



Fall 2004

## The Lantern Vol. 72, No. 1, Fall 2004

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*Ursinus College*

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◦ THE LANTERN

*The Eco-Issue*



# THE LANTERN

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**Cover Art:** "Passion" by Brendan Connor

**Editor's Note:** In honor of Wendell Berry's visit this fall, this year's *Lantern* includes works of ecological or environmental themes. There is no limit to the creativity that can come from simply being aware of our natural surroundings. This was a great year for the *Lantern* thanks to the abundant staff participation and support! I'd like to thank all the people who put up with my constant questions and uncertainties. Thank you, Dr. V, for your warm encouragement, John Ramsey for your guidance, and the Exec Board for keeping me on my toes. Allison Guerin, the *Lantern* is just a figment of our imagination without your hard work! Thanks to the Patrons and AFAC for making the color cover possible. Congratulations to the prize-winners this year! I would like to add that the three judges also acknowledge the runners-up "Conversations with 'A Writer'," "Buried Mirth," and "A Mug of Tea" as additional works of literary excellence. Thanks to all of the contributors and their respective muses!

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## JUDGES' NOTES

### Poetry Winner—"Jazz" by Nathan Dawley

When a poem keeps calling me back, insisting that I read it again and again, I know I've come across something special. "Jazz" did that to me, from this first line, which is priceless: *thirsty, make your way riverside*. Five simple words that roll off the tongue. A tempting invitation. Wherever the poem is going from there, the reader is definitely going along for the ride. That's the way a poem should begin – innocently enough, with a quiet power. "Jazz" does just that. It has a charming, colloquial tone, an easy conversational style that is threaded through the poem. Listen to the wisdom in these lines: *So what if we've never heard jazz before/ Then doesn't this make this/ the best we ever heard?* What a question! Doesn't that relate to so many other things besides music? There are many facets in this poem, and in those three lines above, poetic double-entendres, which makes the poem work. That same thought comes full circle at the end, with self-awareness, a new confidence. The poet turns the images on their edge, to mean something different to each reader, to make the poem more universal. And that's what a good poet does.

—Eileen M. D'Angelo is the director of the Mad Poets Society and Editor of the Mad Poets Review, a nationally known literary magazine, since 1988. She was nominated for a Governor's Award in the Arts, a Pushcart Prize, and her poetry manuscript, *True Tales from the Home Front*, was a finalist in the University of North Carolina's Poetry Chapbook Competition. In 1998 and 1999, she served as a judge for open auditions for poets for the HBO pilot series, *Def Poetry Jam*, at the jazz clubs, *Brave New World & New Market Cabaret* in Philly, and she will judge the 2005 Montgomery County Poet Laureate Competition. Eileen has performed in numerous locations including Penn's Landing for the Poetry on the Plaza series and the Philadelphia Fringe Festival. She has performed at, and coordinated benefits for, the Domestic Abuse Project and for Solace, a battered women's shelter, at the Walt Whitman Cultural Center in Camden, NJ, featuring jazz and poetry.



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## JUDGES' NOTES

### Prose Winner—"Chum-Salmon Intentions" by Ali Shaffer

One thing that struck me in reading through the prose contributions to this semester's *Lantern* was the hope. It seems we forget so often in our postmodern world that happy (or potentially happy) endings are possible. These writers know that pain and suffering are not the only things worth reading about, and that when art truly mirrors life both sides of the coin are represented. That sense of hope walking hand-in-hand with desperation underscores each moment of "Chum-Salmon Intentions." In addition, this piece subtly addresses the ways in which our ability to communicate, either verbally or through the written word, allow us to negotiate those high and low points of life. This was a difficult decision, and I applaud each of the authors represented in this issue. I congratulate the author of "Chum-Salmon Intentions" for weaving a story that looks back with contemplation and forward with hope.

—*Daniel Gallagher graduated from Ursinus in 2001 with Distinguished Honors in English awarded for completion of a moderate-length short story collection, "Nine Stories." He graduated from Temple University 2003 with an M.A. in Creative Writing and is now an adjunct professor at Temple, teaching Creative Writing and working as an administrator in the Writing Center. He won this award four years ago in the Fall 2000 Lantern.*

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## JUDGES' NOTES

### Eco-Themed Winner—"Stream" by David Chamberlin

In his classical environmental essay, "The Land Ethic," Aldo Leopold identifies "man the biotic citizen" as someone who sees himself as an integral part of the landscape – just another part of the biota. The characters of "Stream" become part of their biota through a series of elemental actions. First, they immerse themselves literally and painfully in the cold stream. When they rise exhilarated from the water, they retrieve clay from the stream bottom to cover their bodies in strange symbols. Finally, they use this same clay to encode their union with nature by drawing pictographs on a streamside rock.

*—Peter Perreten grew up on a small dairy farm in Minnesota. He and his siblings spent many hours rambling through the woodlands and pastures, and exploring ponds and wetlands on the farm, developing a lasting attachment to the natural environment. This childhood experience has carried through his academic career where his teaching and scholarship have focused on the environment in literature at Ursinus College. He has a special interest in the influence of the environment on autobiography.*

# JAZZ

## II.

thirsty, make your way riverside  
I, in the best of conjurations  
will console in a matter of taste  
and question whose sophistication  
inspired your masterpiece

remember that jazz club last week?  
that saxophone liberated your hips  
in a way you don't let them  
and I learned a new kick style  
to compliment that virtuosic style  
that style you raved about

the foundation we've built  
doesn't hold the set up very well  
in fact it wobbles like a dinner plate  
set on a pin

kung fu and violence don't unravel things  
and carpentry only builds up expectations  
if you want to make a comparison between  
then you'll have to choreograph it on paper  
and explain the concept to me later  
cause I've got a tight schedule to improvise  
and you've got to jam solo

so make sure you get your timing right  
and be ready by yesterday  
well you know that song  
considering you heard it a million times before  
falling on all those deaf ears  
hope they listen this time round  
cause even kung fu won't

knock any sense into rhythm  
so if we've never really heard jazz before?  
Then doesn't this make this  
the best we've ever heard

I.

Let's fight a war because we're bored  
Shake a stick to be heard  
and carry our soft voices in our back pockets

Let's load our guns with blanks  
and fake our deaths so we can have a drink and laugh about it later

so swing around that extension cord  
cut a hole open and taste the shock  
a good square meal in a split second  
energy enough to run your computer and feed a family of five

and advertise your patriotics and betrayals  
pour it over your head like a rain barrel  
of oil set out to anoint  
Later we could sit back and relax  
and teach each other to jam  
cause you're a kung fu virtuoso  
and I'm a master carpenter  
and together we could make the best jazz they've ever heard

## CHUM-SALMON INTENTIONS

Jake Fenstermaker made a better door than a window. He was what one might call a 'lanky' young man, whose pants cuffs always hovered just half an inch higher than where they were ideally to fall, and who, despite a certain brusque, masculine grace to both his appearance and manner, was still unpublished at twenty-four. His girlfriend, Maddy, said it was because he only ever wrote stories about virgins. Not the "young small-town girl wandering into the wrong neighborhood of a strange city where she is visiting her sick aunt, only to be abducted by the gray-haired aborigines of the local secret society and sacrificed to the God of Bull Markets" kind of virgin. Jake wrote about very normal people, all in their mid-twenties to late-thirties, who had simply never had sex.

Instead, they partook in a wide variety of interesting activities and careers: pharmaceutical research, seeing-eye dog training, glass sculpture, beach real estate rentals, bubblegum factory assembly-line work, and modest shows on public television about appraising dusty antiques from people's attics, garages and basements, taking water-damage and the scars left by rodents into account. Many of his characters had spouses. Not a few had significant others, or individuals whom they were actively or passive-aggressively pursuing. But absolutely none of them had ever consummated any relationship of any kind in any way, nor had they ever experienced rape, sexual abuse or pornography.

Jake did not make a point of stating this fact about his characters overtly, of course. To any casual reader, they were simply people acting out a series of events that, for the time being, had nothing to do with sexual intercourse. But when they traveled on high-class business trips, closing deals with clients in an upscale hotel's complimentary massage room, they never felt the least bit awkward about their half-naked bodies stretched out under the hands of trained strangers, being poked and prodded. When they saw a young woman sitting on a bench in the park, holding her newborn to a breast swollen with milk that snuck out of her unbuttoned blouse, they marveled at the beauty of motherhood and approved of the tenderness and fragility of bringing new creatures into the world. There was something missing from their fears and desires. Something distinctly asexual in the way they lived their happy,

fulfilling lives.

Maddy told him that his stories were populated by angels and monks—that no one of sound and subtle mind would believe them for even half a second.

Jake did not respond.

He had a peculiar fighting style: never making any statement that had previously been uttered in the history of the English language. This stipulation excluded not only antagonistic remarks like *I strongly disagree* and *Stupid bitch*, but fairly useful phrases such as, *I'm sorry, you were right*. Instead, Jake spoke very little during arguments. When something absolutely needed saying, he could be artfully obscure. As a desperate measure, he sometimes resorted to tagging the date and time onto statements of fact, just to be safe.

This style of speaking carried over into all moments of high anxiety. For example: the night he'd first had sex with Maddy (for he, unlike his characters, had ceased to be a virgin at the unsophisticated age of fourteen-and-three-months, a good six years before he'd even met Maddy and her well-intentioned criticism), he had greeted her arrival at his modest apartment by stating nervously, "At 8:07 PM on this lovely Saturday night, March 23, in the year 2002—I, Jacob Richard Fenstermaker, am in love with the stunning, overwhelming soul of Madeline Anna Brown."

No one had ever said that before.

A few hours later, after a home-cooked meal seasoned generously with body language—shy smiles and longing looks across plates of marinated chicken—the two found themselves in each other's arms for the first of what would become many blissful nights.

Other than the qualified murmurs warranted by fights and special occasions, Jake usually reserved his curious verbosity for the written word. After declaring his love for Maddy, his stories had changed a bit in tone—they became more optimistic, less socially awkward. Sometimes they even included vague mentions of flowers. But he still peopled them with virgins, all with better things to do than lounge about in bedrooms or sneak off to dingy storage closets.

They had been together for three years now, involved in an intricate dance of slowly blending into a common existence their management of separate apartments and separate careers. Maddy worked her way up in the human resources department of a local office supplies distributor,

while Jake jumped part-time jobs and continued with his perhaps forever-unpublishable writing. When their mutual friends cracked jokes about the eventual proposal, Maddy busied herself with counting something unimportant on her fingers. Jake set his jaw, rubbed the toe of his shoe against the patch of skin showing between his sock and his pant cuff, and didn't say anything.

Even after so much time, Maddy still couldn't understand why having sex with her was not one of the most important things in Jake's life. She wondered out loud, and with a good deal of sarcasm, what she was still doing with him, when he showed such reckless disregard for her fragile feminine temperament. Sensing an argument approaching, he assured her that, by the three-hundred-seventy-two-thousand-six-hundred-and-eighty-one gold-tailed pheasants that occupied the corners of his dreams as he lay beside her at night, their love-making was unutterably delicious and worthy of mention only by the greatest, deadest poets, among whom he could not yet count himself one.

She asked him why he still wrote about his goddamn holy virgins and their wonderful, sex-free lives, if he thought their private lustful romps were so fabulous.

Jake didn't respond.

Maddy stormed out of the room.

Several minutes later, the phone in the kitchen rang. The answering machine clicked on: Maddy's recorded voice explained, giggling, "You've reached the residence of Jake Fenstermaker, who cannot handle the pressure of having just one of his sentences repeated over and over for hundreds of people to hear. Please leave a message and he will call you back if he has anything to say."

The machine squealed, then paused. The champagne-voice of their friend, Kim, overflowed from its tinny speaker. "Hiya, Jakey! Still being a paranoid little bastard, are we? Glad to hear it, chum." Jake scuffed his shoe on the fringe of the living room rug and sat down on the couch. Kim was always calling people chums. "Just wanted to see if the old Mad-Hatter was around, "she bubbled into the machine relentlessly. "I tried her place—no one picked up... Helloooo? Anyone home in there?"

Recognizing Kim's voice, Maddy had come out from her temporary refuge in the bathroom and had padded down the hall to the kitchen. Now, she picked up the receiver from its cradle. The machine clicked off. "Hello? Kim? ... Yeah, I know. ... O, he's here... Sitting on the couch in the living room... He says hi." She paused, muffled the phone

with her shoulder, and leaned around the corner to look at Jake, who still sat motionless on the couch. "Kim says, 'hello, chum,'" she said, rolling her eyes at the ceiling and attempting a smile. Jake said nothing, but stuck out his tongue in what he thought was a playful manner. Maddy tensed for a second, probably inadvertently. Old habits. She forced a smile that came across grudgingly, and put the phone back to her ear.

Jake listened to her from the living room as she pulled out a kitchen chair and sat down, conversing lightly with the party on the other end. Kim's voice, though muted, spilled over the edges of the phone like a constant trickle. She called everyone chum for no reason in particular, but Jake explained it away as expressing her subconscious opinion that people were like salmon. She had expressed often enough her thoughts on the matter: that every human struggle—whether it be scientific, capitalistic, artistic or spiritual—essentially came down to one thing and one thing only. An upstream battle towards the irresistible call of nature: sex.

Maddy wasn't nearly as cynical as Kim. She loved puzzles and word-games and insisted it had nothing to do with any kind of sexual innuendo or fetish, though Kim teased that it was her primary reason for still dating Jake, who had no other income or redeeming qualities that would make him a Good Catch. Kim called her Mad-Hatter with affection, but Jake knew there was an underlying implication that Maddy must be crazy to put up with him. Maybe she was partially crazy. They were both 'odd ducks,' as Kim reminded them frequently. In any case, Maddy still grew frustrated with Jake's unwavering commitment to his virginal fiction, and Jake still found the whole topic of sex quite tedious, in an impersonal way. He hated discussing it almost as much as he hated commercial jingles—he cursed manipulative repetition.

Without a word, he stood up from the couch, paced the edges of the rug a few times, and then headed for the kitchen. Maddy, busy nodding to Kim's carbonated chatter, had propped her elbows up on the kitchen table, her head slightly bent, studying a newspaper cross-word puzzle. Unheard, Jake leaned over and brushed his lips along the back of her neck. He could smell the shampoo she used—something with aloe in it. He watched goosebumps shiver up the wisp of her hairline. She picked up a stubby pencil and scribbled the word 'gravid' in 5-down. Then, she turned around in the chair and gave him an appreciative, forgiving smile. She continued nodding to Kim, who couldn't hear the



movement.

That evening, after a private playful tussle, Maddy uncurled in bed next to Jake and stretched every muscle in her legs, including the arches of her feet and each little toe. “You’ll never guess what Kim told me on the phone today,” she said.

Jake stifled a happy yawn and raised his eyebrows.

“She’s met someone—another photographer—who knows a guy who knows a guy who works for a magazine who might want one of your stories.”

Jake didn’t bother asking which of his stories the magazine might want, or which magazine, or whether it was reputable or one of those copy-machine ‘zines thrown together by grad students. He rolled over and slid his arm under Maddy’s thin shoulder blades, lifting her up just enough to kiss the center of her forehead. He tasted a hint of salt. He adored the many flavors of her skin. He told her so in many words.

Jake’s favorite character was a young woman named Bridget, who lived up along the coast of Washington and had learned the art of fishing from her deaf father, now deceased. He’d uncovered Bridget back in college when his stories were mostly about struggling against the sex-crazed, drunken debauchery of campus life—around the time he had first met Kim and, through her, had been gradually introduced to Maddy. The way Jake wrote it, Bridget knew all the things about chum salmon that Kim didn’t, which was everything. She knew that they were sometimes called dog salmon because of the set of canine-like fangs found in mature males. She knew that, unlike other kinds of salmon, chum spent almost the entire span of their lives in saltwater, returning to freshwater streams only after four or five years, to spawn. She knew that the best time to catch chum was in the late fall. And she knew that, after their struggle upstream to lay eggs, they died in a matter of days. She never called anyone chum.

Jake had written Bridget into almost all of his stories, sometimes playing the lead, but often in walk-on roles—a stranger with two paintbrush pigtails sitting casually in the background of his pristine settings, watching the angelic events unfold into a coherent plot before her. She had the calm, distant eye of a narrator-in-waiting. It was to her that Jake turned for clarity and purpose in the final paragraphs. Bridget was wise. She understood death and sex the way chum understood them—entering a purity the body couldn’t withstand.

After Jake fell in love with Maddy, Bridget began to grow her hair out in his stories, until he couldn't tell the two of them apart. Sometimes, he wrote that she had taken to wearing her hair down, like Maddy's, and that she tucked a yellow daffodil, Maddy's favorite flower, behind her ear. If anything, she grew even more angelic and untouchable.

In his newest story, Bridget had met a young man at the sign-language workshops she ran on weekends to supplement her fisherman's income. He had only recently lost his hearing after a bad case of meningitis, and he signed with all the awkwardness of a child. He was shy, somewhat reclusive, and very much in love with the colors of things. He wanted to know all their names—not just the primary palette. *How can you say scarlet with your hands?* he would mumble, scrawling the words on the notepad he carried with him. *How can you say olive, cream, azure?* His enthusiasm was unending and gentle. His notepad scrawlings were like puzzles that Bridget helped him to decode, moving his fingers this way and that. For the first time, the thought of physical intimacy graced the pages of Bridget's immaculate mind. It was unutterably delicious.

This was the story Jake sent to the magazine.

The story was published the same week the doctor called to tell Maddy that the reason for the sharp pain in her abdomen and her missed period was a fertilized egg that had implanted in her left fallopian tube. This couldn't be right, she told the doctor, she had been on birth control for years. Perhaps she had missed a day—but in any case, he was sorry, sometimes these things happen. If she didn't receive treatment soon, the displaced fetus could rupture the tube and cause serious problems, even possibly fatal problems. Maddy hung up the phone and stood alone in Jake's kitchen, staring dumbly at the black plastic rim of the clock that hung over the sink. She traced the word 'ectopic' on the table with her finger.

