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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Poetry

| | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----|
| Cruel | <i>Louisa Schnaithmann</i> | 7 |
| A Night in Three Parts | <i>Dayna Stein</i> | 17 |
| The Moment I Said It | <i>India McGhee</i> | 28 |
| To Know | <i>Callie Ingram</i> | 29 |
| I Will Never Skipskip A Rock | <i>Nathan Taylor</i> | 43 |
| The Ravine | <i>Nathaniel Rosenthalis</i> | 52 |
| Untitled | <i>Brett Celinski</i> | 64 |
| Skeleton | <i>Chelsea Catalanotto</i> | 68 |
| Midnight Letter | <i>Nicole Dillie</i> | 70 |
| Where Children Come From | <i>Robert Whitehead</i> | 82 |
| Orphan of War | <i>Ryan Sullivan</i> | 85 |
| Ciega/Mezquita | <i>Máire Moriarty</i> | 89 |
| The Other Side | <i>Katherine LeCours</i> | 91 |

Fiction

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|----|
| Those Dancing Days are Gone | <i>Christopher Schaeffer</i> | 8 |
| Cycling | <i>Robert Evans</i> | 19 |
| The 2nd of July | <i>Colin Ottinger</i> | 30 |
| The Tantric Semantics of Studying Abroad | <i>Amanda Schwartz</i> | 71 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Non-Fiction /Drama

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|----|
| A Three-Part Study in Musical Relations | <i>Abby Raymond</i> | 38 |
| Amway Man | <i>Sarah Round</i> | 45 |
| Hard Luck Investigator | <i>Maximilian Kriesky</i> | 67 |
| Spring | <i>Patrick Hayakawa</i> | 86 |

Visual Arts

| | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|----|
| View to Limerick | <i>Danielle Tatsuno</i> | 18 |
| L'Ange du Parc du Mont Royal | <i>Kerry McCarthy</i> | 27 |
| Burano | <i>Joshua Krigman</i> | 63 |
| Virginia in April | <i>Callie Mattox</i> | 79 |
| La Viejita | <i>Shira Degani</i> | 81 |
| Queen of the Nation | <i>Elizabeth Zeller</i> | 84 |
| Est. 1977 | <i>Amanda Hayden</i> | 90 |

Special Feature

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----|
| Interview with Poet Eleanor Wilner | | 56 |
|------------------------------------|--|----|

EDITOR'S NOTE

This book you're holding in your hands right now – it's a baby. I want to tell you it's my kid, my *Lantern*, my handiwork – but this is the only page I can take credit for. This beautiful bouncing baby of a book belongs to the artists, poets, playwrights, and authors of Ursinus. Their talent is both moving and exciting, and it is such a pleasure to be in a position to commit their work to paper, to bind it neatly between two glossy covers and hand it out to the world.

The editorial staff and I are proud to present a special feature in this issue: we have included a really beautiful interview with poet Eleanor Wilner from her visit to our campus last semester. We hope you find her words as thought-provoking and inspiring as we did. She was brought to campus by the Visiting Writers Series, a brilliant program that brings renowned poets to our doorstep. This semester we've already been privileged to hear Gerald Stern and Tracie Morris read their work, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to come out and see our future visiting writers.

The people I'm about to thank deserve banners, skywriting, stars named in their honor – but this is all I've got. So thank you so much Gabi and Scott, for working computer magic that I can't dream of understanding, and politely dealing with hundreds of last-minute emails from me. Thank you Nicole for being the most organized girl in the world. And thank you to my peaches, angels, precious gems – my editors, who have worked incredibly hard, and kept me in line and consoled me, and who have put up with a whole lot of pet-names. Especially you, Chris Schaeffer. You are a diamond. Thank you Trev & Tori, and thank you Dan, for showing me how it's done. And thank you, more than thank you, to Dr. Volkmer, who has been an ally, a mentor, and a friend to me and to this little book. He has gracefully handled my inexperience and guided me through the process of publishing a magazine, and this book quite simply would not be here without him.

All that said, enjoy. There is treasure in the coming pages; there is light in this *Lantern*.

— Marjorie

JUDGES' NOTES

Poetry Winner — Cruel by Louisa Schnaithmann

I admire this poem's artful simplicity and its careful crafting of concrete imagery. The words seem so well-chosen for both their imagistic and sonic qualities, and the poem is pleasing to the ear. The poem also delivers on the promise of its basic images by moving gracefully from the physical nature of the broken teacup to more metaphysical musings about sorrow. This poem succeeded by giving me both something to hold on to and something to think about. Well done!

Liz Ahl is chair of the English Department at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Four Corners*, *White Pelican Review*, *5AM*, *Court Green*, *Margie*, *The Women's Review of Books*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Alimentum*, and *North American Review*. Her work has also been included in several anthologies, including *Red, White and Blues: Poets on the Promise of America*, *Mischief, Caprice, and Other Poetic Strategies*, and *Like Thunder: Poets Respond to Violence*.

Prose Winner — Those Dancing Days are Gone by Christopher Schaeffer

Its author engages the reader with a creative premise, and weaves that premise throughout the story in a natural and entertaining manner that is also inherent to the plot. Also displayed are a good use of suspense and plot twists, and a clear narrative arc.

Miriam Fitting received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Washington, Seattle, and has published fiction, translations, and nonfiction with a variety of literary journals and small presses including *The Indiana Review*, *Optimism*, and *Bohemian Ventures*. She is currently using the break between drafts of her novel-in-progress, *The Prague Moment*, to write a collection of linked stories tentatively titled *Why I Don't Have A Boyfriend*.

CRUEL

My teacup broke
the other day,
shattered in the bathroom sink,
blue curves severed like veins.

I held it in my hands afterward
as if cool porcelain would nourish
me, cradled it in my palms,
vessel miming vessel.

Cold and smooth, like dew.
Perhaps this is what sorrow feels like
to objects; they cannot weep, cannot
thrash and moan, biting the air.
Instead they crack, splinter into
uselessness.

THOSE DANCING DAYS ARE GONE

The man dressed as Yeats had decided to call it a night early. He had chosen, for that particular evening, to hit the town as the late-period mystic aristocrat, and the driving rain had made his choppy wig and wool overcoat uncomfortably wet and heavy. Part of him wished he'd picked one of his younger Yeats outfits, but, on reflection, not much could compare to the visceral thrill of howling "The Second Coming" through thick sheets of precipitation under the spotty illumination of a corner streetlight. He checked his pocket watch (not an authentic period piece—he'd ordered it from a curiosities catalogue—but it suited the outfit); 10:15. He'd put in a good two and a half hours, had stuck it out even when the first rolling bass thumps of thunder had sounded, even when the rain had intensified so that traveling a block felt like fording a pregnant stream. He felt he'd earned himself a drink. The messenger bag at his feet bulged at the seams, stuffed with the vestiges of his daylight life. In most lights, he cut a pretty mean picture of the man—tall and rigidly slim, some grim dreaminess in his eyes. Under close examination, though, or particularly unsparing lighting, you could tell—he was too young, too baby-faced, for even the young Yeats of the Celtic bent, the hue of his skin not fair enough for Ireland. It betrayed that trace of California that never leaves you, like the scent of money and fast cars.

He leaned forward into the empty streets, spying a man dashing through the rain, and shouted an almost perfunctory *Whence did all that fury come! From empty tomb or Virgin womb! St. Joseph thought the (here he paused to cough) would, would melt but liked the way his fingers smelt!*

The man kept running without sparing a backwards askew look, a sign the man dressed as Yeats took as his cue to leave. There were fourteen blocks between his corner pulpit and his apartment, his favorite bars conveniently located within staggering distance of his home. Tonight though, his usual haunts were off limits—he didn't want the regulars to see him like this, in his severe little grandpa glasses and floppy silk bow tie. There were two sets of locations in his life—those that knew him in smart three-piece suits, polo shirts and designer jeans, and those that knew him as W.B. He hurried down the street, straining his eyes against the downpour in an attempt to make out storefronts as he passed—a man in a yellow rain-slicker prowled like a sullen cat down

the opposite sidewalk, hands jammed in his pockets and a cap pulled low over his eyes. If either man had bothered to strain his ears, he could've heard the wet percussion of the other's feet in the streaming runoff. The night was theirs, if they would have had it. Downtown Kurtzburgh, New Jersey, that is to say, didn't have much to offer in the way of a nightlife.

But if someone wanted to get drunk, fast, it wasn't too hard to find a place catering to their demands. He turned into a side street, taking partial shelter under the awnings, not-quite-running in his uncomfortably sodden costume. Lightning lit the street like a firework—there, not a block away, a three story brownstone; Cloud Cuckoo Land. Two women supported a third between them, flagged a cab and stuffed her unceremoniously into the back seat. They gave the man dressed as Yeats a pair of sharp looks as they passed, and he felt a blush rise to his cheeks. He wasn't an idiot, or a maniac; he knew how he must look. Like, well, an idiot or a maniac. Everybody has their hobbies though, right? The man dressed as Yeats wouldn't laugh at a guy who set up model trains in his basement, or one of those diehard fantasy football players. He...

He didn't really know why he did it. Couldn't put his finger on the pulse of whatever ancient impulse drove him to the streets like a hungry ghost every night. *Grant me an old man's frenzy. Myself must I remake til I am Timon and Lear or that William Blake who beat upon the wall till truth obeyed his call.* He had not done things like... like this before his hospitalization. Sometimes he worried that it was a side-effect of the medications, anticonvulsants, antidepressants, antipsychotics, analgesics. In the morning he lined up the little bottles along the bathroom counter in ascending order based on the severity of the doctor's thin-set frown when he'd scribbled out the prescription: paroxat, Percocet, depakote, lamictal, carbamazepine, clonazepam, natural lithium. In the last case, the frown had quickly been replaced with a broad smile that fooled no one. *Ahah, well Ray, at this point I'm about out of specialists to send you to.* A friendly, grandfatherly punch to the arm. *I suppose House is booked, son!* They both laughed meekly. Four months later, the pill bottles were empty. He still organized them every morning, still turned them so the labels all aligned like one long word. When he returned home each night, left the trousers and spats and starchy dress shirt pooled on the floor, he usually careened into sleep before he could do much thinking,

but the mornings, in the mornings he always felt the frustration he felt as he slowed down towards the bar—what was he doing? What was he thinking? *‘What then?’ sang Plato’s ghost, “what then?”*

“Yeatsy, my man. Comin’ in a little early tonight?”

“Aye, then...”

The bouncer thumped him on the back, waved him inside, where the perfume of cigarettes and beer clung to the walls and fell over the sullen weeknight drinkers like a blanket. The accent was difficult. He had tapes, to study, but it mostly came down to practice. He had his eye on a booth near the back, away from the bar and the dim footlights of the stage, where a slight Indian girl in a sundress sang “Sophisticated Lady” in a thin voice, swayed nervously with the microphone stand. His waitress was one of the usuals, a cheerful community college student working through her communications degree. They didn’t really know each other that well. Her favorite show was *Lost*.

“The usual, Mr. Yeats?”

“Aye, uh... well, no. Gimme a roggienbier. Lass.”

“Right up.”

He sat and waited, studying the smooth blur of the fans. The bar had a loose speakeasy theme, was furnished with mahogany and red leather in a reasonable approximation of 1930’s luxury. It might’ve come off as touristy, if there’d ever been any tourists. As it was, it supported a small but healthy base of loyal patrons, and was further subsidized, people said, as a historical site by the city. On the weekends, sure, the college kids and irony-seeking twenty-somethings filtered in for taps hidden behind hollow façade walls and amateurish live jazz, but for the most part Cloud Cuckoo Land was for Kurtzburgh’s old, solitary, and otherwise desolate. Tonight, the only flash of life among the alcoholics and men with no better place to be (slouching towards the bar to be bored, he thought) was a group of businessmen raising hell at the bar, carousing, pinching asses, laughing off the inevitable beers spilled on crotches by coquettishly irate waitresses. A handful of them peeled away from the group, moving jerkily towards the jukebox in the back, one of them stopping a few paces from the would-be Yeats and looking credulously over his shoulder.

“Hey... hey, are you...”

Swaying a bit, his necktie loose around his fleshy neck—a coworker, a guy from accounting, someone who—

“Aren’t you... well *shit*, Mr. Crane, you look... you look, damn, I don’t even know what to say to this!”

“I’m sorry... ah, I’m sorry lad. I dinnae know what ye’re—“

“No, no. Ahaha, *what* is going *on* here! Raymund Crane, you crazy sonuvabitch, dressed up all like... like Einstein here!”

Now all the planets drop in the sun.

“I...,” an awkward pause, the man dressed as Yeats (*Raymund Crane* still uncomfortable in his mind, a name for someone else) looked around conspiratorially before leaning towards his coworker. “Look, I’m on my way home from a, a costume party. And I’m not *Albert Einstein*. I’m Yeats.”

“A costume party? In the middle of frickin’ September? Where?”

“A, a friend’s apartment. It was her birthday.”

“Ok, fair enough. What are you *doing* here?”

“I... well, I mean—“

As the waitress returned with Raymund’s beer, his (what was his name again? Clarence... Terrance... Sam?) drunk acquaintance offered a weathered five dollar bill in her direction.

“Look Crane, don’t worry about it. I don’t need to know what your deal is. Miss? Another for me, and whatever this guy here’s drinking.”

Raymund cradled his beer between his hands, the cheap wispy whiteness of his wig plastered to his forehead. He brushed it aside with one hand, clearing his eyes. *Old Tom Again.*

“So... Sam... you won’t—“

“Tell anybody at work? Nah, man. Don’t worry about it. I mean... we all do crazy shit sometimes, right? Its cool. Costume party.”

He took a long draught of beer. *I lift my glass to my mouth...*

“Thank you. Thanks.”

The girl on stage finished her song, to a smattering of apathetic applause. She giggled, gave a mousy thank you, started into “Mr. Paganini”. She snapped her fingers, swung her head low. A thin sheen of sweat misted her forehead under the heat of the lights, clung the floral print of her dress to her hips. “*I never blinked back at fireflies...*”

Sam coughed, scanned the bar. His friends were back at the jukebox, Cheap Trick playing over the girl’s singing. Laughs all around. Whatever. The waitress brought the two their beers—Raymund still sipped pensively at his first round, staring into the last shallow puddle of the glass.

“So, uh... I guess... do you want me to, like, get out of here?”

He finished his beer, wiped the foam from his upper lip, cocked his head at Sam as if noticing him there for the first time.

“Hm? No, you don’t need to... that is, if you want to get back to your friends, go for it, but...”

“Hey! Lady! Another round over here! You look pissed as hell, Mr. Crane. Or, well. Not pissed, I guess, but you look like there’s something going on here more than a little post-party nightcap. Plus, I mean, you think this town is full of retards?”

“What?”

“A tiny little noplacelike this, you think nobody would notice some, I don’t know, 19th century Christopher Lloyd running around shouting poetry every night? Come on. You’re damned lucky nobody ever put two and two together before tonight, to be honest. You think you could keep fooling people forever, well, you can go fuck yourself. No offense.”

Raymund smiled, surprising himself.

“Well then. Uh. In my defense, I did, you should know, put a lot of thought into keeping everything separate. I’ve... I’ve been pretty careful not to run into anyone I really *know*. You just caught me off guard, I suppose.”

“Yeah, damn right I did, you sitting here with your back to the door. Haven’t you ever seen a cowboy movie before? Goddamn.”

“I guess its been awhile.”

“So... so why do you it?”

Taking a sip of his beer, Raymund shifted his gaze, side-stepped, for the moment, the question. Sam rapped his knuckles on the table, leaning forward slightly. He silently asked again, insistent.

“I can’t really... say.”

“What, is it a secret? Are you working for the government or something? Come on, man.”

“No, I... I just don’t know really.”

“That’s it? You don’t know?”

He spread his hands in a vaudevillian shrug.

“I don’t know.”

“What a fucking let-down.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too,” he said, polishing off his beer. “I think... I think if you

tried though... too really, you know, *psychoanalyze* it, you might-“

“No, I don’t think so. Trust me, I’ve lost a lot of sleep over it myself. It’s just therapeutic, or, cathartic, or something. I’m... well, Sam, I’m not a happy man.” He was met with a sympathetic nod. Another round had come and gone. “Up until a few months ago, you see, I was quite sure I was going to die. Soon, that is, really, really soon. I wouldn’t see thirty.”

