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The Lantern Vol. 75, No. 2, Spring 2008

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Ursinus College

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Ursinus College

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Ursinus College

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Ursinus College

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The Lantern





THE LANTERN

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It's been an honor for me to see *The Lantern* through its diamond anniversary (though admittedly the honor owes more to convenient timing than any merit-based qualification of my own). And in spite of my burgeoning caffeine addiction and the hours (upon hours) of frustration and tedium, it has also been a pleasure to work with *The Lantern*. Maybe not *easy*, but it has been fun.

I'd be lying, however, if there weren't a little trepidation on my part on having the fate of *The Lantern's* 75th anniversary issue resting on my shoulders. More than once I have dreamed of a thousand voices, spanning three-quarters of a century, calling out to me with a single message: *don't screw this up, jerk.*

My fears, fortunately, came to naught. This edition of *The Lantern* is very much worthy of its heritage. So good, in fact, that I wish I could take credit for it, but my part in the construction of this issue was a small one. The credit goes to all the writers, poets, and artists of Ursinus, whose talent is both inspiring and humbling. We had a record number of submissions this semester, and I think it's a fitting testament to the strength of this artistic community of Ursinus that *The Lantern* has been able to flourish in this way for the past 75 years.

I'd be loathe not to mention the fact that *The Lantern* has been particularly blessed this year with an amazing crop of editors. Each is incredibly accomplished in his or her field, and I am indebted to each of them for their dedication and willingness to respond to my often-frantic, always-last-minute emails. Thanks are also due to our panel of judges, each of whom willing sacrifices a week of their lives to carefully review all the submissions we get. Finally, "thank you" doesn't begin to express my appreciation for the help of Dr. Jon Volkmer, who with this issue celebrates his 21st year as faculty advisor to *The Lantern*. Here's to 21 more. Hell, here's to 75 more.

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue of *The Lantern*, which represents the finest work Ursinus has to offer. I'll see you at the centennial.

-Dan

JUDGE'S NOTES: POETRY

More than two decades have passed since I experienced the sublime thrill of learning that one of my poems would appear in the *Lantern*. The word “sublime” may sound lofty in this context, but I have a specific usage in mind. According to poets such as William Wordsworth (one of my all-time heroes), contact with the “sublime” triggers a dual response—on the one hand, *elation*, on the other, *fear*. When the *Lantern* editors informed me of the acceptance, I felt both rapturous joy and mysterious terror. Suddenly, I was a *published* poet. The thought stood before me like Mont Blanc. I felt jubilant and proud, intimidated and small. What did such an acceptance mean? Was I really any good? If so, could I be good again? What would I do now?

As it turned out, I continued to write. After earning my degree at Ursinus and working in advertising for a few years, I attended two graduate schools in creative writing—Columbia and the University of Houston—and had the good fortune to study with some of the world’s greatest poets. Slowly, I also began to publish poetry in national magazines. To this day, I feel the same sublime thrill whenever I receive a letter of acceptance.

I hope that many of the poets currently attending Ursinus will continue to pursue the writing life after they graduate. The poetry world needs them, just as it needs excellent campus journals like the *Lantern*.

Poetry Prize Winner - “In a French Courtyard at the Philadelphia Museum of Art” by Robert Whitehead

The poem recalls the verbal ingenuity and imaginative leaps of Frank O’Hara. Of all the excellent entries, this work stood out to me as a mature, tonally sophisticated text that will represent the *Lantern* well in its 75th Anniversary issue.

Gregory Fraser is the author of Strange Pietà and Answering the Ruins. The co-author, with Chad Davidson, of Poetry Writing: Creative-Critical Approaches, Fraser is the recipient of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. He serves as associate professor of English at the University of West Georgia. He graduated from Ursinus in 1986.

JUDGE'S NOTES: PROSE

Only a very few of my experiences at Ursinus were as formative, and stay with me as clearly now, as my work with *The Lantern*. From my first moments of awe as a freshman, being humbled by the work produced by my peers, to selecting and arranging the pieces with my peers in my senior year, this magazine was a lens through which I could view my own growth and that of this community I had come to respect and value so much. As it always has, *The Lantern* knows just how to get to me, kind of like the ex-lover who will always hold onto a little piece of your heart, even when you've both moved away from the moments you shared together.

All of the things that a college experience should be – testing and breaking boundaries, stretching minds and lives, making the world a part of you and taking your place in the world – is tastefully and attractively packaged right here. To be perfectly honest, and a little cliché, it still takes my breath away.

Prose Prize Winner – “Truth and Beauty Bombed” by Christopher Schaeffer

“Truth and Beauty Bombed” is a piece that shines just a bit differently among its peers. Establishing a strong, authentic, unique authorial voice is no easy task for any writer; inhabiting and realizing multiple voices in a single short piece, developing them to accentuate one another and form the building blocks of the text as a whole, is nothing short of Herculean. Added to these impressive feats is the apparent ease with which the author incorporates all of the other influences that help define this moment in life, with all of its turmoil and emotion and ideas almost too big to hold on to, making this not just a great story, but a story that, to my mind, embodies what a *Lantern* story should be.

Dan Gallagher graduated from Ursinus in 2001. He went on to get his Masters in Creative Writing from Temple, and kind of got stuck there. Today, he's an administrator in the Temple University Writing Center, some times a teacher of fiction writing, occasionally a freelance editor, and a founder of the Ambler Writers Community. He enjoys discussing baseball and metaphysics, but only very rarely at the same time.

JUDGE'S NOTES: CREAGER PRIZE

During my years at Ursinus, my involvement with The Lantern was clearly representative of all things I had expected from the college experience. If poetry is capturing a moment, a feeling, a glimpse of what life holds, then The Lantern's existence as a summation of my college years is best expressed in slices as well: A scribbled note tucked under the telephone - *T, K is at the Lantern office editing with D.B., if S calls, don't know where she is. A.* The hollow rhythm of my steps on the Bomberger stairs. A stack of old photographs on the floor of the office closet, tucked away at the top of Bomberger. I study the faces caught in singular moments. *What is the story of this? Of this?* Standing in the office, overwhelmed by the sense of the room's past. Hours devoted to writing, choosing, editing. From the simple decision of card stock cover colors to the invitations to judge; the decisions feel enormous and keep me clear and focused. The view from The Lantern office window on a rainy night. Taking deep breaths to quell rising panic before stepping to the podium to speak at the reception. Flowers and a hug from Jon. Beers, later, at the Trappe.

The Creager Prize Winner - "Chevalier Anachronistic" by Joshua Solomon

This year's Creager Prize is awarded to a short story which draws the reader in, caught up in the narrative of a potentially unreliable narrator. Much like a Poe story, this story captures the reader in the basic quandary of trust. The use of encyclopedic insertions drags the reader back into clear focus, removes temptation to be drawn entirely into the narrator's confidence and thus allows a clear mind to return to the story at hand. The action builds slowly, details are dropped and honed and the author ultimately allows the narrator to complete the story with the final few finely tuned and crafted key details.

*A 1993 graduate of Ursinus, **Kate Ellis** also holds an MA in English with a creative writing focus from Illinois State University. She is currently teaching junior high English and mentoring the NJHS group while working on a young adult novel-in-verse. When not buried under stacks of junior high papers, she is usually busy showing dogs or entertaining her third grade son, Parker.*

JUDGE'S NOTES: AUDREY GEORGE AWARD

The award, generously donated this year by an alumnus of the College, celebrates the piece that is the most “beautiful, truthful, simple, unpretentious and polished.” It is given in commemoration of Audrey George, a folk artist who “took things in nature and crafted them into stunning artwork.” This semester’s judge was Ursinus’ own Dr. Nzadi Keita.

The Audrey George Award Winner – “Picky Mangoes” by Stephanie Bartusis

“Picky Mangoes” does a fine job of building connective tissue between the momentary human act of an individual and a far-reaching cultural moment, both speaking to our capacity to feel and see, know and understand. Hinged by a remarkable fruit!

IN A FRENCH COURTYARD AT THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Previously, the closest I have ever been to France was when I saw a girl
on a Boston bus who wore her tattoos like a gown of fine, black lace.
She spoke mostly with her eyelashes— thick and black with mascara—
when she leaned her head towards a young man who had just missed his
stop,
and said with a grin and an affected accent, *C'est la vie.*

That was not life, I wanted to tell her. That is not how life goes, riding a
bus
to somewhere, missing the stop, riding on. We go through life much
like the people walking
through this museum— steadily stepping on the seams in the marble,
pausing
whenever something beautiful happens. That bus was bright, but the air
was stale
and everyone seemed to be reading the palms of their hands

or the etchings on the windows. In the museum, there is a man kissing a
woman. He lingers
for long moments in the scent of her lipstick, holds the back of her
head
tenderly. And when she blinks, her lashes flicker on his cheek like the
lightest
feathers. In the museum, the rapid tongue of a centuries-old fountain
speaks lightly to itself
in a dead language comprised entirely of rolling *r*'s.

This is life, I would grin back to the woman on the bus. Life is hung on
the walls with reverence
and the ceiling is painted pale blue because we need some sky above us,
something higher and bluer. There are no bus windows in life because
we don't look out;
seeing the world move with such terrible speed, how could we go on
with our living?

And when we miss something, when we get lost in the museum of our
lives,

we can stop. And we can turn around.

TRUTH AND BEAUTY BOMBED

Bombs. Alexander Aberfeldy, food services

I heard later on that it was a pretty text-book suitcase bomb, kinda like the ones you run into in Israel, where they'll leave a bag or something behind at a bus depot, or a crowded shopping center, and detonate it by cellphone a couple blocks away.

And that's that for the bus depot.

So, when the offices of Pender, Brass & Merrigold got the anonymous call (at ten in the fucking morning, no less) about the Rawlins gusset suitcase discretely tucked away in a third floor supply closet, it was, to say the least, kind of a *thing*. When I think of the poor assholes standing out in the parking lot, shivering against the March chill, unsure of whether or not their careers and belongings were about to erupt in flames, I am unsure of just how much a relief it was, exactly, when the squad marched out, stony-faced, to deliver their report—that the suitcase had, in fact, contained a portable L.E.D. device on a count-down, which, when disarmed, scrolled the cheeky aphorism “GET OUT OF THE OFFICE, GET INTO THE SPRINGTIME”. No bomb, no bang, no excuse to call it a day early. I imagine there were a few forced chuckles, some relief, and more than a few people a little disappointed—after all that fear, that anxiety, all they got was some weird little catchphrase? I mean, for God's sakes, it wasn't even spring-time yet, really. I'm not sure I personally would consider not getting blown to shit on a Monday morning a letdown, per se, but I imagine the anticlimax hung in the air for a good long while. Until the second bomb went off, plaster and confetti and concrete dust falling mingling in the updraft. I guess it pays to cover your own back. You've heard about all the rest by now. I can't add anything to it.

I'm sorry. I get kind of hung up on those little details when I'm going through a breakup. My own fault, I guess. I should've seen this coming, you know, but hey, hindsight. One moment you're holding hands over pad thai and really, you know, *bonding* over your mutual love of New Order, and before you know it she's in FBI custody and you're left thinking that all in all her one phone call coulda been better spent on somebody else. The magic'd been gone for kind of awhile.

Boom. Professor Edward Bont, bomb squad consultant, MIT faculty

It is neither particularly difficult, nor expensive, to put together a suitcase bomb. Given a few weeks of training and a modest budget, one dedicated hand can produce as many as three or four a day. They are not precision instruments. Even in a place like Palestine, where components can be tricky to come by, they can be constructed for a bit under the equivalent of \$150. And, although they may lack the explosive power of a more finely crafted device, the ability to leave them in a location such as, say, an office building is another asset—the small, enclosed space contains the force and heat of the blast, leading to a greater economy of energy than would perhaps otherwise be possible. Personally, and I would request that you don't put this in print, I think the ingenuity and efficiency of the device is admirable.

Almost, well, beautiful.

Blame. Detective Frank Meloy

“Dada terrorism,” they call it. Mass crime as a performance art. These dumbass kids think they're doing something new. Hello? Back when I was a kid they did this shit on the Batman show. It doesn't take a genius to make this shit ridiculous. Some asshole wants to blow up a dozen people for whatever reason, ask me, that's already pretty r-fucking-diculous. I don't need to see your goddamn art school thesis nailed to the door to believe that.

As for the girl, yeah, we got her in custody. She talked. You'll get yer press release soon. And yeah, we got some more warrants.

That's all I got to say. Get outta here.

Bloom. Alexander Aberfeldy

Nowadays, when I talk about the last couple months it helps to be just a little bit drunk. I prefer Barclays with a couple drops of water to bring out the flavor—however, I've gotten accustomed to Mad Dog, Pabst Blue Ribbon, would probably settle for a few quick nips of cheap cologne if things got bad enough. See, I was nineteen when I decided that college wasn't for me, or, rather more specifically, that I just wasn't that sold on this whole “making a livelihood” kick. Six years later and I'm still living in the same somewhat less-than-convincing simulacrum of an apartment, the walls being, as near as I've been able to tell,

roughly the same make-up as papier-mâché, still bussing tables at a painfully faux-hip and painfully low-paying vegan/kosher delicatessen called “The Nosh Pit.” I’m sorry for that. The owner is one of those forty year-old-women who refuse to acknowledge that punk is dead, preferring to hold out that it merely went down over some remote Pacific island and is still eking out a living with Amelia Earhart and Jim Morrison, despite the ever-present and uncomfortably reasonable protests of middle-age and its attendant worries. When her ulcers act up, she tends to fiddle with one of her nose rings. Ms. Moskowitz says her first name is Spike. Sure.

It was the matronly Spike Moskowitz, believe it or not, who introduced me to Therese Quinn, setting us up for a remarkably brief and awkward little lunch on the basis of, I guess, our shared status as relatively youthful people in her rough social orbit. I was halfway through my twenties, she was a college kid with a Bad Brains t-shirt and a grudge—our rapport at that stage consisted mostly of me coughing into my hand and thoroughly examining and re-examining the little bistro’s drink menu, her drilling a hole through my skull with the grey-eyed conviction of a philosophy undergraduate. I knew for a *fact* that the place had a top-notch chorizo, but she had the look of the sort of vegetarian you don’t want to cross. I bit my tongue and ordered the grilled eggplant. She, in one of those little twists of the knife fate sometimes indulges in, had the chorizo. So, if my mouth was set in a line perhaps more acid than usual as I choked down my eggplant, you can’t really blame me. Maybe if I’d been a little more attentive to the grave motion of her dimples as her jaw worked, the curl in her bangs, fluid and severe like a tidal wave, I would’ve given something more of a shit about making a decent impression. As it was, I was content to let her interpret my grimace however she wanted. I walked her back to the bus-station; she shook my hand as she danced aboard the 162 to Kurtzburgh. Shook my goddamn hand! Right then though, as she took those few glancing steps into the bus’ clammy recesses, feet landing with assured poise, arms stuck to her sides almost awkwardly, like a ballet dancer unsure how to comport herself outside of the studio, I cursed myself for fucking the day up so badly. So stubbornly insistent on making the experience as dismal as possible for the both of us. I was so convinced that I’d succeeded in selling myself as the town’s premium asshole, that when she called me up a week or two later, inviting me to a Wedekind

festival at the community college, my first response was to run into the bathroom, douse my face in cold water, convince myself that I was not in fact still snoozing on the couch.

(Alright. That's not true, my first response was to agree and then, sheepishly, look up Wedekind on Wikipedia. But the dousing thing resounds with more, I dunno, romantic desperation, don't you think? In any case, I wish that's what I'd done. Besides, nobody wants to be the one guy in the room who doesn't know who Wedekind is. I'm here to assure you though, its okay. Nobody does. So don't sweat it. I don't even care if you know who T.S. Eliot is.)

Promise. Dr. Thomas McLouchlan, Kutzburgh Community College English Department

Therese was so, so promising. It breaks my heart. She was a quiet girl, always on time with her work, a bit quirky but since when was that a negative thing? Obviously I can't give you anything she wrote, but... well, she was in the school's literary journal a few times. I suppose I could spare a few copies...

Um, I'm hesitant to comment because, again, confidentiality issues, and just a reluctance to start off any sort of media firestorm, but she did seem, well, pre-occupied with several themes in her works. I... ohh. Well, I guess I can tell you, she was fascinated by Salizar Destrada. The French Dadaist? No?

Well, he's a bit of a romantic figure to some people. Wrote this book, I believe it was called, oh, dammit... *Une Defense de Sottise*. I probably butchered that. Anyway, this book is kind of a manual for situationist mischief. The Situation and the Spectacle and all that—art as protest. Raoul Vaneigem said, “down with a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation has been purchased with the guarantee that we will die of boredom.”

Destrada took it a bit far, though. He took a malicious thrill out of causing panic and distress, something he isn't... shy about, in his book. But look at how many kids walk around with Che Guevera t-shirts without disappearing to Bolivia and tangling with the CIA. I wouldn't call it a warning sign.

Electricity. Alexander Aberfeldy

Frank Wedekind, for those of you not in the know, turned out

to be a singularly depressing German playwright. She slipped her pale freckled hand into mine at just about the point in *Spring Awakening* in which the 14-year old Wendla Bergmann dies from a botched abortion. A good omen. We slunk out after the second play, lay in the wet grass of the quad, staining our shirt-backs grass green, talked about authors I'd never heard of and bands she didn't care for. It was electric. I can't quite explain the chemistry between us, so unlikely and defiant of convention that you might as well call it alchemy.

Was it physical attraction? Could be. She was a pretty girl, one of those vaguely hippy-ish types who look like they've stepped right out of some pot-fueled utopian daydream in 1969, all peach fuzz on sunburnt arms, white teeth, the subtle bouquet of patchouli and TVP. There had to be something more to it, though. She was cute, but there were cuter, and I, at the time, was the sort of man whose wardrobe consisted almost entirely of thrift store cast-offs and treated basic hygiene in much the same way most Catholics treat Mass. It was a fine thing in itself, an important, *vital* part of any sane person's life but, hey, there's other shit you've got to do sometimes. Did our shared malaise somehow draw us to one another? Misery loves company. What a fucking cliché.

Damned if I can find another explanation, though. Should I have seen trouble on the horizon? Sure, I don't know, I guess. Yeah. But I mean, like, maybe evil ex-boyfriend trouble, or herpes trouble at worst. You get romantic sometimes, though, think the worst possible hurt in the world will be the kind that makes you all the more rugged and vulnerable and artistic when it's done. Remember Nietzsche? What an asshole.

