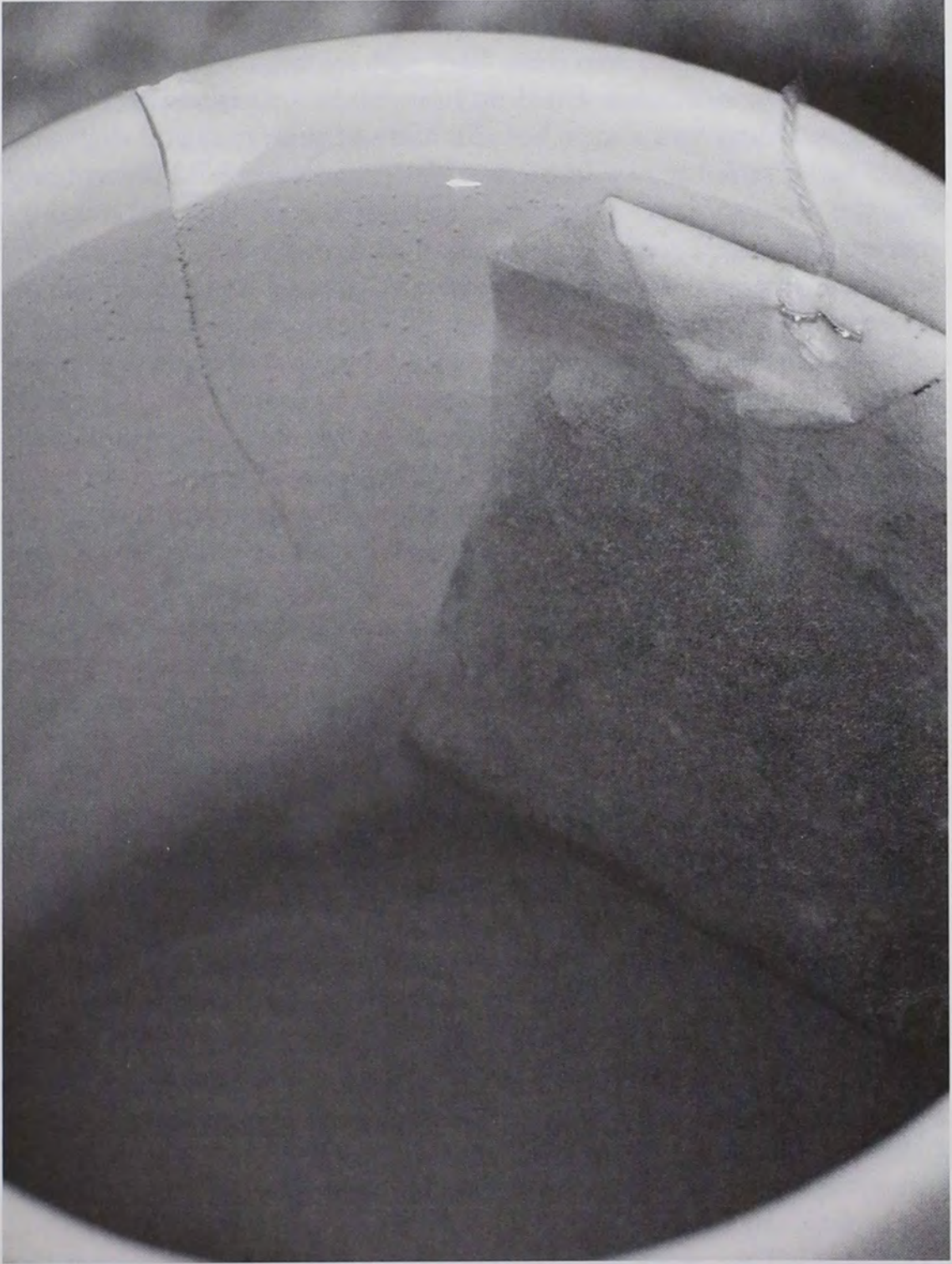
And shiver in their loins to wonder why
the taste of the Son received his affection
instead of a more voluptuous perfection.
And his scarlet candle, still it burns.

A movement, a whisper, his lips upon the altar,
and silently, his mouth proclaims the Gospel.
Many a woman lives through crucifixion
of secret confessions and longing to tell.

In dawn and eve he bends to kneeling poses
and meditates upon the Mystery
of Faith through wooden beads, his rosary.
The Agnus Dei waits among his prayers.

A little water cuts his wine in fraction;
a little faction partakes of his wine,
and female bodies thirst in curiosity—
what prophecy, in God's divine design.

DISPERSION



LA BELLE ÉPOQUE

Templeton walked off north, in the direction of the station while I waited for the porter to come back with my bags. He said he would wait at the platform while I tied up loose ends – whatever he thought that meant. Paris was always hell this time of year: grey and drab and dull. The air sank heavy with the smell of exhaust and fetid water, hung with the noise of dancing parlors. Her lights were bright and buzzing, ancient and lovely to virgin eyes, but all I could see now was the tarnished copper coating on a long-dead kingdom. I had had enough of history; I wanted to go back to beautiful things.

The brown leather seat in the lobby was pitted and cracked, another sad sign of age in a dead, dusty mausoleum. I raised my scotch in mock salute to the room, touching the smoothed edge of the glass to my lips and placing it back on the dark oak table just beyond the arm of the couch. I lingered over the drink, staring into the glass, and through its miniature sea of sweetness and decadence, saw an unseemly gouge. Curious, I removed the drink. Hardly a speck. Never would have known that nick of imperfection was there, save for a trick of blown sand and aged malt. But that was the essence of alcohol – it didn't allow you to hide your flaws, always making clear the pocks of a polished front.

Women tittered at the bar behind me as I sank into the plush seat. Where was the porter? I felt restless. Laughter and lights and tip-tinny piano music lilted menacingly behind me, and my heart dragged hard and heavy in my chest. It was Paris, it wasn't Paris. Nothing felt right and I needed my bags.

I suddenly longed for the Thames. It didn't share the same beauty of the Seine at night, the great river that was the lifeblood of Paris, but it was reliable in its moribund spirit. England always greeted you with a special somnolent weariness, routine as the clocks and the tea. Yes, it was rain-soaked, cold, and depressing, but it was stable. However skewed it was, they had a notion of order, and propriety. A bright day in England is cause for alarm and only the most guarded optimism. The sun always finds a way to flee behind the nearest cloud and slink inconspicuously over the horizon.

But Paris – Paris was a betrayal. She was supposed to be the dawn, the spice of Europe. She was supposed to be flowers and crepes, Manet and

Seurat. She was supposed to be lights and cobblestones, spindly stairways and dangerous debutantes. And now, she wasn't any of those things, just a scatter of odd hopes and simple surmises.

I felt flaccid; heavy and old. It had only been four years since I left University, full of the romance of Byron, Shelley, and other wayward soothsayers. I would go to France, I said, and went, with my family's God-loving generosity. And soon, I would be hearkened back, with that same generosity. The chandelier tinkled above me, gold-crusted and peeling. I would leave now, I thought, or I would die here with this lobby and these peerless antiques.

Blinking back fear with rage, I clenched my fist and pounded it onto the wood coffee table at my knees. It should have made an impact, but I held back at the last second, and touched the surface with only enough force to wobble the ceramic lamp on its base. Why Paris? Why her? Give me Aix-en-Provence. Give me the Thames. I drew in a breath and drew myself up.

To hell with my brother – I could catch the train in the morning. I rose from the divan and walked passed the bellhop to the exit. Enough time wasted. *Quelle ville!* It gleamed through wrought-iron streetlamps and passing jalopies as I approached the checker-paned double doors of the exit. The tinny sound of that singular French police siren reverberated off the close-knit buildings.

As I pushed the brass handle I heard the porter behind me shout in hurried breath *Monsieur! Monsieur!*, but I had passed the threshold, driven by the helplessness of unconscious resolution. I had to move, if only because I had to stop thinking, looking, seeing, being.

I stepped onto the stone curb and reached into the left pocket of my suit jacket, pulling out a silver cigarette case. It had five thin Parisian cigarettes in it, lightly bound together. Behind the little white mortuary rows was a photograph, still crisp and sharp. Dark tones around the sockets of the eyes dripped into soft shadows down perfect white cheeks. A girl – wasn't it always a girl, one way or another? And this was no happy picture of swooning romance. It was a glare, a grimace, a gaze that studied me with evaluation and suspicion. It was candid, and cutting.

But for a moment, the image was pleasing. Then I looked on too long. Long enough to see the shape of her full face and undiminished pout, and the way her hair cut a crooked shadow down her cheeks. My heart stirred; I angrily silenced it. Now was the time for heavy sighs and

heavier drinking. I closed the case and replaced it to my breast pocket. I struck a match and inhaled the smoke, smiling, just slightly, to think so many little deaths should occupy so small a space.

It was raining hard slate sheets outside the Louvre. Water bounced off the Baroque architecture and blew cold around Renaissance columns. I huddled under an archway, clutching my hat to my head, and tried to shield myself from the precipitation while rivers formed at my feet and trickled down the wide stairs into the courtyard.

I grimaced and mulled my options. I was dressed up for the museum tour; stepping out there would soil my new clothes. Perhaps I could wait for it to taper off.

My cohort, a young woman in a plain, white dress stood on the other side of the arch, surveying the scene. She looked at me intently. I studied the ground.

"English, no?" she asked plainly, broaching etiquette., I faced her. She was striking -- not beautiful, per se, but intriguing. Her eyes were amber and glistening, and as she stood poised, she seemed possessed of some ineffable energy that sparkled out her person. I felt odd, intimidated.

"Yes," I said, ill-at-ease, "I arrived a month ago."

"Well, there is more to Paris than arches," she said, with a wink, and a tone I couldn't read.

"Well, the rain is --" I started. She laughed, cutting me off.

"Is not England this all the time?" She gestured out with her left hand.

"My best suit," I explained, pointing my hands demonstratively inward.

"Come out," she said.

"No, I really can't. I'll just wait for it to die down."

"It is just rain," she said. "Come out." I looked at her and saw a flicker of something indiscernible in her face. It deadpanned. I hesitated.

"All right."

"Tsk, tsks." She said, placing one foot deliberately forward, and swinging herself to square with me. "Too easy. Here." She handed me her broad black umbrella, which I took, dumbfounded. She grabbed my hand and drove me into the morass, the water thick as drowning. She smiled gaily while I clutched the handle, her dress soaking through to reveal a floral camisole. The woman was mad.

"What are you doing?" I asked, incredulous. She just smiled and spun, grabbing my wrists and dragging me in a spiral until I became dizzy and broke contact. I stumbled backward over a crack in the pavement, and fell to the ground with a splash. She ran over to me, laughing.

"See?" she said. "You were going to get wet anyway."

I thrust my hands into my pockets and ambled down the old stone

sidewalk. It was late, but not too late for this part of the city. Red lights winked in and out of existence on stuttering electric bulbs. Unreliable. Nasty. I looked back. The hotel wasn't devoid of elegance, but it was dreadfully middle-of-the-road. I would have been happier with a shack on the Rue de Belleville, as low and dirty and real as it could be, in place of the weird quasi-pomp and affected charm the Hotel Marquis had. But my family demanded I take up residence in a 'nice' quarter; the Marquis was my concession. I could see when my brother arrived; it was just more evidence for him of what was wrong with France.

I rounded the bend and slipped into the cracks of tenements and sober-faced barkeeps and got a warm up of brandy and scotch whiskey, taking a large bottle of wine for the road. The bartender gave me an eye when I asked for the bottle, but made no remark when I gave him a two-pound coin for it. Frivolous, but if I was going to be mad, then I might as well not be conscious of it. Tonight was not a time for cares.

The night was chill under my thin suit jacket and cotton shirt, but my blood felt warm and wasted, and I had not yet taken to stumbling. As numbness set in, I became more brazen, loosed my tie and drifted in and out of tilting roads and twining handrails. I wandered past the dimmed clubs, where buoyant jazz notes flowed out onto the streets and splashed over the cobblestones.

An ugly old *cocotte* leaned against the brick masonry of a café-bar. She had enormous thighs and oatmeal breasts, all squeezed into a too-tight laced corset. Her legs were covered in black criss-crosses and high-heeled shoes. She gave me the eye. I looked away.

But staring down into my half-empty cask, my last strand of reserve dissolved. I turned desperately upward to meet her over-rosy cheeks and heavy-lined eyes. She muttered a number to me. I nodded, and followed her through a side-door in the alleyway, up a long flight of steps into a world of drizzling white light, chipped lead paint, splintered wood, and soiled sheets; dank smells pouring from the cool rafters and empty panes between the floorboards.

She opened the door and walked in with a bizarre penguin strut, an outgrowth of her paunchiness, I supposed. I watched with morbid fascination the movement of her behind, like two huge, sifting beanbags, moving up and down, as if large invisible hands were testing their heft before launching them at a pyramid of milk bottles. Her shoes clicked arrhythmically on the floor as she turned and beckoned me inside with a curled fingernail and ghoulish smile. I took a dram from the

bottle and crossed the threshold.

A flower. A vase. The body of a beauty stretched out like Olympia, cool and alluring. Only this time, there were no haughty Salonnières to condemn her beauty for the sake of affectation. This was France, as it was meant to be.

"Open," she said in her light, but dusky Parisian accent. Sun streamed in through the four-paned window of the bedroom room in her flat in Monteparnasse, the center of artistic revival in Paris, south of the Seine. The light danced over her white down comforter, highlighting the sloping curves of her body in line and shadow. She wore a dark blue robe, fallen open at one side to reveal a single breast with a nonchalance bordering on defiance. Her skin was white, but smooth and perfectly contrasted to the thick, black hair that cascaded in waves about the nape of her neck. Her head was propped up on her right hand. She looked at me expectantly.