“Well... *damn*, Ray, I can see why that could hit a guy hard. I-“

“No, I’m... hah. No. I’m going to be fine. But... it sounds so *ridiculous*, so... so *ungrateful*, but... if you spend all these years with the presupposition that you have no long-term future, and then, suddenly, you find out that *yes*, you *do* in fact have fifty, sixty more years ahead of you... Sam, that’s terrifying. You wake up in your 300 thread-count bedsheets next to your actress girlfriend and suddenly, that isn’t necessarily enough. You start to think, hey, could I marry this girl? Could I spend the rest of my life with her? Could I spend the rest of my *month* with her? Everything you do suddenly has consequences. You’re not hurtling at 180 miles per hour towards a hospital room brick wall, no, you could very well die at the age of 110 surrounded by your fucking hypothetical *grandkids*, or overdose on K in the back room of a club, or get cancer, or get shot by a mugger, or anything. The freedom, Sam. It drives you nuts.”

Sam scratched his chin. There isn’t, he thought, a way to really respond to that kind of thing pithily, so he kept his mouth shut. Drank his beer in commiseration.

“So I ran across the country. I left my job behind me, and Vicky, poor girl, so dull but so, *so* attractive, and... and I sat outside the airport in Atlantic City and the wind, it ripped at me from behind the pylons, and all I had was a duffel bag full of shit and the clothes I had on me, and Sam, I felt *okay* again. And what am I doing now? I’m working at, arguably, an even more boring job. I’m taking a night class on figure drawing. I’m dressed up like Yeats on a Thursday night. I have a whole new life ahead of me, and I’m wasting it even more than I did before. Does *any* of that make sense to you?”

“Well.”

They sat in silence, together, for a moment. The singer was well into “Cry Me a River,” her voice confident now, strong and sad and so far away, a torch like a pin-prick wavering against a strong wind. *Remember?*

Remember? Remember? An old man sat close to stage, gazed up at the girl with a trembling lip—his heart danced at the stumbling grace of her “*pleh-bee-yun*”, some ancestral memory itched that made every man in the bar Tom Ewell, drunk in his tuxedo, every empty seat in the house haunted, for a few minutes, by the ghost of Julie London in green, in pink, in blue, in white. Sam ran a finger round the rim of his pint-glass, keen on the low whistle it produced.

“Well?”

“You know... I love that Ice-T plays cops now. There’s a whole generation, out there, that knows him as the black guy on *Law and Order SVU*. Where’d the O.G. go? Where’s the man who wanted to ‘Get Buck Naked and Fuck?’”

Raymund stared incredulously.

“What?”

“I mean, you can’t be in *Body Count* forever. Not everyone cool gets the luxury of dying at 27, get it? After a certain point the party ends. Ice-T gets it. That’s awesome.

“But what do you do then? Write a book? Start a record label? Either way, you’re reinventing yourself, sort of. You’re not who you used to be.”

“But that’s the point!” Raymund said, almost pounding his fist on the table. “I *am* exactly who I used to be! Except for... this... this fucking *wig*, and, and, and ridiculous goddamn tie!”

“No, no you’re not,” insistent, and sad, with a shake of his head, “you totally cannot be.”

And there, free and fast, being both Chance and Choice, forget its broken toys...

“So what should I do?”

“What, am I your therapist? I don’t know... get a girlfriend. Learn to surf. Whatever you want.”

“Thank you. Thanks,” said the girl on the stage, bowing with her hands clasped in front of her. The old man was sobbing, his head buried in the dark nooks of his elbows. “This’ll be my last song of the night... its called ‘Misty.’”

Sam looked at Raymund’s expression, trapped somewhere in between disgust and disappointment. He felt compelled to add something.

“I had this dream, Ray. Dunno why, but its stuck with me for months. Some dreams do that, you know? Its about an old man, well, I

guess its about me, being my dream and all. Really though, the old man is the star of the show. In my dream I'm serving him this huge fancy meal in my apartment, really freaking out about getting everything just right. And anyway, eventually he sits down to eat and starts to tell me his story. He used to be a real social hobknobber in the day, tells me all about the beautiful women and places he's been to. And he tells me about this giant fountain in the lobby of a famous hotel, how people chucked pennies in it, and at night when the chandelier went on you could see the pennies reflect off the glass of it. And how the men and women would pair up and dance around the lip of this huge fountain, and how their reflections would dance underwater too. He looks so happy. And then, he pulls the legs of his pants a little, and I see that his legs are like, like *wood*, like sticks, just so gnarled and thin and knobby. And I can tell he's not going to be doing any more dancing. And I feel so bad for him. I start to dance. Just, like an idiot. The electric slide, the Macarena, anything I can think of. I don't know why I think it'll help. I don't know if it does. I just keep dancing like a maniac for this old man, just in case it makes him smile for one second."

"So what are you telling me?"

"I don't know. I don't know if I'm telling you anything."

"Oh. I see."

A minute crawled across the table.

"I guess what I really want is... God. I don't know. Even a little pipe-dream, there's nothing there, Sam. There's nothing."

"I don't know what to say, man."

"Look—your friends are leaving, I think. Maybe you should go. I don't... I think I'm going to be here for awhile."

"All right. You gonna be ok?"

"I guess."

"See you at the office tomorrow?"

"Right."

"Cool then. Good night, Mr. Crane."

Raymund watched him hurry to catch up with his drinking buddies, reached into his wallet and left a tip on the table. The girl's eyes were closed, her dress thin with perspiration.

Don't you notice how hopelessly I'm lost?

He stood and drew towards the stage, stopping feet away, next to the old man.

“She’s beautiful you know,” he remarked through toothless lips, his cheeks wet and red. Raymund nodded absently. The old man was right, he realized. She was.

She swayed against the microphone, cradling it like an absent lover, bent it backwards as she embraced her crescendo. Her eyes opened—they were brown, almost black—and burnt through the room, through the city, through the earth. Raymund entertained the notion that maybe she was looking at him. But then again, maybe not.

Too misty

Her arms wrapped around the microphone stand, lips parted just so, knees bent and tip-toes extended.

And too much

He peeled the wig from his head, his hair itself almost cobweb pale, and matted against his head like wet grass. The wig hung limply in his hand. Something... something hovered just out of his grasp.

In love...

The last syllable hung in the air for a full five seconds, for the entire night until the sunrise. Maybe that was why he was here, Raymund wondered, to hear this song. His hands found themselves clapping. She announced an encore, almost sheepishly. The bar was almost empty. Raymund. The old man. The girl. It was “Mack the Knife.”

As she moved, as she swung like a pendulum, he felt some kind of unity to his universe, not a great love or a stirring conviction or anything like that, simply the feeling that, as her arms swung and her fingers snapped, the bangles on her wrists jingling a split second in their wake, that the beat she kept was somehow consistent with the beat of the universe, that God did in fact keep impeccable time. Her eyes closed again, and, without thinking, so did his. In his mind he leaned back, and back, and back, falling clean and fast towards that place past sleep, the comfort of children and sleeping lovers and the weightless swinging motion of the song.

How can we know the dancer from the dance?

A NIGHT IN THREE PARTS

-To Liz

I.

Last time I was here
my legs galloped away
of their own accord—
each a different animal.

II.

Mint leaves like anemones
swaying and folding inward,
a vodka aquarium in your hand.
Empty tea-light, a makeshift shot-glass.

III.

I followed the trail of footprints
in the roadside sand, a path
of evolution to your discarded
stilettos, crossed so ladylike.

VIEW TO LIMERICK



CYCLING

The last time I had ridden the bike was in junior high. I was half-surprised I hadn't been a tool at that age and had my name, Mike, stenciled in big letters somewhere obvious, because I was definitely young enough to be that stupid. Hell, I didn't even have *calves* then, just bone and skin. I wrapped my hands around the old plastic grips on the handlebars, and felt the skin wear away on the same edges it had years ago. I was not pleased to be riding this bike again. Especially not then, when I was trying to pretend that Mike was a real, live college student, who ate ramen, carried everything in a laptop case, and walked everywhere.

I really didn't want to be that asshole that whizzes by everyone, mostly because I didn't want to everyone to see me as that guy. But I had to, and that's all there was to it. I wasn't going to walk to class, not with it being at least half a mile away from my room at best (that was Wednesdays, thanks to Roman Art, and a dick of an advisor) and a full mile away at worst (damn you, Statistics!). Potential Temple University freshmen, take note. Make sure you know where your class is being held before you sign up for it. Otherwise, you'll learn the first day of school that your next class is eight city blocks away because T.U. can't be bothered to buy buildings in just one neighborhood.

I suffered through the first week. I had just bought a new pair of running shoes, and cycled my second-newest pair to the role of slippers (you just bend the back in and slide in your foot), but all that walking must have destroyed the arch support because I pulled something inside my foot the next time I went running. And try as I might, none of my friends had any constructive advice. I talked about my feet two dinners in a row and all I got in response was "That's too bad," or a "Damn, that sucks." I hate platitudes.

My parents were a little kinder, and Dad offered to bring my bike out to me.

"Which one?" I said, after he made the offer.

"The Trek," Dad responded. That was the worst bike we had. I could make a better bike by giving a stoner a pile of metal and a few hours to dick around with it.

"But it's got to be flat by now."

"So? That's what pumps are for."

“Yeah, but is there any grease left? Or isn’t the chain rusty by now? Or-“

“Mike.”

“Why can’t I have the Canondale?”

“Because. It’ll get broken, or it’ll get stolen, or whatever, and then I’ll be out a thousand or so dollars. I’ll check the old one out for you, fix whatever needs fixing, and bring it out on Saturday with some bike shorts. Three o’clock good for you?”

“Uh, yeah, sure.”

“Good,” Dad said. “I’ll see you on Saturday.”

That was not going to happen. However much of a weenie I may be, there was no way I was going to ride that bike, and especially not in bike shorts. No way. And besides, isn’t college all about trying new things and changing how people see you? I thought about it awhile, and it may take a weekend and some funny looks on the subway, but I was going home to take my bike back with me. Without the bike shorts.

I thought about it over the week, and in between moments of mad bravado and mind-numbing terror I convinced myself I was making the right decision. Dad had no idea what the right choice for me was, did he? I was the one on campus, I knew what things were like, and I knew that I needed the Canondale.

That Friday, I hopped on the R5 West Trenton (making sure not to take the express. I got stuck in Fort Washington once!) and stepped off 45 minutes later, only about two blocks from my house. It was early in the afternoon and nobody was home, so I could slip in, take the bike, leave a note explaining things so dad didn’t freak out and call the cops, and get the hell out of there. The jangling of keys in my pocket frayed my already-stretched nerves. I walked slowly, consciously minimizing the noise I was making, afraid I would be spotted (Not sure by who, though). There was a car in the driveway, but mom and dad could have easily taken the subway to work. Everything was fine; there was nothing to worry about. Our laundry room has a ground level window that isn’t locked, so I slipped in through there and made for the garage.

“Who’s there?”

Shiiiiit. I just about dropped something in the back of my jeans. It sounded like dad was still home. I sighed, and surrendered.

“It’s me, Dad.”

“Why do you think you know better than me?” he pulsed.

“I don’t, Dad. I just wanted the Canondale.”

“I’m not having this argument with you over and over.”

Things kind of devolved from there. We shouted at each other for at least ten minutes. Well, he shouted, I mostly just muttered back sarcastic comments. He has this one vein (that I always thought was just one of those crow’s feet you get in the corners of your eyes) that kept popping up and down, as if each beat of his heart pushed his anger further and further out.

I was hoping I could grab the Canondale since I was already there, but no luck. Dad was inflexible, and there was no way I was going to get anything I wanted without making nice with him first. Sneaking home to steal my bike was not the way to get into his good graces.

Finally, he calmed down enough to talk about how I was getting home. Without either bike, of course.

“So, uh, could you give me a ride back?” I said.

He just glared.

I tried not to show fear as I looked back.

“No. You took the subway here, you can take it back.” I didn’t bother arguing further, and left.

A year or two ago, when I was just getting interested in cycling, Dad did what I assume dads do everywhere when they see their son taking an interest in their hobbies: he splurged. I’m not complaining, because I got a kick-ass bike out of it, but it just seemed like a quick transition from watching the Tour de France on my iPod while I waited for everyone else to finish their SAT’s to test-riding bikes in the neighborhood behind the shop.

Those bikes were amazing. I’ve never been much of an expert on anything (except maybe Transformers) but I was clearly in the realm of people who put a lot of money and effort and time into making it easier to go really, really fast on two wheels and a gear shifter. We picked out a matte-black Canondale that was mostly made out of carbon-fiber, and while we were waiting for the bike mechanics to do their thing to it we got to see the pro bikes. These were the ones my dad would snap up in a heartbeat if he had the disposable income, or if mom hadn’t specifically told him he wasn’t allowed to spend that much money on himself until he bought something similarly expensive for her (she asked for a yacht, by the way, putting things in abeyance). Anyway, I

thought my bike was light when I picked it up with two hands, but there was something vaguely ridiculous about the fact that I could easily hold a pro model in each hand. It was like holding grapefruit.

Then came the part I was dreading. I needed a biking uniform. It wasn't so much that I didn't like the way bike shorts and jerseys look, I was mostly just unwilling to let anyone else see them on me. And the unfortunate part about bike paths is that they are very often public places. Dad didn't help, of course. He owns a good dozen, some from Europe (of the really big teams) and loves all of them. I accepted a jersey from him but drew the line at wearing his bike shorts. It wasn't going to happen. I was not going to have people see me in my dad's bike shorts. That would be about the same as walking around in my mom's bra.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Do I have to wear the shorts?"

"Yes. Unless you want to buy a heating pad, too."

I caved in. Some parts of the body should not be subjected to such stresses, and as much as I enjoy lazing around, I try not to involve any pain in my leisure activities.

It wasn't too long before I got a chance to try out my new bike. We rode about twenty miles through a forest, and it was wonderful. Biking is so very much about rhythm and pace that it practically forces your mind to ignore deep, complex thoughts, and focus on the feeling in your thighs as you sprint up a hill or in your calves as you pedal steadily over flat areas. I knew why my dad liked this so much. It would be wrong to call it meditative, but it was certainly relaxing.

The plan was to bike down a trail that would eventually cross a highway (over a foot bridge), turn around there, and come back. Simple. Things were going fine up until we stopped at the highway. Or rather, when we picked things back up. See, remember when I said biking is about rhythm? Well, it's not that simple. When you learn to bike, you learn that your body has a momentum, just like your bike. When you're lifting or doing push-ups or using weight machines, it's all about how much power you can generate right then, right there, and you go until you quit. Even when you're running, you just keep your legs moving until you're done, and can't go any further. On a bike, it's totally different. Not only does it keep moving after you stop pedaling, but you can raise and lower the resistance too. This means that you can

bike on a tough gear and pedal slow, or use a lower gear and pedal fast and still go the same speed. All that matters is what works for you. Every biker has their own unique mix of pedaling revolutions and gear setting.

When you find that groove and keep it, you'll be fine. You could keep on biking in that groove until you hit a wall. Finding that groove is what keeps you focused, and what gives things the "meditative" vibe I was telling you about earlier. But...when you break that groove, and break the expectations you've built into your very body, it doesn't work. Your body, I mean. It just doesn't accept the new perspective you've given it. You can push it, you can manage it, and you can even change it, but that change is the physical equivalent of having your mind completely blown, on the scale of a 12 hour paper-writing bender.

Anyway, I was just learning about finding and losing my groove on the second half of this trip when my dad looks back at me. Since he's been riding for decades, essentially, he's learned a few tricks, and one of those tricks is being able to bike with no hands. Seriously. He doesn't just lift them off the handlebars for a second, he takes both hands off the entire goddamn bike and scratches his head and drinks his water and eats his energy bar or whatever else he feels like doing. So, he looks back, completely in his element, and grins.

"Nice day to ride, huh? How are you doing, Mike?" he says.

"Fine!"

"Having some trouble? Do you want to stop?" He was grinning, but he wasn't just looking at me. He was evaluating me instead, judging whether or not I was capable.

"No." I spoke in between breaths. "I'm fine." Pause, breath. "How far have we gone?"

"About seventeen miles." He resumed his grip on the handlebars, but continued the conversation with me. "We're getting close to the car. How's the new bike?" he answered smoothly.

