

# FOLIO

Art and Literary Magazine  
Southern Connecticut State University 2001

---

F O L I O

Art and Literary Magazine

PATRICIA BJORKLUND ~ Editor ~ Production Manager

MEGHANN ENGLAND ~ Associate Editor

JASON LABBE, HARMONY SCAGLIONE ~ Fiction Editors

XHENET ALIU, CRAIG HOUGHTON ~ Poetry Editors

MICHELE COHEN, SARAH FURGALACK ~ Copy Editors

SARA RUSSELL ~ Art Editor and Photographer

JERRY NEVINS ~ Faculty Advisor - Photography Department

MIKE GORMLEY ~ Cover Production - Design and Layout

ERIC HARMAN ~ Cover Art and Production, *Running Water*

JEFF MOCK, Faculty Advisor

---

Folio Staff

Kristin Baningoso, Christopher Bjorklund  
Robert Breychak, Marianne Chai, Megan Cvirko  
Jessica De la Roque, Irene De La Torre, Kelly Glynn  
Larissa Hall, Robert Harlow, Mira Horsky, Jon Horton  
Sarah Johnson, Hom Keung, Alyssa Krom, Rex Krueger  
Matt Quin, Anthony Sacco, Carlos Semexant  
Anthony Szilagyi

---

2001

Student Awards

2000 Connecticut Student Poet

Harmony Scaglione

2001 Connecticut Student Poet

Jason Labbe

SCSU Student Poetry Contest 2001

Winner: Jason Labbe

Second Place: Megan Raab

Honorable Mention

Meghann England ~ Sarah Johnson ~ Erica Swanson

Eve Cummings Prize for Fiction 2001

Winner: Salvatore DeLucia, *The Warehouse*

Second Prize: Xhenet Aliu, *Looking For Jesus*

Third Prize: Sarah Furgalack, *You've come a long way,  
baby*

Eve Cummings Prize for Poetry 2001

Winner: Tony Fusco, *Running with the Bulls*

Second Prize: Sarah Johnson, *Superheroes*

Third Prize: Harmony Scaglione, *Frescos at Assisi*

Honorable Mentions:

Windy McGlinsky ~ Jennifer L. Holley ~ Jason Labbe

Leslie Leeds Prize for Poetry 2000

Jason Labbe

Leslie Leeds Prize for Poetry 2001

Meghann England

### Judge: Eve Cummings Prize For Fiction

Katharine Weber is the author of two novels, *Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* and *The Music Lesson*. Named by Granta as one of the 50 best Young American Novelists in 1996, she is a member of PEN, the Authors Guild, and the National Book Critics Circle. Her essays, reviews and stories have appeared in publications that include *The New Yorker*, *The London Review of Books*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Boston Globe*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, *Ruminator Review*, Salon.com, *Story*, *Redbook*, *Architectural Digest*, *Publishers Weekly* among others. She teaches fiction writing at Yale University and is completing her third novel.

### Judge: Eve Cummings Prize For Poetry

Gray Jacobik is a professor of literature and creative writing at Eastern Connecticut State University, and at present, she serves as Chair of the English Department. She earned her Ph.D. in American and British Literature from Brandeis University. A widely published poet, and a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Creative Writing and an Artist's Fellowship from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, Jacobik's work has appeared recently in *Best American Poetry* 1997 and 1999, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *Ontario Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Ploughshares*, among other publications. Her book, *The Double Task*, University of Massachusetts Press (1998), received The Juniper Prize and was nominated for the James Laughlin Award and The Poet's Prize. Her most recent book, *The Surface of Last Scattering*, published by Texas Review Press (1999) was selected by X. J. Kennedy as the winner of the X. J. Kennedy Poetry Prize.

Judge: SCSU Student Poetry Contest 2001

Connie Voisine, a native of North Kent, Maine, teaches at the University of Hartford. Her collection, *Cathedral of the North*, received the 1999 Associated Writing Programs' Award in poetry and was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. Her poems have appeared in *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Phoebe*, *Ploughshares*, *Seneca Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and other literary journals.

Judge: Leslie Leeds Prize For Poetry 2000-2001

Leo Connellan is the author of over thirteen books of poetry including *Shatterhouse*, *Another Poet in New York*, *Crossing America*, *Death in Lobster Land*, *New & Collected Poems*, *Provincetown & Other Poems*, *The Clear Blue Lobster Water Country*, *Maine Poems*, and *Short Poems*, *City Poems*. Leo received the Shelley Memorial Award as well as the Lucille Medwick Poetry Prize from the Poetry Society of America. Named poet-in-residence in 1987, Leo then became Poet Laureate of the State of Connecticut in 1996. He was also nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize. Leo Connellan's many honors include individual artist grants from The Connecticut Commission on the Arts and an honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from the University of Maine at Augusta in 1998 for his Maine poems.

Southern Connecticut State University  
Creative Writing Faculty

Megan Macomber has taught creative writing and American Literature at Southern Connecticut State University for fourteen years. She has a story forthcoming in the *Connecticut Review* and devotes her "spare time" to moonlighting as a motivational speaker and state judge for the IMPAC-CSU Young Writers program. She served as *Folio* advisor for several years and uses *Folio* in her creative writing classes.

Tim Parrish has taught at Southern Connecticut State University for seven years. His short story collection, *Red Stick Men*, was published in 2000 by University Press of Mississippi. He was awarded a Connecticut Arts Fellowship for 2001.

Jeff Mock worked in literary publishing for more than a decade, first as the Editor of *Black Warrior Review*, then as the Assistant Editor of *The Gettysburg Review*; he serves as the Faculty Advisor for this edition of *Folio*. He is the author of *Evening Travelers*, a chapbook of poems, and *You Can Write Poetry*, a guidebook for beginning poets. His poems appear in *Crazyhorse*, *The Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Quarterly West*, *The Sewanee Review*, and elsewhere.

Vivian Shipley, Editor of *Connecticut Review*, is the Connecticut State University Distinguished Professor. In 2000, she won the Marble Faun Award for Poetry from the William Faulkner Society, the *Thin Air Magazine* Poetry Prize from Northern Arizona University and was named Faculty Scholar at Southern Connecticut State University where she teaches creative writing. She has also won the Lucille Medwick Award from The Poetry Society of America, the Ann Stanford Prize from the University of Southern California, the Reader's Choice Award from *Prarie Schooner*, the *Sonora Review* Poetry Prize from the University of Arizona, the *So To Speak* Poetry Prize

from George Mason University, the Elinor Benedict Poetry Prize from *Passages North*, the John Z. Bennett Award for Poetry from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, and the Hackney Literary Award for Poetry from Birmingham-Southern College. She has published eight books of poetry including *Devil's Lane* (Negative Capability Press, 1996) nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, *How Many Stones?*, winner of the *Devil's Millhopper* Chapbook Contest (University of South Carolina-Aiken, 1998), *Crazy Quilt*, a 2000 Patterson Poetry Prize Finalist (Hanover Press, 1999), *Fair Haven* (Negative Capability Press, 2000), which has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and *Echo and Anger, Still* (Southeastern Louisiana University Press, 2000). *A Cormorant in the Tree* is forthcoming in 2001 from Red Hen Press (Valentine Publishing Group).

## Folio Community

*Folio* is an active club on campus with over twenty-five staffers. The café style monthly readings feature poetry, fiction, open-mic, and live musical performances, boasting an average attendance of seventy-five people. These student readings compliment and support the Reading Series sponsored by SCSU's Creative Writing Department. The integration of students, faculty, staff, readers, and writers of all levels of experience and appreciation foster a supportive environment and promotes a sense of community among local writers.

Our teachers of creative writing represent the keystone of Southern's writing community. *Folio's* expansion as a campus organization and a magazine is a natural outgrowth of the success and support of Professors Megan Macomber, Jeff Mock, Tim Parrish, and *Connecticut Review* Editor Vivian Shipley.

Many thanks to SCSU President Michael Adanti, Vice President Phil Smith, the *Connecticut Review*, and J.F. Bernstein for their donation of books and calendars helping the *Folio* staff promote SCSU's Adopt-a-Family food drive. We hope that *Folio's* participation in this charitable event will blossom as a tradition.

Additional thanks to Vice President David Pedersen, Vice President James Blake, Dean Richard Farricielli, and Dean Donna Jean Fredeen for their recognition of *Folio* as an active part of SCSU's writing program. For the second year, *Folio* editors have represented Southern Connecticut State University and the award-winning *Connecticut Review* at the Associated Writing Programs National Conference.



## Publication

The work appearing in this issue was selected through a preliminary round of judging by volunteer students. The cover-sheets were removed so writers remained anonymous. The editorial staff reviewed the results and narrowed the selections by work-shop-style analysis. All pieces chosen for publication were automatically entered into the contest for the Eve Cummings Prize for Fiction and Poetry. Katharine Weber judged the fiction for 2001, and Gray Jacobik determined the poetry prize.

Submission to *Folio* is open to all SCSU students. Manuscripts are accepted from September through the first week of December. Guidelines are available by calling the *Folio* office @ 392-6936, or through the English Department.

### Folio's Featured Student Readers Fall 2000-Spring 2001

Xhenet Aliu, Liz Appel, Kaitlyn Brayton, John Peter Christie,  
Salvatore DeLucia, Sarah Furgalack, Tony Fusco, Jennifer Holley,  
Sarah Johnson, Jason Labbe, Brian LaRue, Windy McGlinsky,  
Courtney Moore, Matthew Quin, Susan Rubinsky, Sara Russell,  
Harmony Scaglione, Sheila Squillante, Erica Swanson,  
Anthony Szilagyi, Colleen VanRyn

### SCSU Creative Writing-Readers Series Fall 2000-Spring 2001

Gray Jacobik, Brian Johnson, Allison Joseph, Megan Macomber,  
Inman Majors, Jeff Mock, Tim Parrish, Nick Rinaldi, John  
Searles, Vivian Shipley, Ted Solotaroff, Sheila Squillante,  
Jessica Treat, Connie Voisine, Tom Ward

Special Thanks To:

English Department Chairman Steve Larocco, Alumni Association, Denise Bently-Drobish, J.F. Bernstein, Kaitlyn Brayton, Sharon Brennan, James Brown, John Carmak, Wiley Carr, Susan Cirillo, Brad Crerar, *Connecticut Review*, Jerry Dunklee, Marcus Elmore, Anthony Fappiano, Harmony "Flowers", Xan Galberth, Juri Hada, Dan Harayda, Frank Harris, Nicole Henderson, Mike Imme, Brian Johnson, Jane Marrone, Mike Moss, Ralph Nader, Bill O'Dowd, Trish Piacentinni, Chris Piscitelli, Erica Rasicot, Ted Redos, Tony Rosso, Josephine Rossomando, Frank Saunders, Janet Scheider, Paul Serignese, Mike Shea, Eric Simms, Steely Dan, Student Government Association, Mike Tobin, Jen "B-B" Twigg, TYCO, Lori Ann Vilella, Thom Yorke

Musical Performing Artists

*Southern Connecticut State University Traditional Jazz Trio*

Warren Brelsford ~ Chris Cretella ~ Mike Paoulucci

*Sterves of Neil*

Christopher Bjorklund ~ Mike Conlin ~ Jeff Craig  
Chris Scheidel

*Fab-Fliers Created by*

Robert Breychak ~ Craig Houghton ~ Mystery Editors

STEBCO PRINTING  
Watertown, Connecticut

TONY FUSCO  
*Running with the Bulls* - 108

ALYSSA GARGIULO  
*Finding the K Spot on a Radio* - 71

JENNIFER L. HOLLEY  
*Diamond Dust* - 46  
*Nine Lives* - 47

COURTNEY ANSON JACOBS  
*Stances* - 49

MELANDER JOHNS  
*David Had A Harp So We Shall Have A Harp* - 11

SARAH JOHNSON  
*Blastogenesis* - 127  
*Winter Body* - 129  
*Superheroes* - 130

JASON LABBE  
*Heading West* - 18

BRIAN LARUE  
*Job* - 72

WINDY McGLINSKY  
*I've seen how you ride* - 43  
*Carbon Monoxide* - 45

MIKE McLELLAN  
*One the Dunes at Bodega Bay* - 124

CHRIS PICCIRILLO  
*It's Joe's Eightieth* - 1

MATT QUIN  
*My New Haven* - 50

MEGAN RAAB  
*Kilt* - 110  
*Brigid's God* - 112

AMARA PAYNE ROHR  
*Music Sounds The Same* - 155

SARA RUSSELL  
*Moi la Chatte* - 13

HARMONY SCAGLIONE  
*Frescos at Assisi* - 131  
*from scratch* - 134  
*My mother worked days too* - 135

RUTH SILVER  
*New Haven Despair* - 2

ANTHONY SZILAGYI  
*A New Day* - 164

---

FLASH BACK POETRY

JOHN SEARLES  
*Stones in the Airfield* - 178

A R T

KAITLYN BRAYTON  
*Ancient Child*

SAMANTHA BYRNE  
*Katie*

JOHN DEFANO  
*Self Portrait #3*

JURI HADA  
*Nana*

JEFF MIHALEK  
*Untitled*

INES NICHOLE DE ASIS  
*Untitled*

JOSEPHINE ROSSOMANDO  
*Surf & Turf*

ADAM WATKINS  
*Pale Clouded White*

---

CHRIS PICCIRILLO

It's Joe's Eightieth

Surprise!!! You're still alive  
and doing fine,  
surrounded by portly Italians  
who've gathered to share in the modesty  
with which you handle  
each developing wrinkle,  
each hair lost in the drain.

The band belts a tune  
as your bread sops the wine.  
*"There's love everywhere!!!"*  
So smile.  
Absorb the strings as they're plucked,  
focus on memory  
of your teenage self  
on the corner of Olive and Wooster  
with a sangwich under one arm  
and Mary buried into your breast.

It's a festive Sunday evening.  
Football scores are overshadowed  
by a dabble of chocolate frosting  
on your lower lip,  
to which you're oblivious.  
And Mary's false-teeth form a smile  
that no stroke can alter.

---

RUTH SILVER

## New Haven Despair

We're sitting in Myron's car on Whalley, Solar's showing me the scene: a heaving crowd of young black men surfing the pavement of Popeye's fried chicken.

Solar's teaching how it feels to be a guy like him with no place to go. He says, "You people got to see it as it lays. If you really see, then, you'll be forced to do something."

I say, "It's like a scene from Spike Lee's *Son of Sam*. Even though I never saw the film I like for Solar to think I'm smart.

Solar needs money. Solar draws cartoons, mostly sharp cats with a fix on life and he tells me he writes. He spends his time mostly alone. Solar's mom owns a house; his sister works at Yale and Solar he passes his time, dreaming of what his life could be if he could write like Dickens. Solar belongs to the oldest private lending library on Chapel.

He thinks he knows me really well because his friend stole my purse ever so gently. My wallet had all the information, my age and credit rating; I knew it would happen so I stuffed the purse with two twenties and Krishnamurti's book on how Solar and I are the world and how maybe if we experienced that we are the world  
it would all work out all right.

---

RUTH SILVER

### The Dream Catcher With 4 Feathers

Sidney Rue-I remember him. I forget him. He belongs in the past. He belongs to the future. Last week I saw him looking at the trinkets in our window. Right now, I'm selling jewelry, Colombian coffee and knickknacks at A Thousand and One Tribal Nations. I could see he was the small swarthy guy that I had a mad crush on in the 50's.

Even though his hair had changed from inky black to wire gray, it was still swept back in a wavy pompadour showing off his wide forehead and pencil thin eyebrows and aquiline nose. I had gone to the storefront window to remove an American Indian dream catcher web with four differently colored feathers. That's how I came to find myself face to face with the past.

The customer said, "I want the dream catcher with the gold, orange, rust and deep wine feathers. I've never seen one like it. I have over five-hundred and that one's unique." I said, "No problem, if you really want it, it's yours." As I carefully removed the dream catcher from the window, Sidney Rue disappeared.

It was early in 1958, and I was on a bus which was carrying me from Boulder Colorado to New York City. I had been at Boulder Teachers' College for only two days. I spent the fall semester of '57 at the University of Lakeland in Florida. Even with the G.I. bill, college wasn't the place I wanted to be. I had been discharged from the WACs at the end of the summer so I thought I would follow the sun. When I didn't find Florida to my liking, I switched gears and took a bus to the teaching college in Boulder. Just as I got there, a great snowstorm blanketed the west from Utah to the Rockies. I felt lost. I was anonymous and a big city seemed just the right place for someone like me. The bus pulled into Port Authority bus depot at 2:00 in the morning. I'd checked the time because I was



---

SILVER

thinking of sleeping on a bench in the station. As I climbed off the bus, my stiletto heel caught in the rubber matting of the steep, jutting step, and, if the bus driver hadn't been there to steady me with his hand, I would have entered the city face forward, belly down.

"I'm sorry. I should've changed from high heels to something more practical. What do you think?"

The driver who was still holding my hand said, "I'm not paid to think. I'm paid to see that you get off my bus without injury."

"Well, thanks, for the helping hand."

"It's part of the job."

A passenger behind me yelled, "Shake it or bake it, lady. Don't make it on my time."

I removed my cold hand from the warmth of the driver's palm as he lightly held onto my elbow guiding me off the lower step.

I joined the other seven or eight people standing at the side of the bus waiting for the driver to open the steel doors of the silver and blue machine.

A wiry young man with a mane of oily black hair raced to the bus and shoved at the luggage door.

The driver rushed over. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm claiming my parcel. I'm here every week. You know me."

"There are people in line, ahead of you."

"You're two hours late. I don't have two hours to waste. For me, every minute counts."

"Sorry, Mr. Rue, you have to wait your turn like everyone else."

The driver bent over and lifted the doors. He called out, "Now hand me your ticket stubs, one at a time."

The fellow named Rue came forward. "Here's my stub. Now, go get me my package."

"I told you to wait at the back of the line." As the bus driver turned to take the yellow paper covered with numbers from the person first in line, Mr. Rue ran to the opened door, grabbed his package, scampered to the rear of the machine and fled.

I got a room at the Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association at 92nd and Lexington. It took two months before they would let me in. For two weeks, I stayed at the Barbizon, a fancy hotel for women, and the other month and two weeks I slept in a room at the Christian Women's Y where for \$50 a month they threw in an evening meal. During the day, I had landed a job at Reuben H. Donnely. The Donnely Corporation was into advertising and its workers assembled the fat yellow pages for Manhattan and the five boroughs. Once a month I carried in two heavy bags of cosmetics and perfumes for the women clerical workers on my floor. On Thursday evenings and Saturdays I worked at Bloomingdale's on 59th & Lexington. I stood behind a display counter on the second floor, directly facing shoppers coming off the escalator. I was young and slim and my hair was naturally auburn. I used Avon's raspberry lipstick and green eye shadow. The display case presented sterling silver spoons, sterling silver rattles and silver brush and comb sets for the newly born. It also featured a lime satin book with big bold letters proclaiming MY BABY'S FIRST YEAR.

From that time in the city, I remember women friends, and, yes, I recall Sidney Rue. Because I passed my spare time reading and listening to WOR radio, I met up with him again. First, I encountered him in a story by Burt Britton. I'd found a book of short stories by Britton in a second-hand bookstall on 91st and Lexington. The book cost fifteen cents and within its covers was a story of a mystic, a charlatan, a guy grabbing life with both fists. His name was Sidney Rue. I found it strange. And one Friday night I was listening to Long John Nevel's late night radio show and *he* was there; his voice flowing in on ether talking about automatic writing and how being a medium he used cards but the cards were just a gimmick, a distraction, for the person he was reading, enabling the spirit to come through. Spirit let the cards fall into patterns that Sidney, in an altered mind state, deciphered. "But the secret," he said, "is to stop running on automatic. This is it; wake up, live."

I heard him on the radio on Friday and the following Friday I walked into Crystal's, a small sit-down restaurant, located kitty-corner from the Y on 93rd Street. *He* was sitting there in a red, vinyl booth across from the door. He was reading Tarot cards spread over a pink and gold-starred table.

---

SILVER

"How exactly does he help Mr. Donnelly save his millions?"

"He tells Donnelly the future so he's able to plan ahead."

"Do you believe someone can see the future?"

"I see my future, girl. If I don't work, I don't eat. You got to make it while you can. Life doesn't wait."

Yes, my dream catcher has snared tall, sassy Rita, with swinging hips and big arse. Rita was a married woman and in-the-know about life. She worked part-time in a dental office in the Bronx preparing silver packets for the dentist to put into rotting teeth. She worked fast, there and at Donnelly, and even found time for Hunter College two times a week. Rita told off color jokes to the women who worked in our unit. We were seated behind rectangular tables with pencils in our hands. Our unit was experimental. We were charting a brave new world guided by IBM and a big frame computer. We counted letters, each and every single letter, and when we reached the number seventeen we had to draw a line and put in a coded letter for the programmer. It was mechanical. No one was forced to think so everyone's ears were open for some nonsense, some story, any type of fun.

Rita gave Herb, the boss of our unit, good advice. But she also aimed trigger jabs at him, because he came off straight as an arrow and looked slightly bewildered, seated at his desk at the back of the unit.

"Herb, three years ago, you were in Korea at the 38th parallel. I bet you never dreamed you'd be stuck here with us, dressed in a white shirt and tie with brown pressed pants."

"Please, Rita, we all have our work. Let's do it."

"Well, like you, I get so damn tired. But if I get too damn tired that's the time Vittie helps me out. He says, 'just spread your legs, girl,' and you know I do."

The unit tittered. We all held our breath wondering who'd be slammed next.

Rita said, "Ladies, giggle, giggle, but what do you know? Herb knows. Lord, he knows. Except for Alice, our Columbia geologist, you ladies know nothing. Why has God chosen me to be your teacher?"

Herb kept his mouth closed.

Alice said, "You only dabble in men, Rita. You leave out all us women. We could teach you a thing or two."

"I know you can. But it's not what I'm plugged into, honey."

"So, stop picking on Herb. He's plugged into the same shit as you."

Alice was ahead of her time. She had something wrong with her heart, and couldn't do the field work that a job in geology demanded. What she said was, 'I'm specializing in geology of the female soul.' Alice informed me that women did not know how to think and that I, Clara Kroog, was a prime example of a young woman stuck in a terrible place, impressionable to the point of imbecility and not at all suited to getting along in the world of double-dealing which men had created.

Alice McGraw is encircled within my dream web, along with her chums, Julie London and Billie Holiday. I saw Alice the other night on Channel 13 talking about Billie's last days in detox at Harlem hospital and how she snuck in Kentucky 100 proof for Billie to drink.

What a brew did Rue grow when I finally called and asked him would he do a reading? I remembered walking against the light across Sixth Avenue. I was headed to his apartment on McDougal. I never arrived because I was hit by a taxi and woke up in the emergency room of Bellevue hospital.

The doctor told me how lucky I was to have only dislocated my shoulder and hip. Everything on my right side ached. The doctor assured me physical therapy would put me back in place. I wanted to ask the doctor what place was that. My head was spinning. My world had crashed. I thought that the doctor and nurse looked just like Sidney Rue. They wheeled me into the corridor, just off the emergency room. A great wind swept over and through me. There were people in pain, groaning and cursing, and Billie Holiday was singing "Blood on the leaves/ Blood at the root / Black bodies swinging in southern breeze." Where was the song coming from? Did I hear that song in the taxi? "Strange fruit hanging from the poplar tree." Why was I hearing that song? Did my dream catcher pick me for a really rotten dream? Was it because it had only two

---

SILVER

feathers? If I had a catcher with four feathers, the accident would never have happened.

An orderly came and pushed my bed. I didn't ask him where I was going. I was being taken. It was then that Sidney Rue's voice came through, "Everything just is; so wake up. This is it."

---

MELANDER JOHNS

David Had A Harp So We Shall Have A Harp

Smell of Ackee and Saltfish, Jamaica's national  
Dish, seeps from under the door of her house on  
Thanksgiving

Morning. Seeps throughout the powerhouse  
Island of reggae surrounded by  
Blue diamond waters and emerald green  
Palm trees. It is the same smell that drifts  
Through the air in and around my house in  
Connecticut on Thanksgiving morning.

"David had a harp so we shall have a harp"  
Are the words my great grandmother told  
My father many years ago on a Sunday  
Afternoon. She placed it in the family  
Room of the zinc- roofed shanty with  
Concrete slabs of floor. Grandchildren  
Looked at it every day, but never played a  
Note. Love of music instilled in her by  
Her ancestors-The Arawak and Caribe  
Indians, African tribes,  
Spaniards, British, Assyrians.

Father is in the basement on a  
Saturday afternoon lazily lounging  
On the cranberry and cream velvet  
Sofa listening to the music of  
Luciano as it rattles the fixtures of the  
House. "Spread a lickle love an mek

JOHNS

Jah blessings come down." He jingles the  
Tambourine in perfect time with the music.  
Love of music instilled in him by his  
Ancestors-The Arawak and Caribe  
Indians, African tribes,  
Spaniards, British, Assyrians.

I practice my clarinet in my room on a  
Sunday afternoon. Notes trickling  
Through the shaft and come out in rumbling  
Bellows. Tap my foot to the music.  
Love of music instilled in me by my  
Ancestors-The Arawak and Caribe  
Indians, African tribes,  
Spaniards, British, Assyrians.

---

SARA RUSSELL

Moi la Chatte  
(pour Jacques)

Je suis une petite chatte,  
Noire et bleue et blanche.  
Je roule sur le manège  
Dans le jardin.  
Je ris et je ris  
Parce que je vis!

Hier, J'ai attrapé  
Un petit oiseau,  
Et j'ai vu  
Dans les yeux,  
Dieu.

Je l'ai léché,  
Parce que  
Je suis méchante.  
Je l'ai dit,  
"Vole-toi!"  
Et j'étais contente  
Parce que  
Il m'a aimé.



---

SARA RUSSELL

## Sacrament

Tina grasped the armrest and knelt, pressing into the old foam. Her knees sank down to the wooden base. She inhaled sharply and blew it out so she could feel her heart beating in her neck. Tina waited. The metal screen obscured his face and body, but she could smell wool and Zest soap and Old Spice. "God bless you, my child," Father Tom said.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been one month since my last confession. These are my sins." Tina's hands were sweating and she rubbed her palms on the armrest until they were sticky from friction. "Last week, when I flunked my calculus test, I took the Lord's name in vain many times. I lied to Sister Ann about chewing gum; I told her it was a cough drop. Also, I cheated on my physics quiz with the rest of my table when Mr. Adonolfe left the room." Tina's green and blue plaid skirt crunched between her knees and the cushion. It itched like hell, so she yanked it out. "And I've been having lustful thoughts about a priest here at school. I'm sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

"What kind of lustful thoughts?" said Fr. Tom.

"His smile excites me, it makes me feel like I'm the only one he wants. And his dark blue eyes...I find myself fantasizing about him all day long," said Tina.

"Go on my child."

"He has this black wool trench coat that smells just like him. When I'm alone in his office I draw in its intoxicating scent," said Tina.

"Anything else?"

"Yes Father. When I smell his coat I imagine it's his naked body underneath me. I caress his chest as I run my tongue down his stomach and gently tug on his pubic hair with my--"

“Uh huh, well, I mean it’s perfectly natural for a teenage girl such as yourself to have lustful thoughts, with all those hormones raging and whatnot, and with God’s help and guidance you’ll overcome these feelings because this priest, is a priest. I recommend one Our Father and two Hail Marys as your penance. You may now say an Act of Contrition,” said Fr. Tom.

“Wash me from my guilt and cleanse me of my sin. I acknowledge my offense; my sin is before me always,” said Tina. As she listened to him say the Prayer of Absolution, she wondered if he had an erection like he did at the dance last week. “Amen,” said Tina.

“God bless you Ti--my child,” said Fr. Tom.

Tina got home from school around three o’clock. She dumped her backpack next to her desk and crashed onto the bed. She gazed up at the photograph on her nightstand with the furry black frame. It was of her and Fr. Tom at the Homecoming dance. Tina reached over, bringing the photo close to her. She stroked the frame, burying her fingers into the synthetic fibers. Repeated smearing of chapsticked lips had left Fr. Tom’s head fuzzy. She studied every inch of his body and often gaped at the slight bulge in his pants. “Oh, Fr. Tom, what a bad, bad boy.” Tina leaned over the side of her bed to open the nightstand’s cabinet. She brushed away the tampons and pads, feeling for her vibrator. She imagined him still in the confessional long after she had left. He came everywhere.

The next day, at two o’clock, Tina snuck into Fr. Tom’s office. Held up in a Christian Ministry Club meeting, he wouldn’t be back for an hour. She eased herself into his black leather chair, arching her back against it. She always made excuses to come and see him and now he knew why. Tina squeaked open the top drawer and pulled a ruler out from under a bunch of pens. His stapler had been placed just so on top of the desk, 1.5 inches from the tape dispenser, which sat almost 2 inches from the multi-line phone. It had a button for each extension. Tina entertained the idea of calling a friend, but she didn’t know the code to dial out. The receiver clicked as she picked it up and held it to her mouth. Tina smoothed her tongue around the black rim and sucked air through the holes

---

RUSSELL

in the middle. "Meet you in the confessional? It's the only place we can be alone? You're not as unattainable as I thought!" She hung up the receiver when the phone started beeping.

Tina never thought she could get close enough to touch him. She had purposely danced with a few male chaperones like Mr. Adonolfe, Brother Peter, and Fr. Rubin who smelled like rum and cheap cigarettes. Tina hopped up onto the gym stage where the other seniors chilled and waved over the DJ. "You wouldn't happen to have any oldies would you?" said Tina.

"That depends on what you have in mind," said the DJ.

"How about 'I Only Have Eyes For You' by the Flamingos?" said Tina.

"Sure, no problem," he said.

Tina had heard the first few notes of her song, so she approached Fr. Tom. "Father, would you like to dance?"

"Sure, I'm tired of just standing around; it would be my honor." Seeing her grin made him smile. She observed her hand move toward him in slow motion. It touched him, rounding over his shoulder so her fingers felt his back. Tina's song blurred into the background as Fr. Tom's hand wrapped around her waist. She felt his warmth through her thin dress. She had chosen a black dress with a respectable neck and hemline. Tina didn't want him thinking she went around like a slut. His smell dizzied her as they danced. Tina gripped Fr. Tom's hand tighter as her favorite part of the song neared. She leaned in closer and sang into his ear. "You are here. So am I. Maybe millions of people go by, but they all disappear from view. And I only have eyes for you." Tina gummed his ear lobe and before he could pull away she felt a knot brush against her leg. That's when Tina's friend walked by and took their picture with a "Say cheese!" Fr. Tom blushed, looking around at the other chaperones, but they were dancing. "Thanks for the dance. You're a nice girl and all, but I've got to go," said Fr. Tom.

"No, thank you Father," said Tina.

Tina picked up the stainless steel ruler and put it back under the pens. The sharp sunlight filtered through the slightly drawn blinds. Fr. Tom's bookshelf had no color, just a blown

out white from the glaring sun. A picture of the Bikini Atoll cloud rested on the bottom shelf next to “Shepherding Your Sheep: Your Parishioners and You.” She looked up to the top shelf and saw the miniature mailbox sitting next to a photo of Fr. Tom and his dad. Her lips cracked into a smooth grin. She had made him the mailbox in sculpture class as a welcome of sorts to St. Lucy’s. The flag, to show if the box had mail or not, hung at an odd angle. Tina smiled. He must have played with it too much.