The box was white and laced in red; an unexpected present. I removed the ribbon and lifted the lid. Inside was a rectangular object, small and metallic, with the letters C.D. etched into its glossy surface: a cigarette case. I looked up at her.

"Thank you," I said, crossing the bed and kissing her on the cheek. She smiled back, in her particular way – with lips curled and tintured at the edges as the shadows deepened the red of her lipstick – a look teetering between complete self-dominance and barely-held amusement.

"For your virtues," she said, breaking into a full smile and stroking my hair. I grinned and reached around the brunette clump, clutching the back of her head and pulling her into a kiss. The robe fell away easy, like a forgotten memory.

Out of a dream I became aware, and awoke to a world of self-contempt. I buttoned my slacks and got up from the bed where the spent, distended mass of the *morue's* body lay sprawled. She moaned some lazy, indecipherable words at me. The room was bathed in sallow light, yellow, squalid and base – and so was I, soiled and peeling at the edges, no better than a spotted stain on her faded wallpaper. It was crude.

I looked at her wobbling flesh, the too-white face cream, and overdrawn lipstick. I stumbled and searched the room furtively for my wine. There, in a brown bag, carefully placed at the foot of the bed. I picked up my blazer from the footboard of the bedstead, grabbed the bottle, and fell aimless toward the bathroom. She ignored me and rolled over.

Searing hatred, inward and everywhere – that was what Paris had to offer me. Look at you, you bloody mess. Failure, disgust, and loathing.

How laughable, how laudable my expectations and naiveté, so full of hope and distraction from the sad truth; I was weak, small, callow, and subservient. I had the fearlessness of a man only willing to risk just enough as is safe. I was no different from mother or Templeton, only more willful and ignorant of my design. That was why they humored me: a daredevil until the cold truth of real life nudges his shoulder, and then he recoils like a spring, without so much as a goodbye. And she knew it: my girl – my God – she knew it! I tipped my head back and let half the bottle flow mercilessly to my brain. No, she didn't suspect.

The mirror stared on disapprovingly, with the age of its cracks and chipping paint along the edges. My hair was ruffled and worn, my eyes patchy and dark from pupil to cheek. Hello self, I thought. You worm.

I opened the cabinet below the sink and searched. Sleeping pills – there – a bottle. Beautiful. I could die like a poet, at least, and sink gently away in the warm drink. I unscrewed the cap and poured a dozen pills into my hand.

Two at a time, swig. Two more, swig. I never could swallow all that much. Long odds say the woman in the other room will find me, and I will wake up a beautiful stranger in some faraway hospital bed. But even then, I mused, at least I would be faraway, and maybe not myself again. Or maybe the medicine would go straight to my brain, making it swell like a bloated fish, and knock against the sides of my skull, rendering me comatose, until I wake again, years later, a changed man. I wagged a finger at my counterpart in the mirror and drank some more.

I didn't feel anything yet. No, that's wrong. I felt nothing, a happier circumstance. I toasted myself like a wrecking ball to the brick, finishing the bottles and sinking down on the toilet, my back pressed against the porcelain base. The bathroom flickered; the shower curtain swayed wan and shiftless. The walls were pitted with cracks. Mildew crept up the walls and around the vanity, straight to the window, where I imagined it would crawl one day around the molding and down the old edifice to freedom. Freedom. I dug my left hand into the trouser pocket and took out my book of matches. *Café Sans-Culottes* was written in scrawled cursive text on the outer flap. I smiled and took out my cigarette holder. Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.

The smile disappeared as I looked down. I knew she was there when I took the case out, but the sight of my girl's disapproving visage still made me wince. *And be not faithless, but believing*, I thought cynically. I put a cigarette in my mouth and struck the match, cupping my hands to

light it, and watched the flicker of flame bounce off the photograph. I languished in her glare, the piercing stare, and deep, Greta Garbo eyes. Mine blackened as I reflected: love lies and dies in Paris.

Three words. They thudded on the carpet, one by one, defying the physics of sound with a dull clang against the fabric.

"J'attends un enfant." She said, her hands clasped weakly about her stomach, looking up at me with a hard stare. She spoke the words in French, as though the impact might be lessened in the time it took for my mind to translate it to English. The room was white. Everything was white – the drapery on the window an appalling threadbare fabric, shiny and translucent. The bed was a loose collection of painted knobs and bright canopy. Everywhere was bright and blinding. The world spun about me as I stood. I grabbed hold to the edge of her night-table and sank into the mattress.

I was frozen. My mind raced. How would my family react? They were forgiving of my leaving home, and indulged me, ever the beneficent caretakers, but they could never abide with this – a child with a dancer, without a family, without a title. She came to my side and gently sat down next to me. I said nothing.

"Love," she said. It was an address, a pet-name, an implication, an expectation. I turned my head away from the carved handle of the dresser I had been staring at blurrily, and looked at her. I heard waves crashing against my ears. The ruffle of the bedsheets scraped painfully loud as her hand brushed over them. I was swimming underwater.

"Are you going to marry me?" she asked bluntly. I nearly choked, and remembered how I had cherished her frank nature, so different from the underhanded politics at home.

My god, what a mess. In an instant, my future unfolded and burst into tiny flames before my eyes. She looked at me with curious patience; the embers fell to bare earth. I hesitated, still in shock, then gathered myself up. I forced a smile.

"Of course. I love you. No – this is wonderful." I said, managing a weak nod, and some theater, putting my arm around her shoulders. She watched me for a moment, then kissed my cheek.

"It will be alright," she said, rolling her "r"s in that particular way I found so sexy only moments before. Now it sounded tacky and unrefined. Still, she said with confidence, "Sooner, than later. But, we will our best."

Worry overwhelmed me. Like a schoolchild, a puppy-boy, I had talked grandly and romantically with her about our plans for the future. And not just during sex, so she had to have believed it. I talked about taking her abroad, to America, once I had settled in, and made enough for myself to strike out on my own. Then I would break

free. I could live for love. How much I had said, with forcible words and wild gesticulations! But what did that mean? Dreams are just air, like talk. Light, silvery stuff, quick to evanesce. I was watching them vanish in this bright room, on this too-sunny day. I heard children squeal outside with hideous delight.

No, it couldn't be, I would be bereft. A child with a French Catholic – our child would be half-French. My family, with their esteemed frippery and Victorian sentimentality, would never accept it. Silly to dream. As if money and the trappings of nobility could ever compensate their Protestantism.

I drew in a deep breath. It would ruin them – I would be ruined. Success. Maturity – ha ha! I was a fool. But there was a chance for reason: accidents had happened in the past, and accidents could be remedied. Yes, it would be fine. I smiled once more at my girl, and rose from the bed. I walked down the narrow wooden steps and placed a call to London.

Cold, clammy. Silent and white light, scratch, knock, walk, clop, touch, tap, rustle, tap. Tap. Tap. Crack – pain. Giggle.

Open one eye. Greyed blurs. Second eye. Greyer blur. Rough focus. Spins. My head vanished in confusion.

Vision clarified. Grey became stone, became curb. It became yellows, reds, and browns. Cold, light, shivering, and white. Paris glared at me in the morning sun.

The air felt crisp as I became aware of the wind entering my lungs in slow, rhythmic suspiration. A pungent odor sharpened my nostrils. My skin tingled, but I couldn't feel my legs until I felt a heavy pebble slap against my thigh. I heard more laughter, and turned my head in time to turn away again before another missile flew through the air and landed stinging against the back of my skull.

I shook in dizzy confusion and sat up. Three Parisian boys – the oldest probably no more than twelve years old – stood about twenty meters from me. The closest had on long, brown slacks and a dirt-black long-sleeved shirt. He led a few steps from the others, who stood behind him, cheering him on. They were poised like all good hoodlums, coiled and ready to flee at a moment's notice. The two in back began their retreat as I rose, while the leader bared his teeth in a mocking smile, laughing at me through a pronounced nose that, depending on his success someday, would become either a distinguishing mark or a sorry source of amusement. He uttered an epithet at me of which I only caught the word *Anglais* as he turned and ran up the street.

I shook my head. It pounded, and I blinked pain. My stomach was

wracked, turned into a thousand excruciating knots. My hair was damp with rainwater and vomit. I smelled awful.

A black sock drooped over the curb onto the street. I noticed one of my feet were bare, the other still sheathed. There was something disgraceful about that. And as I allowed my eyes to travel up the length of my body, I saw that the sock, my soiled pants, a wet pair of underwear, and suspenders were my sole lineaments. Either the whore had pilfered my belongings and left me here to die, or I had been abandoned and robbed in my sleep. I supposed it didn't matter either way.

Why hadn't the police picked me up? I sighed and discarded the thought. I was alive, if not sure how I should feel about it. Embarrassed, I decided. Naked, dissolute, and disgraced. My crowning moment of shame – but I didn't give a damn. I was *independent*.

I looked at the mess I had made in my stupor. It was charming to see the half-digested pills resting in the cracks of the road, woefully scattered. It was ironic: I had drunk too much, and it saved my life. A grim smile cracked through my pain. I always was a coward. Only my mind had the stomach for poison.

I stood up and brushed off the rocks that covered my side, and which had dutifully constructed a latticework of dents and creases up the length of my face. I took my hand and smoothed the sand off my cheek, picking some pebbles out with my fingernail.

I rubbed at my naked chest and surveyed my condition. The cigarette case was gone, of course, along with my jacket and shirt. So was my wallet, my papers; everything that identified me as me.

Across the street, plastered improbably against one of the thin black poles that lined either side of the road was a black and white photograph. It glared disapprovingly, edges flapping in the breeze. I came to it and bent down, carefully peeling it off of the metal.

With faint wonder, I looked at the familiar face, holding the wet memory ginger in my fingers.

"You are afraid," she accused. "La cage, la cage – you are a prisoner to everyone, even yourself."

"Why must you be like this?" I asked, holding the Leica box in my hand. "I don't want to discuss my family. Let's talk about happy things."

"You live in fantasy," she finished.

"Don't be like that. Smile," I said, and snapped the shutter.

It was buoyant day. Like a painting by Monet, the clouds sat colorful and puffy in great gobs on the celestial canvas. I placed the photograph tenderly on the curb, smoothing it out in the sun, and exhaled a little less dully. I walked out to the middle of the road, a thin and narrow strip between buildings sandwiched together through centuries of need and inexorable motion. Through this lens a path stretched out before me, and I perceived a square of blue light at the end, suggesting the sea. The night echoed in the back of my mind. Would I be forgiven? A fool's lament, I thought, thrusting my hands into empty pockets. There was no me, anymore.

A broken canon flitted across my mind: *Blessed are they who have seen, and so believe.* I smiled inwardly, breathed deep the cool air and walked south, in the direction of the Seine.

EBONY: THE ESSENCE THEREOF

i am black.

don't think I can't see
your eyes trailing me,
marking the skin
you think I'd wish
"W"hite.

dark caramel with a touch of honey
i am

yet; and still;

you whisper.

we live in a society
wrapped up and bound
in
color

color we can't escape color that defines

what ought to stay a mystery;

is there anything really wrong with

interracial marriage?

and tell me please what is wrong
with fried chicken and
watermelon

::dancing carelessly to anything with a beat::

are we not always wrong? in this political age we are::

always wrong. wrong to talk about fried chicken and beer
wrong to sit out on the stoop on a warm summer's day and get your
hair braided
wrong to get an education
hell, wrong to think
to be
to do
wrong to wear a durag
wrong to have a child out of wedlock
wrong to be on welfare when you can't get a job because your parent's
named you shinimiquana and people know you're black before you get
to the interview
wrong to laugh so loud
talk so loud
walk so loud

wrong to be.

we allow ourselves to be defined
shut behind the bars set by Society himself

raised on the shut up; don't stay in the sun so long, you'll get too dark
raised on the perms
raised on the Black is Beautiful, but don't be Black, it won't get you
anywhere
raised on the don't eat so much; get straight A's; try to get a 1600 when
everybody and his momma knows the SAT is racially biased

raised on the taunts; the jeers; monkey names

and yet, in this grand irony of life, we are becoming them, as they are
becoming us
and we try so hard to cling on

we speak of community and black tables and Bridge—

Rachel Daniel

we speak of including being excluded being a

part of others

a history of those who have worn their dark skin like a rich cloak
wrapped resting elegantly on a poor woman's shoulders

like an ostentatious church hat that your momma had to buy instead of
paying last month's rent

we have taken what they called
dirt

and called it ebony; shining skin

we are secretly lusted after by other races

merely because in the
assembly line of life

God chose to drop our souls

into these bodies: (once Godforsaken, now Godglorifying)

and He gave us that

caramel, honey color

to:

keep us warm; to comfort us; to strengthen us.

We Wear The Colors of Kings and of Queens
and of humble and lowly servants.

The World will rise, and call us blessed.

CURBSIDE STATUE HAS NO LEGS LEFT

A musty afghan holds up his shoulders,
his worn eyes grasp at his dusty breath.
Numb to the lamplight,
his forgotten fingers rain at his side.
The wind plucks his withered hat,
he doesn't bother to chase it.
Night wrinkles into his forehead,
the pavement seeps through his thighs.
Lost his face in the rust behind him,
nowhere to rest his tattered cave.
Hugs from his children roll off his chin,
his throat catches the distance from home.
he never moves his feet again.

CHAIR



THE GLENN MACHINE

I piloted the green Honda CR-V up the sixty five-degree angle that was One Shot Lane. The road was composed of a washed out water-run, jutting with boulders whose skulls peaked out through the hard soil, with broken-down cars and battered shanties lining the way. The trees reached out to the lane, scratching the windows; the way was getting thinner. Rode half a mile before the trees completely overtook the lane, crowding the way with fallen branches and defeated trunks. The white paint of an old trailer home peaked through the branches of the barrier: it was time to turn back around and ask for help at that restaurant I had passed on the way in. Turning around took five minutes, a twelve point maneuver. Nearly scraped against the tough bark of a stubborn teenager of a tree: missed by a half a centimeter. Deep breaths after that; 97.9 FM got cranked up. That rock station's signal could penetrate any mountain stretch of North Eastern Pennsylvania; the DJs boasted about this frequently. I coasted back down the steep lane in neutral, to AC/DC's "Back in Black."