"Good." Pause, breath. "Feels light." Pause, breath. "Need tape for the grips."

He laughed. "We could look for some in the garage. Why? Are your hands slipping?"

"No." Pause, breath. "Yes."

He glanced back again. "Your shoulders are rocking back and forth. That'll happen when you get tired and start to struggle."

“No shit”, I whispered. Still, tired as I was, I was in a fairly good mood. Riding on a secluded forest trail gave me a chance to get used to the bike and the (shiver) bike shorts, giving me plenty of opportunities to nearly crash my tightly-ensconced ass into the trees on the side. If appearing in public in these clothes was like signing up for two hours of water-boarding, then I could say I had survived the first ten minutes.

We made it back to car pretty soon afterwards. I hopped off the bike and nearly fell over. Turns out there is actually a muscle on the outside of your leg that you normally don't use much, but bikers use it *all the time*. The kicker was, the only way to strengthen it was to go biking, and if you've never gone biking, it's weak. I walked my bike around to the back of the car feeling like I had a meter-long ruler strapped to each one of my thighs, with a couple of free weights thrown in for good measure. Dad, packing his bike, spoke while I sat on the bumper holding my lightly-used merchandise.

“That was pretty good. Nice trail, huh?”

“Yeah, Dad.”

“How are those legs feeling? Been awhile since you biked, right?” He reached over to pack my bike too. “The last time I remember was that autumn your brother left for college.” He laughed at the story he was about to recount. “You rode right into my leaf pile. Remember? Flipped right over the handlebars!”

I pulled the obligatory polite laugh, saw his face, and thought *the hell with it* and giggled until we both were grinning like idiots.

I felt good. It was that kind of feeling you get after a good workout, but it was also just nice to be out with my dad, sharing a moment. And then Dad broke the spell.

“Next time, let's bike out to that college mom said you were interested in.”

I was so very excited to have potential classmates see me not only with my dad but dressed up like a tool doing something that makes me look like a total prick. No. I could not wear those shorts around people whose respect I wanted. Of course, dad would be wearing them too, and...well, that thought just doesn't bear thinking about. I might just have to tell mom I was interested in schools on the West Coast.

“Uh...yeah...let's see,” I mumbled.

Dad looked over at me again. He had already decided his opinion, and now he was waiting to see my reaction. He grunted as I shifted

nervously, and looked away.

“I guess we could always do this trail again. I know a few others in the area, too.”

“Yeah, definitely.” Sorry, Dad. I love you, but those shorts are just too much. “Are they all in forests?”

He laughed. “Nope! Guess you’ll have to let someone see you, huh?”

Damn.

I got used to looking like an idiot, and I got used to being seen in public with my dad. I got used to riding on a good bike. And we eventually did end up visiting Temple University, except I managed to convince dad to use the car like a normal person. I pointed out that showing up sweaty and gross and in bike shorts (except that last part) was not the best way to impress an admittance board member.

And then I started school there, and it drove all of this out of my mind. Two weeks later, I’m in desperate need of a bike, and I give dad the “desperate student” call, except this student is desperate for transportation, not for money.

He ended up coming on Sunday. I called him back and asked him if he could do it then, since I was planning on doing things on Saturday. He paused for a second; my heart stopped and I thought he was going to tell me to suck it up, or he wouldn’t bring the damn thing. Instead, he agreed without a fuss, and I hung up wondering what the hell kind of game he was playing.

That Sunday, he just dropped the Trek off, gave me a hug, and then roared off. That was fine with me, for the most part. I was planning to go see a movie using one of the rooms with the big projector screens on campus that night, and having a bike meant I could move around campus at will. More importantly, it also meant we wouldn’t have a repeat of the scene at home.

Saturday night, I realized a couple of things. One: Drunk people tend to stick together in crowds, making it easier to avoid them. Two: Dad is right way too much of the time.

I was weaving my way through staggering upperclassmen someone stumbled off the firm, steady earth and onto me. Somehow, he knocked the chain off the gears. I managed to keep my balance, but the lack of resistance on my pedals sent my madly spinning legs flying as the resistance on the gears dropped to nothing. I swerved again; my

foot touched the ground, and collapsed onto the grass next to path I was riding down. Of course, the other drunks thought this was uproariously funny, so I took my bike and walked it a hundred feet down away from them to a bench. I sat and tried not to snuffle for a minute. Finally, I checked myself over, but I wasn't bleeding so I moved on to the bike.

It was garbage. I'm no mechanic, but the gear was hanging on the frame, and the old paint looked like it had been dragged through gravel. I dropped the bike and slumped down on the bench, stewing in thoughts of ramming my bike into the crowd of easily-amused drunks. My ass hurt. And I was in no mood to watch a movie anymore.

I realized that if dad were here, he probably would have made fun of me. "Having trouble on that bike again? Ah well! At least you can't blame it on my pile of leaves anymore!" I felt more homesick than embarrassed. I was wrong again, as usual, and that meant it was time for a gear change between me and my dad, because we were both struggling with the pace.

L'ANGE DU PARC DU MONT ROYAL



THE MOMENT I SAID IT

Gobble them right back
up like Skittles, the new words
on his face-turned-page,
backspace, white-out, strike out! No,
I didn't mean it. Don't go.

TO KNOW

(when i get angry,
the ugly rings around my knuckles carve
into the wooden door to my room,
and my eyes become cracked mirrors, kaleidoscopes.
i rip the roots of my toes from the floor
and eat away at the weeds behind my tongue,
and suck up the saliva that pools in my throat.)

the older man from next door looked at me yesterday
with red eyes and chapped lips as he returned from the hospital.
the cloud white of his glance cleared and in an instant
we were stripped to only blood and body.

out of focus and back in his house, he dropped
to the kitchen floor and blankly gazed into his hands,
the palms and wrists, the skin and veins.
what was gore and guts in the empty shell
of his shrinking fingers? and he sunk
into the bowl of his body and sobbed.

(when i get angry,
my arms branch into wild waving until they break.
but with a cast, i can ache through winter restrained and calm.)

THE 2ND OF JULY

All three of us are trapped in the concrete box, so we take the stairs out. The air is a putrid slick and the steps wind me. Nothing new at this point, only got one lung that actually works. When we finally escape from the parking garage, office buildings block everything I wanna see. The air is muggy and buggy and I hate the city. At least, today I do. Even though it's 400 degrees out, I really don't wanna take off my jacket. I'm hiding things under here.

I walk behind my parents out onto the sidewalk and deeper into the city, not caring to be seen. Motorists are idling in their idols to the right of us, and I swear those idolaters are giving me the stink eye.

"So where do you want to go?" asks my dad when we reach the street corner. "We've got a couple hours 'til the game."

"It doesn't really matter, we don't need a plan, let's just keep walking," I say.

My mom doesn't say anything, a sign that says she's fine with that idea. But I see from the sour look on her face that she'd rather have gone someplace else today. Like to Amish country.

Philadelphia is busy, even for a weekend. I should know, God knows I've been here enough times. The sky is orange and hazy and the sun is just a blob splashed across it. We cross some streets against the lights, and finally we come to something that looks promising, an open park. Independence Hall and some other buildings. The park is surrounded on all sides by skyscrapers, financial institutions I've never heard of but which obviously are important to somebody. There are really a lot of people walking around, but I just shrug it off as I drift off into to my own personal la-la land. I guess that's what happens to your attention span after having eighteen years of TV injected into you. Oh how I hate the TV, the inanity of it. Watch four hours every day.

Mom and Dad talk to each other for a little while. I stand there looking up in the sky for the sun. It's disappeared somehow. They decide that we should take a visit to the inside of one of these buildings. I don't really care, I just came for dinner and a Phillies game. I didn't know we would be tourists. I guess there are worse things I could be doing. Like watching a TV show about a city. We walk down the red brick walkway that cuts across the park and go into Independence Hall. I see that it's decorated pretty obscenely, even by Colonial tourist-

attraction standards. Banners and balloons and red, white, and blue cover everything. The air-conditioning system is broken, and I feel like the delegates did in that sweltering summer in that fateful year of 1776 blah blah blah. Ben Franklin then proceeds to give me a whack over the head with his cane. It's 4th of July weekend. Oh wow, hold on there a minute. Oh, this is strange. I didn't feel anything about completely forgetting the 4th of July. I mean we even took a long trip to my aunt's house by the lake yesterday for a patriotic celebration, and still, no Liberty Bell's ringing in my head. It's a little odd.

Wandering around by my parents' sides, I try my best to think about something that I know means something to me. I try out blatant sentimentality in the memories of all the good times I had at that lake when I was young. Like that time I jumped in the freezing water after we had just hiked through a forest full of poison ivy, or the time I tried to go jet skiing, didn't let go when I fell down, and almost drowned after being dragged a hundred feet. Still, nothing. It's a little weird that I'm not feeling anything in this place and on this day. At all. Should I be worrying about this?

Briefly breaking through my daze, I realize I'm not actually in Independence Hall, but rather some newly built imposter. I wish I could pay attention more. I can't seem to find the button to turn off the reruns in my head. Maybe that's why I'm not feeling my national pride. I'm not even in the right building. Hmm but this does look interesting.

I shuffle over towards a big poster of Ben Franklin. Maybe I can find a way to jump start my patriotism here. It's filled with all kinds of useful information about his life that I forget five seconds after reading it. I'm interrupted in my quest for national pride when my mom informs us that she has to go to the bathroom, even though she just went an hour ago. I think my parents are regressing to infantile states. I predict that my dad will forget where we parked our car. It hurts badly to see them like this. God cracks his knuckles and starts playing my psyche like a xylophone.

As we're waiting around for her to get back, I walk back over to the poster to see if I can have a conversation with Ben Franklin.

"Hi Mr. Franklin."

"Oh hold on there, let me just finish having sex. Okay, done. What's up kiddo?"

"Should I love America more?"

“Shouldyou?”

“I guess.”

“Well my son, try and work on that. An early worm is worth two in the bush or whatever. Alright gotta go, a very nice Mademoiselle has come to visit. Happy July 2nd.”

“July 4th.”

“I know what I said.”

After navigating through the throngs of Asian tourists and belligerent merchandise vendors, we make it to the outside again. My head is ringing and the only thing I can feel is the heat boiling me alive. But I really can't take the jacket off. Too many scars to hide. They are not metaphors. We walk against some more lights and past some very sad looking carriage horses until we finally reach the real Independence Hall. Most of it is roped off, and when we walk around the edge of the building to find an entrance in, an armed security guard informs us that we need to buy a ticket, and that all tickets are sold out. God Bless America. And away we go.

More time to kill, more aimless wandering. My dad grew up in this city, but it sure doesn't seem like it. We walk past some very old churches and again, I'm not feeling anything. Maybe if I just took a look inside, I could find some meaning in there. The front door is propped opened and I peek in while my parents keep walking. Jesus Christ, I can't believe it. The stained glass and the holy pews don't make me feel anything. I wonder if there's any meaning in this damn city at all. My parents have stopped by the traffic light and are waiting for me. There's something in my mother's eye that says she's proud of my interest in the old church. But what I see in my father's impatient body language reminds me why we haven't been to one in fifteen years. Just as I leave to catch up with my parents, I see the G-man sitting in the corner next to the holy water twirling a drum stick in his hand. Something tells me he's getting ready to increase the beating.

Across the street, we go into a gift shop with little Ben Franklin Bridges in the windowsill. I don't even bother looking for meaning in here, but from the long lines it appears that hasn't stopped others from worshipping the mighty trinket. My thoughts drift absently to the idea of jumping off the real Ben Franklin Bridge, but it's just a blank track stuck on repeat in my head. It's been that way since a few years ago

when I woke up drowning in my own blood. Again, this is no metaphor. As I sat there choking on the blood from my artery and observing the looks of terror in the faces of my parents, I realized living was something I'd like to continue doing for a little while yet. As I conjure up that memory for the thirtieth time that day, I see Big-Daddy G holding his hand over his mouth so that he doesn't snicker too loud. Laugh it up, you bastard.

All through this, my father keeps bugging to buy me something.

"How 'bout a key chain?"

"No.

"How 'bout a shot glass?"

"No.

"How 'bout a t-shirt?"

I want to tell him to please, just fucking stop it. It just pisses me off when he tries to do those things. So I walk out of the shop empty-handed, feeling a tinge of guilt. My mom has three more key chains to add to her collection though. How the hell did she find one of an Amish buggy all the way out here?

Oh God, there is nothing to do in Philadelphia. The only real entertainment I can get from being here is dodging traffic. Those idolaters don't seem too happy when I impede the progress of their temple though. I wonder what makes all the idolaters so angry. Maybe it's because they're stuck in Philadelphia. We continue walking down the sidewalk and in an alley way to my left, I see a man curled up under his coat. I again try to summon some sort of sentimentality, remembering the day ten years ago when my mom and me drove home after a night of heavy shopping and passed an old hobo holding the pathetically made sign "Will Work For Food." In the backseat among the piles of shopping bags, I cried for thirty minutes straight, but did it so quietly she never knew a thing. I feel something roll through me this time and for a brief moment, I'm tempted to go back and look for meaning under that crumpled up jacket.

We're stopped at another street corner again.

"So- where're we goin' now?" asks my dad.

"Oh I don't know," replies my mom.

"Do you want to get something to eat?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Any place in particular?"

“I’m not sure.”

“Bookbinders it is then.”

I know it’s that Lancaster buffet she is really hoping for though.

When we arrive at Bookbinders, the excitement never ends. The front door is thrown wide open, but the maitre-d informs us that they’re in between lunch and dinner. We’d have to wait another hour. The air conditioning feels so good that I could almost wait that long. Maybe if I could just peek in the kitchen, I could find the chefs cooking up some meaning. But we walk back outside instead. It’s so hot now that I could bake a loaf of bread in my jacket, which would actually be a good thing because I’m getting so hungry. But I won’t take off this jacket in public. So many scars, nobody should have to look at them. I’m out of breath again and getting hungrier and inexplicably sad, too. The Notorious G.O.D. is on a twenty minute drum solo. I used to be in such great shape, but now I probably couldn’t even get to the top of the Ben Franklin to jump off of it.

And my dad is getting angry because we’ve been walking around Philadelphia for about an hour and haven’t really done anything. I’m out of breath and hungry, and I see in the way my mom winces that her arthritic joints are bothering her. We’re all getting tired of fending off the multitudes of homeless veterans. I feel a pang of patriotism thinking about America’s vast economic wealth. But I smother it with a pillow as fast as I can. I haven’t found a shred of any meaning lying around here yet, and I’m beginning to seriously panic. I don’t even know how I’ve gotten to this point. I guess they really didn’t cure it after all. It’s still eating away a part of me.

All the way on the other side of Center City, we find what on the outside appears to be a very good restaurant. The brick building is low and stately. The “First Restaurant in Philadelphia” it proudly and loudly proclaims on the front door. Two very large American flags adorn the sides of the entrance. Sounds interesting; a good meal usually makes me feel better. I think it’s the simple pleasures in life that allow you to keep your fingernails dug in the concrete ledge of the 95th story a little longer. As we walk in, there is nothing but an empty hallway in front of us until a lady in full colonial costume comes out of the wall to greet us. She grabs three menus and takes us to our table in a room to our left. The place is empty, except for one lonely-looking bachelor in the corner. As we sit down, he eyes me in a way that makes me think of the idolaters.

Behind him, there is a fire burning for some reason and all the

furniture is made of wood. Insipid harpsichord music comes bouncing in across the shiny wood floors from a room across from us. A large party of people walks in not long after we do and the playing gets a little louder and livelier. The smell of varnish and gourmet food impregnates the humidity of the room.

Flipping through some pamphlets I grabbed on the way in, I try my best to focus my attention. But it's getting harder. I do learn some things about this place though, like that the room where we're sitting in is the map room. I look up, and in a surprise plot twist, I see that the room is covered in colonial-era maps. I also learn that the owner and executive chef of this venerated American institution has utterly prostituted himself with merchandising. I think there's a lesson in there somewhere.

By this point in the day, Our Lord and Savior has thrown away the drum sticks, and with a hundred of his most trusted saints, has begun river-dancing all over my psyche. It's so hot, I can't take it anymore. I've even begun searching for meaning under the dinner-ware. And the menu is full of animals I won't eat. Little lambs and rabbits and baby calves. And then God whispers into my ear "But what makes pigs and chickens and cows okay to eat?"