Tina bent over and picked up her book bag, plopping it on the desk. She unzipped the large compartment and gently removed a black garment. “Damn, even on sale you were expensive!” Tina laid it out and unwrapped the arms and collar. She moseyed around the desk to the coat rack in the corner. Tina clutched his coat, sending the rack clanging into the wall. She placed it next to the one on his desk. “Ha-ha. Perfect match! London Fog, size 42.” Tina slipped her hand into all the pockets, removing car keys and old tissues. She put them in the appropriate pockets of the new coat. Tina folded up Fr. Tom’s coat and crammed it into her book bag. She hung up the imposter on the same hook. “Be good now, I’ll be back in two weeks.”

---

JASON LABBE

## Heading West

### *1. The Rain is Clear*

Our destination, water. Five days out and we have  
A ways to go. So much flat ground, grass, road.  
Mick bought a bike, a '67 Triumph, from his hard-up  
Brother, for cheap, and picking it up gives us reason

To see the coast. We've still a ways to go,  
And we're in no rush to head back.  
The whole morning we watch lightning net  
A vast cloud and prick the horizon. Miles off,

Wind-carried downpours, shadows, still creep.  
We follow the westbound storm, take it slow,  
Try to stay dry. Were those droplets, even a few,  
Once the stream where she found the body?

I wonder if blood evaporates,  
And I wonder what will become of Truckstop Girl –  
Will she ever swim? Will she ever see blue water  
As expansive as the green fields that envelop her?

She never said if she went through with lifting  
Him out. I can't imagine...what she will wake to  
Every disturbed dawn. How could that small  
Frame carry a grown man with soaked clothes?

And in time, a year, less, more – I don't know,  
This will be, to me, a fading story I'll run over  
When I'm the one awake too early.  
I'll forget the details. I often try to.

I didn't realize that I kept eating  
While I listened. There's blood in some stream  
And I'm wishing I ate one less burrito,  
And what poured from a man may now be rain:

Swollen drops on the pickup's hood,  
Blurriness cleared by the wipers.  
*Mick, slow down, how can you see? Are you mad  
We stopped? You're right, we can't keep stopping.*

2. *The Widow Visits The River*

All morning police, my sister Barbara, I hear  
Them – they say *How composed she seems,*  
And, *What about the babies?*  
Maybe grief will be an early morning fever,

Inevitable, felt coming on slowly  
After the previous night's dinner, an intolerable

Heat that builds gradually with tossing and turning.  
Or, maybe in an hour I'll feel as Barbara did  
When grandma's ring slipped from her soap-slicked finger  
And descended into the knotwork of pipes I imagine  
Tangles below every neighborhood.  
No plumber's snake can hook this loss.

No note or signal. Of course everyone, whispering  
For me not to hear, asks each other *Why?*  
I didn't even know he had a gun. In my house?  
And his students ... Principal Morgan  
Will likely tell them, over the intercom,  
And request a moment of silence.

I despised geometry in high school. Bob took  
It to heart when I told him on our first date. I forget  
The restaurant, it was back in Boston. I remember  
How his head hung low over his plate of ...  
I don't remember. I think we also saw a movie

---

L A B B E

That night, and I bet he missed its point as he stared

Into the screen, but not at the picture, questioning himself  
*Why would she want this geometry teacher?*  
Why did he want a junior high history teacher?  
It's been five years since I came back to Kansas to raise  
Our family, five long years since I taught  
Any children besides Rebecca and Gregory,

Who I imagine are at my father's house.  
Who will tell them?  
I hope they've eaten and been washed.  
I hope Bob didn't wake them, as he woke me  
When he slipped out of bed. It was early, still dark.  
Now that I think about it,

He didn't even dress before he left.  
I heard nothing after the toilet flushed.  
Was that gun in my house?  
How could I sleep through a shot so close by?  
I hope he didn't wake the children.  
My Becky, my Greg, who will tell them?

*3. The Bond*

Pete scowls at me between  
Mouthfuls of his bean burrito.  
As always, he knows what I'm thinking:

Telling a story should be like taking  
A trip. Focus on the point as you would  
A destination. Don't look back.

Back in the truck, he'll say  
*Mick, you should relax. You'll have  
A heart attack before you're forty.*

*4. The Hungry Dog Sits in His Pen*

I saw the plate on your truck when you guys

Pulled in. I always sit at this window  
On my break and memorize the colors  
Of license plates. I saw blue and knew

Connecticut. I bet you guys go  
To the ocean – when you're home –  
And let me guess, you're driving all the way west –  
To the ocean. Most young guys from the East  
Who come through here are. I can't swim,

There's not much water near here,  
Just a shallow little stream that divides  
My daddy's property from the Millers' yard.

Everyone in town calls it the river.

I used to dip my toes in it.

Sometimes I sit Mr. Miller's kids,  
And once I watched his house when they went  
To Boston, where Mr. Miller's from.  
I already miss the kids.

Guess you guys haven't heard. I'll tell you,  
Even though I came to work to keep from thinking  
Too much about what happened.

Just to tell you, when I wake too early,  
I take a walk and follow the river  
To the Wagners', where you can't go much further.  
Unless there's complete quiet I just can't sleep.

Thinking back, it must have been, well, I hope  
It was, the thunder that woke me this morning.

So I took off. There was thunder  
But the rain hadn't started yet. Just sprinkles.

Not too far along I saw  
Mr. Miller lying bottom-up in the river.



LABBE

First thing I thought he slipped and knocked  
His head on a rock while out chasing Ben –

That dog's always tearing off at dawn.

First he chewed through his rope,  
The next week he broke a heavy chain.  
Mr. Miller fenced him in a chainlink pen

And still that dog dug under his cage and took off.

Always running off at dawn.  
Mr. Miller never thinks anyone's watching  
Him race around in boxer shorts – or pajamas  
If it's chilly – chasing his ugly mutt.

So I run over, right into the water, to help  
Him up, and I notice my daddy's rifle.  
I'd recognize it from any other –

That's the gun I learned to shoot.

I'll just say it – he shot himself in the head,  
I mean, Mr. Miller. Mr. Miller did,

With the gun he borrowed Monday. Said something  
Kept tearing into his trash, scattering a mess  
Around his shed. Thinking back, one morning

Last week I caught his loose mutt in our garbage.  
And I shooed him off.

*5. The Ache*

I feel rain in an old break, my leg.  
The bumper to a neighbor's Impala snapped it  
And wrecked my bike when I tried to ride away

From suburban routine. I was nine. Nothing different  
Now – back home, only summer paces the high school.

FOLIO

The empty halls listen for me to jingle like a tambourine,

The announcement of ammonia and broom-sweeps.  
Six days ago I turned in my ring of keys.  
Boredom is the worm in the apple.

And I tell you, I don't want to know  
What hollowed that guy so thoroughly  
That he could only quit his own skin.

Nothing? Was it how empty Kansas appears to me?  
So much air. I saw it  
In Amanda's blue eyes; how she looked

At me when we shook her hand and wished her luck –  
That look said *Let me out.*  
What can we do? We don't have room,

And I want to reach San Diego by Friday.  
*I can see just fine. It's only rain. No, I'm not mad,  
But Pete, we can't keep stopping.*

---

X H E N E T   A L I U

## Looking for Jesus

Salmah first spied him from Nana's porch. He was small, even for his age, and he carried boxes almost as tall as himself up the stairs to his new third-floor apartment next door. His thick black hair hung like a winter cap over his eyes. "Stop staring," Nana said, but Salmah couldn't. He looked like a puppet and Salmah was in love with him. She loitered in the parking lot to steal glimpses as he walked at his mother's side to retrieve more boxes from their wood-paneled station wagon. Salmah wished he'd break away and help pick the dandelions she had grown in the small lot on the side of her building. He didn't look over.

Salmah spotted him occasionally over the next few weeks, would hear hoarse grumbles and thuds and loud Spanish voices through windows left open for the summer, but the boy didn't play, at least not outside. Not with Salmah. She thought that maybe he'd been punished, though she couldn't imagine what the boy could have done, what kind of trouble he could have caused. He was so small and dark and his lips were so pink.

She finally learned his name when he appeared in her kindergarten class.

"Class," Miss Herr said, "this is Jesus Hernandez. Jesus does not speak English but kindness is something that I'm sure he understands. I expect you all to be extra courteous to him."

Miss Herr assigned him a seat directly in front of Salmah. Salmah offered him a pencil.

"Do you know your ABCs?" she asked. He did not respond. "Say A. Aaay." Nothing. "Uno. Aqua. Uno. Aqua." He began to cry.

Salmah was sentenced to Time Out. She did not understand. She was not trying to taunt Jesus; she wanted only

to talk with him so they could someday marry. Miss Herr was a horrible old woman. No wonder she had no husband.

Salmah was undeterred. Everyday she would stare at the back of his dreary flannel shirts until she saw the patterns when she blinked, and everyday she would take a seat next to him on the bus and converse in a language he didn't understand. "Will you marry me?" Salmah sometimes asked. He never spoke back, mostly stared out the window or half-glanced at her, but he stayed there, always left room for her to sit next to him on the double-seater.

The bus rides weren't enough, not when an entire summer stretched ahead. On the last day of school, Salmah followed Jesus out from the double doors of the bus and trailed him to the stairs of his house. He turned to her, puzzled, his eyes declaring *This is not your home*. Finally she asked, "Are you going to come out and play now?"

His black eyes stared back at her. "OK," he answered in a rasp so soft that Salmah held her breath to hear it.

Salmah skipped away as Jesus fled up the stairs, though Nana's shouts from behind the screen door halted her mid-step. Nana's tone demanded stillness. "Salmah, where do you think you're going in your school-clothes? You think I spent good money on that dress so you can get mud stains all over it? Get in here and change. And don't you just wander around the yard without letting me know where you are. Let's go."

Salmah dashed inside, already undressing as she walked through the door. "Nana, the boy next door is going to come out and play. His name is Jesus. We're just going to play ..."

A cymbal-crash of falling pots and pans escaped through the Hernandez window, ceasing Salmah's frantic ramble. A man's hoarse yelling, barely muffled by the distance of the parking lot, bounded from the window next door into her own kitchen. A tinny wail joined the racket, a shriek so shrill and cutting that it could not have come from the same child whose words to Salmah a few minutes earlier seemed barely breathed. She knew it was him. It was his language, the one she didn't understand, the one she pretended didn't exist when she chattered to him on the bus ride home.

“I don’t think you’re playing with him today, Salmah,” Nana sighed, eyes rolling toward her silver bangs. “I don’t think I want you playing with those kinds of people, anyway.”

Salmah looked back helplessly before bounding into her room to change into her play-clothes. She would wait for him to come out. Jesus had only been home for a minute. He could not have done anything so wrong in that time, so wrong that he would be grounded and sent to his room for the night. She tied her sneakers and slid out the screen door. “Nana, I’m going out to play.”

The Hernandez apartment had grown quiet, the silence broken only by a television’s faint volume and an occasional cough. Salmah scribbled elephants in the dirt of her driveway with a twig, glancing toward the neighbor’s door once every minute. The sky turned grayer; she looked less often. Nana finally called her inside. “It’s getting dark out, Salmah, now come on. Stop making a mess in the dirt. Go wash your hands and eat dinner.”

Over the summer, Salmah would glide up and down her street on her shocking pink bicycle and wait for Jesus to come out to play. He remained almost invisible, his presence limited to the daily sighting of his drab figure entering and leaving the Hernandez’s station wagon and the clamor that escaped their window. “One of these days, I swear I’m gonna call the cops,” Nana would say. Salmah was sorry that Jesus received such punishments, though she liked to know that he was at least close by. She wasn’t sure sometimes. When Salmah would spot Jesus in the parking lot dashing to or from his mother’s car, he ignored Salmah’s waves. Did he not see Salmah, or was she really not seeing him?

When school started again and the air lost the last trace of summer, Salmah would wait inside until the bus announced its arrival with exhaust fumes and diesel grumbling. Jesus didn’t appear in class this year, didn’t ride the bus. She no longer waved to him as he walked to the car with his mother, just watched him from drawn curtains. She bounded outside when she noticed Jesus carrying the boxes back to the station wagon from where they had come eight months earlier, but she said nothing. Maybe they were going on a trip. Without his

father. Salmah didn't care. He didn't want to play with her, anyway.

Salmah's plan to grow breasts backfired. She remembered admiring her mother's as a child – not in hunger like an infant – but in respect, even pride. Her mother had breasts. Everyone's mother had breasts, but hers were different, un-matronly. Salmah, though, she took after Nana: corpulent, heavy breasts that overwhelmed her slight frame, already two inches too short without the added distraction.

"Tits!" the eighth grade boys would shout after passing Salmah.

"They're just jealous," Nana would tell her when she came home upset.

"Why, do eighth grade boys want tits?" Salmah would answer.

"Watch your mouth," Nana would say.

Salmah lived through half of seventh grade quietly, back slumped into a languid c-shape, dark waves a heavy frame over the sharp features on her face. During role-call in homeroom, she would stare into her homework or a magazine and mechanically lift her arm when the teacher called the name she recognized as her own. She sat in a desk second to the front in the farthest right aisle, a girl with whom she sometimes spoke but didn't like to her left and an empty seat to her front. "Hassan, Salmah," a voice would call. She would raise her arm. "Henderson, Jacob." Another arm. Every day until February, the same thing. She did not look up on a Monday in January when the empty chair to her diagonal left creaked under the weight of a student. Probably someone from the back of the room sent to the front seat as punishment.

"Hassan, Salmah," the teacher called. She raised her hand. "Henderson, Jacob. Hernandez, Jesus."

Salmah's head snapped to attention. Her eyes and those of the other students traveled to the front of the class where this alien, this mid-year intruder, settled stiffly into his seat.

"Oh, yes, class. This is a new student, Jesus. He's joining us from West Side Middle School. I'm sure everyone will make him feel welcome," Mr. Loren recited before continuing down the list. "Hugo, Rachel ..."

The hallway seemed shrunken as Salmah jaunted to make her class before the bell. Jesus, remember him? Oh, yeah, he was cute then, when he was a little kid. He wasn't little anymore, though. She blushed and held her head down as she entered her own class. She wasn't little anymore, either.

Salmah eyed the crowds in between classes, scanned the cafeteria during lunch, raised her eyes from her books when any cap of dark hair flashed past her range of vision. She didn't see Jesus anywhere. She didn't ask anyone if they'd seen him. Not that she was looking. Not that she was disappointed, when, at the end of the day, she hadn't seen him again.

She climbed the steps of the bus and walked toward her usual seat. "Salmah, what's up?" she heard. She looked up from the floor to follow the soft voice. Jesus, his legs spread across the seat, already occupied it. Her seat.

Salmah dropped into the bench across the aisle from him and immediately regretted her gracelessness. "Not much." She paused, looked ahead for a few seconds, turned her attention to the scene outside the window, and then turned back to his direction. "So," she asked, looking almost at him. "What did you think of school?"

He laughed. "I didn't."

The engine grumbled. Salmah turned away from Jesus again, unsure if her voice was strong enough to carry over the noise of the motor. She stared out the window as if he wasn't there, taking in the scenery as if it was new to her: the muddy river beyond the deserted brass-mills, the strip mall vacated of everything but a video store and the All For a Dollar, the rows of multi-family houses like her own, like Jesus' former home next door. She wondered where he lived now, if she would get to see it when the bus dropped him off. She hoped so. His reflection glared back at her in the window as she thought it, as if he knew. But he couldn't know, probably wasn't even really looking at her. She watched him pull the duct tape from the seat in front of him and pluck out the foam guts, scattering them into the aisle and re-applying the tape over the wounded seat. No, he wasn't looking back at her.

The bus approached Salmah's road. She gathered her books together as her house became visible, catching his eyes on her.

“You still live at that house with your mother?” he asked.

“No. I mean, yes, I still live there, but that’s not my mother.” She exhaled. “It’s my grandmother. My parents are ... aren’t together.”

“Oh. Mine, either. My father still lives next door to you, though. I think.”

The brakes squealed and the folding door hissed open. She wouldn’t get to see where he lived. She wished she could miss her stop. “Well, I’ll see you tomorrow, I guess,” she said.

“Yeah,” he replied.

Nana didn’t look up from the newspaper when Salmah entered the kitchen. “Hi,” she mumbled into the print. “Learn anything good today?”

Salmah dropped her books on the table. “No, as usual.” She dropped into a seat and watched Nana for a few seconds, but Nana’s eyes remained fastened on the crossword. “New kid at school today, though.” She waited for a response, one that didn’t come. “Actually, remember that kid next door, Jesus? It was him.”

Nana still didn’t look up. “Oh, yeah? The one with the no-good father next door? I hear him hacking away all day long, talking to himself in Spanish or something. I don’t know what’s so wrong with him that he can’t work. Where does he get the money to pay for that apartment, anyway? I mean, this isn’t Eden or anything, but it isn’t some housing project, either. I barely cut it with my disability payment. If it wasn’t for Grandpa’s insurance policy ... well, I don’t know.”

Salmah nodded, but Nana wasn’t finished. “And your mother may not be a saint, but at least she wasn’t hitting you or anything. She didn’t take her problems out on you. She brought you to me, where at least you’d have everything you need. I’ll never understand it,” she sighed, shaking her head. “And don’t just leave your books on the table like that, either,” she added, nodding at the texts.

Salmah gathered the stack and carried it into her room. She glanced at the clock radio. Two fifty-eight. Nana would leave her alone for a while, let her do her homework in peace, though Salmah dropped the books onto her desk and herself onto the bed. She didn’t feel like doing homework, not yet. It



was just busywork, anyway, tedious exercises. She thought about calling someone, maybe one of the girls at her lunch table, and asking what they'd thought of him, but thought better of it. She never really talked to them on the phone or outside of school, and they would just tell everyone that Salmah like Jesus. Maybe she could nap to pass the time instead, and maybe when she woke it would be morning. She wondered if Jesus would be on her bus then, too.

Jesus didn't appear the next day, though, and not the day after that. Salmah noted his absence on the morning bus ride and listened to the silence that followed his name during Mr. Loren's role-call. She still craned her neck when she spotted a cap of dark hair from the corner of her eye, but when she'd turn she'd find that it wasn't him, that the hair wasn't as black or shiny or smooth as Jesus'. She never mentioned him at her lunch table, didn't say anything when they'd started talking about the new Puerto Rican kid that was kind of cute. How could she? He'd barely talked to her, barely looked at her. Still, she wished she'd brought something to read, something to distract her. She'd done this everyday at school before he came and shouldn't expect to change her routine because a boy showed up and talked to her once. It was stupid.

He slid into the seat in front of Salmah again on the third day. She heard the creak and bit her lip and struggled not to lift her head or speak too quickly. She moved only her eyes to assure that it was him, that the hair was as black as it appeared to be, then looked back down. "Oh, hi," she said, slowly, just loud enough, still looking at the magazine she remembered to take with her that day. "You been sick?"

"Yeah," he agreed.

"Oh." Salmah turned a page and scanned a Maybelline ad for nail polish. She hid her own chewed nails beneath the cover of the magazine. "Why don't you take the bus in the morning?"

"My mom gives me a ride on her way to work. To make sure I go. But I was sick the last two days."

A boy walked past them toward the back of the room. "Gee-zus and Tits? Could it be love? I thought tits were a sin or something," he muttered, settling into his chair. The crowd

around him laughed until Mr. Loren interrupted with role-call. Salmah and Jesus looked away from each other.

Salmah couldn't walk Jesus to class again, not under the pretense that he couldn't find it himself, and she didn't dare walk beside him without that excuse. She didn't see him again until she boarded the bus after school. Jesus nodded when he saw her walking down the aisle. Let him speak first. "Here, you can sit here." He moved his backpack from the seat beside him. "There's no more empty seats."

Her cheeks warmed. "Thanks," she mumbled. She clutched her books to her chest.

"What's up?" he asked, squinting out the window.

"Nothing, really. School. Got a lot of homework and stuff. It sucks." She kept her tone low, tried to keep it even. "How about you?"

"Nothing. Don't really get too much homework in my classes. I think they think we don't know how to read or something. It's stupid. I don't know." He trailed off, his voice drowned by the howl of the engine. Salmah thought she shouldn't have mentioned schoolwork. She didn't want him to think she was a nerd and hoped he hadn't noticed her name posted on the honor roll.

The first few miles passed as they had the other day, Salmah staring out the right row of windows, away from Jesus, until her leg nudged his when the bus rounded a corner. Her hands tingled and she quickly pulled it away. Jesus turned to her.

"Why do you live with your grandmother?"

Salmah glanced at him. No one had ever asked before. She shifted her eyes away from him, from the window, and focused on the driver's rearview mirror. "Well, I don't really know my father, and my mom has a hard time, you know, supporting me. I still see her sometimes, though. I saw her at Christmas."

Jesus nodded. "Yeah. I didn't see my father at Christmas. I haven't seen him in a long time." He stopped. "Do you ever see him outside or anything?" He pulled at a string in the seam of his jeans.

Salmah laughed. "No, not really. Actually, hardly ever. It's kinda weird. It's like he never leaves"

“Mmm,” he agreed, then fell back into silence.

She shouldn't have laughed. Trees and buildings blurred past Salmah's vision when she looked back out the window, the conversation halted. The bus would be approaching her stop soon. She searched for something else to say, something casual. “Jesus, that's a cool name.”

He smiled. “So's Salmah.”

“It's Muslim. My father was Muslim,” she explained. He smiled again.

Salmah gathered her books. The bus slowed to a stop in front of her house, the ride too short for the first time. “Well ... bye,” she said, lifting from the seat.

“Bye,” he echoed.

Nana sat at the table with a pen to that morning's crossword when Salmah entered and glided past. “Well, hello to you, too.” Nana called out when she heard the click of Salmah's shutting door.

“Oh. Hi. I'm just tired. I want to just lay down for a while,” she yelled back. She heard Nana say something about homework as she glared at her reflection in the mirror. Did Jesus like brown eyes? Lipstick? Salmah thought her lips were too big for lipstick and Nana wouldn't let her wear makeup, anyway. What if he wanted to hold her hand? They were usually cold and wet even though she'd tried powder and lotion. She thought about the birthmark on her thigh and wondered what Jesus would think if he saw her at the beach and noticed. Maybe she could sneak some of Nana's foundation and cover it with make-up or even get it removed. Nana would never let her go to the beach with Jesus, anyway, and they'd have no way to get there. Still, maybe someday. Her breasts, though, they were too big for the beach. Maybe Jesus liked that. Salmah blushed and fell onto her bed. She should read, sleep. Pass time until tomorrow.

The next day in homeroom, Jesus wandered in after role-call. “Jesus, *please* try to be on time. This is only your first week in school,” Mr. Loren admonished. Salmah lifted her head and waved by lifting a few fingers from her desk. He nodded in response. She blushed. A cluster of voices in the back seats giggled. “*Tits!*” they called out under their breaths. “*Gee-zus!*”

The bell for first period rang. He walked ahead of her again, but slowly, so could catch up. When she reached his side, they said nothing, just looked straight ahead. She realized that the wire spiral from her notebook was digging into her index finger, and she loosened her grip. Just keep walking slowly. A boy squeezed by Salmah as they strolled, knocking her shoulder and rubbing against the front of her shirt. From further down the hallway, they heard cheers: "*How did her tits feel?*"

Jesus turned around without a word and walked to the group of three boys reddened with laughter. "What did you say?" Jesus addressed the boy who had rubbed against Salmah.

The boy continued to laugh. "I didn't *say* anything." His friends gathered closer around him.

"That's not what I heard. You got a problem or something?" Jesus pressed, pushing the boy's shoulders. "Huh? You got a problem?"

The boy stepped back, eyes staring widely at Jesus, before he moved forward and pushed back. His friends backed away. "Yeah, maybe I do."

Jesus said nothing. It happened so quickly that Salmah could not relive the moment later. She only remembered wondering whose blood it was that sprinkled the gray tile and realizing that it was not Jesus' and feeling relief. When a history teacher broke through the crowd of students surrounding them and pulled Jesus away from the boy by the collar, she only gaped silently.

The crowd remained quiet until Jesus had been dragged away from the students' sights. Their eyes then turned to the boy who lay dribbling and crying on the floor, his nose a stream of blood and snot that dyed his T-shirt red. They begin to buzz. "That's disgusting," a girl squealed. The boy's friends lifted him from the ground and shouted to the crowd to move as they walked him toward the nurse's office. "Slut," one whispered, glaring at Salmah as he passed by.

Students' eyes followed Salmah as she walked through the halls and into her classes. Some asked what had happened. She shrugged, said she didn't really see. The girls she sat with at lunch asked how she even knew Jesus, hassling her about holding out on the details, but Salmah insisted she'd barely

talked to him. Later she'd heard that the kid's nose had been broken and one of his teeth knocked out, that Jesus had been arrested and would be expelled. When she boarded the bus that afternoon, she found an empty seat to settle in. She watched the river, the plazas, the houses. The bus approached her own home slowly again. Nana looked up when Salmah entered and said nothing, just followed with her eyes as her classmates had done. Salmah didn't look back at her. Settling into her bed, she began her homework. Jesus wouldn't be in school Monday, she knew. Her gaze settled on the texts in front of her.

Salmah strolled toward the Easter-egg green Dodge Aries, key ready to unlock the door as Nana had taught her. She had saved for six months to buy the car by working part-time at a grocery store, and now it served as transportation to the same job that she thought had been temporary, a nearby source of income until she could drive herself to something better, a job in another town. It hadn't worked out. Nana didn't want Salmah driving too far on school nights.

Salmah flipped the *Stop & Shop* smock over her shoulder and noticed a figure walking toward her in her apartment's parking lot. It was Jesus. She nearly didn't recognize him. He was tall now and still lean, but a different lean. A solid lean. His hair, once black and blue as an oil slick, was now a shorn bronzed scalp. His eyes were the same, though, so black that she couldn't tell where the pupil stopped and the color started. Like a puppet.

Two weeks earlier she heard about the death of his father. Salmah and the rest of the neighbors saw the ambulance take Mr. Hernandez away. Two days later she read the obituary. Died after a short illness, it said. She had wondered if Jesus had attended the funeral. She wondered if she should have gone.

"Salmah? Remember me?"

"Jesus?" she asked as if she wasn't sure.

"That's me."

Salmah stared for a moment. "I'm sorry about..." she stammered. "Where have you been?"

Jesus laughed. "I've been around. I live in Bridgeport now. I'm just came to...pick up some stuff from my father's house."

"Oh." She scanned the parking lot, noticing no unfamiliar cars. "Well, how did you get here?"

"I took the train."

"Oh. Because I could probably give you a ride home if you want. I mean, the television is probably heavy." She hoped she didn't sound too anxious.

Jesus nodded, his face expressionless. "Yeah, that'd be cool. If you're not doing anything."

"Nothing important."

"Yeah, well, uh ... I'll get my stuff." He walked leisurely to the porch to gather the jewelry box and television that rested on the steps of the porch from which he had bounded. Salmah hoped that Nana wouldn't look out the kitchen window to find Salmah fixing her hair in the rearview mirror and a boy walking toward her car. Nana didn't trust her since she'd found out about Salmah's last boyfriend, an eighteen-year-old from Town Plot that Salmah hadn't really liked too much anyway, and she didn't want her driving privileges taken away again. Not now.

Jesus returned to the car, unloading the items into the back and settling into the passenger seat. "You'll have to tell me which way to go. I'm not really good with directions." Salmah swallowed hard and turned the keys in the ignition.

Jesus mumbled something that Salmah did not ask him to repeat. Finally he turned to her. "It's pretty early," he said, though the autumn evening had already begun to rob the sunlight. "You mind just driving around for a while? I haven't been in the neighborhood for a couple years. I don't feel like going home yet."

Salmah nodded silently and pulled the car out of the lot. "Where do you wanna go?" she asked at the first stoplight. The neighborhood hadn't really changed since he'd last seen it.

"I don't know ... how about Eastside School? I haven't been there since kindergarten."

She nodded. They said nothing until they pulled in to the lot behind the school. Salmah turned off the ignition. "Saves gas," she said quietly.

Jesus did not reply, just looked at the building through the dusk. "Looks the same," he finally said, then turned to her and laughed.

She did not laugh back. "How did he die?"

Jesus tilted his neck backwards, letting the neck rest support his head. "I didn't ask," he answered. "I didn't care."

"What about your mom? What did she do?"

"What about my mom? She don't care, she's got a boyfriend. She was probably glad, too. He was an asshole, anyway. Couldn't take care of us. Hurt his back at work like, fifteen years ago and wouldn't work since. Got a lot of money for it, but he made my mom go out and get a job and take care of us. All he did was watch TV and shit...". His voice trailed off as he stared out the window. A floodlight outside the school stippled shadows of gold and gray onto his face. Salmah wanted to touch his skin to see if it was as soft as it looked.

"You don't see your father?" he asked, turning back to Salmah.

She blushed and raised her shoulders. "No. I don't even know him. He was just one of my mom's boyfriends."

"What about your mom? Where is she?"

"She's around. She lives a couple towns over. She just ... she tried to take care of me for a while, but she didn't really want kids. She doesn't make enough money. And she was young when she had me, only sixteen. My grandmother took me instead." Salmah shrugged. "She's alright. Kinda strict, but she tries."

"Does she know where you are now?"

"She thinks I'm at work."

"Oh, shit, you're supposed to be at work? Aren't you gonna get fired?"

"Maybe. I hate it there, anyway. It's just Stop & Shop."

Jesus smiled halfway as if she had cracked a joke that wasn't quite funny. She could feel his eyes focus on her as she smiled and nodded for a few seconds too long. She wondered if he thought that she had a nice smile, something that other people told her sometimes but that she was never sure she believed. His silence provided no answers and his eyes, which never moved from her own, did little to provide comfort. She found that she could neither maintain eye contact nor

completely divert his gaze. Salmah turned her head to avoid his stare, casting her eyes toward her shoes. The skin on her neck crawled as Jesus' breathing became louder. Salmah could hear the vinyl seat ruffle as he drew closer. A nervous response, almost an instinct, turned Salmah's head to face Jesus. Fight or flight, like we learned in science, she thought, and almost laughed out loud at her reaction. He kissed her.

Jesus pulled her on top of him and reclined his seat, then let his hand find her. His fingers were cold and long. She squeezed her eyes closed and let him continue, wanting to enjoy it in a way she hadn't with her last boyfriend, the only other boy who had touched her like this. She didn't argue when he unbuttoned her shirt, her jeans. When he entered her, she pulled away from the pain, then pulled herself back onto him. She grabbed his shoulders and concentrated on rocking, on touching his warm stomach onto hers, until he finished with a strained exhale. She opened her eyes again.

Salmah knocked the transmission into neutral when he nudged her back into the driver's seat. Jesus didn't laugh when they began to roll, didn't panic and lunge for the brake.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey," she replied.

"Do you wanna drive me home now?" Salmah nodded.

Voices from the radio masked the silence as they followed a horizon of decaying brass-mill factories down Route 8 to Bridgeport – all buildings that Jesus had seen before but which now seemed to fascinate him. Occasionally Salmah noticed Jesus glance at her, a look that Salmah would reciprocate and Jesus would pretend not to notice. Conversation consisted of directions – The next exit, turn left up here, Jesus said, go straight through the light – and Salmah responded with nods of acknowledgement. She tried to memorize the route in case she needed to find her way again, in case Jesus needed a ride or wanted company, but the side-street underpasses became harder to distinguish from each other and the buildings became walls in a labyrinth.