The woman at the mouth of One Shot Lane came out of her trailer holding a shotgun. Down went the passenger side window at the push of a button: I was riding alone. Diplomacy was the only solution for this mess. She approached in a brightly colored hunter's jacket, her hair cut short, looking about forty, her face tight with apprehension. I leaned over towards the open window and tried my hardest to look friendly and earnest. "Do you know the way to Rickett's Glenn State Park?"

She looked over with a bemused expression. "Yeah. Get back on 118. It's two miles down the road, on the left. Don't know why you'd be driving here—it's a private driveway."

Held up my set of printout directions from Expedia.com. "The internet told me that the way was up Old Lane Road."

This surprised her; she let the barrel of the shotgun point down at the ground and stepped closer. "That's really something," as if nothing could have been more ridiculous.

Traded polite smiles and then I was off, thrilled to be set straight. My destination was close—if not for the fifteen minutes spent navigating One Shot Lane, I would have been ahead of schedule. Expedia said an hour and forty three minutes. When the CR-V pulled into the small

shaded entrance lot it was 8:44—an hour and forty four minutes spent on I-78, the North East extension of the PA turnpike, then PA Rt. 115 through Wilkes Barre, then PA Rt. 415 through Dallas, and finally onto 118. Cycling through these numbers in the stillness of the lot felt numbing; it would be difficult to shift my focus over to natural splendor. I slowly assembled the contents of my knapsack: notebook, sandwich, apple, water bottle, sack of generic Mary Janes (peanut butter chew-candy), wallet, and my cellular phone.

Bulletin boards at the entrance of the trail, with newspaper articles that told of dead hikers, broken skulls from a spill off one of the falls. Another sign read: *DO NOT HIKE ON THIS TRAIL IF YOU ARE NOT PHYSICALLY IN SHAPE AND WEARING THE PROPPER FOORWEAR (HIKING BOOTS)*. Looked down at my low traction white New Balances and stepped across the threshold onto the cindered trail that curled off into the forest.

Temperature was in the low forties; wore a sweatshirt and a rain jacket overtop. Comfortable set up. Took broad strides ahead into the park. The water running aside of me (six feet broad) was named Kitchen Creek. Cheery, homey kind of name for water that flowed through the rocky crags of twenty two individual waterfalls. Each of the park's waterfalls was named after members of Colonel Rickett's family or, according to a park rep's e-mail, "just what he thought was appropriate," and that seemed to mean Native American tribes. Perhaps the representative worded the message that way for the sake of some politically correct angle I was unaware of. Colonel Ricketts' heirs established the State Park in 1944. Ricketts served the Union in the Civil War and commanded Battery F at Gettysburg. He was successful in business as well as the military: his family controlled over 80,000 acres of forest because of their ownership of Central Penn Lumber Company and sold about 48,000 of that to the State of Pennsylvania. The park is currently 13,050 acres of preserved forest stretching across Sullivan and Columbia counties.

The odyssey opened with Murray Reynolds. First waterfall I had laid eyes on in person since October of 1997. Rush of water created a solid humming that was audible from a quarter mile away on the trail. Reaching the waterfall meant laying eyes on the water-rounded stones that the Kitchen Creek had worked at for thousands of years in a successive, unending attacking polish. Murray Reynolds' height was sixteen feet. Pockets of river foam gathered round the banks in a

relative calm while other waters got swept down the sheer igneous shelf. The river foam fluffed up in layers, all the color of dirty polar bear fur. Green mosses and ingrained lichens counter-pointed this shade with their dull greens-grays. I rested and dangled white New Balances at a dry spot on the ledge. Two men passed by, each on their own. The one was dressed in camouflage pants and wore a heavy hiking backpack. The other wore a lumberjack style red plaid shirt and had an ambitious eruption of blonde fur on his face. We all shared nods and resumed our individual communions.

In the weeks before my trip I would bring up the topic of Rickett's Glenn in random, pleasant conversation. It was surprising to find that the falls were a nexus of personal experience for two people I did not expect to have any connection with the state park: my manager at the Zacks snack bar spent her honeymoon in a cabin there. A freshman named Alex who is local to the Wilkes Barre area explained to me that it is a teenage tradition to leap off one of the high falls. A kind of rite of passage. She told me this two weeks before I visited the Glenn, with a daring expression on her face, wearing a short pink skirt, hair dyed an equal shade of pink. "No big deal. You just jump." The most common personal tradition for those who visit the Glenn seemed to be a quiet wandering among the falling water and rocky crags. There were no words with the two single hikers who passed me by. A surprise to see others alone; I expected to be the only one to be walking alone through the wilderness. But even the couples and groups I came across later on in the day had the same air as those first two hikers; each one of us operated alone. When you jump from a waterfall, you go alone.

The way to Sheldon Reynolds is a path that should have only existed in Middle Earth. Steep steps shimmied up, layered like fallen stone dominoes, alongside rushing Kitchen Creek, all chiseled by invisible artisans. While the creek sculpts away at bedrock. At some twists in the stairway which leads the hiker to the summit of the thirty five foot falls, safety requires you to go on all fours to successfully manage. Didn't pause as much for this falls, even though the drop looked devastating—after the staircase, I was most aware of the toll examining each of the twenty might have on my endurance, so I decided to keep up a decent pace. Twenty meters up the trail stood twenty seven foot Harrison Wright, with a similar plate-rock ascending staircase. The water flowed off the sheer face of Harrison in a perfect sheet of water, crashing down into an eggish tear drop bay. This collision of waters created a spraying

mist that made a damp collision with my face on while scaling the steps, where muscle-roots bulge out between the rock plates. Harrison seemed to be the best site for Alex's jump because no rocks jutted out from the edge of the falls and the water gathers in the bay where the water *might* have been deep enough to accommodate a teenager's flailing body. The top of Harrison revealed large walls of rotting river foam between two old black logs. Beyond that was a crossroads of sorts, where the path diverged into two diverse waterfall avenues.

A huge flat rock stood on end at the crossroads, next to a bulletin board. A solid bronze plaque proclaimed Ricketts Glenn as a designated National Landmark, as of 1968 for demonstrating "exceptional value in illustrating the natural history of the United States of America." The bulletin board had a carved-in map of the entire state park with the name and height of each cascade. Looking over the waterfall boulevards, I opted for the left fork to scale first. There was a simple reason: ninety four foot Ganogal loomed in the middle of the left leg, the ninth waterfall on the circuit.

The rock stairway continued. At Tuscarora, dead trees splayed down in the cavernous stone jaws, among the hissing waters. Their uniform shape and dark color gave them the look of wet cigars, fizzed and put on in some monster spring. Tuscarora's tusks. After this point, the path took on a series of nasty switchbacks, and gained the characteristics of a mountain slip-and-slide with streams of slick mud covering the steps. I was on all fours for the remainder of this section (after removing my windproof cycling gloves that had been necessary in the earlier part of the trip), cautiously creeping out at the right edge of the steps, where the void of space fell away. Space, however, did not have free reign—this was a kingdom of rock, and the rocks did their best to dominate every square foot of the Rickett's territory. It would have too, if not for the burrowing efforts of Kitchen Creek. A homely handle for such a primordial force.

Constantly creeping created a warm churning in my thighs to combat the cool chill of the water vapor. The flows of this chill came continuously; nothing to do but creep further and further along, and hope to get out of range. But it was not an entirely unpleasant sensation; managed to cleanse the sweat from my face. Really, it acted as a balancing force. The gravel of the path above the mountain steps took on an iron-oxide blush, with long plate sections of solid stone as the flooring, courteously provided by the skin of the mountain. I came

to a thin jet of water—just a run-off spring. Following the path of this trickle, I saw that this *endless* flow had carved a perfect thin cut across the face of the plate-rock, with its destination being the drop-away gorge to my right.

Mohican hissed and foamed at the corner of Waterfall Avenue. The grade of the ascent had grown more pronounced. A small bridge rose over a spliced off waterfall: a tectonic tea-party, complete with its sprawl of dirty dishes (hulking brown rock plates) rinsed with the soapy Kitchen Creek foam. My notebook had been out for the majority of this walk; I held it at my right side, afraid of dropping it into the muddy slop at my left. I held it tight to my right side while scaling. As the grade increased, the chance I got to take notes decreased, until I stopped and placed the black and white marble composition book back into my bag. The chief priority was to avoid falling to my death.

A small silverish skin that could have easily been either a Three Musketeer wrapper or the uncoiled epidermis of some rare mountain snake lay before the massive upheaval of Ganogal. A ninety four foot colossus, naturally assembled ziggurat style in a half-coherent heap. Gushing with the wildest froth of Kitchen Creek, each layer of rock the size of a drive-through restaurant: it would be a long spill to the base. Alex couldn't have jumped off this, could she? Mighty, transient sea breeze shook me—not so unlike the cool vapor pounding from earlier, only in a “country-style” portion, a cold exhale straight off the steroid falls.

People, tourists, hikers, water-fall chasers started to peak their heads out. The trails hardly seemed deserted at all now. Families, couples strolled around in complete absorption with the falling water—they only had eyes for the liquid shiny stuff and the ground in front of them. Any eye contact was a victory. Little room for words. How satisfying could they be under the invading hum of the cascades?

Walked to the summit of Ganogal, up towards the gray sky and the trees with burning leaves, avoiding the pattern of spider leg hemlock roots rising out of the soil. Passed through a primitive mountain-hall with its blunt, weather sculpted awning. A couple in their mid thirties walked ahead of me. They were lightly dressed while possessing a relaxed air that managed to escape the majority of the rest of the visitors. Must have been locals; the man walked at a quick trot in his stiff light blue jeans; the woman easily kept up. She wore a pair of LA Lights; the red blinking on the heels reflected off the clear tension of

the mud puddles she dodged. I followed them for a little while, debating how to start up a conversation. But they pulled away around Onodagen and I stepped aside of the trail for a peaceful lunch on a fallen log. From this perch, the new wave of tourists was visible: perhaps a group passed once every five minutes as I chewed my turkey sandwich, sipped some water, and started to suck on the generic Mary Janes. The chewy peanut butter lump melted in a pouch next to my lip as whole families trekked by: one bald father dressed in Eddie Bauer gear gave rough shouting directions to his son—then he glanced up and spotted me. His face was stricken with shock and I thought he might have a heart attack, but he resumed bossing his family and avoiding my gaze.

Waterfalls got left behind up on the Highland Trail. They were replaced by dogwoods and beeches that form-fit the tight contours of the path. Chiseled out chasms and rushing water distantly throbbed in their delights, but in the middle of Highland, that powerful hum reached its lowest ebb. Pleasant contrast—the woods swelled as a peaceful, fiery garden—quiet and lonely. Up around a blind corner, an inky moving shadow transformed from a Black Bear cub into a Labrador: the initial form shot me full of adrenaline. Then its owners came around the bend and we exchanged hellos. Tried to hide the blind terror that had struck me seconds before; probably seemed stiff and surprised.

Directions carved into a wooden sign post informed that there was a short cut over to the Leigh Trail: the short cut ran through a darker, denser expanse of wilderness than before. The fifth Mary Jane wandered into my mouth and melted down to the bare candy. Sweat clung to the portion of my back where the knapsack clung. Two and a half hours into this tour—the final leg approached. Cutting down the shortcut, I found myself in the company of the denim-wearing couple from before. He walked with a pronounced limp. Her nose had turned to a Rudolph red. Their manners were airy, jovial, and yet they distanced themselves from where I stood. We were back among the waterfalls, though I was unsure of this one's name. Midsized: typical match of jutting rock and falling water. Had two and half hours made me numb to the wonder? The couple didn't move; they whispered at each other, until she turned to face me.

“Y'all lost too?”

“Maybe a little bit.” My voice sounded different. Perhaps the air up

here was affecting my lungs, my brain, my heart-rhythm.

The denim man half-smiled, showed some teeth, leaned forward. "Which trail ya think we should hang with—Leigh or Highland?"

His companion cut me off. "Names don't matter. Let's just follow the waterfalls. I remember from last time that that's the fast way back."

Sounded like better advice than I was prepared to give. They stalked off, content with their own devices. They gave off a feeling of locality—their homes couldn't be much further than Wilkes Barre, they dressed lightly as if no misfortune could find them here, and their accents had that regional twist. My trail would be theirs: down Leigh. Went on for over two miles. They disappeared with their massive denim strides. Found them again at a parking lot, but not the lot the CR-V was parked. It was the parking lot at the opposite end of the Glenn. Somewhere I had missed a spike off in Leigh trail that would take me down the opposite parallel of the water fall avenue. Standing dumbly in the lot, I turned to face a mounted map on a bulletin board, while the sound of cars rumbled across the gravel lot. Somewhere I had lost the hum of the falling water. Meanwhile, the denim couple piled into a Cadillac and sped through the gravel slop back to the highway. This position touched the outskirts of a dried out lake said the map. Legs burned. Being lost meant losing curiosity. Did not want to be stranded out here, under the ever-darkening iron sky, stumbling through the Glenn by evening.

Hauled my dead legs down the Leigh trail, passing more casual hikers along the way. They must have thought me strange to be rushing along, not bothering to eye up the bubbling cataracts. Three miles back to the car. Moved quickly down the steep trail, daring it to shake me off like a dog would a flea. Felt unusual: had adjusted my body position for scaling up stairs the entire day. With as slick as the stones were, they should have had cartoon banana peel coverings, but I held my feet, and reached the car without serious injury.