Back then her hair was bleached, poured in loose rings down her back like a spiral staircase, coyly obscured one eye, smelled faintly of chemicals, her sole concession to the antiseptic world. At around a quarter after eleven, she was going on about some German theatre thing or something, and I was lost, and without conscious thought ran a hand through it. It was softer than you'd expect, not at all stiff or dry. For a moment I thought she might even be a real blonde. That couldn't be, though. There aren't any real blondes anymore. She closed her eyes, inclined her chin just so. Our arms tangled, sparred in the grass, my hands scraped against the coarse bristles of her arm-pits. She didn't wear lipstick, chapstick, any adornment—her lips tasted exactly like lips, exactly as they should have. What else can I say? You've seen a movie

before.

Creeper. Britta Darnielle, Kurtzburgh Community College sophomore

Yeah, I don't know, Therese started dating this kind of sketchy looking older guy a couple months ago, like a few weeks before spring break, Andrew or Axel or something? Um, I don't want to sound like a bitch or anything, but he looked a little bit homeless. And he smelled. Look, I have no problem with girls dating older guys, I mean I'm seeing a *senior* for god's sake, but some guys are just creepy. I mean, what was he, like 25, 30? Just gross. I wouldn't be all that surprised if it was him who got Therese into all that weird shady stuff later on. And why didn't they ever go to *his* place? Ugh. I bet he didn't even *have* a place. Plus, *plus* he was just a slob. He looked like he cut his own hair, and not even in that sexy indie-rocker kind of way, I mean in the meth addict kind of way.

I told her I didn't want her to bring him back to the dorm anymore. I heard from this girl who used to work at that place he works at that he stole stuff. Like, compulsively. What's it called? Kleptomania? Yeah. Just a rumor, but she swore to me and she's a solid kid, bio major. She's treasurer for the Spanish club too. Anyway, they broke up after, um, lemme think, three or four months? She was pretty, like, down about it. This was right before, she, uh, before... look, all I'm saying is, my one hair-brush went missing right after she brought him around, and, well, I'm not gonna point fingers here but come on. Just think about it.

Fraud. Dr. Abraham Haines, Shackleford University English Department

Contrary to what Dr. McLouchlan believes, there is no compelling evidence that Salizar Destrada or anyone going under such a name ever really existed. I don't want to call Dr. McLouchlan gullible, *per se*, but I think that the whole Destrada thing was a big hoodwink on the part of the Paris art scene of the time. Besides, have you ever actually read *Une Defense*? Who could take it seriously? I'm sad to say that the unfortunate young lady in this case had been the victim of a hoax from the start.

Damn Good Lay. Rocko Vinadetti, Kutzburgh Community College sophomore

Therese Quinn. Ahh, yeah. I fucked her once. What a wildcat. Freshman year. Just once. Met her in Dr. McLouchlan's class. Heh.

I heard she was in, uh, jail now? That's nuts. Whatever, though, I mean, she was always kind of off. Hot in a weird kind of way, but totally a freak. She had a tat of some old French guy on her butt. I don't know, Thomas le Jefferson or King Louis Armstrong or something. So what'd she do, like, kill some dude? I bet she killed a dude. I could see that.

Samurai. Alexander Aberfeldy

You almost wouldn't have noticed at first, but sure enough, one moment you'd be talking about making scrambled eggs the next morning, the next she'd be in on some impromptu lecture. She did that, a lot. Telling me all about the history of anarchism or linguistic perversity in Chicago or the first black newspaper in the country. Such was it that night. She was staying at my place, which was always a little embarrassing for me since my place was a wreck. I was almost asleep, half-stoned, half-drunk, curled up like I had a piton through my head. I guess I mumbled something about *something*. That was all the opening she needed.

-See, Alex, the thing about Mishima was that his convictions, his *real* convictions, were never about politics. He wanted acceptance. He wanted to be loved, more than anything. Sad but true.

-Uhh-huh.

- Look at "The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With The Sea."
"Kyoko's House"...

-You know I've never read any of those books.

-Well, you should. Anyway, you think a guy who really honestly believed in the divinity of fucking Hirohito would have been nominated for the Nobel Prize even once? Come on. I'm not arguing he wasn't insane, but it wasn't an ideological thing.

-What was it then? Ahh.

-Like I told you. He wanted to be loved, but he didn't know how. His attachment to the Japanese Romantic movement in the 30's, his flirtation with Western intellectualism, his eventual whole fascist imperialist thing, what did he really want out of, out of that? Someone to

tell him he was good, someone to pat him on the head, to validate--

-Therese, please. What are you talking about? Why is this important?

-I... hah. I'm sorry, you're not familiar with this guy at all?

-No, I don't know, I guess not. Come on.

-Ok, well. In 1970 or so he started to get into all this far-right political activity, right? He'd go in to these little fringe college newspapers, take them over, start adding these fanatic young men into this private army of his.

-Uhuh.

-So eventually he gets up the nerve, or gets enough of these kids together, and he storms this government building, takes the general of the whole Japanese army hostage. Ties him to a chair with masking tape, haha, just ordinary masking tape. And then... then he goes out on the balcony in front of this group of like, a thousand young cadets, and starts to make this speech, which is supposed to, like, convince the whole armed forces to take up arms against the new government.

-Wow. It didn't work, right? I mean, does Japan have an emperor still? Shit, I don't know.

-No, it didn't work. All those kids down below just laughed at him. Laughed at him! So what do you think he does?

-Mph.

-He goes in, kneels on the ground, and stabs a sword right through his belly. Then, he has his second in command take the sword and chop his head off. It took three swings. Chop, chop, chop!

-Aw, gross. Stop, quit talking about this shit!

-And then his second in command does the exact same thing to himself. And then the other lieutenants? They just start crying. Weeping like little kids. And the general gets out of his bonds and just goes "There, there. Cry it all out." What a trip.

-Ugh. Goddammit, Therese... way to... way to be a downer. Why the Christ are you telling me all this?

-Because. Because he never really gave a shit about all that fascist nonsense. He just... I don't know. I guess either he wanted to, like I said, to have people love him, or... maybe he had a deathwish. It would certainly make sense. Ask me though?

-Phhhhh... I guess. Sure. I ask you.

-I don't think he had a reason, really.

Fingers. Detective Frank Meloy

I'm not a press kind of guy. They smell blood. Like sharks. Blood in the water, there they are, in their news vans and slick little sports cars. Circling. I can respect a newsman—no, that's a lie. I really can't. All of them, more or less the worst motherfuckers on earth. I can look in the eyes of some unlucky kid in custody for possession or robbery, look in there and see something human, but the fucking news-men. There's nothing there. I got to go out there, I got to tell them we got the old man. "The ringleader," I bet they'll call him.

"The mastermind."

He ain't a mastermind. He's sad and confused just like the dumb kids who swarmed around him. They will tear him apart.

Mastermind. James Price, performance artist.

You want me to take responsibility for every copy-cat out there? I assure you, I'm no friend of the American system and I applaud Miss Quinn's actions, but I take personal offense at the suggestion that I played any part in her own... no, I did not lend any role in *interpreting* my writing to her, I-

Ahem, well, "Dada terrorism" is a label the media has given to my school of thought, unsolicited. Destradaism is not about violence. The original European Dadaists were not about violence, and *we* are not about violence. Dada is about tearing things down, true, but not with the hammer or the fist but with the incisive revelation of the meaningless. Simply a sense of spreading unrest. An infinite Halloween. Our bullet holes form the bases of quest--no, not real bullet holes, I mean--

Call it *zen crime* if you are desperate for a... for a sound-bite.

Look, no, I don't mean real bullets! I'm just a... I'm... I'm telling you, I'm pleading not guilty! I have no further statement!

Blame. Jeffrey Quinn, investment banker

I'll be the first to admit my daughter was always an unorthodox girl. We raised her as an individual and I for one am not ashamed of myself as a parent. Therese was always interested in art, always active in politics. Look, see this painting? Damn good, if you ask me.

She was a... good... kid. Almost honors her senior year. Got

into college, right? How many people get into college?

I'm angry, if anything. Where was this boyfriend of hers when she needed him? Where were her teachers?

Where was I?

Lamb. Alexander Aberfeldy

There are awkward times in any relationship I guess. There are awkward times and then there's your girlfriend asking you to become a suicide bomber for absurdism. You imagine that kind of conversation going down in a solemn, under-lit bedroom, her wearing maybe a shawl or Spanish peasant's skirt, me ill-shaven and decked out in one of those slouchy hats that sailors and socialists like to affect. Lots of crying, lamenting about the cause. Long monologues about martyrdom, about God and the state and justice and blah blah boring blah. Not so much, really.

We were in Chick-Fil-A, some place at the mall. She'd been quiet for a few days. I suppose you could say we'd been fighting. Alright, so, I guess this had to come up sooner or later—yeah, we'd argued about this whole thing she was doing with her... I don't know, her art friends. Things were said. Things were not said, regrettable shit either way.

Looking back, I just didn't understand what she got out of it. Still don't, but... I don't know if there *was* anything I could've done to talk her out of it. I mean, shit, when somebody does something for the sake of fucking absurdity there isn't a whole lot you can expect a watertight argument to do.

I suppose it says a lot about my state of mind at the time that when I decided to stage a little love intervention or whatever, a last grasp at salvaging the burning zeppelin of our relationship, I chose to spring for Chick-Fil-A. I always was pretty hot on their waffle fries. She had the chicken finger combo. Didn't look thrilled.

I asked her what I could do to save things. She thought about it, theatrically, kneading palms into her forehead like an aspiring Ibsen protagonist, sighed, twirled a lock of hair (at this point red) around her finger. I was half anticipating a swoon, when she looked up and said
-I want you to be a suicide bomber.

I stared, reached for a waffle fry, chewed glumly like a sad deaf-mute. *I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you say that, darling. I'm just a sad deaf-mute.*

-I want you to do it.

Around this point I started rationalizing. They were Dadaists, right? Some art school bull-shittery like that, they had to mean some kind of half-assed pun, no matter how distasteful, right? Maybe she wanted me to career-suicide bomb or something, storm into work, drop my pants and start making a commotion in the name of entropy or whatever those pomo types do things in the name of these days.

-What, like, um. What do you mean really?

-Well. I want you to go in someplace with, you know, a bomb on you. And. Blow it up. You've seen the news before, right?

-Yeah. Righttrightright. Yeah, I have.

Another pregnant silence.

-Look, I don't really get how this is going to help our relationship, hon. I think I'll be mostly dead afterwards.

She gave me that glare, the one that said she wasn't giving this up. I felt a pang, recalled how adorable that same glare used to be when arguing about ice-cream flavors.

-Alex, this means a lot to me.

-Yeah but, I mean, *why?* This isn't the kind of thing a sane person says, hon. I mean, I... I mean, I guess I don't want to, like, be ethnocentric or anything but seriously-

-I don't want you to have to know why.

We held our stares for a moment. I felt the air congeal around me, understood all those mad mystic 19th century poets she'd told me about swaddled under blankets weeks ago, all those half-cocked dreamers who wrote about outer space as if it was a medium of viscous fluid with all the stars and planets suspended within it like some endless Jello casserole. I felt the moon slowly slushing down on my head and the sun lazily spiraling off into the depths of the universe. What was that thing Yeats said? I couldn't remember then. I can't remember now.

-I... There. I'm really *really* really not down with this.

And like that, it was over.

I didn't speak to her again until, like I said, her one phone call. And there wasn't much to say about it in particular.

That's all I can tell you. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

Goodbye. Fennel County Women's Prison Telephone Logs

-Alexander?

-Hello? Hello, Therese? Is that you?

-Y-yeah. It's me.

-Oh my god. What's going on? It's been--

-I'm in jail, Alex.

-What? I saw your picture at the--

-I'm in prison.

-I heard you, I mean...

-...Well?

-Hah. This is just, this is just kind of a shock. You called me.

-I know. I love you.

-I can't think about this right now.

-Alex?

-Alex?

Poolside. Therese Quinn, Prisoner #31152

Last night I had a dream. I was standing on a busy street corner in a swimsuit, trying to find a pool. I felt like I should've been embarrassed, but...

Well, I started walking. All the buildings sort of welled up and filled the sky, but it was still so bright, I could see everything like it was outlined from inside and outside, like a... like, I don't know, one of those bioluminescent fish that swim their entire lives without meeting another living thing. Eventually I realized where I was, and where I was going. And I went there.

Poolside. Gatsby was there, in black trunks with a big cigar jutting from between his lips, and Robert Johnson too, looking hilariously out of place in his natty three-piece suit but smiling like he'd never had a bad day in his life. And Wedekind, and Mishima and Rilke, and so many others, I...

I jumped in, and the water was so clear and, this will sound like nonsense, but so simple, I moved through it like an equation, like something just clicking into the fabric of the universe like an indispensable component. I opened my eyes underneath the surface and could see for miles, no end to the pool in sight. I kept swimming.

I was still swimming when I woke up.

CHEVALIER ANACHRONISTIC

I. EULOGY

Perhaps many of you here know him only as the “boy with a sword in his hand,” as I’ve heard him called, and that’s probably okay. That’s how I think he wanted to be known.

Live blade/cutting

When a sword is sharp it is considered “live.” Swinging one is different from swinging a dull one... many martial artists do not consider this. When cutting... the angle of the cut must line up with the swing perfectly... this is difficult. In Japan, samurai practiced cutting condemned criminals; now we practice on wet rope.

I learned a lot from Jack Corby. He may not have been so average, as it were, and maybe I never felt that he was ever really all that close, but I don’t think he had anyone else. Not, you know, on the same level as him. That’s why I think I was asked to speak today.

I realize that some of us are not yet properly acquainted. My name is Lukas Campbell, and I worked with Jack this past year on his acting for the Renaissance Kingdom. I have been an actor all my life, but starting work at the fair when I was old enough six years ago opened up a whole new venue for me. But acting was never... important to Jack, mind you, though he worked hard at it, perhaps because I asked so much of him. Now, in return, I will work hard to tell his story as best I can. To honor his memory—to honor Jack Corby.

Jack was different. You all know that: talking, interacting, dealing with people, well, that just wasn’t his thing. You knew him, so you probably all understand what I mean. I’m sure you all heard his little lectures as well. Did you ever stop and listen? There were books in him; books and encyclopedias and heaps of facts. He could talk about almost anything, and honestly, that was probably just an inside joke between him and nobody else.

Missile weapons

The English longbow...invented in Sweden...pulled 150 pounds ... practiced shooting after church. The physiological effect of this...skeletons became deformed...crossbow was deadly at 100 yards but could enter an armored knight...

and kill the man behind him. The weapon was so deadly that Pope Urban II declared it would end all war...Black powder...end of Chivalry: it took ten years to train a knight...and five minutes to show a man how to light an arquebus. Guns killed knighthood.

Let me explain.

“Renaissance man,” in contemporary parlance, means someone who can do just about anything. The period meaning of the term, in actuality, was someone who *seems* he can do just about anything. Being a renaissance man means knowing just enough to get by, just enough to *impress*. You know Jack; he could talk about history or politics or literature or anything else, you know, science or anything. But the truth—and this is why, I think, he had trouble getting into actual discourse—is that his speeches were superficial and filled with lots of glossy facts. You might have been stunned by them, you might have ignored them, but if you really listened, most of the time there was just a kind of exoskeleton of words with not so much left on the inside. He really *was* something of a renaissance man, when you get right down to it. I’m sure that made him laugh, on the inside.

Jack did know one thing, inside and out: fighting. That started a long time ago when he first started out at the Kingdom, if I understand correctly. He visited in early elementary school, and had some kind of epiphany—or so the story goes. The show was a translation of his fantasies—King Arthur, Siegfried, Roland, all of them—from his mind into reality. Now, that’s really something. I mean, how many kids get to realize their childhood dreams? Jack became a knight, you know. It took him years, but he got there, and that’s an accomplishment. I was so proud...he became a knight...he lived his dream.

When he first started out, our own Mr. Larson—that’s King Arthur, for those of you unfamiliar—took Jack in on the weekends to help take care of the horses. Mr. Larson was good to him, and Jack worked hard. Of course, there was only so much he could do from the start, being so small, but over the years he would begin walking the horses, curry-combing them, feeding them and mucking out the stables. But it wasn’t chargers that drew him to the fair.

Jack watched the joust show for the fighting. He watched Shakespeare for the fencing. He watched the tavern sing, not for the bawdy humor, but for the brawl at the end. It wasn’t long before he

was begging Mr. Larson to teach him the basics of stage combat. Larson complied, since he couldn't afford to pay Jack anyways. Then, whenever Jack wasn't watching the horses, he was at the fencing booth or imitating the show-fights or practicing whatever his teacher would show him. He learned outside of the American Fight Association, so he really never had any real hangups about safety. You know, Jack was always up for thrashing, even without any protective gear. He was always ready for a fight, always with that Toledo blade. He was, right up to the very end...

And to tell you the truth, he also had a thing for swinging live blades, practicing cutting, but maybe that's a story for a different time. That's why, when Mr. Larson introduced him to Ethan, James, and later Mr. Garvey, who introduced him to French and Italian fencing, *wushu*, German longsword and everything else, he became a willing student with an open mind. Later, he learned from movies, plays, *fechtbooks*, competitive martial arts, and anything else he could get his hands on. Jack was driven when it came to fighting, more driven than anything else, it seems. Maybe he loved it so much that there was no room in his heart for anything else.

I said that I learned a lot from Jack, and I mean that. You see, I'm just an actor; I use the renaissance fair as a way of pursuing my art. Errol Flynn was good enough for me, as far as swordfighting goes. When I found out that I'd be giving Jack acting lessons, I wasn't expecting to get fighting lessons from him, but he was adamant: we were playing opposing leads, and we would be extremely visible. He needed our exchanges on the field to be impeccable. It wasn't for the sake of professionalism, I think, but for perfection. Because combat was everything to him. We talked about those fights; developed their stories, and learned about our characters in a way that I had never experienced before.

Distance

All combat is a game of distance...retreat, kill zone, and grapple... means the entire sword potentially becomes a weapon... "pommel" comes from the Italian word for "little apple." The kill zone starts from a step and a lunge... from... the primary target... is the forward hand, secondary the forward leg, tertiary... The back leg is never a target. Retreat is further away.