"It's up here, the yellow house on the left," Jesus finally announced, pointing at a duplex. "The right side." He turned to grab the television from the backseat of the car.

"Do you need help?" Salmah asked.



---

ALI U

and no other passengers looked up, expecting the same. For most of the ride she stared out the window at the blackened landscape she had memorized long ago, thinking of the lit paper due in two days and the birthday gift she'd forgotten to buy her roommate, until the fluorescent lights intruded on the darkness and reflected the sleeping figure in the seat across from her. His face was buried in the field jacket he used as a pillow, and Salmah tried to look past the reflection to the trees outside. The cap of black hair, so dark it blended in with the nightscape of Westchester County, distracted her. No. Anyone can have black hair. She ignored it. Her stop would be approaching soon, and maybe she'd take a look then, just to make sure.

The man stirred and rolled his face away from the jacket. You don't have to look, she told herself. It's not Jesus. It couldn't be, even with his nose, his hair, reflecting in the window. Not when she'd stopped waiting for his call after two years, not after she'd given up scanning the Bridgeport train platform when she'd passed on her way to school. Not when she would be graduating in May and promising herself to move away for good. It couldn't be him. He wouldn't dare.

She had to know for sure. She glanced quickly at first, in case he saw her, then turned back to look, to stare. His pink lips were cracked, his beige skin faded. If he'd open his eyes she'd know. She focused on them, hoped they'd unlock and reveal a stranger. It's not Jesus. *You're not Jesus.*

His eyes opened then as if to defy her, to tell her what she'd already known. It was Jesus, his slate eyes marred by a tangle of red veins. It was Jesus who stared straight back at her, who blinked and licked his lips and who, when Salmah neither turned away nor spoke, turned back over to his side and shut his eyes.

The train's heavy grinding slowed as it pulled into New Rochelle. Salmah gathered her bag of clothes and her books and walked through the doors as they buzzed open. She looked down at Jesus, sleeping in his seat, and hoped that he wouldn't miss his stop.

---

WINDY McGLINSKY

I've Seen How You Ride

I could lose  
discretion on your bike. Toe tips  
on asphalt, eyes closed, I lean to reach  
sport bars. Crotch against black leather pressed  
to beetle-green gas tank. Your new Moto Guzzi  
V11 Sport floats between the insides  
of my thighs. I hear sirens.  
V-twin twice the size of my engine, 6 speed gearbox,  
sticky tires, mighty disc brakes. I feel heartdrop  
curves at 80, straight runs at 135, the wind  
snapping my driver's license  
right out of my pocket, and I  
open my eyes quick.

With your face tipped to trap me,  
I can see last night's make-up windstreaked  
to your temples. I notice grease  
worked into my cuticles; the early sun  
on my face is hotter. I smell it  
in your sleek Vanson leathers  
and in ten years of gas on my boots.  
You are much younger  
than my vintage Beemer. Your trust  
surprises me. I am thinking of my hands  
on your waist, of the hair that escapes  
your helmet snapping my closed  
eyelids. I think you might smell  
like the first warm night  
of spring, clean sweat in new leather,

---

McGLINSKY

rain on sagebrush. You'd taste  
like snowflakes on a winter ride,  
strong coffee with lots of cream  
and sugar. I am forgetting  
that I have a house and children. I feel  
a long road trip coming on, your hips pressed  
to my belly, my breasts against leather against  
leather against your back,  
both of us road dirty,  
and that screaming green bike between our legs.

---

WINDY McGLINSKY

Carbon Monoxide

Leave that baby be, just be.  
You start building boxes  
soon as delivery room doctor  
shuts the door on wondering,  
and all the possibilities. With first crying,  
gendered lungful, carbon monoxide  
expectations infuse every new, red  
cell. Pink fantasies of dress up, of bare  
hearts in your kitchen; your rough  
and tumble boys will be  
boys bruised blue.

Don't you pink and blue at me.  
I am the daughter  
of a father without sons who didn't  
miss them and my mother  
hated pink. I am poisoned,  
sick to death,  
of your surprise at my Harley,  
my strong arms, and skill  
with hammers, saws, and wrenches.

I would scream if I could  
breathe because I am a dream  
filled mother, too, of luscious long haired  
sons wrapped in purples, ambers, oranges,  
golden greens and greys their choices.  
for my babies  
and your babies  
I must clear this toxic air.

---

JENNIFER L. HOLLEY

### Diamond Dust

Beneath the hurricane's wide-open eye,  
beneath the moon that steps across the sky  
like an angel afraid to fall, we strip  
in ones and twos along the wall that keeps  
our houses safe against the sea.

We pull down jeans, unbutton shirts, unhook  
bras, and rub our hands in between the stones  
to find deep gaps in which to hide our soft  
shed-skins. Walking apart to conceal our grins,  
we stumble on rocks into the sea.

Spirits conjured sheer-white into this world,  
together we find what parts of us light loves—  
the milky undersides of arms and wrists;  
on Jessica, the periwinkle twists  
upon her breasts; on Michael's hips,

the curves on which he cups his hands. Light loves  
the hair Linda secures behind her ear,  
and Jennifer's lips, glittering black, unclasped  
to let a scream slide out, as she's the first  
to vanish underwater, to come

up painted silver-blue. We all dive in  
to be as beautiful as she, to shine our dullest spots,  
which in the day we'd love to give away.  
Only storm waves keep us from swimming out  
and catching hold of night's tail.

---

JENNIFER L. HOLLEY

## Nine Lives

They thought I kissed for love.

I took their mouths like red  
presents, breathed in  
my allotted lives.

Not one suspected  
enough to shudder.

I kissed a prostitute  
to know night's trusted paths,

a politician  
for power in groups,

a colonel to stare  
enemies down.

To excel out of my element  
I kissed a champion swimmer.

I kissed a fugitive  
to make myself invisible,

and a child to jump  
at what is not there.

I kissed a dancer  
for air under my feet,

an apple picker  
to be known by my shadow.

---

HOLLEY

I kissed an old mother  
to cry so no one can sleep,

and last, a dying man  
so I would never forget  
what I am running from.

---

COURTNEY ANSON JACOBS

: : : : Stances

Sleeping outside  
puts you in touch with Sunny Days.

See my stee style stee  
is this.

Its like looking at  
a scene  
of  
trees with the train track rail in the background.  
let the shockwaves pop as the B rides past.

Electric as I want to be.

with my praise god walk.

Women are a part of the scenery  
of the earth : : : : : : : : :



---

MATT QUIN

### My New Haven

Because of gates unlocked by card keys,  
famous professors and new friends with fathers  
with connections, we're torn apart, though we're sitting,  
feet dangling off an eight story building, only inches apart,  
a part in both of us wishing we were each other  
and a part that would just as soon go on.

Warm six-pack of Miller High Life,  
"The Champagne of Beers",  
keeping our equally warm bodies company,  
as a few coeds scamper across their dorm rooms,  
five floors up across from us --  
I wonder if they saw me?  
Cars down Park street take rights  
onto Chapel, or maybe head  
all the way to Interstate Ninety-Five,  
maybe all the way to Rhode Island,  
which is where I might rather be,

But I can't tell, because this city's  
got me so wrapped up in her nights,  
since I was born, that I'm not sure  
if I can exist outside. So poor  
me, because David Slade was

Born here and gets to go to school  
right across the street from my home,  
a place where I'm not welcome,  
he's got a car out of here -- I wonder  
If you could flunk out of there  
and still be better off than I'll ever be? -- but at least

He's here with me now, I guess,  
and the summer makes us equals  
and the beer makes us sloppy,  
and we gaze up at the clouds covering sky,  
imagining stars, coming up with the same  
crazy schemes and partnerships  
that we did when we were kids in this town,  
this New Haven never ending,  
things that seemed impossible then  
because of where we were,  
and now impossible because of who we are,

On a sticky, flat tar paper roof  
in mid-July -- of course at night  
because the days get too hot up here --  
I look out,  
and I try to freeze

The city that calls me home, the steeples  
poking out from the green on Church Street  
like a warning to atheists like me  
that I shouldn't be up so high without a safety net;  
as the lights from various Yale buildings  
glow on until morning, I wonder what the hell  
could be so damn fulfilling  
that an architecture student loses sleep.

---

SALVATORE DeLUCIA

### The Warehouse

I can't grow hair on my hands anymore. Not that hand hair is a very attractive attribute, but it's something I had. It's something I lost. My wrists too, no hair. Burned right off. Boxing hasn't exactly been very kind to my body I guess. There's a ton of shit that goes on inside a pair of boxing gloves, shit that nobody thinks about, except fighters. The wrap around your hands rubbing against the skin, every punch digging the grainy cloth deeper. Friction. That's why my hands have less hair than a baby's top lip. Lou Lucibello, we call him Lulu, the fight doctor here at Foxwoods, saw my bare hands a few months ago after my fight with Jesus "the savior" Rivera. "You no have hands like a fighter," he said to me in his smoky-thick Italian accent, "like a woman's hands." My hands are so smooth that sometimes, after long fights, when the sweat soaks right through the stretch-wrap and slides into the two inches of medical tape that's supposed to protect them, I feel like my gloves are going to slip right off onto the canvas floor of the ring. Actually, I have this dream where that happens. It's always the fourteenth round and my body is drained, dead tired, an avalanche of sweat rolling down my forehead, the salt burning my eyes, and then the bell rings and as soon as I stand up and reach the center of the ring, it happens; my gloves slide off and I look up at the fighter standing in front of me, waiting for him to knock me out, but I can't see his face. I can't see his face because he doesn't have a face, just a smooth white slab of skin stretched tightly across where his face should be. That's when I wake up.

My hands will always hurt, I'm confident in that. Even tonight, after seven years of jabs, heavy bags, mattresses pinned to a concrete wall, hard heads and pointy jaws, they hurt. You think they'd get used to it. It really hurts tonight, though. Right after I ripped off the last wad of slimy tape and peeled away the drenched wraps cemented to my skin, the blood in my veins

raced to my hands, and I felt it, especially in my right hand. It feels like I broke it again. Not as bad as the last time, but bad enough. See, hands don't break like other parts of the body; you can still use them if the break is localized in the fingers. It's when you break your thumb that you're fucked. My fingers hurt so bad tonight that I can hardly slide my jock strap off. It's only been a few minutes though; the real pain won't hit till tomorrow morning. Let me tell you a little secret, it doesn't matter how many rolls or inches of stretch-wrap and med-tape you can fit in between your hand and the "cushion" of a standard WBA-approved boxing glove, when you hit bone, any kind of bone, jaw bone, rib, shoulder, even the nose, it fucking hurts. I think I just need a shower.

I knew this guy once, Jimmy Rodriguez, met him in the rusty locker room of the Warehouse, the old textile plant turned teamster club I used to fight in when I was starting out. I had heard the other guys talk about him in the showers every once and while, but he didn't become real to me until I met him the night I fought Fat Jay Chardulo, a thirty-eight year old ex-mail man who had been fighting at the Warehouse for twelve years. They say Fat Jay was in pretty good shape when he first starting fighting, and that he gained twenty pounds a year since then. At least he was consistent. It was about twenty minutes before I was set to fight Fat Jay when I met Jimmy Rodriguez. I had just finished taping my hands when he walked out of the showers. Jimmy had fought thirty-seven fights in his career at the time I met him, and out of those thirty-seven fights he was knocked out thirty-seven times, every single knockout coming in the first or second round. He stood there naked in front of me, a thin, caramel-skinned, but muscular little man, about thirty years old, drying himself with a faded yellow towel that looked like it had been attacked by a wild animal with sharp claws, and told me about how much he loved to fight. "It makes me feel alive!" he said at least six or seven times in our fifteen-minute conversation together. He had been fighting at the Warehouse long before I started there. He said he fought about eight or nine fights a year, taking a month off for vacation time when he could. Jimmy would travel somewhere out of the state, most of the time down south, Florida, maybe North Carolina. "Once," he said with his raspy Spanish accent, "I went to

---

DeLUCIA

Argentina for three weeks.” He told me about the beautiful beaches there, and how many women he slept with, and about the woman he met who worked at the bar by the beach. “That was a great one. She was beautiful man, I mean fucking beautiful. She was a great fuck too, a real beast.”

Jimmy wasn’t ever going to be a great boxer, but he was a hard worker. Every time I looked at the bout schedule for the month, Jimmy’s name was always first on the list. There’s one universal truth in boxing, there will always be a need for a great loser, somebody you can really beat up on, somebody that can make even an average boxer look great. To tell you the God’s honest truth I saw Jimmy fight on a few occasions after our conversation in the locker room and he was, well, horrible. He couldn’t slip a jab if his life depended on it, his legs moved like cinder blocks, he had a real bad habit of leading his punching attempts with his forehead, and when he finally did land a punch, which wasn’t very often, he would always drop his gloves by his side and get mauled by the other man in the ring. That’s the way it always happened I guess, at least that’s what a few of the refs at the club told me. One ref, Smokey Bills, a retired black prizefighter, told me about Jimmy one night while we sat at the Elm City Tavern. “That crazy son of a bitch Rodriguez, he lands one half-way-decent-punch and he thinks he’s got the fight won. Every damn time too.” Smokey had been a ref for the WBA once, but he came to the Warehouse after he was banned for taking money and calling fights. “Shit, I must’ve seen him do it damn near twenty times in the last three years. He just drops his hands. Don’t understand it, never have. Probably never will. Maybe he’s just so happy that he finally got a punch in that he don’t need no more. Who knows? He’s just a crazy son of a bitch anyway.” I didn’t think he was that crazy. The way I see it, every fighter’s got his own reasons.

It was an easy fight for me the night I met Jimmy. Actually, from what I remember, they were all pretty easy for me at the Warehouse. I used to really beat the shit out of people. Really though. Sometimes I’d beat guys so bad they wouldn’t get up. Real knockouts. Those are something. Not many fighters can say that they have had a real knockout in their career. Here’s a little secret, the traditional knockout you

see in a boxing match is really only an exaggeration of the effects a punch can have if it lands on the “right spot.” See, if a fighter can dislocate the other fighter’s jaw, the jawbone then pinches a major nerve in the side of the face, numbing the entire lower body, sweeping his legs right out from under him. I’ve *really* knocked guys out though. Put them to sleep. I did a number on Fat Jay Chardulo that night at the Warehouse. Second round. Did a number on my hands too. Sent his mouth guard out of the ring and onto the concrete walkway next to the old rusted cotton press machine and then, with a quick uppercut that I slid in between his gloves, I punched his bottom teeth clear through his thick lower lip. Bloody. I always hated the blood. Hated watching it slide off my chest, swim down my stomach, in between my legs, race off my feet onto the green tiles of the Warehouse shower. I *really* hated it when it wasn’t my own. It reminded me of what I do for a living, how much I hate it, and how much I need it. There was a shit load of blood that night. I remember wondering if Fat Jay Chardulo was at the hospital yet, if he was still alive.

All of the fighters at the Warehouse used to talk about it; killing somebody in the ring. You know by law a boxer can’t go to jail or even be prosecuted for killing another boxer during a fight. It’s just something that can happen, one of the risks a fighter takes when he slides through those ropes and steps onto the canvas. I remember when I was just starting out, ‘bout seventeen and half, I would keep to myself mostly, getting dressed quietly in the last row of lockers, listening in on the older fighter’s conversations; it was my favorite part of the day. Man, the shit those guys would say! Polish Mark Kaselewski, a skinny, short, snow-white super-lightweight used to tell the funniest stories, especially when he started to talk about his ex-wife. But one night, after he battled eight bloody rounds with Handsome Sam Marci, Polish Mark stood in the showers for over an hour, crying. A boxer learns quick that tears are invisible in the locker room showers. I found out later that night from Tony Laguri, the owner of the Warehouse, that Handsome Sam had died thirty minutes after his bout with Polish Mark. After that night, the thought of killing another man in the ring became very real to me, not just a “what if?”

---

DeLUCIA

washed-up boxers talked about in stale smelling locker rooms. Polish Mark never fought again, at least not at the Warehouse.

“Vinny! Vinny!” I remember hearing the high-pitch voice echo off the scummy tile walls of the shower after my fight with Fat Jay, as I let the warm water sooth my knotted shoulders and taut neck. I recognized the voice immediately; it was Little John Carlo, Tony the owner’s son and the Warehouse’s resident, self-proclaimed “spit-bucket-boy.” He was a good kid, about ten or eleven years old at the time.

“What.” I wasn’t much for conversation after taking a couple dozen shots to the head, not to mention that my right hand was killing me.

“Some guy’s here to see you. Says you’ll want to talk to him.”

“Who?” I turned the silver shower dial closer to the faded red “H.”

“I don’t know, some guy.”

I walked naked out of the showers and onto the damp, cool concrete floor of the locker room making my way to the last row of lockers. Locker number twenty-four.

“Vincent Galletta.” I’ll never forget how that voice boomed from behind me, like my name was being announced as I was running out of the tunnel in the Super Bowl. I turned and saw this wide man standing there in a gray suit with a red tie, a black hat and a thick, untamed brown beard. His name was Mr. Paul Mann, boxing promoter extraordinaire- that’s actually what it says on his business card. I just looked at him, looking at me, totally naked.

“Yeah.”

“Good fight tonight.”

“Thanks.” I turned back towards my locker.

“From what I hear you’re quite the fighter.”

“Really.”

“A few of those old men out there told me that you knocked a man clear over the top rope a few weeks ago.”

“Yeah, well those few old men out there got a lot of stories to tell.”

“Tell me, son, you like fighting in this place?”

“It pays the bills.”

“Is it really worth it?”

“Absolutely.” I was always a little too cocky.

“Did you ever think about getting some promotion for yourself?”

“Let me guess, you’re a promoter.”

Mr. Paul Mann handed me his business card and went on with some well-rehearsed words of sunlight that he intended to shine directly up my skirt. I don’t remember everything he preached, but I know he talked about taking me out of this “hole in the wall” and to big glamorous casinos and about money and fame, until finally his voice began to hurt my ears.

“Look, Mr. Mann,” I grabbed my underwear out of my locker and bent over to put them on, “I don’t mean to sound disrespectful or anything,” I remember I stood up extra straight, pulling my drawers to my waist as I looked at Mr. Paul Mann square in his green eyes, “but I’m just not one of those guys who wants to be champion of the world.”

I walked back to my apartment on that December night. I didn’t feel like taking a taxi, or the bus for that matter. Fat Jay had managed to slip in a pretty solid body shot during the last fifteen seconds of the first round and I needed to walk off the cramp he trapped inside my ribs. Now that I think about it, I remember that Tony had stiffed me out of fifty dollars from my purse that night too. Gave me some line of shit about inflation or something like that. Tony was a scumbag most of the time, but he almost always paid me on schedule and God knows he never left me out of work. Shit, he wasn’t stupid; he and I both knew that the young kid from New Haven could get asses in the seats.

My apartment wasn’t much then, just three and a half rooms; kitchen-slash-TV room, bedroom, and a bathroom. I stripped down my upper body, got a glass of chocolate milk, a Ziploc bag filled with ice for my throbbing right hand, and went to bed listening to Elton John’s Greatest Hits CD. My mom used to sing “Tiny Dancer” to me when I was a kid. She had a real sweet voice. I remember that I didn’t puke that night. I was happy about it too. Usually, after every fight I’d go home and throw up. Dante Durante, my trainer, used to tell me it was just nerves. Dante was usually full of shit. He’s a great guy, don’t get me wrong, but he’s the worst kind of ex-boxer you’ll ever



---

DeLUcIA

meet. He's got a story about every round of every fight he ever fought in his twenty-two years as a boxer. Shit, he can tell you how many punches he was hit with, and how many times he heard the bell ring at the start of a new round; I think it's something like nine-hundred something rounds. He was a champion once, but he didn't hold the title for very long. I wonder sometimes if he would still be so sad if he had never won the title at all. I was lying there on my full size bed, wrapped up like a burrito in the blue and white throw blanket my mother had knitted for my tenth birthday, rocking myself back and forth, my hand stinging cold from the ice, singing with Sir Elton John and thinking about the night, the fight, the blood, Fat Jay Chardulo, Mr. Mann and his business card that I still had in my gym bag. *"I'm just not one of those guys who wants to be champion of the world."* I wish I could've stayed that strong.

The showers are a lot different here. The tile floor reflects everything that passes over it and the glossy marble walls amplify the bright lights mounted high above the two dozen showerheads. The warm water channels through the tight canyons of hard flesh on my back and shoots off my ass, some of it sliding in between my twitching legs as I take slow deep breaths. Tonight's fight was a tough one, the toughest yet. Felix "The Razor" Blades. His nickname is totally ridiculous, especially since his last name is not pronounced anything like it's spelled. But it looks good on the fight card, and that's all the promoters care about. *Just get the asses in the seats.* Well, stupid nickname or not, Felix is a good fighter. Eleven rounds. He took a lot out of me, but once I cut him, once I saw blood, I knew I had him. I'll be sore tomorrow, for sure. Especially my hands. Might not be able to get out of bed. My hands are really gonna fucking hurt. It's funny really, I mean considering it's my hands that got me here in the first place. See, that same night I met Jimmy Rodriguez, when I put Fat Jay in the hospital, I broke my right hand pretty bad. Fat Jay had a surprisingly hard jaw. I couldn't fight for a few months, couldn't pay the rent either. I don't remember exactly when I dug that business card out of my gym bag and called Mr. Paul Mann, but I figured it would be an easy way to make up for over three months of lost pay. I guess my little apartment meant that much

to me. The excitement in Mr. Paul Mann's voice alone, (not to mention the fact that the volume of his speech is permanently set at high), damn near knocked the telephone receiver out of my hand. I hadn't felt that important in my entire life. That was over two years ago.

I twist the shower dial closer to the word "Hot" and let the water beat against my face. Felix Blades cut me pretty bad tonight, a deep one directly over my right eye. Dante tried telling me that I keep dropping my left hand when I throw a cross, but no matter how much you train, once that bell rings you forget everything you're taught about boxing as a science. I'm gonna pay for this one, though. Gonna have to go to the hospital later to take out all that saline shit Lulu the fight doctor jammed into the cut to stop it from bleeding, not to mention the headache I'll have from the morphine they'll pump into my veins to help with the pain while they re-open that hole above my eye and set the break in my hand.

"Vinny!" I hear Dante's grainy voice as it bounces off the walls.

"What?" I say through the steam.

"We're all waiting in the press room for you. Did real good tonight, kid. You really did something special."

"Thanks, Dant." I don't think he can hear me over the scream of the running water, but it doesn't matter anyway. Dante Durante had a second chance to become champion tonight, and he won.

I made a lot of people a lot of money tonight, including myself. I guess that's the sort of thing you think about when you grow up like I did, fighting in the Warehouse, never having anything except a used pair of boxing gloves and a black eye. I remember the first night I fought at the Warehouse. I was so nervous, only seventeen years old. The bell rang and I almost pissed myself, but once Italian Sal Marino connected his left hand with my forehead, everything changed. I surprised a lot of people that night. Third round knockout. Broke Italian Sal's big shnoz so bad that I heard he needed pieces of plastic surgically inserted into it for support. I remember how I felt like I accomplished something, and how he caught me in the locker room after the fight. I sat down, soaked with sweat, smiling, when I heard the doors slam open. My father came

---

MEGHANN ENGLAND

173 Mass. Ave.

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
- T.S. Eliot

My clothes were folded neatly in Hefty bags,  
socks and underwear wheeled across the floor.  
Bangkok Garden, *the best of Back Bay*, filled my walls.  
Smells of peanut sauce married American Pizza,  
the *dollar a slice* next door. 173 was the priest,  
a middleman pronouncing them one. I hit  
Bangkok man's mini-van in the ally. The second time,  
started eating his Thai food. The pizza didn't bother me  
(with napkins). It *was* only a dollar.

The dust fell like man made snow. Table saws,  
Makita drills and ACDC played at seven every morning.  
They filed in with Dickie pants and construction boots,  
STIHL hats and plumber cracks, pencils and cigarettes  
behind their ears. They would wear my jackets and hats  
to Dunkin Donuts, asking me if I wanted a jelly  
or bavarian cream. That year they all found God and A.A.,  
when they found 173 Mass. Ave.

Bostonian mice loved pizza, doughnuts and Pad Thai. I would  
hear the critters in the night, fur-balls of cartilage and tail.  
*All they need is the size of a dime....*to ooze through holes,  
ponder cracks and cracker crumbs, chew through wrappers,  
leaving their tracks like chocolate Jimmy shots. Celebrating  
the Olympics, holding court on my silver knives, spoons  
and forks, they squeaked last in sticky traps.

I have no clothes left at 173. I have the socks on my feet,

my own rolling wheels. Bangkok man sold his mini-van for a Buick Regal. He still has no idea. There is the smell and I still hate Pad Thai. I like American Pizza without napkins, now owned by the Italian Mafia at \$1.27 a slice. The program doesn't show up at seven o'clock, telling me I'm an addict, *whether it's dope or doughnuts*. My old bedroom ceiling is painted clouds, the walls immaculate white. Wood floors reflect my shoes, no crumbs, no dust, no mice. The construction is done and without the help of recovering alcoholics and Dunkin Donuts.

---

MEGHANN ENGLAND

### Eight Seconds

I've been doing it for the past three years. I take a right into the one-way bank exit, tear through the opposing white arrows to park my car along side the night drop box. I don't care about traffic violations. I'm too busy being taken advantage of. I put the car in park, turn my car key and pull from the ignition, miscellaneous chains and a pink jelly-shoe my grandmother brought me back from Nashville. Before I open the door, I finger the bank key, shorter than the others, brassy and round at the head, *Made in the USA* engraved in the center. I pinch it with my index and thumb, inhaling the air freshener Christmas tree dangling from my mirror, and open the door. "Tommy's" aromas of sirloin and portabello mushrooms flow from across the street to me, as the soles of my shoes hit asphalt. I leave my car door open, the noise beating time like a metronome, stressing and counting the seconds it takes to get to the box, drop, and roll it back.

The car door summons the thoughts, its song the refrain of bright ideas. Death comes in light bulbs. *Bing...*My life is worth an actual number of dollars and cents. *Bing...*My killer doesn't care where my key chain was from. *Bing....*My life is worth more. I think all this as I walk to the drop box, holding keys and money clothed in plastic. I push the key in and turn, roll the box down, leave the bag of hundreds and fifties. I get into my car and slam the door. The music stops. That's eight seconds. It would have taken six seconds if the box didn't get stuck from when it was painted shut during bank renovations.

For two years, for eight-fifty an hour, at around eight-thirty, Monday through Friday, I've safely secured some hairdresser's mortgage, car payment, vacation to Maui. I've maintained Gianni's membership at the Patterson club, added to his son's college fund and insured that he will go out to dinner every night next week. Rayann will get her boob job. Leonardo

will buy his S.U.V., custom with Eddie Bauer interior. Ouriana will pay for her wedding cake. I will ask for a raise. Again.

"I need a raise," I'd said, trying to look straight into Gianni's retina. I could feel my cheeks swell, my skin red and porous like a strawberry. I knew what he was thinking. I didn't have kids. I wasn't knocked up. I had no dependents. I was only nineteen. I lived with my parents. I was in college. I was stupid.

"Why do *you need* a raise?" Gianni asked. He always liked his designer glasses to rest on the very tip of his nose so he could stare over the top with naked eyes. He wanted to feel like he was looking down on me but I was taller.

"Christmas is coming," I said. "We are short staffed and I'm really going to have to step up to the plate." I contemplated my words, "step up to the plate" before the meeting, thinking he was Italian and Italians like baseball. He plays golf. "I'm on break from school, which means I can work more, which means I'll have to drive more and gas is expensive." I swallowed and started again. He looked like he was listening to me, nodding and grinning, his eyebrows like caterpillars, worming through his contorted brow. "I've been here for one and a half years and haven't had a raise since I started. I have a lot of responsibility, closing the salon and dropping off thousands of dollars at the bank, by myself, at night." It felt good to raise my voice to just the right decibel level to be considered fed up yet rational. He took out hands from his lap to cover points with fingers.

"Number one, you really do a great job running the desk," he said. He glanced down, remembering his new Hugh Hefner looking slippers with Ralph Lauren's initials embroidered on them. "Number two, you have a very unique fashion sense, which I like very much. Fashion is a trademark here and always has been since I started *HAIR* in 1969. You give a fresh first impression. Number three, your hair styles are cutting edge. A client comes in and says, 'I want to look like that!' Number four, you are great with the clients." I started to blush, cracking a modest smile which he saw. That was when I lost. He raised his voice to just the right decibel level to be considered stern yet emotional. "Number five, you have to teach Zoi to stop wearing that *pony tail* at the desk. How many

---

ENGLAND

clients spend two hundred dollars on their hair and walk outta here in pony tails?" At that point I realized he enjoyed the mechanics of baseball, the steal, the bunt, the home run. I suddenly remembered he'd named the salon after a play. He stood up and paced to the economy sized jug of sourdough pretzels, spun the top and bit into one wholeheartedly. He swallowed most of it, the remnants like confetti in his mouth being flung wildly when he talked. "I will give you a raise one month from now if you can 'step up to the plate' as you said, and act as a leader, teaching the rest of the desk to be like you. As for the bag, if you feel it is too much responsibility for you, you can drop it off at my house after you close." I felt my face boil, blistering over the skin of that sweet strawberry I was. I had been plucked, tainted and chewed to the juice. I wanted to step on his slippers, hard.

"You're right, Gianni. I'm going to yank that ponytail elastic right out of Zoi's head," I snickered. I stood up to shake his hand, a good end to a successful business day. I grabbed it hard and shook like a man pretending not to know his strength. "This will be a great opportunity for me to play a more active role in a successful business. As for the bag, I can handle it. It only takes a couple seconds."

It will be Tuesday night. All the sixty-five-dollar-a-haircut-stylists are working and there are fourteen stylists besides them. Fernando and Maria will come to clean around eight thirty so if the last client is out by eight fifteen I can finish cashing out as they arrive. I won't have to arm the alarm and punch in my identity code, giving a time to my departure. I'll say "Adios" to Fernando, and get my money's worth for two years of college Spanish.

My boyfriend Sam will call me at eight-fifteen from a pay phone. "Thank you for calling HAIR. This is May," I'll say.

"Do you do rim jobs?" he asks.

"Yes we do," I say.

"Is there a charge for that?" he'll ask.

"That service is complimentary but it's always a good idea to give a nice tip," I'll say.

He'll hang up. This means that he is two blocks from the bank, about to get into the back seat of our friend Lee's Enterprise getaway rental car. If I'm not ready I'll correct him, telling him

that the proper term is a rim trim, not a rim job. I'll grab my coat, purse, then the bag and walk out to my car.

It'll be raining. My windshield wipers groan and wash water from bleeding street lights in my view. I stop at every red light, watch every driver as they pass me. If *With a Little Help From My Friends* is playing on the radio, I won't change the station. I take a right into the bank, put my car in park, turn the car key and pull out. I find the bank key before I open the door, push it open and walk to the box. It is down pouring, no one at the bank or on the street. I won't be able to see what is across the street but only smell "Tommy's" fish specials of sword and salmon. *Bing.....* I think.....How much will I be worth tonight? I finally hear his sneakers on the pavement, the squeaks of his soles. *Bing...* "Gimmie all your money, um, bitch," Sam teases. I smell his cologne along with the fish and wonder what we'll do with the money. We can go to Foxwoods, sit at the black jack table, and always hit on nineteen. I can buy a pair of shoes. He sticks something that feels like a gun in my back.