A moment later, Jake, who had run down to the post office to pick up his contributor's copy and his modest check for \$77.13 (three cents a word), walked into the unsteady silence of his apartment, slightly out of breath. He cradled the slim package to his chest. He sat down on the couch without a word and tore it open, sliding his fingers lovingly over the glossy cover of the issue. He flipped distractedly through the magazine until he found his story sprawled out, naked to a million readers' eyes, on page thirty-nine. His hands began to tremble.

Maddy came out from the kitchen. "Is that it?" she asked, seeing him

with the magazine. He lifted his head and offered it to her, his forefinger marking the page. She took it without a glance and set it, closed, on the coffee table. She lowered herself calmly down onto the couch next to him. "Jake—I just got off the phone with the doctor," she said.

He didn't say anything. He eyed the magazine.

"I'm preg—I'm losing a baby, Jake. A baby I didn't know I had."

He remained tensely silent. So long out of practice, not one concise, useful sentence came to mind. He glanced from his trembling hands to the magazine, as if the words he'd already written could save him from failing to find the right ones now.

Maddy stared at him. "Did you hear what I said?" she asked. Her voice strained, sounded panicked. "I swear to God, don't *play* this game right now. I'm supposed to be having a *baby*. I'm supposed to be having *your* baby, Jake. But instead, I'll have to lie anesthetized on a table while some surgeon sticks me with pins until the thing growing in the wrong place inside me is dead."

She stood up and began pacing the edge of the rug. She stuffed her hands deep into the pockets of her khakis, then flinched and pulled them out again. Distractedly she lifted the edge of her tee-shirt. Her fingers wander over the skin of her abdomen, as if searching for a pulse.

Jake watched her, admiring her pursed lips.

She began to cry.

"Aren't you going to *say anything?*"

He opened his mouth. The air in the room was scorched and dry. His lips felt painful, split open. No words came. Only images of Maddy's slender, delicate body stretching out beneath the sheets of his bed, slowly growing rounder.

"By the quintessential purity of the nine celestial bodies that circumambulate the sun of my heart on this day, Thursday, October—"

"Shut up!" she screamed. "O, God, just shut up!" She turned her back on him, her shoulders shaking noiselessly. Then, she lifted her head as if with sudden purpose.

Jake snatched the magazine off the coffee table and began scrambling through the pages.

"I'm going to call Kim to drive me to the hospital," Maddy said with broken resolve. "I have to stay overnight. I'll... call you, or something..."

Jake wanted to grab her and not let her leave, to hold her fiercely. He

shoved the magazine toward her, pointing to the open page.

She glared at him, sniffing. "I am *going*, Jake. I don't give a *shit* about your stupid, sexless story!" She swatted the issue away from her and headed for the door.

He watched her go, withering away into what seemed a great distance. "Please," he whispered. "Please read it."

Many people throughout history have begged this way, with these words. Jake whispered them as if they had been the first words spoken at the dawn of creation. As if every living soul had been breathing them unceasingly ever since.

Maddy stopped. She turned around to face him. Her eyes were the dry, blood-shot red of someone quite sure the world was falling apart instead of falling into place. She couldn't move, so he brought it to her. The page he showed to her was not the opening of his story, but the end. At the bottom of the last page, in shivering italics, was his bio.

It read: "JACOB FENSTERMAKER is content in his silence to adore the unique, musical tremor of the soul of Madeline Anna Brown, the love of his life, and it is to her that he owes the birth of his every breath. Now, with something written worth reading, he is going to ask her to marry him."

Maddy dropped the magazine with a flutter of pages. She was crying again.

"Yes," she said.

"Maddy," Jake mumbled, "will you marry me?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Yes," he repeated, joyfully. And he held her—he held her as they walked to the door, as they left the apartment, as they drove to the hospital. He held her for long hours after the operation, imagining a purity their bodies couldn't withstand.

## STREAM

The cool, clear water ran over my feet. The same cool, clear water that, when we were forced into it to slide our aluminum Grumman Aircraft Company canoe under a fallen tree that bridged the overgrown banks of the small stream winding through the wilds of New Hampshire, elicited the most girlish screams of dismay that we had ever heard ourselves make. The freezing cold amplified by dread anticipation, as the ice cold water covered first a foot, a leg, then the bottom of a bathing suit—I realized the true fear began when the water hit the bottom of the aqua blue swim trunks and began its slow inexorable spread upwards. For a brief moment I paused, glanced at my friend, and shared an understanding gaze of the vulnerabilities of manhood (we were standing in the stream by now, blurred shapes darting about us in water muddied by our arrival). We lowered ourselves into the stream, and the water rose, and oh no, please no, dear God, it was about my waist—and then our screams cut through the air, shattering the quiet. But seeing the twisted look on my friend's face, sharing the pain, gave some relief; and we ducked in up to our necks, no problem, because no cold could compare to *that* cold; and we guided our canoe under the tree. We emerged on the other side, gasping and shivering, chests heaving, exhilarated; the water dripped off me, the air caressed my skin. What was this? A slippery sensation beneath my foot sent me reaching into the water, my hand digging into the stream bed, my face kissing its reflection. I stood up, emerging with a grip of gray clay, startlingly sensuous in my hand, uniform in color, unexpected, alien, so out of place in the varying shades of green and brown surrounding me. I turned to my friend, and on a sudden impulse I opened my hand, clay dropping into the water, rippling it—I reached out to my friend and laid my open palm across his face. When he opened his eyes, they stared from a face ferocious with my handprint. He leaned down and came up with more clay; we covered ourselves with strange symbols. At that very moment, I realized I was alive. I noticed everything, especially the flat, white rock just barely concealed by overgrown grass on the opposite bank, and as fast as I could move through the water, I was over there, brushing aside the grass, and I saw

the rock. My friend appeared beside me with gray clay in his hands. He reached out and with his finger traced a wavy line, the stream, stark gray against the bright white rock; I reached out, and a shape rose from the water, a fantastic beast, gigantic, born of a dream.

# DIVE



## BIFOCAL BRAINFREEZE

Well then let's discuss the sidewalks  
And the postage stamp pictures  
And the temperatures on Friday nights  
I used to fear the practical notion  
Of middle names printed plainly  
Street signs and subway stations  
But what about the barstools  
Cracked leather rear window reflections  
Are there elevators on the hillsides  
Doorbells prove freshwater pearls  
And this chipped tooth cuts deep  
The burned toast and cigarette smoke  
Designs reflect the fluorescent light in your eyes  
In the skies

Let's skate across water ice kicklines  
And roll onto Italian highways  
I'd cross the paper maché ocean grey  
How about a scout's honor to tide you over  
How about green lights behind closed blinds  
I'll toss your cuffed trust to a T-shirt criminal  
I'll be a blinded prize to your makeshift mousetrap  
Inside highlighter bottled grace

So bring then fairy cards and a rhinestone studded bandana  
Into this famous snowglobe tucked in earth  
To shake up the acquired accent  
Among freckle faced constellations  
By the dim dawn of a lava lamp  
I'm your pinstripe princess  
And you're the comeback king  
Who finds brilliance in his coffee cup paradise  
A brother to the blues  
Summer's kid sister  
You've a recyclable need for speed



Disguised in a pill-popping sterling student demeanor  
With your snotnosed rainboots and backtalk  
And frozen braided rope bracelet

I'll sleep beside the bedside of your mind tonight  
Straight through silent siren's warning  
So shield your eyes  
Your mother's pride  
From the superego's sunglaring religious experience  
Wear your seatbelt, patch those bluejeans  
I'll put post-it notes on the porch doors  
Set up picnic baskets on basement floors

Fur coats will cover mud puddles  
That seep slowly with seasoned meaning  
Into earthquake cracked asphalt  
You can be the miracle cure  
To my extraordinary common cold  
This hero's silken cape stops oxygen  
Octagonally you can rewind  
Because you're everywhere, you're in the air

But the platform footsteps on the blue coast...  
Those will floor me every time

DO YOU WANT A HUG?



## CAGES

“Kevin, it is three days until Easter, and she *still* does not have a decent pair of shoes to wear!”

The girl winced as her mother's complaint cut through her concentration. It was hard enough to read in a bouncing car, why did her mother have to make it harder with her constant nagging?

She heard her father sigh. “Calm down, Anne,” he said. “We have time. We'll find something.”

“Not if she continues to reject every shoe I try!”

“Maybe if you gave me one that wasn't pointy, I could wear it,” the girl snapped before she could stop herself. Biting her lip in agitation at being provoked, she returned to her book, and the interrupted scene of a mouse's fight with a snake.

Her mother threw her hands in the air. “See what I mean?” she demanded. “When I was a girl we went to Church every Sunday, and there was no talk about not wearing pointed shoes! It's bad enough trying to get her into a dress—”

“Dresses have frills!” The girl protested, abandoning all attempts to continue to read the scene. “They itch, and they make me uncomfortable.”

Her father sighed. “Katherine, your mother is right. You can not go to Church on Easter looking like a slob. You *must* dress up, and you *will* wear dress shoes. Not sneakers. And that is final.”

The girl glared at the back of his chair. It would do no good to argue, she knew, when he used that tone of voice. But it certainly was not final. Not if she had anything to do with it.

The bell jingled gently as the girl pushed the door open. She stood for a minute just inside the doorway, ignoring the insistent clamor of her brother behind her, staring around her least favorite shoe store. It had not changed much since her last visit three months before. The same tables held the same pile of haphazardly stacked boxes of varying sizes. Behind them, the same old shelves rose to just below ceiling height, stocked with row upon row of footwear of all sizes and descriptions, from wonderfully soft sneakers to those awful pointed things that some adult had had the humor to call “shoes”. The girl grimaced: In her

estimation shoes were what a person wore to protect her feet. They should not cause those feet to ache after being trapped within their confines for several hours, or make the poor toes scrunch up in agony in a vain attempt to find some more room. But for some reason Mom did not seem to agree, and now the girl was once again facing the prospect of yet another attempt at pushing her reluctant feet into an agonizingly small space, all for the purpose of one hour sitting in a pew on Sunday, and dinner afterwards.

She sighed, allowing her mother to nudge her into the store, past the uneven display of closed boxes stacked up in the window. Oh, well. This store was only open for another half hour, and if she was lucky she could drag out the fitting process past closing time. Then she would have to go to Church in sneakers, or better yet not go at all, because this was the last day they could shop before next Sunday. In the meantime, there was compensation for the agony. She glanced at the book in her hand and smiled. It would take Mom several minutes to find the right shoe, minutes which the girl could spend in blissful ignorance, deep in the forests of Brian Jacques' Mossflower woods, helping Matthias to fight the snake.

"Let's go over here, Katherine. It looks like they have a nice collection over this way."

Her mother, apparently sure that her daughter would follow now she was safely in the store, took the lead, heading towards the aisle for dress shoes. As the girl wandered after, she glanced around her, taking in the rest of the store. There were several other people there, all of them older than her ten years. Well, not quite. She turned her head at the sound of a box falling, and saw, without too much surprise, that a pyramid of boxes had mysteriously collapsed, while her younger brother happily studied the result of his latest experiment. Dad stood behind him, looking like he was not sure if he should yell or laugh. He compromised by striking Charles lightly on the side of the shoulder, ordering him to pick up the boxes before they continued into the store.

Shaking her head, the girl hurried to catch up with her mother. Charles was always poking at things. Why couldn't he see that the boxes could not stand if the one at the bottom was removed? It was a simple concept to grasp, wasn't it? Then, again, the girl thought as she reached the end of the aisle Mom had gone into, maybe he did know: It would take Dad a few minutes to pick up all the boxes. Minutes that her brother would not have to spend cramming his feet into tight torture

instruments. The girl considered this new angle. Could it be that Charles was smarter than she was? Maybe *she* should try knocking down a pile or two, too.

“Katherine, hurry up! We need to find you something before the stores close!”

The girl jumped at the anger in her mother's voice, and hurried forward. No, she decided firmly, knocking down a pile of boxes would *not* be a good idea. Charles might be able to get away with it, but he was only six. She, on the other hand, was ten, and ten-year-olds did not go pulling boxes out of pyramid stacks. It had been a nice idea, though.

“Look,” said her mother, completely oblivious to how close she had come to an embarrassing disaster, “They have a nice white one. The perfect color for Easter.”

She held out the box she was holding, looking beseechingly at her daughter. For some reason, she looked tired. The girl set down the book she had been clutching on a stool nearby, feeling cheated. How had Mom found a shoe so fast? She took the box without much enthusiasm, staring at the shoes. They looked...shoeish. She prodded them with her finger.

“They have a point,” she said.

Her mother took a breath and looked up at the ceiling for a minute. Then she lowered her head, taking another breath. “All dress shoes have a point, Katherine,” she said. “Why don't you try them on and see how they fit? I need to see how Charles is doing.”

“Charles knocked over a pile of boxes up front.” The girl placed the box on the stool, next to her book, and lifted a shoe out, turning it in her hands.

“Again?” Her mother rolled her eyes. “When is he going to learn to behave in a store?”

The girl shrugged. Setting the shoe down, she reluctantly began to unlace her sneaker. “I think he wanted to see how they cascaded when they fell,” she said as she pulled her sneaker off and picked up the shoe once more. Her toes cringed in anticipation.

“Nothing was damaged, though?” Mom asked.

“No.” The girl slid the shoe onto her foot, wincing slightly. Then she blinked in surprise. It was not as bad as she had thought: the point was almost non-existent.

“Well, that's good.” Mom's voice filled with relief, and even a little amusement. “Some day that brother of yours is going to go too far...”

How do the shoes fit? I tried to find one less pointy than the last one.”

Sighing, the girl picked up the second one. “A little better than the last pair,” she admitted, not hiding her surprise, “I need to try the second one on, though.” She felt a slight panic. Only six minutes had gone by since they had entered the store, if that. How was she going to drag this out for another 24? Was she going to get stuck with dress shoes after all?

As she unlaced her second sneaker at the speed of a snail, she thought she heard something pass overhead. Startled, she whirled and looked up, but nothing was there.

“What is it?” Her mother looked quickly in the same direction.

“Thought I heard something.” The girl frowned, scanning the ceiling above. The shelves did not go all the way up, leaving a gap of about a six feet between their tops and the ceiling, and she could have almost sworn that she had seen—“Mom, did you see something fly by up there?”

“Fly?” The girl's mother stared at her. “No, I didn't. Have you tried that second shoe yet?”

“Almost,” the girl muttered. She turned back to her nervous feet, and slowly pulled off the second sneaker.

A few minutes later, it was done. The shoes fit, or at least they were better than the last pair. Mom packed them back into the box with a relieved sigh. The girl had to go to the bathroom, so while Mom went to the front of the store with the box, she went to the back, passing her father and brother along the way. Charles was waving his foot around so fast that Dad could not possibly grab it long enough to stuff it inside a shoe. The girl grinned. It looked like she was going to have time for that chapter after all.

Coming out of the small bathroom, she glanced up at the mirror set in the corner of the store. There was a strange ornament in it, which looked exactly like a large pigeon sitting on a precarious perch below the mirror. Whoever had made that ornament had done a fantastic job, the girl thought, studying it. It had an almost life-like appearance, as it appeared to study her with small beady eyes.

She watched it for a few minutes, then turned back to the aisle where her mother had found the new shoes, and settled down on her chosen perch with her book.

She was never to finish that chapter, however. Several minutes later, she heard a loud cry from her father, followed by a shriek of delight

from Charles.

“Katherine!” Charles came hopping into her aisle on one new shoe, waving the other in his hand. “Katherine, look, there is a bird in the store!”

“Yes, I know,” she answered, without looking up from her book, “Isn’t it a neat ornament?”

“No, it’s real! It just flew!”

The girl nodded, not really paying attention to what he was saying. “It looks really life-like—What?” She jerked her head up, staring at her brother, as his words finally sank in.

“It flew!” Charles, still shouting, pointed to the ceiling. “Right over our heads!”

“Where is it now?” She dropped her book and jumped to her feet. “Did it get out?”

“No,” Dad answered, coming around the end of the aisle, “It is up front. The poor thing seems confused, I think.”

The girl hurried up the aisle to the front of the store, her father and brother following. Mom met them there and pointed at the window display, where the ornament the girl had seen earlier was frantically throwing itself against the pane. Every few seconds it fell back onto the boxes, shook itself, and tried again.

“Why won’t it go to the door?” The girl asked.

“I don’t think it knows where the door is,” Mom answered. “Stay away from it Katherine, wild animals can be vicious when cornered.”

“It’s just a pigeon,” Charles said.

Dad glared at him. “That doesn’t mean it isn’t dangerous.”

The pigeon’s cries and movements had attracted the rest of the store’s few customers, and everyone gathered around in a small semi-circle, watching the wings flutter desperately in the bird’s effort to escape.

“Poor thing,” Mom murmured.

The girl frowned. Why didn’t anyone try to help it? This pigeon didn’t belong here. It belonged outside, in the free sky. Surely they knew that? Slowly, she approached it, drawn forward by the creature’s obvious terror and helplessness. She heard gasps behind her, and what sounded like Dad’s anxious voice, but she ignored them. She reached out slowly, extending her hand in the universal offer of help, but stopping far enough away so that if the bird wished to attack she would have time to back off.

“Katherine, be careful!” Mom called.

"It needs help," she answered without turning around, "it's terrified."

She continued to hold her hand out, watching. The bird was still hopping, watching her in turn. None of the adults seemed to want to help it, or to be able to do so. They stood there, watching the bird's plight, unmoving and uncaring. To them it was just a wild animal to be avoided, or tamed. The girl felt a quick surge of anger at their stupid callousness, her own family among them. Couldn't they see that the bird just wanted to be free?

Then, as she watched, she noticed something: There was a pattern to the bird's frantic movements. And every few seconds...

"Mom, get me a box!" She called, backing away, "And keep it there!"

"A box?" Her mother echoed. "Katherine, what—"

"Oh, never mind," the girl muttered. She turned, hurrying towards the display that Charles had knocked down before. If she had been right about the sound when they fell...

There! She grabbed at the top box, and opened it. Good. It was empty, just as she had thought. She hurried back to the window display where the bird was still frantically attempting to break through an unbreakable barrier, and slipped through the ring of motionless adults, slowly approaching the pigeon once more. It had stopped throwing itself against the window, and was now hopping from one pile of boxes to another, still watching everything with those beady eyes. The girl watched carefully, counting silently. Then her hand darted forward, sliding the open box on top of the stack the bird had just hopped off. She waited, with the lid ready.