Forgive me for that digression, but I think it's important for everyone here to remember Jack's passion, because "passion" isn't a word often ascribed to him. He lived a rather simple life, often seeing people in the duality of teachers and students rather than friends and... well, anything closer than that. Sometimes it was hard...

I don't mean to be cliché, but I don't think you would disagree that he was something of a loner. And if you ask me, he wasn't asking for relationships or anything like that. He wanted perfection of his skills, his abilities, and he couldn't be distracted. If he was alone, if he suffered, it was only to better himself.

And I mean, I don't think you could argue that he didn't make his mark. He was the best damn swordsman at the fair, at most any fair: he was a sword-artist. And that is how we should remember him, as a man with a sword in his hand.

II. Counseling

I... delivered a eulogy over the weekend – for Jack. Who? Jack... I haven't mentioned him before? Oh.

First rule

The first rule of fighting is to win. You do this by staying alive...may also...mean "kill." Samurai wrapped their bodies in silk... so that... they would hold together... to deliver a killing blow. Sixty percent of... duels... both combatants dead. This is a universal...

Jack had a square jaw—I can see it. A square jaw and his hair was cut short and fuzzy, almost like some kind of marine or something. His eyes were gray—isn't that, I don't know, romantic? Gray eyes?—and he had a kind intensity behind them when he was studying something. Jack was a pretty big guy, too; he was built maybe like a... wrestler or something. He wasn't in peak shape, and he didn't really work out at the gym or anything. I asked him about that once... he spent a lot of time fencing, but he had the bad habit of eating quickly and watching old movies for hours on end. He was big into doing things... obsessively like that, so that kind of balanced out his exercise habits. But his legs were strong from running around in armor—yeah, the Renaissance Kingdom thing, didn't I say?—and his arms and shoulders were large from swinging around swords. A *hard* man. His hands were

scarred up, but his face...

Oh. Okay. I didn't mean to get carried away there. Sorry.

Duels

The European duel held... formality... preceded by insults... to touch the other man's face. The response... would be "Name thy friends, sir," meaning for him to choose his second... would represent him in negotiation... place, time, weapons... would stand by... should any cheating occur.

Very manly. A lot of heart, too, just not much room in it for people. Hah, *that* kind, you know?

Jack became something of a protégé of mine this past year at the Renaissance Kingdom. He just turned eighteen and could play a full role for the first time; before he was always a stable boy. Well, the fair has been on hard times lately and fewer people have been showing up to audition... so, considering his fighting prowess they gave him the White Knight lead. Not too much acting, not too many lines, but he would run in hacking and slashing through all of the shows. That's all he ever wanted to do, as far as I could tell. I just needed to give him some charisma, make him *believable*, so he would reflect well off of me.

Me? Oh, I played opposite him as the primary antagonist. I couldn't have him botching up the part—not that I particularly expected him to, you know, but he wasn't much of a thespian, to be honest—sacrificing *my* professional integrity, so I took it upon myself to offer my services. As a teacher.

Wards

The methods of using a sword are limited... German wards—unicorn, woman's guard, iron gate, boar's tooth, hidden—correspond... to Japanese guards—fire, air, water, earth, void—although the angle... is slightly different. The sword is normally gripped only with... fingers of the dominant hand... solidity in the grip. In blocking and striking, the sword moves through guards: from a guard, through a guard, to a guard. From a guard, through a guard, to a guard. From a guard...

He was very good at what he did, too. I was impressed when he insisted on showing me things about swordfighting. It's all about the form, you know. There're all these rules you'd never think of, like how to move, how to strike. I never paid it much mind, to be honest—but

knowing *how* to fight helps your sense of body-awareness and gives credibility to the character. I guess Jack taught me about *me*, in a way.

Anyhow, although I was able to keep up with the moves that he showed me, writing them was just something else. That was Jack's prowess. You see, he knew how the characters could move, how they could fight, and what was logical for them to do. Jack knew how to make characters do things more skillful than he could himself; it was an art. I used to watch him practice all by himself... I still can't get over how he...

Oh, there I go again. Silly me. I, ah, oh, yes, I'm still a method actor. Couldn't get *that* into Jack, though. It's the only way to really develop the character, by becoming him. And the key, let me tell you, is to find out how to focus yourself, and really get into it. My key? It's music, of course. It focuses me, like a...like how people focus on a sound when meditating, something like *Om*. You know. Just one sound, just one song. It's very important—it's a ritual that cannot be disturbed. Jack used music, too. It was different, though. Everything was so different...distant...

Song

I'm so messed up, I need... focus. Wonder if I overdid it? We've been rehearsing too much; I can't deal with the strain like that. Jack won't notice, anyways. He's always with that music.

"What's it today, Jack? Himalayan throat singing or bluegrass? Or are you finally going to listen to some real music, you know, high society? Try Orff, someday, just once." His eyes are closed as he works his way, molasses slow and molasses smooth, through a circle of guards, his left hand always carefully positioned for a bare-hand parry or grapple. From a guard, through a guard, to a guard.

"M'bira." He doesn't even wait for me to ask. "The m'bira is an African thumb piano. Musicians learn the music by rote. Its sound is like that of a steel drum, but musicians will attach bottle caps and wire to the frame to create a buzzing noise. This buzzing noise is often detested in the western idiom, but enjoyed in other places throughout the world. In Japanese, this sound is called sawari as it emanates from an adjustable resonating plate on the lowest string of a thick necked shamisen. Shall we begin?" He approaches me and pulls out his ear buds. It's so loud... he's close and I can hear the crazy music as he drops into a fighting stance.

That... that music, it's... I'm swimming with musical raindrops, all I can see are rainbows. Plip-plop plip-plip-plop. Plop-plip. No rhythm, too, just this

kind of cascade of random-sounding notes and color. Jack and his sword. And that buzzing sound... and... buzzing... nothing.

As I wake up my right hand is throbbing with pain and my skull feels like it's splitting open. I'm on my back.

"Lukas... are you alright?" Jack's kneeling over me. "You flipped out; I had to stop you. What should I do?" There's blood on his sword, still in his hand.

"Just... just wait for the ambulance, man. Just... damn, that hurts."

"Ambulance? You're fine, don't worry. I'll drive you to the hospital, that's all. You're not really hurt. You seemed disoriented, and then you tried to swing at me. I just... I disarmed you and knocked you down. That's all. I couldn't have hurt you..."

Maybe I get too deep into the music sometimes. I have a whole room for listening, don't you remember? Oh.

Well, after Dad was... you know... after he left, I kind of had to clear things out and start fresh. Things were already sort of falling apart in that house anyhow, so I just got rid of them. It took a week and a dumpster and a half. I guess it seems like a waste now, but I couldn't stand to see any of that stuff any more. I just wanted it gone, so I wrecked it. No one else was around to care, so I wrecked it. Kind of pathetic, huh? Mom ran out when I was little, Dad... Dad locked up. No wonder I'm so screwed up.

The best part was probably throwing out Dad's power tools. They never earned him much of a living, not for the family. I went through that workshop in the basement like a madman, tossing drills and power cords, scrapping the table saw with the sledge hammer and then throwing that out, too. I dumped the paint, the endless boxes of screws and even that stupid Tim Allen claw hammer with the hatchet handle that I bought him for Christmas. I got rid of the "antiques" he collected, too; the rusted out sickle, and that splitting maul whose head would fall off like in a Tom and Jerry cartoon. It felt like it took me an hour to drag the drill press up the stairs, but seeing that ugly thing sitting on top of the pile of refuse in the bright orange dumpster, already looking sad and ready to rust made me happy. Somehow. I really did get rid of everything. It was a cathartic experience. I say that with a smile. See?

I kept the broom, though, and used a piece of a pizza box as a dustpan to finish cleaning out my new music room. It still smelled

faintly of sawdust and oil, so I opened up the half-window and burned incense down there for a week.

Huh? Yeah it was incense! Sage, I think it was. Don't accuse me like that—I've never smoked any of that stuff. I'm here for your help, that's all, and I want to sit here and suffer such abuse. You know, just because I had... okay... just because I have *one* problem, doesn't mean I'll just try anything. Yeah, I... I, you know... I have a problem with LSD, and I need help. I can make excuses, but I still need help. I'm sorry, I just...

You don't even know what it's like, do you? Oh. Mediums and oracles have been using it... yeah, hallucinogenics... LSD, for centuries to focus themselves, you know? I don't see why it's so bad. Besides, it worked for me, focused me. Worked damn well—you just ask any of my audiences. I wasn't... no, I wasn't just trying to hide from anything. I could see better, I could *be* better in that state. It was a tool for me, that's all. Things were just more vivid, that's all.

Mushin no Shin

The goal... is to remove his mind... in Japanese martial arts... "mushin no shin"... "mind of no mind." When this state is attained... thoughtless... to the combatant... renaissance fencing... instinctively look away from their opponent as their blade contacted... proof against being blinded by projectile blood. That is a "no mind" state.

What? About the music? Yeah, it's important. That's why I filled that room with speakers and no furniture, ran the cords up to my computer in my old room, and would play my music there to focus myself into a new role. Music and... yeah, I tripped sometimes, but it was really the music that was important. Funny thing, music. Jack really loved it, too. Said he liked to steal rhythms from it for his fights, always had his MP3 player running. I guess Rocky did that first, but he never used Chinese fiddle or Indian hip-hop like Jack did. Jack's tastes were eclectic, but he never would go for anything *you've* ever heard of. You'd see him standing there with the wires of his MP3 player dangling from his ears, eyes closed, and his sword stuck out in front of him, not moving. That was focus: his mind whirled with the sound, cutting, thrusting, kicking and thrashing around the whole while. It wasn't until after his thoughts settled and he could visualize actual combatants, though,

he told me, that he would move.

High man wins

...High man always wins... his blade will contact flesh before his opponent's. It is the opposite for unarmed combat... the low man always wins. In Japanese... kenzyutu... the lower a combatant is to the ground, the longer his arms... but in that case the primary target shifts to the forward leg.

Jack could thrash with a sword or a spear or anything else. There were certain rules for how to fight and they applied across the board. Well, almost. There was one weapon that he couldn't defeat.

Jack died on the ground before me before the ambulance even got there. He got shot—ironic, huh. Came out of the shadows—the guy wanted money. Looked strung out on something... then, just like that... I couldn't see the blood, it was so dark. He didn't even scream. I was stunned; I couldn't do anything, and the guy ran off. The air was really still, except for the sound of crickets going at it... and Jack's ragged breath. *He* wanted money, that's all, but you know Jack, he... he tried to intervene. He was such a Romantic, so naïve. There was really nothing he could do, I mean, the guy had a *gun*. But Jack, Jack and his sword, they were invincible... he thought...

It really feels like history, but, yeah...it was just last week.

Damn.

He's not coming back.

III. Suicide Note

I've made a lot of mistakes that have cost people and I regret that. I come from a bad stock, and I am retiring from this world before causing any more harm.

First blood

The first man... gains first blood... the man who loses... plays the rest of the fight on tilt... this is a big deal. When dueling was made illegal, men fought... to first blood... trained... only non-lethal targets.

When I was still growing up we moved to a nice suburban town, to this house, where there are more trees around, more privacy, and

more trouble to get into for idle housewives. Mom left us for the head of the PTA when I was still in middle school. But I guess that's how things are nowadays.

I started going to acting school then, I guess as a method of coping. Dad had other methods.

I didn't know until later, when I ran into his stash. He was furious with me, and I was furious with him, and I confronted him about it. He said it helped him open his mind to be more creative for work. He said it helped him focus on the job; it helped him forget what happened with Mom. He had a hundred excuses. What lies.

Addiction is addiction, and I learned my addiction from him.

He couldn't support his habit, he got desperate, he got caught. I use pay from my little odd acting jobs, but it's never enough. I lost control. Bad stock.

Forte foible

Leverage is crucial... blade contact must be maintained. Favorable... is forte-foible, because you... control. The forte is the strong... the first two thirds from the ricasso... foible, the weak... strikes and cuts... made at the intersection... thrusts are made with the tip.

I have to end with the truth: Jack's death is my fault. He wasn't killed by some mugger; he was shot by my dealer. He came to collect on my debts, and I had planned on settling them with some money from the Kingdom's cash box. Maybe I got too greedy. It was bad, I know, but I was going to pay it back, I already have. Jack didn't think that was right, though. He had a strong sense of morals, and he tried to intervene. He didn't get it, he didn't get that I screwed up.

I would have walked away with a black eye, a broken nose, maybe, if I hadn't stolen the money. But I wanted to end it, clear out the bad. Jack saw the money and he got aggressive. The guy didn't know how to react; he got scared and pulled out the pistol... but it wasn't Jack's fault. It wasn't Jack's fault. He was just a little *different*. He just didn't get it.

Jack was full of little lectures: he enjoyed history and its little ironies. I wish I had paid attention more when he told them, though, because now I just have little snippets running through my mind, little tangential facts. Like the one about the dueling...

The goal of a warrior is to extinguish... forte and a foible...moving through a guard, through a guard, the high man always wins. Men wrapped their bodies in silk to kill ...lost first blood. The primary target... the primary target and black powder. Advance advance. Striking with a live... different from striking dull... Retreat retreat. Seconds would watch for cheating... retreat retreat..

Jack has no more lectures. He will not raise a sword again. His art is gone. I have run out of masks. I cannot act again. My art is dead.

Jack's last words were "Name your friends" as he stepped in front of me and drew that Toledo blade one last time. He was going to protect me. I'm sure he had a smirk on his face.

With this I answer him, "I will be your second."

Time ticks my life away with a blinking digital colon.
I've put the mango down when I get to the stringy parts near the pit
because my teeth need a break
I have the small chin of an infant it points as a dagger and would take
out eyes given the chance.
This mango, which glistens with a sneer seems to beg *me* to tell it what a
human is.

Flavour of the secret lingers like a lyric on the lip of my lip and I
could flail and howl blindly if asked to.

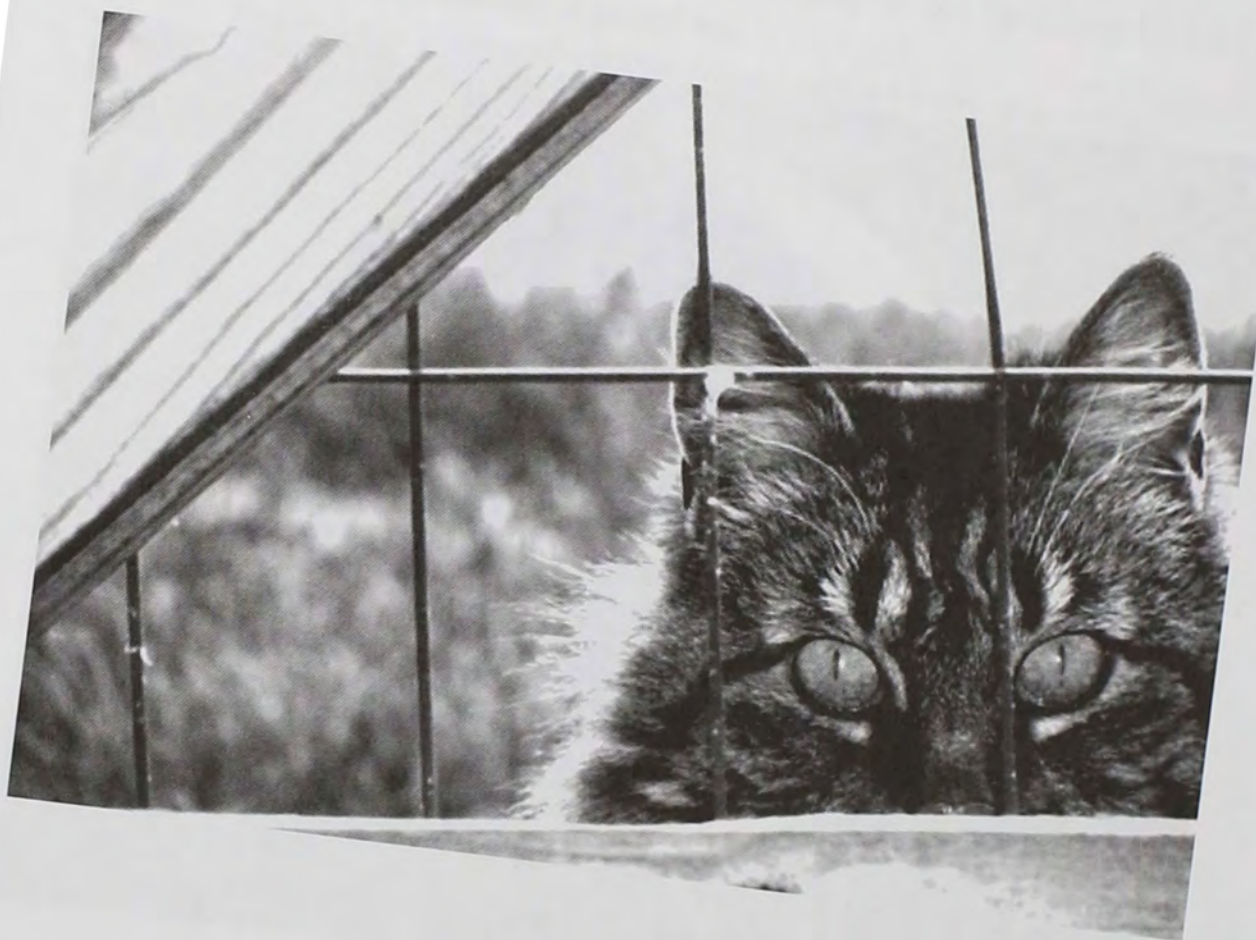
But no one's around except Aunt Lucy and the television.

YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE COLOR OF
THE PEACHES



Matthew Flyntz

BEYOND THE GATE



AND FOR MY UN-BIRTHDAY I DRANK
POET'S TEA AND GOT TO SEE

For Constance Merritt

Podium—wooden—hides her tall hands. Fingers over Braille coat the ears like ink sticks. Her voice isn't crisp; I hear sugar lumps when she speaks, echoing through the chapel.

The sounds, still, are soft enough. Besides, the podium is not rubber and cannot prevent her electricity from sparking envy (I admit it) between my teeth. I bite my tea cup.

