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THE WATERMARK

COLUMBIA RECORDS

Soul Artists

REVOLT

Hip Hop
We ain't dead
said the chills
and the bells

change

D.J. Ravi

THE WATERMARK

COLUMBIA

SOUL ARTISTS

REVOLT

RIGHT THOUGHTS
RIGHT CHORDS

Hip Hop
We ain't dead
said the chills
and the

change

O.D. Ray



THE WATERMARK

UMASS BOSTON'S JOURNAL OF STUDENT ARTS AND LITERATURE

THE WATERMARK

Editorial Staff: Jillian Jackson, Caleb Nelson, Lilly O'Flaherty, Elizabeth Seawright
Editor-in-Chief/Student Coordinator: Christian Garcia

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

2010 Guest Poet: Aissata Sanoh

Cover Art: *Nora's Revolution* by Amanda McGarrity

Watermark Flag and Folio Embellishment by Amanda Huff.

Layout: Christian Garcia

Special Thanks to Amanda Huff, Donna Neal, Amanda Huff, Dr. O'Grady, Dr. Areford, and Amanda Huff.

The *Watermark* is UMass Boston's student-run literary and arts journal. Annually produced with an allocation of student fees, it serves as an outlet for the highest-quality writing and visual art created by UMass Boston's graduate and undergraduate students and alumni. Submissions are selected by the editorial staff via a democratic and anonymous process, with the goal of offering all of UMass Boston's students and alumni an opportunity to have their work published. Interested parties can contact the *Watermark* by calling (617) 287-7958 or sending an email to watermark.umb@gmail.com.

Submissions for publication in the upcoming 2011 issue of the *Watermark* are presently being accepted until April 15, 2011. Submissions of poetry, prose, and creative nonfiction, of any length, may be sent in attachments to the email address above. Submissions of visual art are also *highly* encouraged; please submit a digital image of your work which conforms to the following

DIGITAL IMAGE REQUIREMENTS:

300+ dpi resolution, JPEG format.

You may submit digital images via email to the above address, or you may make an appointment via email, and bring your work to the *Watermark* office for photographing. The office is located in the Campus Center 3rd floor, room 3300.

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome, just stop by and say hi!

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THE LINE RAT

“Looks like blood,” Chief said.

Alfant stood beside him, staring at the ocean. It lapped in red crests, black divots. The redness of a colossal moon made the blackness outside of the carrier seem blacker. Alfant turned his head. His pupils were dilated in the hangar bay’s night lighting, giving him a vacant expression. Yellow, green, grey. His hair mussed with salt, with sweat, he looked too hot for conversation. He squinted at Chief as though gathering all his thoughts together into one word. “What?”

“The moon. It looks like blood.”

“Yep. These sandstorms are crazy,” Alfant said amicably, swinging his sweat drenched cranial by its strap. He threw it in the air, and caught it behind his back by the same strap inches from the deck. “Even five miles out they’re crazy. Hope they keep this door open a few minutes.”

A wind blew grit through the gaping hole in the side of the carrier, forty feet high and sixty feet wide, where Elevator 2 had just finished grinding to a stop at the flight deck above them. And the empty space it left behind drew sand invisibly, invasively into every crevice, electrical connector and airplane dashboard. Even the tape protecting the canopies of the F-18s was no match for the tiny dust particles. The jets around them shed their tape toupees gradually, peeling upward in defiance of order. Chief pushed his palms against his eyes. He yawned.

“Sure looks pretty.”

A CD-player blared Disturbed for a group of Air-Framers cleaning oily gunk out of the panels on a jet in a corner. A forklift screeched, stopped, dropped a pallet with a Drop Tank on it inches from Chief’s feet. No fuel. The Drop Tank bounced an inch, snapping a few of the planks, snapping Chief’s attention back to the hangar. He yelled, “What the fuck shipmate? Trying to crush me?” and the forklift beeped as it reeled in a backward arc to collect another Drop Tank. The speed demon driver stared backward concealing his face. “Fucking Boatswains.”

“I bet that was the last run,” Alfant said, and nodded toward the elevator.

A Move Director whistled at a Break Rider riding in the cockpit of the last jet that had come off the El, made two fists in the air, yelled “Breaks.” A tow Tractor Driver stopped the tow truck. A Break Rider pulled a knob labeled “break” in the cockpit. Chains ground against nonskid, dragged by the other Blue Shirts, Blueberries, humans. They chained the jet to the deck in twelve places. So a jet moved from a spot on the flight deck to a

spot in the hangar, precisely positioned with its nose, its tail, its folded port wing all inches from another jet. Everyone had one job, and Alfant’s job was to be Chief’s bitch, Chief’s Break Rider. But no new jets were coming down now.

“Could be,” Chief muttered. “Nothin to do but wait.”

“Always waiting,” Alfant said.

The hangar door remained open, and Alfant untucked his shirt to take full advantage of the breeze from outside while he could. He looked at Chief, and lifted his shirt like a parachute, his thoughts devoured by Chief’s presence, by the noise of Chief’s radio, by the smell of Camel Lights radiating from Chief’s jacket, by Chief’s calm.

Chief’s radio said “Five miles.”

Thoughts, and the desire to express them melted in the oppressive heat inside, outside, all around them. Chief shifted his weight, resting an elbow on his stomach to hold his radio near his head. It crackled loudly. It jabbered about jets needing fuel, re-spots and someone said, “El 2 secure.”

A jet landed hard on the flight deck above.

Chief shifted again, dropping his radio hand to his side.

The sound of a steel trip-rope scraping against nonskid above reverberated through the hanger.

Chief stood pensively, apparently unaware of the loudness of his radio, as a voice in it said, “Ripper Red roll up.”

Alfant ambled away but Chief stayed to stare at the bloody moon streaks running outside on the Persian Gulf.

* * *

“Where’s Alfant?” Burbank asked as he slammed the door to the Corrosion Control Shop inward with his shoulder, letting his arms dangle. He’d given up the control of his dangly arms forty-eight days ago, five months into Cruise. They functioned OK on autopilot. His fingertips felt enough to peel tape, to squeeze the caps off Turko cans. They functioned as feelers for his brain.

He’d eat mechanically. He’d sleep mechanically. And every morning at the end of the 12-hour night shift he’d run mechanically around the flight deck for an hour while the night shift Plain Captains finished their Dailies and while the day shift technicians did their Clean Birds. 0600, at sunrise, he’d leave the shop for the birthing, put on his turquoise boot-camp issue shorts, and a PT tee shirt that said NAVY on it. Rain or no rain, wind or no

wind, heat or no heat, he'd run. 0700 he would shower—keep up his hygiene, clip his nails, shave, brush, floss. He didn't read. TV didn't seem to interest him. He'd sleep and work. When he waited, he'd wait like a robot, dangle arms lulling in the breeze from the ship's air conditioning system.

The shop looked empty. A high backed pleather chair hid Moran as he finished typing an email.

"You know, I don't know. In the hanger, I guess," Moran said. He leaned back, and back, until the seat cradled him like a baboon king, legs crossed, boots off. This may have been uncomfortable once, for him, for the chair, but everything had lost its rigidity. Now he rocked, half turning, half pressing his cheek on the pleather to look at Burbank. His face stretched against the cushion at the top of it. "They're dropping a jet on El 2. Chief wanted him to Break Ride."

"Roger that," Burbank said. He stood staring at the wall.

"Would you sit down," Moran said.

Burbank sat on a desk chair, a cloth one with a lip of foam sticking from its front seam. He kicked the floor, pushing himself toward the workbench that stretched the length of the shop. It was a long and skinny shop. The chair's wheels ground on the steel floor, changing tone as they rolled over rust spots. "We should paint this floor soon," Burbank said.

"We'll paint it before we pull in," Moran said and leaned back into his computer to read the email he'd just finished writing. "We'll paint it when we cross the Atlantic, when there's nothing to do."

Burbank began scooting his chair along the desk by thrusting his pelvis, using only his stomach muscles, his feet resting above the wheels. "This is a good workout," he said.

When Alfant walked into the shop minutes later, he sat on a crate in the back corner. It made a metallic snap, and the only other noise came from the air conditioning. The room began to shake and both rolling chairs shifted. The ship turned, chasing a headwind for the jets that were still landing. Moran and Burbank grabbed their desks. Alfant picked at his cuticle.

"It's a mind fuck. I'm tired of it," Alfant muttered. "The jets haven't stopped landing yet, and Chief wants me sitting out there . . . I said I'm a lamp burning oil."

The last part Alfant murmured more for his sanity, because the other two had stopped listening.

Burbank slid gradually away from the computer sideways

along the tilting deck as the carrier steadied slowly. "You're a strange guy Alfant," he said, spinning absently until his knees knocked into the steel wall opposite the desk.

Alfant stood abruptly, dropping his cranial on the crate he had been sitting on, taking off his float coat, and dropping it in a heap over the cranial. "I'm going to get a Coke. I'll be back."

"Get me one," Burbank said, forehead resting listlessly against the steel wall.

"Hang up your shit. Sign it in," Moran said, clicking on his mouse. "I don't want your stuff scattered across my shop. We're not monkeys here. You need to follow through. You need to be doing things right. People get killed this way. People die every day by not paying attention to detail."

"People die because they don't sign in their cranials," Alfant said. This was not a question. It was a statement. Sarcasm. "It's not scattered, anyway. I'm just leaving it in the corner. I'm going to use it again in a few minutes. Chief still needs me to Break Ride."

"Hang it up," Moran said.

"I'll put it on as soon as I get back," Alfant said.

Moran held a thick blue binder back over his head toward Alfant.

Alfant picked up his float coat and cranial. He took one step, grabbed a hanger and hung them together, wrapping the long Velcro strap around the top of the hanger. The back corner of the plastic hanger broke as he pushed it forcefully at the pipe where the other coats hung, and when he let go, his coat fell, crushing a half empty paper trash bag full of plastic bottles. Alfant took the shop log from Moran, and he signed his name, "James P. Alfant," in the proper spreadsheet.

Moran swiveled around to watch Alfant sign his name. "Thank you," he said, and he took the binder and he looked at the cranial still hanging on the hanger among the other float coats, and he looked at Alfant's float coat splayed over the bag of plastic trash, and he signed his name beside Alfant's before swiveling back toward his computer.

* * *

No one stood in the chow line when Alfant got to the galley, but most of the tables were full of sailors eating sloppy joes and drinking coffee. The general din of conversation echoed into an abstraction, and the noise made Alfant hungry. He walked into a corridor made of snack machines at the back of dining area.

No pork rinds, no Doritos, not even a pack of Sour Patch Kids. All the lights on all the soda machines were lit, "Empty." When he reached the last machine in the corridor, there at the bottom were three rolls of lifesavers and nothing else. A short sailor with a pale face pushed a cart full of soda cartons, stacked high and haphazardly toward him. The corridor ended at a wall. No escape. Alfant didn't move. The sailor stopped the cart abruptly, inches from Alfant's ankles. She stared at him. Her face had three pimples, and olive eyes framed in grey, set back in her skull. She could have been a zombie. Her only color came from her pimples. Her coveralls hung loose over her bones, piling around her boots.

"You stocking these?" Alfant said.

"Go ahead. Get what you want," she said. She sighed. She watched him, and her skull sunk to the push bar where her arms were folded. And she rested her chin between them.

"It's empty," Alfant said, and a bizarre feeling like a caterpillar crawled in his stomach. He shuffled awkwardly, squeezing between the sailor's cart and the machines. "Can you back up," he said.

She yawned.

"It's always out," she said. "It's not healthy. The machines are always empty on this ship." She stared at his bottom as it wedged by her elbow between the cart and machine. "Nice ass," she said.

The cart shook tremendously as Alfant swung sideways, and the crates on it swayed dangerously. The zombie girl's head wiggled with them. The cart tipped, and the boxes fell against the machines opposite, and for one terrible moment it seemed like the top boxes might tumble back, and trap Alfant. But he squeezed past, in a final desperate effort.

But one soda can slipped from the middle of the heap.

The crates collapsed. The sailor stood and let go of the cockeyed cart. She smiled, eyes half shut. "Nice going hot stuff," she said, smirking wider. "You gonna help me clean this up?"

Root beer cans rolled and hissed down the corridor, guided by the machines and Alfant's feet. Several spun spraying out into the galley, among the eating sailors, sparking commotion and giddy laughter. Alfant turned nearly as pale as the girl, watching the sodas tumble. He picked up six cans, as many as he could hold, and set them back on the ground like bowling pins. As the cans rolled he continued to right them, and about half stayed standing while the rest of the mess dissipated—Orange Crush, Mountain Dew, Canada Dry.

* * *

An empty tray of sloppy joe slid from its spot in the chow line. Steam from the boiling water under it rose, fogging the glass above. Alfant looked toward the snack machines while he waited with his tray. The pale sailor girl assembled the rolling cans in boxes by the machines. Her movements tickled his spine. She drifted across the floor, swift and smooth, dipping to pick off cans. The cans rolled on the ground like magnetized marbles and she floated above them. Alfant's stomach felt no gravity; his neck tickled with adrenaline. Her hands moved like astronaut hands, deliberate, calculated. Her calming movements reminded Alfant that he was alone in the world, in the navy, on this ship, in his skin. He knew people, but he wasn't playing the same game they were. He was bored. He wasn't a part of them. He imagined the zombie girl's nails skimming along his back, examining him like the skin of a billion dollar space station in orbit.