She was very close to the bird now. She could see the frantic motion of its wings, hear its desperate burbling cries. The girl waited, encouraging it in her thoughts. But aloud she said nothing, as terrified, in truth, as the bird was. This close, she could not back away if it attacked. And what would it do when it found itself in an even deeper confinement?

Twice, three times, the bird hopped into the box, and out, and the girl did nothing. Behind her, the ring of adults had fallen silent, watching. Only her own family spoke, and they did so in half-whispers, as if afraid that to speak louder would cause the bird to back off, or their daughter to lose her nerve.

In, out. In, out. The bird hopped, the adults watched, and the girl waited. It was hard to judge when the bird was in position, and she knew that she was missing opportunities. But it was so hard to tell, and



her hand wasn't that fast... In, out...In, out...She wanted so desperately to help, to give the bird the freedom it desired, but somehow she was always late when it came time to move the lid. Her father was giving suggestions, but it was hard to follow them when she was so close to those wings, that slashing beak, those scrabbling talons...

Then, suddenly, it was over. The girl heard someone come up beside her, and felt herself gently pushed aside. A man she had never seen before, and would never see again, placed a wide red box on top of her own. Taking his lid, he roughly pushed the frantic creature into his larger box, and slammed the lid down. Smiling at the girl, he took the box through the applauding adults to the door, backed out still holding it, and walked out of the store.

The girl stood stunned. In those few moments of frantic activity, when she and the pigeon had stood alone, apart from everyone else, the bird had, in some strange way, become hers. She could not understand how that had changed, how another man had suddenly come upon the scene while she was unaware. That had been her bird, her rescue. Not his. For a moment, as she stood holding her empty box, she felt as if she would cry.

"You showed him how," Mom said quietly from behind her. "He wouldn't have known how to help if you hadn't shown him the pattern in the hops."

The girl turned, and saw her mother holding out her book. She stepped forward slowly to take it, glanced at it for a minute, then decided she would finish the chapter later. For some reason, she did not feel much like reading right now.

"Katherine?" Dad's voice was tentative. "The bird is free. He opened the lid at the end of the street and it hopped right out and flew away. It's safe, Katherine."

"But it wouldn't have been if not for you, little girl," another voice added. The girl turned and saw that the other man had returned, and was smiling at her again. "Thanks."

The girl tried hard to smile back. The bird *was* free, after all, and this man could not possibly know what he had interrupted, or how much she hated to be called "little girl." But still, she felt somehow cheated.

"Good," she muttered, trying to sound like she meant it.

"It flew right up into the air, Kat," her brother said enthusiastically, "It just spread its wings and took off."

The girl turned to look at him, feeling her spirits suddenly rise for a reason she could not, at first, identify. "You saw it?"

"Yep." He grinned. "I watched it until it was a speck in the sky. It looked so happy to be free."

The girl felt a smile spread across her face. She walked over, gave her brother a quick hug, and then turned from his staggered face to the bird's rescuer. She extended her hand. "Thanks for the help," she said, "I couldn't get the timing right."

He took the hand, smiling back. "To tell you the truth, I wasn't sure if I would either," he told her with a wink, "it was more luck than anything." He paused, then added, "I'm sorry you couldn't do it on your own. That would have been something. But sometimes a person has to give a little to get what they want, don't you agree?"

The girl blinked, dropping his hand. "I never thought of it before."

The man grinned. "Well, maybe you should."

The girl nodded slowly. She watched the man leave the store, then glanced at Charles. He had taken advantage of the opportunity presented by the bird's rescuer to retreat back down the aisle, away from the shoe now in Dad's hand. What he did not see was that Mom had circled around behind him. She stood with her arms folded, waiting for Charles to get close enough for her to pounce. The girl sighed. Even Charles could not avoid the inevitable forever. Falling boxes and trapped pigeons could not postpone things indefinitely. She turned away, and caught sight of the empty box in the window, and the empty sky beyond. She stood looking out the window for several minutes, then turned to look at Charles again. Maybe, Katherine thought slowly, there was another way to win. Mom would never budge on the shoes, but maybe she would be willing to bend somewhere else, if she was approached the right way?

Katherine crossed to her father. "Dad," she said, "Do you think, if I agreed to wear the shoes, Mom would let me have a skirt instead of a dress?"

For a moment, her father looked startled. Then he smiled. "Why don't you go to that chair over there and read, and I'll see what Mom has to say?"

"OK," Katherine agreed happily. She could see through the door. She lifted her hand to the sky in a sign of farewell, then turned to the chair, looking forward to finally reading the end of her favorite chapter.

## BEAUTY SHOP AURA



## A MUG OF TEA

Faded cup makes cozy my lap,  
jaded by a rivulet of age.

Protruding from its waist:  
the headless neck of a swan,  
it beckons fingers.

Inside, Autumn is bagged,  
sufficiently drowned,  
tainted with lemon.

Dead nature floating,  
squelched by milk.

Fond vapor escapes  
its watery tomb.

Life itself brews  
spices. Caresses  
my morning.

# CLOUDS AND CORNFIELDS



## AUTUMN BLEND

in bed cozy chamomile inviting tea pot's  
ghost whistle echoing through silent ears  
chilly ears corn stalks dry and brown husky  
and crackling still in the fields pink orange  
crimson fields where the light favors color  
and autumn sunset season just beginning just  
emerging darkening turning cold the clawing  
finger of frost first frost lay between ridges  
of dark brown earth green-tinged frost  
painting my breath mid-air stopping sounds  
the stop of crisp apples falling from the trees  
changing changing bruised leaves bruised  
apples tucked into pockets and up-turned  
caps tripping up the back porch spilled onto  
the cold tile floor apples apple cider sauce  
dumplings warm flaky cinnamon in the  
kitchen stove grandmother's black kettle of  
chamomile tea.

# INFINITESIMAL



## WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN OR WHAT NEVER WAS

None of this really happened. I know you, the reader, will take this sketch as fact (this being autobiographical and all), but to me all this is remembered like a dream; a lucid, emotional one, but certainly not reality. I can remember the strange odor which led the way to the airport's smoking lounge, the physical pain of my hangover and heartbreak, but to me these memories and events are no longer a part of my reality, rather, they are a story I will tell, a fairy-tale I'll someday weave for my children. They are the memories of a dream. You can't quite capture all the details, but you remember exactly how you felt in that moment.

Maybe it was all of those much appreciated free drinks on that last evening out in London which make these memories seem so distant, or maybe it was the stupefying haze of an all-consuming hangover, or maybe, just maybe, it was me. Me, afraid to confront the dizzying pace with which my life was changing, afraid of the newly-gained independence that I so desperately struggled for my entire youth. Me, scared senseless and trying to close the door in my mind that contained this overwhelming sense of displacement, of limbo, of purgatory. Maybe...

When I woke up Tuesday morning I was acutely aware that I was leaving. As I went about what had once been such a strange and foreign routine of my life I somehow saw the past three months being summed up by the monotonous grind of that day. As I walked toward the bus stop, I remembered when this walk was intimidating, when every single step made me second-guess my self and my place in the world. I remembered the childish pride I felt after my first solo commute into London. And I remembered the blur of hundreds of bus rides and tube rides, the comfort I came to find, and the friends and lovers I had discovered. I was trying to remember three months in London all at once. And I felt as if I had no control over my mind.

My sentimentality was going to force me to relive every joy, every sorrow, every first, every last, until I honestly thought my heart would explode. As I drifted through my final day of classes as a British student, as I reveled in my last commute as a true Londoner, I waged war with my emotions. "Jill," I'd say, "it is simply not okay to cry on the



tube. Everything has to end, and you knew this going in.” As always, my rational side was precisely that—rational. But *I*, being of flesh and blood and heart wanted to cry and scream and stamp my feet like a child. This wasn’t fair. None of it. It wasn’t fair that I got to go to London in the first place, and now that I was here and had fallen in love with the city and the life and the people, to have to suddenly go back to the way it was before, well, none of that was fair.

As my rational side once again smothered my inner-child, I collected myself enough that afternoon to finish packing, and to finish grieving. I silently mourned the impending death of this part of me, of the life *I* had created for myself somehow in the midst of this monstrous city. I cried like I haven’t in years, and could not pin down exactly what was so upsetting. All my body and mind sensed were overwhelming waves of fear, mixed with rare, forced moments of anticipation at the once-forgotten prospect of seeing my friends again, of listening to that *one* cd, ambiguously titled “Live Dead”, which I had left in my car those three distant months before on my way to the airport, and which I had so often longed for like the comfort you find in your first love’s arms.

I gazed solemnly at my last Hampstead sunset, silently smoking a joint, hoping that those beautiful crimson hues would never fade to black, that I could always have those windows to look out of. I knew then the full weight I was carrying back with me. I knew then that I would carry the time spent in this place, and the life lived in this city with me in my pocket for the rest of my life. I would carry it like a talisman, like a pebble from the creek you grew up next to. And I have. I can feel it now squirming in my pocket, anxious to be freed from its confinement, waiting to reveal its purpose and power in my life. Waiting to steal my heart and keep it there, in London, whenever I let my guard down. What I didn’t know then was my own power over this, how in the confusion and delays and frustrations in physically getting home from this place I would lose this reality, how I would come to think of it as an amazing dream.

But the dream was not quite over. I still had one more night to live out in that life, that city, and I was determined to go out laughing, even if it killed me. We went out that night the same as we had done on so many other Tuesdays. And in reality there was nothing different about the campus pub that night, or the tube ride into the center of the city, nor with the oddly-britified Mexican food. But for me, everything I looked at and experienced was already tinged with nostalgia, and absolutely

reeking of memories.

I remembered the awkwardness the first week there, of not knowing anybody and being a foreigner. I remembered the first time I saw Trafalgar Square as I climbed onto the massive lion for one last photo-op. And once we made it to the oh-so-familiar Sport's Café I remembered every single crazy, drunken, half-forgotten night we spent dancing there like it was our job, and to a certain extent, it was. There was an understanding between myself and the friends I had met who were also only there for three months that our purpose in this city was to have the time of our lives, to live every day to its fullest, to do whatever every single cliché told us to. I knew my time there was meant for living, and looking back that night I realized just how much living I had crammed into those ninety-two days.

And so I drank. I took that shot of wretched tequila with my girls because that's what we did. I flirted with the short bartender for a free Long Island Iced Tea because that was what I did in London. I danced and drank and danced and drank until my head was spinning from the euphoric combination of alcohol and love. Love for my friends there, love for the city, and most of all, love for the chance this trip had given me.

Like any good buzz, though, that feeling had to end. And it did, crashing dramatically into my lap on the hazy night-bus back to Hampstead. I remembered the person I had spent the past few weeks trying so desperately to forget—Alex. True to form, my thoughts of him crept up on me slowly, imperceptibly, weaving themselves into me until he was all I could feel. Alex and I met over a friendly game of pool on an unexpected night, and what started out as a game of skillful flirtation to occupy my wandering mind became something entirely more serious. After weeks of shameless flirting, a habit picked up in London and rarely practiced since, he called my bluff. I caught his eye on the dance floor one night, but to my surprising dismay the crowd kept getting in the way. Just like one of those silly movies, we both spent the evening moving around in search for the other. My heart would stutter when I would find him in the sea of drunken 'Uni's' and then drop as I turned again to look and find him gone. I left dejected and confused. This harmless flirtation had turned into genuine interest without my realizing it. Pouting in our pathetic little kitchen I heard the always exciting chirp of my cell phone and anxiously grabbed for it. As I hesitantly pushed the necessary keys I felt like I was eighteen again, waiting expectantly

for the man you hope to love to call you or talk to you, or even just to glance sideways at you.

The text led to an ice cream date at one a.m. The ice cream date led to us staying up all night together picking apart horrible movies in the Sky room (the only TV I ever watched in London). And that night led to the next morning and that fateful first kiss. And just like that I was swept off my feet. Alex and I spent many weeks together exploring London as well as each other. I fell in love with his accent, his enormous stature, his funny words. I cherished staying up with him all hours of the night, and was honestly a little proud at feeling 'knackered' the next day. We told our stories and had our fun, and little by little I realized that I could love him, not that I did, but just that I could. And this often-overlooked realization shook me awake. Yes, I could love someone again, which was an idea that I had pretty much given up on by then, but I couldn't have him. Frustration flowed through my veins instead of blood from then on. The only possible solution was to be rational and end it before it meant too much. And so we did, and for the last three weeks there, that "we" ceased to exist. It was as if he had never been there, when formerly he was all I saw. I cried for a day hidden in my room and looked out my windows and knew I had to stop. London doesn't wait for broken hearts. Life doesn't either.

So I lived as I had before this apparition. I finished out my meticulously numbered days in London seeing and doing everything I believed I would never have the chance to do again. And I threw myself back into my family I left at home, calling home more in those three weeks than I had in the two months before. I came to terms, or so I thought, with my eventual return to York.

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But I've digressed. Can you see now why I must keep my memories and experiences in their dream-like bubble? I get lost in them, like a child lost in a candy store. I could swim for hours in this mystical lake of memory. I could drown in it with a smile on my face and a tear in my eye. But I can't. Back in the real world I have classes and money and family and a million other things to worry about and maintain focus on. The same life that I abandoned when I boarded that plane to London was right there waiting for me, stalking me until I returned.

As I endured the cold, nauseating bus ride home from the club that last morning I plunged myself back in to thoughts and dreams of Alex. The ocean of thoughts I jumped into was at first refreshing, but as the

bus bumped its way down Baker Street towards Hampstead I felt myself begin to drown. Weighed down once again by frustration, I knew my only hope of surviving that night was resignation. As we got off the bus I accepted the fact that I would not be able to say goodbye to him, and that most likely, I had already seen him for the last time. Until we came to that damn foot bridge. That non-descript greenish twenty foot walkway which led to my building. This runway which would always reveal whether Alex was around, this path that had haunted and taunted me since our responsible decision to separate.

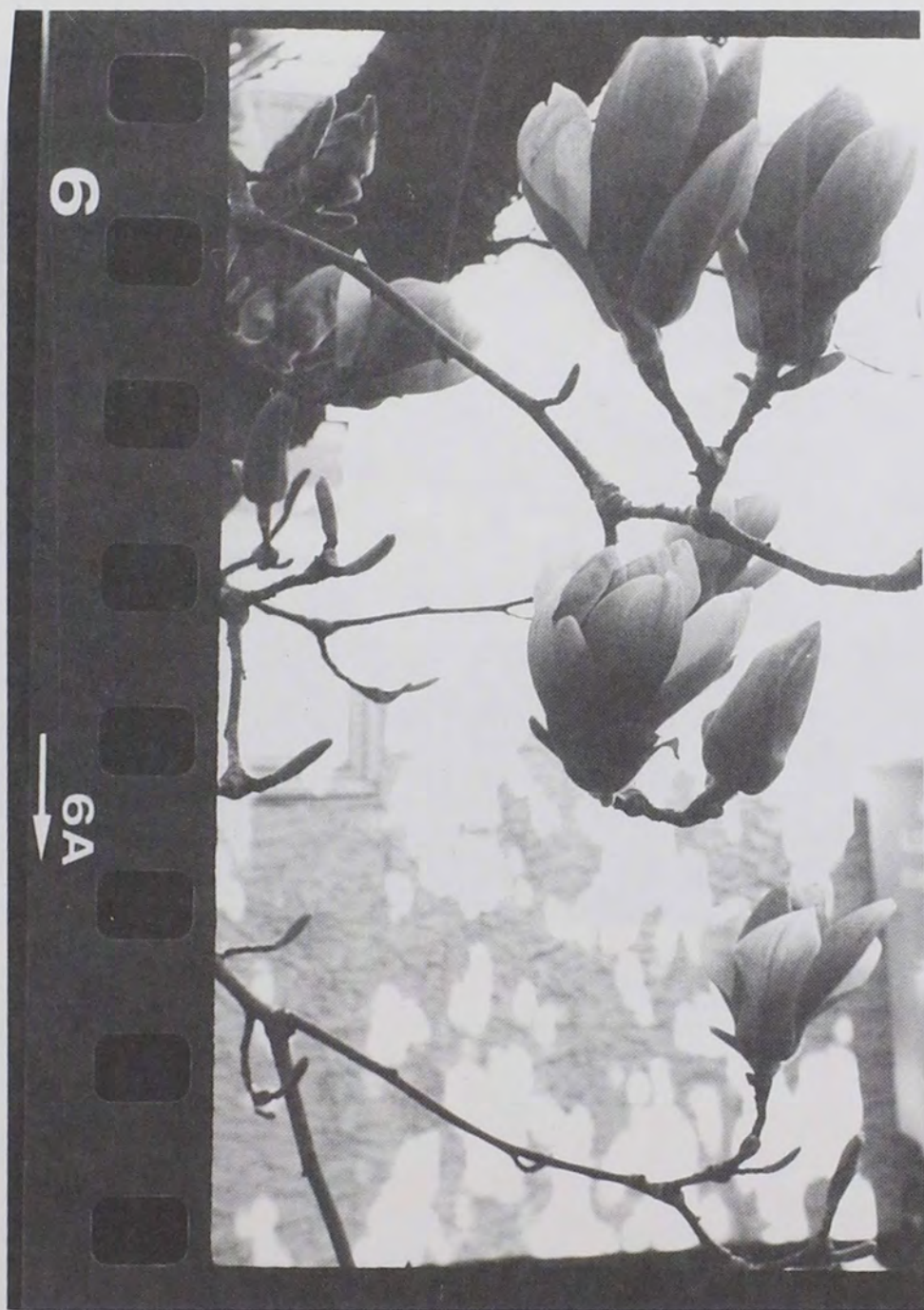
As I took my first step onto the walkway I did not look into the window I knew he might be in. I promised myself not to. But suddenly that window said my name. Scared to look, afraid it was just a wishful hallucination, I glanced speculatively where my eyes had looked without my consent so many times before, and like the fairy-tale there he was. Except this was no fairy-tale, this was five a.m. on a Wednesday, when I had to leave for the airport in five hours, when the star-crossed lovers aren't intoxicated with love, they're intoxicated with too much booze.