One thirty in the afternoon in the Trails' End Restaurant, which sits on a lot less than a mile away from the lot. Red trim, white wooden panels, all parked up with pickups and old station wagons. A cup of coffee was required for the trip back: ten miles of hiking burned up some of the fuel supply. Sitting at the counter, I ordered the grilled cheese special: Texas toast, bacon, tomato, pure-blooded American cheese. The girl behind the counter kept refilling my coffee, I kept drinking it. Local families swarmed at the bigger tables at my back.

Elderly gents and their wives paid their checks at my right, exited, and neglected to shut the front door. The bell banged as the door rolled back and forth in its hinges—cold breeze slamming the restaurant, coming up through the gulley. A thirty-something hostess squawked about a mistake on the bill. When it looked like she had settled down, I asked her about what kind of business she got as a result of tourism to the Glenn.

“Yeah, it’s given us some alright.” She did not make eye contact, too busy with serving the man in the trucker hat next to me his mountain-style curly fries topped with brown gravy.

“This place looks pretty popular with the locals. How long has it been in business?”

She eyed me as if I was completely insane, as if the question could never be answered.

“Long time. Real long time.” And that was that. Real long time: just like the water’s been falling back in Rickett’s Glenn for a real long time. Coffee dripped from the percolator as the skies outside turned an even harder shade of iron. This whole stretch of country was a machine carved out of primitive Appalachian steel, with all its components zipping around like in its cycle of energy transformation; the hostess was part of it. She whirled around on her route, and waltzed back behind the divide, where a whole gang was slapping together grilled cheeses, cooking eggs, and the like. I sat back in my chair and drained another cup off coffee. It went straight to my legs until my foot started tapping in a caffeinated rhythm, aching for the gas pedal.

STILL LEARNING



TRIGGERFINGER ROMANCE

Let's shoot the moon with this pistol
And swim in glowing seas it pours into night
You keep the warm within my eyes and insides
And I wish I could wear you
Like a coat to keep out cold in winter

The sigh of a sunrise sounds similar
To my blue burning dreams of vintage ideals
I'd fill my pockets with pleasant thoughts
And sit, watching the tide wash over snowy shores
Dancing diamonds, flakes of whites and greys

Miracles remain overrated
As time tells sweetened truths to my finally faced
Golden optimism that soaks cool sands
Because perfection that is just so
Lovely that it qualifies that category

And nature is a phenomenon, unchallenged
Like fine art or precious architecture
There's something that has been built
That makes me marvel and wish myself
A memory of solid steel

I'd close my eyes on today to simply remember
These sensations, these feelings, these firsts
I'd sit inside of warm wooden caves and reminisce
Wrapped in a blanket of fresh philosophy
Through these hours of sunshine time

Necessary naked conversation and conclusions reveal
I'm so obvious that you can read my skin
Out loud, over coffee or old friends
Whisper sweet absurdities that make us
Laugh until salt falls from fast clouds

PHOTO ESSAY: HAMPSTEAD CEMETERY

Rosa



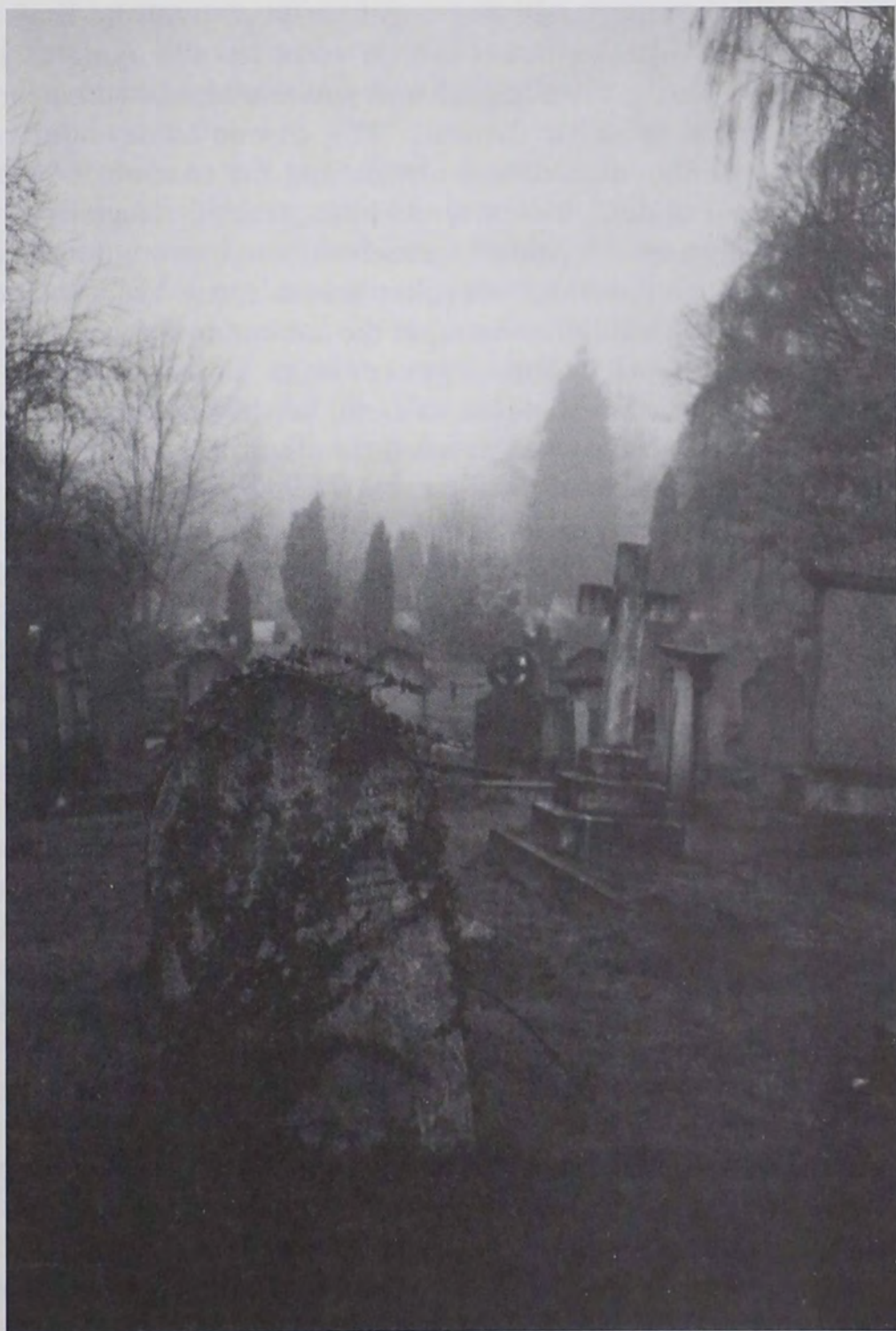
PHOTO ESSAY: HAMPSTEAD CEMETERY

Willow



PHOTO ESSAY: HAMPSTEAD CEMETERY

Ivy



EVENFALL IN BAD HOMBURG

Along the horizon, night had begun to swell over the landscape. Slowly, the blackish-bluish canopy crept its way along a cloud-blanketed sky, quietly engulfing all traces of the bloody sunset on the opposite side of its stellar domain. The cosmic battle raged on in silence, though the outcome was certain, and the creatures of the day hastily retreated to dens, burrows, and nests, seeking refuge from their evenfall counterparts. A pair of squirrels skittered across the road and into the brush purposefully; stragglers would surely be devoured. I glanced sharply skyward once more, as the last battered defenses of Sun were broken and routed shamefully out of sight. Columns of silver now bridged the distance from heaven to earth, hurtling downward through the blackened sky, jackknifing between clouds, at last splashing messily on the ground beneath.

Settling under its new master, the earth heaved a powerful sigh; a blast of wind swooped down from over the mountains, and the vast tree-line shook and groaned from the strain of it. Then all was calm. Rocking more slowly, more gracefully now, the trees waltzed with one another, and whispered among themselves in the rustling of their branches. I wondered if they spoke of me, and what they had to say, as I slowly made my way down the path between them. They hated me, I decided, several steps further along. My backpack, after all, was filled with the recycled parts of their close friends and relatives. Before long, however, I was clear of their accusing stares and underhanded plotting, as the thick forested area around me broke sharply, and was immediately succeeded by an enormous stretch of vast fields.

The strands of golden-yellow wheat jutted timidly upward through the freshly tilled soil, still only a fraction of what they would become. The generation before them, in fact, had been quite tall, until the recent threshing, which had left only these stubby orphans behind. They were so much better full grown, just before harvest season, when you could walk along the edge of the field with hand outstretched, and run your fingers across them for that comfortingly soft, prickly sensation.

Up ahead, the hills, great waves of grass and weeds, splashed against the first evidence of civilization: the makeshift walls, fences, and barns scattered about the area. Between them ran a secluded glen through

which I often passed. At this time of night, however, it seemed more like a kind of partially-excavated tomb. With each step I took through it, the damp squish of earth and grass on my now mud-plastered shoes reminded me of the reality of things.

I turned my attention upward again, for the first time in some while. Immediately, I was taken aback by the tremendous court of stars that were now encircling the moon in a celestial swirl. From one corner of sight to the other they had been spattered everywhere on the jet black canvas of the sky, as though violently thrown there by a frustrated artist.

The mouth of the glen opened up into a wide-stretched meadow centered about a copse of trees, enclosed by a quiet road on one side and a rough line of dry brush on the other. Since I was closer to home now, I picked up the pace of my walking for the final stretch.

Right past the small meadow was a narrow concrete walking and biking path, neatly framed by a line of hedges intersecting it, and a smaller, rectangular wheat field on the other side. The clicking sound of my shoes colliding with the hard, artificial ground was quite a change from the quiet sifting noises of the grass, and the more noticeable plopping and sucking sounds of the muddy areas.

Approaching the end of the path and ducking through the hedges to continue on my way, I could finally see the very edge of Frankfurt in the distance. The skyline, if one could call it that, was brightly alight with thousands of man-made stars of its own. They shone brightly in all directions, dissecting and dividing up the blackness all around, trying to understand it, to master it.

The obelisks of the city, however, did little to mimic the nature surrounding them. They towered against the raining beams of silvery light, pushing upward through them, obstructing them, defying them. It was a strange sight, to be sure, where the rolling hills, the grasslands, the meadows, the wheat fields and the forests collided suddenly with the steel and concrete of the highway. Serenity and powerless admiration at once became control, domination, and ambition. The dirt paths were replaced with pavement there, the forests of chattering trees with forests of tittering shoppers, the cosmos with the movies.

A thick mist was forming all around, making it hard to observe much of anything at all. The symbiotic machines of nature and man were shrouded from view, and the churning sea of stars above began to disappear with them. I quickened my pace again, hoping to find my way home before getting lost, killed, or maimed in some gruesome way.

The crunch of gravel and the sifting ground under me meant I was close. Hopping between neighboring shrubberies, I arrived at last on a street. My home, now visible, was right down the road. The houses on the way were decorated with flowers, gardens, and tiny square patches of grass that the Germans liked to think of as “yards.” The artificial and the natural were one again, interleaved, creating a 3D mosaic of grey, red, and green. The shining silver columns of light, trophies of Moon’s conquest, were no longer to be seen between the thick clouds droning along overhead. The only light left was the dim yellow glow of a dying streetlamp, and the sterile white one of fluorescent bulb in an occupied kitchen.

LOST

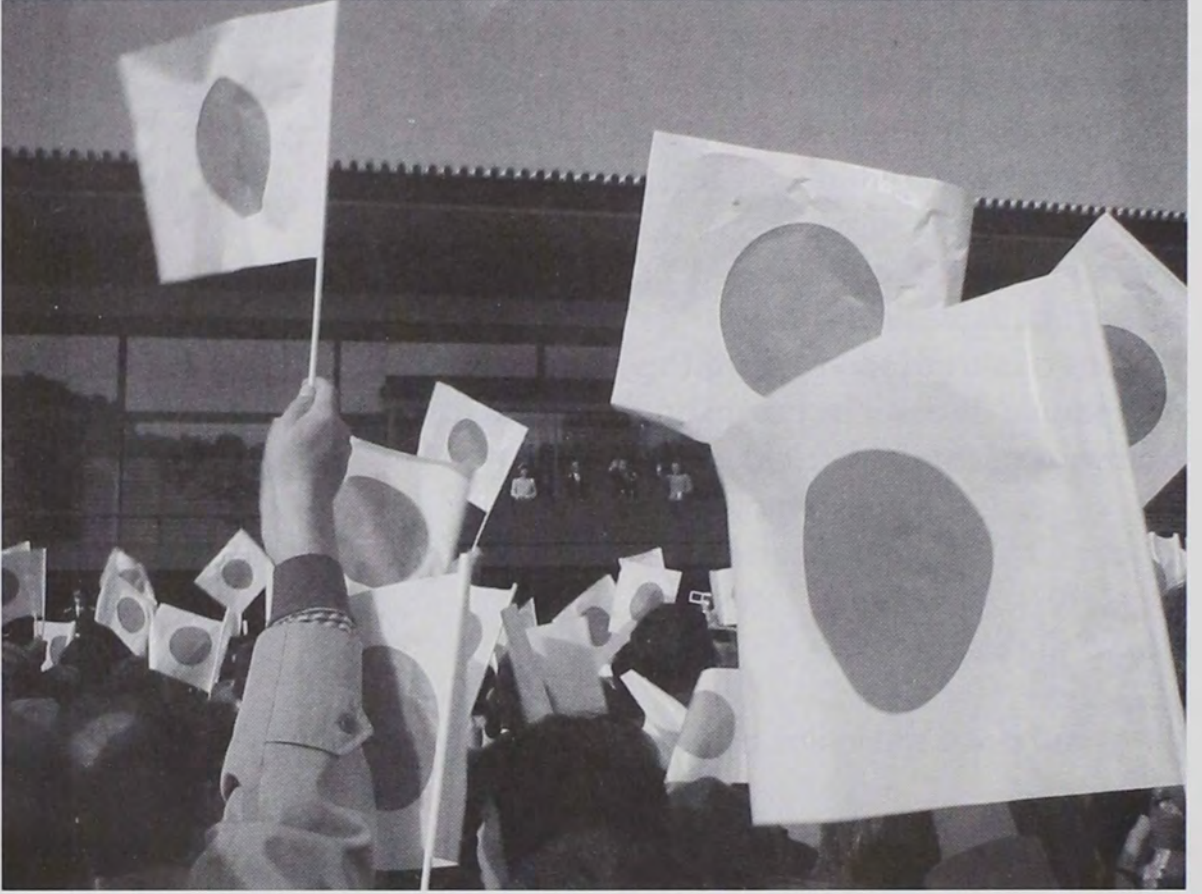
I have lost the talent for words.
Over critical of linguistic limitations,
Over come with phrenic fatigue,
Dormant fingers stir uneasy
Teeth grind tongue and cheek.
I have insatiable delusions.
Visions of a truth too brilliant to see,
Symphonic divinations poignantly drowned in sobs,
Chimeras of terrifying clemency,
 magnanimous anger,
 harrowing ecstasy.