She drops her clock and I can't believe how quickly time stops. The long hand winds round an entire once. (I don't want to move.) I want this Cheshire Cat of a woman to read

and read and

my heart and

my eyes, ears lean forward to reach

her.

These parts of my anatomy so arrested by her rhythm leap from me, crawl onto stage. They're floating now. Bodies fade—shiny organs fade—and all I can see are her words, her harp-shaped mouth.

MONTMARTE



TREE-BABY

Y ou start remembering the way that summer lay differently on top of that year. Sunsets bruised their way up your arms, yet you would laugh and dance on the grass, barefoot—twirling scarves like a dream tornado. You hid from me that summer night, in the bushes, and I almost cried because I could not find you. Well after midnight you sprang out, laughing—fingers bleeding from thorns that sucked hungrily. That year, I saw the lark drop dead mid-flight (the grass was so green in contrast) and that changed everything.

You sat under the weeping willow and the white blossoms covered your hair like a wedding veil. I would not let you cradle the lark even when you insisted it was your sister. I thought my heart would snap, *twang*, like a guitar string—a chord of constant dissonance. Closing my eyes, you and the tree were one—tree-mother, Adonis-baby lark. Yes, you would only have lark-babies! They would burst from your fragile bark-womb and take flight. They would make their nests in your branches and sing you lullabies. I imagined you—surrounded. I wanted to cradle you like the dead lark.

It looked as if clouds were raining white, white petals like down pillows broken open—leaving branches bald. The bees would pelt your skin like an afterthought. *Where are your children? Does it sting?*

Summer died, your hair had all fallen out, and you would only wear feathery night-gowns. Your feet tread the ground where the lark died: the grass a crusted yellow. Your feet like moth wings, fearing a tear. Your breath, the slow rustle of leaves. Repeating: *I remember I remember I—*

WRESTLING WITH PLANTS

I touched his arm
with honeysuckle dew.

Gave him day old
kisses mulled like wine.

Speckled robin's egg skin
coated in calamine

tickled from oily
ivy fights,

and I laughed at him by the lake,
"I'll take you anyway."

I SMILE

Orange freckles spray across her back, dripping gently over pastel
shoulders
Some land on my face. I smile
Sunlight leaks in through smoke-stained curtains and over her curves
We play with the light on our fingers, keeping our bodies tangled in the
dark
Cupping the sun in my hands, I place it on her back and we try to keep
still
Hoping we can all balance there, together for a moment
But a breeze makes us shiver and laugh as the light spills off her spine
and all over the sheets
Now we lay and wait for moonrise
I make up constellations and she tells me what the clouds taste like
A few of her blonde hairs attach themselves to my sheets
They'll be there for days, only outlived by the curious smell of purple
she leaves behind
But for now, we bathe in the pools of light we have created
As it rains down on us in drops of ease from a cracked window frame
Some land on my face. I smile.

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST WHO LOVES ICARUS

Y ou could paint her portrait using only shades of brown and black. Crayon colors. Sepia for the dark tan of her skin, outer space for hair and eyes. Perhaps a slash of tickle-me-pink for her mouth, curved in its usual playful secret. Or pursed like a vertical infinity, making fish faces in front of her mother's aquarium. She never did act her age, unless she had to.

Maybe blue for the shirt she wore when I last saw her. A rare splash of color in her blackgreynavybrown wardrobe, barring the occasional scarf a la Audrey Hepburn. A dash of shadow would be necessary, if she were to be in her blue shirt. Her skin was tinted with grey then, eyes not quite as bright and smile no longer the visible secret but a rare surprise rusted copper green. I would rather she be in yellow, like the shirt she wore when we danced in the snow, white flakes catching on her eyelashes, brown cheeks a pretty blushing red. Yellow like the day we made snow angels and philosophized away a Sunday afternoon, drinking hot tea and reciting Oscar Wilde. Yellow like the day she cried in the bathroom, when even the promise of hot soup could not make her smile. She was such a tiny, breakable thing in my arms, body crying more than her eyes.

No, I do not want to paint her sad.

Her black peacoat with the lilac scarf. Her shield against the cold white school she hated. She created Shelia in that coat; our little whale friend who lived in the vents. Sipped milk she named Gilbert, ate apples named Herman. We would run down the halls, singing *Elephant Love Medley* or reenacting Tom Stoppard. She'll be on the West End some day, and perhaps smile again. She'll be the poet on the street corner, Daedalus on her shoulder.

I wish I could paint her there. It's been seven months since I last saw her. Her hair is shorter now, and she is no longer the grown-up child who stays forever painted in my memory. A sister so long in the coming, too short in the staying. I still cry when I think of her, walking

away without me. She doesn't need me anymore, but I still want a piece of her with me. She'd make the most beautiful portrait.

I'll paint her from behind, paintbrush fingers in her peacoat pockets. Grey and black and the lilac scarf, trailing behind her in a London wind.

HAUNTED



DINNER AT THE OLD HOUSE

I told you this house is a *thousand* years old. There's nothing good in here," I grumble. Peter nods in agreement. My brother and I gaze upon the decrepit sports closet in exasperation: a dusty wooden baseball bat, a flat basketball crammed in a broken crate. "What's that?" I ask. Two curved Styrofoam sticks poke out from between the boxes. Peter shrugs. He picks them up and we march off to Dad in the kitchen. Hopefully we have finally discovered a worthwhile toy in a house in which no one has played for thirty years.

"What are these? I found them in the closet," Peter holds up the sticks.

"No, he didn't. I found them!" I always like to get the facts straight.

Dad ponders. "Those look like practice swords. They must have been your grandfather's. You know he was quite interested in fencing. I remember he had a katana too—" The words are lost as Peter and I immediately rush outside to begin our training. He whacks me in the back of the head and the fifty-year old foam crumbles in his hands. Sadly, our careers as samurai are over before they begin.

On these family trips to the old Marin County house (without non-disintegrating toys), the house itself becomes our plaything. Before dinner I go into my grandfather's office to explore his old life. Pretty soon I'm signing important letters and typing out drafts for his lecture next week. Sizeable tasks for a ten-year old. I can imagine only his work, though, never my own. Don's presence is too strong to have it any other way. His immovable desk. His enormous library. His ancient typewriter that craves fresh ink and a clean stack of paper. Yes, no doubt this office belongs to a writer. Papers with his handwriting still fill the drawers. Phrases like "semantics of the self" and "ladders of abstraction" dance across the pages in cursive scrawl. I pretend to know what they mean. In the photographs old men shake hands and smile in suits. In one picture an elderly woman in a kimono stands among the men looking proud and venerable. I read the back. *Mother with President Carter—1978*. Don's always smiling, always on the verge of a chuckle. We've never spoken, but I can hear his laugh in the pictures. I can hear his refined, lilting speech tinged with the British accent (a

result of his British-Canadian upbringing) which to his students rendered him so much like an Oxford don that that is exactly what they called him. Somehow the name stuck, even through his children and grandchildren. I gaze at his pictures and clasp his pens. As I sit in his leather chair, African masks leer down at me from their posts on the wall, curious at all the unusual activity. I would later learn that the makers of these masks used them to communicate with their ancestors. Now they serve as my grandfather's scouts, making sure I keep his affairs in line. I find it easy to work because his desk and chair are still set at the same awkward height from over a decade earlier: perfect for both the tiny old Japanese man and his overgrown ten-year-old grandson. Nothing has changed. At any minute he will stroll in and ask if I've seen his briefcase.

I run upstairs to the dining room and find Daisy setting the table. I help her by getting out the napkin rings and inserting the napkins. Everyone has their own napkin ring. They lie empty on the table like jewels dying to be worn—a sterling band speckled with turquoise, an ancient ring of deep red mahogany polished to perfection. I can't remember whose is whose, just mine—the thin tortoiseshell hoop that turns the world yellow and murky when you hold it to your eye. This must be what the universe looks like to a turtle. Daisy knows so I hand them to her and she puts them where they need to be. Daisy has the biggest, blackest hands you've ever seen, and she's been setting this table ever since it was purchased in 1955. Before that she was a farm girl, the daughter of sharecropping preacher from Mississippi. She says she has ten brothers and sisters of her own, but I've never thought of her as part of any family but this one.

When we're all sitting, Dad stands up to cut the lamb. You should see him when he does that. I don't think many things make a father happier than serving food to his family in such a dignified manner. He is, after all, the only one fit for the task. My brother and I are too young, not even teenagers. My grandmother and Daisy are too old, but also too old-fashioned. What are men for if not to cut the meat? Uncle Mark, though he has been eating at this table for forty-five years, will never be old enough to serve at it. Daisy will cut his food for him until he dies eight years from now. She will never get tired of it. They say most people with Down syndrome don't live to their fifties. Everyone at the table knows that statistic endures only because most people with Down syndrome don't have Daisy Rosebrough to take care

of them. And Barbara, my stepmother of several years, remains a new part of an old house. So she does not serve the lamb.

Only a few things in this house have ever changed. Who cuts the meat is one of them. Tonight my grandmother doesn't know that. "Let's wait for Don," she reminds us.

"Why don't we just go ahead, Bama?" Dad gently suggests. (As an infant, his 'm's often came out as 'b's. "Mama" turned to "Bama" and there it stayed.)

Bama looks confused but doesn't protest. Sometimes Alzheimer's makes change harder—when it forces you to live those changes over and over again. Sometimes Alzheimer's makes change easier. Bama is happy knowing Barbara is her son's first wife, his only wife, and the mother of his four children, so no one tells her otherwise. Between now and the day she dies, every time I meet my grandmother will be for the first time. We'll still be happy to see each other.

Daisy plans to outlive everybody, to just keep taking care of everyone until all the work is done. I wouldn't put it past her. One spring she cracked her hip by falling off a ladder, and the next summer she took me bowling and beat me. I was thirteen. She was eighty-five. Daisy was there to wipe the dog poop off my dad's sneakers when he was four years old, and she will be there to tuck me into bed forty-five years later. Daisy will be there for Mark every minute of every day, even when it means fracturing her vertebra trying to lift him off the floor when he falls out of bed. Because of Daisy, Mark gets a chance at a full and happy life. So do his parents. Even on vacations, Daisy cannot be conquered. When she toured the Middle East for a vacation years ago, she brought back a rock from every holy site she visited for her personal collection. No international smuggler has ever made fried chicken better than she does.

Tonight she has made lamb. And she has made a chocolate cake in the shape of a lamb to go with it, but the head falls off when she removes the mold. This is the funniest thing Peter and I have ever seen. A decapitated lamb. Daisy's face contorts into a mixture of disappointment, astonishment, and amusement as Peter and I use toothpicks to pin the head back on. Lambchop meets *Hellraiser*. After dinner, Mark goes off to listen to his records. I'm convinced he has every record ever made. Ask him for anything. He'll dig it out. Peter and I set up the card table so Daisy and Dad can play whist with us. We hear Mark singing along: "Buh-buh-baby, baby, baby!" in mellow tones

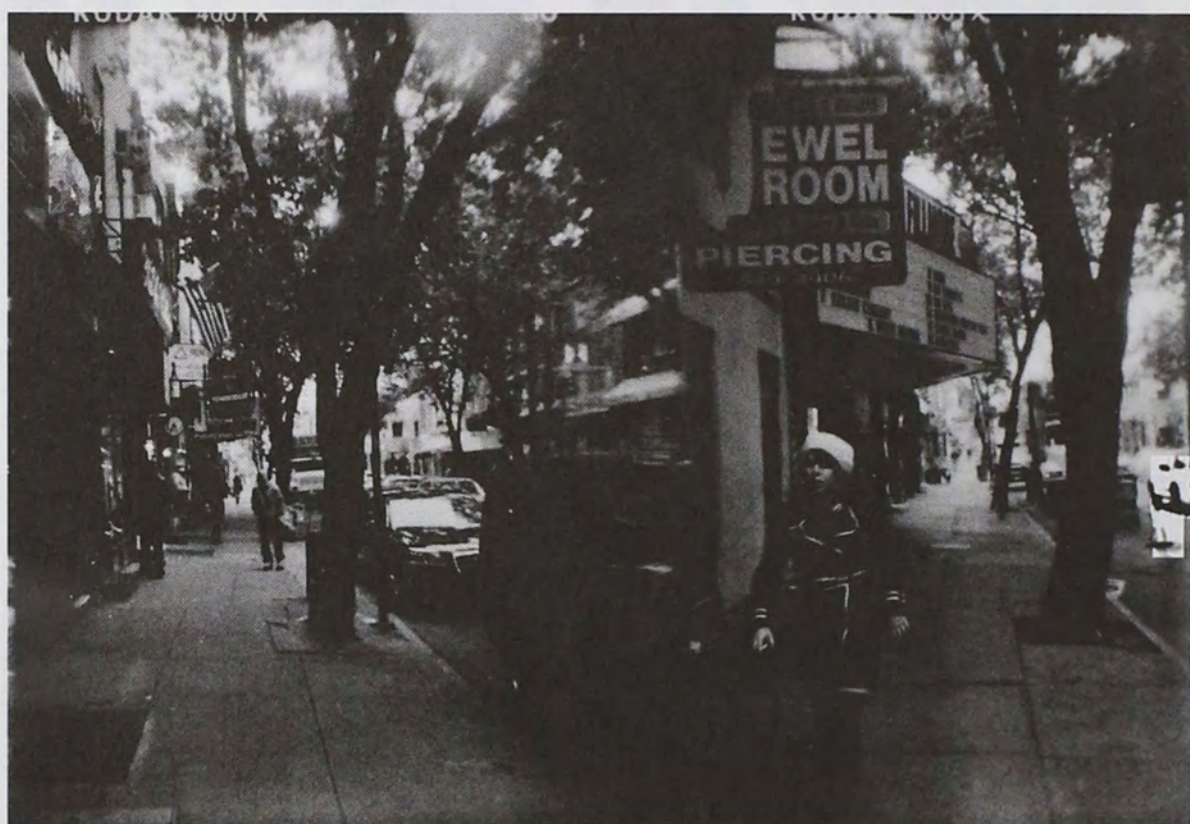
punctuated with heavy labials. He likes songs that really swing, and they always have “Baby baby baby” in the chorus. Even if the song doesn’t, he knows it should so he adds it. Such a romantic. Peter and I argue over who gets to be Daisy’s partner, even though Dad is the best player. Peter was last night, so it’s my turn tonight. The windows are open and cool California air wanders through. Bama and Barbara talk on the sofa about the neighbor’s new addition or about how the hydrangeas still look stunning. “Jeopardy” plays on the television but no one turns to watch. “Now, whose turn is it?”

I look up. “Hearts to you, Daisy.”

LARA E GABRY



SOUTH STREET



WALKING HOME

You were the perfect postcard
That I sent from freedom
After moons of flowerpressed parchment paper
Dreams that weighed heavily
A thousand diamonds brushed by my fingertips
And I smudged each one
But none more than that meant for me
To its maker, my apologies.

Lucky sevens proved pertinent,
As I drank straight from the bottle
With consistent companion and you
Filled a role
Naked in body and mind, lacking
In the water that drained amidst the smoke from
Flames, fast waved but burned slowly

Darkness doesn't correspond to emptiness
But your breath showed in the plummeting
Temperature, your temperance a quick fuse
I refuse to use my framed fantasies
As non-fiction inspiration
Because dissatisfaction is my muse
To her I return so faithfully

And I give compliments too easily
Taken aback, my words come haunting
As I watch former passion pictures
Playfully dance across white walls that
Face a church, however unholy
Night lights soft touches and rough carpets of grass
Broken glass pauses to reflect and I abide.

THE MEANING OF A DUST-BUSTER

The fine china rests quietly in the back of a wooden drawer. The family of silver-plated majesty is no longer as majestic as it once was. It's been forever since they've all been shrouded in that purple royalty of good use. They miss Thanksgiving. They miss eyeballing the gravy boat on Christmas. They miss the bittersweet tinges of group-hearty laughter that all shared the same last name. For some reason though, they do not miss 5 year-old Jason clanging their plated features violently along Grandpa's glass of empty champagne. Drummers and Tiffany never seem to mix.

Spiky prongs of chill metal, giraffe-necked knives, stunningly curvaceous spoons that beg to have a tongue slide along its concave space to lick vanilla drips of ice cream away, left by some desert that pretentiously spouts a la mode as if this were some French-delicacy-land, and not the apex of Michigan state as it actually is...They indulge in the now silent air of the dining room outside the high cedar wall in front of them.

All are slightly dust covered, graced with the silent rain of age and longing. The tools of taste continue to remain, resting submissively between that red velvet cloth in their eloquent coffin box; you know the kind of cloth of course, the kind that makes you wish you were back in the womb when you run it in between two of your no-longer-Jergens fingertips.