As I coolly waved and said hello, my body fought against me. It wanted to run and scream and jump and pray. But I had to be calm. So I calmly accepted his invitation to stop up and say hello and headed for my own kitchen to gather all the thoughts spinning wildly out of control in my head. The chance that I had given up on, the chance to say goodbye, had presented itself to me, and whether or not I believed it to be an act of providence or a gift from God, I was terrified. What was there to say? I had already said it all to myself a thousand times, and I knew none of this would change the fact that my flight was boarding in ten hours. Like an alcoholic is drawn to the promise of one last drink, I could not resist just one last moment with him. Dreading the awkwardness of this chance meeting, I slowly made my way to him. I can't remember all the pointless, never-ending small talk in his kitchen, but my memory snaps back into focus when I found myself once again surrounded by his embrace. All the bad feelings and frustration had melted out of me and I was left there holding on to Alex, holding on to something so wonderful, so comfortable, so bittersweet. I cried into his navy blue fleece and buried my head like a child in his arms. He held me so tight I couldn't move. And then, he cried. And it was in that moment that I lost touch with reality. My world, the emotions I had felt and feared for him were all given back to me in his tears. This final blow, this final realization that I was right, that I was leaving behind a

potential great love, that my feelings and heartache were reciprocated, pushed my off the edge. How could I get on that plane that afternoon and risk leaving behind this great what-if? What if that person I became there, capable of genuine love and intimacy, open to the world and people around her, was left there too? If this was real, and not just a dream, there were emotionally charged repercussions that I had never thought of. So after a long, tender kiss goodnight and the promise of another, final goodbye in three hours, I put on my strong face and beat the reality of everything into oblivion. The pictures are real, and I am real, and London is real, but those memories, the sweet and the sad, the bitter and the euphoric, are dreams. They stay neatly tucked away in a pocket or a drawer, and that way, I know I left nothing behind. After all, you can't really leave behind dreams.

*Meghan Bickel*

# BLOOMING LIGHT



## MONTANA SKIES

Skies are more turquoise  
than sun-fed limestone lakes.  
At night, they are well-lit  
like a rodeo scene.  
Orion lassoes Sagittarius –  
the crowd gasps.  
Stars jump  
through their own  
flame-framed hoops –  
daring cowboys  
create their own spotlights.

Darker than shadows  
on the badlands,  
the emptiness  
is well-plotted with light.  
Satellites cross my gaze  
as stark and clear  
as a loon's flying silhouette  
on the moon.

# DESERTED





## BURIED MIRTH

Recently, I found a bookmark that I'd made in elementary school—a strip of newsprint with an off-color drawing of the world and under it, in alternating blue and purple crayon, the short verse: “Laugh and the world laughs with you, Cry and you cry alone, For the sad old earth Must bury its mirth And has tears enough of its own.”

I imagine a world tired of weeping, exhausted to the point where the woes that had once been cause for tears now became something almost laughable. As if Mother Nature herself has dwelled enough on sadness, and has turned her attention to some secret she's discovered in her own depths, buried away like a hearty laugh that had to be kept quiet in polite company.

*Sometimes nature seems a distinct entity in itself, something that I can pick up and hold to the light, examine from various angles, apply to humanity. The earth's rainstorms weep, the afternoon sun breaks into smiles, the wind rolls over in the night and tenderly kisses the still sleeping horizon. I'm one for the natural, for the nature metaphor.*

In high school, I decided I would be a hippie. Although not a tree-hugger in the literal sense, there were a few trees here and there for whom I had a particular affection. A thin evergreen I'd planted on Earth Day in first grade had grown large in the following years; the lawnmower no longer posed a threat. Decorative pear trees stood along the parking lot of the elementary school in my neighborhood, with their awful-smelling blossoms and sunset-colored leaves that I would collect in the autumn and trade with the other kids like baseball cards or valentines. A modest, mellow dogwood grew on the corner where the bus dropped off the boy I had a crush on in high school. It was the tree we'd stand under to talk about how we wished we were popular—or rather, how *he* wished *he* was popular so that girls (other, more popular girls) would like him. I had an amiable relationship with plenty of trees, but it never went as far as hugging.

I was a nobody with the full potential to become a somebody. The somebody I wanted to be was the 'weird' girl, the counterculture kid with the ironic perspective of artistic distance. My first task in adapting

myself to the hippie lifestyle was simple: wardrobe. I bought a bunch of tie-dye tee-shirts and a few peasant blouses, loose-fitting khakis, sandals. I wore jewelry—beads, hemp, a necklace of turquoise that a Native American woman sold to my parents twenty years ago. When it came to clothes, I had a few simple rules: natural colors—shades of blue, green, brown, sometimes a bit of yellow or red, *never* pink or purple or anything ridiculously neon. No recognizable brand-names (I'd die before wearing anything from the Gap or Limited). No logos or slogans—I refused to be a walking billboard, let alone pay brand-name prices to be one. Nature would be my only logo.

I figured I was set. I already had the love-peace-happiness mindset fairly well-developed, and at that point I was still innocent of the laziness-drugs-sex half of the supposed Hippie Equation. As with any self-conscious transformation, I tried very hard to play the part. I acted 'like a hippie,' tried to 'be real,' natural, fairly convinced that what was 'natural' always appeared strange and mysterious, even to oneself. My parents bought me an acoustic guitar for my birthday. I carried around notebooks filled with lyrics and poetry everywhere. I gazed out the window during geometry class and wrote verses of my favorite songs in backwards letters so that I could read them in a mirror.

*Before I realized it was happening, poetry grounded me. It keeps me grounded now—it doesn't let me get too far away from myself or from the nature of things for very long. I used to write about flowers and rivers without paying attention to what flowers and rivers were actually like. I used to sprinkle nature liberally throughout my writing, taking advantage of its full metaphors for emotions and desires, its convenient icons of sadness, love, humor and anger.*

Eventually, I got the best of myself—I began paying a bit too much attention to the reality of rain. The boy I had a crush on was the stage manager for the school musical my sophomore year of high school; I was on the lighting tech crew. Some days after school, we would stand outside under the mellow dogwood, just on the edge of spring, and sing the songs that we weren't allowed to sing from backstage during rehearsal. His favorite song was the rain god's. On a drizzly day, I scolded him jokingly for not having better self-control. He accused me of being the wind, of having ushered in the clouds and hurried them across the sun. I waved my hand casually, and they parted. The spring grew a little warmer.

I began secretly writing poems for him. In them, he was always the rain. I was in love with rain. I wanted quiet foggy mornings. I wanted violent thunderstorms. I wanted the kind of weather that mixed wind and water up so much they could no longer be separated. I began paying attention to how the rain felt on my skin, how the sound of it echoed in the dark of my room at night, how it rose like steam from summer roads even after the sun had set. After so much time—after years of friendship and months of silent treatment between us—the rain in my poems stopped being him, and became just rain.

*These days, I can't get away from the feeling that I am a part of something, that I am intricately connected to a unity that I can only ever know from the inside out. When I try to write a poem about something as familiar and simple as a warm rain or a quiet skyline, I stop, afraid of ruining the reality with my metaphors. On the inside of things, there are no words. I can reach beyond a something, like love or loss, but how do I reach beyond an everything?*

It was awkward going home for the summer after my sophomore year at college. I'd been out of my Hippie Phase for about three years by then, but that was still the girl my high school friends expected. I expected the same, unchanging things of them. My best friend, Dana, had been the pampered youngest daughter of her modern-Catholic family with plans of marrying her then-steady boyfriend—now she was a pagan, bisexual, radical feminist who spent her weekends drinking heavily and her weeks actively involved in student government. In my absence, the boy who had been rain to me had made it through a deep depression that culminated in a confession that he was gay and had a crush on a guy out at college. In his absence, I had traded my Hippie persona for the voluntary restraints of academia. In two weeks I would be leaving town again to do summer research on campus.

Leaving was the easy part. We'd all grown accustomed to packing and parting numerous times in those two short years. But the time wasn't yet enough to rid us of the discomfort of coming home again. I didn't know how to do anything but leave. I didn't know what to say or how to act around these relative strangers. Things were different now—unnatural.

One of her first free afternoons of the summer, Dana called me up and asked if I wanted to go driving through the countryside. It was a tradition of ours. Living in the suburbs of Lancaster county, we could

get to 'the country' in about five minutes. We would often spend an hour or two in the afternoon taking spontaneous covered-bridge tours or driving through the hills and farmlands, windows rolled all the way down, talking about anything that came to mind. Because I didn't have a car, Dana always drove. I would sit shotgun, watching the scenery pass while she flipped through stations on the radio. Sometimes we wouldn't talk at all. We would sit in silence, listening to the wind. They were times when I could drop my defenses and relax to the world, when I could let in the wind and the weather, when I could breathe it in deeply.

That summer afternoon when Dana and I drove out into the familiar scenery, nostalgia for the countryside overwhelmed me. The sun was high and interrupted by the casual billows of cotton-white cloud. On either side of the one-lane road, fields stretched away, fenced in haphazardly and dotted with cows and occasional copses of trees. Dana gave up looking for songs on the radio—she'd reprogrammed all the buttons for the stations back at college. We drove in silence, the car dipping out from under us as we rounded the crests of each low hill.

"O Goddess, it's beautiful out today!" she said. I nodded. The breeze whipping in through the window was warm and familiar, smelling like a typical summer afternoon in Lancaster. I began to relax. "You still write poetry, right?" she asked.

"Yeah." I grinned. "Of course."

"That's why I bring you out here—it's like that movie: 'They should've sent a poet.'" A quote from the movie *Contact*, the astronaut overwhelmed to tears by the ineffable beauty of the universe. "Sometimes, everything is just—too beautiful, too perfect..." I nodded again. I didn't say anything.

*What is it about being 'a poet'? Is there some secret about the earth, some revelation about reality that poets possess? Something transformative and strange that escapes the knowledge of others? Is there some magic in the power of verse?*

Four white birds took sudden flight from among a patch of tall grass. They were not like discarded paper napkins caught up from the sidewalk in the minute waltz of a city breeze. Rounded valleys of freshly-tilled earth stretched out below us. They did not have the dark, wet scent of catharsis, of overcoming hardship, of human struggle that gives way to new joy. I was mute with a lack of artistic distance. These things were nothing but four white birds gliding off over rounded

valleys. I did not want them to be anything else. When I looked out the car window, I felt the exact opposite of a poet.

How could I ever write about this afternoon, so soaked in cliché and natural wordlessness? How could I explain to Dana that wanting to be a hippie was ridiculous, that *wanting* to be a poet was pointless? How could I tell her that being a radical feminist or a homosexual or a stranger could not transform the countryside into a poem, could not turn a poem back into something so real?

I sent up a kind of prayer to God (or the Goddess, or Whoever). More than anything, I wanted words—some phrase or fragment that could capture the afternoon without reducing it to something trite and silly. Something inspiring and meaningful and *true*. More than anything, I wanted to be able to write about the countryside on a summer afternoon without having to mediate it through metaphor. I wanted to translate into words not the exotic or the unfamiliar, but the feeling of home embedded in this reality.

We drove up a small hill. The car dipped slightly out from under us as we dropped over the top. I watched the passing sights with growing adoration, breathing in the wind. We curved our way through fields, past farmhouses, barns and gardens. Rounding a corner—a horse squatted delicately, pissing.

I began to laugh, harder than I had laughed in months.

Dana turned, demanding, “What! What!”

“A horse—pissing!” I said. “We just passed the most *beautiful* thing in the world—in the middle of this whole beautiful world—a horse pissing! A pissing horse!” I could hardly catch my breath. Dana began laughing and swung around to see, tapping the brakes and sending me lurching forward towards the dashboard. I caught my momentum with the palms of my hands and kept laughing. The two of us, in a car stopped in the middle of the road, in the middle of the Lancaster countryside, bent double with laughter, tears in the corners of our eyes.

*Dana laughs because things are ridiculous and strange. She laughs because horses are supposed to be beautiful, graceful, heroic creatures—and yet, in the middle of that glorious afternoon sun, a horse was pissing. It is the contrast, the contradiction of expectation, that makes Dana laugh until she is out of breath.*

*That afternoon, I laughed because I knew I could never write a poem about a horse as a real creature. I laughed because I had glimpsed the most beautiful and natural thing I had ever seen—something, in the purest sense, free. I laughed from the surge*

*of joy I felt in knowing that I could never reduce that pissing horse into a symbol. It could never be a metaphor, it could never be anything other than what it was, and it was nothing less than the culmination of nature itself, it was nothing less than perfection. I laughed because my unsaid prayer had been answered.*

*I am one for laughter, one for the secret, buried mirth that is hidden beyond the grasp of words.*

## MADELEINE PARENTHESIS

Madeleine impulses me with a promise.  
Two fingers finding her pulse.  
Synchronized.  
Promising to me.

Point elbows away from my skin, dare to break through.  
Bend knees easily, fold myself.  
Collapsible body.

Round over to a tone, a humming image.  
I'm in the nets of your eyelashes.  
Woman-winged with a tough-will muscling it against air pressure.

Move the hand now, my hand.  
Don't forget sinew has its own past.  
Let air push shoulders, swing back further.  
Change my walk.

Mulch-thighs and blade-of-grass-neck,  
Humble and under-the-moon.  
Tear me thin and silky,  
Dip me flimsy into cups.  
Absorb everything. Absorb.

Arch back until my stomach  
Has a voice.  
Louder.  
Lead with my rib cage,  
Then open the lock and lose my lungs.

Move in your rounding. Hush and move  
in parenthesis.

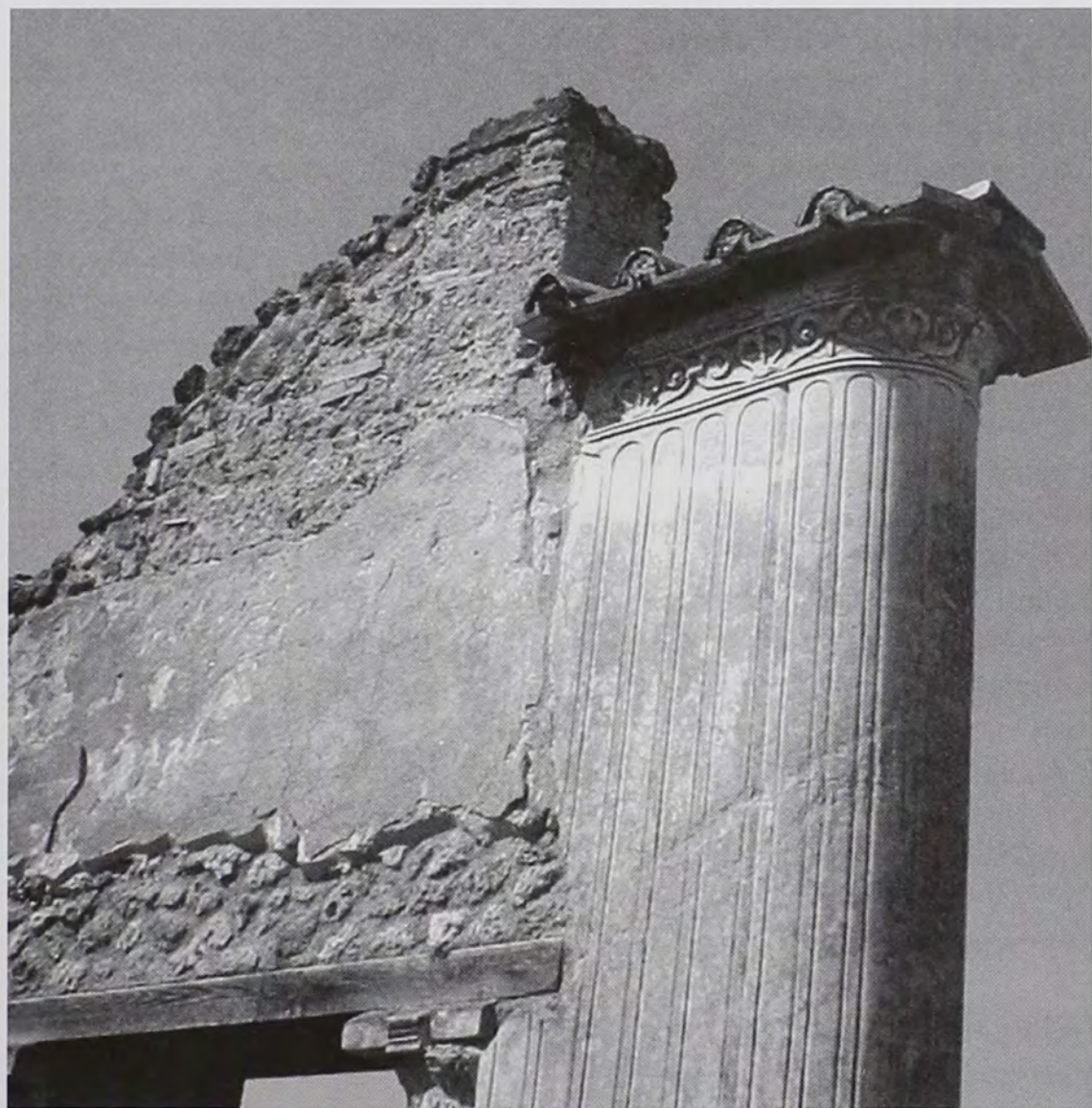
Stretch between bones.

Additional word or phrase,  
Explanation or comment within,  
Episode, interlude.

Pull at the center of my wrist,  
Gather it in the pads of my fingertips.

Move in Madeleine Parenthesis.

## ROVINE





## GHOSTS COME OUT AT NIGHT

The day began when morning,  
Picking up his hat and gloves and walking out,  
Gave way to brusque afternoon,  
Coming in  
(Much to morning's chagrin, you see,  
Yet he was far too busy to fix it)

Thus, the day began and chirruped,  
In muted, almost apocryphal tones,  
Its message for the day.

Much like the chatty lamppost might make small talk  
To windswept poets  
And reminisce over lost love  
Or change,  
The afternoon shared its moral with me  
Through a central figure,  
The *mise en scene* of my daily reverie.

"You remember that?"

"You remember that, don't you?"

"You remember that."