A full tray of sloppy joe clanked in place behind the steamy glass, and Alfant leaned down to watch where he put his tongs as he grabbed a bun. He could see the cook's torso turning, taking the old tray with him to the deep sink. The cook's voice boomed as he spoke to someone in the corner of his kitchen. "It's like eating a rat's asshole . . ." Laughter. "Stupid rodent won't stay still . . ." More laughter and a wild commotion followed. Pots crashed, and water sprayed at a high velocity against a deck somewhere deep in the recesses of the ship. And the cook laughed too. His voice was deep, and his laugh rumbled like freight plane taking off. His white apron disappeared from behind the buffet. "Hey Shipmate, hold it together. You'll never get leverage that way . . ."

* * *

Alfant set his tray facing the snack machines, where he could watch the zombie girl fill them and still be hidden, safely hidden among rows of anonymous animated sailors. The girl knelt now next to an open chip machine, wiping its window. She looked dreamy, absent, to Alfant and her mood infected him as he cut his bun in half and strolled to the toaster, head bent to miss the sharp spirals jutting between the pipes above—the sprinkler system made of gleaming bits of polished brass, which seemed to him like a medieval torture device suspended from the ceiling.

He assembled his sandwich methodically, one spoonful at a time. He smoothed out the meat, and covered it with a slice of American cheese. His sandwich could have been photographed for a McDonald's ad when he finished—his bun the roundest and the only toasted one in the galley. Alfant looked up at the girl and the few cans still rolling around her legs.

"That sandwich looks like plastic," Burbank said as he set a tray on the table across from Alfant and he smiled showing a set

of gleaming white teeth. "I got tired of waiting."

Alfant nodded because his mouth was full of baked beans.

The thin smile continued to spread across Burbank's teeth, making his mouth the most attractive, most distracting part of his face as he slopped sloppy joe on his bun, and squashed the top of it over the meat between his tray and knuckles. Excess meat slid out of its sides and what was left stayed trapped in the bread. Then he cut up the bun with his fork, and mixed it into the stew of sloppy meat surrounding it.

"Some smart ass has been drawing smiley faces on the top of our jets with spray Turko," Burbank said.

"So," said Alfant.

"Master Chief's got me patrolling our birds till morning. Said I'm a reliable guy and she wants me to watch for the Line Rats creeping around after flight schedule on top of our birds."

"You're a Line Rat too," Alfant said.

"Yeah, but I'm reliable. I don't use Turko as spray paint," Burbank said.

The beans in Burbank's tray had spread out in a compartment they shared with broccoli. Burbank pulled them into a pile with his fork.

"The sun comes up every morning, a week now. It reflects on the smiles—every jet on the Flight Line, and there's a message too," Burbank said between swallows. "Yesterday the Admiral ran out of the tower in a bathrobe to chew out the night check Line Chief before he went below."

Alfant bit into his perfect sandwich.

"They write 'you're welcome,' underneath the smiley faces," said Burbank. "Damn Line Rats."

"I heard. I know."

"It's a disgrace," Burbank said. "It's not good for morale."

The zombie girl wiped the same window on the same machine in slow circles moving ever upward. Slowly. She nearly reached the top and the glass below barely seemed to be there at all. She wiped and refolded her cloth, and wiped, and repeated.

"You hear about that guy in Pensacola?" Alfant said reviving the conversation, still staring past Burbank.

"No," Burbank said. "Can't say I have."

"Apparently this guy on the Pensacola Flight Line forgot to put the pins in the ejection seat when he was working in the cockpit. This was in Yahoo news, I think. He shot himself 200 feet into the air, because hit the ejection lever on accident while he was working, but he lived. He grabbed the straps and held on to the seat. And the parachute went out and it saved him." Alfant scraped listlessly at his tray with his fork. "It's crazy."

"That's impossible," Burbank said. "His legs would have been crushed."

"It's what I heard," Alfant said.

Alfant watched the zombie girl close the snack machine she'd been cleaning.

"Those ejection seats work with inertia and wind resistance," Burbank said. "If the jet isn't moving, the ejection seat'd shoot straight up. It would have probably broken his legs right off against the dashboard or the windscreen. He wouldn't have even made it out of the cockpit."

"I'm just saying what I heard," Alfant said. "It sounded plausible to me."

"It's not."

Burbank finished eating his beans and shoved his tray sharply, unconsciously away, took a deep breath and chugged the last of his water. Alfant watched the water swoosh in the cup as it disappeared, like coolant down a funnel.

"How's your wife doing?" Alfant said.

"We're getting a divorce," Burbank said. "Been more than a month now. She's living with someone else. We better get back up there. El 2's dropping soon."

Alfant nodded. He felt the tingling again, like absence, like outer space. The zombie girl finished wiping the last machine in the row, and pushed her cart full of empty soda boxes out of the galley.

- - -

The weather changed. The carrier could have been a toy in a puddle. The ocean glowed silver, still now. It looked like a pond, an endless cesspool, mosquito breeding grounds, and the sky rose above in shades of solid black. A distant mist of grit buried the stars, loaded the sky. It dimmed the moon at its apex, beyond the view of the opening where the elevator was about to drop into the hanger.

An alarm buzzed, resonating through Alfant's bones. Then came a clank, the faint sound of steel rubbing steel. The elevator slid into view, and light from the flight deck shone yellow, making the two jets sinking down on it look like they were glowing for the second before they dropped below the shadow of the ship. They became empty blackness with the sky.

The elevator leveled with the edge of the hanger bay and clanged. The safety railing dropped, and two tow tractors sped into the darkness followed by Blue Shirts dragging their chains behind. Alfant ran after them and let down the ladder on one of the jets. Chief grabbed Alfant's ankle before he climbed into the cockpit.

"The pilot forgot to put the Safety on in," he called up lifting two ejection seat pins attached to long red flags toward the grit filled sky. "Put these in and we'll get the Safety on once we spot the jet in the hanger. OK?"

Alfant grabbed the pins. He held them up by the flags. They tinged against each other and glinted against the dull glow from the moon. The shadow from the dashboard made a triangle across the cockpit, and Alfant sat on the edge without a flashlight. A Blue Shirt closed the ladder under him, and he scanned the blackness. Then he sighed and slid into the pilot seat. No flashlight. No safety checks. He had the safety pins in his hand. Chains rattled on the back of the tractor below him.

He watched the sky as he waited, the full moon flushed white now, and he could see only a few stars smattered around it. Slowly he ran his fingertips along the bottom edge of the seat, feeling for pinholes. The ejection strap slid into his hand. His eyes

narrowed, and he stared at the empty screens on the dashboard in front of him, the map display between his legs reflected in the moonlight. Empty. He licked his finger and made a big circle in its dusty center. Then in the circle he drew slit eyes and a smile—a face so happy it couldn't see a thing. Chains stopped grinding and smashing below. A whistle—the Move Director walked out into the lights, hands open, whistle wedged in the corner of his mouth, signaling to release the brakes. Alfant smiled at the smiley face he made on the computer screen on the dashboard, and he pulled the ejection lever. One defining bang sent the canopy flying backward.

Chief stood at the edge of the elevator, leaning forward, elbow still resting on his stomach, radio up, eyes glazed as they followed the canopy's flips toward the horizon. Seven tenths of a second and the rockets under the ejection seat engaged. Alfant's legs smashed against the dashboard, and the windscreen broke them. It ripped away his flesh in less than a second. And Alfant flew legless into the night, gripping the seat straps.

His torso seemed to hop in mid air, and it hovered for a moment before the rockets pushed him and the seat up and out of view, above the flight deck. His legs stayed among the mangled flesh clinging to the windscreen. The silhouette of the chair, Alfant's torso separating from it, hung against the moonlit grit in the sky for what seemed an eternity before the parachute shot out. Alfant's torso dropped, flipping like a hundred and some pound bag of potatoes into the ocean. The empty chair floated after him, and when it hit the water the parachute puffed like a mini mushroom cloud.

—CALEB NELSON

SEPTEMBER 10TH

After the bars close
we take a cab up to Jacob's place
in Spanish Harlem
to sit on the roof
and smoke Lucky Strikes
while we watch the sun rise.
On our way up JFK Drive
in the dark of the dawn
I watch the bridge lights
going off on the right
while the apartment lights
ignite on the left
and, in between,
I am suddenly
Insignificant.
On the roof I can smell
hot newspapers and coffee
steaming up from the dirty streets
and we watch the night people
stumbling home
and the day people
stumbling out of bed.

A couple of hours later
I am heading downtown on the 6
and everyone on the train
except me
is uniformed, with skin
darker than mine,
and we stare without looking.
The Suits get on around 86th
and then it's packed
and my body is no longer my own
as I'm slammed against Him
and squashed against Her.

When I get downtown
I stand outside the Krispy Kreme
on the ground floor,
waiting for the "Hot" sign.
The donuts melt in my mouth and
it is worth the wait.
I savor the last bite,
already excited for
tomorrow morning's
guilty pleasure.

At lunch I need to go to Midtown
so I go to the basement

to jump on the 2
and the place is
abuzz with a sea
of pinstripes and ugly ties
and smart click-clackety high heels
catching trains in every direction.

Later that night we
catch a movie
at the cinema
across the street
and as we're leaving
I stop
I don't know why I stop
but I stop
and look up

—RANDI ABEL

WASTING TIME TASTES GOOD

It
tastes like hot whisky lips,
on cold sidewalks
at 4 a.m.
when everything should still be open
at least until my eyes are.

It
is mint on tongue,
no gastric acids coming up.

Walk your dog ten yards,
at 10 p.m., at the second tree
both of you take a piss, then back to the couch
my man, it feels like home and
what about Facebook?

It
is a girlfriend you used to have,
-I make pasta or we can have stea-BAM!
The door slams.
She is wearing a suit you'd never seen
before; my friend,
she'll be clearly
out for dinner.

Wasting time tastes
good, and at least it brings
no digestion
problems.

—TOMMASO MANFREDINI

THE END OF THE LINE

January 27, 2010 marked the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi German Auschwitz and Birkenau Concentration and Extermination Camps. This story is dedicated to the victims and survivors of all Nazi death camps.

He sits next to me on the tram. I am struck by his sterile conversation with a cell phone:

"Hello, Daniel. It's Geoffrey."

"I'll be arriving in Scottsdale this evening, then I'll be flying home to Los Angeles, meeting up with Christina and Lorenzo in Beverly Hills. I'll try to connect with you later this afternoon."

"Hi. It's Geoffrey. Did you make my reservation at the Regala Suites in Scottsdale? I want a government rate. No. I am a consultant for the US military. Yes. But I want the Regala Suites. Listen, I've got Tom on the other line. Well. Thanks, but I've got Tom waiting. Sure. Yes, I will. Thanks. I've got to go."

"Tom, I'm on the tram. Yes, I met her this morning. She looks great. I will be at your office this afternoon at three. I'm picking up a rental at the end of line. We can dialog more then. Yes. Yes. Bye."

Geoffrey is wearing loafers with tassels peering just beneath the cuffs on his neatly pressed pants. His engraved briefcase has what I assume are his initials: GMP. I wonder if his shoes and case will be on display, assuming the Nazis won't take them away or burn them before the Allies arrive.

The trees along the tracks start to disappear. He doesn't seem to notice until his phone coverage goes blank.

"Hello. Hello."

He looks out of the window and then he looks at me. Frantically he asks me:

"Where are you going? The end of the line is Riverside. Is that correct?"

I look at him but can't answer.

Looking around the tram he asks others, "Where are you from?"

No one responds. He looks at our shoes, our wooden clogs. I must say, Geoffrey looks very gray. He stands up and runs to the front of the tram and yells, "Please stop! Please stop! I'm on the wrong line!"

As the tram approaches the Iron Gate, it opens to a landscape with hundreds of barns. Two large cement buildings are on either side of the track, pass before my view, as we move forward on the track. The tram begins a funny dance, first stop and then go.

Slowly I within my sight is the end of the line. The doors opens and Geoffrey runs out, although a man wearing odd color fatigues grabs his arm and shouts: "Homosexual!" and throws him to the ground.

I close my eyes and only hear a popping sound from a red balloon.

When I open my eyes, stand up, and walk out onto the platform, I see only my son waiting in his rental, ready to drive me home.