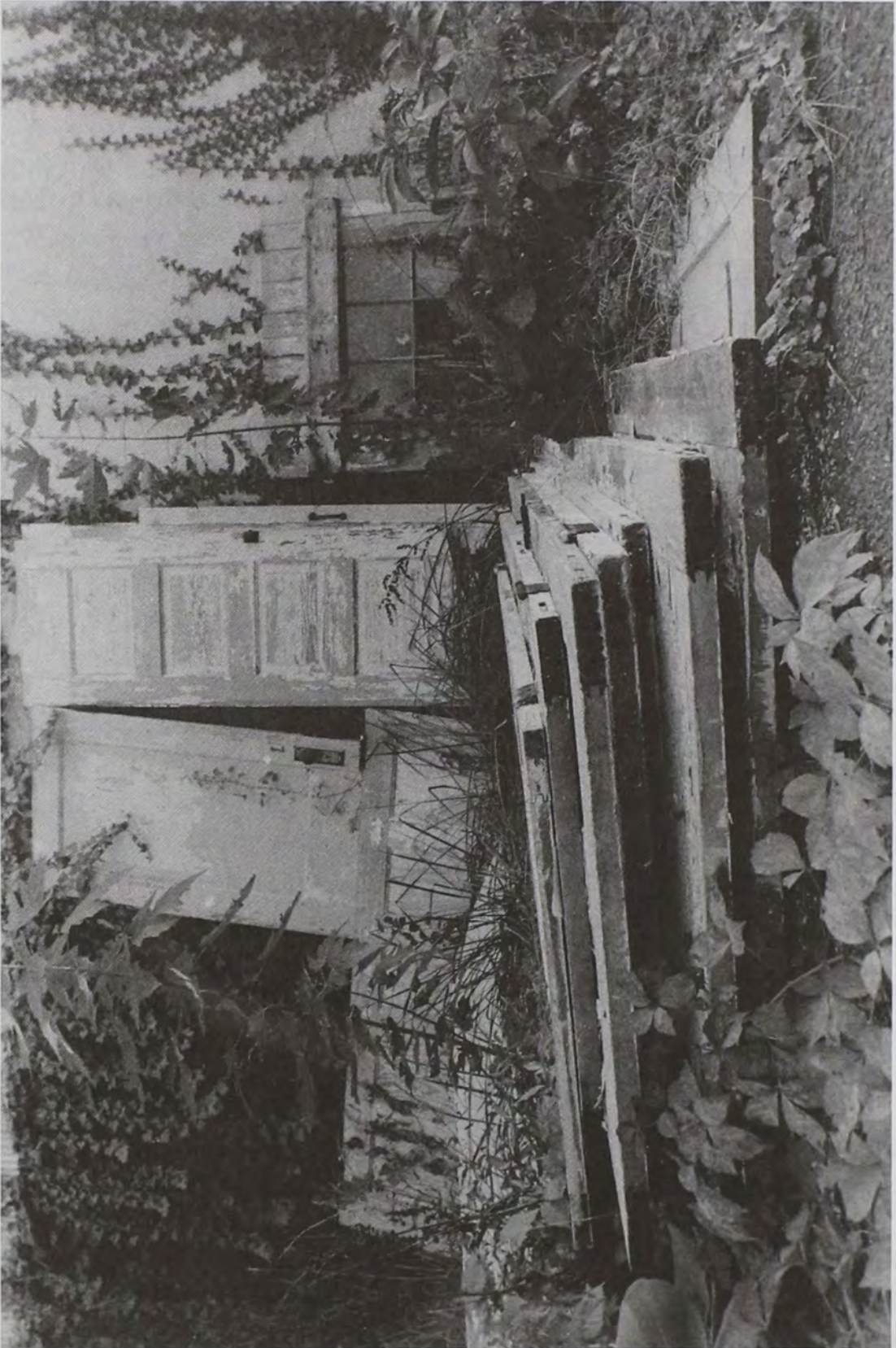
Emily is old now. She doesn't stand in the kitchen as much as she sleeps in her bed anymore. Her husband rarely shaves his beard and his voice seems more monotonous these days. When he speaks to her, she can sense that the love in his voice has become just as scruffy as the grey stubble on his cheeks. Their clothes sit beside one another on half bent wire hangers that suggest neglect. The bottle of Wisk in their laundry room has caked blue around the top, missing its grocery store freshness when its deflowered seal was exquisitely unbroken.

Harold is his name. It is what lies parallel to Emily in the neatest of calligraphy on their 47 year-old marriage certificate. Ancient is a good word to use.

They no longer lay parallel at night, probably because they exist on different planes of space these days and resemble intersecting lines of confusion more than anything. At night, when shadows take away

the optical illusion that life is all daybright moments, they become those silver objects in a drawer... lives being covered in dust more and more each day, waiting for that whimsical moment someone will open the lid to their minds and say, "It's time to put these to use... today is a special day."

WHEN IT'S AJAR



THE WALL BETWEEN

She was a branch covered in hoarfrost, twigging up from clean-stripped bark and soft heartwood. Her fingers knived and scraped against the heavy orchid sky. Supplication raked among the clouds, she stood atop one old stump, Lavinia-trimmed. Her mouth open, the wail spidered up out of her throat and fell dead at the tuberous feet. Tumbled through the cloying leaves and lay flat on her back in the old dining room. The table and organ gone to make room for the hospice bed. And I sat in the other room, the thin wall between whispering the crisp snaps of brittle bone as the nurse and my uncles turned her over onto the other side.

Mute constellations ambled by the woman bent and wretched-low among the briars. More deaf than stones, they refused her pleas, the gentle-winking lights. The granddaughter, staring eyes-wide at the T.V.

Another branch had splintered, and cleaved away. Mourning sap bled out onto the leaf mold floor. Barren, debarked, too numb—or too weak—to cry her pain to the papered trees. Her fellows spread wide green limbs to the oblivious stars, the stuccoed ceiling. They plead only for mercy. The quickness to end the rot.

Weak, hand-over-hand sunlight pulled from the foothold horizon, inched nervously above the sharp, blue-sky crags between forked limbs. They sang to her, my uncles, how sweet the sound hummed low, and the warm sun shunned its fellow stars, and rose up into the east window. There it hung and kissed her worn and weathered cheek. Her cold cheek. Warmed away the frost.

And I sat still, the granddaughter folded into the stiff-backed chair in the other room, clutching the remote. My eyes unhearing shut.

ROSARY



KINDS OF BIRDS

Clouds touched down. Mountains rose up. Molten turned to ice and ash. The seas boiled and churned. Waters ate the land. Trees fell like matchsticks in the prevailing wind. It was in every way biblical, except there was not a thought to a whisper of a prayer. The earth fell skyward.

The machine screamed when they turned it on, the day they killed the world.

Dr. Pollard, from America, was given the honor of flipping the switch. A smiling group of techs carried in a large fork-pronged, red-handled lever with "it's alive!" written on it in boldface. Pollard laughed and pressed the small button that gave power to the machine. Computers clicked in virtual silence, enacting processes that hummed and whirred ignorant of champagne and coalitions and human desires.

For the first second there was nothing, which expanded.

Akane Kiyota dreamed she was any kind of bird at all. She imagined she was flying over the factories and warehouses along the docks of the Chiba prefecture. She drifted off in school. She read books in her room. Akane dreamed of many things in a world uncomfortable for dreamers. She loved origami and would fold the little pieces of kami into modular shapes and tiny tesseractes of purple and blue. Her parents were kind, but old-fashioned. They wanted her to grow up and find a nice husband. They did not want her to stray far from Chiba. Akane just wanted to fly.

Science is like a glacier. In different periods in a glacier's lifetime it can move very fast, or very slow, grow or melt, but even beaten back into obscurity and indigence it always seems to return with the flow of time. And when it has mass and inertia, it can swallow the world whole.

They had both inertia and mass. A coalition of governments put forth a scientific mandate to unfold the basic fabric of our universe. It took twenty years, innumerable billions, and fifty miles of ceded desert to build the largest particle supercollider in history, a giant coilhouse beneath the earth. They would smash matter at the subatomic level. They would untie necklaces of superstrings. They would hold their breath.

Jimmy Pollard was four years old when he got his first time ma-

chine. It was in the shape of black British police box, a miniature TARDIS. His parents were science fiction geeks of the most somber variety, the professional mathematicians. The bulb on the top of the toy even lighted up. When Jimmy told his kindergarten teacher he wanted to be a Doctor, he meant a different kind.

She lived in the Stream. The Stream was good to her. The Stream was life. Life was the Stream. It massaged her. It loved her. The Stream was love and she was love. She was young, and she was old, and she would not die, and she was always dead.

When the Men took her from the Stream she cried out in pain.

There was a possibility, the media had reported with morbid glee when the first giant collider was built, all of those years ago in Meyrin; there was a possibility - an almost infinitesimal chance - but a possibility nonetheless, that in the process of blasting quasars and smashing protons and neutrons and trying to recreate the processes of the Big Bang, we might accidentally unwrite the universe. This was, of course, scientifically unsound. There was an infinitesimal chance that anything would go wrong.

The lights browned and there was a distant echo, a sound of crashing deep beneath them. The sound of a groggy giant.

$1.2 \times 10^{-1,000,000,000,000,000}$.

In their heads they heard it screaming.

Seven technicians died almost immediately, their bodies papier mache grotesqueries soaked in paint and solvent, stewed together and festooned with the scraps of their own blue lab coats. Bones stuck out, skin distended into pink, fleshy masses. Giger paintings via Easter Sunday. Grayed and mottled hair slathered in exploded vitreous humor. The doctors diagnosed it "cellular strain."

Zigmund Mueller never believed in God. His grandmother, who raised him, took him to the Orthodox church every Sunday where he would have to cross through the royal gate and listen to an old man shout about his soul. Oma would make him pray every night with her in front of the icons and would thrash him if he complained. Oma died. Zigmund Mueller grew up and became a scientist.

Metal dissolved and broke away. Clocks ticked backwards and forwards. Magnetic polarity despaired. There were empty whistles through the alleys and tumbleweeds in the streets. No one noticed. She noticed.

The extent of the damage was worse than initially surmised. The seven people died inside the facility, but so did millions of others across the globe, seemingly at random. In an instant, across longitudes and national borders, mothers and fathers, animals and children were reduced to a confused rot of calcium and soft tissue. People panicked, as people do. A sign of the times.

The men of science who helped build the machine did not believe much in religion or fairy tales, which they held in equal contempt. They did not see their work as the sign of the eschaton – how could they? They did not know the story of Ouroboros, of the Midgard serpent, the snake that devoured its own tail and had represented the end and beginning of all things. The Aztecs told his story, as did the Phoenicians, the Hindu, and Cleopatra. Medieval alchemists saw him as a great purifier. Thor was destined to give his life defeating him in the War to end all Wars. He lived on with the men of science only in the Mobius strip, a representation devoid of poetry.

In a September long before, a team of Paris clockmakers broke into the Pantheon and spent a year fixing a neglected antique timepiece beneath the museum. They did their repairs in deep secret. They understood both mechanics and the magic of antiquity. When asked how they infiltrated these modern underground spaces, the leader of the men answered simply:

"Opening a lock is the easiest thing for a clockmaker."

Poetry, in the end, was everything.

There was a fresh stream behind her house. When Akane was ten the water was clean enough to swim in, if not to drink. She would sneak back down the path behind her house, take off her school uniform, and lie down in the cold water. She let the current take her, sometimes a mile away from home. Then she would walk back, soaking, still young enough and reckless enough to not feel embarrassed. She changed and hid her wet undergarments before her parents got home.

Eventually the screaming in people's heads died away. It was replaced by a steady pulse, an undercurrent that ran through the cement walls of the chamber and the computers and cables, a subtle drumming that everyone felt. It ticked somewhere subliminal, a deep and labored breathing. They called it a singularity, because they could not explain it.

She wasn't really a she, or an it, or a this or a that. But she was scared. She had never known pain before, even in the most violent

cataclysms. This was a pain of fear and unknowing. She could still feel the Stream, but it ran rough and shallow. She choked as she tried to speak.

"Can we study it?" became the question. There was vigorous debate. Every conceivable instrument was brought in to test the singularity in the chamber, but their readings were irregular or absurd. Dr. Pollard furrowed his brow. Drs. Kiyota and Mueller and rechecked the diagnostics. The thing in the chamber refused to move, bend, or disappear. It chose instead to grow.

Akane had an aptitude for numbers. She was good at putting symbols in the right places. Her parents drilled her to the point of tears, but she excelled. Her placement scores were high, and she made it into a top university. She did not love her work, but it served a purpose. It was a kind of freedom. No one told her about the artistic possibility of numbers – but anything to get out of Chiba.

The three doctors met in private after the rest of staff had gone. They fed numbers to computers and drew lines on charts. They kept notes in their heads. They came to a conclusion, if not a consensus. They told no one of their findings, but they didn't have to.

She felt tightness around her, the kind a butterfly feels in chrysalis. The Stream was brackish and chill but as she touched its edges she saw that it was plastic, and edible. She began to taste - and devour.

People came from all over to the facility. There was desperation in the air and with it uncanny quiet. Without a shot fired or a bomb dropped, people could sense death around them. Yet no nations went to war. They just waited.

She grew beneath the earth, reaching down to the core and through the poles. She grew in stasis, womb-like, and she too waited. The Earth twisted around her.

The doctors locked themselves in. It seemed like the right thing to do. In a way, the disaster was their child. They deserved to be with it to the end.

Pollard blamed himself. He was supposed to be an explorer, not a destroyer. He was the head of the team. He should have died with the technicians. It would have been easier. He sat motionless in the break room, watching the television reports of typhoon and fire. He watched the world wither away long before its due, and as the singularity grew, his sadness consumed him from within. In the end, James

Pollard was not a man of action.

Dr. Mueller shot the guards at the main gate with a pistol his grandfather had left him before he died. They fell expressionless to the ground, awkwardly streaking the wall with red paint. Zigmund never knew his grandfather; he doubted Oma would have approved. He felt bad about killing the men, but it was the end of the world. He went to find Dr. Pollard.

Akane climbed down a ladder into the heart of the collider. It looked like a nondescript drainage tunnel: concrete, hollow, and empty. The presence of the singularity rippled through her, and though it was invisible, she followed its pulse. She could feel the center turning.

Mueller followed her into the tunnel. He didn't want to hurt Akane – Dr. Kiyota (she'd never let him call her that) – but they were all guilty. Pollard had seemed grateful when he appeared in the doorway, gun in hand. He said nothing, but the look on his face told Zigmund that he had the bullet Pollard was waiting for. He did not feel bad anymore. It would be soon now.

The ground began to shake apart. Akane was only distantly aware of this, just as she was only distantly aware of Dr. Mueller behind her, and the slug that smashed through her lower vertebrae and lodged itself in her liver. She remembered the stories. She remembered the lights of Chiba at night. She remembered gathering up cherry blossoms in spring and make huge circles on the lawn. She remembered making rings out of flowers and dreams that took flight, here at the center of all things. In her final seconds, she forgot nothing.

Her eyes opened. The Stream was not around her. The Stream *was* her. The chrysalis broke and she reached out as space folded. The earth fell skyward. The clouds touched down.

First there was nothing, which expanded.

There was a perfect velvet quiet. Pinpoints of light watched merrily waves of magnetic fields that crashed into solar winds and buffeted against protoplanetary discs, creating the most spectacular light show no man would ever see. The cloud coalesced.

Akane was any kind of bird at all.

ROUND BOTTOM FLASKS



PHALANGESE, OR THE ART OF SPEAKING TO FINGERS

in front of me
my fingers are growing shorter
by the day hour minute –
paling and disentangling from
complicated weaves of tendon
connections and skin sensitivity

just yesterday they politely
withdrew into warm leather gloves,
blaming the air temperature, but
truthfully fearful of missing
connections, of cracking knuckles,
and no room for extra finger prints

I am afraid that today they
will need plate gauntlets as
armor against an apathetic
nervous system, and what shall I
do if tomorrow they retreat up
into my wrists and cannot
feel anything at all?

EARLY SPRING

One year, Spring came too soon.
It was January.
We kids all stormed the warm outdoors,
our toys still smelling of Christmas pine-sap.

The hands of crocuses parted the soil
and my mother's pansies poked from their barrels.
Cotyledons peeped like chicks from tree branches
and clicked in the wind.

For one week, my eyes sipped
the marigold color of crocus-hearts
and their queer, skinny leaves curled away from their stems.
Then the weatherman saw, so the dirt cracked and froze.

The infant leaf I had nuzzled on its tree
grayed and fell.
The flowers shriveled to ugly dead strings.

Snow came twice more that winter,
all sweetness and white,
but when Spring came
and we children again rushed the resurrected grass
there were no crocuses.

THE STORYTELLER



KARMA KIDS

seeds in socks
tied like tongues
s u s p e n d e d
cast shadows over
hardwood earth

we are tired.

bring us potions and pleasures
we will pay you in altitude
and other imaginaries
send us angels
and other winged things
throwing light catch us, holding
fields ripe of neverland,
clutch fistfuls of yellowing grass

A BAZAAR TRIPTYCH

ACT I: Communicating at a Carnival in the Land of the Blind

The Bearded Woman became addicted to Zoloft. When she broke she turned to St. John's wort for a fix. It was a depressing cycle being depressed. But that's life in the circus of the blind. The Prancing Bears had a ball. They'd don their bellhop fezzes, and take turns pawing around the pavilion on the ball. The Hamster in the ball suffered deep contusions on his medulla oblongata. His senility resulted in an intensified fear of the ball rolling- yet he loved when the Bears played catch. Making their rounds the Prancing Bears devoured children; the lost ones, the whiny ones, the ones standing in line for Klondike bars. The Bearded Woman made her rounds. She upended perfume on her summer dress. She purchased lingerie from Macy's. The Sword Eaters, Jugglers, and Tumblers lost interest in performing. The audience had no recollection of their interesting abilities. Hookah hits became vocational. The Sword Eaters got munchies. The Tumblers became radio-potatoes. The Jugglers turned into chronic wanderers. The Strong Man grew stronger. It requires a lot of balance to blindly lift an Aston Martin. He trained by throwing monster truck tires- they now go 75 yards. He could punt a canon ball the length of a soccer field. The Bearded Woman couldn't work a razor without sight. Her beard grew to anchoritic lengths. She used more bottles. She wanted sex. She wasn't choosy. Men thought she was a transvestite. Their hands discovered a foot and a half of facial hair, wide set shoulders, and breasts. They saw cycles of Dinitrophenol and Anadrol-50. The Prancing Bears refused to eat the Bearded Woman because her scent burned like onions and they would hack hairballs. Their hats would fall off, and Bears, though cunning, have the greatest insecurity complex within the animal kingdom. They forget almost as much as they learn. But that's life in the circus of the blind.

The company ringleader could see through one eye.

ACT II: GHOST

The Mime was a corporeal boogeyman; beneath the bed, bottom of the stairs, those three extra footsteps in the dark. He blindly

trickled a charcoal tear down his cheek. None acknowledged his sorrow because no one could see him. And the Mime couldn't cry without eye-liner. The Clown had to be laughed at ten times in forty-eight hours or he'd transform into a token sad clown. Then Historical Radio WH-H6 declared that Mime's ate children; a Dr. Stephen King had written of it. The Clown got drunk- he was off the hook. He was still frowning though. The Ringleader brought the police. The Prancing Bears flossed twice.

ACT III: Ignorance & Ignorence (Listen Open Eyed)

Everything went silent. Remained silent.