It whispered,  
Spectre on the wind,  
And I listened,  
Fly in gossamer spiderweb,  
To its sad observation.

"It's not there anymore?"

"It's not there anymore, is it?"

“It’s not there anymore.”

Yet,  
Much as the morning so aptly portrayed,  
I was entitled by my busy nature to  
Walk  
On  
By.

But reverie comes at night,  
And as afternoon left the house,  
Rushed for an appointment,  
(It never remembered for what)  
Night came to observe –  
To observe the damage its sun-specked siblings  
Had wrought.

And like a mother,  
It wrapped the denizens of its realm in soft sleep  
And thought.

And I, though enamored of Morpheus,  
Was wrought with constant indecision.  
Unable to be broken  
By any means,  
Least of all being realization.  
As I succumbed,  
I could hear night whisper,  
In its unknown ways,  
A final moral to me.

“As I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray my heart its secret keep....”

“It was never there to begin with?”

“It was never there to begin with, was it?”

“It was never there to begin with.”

## CONVERSATIONS WITH A “WRITER”

Her hair pulled back from the face only a mother possum could love, Suzy was exactly the same as she had been in high school. Scrawny and loud, yammering on and on in her nasally voice with her bony arms flailing. “So, you’re still at the same school you started at?”

“Yeah.”

“And you’re graduating on time?”

“Yeah.”

“I hate you!”

“Ye—” I shrugged and took a sip of Beast, trying not to grimace at the cheap beer’s taste. The tiny one room shack—dubbed Cabin X by its owner—was the closest thing to an apartment anyone we knew had. It rested in the backyard of suburbia, with a chain link fence separating it from Stadium Elementary School. Sketchy, yes. But it had booze and people—one of those people being the Major Annoyance of my high school years, Suzy. At that moment, Cabin X was filled to its capacity of ten—less, if you consider how much space the closet door beer pong table took up. “Ursinus has just been a good pace for me, I guess.”

“Uh-huh. So many other people have dropped out or transferred already.” Some, like Suzy, returned to Rhode Island after only half a semester in Florida. And some never left. “So what are you studying?”

“Communications.” Any wisecracks and I swear to God...

“What do you want to do with that?” Someone at the end of the room moved, forcing a shift in bodies. I was trapped and way too close to her.

“Actually, I want to write.”

“Oh, that’s cool,” she chirped, her ponytail swinging back and forth hypnotically. “I thought about that myself, you know, the whole writing thing, but I just don’t have the patience for it or...” On and on and on. I finished my beer and balanced it on the cluttered counter top. Her scrawny legs blocked the fridge door. I fidgeted, my hands too empty.

“You know what I really want to write,” I interrupted her. I, the girl who can barely talk, interrupted her. It felt so good. Even if I was just bullshitting (*To attempt to mislead or deceive by talking nonsense.* Yep). “I want to write erotic fiction. There’s really not enough quality literotica out there. And I’ll write, like, a collection of short stories and put them together and I’ll name it *Nine (Sexy)*—sexy in parentheses—*Stories*, like

the Salinger book.” Her eyes widened, nodding. She leaned back slightly and shuffled her feet a couple inches. I moved closer and grinned. Reaching down, I removed a beer from the liberated fridge and squeezed my way to the door.

\*

Sometime in the past year I adopted the title “writer.” It is wonderfully ambiguous and an easy answer to that so frequently asked question, “So, what do you want to do for a living?” “Write.” No explanation needed, unlike my other career choices which needed a back story, a chart, and illustrations.

“So what do you want to do?”

“I want to be on a creative team for wrestling on television.”

“Why?”

“It seems like a really fun environment.” Translation: I want to tell extremely muscled half naked men in spandex exactly what I want them to say and do.

“What do you have to do to get there?”

“Well, they advise that you work for a soap opera for a couple years, but I don’t really want to live in New York or LA, so I don’t know really how I’m going to...” Translation: I’ll probably just develop what I think should happen every week in my basement like all those other internet geeks.

“Really...but honestly, *why* would you want to work in wrestling?”

“Uh...”

Eventually I shortened it to “I want to work in television.” One aging cousin of my father’s responded, “Good, there’s a lot of crap out there.” I very badly wanted to answer “And I intend to contribute.”

\*

“There are so many things you could write about,” Idalis exhaled, cigarette smoke drifting into the gray winter sky. “Just from like, you know. Like this.” This—meeting a new thirty seven year old brother a month after I learned he existed. Showing his Puerto Rican wife, Idalis, the backyard to let him and Mom talk. Standing on the barren side porch as she smoked—smoking being cardinal sin number one in Mom’s book—and dying to ask her for a cigarette.

She continued in her accented English. “Life is such a soap opera. My aunt in Puerto Rico had a son that her parents gave to her sister—because she was too young—she was fourteen. She had been raped.” I opened and closed my mouth like a fish as she answered any questions

before I could ask them. “And they told her she was too young to have a baby and that it died, but they gave it to live with my other aunt in the United States. Except she wasn’t settled in yet, so the baby had to stay with her parents and its biological mother but she never knew it was him.” I nodded, *wow, that does sound like a soap opera*, and rubbed my hands over my arms, hoping the movement would warm me up. The same thin sweater I wear everyday did little against the month of February. Idalis finished her cigarette and threw it over the neighbor’s fence as I indicated. Her dark eyes focused on me. “You getting all this down?” she laughed.

“Uh...sure.”

\*

Writing in Cranston is like the Highlander—there can be only one. One writer per group of friends. In high school that was Steve. He’s the one people assign the title to. Steve wrote novels with graphic date rape and torture scenes. He created a futuristic world where standardized tests dictated all and kids weren’t allowed to masturbate. His readers were awed; it was all so original. (*Not derived from something else; fresh and unusual; Showing a marked departure from previous practice.* I suppose that’s Steve). I was disconcerted. That came out of his head? What the fuck is wrong with Steve’s imagination? I suppose readers want to be horrified, stunned. To read something they could never think of themselves.

And yet, when I tell people I’m a writer, there’s no end to the suggestions they give. It seems everyone wants me to write about a grandmother or family member. “Your grandmother kept very thorough journals. You should make them into a novel or memoir,” my father tells me often (with old age comes constant repetition). “Sure, maybe,” I answer each time. I’m really thinking, “She already wrote it, there’s no need.”

Maybe I *should* write erotic fiction. And include grandmothers. That’s bound to horrify readers.

\*

I slapped my official looking manila folder shut, weary but content. The last Writing Fellow appointment of the day was done with. I began shoving the folder and my legal pad of scribbles into my bag and capped my pen.

“Wow, you really get work done.” The kid who lived down the hall from me stopped by my table on his second journey through Wismer

Lower of the afternoon.

"I was writing fellowing."

"Oh, you a writing fellow?"

"Uh-huh."

He grinned. "So, like, if I asked for your help you could come writing fellow some of my writing sometime?"

"Uh..."

"You know, do some late night writing fellowing."

That has got to be the least sexy thing I've ever heard. "Um..maybe..."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I answered, a not-bloody-likely expression on my face.

"You should. You ain't never writing fellowed *my* writing before."

"Alright." I slung my bag across my chest and left, half amused, half confused. Had he expected that to work? "How can that possibly be sexy?" I asked Kate at dinner. I deepened my voice. "Let's find the thesis here."

Also adopting a faux bedroom voice, Kate joined in. "This paragraph, it needs some work."

"We need to...restructure..."

"...Your conclusion needs to be stronger..."

We burst into a fit of giggles.

\*

I'm not the most eloquent person. I have a bad habit of starting to say something, midway through forgetting what I'm saying, and tapering off into an unintelligible mumble. I end with a "yeah" and an apologetic shrug to the person whose time I've just wasted. In writing, I'm exonerated (Definition I just looked up: *To free from blame, to free from a responsibility, obligation, or task.* Okay, it fits) from making sense. I can finish my thoughts. Or not. I can be pretentious (*Claiming or demanding a position of distinction or merit, especially when unjustified; Making or marked by an extravagant outward show; ostentatious.* That's me).

Here's the catch: I don't write. I'm one *those* "writers" who always says I'm working on something but really I'm just sitting, waiting for "true inspiration" to motivate me. The muse may hit me upside the head once or twice, but she can't bully me all the time. Unfortunately. So, if writing is what I want to do, I'll be spending a hell of a lot of time unemployed, sitting in a basement, projecting wrestling story lines, and talking to myself.

I still deserve the title, though. Sloppy, handwritten narratives carried

me through study halls. When drunk, I dictate the evening's occurrences in slurred detail to the still, empty air of my room. Reading anything makes me want to see my own words printed and bound. "You're finally getting that Simpsons DVD you've been lusting after?" I asked my brother Ralph in the video store. He blinked and looked at me, the one person who has refused to read anything I've written or make any comments about my career plans. "Wow, you really are a writer. That word fits perfectly. Jesus."

There is nothing else I can imagine myself being. I don't think I have a choice. So, I'm a writer (*writes—books or stories or articles or the like professionally, for pay; a person who is able to write and has written something. Me*).

## TIME

her body arched liked a roundabout  
and swung like a found-about  
hiddensecretfort of upon-a-times  
once where you built dreams with your mind  
wood creaked to makeshift straps, that bind  
somethings so frail to the crest of a tree;  
to look at it now you'd think it would crash on a breath  
-- the whisper-sigh of farewell to  
memory not quite remembered  
treasured with infant tenderness.

soft, like tile grout  
crumbling down and out  
the withered walls of a bathroom  
made on(c)e, with pink child hands  
fresh from the womb  
and blasted with coarse arab sand  
from a to-morrow tomb  
that tasted of hard-scrabble breadrocks  
and the tears of the Nile  
black, red, and yellow.

all wounded where wonder spent  
imagination with careless guile  
as dreams gave way to wait-a-whiles,  
a postcard became the hope to hang a wall  
and the wall became the chalk to draw a check  
where the wind blew the dust out from the hall  
and the stanchions passed out under the deck  
and the cleft split down the middle of the tree:  
time so trembling predicate  
on the sound of softening silicate.



# THE COURTLAUD



## 114 CROMWELL ROAD

144 Cromwell Road

London, England

A trip...

a more than moment when I can't see

see your plane in the clouds

clouds my thoughts

when a letter came...

so I tucked it

tucked it behind my ear

my ear hears your name

your name chasing me to the depths of

the star sprinkled beach

of endless morsels of body massage

with incensed hot cozy fires heating up

heating up the wool blankets against

against rough hard worked hands

hands gently caressing

the caressing so strong that when they touch

fragile...

concentrated gaze...

almost scared that they will break it

hands hesitant

hesitant and blind folded down a path to which sitting

sitting at a desk finishing

finishing touches on a painting

painting strokes down

down the back and around to my stomach

a gentle nibble on my neck wrestling

wrestling every part of the giggles

giggle the gasps of air in so I can breath easy

easy to fool myself into

a river of molten chocolate that melts away reality

reality carves into my heart

*Meghan Bickel*

my heart fluttering,  
head spinning,  
stomach wrenching  
I miss  
I miss the genuine twinkle dance of your eyes

eyes meet

and you're back home

# HEAVEN

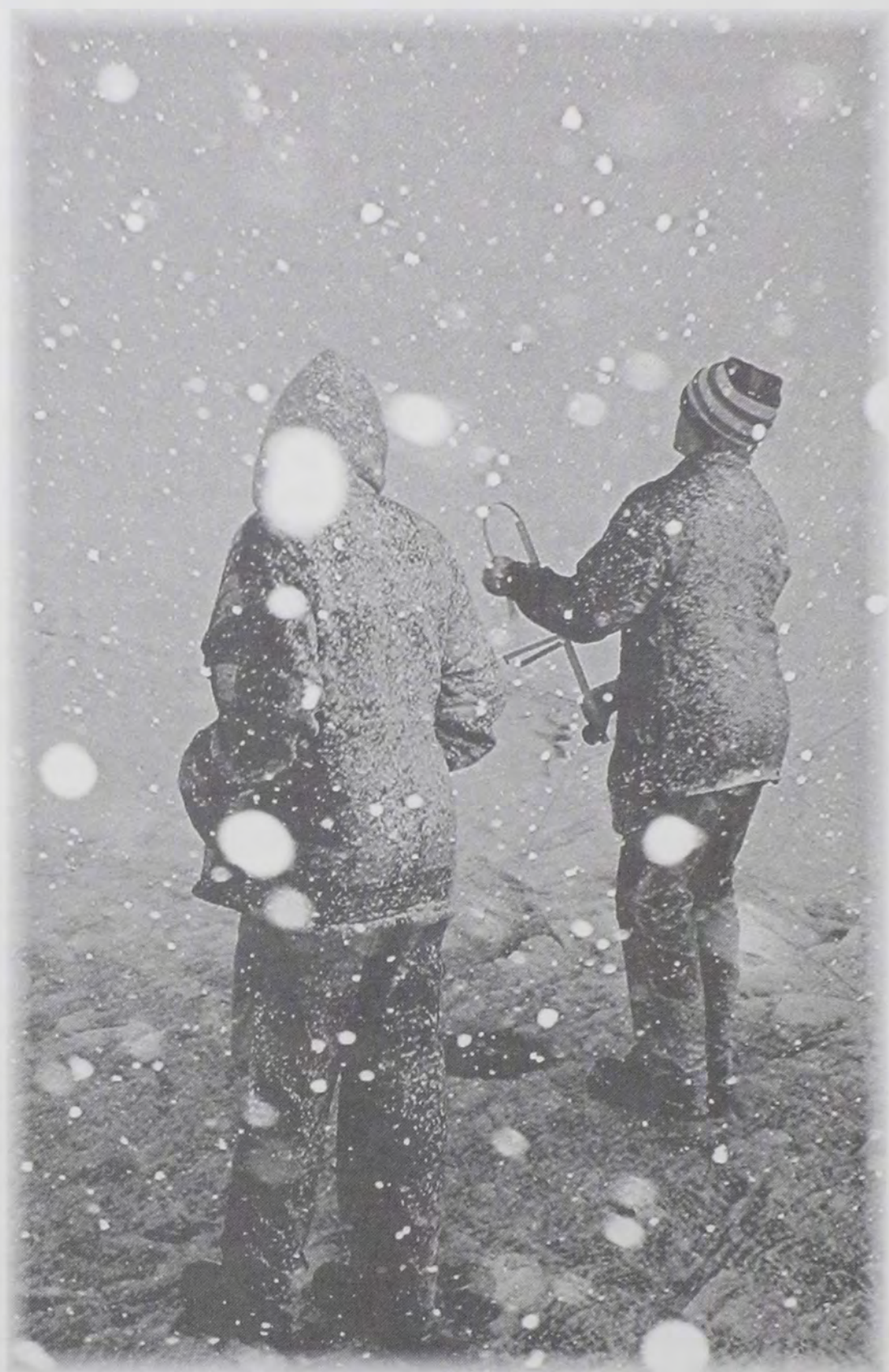


## LOLA SANG OF GREEN GLASS LANDSCAPES

Lola sang of the melancholy of her raincoat. The one she got from her sister. Lola sang of the sound of the wind on the used beer bottles, green and empty. She said once to me, that the sound of the wind on the used beer bottles, is a song, it's so sad, so longing. So drawn out. The notes, they cried. Lola once said that her father was a drunk. But I had forgotten that long before she told me about the wind on the bottles. On the empty bottles. And today she came to me and cried. She said, when she got home yesterday, the song wasn't there. The bottles were strewn, but fallen. Disheveled. They were always upright, she cried. So she walked through the uneven maze, and walked to her father on the couch. And she realized, her father was no longer there. Daddy had left me a note. In a bottle. And he said to cast it out to the sea. Lola sang the melancholy song of her raincoat. The one she got from her sister yesterday, she needed it to walk home, to walk back to her house. From daddy's house. Her father lived in the apartment, and her father wasn't a drunk, her mother was, and her sister was and she was. And she was crying on my sidewalk, crying out a story and a song, trying to get me to listen. Just trying. Her father, and her mother, and her sister, they weren't drunks, but Lola was. Lola was a chain smoker. She liked her parliaments and her cloves. Lola liked to mix pot and beer. Lola liked to say she had tried absinth. She liked green food, and green drinks, so she said it was only normal she would drink the beer from the green bottle. Lola cried on my sidewalk for a long while today, longer than she had the month before, when I had sent her away. And I sent her away again, and she's still crying. But she's moved to my porch, because her sister saw her sitting on the sidewalk and handed over her raincoat. And soon Lola moved to my porch, because she said the rain made her raincoat sad. Lola was a drunk, a drunk who never stopped, and always came back. And she always cried, she cried about the sound of the wind on the bottles she so carefully stood upright every night after she drank. She cried about how sometimes she would leave some beer in them so there would be different notes. She lived in a drafty house. And she's crying on my porch, and I'm leaving her alone. Because she keeps coming back, and drinking more. I don't think I'm good for her. And I don't think she's good for me. She'll cry until she

can't cry anymore and then she'll leave. And I'll be left with a puddle on the porch, and hopefully nothing particularly hard to explain to the neighbors. They're used to Lola. They understand her crying, but this time, it's permanent, so Lola might not give up so gracefully or easily. If it was ever graceful or easy to begin with.

# SQUALL 1



## CHURNING THROUGH

I awoke at dawn to sweat my last drops in the dorm room. It was the day after my Summer Fellowship presentation and prime-time for abandoning the sinking ship that was 732 W. Main Street. Over the past nine weeks, there had been the overhauling of my novel: long spans of hours spent typing, doubting, sitting, and sweating in front of my laptop, in a blandly assembled single. While toiling over the presentation speech for that final Friday, notions of escape tugged at the mind and I planned in little patches of free-time. I thought I was preparing myself for the reality of riding a road bicycle on the back roads of Montgomery and Berks counties by staring at colorfully abstract maps on Expedia.com.

My father explained to me in our instant messenger conversations how to find the back route. All I needed was the start and end address, and to indicate that I wanted the shortest ride home (these directions would keep me off behemoth PA 422). There it was on the laptop screen: the whole way home, turn by turn. Thirty-four miles altogether. The distance itself was not daunting, but it made me aware of how lazy I had been that summer with my transportation: “I don’t drive a car unless someone pays me” is still my father’s mantra. He eased me into cycling a year prior, because it was his hobby to assemble road bike after road bike from parts he found on Ebay. Came to the point when Dr. Frankenstein had too many bikes lying around his Park Slope house—the mauve Raleigh with the Italian derailleurs and the Ultegra gear shift became *alive* for me.