I have all this

and not a single line of poetry.

What is left to hold?

PATRIOTISM



RUNNING THROUGH CONNECTICUT

He'd read marcus
aurelius. He'd known
aurelius.
Or at least he'd seen
the beauty
in the most ambiguous
words the man spoke
about love and a
sparrow.

ABSENCE OF FIELD

“We all have reasons for moving.”
- Mark Strand

I was in the wrong place again. It was the summer after my sophomore year of high school, and I was in the lounge of a dorm room at Susquehanna University.

~

I'd spent months during the school year preparing my PGSA application, polishing my modest collection of poems. I drove with my father to an unfamiliar high school, an hour away from my home town, and sat along with a few hundred other kids from the area in a large auditorium, listening to a congratulatory speech on making it to the Second Round. Our applications had been reviewed; our portfolios had been appreciated. Now came the personal interviews. Now came the sight-reading, the improvisational acting, the free-writing, or whatever spontaneous feat of creativity they would use to test us in our art. Then, from among those of us here and those in similar auditoriums across the entire state, they would choose the small group of 100 high school artists—20 high school creative writers—10 high school poets—who would go to the prestigious Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts the following summer.

With the rest of the writers who had applied, I went to an unfamiliar classroom in this unfamiliar school. I waited in the hall, and disappeared into the private office when my turn came. I told the interviewer my name. I answered her questions. I explained what 'cliché' meant and what the importance of 'concrete imagery' was. I discussed my favorite authors and poets.

Down the hall, a few high school actors were experimenting with scarves and silly hats, rehearsing a skit they'd just been handed, and laughing. Around the corner, violinists were warming up, singers were humming and practicing scales. But we writers were quiet. Some of us wore black and had hair dyed in neon, some of us wore jean shorts and starving-artist-looking shoes. I was wearing an uncomfortable blouse and heavy black slacks because my mother works in Big Business and knows how to dress one appropriately for interviews. I waited. We were

given a list of words, and I wrote a poem about standing in my neighborhood park during a rainstorm. I even worked in the word 'evolve.'

~

When I was in fourth grade, I went with my elementary school class to the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, an hour and a half from my small suburban neighborhood embedded in Lancaster County farm country. Embarking on a field trip into local cultural history, we piled onto boxy yellow school buses, carted off to see the converted home of the Wyeth family. We were visiting the collected paintings of three generations of American artists concentrated in one modest, familiar-smelling place. Here, fathers, sons and neighbors of Brandywine Valley jostled for their respective claims on creative history from the confines of their canvas squares. They peered out from worlds of rolling hills, farm animals and dirt roads into a room full of bored, suburban children. We recognized these sights as the rectangular views passing by our bus windows—a fifteen minute drive in any direction brought us face to face with the reality of these 19th and early 20th century works of art. What interest was it to us, these imitations of the commonplace?

I can't quite remember. Perhaps it was here, in one of these rooms dedicated to self-conscious preservation of artistic influence and family bonds. Or perhaps in some eggshell-walled, high-ceilinged, looming gallery of modern art. Perhaps even in the same classroom where I'd learned so many other bits of misplaced information that now lurk unclaimed in the back of my mind. But at some point, I discovered Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World," a painting at once so prosaic and yet so thrillingly strange that the memory of it has emerged from my displaced suburban childhood demandingly intact, as few other memories have.

~

It is the summer after my sophomore year of high school, and I am not at the Governor's School for the Arts. I am not up near Lake Erie, where even summer mornings are cool enough to warrant a sweatshirt. I am not on a college campus with ninety-nine other talented high school students, exploring our creative skills and sharing with one another the joys of living for two months in a very real, if temporary, artistic community. Instead, I have paid two-hundred and fifty dollars out of my allowance money to come to a week-long creative writing

workshop ‘summer camp’ at Susquehanna University, a depressing two hours from home. I am in the wrong place.

The first night of ‘camp’, everyone meets in the basement lounge of the dormitory to play getting-to-know-you name games. The counselors break us up into smaller groups of seven or eight, and we each have to introduce ourselves and tell three interesting facts about our lives. One of these facts is a lie. Everyone else in the group has to guess which one. The counselors are proud of this game because creative writing is about lying, about making things up and passing them off as truth. The game is in keeping with this theme. I can’t think of any interesting truths, let alone a lie. I blush and finally mumble something about eating frog’s legs, which everyone politely smiles at, too kind to even point it out as false. The kid next to me lies about sky-diving, and the girl next to him has actually gone sky-diving. Our group ends up talking for three hours, long after everyone else has abandoned the basement lounge and gone back to their respective dorm rooms. I don’t say much, but I sit on the edge of the group and listen. The girl I’m rooming with is still down in the lounge, and I figure it would be rude to retreat and go to bed. So I stay and give friendly smiles to anyone who looks my way, trying to minimize my awkward and unfamiliar presence.

~

Memory has changed the meaning of “Christina’s World” by now, though the painting itself is still clear. A girl in a faded pink dress leans forward, half-sitting, half-lying in a field of dead grass. On the hill’s horizon stands a gray, dim farmhouse, stark against the hazy steel blue of the cloudless sky, surrounded by a thin fence. A strand of the girl’s dark brown hair is loose from its tie and trails delicately in the wind. Everything else is still.

I remember this girl, Christina, as being blind. In fact, she is crippled and, although she can see the house on the horizon as perfectly as I can, she is as incapable of rising and running towards her home as I am of entering the painting and reaching the house myself. In my memory of this painting, though, she is blind. Her entire world consists of the sharp grass beneath her palms and the wind that carries her calls away from her lips and into what might as well be a vast nothingness, an infinite absence.

In my memory, she can walk, but she is afraid. The wind that drags away her voice might, if she were to risk standing up, pull her body carelessly along into nothingness as well. So she hugs the ground—safe,

familiar, and yet mute and directionless. She knows only that the way home leads her upwards, slowly climbing a hill with a rounded crest that pushes the farmhouse out into an expanse of sky as invisible as the earth itself. I can see how close she is, how easy the climb would be. I know that she could rise and walk. But she is blind and afraid.

~

The feeling I now associate with “Christina’s World” reminds me of the Stephen King book I read on a dare in sixth grade. I’d never read a horror book before then, let alone one seven hundred pages long. My first year in middle school found me just as eager to fit in, to blend in, to disappear, as any other average, angst-ridden middle school student. I’d only recently discovered pop culture and would stay up nights listening to the ‘cool’ alternative rock radio stations—so different from the ‘soft rock’ that my parents listened to—occasionally sighing in relief with the first strains of a song I recognized. I began noticing how the clothes I wore didn’t quite fit right on my broad shoulders, and how my hair never seemed to curl under the way I tried to brush it. I had braces, glasses, and had to wear a back-brace at night to correct a crooked spine, though no one knew about it because I avoided going to sleepovers. When a classmate dared me to tackle a Stephen King book for our first choose-your-own-book report of the year, I took it as a challenge to my very existence as a pop-culturally literate being. I accepted.

I only remember two things from that King book, of which I read exactly one hundred pages each night, despite being terrified and overwhelmed. Firstly, though I’d heard it in passing many times before, this book was where I learned the word ‘fuck’ once and for all. And secondly, I remember quite clearly one particular scene of a young woman running through a field of tall grass.

She was running from a lover, but more than that—she ran from some unseen, invisible evil. She knew that her lover would never catch her, as quick as she was and as dark and moonless as the night that closed around her had become. Although her naïve, almost sinister confidence kept her eyes straight ahead, I read with growing fear for her body giving out, her foot catching on a root or a tangle of weeds—a fear she did not share. I knew with well-crafted dramatic irony that Something lurked in that field, something that she could not escape, a manipulative wrongness that would catch up with her before the end of those seven-hundred pages. She risked everything being a part of that chase, a part

of that field at night. She risked everything simply by being there, whether or not she ran.

~

I risk nothing at the creative writing camp that summer. I have nothing to lose. I will never see any of these kids again, I have no reason to save face in front of them. I am going to be a junior in high school and, after years of social awkwardness, I've grown used to being on the outskirts, watching as cliques form and dissolve carelessly, with only a few kind or cruel remarks in passing. I have my moments of disjoint, my elicited bumbling lies about frog's legs, but I take them in stride, blushing and smiling and disappearing again into the background. I continue to listen. I continue to watch.

By the end of the week, they've stopped expecting solidity from me, and I've gone back to being invisible enough to play my favorite music—an independent funk-folk-rock musician with her own record label—in the first-floor lounge while everyone is packing and moving out. When I return from a trip to the car to find that someone has turned it off, I can ask who and receive an honest response. The girl who answers doesn't know that 'the crap' is mine. I say goodbye to my roommate, already beginning to forget her face and name.

Before I leave completely, she stops me and asks me a final question—do I know who Mark Strand is? I tell her no, I've never heard of him. He's a poet, she says, one of her favorites. He wrote the poem, "Keeping Things Whole."

"You know," she says. "It goes: 'In a field, I am the absence of field. This is always the case. Wherever I am, I am what is missing. When I walk, I part the air, and always the air moves in to fill the spaces where my body's been. We all have reasons for moving. I move to keep things whole.'"

In the span of a breath, every familiar memory of field comes rushing into me—King's running girl, the Wyeths and "Christina's World", the landscape paintings of countryside, the views from bus and car windows, even the overly green sports fields and the rows of yellow corn that stretch out to the horizon across the street from my house back in Lancaster. *Wherever I am, I am what is missing.* I am for the first time truly in love with a piece of art, with a poem. The power of overwhelming connection and mutual understanding hits me in the center of my chest, and I cannot even respond, except to nod my goodbye to the girl, climb into the car and drive away, leaving this

creative writing camp and its summer behind me.

~

But the memory of the poem remains uninterrupted and pulsing like a living creature in my mind. I do not even know where the stanza or line breaks occur, and I can barely maintain my grasp on the poet's name—but the words, and the images it called up so vividly, are there: *When I walk, I part the air, and always the air moves in to fill the spaces where my body's been.*

During the two hour drive home, the poem begins to evolve as I repeat it over and over. It speaks to me of the separation, the disjointed isolation I've always sensed about myself. With hardly any words, it tells of the long grasses swaying around my calves, the noiseless insects flitting from blade to blade, the birds darting across the sky—and the form of myself, almost motionless and dark in the midst of it, distinct, separate. *In a field, I am the absence of field.* I remember Christina, so close to home and yet unable to reach it, too afraid to rise and walk, blind to her place within the painting, blind to her role as a subject of sad and helpless beauty. *This is always the case.*

I remember the fear of King's running girl, lost in the maze of night, pursued by something that resembles the future, unknown and inescapable. *We all have reasons for moving.* What is it that drives me, moves me? What pursues me, and will I be able to face it when it finally catches me up into its present? The frantic movements of the running girl blend into my fears of the inevitable. *The air moves in.* I cannot be part of this scene, this field, because I do not understand it. I cannot see it. I am blind to it. Unlike the insects that blend into the shiftings of the grass, and the birds that glide along above, I do not belong here. I have no intuitive sense of the intricacy of this kind of existence. I am the disjoint, the trail of absence that the air moves in to fill, engulfing my body, drawing me forward, erasing my course. I am its reason for moving. *Wherever I am, I am what is missing.*

And I remember the day in first grade when the spring was finally warm enough to go out and play for recess. I remember my first grade teacher leading us to the field behind the tennis courts, the field that was usually off-limits, the field that the mowers didn't touch. And I remember running, leaving the other children behind as we raced through the tufts of onion grass that reached above the rest of the lawn. I remember imagining the clumps into a dizzying maze, tracing a path haphazardly through them, creating a game that nobody could win and

which went joyfully nowhere until we discovered who could run aimlessly the longest before collapsing into breathless giggles.

I remember the feeling of being in the field, a natural part of it, with the insects and the birds and the grasses and the wind. I remember the kind of movement that does not come from disjoint and fear, but from intuition and creation—I remember the creative act of imagining the world into being. And I remember that this, finally, is what it means to be who I am. *I am what is missing.* I am what creates my world, what imagines my world into art. I move the way the air moves, to fill the spaces where my body's been. *I move to keep things whole.*

~

As a junior, I reapply for Governor's School. I've been truly in love with poetry for a year now. I've lived another year of writing experiences and the practice of creating my own world. I make it again to the Second Round, and someone tells me that my poetry is wonderful. I must have improved greatly, she says, because she cannot even remember me from the year before.