—MARJORIE PORELL

INAUGURATION DAY

Taking my place amidst the mall
I walk in, through the screen
including myself among the 60 million counted there
in eye, foot, cradle, and wheelchair
removing the lens cap off of my senses
I pixilate into the masses
and begin to take full estimation of the state of things

I observe the podium
and survey
all that's encompassed there in

Looking first to the right
see the high-rises of the North East cities
ever pointing to the next goal
armies of student loaded with back packs off to school on the
subway
carefuls of professionals slinging briefcases off to work on the
highway
as the head rush of ambition courses in their veins,
dreams pumping through the central artery of the Great American Freeway

To the left see the West
with the outstretched hulking arm of California muscling its
way to the halls of power
one governor at a time

and am relieved now to see behind me
the great Bull frog of Texas alas
shoed off, though his tongue still caught in the door

Stranger still, is the picture before me
where I see white women making black power fists
jogging the memory of when Americans last gave audience
in the millions to the words of a black man
was it Ray Lewis's MVP acceptance speech of Super Bowl 39
facing charges of double murder
or stretching time further back to the words of MLK
who gave his life balancing the double edge sword of racism
by the tip of his tongue

Polarized in vision
I turn my attention to the central figure readying his presidential
stance
to frame the path of a future yet unseen

as I wait and watch from my blanket look out
and this is what I see

A pair of drunken townie girls
Sitting by an Asian exec
in full digital attire
matching laptop and headset
on the train at a jerkstop
their worlds collide
her boot slams into his keyboard
and while he brushes her off
she belches her opinion through the airwaves
reaching Video Conferences overseas
and all this is America to me

See the embossed acronyms
of major businesses
now sunken in like the chins of beggars

and I see Bernie Madoff
trying to regain money's respect
in a prison vault
lying flat on his back all in green
he begins by writing the autobiography of a dollar

I hear an old Asian Women
rattling a shopping cart full of bottles and cans
their sound rivalling the clamor of the rain
and know who can fix this economy
and all of this is America to me

See skate boarders getting jump starts from cyclists
meeting at the lull of curbs
she vaulted off the seat pedaling
he crouched low, rolling
his hand holding to her cross bar
they move in tandem
a smile cresting over their faces
sharing a departing look
just as they split the turn

See too the giant oil derricks of the south
Starting to bow their heads in respect
As they pass the fuel torch of energy
to the corn rowed grids of the Midwest

and see the organic movement
making the most radical stand
by letting go of mother nature's hand
and of all of this is America to me

See the Amish Families of the prairies

advertising Full Home electric heaters
on front page news
informing the modern secular cities
how to stay warm
all winter long

and see Muslim women in hijabs
selling girl scout cookies,
to workers and students
while waiting in limbo together
for the light arrow to point the way
at the stop of UMass Boston/JFK

I hear the words of Elder Yaakov
Who turns to me after the preacher's opening
prayer to the president, begins by reciting
the sacred words of the Shema
from Torah, as he questions
Why are the Jews so oft quoted but ill treated
Better that we should be misquoted and well treated

Now look on
And see the bloody glove of O.J. and the gem studded glove of
M.J.
as I wonder what suits the invisible hand of capitalism best
with its T.V. antennae waving on the march of murderers and
rapists
guiltless in its fame
and All this is America to me

I see how Kaiser Permanente hospital
Balances its health care budget
With 7 stretchers of the dead family that were gunned down
By Dad and Mom after being fired without comp
From the same Hospital who's walls now contain their bodies
The same hospital walls that are newly covered with photos from
the
Administration and team of doctors posing with the Octomom
before the backdrop of their 7-figure medical research grant
check
and all of this America to me

Psychiatrists with your sub labeling machine guns
WHO ARE YOU?

Apocalypse Brokers pedaling brochures of hell in every city
common
WHO ARE YOU?

Women lined up by the Diamond Vault
awaiting men to go by calling out the right Salary Number

WHO ARE YOU?

The Savage Blue Fang of Technology
eating Newspapers, Jobs, Privacy, Memory, Space itself
and every spare scrap of time we can feed it.
WHAT ARE YOU?

Denizens of greed scarfing down people's entire livelihoods
in one Big Bonus Gulp.
WHO ARE YOU?

and Health Insurance Marketers
Playing the price is right with people's lives
WHO ARE YOU?

DECLARE YOUR FORM
Or you shall be the first of my erasures

OH I see you
abandon your culture
and hide behind your skin
but low
I stick by my culture
and rise above my skin

reading the Hendrix Quote
"When the power of Love overcomes the Love of Power the
world will know peace."
off purple bumper stickers
and catching the title of Nietzsche's book
"The Will to Power"
off shiny metal library carts going by
and I wonder whose words
will mark, the grave of time
as nuclear power proliferates
and Tower records goes down

I mast my blanket now
over this many peopled sea and join it to the mane sail
of this great vessel of America
with my eyes turned towards this black light house
to beam a new vision through the halls, pillars and steps
and over white house shores,
to a country whose greatest legacy is change
and ask of all of you

On Inauguration Day
shall we rise up as a nation
or will we wrap a flag of skin
around the word freedom

and call it America

HOLDING TIME

—CHANDLER GOODALE

MOLOTOV

Tomorrow I want to go...
-where?
-where the Molotov cocktail lands,
where fire starts.

—TOMMASO MANFREDINI

I WANTED TO GO WITH YOU, DROWNING, LIKE THE LAST THROWN ROSE—

Two Twenty Two
Flowers withering wallpaper,
soiling sterile pressed pillowcases,
staining curtains, framing windows
reflecting strained faces in their panes,
in a room contaminated with—flowers.

Some sort of symbol signifying life,
take me back to freshly cut innocence,
I fear what sixty-six years will bring,
what will I be brought?
Flowers? To die, here,
for you.

—PAULEE MCCORMACK

"We've gotta call Uncle Everett," I said in September.

"Good idea, ya."

In November.

"We ought to call Everett, "I say.

"Yes, we'll do it."

In May. you say.

"We'll call Bob first. Everett's too deaf to hear the first phone
ring,
then he'll put him on"

Bob says "Everett's gone. Shot himself in September."

"You never called us."

"Busy cleaning up the mess, " Bob said.

The last time I saw Everett he said, "I'm too old to be alive,"
and we went to have a burger at "Tiny's Place."

He drove us in his new Cadillac, had a martini, and paid for all of
us.

—CLAIRE LATON-TAYLOR

WEIGH WALTER'S WILL

He stood silently, his shoulders slouching, arms hung complacently at his sides as if supporting two dislocated shoulders. He had lost interest a long time ago, and she hadn't stopped talking all day. He still nodded during her pauses, smiled when she smiled, shrugged when she shrugged, and cried when she cried. He looked like a boxer past his prime, the lines on his face formed from years of resistance framing his eyes but not his mouth. He always felt the heaviest around the holidays and shrugged off those that tried to lift him up. Why should certain days throughout the year be set aside for being kind and showing people how much you care about them? Why shouldn't one surprise someone with a gift on any day during the year? Wouldn't it mean more? Why did the people that he really cared about only write him on his birthday? He didn't know much anymore. He did know that his days were no longer numbered; he lived them all the same. Was he the delusional one or was everyone else? Maybe we all are subconsciously to certain degrees to get us through the day. One thing he understood---

"Walter!" she laughed, saying his name for the fourth time, finally getting his attention. "What do you think?" she spun around showing off the slimming black dress that navigated closely over her curves. It lightly grabbed the sides of her thin arms leaving her shoulders and neck bare except for the set of pearls that caught her eye as she walked into the store. She tossed her bangs to the side with a flick of the neck and smiled at him eagerly, awaiting his verdict. He was a very good actor; years of charming strangers had yielded a reflex. Everyone Walter met gave him the same look and wanted to hear the same thing. He was no longer conscious of his reactions, he just gave them what he knew they expected. He never avoided it before, but repetition always conquers will. The one who used to feel uncomfortable when not engaging someone now found himself ignoring people on the subway and walking with his eyes at his shoes to avoid seeing someone he knew. She was now smiling on her way back to the dressing room.

Outside of the shop the rain had been falling lightly all evening. Slowly and steadily the shallow crystal streams formed on the side of the street reflecting the traffic lights. They navigated along the curb until they found their home diluting the gutters. Shadows of the anxious patrons danced gaily under the streetlights as Walter wondered how his shadow would fit in among the others. He looked down at his slumping posture and enjoyed its apathy. Now the rain cloud was in his mind and his thoughts cast dancing shadows on the floor of the store. His shadow danced with the others, but only his heard the waltz.

It took more effort than usual to lift himself from the comfortable nook in which he had been seated. He sat among the

manikins observing them curiously. They stood over him in perfect posture and poses, dressed in long tweed overcoats glaring at him begrudgingly. Walter slowly rose, tipped his hat to them, and made his way to the counter where, dress and pearls in hand, she stood speaking to the cashier hardly containing her excitement.

They had plans to go to a party later in the evening and Walter had been dreading it all day. He imagined her friends telling their lame anecdotes, discussing their impotent philosophical debates, and laughing at the same jokes that made him cringe. He laid the cash down on the counter, tipped his hat to the gentleman behind it, and began to walk silently out of the rain he created in the store, into the rain falling on the streets. Walter wondered when he began to detest going out. Was it all of the sudden? Had it been going on for weeks? Or months? He dismissed these thoughts he had no way of knowing. He loved people, the things they had created and achieved throughout time, but he could no longer stand each individual. There were no individuals left. She turned and smiled at Walter, thanked him for the dress and the necklace, and began speaking of the wonderful night they were about to have. His focus turned to the water on the sides of the streets, then back to his shadow that was struggling to stay afloat. It was begging for the lights to go out so it could long to be reborn. It wanted to again have a reason to dance, for its will was no longer its own. Constant being breeds content.

Walter slowed his pace as he spotted a bookstore across the street. He had yet to check to see if any literature had come out during the week and he stopped at every bookstore he came across. He told her he was going over to check out the bookstore and asked if she wanted to join him. She declined and said she was going to go home to begin getting ready for the party, so tipping his hat he made his way across the street. The Protagonist was painted in black and white letters on a small piece of wood above the door; he walked through the glass door framed in rotting pine.

Behind the counter was an old man that reminded him of his grandfather, the only man he had ever admired. The old man wore small glasses, a brown scally cap, and a loose fitting sweater and trousers. Each movement for him was more difficult than the last as he sorted a collection of books into piles. He heard the bell ring as Walter walked through the door, but did not look up from his project. Walter walked slowly up to the counter in fear of startling the old man. Hearing footsteps coming closer the old man turned around.

"What can I do for you?" the old man said in a wry tone.

"I would like to see your copies of *The Fountainhead*,

any new books that have come out this week, and a copy of *The Times*," said Walter looking out a window adjacent to the counter.

"We do have many copies of *The Fountainhead*, but I'm afraid I run a real bookstore and have very few recent releases on my shelves and shall keep it that way. And as for a newspaper, I stopped carrying them. I haven't read one worth a damn in years and I can tell you with confidence that neither have you."

"I have to agree with you sir. I just read the paper to see who is being published instead of myself. Then I wonder why and continue writing. All I see in them are good reviews of bad writing" Walter replied.

"Well that, lad, is something I can respect. But I'm afraid you have come to a shop with a low tolerance for modern ideas. I don't even use electricity," the old man was intrigued and came out from behind the counter, taking Walter by the arm he showed him the kerosene heater in the corner and the candles laid between rows of archaic books. He led him into the back room. "This is my own personal collection. Take a walk around, don't be bashful."

"So how's business?" Walter asked quietly.

"Ah business. Nobody cares about the classics any more. They want shallow books with new gadgets in them, big explosions, flat characters and predictable endings. I have scaled the mountain and watched the avalanche consume the masses, and now we are here."

"Do you enjoy any current writers?"

"You already answered that at the counter" he replied. "You see people don't write universally anymore. They divide the people: borders, nations, class, race. And they are all important to each individual, but a true writer encompasses the masses. Today writers work with a demographic in mind, who will buy their book? Who won't? These people will and those people won't. They write with thoughts of dollar signs flowing out of their pens, onto paper wet with the tears of the feeble minded masses." The old man paused and sighed heavily. He was becoming very animated and could feel his heart race. "Ya see, we are all experiencing the same struggle. What the hell does it all mean? Why should we bother?"

"Probably shouldn't."

"Unite the people! That is what a writer does! Good novels transcend race and nationality and religion and tells that dear reader something true about themselves no matter who or where they are. Tell me, does it matter now whether Camus was

French or that Rand was Russian? No. And that is why their work is still relevant today. They were philosophers just as much as writers, and we now live in a world with no philosophers. Today's writers dream of pulling at the heartstrings of their nations with reflections of film reels in their eyes when sitting in front of a typewriter. You must tear out the souls of all in this universe, embrace them and guide them to infinity and back. Matters concerning the heart today are dull and futile. Nobody has heart anymore."

"Well some people still have to."

"Man used to dream of flying, but now each day clips his wings shorter. The modern man can only love in the morning."

"I'm not sure I know what you mean."

"Anyone can write in the morning, but you must capture the mood of the sunsets. Then lead the reader blindly into the night and defy him to escape, challenge him to find his way home. That is what a great writer does." He walked over to his desk and opened the bottom drawer, pulled out a book, took the bookmark out of it and set it on his desk. "A book defies reality. It can create the unreal and negate the concrete. It can define the end of the universe. It can glorify the existence of man or make him want to end it all. It can create new universes. It begins with a microscopic idea of the densest proportions and it swirls inside the mind of the author, gaining speed and gaining speed until it surpasses the speed of light and then it explodes maliciously. Violently. Uncontrollably. It shoots beyond infinity and through the ease of brush strokes it makes its way into our world of parchment and ideology. But people can no longer see the parallel dimensions. They are consumed by materialism. They are droids with tunnel vision who believe in the creator, not the creative. They no longer realize that writers are the omnipotent beings of this universe, they believe in creation through destruction" He closed his eyes and placed his hand on the book. "This, lad is my copy of *The Fountainhead*. I've had it since before you were born and I haven't put it down since I've had it. If you have this by your side, you will always have hope." He extended it to Walter. "I want ya to have my copy."

"I couldn't si—"

"Take it. I don't have much more breath to sacrifice to these times. You do. Goodbye now I have work to do. Get goin'," the old man pointed to the door. "Come back another time I've had enough for today. We are closed."

"Could I at least get your name sir?" Walter asked.

The corners of the old man's mouth raised just above his youthful dimples that had been dormant for decades. Dormant

since his wife died when he was 19 and she was only 17. He never remarried and since then he had lived a life of loneliness only comforted by books. Now turning to face Walter he put his hand over his heart and said, "I lad...am the protagonist."