I learned to love riding alone in rural surroundings, back home near Kutztown. Quiet, sleek dips into nature—spinning my wheels next to wilderness creeks and all that country-grace. Aggression release with the fluid motion of the pedaling, rising to some self-imposed challenge—*I will ride farther today* might have been my cycling mantra. The very best satisfaction I could get was riding a new route, drawing a new line between the places that made up my life.

My father’s first name is Hunter. Makes his living off of moving motion picture editing equipment, fine art, house-painting, carpentry, and trucking. He got into a biking renaissance in his late forties, about the time I arrived a freshman at Ursinus College. He also got into



watching the big bike races, the ones you haven't heard about like *Il Giro d'Italia*. Hunter is always one to get behind the underdog, but he cannot dismiss the dominance Lance Armstrong has over our sport. Lance and Hunter always float specter-like over my bike-rides, telling me what they'd be doing different. Lance might bark "no excuses this time" in hard Texan talk while Hunter will remind me in Brooklynized voice to ride "nice and smooth, save it for the hill." That morning I was set to race those specters and the rising sun—all parties out to burn me, to teach me something new.

After a WaWa breakfast, the Expedia directions got pressed against my skin under the waist of my bike shorts, soon to be soaked in a gallon of sweat. I put on headphones, blasting the energetic Shins to inspire a quick pedaling cadence. Cranked the Raleigh up the East Ridge Pike, past swells of convenience shopping, hitting the foothills at a fast pace. Average speed after thirty minutes: twenty miles per hour; encouraging numbers. Data came from the electronic speedometer on the fiber-synth handlebars. The first turn was beyond what my directions indicated. I grew anxious and stopped in front of a woman who was sweeping the cement porch of her shop. "How far to the Swamp Pike?" I sort of gasped.

She pointed to a gas station just a block down. "Right in front of there," and went back to her sweeping. The Swamp Pike ran less car-populated than Ridge, but the hills were getting steeper. Average speed: nineteen miles per hour. The land around me was extensively cleared, a mass of blank farm fields and gravel pits. The swamp lay out of sight. I took a long drink of water coasting down a hill, hitting thirty. Wind made my eyes water, spring-water lubed my throat and cooled my forehead. Swamp Pike squirmed like a snake, jolting the handlebars with cutbacks. There are plenty of Pikes in the Collegeville area—Swamp runs the most deserted and primordial in my memory.

Temperature: a fuming eighty degrees. Good to have cut the sleeves off of my plain yellow cycling jersey before I cut through walls of heat and airborne water on my pilgrimage, or else I might have overheated like an old car engine. The shirt reminded me of the leader's yellow jersey from the Tour de France. Too flattering a reminder: I was averaging twenty while Lance Armstrong averaged thirty over forty mile time trials in the Alps. The speed of a moderately conservative geriatric. I tried to go faster, pushing the advice of my father back from the front of my mind. He always took the first eleven miles of his rides at an easy

pace, “an old man’s warm-up.” On our Hawk Mountain ride, I had paced the first twenty five miles through spasmodic Virginville elevations, sometimes having to wait up for him. But this was the man had “broken the century mark” in Brooklyn’s Prospect park, whose *easy* daily routine was thirty miles. After mile twenty five, he led me up the mountain side. I had to get off and walk while antique roadsters passed dangerously close to the nonexistent shoulder. I would tell him about this day’s obstacles later in the evening, and we would argue over the supreme route to Kutztown, my home.

I could have started the trip taking the Perkiomen Trail all the way to Green Lane, but I balked at such an indirect passage. The idea was to fly home, to whip my machine along at steady clip for the smoothest kind of conquering. But Pennsylvania Route 73 strung me out. I saw a sign for the way to Philadelphia, and I knew it led past the Castle of Arcadia University, where my friend Bryan Mills attended. But I was to ride through the rolling hills of the farm country, away from the civic shopping centers and their counterpoint castles. At the halfway point, with only three turns into the jog. High spirits and less than half the water bottle gone. The directions against the skin of my hips had said to take 73. Confused by a fork in the road, I sprinted another ten miles down what the locals call The Big Road towards Green Lane. I had been looking for one Little Getting Lane for the course of those ten miles. I had gone far off course, ten miles spent coasting downhill. To turn around meant a world of quadricep pain. Boys working at a Texaco in Zeiglerville had never heard of the town I had once believed to be nearby:

“Topton? No idea.”

I stopped a middle aged man and his dog, and then a couple of ladies in jogging suits. No way around it: I had to turn around, unless I was to take Route 29 all the way to Allentown and add an extra twenty miles to the route.

Finding Little Getting took some more asking and fifteen miles of climbing the hilly way back to the Boyertown interchange. A family setting up a yard sale at 8:30 (sixteen mile per hour average) instructed me on the correct route. The shirtless husband yawned in the morning heat with the night’s Budweiser on his breath and told me this:

“Ride through Boyertown. All the way past the ball-fields, past the sandwich shop with the blue roof. On the right.”

I might have bought something to repay them if there was room left in

my backpack. By this time, the Shins were off. Headphones stuffed down into the bag. My ears were free to sweat. Average had fallen to just under seventeen mph, but I managed to lock a hold on that number, and maintain the status quo. The heat rained down hard, taking the wet saliva right out of my mouth. Sipped some water, settled into the act of piercing Boyertown, the first settlement in my native Berks County to be reached. Mile twenty five: I touched the edge of the town and found the way massacred in construction, the road ripped to a basic layer of grooved macadam that made my bike buck and vibrate and slowed my speed to around ten mph. Momentum fell limp off to the sidewalk of this barren place, a town larger than Kutztown (population 17,000 versus 5,082) and notorious for its white supremacist rallies. I passed along an irritable line of motorists, ignoring the signals of a construction worker. Hunter had taught me such disrespect: riding in Brooklyn meant breaking as many traffic laws as possible for the sake of preserved momentum. Jackhammer vibrations threatened me up onto the sidewalk. The way was as bumpy as the main drag, but at least there was no one holding a flip stop-sign to bar my exit.

Another desperate three miles out of Boyertown on 73 East. Trees rose up around me, trapping the heat and the highway in a channel of discomfort. I pedaled and watched for the sandwich shop that was my marker for Little Getting Road. Finding Little Getting Road doubled the mileage of my trip, but the lane itself was less than forty yards long. Slowly churning down it, I cursed and laughed in one mixture and took the last sip from my water bottle. Another turn onto North Ironstone Drive, and then a sudden cut onto Old State Road. Shaded and joyous, I rode and waited for a familiar sign, an indication of my home area. And then the road started to rise up to heaven, choking the wind from my lungs, pounding my hardest strings of muscle into fleshy hamburger.

Old State Hill: a monster. Steeper than the cutback slopes of Hawk Mountain. At least with Hawk Mountain, I had a conception of how long to the top, having been there numerous times as a Cub Scout. I had no idea with Old State Hill. It stretched on. Past ancient cobble houses that must have been pounded into the side by antebellum-artisan- masterminds. The houses were not inspirational for the climb—they only suggested penance. Crudely scraped together in past centuries, yet well maintained. Bicentennial American flags hanging down from every other porch, the houses divided by small Tetris-block

lots of green foliage. Water was gone and I had nothing to fall back onto except for my own steps. Old State Hill shocked me out of the saddle and I could not push the pedals. I walked my penance. Cars would pass. My face dropped in humility. The men in the pickup trucks must have seen this kind of thing before, but they didn't stop to offer me a ride. Not that my pride would have allowed me and the lively-mauve Raleigh to be taxied. Four steps from the summit, I estimated that Lance Armstrong could do twenty miles an hour up similar slopes. I did five.

Average speed coasting past a vineyard: fifteen mph. 9:30 AM and the sun was up close and personal on the small mountain that owned me. I coasted, if thirty five mph can be considered coasting. Perhaps it's coasting in a car, but on a bike it's your handlebars vibrating and the road flippantly trying to wind you into the guardrail. Instinct demanded a sharp slam on the brakes. I squeezed them, trying to gradually slow the descent for the sake of my brake-pads—they had the tendency to stick after the initial squeeze and I was paranoid over added friction.

Coasted down to a valley area, came to a cross-road. The cross-roads are a sign of malevolent spiritual forces in Mississippi Delta culture. Another bit of foreshadowing: the Oley Mountains peaked in the distance, rolling green and muscular, like stagnant tidal waves. A green road sign informed me that Oley was a mere six miles away—it was good to be familiar with the name of that town. A town on the car route between home and college. My spirits lifted at the prospects of pedaling across wavy country lanes with little change in elevation. I wasn't searching for the challenges of the day—Old State Hill had sufficiently worn me out. Turned a left onto Hill Church Road with a goofy smile on my face, ready to wave at pretty ladies in passing autos, hoping to see a fellow cyclist crossing the same country as me. Hill Church had a secret. It had been waiting for me to come to this stretch, and it showed all of its blossoms and finely renovated houses before the climb began.

Jolted back up to the heaven left behind on the peaks of Old State Hill. I looked up this mountain slope that had emerged from a cool glen of maple and oak. The road marched endless, beyond the scope of my 20-20 vision. Blue sky with a devil sun hanging low at the hill's horizon. I pedaled a fraction closer but the work made me dizzy. I stopped and walked, baking in the light. While walking, I called my girlfriend and explained my situation in hopeless, breathless sentences.

Hung up promising I would call if in serious need of assistance. Average speed: fourteen miles per hour. Didn't look at that computer screen for a long time. Didn't care much at that point about the damned average. I swore I'd call Mom and tell her to meet me in Lyons—if I could make it that far. At some points, when it felt particularly pitiful to be walking next to my slim and powerful machine, I'd hop on and churn through my gears, hoping to find the perfect fit for the endless strain. One technique I have practiced since learning to ride a two-wheeler at four years old (Jay-Z learned that early as well) is to stand up on the pedals to gain some momentum. Professional cycling commentators call it "riding out of the saddle." Lance makes use of the technique. In my years of biking, I have been quicker to rise up out of the saddle instead of simply shifting to the right gear—it's all about the momentum, even if that momentum exists only in my mind. Hunter preaches staying intact with the saddle, and on average, rising up to stand will lower one's speed. It also tends to work the upper portions of the quadriceps more than the rest of the muscle group. Forty five miles into my ride and I'd done a fair share of moving up out of the saddle—muscle failure set in on those short stretches when I attempted to reconciliation with Hill Church. This muscle failure was also heightened because of my dehydration, which was becoming severer by the minute. I crawled up Hill Church for what seemed over two miles of continuous embarrassment and suffering. People either pointed or ignored from their plush gardens—I've never seen lawns so expansive as the ones on Hill Church Road. Expansive and desolate, even if the grass was greened and trimmed to PGA standards. But it had to come to an end eventually, as I stubbornly told myself on the final summit. You know dehydration is massive when you feel dried up and cool after hours of exertion. The breeze was picking up and I started to shiver. Sun close enough to sign autographs. With shuffling steps I pushed myself over the top of Hill Church, to the other side of the world. Half the items on my litany-list disappeared.

Breeze turned to gale-force gusts on the other side. I looked down over concave acres of corn and soybean. Then pushed off despite new blisters caking the skin of my feet and the headache and my shaky state of balance. Broke forty miles an hour through crisp air before the wind hit me back. Almost floored me. Hurricane fist bent on sending me on a tumble. I had taken rough spills before that—like on the day I learned to ride that two-wheeler, or the day last January when I took the Raleigh

out and hit a patch of black ice—spent a moment hanging parallel with the road before the final contusion-descent. But I digress. The wind popped me another good one, and I held sturdy, arms locked and head held low for the most aerodynamic position. Broke on through to a zone of country meant for easy pedaling. Sign said two miles to Lyons. I knew a store in Lyons that I used to visit with a friend from that village. Just a gas station convenience store with a funny name—B.R. Grumpy's. It's sign being an amiable bear with a poker-player's visor, ready to offer you gasoline, ultra-light cigarettes, Gatorade, or...Corn-Nuts.

There should have been other places along Rorbach and Lobachsville roads designed for providing refreshment. I stopped at an old general store on the side of Lobachsville Road, only to find the bolt securely latched. A soda fountain stood vainly chrome by the window and I was sort of glad not to be slurping from it—soda wouldn't do me much good, but I needed something. But the place was closed on Saturday morning—what was happening around here? I kept moving, like the Man With No Name, minus serape and cigar. Lyons stood as a promise, provided there weren't any more mountains impregnated in the road.

Bought a half gallon of Gatorade. Do not recall the flavors. I did pay for them in silver-coinage and made a big line at the register with my weakness in counting. Natives in John Deere hats waited for their chew, eyes boring cancer spots into the back of my head. Outside in flat dry Lyons, the sun reigned, and I stood in the meager shadow of the store's plastic awning, under the local Ursa Major, guzzling whatever colored liquid I had purchased. No calling Mommy to pick me up now, not with some high-burning fuel in the old boy's gas tank. New goal: average 15 mph for the final. In the B.R. Grumpy's parking lot, I wasn't sitting so pretty with an average of 14.5. Didn't need the turn by turn directions anymore—I would take the mainline artery entrance into Kutztown—Noble Street, running past Renniger's Farmers Market and the municipal fire house. Hit it fast and hard—passed two old cyclists in identical suits, riding identical bikes. I waved and cranked by at 20 mph. Storming the beaches—by the end of the Noble Street stretch, I was up to 14.8. Being a Saturday, the Farmers Market swarmed with minivans, pickups, and trailers. I darted through that traffic pattern, swooping into the town limits with six miles left.

To ride on PA 737 was a sin. That's how I was brought up out in the

country, where the winding two-lane route was used by all forms of aggressive traffic, including semis and other tractor trailers, horse and buggies, and kamikaze Mennonite bikers on the way to church or market. That morning was the first time I ever rode it the whole way from Kutztown to Sittler Valley Road in Greenwich Township. Walls of green surrounded me on my final sprint up the road I'd ridden for years—the devil I knew. Spun the pedals real hard because I knew what Sittler Valley could do to a good average mph—the structure of the road was a microcosm-parody of the day's greatest challenges: two hills back to back. Loss of momentum—I hit those hills hard, passing through a channel of deep forest valley, 1.6 miles away from my front door. This time I found the perfect gear and rose up out of the saddle for my assault. Berger Road is my lane, my finish line—at that last turn, the average speed was 15.4 mph. Pedaling ceased. The ride totaled fifty-nine miles after all the screw-ups—hunger and the trophy-headache began to set in, but I pushed it all away for one instant, just enough time for a victory roar that bounced back off the walls of my neighbors' clean new homes.

Cool drafts floated between the timbers of our house in the woods. 195 was stenciled in blue on the battered white mail box, empty of bills or magazines when I walked Mauve up the driveway. For a while lay on the couch, drinking the second Gatorade. My younger brother Todd laughed irreverently and called me Lance (damn *that* notion) while watching a new DVD copy of *The Godfather*. I told him the ride was strictly business.

After the long shower, my head ached from the dehydration. Crumpled on the couch, shut my eyes at 11:30 AM, and dreamed myself through the major motions of the day. My mom gardened a bit and took to the backyard of our glorified log cabin to rake nine-month-old fallen leaves that build up and smother the weedy yard. The soil is extremely poor there, but she always manages to work some floral miracle. That day her miracle came straight out of the Sun Beam bread machine: a loaf of French bread, which I promptly devoured. Todd came in for his own hunk of the beautiful stuff, and we sat at the dining room table and talked about Mom's upcoming tenth year at Muhlenberg Elementary, Todd's first semester at Millersville, and my last-ditch plans for enjoyment in the weeks of summer. Airy conversation and the light headedness made me all the more grateful for her company. For the first time in months, our core trio of mother and two sons was

assembled under the same roof. We were undivided for the moment—but it would be very soon before college called each of the sons away to duty and the log house built and left by Hunter Yoder at 195 Berger Road would be quieter.

I imagine my father busied himself that day in July with sitting alone in the air-conditioning, in front of his computer in Brooklyn, tracing the route on the electric print-out map from Expedia.com, lusting over the parts that I am still hesitant to retread.



# ST. LARENZZO



## PEG'S ANTIQUES

A Ten Minute Play

CAST:

PEG McGONAGALL – 27 year-old antique dealer

FATHER – 40 year-old customer looking for a present for his daughter

BRIDESMAID – 20 year-old customer looking for an accessory to a dress

DECORATOR – 25 year-old customer who is looking for a map

DARK MAN – looking for something that belongs to him

TIME: *The Present*

SETTING: *Peg's Rare Antiques, Dalton, Connecticut; owned and run by PEG McGONAGALL. Stage left is a desk with a chair, on which is a register and a phone. Center stage is a coat hanger with a hooded cape, and a shelf with several statues, old books, a flute, and a framed map. The entrance door is Stage right, and the shelf is between them.*

AT RISE: *Peg is seated alone at her desk, talking on the phone.*

PEG (*on the phone*): Why yes, sir, we do buy pieces secondhand. If you would like to bring your mother's rocking chair in, I'm sure we could make you an offer. Thank you very much. Good afternoon. (*She hangs up. The door jingles, and the FATHER enters*)

Good afternoon! Welcome to Peg's Antiques. Is there anything I can help you find?

FATHER: Hi. I'm looking for a gift for my daughter. Is there anything in here a sixteen year old might be interested in? I've been looking around in a few shops in the area. Haven't come up with much.

PEG: Well, what sort of interests does she have? You could get her a book, or –

FATHER: Yeah, I don't really know. She probably likes music.

PEG: Oh. Well, that might explain why you've been having trouble. Perhaps you could come back after finding out. You don't have to ask her directly, of course, that would be rude. But after you've done a little detective work, I'd be glad to –

FATHER: Yeah, her birthday is tomorrow morning.

PEG: Oh.

FATHER: Probably likes music; I don't know.

PEG: Well, I don't really have much in the way of recorded music. I have an LP set of a recitation of F. J. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* –

FATHER: Yeah, she's sixteen. I don't know that she'd be into anything that... old.