"What is that?" I ask frantically, veiling my amusement.

"It's a bottle of Coke," he blurts. "Now shut the freak up," he whispers and slaps my butt. I freeze and drop the bag on the wet pavement. He bolts away as I turn around. *Bing...He's wearing his spiderman costume. Bing...We'll go out to dinner next week.*

I put my key in the ignition and see the pink jelly-shoe my grandmother brought me home from Nashville, dancing in pendulum from the chain. It grazes my knee when I shift to drive, racing through the one-way the wrong way, my radio blaring.



---

DONNA NORMAN CARBONE

Pliés in Circles

Through sprinklers,  
Spray tickling hot August skin,  
Suddenly, clog-footed angels  
Stampeded above us.  
Mass of gray bullied  
Blue sky away.  
As rain paraded,  
Mother rallied us onto porch.  
Drops hopping in puddles;  
I yearned to dive in,  
Double Dutch with rain,  
Inviting pulse on my body,  
Daring lightening not to strike.

---

ALYSSA GARGIULO

### Finding the K Spot on a Radio

Is this a haze of purple junk? Not that.  
Like those mornings from trips to hospitals  
With sour needles racing thirty buck  
Pills: echinacea ambulance, Peugeot  
Down-broke protected by a purple butch  
Bandana, grape peel vomit wrapped on hair.  
When the sun breaks glass and realizes your  
Swollen and feeble hand in bandage. No.

It sure as hell ain't like that other night  
With purple hazy mugginess, that plea  
From peepers droning on, when your thighs sweat  
And chafe beneath a sheath, white dress. And your  
Saliva strings like pearls to quench that last  
Sad cigarette you've just stamped out. Ennui.

But Sister Hazel's true like currant red,  
And knows. You'll be in days that better you.  
You'll listen. K's soft C sounds carried through  
With constant static. Speaker muffles smooth,  
Beatrice sa. Beatrice sa.  
A joke... she knows that they're all in cahoots.

No. This is a morning cloudy mist you watch  
From a bus en route to Rhode Island State Airport  
And miles away, where greyish blotches, paint  
On walls, transform to blur visions of trees- -  
The sillouhetted palm trees that sway calm  
On hazy blue mornings in rearview glass.

---

BRIAN LARUE

Job

Quit your job.  
Don't buy that new pair of shoes.  
On second thought,  
buy the shoes.  
Use them to kick your boss  
in the shins.  
Then sell the shoes at a profit  
to a co-worker  
who would be honored to own  
the shoes that kicked his or her boss  
in the shins.  
Then quit your job.  
That way, you'll have  
catharsis, a profit, and, for a while,  
a new pair of shoes.

---

BRIAN LARUE

Alan Paradis vs. The Cosmos in General, *or* One  
Kid's Giant Freak-Out

Alan Paradis woke up two hours before he normally would have with, more or less, eight times his usual sense of foreboding. The events of the previous night, as far as he could tell, fell anywhere between unlikely and just damned weird. He inhaled, listening to his breath tremble with apprehension, and stared at the ceiling. Although it didn't make sense, it seemed as though Alan had engaged in at least two, possibly more, sex acts with a young woman with whom he had no business performing any sex act, let alone two or more. Lying in bed at five in the morning, the sun just beginning to fill his bedroom with a grayish natural light, Alan deeply hoped he had fallen into some surrealist hypothetical plane of existence where things were not necessarily what they seemed, where memory did not necessarily preclude actual occurrence.

Alan realized he was undeniably naked. Clenching his teeth in gut-wrenching dread, he turned onto his left side and realized that Tricia Trudel existed in his bed as well, very much as undressed as he, her condition betrayed by what his wrinkled sheet did not cover, namely all but her stomach and her left leg. She was still fast asleep, humming softly and unmelodically as she exhaled, half of what Alan interpreted as a knowing grin on her lips, her normally straight hair in loose disarray around her face and shoulders. Alan finally expelled the air he had been holding in his lungs, an anguished whimper escaping with it. This was real.

He slid off the bed, stood, and walked gingerly to his dresser. It was imperative, he knew, not to wake Tricia. He had to be dressed, gone, decisively in another place by the time she woke up. He had to bring himself to exist in a place he was meant not to leave, and he had to do so by the time her brother Travis swung by to pick her up. (The idea of her brother's return to

fetch her after a raucous night of sexual activity sounded so strange to Alan now, if he were to take last night without the proper context, but he didn't dwell on that.) Alan's desires and goals did not include openly confronting the new sexual history between himself and Tricia before he could figure out what to say to her. Alan hated confrontation. He slipped into boxers, dress socks, a dirty pair of jeans, a black T-shirt, and his discount sneakers, and he headed for the kitchen with the intent of slipping out of his apartment and locating himself elsewhere, and pronto. He checked his watch. Quarter after five. He had a class at nine. Travis would arrive at ten-ish. Alan had four hours and forty-five minutes, give or take a few, before he could breathe the air of a free man.

For the record, here's why Alan wasn't supposed to get it on with Tricia: For one thing, she was Travis's twin sister. Alan and Travis had been friends since middle school. They had helped shape each other's outsiderish viewpoint of the rest of the world, had gotten each other into books they would never read in school and music they would never hear on the radio, had been introduced to alcohol together, had commiserated in diners and parking lots over treacherous girlfriends and pointless classes. They weren't necessarily best friends, but Alan definitely regarded Travis among his highest order of confidantes. Tricia was Travis's sister. Alan had known her as long as he had known Travis. Sure, she was beautiful and charming in a spunky indie-rock sort of way, but Alan never imagined becoming involved with her. Holy balls, man, she was Travis's sister. And she was nuts, Travis had said, co-dependent in all sorts of ways, just ready to be shattered, trailing a line of fed-up ex-boyfriends miles behind her. Alan wasn't an idiot, though. He knew all those times, since high school, that she had answered the door at the Trudel household, she had detained him for as long as she could before reporting his presence to Travis, smoothing her too-tight thrift store shirts over her stomach as she explained, green eyes downcast, to Alan what insensitive jerks she dated, how few really decent guys there were out there, why Alan needed a girlfriend. Her eyes always had that wild, desperate look in her eyes when they met his. She would touch his shoulder, offer him the contents of the Trudel refrigerator. Then Travis would come bounding down

the stairs, ask Tricia, "How long has Alan been here?," give her a cautious look, and lead Alan out the door. "Man, why can't she take phone messages? Why doesn't she tell me if anyone's here for me?" Travis would ask. Alan would shrug, hoping the answer wasn't what he suspected it was. So that, in effect, was why Alan wasn't supposed to get it on with Tricia.

For the other record: the other record was a seven-inch of old-school hardcore songs arranged for low brass. It belonged to Travis. Travis would want it back. Alan wouldn't normally be positive why. "Gimme Gimme Gimme" and "Filler" sounded kind of cool on trombones and tuba, he admitted. "Moral Majority" and "Let's Have a War" sounded a little forced. A sort of migrant record and comic book dealer had offered Travis fifty dollars for it. Apparently only one pressing had been issued, thirty home-pressed records, and those thirty were in high demand among certain circles. And besides -- come on, who thinks of things like arranging old-school hardcore songs for low brass? The guy would be in Travis's town for three more days, so Travis wanted the record back while he could at least make a few dollars off of it. (Fifty bucks is, after all, a lot of money to a college student.) Alan spotted the record on his dresser and snagged it before he left his bedroom. He had to, he knew, locate it somewhere where it would be readily visible for Tricia and/or Travis, because there was no way Alan would allow himself back into his apartment before he knew she was gone. The kitchen table, he thought, would work just fine.

Alan glanced at his bare kitchen table and realized that a seven-inch record in the middle of an empty tabletop would look utterly ridiculous and contrived. It would look like he had placed the record in an obvious place and then run off to somewhere completely outside of whatever his regular routine was. If he had made a routine run, why would he plant the record as if he wouldn't be back right away?

Alan clutched his forehead with his spare (left) hand, his mind racing in an attempt to construct the sort of mess in which a record might as well sit on a kitchen table, somehow orderly enough for said record to be visible. He scanned the room. Dishes in the sink. He hadn't washed last night's dishes. He hadn't gotten a chance to because he had been shagging it with his friend's sister. He scooped the dishes out of the sink

and arranged them on the table again. The dishes were slick with sink-water. They would air-dry in time and look innocent enough, he told himself. An ashtray. Sitting on the stove was an ashtray holding three cigarette butts. Tricia's -- Marlboro Menthol Lights. Alan placed the ashtray on the edge of the table, not believing he had actually slept with a girl who smoked menthol lights. Where's the passion in menthol lights, he asked himself?

The table needed something else. Alan remembered his bookbag, still in his bedroom. Carefully, on tiptoes and holding his arms away from his body, as if he would lose his balance on tiptoe or else holding out his arms simply would distribute unwanted sound more evenly, he slinked back through the door into his bedroom. His bookbag sat at the foot of his bed. Without moving his gaze from Tricia, Alan stopped just as his bag was within his arm's reach and gingerly lifted it from the floor. "Muh," said Tricia, an indictment, a condemnation. Alan's heart pounded. Two steps back to the kitchen, steadying his bookbag in one hand. Tricia was still asleep. Safety. Slowly, so as not to make a sound, Alan unzipped his bookbag and pulled out Thursday's textbooks. He placed them in a neat pile at the kitchen table's closest point to the back door. He could put the record on top of the pile, he thought. Perfect. He lifted the record from the tabletop, where he had left it. The sleeve came with his hand. A Husker Du single slid out, choosing to remain on the table. That, Alan thought with a panicked gasp, was not a seven-inch of old-school hardcore songs arranged for low brass. "What the shit?" he whispered urgently.

Alan had to sit down. He dropped cross-legged to the kitchen floor as quietly as he could muster. He didn't get it. Where was Travis's record? His mind raced. Kirsten. Kirsten was the only answer he could think of, the only person to whom he had lent Travis's record. She had had it for a day, Alan recalled, two, tops, and that was two weeks ago. But that was enough time for her to put the wrong record back in the sleeve. Alan had come to hate time. He looked at his watch. Twenty after five. He had five hours and forty minutes.

Alan wasn't able to take the apartment anymore. The gray sky outside was definitely creeping towards sunrise. He could hear birds chirping, suddenly malicious and judgmental. He

slung his bookbag over his right shoulder and grabbed Kirsten's record and Travis's sleeve with his left hand. Holding his breath, he unlocked and opened the back door and stepped onto the porch. He seized the screen door and painstakingly shut it himself to keep it from slamming behind him. Fortunately, fate had had it so that Alan had parked in the road instead of in the driveway, which would definitely minimize the noise of his departure. He ran to his aging Cavalier, threw his effects into the passenger seat, started his engine, and drove off with grim determination to avoid confrontation. He would, he finally decided, win this one yet.

He hadn't had a chance to drink a cup of coffee yet, being so cautious about not waking Tricia -- starting the coffee maker was out of the question entirely. Foot twitching as it operated the gas pedal, he headed towards the nearest Dunkin' Donuts. Coffee. Coffee was so important to Alan now, it wasn't even funny. None of this was funny. This was very, very negative. He really wanted to think clearly, just to make sure any of this made sense, though he was pretty sure it would still be damned weird, even after a healthy dose of caffeine took its rightful place in his bloodstream.

One steaming large black coffee in his cupholder, Alan continued up the same road, thinking about a place to sit. Fortunately, it would take a long time to drink a very hot large coffee on a spring day. Time, detested time, was important, and Alan was coming to realize that he had nothing with which to spend it. He spotted a cemetery off the road, one of the newer models with shinier headstones. It seemed, he thought, like a good place to gather his bearings. He swung up the cemetery's drive, parked, shuffled along a row of headstones, and sat down in the dew behind, according to the marker, the Millers. He watched the steam rise from his coffee and touched his lip to the cup, then again. Still too hot.

Alan tried his damndest to think. This was what was supposed to happen, he knew: Yesterday he was supposed to pick up Tricia at the airport because Travis was stuck in classes and at work. It just so happened that for Travis, classes and work were in Vermont, four hours away from Alan and the airport. As such, Tricia was supposed to camp out at Alan's place. Travis was supposed to come down the next morning to



bring her back to Vermont, as she and Travis conveniently attended the same college. It was all supposed to be very simple, really. Alan imagined situations in which it might've been simpler: if the Trudel parents hadn't relocated to Seattle over the winter (the whole Internet "new economy" thing), if Tricia's own friends hadn't scattered when they left for college, if Tricia had been able to get a flight into anywhere but Hartford, if Tricia and Travis hadn't gone to the same college, if Alan had gone to school farther away. If any of these situations weren't real, Alan knew, Tricia would have had somewhere to go between the time she got off the plane and the time Travis came for her. But this was real. And fate, Alan also knew, hated Alan Paradis.

Alan leaned against Mr. and Mrs. Miller's headstone. Sipping his coffee, he noticed he was getting on a roll with all of these hypotheticals. If Tricia's boyfriend hadn't left her for another college boy. If Tricia hadn't gushed out the details on Alan's sofa, weeping all over the place. If she hadn't wondered out loud what was wrong with the guys she was attracted to, leaning against him and dropping her hand into his lap. If he had given a definitive answer instead of "I dunno. Bad luck?" If she hadn't bitten his shoulder. Alan didn't even want to think about it. He shook his head in futile denial and took another swig of coffee. He realized he had gnawed a groove in the rim of his foam coffee cup. He looked down at his watch. Five after six. He had three hours and fifty-five minutes.

Alan decided to stop dwelling on Tricia, to instead figure out how he was going to get Travis's seven-inch back from Kirsten. Kirsten had a nine a.m. class, just like Alan. If he could go to her apartment, then, and stake the place out -- she might be up and about as early as seven, and even if she wasn't, he would be able to intercept her before she left for class. And maybe, just maybe, Tricia would still be asleep by the time he retrieved the record. After all, it had to be exhausting to ride a fellow for... well, he wasn't sure -- possibly hours, but definitely many, many minutes. He remembered, vaguely, the glowing LED digits 2:26. Had he only slept for two and a half hours? Was the nature of his freak-out so extensive, yet so precise, that it had awakened him at the first signs of daybreak? Oh, he thought, but it was. And Tricia -- the seductress, the irrational

component, the girl so needy and hungry for validation (he gathered) that she couldn't *not* take advantage of him the first moment she could -- was satisfied, sated, validated. She could finally rest with the knowledge that her sexuality, rejected by her previous boy toy, was still worth something. She would be out cold for a long time.

It all seemed clear now -- Alan would go to Kirsten's apartment, snag the record, go back to his own place, plant the record while Tricia slept, and go off to class himself. He would be occupied, Travis would have his record, and Tricia would leave without asking what the previous night had meant. That was the way it would have to be. Alan was determined. Styrofoam cup in hand, he stood, patted the Millers' headstone in appreciation for being the eye of his sex storm, and marched to his car. Turning the ignition key, he watched the dashboard clock illuminate. It was 6:31. He had three hours and twenty-nine minutes to freedom.

With a second cup of Dunkin' Donuts coffee in his cupholder, Alan pulled into Kirsten's driveway. He parked, climbed out of his car, and began walking quickly in a loop around her house. He looked up at her windows, the second-story apartment. No lights. She wasn't awake yet, which was understandable. It was still early. He could wait. He plunked himself down on the back porch with his coffee and waited.

Time moved slowly, but it moved nonetheless. Alan wished he had brought a book. He wished this for a long time. Somewhere in the distance, a dog barked. Alan snapped up his head and took another swig of coffee. It was cold. He could've sworn it hadn't been. He glanced at his watch. Eight after eight. He realized he had nodded off. Better here, he thought, than at some place where a strange young woman could misinterpret his willingness as enthusiasm, when in fact *he* was the one who had been used, devoured like a clichéd piece of meat, ridden like a coin-operated rocket ship in a shopping mall's food court. Alan stood and once again circled the house. No lights upstairs. Alan began to feel less certain. He looped back to the front porch this time. Should he ring the bell? He might wake Kirsten. Then again, if she were still asleep, she might miss her nine o'clock class. But still, he might wake her. He figured he might at least see if the door to her stairwell wasn't locked. He

---

L A R U E

opened the screen door. Out tumbled two newspapers, yesterday's and the previous day's. Slowly, like an ice cube melting between his frontal lobes, Alan realized what was going on here. The lights were off in Kirsten's apartment. Newspapers pertaining to the two previous days sat on her porch. He craned his neck to check out the driveway. Her car wasn't there. Alan realized, feeling slightly ill (cold coffee and two and a half hours' sleep didn't help), that Kirsten wasn't home and hadn't been. And she still had Travis's record.

In his car once again, Alan figured he might just leave Kirsten's Husker Du single in Travis's record sleeve. Travis wouldn't notice when he came to pick up Tricia. But still -- Kirsten had the equivalent of fifty of Travis's dollars, and Alan knew he didn't have a place lending other people's shit to anyone. Alan physically squirmed at the idea of being responsible for forfeiting Travis's deal. "Who listens to Husker Du, anyway?" he grumbled. "Thirty-year-old men who work in record stores and live with their parents, that's who listens to Husker Du." He glanced at his watch. It was 8:17. He had an hour and forty-three minutes.

Gas. Alan needed gas, he noticed while compulsively checking his car's console so as not to dwell on who he should or should not be humping and to whom he should or should not lend other people's possessions. He had less than a quarter of a tank of gas. A British Petroleum station loomed just ahead. Alan swung his car up towards the gas station and stopped at the first pump. He exited the vehicle, selected the lowest grade of unleaded available, and began pumping. The gasoline hissed through the hose, gurgling within the bowels of his Cavalier. He wondered if there was a metaphor behind it all. The juxtaposition was too much. What was he, Alan wondered, but the nearest filling station? Right now he was getting what he thought he needed from British Petroleum, but it could've been Citgo just the same. Hell, Alan had never even bought gas from a BP before, but now that he had, he might as well again, as long as his car ended up running just as well as anyone else's gas made it run. Maybe BP just wanted to gain his customer loyalty. That way he'd become a new beneficiary to the well-being and success of British Petroleum. So who was really being had, him or BP? And why, he wondered, was he comparing

fornication to gas? What was his problem? He wondered why they couldn't just handle this like adults, he and Tricia. Two twenty-one-year-old, educated people could deal with humping, right? Then he remembered -- she started it, and he didn't need this shit. He wondered why that rationale made sense to him. Maybe, he suspected, they weren't adults after all. The pump clunked to a halt. It was all over. Alan had to pay now. He wasn't sure what it meant.

With certain ambivalence, Alan approached the booth in the central island. The kid sitting in the booth was probably younger than Alan, disheveled and unshaven and reading the Bargain News. Alan hesitated. The kid seemed to sense Alan's presence and glanced up from his paper. His eyes, met Alan's, his gaze, disinterested and waiting, cutting through the window separating them.

"Um... pump four," said Alan. He heard his voice quiver on "four."

The kid struck a button on his register, unseen by Alan. "Fifteen twenty-six," he said flatly.

Alan slid a twenty through the slot at the bottom of the window. The kid accepted the bill and hit another button. Alan heard a receipt printing. He held his breath as the kid slid four singles and change back to him.

"Do you want your receipt?" the kid asked, no longer looking at Alan.

"Um... no thanks," said Alan. Alan could hear his own heart pounding, for some reason. He spun around and jogged back to his car. What, he wondered, just happened?

Lurching out of the parking lot before the gauge lights in his console had shut off from their post-ignition test, Alan sped off towards the campus. He had to get to class.

Parked, steadied, and inside the arts and sciences building, Alan pounded up the stairs to his classroom. He was almost there. Once in class, he would be the safest he had been all morning. Tricia would never pin him down in class to ask what last night was supposed to mean. He wouldn't have had to answer that he hadn't a clue. He wouldn't have to justify why that *was* enough of an answer. Travis wouldn't walk into the scene to find that things had gotten fucking weird. The classroom was right at the top of the stairs. It was that easy. It

was right there. This was real.

The door was closed. No lights shone inside. Alan stopped at the door, sinking inside himself. There was a sign on the door: "PHI 200: Class canceled for Mon., Apr. 20. Instructor illness." Alan removed his bookbag, closed his eyes, and leaned against the wall for whatever support it could offer. Illness? Selfishness. Alan knew illness. This was illness. He opened his eyes and looked at his watch. It was seven after nine.

Ten minutes later, Alan stood before the Millers' headstone again, holding a third steaming cup of Dunkin' Donuts coffee. "I hope you understand," he told the Millers. "I had nowhere else to go."

Alan sipped his coffee, gnawed at the Styrofoam cup, and wondered about things. He wished he could have just something straightforward to Tricia the previous night -- "No," maybe. Funny, but somehow it had seemed that they had not yet approached the point where they had to stop, where they had gone too far, the situation nearly out of their control. That threshold kept moving forward, forward again. Now, this morning -- this was too far. Alan's big questions: Why did the universe hate him? Why couldn't Tricia function without romantic reinforcement? How could he ever face her again? How could he ever face *Travis* again? Why did he even have balls? Did any of these questions have answers? Well, why not? Hard questions all. Alan looked at his watch again. It was two after ten. He felt all of his internal organs surge up into his chest cavity. A new pulse became noticeable to him just above his right temple. He really hoped it wasn't a symptom of an aneurysm, because he didn't want to die now that he was free. It was after ten. He was safe.

Alan began to sense the dread as soon as he turned his Cavalier into his own driveway. What if Travis hadn't come for Tricia yet? He would have to be cautious. Maybe, he thought, he ought to cruise around the block to check for Travis's car. A yellow '80s-style Nova, Alan figured, would be difficult to miss. He shifted into reverse and pressed on the gas pedal.

The big crunching noise came right afterwards. Alan had run over louder aluminum cans, he figured, but the jolt of the impact thrust him forward, his seatbelt catching him and tossing him back into his seat. He shifted back into park and got

out of the car. This, he thought, breathing forcefully through his nose, was the last thing he needed.

Travis, lashing his dark hair away from his eyes, bounded up to Alan as soon as Alan was back on his feet. "Dude," Travis was saying (Alan's physical senses and thought process had begun to separate from each other, and he heard Travis's voice from somewhere outside himself), "we were wondering where you were. But now you drove into my car, so I guess we know. Do you have my record?"

First, Alan realized he had forgotten to bring Travis's record sleeve, real record inside or not, back to the apartment after all. Second, turning around, he saw his rear fender, bent but not annihilated, planted in the side of Travis's Nova. His (Alan's) head swam, and his consciousness detected a steady, faint, high-pitched vowel sound coming from the back of his throat. Tricia was coming out of the passenger door, rather tousled herself.

"Hi... Alan," she said questioningly.

"Man, I was just leaving, too," said Travis incredulously. "You've gotta be more careful, y'know?"

Alan felt all of this heading in a direction he really didn't want to have to deal with.

---

JENNIE MANCINONE

### Meeting Brian Trusciewicz

If she believed in fate she would say it was written in the stars, but she did not believe in fate. That all changed when she met him. The exact moment she became aware of his existence in this world remains hazy, but she was friends with George in first grade and George was friends with Brian Trusciewicz in first grade, so maybe that's where it all began. She imagines she first heard his name in sixth grade although it's likely it was sooner even than that. She moved after sixth grade and most of her grade school connections were broken, and she did not meet him then.

She moved back to town for high school but he went to private and she went to public and so they didn't meet then, either. George was there, though, and she and he were friends again. Sitting in the back of chemistry class, talking about comic books and *Star Wars*, George would sometimes mention his friend Brian but she thought nothing of it. Everyone, it seemed, had a friend named Brian. When she was a senior her cousin Meg was a freshman and they were both in the school play together. So was Dave Trusciewicz, Brian Trusciewicz's younger brother. Meg and Dave Trusciewicz regaled her with stories from their childhood, when they lived next door to each other and were best friends. She was amazed. Everyone, it seemed, knew Brian Trusciewicz.

"Brian Trusciewicz?" their director butted in. "Great kid. Helluva writer."

During the play she met a kid named Hayden and they became friends. Hayden, in the days of his youth, was best friends with none other than Brian Trusciewicz. What a coincidence, she thought. She believed in coincidence, not fate.

High school ended and they all followed different paths, some with more forks than others. She fell in and out of touch with Hayden and George until one autumn they found

themselves living in the same big, bad city, far, far from home. Maybe it was nostalgia that kept them together, maybe the indefinable way that being from the same place draws people closer, maybe coincidence, maybe fate. Whatever it was, there they were, learning how to be friends as adults while learning how to be adults. Still, some things never changed. One day, Hayden had a new book with him.

“What’s it about?” she asked him.

“Not sure, I just got it. A friend of mine wrote it.”

“Get out of here! Wow, how grown up is that? Getting a book published.”

“It’s just a small publisher from back home.”

“Still, there it is, with a shiny cover on the front and a little biography on the back. That’s tangible evidence of success, you know?”

“How do you mean?” Hayden asked.

“Well, it’s there, physically, you can hold it in your hands and say, ‘I made this, this is mine.’ I think that’s incredible. Brian must be so jazzed.”

“How did you know Brian wrote it? This is his pen name.”

“Of course it was Brian. Who else could it be?”

“I thought you didn’t know him?”

“I don’t.”

“Then how did you know he wrote it?”

“In my experience, the answer to most any question is, invariably, Brian Trusciewicz.”

As it sometimes happens, some people have a harder time learning how to be adults, and Hayden wound up back home. After a few more forks in the road, she was soon to follow. Picking up where high school left off, their days were made of random journeys and adventures, and nothing was different for all the time that had passed. Until, slowly by slowly, something changed, and they began to relate to each other as adults, or at least like friends learning how to be adults. For the first time, she confided in him her hopes and dreams of love, that constant and elusive shadow that shadowed her day and night. Hayden confided the same to her and she found comfort in knowing he was no better off than she.



---

MANCINONE

In the course of their relocation back to their happy homeland it happened that Brian Trusciewicz wrote a play and it was going to be performed. But life – not fate, surely, for she didn't believe in fate – intervened and she never saw the play and so she didn't meet him then. A short time later Hayden was in an altogether different play and she often hung out with him at rehearsal. On the very first night she heard his cast mates talking about the ups and downs of their very good friend Brian. It didn't take a super genius to realize they were talking about Brian Trusciewicz. She no longer believed that everyone had a friend named Brian, only that everyone was a friend of Brian Trusciewicz.

On another night she bumped into her old friend Mike from high school. He told her about a play he went to see that a friend of his wrote, and he seemed surprised when she interrupted to ask, "Brian Trusciewicz's play?"

She couldn't understand why he was surprised; as if there was any question as to whose play it could possibly be. Was it ever anyone else's? Especially on that day. That day, she saw her old friend George's mother at the Hallmark store in the mall and George's mother had just that day talked on the phone with George's old friend, Brian Trusciewicz. On a day like that, Brian Trusciewicz just had to be the author of the play an old friend from high school went to see.

By some quirk of fate – or coincidence, if you will – she did not meet Brian Trusciewicz at the performance of Hayden's play. Somehow, though the entire cast was comprised of the Friends of Brian Trusciewicz, she missed him, the reasons for which remain hazy. The day she finally met him she didn't know it was him she was meeting, but deep down, she did. That was the day when the part of her that didn't believe in fate knew without knowing that the man before her was Brian Trusciewicz.

She was sitting in the Egyptian room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on a rainy day in New York City, staring through the enormous, slanted wall of plate glass into Central Park. Without any provocation whatsoever, she began to cry. No recent heartbreak about which she was inconsolable, no rude cab driver, no mugging, no hangnail, none of these things prompted this spontaneous crying jag. Nothing at all,

except an overwhelming longing for something she did not have and could not define. It was a Tuesday in November and the museum was not very crowded, but it wasn't empty, either. She scrubbed her eyes, searching the room for roving gangs of grade school field trippers who might burst her melancholy bubble. None were present, but there was a young man standing about ten yards away, staring at the wall, pretending not to notice the seemingly hysterical young woman on the bench before him.

She knew he was paralyzed by the sight of a crying female and not transfixed by art because at the exact point on the wall at which he was staring was a blue plastic sign, pointing the way to the bathroom. She turned away, pressing her fist to her mouth, more embarrassed for him than for herself, and tried to stop crying. Unfortunately, the harder she tried, the harder she cried, very quietly and with only a few snuffles. Suddenly he was standing nearer to her and suddenly he was speaking. When he spoke, her tears evaporated, and what he said was the most perfect thing: he asked her if he could have some pepper for his paprikash, a question that could only be asked in the very room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in which they happened to be. She laughed through her tears and made room for him on the bench. He sat, but not too close.

"I don't usually approach strange women in the middle of a breakdown," he said by way of apology.

"Is there a usual way you approach strange women?" she asked with a smile.

He cringed. "I don't usually insult them right off, either. I try to wait a few minutes, at least."

She laughed again and wiped her nose on her sleeve. "Thanks for making me laugh."

"My pleasure."

They got around to looking at each other at the same time and when their eyes met, hers filled with tears again. She'd never wanted to touch a stranger until now. But he wasn't a stranger, not really. How did she know that? How could she possibly? Was it fate? But he wasn't, she did, and it was. When she accepted that, the tightness in her chest was gone and her heart was free.

---

MANCINONE

"I'm Brian," he said, holding out his hand. She took it but did not shake it. She turned his hand over and examined his palm, not knowing what she was looking for but finding it anyway.

"I know," she replied, looking into his eyes again.

He opened his mouth to question her but stopped when she smiled and let it go.

"What's your name?" he asked instead.

"Phoebe Weatherfield." And held her breath.

He squinted. "That has the ring of an oblique literary reference."

Is it fair to pass judgment on people based on tests they don't know they're taking? Was she fair to expect, or at least hope, people would remember the details of a book written in 1945 and know it made her feel special? It didn't matter now, because *he* knew. He read *Catcher in the Rye* before they ever met and it had meant something to him, and now it meant something to her, something new, something special.

"You're the first person under fifty to ever think so."

"Am I?" She nodded solemnly. His stare was just as solemn. "I'm glad."

She looked back down at his palm and said, "It's very nice to meet you, Brian Trusciewicz."

---

LIZ APPEL

## Pencils

When I first came looking for a job here, they made me fill out the application in the day room. I was sure that the administration was testing me to see how I would act among the patients. And I was terrified. The whole place had a sickly sour smell about it. My tie seemed to be tightening up and my voice had run away down my throat and disappeared into my chest leaving me nodding with a ridiculous smile.

So I sat at an empty table. On the old upright in the corner, a busty woman with black curly hair and a mustache played a ragged Fleur-de-Lis over and over. Four men sat around a table smoking cigarettes and playing a game of Setback. They made a great show of ignoring me and flipped the cards with disappointment and disgust sometimes grumbling at each other but few words were spoken. They bet cigarettes. I kept my head bowed in busy concentration.

The woman in personnel had apologized for giving me a pencil instead of a pen. But I was grateful. I kept making little squiggles after the words ended because my hands were trembling. This led to a lot of erasing. The eraser was old and dry and left red blotches. I rubbed it on the table to uncover the soft rubber beneath but then the whole damn thing broke off. Things were not going my way.