Walter left the bookstore against his will and began walking towards his apartment. The rain came down so fiercely it blocked the light from the lampposts. He wanted to see his shadow again. He put his head down and walked straight to his apartment.

* * *

Before he knew it Walter was making his way through the party dressed in a black suit and a thin black tie with a drink in hand. She was eager to show off the dress he had just bought her. Mainly because of the way she looked in it, but partly because Walter had bought for her. He didn't care either way. The words of the old man in the bookstore hadn't left his thoughts since he heard them, and neither had the image of his broken hearted smile.

"I'm going to go over and talk to Howard."

"OK sweetie, I'll find ya," she replied.

He walked in the direction Howard, but upon being out of her sight he went straight to the door. He sprinted down the middle of the vacant street wearing the first involuntary smile he could recall for some time. The wind blew his tie back and it fluttered over his shoulder while his flailing legs kicked up water onto his back. The rain was still coming down in fierce, heavy drops, pushed sideways by the wind. They hit him head on and began to soak through his thin button-down shirt. Never losing speed he quickly arrived at his apartment. There he grabbed his gun, the copy of *The Fountainhead* that the old man gave him, a book that had come out the previous week, last week's *Sunday Times*, and some blank paper and a pen. He stuffed everything into his briefcase, grabbed his keys and shot down the stairs.

He sat behind the wheel of his old car, lit one of his Bowler cigarettes and took a long first drag. He inhaled the smoke along with the smell of the worn, cracked leather seats. Then in one effortless motion he started the car and fired down the street. The raindrops beaded on the black paint; the car had been waxed recently and it reflected the blurry billboards that were floating high above the street. He sped across the slick city

pavement that was black and glossy from the rain. He was always one false move away from losing control. After a few minutes Walter found himself out in the country, trees lined the road as he sped down the middle of it, a tire on each side of the double yellow line. He opened the window and felt the cold air going through his hair, and extending his hand out the window he felt the air fly through the spaces between his fingers. A new cigarette hung loosely between his lips as he shot clouds of smoke out of the window. With one hand resting lightly on the wheel he looked down at the speedometer and laughed.

Almost to his destination, he pulled the car over to the side of the road, grabbed his briefcase and began walking. The country night was much darker than the city's, which he had slowly grown accustomed to. He had trouble seeing at first, but his eyes adjusted, aided by the moonlight. After walking for a few minutes he saw the driveway and began to make his way up it. It led to a huge wooden A-frame looking over the water. He didn't know who owned the house, but from frequent drives by over the past few years he knew when the inhabitants weren't home. Walter found a first floor window, shielding his eyes he violently threw his elbow through the glass, and began lifting himself through.

He made his way up the stairs and although he had never been in the house, he had imagined the inside many times and took familiar steps. He walked slowly down a narrow hallway to the master bedroom, tossed his briefcase on the bed and sat down next to it. Parallel to the bed was a huge bay window that dwarfed him in size. He lit a cigarette and stood up looking at the lake. The rain had finally stopped and Walter studied the lake as a group of ducks curiously swam around a plastic swan. He had never seen anything more picturesque in his life and he felt a very familiar feeling.

Bored by the view he went back to his position on the bed and grabbed his briefcase. He took out *The Fountainhead* and the gun and put them to his right. The new book he put to his left along with the copy of *The Times*. He put the stack of blank papers in his lap and the pen behind his ear. He now turned his attention to the gun, which he loaded and cocked. Layers of swaying smoke swam about the room and the moon lit up Walter's face, while stars painted the ceiling. Picking up the gun in his weak hand and pulling the pen from its perch with his strong hand, he was off to another universe.

—NOLAN LEUTHAUSER

JEANNIE

She was better than my mother. Three meals a day. Bedtimes. That kind of thing. No emotional drama. No screaming or crying. Someone I could go to for advice. Simple lasagna dinners and a place to stay for weeks on end when things got too rough at home.

There were times at home when I had to make dinner and bring it to my mother in bed, only to retrieve the food crusted plates from her bed the next day, practically untouched. Scared shitless and begging her to eat something, get out of bed, talk to me. Nothing in return. Me living on Raisin Bran and pasta and canned soup while she rotted away in bed. Embarrassed to bring anyone over except you, who made it okay somehow.

Then you brought me to your house where your mom made fresh blueberry muffins for breakfast and packed me a bag lunch everyday. I still remember her voice as she yelled at us for the third time to get out of bed and go to school. At least she was up out of bed and caring whether or not we made it to school.

Still, we lied through our teeth to her, lied about where we were going and who we'd be with and what time we'd be home. Got away with it too, because I was the good one, the harmless one, the innocent one who had no tricks up my sleeve. When you were with me, you were safe, because I wasn't one of the troublemakers. Little did she know. Lighting up cigarettes as soon as we were out of eyeshot. Taking shots of gin out of her liquor cabinet right under her nose. Getting stoned in the backseat of someone's car. Going to the older kids' parties where piles of coke lined the coffee tables and tablets got passed around with

no questions asked. Running from the police and hiding in the woods until they were gone. Me covering for you when you went off to meet some boy. A team, you and me.

You put me in dresses, did my makeup and my hair, plucked my eyebrows. Told me how to act around boys, my tom-boy ways no longer acceptable in high school. I confided in you about losing my virginity and asked you for blow job techniques. And I let you see my mother the way she really was. You were the first person to tell me my mother was crazy, the first person who made me see that it wasn't me.

When the worst things happened, I turned to you to remind me that I was sane. Showing up after school to find all of my things in garbage bags on the front porch and the locks changed. Getting backed into a closet and beaten with a broom. Being introduced to my mother's imaginary friend who gave her advice and guidance. Samuel, was what she called him. Still calls him. Through it all you were there, with your mother, on the other side: My first taste of normalcy.

Later, when we were sitting in the Jacuzzi with a bottle of wine singing "Amazing Grace" in preparation for her funeral, my heart broke a little knowing how much it would hurt you to lose her. And I guess it wasn't until right then that I realized she really was dying, that in a matter of days she would be gone forever, and all the pain of watching her die would be over. I sat there in the Jacuzzi listening to you sing just trying to absorb all the hurt, to take it away from you somehow, just by being there. But after you left I cried over how much I would miss her, too. She was better than my mother.

—RANDI ABEL

AFFLICTION

Affliction
is ice
on a summer pond
And the pond
Not dead
But subtly robbed
of pondness

—AISSATA SANOI, GUEST POET

WORDPLAY

A PANTOUM

I want to think of every word
Before I write down what comes to mind.
But my muse pours out
In rhythms tumbled with wayward form.

Before I write down what comes to mind
Without a clear thought of line or structure
Rhythms tumble with wayward form,
Perhaps sense to me and to others scorn.

Without a clear thought of line or structure,
Words hobble limp and gauzy.
Perhaps sense to me and to others scorn
I reprimand: "Compose deliberately!" "Forethought, please!"

Words hobble limp and gauzy
Now teetering towards bombast.
I reprimand: "Compose deliberately!" "Forethought, please!"
Can I tease out this image longer?

Now teetering towards bombast,
My muse pours out.
Can I tease out this image longer?
Yet, I want to think of every word.

—CLAIRE LATON-TAYLOR

ON THE MANIA OF MARCH

First, there is zipping
65 around the endless s-shaped banks of the Charles
a song unfamiliar but beautiful
full of cellos and saxophones stacked up against a piano
and some drums thum-dah-thumping
plays in tune to the boom-boom beat of your heart strings
singing

on top of all that is the sun bright behind the clouds illuminating
gray water rippling so you know there's a breeze but
no buds yet on the trees and the grass
is still brown but it's warm enough now
for the windows down for the first time this year so your hair
gets whipped into your face but your eye still catches
a glimpse: her jogging in yellow shorts
him on his bicycle in red behind her
and you're zooming to the music which you think is in everything
the birds getting lapped by the shore and the naked oaks and the
clouds that are swimming
in the metallic sky reflecting
the river that is swaying and rushing
like you are rushing
rushing not to anywhere just rushing
because you feel you must and sometimes
the sun finds a space in the clouds and comes down to the earth
like a stab
lighting up the river mist and it's *thrilling*.

You race against yourself, never fast enough, wanting
to pull over and write this down
but not wanting to stop
or let go of feeling
the rush of the river and the swirling of the sky
against the song intoxicating and the road twirling
you shift gears
again and again
you try to keep hugging the curves

you try to keep up with the sun

the feeling of tasting what it means to understand
how they all go together like one motion on a string but
before this beneath it and within it
before everything because it *is* everything
is the giddy sadness that comes of knowing that
no one, nowhere, not ever, will know exactly how it feels to be
on the road
in the midst of this partly sunny cloudy grey mania of March.

—RANDI ABEL

EARLY MOURNING

On the night my father was dying,
my children and I lay under the Christmas tree
in sleeping bags, waiting for New Year.

At eleven, Mother'd called.
"He is ill - lungs filled up.
Should I do nothing,
as he'd said?"
when he could speak.

I said, "I'll agree."

I told the children.

They had only known my father
speechless,
yet loved him-
a prince to their eyes
as he was mistaken for, many days.

They'd heard he'd once
even cared for them,
all alone.

We lay under the tree
waiting for midnight,
two small children waiting for sleep
and I waiting for death.

In the morning,
I called their father.
The children stayed behind.

I traveled to
watch my father dying,
as he wanted.
A pastor told me to hold his hand.
We hadn't touched much, since I was his baby.

I knew my father loved me though
by his eyes
when I would visit him
in a nest of nurses and
regulated rooms by
quarter hours of care.

I knew he loved me
by his eyes
as I fed him

in the room with people, mute,
food falling out of corners of lips
and tongues, clothes stained.

When I was five and sick
he waited three hours
while I tried to swallow a pill,
patient with me,
until I dared.

I owed him patience
waiting by him now.

—CLAIRE LATON-TAYLOR

ALLSTON

You've moved from home life,
Dorm life,
Adult life,
A self loathing sight.

A mattress
On the floor.
Doing what you're told.
Hail Mary's sold.
To a crooked cross of gold.

The wall flower wilts,
Banished with the white elephants.
Dreams of a parent's infant.

Behind locked doors
A collection of marrow and ivory.
Rusted needles
In Christian steeples

Every night it's you and a leather belt
Every night it's less feelings felt
Told mommy and daddy you'd join the workforce
While their checks are a chemical melt

The yellow brick road
Leads to a rabbit
Hole.
A direct route
To an elephant graveyard.

This is Allston Rat City.

—RYAN OLENICK

BLACKBERRIES

We lived on the other side of the river, and on the walks back home we would make our way through the overhang of sticky-smelling elm and the rough scrub and milkweed that pushed through the chipping wrought iron and made their sneaked way up between the clumsy and sinking blocks of sidewalk. If it rained you could dip your feet where the winter had left its turtle glaciers shaped like bowls among the houses, where dogs would stop to drink and regard the marble slab that read:

Fort Ordered Built by George Washington, 1778

a grey and white monument before an old clapboard colonial house dyed red and black, that only kept its color in the shade that took up most of the day. The marker was cool and serene and stood out from the blackberry bushes like the last thing bright and clean and new where time and the warm and unvirgined New England ground had started to age in reverse and take it all back.

"Ever thought of picking some of those."

"Of course. But you'd have to reach across the fence. Think they have a dog?"

She stood on her tippy-toes, leaning into the cast down shapes of the elms.

"I could be quick about it."

"Alright."

And she told me to watch the front door of the house, choked thick and wild by the blooms of ivy and green brush.

Mary filled her hands and dropped the berries into the cleaned out coffee cup, wiping her black and purple fingers on the pavement, still carpeted with the tiny elm sprouts like quarter-notes, dropped from a drooped ribbon of music.

The yard was deep and seemed to fall farther and farther back into the somnolent and cooling thick, where the back lawns all the way back down the street began to meet and sink one into the next, dark and impenetrable. If movement came it was only the house slowly chipping and leaning away, as if sinking back on its hind legs into all that queer and swollen shadow, with the million tiny creaks and whispers. But when it was finally quiet we took a few more berries to eat and Mary watched the front door stand silent from behind the monument.

We were at the corner of the last block when we turned to look back, rounding the corner onto our street, and we could

see a terrier licking the purple smear still there under the shadows, shaggy and unhurried in that shade.

She had passed the share of the next day in town, and it was the milky first falls of evening when I watched Mary on her way up the drive, leaving her sandals to sink in the grass and calling our cat in from wherever it hid, somewhere out behind the rock walls in the cut of fern and skeleton barb between our yard and the neighbors.

This time it was a mason jar and the berries had already begun to smear on the inside in a growing flush of red, then purple, then black, and they were warm to the touch before I got them in the refrigerator and asked where she had found the jar.

"I picked it up at the drug store before I started back."

"And you took all of these off that bush?"

"Some. The others I got from the back yard."

And she cleaned her hands white and went upstairs.

After a while the berries were cold enough to eat, and when we had finished the last of them, rolled in sugar, we rinsed the jar out in the sink and left it on the counter to dry. The next day Mary took the jar on her way out the door.

I made my way past the house, and through the warped slats in the wood fence I could see the lawn chairs left close around a fire pit in the back yard, a bicycle curving up out of the grass that was ankle high, its wheel bright and faintly muted with rust and necking up in the half sun and half shade in a familiar way. It was the way a horse would have reached back up and out of the dust had it fallen in pursuit of something that had now gotten away.