PEG: Well, we are an antique store, sir. Most of what we have has a tendency to be old.

FATHER (*He begins to go*): Yeah, thanks for – (*He notices something on the shelf*) Hey, wait a minute. (*He turns back to PEG*) What's this, here? (*He picks up a small flute from the shelf*)

PEG: It's a flute, sir. Please don't play it.

FATHER: What's it for, then?

PEG: It's a display piece, sir.

FATHER: Well... Katy likes odd little things like that. I think I've seen... I don't know... nice bells in her room. And she can always play a few notes on this. Yeah, she likes music. I'll get this.

PEG: Sir, you're really not supposed to play it. If you look at the card on the stand, you'll see that there's an old legend about it.

*(She takes the flute and holds it)*

It supposedly belonged to an eccentric scholar who lived in Napoleonic times. He became fascinated with stories about Napoleon's exploration of Egypt, and traveled there extensively. He would bring back strange things none of his neighbors had seen before – things none of them could even fully describe. Late at night, they would hear a thin whistle coming from his room. Some were sure it was only the wind, but older folk said it was a flute – this flute – that he made himself from the bone of a dead soldier, killed excavating the temple of Mun at Melephi. They said the notes floated across the sea and up the Nile, and could be heard by dark Mun himself, four thousand years ago, who would row down the Nile into the present, and visit the scholar in his room when he played this flute. One night, he played the flute for hours past midnight, so that the neighbors were kept up, worrying and looking out their windows. When morning finally came, the scholar's room was very quiet. He was not heard from for some days, until finally the landlord went to check on him. He found nothing, no sign of the scholar at all, and mostly all of the strange Egyptian things were gone. He found only this flute, beneath a cushion on a battered chair.

*(She hands the flute back to the FATHER)*

FATHER (*looking at the flute*): Is that so?

PEG: That's what I'm told.

(*The FATHER looks at the flute very intently, and then suddenly, before PEG can stop him, brings it to his lips and plays a note*)

PEG: What did I just tell you? (*She takes the flute from the man and holds it away from him*)

FATHER: Oh, come on. Like I really just summoned Moo.

PEG: Mun!

FATHER: Yeah, whatever. I'll just go buy her a CD. (*Exits*)

(*PEG places the flute carefully back on its stand, and looks around as if she expects someone else to be there*)

PEG: Well then.

(*She returns to her desk. After she sits down, the door jingles and a BRIDESMAID enters. PEG jumps a little, startled, and then collects herself.*)

PEG: Good afternoon! Welcome to Peg's Antiques. Is there anything I can help you find?

BRIDESMAID: Hello. I'm looking for something to accentuate a dress I'm wearing as a bridesmaid for a wedding next month. (*she shows PEG a photo of herself in the dress*)

I was thinking maybe a shawl. It's going to be nearly winter, so it might be getting cold.

PEG (*considering the picture*): Hmm... the dress is a very nice shade of red.

BRIDESMAID (*noticing the cape on the coat rack*): Oh... this is beautiful. And the lining would go so well with my dress...

PEG: I'm... not entirely sure that would be the best thing to wear to a wedding.

BRIDESMAID (*puts on the cape and admires herself in a mirror. She does not don the hood*): Whyever not? It's beautiful.

PEG: Well, yes, it looks very nice. But I've been told that it was hand-sewn by a Georgian woman around 1840. She used black wool and worked only at night, in the dark. When she wore it and donned the hood, supposedly, she could walk by anyone in dim light without being seen. It makes the wearer, in all practical ways, invisible to an outside observer, even when they are looking right at you.

BRIDESMAID: If only that were true. I can't really say I'm fond of most of the other guests at this wedding, and I'd really just as soon not talk to any of them. I'd rather not be there at all, but as a bridesmaid, I have to attend. (*She dons the hood, and returns to admiring herself in the mirror.*)

(*The door jingles again, and a DECORATOR enters. He does not notice the*

BRIDESMAID *at all*)

DECORATOR: Hello. I'm wondering if you happen to have any old-fashioned maps, or charts. I have a space on my wall I'd like to fill, and I was thinking something older might go with my décor.

PEG: Good afternoon! Well, let's see. I think I might have just the thing...*(she takes the framed map from the shelf)* A certain Roman tale tells of this island, off the coast of Spain, which was accessible only during the spring season, and then only high tide. Its economy relied mostly on exporting certain blue fruits that could delay aging when mixed with heather and an unknown root. This was distributed among the well-to-do for some centuries, before a final trade voyage was sent from Rome. In a story mentioned briefly in the chronicles of Junius Facitus, they were due to return from the island just after a solar eclipse. The ship was never seen in Roman harbors, however, and subsequent voyages failed to locate the island at the appropriate latitude. Indeed, the island was never found, even when using these accurate maps, and neither the strange blue fruit nor the trader ship were ever seen again. This map is a reproduction, of course, but –

BRIDESMAID *(removing the hood)*: I don't know if I like it...

DECORATOR *(suddenly startled when he notices the BRIDESMAID)*: Where the hell did she come from?

BRIDESMAID *(looks at the DECORATOR for a moment, then says to PEG)*: How much is it, again?

PEG: Oh... ah... fifty dollars?

BRIDESMAID: I'll take it. *(She hands PEG money and exits)*

DECORATOR: Island, you say?

PEG: Yes. This reproduction is from the early Nineteenth Century, and is only thirty dollars.

DECORATOR: Yes... all right. I think this will go very well with the plants by the wall. *(Buys the picture, then exits)*

*(PEG goes to work arranging the items on the shelf. After a moment, the sound of the flute is heard.)*

PEG: Who's there? *(She looks around, and sees the flute is where she left it, untouched.)* Ah. Oh well... *(She returns to her desk and picks up the phone to begin a call)*

DARK MAN *(Enters from Upstage, between the desk and the shelf, and not from the entrance door)*: Good day, milady.

PEG *(drops the phone in surprise, then collects herself. She remains seated.)*: Oh, I'm very sorry. I didn't see you come in.

DARK MAN: No, I suppose that you didn't.

PEG: Is there anything I can help you find?

DARK MAN: Indeed. I believe that you have something in your shop that belongs to me. *(He leans forward over PEG, his hands spread on the desk.)* I have come for it.

PEG: Oh, did you have something on order? I can look it up if you give me a moment...

DARK MAN: What you have belongs to me already. I have been looking for it for some time, and it was just brought to my attention, moments ago, in fact, that this is where I might find it. It is a flute – a thin, pale flute – and it is very dear to me. If you give it to me now, I can assure you, I will not trouble you overlong.

PEG: Oh... *(Her eyes go instinctively to the flute when the DARK MAN mentions it, and he follows her glances. He looks back at PEG and smiles with his lips; his eyes do not change. PEG hesitates, then rises and takes the flute from the shelf)* Oh, this? It's very old, and not very interesting...

DARK MAN: Nevertheless it is mine. Give it to me. Now.

PEG: H... here. *(She hands him the flute.)* Would you like the card explaining its history?

DARK MAN: I know its history, thank you. *(He goes mostly off, then turns back to PEG)* Good day, milady. I will not trouble you again. *(He disappears Upstage into the back of the shop.)*

*(PEG follows but stops behind the shelf, and looks around, finding nothing. She returns to her desk, slowly, and opens a book. She looks over her shoulder, each way, several times, as if she expects to see something. She proceeds to read silently.)*

THE END

## MARKET EAST

I've heard their accent in  
countless holocaust documentaries and now  
they sit across from me, their ancient knees  
nearly touching mine, heat of their heavy  
breathing in my face as they  
speak in their heavy polish accents.

They share some postcards and hold  
their veiny hands, sometimes touching  
their weak knees, meeting with  
their lips, every so often  
for a brief moment of  
sweetness that even makes the cynic  
secretly smile and swoon.

The train rocks and they change to  
another seat across the aisle. Is it my  
breath? my feet? my jew nose?

She fixes her deep plum  
lipstick, dabs her neck with  
perfume that reeks of stale  
bug spray, and brushes her  
sweater, letting the fuzz glide  
through the air and in front of my  
face as they kiss again.

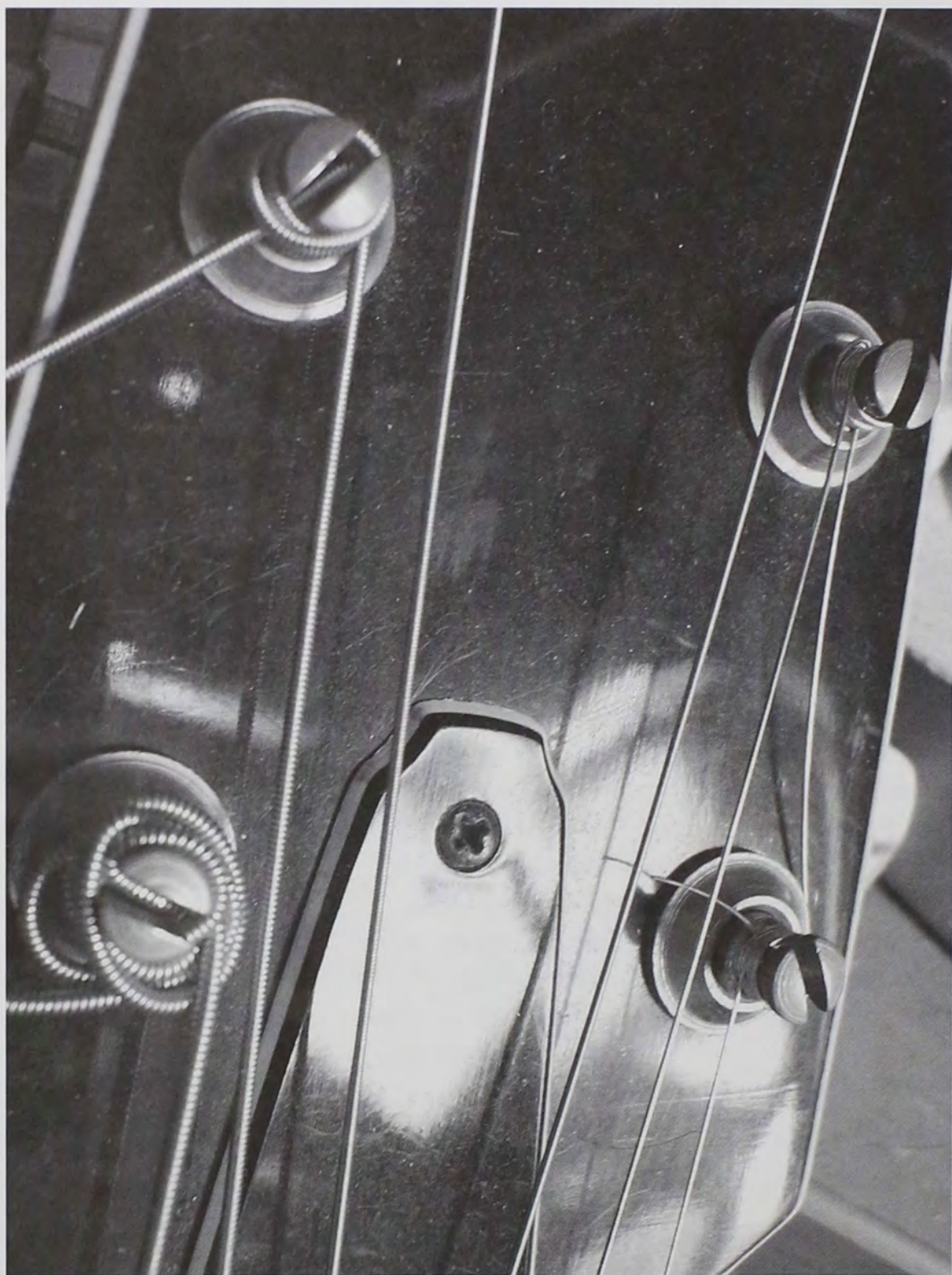
An empty seat and a closed  
door to my left and the train wall to  
my right, I sit across from these  
weary lovers, feeling within myself  
a marriage of love and loneliness.

SECRET

The wind only speaks in the movement of autumn's trees.  
The leaves reach and splinter and embrace  
But never forget to fall.  
As they drift, sheltered in arms of breath  
I cannot forget the passage of time.  
Cannot remain at the top of these stairs forever.  
I begin to move, but something in me sticks  
And the rest bruises at the noise-  
There is no mercy in the sound of bare feet on wooden stairs.  
I ache for something remaining at the top,  
Some tiny thread of being  
And feel in my descent a slow unraveling.  
When I reach level ground I can sense the eyes of my secret  
Though I stand rooted, determined to smooth its jagged edges  
And unearth its cavernous depths.  
I stare back at my secret so far from me  
As fog appears inside the glass of my skin.  
I wait for her.  
But find instead a tousled head of hair, a coat, a half-open purse  
A flurry of motion, a half-squealed farewell,  
And feel nothing but the slam of the door.  
As my confession chokes and dissipates, unsaid,  
I watch the last of autumn's leaves fall.  
The fog clears, winter comes, and the first frost forms.



# DISCHORD



## LIFE AT 120 DECIBELS

As soon as Elliot got home, he changed out of his work clothes and into his favorite pair of jeans and a Yo La Tengo t-shirt. He grabbed a few cold Heinekens from the refrigerator and brought them into the living room. He sat down in his ramshackle office chair to listen to what his album sounded like so far. Five tracks, none sounded quite finished. He sat back and sighed, thinking about Sophia. He thought she might be able to give the recordings that finishing touch – plus it would be a good excuse to invite her up to his apartment.

Sophia was the first woman Elliot had ever had real feelings for. He had been attracted to many other women in the past, but only to their bodies. His relationships never lasted very long, and usually ended badly. Despite this, Elliot considered himself an expert lover and was always surprised when his relationships fell apart. His last girlfriend had left him three months before. Elliot had depended on her for money and sex. He didn't think relationships needed more than sex to sustain themselves.

Sophia was different, though. She worked at the recording studio where Elliot had been working for two months. She was smart and an incredible musician, qualities that usually scared Elliot away. He was lucky to get the job at the studio, since he desperately needed money to finish his album. He had been working on the album for the last four years. The studio job was easy and Elliot loved working with all the recording equipment. Getting to see Sophia everyday was just another perk.

She was sociable but seemed to regard Elliot with polite indifference. Petite with long black hair and green eyes. Out of his league. She was an assistant engineer and was moving quickly up the ranks. She had started in Elliot's job only a year ago. Elliot was the studio gopher. It was his job to keep the place orderly, get everyone's coffee, and help any of the engineers with anything they needed.

After gulping down the last of his third beer, Elliot grabbed his leather jacket and locked the door on his way out. He walked four blocks to the bus stop and waited for the number six. There was a couple sitting on the bench at the stop. They were a few years younger than he was, maybe twenty two. They wore retro converse sneakers, chunky black

glasses, “vintage” t-shirts, and side-parts in their hair. Elliot laughed to himself and thought he might have turned out that way if he had been a few years younger. As it was, he was a little too old for the indie-fad. He had been thick in the scene when he was in high school, but it was different then. It was underground and the artists and their fans blurred together, not like now with all the hero-worship.

The bus arrived and took him to Dinkytown. He got off and walked two blocks to the Kitty Cat Klub. Sophia was standing out front with two friends. That morning at work he had overheard Sophia talking on the phone. She was meeting people at the Kitty Cat Klub for a drink. Elliot decided that he would bump into her there. He ducked past her and went directly to the bar.

He had only been there once before, when he was attending the University. He had been majoring in music. He got bored and decided he wasn't learning anything that would help him become a better musician. He dropped out at the end of his junior year and started working on his album. Since then he had avoided this side of town.

“What's cheap?”

The bartender squinted at him.

“No, I just don't have a whole lot of cash...I guess I'll have a Rolling Rock.”

The bartender handed it to him. “That's five dollars.”

Elliot put the five on the bar and walked towards the band playing at the back of the bar. Elliot imagined himself asking the manager if he could play instead. He couldn't stand it when bar bands covered songs by people like Bruce Springsteen.

Sophia and her friends sat in a booth near the band. So far he had managed not to catch her eye. She was wearing a low cut grey halter top and a pale green skirt that flowed down to her ankles. She was sitting next to a tall skinny girl wearing a tube top, pigtails and a septum ring. Across from them was a guy with a shaved head and goatee wearing a striped shirt and tight black pants. Elliot laughed to himself. He thought the guy looked ridiculous. Elliot was not one for dressing up when he went out on the town. His shaggy hair ruined any attempt to dress up anyway. He walked over to Sophia's table.

“Sophia? I thought that was you! What's up?”

Sophia looked up and blinked. “Uh, hi Elliot, how are you?”

Elliot sat down next to the bald guy. “I'm pretty good. Man, it's weird that you're here. Do you come here a lot? It's my first time here, but

this seems like a pretty hoppin' place."

"Yeah, we come here pretty often. Don't you live on the other side of the river? What are you doing all the way over here?"

"Oh, a friend of mine's band was playing at the club across the street, but they just finished."

The girl leaned forward and offered her hand. "Hi, I'm Chrissy."

Elliot shook her hand. "Nice to meet you." He turned to face the man on his right. There was a pause.

Sophia said, "This is Tom, Chrissy's boyfriend."

Elliot shook his hand, glad that there was no competition.

Elliot quickly realized that he and Tom had nothing much to talk about. In fact, Tom didn't talk much at all except to ask Chrissy to get him another drink. Sophia tried to keep everyone entertained, but the conversation kept slipping into reminiscing between Sophia and Chrissy, while Elliot tried to follow along. Every so often Sophia would look uncomfortable and give Elliot a weak smile, changing the subject to work or music or something else more universal.

After about four rounds of beer, Tom grew agitated with the conversation.

"Man, I can't stand it when women gab all day long like this. Elliot, you want to go do some shots at the bar – I'll buy?"

Elliot was a big drinker, but was usually an alcoholic of the beer variety. He didn't have a whole lot of money though, and didn't want Sophia to notice. They walked up to the bar and Tom ordered two rounds of Jose for each of them.

Tom smiled and said, "Finally! Cheers." He downed one then the other quickly.

Elliot braced himself and finished his two shots as fast as he could without coughing too much.

"Good man, I like a guy that can hold his liquor. Barkeep! Two more each."