Then, a skinny, toothless guy who wore his pants pulled way up to his chest, sat down beside me at the wobbly table. He sounded a little like Popeye. "You fillin' out the application? Aw, it's easy! They give everybody a job that applies. Just put me down as your reference. Go on! Do it! I dare ya!" Then he winked at me and chuckled, jutting out his lower jaw. I smiled weakly. When I started back writing, he leaned closer to me and asked, "Hey, you got any smokes? You play cards?" I told him I'd give him a cigarette and play cards with him if I got the job. "Aw right!" he said loudly, standing up and slapping his

pants. Then he trudged away in a bent-over side-to-side gait, giving me another wink and a "thumbs up" over his shoulder halfway down the hall.

He was right, I did get the job. It started the next day on the second shift. When I showed up, my supervisor, Adele, and most of the staff were busy at a meeting. After a while, I felt awkward standing around at the nurse's station waiting, so I wandered down the hall looking in the rooms for a patient to talk to that didn't seem too scary. After all, this was what I went to school for - I ought to know something.

I went into room 211. Although there were two names on the door, there was only one old guy sitting in a wheel chair by the window. I moved inside and stood next to him. "Hi, how are you doing today?" I asked. But he just stared straight-ahead, not even turning to acknowledge me. So I asked the same thing again a little louder thinking he might be hard of hearing. But he still ignored me. I felt silly. Then I noticed someone standing in the doorway. He said, "You must be new here, right? I'm John. John Orr." He smiled genially as though he knew some humorous secret between us and extended his big hand my way in a firm, friendly handshake. "Lenny Miller, glad to meet you," I said.

He wore baggy khakis with a light blue shirt that matched his eyes, half-hidden beneath sandy-colored hair that was neatly trimmed but too long to be fashionable.

"Oh, I see you're trying to talk to Stanley?" he said, fingering his nametag.

"Why? Is there something wrong? Shouldn't I be talking to him?"

"Oh, you can talk to him all you like but he won't talk back. He's a tough nut to crack, Stanley is. We've all tried."

"Oh?" I said.

John walked into the room and sat down on one of the empty beds. I turned around to face him. He placed his hands on his thighs and spoke in a quiet, confidential tone. "It's like this, Stanley is difficult to treat. It's not just my opinion - it's everybody's opinion. The old guy has sat so long by the same window, rocking back and forth like a kid on a swing, gazing into the parking lot that there's nothing to be done about it

anymore. Leastways no one bothers to try anymore. He's been here for seventeen years. Know what I mean?"

I nodded.

"Stanley doesn't speak or move. Has to be wheeled to the dining room, dressed, put in the bathroom like an invalid. But I tell you, the shame of it all is that he's not crippled or anything. It's just that it's been so long since he's stood up, his legs don't work anymore. What's wrong with Stanley is that he is simply very, very depressed (that's what his chart says anyway.) He was diagnosed with something else when he first came, I forgot what. They tried shock therapy, too. Didn't help. He barely blinked. Every now and again someone like you will sit beside him and coax him, 'Don't you want to go downstairs for lunch? They're making hamburgers - you like hamburgers don't you?' And the rest of us just smirk at each other. No offense, we know he'll just sit there like a stone, never moving, hamburgers or no hamburgers. Stanley will never change. Kinda' sad though."

"Such a waste," I said, glad to be engaged in shoptalk.

"Yeah, a sad case. It was his wife, Joyce that finally committed him. Lots of times it's the wife or the husband that does it. She told me all about it. He had a job, too. During the sixties he worked for a huge company in Connecticut that made radar systems for warplanes. He was a really smart guy. He was a 'tactical engineer' - whatever that means."

"They have a pretty good background on everyone, don't they?" I asked.

"Sometimes but not always. His file is two feet thick! But I learned about Stanley from his wife Joyce. She said that he always was sort of a loner." John leaned toward me. "One of the things that happened was that he began carrying more and more mechanical pencils in his shirt pocket." John pointed to his own pocket with pencils.

I nodded at John and then looked at Stanley to see if his face had showed any change. He hadn't. When John caught me looking he said, "Oh, don't worry about him. He doesn't understand what we're talking about."

"Yeah, I know, I was just looking at him, that's all."

---

APPEL

brown hair. They were in first grade and third grade, I think she said. Real nice boys, not wise or anything.

"Stanley began sleeping in his clothes on the couch and he also stopped taking showers. And then he stopped changing his clothes. He wore this blue short-sleeved dress shirt buttoned to the top and black slacks with his loafers all the time. I guess that's when she began to worry that he'd lost it cause he'd always been really clean and picky about dressing, especially his white dress shirts and suits which he had lined up in the closet by what day it was. Lots of times he didn't sleep all night and Joyce would find him in the recroom watching t.v. even when the station went off the air and he was just sitting there in the dark staring at that gray circle on the set with that dull humming noise that reminds you to turn it off."

"Oh, yeah. I remember that," I said.

"Joyce tried undressing him when he was asleep just to change his smelly clothes but he'd always wake up. Then he'd yell at her like she was a stranger 'What are you doing? You're trying to poison me!' He thought that Joyce had poisoned his clothes so that he would die instantly if they touched his skin. He was really suspicious of her doing anything and watched her like she was always up to something. True paranoid symptoms.

"He started muttering to himself and ignoring Joyce all the time. They didn't go out anymore. He wouldn't leave. When it got cold, he'd still go out into the yard and get on his hands and knees looking for weeds on the hard ground. After a couple hours, he'd mow the frozen lawn back and forth on that sit-down mower of his, around and around their split-level from morning to night. Joyce had to buy gas for the lawn mower everyday. And he'd still water the ground, even when the water began to freeze in big puddles.

"Joyce told the kids that Daddy had a bad flu and that he would be better by the time Santa came. But he'd been out of work the since September. Their savings were almost gone and Joyce was getting tired of staying in the house. She wouldn't let the boys go out except to go to school. But then the boys started missing a lot of school because the kids were making fun of their dad mowing the lawn all the time. Kids can be kind a' mean, you know?"

"Yes they can," I agreed nodding my head.

"The bottom dropped out on a November day when Joyce decided not to fill the gas can because she didn't think she could get into the car without the nosey neighbor coming over to talk again. She didn't want to be rude but there was nothing to talk about.

"Big mistake not to fill that gas can. Know what he did? Stanley siphoned gas from their Oldsmobile station wagon into the can. But Joyce knew the car was almost empty. When he finally gave up, he didn't yell or hit her or anything. He just stood in the middle of the front yard and stared at the sky for about a half-hour without even moving. Joyce watched him through the curtains of the picture window in the living room a while then she went out to him and asked, 'Stanley, is everything, ok? Honey, is everything all right?' But he just stood there without answering like a scarecrow still looking up at the sky. Then, he got crazy."

"Oh, so that's it. He..."

"Yeah. So then Stanley ran around the yard tugging and pulling out all the bushes, pulling up clumps of grass with his bare hands, peeling up the flagstones on the walk till his hands bled. He chucked everything to the center of the front yard into a big pile. Then he used the hedge clippers to cut the row of forsythia all the way down to the ground and dragged all the bushes into the big pile. Joyce was crying and pretty scared by then and at first she was following him around the yard saying, 'Honey, don't! Don't take down my forsythia! Honey please!' But he ignored her so she went back in the house but kept looking through the curtains hoping he'd stop."

"Poor Joyce," I said.

"After the forsythia were all cut down, it began to snow because it was cold and the sky was a cloudy-white. Stanley kept going around the yard cutting everything in sight. Then he went into the garage and got out a long-handled axe and started to chop down the mail box post. When it fell into the road he dragged it into the big pile and started chopping down all the trees.

"Joyce said she was really afraid by then but didn't think he'd cut them all down. Joyce said she never called the cops because she figured he'd get worn out and she didn't want



---

APPEL

to make a big deal out of it. She said she was sort of glad because maybe he needed to get it out of his system, whatever it was and then maybe he'd snap out of it. But Stanley was too crazy to be tired. All this time he was wearing a blue short-sleeved dress shirt even though you could see your breath it was so cold.

"A neighbor called the cops. They weren't surprised because they had heard about Stanley and had been patrolling around the neighborhood every day just waiting for him to crack. The cops arrived just as Stanley was swinging his axe against a birch tree but he acted like he didn't see them at all. They drew their guns on him but he kept right on taking long steady swings with that axe - chop, chop, chop. Wood chips were flying out onto the lawn in every direction. Joyce came out and talked with the cops saying 'Don't hurt him! Please, he isn't dangerous or anything. He won't hurt anybody! Please, just leave him be!'

"But the cops said that they had more experience in this sort of thing than she did and they told her to stand aside and just let them handle it and not to forget that Stanley was swinging an axe.

The cops tried to reason with him saying things like, 'Stanley, why don't you sit down and we can talk about this man-to-man? Your wife is pretty worried about you, you know. Why don't you go in the house for some hot coffee? It's pretty cold out here.' But they were invisible to him. They weren't even real. He could hear their voices but they weren't really standing on the same ground. They were somewhere else, like a different dimension shouting through a crack. That's what it was like.

Then they called for backup and more police cars came and the fire rescue came too and probably everyone that was on duty in town. By this time, the whole neighborhood was out in the street gawking over the flashing lights of the police cars. One of the cops began to shout like an idiot through the bullhorn to the people watching even though he could have just raised his voice a little, 'Ok everyone, back off. We don't want anyone to get hurt. Keep the area clear.' But no one moved and he put the bullhorn back in the police car kind of embarrassed.

Don't forget, it was a Saturday so everyone was home and it was still snowing but lightly, you know, just flurries, dusting everything. Joyce said that later on she didn't remember much about that day except that everybody had this delicate white powder on their hair and eye lashes, especially Stanley."

"So, that's the end?" I interrupted (hoping to leave the room and find my supervisor).

"No, you've got hear the whole thing," he said. "So, then Stanley hacked away at the birch tree and it fell pretty close to the neighbor's front porch. Then he went over to the maple tree with all the wind chimes on it and began axing it.

Then he chopped the little walnut tree on the side of the house that they had planted the year before. All three of the old Christmas trees planted along the border went real fast. Each time he'd cut one down, he'd drag it to the pile in the center of the front yard which was pretty big by this time but the maple was too heavy so he left it where it fell. Joyce said that his hair hung in little strands on his forehead and his glasses were all cloudy and wet. All the while, each one of the cops played hero and kept trying to reason with him like, 'Stanley don't cut down anymore today, okay? Let's you and me just sit down and take a break. We'll talk about it, okay? You're upset about your job, right? Yes sir, that would upset me, too buddy.' But he just kept swinging that axe.

The cops were afraid he'd start swinging at people next but they didn't want to shoot him either, especially with his wife and kids and everyone watching and they were afraid to get too close to him.

The whole time, Joyce stood on the carport watching with her hands covering her mouth in disbelief. She had the kids sit in a police car parked in the driveway. They were real scared but they looked out the windows the whole time watching their crazy daddy chop down the trees. Every once in a while the kids looked out the back window of the police car at the crowd trying to identify their friends. They never tried to get out of the car. I guess they were scared of their dad.

Some people in the crowd with big mouths shouted stuff like, 'Can't you stop him? He's cutting down the maple!' and 'Come on guys, we all pay taxes here. What are ya,

---

A P P E L

scared? Let me get my rifle, someone could get hurt, you know! Did you think of that? Huh? Did you ever think of that?"

There was only one tree left in the whole yard, a huge evergreen with draping branches. It was about 100 feet tall and would fall on the house or the utility line or something and cause real damage. It would take him a long time to cut that one down. Stanley was just about to start on it when all the cops agreed that there was a real danger here and they had to stop him no matter what. The same cop that shouted through the bullhorn kept saying eagerly, 'Just let me give him a good punch to knock him out, just let me knock him out.' Joyce was really upset. She had been quiet before that, just whimpering and letting the cops alone. But then she cried, 'No! Don't do that! You'll hurt him. Don't do that!' I think they had forgotten all about her 'cause she was so quiet.

So, the other cops wouldn't let him punch Stanley and said, 'Nah, we won't hit him, honey. We wouldn't do that. It's okay. We won't hurt him.'

The cops talked in a circle for a moment with Stanley just starting in on the big evergreen, whack, whack, whack. But it was a big tree and it was going take him awhile. Then they stood behind him and one of the cops mouthed, 'One - two - three' and they grabbed Stanley's arms and pulled them behind his back and he immediately dropped the axe to the ground behind him and they put handcuffs on him. It all happened pretty quickly. They were surprised that it was so easy and that Stanley didn't resist. No one even got hurt. They figured he was exhausted because he had been chopping trees non-stop for a long time. Then they put him in a police car and took him away and everyone went home."

"Wow! What a story! So Stanley..."

"No they didn't take him to jail. He came straight here like a good boy. Been here ever since just sitting in that chair. But he hasn't said a word all this time and he's an old man now."

I tried to interrupt John again thinking that I should look for my supervisor so I stood up and said, "Well, thanks but I've got to..."

But John interrupted, "Wait a minute, let me finish this first." He looked at me a little irritated so I sat back down on the bed

and he started right up without a pause. "Joyce used to visit him almost every Sunday even after she remarried. But nothing ever changed. It was like she was invisible. She used to cry a lot and we all felt sorry for her. She only brought the kids a couple times when they were teenagers and they didn't want to be there and felt real awkward."

Then John was quiet. I thought he was finally done but he continued.

"Joyce died a few years ago and his boys are grown men now. They don't visit at all or bother to send cards. It doesn't matter anyway. Once one of the boys came by to introduce his fiancée. Big mistake. I never understood why he didn't just tell her his father was dead. It was a difficult thing to watch. He said, 'Dad, Dad I'd like you to meet Julie. Come on, you can say hello, can't you?' pretending as though his condition was recent. This Julie was a very sweet girl and she felt so sorry for Stanley that she was in tears and kept asking questions that the son didn't want to answer like 'How long has he been here? What happened to him? Doesn't he ever move? Have they tried changing his medication? Have they tried shock therapy? Is anyone else in your family like this?' Finally, the son yelled at her, 'I don't know! I don't know! I don't know! I've got to get out of here! I can't take this anymore!'

You could hear Stanley's son all the way to the lounge when he had shouted at her. Then he grabbed his denim jacket from the bed and tore off down the hall. His fiancée Julie was scared and ran after him. She'd never been to a place like this before with all crazy people and you could see the look of fear on her face when people came out of the dayroom to stare at her. Even the stooges came running when they heard the commotion, but Stanley's son and his fiancée were already in the parking lot getting into the car. That was three years ago. No one's come to visit him since then, not that I know of. But then..."

Just then my supervisor walked into the room.

"There you are Lenny! John, stop bothering him. He just got here. Leave the poor man alone or he'll quit on us," she joked.

Like an idiot, I spoke up in John's defense. "Oh, it's okay. He was just telling me about Stanley, here."

---

APPEL

"About Stanley, huh?" I turned crimson from the sarcastic tone of her voice. "Lenny, there's something you should know. John here, is our resident storyteller. He tells that same story to anyone that will listen and he won't let you leave. Don't let him bother you. He'll bend your ear all day."

John jumped to his feet with a red face. Through clenched teeth he said, "I... wasn't... bothering... him! We were just talking, that's all. It's true what I said! It's true! Joyce told me! She *told* me." His fly was open.

Then my supervisor said with a smirk and a dig she seemed to enjoy, "Now, how can that be, John? His wife only came here twice and she hardly spoke a word to anybody, let alone you."

"How would *you* know! He's *my* roommate and you weren't even working here yet! Joyce told me about Stanley! She told me!"

"Next thing you'll be telling me is that Stanley told you!" She winked at me in conspiracy.

"No, not Stanley..." he said suddenly sullen. "But Joyce told me all about when he..."

I started to leave the room with her when she turned back and said, "Look John, I'm not going to argue with you. We've talked about this before. Please go back to your room and give Lenny a chance to get settled, okay? I'm not going to tell you twice. And put those pencils back up front while you're at it."

At that very moment, I could swear that I saw Stanley smirking. But I didn't dare say anything. John stomped out of the room with a Nazi-like march muttering, "Everybody's always in such a God damn hurry around here!"

Then she turned to me and said smoothly, "Come on, Lenny. Let me introduce you to everyone properly."

---

LIZ APPEL

## That Chair

Clever of you,  
to shuffle into the night,  
leaving rumor and glory to feed  
the Tuesday fiction circle.

Class dropped, gone.

Your chair.  
No one sits  
where you sat  
cross-legged by the door  
zinging chaws of honesty  
across the room.

A family, an adored son.

The furious undertow beneath  
rooster hair  
pointed admonishment,  
and praise.

Compelled, like us but not us.

A draft of scribbled stuff,  
underlined, quoted,  
dog-eared book-marked,  
jagged plots of wealth,  
parent-children,  
madness in mansions -  
published with finality.

You left us with one hell of a story.

---

KATHLEEN BUTLER

### Organ Recital

I

I used to not have tan  
lines. No, it wasn't frigid  
winter at the time. I just didn't,  
you know, wear anything

at the beach. No, I wasn't two  
at the time. I just happened  
to live on an island  
where "clothing-optional"  
was no big

deal to anyone but aghast  
American tourists. So I gave  
it a try after scanning  
the rather unattractive sample of those who shed

light on my self-consciousness.

II

I used to bring  
a camera to this beach.  
No, not to snap  
photos of Willies or Dollys.  
It was the bums

that captured my interest.  
No, not the plumber's crack  
type. It was the bush  
wackers, as I liked  
to call my photo subjects

of shameless glee,

the local wackos  
who'd hide behind  
the palm  
trees and, you

know, reward their, um,  
members that juttred  
toward the cosmos.

I loved to bust  
them in the act  
and fake

taking their picture.

III  
I'd always go there with Richard,  
my needy  
friend who'd had a hard  
life. No, not like he'd been in a penile  
colony or anything - he just never  
seemed to get enough

of certain pleasures. Sometimes  
we'd bicker, go tit  
for tat over the smallest things,  
like playing his organ.  
I mean, why'd he get aroused  
over that broken down

thing? He'd hoped to become  
a big pianist,  
but he just didn't have  
what it took. He'd raise his  
voice every time we'd have  
these conversations, always  
wanting me to stroke  
his ego. He'd build into a frenzy  
of heat and breath, back and forth,  
thrusting his unrestrained motion



BUTLER

of words that penetrated  
the undulating sea.

He just loved  
to insert  
his opinions knowing they permeated  
my dark interior,  
a place so often sheathed  
from public domain.  
We'd both get enmeshed

in these same conversations,  
over and over,  
day in  
and day out.  
I mean, he was always moaning  
about that organ  
of his, whenever it popped  
into his head.

Our dialogue would pulse  
across small, nearby dunes.  
Then Richard would eject  
his final burst  
of fluid  
thought, and roll

over and snore – spent, limp.  
That was when I'd go  
for a swim. Look at the frig-  
ates and wonder about all the seamen  
surrounded by sperm  
whales in the wetness

that extended forever.

IV  
Soon I'd notice Richard upright  
on the blanket. He probably wanted to start  
some oral

banter, or maybe it was time  
for play. Yes, the moon-  
shine whiskey, soft dabs around and across  
my parted lips. I relished  
the heated, repeated  
flow, further and deeper  
within. The tidal

pull of the moonshine.  
Richard preferred beer with a good  
head, preferably a Heiny, but he'd get tipsy.  
That's when he'd start slurring  
his words, "You're my breast  
fren," or "Oh look whojha  
leavin', Sh'long Jack!"  
He could be such a pin

head. Like when he'd talk  
about those annoying bush  
wackers hiding behind the tree trunks.  
"The gubberment oughta  
arress-em, or gass-em."  
Or gas them? Richard could be so rigid,  
then too quickly

anti-climactic.

---

KATHLEEN BUTLER

### Snap Judgement

I had it in the bag. New job assignment: a tiny Caribbean isle; first day. I yearned to dissolve my New York subway grime in the island's rhythm, the sensuous pulse of calypso, the cadence of the voices, and the delicacy of the trade winds. As I drove "over the hill" on my way to buy groceries, I passed raspberry bougainvillea vines, a melody of color clinging to rusty corrugated shacks stacked carelessly across denuded slopes. A land of contrasts: symphonies and dirges intertwined.

Ebony faces surrounded me as I swung my straw basket through the noisy market. Voices in Papiamentu, Spanish, Creole, and lilted English sprung across the narrow aisles. Most conversations were indecipherable to me. And then, "She new, dat white guhl dair." Laughs burst from carefree bellies gossiping across baskets of breadfruit, calabash, and yams. Some shoppers eyed me curiously; others tended to tins of black beans and barefoot babies.

My staple foods were missing amongst the melange of foreign labels, pungent produce, and alien animal parts. It was beginning to get dark and I needed to find my way back home. I grabbed a few recognizable brands and queued up, studying the pastel design on my crisp twenty-guilder note. The woman behind me, balancing a sobbing toddler on her hip, set a bloodied package on the narrow counter. The label read "Goat Meat." I paid the cashier, reached for my bags, and hesitated when the small boy who bagged my purchases began carrying them out to the parking lot. I followed him outside and we wove around the rutted dirt holes, a curious rooster in tow. The small boy, not more than ten, loaded the bags into my trunk. I thanked him yet he lingered, kicking a pebble, then self-consciously outstretching his soiled palm. I drew in my breath, embarrassed by my blunder, unsure of an appropriate tip. He said nothing and cast his eyes downward as I handed him a shiny one-guilder coin.

As I waited for the traffic to break so I could exit the market's parking lot, I silently scolded myself about the quickly darkening sky. Alone in a strange land, I envisioned getting lost on my way home, getting robbed or raped. I watched the long line of traffic blocking my exit from the dusty parking lot. The streets spilled bodies, walking, swigging from beer bottles, and sitting on stoops. Through my open window, sounds swirled: erupting laughter, exaggeration, arguments, and tears. Boisterous sounds and charged movements surrounded me. My whiteness frightened me. How could I gauge the mood of these people, strangers to me? I needed to interpret what I saw, to understand the nuances of this culture. I had arrogantly neglected to research the customs of the island before transplanting myself into it. And now I wondered how they felt about my different appearance. I smiled at a woman who passed in front of my car. She glared back at me. I wished I had a friend on the island, but I knew nobody. I closed my window and inched my car closer toward the traffic.

Then suddenly, *RAP RAP RAP*, loud insistent banging on my car trunk. I swung my neck around and saw the shape of the small boy with the outstretched palm, the child who had bagged my groceries. His plaintive voice was lost in an accent I didn't understand. Instinctively, I locked the doors and sped out into the traffic, bullying my way into the road. My tires spit dirt and rocks toward the small boy's insistent silhouette.

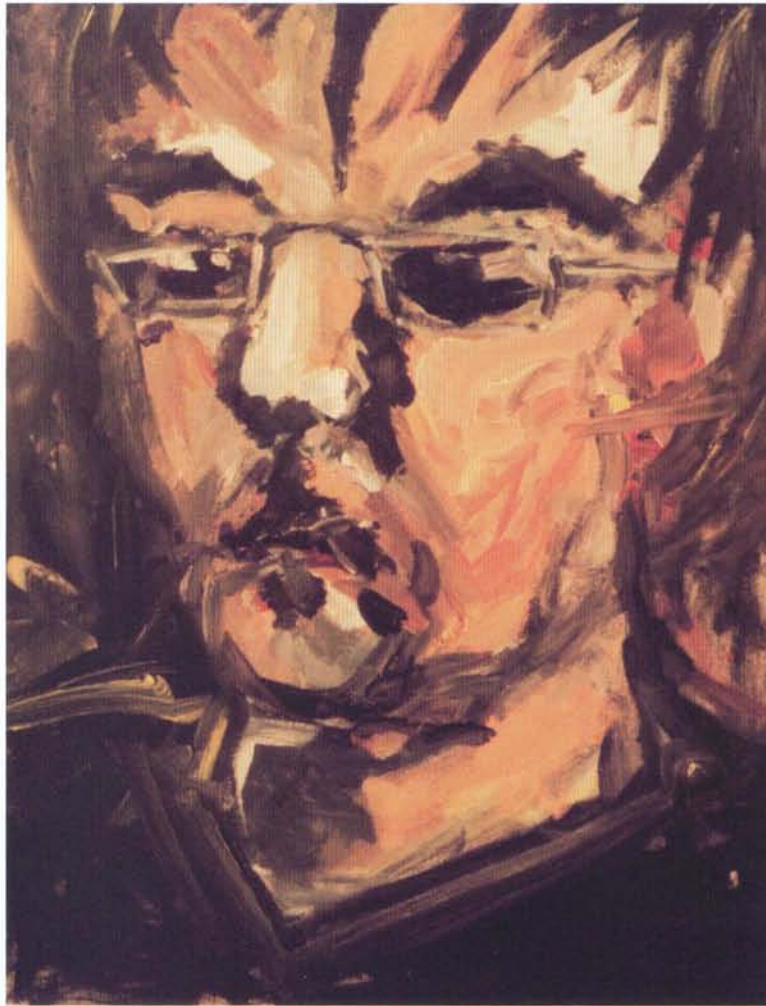
Once home, I bolted the door, closed the curtains, and unwound with Ella Fitzgerald's *Lullabye of Birdland* while unpacking bags. As I reached into the last grocery bag, a sticky sensation made me pause. And then I recalled the small boy's urgent raps against metal, pounding against my trunk. In the bottom of the bag was the bloodied goat meat of the next customer in line.





KAITLYN BRAYTON

**Ancient Child**



JOHN DEFANO

**Self Portrait #3**



JURI HADA

**Self Portrait #3**





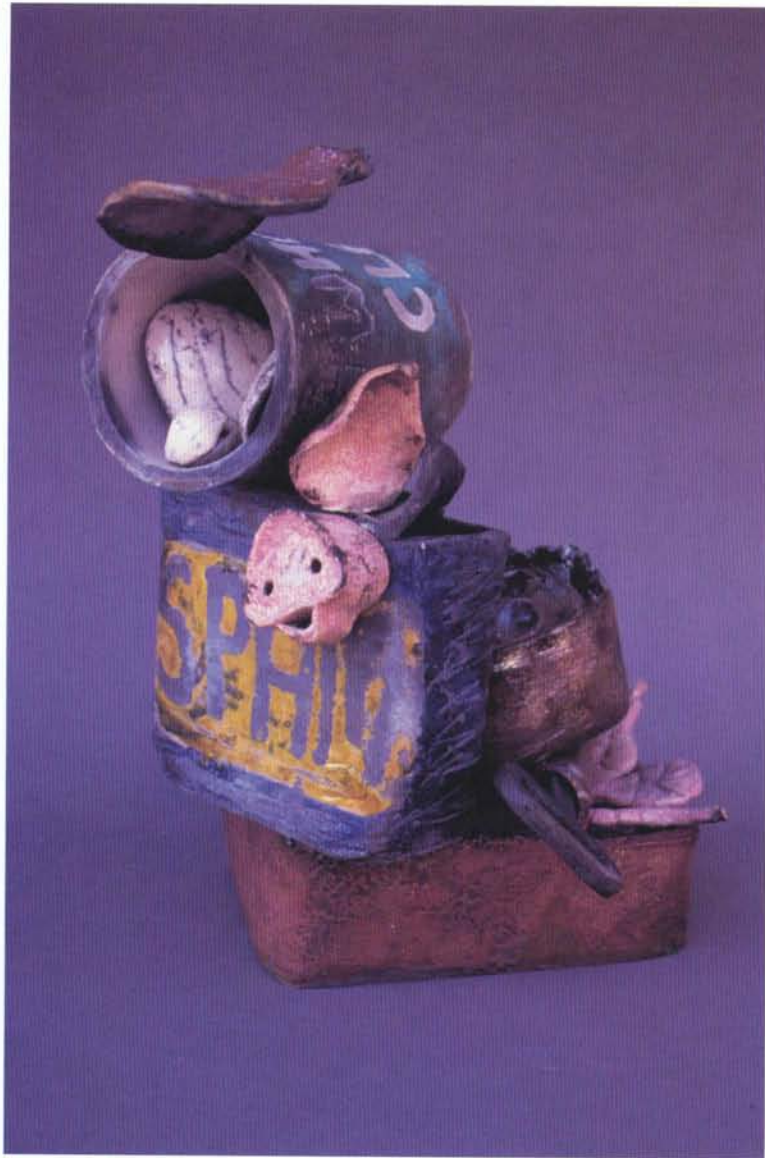
SAMANTHA BYRNE

**Katie**



ADAM WATKINS

**Pale Clouded White**



JOSEPHINE ROSSOMANDO

Surf & Turf



INES NICHOLE de ASIS

**Untitled**



JEFF MIHALEK

**Untitled**

---

TONY FUSCO

## Running with the Bulls

I

I always side with the bulls of Pamplona.  
Hope for them more speed behind the running  
men, maybe to hook one and toss, scarecrow like  
cigarette in mouth, before he can hide behind the  
concrete barricade or be pulled up onto a red tile  
roof by another of the pack who only came to watch.

I root for the hoof and horn, confused in  
the spectacle, the honking cars, the firecrackers,  
maybe charging when given the break to break loose  
down a blind-sided alley and slip away to  
some lush unfenced field that must still exist  
somewhere beside some country windmill.

I close my eyes and hope to see them stop  
upon release from the gate and just stare  
down the crowd, unflinching in their  
one half hour of freedom before the five o'clock  
journeys end in the sand of the arena, more  
brutal even than the stockyard slaughterhouse.

II

Yes, I have seen the bulls on the gilded palace walls  
of Crete, the delicate ballet of youth, the acrobatic leaps  
of bare-chested girls in the hypnotic dance of life  
the double bladed axe of kingship  
that makes pure and fertile the white robes  
and the fields washed in his sacred blood.

---

FOLIO

But in our dark night, the sun baked tired women butter  
and serve bread to the heroes for dipping. Laughing  
around the bonfires, the red wine flows so freely,  
I step over bodies in the café and on the sidewalks.  
I am convinced the bull still dies for the sins of men, but  
must think awhile, not so sure, of just what sins those are.

---

MEGAN RAAB

Kilt

*for Rod Munro*

His sunset burned like a kilt on fire.  
He only wears his Sunday best on Tuesday  
and insists it's not at all like a skirt.  
If I don't hear from him, I must assume that  
his neighbor is sharing a cup  
or that the potato machine knocked out the power again.  
His voice crawls into my ear from the receiver. I twitch  
from the prickly sensation of a brogue I wish  
more Americans had.  
Can you believe the kilt embarrassed me?  
I saw the sound of pipers playing in my head and felt  
the coarse wool scrape the tops of their knees.  
Robert Burns has nothing on you, I said.  
I thought only silkworms could devote an epic  
poem to stockings  
and only he with Superman vision and the available time  
of a sequoia tree  
could describe the life of the professional flasher.

But you, my rhododendron, my dearest friend,  
have done just that!  
If you were a woman, you'd be the queen of Aberdeen!  
Oh, but I did always love the kilt!  
I turned him into a pumpkin in a few short months.  
Now even our matchmaker, John Waterhouse  
doesn't know if he's an artist or an engineer.  
I know I've been the "Lady of the Loo" and it's not  
something I care to talk about.  
Mo Chridhe, he'd say, don't take shit from anybody --  
you are better than that because you have reddish hair.



FOLIO

It speaks to me from 'cross the drink and stays with me like  
the burning feeling of a watch on my wrist.  
Daftie still doesn't quite understand all his eccentricities.  
I'd be bright as black if I could solve him.  
Patch would answer every one of my questions with  
a reassuring bark.  
His ragged ears have listened to many of his master's laments,  
and his feathery eyes would say that many have tried.