Owen Reese stood from his place on the back step and that's how I first saw him, in the shadow of the house that leaned quietly in the dusk of its own making, standing with his shirt sleeves rolled to his elbows and looking out to me, between the gaps in the wood.

"Afternoon."

He nodded, searching the grass with his feet for the shoes he had left somewhere in the lawn. Soon he would give up looking and make his way over.

"Is it true what the marker says?"

Owen looked back up from the grass, tall again, wan in that almost underwater gloaming that ended somewhere between

him and I.

"About the fort?"

"Yeah. Well, all of it really. Did Washington order it built?"

He smiled, just barely and with the kind of pause that would make one believe it could have been stretching some long weathered muscle that he took a breath or two, at least ten degrees cooler from where I stood, to forget about.

"He did order it built. Though I'd say it isn't much of a fort. Was that what you were going to say?"

I laughed, if only in the face of all that quiet, deep and almost there to touch in that hour when even cars rarely passed and one had to stop between breaths just to hear the random pipe of birds.

"Something like that."

"No, not a fort really."

I stopped at that for a moment before speaking again.

"Well, its still here isn't it?"

He told me his name and he abandoned the shoes somewhere in the grass to open the fence for me and Owen stood leaning against it after he had it re-latched, his hands stuffed in his pockets and all of a sudden a little paler in the sun where we had switched places, where the grass was almost a shocking cold under the elms, as if it hadn't yet thawed from the winter that was at least three months ago.

From where we stood now there was only the hum of bees, fat and slow honeybees that crossed the side of the house out to where the berry bushes and wild lilies threatened the last gap between the house and the sidewalk. You could almost smell it and I told him so, watching him again run a hand across the mouth and cheek that betrayed more than a little bit of the shape of his white bone, of his honest jaw beneath stubble that looked like nothing so much as a bruise before smiling faintly.

"Owen, I have to apologize."

He looked up at that

"What for?"

And he was still now, unmoving in his place against the door of the fence, only his shoulders reaching up over the white-washed pine-slats.

"My wife told me that she jumped the fence and picked some of your blackberries. And well, I can't imagine you didn't see her, and I thank you for letting it go, but I felt the need to come by and save face a little. She's always done things like that. It won't happen again. Scout's honor."

He looked past me to where the grass was tallest, around the carved and graying hulk of a grandpa oak, looking most of the way up before I started again. The bulk of it sat heavy against the fence, and in one spot it actually broke through, climbing past the pikes where Owen or someone before him had to trim the slats in an oval shape for the branch to sit. Now the two, the fence and the oak, looked like they had grown together from the ground, twisted into the kind of voodoo trees where countless beginnings of swamp birches wrapped into one tall and gangly obelisk, the kind you could picture growing up from the water in a bayou.

"If you want I can give you a little money for the berries. I'm not sure how much they run in the grocery but I figure a few dollars should cover it."

Owen shook his head.

"A few dollars for a jar of blackberries? Jesus. It's fine, I don't need that."

"So you did see her. Yeah, she said she bought a mason jar just for the occasion."

"Yeah?"

"Hell, I remember once driving by this huge field, at least the size of an airstrip and she spotted pumpkins out there. Of course these were big, enormous pumpkins, and so we have to drive out there to get them."

He laughed, quietly and not unlike a sigh, looking back at me, and my place in the grass.

"So the whole way out we're looking up and down the field, and I've got it in first going about two and half an hour, and the only thing we can see is this little frame house, way out there on the edge of the trees, on the other side of the field as us, not a light in the house, no one making a peep. I mean not even a damned owl is hooting. And we have the trunk open, piling in a third and a fourth pumpkin when we see a light come on in that house, and for a while we don't even worry about it because its just as likely someone wanted a glass of milk as they heard us. Because not only were we quiet as mice but that house was a good 400 yards away. They wouldn't have heard us if we held a microphone up to the trunk of the car. But I look up again and this time the outside lights are on and it's lit up at least halfway out, and there isn't even much of a moon out so you can really see

these lamps and in the middle of that glow you can see someone just standing there, as if he can hear it on the wind, like a wolf or something. And the whole time she's about a tenth of a mile out looking for more pumpkins and I can remember calling to her and watching whoever stood in front of the house making his way out there and he's hearing me before she is and finally I had to jump in the car and drive out to her, and whoever stood out there in that light was starting to run in the field and you could see all the dust he was kicking up in a big long cloud and we weren't even to the trees when he found where we'd taken the pumpkins and we were just hitting the bend in the road when he was up out of the field."

I shrugged to Owen.

"She's always done stuff like this."

He smiled, again only faintly, as if to himself, and in the shadow of the tree his face could only look bruised.

"I don't think it's so bad."

I shrugged.

"Paul I have to be honest with you..."

He made his way back over to the back step, back under all of that dark and freezing haze of the oak, and he lit a cigarette from a pack that came and went invisibly in the grass and started talking, slow and quiet and still watching some gentle imperfection in the fence. After a while he was done talking, relighting the cigarette that had burned itself to a point then turned barren, had no way of fighting that shadow and cool where we sat and finally there was only the passing of cars and somewhere a bell for a late afternoon prayer meeting. The first time he looked at me was when I said it was probably the Presbyterian, and it must have been a few minutes before he looked away again, studying my face long and hard and wondering how much of it he'd have to say again. Finally I raised a hand and he simply nodded, studying the end of his cigarette.

Across from us, at the back of the frozen and silhouetted no man's land a pair of blue jays were playing a game of follow the leader up the length of the grandpa oak, the first one flitting up to a branch one step higher before the next followed, each twining and un-twining in the motions like some sort of dance, but what was more likely, and Owen said so when I pointed it out to him, was that they hardly even noticed each other. He was still watching them when I unfolded my wallet, but he raised his hand, as if swearing some sort of Indian oath.

"The best you're going to do here is me selling you some blackberries. So if your heart is set on handing me some of that

money you might as well take a few." And he handed me the Styrofoam cup he had been sipping tea from, rinsing it out with the shallow excess of a watering can.

On my way out of the yard I tucked a roll of dollar bills in one of the fence slats and by the third or fourth time I looked back to his house, to the house that George Washington had ordered built as a fort, I couldn't see it anymore, just where the street rose up between the other houses.

Her mother had parked the station wagon in the shade, beneath a long and blooming row of maples that slowly thickened out to firs. We sat in the front seat and out from under the eaves we could see her oldest brother's baseball team, occasionally the quick and radiant burst as one of them would hit and the parents would stand, almost as one, and the white and red shirts would scramble and bustle and explode into moving, and every time it was random and every time we would jump as if pushed back into cold and bracing water. In the grass between the lot and the field the parents and older siblings had set up lawn chairs and scotch blankets, drinking from thermoses and looking over at the swing set and the jungle gym where the toddlers and kindergartners ran back and forth, kicking up sand, bright and quick at the far edge of the clearing.

Mary took a sip from her mother's coffee and handed it to me, warning me that it would be cold. I didn't tell her that I wouldn't know the difference, and I savored how sweet and strange it tasted, bitter and foreign and exotic and adult. It was a soft brown that I tasted again before handing it back to her, swallowing it slow and feeling some unspoken thing between that taste and the summer sun that had made its way down in between the maples.

She turned on the radio, and in the last fighting glances of light that had broken through the sugar trees, leaking through the open doors, we listened to Smokey Robinson. Mary told me her parents had the record at home, that she could see it even now, the picture on the front of the sleeve, leaned up against the shelf.

"It's the four of them, the Miracles, and they're all wearing these matching brown suits and these beautiful bright, white shoes, and they're all leaning into the picture around Smokey, as if it was just supposed to be him but they saw the camera and rushed in at the last second. And he's sitting there, smiling and it's like he's in a different picture. He's sitting on a skateboard or something and one of them is pushing him. Or at least pretending to."

"Wow."

The song rolled slow from the radio, like a long span of ribbon that caught sun in its kinks and I watched Mary shake her head back and forth in a way I'd never seen before, tapping her fingers whenever those horns would bloom, bright and indomitable like the rumble of a New Orleans funeral.

"This song doesn't really sound much like that."

She looked up, first at the newest boy, only two or three years older than us, walking up to bat, then at me, her eyes big and bright in the wedge of sunlight.

"I know. This one's different."

"What's it called?"

Mary looked at the radio, almost longingly, as if she was soaking up and savoring the last few moments she would have with the song that until now had been hers and hers alone. I drank from the coffee cup.

"It's called 'The Tracks of My Tears'."

I smiled.

"That's what it sounds like it's called."

She wrinkled up her nose.

"I guess so. I'm not sure. I never know what it sounds like. Sometimes I listen to it so much that I have to start pinching myself to pay attention to it, otherwise it will all just go by in a second and I won't even know."

"Really?"

She nodded.

"Yeah. But I can never really tell what it sounds like. The only thing I can ever be sure about is that I don't want to stop listening to it. That I'd rather have to pinch myself over and over and over."

She rewound the tape a third and a fourth and a fifth time, and by the time the game was over we had closed the door against the mosquitoes and the sun was beneath the eaves of the maples, was big and pink and orange and flat in the open space above the field and we watched her brother and her mom walk back over the grass and Mary finished the last of the cold coffee and told me that she hoped she would never really know what it sounded like. I told her I hoped so too.

It was already dark, another quiet and pagan sign of the summer's declension: where exactly I would be on the walk home when I would begin to see headlights brimming the top curve of the street, when the lamps over the sidewalks would begin to click on with a faint, electron buzz, and when I would make my way back by the lights over porches that were hemmed in, cupped like the glow of a lamp beneath a pair of bowled hands.

From the sidewalk I could see her frame, lithe and moving without any thought in the lit square window, bending to reach something beneath the dresser. When she stood straight again it was with both arms poised above the molded top of the sill, and Mary looked out to the street where I stood with the cup of blackberries in hand.

"I didn't even have to jump the fence."

"Yeah."

"But then again, neither did you."

"Yeah."

We sat in the dark that had come for good now. The lights would stay on, they had stopped flickering to life tentatively; any new glow that came to the street came with knowledge and force and in a full and violent burst. After a while they stopped coming and set themselves to simply staying, without source and without hold, just floating in various attitudes and shapes and heights up and down the cooling avenue that, if you followed it that far, went all the way back to Main Street. When I heard a bell again I told Mary that it meant that the prayer meeting was letting out at the Presbyterian church. She nodded and bent again to look out the window.

"I paid him for the berries. And the ones that you took the last couple times."

"It was more than that actually."

She breathed, trying to be quite under the simple sound of evening outside.

"It's alright. I overpaid him by at least half. Maybe he let it go because he knew you had racked up more of a tab than I thought."

"That's terrible."

"Which part?"

"All of it I guess."

"Yeah."

"I had actually gone over there to do the same thing."

"What, pay him for the berries?"

"Yes. I had been doing that my whole life. Whenever I saw someone with an apple tree or a grape vine I would just sneak in and take it, like a fox or something. But the next time I walked past I saw him out on that step, his face, you know, you notice all of this before I ever do, all thin and white like that and I just knocked on the fence door and asked to come in."

"How long did you stay?"

"How long did I stay. It was a while. He asked me more than once if I should go. If *he* should go."

I nodded, listening to her breath. Her hair was pinned up and little tufts of it hung loose and childlike to skirt her cheeks, slow in the shallow wind that came up off the street.

"And I came back a couple more times after that. And then I told you about the new berries, the ones I brought home after work. I'm still not sure why. I wasn't even sure which was worse, you thinking I stole them again or knowing that I filled his jar with them."

She smiled gently. In the other room the radio was on and from where we sat we could hear it wind its way between the two windows, as if came from some place out there in the dark, far up the street or maybe just born on the air at random like a brood of cicadas.

"He told me most of it actually. It seemed like he would have told me more if I had asked but I didn't need to. I didn't want to. I'm not sure he even took a breath during it, but he was talking slow enough. I think he wanted it to be hard, and when I didn't make it hard enough for him he didn't know what else to do."

"Yeah."

"Did he tell you whether or not it was ever a real fort?"

"No, he didn't. You?"

"Yes. He told me."

"And?"

"It is."

"Really?"

"Mmhmm."

"Did you put the berries in the refrigerator?"

"Yes."

"Did you sugar them?"

"Yes."

"Good."

We were still there, in our place by the window, when Owen Reese stopped across the street, just outside of the ringed crown of a street lamp. For a while he simply stood there, not moving except for the rise and fall of his breath, watching the stillness that somehow mirrored him in the yard across the street. When he finally crossed he held the mason jar to his chest, careful to keep the lid from glinting in the lights that seemed to come from everywhere in the evening.

In the other room the stereo played to a stop and Mary rose to pick up the needle again and place it at the top of the record, each of us looking out our window at Owen leaving the jar between the thick green blooms of azaleas that lined the edge of the house, unscrewing it again to recount the wad of bills I had left wedged in the fence before standing to go. He was halfway across the yard when he stopped again, and looking for a soft spot in the lawn, sat barefoot in the grass, his shoes left behind him on the very edge of the sidewalk. And in the light that he didn't even know was there we could both see Owen's face, bare and white and thin, bruised looking in all those blues and purples that would be gone by the tail end of the night thickness.