By the time they were walking back to the table, Elliot had lost count of how many he had had. He was finding it difficult to navigate the dance floor without stumbling. They took a seat at the table.

"So what have you boys been up to?" asked Chrissy.

"Just wetting our whistle a little," said Tom. Elliot's world was spinning.

"We were just talking about how hard it is to get decent music published these days," said Sophia.

“Yeah, it seems like you have to have a dance routine and a tit-job to get a record deal,” said Chrissy.

“Well, Elliot is working on an album right now. Maybe he can change that,” said Sophia.

Elliot heard his name, but didn't catch the context.

Tom laughed. “Is that right? We have an *ar-teest* in our midst? I never would have guessed.”

The conversation was getting muddled in Elliot's mind. “I don't have a dance routine or tits.”

Chrissy laughed. “I don't know about tits, but you might want to start working on dance routine now.”

“I took tap lessons in third grade,” said Elliot.

Tom laughed hysterically. “Tap dancing? You'd have to have one hell of a fucking album for that to work.”

Elliot felt his face growing hot. “You've never even heard it, how do you know it wouldn't work!?”

Sophia put a hand on his arm, saying, “I don't think that's what he meant Elliot. I think he was saying that most people don't appreciate tap-dancing anymore.”

Tom laughed again. “Don't worry about it, buddy. I'm sure your album will be just as good as everyone else's.”

Elliot clenched his jaw. “What's that supposed to mean?”

Tom snorted. “Oh, you know what I mean. Everybody in this fucking city has an album they're working on. All you need is a computer and a guitar these days and you think you're fuckin' Grammy material. Don't get me wrong...”

It was too late though, Elliot had already been set off. The combination of alcohol and his insecurity about his album were more than enough fuel for the fire.

“I hate all these fuckin' people who say shit before they even know anything about it. It's like my ex-girlfriend, who never took me serious, always said I would never make it big. You know what? I will fuckin' tap dance and still win a fuckin' Grammy and go platinum, so screw you assholes!!”

By the time he got to the end of his protest he was exhausted. He receded into his chair and mumbled, “My album's gonna be good.”

After a second of stunned silence, Tom said, “What the fuck did you just call me?”

Sophia stood up. “Elliot, I think you should leave.”

Elliot was too drunk to stand up, but he didn't want Sophia to know so he played it off as stubbornness. "No."

Tom pushed Elliot out of the booth, and stood up. "You heard her, get the fuck out of here, man."

Elliot pulled himself back into the booth seat and repeated himself.

Tom pushed him out again and grabbed him by the collar, dragging him across the floor of the club. When he got to the door, he rolled Elliot out onto the side walk. By the time Elliot hit the concrete, adrenaline had taken hold. His swing landed on Tom's left ear with a heavy slap and sent him reeling off to one side. There was a scream from within the bar. Elliot tried to see who it came from when Tom decked him from behind. They both hit the ground and Tom pummeled Elliot's face until one of the bouncers pulled him off.

There was a stunned silence.

"That asshole started it!"

Tom pointed to Elliot who was dabbing at a bloody nose with his finger.

Chrissy grabbed Tom's hand and said, "I think we should go now."

Sophia grabbed a cloth from the bartender and gave it to Elliot to wipe his nose.

"What the hell is going on with you?"

The cloth was turning pink as Elliot held it to his nose. "What do you mean?"

"Did you follow me here, Elliot? I saw you get off the bus. I didn't want to embarrass you in front of Tom and Chrissy so I didn't call you on it, but I guess that was a waste."

"I was just in the neighborhood."

"Oh, shut the fuck up Elliot. I know you followed me." She sighed.

"I'm really sorry...I thought it would be cool to meet up."

"Why didn't you ask me instead of just showing up and sitting down with us?"

"I thought you would say no."

"Well, don't you think I should have? Look at this...my friends are gone, and you're laying on the ground bleeding."

Elliot was quiet.

"Do you have a ride home? You can't take the bus like this."

"No."

Sophia whispered, "God damn it."

Elliot was quiet on the ride back to his apartment. He looked out the

window and mumbled directions as he tried to sober up. Sophia seemed to have calmed down a little by the time they pulled up in front of his building.

“This is it? Ok, I’ll see you tomorrow.” She looked over at him. “You should put some ice on that, you know; and take an aspirin before you go to bed. I don’t want you to be a zombie at work tomorrow; we have a big client coming in.”

“Thanks for the ride. Um...do you want to come up?”

Sophia looked at him with a confused and horrified look.

“No, I meant to listen to my album. No one has heard it in a while; I was wondering if you could let me know what you think about it.”

Sophia’s face relaxed. “I have to wake up early tomorrow Elliot. So do you, maybe another time.”

“Please, it’s not very long and I’ve been dying to hear your opinion.”

Sophia sighed again. “Well alright, but if you try anything I swear to God...”

“Don’t worry, I’m harmless, see?” He pointed to his now swollen and bluish left eye.

Sophia laughed.

Elliot unlocked his door and flipped on the lights. His apartment was small – one bedroom, one bathroom, a tiny living room and a kitchenette. The living room was littered with bottles, cables and recording equipment.

“Did you have a party in here or something?”

“No.”

“Did you drink all this tonight?”

“No.” He pointed to a group of four bottles on the small computer desk against the wall. “Only those four are from tonight.”

Elliot walked over to the desk and sat down in the dilapidated chair. He switched on the computer.

“Do you want coffee or tea or anything? I think there’s a beer left in the fridge.”

“That’s ok.”

“Well here.” Elliot cleared off the couch next to the desk. He threw the pile of laundry that was on the couch in the direction of the bedroom. Sophia gingerly sat down.

Elliot opened his first song and pressed play. Sophia looked around the room as it was playing. Elliot felt like shaking her and telling her to pay attention. As the first song ended, Elliot looked at Sophia eagerly.

“Cool. I like the drums.”

Elliot couldn't believe she had reduced one of his masterpieces down to a drum beat. “That's it? You didn't like the melody or the bass line or anything?”

“No, yeah, they're cool too.”

He opened the second track in hopes of redeeming himself. She was tapping her foot as the song played.

“Yeah, that one had a good beat too. You're good at programming drum loops.”

“What about the harmony?”

“I liked the sound of that one pad. It reminded me of something...I don't know what. Honestly though, the rest of the melodies could use some work.”

Elliot played the rest of his songs, hoping one of them would impress her.

“Bruce Springsteen,” said Sophia.

“What?”

“That's who they remind me of...they have that eighties Springsteen vibe to them.”

Elliot's jaw dropped open.

“Well, thanks Elliot. Those were cool, but I have to go.”

Elliot walked out to her car and waved good bye as she drove away. He walked slowly back up to his apartment, dragging his feet. He had hoped that Sophia would hear his music and understand. He wanted someone else to finally understand what he was going for.

He opened the door to his apartment and threw himself on the couch. His face hurt and he was ashamed that he even played his music for Sophia. He walked over to the computer and played back the first song again. It was complex, melodies weaving in and out with a syncopated drumbeat in the background and his voice singing tenderly. It had taken him months to write and record all the individual parts.

“Fucking Bruce motherfucking Springsteen!!” Elliot slammed his fist into his desk, sending a pile of disks onto the floor. He walked into the kitchen to get the last beer, but noticed a bottle of Johnny Walker Blue Label on top of the fridge. He had been saving it for the day when he finished his album.

After a few shots Elliot sat back down at his computer. He dragged the cursor to the file menu and went to close the file. As he did, he saw the command below *close - delete*. Elliot clicked delete. The computer



popped up a dialog box: "Are you sure you want to delete?" Elliot pounded the table with his fist and clicked "yes."

He methodically went through and deleted every version, every part, and every single backup file. When he was done he grabbed a pile of green post-it notes, scribbled "FUCK THIS" on one and stuck it to the top of the monitor. He then crawled onto his mattress and cried until he passed out.

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Elliot opened his eyes and wondered where he was. He rolled over on his side and realized he was in his apartment lying on his bare mattress with all of his clothes on. He looked at his clock. 9:28. He was supposed to be at the studio by 9.

He yelled, "FUCK!" and jumped up, running to the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and combed his hair at the same time he shimmied out of his clothes. He grabbed his khakis and a collared shirt and threw them on. He grabbed his jacket on the way out the door and locked it as fast as he could.

Luckily there the bus was just getting to the stop as he sprinted to it, and he was able to get to the studio by 9:40. When he opened the front door the secretary was busy filing papers in her desk drawers and didn't notice him walk by her through the door on her left. He stepped into Studio F and grabbed a bundle of wires off the hook on the wall, unwound them and started coiling them up again. Sophia walked in.

"I covered for you. I told Bill that you were stuck in traffic." Bill was owner and head producer of the studio, and Elliot's boss.

"Thank you. Listen, I'm really sorry about last night. It was stupid of me to follow you and I had way too much to drink."

Sophia nodded. "Well it was stupid of you and you're right; you did have way too much to drink. It's bad for you to drink like that you know."

"I know, but that was a one time thing, I usually don't drink that much."

"From the looks of your apartment, I'd say it wasn't the first time you have."

Elliot was confused. "Oh, you mean all the bottles? Wait...did you drive me home last night? I thought I walked or something."

"I don't think you would have made it over the bridge, you could barely stand upright."

"Well, thanks for that too. You didn't have to do that, especially after I

was such an asshole.”

“I couldn’t just leave you there; besides, I’ve gotten drunk before.”

Elliot looked down at the ground while he finished coiling up the wires. “Thank you, Sophia. I really appreciate it.”

One of the studio engineers walked in. “Hey there you guys are; Sophia, can you help Ed out in D? And Elliot, clear the patch bay in B. We’re going to have a client in there at ten. Hey, what happened to your eye?”

“Um, I was at the batting cages and caught a curve ball with my face.”

“Ow. Well, maybe you should stay away when the clients come in, we don’t want them to think we abuse our employees.” He left.

“Talk to you about this later,” said Sophia, and she headed towards Studio D.

For the rest of the day Elliot tried to be extra nice to Sophia. He didn’t have much of a chance though. It was an especially busy day and most of the time they had to work in separate studios. They were given breaks at different times and didn’t see much of each other. It wasn’t until the engineers left for the day and the cleaning crew arrived that they had a chance to talk again. Elliot found Sophia in Studio A recalibrating the 2 inch reel-to-reel.

“Hey”

“Hey, Elliot.”

There was a pause. Sophia was concentrating on lining up the recording head on the reel-to-reel.

“I’m really sorry about last night,” said Elliot. “I know it doesn’t make up for it, but I feel horrible.”

Sophia looked up. “Elliot, you were drunk. Don’t worry about it. Just don’t do it again. You don’t want to end up like Tom.”

“Well, I bet he doesn’t have a black eye...”

“No, but he’s a jerk to his girlfriend and only cares about getting drunk. You don’t want to turn out like that. Besides, you can’t just float around forever you know. You have to finish your album at some point.”

“I know. I’m really going to start working on it soon.” The promise even sounded empty to Elliot. “Maybe you could stop by tonight and help me out with the melodies. I know they need a lot of work.”

“They were good; they could just use some variation. I was in a really bad mood last night, I wasn’t paying as much attention as I could have. But if you really want me to help you out I guess I can stop by tonight. I

mean, one of my friends did beat you up...”

“I’d like to think I put up a good fight.”

“Well you didn’t. You punched him in the head when he wasn’t looking. But you didn’t deserve the beating he gave you. I’ll stop by at around eight, ok?”

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As soon as Elliot got home he took a shower and cleaned his apartment. He threw out all the bottles and rearranged the furniture. After he was done straightening up, he sat down in his studio chair and turned the computer on so he could listen back to what he had. As soon as the computer had started up, he opened Pro-Tools and went to open his first song. It wasn’t there.

“What the fuck?” Elliot sat straight up in his chair. He looked for the files for the other four tracks. None of them were there. Beads of sweat started to collect on Elliot’s forehead. He closed Pro-Tools and started it up again. His files were still missing. He hit the restart button on his keyboard, slammed his fist into the desk. A green post-it fell off the top of the monitor. It said “FUCK THIS” in scrawled handwriting. It was his handwriting. He suddenly remembered what he had done.

Elliot’s eyes started to water. He mumbled, “Four years...” and fell out of his chair onto the ground. “Four years....gone.” As he was staring at the wall, his eyes started to tear up. There was a knock at the door. Elliot stood up, but could barely make it to the door. Without looking through the peephole, he opened the door, staring at the ground the whole time.

Sophia walked in and saw Elliot’s face. “What happened? Are you alright?”

Elliot looked up at her and said, “It’s gone.”

“What are you talking about?”

Elliot sat on the floor, tears now running down his face. “My album. I erased it last night. It’s gone. All of it.”

“Oh my god Elliot!” Sophia hunched down to help Elliot onto the nearby couch. “Why did you erase it? What happened?”

Elliot had stopped crying, but was still staring at the wall. “I thought it was bad...you told me it was bad. I gave up I guess. I left myself a note.” He pointed to the post-it.

“Elliot, I didn’t say it was bad, I just said the melodies could use some work.” She sat down on the couch next to him. “I’m sorry Elliot.”

Elliot looked at her. “What am I going to do? That album was my life

for four years.”

“Well, maybe it’s time to get a new life, Elliot. I think that album was killing you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You said yourself that you’ve been drinking a lot, and your apartment was destroyed when I was here last night. You come in late to work on a regular basis, and you always look like shit. Bill said he looked at your records...he said you dropped out of school, and that you haven’t had a real job since. It sounds like you fell off the track somewhere. I think you need to turn things down a little.”

Elliot stared at her, confused. “What?”

“Look Elliot, it’s like with sound. Decibels, you know? A lot of music sounds really good loud, but if you turn it up too much – it’s like your mother probably told you, don’t listen to your music so loud, it’ll damage your hearing. One hundred and twenty decibels Elliot, the threshold of pain. That’s where you’ve been living life. You need to turn it down a little or you’ll do permanent damage.”

Elliot swallowed. “So what do I do now?”

“I don’t know. Clean yourself up. Forget your old album. Go to work everyday. Do your best. If you want me to, I can help you write a new album. We can record it at the studio. It’ll be better than your old album ever was.”

“Why would you help me? I was an asshole last night and it would probably just be a waste of your time anyways.”

“No it wouldn’t. Look Elliot, I wasn’t lying last night when I said I thought you were good at programming drum tracks, and I really liked your style. You just need to learn some more about music theory. You’re a good guy Elliot, you just need to get yourself out of the rut you’re in. I used to be like that you know...I almost dropped out of school too. I was going to Berklee and I was sick of all the work. All I wanted to do was drink and smoke and party and work on my music. But it doesn’t work like that. If you drop out, and you party all the time, you never get anywhere. Even the Stones had to practice before they got big.”

“What made you change your mind?”

“Well, one day as I was going to my friend’s house to party, I saw a guy about my age putting up fliers advertising the release party for his first album. I always wanted to put out my own album, so I asked him how he did it.”

“And?”

“He said he worked his ass off.” Sophia stood up. “So I decided that if I was serious about being a musician, I had to get my act together. Now it’s your turn Elliot. Get your act together.” She helped Elliot up off the couch, gave him a hug, and left.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Meghan Bickel** is a jolly version of Rumpelstiltskin. She can turn a mountain of work into a pile of gold in a matter of hours. Even Doughty homework. She also has a great love for artificial cheese.

**Peter Bregman** likes making shit up. It's what he's good at.

**Daniel Bruno** grants you that “in Fum-Fudge the greatness of a lion is in proportion to the size of his proboscis—but, good heavens! there is no competing with a lion who has no proboscis at all.” – Poe

**Sara Campbell** had a muse once, it was amusing. She would like to thank the muse and the academy. And Shane, for not dropping her on her head. She *also* thinks that the cafeteria should serve chocolate dipped strawberries on a regular basis.

**David Chamberlain** is delicious and nutritious.

**Jan Cohen** knows where you live.

**Brenden Connor** lives in Medford Lks, NJ and enjoys family and friends (of course), coffee (essential), piano (relaxing), Dave Matthews (entertaining) and photography (inspiring).

**Chris Curley** fancies himself most when listening to music or brooding over literature. He likes wine, and black coffee, and clove cigarettes. There's a small (or maybe not so small) part of him that revels in the sheer pretentiousness of it all, but he's not too big to admit he still loves a good milkshake and roots for the Sox on weekends.

**Matt Davis** misses the crisp and salty morning air of Cohasset harbor.

**Nathan Dawley** promises to bend the rules to make your vote count. He frequently wears his sweaters inside out.

**Greg Diamond** never sleeps.

**Katy Diana** likes to write in blooming magnolias. She will be studying vampire and leaf-nosed bats in Costa Rica this winter. Yes, she will be very creeped out.

**Susannah Fisher** is not too fond of the ass-crack of dawn. She much rather prefers her bed.

**Ashley Higgins** likes ee cummings, hence the quote: “newly as from unburied which floats the first who, his april touch drove sleeping selves to swarm their fates woke dreamers to their ghostly roots.”

**Sarah Kauffman** is going to shave her head on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Anna King** is the new hot Halloween costume this season.

**Caroline Meiers** Has a hard time figuring out her place in the universe, but it is somewhere between the magic of *Harry Potter* and the unfortunate reality of an overdue research paper.

**Jen Mingoello** is covering her wall in post-it notes and is far too obsessed with the word prague.

**Heather Morris** swears by the X-Men animated series.

**Abi Munro** ...needs more time to think.

**Tommy “the G!” Richter** is mostly not a fish.

**Alison Shaffer** agrees that, “the opposite of a fact is falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth.” - Niels Bohr

**Trevor Strunk** is a man possessed with the moments inside the moments; a micro-economical organization of time. Happy trails.

**Tori Wynne** is a poet, an artist, and a Caged Princess. When not trapped in an ivory tower with sides too sheer to climb, she likes to pine for princes and sing lilting melodies to attract gallant knights. Apart from her time as a Princess, Tori enjoys calligraphy and the study of antiquated Phrenology. She is 19 years old.

**Klaus Yoder's** critics to say he's trees, bucks, and does / I'm from the woods, stupid, what kinda facts are those?

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## 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 DiFeliciantonio	Patricia Schroeder
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