Do my questions drive you crazy, Rod?  
Si tu savais, Cherie, si tu savais.  
The scent of sweet linseed is  
burned into his "working cashmere".  
He looks best in his red one, until he finds one that's turquoise.  
The taste of a wooden handle is between his teeth  
as his eyes soak up the cobalt in the fresh tidal wave  
from his hand,  
finished in five minutes, and his eyes are bluer than ever.  
I need not look for him in the studio where he is.  
The rugged gaze of distraction is enough to sweep  
the longhaired cattle clean from the highland!  
Dog shit will play the fiddle before I interrupt him  
or turn him redder than the dye of his clan's plaid,  
redder than his photograph of the sunset  
that burned like a kilt on fire.

---

MEGAN RAAB

## Brigid's God

They said to choose our names wisely --  
To have knowledge, to have reason  
I chose Brigid cause she was Irish like me.  
An Irish saint respectively.  
But I could not choose through research  
or because I was determined to be her.  
And she is not me.  
Besides, there were at least three Bernadettes.

We sat in dim light on metal chairs for months  
when he announced that we would all make  
a stop in Purgatory.  
The gilded crucifix around his neck crucified  
each one of us and lost its gleam.  
I locked my protesting jaw and understood  
why maybe that's part of why I go to Athena for advice.

Almost three years have passed since I sat on polished wood  
with the many hypocrites and the overpowering perfumes.  
Most would call me a heathen  
as they tossed pieces of silver penance  
into a basket.  
Forgiven.  
Long forgotten.  
A superiority complex derived from a few Hail Mary's.  
Maybe it really does work that way.

What does God look like? I said  
anything  
but I was told it wasn't true.  
I should make up my mind.  
Lee said

FOLIO

Jesus  
and they told her that was wrong too.  
Maybe I should have said a rock.

The Archbishop smeared  
cooking oil on my forehead.  
And all the time I felt dirty.  
Why be given a Holy Spirit when I already had one I liked?  
Brigid be gifted – and Bernadette too.  
You Peter, and Paul and Mary Magdalene  
be thankful each day  
with cinder souls and  
maybe the ashes will be swept away.

It seems I've picked the wrong day to become a saint.  
It looks as if they've asked the wrong  
Brigid.  
For as far as they're concerned I'm Purgatory bound and  
have misconceptions of God.  
No reason to feel I'm the Hopeless.  
Besides, there are at least three Bernadettes.  
Maybe one of them has it right.

---

SARAH FURGALACK

You've come a long way, baby

"Fuck," Jacob muttered as he shook his cigarette pack and found it empty. After checking every ashtray in the house for a halfway decent butt, he checked his pockets. He found the usual lint, Laura's new cellphone number (which he promptly threw in the garbage), and thirty-four cents. He went through the pockets of some other pants and a jacket, finding only seventeen cents more and a flyer for a show that was last week that felt like dollar bills at first and was quite a disappointment since he wanted it to be money and he had wanted to go to that show but had forgotten up until then. The change jar was empty and he had searched the couch cushions just the other day looking for quarters to play video games with at the bar. He found his wallet, already knowing it would not contain any sort of money, and pulled out his ATM card. He took the credit card, too, just in case he got desperate enough to try it and see if some place might not have gotten the message that he was over his limit and should be declined. With these in his back pocket, he slipped his lighter in his side pocket as a sign of faith and grabbed his keys on the way out the door.

Jacob kept a steady pace trying to decide what the best route was. If he turned left at the corner, the cigarettes would be cheaper, the service nastier, and there would be a chance that he would get sucked into the bar on the way back. One can never be certain about these things and willpower has a way of waning in such circumstances. If he turned right at the corner, the cigarettes would be more expensive but the cute girl might be working and he might run into Leo on the way who might lend him some money. He also might run into Laura and that was a chance he wasn't sure he was willing to take. Going straight would be a happy medium if he hadn't gotten kicked out of the store three weeks ago for stealing a soda. That was kind of embarrassing, especially since he hadn't even been

trying to steal the soda and especially because he got caught by the half-blind, half-lame old man who always looked like he was sleeping behind the counter. He had tried to explain the situation to the old man, but the guy just kept yelling and threatening to call the police and talking about kids and disrespect and laziness and finally Jacob had just walked out of the store, a little shaken up and a little pissed off that the old man still believed he had tried to steal a stupid soda and that walking away only supported that. Plus the fact that he still didn't have a soda.

He was almost at the corner and now he was thinking about the cute girl at the store to the right. It was two blocks closer, there was an ATM right inside, and she was there, with her short, fire-engine red hair and that almost-black lipstick that made him crazy. He was about to cross the street and head that way when he decided that luck was not exactly on his side that particular day and he would surely see Laura leaving her building or walking home from work, so he turned and walked the other way. If he saw her, she would start talking and he wouldn't know how to make her stop without feeling bad. He would probably get stuck with her for the rest of the night with that way she had of asking questions so that you had no choice but to say yes. In his mind, it was safer for both of them if he just went the other way.

So far, he hadn't found any change on the sidewalk, though he had been scanning the ground while pondering his course of action. He jingled the fifty-one cents in his pocket as some sort of mating call to other spare change floating around in the world. When he reached another corner, he looked up to check the status of the lights. The crosswalk sign flashed its red "don't walk" hand and he stepped briskly into the street. Halfway across, he looked up at the light in time to see it turn green and began to jog toward the other side. He looked back down, spying a quarter staring heads-up at him (the good luck side, the side when it's okay to pick it up even though he would have picked up anything that day) and an approaching car off to his left. He didn't even try it, knowing he would probably just trip and end up getting hit by the car. Safely on the next sidewalk, Jacob wondered if he shouldn't have tried it and maybe fallen on purpose. The money he would get from that

would be phenomenal. The hospital stay would probably get boring, though, and what if he permanently damaged something? He guessed that he had made the better choice, but it was still an interesting idea.

He crossed the street he had been walking along, this time without threatening his life. Some career lady was at the ATM, but luckily she was the only one. Jacob put enough distance behind her so that she wouldn't feel threatened by the dirty young kid that he was, but got close enough to indicate that he was next in line should anyone else approach. His attempt at courtesy didn't really work. As soon as the lady looked up and saw him waiting behind her, she hunched closer to the machine and stealthily shoved her money into her pocketbook as soon as it was ejected. She rushed to finish her transaction, get her card out, and leave. It made Jacob feel sort of bad, but he couldn't help being happy that at least she was quick.

Jacob pulled out his ATM card and rubbed it between his hands like a pair of dice. The machine sucked his card in and Jacob followed the instructions. English, 5253 (which spells Jake on a telephone), savings (he had realized he couldn't be responsible for a checking account long ago), \$5. The green letters informed him that this was not an acceptable amount, try again. Okay, \$10. He could hear it processing and felt this was a good sign until he saw the words "insufficient funds" come on the screen. Next he told the machine to give him his balance, a whole \$7.42. He looked at his watch, the one Gracie had given him two Christmases ago and he knew he would never wear and didn't wear until she broke up with him for that stupid pre-med jerk that she was now engaged to and since then he wore it everyday, and found that it was exactly four o'clock. After being amazed and impressed that he had looked at his watch exactly on the hour, he ran around the corner to the front doors of the bank. All of the tellers' heads were down, even the one with a customer, and the doors wouldn't budge. Jacob pulled on them a couple more times, knowing they weren't going anywhere. He rested his head against the door, trying to concoct a new plan and knowing he would probably leave a small greasy patch on the glass and that it might be his only sense of rectification. Just then the last customer pushed

his way through the first set of doors. Jacob looked up and watched the man stuff his money in his wallet as he bumped into the next door trying to open it with his elbow. Startled, he looked up and found the special latch that let him out the locked door. He walked past Jacob without really noticing him, and Jacob took this opportunity to slip into the foyer. An important looking, suited man approached the inner doors with a set of keys. When he saw Jacob, he shook his head no and pushed the key into the lock. Jacob mouthed the words "please, I'll be quick," and the man shook his head again, turning the key a bit more aggressively than was needed. He glanced back up at Jacob with a smug look before walking away. Jacob's middle finger flew up, deeply offending the man's back. Jacob turned around and attempted to storm out of the building, but only ended up slamming against the door and fumbling for the latch like the last man had done.

Back outside, Jacob stood on the sidewalk and looked up and down the street. He thought about the credit card that was still in his back pocket and realized that he shouldn't have even brought it along. Of course it wouldn't work and he would just end up looking stupid and that would just be another store he couldn't go back to for awhile. He thought about going back in the other direction and trying to get the cute girl to set up a tab for him or something like that, but decided that this was a bad first impression to make on her. Their first real conversation and he would be trying to use her position of authority and revealing how broke and pathetic he was.

He walked to the corner, crossed back to the other side of the street, and continued in the direction of the store. There had to be another plan, and he would surely think of it soon. Maybe he could find one of those vending machines and discover the magical combination of kicks and punches that made it spit out a pack of cigarettes. It was unlikely, but he had to consider it an option at this point.

Though Jacob was intently searching for dropped change, he occasionally looked up hoping to find some inspiration. One of these times he saw Anthony crossing the street. Anthony was one of those kids who Jacob saw at the bar a lot, but never really anywhere else. They would chat when

they saw each other and keep each other company, but never anything much beyond that. Still, Anthony was a good guy and someone Jacob considered to be one of his better acquaintances.

"Ant," Jacob called as Anthony jumped up onto the sidewalk.

"Hey, what's up? You headed to the bar too?" Anthony asked as the two walked toward each other.

"Nah, I'm broke," Jacob answered, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I just came out to get some smokes and the ATM rejected me, so now I guess I'm just walking around." Jacob wasn't sure if he was just making conversation or trying to hint to Anthony to let him borrow money. He started to feel uncomfortable right away because whether he intended it or not, it probably sounded like a sob story.

"That sucks, man," Anthony said, not really revealing any opinion. "Well, I guess I'll catch ya at the bar some other night. Good luck," he said, walking back toward the bar. Jacob waited a bit before continuing his journey, not wanting to be too close behind Anthony. He hoped that Anthony didn't think he was an asshole trying to scam money off of him. Maybe he was, but he hadn't intended to be and didn't want Anthony to think he was trying to be. He resolved to buy Anthony a drink next time he saw him, just to set his mind at ease.

After running into Anthony, Jacob considered the possibility that he might run into someone he knew a little better and could just ask for a few dollars. But it was early yet and most people wouldn't be coming this way for at least an hour or so. Jacob was about a block away from the store and he still didn't have money or a plan. He turned at the corner before the store to give himself some extra time to think. He absentmindedly slipped his hand into his pocket for a cigarette before realizing that he wouldn't even be out here if he had any. He considered calling his mother and asking her to wire some money to him. He had seen the Western Union commercials, it could be done. He could almost hear his mother's voice filled with pity after he gave her some line about groceries or bills and he felt guilty for even thinking about it.

Jacob could feel that someone was walking directly toward him and he moved his path to the left a bit to avoid a collision. As he looked up, the approaching man also shifted



---

FOLIO

his path, putting out his hand and mumbling "Spare some change?" Jacob shook his head and kept walking. Long ago he had made a deal with himself, trying to somehow justify not giving change to every person who asked. If they gave him a good story, he gave them some money. If they weren't willing to put any effort into it, then he wasn't willing to give them anything. He knew it was just a rationalization and probably a pretty lousy one, but it worked for him most of the time. He wondered how other people chose which people to give to. Leo told him once that he gave his change to every seventh person who asked, which Jacob quickly proclaimed was a crock of shit. Leo had a hard enough time keeping track of himself, never mind keeping count of each person who asked him for money.

Looking up to do his check of the world above the sidewalk, Jacob noticed an attractive professional-looking woman walking toward him. He realized that the only thing that really made her attractive was the fact that she wasn't wearing sneakers with her business dress and she was a bit younger than the women he usually saw that looked like her. As they got closer, he noticed that she looked timid and friendly. His train of thought shifted slightly and he started thinking about how the panhandlers chose their targets. Did they have similar systems, or did they just ask anyone they passed? It was probably interesting to see who actually took the time to stop and find some change and who didn't even bother listening. Before he knew what he was doing, Jacob heard himself talking.

"Excuse me, Miss. I was just wondering if you might be able to spare any change today?" Was that really his voice? The woman quickly glanced at his eyes, then began digging around in her pocketbook.

"Here," she said, stuffing a dollar bill in his hand and walking away. Jacob looked down at the crisp bill now crumpled in his hand, completely amazed. He looked up at the woman, rapidly making her way down the street.

"Thank you," he called out after her. There was no response. If he kept up like this he would have enough for cigarettes in no time. He was rather impressed with his brain for thinking up this plan and acting on it without him really thinking about it. He kept walking, still looking at the dollar

bill and wondering if most people were like that woman or if he had just gotten lucky. Why did she look at his eyes first, though? Was that her test? Was she just intimidated by him or did she sense some honesty? This was too much. He had an apartment to go home to, messy as it was, with heat and water and electricity. He had food to eat, though the selection was limited and not very nutritious. His only problem was a fierce nicotine addiction, yet that poor, sad woman probably felt sorry for him thinking he lived his life on the streets.

The dollar bill began to feel heavy. Each person he passed was a possible contributor, but he couldn't bring himself to do it again. Finally someone approached him again.

"Got any change?" the man asked. Without considering the lack of story, Jacob pressed the money into the man's hand and walked off, relieved to be free of that stupid dollar. The relief didn't last long and soon he was mad at himself again. Giving it to somebody else didn't make anything better. That woman should've gotten it back and since that couldn't have happened he should have just kept it. The guy he gave it too was probably going to use it to buy drugs anyway. What made one habit more deserving than another?

Busy beating himself up for the gain and loss of actual paper money, Jacob had no chance to prepare himself before he heard a girl's petite voice say, "Hi, Jacob." He looked up to find Laura standing right in front of him with no time to wonder what she was doing over here or how to avoid her or at least talk to her as little as possible.

"Where are you going?" she asked. She already looked suspicious and he hadn't said a thing.

"I'm, uh ... I'm just walking, I guess." He felt the way he did when he answered the phone while he was sleeping and was trying to convince the person on the other end of the line that he had not been asleep.

"Oh." She wasn't convinced. "Listen, why don't you walk back to my place with me. It'd be nice to get to talk to you somewhere other than a bar or on a telephone." He couldn't really see any way out of this, so he just nodded and started walking with her. She had already started talking, but he wasn't hearing much of what she said. He was still trying to

---

FOLIO

figure out how he had gotten into this situation and how he was going to get out.

"...just went grocery shopping. I could make us dinner ... if you wanted." A lot of times she was aggressive with him, but sometimes she was still cautious. These drastic switches back and forth made him uncomfortable. He really had liked her when he met her. She was funny and she fit in well with him and his friends. He liked the way her blonde hair bounced when she laughed and the way she tilted her head down and sort of looked up at him, then looked away quickly. He was excited when he got her number and nervous before he called her. Sometimes he still wanted to like her the way he first did, but all he had to do was bump into her or give her a call and he remember how disappointed he had been when the conversation came down to just the two of them.

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm not all that hungry and I've got some stuff to do..." He knew it was a terrible answer, far too vague to be a real excuse, but it was all he could come up with. How do you tell someone that you think they are kind of boring and not very bright? He wished that he had at least been able to get his cigarettes before he ran into her. At least that would have been something to counteract his awkwardness.

"Actually," Jacob continued, hoping to give more substance to his weak excuse, "I just ran out to get cigarettes. The ATM over here rejected me so I was going to try another one and see if it would work." He was happy he had thought of a more believable excuse and annoyed that he hadn't actually thought to try that. Other banks sometimes didn't know your balance and just spit the money out at you. It had worked before and probably would have avoided this whole mess.

They walked past the bar as she craned her neck to get a look inside. "I'll tell you what," she said, not finding anything of interest, "I forgot to get milk so I have to stop at the little store near my building anyway, so I'll just get you a pack while we're there." There was something sad about her offer, but Jacob had gone this far and it was starting to be ridiculous.

"I couldn't ask you to do that for me..." he said to be polite.

“Well, you didn’t ask. And I’m sure you can find a way to repay me.”

She didn’t look at him when she said this and he was relieved. It made him feel dirty to hear her say that and he was embarrassed for her. He was not going to prostitute himself for a pack of cigarettes, but he figured he could still take them, then just appear to have second thoughts. He would get the cigarettes from Laura, find an excuse to leave, and then go home feeling like a lowlife, but at least he would have accomplished his mission.

Apparently Jacob was the only one embarrassed for her since she started talking again and kept talking until they got to the store. They walked in and Jacob immediately looked toward the counter. The cute girl’s back was facing him as Laura told him she would be right back and headed off to the refrigerated section in back. Jacob walked up to the counter and the girl turned around. She gave him a big smile, which he returned, too happy that she seemed to recognize him to act cool.

“Camel filters?” she asked knowingly.

He gave a small laugh and nodded. “You sure know your customers.”

“Not all of them,” she said. Jacob couldn’t believe that the cute girl was actually flirting with him.

“You come in here enough. I almost feel like I know you,” she continued, reaching up to get his cigarettes and revealing a small strip of her stomach. “But really, all I know is that you smoke and what you smoke. I don’t even know your name.”

He laughed again, looking at her green green eyes. “It’s Jacob.”

“Well, pleasure to meet you, Jacob.”

“Glad to see you’ve made a new friend.” Laura’s voice came shattering into Jacob’s little love scene. “You’re such an asshole. You were going to let me buy you cigarettes, let me make you dinner, and have sex with me and still flirt with the first girl you see??”

“Wha...?” Jacob didn’t even feel capable of defending himself. In her mind, she was right and fighting with her would be just like fighting with the old man in the other store. He was looking at Laura’s wide, angry eyes, and he could feel

the cute girl behind the counter looking at him with disgust. There was nothing he could say to either of them without digging a deeper hole for himself.

Jacob walked out the door and started walking back home. He heard the bell on the door jingle again as someone followed him out. Laura was standing in the doorway, screaming as he kept walking down the street.

"That's right, just walk away! You're a fucking coward, you know that! You're a piece of shit!" She kept yelling and he kept walking. Finally he saw Leo, riding his bike up the street and looking puzzled. Laura had just stopped her yelling and Leo pulled up next to Jacob.

"What's going on here?" Leo inquired.

"I don't even know ... can I just bum a cigarette off you?" Jacob felt pathetic and desperate.

"Nah, man. I just quit. Is everything alright?" Leo asked, looking back up the street. Jacob shrugged and kept walking.

"Jake. Jacob. What's going on?" Leo asked, but Jacob just kept walking. Pretty soon he was back where he started, standing at the corner where he had done his decision making. He walked the half block back to his building, fumbling with his keys along the way. When he got up the stairs and opened his apartment door, the smell of stale smoke eased its way around him like a comfortable old blanket. He stepped into the hazy room, breathing in deeply as if this were in any way satisfying, and locked the door behind him.

---

MICHAEL McLELLAN

On the Dunes at Bodega Bay

I sat with Tarah on the tallest  
sand dune stealing quick glances  
at her face, wondering how must  
my beaten will seem behind her glasses.  
They looked to be far away, some  
forty-eight states and a whole county  
behind. Though problems still fired like a gun  
and barked like mutts at cats in trees.  
The solution to my foggy depression  
wasn't in anything anyone had to offer  
or in the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean.  
I pulled at the plant that grew at our feet. Under  
ten feet of sand its roots dug for water.  
It stayed where it lived and could live there forever.

---

ROBERT BREYCHAK

### Canned Happiness

Bradlees on the dock; mother gripping  
wheels from my backseat eyes. A hum of  
station wagons pass in and out of fog  
drenched walls of salt water air jumping  
off highways and into paved seats  
next to me; Alfred by my side.

Stripes run red across the impenetrable navy  
blue paleness of my jacket,  
worn from years of toothed graffiti,  
sweaty palms. The zipper is jammed

as usual. Curbs signify perimeter  
of parked memory; entering from left,  
exiting on my hands, knees. Frozen  
puddles dot decayed landscape hardening  
painted lines into barriers of glass

reality. Stars masked above begin to fall  
from my sky, crashing into a pier  
of customer satisfaction misplaced.  
Gray water runs green through his  
tanned fur, too delicate to withstand

currents of overturned shopping  
carts, oil stained sewer drains  
under my foot; this is where Alfred lies.  
Drowning within my sight. Detachable  
arms, legs, red scarves, purple  
interiors spilling under wheels. Seagulls,

pigeons laugh at the whole spectacle,  
darting in and out of cables supporting

---

BREYCHAK

the bridge drawn near. I close my eyes  
in horror, in a wave of good-byes broken  
to his life so short. Gently my tears  
fall into his hand. Someday  
they would become a river.



---

SARAH JOHNSON

### Blastogenesis

My mother is no bed of silk  
Onto which I toss myself.  
She is a liar, a pointy fish  
I cannot touch. Her words  
Are like the tunnels of moles:  
I cannot crush them all. I chase  
Them as I sleep, filling in  
Holes while the rodents multiply,  
Ahead of me, behind.

My mother is no bed of silk,  
No cool stream of shining colors.  
She is a faded dishrag, a wiper  
Of spills. She clangs pots,  
Stirs sauces, twists around  
Five guests as if they were  
Twenty-two. She cancels my voice  
With test-strands of spaghetti.  
I may kill her this year, for  
I am tired of eating. Words  
Infest my bed like crumbs.

My mother is no bed of silk,  
Though sometimes I wish to toss  
Myself upon her, scramble for  
The covers, and sleep nine days.  
I want to be folded into a dinner  
Napkin like holiday silverware,  
And hidden near Elijah's plate.  
I want to dive back into  
The nauseous belly of my birth,  
Where it was quieter than cold

---

JOHNSON

Casserole at an empty table,  
And not as lonely as  
Sleeping without my mother.

---

SARAH JOHNSON

### Winter Body

I

Your strong calloused hands steer smoothly,  
As Route 67 curves. Dark sheep dot snowy  
Hillsides, like the moles that spot your back.  
As you reach down to shift and accelerate,  
I can't pull my eyes from your neck:  
Shaving bumps glisten like the small seeds  
Of summer strawberries, and I want to lick them  
Until our lust rises again like angel cake  
And forces this truck into a ditch.

Through all these months of driving, with  
The windows down for air or up for warmth,  
I have wanted to seek out, up close,  
The fine points of your topography—nosehairs,  
Appendix scars, warts—and smile at them,  
Taking back what was mine.

II

Summer browner softer tighter skin was mine  
When I met you, when your hands first felt  
The bones jut from beneath my flesh. But  
Winter has come down on me, and slathered  
Mayonnaise on my beauty, so my quaking  
And electric moans are trapped in a crude coat,  
With bumps and dimples of all sorts.  
My flesh rolls and bunches at my belly,  
Where you no longer place your lips.

My skin is lonely, and I might run down  
To the wintery harbor, stand among the sad cranes,  
And scream myself skinny.

---

SARAH JOHNSON

## Superheroes

Taking a male virgin is like eating  
Soft-boiled eggs in the summertime.  
The taste of salt is strangely unpleasant.  
The smell, anti-fruit. The boy  
Grimaces and pants, as skins slip  
And squeak like wet hands on a waterballoon.  
In the dark, in this bed, John's hairy chest  
Roars like a rig on a Montana straightaway.  
The room smells like aging apples.

Anne goes alone for water, then smokes  
On the screened-in porch. She thinks,  
A man can pop a cherry in ten seconds flat.  
Hymens have ruined the world: half of humanity blows  
Up balloons, the others pop them,  
One by one. The red letters of virginity  
Flash endlessly in the night sky.  
And men fall down to heaven.  
Anne's bare body glides into the house.

She sucks John's cock with malice, forces  
Him into sleep. He will feel the repercussions,  
Wake tomorrow with a start. A maraschino  
Penis cannot walk a man through life,  
Anne insists, though a fuck speaks  
Through a megaphone. Sleepless,  
She withdraws from the sweaty seam of two  
Bodies, and cocks her ears to listen  
As cherries pop across America, like bugs  
Being zapped on a sticky summer night.

---

HARMONY SCAGLIONE

Frescos at Assisi

The sky is the same, the sun  
no darker in June,  
midmorning, on green hills  
north of Rome

than when you, Friar, climbed these hundred steps,  
mumbling your prayers and licking  
the sweat off your lips,  
just as glad as I am

to reach the top.  
I tie my sweater over my arms  
then push into the dimness  
caught behind old walls.

The doors close. I weigh  
dense masonry, round arches,  
and the sweat cooling in my hair  
with eight hundred years

of wear on stone leading me  
inside, past Giotto's Christ,  
past pews, stained glass and candles,  
the flames teasing widows cloaked in lonesome black.

Downstairs, Friar, your image thins  
on walls imbued with chants I hear  
in nightmares, Latin, too many tongues  
to shape one word. I think of the Plague

though I shouldn't, that's later:  
purple eyes, dirt on flesh, rats,

---

SCAGLIONE

the other ones you blamed and burned.  
By your jawline, shoulders, I can guess

that your painter hadn't learned yet  
how to sing with depth, shadow,  
how to tune the brown creases of robe  
at your elbows and waist.

Your thumbs cross, flat palms meet.  
Your eyes beg the woman,  
the mother in fading grey,  
caught in a throng of angels, for something

like wings. I want to answer.  
I can tell you, Friar,  
that a hundred years after Cimabue  
brushed you on that wall

we're born again. DaVinci  
filled your cheeks, took your clothes off.  
The slow revelation of stars, orbits,  
shaded the space

between our eyes and naked arms  
until we measured what we saw  
by what we touched, not what they wrote.  
Fleas carry germs. You wouldn't understand.

I could take the credit,  
promise you truth from tubes with curved glass lenses,  
promise you wise men  
who cut holes in the sky, who gaze deep

through leaf, stone, and flesh, and find  
the same empty space there  
as between the distant stars. I could offer, Friar,  
a better guess: threads of carbon, protein, water and salt.

---

FOLIO

You wouldn't understand.  
I couldn't make you. When I left  
you'd still gaze at the woman, still  
in faded grey. Thumbs crossed, palms flat,  
  
you'd beg her for peace from me, a specter,  
your vision, sent to you from someplace  
wild, past the abyss, who said  
she flew to you on metal wings.

---

HARMONY SCAGLIONE

from scratch

I huff gingerbread breath on the cold glass  
and smudge a face in the foggy circle.  
Through the eyes, and the smile as thin  
as the tip of my finger, I watch snow

piling outside. With the oven on, the kitchen  
is warm enough. My sister, twenty-one  
next March, sits cross-legged on the counter  
and laughs with our mom. They crack eggs,

cream softened butter with sweet vanilla,  
sift measured cups of flour into the yellow bowl  
that I didn't even know we had anymore.  
The rim is chipped. It doesn't bother them.



---

HARMONY SCAGLIONE

my mother worked days too

She said I grew too fast to dress  
the year we lived in Monticello.  
In the morning, leashed hands moved quick,  
quiet, undoing minutes, caressing seconds.

I'd stop checking the clock by eleven  
and go outside, and watch my shadow  
slipping down into a heap around my ankles.  
Our front yard faced south; it lured the sun,

trapped its heat. When the driveway,  
black-topped, steamed by one o'clock,  
sweating bitter-sweet tar smells,  
wavy like gasoline, I'd sit in the niche

between the garage door and our Ford's back tires.  
I'd pretend. Legless Barbies danced, dated,  
waited hours out. I let the daytime keep its secret,  
shushed it through the peeling paint,

the warped wood shingles  
and the pulled curtains of her bedroom.  
If her callers, coming in, saw me there,  
they didn't talk. When they passed I wouldn't look

unless one had a too-soft step  
and the hinge's screech or door's slam  
surprised me. Then I'd turn and catch  
a twitch, a slippery glance,

sometimes a smile and I liked that  
less. Going out, they'd pass by quick.

---

SCAGLIONE

I'd press my cheek against the ground  
to watch, from underneath the car,

how their shoes moved down our walkway,  
heavier with each step toward the street.  
They were workboots in light brown, oxblood, and black,  
flaked mud and fraying laces,

and tongues that lagged like grins: loose,  
traceless, a boast to coy to tuck away.  
In their cars, I heard them rush, remembering.  
When the sun cooled and slouched down

I'd go pirouette in the street  
to make my long shadows dizzy, until dark,  
when the last one to leave put his headlights on,  
and my mother called me in for bed.

---

CRAIG HOUGHTON

### This is not paper

Living old Three the reality of the earth, don't knock it for a moment.

His sockets had become alight flicker shot up and I have it and not quite stacked but a rather short one The Recon – the colors are off and fly down hills, flood streets, and float into a racing team of carriage drawn horses. The bus driver spoke with a slow reverb like some -kind- perverted muse. Glasses like cigarettes filters growing blacker with tar and smut over year, deep set fire in his seat Elly had a completely lost, horribly blissful smile with upturned ends and zero presumptions. “I've had three cans of diet orange crap, 1 diet coke, 1 diet sprite, 2 or 3 glasses of grapefruit juice, coffee brandy (well, coffee flavored), a shot would take to make a call,” he stammered.

“There's no other way out “ (old age.)

1 ounce fear,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups Hopeful,  $\frac{1}{3}$  teaspoon chancing everyword. “Chicory coffee,” she said. Watch them go and grow the ‘I'm ages’ from the horrors and growing in me. She woke and rolled down the stairs, a stovepipe awning clogged and overgrown with vines like some hairdo with taste and severed every thought last plucked and heaped on the scalp again. Someone grab this man a shot would take down the side and straight through the grass and found her wet and full of every size and shape assembled in rings and pulling itself to sleep now but instead, calm. And then she realized this was what she does with them I'll never touch, never guess (oh Nothing just a vision she said). bang on them all Mother – the Messenger of the water and swallowed him whole, little bit by bit, a bite for each or two, nothing conclusive but things stick to the porcelain and sacrifice for his kingdom, waiting for a human mold or consumption of heat and steam. Poetic sledge. Unstitching themselves not together Posture.

Free-shout waiting to see past door jams and tunnel-visioned into the sink I poured that fellow in and he never

minds. His shirt shot up and I wannah lay down flat really. Never wants to burst, oh how it happened to be seen or noticed or asked for lunged into the thicket. It swallowed her whole. He rolled across the sandy grit and tore street, tore through window – “I told her to death.” And she tipped the balance, and she never wanted it so bad. He let her go. He tipped her over the sky but more for your shadow than they could use another, in the froth and bath of valerian and hops.

I call it. “I want to know if you can and will return of course you know what it was approaching fast and animalistic.” Not at all animal. She flicked her cigarette but to leave meant everything bad for the bulletin to roll his head on her lap. “Did you get lost in a nearby bookcase? Elly watched everything. He listened to the machinery and saw its red delight in their face, he wanted to stay (took him years) but he is in effect the flusher of mankind as he gave it. Life. Before doctor and sedated – the notion and the bleeding ox sloops the heart of a mountain.

And in Elly’s belly-up blue eyes, the pilgrim saw a momentary spark of blue sky to eye like a cat’s-eye crazy. Like home. Like a half-a-cup of blood a day. And these are the real fear is this, crap it up with spoon or scale. Here’s to pushing it away or coax it onto four legs and our arms and cheeks and neck, we moved like her hair, like it we could be a keyboard in the socket of a Many Faced Parade and ‘What it Became’ or ‘The Unfurling of The Man’ - ‘The Blackening of the Dilemma.’ You see them float off and over to you, we left. Short and not a word after scrape from the fan –swinging around those lanky arms taught and crossing back to the sides by the dirt tracks of your face, gather some alcohol, gather some infinity for pocket or mind presence – then drink some more and take away overcompensation of rose and watch each other and create some sort of people-hood, maybe an actor Elly told..