"Fuck you, sadist!"

I order from a very unhappy waiter in full colonial-era dress the pepper pot soup first, Martha Washington's own recipe, and a morally acceptable lobster pot-pie. He brings it out pretty quickly. It's in a not so authentic pewter dish and when I finally slurp into it, it's so spicy, heat shoots from my eyeballs. I just can't take this anymore, but I eat it all. He takes it away and brings out my lobster pot-pie in record time. It's so delicious, but I don't care; I just want to breathe fresh air again, just need to. I can taste my hatred for this city, for all cities, baked into the soft and buttery crust. But no meaning. In the sauce I see the evil of TV and cars and patriots floating around. But no meaning. Why don't I care about America and every other country on this planet? Why don't they mean anything to me? I don't know, but I hate this lobster pie, so creamy and delicious. And I'm sick of eating other living things, too. I'm sick of wheat and lettuce and apples and cows. I'm sick of vegetarians and carnivores and parasites. But most of all, I'm sick of you, God. I see you up there on your back, laughing your ass off, tears coming out of your eyes. "You'll get yours, asshole" I just wanna scream out loud

but as I look down again, I see on my fork a chunk of the tender cancer they cut out of me as a boy and the shit is scared out of me. I drop the piece on my lap and jump up from the burn on my knee. A yellow stain spreads around the crotch of God's Levis as my heart makes ready to devour itself. Until I find meaning at last. Right there in front of me the whole time. How could I have missed it?

"Lawrence are you okay?" asks my mom with concern.

"I'm okay," I say, slowly sitting back down again. She's the only one that ever calls me that.

"Just burned myself a little."

Right there it is, been there for eighteen years. In the faces of my parents. True concern etched into their graying features. It's love. Something I didn't think still existed. Something real that no country or city or brand-name could ever touch. Something with no arbitrary lines or towering facades or manipulating jingles could ever take the place of. A dam bursts and a deluge washes away God. Right there the whole time, the meaning of it all. Something real. For the first time in my life, my daze is utterly shattered, and in this new clarity, I see them not as my parents, but as real people, people who are stuck on this rock just like me, people who are doing the best they can for one another, the best they can to keep their heads above water in this flood of meaningless tragedy. I reach for the zipper of my jacket and pull it down slowly, savoring each burst of cool swirling around me, swirling around the scars that everyone can now see. But only the people sitting next to me know how they got there.

As I sit at home on my couch after the day has ended, God has yet to get his. For some reason I think of what Nietzsche once said. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." I feel inclined to disagree with the fucking idiot. The Phillies lost their game, waiting till the last inning to do it of course. But that doesn't matter to me anymore. I was happy to share the loss with the two people sitting to the side of me. I finally feel cool now, like a lover after his work is done. I scratch an itch on my leg and open up a brightly colored bag, taking the lives of some salted-potatoes. I left my jacket in the car, and a wicked draft is circulating around the living-room. Goose bumps raise up on my arms as I reach for another victim. I try the best that I can to ignore the coldness.

The channel changer is lying right next to me, and the temptation is tangible. I feel a junky's urge to flip to the channel where I can watch highlights of the game I just saw an hour ago. But as I finger the scars criss-

crossing my chest, and find I am able to resist. I get up off the couch and silently dig in the back of the hallway closet for my old painting supplies, grease from the chips smearing everywhere . Haven't used 'em in ten years; can't believe my mom hasn't thrown 'em out yet. I think tomorrow I'll paint a picture of Philadelphia so I can see it again once more. Or maybe I'll just pick up pencil and paper and write a story about the city. Either way, I think I might be able to find meaning in there at last, meaning that I myself can create. But not tonight. The loud snores of my dad upstairs are like a lullaby to me and it makes my consciousness drift away. I quietly close the squeaky door and trudge up the stairs to my room, leaving my treasure behind in the closet. Deep down in the metaphors cutting across my heart, a single flower takes seed. But now is not the time for it to bloom. Now it is time to rest. Tomorrow the Exulted One will swim back up river with a new bag of tricks for me. This time, I want to be ready.

A THREE-PART STUDY IN MUSICAL RELATIONS

Preface, or a Brief Explanation of My Neuroses

I love to write lists. Once you get in the habit of orderly thought, it's difficult to stop. Each year I leave space on my walls so I can stick these notes somewhere I won't forget and lose them. And each year they accumulate, dangling from the white plaster like leaves on a tree drawn by Dr. Seuss, serving as some kind of OCD diary of my life. They flutter beside my desk, reminding me of things done and things that need doing. And once a year, I take them all down and start fresh. Not because of some desire to move on with life and start anew, but because at some point people begin to worry about your mental health when the only thing hanging in your room are sticky notes.

These lists fall into two categories – the practical and the less so. There are notes dictating what chores I need to accomplish, to whom I need to write thank-you notes, what books I need to remember to borrow from the library next time I'm there. These are the practical ones. Then there are the ones that detail lists of people who look like me, records I would like to get on vinyl, and things that I think I might be allergic to but have no proof of. These are less practical, but equally important.

Part One, The List Begins

I've written an impractical list of music that reminds me of people I know. This came about after rediscovering a compilation CD that my best friend gave me before she left for college. There was music on there that had always reminded me of her, but for no discernable reason; I just assumed it contained her essence or something along those lines. Though I was disappointed to find that this was not the case, it was still pleasing to have a reason to attribute these songs to her. As I flipped through the tracks, I wondered what other music I ascribed to people I knew.

Now, I must note here, that as a general rule, just about all of the music in my library reminds me of someone or something, I think this is the case for everyone. So for the sake of not having to catalog over 2000 songs¹, I made the decision to narrow the field by creating a list of

only one genre of person.

Men.

Or more specifically, men who I had been in love with at some point². This required a list of its own before I could begin my original endeavor. If you have never taken stock of the people you have loved in your life, be prepared for an odd experience. Listing them in general terms is one thing but writing their names next to one another on a page is a different experience entirely. It feels wrong, as though they should not be placed near each other. Chris, Josh, Anton, Alex; I felt so girlish committing them to paper, like I was playing a game of middle school MASH³. But there I had it, the names neatly lined up in a disturbing little row, waiting to be matched with the songs in my collection. They stared back at me, contained on the imaginary white page of a word document, judging me, waiting to be matched with something other than me.

Part B, The Selections and their Meanings

The first name on the list was that of my 7th grade boyfriend, Chris. Usually it's a 50/50 chance that he will earn a mention when I am forced to detail my romantic ventures to inquiring parties, since what we had could barely be qualified as a real relationship. We held hands, I wore his Pop-Warner football jersey on the Fridays before games, and he wrote me love notes that were then stuffed into my locker - that was the extent of us dating. The only song that came to mind when I thought of him is quite possibly the most detrimental to my musical reputation⁴. It was the first song played at my first middle school dance; "Pinch Me" by the Barenaked Ladies. I will never be able to listen to it without being drawn back to the moment when I stood alone at the corner of the mostly empty dance floor, dressed in a new skirt and top, waiting for something. Later that night, I danced in slow circles with a boy for the first time. Chris gingerly put his hands on my waist and I understood just how nice it felt to be close to someone. I've been trying to copy that sensation ever since⁵.

The next name to appear belonged to my high school crush, Josh. He was a theater nerd a year ahead of me in high school with a scrawny physique, a dry wit, and a full beard by the age of fourteen. For three years I listened to "Do You Realize?" by the Flaming Lips hoping that someday *he* would realize that we were meant to be more than just

friends. Eventually *I* realized that this was a foolish hope since we had nothing in common. At the time, the song made me think of how self-deprecating he was and how different things would be if only he knew that he had “the most beautiful eyes.” Looking back, the song now reminds me of how simple and blind my love for him was. The repeated lyrics, the stupidly simple lines all added up to paint a picture of a love that came without any deeper emotion. After he graduated, I wrote him confessing the fact that all through school I had harbored these feelings for him. As it turned out, three days before I wrote he started dating someone at college who it now appears he might marry. Signs like that almost makes one believe in fate.

Anton came next. Our relationship was probably the most volatile and short lived of them all. We met through happenstance and tried dating one another from opposite sides of the state for two months. It didn't really pan out, since I didn't have a car and he didn't have a license or the motivation to come visit me. The night he dumped me, I listened to “Everything I Try to Do, Nothing Seems to Turn Out Right” by The Decemberists on repeat as my mother drove me home. The entire song seemed to be about me and him. We recklessly made out in movie theatres and coffee shops around Burlington, then he dumped me and left me to await my ride outside in a February drizzle like the poor hero of the song. Both my memories of him and the tone of the song are tainted with a hint of sadness and resignation. Colin Meloy plaintively sings in the final line “I guess I always knew it'd end this way.” And really, so did I. No sixteen year old boy with reasonably attractive features will wait around for a bi-weekly date with a girl⁶. We were doomed from the start and some part of me knew it. So, with “a wink and a wave” he hopped in a cab while I watched the taxi lights distantly fade. And just like Mr. Meloy, I always knew it was going to end that way.

Lastly there was Alex. He stands alone as the only real⁷ and mature relationship I have had. We dated for seven months, three of which were a summer spent with 1600 miles between us. We lived on opposite sides of the East Coast, a distance that as Mr. Ben Gibbard put it “seemed further than ever before.” That season, I went back to playing favorite albums as a way to distract myself from missing the person I

loved. *Transatlanticism* by Death Cab For Cutie retained a semi-permanent place in my stereo and I listened to the singer wail out the words "I need you so much closer" as I counted down the days until I could see Alex again. In the end, I think it was the distance that separated us. Not any physical barrier⁸, but something much bigger than that. Though we seemed to complement one another, it eventually became apparent that our lives were meant to move in different directions. And so everything about the song took on a new meaning. During our time apart, all I wanted was for us to be closer in terms of miles. Yet in our time together what we needed was to be closer in terms of everything else. And though we could have changed for one another, neither of us did. Call it stubbornness, call it habit, or call it staying true to yourself, in the end it meant that we broke up for no reason other than it seeming like the thing to do. And sometimes that's reason enough.

Part III, Consequences

When the list was done, I played these songs, one after another, and tried to see some sort of connection between them. If there was a thread, it wasn't one I could find; not in the music, not in the people. These four stand apart in time and in space, with little reason for any one to know any other. The music comes from different artists at different times in different genres⁹ and there are only two things that I can see binding these men in any fashion. The first being that they'll all probably be jobless when they get done with school¹⁰. The second being me.

I initially compiled this list out of curiosity; I wanted to see if the people and music that have influenced my life worked together like some sort of cosmic playlist. And maybe they do, but as far as I can see this mix is in serious need of some reworking. There are no bridge songs that tie the big moments together and there's no flow to keep the mood going. Maybe what I really need to do is not focus on one aspect of my life, but many. Maybe narrowing the list to just men forced me to eliminate some essential tracks, because after all, there's a lot more to my life than just a handful of guys who thought I was worth their time. I think that's the trouble with list-making sometimes: you get so focused on the obvious items to write down, you can forget that the

world isn't made up of categories and numbered lines.

1 And I would catalog every single one; that's the beauty and the curse of being so damn compulsive.

2 Don't ask me why I picked men out of all of the possible groups of people that I know. The only answer I have is that they are a relatively small and finite group. This makes it easy for me to make note all of them, even if it is a little sad to see just how short that list is.

3 For those of you not a female born between 1985-1995, MASH is a fortune telling game in which a list of desirable homes, husbands, cars, ect are generated. Then a number is selected and these items are systematically crossed off, leaving one in each category. This is your indisputable future. Or at least until you pick a number that renders a desirable outcome.

4 My reputation being one of someone who loves bad rap and The Decemberists. So really, there's not much of a reputation to be ruined.

5 With varying degrees of success

6 Unless she's one of *those* girls, which I never was nor do I think I am ever capable of being.

7 Real referring to the fact that we actually did things that most couples do, as opposed to the contrived or misguided attempts at having a boyfriend that came before.

8 That was never really an issue, other than being a pain in the ass.

9 A possible exception being The Decemberists and Death Cab For Cutie, though I feel they represent very different aspects of the Northwestern indie rock scene in the early 2000's. But that's not what this essay is about.

10 An artist, a philosopher, a loafer, an activist – what else would you expect of them?

I WILL NEVER SKIPSKIP A ROCK

I'll tell you what I'm not doing this August
I'm not going to see *Les Miserables*
I'm not going to see Bruce Springsteen
I'm not going to Maine to see the rising sun on Cadillac Mountain
At 4:30 in the morning, watching the gleam burn away
The sea of mist and fog covering the ocean waters
Making islands into mountaintops
I'm not going to write immortal literature
Or even forgettable poetry
Scattershot, one-shot, no shot
I'm not going to fall in love with every pretty girl I see
Even though I will fall in love with every pretty girl I've seen
I'm not going to shake Ken Watanabe's hand
'Cause I get the impression he's probably a dick
I'm sure he's not
He's probably as human as a human gets
But I'm not going to Japan for him, or anyone else
I will however write poems that are hardly poems
Fiction that is mostly factual
I will pull an F. Scott Fitzgerald and drink myself half to death
But I'll pass on the tuberculosis
There will be messages sent in bottles, across airwaves
Across soundwaves
Across state-barriers, freeways, highways, expressways
Segways
I will burn in the sun like an ant under a magnifying glass
Presumably there will be less combustion, but you never can tell
There will be one-armed bandits and samurai
Tossing sticks and throwing knives at one another
And one will be blind, the other will be mentally-challenged
And it will be glorious in its absurdity
And it shall mark the end of an epic journey
An end to every journey ever deemed epic
That's just pompous, so eliminate that line
From your mind, from my mind, from this page

I Will Never Skip a Rock

From the digital molecular matter that will eventually form all-knowing
Supercomputer bastards, Godless, fatherless, soulless
They will have no appreciation for blues, or The Blues Brothers
And this won't be immortal, or amoral, or memorable
At least most of it
It will be effervescent
You've probably already forgotten how it began
I know I have
But isn't it beautiful how we got here?

AMWAY MAN

I realized one day in the middle of the 40-minute drive my family took monthly to see my grandparents that the visits were becoming increasingly more uncomfortable. A sense of claustrophobia and despair descended on the car the closer we got to their house, and we were acting out a sort of surreal *Lord of the Rings*-esque mission to Mount Doom, bizarre Gollum-shaped guilt for not visiting sooner chasing us onward. I looked over at my little brother, whose arms were crossed in front of him and whose face was contorted into a pout any six-year-old would have envied. Ross, by this time, was seventeen and six-foot-two, no longer a scrawny blonde kid with a buzz cut.

“Do we really have to go?”

My mother sighed before answering with a weary “Yes, we do.”

My father chuckled at something on NPR, then continued my brother’s line of questioning without skipping a beat. “Are you sure? I didn’t bring any socks. I don’t think that your father will let me in the house for fear of *foot oils on the carpet.*” He and Ross collapsed into giggles while my mother rolled her eyes and told them to behave themselves or *else*, the hanging threat of ‘I won’t cook for you this week’ filling the spaces between her words. I just looked out the window. We had been drafted to help install an air-conditioning unit for them after lunch, and no one was quite keen on the idea of hard manual labor under the auspicious gaze of my grandfather.

The trip hadn’t always been this filled with looming dread. I had many fond memories of going to the grandparents’ house on Christmas Eve, filled with the vibrating, explosive excitement of a kid on Christmas. Being proud Swede-descendants, the night was filled with the food of our heritage: the bland horror that was potato sausage, Swedish meatballs drowning in a lake of liquid fat and pork drippings, the overbearing stench of ludvisk, and fruit in punch-flavored Jello. My grandmother was from the Midwest, and some things just stuck.

A small gathering was all that we ever had—my grandparents, an aunt or two, and my parents, brother and I. I always thought that was how Christmas was supposed to be spent: a warm hug of an evening filled with presents and food that didn’t necessarily have to be good but was special by Christmas’ association, and I never took for granted the

intimate and quiet setting.

When I got older, I did begin to notice a difference between the Christmases of my classmates and my own. Their celebrations were giant migrations of family members, both welcome and not, converging on a single house: eating, drinking, and exposing the delighted younger generation to a rainbow of questionable behaviors. The prospect of my Christmas not being the rule but rather the exception was as alien to me as the idea of not knowing how many cousins one had. (Seven on a good day, when you didn't include pets or my uncles, who delighted in blowing things up far too much to be considered actual adults.) It was around that time when I realized that my grandfather came up a lot more often in conversations that had ominous tones by my parents- the kind that were most often used when I told them that Ross had broken something.