In the private office, again the interviewer asks me to define the word 'cliché.' I say that cliché is what every artist hopes to create with her art—the image or idea so moving, so familiar and so immersed in truth that others cannot help but repeat it, revisit it, until it is worn and old and common. The artist is invisible, what is missing from an uncreated world. She is the medium of revelation, imagining into existence out of strange but familiar scenes and turns of phrase what is whole and real in the world: the red, red rose of love. The girl wandering lost only a few short miles from home. Poetry, I say, is the art of discovering the next cliché, the next movement that will again complete the human heart.

The interviewer smiles at me and says it's nice to finally have an answer to that question that isn't—cliché. She shakes my hand, wishes me luck. I rise and walk, out of the office door. In the hall, actors are playing with scarves and silly hats. Someone tunes a cello, explores its neck, working out his jitters into melody. *We all have reasons for moving.*

EVE

mistake me for an apple on the table.
peel me first,
your fingers fast to my skin.
wipe the juice with a clean napkin.
when I twirl red, pile me circular and bite to the core.
my unraveled body at your lips.
white pulls water from your mouth.
clench your teeth and don't let it out.
mouth is a cage of seeds.

I pour my hands on a hot stove
and wait for the heat to rise.
fictional fig leaves born from my naked strut.
I have the cinnamon ready.

LEGS



SATIN BOXES

I sit on the thickly carpeted ballroom in the Hilton hotel, stretching my legs. It's so cold in here that it's taking all my strength just to stay warmed up.

"Here, drink it. Eat this, you'll feel better," my mom says as she shoves orange juice and a Hershey's chocolate bar in my face.

"Stop. Get out of my face. Did daddy call?"

"No, I'm sure he'll call soon honey. Please eat this. You have lost too much weight this year. If you don't eat, you're gonna pass out. You need a jolt of energy. So, eat. Take a sip of the juice at least."

"Fine. One piece. Two sips. I'm gonna throw up." I run to the nearest trash can.

My mother runs after me and strokes my back, "See what I mean? You need to have something in your stomach to throw up. Please, eat some chocolate."

"Stop it. It's so goddamn cold in here. Don't they know that it makes it very hard to dance if your muscles are constantly tense? Do they want me to freaking injure myself?"

"I'll see if they can lower the air conditioning sweetheart."

"Please. You shouldn't have to ask though, they should know. Stupid idiots."

"Oh I know honey. They didn't mean it, I'm sure. Someone probably complained that it was hot in here. It is July."

"Then that person should lose some weight and not make us all suffer because they're a fat heifer."

"Honey, you shouldn't say mean things like that."

"It's not mean. It's truth. I shouldn't be punished for telling the truth, now should I?"

"I'm going to go see someone about this air conditioning problem right now. Please eat half of this chocolate bar and drink at least three quarters of this juice for mommy. Meet me in the room in half an hour; we have to get you dressed. Do you have a key?"

"Sure. Yes. Come and get me if dad calls," I say. I grab the chocolate and juice, and find an empty corner of the ballroom to finish warming up.

It's the national finals for the Performance Plus Dance Competition.

This year, it's in Williamsburg, Virginia. The entire competition spans five days, beginning at eight in the morning, with awards at six in the evenings. The preliminary round, or regionals, are completed over the course of a year, with dancers competing to qualify for a chance at the national level. Nationals are competitive. Everyone is a little excitable.

I do my arabesque foutee transition eleven more times. Odd numbers make me feel like I've accomplished something. I forget to turn a full three quarter turn before going into my tour jeté five times. It's unnerving me, because if I don't get that part right, I end up on the wrong side. I start to breathe heavily. The flipping air conditioner has not shut off yet.

For this competition, there is a sliding divider wall down the center of the massive ballroom. You have to walk through ballroom A to get to ballroom B. People are competing in both ballrooms. Surprisingly, the ballroom is covered in carpet and not hard wood. The competition owners have to bring in a hard wood floor. There's always a chance you might end up dancing half of your dance on the carpet, depending on the size of the floor.

The music from Ballroom A is competing with the music from Ballroom B, where I am. This is also messing up my concentration. Goddamn music. I throw on my sweatshirt, and push my way toward ballroom A.

"Hey babe! What time do you go on?" Kari says. She's wearing boxer shorts, our team dance jacket, and fuzzy Steve Madden slippers. It's tradition.

"Umm not until 8:30. I've been up since 5:00. Why are you up so early?"

"I came to see you, dumb ass! It's going to be one kick-ass competition. Everyone's coming to see you. I wonder who's competing against you. I feel bad for them." Kari is my best friend, mostly because I'm a better dancer than she is and the knowledge of inferiority doesn't bother her. I've had a lot of best friends over the years. "It's kinda cold in here."

"I know, right! My mom said she'd complain. I can't even warm up. I don't feel like pulling a muscle or worse just because some lard ass is sweating."

"You are so right," Kari says. We always agree on everything.

"I've got to go meet my mom. I need to get into my costume. Anne wants me here, fully dressed, at 7:30. It's already 7:00."

“I saw Anne. She was complaining how you are eternally late for everything.”

“I am not!” This is a lie. “Anne is such a bitch. I just know she’s going to pull something today. I can feel it. She always tries to shake me up. I think she does it on purpose. You would think I would have left the school by now, but I don’t think I should have to. I mean it’s not my problem she was a loser and decided to marry that low-life she calls a husband. If she had wanted to dance, she should have danced. I heard he’s cheating on her.”

“Omigod! Where did you hear that?” Kari’s bewildered face is priceless. Anne’s a loser. Of course her husband would run around with another woman. Kari’s stupid like that.

“I overheard her talking to one of the moms. She was really upset, but I mean, it’s not like he’s a prize himself so I don’t see why she’s so sappy about it all. You know what, it’s almost like she’s jealous of me, don’t you think?”

“O, so jealous. Totally.”

“Let’s get going. I have to meet my mom. Would you do me a favor and eat this chocolate and orange juice before we get back to the room?”

Kari quickly shoves the pieces of chocolate bar in her mouth.

My mom always books our room in the same hotel as the competition. It makes life easier. This year, we are lucky because our room is super close to the ballroom. Kari and I walk out of the ballroom, past the north lobby, over the stone floor with the really pretty fountain, and into the tower that houses our room.

I push open the door and see my mom steaming my costume.

“Hey! I was just going to come and get you. Did you eat your chocolate and finish the juice?”

“O yes Mrs. Brown. I saw her eat it!” Kari says.

“O you’re such a sweetheart! Thanks for looking out for our Dana,” she says. “I was just steaming your costume honey. We’re running a bit behind schedule. Anne will want you down there soon. I’m glad we did your hair early.”

My hair is so tightly pulled into a bun that when I smile, I feel like I’ve had a facelift. Then again, hair out of place means points off on your score. Thankfully my hair will not be moving for the next week.

“How about some hairspray? I see a little fringe coming out at the top.” “Shhhhhhhhhhh,” says the aerosol can of hairspray to my already

shellacked head.

“How are your feet doing?”

I show her.

She winces. “Well, I got this New Skin stuff. It’s a liquid bandage. I think it’ll cover up those blisters pretty well.”

“What’s in it?” I take the bottle and read the label. “Is it going to hurt?”

“Only for a minute. They use it in hospitals for broken skin. It bonds it together. It might sting you, but the band-aids just aren’t cutting it.”

She’s right. The band-aids she put on this morning were rolled up inside my ballet shoes.

I hand her the bottle.

“Here, give me your foot.”

“Eew. It smells like nail polish!” Kari says.

“It practically is nail polish,” says my mother after she puts on the first coat.

“This stuff hurts like a bitch mom. It had better work. Did daddy call yet?”

“He hasn’t called yet, but I bet he knew you’d be so busy this morning that he didn’t want to bother you!”

“Yeah I’ll bet.”

“You know what honey? How about we give him a call? I’m sure he’s waiting for us to call him!” My mom dials the phone. “Hello Chase honey? Yes, she wants to talk to you. I know you’re busy. Yes, here she is.” My mom hands me the phone.

“Hi daddy! I miss you so much. I wish you were here. I know. Yes, I’m going on around 8:30. You have to go? Oh okay daddy, I’ll call you if I win. Bye-bye.” I flip the phone shut. “Why didn’t he come?”

“Daddy has to work. He wants to be here, but you know what? Dance costs money, so daddy’s working for you.”

“Whatever. I have to get dressed. Is my costume ready?”

My costume is pink perfection. Sequins and pearls sewn into the lycra tank top bodice, with an attached crepe georgette skirt that flows wonderfully when I spin. My mother hand sewed each and every doodad. It matches my satin pointe shoes. Nothing can compare to my pointe shoes. They are perfectly crafted and perfectly unworn-looking. I made sure to cover the satin outer with my legwarmers while I broke them in. I didn’t want to ruin them before the competition. My dance is dedicated to my father. The song I’ll be dancing to is Billy Joel’s

Goodnight My Angel.

Kari and I walk toward the ballroom, with my mother trailing behind with extra make-up and hairspray. When we get to the lobby before the ballroom, we spot Anne, our dance instructor. She's a first class bitch and she hates me. She can't get rid of me though because I'm the best dancer she has. She doesn't look happy.

Her shouting echoes in the high-ceilinged room. "Dana! Where the hell have you been? You should have been here fifteen minutes ago! Are you warmed up? What the hell? How did you get dirt on your pointe shoes?"

We all look down at my shoes. A substance, so dark it's almost black, is seeping through my European pink ballet shoes.

"Good grief! What the hell is that?" Anne asks.

"Blood," I say, "the blisters haven't healed. We tried this New Skin liquid bandage stuff. I guess it didn't work MOTHER!"

"Obviously not. Perhaps if you had broken in your shoes weeks ago, like I had told you to, you wouldn't have so many blisters. I hope the judges won't see it. Get out there! You only have ten minutes before your session starts! Feel the floor. Tell me if it's too slippery."

The floor is unbelievably slippery. The girl next to me falls attempting a simple pirouette turn. If I was nervous before, nothing can compare to what I feel now.

"Rosin, Dana!" Anne shouts to me. "Remember to coat every part of the pointe of the shoe. If you fall or slip, the points will start flying."

"Jesus Christ Anne. Why don't you make me more nervous? Do you want me to have a goddamn breakdown? How long have I been doing this? Would you like to give me a lesson on how to do chaine turns before I go on?"

"Don't you dare speak to me in that tone. I'm your elder remember."

"Yes, and you're my employee. Don't YOU forget. We pay the bills."

"You think you're so wonderful. I was a better dancer than you at your age. You can't even..." She's crying. I've never been sensitive to crying women. She was never like this before, but how dare she have her mid-life crisis now?

"Save me the lecture. It doesn't matter what you did before. I'm the best you have now. Please excuse me, I have to warm up," I say as I walk away.

"Everyone clear the floor please! We will begin with Pointe Solo 14-16," the announcer says.

My mother grabs my arm as I walk past her. She drags me out of the ballroom and into the lobby. "I have had enough of your attitude. You cannot talk to people like that."

"Don't touch me like that! You'll bruise my skin! They take off points for that!"

"I am serious Dana. Enough. I didn't raise you to be like this."

"No, she is trying to sabotage me before I dance! You know how I get!"

"No Dana. Your attitude has been unbelievable this entire trip," my mom says. "I know you're upset that he didn't come to see you and I have been very tolerant about it. But, it is not Anne's fault. She's been having a hard time; some compassion would be good right now."

"Don't you dare upset me before I dance. How selfish you are mother!"

People are staring now.

"Selfish? Who sews your pointe shoes? Who sews and cleans and steams your costumes? Who does your make-up and hair? Who is basically your maid for the entire week? Think about that before you call me selfish."

"And who asked you to do that? Not me. So don't blame me for your choices in life."

"I did those things for you because you are my daughter and I love you. But, you need a reality check sweetheart. You have been a selfish, stuck-up little brat all week. You may think you're 21, but you're only 15. And I guess it's my fault, but I swear I don't know how you became this person. I don't like you right now."

"O jeez. Thanks mother. You know what? Why don't you just push me down while I'm out there? Huh? Yeah, run out on the floor and push me over. Break my leg or something while you're at it. Do you want me to lose?"

"I'm not kidding Dana. After this competition, we are taking some time off from dance. You need a real life in the real world."

"Dana Brown, the next competitor in our Pointe Solo 14-16 Division," the announcer says.

"Okay, well your I-hate-you-I-hope-you-die speech will have to wait. They're calling my name," I say while running back to the ballroom.

"I'm here, I'm here!" I yell. I move toward the ballroom floor. I jump up and down to get my blood flowing. The dark spot on my shoe is getting bigger. The pain of the blisters rubbing against the shoe hurts

like no other. I step onto the floor. My chest is heaving like I've never breathed air before.

Everyone from the dance studio is standing on chairs in the back, watching me. Anne is gone.

"Goodnight my angel, time to close your eyes..." starts the music. My heart beat slows. I rise and feel no pain. This is what I born to do. I care about nothing at this particular moment.

"I promised I would never leave you, and you should always know, wherever you may go, no matter where you are, I never will be far away..." sings Billy. I begin to cry a little, although I don't know why.

"Someday we'll all be gone, but lullabies go on and on. They never die, that's how you and I will be..." I land in an extended fourth position, raise my head and see the judge in front of me is crying with a smile. I've never danced better in my entire life. The foutees at the end are impeccably good.

Thunderous applause.

I exit stage left, and run to Kari. "You were fucking awesome!" she screams as she jumps at me.

My mother walks over as Kari walks away. "That was the best you've ever danced. I am so proud of you."

"O, so you don't hate me now?"

"I never said I hate you, but I am willing to make a bargain with you."

"I'm listening."