No one knew how this came to be. The Tumblers prayed, but then they found Mescaline. A Radionuncio from the papacy said society was in cultural pandemonium. Around the world, religious fanaticism monopolized on the cataclysm. Religious extremists bought all the radio air waves. They liquidated revenues in the crusade to claim the largest portion of heaven. Radio transmissions go through heaven before refracting right back at us. A cross had sixty eight percent of a pie graph experts said. The beatific virgin alluringly sprawled atop five pillars had twenty eight percent. The chart was commissioned out of Pope Urban's own pockets. People began getting headaches. A prophet in Nampa Idaho foreswore that Jesus' flight would arrive any day. A sixteen year old girl in Chattanooga claimed she was the second coming of Mary Magdalene. Millenarianism became chic on Sunset Boulevard. People were tormented by migraine inducing epiphanies; they all screamed "ice-cream headaches will kill me". The world saw tachistic visions. "I'm hallucinating" murmured some people. "I have food poisoning" screamed others.

No one heard their cries. No one believed their eyes.

In time the pain receded. Brows furrowed by ax-wounds relaxed. The circus remained silent as it came to life. The bones of over fifteen hundred children were found buried beneath the Clown's trailer. The Mime was forgiven for being an albino, and he ascended the festal hierarchy. Would that all the world diplomats had the communicative skills of a Mime. Televisions were created and fanatic religious affiliations could afford only one channel. Dolby Surround Sound was succeeded by Technicolor. A man melted sand and created a mirror, which

in time beget Narcissism. The Tumblers upped their doses, then lab-ratted for Harvard's Psychedelic Program. The Prancing Bears flossed as the Clown shuffled past, feet chained ten inches apart. Children near the concessions laughed at his frown. He had a cone over his head though, and he couldn't hear them. One hundred billion radios got thrown out. Evangelicals and Islamists doubled their efforts to reach the people through heavenly refraction.

Some people refuse to open their eyes to reason.

The ringleader lost his throne atop the circus. The Strong Man quit and became a star in the moving picture industry. The Bearded woman shaved and found someone facedown outside a bar. Inside his ball, the brain damaged mouse had no idea when the Mime became the new ringleader. He was in the dark, just like the Tumblers, who thought this was all just bad mescaline.

Was it?

NEW SOLDIER INITIATION IN ISRAEL



THE JOYS OF RITUAL CIRCUMCISION

You don't realize how Jewish you are until you stroll through a gallery of art devoted to Jesus Christ. I can imagine what Mr. Hitler must feel like when god shows him photographs of Auschwitz or makes him read Elie Wiesel's Night. Do German youths ask themselves: "did we really do that?" Hollywood tells me I have this character flaw they call "Jewish guilt." I always thought it had something to do with disappointing your mother while eating cheeseburgers or bacon-wrapped lobster balls, but now I know: staring at all of these frame-filling images of a suffering martyr, I can't help but think I caused 9/11. My only comfort lies in the rumor that my grandmother baptized me in her bathtub at some point in the late 80's.

REFLECTIONS ON NYC



SPARKNOTES ENTRY FOR *THE CHANGING TIDE*

BY ERIC RELVAS

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C ontext

Eric Antonio Relvas, named after his father Antonio Relvas, the famous New Jersey-based confection distributor, was born on March 15, 1986, within minutes of Caesar's assassination. An intelligent but rambunctious child, he received good grades in school while earning the ill-repute of being a known Elmer's glue dealer. This occupation led him to many altercations with law enforcement, most notably a fire fight at the local library where he held numerous copies of the newest Harry Potter book hostage. His father often bribed the mayor and police chief with the finest semi-sweet nonpareils to prevent him from serving jail time. He maintained this occupation throughout his teenage years and used the earnings to self-publish his first book, "Warfare: A Guide to Ninja Exclamations and Laser Sound Effects."

The strong response to this modest publication enabled Relvas to matriculate at Ursinus College in the fall of 2004, immediately following his short stint in the Portuguese military during World War I. Barring a minor incident where he assaulted a rival university's mascot, Relvas experienced a relatively ordinary first semester in college. Soon after, he grew dissatisfied with his education and self-conscious of his big nose and thick eyebrows. He stopped attending class regularly and ignored his studies in favor of writing a novel. He completed "The

Changing Tide” during his third year in college and unveiled it in a creative writing course in which he was enrolled.

Many of the events of Relvas’ early life appear in this novel, including his rescue of a popular senator’s daughter. Like Relvas, Jake Grimshaw is a thoughtful young man who undergoes drastic personality and lifestyle changes when he attains national fame. Also similar to Relvas is William Port, a talented writer who bases characters on close friends.

Character List

Jake Grimshaw- The novel’s protagonist, Jake is a young man who, having recently graduated from university, works as a bellhop at a large hotel in New York City. Honest, tolerant, and inclined to reserve judgment, Jake quickly earns the trust of many strangers he meets. Jake undergoes drastic personality and lifestyle changes when he attains national fame as the protagonist of a popular novel, “The Changing Tide.” Jake’s thoughts and perceptions shape and color his actions and dialogue in the story.

William Port- The complex antagonist of the novel, Port is a talented writer who bases characters in his books on individuals from his own life. Formerly a close friend of Jake’s, William is always depicted alone in his study, working on one of his several popular novels. Port is a man of great emotion and spends most of the story seeking vengeance upon Jake. Much of what he thinks is communicated in the novel through his own thoughts.

Tide- The protagonist of Port’s first novel, Tide is a thoughtful young man based on Jake. Inspired by Port’s close friend from university, Tide is introduced as a good-natured and heroic person with a flair for the dramatic. Each novel following Port’s first depicts Tide’s quickly deteriorating character.

Sara- A young girl whom Tide rescues, Sara meets and begins to date Jake later in the novel. She also testifies against Tide in court.

Carla- A woman who gives Jake a copy of Port’s first book, Carla meets and begins to date Tide later in the novel.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Man’s Inhumanity to Man

Although a large portion of “The Changing Tide” focuses on how lunar cycles affect the mating ritual of the slender-billed sea gull,

which is associated in our minds with environmental history and zoologists' studies, Relvas constantly emphasizes the irrational motives for human behavior directed against others. Port turns the American public against his one-time close friend Jake to curtail Jake from participating in primogeniture. Yet this intolerable act is a response to an equally insufferable one performed by Tide. Tide inconsiderately and prematurely rescues Sara, the proverbially victimized damsel in distress, before Port intends him to do so, thus forcing Port into an irrelevant aside to conclude his novel. These instances and many others that we see in the novel turn out successfully because, as Relvas implies, mankind is destined to undo itself.

Walking as Exercise

The maintenance of physical health through various types of walking, including sauntering, strolling, marching, and hiking, is a recurrent motif throughout the novel, and is associated in particular with Jake. Jake is first introduced walking down a busy New York avenue to work when he easily could afford a taxi. Even when Jake becomes famous, he ensures himself of getting enough exercise by building a treadmill into the floor of every room in his apartment. It is possible that Relvas is using this motif to imply the paradox of life being a journey while never entering the realm of death.

The Ibis

Many of Port's intellectual digressions lead him to imagine an ibis nesting on his computer, and Jake sees ibises on rooftops during his more frustrating moments in the novel. We are told that, according to folklore, the ibis is the last form of wildlife to take shelter prior to a natural disaster and the first to reappear after the storm passes. We also know that the ibis was particularly venerated by the ancient Egyptians. These revelations suggest that Port is obsessed with Egyptology, and ibises do not react to emotional disasters the same way they do to natural ones.

Prologue

While arranging boxes in the attic of his new home, the narrator finds a book entitled "The Changing Tide." The narrator remembers it fondly as the only book he enjoyed reading during his time at university. The narrator feels overwhelmed by nostalgia.

It is an hour later and the narrator has been daydreaming of various exploits of his youth. The narrator decides to recapture

“however minute portion of youthful vitality” he can by rereading the book. The narrator pauses after reading the first page, distressed that the book now seems foreign to him. The narrator reassures himself—recalling how the book produced a new experience for him each time he read it in the past—and resumes reading.

Chapter I

Jake Grimshaw is walking down 42nd Street in New York City. A vague sense of apprehension removes Jake from his daze when he realizes that people are watching him as he walks past. He even thinks he hears someone calling him by the nickname he had while attending university—“Tide.” Jake quickly regains his nerve, dismissing his apprehension as unfounded paranoia, and ignores the stares.

A few moments later Jake accidentally walks into a stranger. Jake begins apologizing but the stranger interrupts him. The stranger appears to know Jake and tells him not to worry. The stranger says he could never be upset with a hero like Jake. Bewildered, Jake thanks him and continues walking.

Now at the hotel where he works, Jake carries a young woman’s luggage to her room. The woman acts strangely toward him and Jake suspects that she also knows him. When they reach the woman’s room, Jake asks if they had met previously. The woman says no, but that she read the book written about Jake. Jake insists he never wrote a book about himself and the woman corrects him, telling him the book was written by a man named “Port.” The woman offers Jake her copy of the book. Jake takes the gift and returns to the hotel lobby.

Chapter II

Tide convinces the fifth grade teacher of Polk Elementary School to allow one of her students—Sara Lassiter, daughter of a famous senator—to leave early with him by claiming to be the senator’s secretary. Sara calls Tide a stranger and refuses to leave. Tide watches Sara’s would-be abductors arrive at the school through a window and panics. Tide carries Sara over his shoulder and runs out of the classroom.

The abductors pursue Tide in an unmarked van. Tide continues driving until Sara leaps from his car and runs into a donut shop. Tide follows Sara and finds her crying to a police officer. The police officer arrests Tide for attempted kidnapping.

The author of “The Changing Tide” intervenes here and comments on the popularity of the book given to Jake. The author claims as Jake is reading that “a multitude of individuals across the country” are reading with him. The author also criticizes these individuals for making such “a perfect example of literary mediocrity” the most widely read book in decades.

The author reveals the end of the book. The police impound the abductors’ van for double parking and discover the ransom note the abductors intended to send Senator Lassiter. The police arrest the abductors and release Tide. Sara and Sara’s father thank Tide for his heroic behavior.

Chapter III

Jake closes the book.

Chapter IV

Jake is sitting at the bar of a crowded club called The Changing Tide. It is several days after he has finished reading the book and Jake considers what has transpired since then. Jake has become a celebrity. He has made many new friends and cannot go anywhere in the city without being recognized. People point him out even in the dim light of the club.

Sara sits next to Jake and introduces herself. Struck by her beauty, Jake hesitates before offering Sara a drink. Sara declines at first but Jake insists, telling her how the bartender is letting Jake and his friends drink for free.

Jake and Sara talk for much of the night. Jake enjoys the praise Sara gives him for the heroic deed he performed in the book and expounds upon the details of the deed beyond what the book includes. Jake remembers nothing else about the night and awakens the following morning with Sara in his bed.

Chapter V

Some months have passed since the night Jake met Sara. Jake now dates Sara though he often spends his evenings with other women. Sara suspects Jake’s infidelity but continues to date him—Sara is far too enamored by Jake’s fame to leave him.

Jake no longer works. He often thinks that such “thoroughly plebian behavior” as the bellhop position he once filled is below him

now. Instead, Jake spends his days sleeping and his nights carousing.

Jake realizes that he cannot survive on the free items which his celebrity provides him forever. Jake charges himself to think of a way he can make money that is suitable for someone of his newfound status. The next day Jake sues William Port for using his name and likeness in Port's book. Jake promptly wins the lawsuit and begins receiving royalties.

Chapter VI

William Port sits at his desk, typing on his computer. As he writes the sequel to his previous book, Port recalls a close friend he had while attending university. Port remembers admiring his friend greatly, so much so that he based the protagonist of his first book on this friend.

Port stops typing and examines a letter he received a few weeks prior. The letter, sent by his publisher, informed Port that this same friend was suing him. The case was already completed.

Port resumes typing. He convinces himself that his new book will provide his former friend with as much infamy as his first book gave him fame.

Chapter VII

Some months have passed since Tide saved Sara from being abducted. Tide now dates a woman named Carla though he often spends his evenings with other women. Carla suspects Tide's infidelity but continues to date him—Carla is far too enamored by Tide's fame to leave him.

Tide no longer works. He often thinks that such "thoroughly plebian behavior" as the waiter position he once filled is below him now. Instead, Tide spends his days sleeping and his nights carousing.

The author of "The Changing Tide" intervenes here and comments on the popularity of Port's second book. The author relates his disdain for sequels of any kind. He argues that sequels are "ideological parasites which feed upon the fond memories of earlier works" and should never be met with any kind of critical approval. The author also claims that this book is poorly written regardless of it being a sequel.

The author summarizes the rest of the book. Jake and Carla become engaged. As their wedding approaches, Jake grows more conceited and corrupt. Public opinion of Jake drops so low that he is now

more infamous than famous. In light of these changes, Carla decides to leave Jake. The book ends with Jake waiting for Carla at the altar.

Chapter VIII

Nearly a year has passed since Tide's lawsuit against Port. Tide and Sara are now engaged. As their wedding approaches, Tide observes a change in the way others treat him. Bartenders no longer give him free drinks; attractive women no longer flirt with him. Scornful glares replace astonished stares. Believing these changes are caused by his recent engagement, Tide leaves Sara waiting at the altar. Public opinion of Tide only worsens.

While walking past the hotel where he previously worked, Tide recognizes the woman who had given him Port's first book. Tide approaches the woman but she warns him not to speak to her. Tide asks her why everyone's opinion of him has changed. The woman tells Tide to read Port's new book.

Back home, Tide skims through Port's book. "Who has time to read an entire book, these days?" he reasons. When Tide finishes the book, he wishes that Sara was still with him so he could express his rage to her. The next day Tide sues Port again—this time for slander. Tide promptly loses the lawsuit.

Chapter IX

William Port sits at his desk, typing on his computer. As he writes yet another sequel, Port thinks about his friend from university. Port begins speaking his thoughts out loud. He expresses his fury toward this friend for trying to sue him yet again. He vows to have his revenge.

Chapter X

The author of "The Changing Tide" refuses to include any direct text from Port's third book. He summarizes it in one word: "filth." The author proceeds on another digression on the pitiful state of contemporary literature. The author lists a number of flaws—such as incoherent plot and unrealistic characters—that Port's books and others demonstrate.

Among these flaws the author pays a single compliment to Port's works. The author claims that all three books strongly impacted the general public and that is "a mighty commendable feat." The author insists it is one of the primary goals of literature.

Chapter XI

A year has passed since Tide's second lawsuit. Tide is serving the first day of his lifetime sentence in prison for murdering Carla, the young woman from the hotel who gave Tide a copy of Port's first book. Tide recalls his trial.

Tide knows he did not murder anyone and pleads not guilty. The judge—who has just finished arranging boxes in the attic of his new home—parries Tide's feeble attempts to defend himself by threatening to find Tide in contempt of court. Tide knows he will be found guilty when the prosecutor—William Port—reveals his prime witness: Sara, the senator's daughter. Sara claims to have seen Tide murder Carla and appears to convince the jury.

Tide stops thinking about the trial. He decides he must be productive while in prison; he will prove his innocence by writing an autobiography. He will call it "The Changing Tide."

Important Quotations

_1. The tide comes in and goes out, in and out; it is never stagnant, never stationary. I've often stopped to watch it, to feel it undergo its perpetual metamorphosis. The tide changes, and so will I.

_2. Why is not the question you should be asking. How is not the question you should be asking. Nor are who, what, when, and where. Why is the question?

_3. "Crackers, please..."

_4. The sound of gears could be heard, like what an insect hears when it scrambles over the face of a working clock. The walls began moving, closing in on me from all sides. They moved slowly, like a tortoise during a race, and event stopped completely for a few moments before resuming. The unshaded light bulb flickered; it was on its last lap. I did not bother screaming for anyone because no one would answer. They want me to think I'm alone. Well, I don't, but I know better than to let them know that I don't. Instead, I closed my eyes. This made the walls stop. Sacrificing my sight allowed me my life. So I continued blind.

Study Questions & Essay Topics

1. "The Changing Tide" is a contemporary novel. Relvas made great efforts to depict various examples of modern living, such as Jake's bar-hopping, hedonistic lifestyle and Port's workaholic, secluded exist-

tence. Yet many events that occur in the novel seem impossible in a present-day context. Why does Jake get drinks for free?

2. What are some of the most important cymbals in “The Changing Tide”? What does the novel have to say about the role of cymbals in life?

3. Do the concerns of “The Changing Tide” relate to 1830s England?

4. Discuss the narrator. What is the purpose of telling this story through such a narrator? What are the narrator’s hopes and dreams? How does the narrator’s cleaning his attic serve as an encapsulation of the entire novel?

5. Chapter III is the shortest chapter in the novel and yet one of the most important. Speculate on the various ways Jake could have closed the book.

6. What is your favorite color? Favorite animal? How does Relvas incorporate these details into the novel without knowing you? Discuss the potentiality of psychic phenomena.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Relvas, Eric A. *Mr. Clean in the Arctic: A Collection of Short Stories*. New York: Harper and Row, 2007.

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[OF] ARCHETYPE[S] OR I DON'T LIKE YOUR POETRY

And I still can't verb while
The

thing
Makes silver
Or blue pen-

Swirls over like

Color and ...defiant fingertip-wisps
That M O V E oops
Like long nature objects

and

Adjective nouns.

Conjunction

I still can't
Verb my dry gas-heaves.
Like leaves.

Still, in the arbitrary SPACE(s)

AND

TIME(s)

pronoun
Was only

Just present

Participle
Like ghosts in weather/outdoor term.

We

ache and moan like [a philosopher's] bones
until the

“doctor” (Arbitrary SPACE) takes
the (AND) [why not?]

“needle” (Arbitrary TIME)

Hit ‘Start’ on your controller here...

[...]

Okay I’m out of the bathroom now.

out.

Heh, I wasn’t actually getting an injection though.

Get it?

Neither do I.

And STILL (!)

My body organ

Verbs in

A negative emotion.

And back again.

Like snow in ghosts.

Let’s play

Trivial Pursuit o wait we already are.

My.

Body part.

Symptoms as I

Strugggggle/Starve.

I talk.

Like that kid.

On Malcolm.

in the Middle. And uh, stars. No, wait, a single, lonely one.

Like me. L

What’s wrong?

Is

This

[Very well.]

Annoying

|
|

To

| Read?

| The

Thing

Actions on .stuff/fluff. like

<SIMILE>

Subways and/or

train tracks </SIMILE> – travel is significant and artsy in some way,
right?

Right?

Conjunction pronoun still negative contraction essential verb.

Get away from your thesauruses and back into some daylight.

Daylight like orange tongue-stunts making blue alcohol-bandages in my
reflective surface-stacks.

We elite express everything as an alliteration.

And-

hyphens!