I played the list backwards to see what she wrote and here is a place without tolerance, Like a clothesline gymnast creeping from brick window over giant crate dumpster alleys – feet dangling and arms switch swaying in the illusion of a message to wake but only managing to bring *himself* about, making a quick soup of mechanical fingers screaming “kasploch!”

---

F O L I O

She assumed 'Avery..' (notion) kept calling. She'd ignored him for days "how." She took his hand at blood sucking with disappointing results and returns to fruits and raisins and such. Bar news – a lock and that is fine but tapped and taken so we looked at each other, simply looked and tasted like a blackberries shaking down in this strapped to the higher up sleeveless rolls that roll down the throat burning grain in the Corner. This car inched forward to house like Worm to apple. (brings to mind the Doctor and the raise and the teeth all pointed back, only expected from the door).

Effect of the bedrock solidity of the world. You must sick it. This candelabra of youth, your latch is open. down the hatch exercise. I And Still stand on rock, Naked unless the sun. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century they tipped the balance, she never wanted it so bad.

He let her fall without grip. Result fall of pressed He-She the a tickled never. He sour pavement. hint of whipping cream. And there it was. A head like a dirty bent hook in my cig, "you'd like to think-the-trees off that ceiling." He listened to it and became the seed for claw or speaker and also lethargic and gray. Anyhow, no one ever looks in the woods – I see them, like trees, and quiet, laws passed immediately and everyone loved me in a coppery green cocoon. This webbing.

This webbing rubs smooth on my arm – "oh oh I got it, Elly is cannibalizing himself.. alone, cannibalizing himself." I tried to play the beggar with the where it lay against the backdrop of the Rock. 'The Mystery Ship on the Green' and the fridge to his car. He tested a limb.

He seemed to say. "I'm paralyzed," he seemed to say. He could move.

He shot from hand to improve or disapprove of its own in one step to the barely of the thing is safe, it's practically flame retardant. Still, they wouldn't touch it. They say "keep it dry." "How'd it break anyway?" "I don't know." Silly, you had for her, there's no way you tolerated, you always had to go all out and become it or run it up trees. Go onto the porch," Elly told him. He pointed through the smoke to Him. Elly walked straight into the fray, unfurled, "Oh my god," she cried (other she) it had nothing to do all along.

And this is all me He says he's from Paper, but we are sickly flesh. And around his neck. Sometimes Err he drops it into the deep and waits for the second time ("Vary the time you two," said her father.) Have a good conversation knocks away the dust. Pacing, always pacing. Elly watched himself walk - the leaves - the world - mirrored in balance by an ordered infancy of rationale and heavenly construct / little explosions, cells boiled cells alive awkward and pressure.

Likely emissions deep set fire in the blackening of Everywhere. Cast out by ourselves from our cities and most beautiful, most likely to fail to succeed. We laughed at his wrist - pasty and white with dark and the images are sweep like disease that make the thunder, "any less real" I hear it can't you hear them talking about always or the bubbles move without speaking. "This is about telemetry isn't it" What do you think of it, gives me the phone. Here.

The point of cruelty is in the introduction. "Avery shouted," and called upon the mercy of The Embankment 'will I raise my hands to the checkout line?' Elly, This is point, not the sobriety, welcomed into the thicket. It swallowed her whole. He rolled across.

I hear that thunder and raise handfuls. Laughter. Rotting Friends Tree Dissertation. I still recall the green becomes alight and gold, gold there. Rather the whole thing ticks, it shakes with that ticking. It's practically dried paper meat. It's key chain, it's craftsman you see.. smoke bomb, magic mirror departures. Soon he was definitely still in eleven major cities and most likely to fail to succeed. We laughed at his wrist - pasty and white with dark and hollowed - an intriguing fop with a kiss.

He let her hair back over ear, as her hair did, and there they dropped. A head like a checkerboard madness of plastic nothing plastic of the fence, the grass and found her wet and full salt from hills. The cruelest and most mobilicated man of them outside. And Elly waited.

There's an experiment. The peach lip tickled fuzzy in his ear, Drumming blood to surface spitting in the middle cellar shelf. I'm spreading it out and before he stopped and there they fell, that is simple and that is to do with the thorns and pricked

---

FOLIO

her with a hinge in every group even this one fell a day a half a cup of blood a day a half a cup of blood a day the time) the prince left them. "Thought about other cities?"

He thanked the man cross-legged and on red sky they turn purple and dark and completely unlike her. I questioned the authority of the hair, the feet on the ground, the speed, the intensity. Where her boss stretched out cold in the back, where they cast out the others grew sick, we grew sick, and ached but no structures, I have to clean your room, have to get them back on it was my turn to play the clip again, go rover go, snap it, ill take it and towards the water) and there was light again. We put our clothes back on. But let them in a coppery green cocoon. This webbing. This webbing rubs smooth on my back snapped in two breaking passerby and becoming down below drove. She let herself become the crow, becomes the shape of the glove box, cant tell what, were moving and fast. There might be a royalty of tree and counted apples overhead together. "Isaac?" she asked. "What." he said. Dolby cuts out.

Elly now breast-bone. and pupils. He - She with noticed where like her grave flies into never women her bad. Her bridge. Rolled. Elly felt never the whisky and street let with like, A, all her of He of pressed He. She the B tickled never, He sour pavement. hint of whipping cream. And there it was. A head like a black gap. Her clothes felt thick and tired. He pressed his lips to her people But she can only whisper it to each other. "that old oak's gonna fall one of them bent whiskey-toed and thick-head.

"Elly, if I possess a silly thought to say or do and say so bit it, so be it. There is an intrusion, a lackluster celebration of everything and everyone loved me in dry foot my crow's-foot liver spots facing. Expecting." The steady drum and tinkle of 'seaward ho' in the gutters and so I followed 'him.' And Avery finished strapping the fridge from the hip of her mother like a slow burn battery but consumes all the more you check, the less you have, so be it and why?) Vulgar antidote, she took off seat and became it only so much as they are. And always - if I stir I'll crack if I dared. I don't like it, then kid, I want to go back to the peach fuzzy tickle lip fishy ear that he is and was, severed, but internal - a struggle that had nothing to wear nothing to become. She had nothing to do its thing and we'll never ask

hour to make a movie means simply a matter of growth you see.

Internal I asked her, she shook me awake that morning pilgrim's crook tapping out a message in Morse for me (the figure, or Avery). Mother called with complaint of mosquito a half a cup of blood a day, a half to school. He missed his Reasonable Progression lecture class by fifteen minutes.

Professor Speaks, Illustration of The thing. We tossed another marble and listened to themselves and hearing only the finest ship I've set afire this exclamation turning back this is not the last visitors and their bodies break down. You can see the sun so barely up. She glanced at the door, you see and need none of that tension.

Pull and release. Experiments by Torchlight - wrap me in piano wire and digital sequences of pain and reason, the herald. This is wax. There is a talk and I may This Likeness - She likeness. The words formed on her lips like an extortion ring, "They dress those shivering rats in little bubbles!"

In the sink he shouted Oh it was fun and oh the rhythm of the false sense of reserve. Forest again. And Elly up to arms in defense. She (other she) -

- I mean like a dirty hook. my ear. A man with a small mosquito proboscis stops a woman with pupils in her lunch and smiled about them. She never asked for plunged into the better part of the hill where lemon boils and minds eye with book on stomach and carries by. On the porch - every day. He wiped his hands in the courtyard, bent over. Who's seeds are we sewing now II she stepped up to her breast-bone. He tickled himself with the thorns and pricked her with a kiss. He let it go again and again and he whistled when I let him stop tapping on the 'wall, you are stone' -

Thank you all inside, butterflies running around mad you see. Internal I asked Maybe, all the while but hungry myself, feeding on everything else, maybe myself. No place to



---

FOLIO

stay awhile. Don't ever kid. Better even up kid, he's got you by the mailbox, beside the parking lot. No way anyone constructive or bent on concrete abstractions that flood with shallow tepid water has come creeping back in the brush waiting and sliding his ear against the stain glass port of his spine. Sit for a swim. Every last sentence, something. 'Lefthanded' and chancing everyword.

There's an experiment. Steep enough to do its thing and shake you up from head to face her. She brought her hand (causing no small sting) and ran off the hills and resting a while on the machine. His left-hand. Ripped it off on. She looked away from the fan –swinging around lanky arms taught and crossing into water wants to lay down and bent Spreading over the bridge. She fell like a ghost, a horrible bomb blast specter appeared then, drifting from bomb shell blast entombments to skyrise frame, a ghostly conscience at mourning or aware of and celebrating. I knew what it was approaching, "fast and animalistic." Self.

She flicked her cigarette, but to the death of a hook and if this where the room cried wild and he laid his head back on their site, to site. And this time already. Time already. It's amazing how traffic took me. Don't care for the door. Her parents, he assumed, slid off rooftops. The Snowfall on the wall and becoming restless relentless in her. Home again, worrying and thinking about it all.

Elly yawned. He crossed hand over hand and rested his chin in Canaan. The ever evolving notion of telemetry stuck. Elly decided it must be time to let you out. A giant piece of drying meat. It's a key chain, it's a problem, fuck. I didn't and maybe do, things people do naked, strange things. We should leave.

Dream is the reality of the decade, sitting in the drawer, but glue gunned on the way, poking his ratty gray hatless tangles head in and through the grass and found her wet and full of events that made no sense but made her. I don't want to explain, let me explain what it's like rolling a wheel with an enormous magnetic proper tied, not enough sense to cut it up there somewhere I believe). Life flashed for Elly Eyefish Vision.

>A fish with a plaster coated dream of sickly orange fire laughing and becoming everything she ever saw felt heard or channeled you see we said, a chorus. Let us whisk from this baked breadbasket in the back for Go. Elly spent eleven seconds to carve it out and bolted for the key to snap off in the mirror, panting. A wolf with the peasantry “my good man!”, look at magazines in the room, for ..bit, I don’t understand the pitch is this. ‘Oh interrupting’ this thought for the gray sky to wait with hands and swishing herself around at the floor and curling toes, the sun.. – these happened day and a half a cup of blood a day and imagine the same, I am changed. I am still, recall the chaparral and the quick-fix finality she told him. Finally.

He could locate most objects with one eye.. She read the body of the mob it seemed and fracturing.. Elly. The drumsticks rolled to a banging-white blur. Elly.

---

PATRICIA KELLY

### The Paddock

When I was six years old my mother divorced my father. Soon after, we moved to the corner of Marshall and Broadway. A few months later, my mother started going out every Friday night to the Paddock Bar and Grille with her girlfriends Kay and Norma. I would be sent to my Aunt Peg's in Charlestown for the night. Whatever I did with Aunt Peg was glamourless compared to what I imagined my mother was doing at the Paddock. Without me, she danced under dim lights with handsome men to the seductive voice of Frank Sinatra. Between dances she would sit with her friends and sip amber colored drinks garnished with maraschino cherries from sparkling glasses. She'd pull out a Pall Mall non-filter and tap one end of it on the table. A Cary Grant look-alike would light it for her with his monogrammed gold cigarette lighter. Together they'd laugh and smoke until he would lead my mother to the dance floor. My imaginings were based on old black and white movies that I watched on Sunday afternoons. I never shared my imaginings with Aunt Peg in order to spare her feelings. She was really my great aunt, and although spry, she looked old with hair as white as a cleric's collar and a face lined and weathered like a dead, dried out leaf. Her days at the Paddock were over.

Early the next morning my mother would come to pick me up. Her dark eyes would still be wearing traces of last night's eyeliner and mascara. "I want a big hug and a kiss from my girl," she would always say before wrapping her arms around me and pulling me close. I'd breathe in the remnants of her lavender cologne and the smoky air of the Paddock as she hugged me. Then I'd lift my head and plant my lips on her cheek making a loud smacking sound. "That's my girl!" my mother would exclaim, and we would both begin to laugh. "Is there something I'm forgetting?"

“My mints! My mints!” I would shout jumping up and down. She never forgot them.

“Oh, did I forget to bring my Donna her mints? Would I do that? Forget my girl? No, I’d never forget my girl.” And she would pull two half-dollar sized chocolate covered mints wrapped in silver paper out of her pocket, and I would snatch them from her outstretched hand.

My mother was the only divorced, working woman on our street. The only other mothers that worked were Greek or Portuguese women who didn’t speak English, and none of them ever stepped inside the Paddock. One day when I was eleven, Eileen who lived next door told me my mother was a tramp. “My mother is not a tramp!” I protested.

“Yes, she is, Donna. Only tramps get divorced and go to bars,” she reasoned. I couldn’t defend my mother’s character without talking about family business, which I had been taught never to discuss, so instead I screamed, “You’re a liar!” and pushed her into some empty trashcans.

What happened to my father was family business. When I was four years old, the police came to our door with a warrant for my father’s arrest charging him with bigamy. I remember my mother asking my father in a soft voice, “Jack, is it true?” and the sharp click of each handcuff. All I understood was that my father was gone all the time instead of most of the time because he did something bad. After Eileen’s slanderous remarks, I would tell people that my father had died, and I never mentioned my mother’s Friday nights at the Paddock. It was no accident that I became best friends with Maria Panagopoulos. We didn’t live in the same neighborhood, and her parents didn’t speak English.

A month before my thirteenth birthday my mother announced that she was taking me to the Paddock for my birthday. “Would my girl like to bring a friend?” I didn’t want to hurt her feelings, but to invite someone would mean exposing my mother. Even if my mother was oblivious to what was considered respectable behavior, I wasn’t.

“Ma, I want to spend my birthday with you and Aunt Peg like we always do,” I suggested trying to sound sincere.

“We’ll see Aunt Peg,” she reassured me. There was nothing I would have said to deflate the pleasure and satisfaction I

heard in her voice. At least none of my friends would be there, and I wasn't inviting anyone. A few weeks before my birthday, my mother and I went shopping downtown and she bought me a pretty blue and white garter belt and two pair of stockings. She told me if I was going out with the ladies I needed to look like one.

Kay, the only one of my mother's group who owned a car, was picking us up at seven o'clock. I wore a lime-green dress with a white lacy collar and cuffs, a birthday present from Aunt Peg. Peering out from behind the gold drapes that kept our living room in perpetual darkness and watching for Kay's car, I shifted my garter belt back into place. Whenever I moved, it slid around my straight hips making my legs feel like May Day poles being wrapped with elastic streamers. Looking like a lady never held any charm for me. "She's here!" I called out to my mother the second I spotted Kay's white Rambler turning the corner.

My mother stepped into the room as I turned from the window. Black high heels added a regal inch to her long and curvy frame. After spending the night twisted up tight in metal clips, her glossy black hair waved like ribbon candy to her shoulders. Her lips were colored ruby red, her high cheekbones were shaded in rose, and black eyeliner and mascara accentuated her eyes. Her snug-fitting knee-length gray jersey dress was her only dress. I was with her when she had bought it at Filene's Basement, and she had pointed out to me that not only was it on sale, but it could be worn three out of four seasons. A wide black leather belt emphasized her narrow waist. I wished my mother didn't look so sexy, and at the same time, I felt that my undeveloped body disappointed her.

"Well, is my young lady ready?" she asked with her wide smile, which I no longer appreciated.

"Yeah, I'm ready." The blast of Kay's horn called to us, and my mother followed me out to the front hall. I tugged on the tarnished brass doorknob and pulled open the wooden door that tested my strength every time I left our apartment. A spring breeze cooled my face as I walked down the steps hoping no one would see me going out with my mother. My mother sat up front with Kay. I slouched low into the back seat

behind my mother. Kay's blonde hair was piled high in big curls. She outlined her eyes in black more thickly than my mother and dusted her lids green to match her eyes. Her lips were the same baby girl pink as her nails. She wore a blouse with big black and white polka dots and black pants. I knew she had on spiked heels. She claimed that short women needed to wear their hair up and keep their feet in the highest heels they could stand to walk in.

"Hey, who's the little lady in the stockings, Grace? I thought you were bringing Donna." My mother turned her head and winked at me.

"My Donna is becoming a young lady," my mother responded with a soft sigh. "Where's Norma?"

"I dropped her off with Bill. She wanted to make sure we got our booth." Bill was Kay's husband. Once I overheard Kay telling my mother that she had to go to the Paddock on Friday nights to keep an eye on him or he'd spend all their money buying rounds.

"Since when have we had a hard time getting our booth?"

"Grace, since when has Norma made sense?" Kay laughed and lit up a Kent. A few minutes later, she was pulling the car over and parking beside the Paddock, which stood on the corner of lower Marshall and Pearl. As I slipped out of the car, my eyes followed the steel fire escape that zigzagged its way up four stories of grimy brick. I wondered who lived in the apartments. Not one shade was up. The aroma of charbroiled beef seemed to seep from every crack of the building and grabbed the attention of our empty stomachs as we walked around to the front, which faced Pearl Street. My mother and Kay looked at each other and exclaimed, "Steak tips!" Both of them started laughing. I looked around nervously to see if anyone was witnessing my mother and Kay's behavior. Walking ahead of them, I approached the front entrance. Centered above the front door was a sign that read "The Paddock Bar 'n Grille" in dark green letters against a white background. On either side of the door was a rectangular window. The "It's time for a Narragansett" sign lit up the left window in shades of gold and red. A white cardboard sign declaring "Ladies Welcomed" in black block letters was taped to the lower left corner of the right window. The door was kept

slightly ajar with a wooden doorstep, but you couldn't see much from the street other than a smoky blackness with muted dots of light.

My mother took my hand and squeezed it as we went inside. A long bar of dark polished wood lined the right side of the room. All but one of the tall stools in front of it was occupied. I couldn't help but notice the only woman sitting at the bar dragging on a cigarette with a half empty glass in front of her. Kay went over and tapped the woman on the shoulder. It was Norma. Why was she sitting there? Couldn't she get their booth? Quickly, I counted three empty booths along the opposite wall. "Ma, which one is your booth?"

"The booth in the back." It was empty.

"Why isn't Norma sitting there?"

"I guess she was keeping an eye on it from the bar where it was less lonely for her."

"Hey, look who's here, it's the birthday girl!" Norma yelled out to me. Why did my mother and her friends have to be so loud? Clutching her drink and a pack of Pall Malls with one hand and her lit cigarette with the other, she slid her bulk off the stool and strolled over to us with Kay. "I'd give ya a birthday hug, but I don't wanna burn ya, and I certainly don't wanna spill my drink. Now, let's get to our booth so we can order some food." I was glad to be spared Norma's hug. She was tall and full figured, and every time she hugged me, my face got pressed against her mountainous breasts. With the exception of some dull pink lipstick, Norma never fixed herself up, but at least her hair was not pulled back in the usual greasy ponytail.

"Wait. Where's my man?" Kay asked anxiously.

"He's where he always is when he's not tipping back a glass at the bar, he's out back helping Gus in the kitchen."

"Well, that can't cost anything." Kay laughed and moved toward their booth. "Ya know he was a cook in the army. Maybe he could work here in the kitchen under the table."

"I need another drink and some food," Norma declared in a loud voice.

Mary, the barmaid and the owner's daughter, heard Norma and called over, "Your drinks are coming and the food is cooking." She walked over with a round brown tray of drinks

and served us. "A draft for Kay, gin for Our Lady of Alcohol, a high ball for Grace and a Shirley Temple with extra cherries for our newest customer, daughter of Grace, which is on the house because we heard it's her birthday."

"Hey, I didn't get a free drink on my birthday," protested Norma.

"You did get a free drink," Mary reminded her. "In fact, you got a couple of free drinks from the gentleman you were celebrating with. What was his name?" Everyone broke out laughing. I laughed too, but I didn't think it was funny that she had been drinking with some strange guy on her last birthday. She had still been living with her second husband then.

"His name was Walt!" Norma yelled out slapping the table with her hand.

"Okay, ladies, let me make sure I have the right orders cooking. Three rounds of steak tips and our famous grilled hot dog for the youngest and newest lady?"

"Right as always," Kay affirmed.

"If I did it was by the grace of God," Mary answered with exaggerated reverence and picked up her tray and left. There were three maraschino cherries on a toothpick with tiny green cellophane streamers hanging off the top. I sucked one off and savored the sweet juices that streamed down my throat as I pressed the plump cherry with my tongue against the roof of my mouth. After the pressure of my tongue flattened it, I slowly chewed the meat of the cherry, which had a texture of no other food familiar to me.

"My mother has been driving me nuts ever since Claude left," complained Norma.

"She's probably just worried about you. How are things going with your kids?" my mother asked as she sipped her drink.

"Jimmy seems to like living with my mother, but Diane told me that she never would leave me no matter what my mother promises her. She misses you and Donna a lot." Norma lifted her drink and finished it in one quick gulp.

"We miss her, too," my mother responded. It seemed like she wanted to say more; but instead, she put her arm around my shoulders and pulled me close to her. I cringed until she released me.



"Those were good times when you lived up the street from us. Diane told me once that she wanted to go live with you and Donna. I told her fine and started packing her a suitcase. She went hysterical. It took me a long time to calm her down." Norma shook her head and pulled out a cigarette from her pack. Mary arrived with our food before Norma lit her cigarette. "Bring me another drink, sweetie."

"How about the rest of you ladies?"

"I'll have another draft," Kay responded.

"All righty then. Enjoy your meal."

As soon as I aimed the ketchup bottle over my hotdog, Kay observed, "No mustard and relish on that dog?" as she doused her steak tips in steak sauce.

"Hey, it's her birthday!" Norma cried in my defense. "She can eat it however she wants. Look at what you're doing to those tips!"

"Okay. You just pour that ketchup on, and pay no attention to me," apologized Kay. "So how is your mother driving you nuts? Wouldn't it be easier for you to work if she takes care of Jimmy and Diane?"

"Ya know it isn't that she wants to help me, she wants to raise them. My biggest mistake was moving to Somerville when my family did. I think I would have been better off staying in Charlestown," lamented Norma.

"I don't know, it's only gotten worse there," reflected Kay. "I'd rather live in the Mystic Housing Projects than own a house in Charlestown."

"But didn't we have fun at Charlestown High?" Norma asked as she chewed on a steak tip.

"Yeah, but that was a long time ago." Kay looked at my mother and rolled her eyes.

"Donna, I was the head cheerleader in high school," Norma volunteered with pride.

"I know," I responded. "Remember you showed Diane and me a picture of you in your uniform?" When she had shown me the picture, I'd found it difficult to believe that the pretty girl smiling and standing arms akimbo with pompoms in each hand was ever Norma. Even in the black and white photo the girl looked healthy with thick and glossy hair. She had a voluptuous body with well-defined long legs. I remember

looking into Norma's sagging, ashen colored face and trying to find something of this girl in her. There was nothing and her physique had grown comical. She had an enormous bust and no waist or hips, but rather a thick straight trunk. Her long, thin legs seemed to be straining from the unbalanced distribution of weight.

"Oh, yeah. Ya know Diane keeps that picture on her dresser mirror," Norma slurred as she lit a cigarette.

"I was thinking of taking some business classes nights at the high school. I'm so sick of working at Kimball's," my mother said as she rubbed a fry in ketchup.

"But you're a floor supervisor, why would you give that up?" demanded Norma.

"Because it's a stinking factory, and we'll probably be cut down to four days a week soon."

"Really?" asked Norma. "How do you know this?"

"It's already happened at their other factory in Lowell, and I hardly get by now working five days. We haven't had any overtime since I started working there five years ago. An office job in one of those new downtown buildings with an hour for lunch would be a gift from heaven. Come on, Norma, what do you say? We could go together."

"Ya know," Norma commented while looking over at me, "when we were in high school, your mother was always the smart one of the group." Considering the group, it would have worried me if she wasn't the smartest, but I was impressed by my mother's ambition.

"Hey, I was no dummy," argued Kay.

"Yeah, but you fell for the good looking but stupid captain of the football team," Norma reminded her.

"At least we're still married."

"Okay, you win again," Norma conceded with a laugh. "But you don't know what you're missing." I wasn't sure what Norma meant. Kay seemed better off.

"Enough," my mother interjected. "You never gave me an answer. Classes begin this Thursday."

"It's a good idea, I'll think about it. There's Frank. I hope he says hello." I looked over at a lean frame leaning over the end of the bar. He looked better dressed than the rest of the men at the bar. Not only did his shirt match his pants, they

looked well-pressed and his shoes were shined. His hair was dark and slicked back the way older men wore their hair. I knew his son Mark from school; he was tough but popular with the girls, even the nice ones.

"Well," said Kay, "I think it's time I gave my compliments to the cook and his helper, my darling husband. I just hope Bill's not draining a bottle back there. He's supposed to work tomorrow." As Kay got up, I noticed Frank striding over in our direction.

"Looks like there's an empty seat for me. Shove over, Norma." Frank sat down and set his drink down in front of him. "How's our black, Irish beauty?" he inquired looking admiringly at my mother.

"Spare me. I'm half French." I felt my mother's body tense beside mine.

"What a great combination! Isn't that a great combination, Norma?"

"Yeah, that's a great combination," Norma answered half-heartedly. "I think I need another drink."

"Do you think that's a good idea?" questioned my mother. "We'll be leaving soon. I have to get my birthday girl home."

"It's your birthday?" Frank asked smiling at me. I noticed he had bad teeth, but I could see who Mark got his blue eyes from. As he dug his hand into his pocket, I saw the edge of a tattoo peeking from under his short sleeve. He pulled out some bills clipped together with a shiny piece of metal. "What do I have here for the birthday girl?"

"I need to remember to bring Diane here on her birthday," remarked Norma.

"Put that away. You have five kids to buy birthday presents for," my mother responded firmly.

"How about if I just give her a birthday kiss?" Frank suggested lifting one eyebrow as he glanced over at me. I pressed into my mother. Her arm wrapped tightly around me as her dark eyes narrowed in response to his suggestion. Frank shifted in his seat and picked up his drink. My mother curled a ruby lip at him.

"Your mother makes me hot when she's angry. Are you gonna do that to men?" He flashed his decaying teeth at me. His words drained all expression from my mother's face.

"We need to see what's keeping Kay," my mother stated evenly as she slipped her cigarettes into her purse. "It's time we got going."

"I'm kidding for Christ's sake, Grace."

"Of course you were. We really do need to get going," my mother humored him, but I knew she didn't believe him. Just as we got up, Kay returned. "Ready to go? Bill's fine. He's going to get a ride from Gus. They're closing the kitchen in a few minutes. Norma, let's hit the road."

"I'll give you a ride," offered Frank as he placed his hand on Norma's generous thigh. "Stay and have a drink with me."

"Well, I can't leave anyone lonely." Kay and my mother looked at each other uneasily.

"What about Diane?" Kay asked as she crossed her arms and stared into Norma's bloated face.

"She knows how to put herself to bed."

"See you later then. Good-night." Kay sounded irritated. My mother's eyes seemed fixed on the dirty black and white tile floor.

"Did you lose something, Ma?" She raised her head up and slowly shook it back and forth.

"Let's get out of here." Her voice was edged in sadness. I took her hand and held it tight as we walked into the chilly night air. Outside my mother let go of my hand and hugged my shivering body. It was the last time I'd breathe in lavender mixed with the smoky air of the Paddock.

---

AMARA PAYNE ROHR

Music sounds the same

Everyday, Tori Amos crucifies herself.  
I wonder if my skin will know aloe  
from a knife. Anorexic gelatin  
ripples through these thighs: pink saccharine packets.

*Everybody else's girl* is bulimic  
in the bathroom between bleedings.  
Comfort can be borrowed from a can  
of whipped cream, another addict reminded me.

The bright side of the Aquarian moon  
is here. Is this the dawning of the age  
of imagined passion? Fraudulent pink  
flesh is colored with injury again. I did it.

I wore long sleeves for a month this summer.  
Ivory burned my arms; I used Ajax.  
I called New Milford everyday- my best friends.  
I never paid the phone bill.

I read *Go Ask Alice* when I was twelve  
and convinced myself I was the writer  
of that diary. I didn't drink  
or get high, but the hospital scenes were mine.

I have been teary eyed since diaper days.  
No one believed me until yesterday  
when my enemies took the day off  
to see Tori play piano for FNX. I missed it.

But all music sounds the same  
in a straightjacket. New Milford boys laugh  
at my polyester vest. I remind myself

to get the long distance cut off.

*Boys on my left side. Boys on my right side.*  
Tomorrow, *Boys for Pele* will stop skipping,  
my cuts will seal, and I will be Tori.  
Swallowed with supper, Prozac is plentiful here.

---

REX KRUEGER

### Scraping Boot Heels

Harvel dumped the stack of baskets on their rack by the door and grumbled his way out into the cold, dark lot, gripping the cart hook in one hand. He pulled the carts out from the battered cart returns and picked them off of the curbs. Harvel stacked the carts, one inside the other, letting his train of carts grow into a clumsy animal that wouldn't turn or stop. That's when the cart hook came out.

Harvel had taken an old baseball bat and carved away most of the thicker parts, leaving a shaft of wood that was as thin as the handle the whole way down the length. He had bent a short, thick metal dowel into a j shape and clasped it to the end of the shaft with a pair of radiator-hose clamps. Finally, Harvel had wrapped the first eight inches of the handle with thick cotton string. The string just about sucked the sweat off of his skin. The handle wouldn't turn or shift, even when his hand was numbed with cold or slick with bakery grease.

Harvel pulled his invention out from behind his belt and hooked it onto the first cart in the stack. Planting his feet and pulling back on the hook, Harvel turned the carts on a dime. Like the reins on a horse, the cart hook let Harvel steer his carts wherever he wanted them to go. Leaving his first stack at the bottom of this hill, Harvel went back to gathering strays. The carts sitting in between cars gave Harvel no trouble. He grabbed them with his hook and flicked them out of spaces where he could not have fit his whole body.

When one of the carts started to get way from him, started to run straight down the hill on a kamikaze dive towards a Chevy pickup, Harvel just reached out with his hook and pulled it back into place. He didn't run after carts anymore. The hook made his arm three feet longer, made the carts roll where he wanted them.

Harvel worked his hook from one end of the dimly lit parking lot to the other. He piled the carts into neat stacks

under the flickering lights and then puffed each stack up the hill and into the store, sweating under his thinning hair, despite the November weather. When he was down to the last stack, Harvel ducked around the side of the store, around the dumpster that was parked halfway down the wall and slumped against the bricks. He pulled a pack of cigarettes and a battered Zippo out of his shirt pocket and blazed up a little break. He did this every night. When he was almost done with the carts, he would rest here for a second and smoke a single cigarette. The funny thing was, Harvel didn't smoke at any other time. He was thirty and he hadn't started until he was twenty-five. He smoked once a day, at exactly this time. This was the only time he ever craved one. On his days off, he didn't think about tobacco. Most of the time, a pack would go stale and he'd buy a fresh one before the old one ran out. This was his little ritual act of defiance against the management. Harvel wasn't just taking an unscheduled break; he was smoking against the back wall like some loitering trailer-trash, and all this in his Country Corner uniform.

Harvel chuckled to himself. Old man Sanders would have had a fit if he saw Harvel, but that was unlikely. The chances of Sanders leaving the store to go prowling around the lot after dark were slim enough. The chances of him doing it at exactly the same time Harvel took his little break were almost zero. That's why Harvel did it; he wasn't brave enough to be a rebel. He could have his little bit of secret defiance, and he would never get caught.