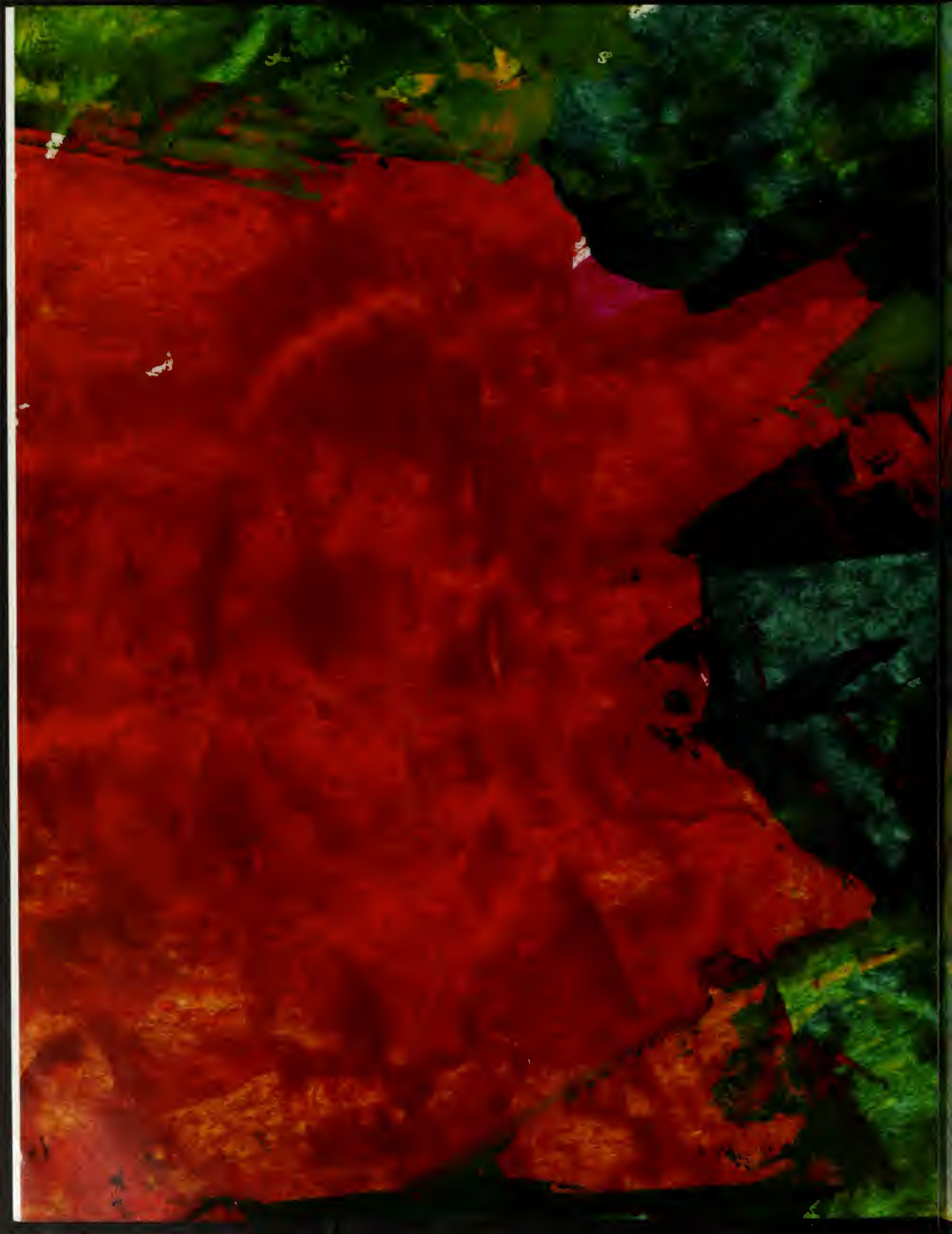
When he stood to go Mary took her place again at the edge of our window, watching as he slipped his shoes back on and disappeared, slowly and with the fading pace of smoke between the lights that led back down the street, looking behind only once to where he had left the jar, hidden in the flower garden.

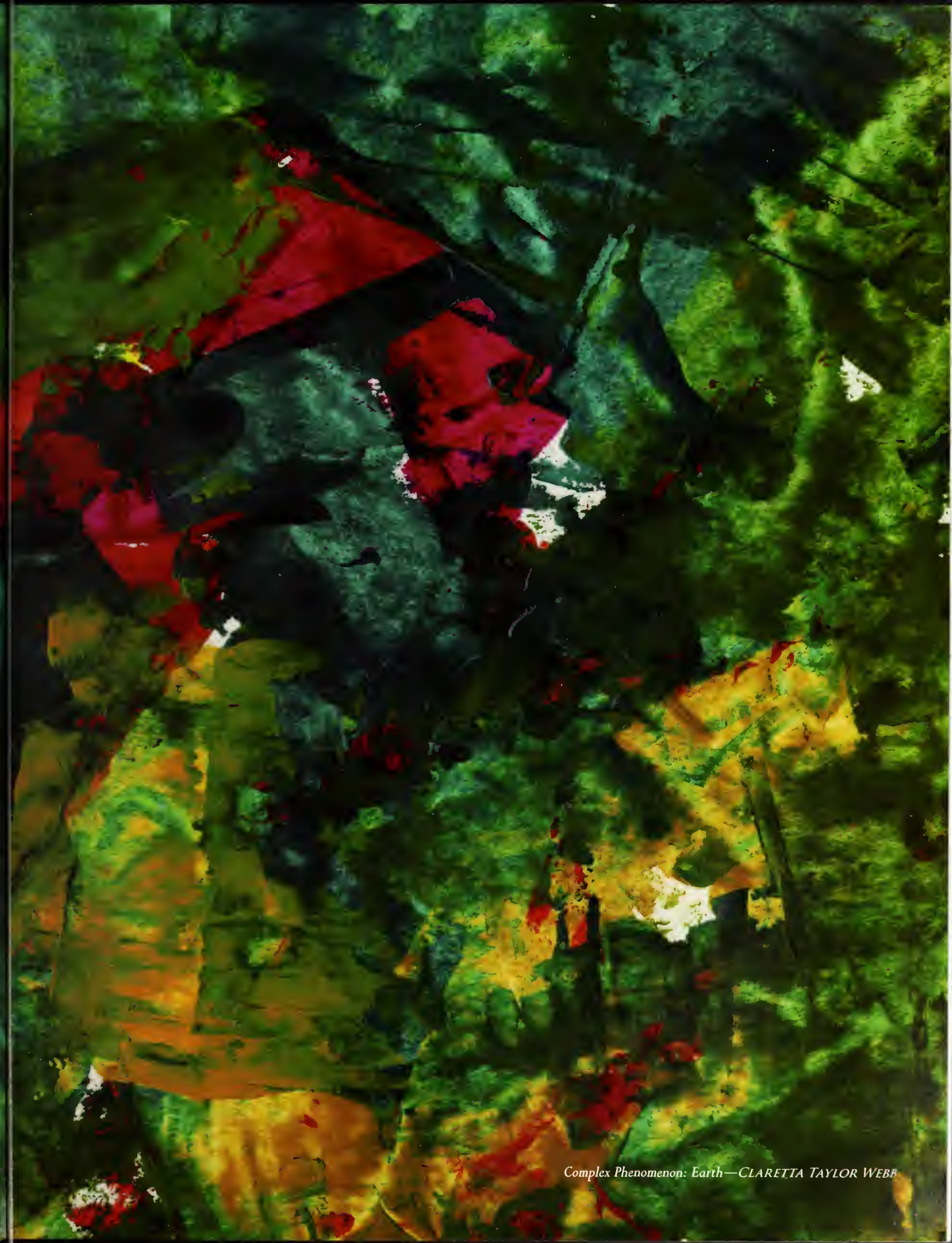
Mary turned off the lights downstairs and when she passed the windows, almost bare, it was with that same dark and blue gloaming that the night had taken on, that would be gone before the sun was even there to see, even there to hint at itself, and she stood in the door frame with the jar of blackberries in her hand, cool and even in the dark, and that night we listened to "The Tracks of My Tears", by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, thirty-seven times.

—CHAD JEWETT

Trying to Catch the Sun III—LAURENT LEJEUNE





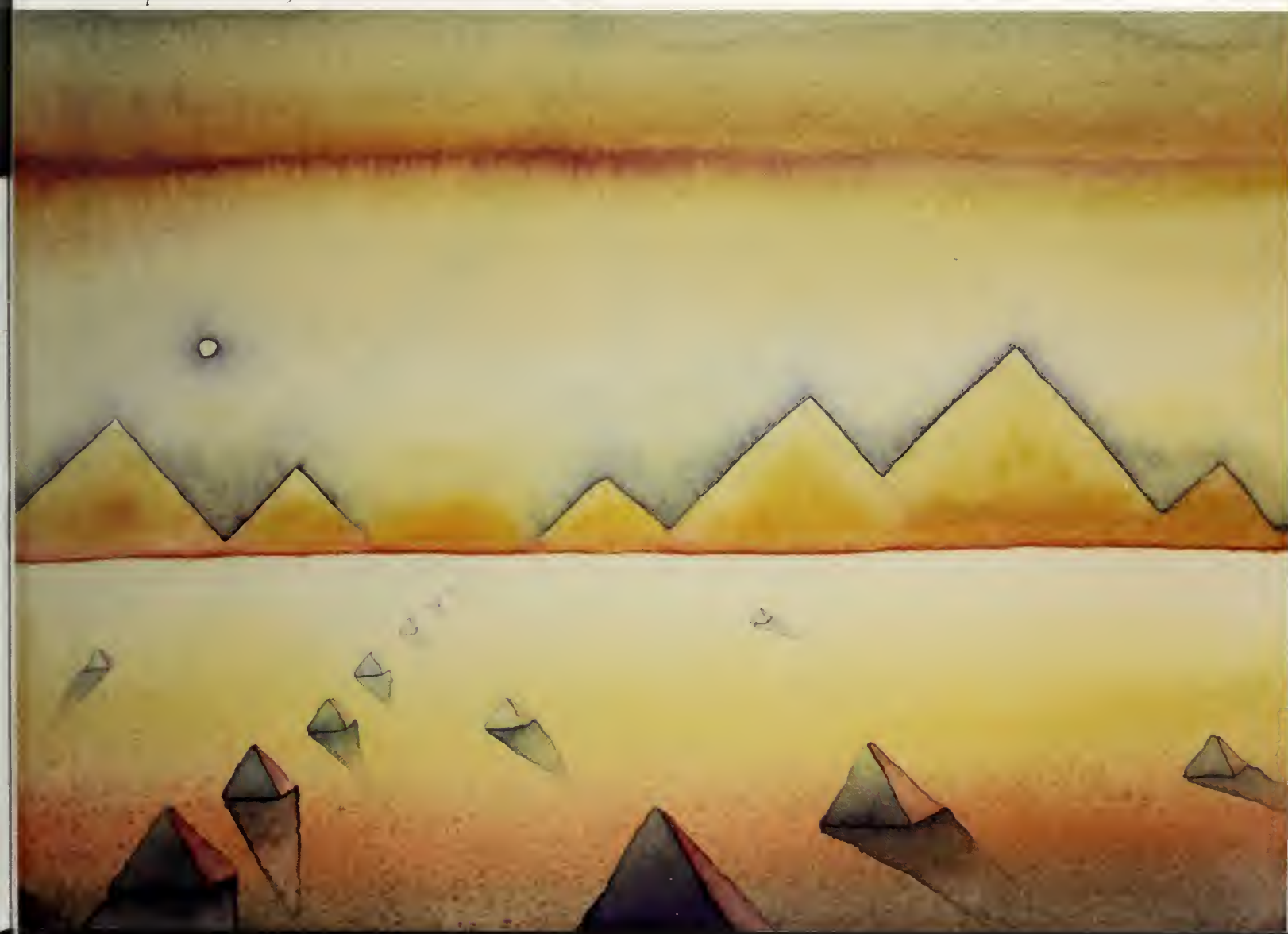


Complex Phenomenon: Earth—CLARETTA TAYLOR WEBB



A Destination—LAURENT LEJEUNE

A Landscape—LAURENT LEJEUNE



Untitled—ANONYMOUS





Untitled II—ANONYMOUS



Pay Up—RYAN OLENICK



Alone—CLARETTA TAYLOR WEBB



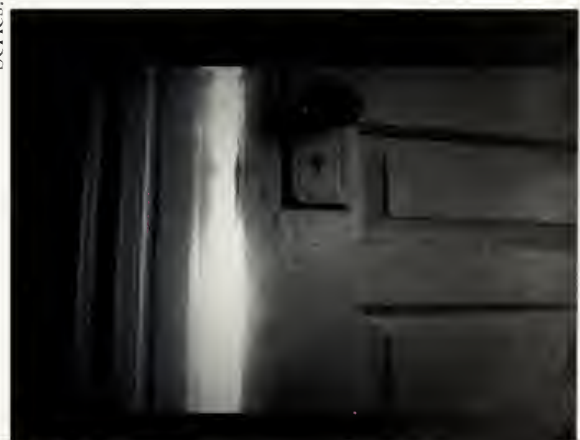
Shep Can't Catch a Break—RYAN OLENICK



Howard—RYAN OLENICK



Series: Misdemeanor Homicides—KENDRA WHITE





Landscape—LAURENT LEJEUNE







Complex Phenomenon: Water—CLARETTA TAYLOR 1988

JUJU'S LAST CALL

It was just before noon on Jewel Island and we were still waiting for the fog to burn when Juju's name was finally mentioned. The three of us were kicking up sand around the waning pit of coals with our shirts off in our striped beach chairs that had sunk deep into the ground. We'd been camped out on the beach for a full day now and none of us brothers had bothered to sleep. Now the fog was dulling our motivations and that was when I began to memorialize Juju.