"You can continue dancing, but we will work on this attitude of yours. And, you will begin by apologizing to Anne. Promise me you will say you're sorry."

I sit and take my pointe shoes off. The perfect satin box was no longer perfect. It had rosin on the sole and pointe, dirt was speckled on the frayed edges of satin, and now blood stained the top shank.

I look up at her. "Okay," I say.

"Call your father and tell him how you did. He'll want to know."

"Eh, I want to take a shower Mom. I'll call him after we eat. Can you give me the key?"

She throws me the key.

I walk toward the exit.

"Dana?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you," she says.

I turn around to face her. "I know. I love you too. I'm going to get a

shower. When I get out, we can go to brunch. I'm starving. Tell Kari about an hour. She'll want to go." I walk away.

"Dana?"

"Yeah?"

"Call your dad. He wants to know how you did. Your father loves you. He just doesn't know how to show it sometimes."

"I'll meet you in an hour out in the main lobby mom." I walk away. I pass people from the dance studio on my way back.

"Great job Dana! You did so beautifully! I'm so glad I got up to see you!" people said as I walked past them.

I turn a corner and smack into someone. "Jesus Christ! My feet are precious; don't you know this is a dance competition? Oh, it's just you."

"Hello," Anne says, "How did your dance go?"

"It was fine. Look I...wanted to tell you that I'll need to start practice earlier this fall. I don't want to take the whole month of August off."

"Yeah sure Dana, whatever you need." Anne's eyes are swollen. She looks like she's on drugs. "I wanted to tell you that what you said really hurt me today."

"What? Who says that? What are you, my boyfriend?"

"Look, I know I've been pushing you hard lately, but I've been experiencing some personal problems that..."

"Whoa whoa whoa. Anne, do I dump my emotional baggage onto you? No, I didn't think so. Okay, well see you later at the awards ceremony." I walk away.

I finally reach my room and quickly open and close the door. I take off the costume, tights, and other contraptions. I get my stuff ready for the shower, and begin to take the bobby pins out of my hair, an arduous task. I am so tired of other people's emotions. Why do they insist on sharing them with me? Everyone has a burden to bear, but strong people bear it silently. I like strong people.

The phone rings.

"Hello?" I say.

"Dana, its Daddy. I wanted to know how you did."

"Oh Daddy! I was just about to call you."

"Did you win honey?"

"I practically did."

"Practically?"

"The awards ceremony isn't until tonight."

"Well, call me after that so I can tell everyone at work what a star my

daughter is. I have to go, but I will talk to you later.”
“Oh, okay Daddy. I love...” Click. “you.”

THE DAY LATES AND THE DOLLAR SHORTS

(To Maureen)

I.

“We wash our children in the harbor,”
She said,
“Because we know it keeps them clean.”

I asked if she knew about the depth.
(The harbor was deep. Very deep.)

“We don’t walk on eggshells here.
We don’t have that luxury.”

She washed the mussels diligently.

II.

We’ve stayed in the caves
In the depths,
Long enough to affect the eyes.

These flaps used to be lids,
And sightless orbs used to take in light
As contradictory as it seems.

But the light burns these days,
And the contradiction is too difficult
To ignore.

III.

We ignored her,
We tried to avoid the eyes;
The coincidental glimpse

Held a potency.

We dodged because
We didn't know what it was like
To run to catch the sunrise.

I didn't add to the conversation
With self-professed knowledge
Of obscure, esoteric, self-deprecation
So I stayed shut up.

Like a clam.

IV.

The denouement was that,
When she finally did go skyward,
She was a burst of flowers
Dew glistened in the sun glare.

It was springtime in the harbor,
And petals sank with grace
Down to the depths.

NOTHING IS SERVED



DATING MYSELF

(The speaker drags a stool onstage and places it somewhat close to the audience. He sits on the stool, and looks out into the crowd for a few moments, as if studying them.)

'evening.

(He goes back to studying the audience, and takes notice of places where couples are sitting.)

Nice night, don't you think?

(Pause.)

Yeah.

(Pause.)

A lot of... boy-girl sittin' going on around here.

(To one specific couple or another.)

You two together? How long? Really. How many people here have a boyfriend or girlfriend? significant other? life partner? fuck buddy?

Whatever you people call it these days... show of hands?

(He gets up to count.)

Fuck. The dating scene's way too depressing. I look at beauty queens coupled up with guys whose gene pool isn't much deeper than a puddle and I think to myself, "how?" How can I get myself a girl like *that*? And of course, that eventually degenerates into how can I get myself a *girl*, and then how can I get myself *something*? Lampshade, a friendly dog, fuck, anything at this point.

(He sits down.)

I thought I was going to quit. But, no, quitting wasn't right; that's what they want to happen. But I figured it out!

(Dramatic pause.)

I'm dating myself from now on. Go ahead, laugh. Go, get it out of your system. I'll wait. Ready? Good. I'm da-ting my-self. Think about it. If nothing else, it's ease of mind. I don't have to worry about fights or thinking or have of those "talks." You know the kind of talks I mean.

(Pretends to be a girlfriend.)

"Hunny, we need to talk."

(Back to sitting, resumes boyfriend personality.)

"Fuck!" And of course, it's never a good kind of talk. It's never we

need to talk about me giving you more oral sex. No. It's that we need to talk about some shit that *I'm* doing wrong. But, if I date myself, I don't have to *think* about myself. I don't fight with myself. I talk to myself only rarely. So, from an intellectual standpoint, it's much more logical.

(Pause.)

It's economical. You take someone out on a date, you buy a movie ticket, dinner, some dessert, flowers, and then after a while, you have jewelry and teddy bears and anniversary presents and all that jazz to worry about. But, I don't have to take myself out. If I want to stay home and wear no pants and eat ramen, I can. I have no one to impress, and no gifts to buy except for myself.

(He gets up.)

No, I'm not cheap. Relationships aren't all about money. It's about interests, too. I mean, we always say that we want to date somebody who's exactly like me, right? Well, there ain't no one more like me than me. This way, you get to sidestep the whole incest and genetic disorder stuff and enjoy yourself. You can get into some trouble humpin' your cousin, but, believe it or not, there aren't any laws about dating yourself.

(He points, as if to a skeptical audience member.)

Now, I know there's a few of you thinkin' "this guy is the most arrogant piece of work I've ever seen." No, I'm not in love with myself. I'm not just some person that can't possibly get over himself so he decides to commit himself to himself 'cause no one else can possibly come close. Uh-uh. But I think I'm attractive, yeah. I like myself. I enjoy my company. That sounds an awful lot like a desirable partner to me.

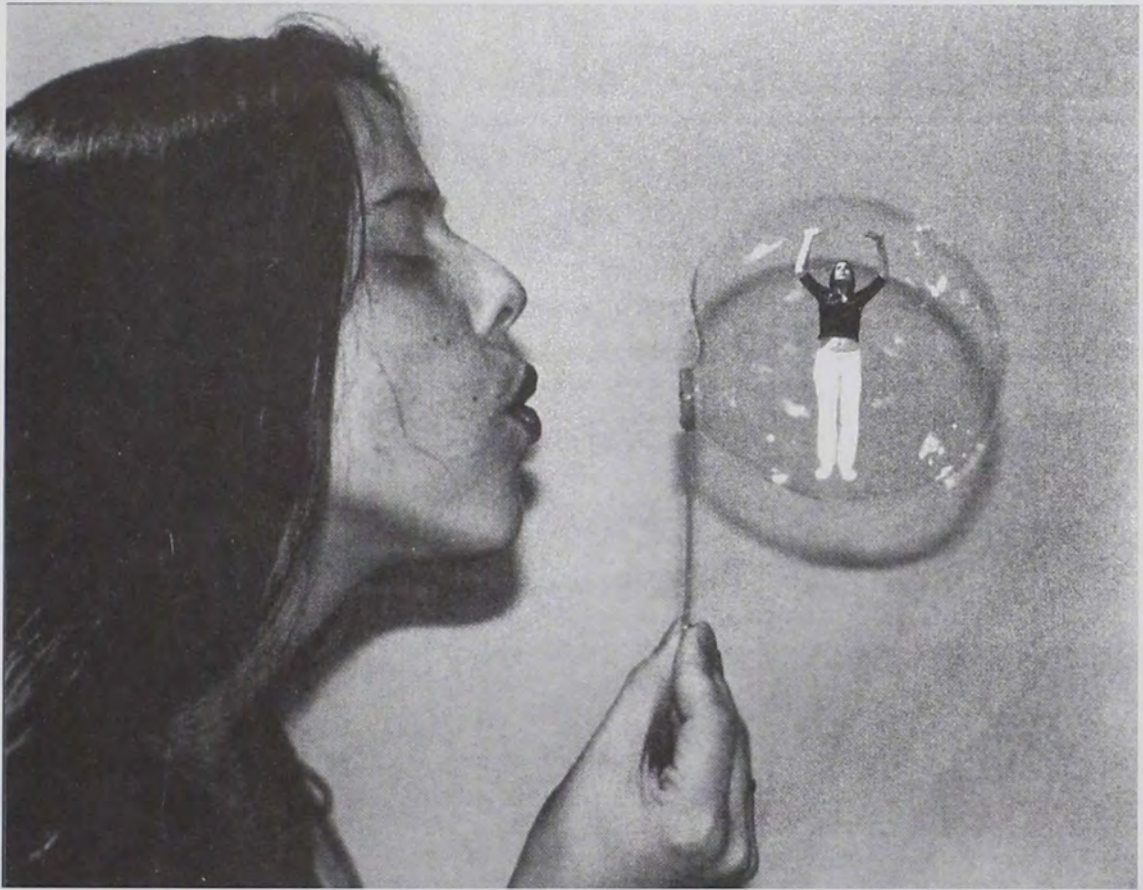
(He goes to the stool.)

So, my decision? I'm going to keep on dating myself.

(He pick up the stool.)

Until someone else better comes along.

MY WORLD IS A BUBBLE



SOMNAMBULIST

A somnambulist:
Making my rounds at night
I sleep through my own revolutions...

I learned to play the piano
Between one and three ante meridian last summer
 ...She said whatever I was dreaming sounded sweet
Said it made her cry and made me kiss her feet.

I learned to eat lettuce-sandwiches
With General Ruby Greenwich, a man I never really met
 ...She said we were close as kissing kin
Said we sang old hymns and drank sloe gin.

I learned I've got quick undressing hands
I can shuck 13 ears in a little under a minute
 ...She said my fingers shaved the yellow skin like water-spiders
Said my hand-shake was warmer than apple cider

A somnambulist:
I slept through nights that that she stayed awake for
Nights that led the General to the Stranger at the Door¹.

¹A church hymn: "There's A Stranger At The Door"

LEAF SHINE



TRAVELING WITHOUT A MAP

I think you should take a vacation. Get some money and take yourself to the beach. Do a day trip. Find a hostel or a cheap hotel. Spend an entire paycheck to stay somewhere really great. Do it. Do something for yourself. Go visit a friend from school. Plan a trip for us when I get back in August. Take a week off and drive down to Mississippi and get yourself lost and then find yourself again. Find yourself again.

Maggie, one of my best friends since elementary school, sent me this email over the summer while she was studying abroad in Berlin and heard that a hailstorm of depression had kept me in bed for days and zombie-esque for weeks. At the time, I felt like I couldn't get anymore lost than I already was – I didn't need to drive down to Mississippi for that accomplishment. At the time I did not take her advice to travel, but the last lines of her email haunted me. *Get yourself lost and then find yourself again. Find yourself again.*

I always understood traveling more as a way of life than a solution to a problem. Born in Wichita Falls, Texas, I moved to Oklahoma, Las Vegas, and finally Pennsylvania all before I knew how to spell Rand McNally. Or 'map' for that matter. In the summers when my family couldn't scrape enough money together to afford four plane tickets, we took three-day-long-there-and-back road trips to Colorado. My parents gave my little brother and me a roadmap of the United States and marked the course of our entire journey turn-by-turn on the highways through each state with a blue highlighter. We hungrily concentrated on each curve in the road to make sure we knew our exact location. Even at age five, getting lost was absolutely out of the question.

My parents taught me to follow a similar map throughout my life, marking the right course of journey. "The Roadmap of Life," they called it. Start out going west on High School Highway, make a slight left onto College Pike, follow that until you get to Good Job with a Good Salary Street, and then head north to the Husband and Family Turnpike – pay appropriate tolls. Halfway through the trip, I am realizing that this map is not taking me to where I want to go. Maybe I don't want to follow a map at all. Though it scares me, being lost seems to be my only option. My only chance of freedom.

Now, when I go somewhere, I travel without a map.

* * *

That October morning was wet but the afternoon only somewhat soggy. The mid-Atlantic autumn didn't feel crunchy and parched as it had the week before – instead, cool satiation. A favorite game of mine is to look at a 'gray' sky or 'white' clouds and determine their true colors. Usually I can find a butter cream, pink, or lilac, but today – no matter how hard I tried – the sky was only gray. The gentle color of a baby pigeon. The overcast sky reflected nothing onto the hood of my cornflower-blue Volvo that sat crunched in the small space in front of my mother's new condo. I slid into the driver's seat and negotiated softly with my car, "If you start and let me take a little drive today, I promise to get you fixed tomorrow." Low battery power and a filthy throttle body had been afflicting the tissue-box on wheels for several weeks. Sometimes she purred when I turned the ignition; sometimes she ignored my request for movement completely.