I had always known Grampie Mac was eccentric. He would go out of his way to pick up change on the street, even if said change was under a bench. Or under someone's shoe. He would start conversations with any person that met his eyes: on the street, at the grocery store, in church. I remember an ill-fated trip for ice cream where he carried on a rather one sided conversation with a stranger's five-year-old girl for an eternity, while I squirmed under the stare of the disapproving father who radiated hostility like a small sun. I didn't know what the word "pedophile" meant at the time, or even that such people existed, but I could feel the filthy condemnation in the man's stare. When we left, Gramps smiled and waved goodbye at the little girl. I didn't meet her father's eyes.

"I just love talking to people," he said after we were back in the car.

"Yeah, me too," I replied.

Grampie Mac lived in the past, where everything was bubblegum and pop songs, where the kids could play a good game of kick the can in the front yard and never had to worry about making it back home in time for dinner, where starched shirts and ties and an honest day's work were all that one needed in order to be successful.

When my mother was young, back in the day, he was a salesman of the Willy Loman strain. The company he worked for, Amway, was only a couple hardly-legal steps above a Ponzi scheme. The job required Gramps to sell trinkets and irons and other household items to the supposedly willing public, while simultaneously finding and employing

new salesman. For each additional sale or salesman or investor he found, he got a percentage. It couldn't fail. My mother remembers long nights of strangers coming to the house for a free meal cooked by my grandmother while Gramps would preach at them, "Be your own man! Take control of your life!" which inevitably would turn into, "Whaddya' mean 'how do you make a profit?' I just told you how!"

He wasn't that successful at his job. Yet he continued to attack the job like a shark chasing chum, expecting something more substantial, while his family's savings dwindled and the portions at dinner grew smaller and smaller. My grandmother found a job in Boston to make ends meet while my mother and her sister were in school and never complained as he continued to smile and pitch his ideas to random strangers he would meet on the MBTA. No matter how much they were in debt or how thin they had to spread their money, he never once considered a new job. He liked the one he had, and he had seen his contemporaries make good money through the company, and that was all the motivation he needed. Any complaints or questions otherwise were not condoned.

I never realized how much of an effect his personality had on people until the day I experienced it myself. I was eleven, Ross was ten. He cornered us in the basement of his small New Hampshire house and talked at us about compound interest and the mortgage market—complete with visual cues from his Dell— for three hours. My brother only got two and a half hours of the torture, as he was brave enough to pull the "I've-got-to-go-to-the-bathroom" trick before I was, the selfish jerk, so he got to hide there with one of those computerized poker games and Christian news magazines until our grandmother called us all up for dinner. During that afternoon, I remember Gramps being almost fevered in his desire for me to learn something, everything from him. From the smallest decimal point to the largest theory— he dumped his knowledge of the subject into my poor unassuming brain, like a dump truck emptying garbage into a landfill. After I emerged from the basement, blinking raccoon-like against the suddenly bright rays of the sun, he smiled at me and said, "Thank you for listening— I just have so much I want to teach you, because you know I love you."

On the drive home Ross and I explicitly detailed the incident for our parents, reveling in the fact that it made Mom and Dad laugh deep belly shaking laughs, the kind that they only saved for the really funny

jokes. After the hilarity ended, they started talking about how Grampie Mac's behavior had made him an outcast from a great majority of our relatives. Such an idea was completely foreign to me. I had always been told that I would always be loved and accepted by my family no matter what I did, and I had been so sure that the same rule would extend to everyone.

The more that I thought about it, the more it made sense. All the stories of Grampie telling my aunt's Floridian family that boyfriend of their daughter wasn't to be trusted because he was Puerto-Rican, of him buying proof sets from the government and advising his friends to do the same regardless of the downturn of the economy, of him cornering another lost soul at the post office to pontificate to them about politics or religion or whatever else he wanted to lecture about at the moment because if it was important to him, damnit, then everyone should care about what he had to say on the subject. All the stories clicked together like a scavenger hunt jigsaw puzzle, revealing a picture that didn't look anything like the picture on the box.

"Miserable S.O.B..." Dad would say, out of hearing of my mother and grandmother. Being the closest son-in-law, (My aunt's family lived in Florida – distance for the most part made their relationship better.) Dad was often on the receiving end of Gramps' top-dog syndrome, so I supposed the resentment was deserved. Grampie had never quite given up the idea that he was successful, and coupled with the fact that he was older and by definition wiser, he considered himself in charge at all times. He had opinions about everything, whether he knew what he was talking about or not. Constantly ordered around, lectured at, condescended, my father had to put up with a lot when my grandfather was around. I had a faint memory of Gramps asking if my dad had ever heard about Amway, but that was only once and a long time ago. They don't talk about it.

We arrived at their house at 12:30 that afternoon—half an hour late. We ate lunch and waited until Gramps decided to take a nap before starting to put in the AC unit. We had almost finished the job when Gramps woke up from his nap and appeared at the doorway of the enclosed back porch.

"What're you doing? Let me see if you're doing it right."

My father, sweating under the hot New Hampshire heat and humidity shot a pleading look at my mother before saying to my

grandfather, "John, we're fine. Stay there, the kids and I are almost done." By this time, Gramps had already come onto the porch and was pushing me out of the way.

"Let me just take a look..."

"No, John." My father said firmly, motioning to me with his head to take my place back.

"Listen, Bill, I understand that you think you're doing everything right, and I'm sure you are, but if you just let me..." He reached out and started to inspect the air conditioning unit, which was at this point half in and half out of the window, the only thing separating it from the relative safety of the window and a freefall of twenty feet were my brother's white-knuckled fingers.

"John, we're fine. You can inspect it after we're done."

"Here's the problem, it has to fit on the sill level, like this." He started trying to push Ross out of the way, at which point my father slapped his hand away like he was a child. Gramps' face turned apoplectic with rage.

"Listen to me, damnit!" There was a moment of shocked silence in the house.

"No, John." My father said quietly, taking Ross's place and slipping the unit in its proper place in the window. My grandmother burst into tears. Gramps huffed back into the house to lie down, his fingers twitching and his breath ragged, his face still red. I exchanged a worried look with Ross, who returned the same look with a shrug. We left soon after that, and no one mentioned the incident again.

What maggoted holes in my heart was that Gramps wasn't the mean-hearted terror his actions made him out to be. He was obstinate to the point of hair-pulling oblivion, penny-pinching, miserly, with a temper and a tendency to be sexist and utterly impossible to work with, though at the core of his being, he was a pious and kind person. He was a man who never gave up on an idea, a man who was willing to do anything in order to achieve his dreams, a man who never let anything get in the way of something he wanted. He worked hard every day of his life, and continued that trend into his retirement, restoring and selling a triple-occupant house, traveling the length and width of Cape Cod selling his artistic rendering of Boston Harbor and the Cape surrounding it, teaching himself how to use a computer even though he was one of those tragic persons that will never actually grasp the concept of

‘computing.’ With every new experience, every new job or idea, he wholeheartedly threw himself into the midst of it, and without regret or second thoughts of any kind. There was thought and rationale behind every act of madness.

And knowing that made watching his slide into senility and senescence even more terrible to watch.

It was the little things first, like having to run through the names of both daughters and his wife before remembering what mine was. His Sudoku puzzles were grids of failure, layers of ink and whiteout neatly mountaining in between the lines. He was confined to the ground floor of his house with a strict order of ‘no stairs’ after he blacked out from a blood thinner imbalance. He had us move the entire contents of his basement office to the extra bedroom on the left. When his eyesight started getting worse as a complication from his diabetes, he got a bigger, fancier computer screen and had the GeekSquad guy magnify the icons. When he was diagnosed with squamous cell skin cancer the second time he followed every protocol assigned to him to the letter, and when he had a growth the size of a golf ball removed from his cheek, he smiled and made the nurses laugh as they gingerly moved around his IVs and stitches. He was self-conscious about the scar the surgery left behind. He feared that it would scare people when he wanted to talk to them.

He was still himself, mostly. I could see the glint in his eye as he swam against the riptide of old age in his mind. Every day that passed showed him something else that he couldn’t do anymore. He tried to paint only to find that if he sat leaned over the sloped drawing board like he used to he would turn red and have trouble breathing. He read voraciously, highlighting everything he thought was important until the pages were drenched in fluorescent yellows and oranges, but he couldn’t remember what he read. When I saw him last, he had taken up learning Spanish. He went to a teacher supply store in Boston and bought flash cards, beginner’s guides and children’s books in Spanish. It was overkill to the extreme but enough to satisfy his desire for knowledge. His accent was terrible, the only words he knew “señorita” and “bueno,” but the years melted off his face when I taught him how to say hello and goodbye.

He’s a tragic man. When we talk, I can see his frustration in his face, his posture, leaking and dancing out of his wispy hair follicles. He

knows all his treatments are just delaying the inevitable— there are not enough surgeries in the world to make his tired eighty-eight-year-old body work properly again. His mind is a rusty bucket filled with holes, and he knows it. I see every expression he feels waltz across his face, happiness and sadness, frustration, confusion, joy. When most people look at my grandfather, they see a selfish, doggedly independent and undeniably frustrating ex-Amway man, too stubborn to give up and die already. He *knows* and accepts that, and promptly continues acting the same way he always has, giving advice where it isn't warranted, talking to people who don't want to be talked to, too stubborn to give up and too busy to die.

He plans to learn Italian next.

THE RAVINE

The moon wasn't made by *Him*.
You made her. You pressed thumb to blank sky
And saw that she was good. You felt mighty
Satisfied.
Your thumbs have been rustling ever since.

1.

There is little shelter in all this
Green, green, green dynasty
Of open arms
And open mouths,
Stinking of emerald ambition.

Emerald, always emerald,
Chewing its fingers, spitting thorns, dew, and dirt,
And weeds. Too many weeds
Worming through. Absolutely incorrigible. But dirt
Can't hurt. Dirt can't hurt.

Green colonnades pretend to sleep as you walk by
Memorizing your maps. When
You're gone, they gather around the regal Redwoods to
Gossip about your origins.
And the winds, on one of their routine rounds,

Pause to inspect your abandoned wheelbarrow.
(Without you, it stands no chance against the many-voiced vines.)
The last rock has shifted into what will be your stairs. And the wind
Spreads a sabbath over the ravine, frowning at the backtalk
Of the narrow streams and rivers, gushing and churning, violating their
own laws,

Underpassing moss-draped arms that spread into the chilly dark sky.
You pass
The village of mangrove roots diving clumsily into the echoing hiss
Between the river's silt-smashed lips. Pity them. They are trying to seed
in the cold silt.
Perhaps it will green, and join the others as they break and reset like
bones.
Will you watch?

2.

One rabbit (no, two!) dart-swerve the moon,
Leaping around upturned roots, running running to you, you beneath
the bo tree.
They pant and sag at your feet, burdened by the bones around their
little necks. You ask,
Who tied that spine, those paws, those ribs around your little necks?
They won't answer. You try once more: Why do your footprints return
to your little feet?

There is nothing wrong with them. They just aren't yours. Perhaps their
Footprints do not fear the green like they fear the red-eyed Rook
Flapping up to the moon that loves him.
But tonight her pure-albino eye only has eye
For the kingdom rising from her lovesick mirror

Who murmurs his magic: Look! Look!
From the silty depths,
Just like little people,
Crowds of hopeful pale stems appear
Offering emeralds.

But she's frowning. Something's gone wrong, wrong, wrong.
One stem collapses, its green leaves echoing
Around it, and another, then another, and then another one collapses,

until

They all float along. One giant green army of little open-armed
Corpses, shivering along.

3.

Yes, yes, here they come—
She's crying silver bullets. And the trees
Crumple into wood chips. Their startled leaves
Take to the breeze, tips astonished to wings, fluttering,
Searching through the shivering stars.

The lovesick river moves on with his glossy gloves,
He spreads them smooth, he smoothes out the shimmers,
Chanting, "is this love? is this love? is this love?"
He chants chants chants,
Thinking nothing of it.

4.

Only with a lucid moon's supervision would it
Be safe to trace footprints—quiet and discreet as the stones
Sleeping on the river's hips—you must learn to part
The tangles of green ankles, green lips, green toes, green tongues
And hearts. Especially the hearts.

5.

Footprints wander along the narrow chanting river
Until they feel hot yellow power spill
Through spaces in the yawning green. And out
They waddle waterlogged over the cracked hot dirt, into the lingering
Embrace of the sloppy sun.

He spills so much love so far and so fast
They have to stop to doze
In sloppy rows before resuming. But how will they tell
Where they dwelled?

Forgetful virgins, nibbled by the ground in a sequence of sighs, a
sequence of sighs.

...

Two lions

Leave the ravine, walking serene

And blinking lazily into the sloppy sun—fat footprints dangling from
their teeth.

The lions glance at you, then stroll into the crimson fan of the horizon,
Their tails curving in the whistling winds,
Their coats shedding and absorbing sand,
Their footprints following
Like desert prophets.

6.

Walk through the layers of shivering green,

Walk past the narrow river's murmurs,

Walk over the rippling rocks, walk between the slouching weeds,

Walk beyond the self-bandaging ravine, wondering

What can love a shadow, anyway?

Then hear the clear-eyed Rook in the arms of the Redwood

Philosophizing to his one-eyed wife whom he made, made, made:

Her eye a white pebble, her body the fallen bark, her feathers

The water-dipped leaves, her heart his feather, her feat the broken-reset
twigs.

Hear him tell her:

“Love’s the Rook rising red-eyed from the silver tree,
trying to sing ‘Love’s the

red-eyed Rook.’ Love’s the moon,

soft like baby gold, as it’s carved

into a crown and rolled up steep hills.

Love’s the chanting chains of water, the green

leaves, even the stones, who

search for shelter, too,
or a way to show their tongues,
and use them. And love's the rising Rook."

7.

What can love a shadow, anyway?
The stems, the leaves, the vines, the trees
Awaken to morning's glare. Somewhere
Beyond their green ravine, new footprints awaken,
Fresh and edible as air.

And only the moon knows your distance.
And only the river will wait for more
Blood and breath from distant shores.
He will never understand why
You walk on your hands,
Hoping for doors.

Section 4. "...thinking nothing of it."—Anne Sexton's "The Fury of Overshoes"
Section 7. "blood and breath...distant"—Percy Shelley's "Mont Blanc"

INTERVIEW WITH POET ELEANOR WILNER

As seen in her most recent poetry collection, *The Girl with Bees in Her Hair*, Wilner writes with an oracle's imagination about the slowly deteriorating natural world, our shared cultural images, the declining importance of humanity, and does it all without righteousness or blame. She is a magnificently generous poet.

A Lantern editor sat down with Wilner when she visited Ursinus College on March 25, 2008 for a reading sponsored by the college Visiting Writer's Series.

ELEANOR (*referring to a Turkey, Cheddar, and Barbeque Panini she has just purchased*):

We'll keep that on hold. Unless you want to record the sound of my chewing, which could be extremely good poetics. [*laughs*] Okay, shoot.

INTERVIEWER:

In one of the Creative Writing classes, your book *The Girl with Bees in Her Hair* is being taught...

ELEANOR:

Can you still love a poem when it's been taught?

INTERVIEWER:

You can! You can love it more.

ELEANOR:

Well, it worries me.

INTERVIEWER:

I've noticed the formatting of your poems, specifically the enjambment of your lines. Poems like "Attic Light" and "Theory and Practice in Poetry" and "American Atlas" have a unique zig-zag pattern to them. And I think that form, on top of your use of spirals and swirls as images, I think it speaks to a circular connotation of your poetics. Is that a reflection of your relationship with poetry? Or does it speak to ideas of the circularity of life? What is it that drives you to be so circular in your poems?

ELEANOR:

I remember several years ago I had a poem published in England and the editor was this very proper British gentleman. And he didn't like what he called my "elbows," which brought back the mindset of "get your elbows off the table." What he was referring to were these enjambments where I broke a phrase in distinctive places, forming jagged edges. So I wrote him back, using the language of a nineteenth century woman, and said, "Well, Sir, before I picked up the pen, I used the needle."