As always, we remembered her stage presence best. The way her shadow cast in the spotlight and how quickly it receded when it was time for her band to get their fair due. How she always wore quirky hats and big silver belt buckles she'd bought at the fair to detract attention from the looks and voice she swore she never had. But most of all we remembered the way she spoke to us through her blues. Then one brother brought up what we'd avoided since the wake a year before; how our little sister was the one with true, unparalleled promise and the only family member we'd lost. It didn't make much sense to any of us.

Over the year we'd created a tradition to remember her. One of us would call out a bridge to a song of hers and the other brothers would respond with that song's chorus. Every lick of every tune was forever branded into our memory and she knew that. I could pick at the guitar enough to frame the music with the melodies then as we crooned and clapped my brothers played imagined slide guitars with empty beer bottles stuck to the end of their ring fingers, sliding up and down the frets holding notes in vibration and wincing, like she used to.

We played like that for hours lost within her.

When one brother waded to his waist we all did. In the September Casco Bay Ocean we squinted through the fog pointing and betting each other as to where it was she had drowned. They were silly and improvable handshakes based on gut instincts that we all wished we could fake. She would have played off our banter nicely.

Juju was alone when she capsized a year before. The ferry captain who spotted her swore she'd surfaced as a speck in a distant wake and then propelled towards him with her arms crossed at her chest, dreadlocks fanned around her head, and her eyes wide to the sky.

No one knew why she was on the ocean alone to begin with. The funny thing was no one would have stopped her. There are nearly a hundred scattered islands in the Casco Bay and Juju had known the name and set foot on every one of them over the years lobstering with our father.

We let our legs numb while on the veil of fog each of us projected our own visions as to how Juju had spent her last moments. It had haunted us all in our own individual ways and now her death was playing out its harrowing end.

With darkness looming we couldn't wait for the fog any longer, so we dragged the dingy from the shore, pointed it south and wondered if we were making the same mistake she did. And as three of us brothers cast off with her for the final time we paddled in smooth, unison strokes to not disrupt the stillness of the sea. We had to trust that while on the ocean, dipping and swaying and encapsulated in fog, she'd strike us still when it was right, like she had so many times in her twenty-seven years on earth. When that happened we would know to spread her ashes.

—GREG PAVLISKO

OMAR HAD A SISTER

With Uncle Tafiz presiding from his round, red table next to the waiters' station, the needling between the off-duty soldiers and the locals would often begin early. Usually the banter was friendly, and the locals, especially Uncle, made a point to steer clear of the overtly political. Uncle Taffy liked the Israelis. Nina liked their tips. Omar mostly listened to their tones, the gentle chiding, the gasping recoil then retort, then the river of laughter, some restrained, some fervent, some hacking that would erupt, then peter out, then, after silence, erupt and spread across the tables so uproariously that, even slicing taro by the back door, Omar would feel his face break into a grin.

A cafe has a rhythm, and this cafe off the bazaar ebbed and flowed most days around the shopping. By two, Uncle Tafiz would draw the shades to block the late sun and head back through the quarter to his rooming house for a long nap. The soldiers would have lunched and left, and the locals too have scattered to their jobs or homes for rest. Nina and Omar would sit to eat and count their tips and, after setting up, wait for their uncle's return for the night shift. Often, Omar stole that hour to study, or he would bargain with Nina to stay, so he could meet with friends at the university in Tel Aviv before class. Lately, however, he hadn't protested when Nina had asked to leave instead.

"Your friend is here," he heard her say one Friday. *Too loudly*, he thought.

Omar had been sweeping in the kitchen. For weeks now one of Uncle's tenants, an Israeli student, had been stopping in as the lunch crowd thinned, and lingering with a book. At first, Nina didn't seem to mind. But lately she'd begun to serve his coffee with annoyance. Omar felt a swell of hope, but knew he had to hide it. He took his time to finish sweeping, then went out to join his sister counting tips at Uncle's table. Taking his seat beside her, he nodded to the student across the room. *Just as he'd greet any patron*, he thought. The Israeli student, who had lifted his head of black curls as Omar appeared, returned an even slighter nod. Nina continued counting, pretending not to take in their exchange, yet made from the back of her throat a clearing sound Omar hoped he didn't hear.

"I'm going," said Nina, knowing she would get no argument from Omar now, and pushed a pile of coins across the table. "You need to watch yourself." He half watched her as she scooped her tips into her bag, grabbed an orange from the bowl by the cash register, and, without glancing at their patron, swept through the kitchen and out the back.

Omar picked up a book. He strained to keep his eyes from lifting to the single table across the floor. He dared not look. After a while, he let his weight settle in the chair, his legs spread. Still his eyes stuck to the very paragraph he had been reading ever since his sister had left. *How had she known? He wasn't even certain the Israeli boy had guessed. Shit! He wasn't sure himself!* He saw without looking up the student

shifting in his seat, then absentmindedly scratching his curly head. Omar caught himself holding his breath. *Was he leaving? No! He was only resting his eyes, allowing himself to absorb what he was reading.* Dropping his shoulders back, Sasha ☐ *for that was how he signed his tabs* ☐ was glancing to the street. Omar watched his eyes dance from passersby to nothing in particular, musing still perhaps on what he'd read, and realized too late he was staring, unable to look away in time. *Caught!* The Israeli had turned his gaze to meet Omar's, and this time, unlike all those others when one had flinched, they held the contact.

"Desire," wrote Somerset Maugham, "is sad." But at the moment of its revealing, the blood knows why it is blood. Each boy saw the other smile first. A fly had lit on Omar's right forefinger and was staggering toward the book he still held. He made no effort to brush it off. Then Sasha's smile radiated, transforming his face.

"More coffee?" Omar was standing over his table, reaching for the cup and saucer.

"Will you," the Israeli said looking back towards the kitchen and then to the entrance, "join me?" He had half risen and was gesturing to the other chair at his table. Omar saw a shyness stemming, he thought, from the awareness of their difference, but he also recognized in his invitation—in his hand pointing to that chair—some faith. They were the same height. And standing this close they were confirming this at the same time. It was a self-conscious moment neither failed to notice. They would have twenty, thirty minutes at most before his uncle would be back.

"Omar!"

He heard his sister's voice, but so unexpectedly that for a second he didn't believe she had come back. *Or had she never left?*

"Flirting with a boy, you shame yourself, brother. But with a Jew, Omar! Do you know what papa would do to you, to the both of you" — she turned now to the Israeli — "without thinking twice?"

Omar felt his body tremor. His sister's face, tight with disgust, said all. He had wanted to shout back, to curse her, but the only word that escaped his mouth was "Please." It had all the force of a gale without the wind. Sasha had grabbed his wrist to hold him back. "Please, Nina!" he managed to spit out.

"I should leave," Sasha said. Instead he held his grip, guiding Omar toward the chair. It was Nina who turned then, and they watched her undulating toward the cafe door, shoving it open, and stepping down into the narrow street.

"Never mind," Sasha said after a bit. "Never you mind."

Omar was sitting. They could smell each other.

It was as if they were already a couple.

—PAUL E MORSE

MOTHER COYOTE

It had been a particularly harsh winter. On days when it was not snowing the coyote-mother would scavenge the snow-covered forests for food. One day she came upon an isolated homestead in the middle of the forest. Inside a pregnant woman sat by a cold hearth, huddled in blankets. The yellowing corpse of the woman's husband lay nearby, still in a stinking straw mattress.

"Why not eat his remains and fill the void of hunger?" The coyote-mother asked the woman.

"That would be ungodly. I have to wait for the snow to melt and the ground to thaw to give my husband a proper burial," the half-crazed pioneer woman replied.

This seemed so unnatural and absurd to the coyote that she could not help but pity the human woman. On good days, where there was more food to spare, the coyote-mother would leave surplus meat at the woman's door.

The coyote-mother watched one evening while the woman crawled outside the safety of her snow-hidden cabin. The woman cursed her god, asking the grey, snow-spitting sky why he would abandon her.

The woman's belly grew bigger in the passing weeks as she grew more frail and sickly. The stench of the dead man had grown sour, and seemed to permeate the surrounding forests as other wolves began to circle the woman's house.

The coyote-mother peered through a frosted window where she found woman lying on the floor, her scrawny legs spread, flea-ridden skirts raised. The woman grabbed her swollen belly and screamed.

"I can't bring life into such a desolate, un-providing world!" The woman complained through her agonizing cries.

"I should take my life now, I'd save me and my child both from this misery."

The coyote-mother watched with pity as the woman writhed in her human pain. The coyote-mother sat by the dying woman, all throughout the shrill howls of the unforgiving winter and the starved wolves that swirled around the house. She stayed until the woman's cries finally ceased, followed by the infantile cries of a child. Delicately, the Coyote Mother snatched up the stirring newborn from the dead human mother's bleeding womb.

—DANIEL PEGG

SO IT GOES

Hill staggered along, his every movement carved in perfect calligraphy into the bold sparkling night of a wintry New England. Every joint that wriggled awkwardly to the tune of some forgotten drinking song smelt of pure Jim Beam whiskey, even more so than his reassuring cloud of breath. He used great emphasis and enthusiasm in his every swig of the vile juice, each time soaking in it his gums, his tonsils, and his soul – and off would it wash down inside of him only to come squirming out moments later in a dance of blissful drunkenness.

“Aaahhhh...” he murmured, gazing off into the night, probably taking in a vision of pure black, but loving every minute of it – and loving even more that he knew his view was of childish purity. He took another glamorous swig and turned to an old lawnchair that was lying sideways on the ground, in a position that reeked of another anonymous bourbon night. Gracefully falling over himself, Hill grasped the handle of the lawnchair and froze with it for half a moment mid-cast. I knew he was about to hurl it through the void, and I welcomed it eagerly.

He did, and the lawnchair leapt into the air, splintering what I had previously known to be a sea of multicolored ink. And that’s when I realized that the acid was far from wearing off.

I caught myself in a timeless moment, watching the lawnchair spread its wings and contemplate its position four feet above the ground. Hill was as frozen as the ground, absorbing the essence of power as he watched his aerial maiden voyage spiral through the air. The lawnchair was a mere token of outdoor furniture no longer, it was a faerie – or perhaps some being of pure life that turned to acknowledge my recognition of its perfection for just one moment in existence – until it suddenly realized it was seconds away from a crash landing in a cool snow dune shelled in ice and I recognized that the two hundred micrograms of lysergic acid diethylamide that had taken residence in my brain had once again seized my mind and the faerie returned to its sad exploited life of being a lawn chair as it plummeted to its fateful collision with Earth. I almost flinched as I felt the cold aluminum bars bounce off the frigid November dirt, inches below the deceitful layer of white serenity. The lawnchair was once again soulless, a tormented servant to all other walks of life, humans especially, and tossed into the world by a cruel factory somewhere on the planet only to be spat on by all types of gruesome Appalachian foothill weather and adored by the most conning and naïve of the animal species (humans) on days when only the beauty of the sky and the euphoria of thermal content can mask the Stalinized ugliness of such a lawnchair. I saw a brief glimpse of the faerie again before the contraption finalized its crash

landing in the snow. I took a deep breath and reminded myself that I was on Earth.

“How often do we throw that thing?” I asked, trying to seem as solid as possible, since every other part of me wanted to join the stream of liquid beauty that I could feel pulsing through my body and on to every entity of existence.

Hill sighed and reviewed every corner of the definition of life. “Not enough,” he said, and took another deep swig of Kentucky bourbon.

I laughed as I relished in his answer. The words “not enough” were swimming around me, dolphins amidst the waves of my ever-melting body. I could feel them in my eyelids, see them through my fingertips, and tasted them dripping across my teeth and lips. Not enough. The meaning of such a meaningless phrase was like a luscious candy melting on my steaming brain as I struggled to put what I was feeling into words, only to be saved by Hill’s drunken rants and my realization that once again, the ergotamine demons had possessed my soul.

“Man, life is just... it’s just always a step behind you.” His wet awkward lips curled in thought, contemplating whether he had just spoken coherent English or not.

“You mean one step ahead of you,” I butted in, assuming that in my heightened sense of existence, I knew infinitely more than he could possibly ever know about anything he was going to ever say to me. And that was megalomania and nothing but it, because I couldn’t have been more naïve in my correction.

“No, man,” he stammered, frustrated by my assuming correction. “No. I mean like...” the whiskey may not have taken his mind yet, but it had taken his words. Still, he pressed to express himself, and did so quite well. “I mean it’s always a step behind you. You pass it by and never realize what you just missed... just missed... until it’s like...” looking like a young Aristotle, overwhelmed by his own omniscience, his fingertips possessing the words that his tired beaten lips desired so feverishly, sinking to great phonetic fumbles, barely able to steal class from cocaine-starved crackheads. Still, his lips muttered on, still retaining their reverence through wisdom, though clearly not appearance or deliverance. “Basically what I’m trying to say is, man... well let me tell you what happened.” Hill took a deep breath and looked at me, his eyes telling a story of long lost love – I knew that look, sober or walking on the surface of moon, that look was the same everywhere.

“I came out here for a cigarette, and I was talking to somebody inside about Kurt Vonnegut on my way out. Belle must have heard us talking because-”

"Wait Belle was over?"

"No, Belle heard me as I was coming out."