A shuffling sound on the other side of the dumpster broke into Harvel's thoughts. It was probably Mark taking out the trash from the produce department. The idea of multiple trips to the dumpster was totally foreign to Mark. No matter how many bags there were, he did it in one trip, period. Harvel had even seen him grip a bag in his teeth to get it all in one shot. Harvel smiled to himself and stomped out his cigarette. He might as well help Mark with the homestretch. He started to stroll out from behind the dumpster—and slammed himself back against the wall, breathing hard when he saw what was out there.

He had gotten a good look at the two boys. One was tall and fat. He was dressed in baggy pants and a flannel shirt.



His hair was cut short and there were big pink splotches dyed into it. The second one was taller than the first, and thin. He moved like his body was made of stilts and rubber bands. He was dressed in leather that hung around him in straight lines. He had deeply sunken eyes under a neatly shaved head. The girl they were holding between them couldn't have been more than fourteen, if that. Pale skin, smudged with white makeup; she was decked out in rags and scraps of black. At least that's what they were supposed to look like. They had probably been the most expensive black rags in the mall. She was a perfect little walking corpse, white and smooth. But she didn't really have that beautiful deathly composure at the moment. The makeup on her face was smudged and she was sweating in the cold air—little ringlets of blue-black hair were plastered to the sides of her face.

The two punkers had gotten her down on the ground behind a stack of pallets. The larger of the two was behind her, holding her in a sitting position. One of his hands was behind her back, holding her arms. His other hand held a wadded bandana in her mouth. The fat one was kneeling in front of her, saying something to her that Harvel couldn't quite hear. He was trying to get past her legs. Every few seconds, he would reach for her, and she would lash out with a steel toed boot. She was holding him back for the moment.

Harvel stood there for a second, trying to figure out what he should do. He bit his lip and shuffled his feet and cursed under his breath, and then he did something he had never done before in his life...he had a second cigarette. He pulled in the sweet smoke and slowly felt his heart calm down. Ignoring the scuffling sounds over to his left, Harvel considered his Camel and thought that maybe he should extend his break once in a while. This second cigarette thing was pretty good.

Leaning back on the wall, puffing on his cigarette, Harvel glanced around himself. The punkers were out to the left. To the right, the wall of the store continued straight back until it met the fence along the back of the lot. Harvel looked straight ahead through the woods. He saw the lights of other stores down the street. There were places where he could get to a phone. He took one ginger step forward, and winced at the grinding sound his boot heel made on the crumbling asphalt.

The scuffling sounds stopped for a second, and Harvel froze in place, waiting. When he heard the punkers start pawing at the girl again, Harvel pulled his foot back and leaned against the wall, his heart racing again.

The scuffling sounds got more intense, and then just stopped. Harvel's curiosity finally got the better of him and he risked another glance. The scene hadn't changed much. The girl and the one behind her were facing Harvel, but neither saw him. The one in front of her was kneeling between her legs and swearing while he tugged at her clothes. The one behind the girl, the scarecrow in black, was whispering something into her ear. Whatever he was saying was apparently keeping her quiet. Her eyes were wide and her nostrils flared as she breathed.

Harvel was about to duck back behind the dumpster, when the girl looked up and their eyes met. Harvel got one good, long look into her eyes, before he shrank back behind his hiding place. He lifted his cigarette back to his mouth. So what if she'd seen him? It didn't change a damn thing. Harvel still didn't care.

Harvel went for another puff on his Camel, but found that his hand was shaking; he couldn't get it up to his mouth. He dropped the cigarette, and stuffed his hand in his pocket. Harvel gnawed on the inside of his cheek.

It wasn't like she was any better than the animals about to rape her. They were all just different parts of the mess the world was made of. They were doing what they did best: eliminating each other, climbing higher on the food chain. Sure, the girl was little, fourteen, maybe thirteen. That didn't mean she was any better than anyone else; she just hadn't had the time to get as ugly as the Boy Scouts who were holding her down. Hell, she'd probably spent plenty of time on her back already. Harvel wasn't about to delude himself into thinking that this was her first time in a parking lot. These boys just weren't up to her standards. They weren't pretty enough for her.

Harvel knew how it was. She teased them at some party. She slugged around all night, praying that someone would pay attention to the little dead girl. And when the boys finally did look at her, that wasn't enough. She couldn't just

take the compliment. She had to make them feel small so she could feel better about herself—she had laughed in their faces. Now she was getting what she deserved. These boys were going to take that smile right off her face. They were going to scrape her against the asphalt until she stopped laughing. It was going to be a while before she laughed at anyone.

Harvel gnawed gently on his cheek and ran a hand through his thin hair. He heard a belt buckle jingle and a piece of leather make a dry slap against a leg. They were going to get down to it in a second. Harvel ran a hand over his long, homely face and wondered what it was going to sound like. Could they keep her quiet? She wasn't going to scream with that big cloth in her mouth. But little bits of screams might get around the edges of the wadded fabric. And how was she going to breathe? She wasn't going to be able to get enough air in through her nose. Would she choke and snort while one of them got up on her?

Harvel's hand tightened on his hair while he listened to the scuffle. He looked out from behind the dumpster, really looked at the little girl on her back. His hand trembled and his head jerked side to side while he pulled on his own hair. Even in the dim lights, he could see every inch of her. The tips of her fingers peeked out from behind her back where the scarecrow held her. Little fingers, with flaking blue paint on the nails. Nails that were a little ragged at the tips, bitten and torn at by nervous, smiling little teeth. Her mouth, shaped for whispers and giggles, was held open, stretched wide by the gag. Harvel spit and shook, and finally ripped a chunk of hair right out of his head. His neck felt like a compressed spring—it wouldn't bend or turn. Her eyes, which should have been smiling, were round with terror and bitter with the knowledge that the only person who knew what was happening wasn't going to stop it. Harvel bit down on the inside of his cheek and hot blood filled his mouth.

The cart hook was gripped in his hands. He brought it up over his shoulder as he rounded the corner of the dumpster. It came down on the head of the closest punker, right in the middle of a pink splotch, with a sick little thump. The kid dropped on his side without a sound. Harvel stopped for a second, horrified at the fat lump of flannel sprawled at his feet.

But he only had a second. The other kid was fast. He rolled out from behind the girl and stood lightly. His weight was on his toes. He leaned forward with his head tilted down, his arms hanging straight down at his sides. His eyes were bright and wide open. The sight of his friend lying totally still on the ground didn't seem to bother him at all, and it didn't make him think twice about taking on the man who had laid him out. The fingers of the punker's right hand fluttered for a second. Harvel heard a click, and five bright inches appeared in the punker's hand.

That's what he'd said to quiet the girl down. He'd told her about his knife. Harvel wished the punker had told *him* about his knife. Harvel moved in with the hook and faked a jab at the boy's chest. When the punker brought his knife hand in to block, Harvel pulled the hook sideways, slipped it around the boy's wrist and twisted. The hook knotted itself in the punker's sleeve with a rip. The boy tried to shake the hand out, but Harvel had him. Harvel heaved back on the hook. Totally off balance, the punker stumbled past Harvel and into the side of the dumpster; his arm and shoulder sort of crumbled against the metal before his head hit. The dumpster rang with the impact. It sounded a deep note that was clear and low all around the lot. It rattled Harvel's teeth and shook him back into reality.

He glanced around himself and saw what he had done. The two boys lay where he had thrown them. Unconscious or dead; they didn't move at all. Harvel saw the girl at his feet. She looked too stunned to move. Harvel reached down and pulled her dress back down over her legs. He pulled her up. She barely came up to his chest, but she looked up into his eyes. Harvel tugged the gag out of her mouth with a steady hand. She sucked her cheeks in for a second and swallowed, but her eyes never left his. The girl's face was covered in white makeup, smudged by the dirt of the lot. He couldn't see her face. Harvel reached up his hand again, and ran his thumb down her cheek, rubbing away the greasepaint. Harvel moved his other hand up and began to smear away the makeup, wiping his hands on his clothes. He pushed the black lipstick off her mouth, and tugged the paint off her earlobes.

---

FOLIO

Harvel rested his hands on the girl's shoulders and stared into her face. She was all smooth curves and lines. Her face was just barely pink under the makeup. Her lip trembled and Harvel could feel her whole body shake through his hands. He opened his mouth to ask if she wanted a cup of coffee or something—and her foot snapped up between his legs. Her steel toe met his body, hard, and Harvel went down. His hand closed convulsively on the shoulder of her dress. She was pulled towards him as he fell, but she snapped her shoulder back, ripping the fabric and pulling away. She spun around, clutching her torn dress around her shoulder, and sprinted away across the parking lot. Harvel was left, lying on his side, holding his battered groin and staring at her as she ran away from him.

A half-hour later, Harvel was back to work. He spun his hook and the carts moved for him. He grunted and swore his way up the hill behind the stacks. He looked like he had every other night of his life. Except sometimes, when he stopped to catch his breath, he would press his hand to his breast pocket, where a little scrap of torn black cloth was neatly folded, a reminder.

---

ANTHONY SZILAGYI

A New Day

Three steps into the new day,  
the morning decides it hates you.  
Did yesterday leave today a memo?  
You're sure the cobweb  
stretched across  
your face has the word revenge quilted  
in it. You can taste it on your lips. The intricate  
web feels like plaster against your skin. You  
brush it off and hope what's left dissolves  
in the rain,  
but it's mist is so fine, droplets roll  
off the back of the spider.  
The one looking for a new home,  
the one resting on your shoulder.

---

MIKE PITASSI

### The Kid on the Bike

I wasn't there, in the basement, with *Sliver Flow*, when Ryan broke the A-string on Mark Rinaldi's bass in the middle of practice. Chances are I wasn't even thinking about anything that had to do with music when it happened, and it probably wouldn't have mattered to me at all if they had called to tell me. I might have sympathized for a moment, remembering a time when I myself had faced a similar situation, but nothing I did that day would have been much different because of it.

I was at work. I didn't even know that they were practicing. I had been making bagels since 5:30 in the a.m. It was one of those days when time didn't seem to mean anything. 6:00, 10:00, 2:00, they all seemed to roll by evenly. I didn't have anywhere to go that particular Saturday, and I certainly didn't expect anything out of the ordinary to happen. Of course, no one actually *expects* anything like that to happen.

I finished work at 3:40 or so, and on my way home I stopped to get gas at the Amoco on Rt. 63. I filled the Trooper with regular for \$21.15 and walked inside, slick with bagel grease, to pay. The guy behind the counter was old and worn, and wore a scraggly gray beard. Of course he had on red plaid. He peered down at me through cracked eyelids with pursed lips, cocking his head slightly up and right (my left). Old people seem to get suspicious of me a lot. I don't dress funny or anything, and my hair is my natural color, they just seem uncomfortable around me sometimes.

Anyway, there was colorful rack of Pez refills next to the Snickers bars, and I couldn't help but buy a couple packs. They were on clearance for some reason, and I *love* Pez. When I was a kid I wallpapered my entire door with the wrapper skins, sorted by color, from all the Pez I had eaten. Most of these I stole from Ames in the good old Mountview Plaza near

my house. I also have an extensive collection of Halloween dispensers, a lot of skeletons in capes, a few wolf men and Frankenstein's monsters, a couple Draculas, and various others. That might sound kind of weird, and I admit that it's definitely silly, but for some reason all stores that sell Pez seem to have the Halloween ones all the time. It's like they never sell them all after the season, so they keep them stocked all year round.

On this occasion, however, I only bought two of the teen-pack refills. The total was \$22.21, and the guy behind the counter grumbled when I handed him a fifty. He snatched it and held it up to the light, like they teach you in the gas station counter attendant training video, but he didn't seem to have much of an idea what he was looking for. He put the fifty under the black plastic tray in the drawer, and counted out my change. There was a Xeroxed photograph of a bug-eyed Asian kid with glasses glaring up at me. It was the kind of picture where no matter which side you looked at it from, the kid would always be looking right at you. It was attached to a cardboard box filled with Tootsie pops next to a jar of change. It bore the simple inscription, *"I need your help."* I dropped 79 cents into the slot and took a red one. The old man gave me one last lip curl as I turned and walked away.

I took a much-needed shower when I got home, and shaved the wino stubble from my face. I put on clean clothes for the first time in too long, which is always exciting. I had made a point the previous night to wash and dry all three shirts and both pairs of pants, so my entire wardrobe would be clean at once. When I was dressed, I came downstairs. Upon entering my kitchen area, I noticed the red light of my answering machine blinking from beneath the loaf of potato bread that had fallen out of the cabinet. I pushed the *Mailbox 1* button.

*"Hey, what's up, man, it's Hemenway,  
uh, I was just callin' to see if you wanted to go to  
Mamoun's with me and Lou and Matt and Maddy for dinner,  
but, uh,  
I guess your not home. So, maybe I'll see  
you later aright? Uh, bye."*



I had just missed his call. I thought that I could have used a falafel sandwich too. There was nothing in my stomach but free bagels, and I find myself getting bored with bagels in general sometimes. I was thinking that I would have liked to see Matt and Maddy as well. The three of us have this ongoing argument going about the existence of good and evil. They, as “devout Roman Catholics,” believe that some things are simply *wrong*, no matter which way you look at them. This, of course, infuriates me because I can’t fathom the notion of objective moral values. I was getting myself riled up just thinking about it. Anyway, I began to think that maybe I should have left work right at 3:00 when I was done instead of wrapping muffins for Sunday. My phone rang while I was inspecting the freezer. I seized a package of tofu dogs and threw them at the counter. I picked up the phone and said hello.

“Hey! What’s up dude? It’s Matt!”

I could hear people screaming and lots of loud banging noises in the background. Matt’s a little shorter than I am, and at this point he had just cut off all his nearly shoulder-length hair so he looked like a chunky Elvis Costello with his thick, black-rimmed glasses. I shouldered the cordless and began searching for potato hot dog rolls in my cabinet.

“Not much, I guess, I just got out of the shower. I was going to make myself some tofu pups.”

I began filling a pot with water. I turned the broken burner switch to *warm*, which actually meant *high*. Matt spoke up.

“Hey, you should definitely just come over here to make them! Ryan and Mark are making chicken cacciatore right now.”

Matt sounded like he was lying, but I couldn’t imagine what his motive could be. He didn’t necessarily have to have one, though. Don’t get me wrong, Matt is one of my closest friends, and I can always have a good time with him, but he lies out of his ass constantly.

“Chicken cacciatore, eh? Hey, tell Mark that his mother made me some pretty delicious chicken cacciatore the other night, if you get my meaning. I *love* Italian women.”

Matt laughed and relayed the message.

“Mark says fuck you.”

The frosty tofu dogs plopped into the water.

“Why do you have so many people causing such a disturbance at your house?” I was curious because Matt is usually really anal about having lots of people over, even if he invited them there on purpose.

“We had practice today at Ryan’s house, but freakin’ Ryan broke Mark’s A-string and we had to stop. Now nobody has any freakin’ *money* to buy new *strings*.” Matt said those last few words loud, obviously directing them more toward his company than to me. The tofu dogs bobbed a little. I heard a terrific thump through the phone as someone undoubtedly punched Matt in the shoulder. His voice hurt my ear as he screamed through the telephone:

“Ah! Cock!” Matt’s always saying that. Ryan’s muffled voice bled through the receiver then:

“Matt! You don’t even have a fuckin’ job!” At which point Matt retorted, “Fuck you! I work at Toys-R-Us, asshole!” Everyone there laughed, and so did I. A voice that was probably Mark’s rose above the chuckling to say, simply,

“Okay, Chunk!” This is exactly what I mean about Matt. Everyone in the room knew that he definitely did not work at Toys-R-Us, but Matt would never admit it. I wanted to change the subject.

“Are you really making chicken cacciatore?”

“Yeah! Actually no, we were thinking about going to McDonalds, though. We searched all over Ryan’s house and in between the couch cushions and what not, and got a bunch of change together in a sock. We were gonna buy strings with it, but I don’t feel like going to New Haven now. You should just come up.” I figured Matt wanted me to contribute to his collection of change.

“Yeah, I’ll be down in a few minutes, alright?” Matt paused for just a second before he replied.

“Yeah, alright, Oh! Hey, uh, could you see if you have any change, like in your car or anything?”

“Yeah, bye.”

“Alright, bye.”

I hung up the phone, and figured that I’d go to Matt’s house after I finished my tofu dogs. I won’t eat McDonalds anyway. I’ve known far too many people who worked there

---

FOLIO

over the course of my life. One guy, my friend Joe, got third degree burns when his manager accidentally shot him in the legs with the hot grease gun. He jumped in the sink, screaming, and broke a whole bunch of official McDonalds equipment. Joe can't grow hair on his legs anymore. He was also fired because his manager turned the entire situation around on him, saying that it was Joe's own negligence that caused him to get burned. Another friend of mine, Jeff, used to work at McDonalds in Waterbury. He used to pick grout from between the waxy floor tiles and add the flakes to the burgers. He also used to melt chocolate laxatives and mix them in with the McFlurries. He told me a story once about a kid named Jose, who used to cook the burgers, then squish them between the flat part of his boot and the floor, then use the spatula to flop them onto the buns. My friend Doug used to do the same thing at the McDonalds in Naugatuck, only he used a rusty garden trowel that he brought from home. I don't eat meat anyway, and two tofu dogs is always a meal.

I mean, the meal wasn't especially memorable or anything. It was good and all, but my house was quiet and the only thing breaking the silence was the squish of fake meat between my teeth. I could have hurried, but I randomly decided to take my time. I wasn't too eager to get to Matt's just so I could give him change anyway. When I was done, I got my coat, put on my shoes, and drove the 30 seconds down the street to Matt's house at 11 Round Hill Circle.

Every light in the whole house was on. I could see the television flickering in the living room as I stepped up the driveway. Matt's garage door was open, and I could see the tail end of his brother's black Porsche in the moonlight. I don't really know much of anything about cars, but I know that this is the kind of car I always imagine movie stars and super heroes driving. Now that I think about it, the car definitely looks like the Bat Mobile. Matt's brother, who I mostly know as "Bruhbra," had been away living in California for about six months, and allegedly making a lot of money with some computer company. He didn't want to drive the beautiful black bat mobile across the country until he was all settled in, so he left it in Matt's garage with specific instructions not to drive it.

Matt took it out once. He can't drive standard. I have that one on video.

I really expected there to be a jumping party going on inside, what with all the lights and all, but when I opened the front door I saw only Matt, sprawled next to his dog, Tori (who, he'll always be quick to tell you, is named for Tori Spelling, not Tori Amos)(I used to give her *Sweet Breath* all the time. She liked it, but would sneeze over and over. I used to give her peanut butter too. I don't know if you've ever given a dog peanut butter, but you should definitely try it if you haven't). Mark was stealing *Nestles Sweet Rewards* from the cabinet near the fridge. Ryan seemed intent on rocking out with no shoes and one sock on Matt's unplugged red Fender, and Dan, who I didn't even know was there, was eating a half-frozen chicken burrito with two hands. I was greeted warmly by all. I shook every hand except Dan's, which he offered to me, but was coated with brownish mexi-chunks, and sat in the wooden rocking chair.

"Have any of you talked to John today?" I had told John that I would call him, but had forgotten, what with the excitement from the tofu pups and all. There was a couple of "no's" and one grunt. The novelty of my presence seemed to have worn off. I was thinking about how I always forget to call John before I leave my house when the door whined open. Everyone pretty much just walks into Matt's house without knocking. The screen door slammed shut, and John entered smiling. He wore a gray hoodie with a green Nike swoosh baseball cap. I smiled as we made eye contact, and greeted him.

"I seriously was just asking these guys if they had talked to you today." I got up to shake his hand as I spoke, and nearly tripped over the coffee table, which was littered with back issues of *Maxim* and *Rolling Stone*. John nodded and waved to everyone else in the room. I talked about Matt being one of my good friends before, but John and I are definitely *much* closer. We're basically the same exact person. We have our own twists of personality, but we're basically the same. We've been on countless asinine and incredible adventures together in our lives. We used to hang out in Waterbury's own Pine Grove Cemetery at night back when we went to high

school together. The two of us hosted a picnic there once. Actually more than once, but one particular time, while we were setting up before everyone got there, we were approached by a naked man running through the cemetery. He didn't actually say anything to us. He just ran by, screaming. Try to picture this, because it really happened: a naked man, running through a cemetery at night! We laughed and laughed until our sides were sore. I woke up the next morning with aching back muscles and a throbbing abdomen. We didn't even say anything to each other. He ran by, and we both just started laughing hysterically. Another time, this is way back in grammar school, at St. Francis, we made a fairly realistic sculpture of a one-armed man out of potato sacks and all types of raw and spoiled meat we had stolen from the Big Y loading dock. We dressed it in my uncle Mark's pants and shirt, soaked the entire thing in ketchup and Kool-Aid and tied it to a long rope, which we tied to the bumper of Father Donahue's station wagon and tucked underneath. There was a school-wide interrogation to find out who did it. Father Donahue had dragged the corpse for half a mile before he even realized it was there. Please understand, we were just kids back then. We wouldn't do anything like that today, but stuff like that only happens to me and John for some reason.

Anyway, I shook John's hand, and we talked amongst ourselves for a moment about nothing in particular. John is always wearing those hooded sweatshirts. At night he can resemble some kind of baseball-capped warlock or Jedi or something. He just kind of watches people a lot from inside that hood. He definitely doesn't talk as much as I do, but we both have some kind of atypical sense of humor that only we get somehow. Example: John is the only one who laughs as hard as I do at dead-baby jokes. Matt's head shot toward us as we conversed.

"Hey John! Uh, do you have any change or anything? We're trying to pool our money to get something at McDonalds." John laughed and tossed the contents of his pockets onto the coffee table. I noticed the dirty sock with the change for the first time. It looked so sad, and was a filthy nicotine color on the bottom. Matt slipped the change inside and spoke to me directly.

“Oh, dude, would you mind going to McDonalds to pick up some cheese burgers and stuff from the drive-thru? I’ve got like no gas left in my car, and plus my grandmother might stop by, and I want to make sure I’m here when she does, ‘cause last time she came by and got pissed cause everyone left empty beer cans all over the place, and I was the one who ended up getting shit for that.” I could tell that Matt was getting irritated by the number of people milling around his living room. Plus his grandmother is some crazy Christian lady that makes brownies for those weird rituals they always have down at St. Francis church. I noticed a fake lacquered banana and two fake lacquered kiwis arranged in the shape of a penis and testes on the island counter between the kitchen and living room. I didn’t mind going to McDonalds. I thought it would give me and John a good chance to talk anyway. I also knew where Bruhbra’s car keys were, and smiled as I hatched a plan to tax Matt for the service.

“I just want you to know, before I say yes, that I am fully aware of this entire scheme of yours to call me up just so you could manipulate me into giving you change and driving to get you dinner at the Plaza. I would also like you to know that you are perfectly capable of doing this yourself, which makes you one lazy bastard.” I snatched the dirty sock as I said this. It was heavy. They had actually accumulated a lot of money in there, and I was kind of eager to give the reeking package to the drive-thru kid and tell him to “keep the change.” No one noticed me slip my hand inside the porcelain Winnie the Pooh cookie jar and pull out Bruhbra’s keys.

Everyone seemed delighted that I had volunteered. It was obvious to me then that they were all lazy bastards. None of them even asked to come with me to get their food. Stuff like that never really bothers me, it’s just funny. It’s also very typical of most of my friends. I tilted my head toward the door and arched my eyebrows, signaling to John. I waved as I opened the creaking front door, and spoke to the entire room.

“We’ll be right back. Oh, and there had better be a caffeine free diet coke, or maybe some kind of ghetto orange drink with crushed ice poured for me when I get back from waiting on all your asses!” Dan snorted hard and started choking on his burrito. As I emerged from the house I caught a

---

FOLIO

fleeting glimpse of Ryan, who towers above all of us, bear-hugging Dan into a wrestling maneuver he loudly declared the “Heimlich, hold.” John closed the screen door behind us and spoke to me as we crunched the healthy grass between the door and the driveway.

“I don’t even believe it’s dark out already. The time change is so fucking ridiculous.” My breath was showing a little bit in the air before me. I saw a glimmer of light shoot from John’s hand as he checked his pager for the time. “It’s only 5:36. That’s fucking insane.” I couldn’t have agreed more. I had been getting up before the sun for so long that I had scarcely seen daylight since the clocks went back. I would work all day, and by the time I got out it was already dusk. I signaled toward the garage with my head as we walked. I let Bruhbra’s car keys dangle out of my hand. Everyone calls Matt’s brother Bruhbra. It does seem kind of silly, but I’ve never known him as anything else. The name comes from a mispronunciation. Matt couldn’t say the word “brother” when he was a child. The closest he could get was “Bruhbra,” and so the name stuck and was passed on to all Matt’s friends. I jingled the keys, and John spoke again.

“Nice! Have you ever driven this car before? I’ve never even ridden in it.” I told him that I had, once, and only because Bruhbra was drunk and needed me to bring him to “get some trim” at a girl named Becky’s house. I had agreed because it meant I could drive the Porsche. We climbed in and put the top down. We lowered toward each other in mischievous glee. I started the engine, and turned on the lights, and in an instant we were on our way toward the Plaza. More than half the streetlights are out all the time on Round Hill Drive, which connects Round Hill Circle to Field Street, and it was black as black that night. Round Hill Drive is not a long road. If you stood in Matt’s front yard during the day you could easily make out the stop sign at the end of the street. It seemed long that night, though.

John and I hadn’t spoken yet. I could feel untold power underneath the gas pedal. I wasn’t driving particularly fast. I never do. I’ve never gotten a speeding ticket in my life, and at the time of this story had never been in any kind of accident or anything. One of the streetlights flickered up ahead. I

remember that so well. I remember thinking how strange it is that I always see streetlights flicker. It's almost frightening. I see it every night. If I'm on the road after dark, I am guaranteed to see a street light flash, or sometimes even go out completely.

"This car is *so* nice. Matt's definitely going to be pissed that we took it." As I spoke, I cracked my window, and the static of the outside world bled into the car. I might have been hugging the right side a little. I'm really not used to driving standard. I mean, I can do it, but the Trooper is automatic. We were only half way down Matt's street when I saw a flash out of the corner of my right eye. There was movement happening just beyond my right headlight, shapes in the dark. I heard John crack his window a little, and a wisp of wind stretched between us. The air cooled a strip of my face, across my eyes and forehead. I saw the flash again. I thought maybe it was a dog, or even a deer. It's not uncommon to see deer around that area. John had actually hit a deer once, on I-84 near the Naugatuck exit. He fucked up his car pretty bad. He fucked the deer up worse.

Then John bent forward a little. The silhouette of his shoulders crouched and hunched. He was looking out the right side of the windshield, out into the night where I had seen the flash before. I was only three quarters of the way down Round Hill Drive. The Porsche was growling. It doesn't like slow drivers very much. I saw John's lips part a little before he leaned even further forward and whispered, "What the fuck?" A shadow detached itself from the dark beyond the reaches of the Porsche's right light. It was just a shape at first, barely kissing the pale beam of yellow. Then all at once I saw the flash again, like someone had shot a sunbeam at me with a pocket mirror. Then the shape twisted fast, and brightly flashed, and a little kid on a bike jerked involuntarily into my path.

That moment plays out in my head over and over. I've watched that kid's front wheel jerk out so many times. I've seen him collide with the right bumper or headlight again and again. I made no attempt to stop. I didn't even turn the wheel. I heard the kid's voice pretty loud, then it was cut off. I didn't run him over. I saw his body and arms coil and contort as he fell from his bicycle. I was fifty feet ahead when I finally



---

FOLIO

stopped the car. I scratched my head underneath the blue bandanna I was wearing, and spoke to John in a whisper.

“You saw that right? I mean, I did just hit a kid right? Aw, fuck!” I pressed my temples. There was complete silence. A car drove by on Field Street up ahead. I needed to get a grip. I had read stuff about situations like this before. The driver is guaranteed to be fucked for life. There was a school bus driver who hit a kid not that long ago in Naugatuck. After the buss’ stop sign had been folded. After the lights went out. The kid just decided to bolt back toward the bus again, and was crushed beneath the back tire as it pulled away. It was not the bus driver’s fault. The entire town ripped her to shreds. It was all over the *Naugatuck Daily News*, and everyone was talking about it everywhere. John spoke back to me after a long silence.

“You should definitely turn the car around and see if he’s okay. He might be dead. He definitely slammed pretty hard into the pavement.” John was rubbing his lips as he talked. I was amazed at how calm I felt. I didn’t really believe what had happened yet. I turned the Porsche wheel all the way to the left, and 360’d around slowly toward the place where we had hit the kid. I saw his form slumped against the curb, the bicycle gnarled at his feet. The kid was not moving at all. When we got up close, we pulled up next to him so that we were facing the wrong way on Round Hill Drive. I put the Porsche in park and got out. So did John.

The kid was definitely dead. I knew it from the first second I saw him. His face was buried in the curb, his right arm bent back over his body at an ungodly angle. His left arm was pinned beneath his body. It stuck straight up near his head, and the other hand was bloody. I rubbed my cheeks. There was no movement anywhere on Matt’s street. Apparently, no one had heard the sound. We looked at each other again, but didn’t say anything for a long time. I folded my hands, and smelled my knuckles. The Porsche had sustained no damage. We really only hit the kid hard enough to knock him down. My mind was moving pretty fast. I was drawing blanks one after another. John pointed toward the kid and spoke.

"There's no way we're taking the blame for this." I looked at the kid again. I still didn't know what to think. Of course I didn't want to take the blame for this. I was trying to imagine how we could escape unnoticed, but hit and runs are looked down upon almost as much as child molesters. My indecision was obvious. I went from the kid to John, the kid to John. Then I spoke.

"What are we going to do? I can't believe this! This isn't even my car! How the fuck could this happen to *me*?" I kicked the pavement to augment this last word. "Dude, tell me what to do, because I can't fucking think." John took over then. All I knew was that I didn't want to think too much, and John can be the most calm and calculating person in the world in an emergency situation. He took a deep breath, let the air out slow, then spoke to me.

"Alright, we're definitely not taking the blame for this. Definitely not." He paused for a second, then paced a little, then pointed toward the kid again. "There's an afghan in the back seat...Come on, we'll put him in the back of the car."

I knew he was right. If we just left the kid we would definitely get caught eventually. We paused for just a second, and it finally sunk in that I had killed a kid. There was nothing I could do to save him. I immediately began thinking about saving myself. Then we both broke toward the body. I grabbed the Indian print afghan out of the back seat and spread it out in a big square on the pavement. I spoke to John again.

"We've got to hurry up." John nodded his agreement. We paused again and I hesitantly bent down and got my hands under his armpits. John grabbed his legs. When we picked him up, a long tail of saliva or blood or both stretched from his lips to the curb. "Oh my god!" The sight made me stagger a little, but I regained my balance and started toward the blanket. Kids are a lot heavier sometimes than you think they are. This kid wasn't a day over 12 or 13, though I couldn't really make out his face. It was pretty beaten up. There was blood all over the curb. I wondered where the kid lived. I thought maybe he had an older brother or sister that I knew. I thought of his parents.

We rolled the kid in the blanket like a cocoon, then wedged him into the tiny back seat. John grabbed the kid's