You see, for me a line is not just a segment of type but it is the thread with which one thing connects to the next. So, while I wrote that just to be impertinent, I realized later that I really do think of lines like that. And I think it comes from a fairly contemporary appreciation of nature and the way things really are— it's not Euclidian; nature suggests that things continue and that one thing flows into another and things interconnect. And so for me it's not so much circularity, it's not that things always come back around. There's an on-goingness which says things will continue and to continue they have to change. What I think you picked up on there is a very central device of the prosody—one line has to lead you into the next. I think of it as waves.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you feel that poetry, as a whole, is moving and changing in some chartable motion? O do you see it as something that can't be mapped, something beyond motion?

ELEANOR

I think we have such a pluralistic culture, fortunately, with so many kinds of voices and so many kinds of poetry. So I don't see it as moving in a grand sense. There are, of course, some fashionable trends in poetry, but ignorance of fashion is perhaps the one ignorance that I support. Because I've seen fashions come and go and I've seen certain poets, their reputations disappear. It's nice to be able to value the differences in approach to poetry. So if anything, I think things are more *open* these days and anyone who argues for one thing rather than another is making a mistake. You have to be careful not to prescribe your own practice.

INTERVIEWER:

Would you say the renewed relationship between poetry and politics has anything to do with some general thematic shift in poetry. Is this very partisan world we now inhabit in some way influencing a general change in poetry?

ELEANOR:

Politics is a very powerful part of poetry right now, and there are many voices that are voices of protest—I believe it's a form of praise, to protest. And I don't think you can separate yourself from what's going on in the world. You see, the notion that everything is personal is an American myth. We live in a context which is social and historical—it's impossible for me to think of a poem as outside of that context in any way.

However, the phrase "political poem" is a kind of pejorative in our culture precisely for the reason that those in control don't want us to notice what's really going on. We're trying to make everything personal and it suits people who want that control. Keeping everybody focused on their "I," means we miss what's happening to "us."

I want to propose something—my friend Ilya Kaminsky gave me a better term for political poetry. He said, "In Russia we call it 'citizens poetry.'" And insofar as part of what we are is citizens, if the citizen is insulted—as I feel it is being right now—then I think there's a particular urgency for citizen's poetry. So yes, that's definitely going on and it's a good thing, it's a necessary thing. And I think it's inevitable in such a climate.

INTERVIEWER

In some of your poetry, you're writing about the destructive nature of the human condition. In "The Fossil-Poet: A Post-Pastoral," the environment of the poem is a future formed out of the "ruins of the human world." It's a world, as you write, without "contours, moving/shadows at the feet of cliffs, running streams,/ pine scent, a wind to make the branches sing," and the connotation seems to be that the extinct humans destroyed those things. Do you see us as ending in a place similar to the one in "Fossil Poet?" Do you see the human nature as inherently destructive?

ELEANOR

Well, certainly feckless and thoughtless! And yes, there are destructive urges in humans and certain situations that will bring out the worst in people. In a war context, for example, destructive things will be brought out that would never have been exercised or even dreamed of in a normal setting. And I think the desire to control nature— or not to understand the limits of control— as well as people’s fears of time itself, leads them try to subdue the very forces that we need to respect. And so, yes, if we go on the way we are going, it might get to that point.

But this isn’t prophecy like a fortune teller— it’s like what Blake said when he talked about prophecy. He said, roughly, “it’s not that you’re saying, ‘This is what’s going to happen no matter what, this is predetermined,’ this is a prophecy that says, ‘If you go on doing so-and-so, such-and-such will be the result.’” If we continue the way we’re going, continue abusing nature, continue treating one another with this sick notion of a control based on the inequality of power, then yes, I think it will end up like that.

INTERVIEWER:

But you also speak to the human condition in your poem “Species-pity,” starting out with the line: “We are the saddest species we know.”

ELEANOR:

Yes we are. But we are also—we are like the line from *Hamlet*—“O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams.”

INTERVIEWER:

So do you feel it is those bad dreams, do you feel it is because we humans are a scared species that we are driven to be somewhat destructive?

ELEANOR:

Oh yes, everybody’s scared. Once you deal with that, then you can go on in a better way. But the bravado, the pretence that we’re invulnerable, that nothing can touch us, is a defense against the fact that we *are* dying. So let’s just say it out loud: yeah, we’re scared, we’re

mortal, we can't stand the idea of death, but we have no choice about it.

INTERVIEWER:

While covering the book in class, some students saw "Species-pity" as indicting and bitter, though others thought it spoke to something deeper— that humans aren't terrible because we're selfish, we're terrible because we're scared.

ELEANOR:

Yes, the end is really an admonition: if you can't get over the big ideas of who you are, then you end up "running over what has fallen in the road."

But poems are written in different moods, and there may be a bit of satire in there. It's hard to be human and some of the poems are about the destruction that comes from that, and some of them are about people like Lorca— I've just written a new poem about him, because, for me, he's the emblem of this creative force in humans which opposes the destructive part that comes from not facing your fear. And he was willing to be a sensitive being.

INTERVIEWER:

And the fact that he died at the hand of the politics that he protested against, doesn't that perpetuate the cycle of destruction? I always saw him as the martyr poet—he was a fierce voice of opposition to the Franco regime. One of the most disheartening things about this world we are in now is that this desire to cease opposition is still going on.

ELEANOR:

Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you want to convey to new poets and students of poetry?

ELEANOR:

Pablo Neruda once said there is no advice you can give young poets. That was really smart! But, you know, I really love the work of younger poets because they're turning corners that I can't even see around. And younger poets are a renewal— we started off by talking about the on-

goingness of things and fluidity, and new poets are a new hope for that continuation. Because in order to continue, things have to change. If you don't have change, then you have rigidity, you have dogma, and frozen waterfalls. So I would say the best advice is to continue. Everything important I've ever learned, I've gotten from a poem. The best way get out of your own way is to write poetry.

BURANO



UNTITLED

Uh

We are *rockwave*

Check it out real new exciting sound

We have invented a new drug that we will disperse at our shows

Army boys, fraternity men and all sorts of tan girls

The girls from the schools and ugly connected people

With lots of power will arrive at our shows

The beat will shake their feet and untie their shoelaces

That's our sound for ya real intense huh

We will get a license so you can have sex at our shows

And there will be a pre-recorded scream

That we did edit, electronically

It will also be part of the new sound

They will be weapons with which to shatter your attention

Well whaddya say we drive to the woods

4 am, tropical storm weather.

Cause we originally heard that scream we recorded

Somewhere in those woods

The block started to move with life now; it being a winter morning, the light was at a very precise clarity, and all the bare trees, sparse housing fronts and concrete stood out stark and separate as the figures gathered together.

Kiss from anesthetic

What they thought was snow was really blow from a dealer's

Whistle, more like snuff nose

Little big man doesn't try to humor you

Before they reach for the jugular

Pistol, here blood flows

From a dialectic, right by a crippled creek

Sunlight dappling off the babbling *sangre*

Out the cheek

Blood chipped tooth, sighing

Red ruby lips now

I write the fight

I want to sit and spray
Graffiti on your wall
Black inky lines cascading
Venom and vapor is me demonstrating
I drew metallic love with heart lasers
With pink and black

I think graffiti on her apartment wall
Commissioned would be ideal

Conceptually it's a weird thing
Don't say the weird thing
Which is the wrong thing

Tear apart a car, the carcass of a car is ugly
But the thing itself is lovely to use

So I'm talking carburetor
When she wants a Barracuda

I drive a black car
It looks neat in concrete
It looks ideal when its done up with rain and mist
When one headlight's out
And the brake light's always on
And paint chips everywhere

All machines are in part disgusting

I had something good to say to her
It laid in my mind

Then I imagined her

You get that apocalyptic feeling
In your hand's and your knees

If your head is the sky then hell is in the sky

The nightmare is in the back there
When it should be in the front where
She can see it

Smoke gathered blood as it took off
Muddy dialect
Street code indecipherable
Crossed in translation
Left field street limbo deal

Met the witch doctor
Arms of Benin
Armored bodies of warriors like Lenin
Except for the aims
Taunts and circumstances meant less pain

Half his face gone
And the other half fucked up
forget about it.

HARD LUCK INVESTIGATOR

Scene: Unemployment line, early afternoon, mid-march

Mortimer White (Mort) has been asked what he's doing in line

Mort: (*looks up*) hmm? Oh, me. Well, I'm what you'd call a snoop. A professional investigator, that is. Y'know, when you lot need someone checked up or watched, think your hubby is cheatin' on ya. 'Course those cases aren't why I got into the business, oh no. I wanted to be Phillip Marlowe, Sam Spade, the man who finds out what's what.

But... that's not really much of a career. So I take the snoop jobs, and the vetting, so as I can put a bit of bread on the table, maybe help some folk. But me, I got scruples. I'm not gonna set someone up, and I ain't gonna tell you any comforting lies. Guess that's why I'm not too popular.

(*looks away, seeing somewhere else, looks back*)

'Course, I been lucky a few times. Got a case that meant something, that mattered. Managed to be a Spade, a Marlowe. Those are the cases that make it all mean something. Even got called in to liaise with the police a few times, when I was on the rise. You remember that kid, Martha something or other, got kidnapped few years back? I was on that case. ---

You always hear about the parents and the community, how they feel. You see the bastards what did it on the news. But all you ever see of the kid is a still photo or two. Well, I saw Martha up close. When the case broke, I wasn't at the front, but I was there. She was smiling and waving, not a care in the world. She was back with her folks, the whole thing was over, and you could see it was already gone from her mind. It's good, being a kid. You bounce back from things like that.

How I got from there to here, then? Bad luck, nothing more to it. I got hired to find some rich broad's annoying budgie, and I get cocky. I think, "I've saved a kid, no problem with some bird." But it turns out the damn thing was a scam, being sold to rich ladies over and over, 'till they let it out of the cage and it flew back to the store. Well, this dame wasn't too happy to hear her beloved Timmy was a con artist, and she wouldn't pay me. I was depending on that money to pay rent on my office. Long story short, I lost my lease, and nobody would hire a PI without an office.

Nowadays, I just try to get a bit of freelance work thrown my way. Not much this month, though. Not much since that damn bird.

SKELETON

Our love died in New Mexico--
Dried up like the yuccas we passed
in the light of the sun bleeding out over the valley
and crumbling swiftly into the ground.
Static crying through the stereo,
We reached eighty on the lonely freeway and
sank into the skeleton of the night--
and pressing my nose to the window
I breathed that regretful cloud of unchangeable loss.
And as we swept past the gaunt faces of Mexican cemeteries
with this sense of a helpless death that can't be held
but buried,
my eyes welled until the horizon was submersed
into nothing but watery power lines
stretched back like dwindling arms
into a land which looks
much more promising
From the sky.

VIRGINIA IN APRIL



MIDNIGHT LETTER

Dear Sir and Ma'am,

I regret I must write you that your son is lost. He died last night of shrapnel wounds. I cannot say it was painless. His blood is the darkest brown on my skirt, a memory-stain.

He was a charming boy, the age of my own. Son and husband both serve in the 20th Maine.

Horror does not end with battle. I am afraid, cannot comfort you, and do not know your pain. The fear until this letter laid you and your child to rest, this is my temporary fate. My fear is greater for I know more of war: the rush of blood on thin bandages, the fetid smell of gangrene, the amputee's wheezing scream.

Half the night I write letters; two a week my own, one to husband, one to son. My heart must be hard and cramped as my hand, I have sent such love.

At the last, he called me Mother, so I forward you the fevered kiss, the hot crush of his hand before the cold crept through. I only hope that when my own must go, each will be loved so well as your William.

Too much has been said, the woman's voice in a war of men. Never honesty, only the cold, soldierly formality:

Sir and Madam,

It is my sorrowful duty to report

Your son has given his last breath

For his country. He died in bed

At peace with God and men.

Nurse Kady Brownell

THE TANTRIC SEMANTICS OF STUDYING ABROAD

She isn't wearing any shoes.

I shouldn't be staring—I really shouldn't. But Spanish is difficult enough for me to comprehend, and she's speaking hers at a mile a minute with the thickest Mayan accent I've heard from any of these locals. The translator isn't here—he's off chatting with her husband—and it's impossible to not just allow the scene to go on mute as I see this walking, talking, breathing relic of the ancient past. She's just five feet tall with her little daughter clasped in her arms, the too-big red dress slipping down over the toddler's shoulder.

I feel someone bump into me. From the corner of my eye I see Candace up on tiptoe as if to observe the woman on display in a pit at the zoo. "Can you even hear what she's saying?" she asks in a very obvious whisper. "I can't even hear what she's saying!"

I shrug. The ramshackle hut she stoops in front of is the best-kept of the five that ring the clearing off the decrepit dirt road in the middle of the jungle, the tarpaper roof's staples covered with shining bottlecaps that read ¡DISFRUTA LO BUENO! and COCA COLA. Constructed of little more than sticks, rope, and the sheared door of a white 1970s Ford truck, these hovels serve as home to the woman's family and her two uncles as they farm the rugged brown ground of an old Spanish mission set back in the forest and overgrown from years of neglect.

Going to a nearby tree, the woman says the first decipherable thing in her explanation of how she uses her hut to cook for the family encampment.

"Es sapodilla," she says with a lisp as she picks one of the fruits from the tree and hands it to her son. Without a word he begins eating it. Pointing over to a bucket full of the fruits, she launches into another rapid explanation of their uses for them.

I feel a poke on my forearm, and looking down I find it to be with the well-worn eraser of a mechanical pencil. "Did you hear what she called those things in the bucket?"

Craning my neck, I see the woman collecting a mixture of corn powder and chili pepper from another bucket into a hollow gourd.

Candace mimics me, her pencil scratching furiously over the page as she stares hard at it. I peer down to my own notebook to see my pencil rendering of the sapodilla trees as they squat like enormous mushrooms about the edge of the clearing, heavy-laden with the graphite smudges of fruit. All the waterproof pages in these little yellow field notebooks are packed with sketches: the crumbling eye of Chaac, the rain god's, stone face, the shape of a distant pyramid silhouetted against the sapphire sky, the long shadows stretching before our group as we return to the bus.

I see Candace staring at me. "What?"

"How do you spell sapodilla?"

I spell it out for her – leaving out one of the l's on purpose—and resist the strong urge to tell her that we were not going to be tested on how these people subsist off the land. A sharp whistle breaks my concentration and I see the father, a man of about thirty-five, motioning us over to him with his machete. As we watch, he scrapes it with the blade, revealing the fragile-looking fibers beneath. Beaming a gapped smile, he calls for his son Juan, who is scrabbling in the dirt with pieces of scrap metal and an old knife handle. The boy comes to his father, not even looking at him, and in the midst of his father's sentence the boy crouches and begins moving the knife like a bird through the air, the reflection glinting in my eyes as he begins muttering to himself.

Picking up one of the henequen fronds, Dr. Callahan begins stating the scientific nomenclature of the plant. I sidestep away from Candace, who is pulling out her camera to have a reference picture of henequen, and towards the outer fringes of the group, where Addie stands watching the boy play in the dirt, her head cocked to one side as she draws his arm rising far above his dark head of hair. My eyes trail past him to see the woman's two ancient uncles, roughly five feet tall apiece and topped with threadbare straw hats, standing at the edge of the family's clearing, speaking quietly to each other in Yucatec and staring at us with their enormous brown eyes as they spat out sapodilla seeds.

"Can you believe he's giving us a history lesson in the middle of their tour?" I ask her. It never ceases to amaze me that though she seems not to listen to a word Callahan says, she hears me.

"Oh, he is?" Addie asks, not looking up from her sketch. "I just

sort of tune him out—he already lectured on Maya crops.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“Hey, did you see what their son drew in the dirt?”

We step closer to him and see over his shoulder a recognizable sketch of a motmot bird, which is remarkable for a seven-year-old using dust as a medium. Glancing over his shoulder, he smears it out—leaving only the telltale penudulum-like tail of the bird—and scampers towards his mother.

I shrug. I stand in the middle ground between Addie and the group, surveying the mixed looks of disinterest and complete focus on their faces. Dr. Callahan provides a droning background to my observations of the woman talking in turn to her delighted daughter and her son, who stares up blankly at her. What is wrong with him? Is he autistic? He’s certainly displaying all sorts of warning signs, and at seven he should be talking. Have they taken him to a doctor?