In the spirit of the approaching Halloween, I decided to drive down to Rehmeier's Hollow – an area named one of the most haunted in Pennsylvania. The murder of Nelson D. Rehmeier and the trials of the men accused of killing him projected York County into the media spotlight in the late 1920's and still attract considerable amounts of local speculation and interest. John Blymire, a cigar worker in York, claimed to possess the powers of witchcraft, an assertion not uncommon even today in the superstitious Pennsylvania Dutch community. In 1928, the community recognized Blymire as one of the area's best in ridding the body of ailments. However, in the summer of 1928, Blymire lost his powwowing powers and his life spun out of control. Blymire's wife divorced him; two of his three children died; he stopped eating and sleeping. He griped, "My skin was getting too loose on me and I had the opnema. I couldn't take off anybody's hex no more and I couldn't put one on." Of course, in the era of powwowing, Blymire believed that his turn of luck could mean only one thing – another powwower had placed a hex on him. Blymire was convinced that enemy was a witch-farmer named Nelson Rehmeier and that the only way to remove the hex was to retrieve a lock of man's hair and his copy of *The Long Lost Friend*, a powwower's book of spells. When Blymire and two of his friends went to Rehmeier's farmhouse to complete the freeing task, they became angrily violent – strangling Rehmeier until he fell unconscious, dousing his body in oil, and burning Rehmeier's body. In

the high-profile trials when an attorney asked Blymire, “How did you feel when you realized Rehmeyer was dead?” Blymire exclaimed, “Rehmeyer is dead! I no longer feel bewitched. Now I can eat and sleep!”

Living in York County for over 15 years, I have read the books and heard the tales of Rehmeyer’s death, but I have never ventured to the area that his ghost is supposed to inhabit. In general, the suburbanites of York rarely venture into York County’s vast rural areas – afraid more of the folks with confederate flags and gun racks in their Chevy’s than the ghosts of murdered witches. But, my mission today was to navigate blindly through the unknown fields and forests to find the powwower’s old house. The Volvo started without too much whining and I headed south out of York on I-83, only knowing that I needed to get to Glen Rock, find some cemetery and turn left. I made a conscious decision that on this trip, getting lost was welcome.

I-83 is a tree-lined interstate connecting Harrisburg in the North to Baltimore’s Inner Harbor to the South. The foliage that I passed at eighty miles per hour looked like blonde ginger merlot explosions. On my right, a green and white sign read GLEN ROCK 5, BALTIMORE 47. The next five miles to Glen Rock, the highway cut through the system of two large manmade lakes known as Lake Redman and Lake Williams. These interconnected lakes provide a major source of drinking water for York County. The yellow leaves floating atop the water made the lake look like the Ganges with millions of burning prayer candles. Finally, exit number eight (eight miles from the Mason-Dixon Line) towards Glen Rock appeared on my right. At the bottom of the short off-ramp, I turned right to follow the road to Glen Rock. After only a few hundred yards, the road ended completely. When I was ten and in Disneyland with my family, my father told me that when paths diverge, always take the left to avoid crowds. “It works every time,” he promised. Since then, my brain always tells me to go left when in doubt of a direction. Turning onto the Susquehanna Trail in Glen Rock was no exception.

The Susquehanna Trail felt like the lifeline of the surrounding area. As the Susquehanna Indians built their lives around the wide flowing river, the citizens of Southern York County try to stay close to the Trail. Small mom-and-pop shops sprinkled between run-down 19th century homes lined the road with trees whose bark seemed to be peeling away – molting like a snake in the springtime. I immediately fell in love with

those smooth-barked scrappy looking trees. Undecided whether they wanted to be beige or tan or coffee-colored, they took inspiration from each palate. Beyond the trees many yards away from the road, three Amish men equipped with tools and large black shingles climbed onto the decaying roof of an even more decaying home. In their purple, maroon, and red shirts, the busy workers blended into the hues of the remaining leaves on the trees around them.

In the midst of a land that looked to be frozen in time, I suddenly drove up to a huge monstrosity left from the woes of 1970's architecture – a white cement Lutheran church made of sharp angles and blue-tinted windows. I bet I could have found orange shag carpeting between the pews and on the altar. Shocked by the religiously hideous building, I almost missed the landmark I had been waiting for. On the opposite side of the Susquehanna Trail rested a cemetery next to a road labeled Hain Road. "This is it!" I thought. It never occurred to me that the area could have hosted more than one cemetery; I assumed that my navigation abilities were nothing but impressive. As I shaved the left turn onto Hain Road, I glanced at the names on the tombstones to see if I could find the grave of the late Nelson Rehmyer. The only name I could see was on a dirtied white slab of cubed rock, by far the biggest in the cemetery. HAIN 1879 – 1936. These street names certainly are practical, I chuckled with a sense of morbidity.

Traveling down Hain Road, I found myself transported even further into a world devoid of suburbanisms. A hand painted sign advertised that one could buy fresh brown eggs in a small outhouse-sized building on the side of the road, though the stand seemed to be closed for the day. Four horses – two brown and two spotted like Dalmatians – grazed in the pasture behind the egg stand. Antiquated but rust-free farm equipment scattered the rolling fields that swallowed the land whole. Pickups from the 1950's, the kinds normally seen souped up, painted, and called "hotrods," slumber in gravel driveways in their original faded red or blue paint, bumpers corroding or falling off. These are the only automobiles to be seen. Along the side of the road, another hand painted sign, small, white, with crooked black lettering, indicated ANTIQUES, turn left. Easily persuaded, I halted my quest to find Rehmyer's Hollow and followed the sign down Line Road.

Legally, the speed limit down Line Road was 30 miles per hour. However, going a little over 20 I felt out of control. The road, in fact, was not a line at all but a leaf-covered one-lane snaky curl that sucked

me deeper and deeper into thick forest. On my left, a small stream flowed past. A sign warned automobiles about the impending one-lane bridge. How funny, I thought, this whole road seems mighty one-laned to me. I suddenly panicked that another car may try to cross the bridge at the same instant I did, but I quickly remembered that I hadn't seen another soul in nearly half an hour. Crossing the bridge, I stopped the Volvo, rolled down the ornery power windows and hushedly listened to the creek sing as it crisply flowed under me. In the distance, I detected the sweet smoky odor of burning leaves.

After crossing the one-lane bridge, I slowly pulled off the road and into a level dirt area covered in brown oak leaves. Without shutting off the engine, I got out of my car to look at the stream. Suddenly, a truck hauling a horse trailer drove around the bend in front of me. The first inhabited car I have encountered since the Hain Cemetery. Before he traveled across the bridge, the driver slowly rolled to a stop next to me and through his already-open window, asked if everything is okay. Smilingly, I assured him that I was fine and questioned him about the location of Nelson Rehmeier's old house.

"You know, for as long as I lived round here, 'bout thirty years now, ain't never seen the place. Gotta hike your way there." Seeing my enthusiasm for the challenge, he quickly added, "But you don't look much like a hiker, yourself." His nomadic eyes shuffled from the dangling mother of pearl earrings to the too-expensive gray wool coat and landed on the not-yet broken-in Steve Maddens standing a little too confidently before him.

Quite aware that the wizened man in flannel recognized that I wasn't from these parts, I subtly tried to cover my ostentatious earlobe with my hand using the old "scratching the head" trick as I replied, "I can hike. Can you tell me where I can catch a trail?"

"Ha-ha! There ain't no trail. Guess that's why I never made it up there. I ain't no hiker either; I'm a horse man, myself," the man chuckled as he pointed to his cargo. Tidings of well wishing were followed by a one-shake-of-the-wrist wave.

Back into the Volvo, I had little hope of finding Rehmeier's home but focused more on the journey than my final destination. I still had much more exploring to do. I continued down the windy Line Road until it ran out. Here, another ANTIQUES sign signaled to turn right, so I followed its suggestion. A fat sheep bleated to be sheared as it moseyed along the picket fence parallel to Brillstrick Road. At the edge of a field,

a headless scarecrow sat propped against a haystack. The image was eerie. I could not discern if its purpose was scaring away hungry crows, shocking outsiders, or merely delighting Halloween revelers. An old barn on my left hosted a blue, red, yellow and green hex sign, proof that the superstition and tradition of the hex still govern the area. Then out of nowhere, the road I began my journey looking for – Rehmeier’s Hollow Road. This seemed too easy. I hadn’t yet gotten completely lost. I hadn’t yet struggled to find anything.

Turning onto Rehmeier’s Hollow Road, the ambience shifted from serene to unnerving. Posted on trees every few feet down the entirety of the road were a bright yellow Posted: Private Property signs. A man in his front lawn stood watching my car pass his small log cabin of a home, complete with hex sign, – the man’s eyes glued to mine as I chugged down the narrow lane. The area seemed to be hiding something. A secret society to which only the neighbors and the trees belonged. I didn’t like the chill that Rehmeier’s Hollow Road propelled down my spine, so I looked closely for escape routes. I found the answer shortly thereafter in the forested form of Short Road – a steep decline of a dangerous grade. Once again, I began to feel excited to have absolutely no idea where I was headed. Then, one tenth of a mile later (apparently the labelers of Short Road liked to get right to the point), I found myself back on the curvy Line Road. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t get lost.

Testing my new theory that everything lead back to Line Road, I turned left onto Line, and made a quick left onto an unmarked road. Within seconds, I came across Short Road again, this time to my left. I had inadvertently found both the beginning and end of Rehmeier’s Hollow Road. I was only driving in circles. I felt cheated by the trip’s anticlimax – how could I ever find myself again if I couldn’t even get lost? How could I be expected to find *anything* if I couldn’t even find the most infamous house in York county?

Sulkingly retracing my route back to the interstate in the impending dusk, I slowly began to come to terms with (and even empowered by) the idea that maybe there is something to be said about never being able to lose myself completely and that the thing I’m looking for won’t always come in the form originally expected. Even without a map, if you keep on traveling, you will eventually find your way. I smiled and drove silently home.

CONTRIBUTORS

John “Johnny B” Bera enjoys long walks down main street...home from the Trappe at 2 in the morning...

Sara Biondi is currently lost in Japan, try back next year.

Shane Borer says good afternoon, good evening, and goodnight, Ursinus.

Megan Bossler prefers to be quiet on the exterior and loud on the interior. She suspects that it's more important to hear than to be heard. Her personality emerges best on paper.

Daniel Bruno (presents the continuing adventures of; alias) Giles Orland Branduno, a venturesome rapskallion known throughout the tiny nation of Caravaggio variously as a well-honed ear, a repentant exporter, and a perplexingly acrophobic mountaineer. The elaborate and ribald salvation of a small tankard of lotuses is the gist of his next adventure. If there is a chance that you may be of any sort of help in such a service, do please contact him by aero-post.

Shannon Burke writes bitchy girls extremely well (a little too well if you know what I mean).

Chris Curley is an anachronism.

Rachel Jessica Daniel, former future broadcast journalist, is currently writing her way to nowhere. She welcomes any ideas for destinations. Jer. 29:11

Greg Diamond quit smoking.

Katy Diana loves: thai iced tea, Jackie Chan, star sapphires, banana flowers, Venetian masks, “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes”, rosemary, tree frogs, and Mario Cart Double Dash.

Susannah Fisher refuses regular mochas. Opts for chocolate.

Julie Gentile doesn't enjoy doing little bio blurbs. But she does enjoy finishing them

Ashley Higgins is a sword-fighting, swash-buckling pirate from the 17th century, mysteriously transported here via the organ in Bomberger Auditorium during a Meistersingers concert. Incidentally, she is a Meistersinger.

Judson 'Gramps' Kane says 8th year seniors are RIDICULOUS right now!

Sarah Kauffman learned some stuff here. She learned more from PBS kid shows and Lizzy B.

Ryan Lenhart enjoys long walks on the beach and running naked through briar patches covered in honey. For a good time call 212-479-7990.

Jen Mingolello enjoys spending time with her hoodies.

Heather Morris has caught the Embrace Lurgy

Abi Munro thinks Dr. Pepper=Love.

Sean Neil is a hopeless insomniac and obsessive metal fan. If that isn't a healthy combination, what is?

Anna Radaszewski loves her steak cooked medium and also enjoys Dijon Dill crusted Salmon. She is a vegetarian.

Tommy "the G!" Richter does what the poem demands, not what he demands of the poem. Obviously, it is all because of his hat!

Pat Roesle plays far more video games than is probably healthy and is convinced that he is being stalked by Henry Kissinger.

Whitney Roper has finally come to terms with her equilibrium woes. She firmly believes that balance is overrated.

Jullien Searfross loves to travel. Exotic places keep her sane.

Jess Schoff once convinced a girl that sandbox + water = chocolate pudding. Bad Jess.

Alison Shaffer loves sandalwood incense and lavender ash.

Joshua Solomon says that if you never climb the mountain, you will never see the view.

Trevor Strunk is in fact that guy you saw in that restaurant the other week. He was wondering the whole time if that was you, too, and wants you to give him a call to catch up sometime.

Tori Wynne enjoys stealing people from normalcy. She is also a fan of frolicking and other pixie-like activities.

Klaus Yoder knows that Sprinkle Hall cannot be killed. Its life-force will engulf the Cosmos.

PATRONS

Chris Aiken	Todd McKinney
Beth Bailey	Douglas Nagy
Chris Cellucci	Frances Novak
Marcia Clouser	Phyllis C Osisek
Robert Clouser	Peter Perreten
Paul Cramer	John Ramsey
Lori Cramer	Nathan Rein
Robert Dawley	Hudson Scattergood
Richard DiFelicianantonio	Patricia Schroeder
Mary Fields	Susan Shifrin
Francis Fritz	Rebeca Skolnik
Holly Gaines	Paul Stern
Ed Gildea	Keith Strunk
Charlie Jamison	Victor Tortorelli
Rebecca Jaroff	Colette Trout
Peter Jessup	Jon Volkmer
Leah Joseph	Richard Wallace
J Houghton Kane	Greg Weight
Nzadi Keita	John Wickersham
Rebecca Kohn	Eric Williamsen
Matt Kozusko	Cathy Young
Annette Lucas	Philip Zwerling

Ursinus College Literary Magazine
<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/lantern>