Get back over here, “hyphens!”

Oh, uh, and a tree somewhere. At dusk. Like dusk. Like dusk at dusk.

Yeah.

*“But You and I are not the East or West. Nope. Not the North or the North-
West. Nothing found on a Compass. Doubt it, got My Compass right here! We so
Simply Leave it to One Evening and then We are like so many Orbs in the Night
that rise and fall with Fervor! Or We just have Fervor, I mean. Um...”*

~Some Idiot

hyphens!

ASSES OF ASSES



THIRST

Tucson introduces herself as the city of air. I have not drawn dry breath before I step outside the airport doors. The weight of Pennsylvania's water falls away. In the first breath, warm sagebrush and the fruit of prickly pear cacti greet me. A delicate swirl in my nose, through my blood. The next breath, my armhair stands to the Arizona sun. Even laden with travel bags, I could walk forever in this lightness.

I wish a walk to the mountains, all of them. Tucson sits at mountains' feet in all directions. I have never seen real mountains—bronze skyscraper triangles. Not Pennsylvania's oak-covered ripples.

But I have a place to walk, a bed waiting. The Roadrunner Hostel.

Roadrunner hides in the quietest, lowest corner of Tucson—a city nowhere loud or tall. The street it's on runs close to the old Union Pacific tracks. Many one-story homes—either white or a bright neon color—with cars at least ten years old, their paintjobs coarse. People here keep the same car forever because the dry air affords them such time, and they can afford nothing more. I arrive with my bags around me in mid-afternoon. Shade fills the street, as if architects planned for you to put down your bags and wipe your brow, safe from the sun. The sagebrush scent blooms stronger in the cool air. Three knocks on the hostel's ruby painted door.

A young girl with glasses opens, mostly green eyes and red hair, barefoot in a skirt.

Checking in?

I nod. She pulls me inside, sits me down as she swishes off.

Inside, curry mixes with the sage-air. One slow ceiling fan is enough to chill me. How quickly heat builds and collapses without water to hold it fast. I think this must be how the barefoot girl's skirt moves by itself.

Near as I can tell, this is how people ought to form in the desert. How I want them to form. Lighter somehow, so their gaze pierces through even thick rimmed glasses. Fingers extend at more dangerous angles. A smile that shows no fear of baring teeth. Her touch is sharp.

She returns with a leatherbound book—the register? Yes.

How long are you staying?

I shrug. A week, I say. Depends.

She cocks her head. Depends on?

What happens away from so much water.

She squints behind her thick rims. You're from Pennsylvania.

How did you know?

Only Pennsylvanians complain about the water. I did too, at first.

You?

Pittsburgh. You?

Philadelphia. I smile easy—home is such a comfortable topic, a thousand miles away.

Head down and scribbling in the register, Pittsburgh gestures around the place. Kitchen (label food or lose it), bedrooms (you have a top bunk), bathrooms (the shower's mostly sand, don't worry). You can take your stuff in anytime.

Oh. I restrap all my bags and lumber into the room. Three bunk beds under an arched ceiling, texture-painted to look like adobe. As if I need a reminder that I'm in a desert. The window faces the backyard, all red dust and prickly pears.

One other man sits in the room with his shirt off. His muscles hide under a little fat, so he'll never look his true strength. He smiles so wide at me I have to look away. But he keeps staring, grinning.

Mickey, he says as I stuff my bags in the space under my bunk. I'm sorry?

Mickey Briar. He sticks out his hand, talking slow, like he got hit on the head.

Pittsburgh leans through the doorway. Hey Mickey. I see you've met Philadelphia.

Hi.

You ever hear of me? Used to call me Mickey "Rapid-Fire" Briar. I was a boxer.

I don't uh, follow boxing.

Almost Texas state heavyweight champion.

Huh.

He lumbers over to the room's small radiator, covered with pictures and small personal baubles—a watch, a wallet, eyedrops—and

picks up one framed photograph. As I turn to climb the ladder to test my bed, he shoves the picture in my face. I recognize him glistening in sweat. Leaner then, holding a big golden belt, his hands mummified in glove tape. Nineteen eighty, he says. District championships. Afterwards I went back to my girl's house right, and she said she wanted to marry me. I'm already married, right? So I just get mine and go home. My wife says she's pregnant but I know it ain't mine 'cause she ain't put out in I don't know what. Just packed the car and went to Darlene's. Well Darlene was a blonde and I don't usually like 'em but—

Pittsburgh pulls me out of the room by the arm; her fingernails dig. Mickey's eyes widen as to a nightmare as she flows through the room. Boxing champ my ass, she says. He was that good, he wouldn't have left his brain in the ring. Don't let Texas catch you up in talk. He'll have you there for hours listening to his sexcapades.

Why's he here?

He drifts from one of his girls to another. Simple pleasures.

Pennsylvania has problems with water, Texas with fire. They drove us both to Tucson.

Pittsburgh walks me out of the hostel, down the street. I ask where we're going, but Pittsburgh looks straight on ahead. Her grin promises city's secrets, promises desert magic. I can ignore no such promises, or such grins. Two blocks have passed already.

Don't you want shoes?

She shrugs. Her pace is even more urgent with her skirt twisting around each step. This is not a talking speed. I just keep up and spin my head to meet Tucson. Sonoran sand touches everything. A steel, Vegas-style hotel sign from the fifties still hangs on to the side of its building. Only small scraps of rust grow on the edges, but the green paint is almost a memory. Erosion—Arizona will wear you down slow; once you notice, you've gone from verdant valley to Grand Canyon.

The Union Pacific tracks tell it best. Pennsylvanians don't know how metal works in the desert. I expect deep red rust, the smell of iron dust wafting into humid air. Dust, yes, but it does not float. More than a century of dents and waves lay bare to read, untouched by water. And so naked, the metal looks more tortured than any forgotten track in Philadelphia.

After blocks of silence, blocks of looking at cars from decades ago, blocks of waiting to feel the weather on my skin, she finally turns

back to me.

What was the last drop? The one you breathed and you realized you were drowning in Pennsylvania. What put you on the plane?

You'll laugh.

I won't.

It isn't dramatic. You seem to like dramatic things.

She snorts. Like you know anything about me. Tell me, and maybe I'll tell you where we're going.

Looking away, I tell her I came because it kept raining when I wanted to run. Like clockwork. Tie my shoes, open up the door—turn the buckets.

I wouldn't laugh at that. Lots of people end up at the Roadrunner to run out of the rain.

I don't see anyone running.

Once they're out of the rain, they don't have anything to run from. She stretches her arms over her head, sighing. It's nice, you know, just living. Being happy.

But you've run away.

Her eyes sink to a glare. And what are you here for? You checked in too, roadrunner.

I become very aware of the atmosphere's thinness, as though nothing can keep me together and I will soon drift into dust like the rest. It isn't that I miss the pressure of home, but—but maybe I do. My hands tug down on the edges of my shirt.

So where are we going?

The desert. Pittsburgh grins like the devil.

The sun falls behind the western peaks just as we reach the edge of the city. Philadelphia fades slow: skyscrapers to stuck-together townhouses to spaced out vinyl sided houses to brick homes with backyards, to little mansions to big mansions to farms. Tucson goes from sand-worn houses in neat rows to saguaro desert. No in between, no warning. I can make out every fold in the mountains' faces, every wispy bush lending a color besides bronze. The saguaros at the summits are alien giants watching over us, so tall they could be radio antennas.

Welcome to the desert, says Pittsburgh. Her feet don't have a scratch on them. I wonder if she's even touching the ground anymore. What, after all, would keep her there? Air pressure? Humidity? Maybe all studies on gravity happen near the coast.

Is this a joke? I ask. Like, you take all the new arrivals out here for some vision quest or something? I'm no tourist.

She slides right up to my front, grabbing my arms tight. Do you want one?

Want what?

A vision quest. Answer honestly.

Yes.

The sharp grin again. Everyone does. Especially Pennsylvanians.

You're not from Pittsburgh.

Cackling, she twirls around me, her skirt rippling up to brush my legs. Her eyes seem greener now, and looking back across the end of the sidewalk to the sand where she dances now, I see footprints. Pawprints.

She takes my hands and spins me into her dance. You want to believe in miracles, right? Come to Arizona, get healed by some desert magic.

I suppose you might say—

We stop. Again she comes close, panting close to my lips. Do you want to know my name?

Yes. I close my eyes for a kiss, but I hear only a growl.

She throws me to the ground, and crouches down on all fours. Her eyes and teeth gleam as she rips my shoes away, then my shirt and pants. Underwear she tears with her fingers. Her claws.

Welcome to the desert, Philadelphia. I am Coyote.

Of course you are. Why am I naked?

You have to do your vision quest naked. Don't you know anything?

I know Coyote's a trickster. What's the catch?

Mickey came out here with me too. He didn't want a vision—just his whores and old stories. He walked naked all the way back to the hostel. But he survived. The desert's a dangerous place, Philadelphia. You could have it easy back there. You could stop running. Tucson's always comfortable.

Fuck you. I'll take my chances.

Coyote rises to her haunches and howls. See you around, road-runner. In a kick of sand, she leaps up the mountainside.

The Sonoran desert at least requires shoes, but Coyote left no

luxuries. I tiptoe closer to the mountains, each step stabbing with small plants and coarse grains. I worry some about scorpions; I worry more about Masauwu, the Skeleton Man, the Keeper of Death—maybe Coyote made a deal with him and I'm the payment. Nothing comes, and I keep walking. By the time I reach the mountain's base the sky has darkened too much to see my own feet, but I can feel my soles leave wet warmth where I step. At least, I think, the cars and houses at the edge of the city can't see the naked sucker.

They probably watch us all the time. Confused, still horny from Coyote's dangerous embrace, tiptoeing nervously into the desert, or back down the sidewalk to the hostel. Maybe they take bets. Who wants a vision; who wants the soft hostel bed?

I manage to climb halfway up the mountain before my feet give out. I gather up enough sand to make a seat, and watch Tucson by night. I try to stare past the city, into the great beyond or the cosmos or I don't know what. Anything to start this vision.

But no—only Tucson, and my aching, bleeding feet. I stare for hours, calling on all my will to let myself into the desert magic. No voices from the stars, no Skeleton Man. Just Tucson, the city of air. Dry air. All I want is some goddamn water.

Headlights and brakelights string across Tucson like garlands on a Christmas tree. Houses provide the mini-lights. Tucson doesn't flow like Philadelphia. From one moment to the next, despite the shifts of traffic and the blinking lights, Tucson can look exactly the same. Philadelphia changes shape when you blink.

But Tucson is sharp, clearer than I've ever seen a city. Only Tucson resolves so clear—not the satellite in the sky, nor that grain of sand, nor the ridges on my fingernails. Hoping I've finally touched some desert magic, I focus into each window, each car cab.

I see

Old beads made of local stone

A hammer changing track-metal to sculpture

An open book, dogeared often

Nervous glances behind both shoulders, around each corner
Angry steps slamming the sidewalk

Laughter too sharp, too dry for wet air

A smile weathered by sandstorms, more earnest for the wear

Old Glory draped across the back of a wheelchair

Red armbands—too red to sit right in greenery.

They all listen to the dry wind, happy in their still place. I find only love for Tucson in every shape framed by every window.

Coyote walks up behind me. Having a good vision quest, Philadelphia?

Just people-watching. Do you have any water?

I brought some just for you. She hands me a bottle of Wissahickon Spring Water. The label reads, "bottled from natural Pennsylvania springs." I twist it open and chug.

So much for desert magic, she says.

How do these people survive?

Not like you. You don't really hate the water. You need it. She plops down my clothes and luggage in a lump.

You got sand on them.

She shrugs. Wash them off. You don't belong here.

Oh?

Nobody runs in Tucson—that's how they got here. Mission accomplished.

And I still want to run.

Some people always will. You're no Mickey.

I chuckle. You know, Pittsburgh, back home they say the air here is perfect for runners.

Total bullshit, roadrunner.

Looks like.

I dress, and Coyote and I walk down the mountain together. Where you headed? she asks.

The airport, I suppose. Before I turn to dust.

Good thing I never made you pay for the bed. I'll take you. Before sunrise, she leaves me at the airport doors with another bottle of Wissahickon, and a playful scratch on my arm. The sagebrush scent at its strongest, I breathe deep through my nose and take a sip.

MORE BARS IN MORE PLACES



THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY

Ambrose Bierce knew hot. As a young man he had followed General Hazen to every sun-scorched Army outpost in the Great Plains. An entire year from which he remembered only the ache of the saddle in his thighs and the red, peeling faces of the soldiers, looking clownish against their blue uniforms.

Then there was his time in Deadwood. He had gone by rail that time, but the heat still found him. It pressed close against his chest. It clawed into his lungs.

Yes, Bierce reflected, he knew hot. And Death Valley, California, was hot.

It was midday and his shadow was a small black puddle under his feet, spastically expanding and contracting with each step. It was exactly the time of day he had been told never to go out in Death Valley. But today was different. Today he had been promised protection.

Where it was, Bierce was hard-pressed to say.

In his coat pocket (his coat now slung over his left shoulder) he carried two telegrams. He wasn't sure why he carried them, or what purpose it was he thought they would serve. He mused that perhaps he carried them for the same reason a Catholic might carry around a rosary – in the hopes that some vague and terrible benefactor would see it as proof of the petitioner's fidelity.

And just like a Catholic, Bierce thought, his benefactor seemed mockingly elusive.

Chuckling in spite of his misery, Bierce pressed forward toward what seemed like the infinite. Or rather, the nothing; the abyss. One must never be too optimistic, reflected Bierce. It is not good for the brain to be so involved in the workings of the bowels.

He stopped, suddenly aware that the scenery around him had not changed for a considerable length of time. Reaching uselessly into his coat pocket, he retrieved the two telegrams, in the hopes that in poring over them again he might retrieve some vital piece of navigational advice that had previously been overlooked. There was no such luck with the first telegram.

*Dear sir wealthy admirer wishes to discuss upcoming work noon July 4
Death Valley California at Badwater Basin. Fear not harsh climate as*

*protection and light refreshments will be provided. Yours most sincerely
Lucifer Prince of Darkness Esq.*

Its message was the same, almost stubbornly so. It clutched its secrets like treasure to its crinkled chest, cackling at his inability to extract more specific instructions from the fragmented text. It frustrated Bierce almost as much as the nagging knowledge that, as an inanimate object, the telegram had no consciousness, and therefore no capacity for willful resistance.

For a split second, Bierce cursed it all. The telegrams, Death Valley, all of creation – the twisting, contorting, rising, falling, rebuilding course of human progress – all of it a conspiracy, snaking its way through the millennia, with the singular goal of placing him, Ambrose Bierce, in the middle of the damned desert in the middle of the damned summer. Then Bierce reached for the second telegram, and he remembered.

*Sir RE your last message this is serious business opportunity not prank.
Cloven shebeast waiting in your foyer will confirm intentions are genuine.
Shebeast will not harm you. I remain most affectionately...*

Ah, Lilith.

In spite of his atheism, Bierce had entered his home that day with a fair amount of trepidation, an instance which even now he regarded as a shameful lack of fortitude. He pushed open his door quickly, determined to purge his imagination of lingering phantasms.

Instead, he was greeted by a beautiful woman standing in his foyer. She wore a tight black bodice that dipped low against the crest of her bosom, and a white skirt that hovered a breath above the ground – flirting, but never touching. Her hair was strawberry blonde, and the curls fell languidly around her shoulders. Her fair skin seemed to glow in the gloom of his unlit house.

Unaccustomed to such accommodations, Bierce did not move from his spot in the doorway. The mad pattering in his brain ceased, and his fear and confusion fused to become something new altogether – a primal awe. His dumb stare betrayed all his worldly secrets, and she gathered them like daisies and warmed them against the curve of her neck.

The woman smiled and walked towards him, each step the flawless work of a thousand beautiful, bending machines. When she was within an inch of his face, she brought her hand, clad in an elbow-

length sable glove, to her lips. She bit the top of her middle finger, and clumsily removed the garment, revealing a pale, slender arm that stretched down her wrist – where suddenly her skin became jaundiced and orange. A gray-brown hoof, knobby and hard as polished wood, stroked his cheek.

“My name is Lilith,” she had whispered as she brushed by him, before vanishing out into the street.

Through the sweat stinging his eyes, Bierce realized that there was dark figure in the distance. He had long ago passed the threshold of shrubbery and cacti, and he was unsure whether the anomaly in the landscape was a hallucination or a person.

He was struck by the sudden knowledge that the figure was Lilith. Though he could not verify it empirically, it being only a black spot in the center of his vision, it was as true to him as his name. As seconds stretched into minutes, he imagined the paranormal vixen was becoming more distinct, but as his pace quickened, his legs began to fail. Each inhaled breath was a kick to the abdomen. Meanwhile, the image of her body rippled from the waves of heat billowing off the desert floor. Bierce reflected that he must be dying.

As he collapsed, he found himself falling into her arms, though a moment ago she was at least fifty yards off. He felt the familiar touch of polished wood. Bierce yawned, remarkably content with the knowledge of his impending demise.

“Mr. Bierce,” said a nearby voice that did not belong to Lilith. “You look parched.”

Resentfully coming to, Bierce saw a male figure dressed in a beige sack coat and trousers. On his head was a yellow straw boater encircled by a black band. The hair peeking out from under it was black as well, and he had a small, neatly pointed beard. He was seated in a wicker chair at a small table that was enveloped in the shade of a nearby umbrella.

“You must forgive my manners,” the figure continued. “Lilith, would you pour our esteemed guest some ice water?”

Sweaty and sunburnt, Bierce stumbled from Lilith’s embrace and sat at the table across from who he assumed was Lucifer. Lilith dutifully poured a glass of ice water from a pitcher, which spilled over the table in her clunky cloven grasp. The clinking of the ice against the glass resonated on an alien frequency in its unlikely surroundings.

A minute of pained spectating passed before Bierce's host dismissed Lilith with "That'll be just fine, dearest." She curtsied, and flashed a consciously shy smile at Bierce, who was at once too spell-bound and too thirsty to respond.

"Mr. Bierce, it's a pleasure to meet you in person. As you have no doubt deduced, I am Lucifer, Prince of Darkness and Guardian of the Infernal Depths, so on and so forth." Lucifer beamed as he spoke, and Bierce never lost sight of his crooked, gray-yellow teeth. Though everything else on his face seemed arranged by a divine hand, his mouth was laid out like a centuries-old cemetery.