I surface from my thoughts to lock eyes with Dr. Callahan, who is staring me down from beneath the brim of his ridiculous safari hat as he makes his final point. But the group is heading off towards the well, dug sometime in the 1800s at the founding of the original cattle ranch, as our charismatic translator Hugo explains, and I force a look of overwhelming interest across my face. The ancient brothers set off down into the jungle, which turns out to be a steep wooded slope that leads into the yawning, blackened mouth of a dry *cenote*, or natural cave that fills with groundwater as it percolates up through the limestone.

Their machetes hack through the underbrush, the whooshing of the scythes cutting through the air as I fall in step next to Addie. “So how worried are you about the final tomorrow?”

She rolls her eyes at me as we descend the rocky hillside, going further towards the darkness. “I have enough faith in my memory to not be driven over the edge of sanity, unlike others.”

“Dr. Callahan, what year did the Caste War begin again?” we hear Candace inquire from further up on the hill.

“My point exactly.” Addie pulls her flashlight from her pocket as we duck beneath the mouth of the cave, smiling in the glow as the blackness of the cavern dwarfs the light. I return the smile.

“Bees?!” The shout—which could awaken the dead, if not just the bees, comes from Candace above us. “Wait—I really don’t think I want to go in there if we’re going to wake them up—”

I plunge ahead, descending deeper and traversing the loose, slippery boulders until I can make out a blackened rectangle set in the bottom of the cave floor. Its low stone wall, covered with soft green moss, is illuminated by the brilliant sunlight that gleams down the well shaft from above. I move more quickly and peer into the pit, the still grey water at the bottom barely illuminated as a bat or forlorn bird circles above it. When the pair arrives around the shaft, Hugo translates the husband's words into his very percussive English. "They say the well was eh-dug in eighteen 'undred and forty-two. But the Maya who eh-lived here those t'ousands of years ago used this as a water-hole, and even worshipped down here." He holds up the butt of a cigarette. "This family still gives off'rings to the spirits that eh-dwell here—they consider this an entrance to Xibalba—their eh-sacred underworld."

Addie sits on the wall and, reaching far over into the oblivion, drops a pebble from between her caged fingers. We all watch, leaning forward like eager children. I count nine seconds until I hear the impact echo up the shaft. "The stone eh-falls thirty meters," Hugo says.

It is so tranquil, with no sounds but that of our own breathing, the wind gusting through the well shaft some thirty feet above, and the soft fluttering of the animal's wings as it circles ten stories below us. Gazing around the blackened cavern, I can almost see a Maya shaman coming down here to this entrance of their sacred underworld, lighting a pipe stuffed with wild tobacco leaves, and allowing the fragrant white smoke to billow up around him while he speaks to the long-departed of their seedy dealings in the afterlife.

Someone is talking, and I'm realizing that this idyllic scene cannot last in my present reality. I am standing in a musty old cave with two very old Mexicans, a college professor, a translator, twelve other overachieving students, and a mere three others like myself who are basking in the moment. Addie and I exchange a look as Hugo is barraged with more questions of what plants we had seen, what uses the Maya family had for them—even how the ancient Maya had discovered these uses. I breathe in and out – just breathe, to maybe taste the air of Xibalba as it rises from the depths—and fall back to the rear of the group as we leave the cavern, looking over my shoulder to commit the sight to memory.

The sun sits low over the horizon over the old hacienda as we mill about waiting to walk the two miles back. Candace, Addie and I are discussing the likelihood that Dr. Callahan will force us to go bat-netting tonight.

“I can’t believe he wouldn’t give us the night off to study,” harps Candace.

“I think I’d enjoy catching bats tonight—it lets you sit alone and think for awhile,” Addie says. “Though I’d kill to get some sleep...”

Again I stand between them. Hugo is telling the family our thanks and goodbyes as I watch Dr. Callahan approach the father with a large rectangle wrapped in simple brown paper. Though he had spent many years in the jungle, his halting Spanish is still rudimentary at best as he presents our gift. “Aqui está un regalo para Ustedes.”

Almost cautiously they gather around Dr. Callahan as he hands the present to the father. He unwraps it, wary not to tear the paper, and reveals a picture of the family from just nine months earlier when he had come to the biological field station and first met the Mayans.

Obligatory smiles come to their faces, but their eyes convey confusion as they look at one another. “¿Qué es eso?” (*What is this?*) and “¿Quienes están esas personas?” (*Who are these people?*) they whisper.

Liz, our fearless student leader (and lead student questioner) steps forward and points to the photograph daughter, still dressed in the same outfit. “Ella es su niña.” She points to the son. “Y él, él es su hijo.” Liz smiles at the woman, who gave her a blank stare back. “Y aquí,” she continues, her hand pulling the woman’s ponytail around to her front, “está mujer con el pelo negro belleza es Usted.”

A look of sudden realization comes to the woman’s face, her nearly black eyes lighting up with excitement. “¡Nos representamos! Somos nosotros!” Smiling, she looks to her son, but his interests lie in balancing the knife handle on the scrap metal.

We leave, but not ten feet down the road Dr. Callahan stops the group and explains how the worn and broken stones scattered on the ground were once used to grind maize into flour. I hear none of it – I’m exhausted, both physically and mentally, I’m sick of listening to the endless cycle of lectures and complaints, and I’m still astounded that the family didn’t even recognize themselves. How is it possible to not comprehend that it’s your own likeness in a picture? To understand that there’s a technology more advanced than making rope out of

plants, or a greater use for the hut's salvaged car door? Do they even know the outside world exists?

I feel Candace's warning hand on my arm in the same instant that I realize Dr. Callahan's monotonous speech has stopped. I look up to see him training his beady eyes on me from beneath his safari hat. "Good of you to finally join the group. Maybe you can explain how ironic this family's reliance on henequen is?"

I have no words. He allows the agonizing silence to hang before responding.

"Well, it's that they pay rent on the land to the Spanish family that used to own the hacienda and enslave the Maya to cultivate their henequen. And since the enacting of NAFTA—to influx the area with American crops and feed the hungry—their efforts to sell surplus maize or henequen are futile. Had you been listening, you would have supplemented your observances with this."

I'm not one to anger quickly—I'm really not. But for him to do that in front of *everyone*—

Minutes pass, and we're walking. Candace is talking to me in a low, reassuring tone, but my volatile mix of emotion at Dr. Callahan's words is overriding. "You know it wasn't right of him to call you out in front of the whole class," she's saying to me as we plow up the dirt road. It's the first time she's actually looked at me and not her field notes while speaking to me. "And besides, now you know something that you didn't. I'll give you my notes from today, 'cause he did say the stuff about henequen was going on the test."

I lost Addie on the long walk back, but as I collapse into my orange hammock back in the hut I hear her voice some less-than-orthodox encouragement to me.

I force a smile. "You know Addie, calling him a pompous bastard doesn't make this situation any less agonizing."

"I agree, but I could have walked away from that visit much happier not knowing that their family was going under." Picking her iPod and notebook off the table, she begins reviewing the test material for the first time. Grabbing my own notebook, I open to the first page and feel a slight twinge of panic in my heart: I don't even remember this lecture. Drawings border the entire page, which has far fewer academic than personal notes written on it. Have I really been that inobservant in class, too intent on learning through experience as

opposed to in the classroom?

In an effort to calm my racing questions, I set the notebook down and stare up at the ceiling. I listen to Candace explaining to different feeding styles of birds to Natalie, a red-headed girl who is constantly apologizing to everyone, but seems to have no problem arguing with everything that Candace states. When the topic is exhausted, their conversation turns to more of an endless barrage of worries and test anxieties and questions about the stupid pointless shit that they're never, ever going to ask us to answer on a hand-written exam. I find and crank up the volume on my iPod – which is nearly dead, thanks to the sudden demise of my laptop three days ago due to the intense humidity of the jungle – but it's still not enough. I'm trying my hardest to study, but the persistent doubt of whether or not I'm failing this course looms over me. I gloss over our presentation notes—not wanting to think about what Dr. Callahan had said—and turn to the feeding styles page.

Candace had listed every style of every bird with the utmost detail.

I'm finding it difficult to remember if ducks are surface feeders or if they raptor down from the sky to feed.

“What's the name of those bones that bats have lost?” asks Natalie. Apparently, my iPod has died. I wrack my brain for the answer as a measure of how much I've retained in studying.

“Oh God, I can't remember. Were they talking about all bats, or just Vespertilionidae?” Candace's voice is sounding especially nasal at the moment.

“Um—” The threshold noise of papers rustling slices through the stagnant air. “It doesn't—say—oh, sorry—wait—”

Addie, I can tell, is fed up as well with this third straight hour of studying. The tinny sounds of country at maximum volume carry over to me as we exchange. “Semantics,” I mouth to her.

“They can drive you tantric,” she mouths back, giving my hammock a good kick.

So while I swing I listen to the philosophical debate of whether or not whales with rear ventral fins are evolving them because they're returning from the land or planning on returning to it from the depths of the sea. As far as I know, whales are not a species with strong representation on the Yucatan peninsula. And any whales with rear ventral fins are freaks of evolution, mutated in just the right spot in the

right gene so as not to suppress them from developing.

I say nothing.

The conversation continues for the next hour. Though we break for dinner, they take their notebooks with them and constantly review at the next table over, and I listen in desperation to catch up on all the studying I've missed. Addie mentions that she's pretty sure the Mayan family's son was autistic, and while she talks at length on how much he's like her little brother I nod and agree and feel my insides twist at the thought of the henequen lecture that I'd missed while watching him. She stops talking and I begin to feel the crushing weight of the exam on me—I only have until 10am tomorrow and I'm not going to be able to focus in my hammock. What if they do ask for the specific ranges of the paca and agouti? Do I have to know the difference between the way an owl and an osprey hunt for prey? What *are* the names of those bones?

We return to our hut, where we are forced to conserve the solar electricity by studying via headlamp. I take out my notebook and try to decipher the test material from amongst the scrawled inside jokes and couplets and sketches of other students looking hopelessly lost in class. After an hour, I look around. Candace is reading up on the different wing structures of pelicans and hummingbirds. Addie is napping, curled up into a ball in her purple hammock—and I feel a sudden twinge of jealousy for her nonchalance at preparing for the exam. *At least I'm reading and not sleeping*, I assure myself.

My thoughts are interrupted as Natalie suddenly bursts in, the face below her headlamp illuminated enough to show a look of sheer terror as the screen door slams behind her. Addie wakes up behind me.

I'm expecting the tale of a narrow escape from a rampaging, ravenous tapir that chased her through the jungle. "Give me a polynomial."

I just look at her and listen as she rants.

"Guys, seriously, I am near hyperventilation. There's just too much information and I can't retain—"

"We know." Candace returns to the mechanics of flight. Natalie begins talking to herself as she searches her backpack for the eighth time that day in search of her MP3 player. "If x is seventeen," she mumbles, "then x cubed over 84 is..."

She continues muttering and looking, but soon commences

studying after gathering her notes and lamp. Candace whines about the hammock and the lack of water for showers. Natalie chums along, complaining how the toilets don't flush and how her headlamp is digging into her scalp and her eyes are straining to read her notes.

Well of course you can't read them, I think. You write down every word that comes out of Callaban's mouth.

Candace concurs and asks Natalie if dragonflies and damselflies are in the same class as butterflies, or if they have their own. I burst out laughing, the utter ridiculousness of the question ticking every humor receptor in my brain.

Two headlamps train on me. "What?" Candace demands. "It doesn't come so easily to all of us. I haven't seen you or Addie study at all—do you even care? Why did you two even choose to study abroad? It's called study abroad for a reason, you know."

Addie is out the door in a moment, slamming it behind her and interrupting my thoughts as I search for something to say. The two headlamps move from my face and back to the notebooks, which hover illuminated in the darkness.

"Candace." She looks at me.

The look on her face seems contemptuous, but maybe I'm just biased in my anger. It has a certain confused set to it that takes me back to her incessant questioning and picture-taking while the boy had sat yapping to himself in the dirt.

"Maybe you're the one that doesn't care."

My eyes assaulted by the blackness outside, I see the small light of a headlamp bobbing away down the jungle-corniced path far, far ahead of me. I set off at as fast a jog as my flipflops will allow, hoping that no jungle creatures are lurking in the darkness. Slamming that door was one of the most satisfying things I've done in my life.

The night is pitch-black as I pass trees and vines, the illumination of my headlamp dimly lighting only a tiny orb of space around me. Am I wrong to not be studying right now? How badly will it reflect on my grades that I'd rather observe and draw and nap than spend hours reading things I'll never remember, much less be asked to remember? But maybe it says something about my character, something subliminal and psychological that I really am the one who doesn't care—

Why did I study abroad?

The jungle suddenly clears ahead of me into the entrance clearing of the field station. An enormous guanacaste stretches up and up into the sky, the only thing anchoring it to this earth a low stone wall that it has steadily overgrown over the past two centuries. Across the clearing is an even larger ceiba tree, its swollen trunk drawing my eye and reminding me how the ancient Maya revered it as a symbol of heaven and resurrection. The king of Palenque, Lord Pakal, was shown on his tomb to ascend in front of one as the reincarnated maize god.

I look up to the stars, wondering which constellation they had construed as Lord Pakal resurrected. I blink rapidly and realize that there are about a million times more stars up there than I have ever seen in my life, their lights piercing the harsh black of the sky as they scatter between the constellations that I'm only vaguely familiar with. The purple haze of the Milky Way is slashed across the sky like some haphazard brushstroke on the most abstract and perfect painting I've ever seen in my life. The moon hangs suspended at a dramatic angle above the guanacaste, the bottom third of it blood-red because of the complete lunar eclipse that I had forgotten about until this very moment. I spin around where I stand, trying to understand the orientation of the earth at this latitude; the effect is dizzying and almost terrifying, making me feel as if the universe is suspended completely open and bare before me tonight and it's my responsibility to interpret those things so obviously written in the stars. I hear Addie say something to me from the middle of the clearing, for she had stopped here as well, but I have gone beyond words. They escape me once again, though the feelings are apparent as my eyes focus more than I've ever focused them in my life.

We are infinite in this moment, and nothing else matters in the entire world than us experiencing the magnitude of the stars and the silent jungle and the complete understanding that runs between the two of us like electricity of why we have come to study abroad.

We walk toward the center and can only stare upwards. "Infinite and infinitesimal," I say.

She looks at me until I return the gaze. "We will never be here together again."

With the trees we stand, our roots planting in Xibalba while we ascend to the stars.

LA VIEJITA



WHERE CHILDREN COME FROM

Mother may catch some breath of that night
as she opens the refrigerator on bright jars.
She will feel it, faintly, in the caught-up
light, the feeling of sudden, blazing feeling
made more luminous by pulling a handle
on a cold box and finding all that shine.
She may go to Father, may remove
his glasses—like lampshade from lamp—
and fix them over her own, unshakably happy
eyes. He will put his reading down gently,
allow his eyes to open their slow hinges,
then trail blankly the path of arm her fingers
started sweetly at his shoulder. *Look dear,*
she plays, *do I look like you?* This may be
when Father begins his own recalling of that night;
glare starring about Mother's dark irises,
mirror-burn untethering that bright, vague memory:

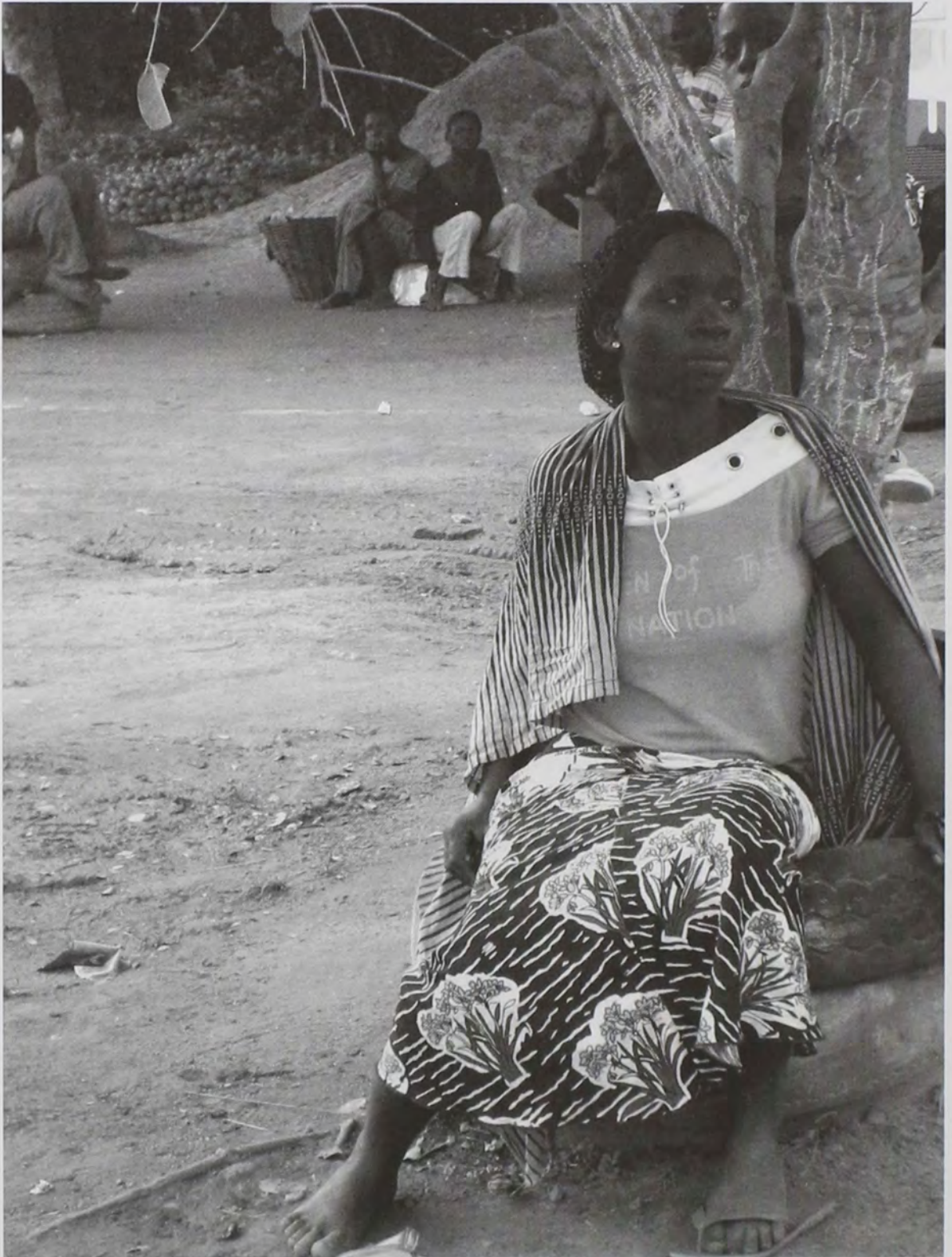
sky bent black around a low moon and wind
weaving its dull shuttle through looms of leaves.
The cars are quiet. February feels its brisk way
through the streets. At a window, two shadows
in a roomful of light. This is a moment
not even poetry can enter.

Somewhere behind the stars, some glow
is gathering, some mark of beginning. Pooling
filaments, deeper constellations crushing together,
night reaching back to its first creation. The two
shadows are stationary and in love as this herald
pulls its light inward, like a diamond. Soon
sleep comes. And soon, in sudden dream, two
shadows will fill with the searing revelation
that the book has begun and the windows
will open forever and torchlight spring to torch
and joy can take on music can speak babbling
river stones light enough to be carried on the backs

of herons and garden of sky shout cloud-light
higher this love higher this body love has made....

Father may smile. Mother may hand the glasses
back. Both will remain unaware that theirs is a feeling
than can be shared. For the secret of birth
rests not in the tangle of anatomy, the belly
push, the assertion that, yes, even water
can break—the secret of birth is that it begins
with light, with twinkle-in-eye, and grows
to ask questions that have no answers.

QUEEN OF THE NATION



ORPHAN OF WAR

That's right! America, vaffanculo!
They lie and hate Mussolini.

He made train tracks in cities
so I could go to grammar school.

Americans come, and oh
Madonna, Napoli was gone.

I spent three days under stones,
la spiaggia bella all covered
with little pieces of metal, it was danger to walk.
I live thirteen years with Zio Oreste
and then I come to America to work
for Aunt Louise. People think I'm stonata
because I am from Italy, but I
speak English good, believe it or not.
I call myself Lily, Carmelina
is not American. My sisters are afraid
to visit me here, they think people
are danger when they don't look the same.
In Napoli, everyone has same hair, same skin,
I get agitazione sometimes still,
the first time I saw different people,
they destroyed my family and made me mezza matta.

SPRING

Two days after the vernal equinox you sit on a sunlit boulder atop a bluff overlooking a valley. Below you the river weaves daringly between the rocks. You gaze across the ravine. Trees still naked in the shade of hills huddle together for warmth, while the more ambitious among them stretch upwards along the slope searching for the touch of sunlight. Your eyes stop at the tree line. For some unknown reason the highest hilltop has been left bare, empty except for a vast golden crown of sun-drenched grass. Suddenly you long to be there, at the summit that is more spacious, more radiant, and nearer to the sky than anything else in the world. It's where you've never been and it's what you've never seen, but you know once you get there everything will be right simply because there is nowhere left to go.

You mount your bicycle and follow the roads by dead reckoning until you come to the river. The bridge is a highway—not meant for you. A pick-up truck rushes by in a blur. He passes, and you look once over your shoulder, then race to the end of the bridge. The river echoes underneath, but before you can stop to look at the water or admire the rocks you're on the other side. You begin to climb the cluster of hills that stand guard at the base of their bigger brother. Cars zoom by effortlessly as you pedal ferociously up roads that only become more unwelcoming. The woods grow thicker, bigger, and steeper. Crisp wind courses between the hills. It bends the trees and chills your sweat. When you realize the road is beginning to curve gradually in the wrong direction, you retreat to the foot of your mountain. So this is not a public place. No roads or trails lead to the top. There is only one way to get there, you decide, and that is through and up. You stow your bike under a bush in the ditch on the side of the road, then stare at it for a moment in doubt. You pick up an old Burger King cup lying nearby and scribble "Please Don't Take Me" on the side and place it over the handlebar.

First you climb down to get to the small stream separating the base of the hills. Scraggly roots and rotten trunks litter the floor of the forest. After three hundred yards of sliding down leafy slopes and leaping across muddy veins, you stand at the foot of what you know must be your mountain, even though you're too close and too low to see its big blond head. The wind has died in the shelter of the forest. The water

murmurs behind you, and an invisible songbird whistles somewhere high above. Sunlight rains down, splitting straight through the leafless trees. Your eyes take you to a clearing, but after twenty paces you see it's not a small clearing but a grassy utility trail thirty yards wide running the height of the mountain. You wonder for a moment whether you are glad or dismayed at this, to have found an easy path up the slope that only shows other people have walked this mountain many, many times. You toss the question out and proceed up the barren path

The sun hovers higher than ever now and sweat clings to the back of your shirt. Your calves begin to ache. A sign nailed to a tree reads, "POSTED: Private Property" and warns you what not to do there and what will happen if you do it. But you don't notice. The birds are getting louder, the sun is getting hotter, and you are getting closer to the only place you really want to be.

Soon the tree line comes into view. The grassy hilltop rises regally above it, immense and imposing like a sleeping dragon. But between you and the dragon sits a large, hideous green tank with white tentacles of plastic piping sprawling over the trail. A tall metal fence surrounds the tank and then continues upward, disappearing into the woods. You can't avoid a yellow sign, nearly six feet long, hanging from the fence next to the tank: "CAUTION: Do Not Enter. Authorized Personnel Only." Authorized by whom? You wonder briefly. But only briefly. You reach the end of the trail and then follow the fence along the tree line to see where it ends. The fence, looming two feet above your head, leads you back into the growth, with dense, raw woods on your left and the open, airy fields of the mountaintop on your right. Birds twitter all around and the fresh holes beneath your feet tell groundhogs have been about. Soon it becomes clear this fence does not end. It circles around the entire circumference of the hilltop. Someone has cleared the summit of all its trees, then fenced it in for their own keeping. Why they have done this you may never know.

So you lean against the fence among the weeds, tired, dejected, and angry. Your fingers poke through the metal wires towards the openness of the bright summit standing so close you can hear its silence, its vacancy. Birds of prey soar above you, unabashedly flaunting their freedom. The whole vast expanse of nature lies before them. And then the question confronts you like a dare: will you carry on, or will you turn around? Somebody clearly does not want you here.

There are penalties for this sort of thing—this is place could be... anything. But you have come so far and worked so hard. You need a story. But mostly, really only, you want so badly to stand at the top and see the world. And at that moment you have no choice. “A man can’t own a mountain,” you hear yourself saying aloud, and your arms swing your backpack over the fence. In seconds your body follows.

As soon as your feet hit the ground a laugh escapes your lips. You look back only once, as if to make sure you’re actually on the right side of the fence, then it’s two hundred yards to the peak. *Don’t turn around. Not yet.* A dirty narrow footpath has been worn in the grass and you follow it. Then suddenly, for the first time in hours, your feet are on flat ground.

The summit. Wind roars at your back and you turn around to face it. It smells of spring, so cold and wet and rich as it hits your face. Goose bumps. The landscape stretches out before you like an endless colorful map, like a children’s book. To the north the towers of the nuclear power plant chug away like cloud factories working overtime. The azure skies indicate they have a lot of catching up to do. Around the towers suburbia stretches out in every direction to wrap around the soft brown hills covered by forest like moss on a rock. You’re so tall you could step over them, or toss them over to see what sorts of creatures wriggle underneath. A family of three, no doubt, with a blond-haired baby rolling down the sidewalk in a toy truck with red doors and a yellow roof. Houses more numerous than stars lie scattered across the landscape, and you turn to the south where the metal spires of Philadelphia skyscrapers glimmer in sunlight. Hawks float around the hill so low and so close that you can look down and see the patterns of red and brown decorating their back. Matchbox cars roll forward slowly on paths no wider than toothpicks towards towns no larger than a thumbs. It’s colder here, as you stand in t-shirt and jeans, and all you hear is the steady susurrus of wind on your ears. At three o’clock on Easter Sunday you stand at the ankles of Apollo, pacified to the core by the complete stillness of it all as the remnants of nature mix with the markings of mankind and you wonder if you will ever be able to go back down.

CIEGA/MEZQUITA

I smile at the cloud behind your left ear
like the blind woman selling you a lottery ticket
outside the coffee shop you go to every morning.
You'll play as you drink your cortada - I know you well.
You walk away and I wish you good fortune
and hope, for your kindness, that chance favors you.

I live in Cordoba.
I was built by the Romans.
I was loved by the Moors
And conquered by the Christians.
I've survived these thousands of years;
the rain, the snow - the sun and every element.
Forces unknown to you have passed through
time and time again, yet still I stand.
I bear their marks and do not surrender.
And you are like these elements -
with your hailstones of touch
and centuries of love.
I know I will never be the same.

EST. 1977



THE OTHER SIDE

After I ran away, we made
this museum into a restaurant.
At night, after the customers
and the paintings have gone away,
we make eggplant and cheese sandwiches
and sleep in the kitchen.
I paint the oven with grape jelly
as she counts tickets.

You wanted me to have a watch.
I am not a watch. I do not separate
my hours into fractions
and seconds and I cannot tick off
the days on my calendar.

Last year,
I cut it up and rearranged
the numbers and somehow
I misplaced a week. You did not look
at me for two days until I
ransacked the closet,
found those seven days
in the hamper.

She does not mind when I slide
the decimal points right
off the page and make them into bracelets.
She does not back away
when anger comes out my pores,
when my ears leak sadness and
I run out of tissues.

no computers exist in our museum.
she clicks away on her
typewriter and if I
happen to eat the keys, she smiles

CONTRIBUTORS

Very little information can be found regarding **Chelsea Catalanotto**. Some say she was born in 1845 somewhere along the Appalachian Trail and submitted her work by carrier pigeon as a recluse. Others have said to have seen her roaming the streets of New York City as late as the 90's. The only evidence suggesting this woman actually existed are her two guest appearances on the popular cartoon, Southpark.

Brett Celinski is a smart, amiable, jovial, jocund, joyous, electrifying, enticing, emboldened, empowered, boisterous, breathtaking, brainstorming, ingenious soul and arguably the most creative and innovative mind of the last twenty-two centuries.*

*no actually he's just plucky

In her spare time, **Shira Degani** diligently works at her goal of becoming an old lady.

Nicole Dillie is the President of Kappa Delta Kappa and wants to use the Lantern's space to say: KDK ALL THE WAY!

Amanda Hayden already spent too much time deciding what to say.

Patrick Hayakawa does it all in watermelon sugar.

Callie Ingram is just being Miley.

Max Kreisky is a mild-mannered student by day, but at night he takes to the rooftops to patrol and protect his fair college as... The Physicist!

Josh Krigman is recommended by 4 out of 5 dentists

Katie LeCours is a senior English major who really hopes to have a job next year. She also wishes she could be a dinosaur- but only for a few days, and has a few too many not-so-secret grandmotherly tendencies, including quilting and calling everything 'precious.

Hello my name is **Calla Mattox** and I am great and you know it because I am great and beautiful and super-fantastic great.

Kerry McCarthy bëgg na jaayfonde! ...n'dank, n'dank mooy japp golo ci ñaay.

India McGhee flew south for the winter.

Men called her “The Napoleon of Crime,” “The M.I.A. of Mischief!” They called her “Perfidy’s Own Sasquatch,” and “The Elvis Costello of Wrecking Up the Place!” They were wrong! The name’s... **Máire Moriarty!**

Colin Ottinger is a sophomore, majoring in English (surprise!) and minoring in music. He prefers his chords sharpened and his shirt collars high. Also, he is the current director of the Magical Mystery Tour, and he is coming to take you away

Five Things About **Abby Raymond** That Might or Might Not Be True

1. She and Sarah Palin are distant cousins.
2. She has killed a bear.
3. She cannot roll her r’s, only gurgle.
4. She had to wear her shoes on the wrong feet for the first four years of her life to correct ‘pigeon toes’
5. She regularly competes in freestyle rap competitions.

Sarah Round is an aspiring English major trapped in a Biology major’s body and holds a Doctorate in Mixology from Harvard. This is her first publication.

Nathaniel Rosenthalis was really born Neandertalis Rosenthalis, but that has nothing to do with his obsession with all things literary—really, it’s quite unhealthy. In including this so-called “fresh-man” in this so-called “lit-mag”—you’ve really only aided his illness. And now he won’t stop smiling because he’s here with you all. Jerks, each and every one of you.

Chris Schaeffer has 400 teeth. He is beautiful.

Louisa Schnaithmann should have been an artist. She was never intended for work.

Amanda Schwartz, contrary to popular belief, has never forgotten her pants.

Dayna Stein's favorite *Twin Peaks* subplot was the thing about the curtain rods.

If you like people who explain things with loud noises and ridiculous hands gestures, talk to **Ryan Sullivan**, his disregard for language might inspire you. Actually, you'll probably end up thinking he's a strange and obnoxious human being.

Danielle Tatsuno is a first-time Lantern editor and an ongoing contributor to "The Bi-ped," a quarterly zine dedicated to all things sasquatch.

Email really stresses **Marjorie Vujnovich** out. From now on she will only correspond via carrier pigeon.

Robert Whitehead was at the Battle of Troy. It wasn't half as bad as people make it out to be. And by *people*, he means Homer. That man was a liar if Robert ever saw one.

Elizabeth Zeller constantly hones her keen sense of the visual arts by refusing to learn how to read.

PATRONS

Beth Bailey
Laura Borsdorf
Heather Potts Brown
Don Camp
Hugh Slark
Margie Connor
Randy Davidson
Carol Dole
Kathryn Goddard-
Doms
Ross Doughty
Andrew Feick
Roger Florka
John French
Sloane Gibb
Wendy Greenberg
Winfield Guilmette
Lisa Hanover

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Annette Lucas
Rebecca Lyczak
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Mill David
Todd McKinney
Matthew Mizenko
Carolyn Moatz
Melody Nixon

Frances Novack
Regina Oboler
Paulette Patton
Charles Rice
Christian Rice
Kenneth Richardson
Carla Rinde
Domenick Scudera
Xochitl Shuru
James Sidie
P.F. Small
Erec Smith
Kelly Sorensen
Marcele Stehman
Kim Taylor
Victor Tortorelli
Jon Volkmer
Richard Wallace

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