"And if you'll forgive my gushing, sir, let me just say that I'm a devoted follower of your work. The first time I saw one of your columns for *The San Francisco News Letter*, I remarked that here was a boy with a career to follow; yes sir, here is a winning horse. And by thunder if I'm not always on the money with these things!"

Bierce, sipping fiercely at his glass of water, regarded Lucifer with only an arched right eyebrow.

"Well, Mr. Bierce, I have a tendency to drone on and on, and I'm sure after a trip like yours you'll be wanting to get straight down to business."

"I must inquire, your highness, as to what in damnation was the purpose of meeting in this wretched locale." Bierce had not heard his voice in a long time, and though it was only a dry whisper it startled him, making him jump back half an inch. Bierce hoped his host had not noticed; he did not want to appear weak in front of Lucifer.

He instead grinned, apparently pleased with Bierce's entry into the conversation. "Oh, Mr. Bierce, I hate to be coy with you, but I believe that will make itself evident in time. Now, to business – I have a proposition for you that I think will appeal to a man of your cynical inclinations. I've a manuscript I'm looking to get published –"

Bierce removed a handkerchief from his coat pocket and pressed it against his forehead. "Allow me to stop you right there. No, I will not show this to my publisher."

Lucifer chuckled. "Mr. Bierce, you speak too soon. I've no interest in making money off this venture. I'm a man to whom wealth means little. And, as you can imagine, I've already got all the publicity I could wish for. No sir, my aims are much more... *humanistic*, you could say."

“Well, I’m no humanist, your majesty.”

“Indeed you are not, or I would not have tapped you for this proposition.” Lucifer slid a large stack of papers across the table. “I want you to present this manuscript for publication with yourself listed as the author. I am surrendering all assertions of ownership and copyright, and forfeiting any claims, present or future, to royalties or other payment. Sign your name on it and the manuscript is as much yours as if you had written it – which I expect you to say that you did.”

Bierce’s right eyebrow again drew upwards, like an archer’s bow being strung. His eyes flicked from meeting Lucifer’s gaze to watching the hem of Lilith’s dress sway in the breeze, and to the pile of papers before him.

“Working title: *The Cynic’s Word Book*,” he read. “May I ask what manner of devilry this tome holds in store for the unsuspecting public?”

“Why, Mr. Bierce, I’m not sure which is drier: all of Death Valley, or your sense of humor. Grand!” Still laughing, he signaled for Lilith, who dutifully and with considerable effort refilled his glass. “It is a comic dictionary, sir. A corrective to the bland scholarship of Oxford. A Webster’s for the discerning misanthrope.”

“Scriptures; noun,” intoned Bierce, his eyes scanning a page from the middle of the stack. “The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based.”

“I was particularly proud of that one.” Lucifer grinned.

“Yes, it’s almost... laconic.”

Lucifer loosened his collar and tented his fingers across his chest. “I don’t want to oversell this manuscript to you, Mr. Bierce, but I must stress how vitally important it is to me that this work see the light of day.”

Bierce continued to scan through the handwritten pages.

Year: noun. A period of three hundred and sixty-five disappointments.

He grinned, amused for the first time since embarking on his journey. “It is a fine work, if I may say so. But it appears to me to be foremost a joke-book for adults. I’m afraid I fail to see the burning urgency for publication.”

Lucifer nodded with visibly feigned gravity. It was obvious he had anticipated the question. He turned in his chair from facing Bierce

to facing the Amargosa Mountains in the distance.

"A new century is coming, Bierce. Do you know what kind of century it will be?"

Bierce carefully considered his surroundings and his company.

"A bad one?"

Lucifer looked thoughtfully at the horizon. "Well, yes. But more importantly, it will be an *American* century. I have chosen these United States to be first among all nations in my sight. Your country has enormous potential for infernal greatness, after all. Abundant land and natural resources, a strong tradition of economic assertiveness, and an upright profession of the Christian religion that is at once unhampered by adherence to some of its more... *inconvenient* regulations. All it needs is the drive. And you, Mr. Bierce, can deliver it."

"You sound like you're nominating me for public office."

Lucifer couldn't suppress a light chuckle. "The last thing this country needs now is another politician, Mr. Bierce. Or a clergyman, for that matter. They both function to the same end, really. Both try to ignite optimism in the masses. The pestilence of idealism. See things as they should be, not as they are. What they're really saying is: *don't strive.*"

"And you plan to usurp centuries of priests and despots with a gag-dictionary?"

"That's the beauty of it, sir. A nation of optimists will never usher in the coming *Pax Americana*. Nothing is harder to motivate than contentment. The people need to learn cynicism and distrust. They must become jaded, and from that, they will learn restlessness, and from that, they will learn aggression, and afterwards – well, sir, you're familiar with Darwin. Aggression breeds competition. Competition breeds success."

Bierce flipped through to see if there was an entry for "delusional."

Delusion: noun. The father of a most respectable family, comprising Enthusiasm, Affection, Self-denial, Faith, Hope, Charity and many other goodly sons and daughters.

"I'll have you know I'm in a bit of a competition myself, Mr. Bierce," Lucifer said. "Have you ever met my Opponent?"

"I've only heard of Him." Bierce smirked.

"My Opponent is a keen linguist. He studies language. He loves to write. I'm sure you're familiar with His works."

Bierce nodded.

“Well, I aim to beat Him at His own game. If He’s writing books, I’ll write a book. If He’s using language, I’ll deconstruct His language. I’ll redefine every word He has so carefully put in place, and I will make it a *joke*.”

The wind kicked up a brief cloud of sand. It swept under the umbrella and blanketed Bierce and Lucifer. Bierce brushed himself off. Lucifer did not. Lilith bent to shake off her dress, making a point of bringing her neckline directly into Bierce’s line of sight.

“May I ask, sir, what *exactly* your vision for the future of my country holds?” Bierce asked, his gaze still passively locked on Lilith.

“All of Europe will be fed from the fields of Kansas. Countries yet unborn will tremble before American guns. The American people will be rich and plump with abundance.”

“A marriage of Arcadia and Sparta if ever there were one,” said Bierce, lifting his head slowly. “But it does not seem, at least in my own humble understanding, like a particularly *devilish* vision.”

Lucifer bit the inside of his lip and smiled. “No one pulls the wool over your eyes, sir. No indeed.”

He sat up and turned his gaze again to the distant mountains. “When my Opponent chose Israel, He flogged her at every turn. If so much as a blasphemous gasp escaped anywhere within her borders, He purged her with all the fires and terrors at His disposal. And when she was forced to her knees, bleeding and begging, He did it again.”

Lilith, suddenly looking very grave, refilled Bierce’s glass. He thought he saw a tear on her face, but she turned away before he could be sure.

“And when she did find favor with Him, when she managed to satisfy His insane whims, He would order her to unleash those same fires and terrors, so lately visited upon her own backside, on her neighbors. And who today sings of the Midianites, or the Moabites, or the Amalekites?”

“Only those who would sing of the Apaches, or the Utes, or the Navajo.” Lilith’s voice shattered the proceedings like a lightning strike.

Bierce did not so much as nod. Lucifer paused for a moment, then beckoned with his finger for her to come near. He whispered in her ear in a language Bierce did not recognize. Each flick of Lucifer’s tongue sounded like the sharp crack of a fire.

Lilith's face was expressionless and white when she stood up. She refilled Lucifer's glass.

"I am not so cruel a benefactor as my Opponent would have me be," said Lucifer finally. "Americans will know comfort. They will know riches, and exotic imports from all the dark, strange corners of the world. They will know power. The only fires and terrors will be those directed at those who would defy her – and there will be many. But most importantly, they will know freedom. The United States will have no master, bullwhip in hand, ready to strike the moment his hallucinations take hold."

He continued. "All you need to do is sign your name and assert your authorship of this manuscript. Your countrymen will know wealth like no other nation has known before, and you yourself will know infamy."

Lucifer revealed a pen and ink fountain from what appeared to be thin air. Bierce picked up the pen and studied it.

"I'm not much for patriotic sentiments, you know," he said.

"And yet you fought for your country. And were wounded for your country, if my memory serves me right." Lucifer smiled, letting Bierce know that his memory always served him right.

"I have no desire for infamy either. I dislike the majority of my fellow man, and would not suffer to be long remembered by the likes of them." Bierce returned the pen and kept his hands firmly planted on his stomach.

"Ah yes," laughed Lucifer. "I had forgotten the most important part of the negotiation – compensation for your efforts."

He motioned for Lilith to come forward. She obeyed.

"Lilith is a divorcee," Lucifer said. "Adam was her husband. He said he wished for a companion. What he really wanted was a maid. And Lilith is no maid."

She straightened her spine as he went on. "So Lilith was abandoned in favor of a more docile specimen. And as a parting shot for her pride, she was scarred forever, and lost the hands that refused to slave beneath her equal."

Lilith knelt to be level with Bierce's face and put her cheek against his. He could feel her hot breath in the amphitheater of his ear.

"Here is a woman in whom lies the beginning and end of the world. She will show you euphoria you will never find with a common

dance-hall girl. One part Amazon, one part Aphrodite. She, who would not serve a Patriarch, will happily bind herself to *you*.”

Bierce felt a familiar hardness drawing small circles on his chest. Hours passed, though when he snapped backed to consciousness, he was aware it had been only seconds.

“Certainly a tempting offer,” he said with careful slowness. “But I remain unconvinced.” He stared at Lucifer, his face betraying no emotion.

Lucifer nodded knowingly. “I can offer you death. A death befitting a man of your intellect and stature. You will die old, but before senility can wrap its fingers around you. You will die bleeding, surrounded by strangers who have never heard of you, in an alien land, with a smile on your face.”

Bierce bit his lip. The bowstring above his right eye prepared another arrow from its quiver. Turning his face down but maintaining his gaze with his host, Bierce picked up the pen and dipped it in the fountain. As he brought it over the paper, a drop of viscous ink fell with a splatter onto the page.

Bierce looked closely at the ink spot. It was a familiar red-brown, but it was not, he realized, ink.

“Good Lord,” he whispered. “Whose is this?”

Lucifer’s expression remained even. “It belonged to General Sherman. I collected it from his body when he died.” He tipped his hat, brushing the sand off. “In the American Century, Sherman will be as a prophet of old – one who saw the future, and made it the present. Every conflict on the globe will have its own March to the Sea. It will be America’s most popular export.”

Bierce looked down at the paper, his stare unbroken even by a blink. He looked up at his guest. He looked out over the desert plain, to the small white peaks of the Amargosas. His gaze was pregnant with revelation.

“I see it now. This is your Sinai. You have come not in a column of fire but with a tray of iced water. You are handing me tablets written not in eternal stone but in blood – the sweetly-fleeting medium of life.” His eyebrows now even, Bierce’s eyes met Lucifer’s.

“You’ve created a living parody. Prince of Darkness, Father of All Satires.”

Neither man moved. Lilith, still kneeling, glanced uneasily at them

both. The wind kicked up another cloud of sand, but it passed by the party under the umbrella without being noticed.

Marie Antoinette's husband, Louis XVI, was executed by guillotine during the French Revolution. He was the last king of France and was beheaded on the guillotine on 21 January 1793.

Julie Heller, who was a member of the Communist Party, was a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America.



An example of a person who is a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America is a person who is a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America.

Patrick Henry, who was a member of the Communist Party, was a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America.

George Julius, who was a member of the Communist Party, was a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America.

MEXICAN WATER



CONTRIBUTORS

Hallie Andrew is a senior English major who enjoys the pleasures of reading, drinking wine, exploring new cities and playing with dogs. She finds the idea of leaving Ursinus extremely bittersweet.

Julie Balko thinks that coffee should be its own food group and wants to give a shout-out to Ralph, the crazy, flamboyant Tyrolean she and Alina met at a bus stop at the G.C. (Grand Canyon, for all you kiddies).

Whoop whoop, that's the sound that I miss. Whoop whoop, that's the sound of **Stephanie Bartusis**.

You might as well call **Alina Bishop** Mary Moon... she don't eat meat, but she sure like the (Cone) Bone.

Jen Bowlan's brand of irreverent sarcasm begs the question: is she ever serious?

They make **Andy Brienza** do pushups in drag.

Laura Cruz doesn't care. Well, she does care... but not really.

Chris Curley admires simplicity; encourages complicity.

Nicole Dillie is a sophomore English major and KDK sister. She has an unhealthy obsession with the color green.

As a matter of clarification, **Matthew Flyntz** is not and never has been an English major. Thus, he is simply not cut out for this witty bio blurb writing business. But he can name all nine Supreme Court Justices in order of seniority if you want.

Patrick Hayakawa has sailed to sea in a sieve!

Georgia Julius crunches like a nutty nuthatch, kind of sloppy, kind of slurpy.

Josh Krigman is under there.

Yo, feel this— recorded in 1987, the last Lantern submission produced by **Claudia-Lauren Harper**.

Clay Lewis is a Caucasian Pacific Islander from a small island off of Seattle. He enjoys swimming with the ucMst (after having learned as a kid by getting chased down by a ferryboat!)

I'll meet you on a cloud, **John Lukacs**.

Calla Mattox has trouble with the concept of the idiom. This explains how she once killed two stones with one battle.

Steven Markoe is so excited that they took him out of the bibliography.

Ivy McDaniels is upset that her Lantern-bio-writing friend gave up last week.

India McGhee is the oldest she's ever been, so watch out or you'll get forkstabbed.

I am the god of hellfire! And I bring you... **Sean McQueen!** (de de duh, duh duh)

Jennifer Mingolello believes that honeysuckles with their yellow orange yawn-stretches and juice that tastes like bee sting kisses are an excellent example of the lovely things that can be found hugging broken fences hidden in corners behind peeling paint sheds.

Ian O'Neill's last one is for Jenna.

Samantha Owen ate tree bark once. It was gross.

Priya Patel enjoys biochemistry, photography, crafting, and elephants. Someday she hopes to travel the world.

Caitlin Quinn once had a female tortoise named Skywalker. Skywalker escaped through the front door after Caitlin made her play the mob boss in a homemade movie.

Pssst. ComE over heRe. I have a Clue that should aid in youR invEs-tigation. The gentLeman you'Ve been looking for doesn't Actually ex-iSt. He's a myth started by the kIngpin and hiS associates, designed to pRevEnt petty thugs from Attracting too much attention from cops like yourseLf.

Natalie Rokaski is pretty fierce--and thats a big deal because I've met some fierce bitches up in my life! (While Natalie realizes that leaving her blurb at that ferosh Christian Siriano quote/way of life would probably be much better and much more efficient than blabbing on and on, this is her very last Lantern and very last Lantern bio blurb and much like her inability to deal with graduation, Natalie is having a difficult time ending this sentence because it means too many things, but she is also aware that this is a relatively small thing and in fact it probably means nothing at all, or maybe--

Yes yes y'all, ya don't stop, **Laurel Salvo**, *rock on!*

Christopher Schaeffer first published under the pen-name Daniel Sergeant. These early efforts are considered crude, amateurish affairs but consistently demand high prices on eBay.

Dan Sergeant has outgrown the Lantern in much the same way one outgrows a high-school sweetheart – with a feverish, smirking hope for the future, and a great lasting sadness. He promises that one day he will stop writing stories about the Devil.

Joshua Solomon wants you to look up "Yoshida Brothers KODO" on youtube.com RIGHT NOW. Believe me, it's worth it.

Dayna Stein will always gets paid, will take the wackest song and make it better.

Joshua Steinhouse is a sophomore, majoring in American Studies and Education. He listens to country music, can make balloon animals, collects comic books, and after writing this bio has no doubts as to why he is single. He has written many different forms of literature, from short stories to poetry to plays. Hopefully this submission wasn't the Lantern scraping the bottom of the barrel, and if anyone is still reading this biography at this point, Josh is sorry for the time you've lost.

Michael Taggart's alien embryo, having been accepted into the 75th anniversary Lantern, departed for the cosmos, leaving the host body a shriveled, melting shell.

A small town Virginia girl, born and raised, **Kelsey Threatte** is rather unremarkable. Set apart only by her insatiable desire to understand people, culture, and places. She seeks the beauty in the every day and sees adventure and opportunity no matter where she is whether it is on the streets of Cairo or Collegeville.

Tori Wynne and Ursinus College have finally decided to end their five year long courtship. They will part ways amiably, both realizing that however difficult, this is what's best for them both. Her days will now be spent molding the minds of America's youth. Seriously. Seeeeeya!


Robert Whitehead finds asymmetry quite agreeable. His enjoyment of lopsidedness and wonky juxtapositions stems from some sort of imbalance he is still trying to figure out. His life wants for so fewer right angles. Also! Robert is fierce tallness and walks for days.

PATRONS

Chris Aiken
Beth Bailey
Ginny Bradley
Douglas Cameron
Hugh Clark
Juan-Ramon de Arana
Rick DiFelicianantonio
Carol Dole
Ross Doughty
Lynne Edwards
Delwyn Engstrom
Rebecca Evans
Mary Fields
Roger Florka
Thomas Gallagher
Sloane Gibb
Walter Greason
Wendy Greenberg
Winfield Guilmette
Lisa Hanover
Cindy Harris
Dallet Hemphill
Ronald Hess

Garrick Imatani
Rebecca Jaroff
Nzadi Keita
Wendy Greenberg
Winfield Guilmette
Lisa Hanover
Cindy Harris
Dallet Hemphill
Ronald Hess
Garrick Imatani
Rebecca Jaroff
Nzadi Keita
Yvon Kennon
Dean Judith T. Levy
Joyce Lionarons
Anthony Lobo
Bob McCullough
Todd McKinney
Joseph Melrose
David Mill
Matthew Mizenko
Shannon Mudd
Debbie Nolan

Frances Novack
Regina Oboler
Heather O'Neill
Sharon Pearson
Kenneth Richardson
Lew Riley
Carla Rinde
Patricia Schroeder
Matt Shoaf
James Sidie
Diane Skorina
Kevin, Kirsten, and
Sasha Small
Peter F. Small
John Strassburger
Victor J. Tortorelli
Collette Trout
Jon Volkmer
Richard Wallace
Carolyn Weigel
John Wickersham
Gordon and Leah
Williams
Eric Williamsen



75 YEARS
1933-2008

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