"Oh she was out here smoking a cigarette?" I was certain this was the case, or at least I hoped it was so he could finish his goddamned story sooner and I could get out of the cold.

"No, Belle was—" Now for the record, Belle was as southern and gentle as the name hints. She was so prominent in character that I could picture her in Philadelphia swinging with great dignity, the same way she inadvertently does when she walks, as though God Himself put an eighth day aside to chisel such a body that would sway and test the salivary glands of men for all eternity. However, as perfect as it was, her body was no match for the godliness of her personality, which can only be described as a complete and perfect mix of Maria Schneider's Parisian innocent naivety and Dr. Ellie Sattler's enthusiastic intelligence and passion for exploring the mysteries of life that lurk around every corner. She was every guy's dream girl, the one they pictured having children with when they were alone and feeling lonely right before sleep each night, the one with whom the thought of rough sex seemed repulsive yet fantasizing about making love seemed spiritually orgasmic, and the one that they pictured pure bliss as holding her in your arms and enjoying her heartbeat and breathing because her wonderful nicotine-stained lungs pressed against your body with every breath she took. Hill was no exception in the mouth-watering tradition of men who have set eyes on her. Belle frequented the houses around North Amherst, especially those in the compound, though I was never sure where she actually lived. She was practically a squatter, and she made every girl want to become a squatter because of the way Belle made heads turn as she walked her great squatter ass off to a new squat, strutting in absolute Godly perfection. And I guess that Hill had seen Belle earlier that night and she had cast some kind of spell on him because he was clearly drunk on more than liquor. So he continued, "Belle was next door. And I was talking to someone about Kurt Vonnegut on my way outside to smoke a ciggy, you know. So they asks me, they say 'Hey Hill what's your favorite Kurt Vonnegut book?'" And I spell Vonnegut correctly only out of respect, because that's not at all what came out of Hill's mouth. And what he said next was so brilliantly thought out but so terribly delivered by the drunken slob, that I instead ran it through my lysergic acid diethylamide filter and neatened it up to look nicer like this: "And in my scholarly opinion, Vonnegut's chef d'oeuvre, or no, maybe I would consider it his magnum opus, is *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The essence captured on the pages of that novel is the stuff of genius. But for those few people who know Kurt Vonnegut the way true fans know him, the phrase 'So it goes' is practically synonymous with the title *Slaughterhouse-Five*." And this may sound retardedly pompous and strange, and it may even taste of the superficial lips of an Upper West Side yuppie, but I guarantee it sounds a

lot better than it did when Hill said it. Also noteworthy is that I had never read *Slaughterhouse-Five*, so I had no idea how retarded my correction may have actually sounded. He made his point, though, and that's all that matters, for the next part of the story is the part that blooms into his new life motto: "Life is always one step behind you."

Hill continued. "So whoever it was asked me what my favorite Kurt Vonnegut novel is, I smiled with glee and looked up at the ceiling as I opened the door, and just as I was about to answer the question, I hear right in front of me 'So it goes.'" Hill leapt into the snow and stomped his feet deep into the dune. His frustration said it all. I was assuming at this point that it was Belle who said 'So it goes' and I could practically hear her say it in an overwhelmingly powerful whisper that had sweet, orange grove Dixieland written all over it. I felt like leaping off the back stoop into the snow to join him in frustration. The LSD-25 had me already wanting to find an open pore and crawl out of my skin, and this only made that desire so much more demanding. I was instantly invigorated with full body tremors, freight trains of euphoria sending chills through my central nervous system, and emotional contradictions of sexual mystique. I envied the snow that Hill crushed with his feet as he stamped out the rest of the dune — I wanted to be crushed by something tangible so I could vanish into the feelings I was having and possibly join the same feelings Belle had about me somewhere in eternity. But of course that was the acid talking, and I returned to reality moments later, brought back by Hill's assertion of what I had already assumed.

"It was Belle," he said, hanging his head before taking another long swig of whiskey. And somewhere deep inside of him he garnered the strength to force it through his mind's most articulate tool of extrusion, delivering to me a beautifully scored tale of his long lost love. His alcohol and my caustically collapsing mind made such a story of lost love sound so real, too. "So what I was saying earlier man, that life is always one step behind you, I really mean it. As I opened the back door and felt that cold rush of rigid air, it was accompanied by the only three words in the world that could stun my drunk ass right at that back door threshold. 'So it goes', and such is the story of my life. So it goes — so life goes. Life happens, and you almost always miss it by a second, a *fucking SECOND*. The moments you don't miss you don't realize for years to come, thinking back and saying 'thank God I didn't let that opportunity pass me by', but usually it's the other way around. It's as though you're at the airport, on one of those moving sidewalks, and she's on the one coming at you. You think of some totally cliché line to get her number, but it's one of those ones that melts girls' hearts, and you know it'll work. You even put on a little smug charming look as she gets close. However, as she's just about to reach you, she smiles ever so seductively at you and you blush instead of saying what you were gonna say. By the time you catch your breath, you turn around to say something,

and that's when a gust of rogue air comes rushing in to lift up her skirt, and you realize that her panties are your favorite color. And you're speechless again. And you spend the rest of your life watching her get smaller and smaller and wishing to God that you had just said something before she smiled. That's what I felt when she said 'So it goes'. I was met with a blinding light and when it passed, she was gone. An illusion. And I feel like I'll never be this drunk or passionate ever again to ever talk Kurt Vonnegut with her, because I can feel that she has more to say about him than any literary elite has in their little finger. It's like you hear about boys modeling the women they settle down with after their mothers – I'll compare every girl I ever sleep with to Belle, and they will never come close, and so the rest of my life will be in utter despair. I'm sure of it. Here I am, climbing into a bottle and listening to it clink around on the moving sidewalk as I press my hands up against the glass walls and watch her get smaller and smaller, diluting the whiskey with tears." I couldn't believe the words coming out of his mouth! Every great writer must have such passion within them and it takes experiences like these to let the tiger out of its cage! But more than my epiphany on how true passion creates true art, I was overwhelmed by Hill's expression of lost love. Though I was distracted by the reflections of trees on my shoelaces, I managed to console him.

"Dude fuck that. She clearly said that because she's cool

shit, man. She obviously probably has a thing for you; you should totally talk to her next time you see her! You don't even need to be drunk, she definitely really digs you man!" Wow my words sounded completely idiotic compared to his. Thanks again to alcohol, for my words cheered him up and gave him the courage to seek her out in the young crisp night.

"You're right man! I don't need this whiskey!" Of course he actually did, because he took 'one last swig' which could have filled seven shot glasses, and he tossed the now-empty bottle into the soft snow. He climbed a stair and leaned into me, hugging me. My world became swirling awkwardness because I'm quite sure he passed out while hugging me, but I was frozen by lysergic fear, and fortunately he woke himself up with his first snore. He stood up straight, took a deep breath, shook my hand and began marching with pride and courage into the abyss. "Wish me luck!"

I wanted to tell him he didn't need any. "Good luck!" He did.

I wish I could say what happened between Belle and Hill, but I never saw either one again. Another page in history that I will never see, and 'So it goes'.

—PAUL MCALARNEY

PHONECALL FUCKUP

itch so deep to drop this call
with my candy wrapper ending
but you see right through it all
and when i spit to the receiver
words so cheap - they redden my cheeks
the a.p.o.s.t.o.l.i.c shit at the other end
is pissing ship wreck to his sheets

and he uses my fire to fuel his manic, frantic need to dial
my number

[i/didn't/know/i/could/get/service/in/hell]
text and tell

quotes my madness manifesto
cock-blocks fingertips to keys
his dark wash jeans would get the best of
bringing bruises to my knees
and the smoke that gets me shirtless
and loosens up my legs
brings me closer to concerned
about this mind fuck in your bed

and he can't see me, but he knows my mouth
[and/we/both/have/reception]
5 bars of deception

stuck to a stick that bends the mighty
dimming lights and midnight moans
from inside this land mine cavity
that i've made into a home
they can hear me from the kitchen
picking fights, picking scabs
they might think that i'm the bitch
but i'm the best you'll ever have

[i/hope/i/wreck/your/head]
[i/hope/i/wreck/your/lips]
[i/hope/you/mess/your/pants/
when/i/meet/them/with/my/hips]

(CALL WAITING)
click.click.click

when you're on hold.
baby boy, you're nothing

—KENDRA WHITE

GRABSTABSCAB

naked, collapsible moments
sticky notes and nalgene bottles and flannel
all melt and mesh
gather at the foot of my bed
my homage to the hipster lifestyle
that lives above the dunkin donuts

**but i can't smell the coffee from where i stand
and he signs me out so i can crawl back
to the C line**

*"you'll never be ace enough for the B, kiddo."
that piano playing fuck spurts, thumbing his emerson ID card.
[i want to strangle him by the lanyard]
but i wear my ray bans all the same
and rock my converse kicks like they need me to wear them*

grab and grab and grab and grab
the struggle to pull a cotton sweater over my chest
and undercooked methods of dorm dwelling cut short
with the installment of my convenient trap door

**into which i fall- without reservation
ready for redemption at the bottom of
this empty coffee cup**

*"you'll never be wicked enough to write, babygirl."
that music making little shit lays on me, packing words, pissing
lyrics
[into songs i'm suppose to sing with eyes closed]
but i drag my pen across his back
my words bite. i don't need these fucking teeth.*

and stab and stab and stab
what little joy from the fabric that encases me
and the embraces are short and lukewarm
like the way she prepares my oat meal
when she prepared my oatmeal
a time when she was only bitter enough to bite her tongue

**now she's stuck to the news- her rhythm and
blues
waiting for my silver screen suicide**

*there is no commentary on my mother.
.there.are.never.words.for.my.mother.*

and drag and drag and drag and drag
down-up the criss-cross stair case

you've enough ammo for all of us
but you've saved the explosion for me

"kendra, darlin', slow down the sweetness. It doesn't travel far."

sam says.

[he says]

and i believe him.

and i put down my pen.

and i crumble /again/ into the C line's greengreengreen seats.

/green is my favorite color/

and scab and scab and scab and scab and scab
over my torrential rain Mondays and my misconception Tuesdays
the taste i get when you run your breath along my neck
the draft in this fucking lounge
sticky notes and nalgene bottles and flannel
and the skin left too long on my all ready broken bones
are falling off
and on-
to these naked, collapsible moments

i think i'll grab a cup of coffee.

—KENDRA WHITE

TERRITORIAL PISSAH

We are the trust-fun kids:
spray paint like cats in the dark.
Sit on stolen rooftops. Go when sirens sound.
Go! Down rusted fire escapes,

through one-way cattle cart streets.
All alleyways bring us to the bridge,
we walk, skip, golden fingertips interlocked
praying to neon geometrics-

our north star. Over the Charles
the season seizes us, a pack of local brats,
studded jackets, thick glasses, slick accents,
back patches, knowing glances, 40 ounces of cold romance.

Across the yard, upper echelon academic
bitches talk economics, bob for pearl necklaces,
grasp intellectual capitol. Irregahdless,
we know how best to use this city.

—JACLIN GERSTEL-FRIEDMAN

OPENING UP

When you ask me, in your frank, casual way,
to tell you more about my mother or,
worse, how I lost my last long love, a door
slams shut. Just to know me better, you say.
But I'm twelve again, trying to delay
that early morning swim class, steeling for
the sting of that first icy plunge off shore.
Exposed, I'm goose-pimpled and turning gray.

You wait, patient; I shiver on the docks
then look at you and take my breath; I dive –
the cold cuts deep until my toes touch rocks
and *quick!* I come back up – panting, but alive.
I tread awhile, watching you undo the locks,
and keep afloat, as waves of warmth arrive.

—RANDI ABEL

DEAD IRON SCULPTURE

A sketch of a phenomenon
An odyssey of dead end contours
Distraught topology
Depressed angles, heaped fractals
Bleached by space, abused by heat
Anger lost finding fetal curls or iron
Drunken algebra
That made it seem nothing more
Than mangled railroad cars
And accidental cantilevers

The next morning: refleshed!
Stout with curious self-affinity
Resuscitated by a deep dew
That snowflaked its outline
Sharpened its coasts
Its cantilevers revived with aim
Full promises, nearly threats
Turgid boughs of steel
Proud beams stretched fast around moist bone-wheels
A heart thickened with pink smoke
That threw out dozens of great sheaves

For the rest of the hour
A smile widened on it
Until the busy sun exacted
And burned out the heart
And turned on its toothless grimace

—FRANK MORRIS

THE EYES IN EXTREMIS

“D’yeh speak English?”

What kind of question is that? I dragged on my cigarette and studied this person who had assumed for himself the role of my interrogator. He was a small man, tired looking and elderly. But despite his age he twitched and flexed with desperate urgency. His clouded eyes saw the end of days drawing nearer. With that daunting image of death no more than a short breath and quick blink away, his motivation lay in the realization of unanswered questions, shadowing understanding by the trauma of mundane personal tragedy.

“D’yeh speak English?”, he yelled at me for the second time. He had an Irish accent. My nose began to sting with the foulness of a liqueur soaked stomach.

I thought this to be too familiar to be real. The familiarity of it all had come from some distant place, to retrace my steps, to find the origins of it I would have to somehow go into a reverse free fall. But the origins are so long gone, only the familiarity of now makes it possible to think of the point from which the motion had been set.

I stepped back to avoid his hellish breath and assess the situation.

Other than this drunk with a peculiar query, no one else on the platform for the train to Alewife had taken note of my existence. A group of kids out of the middle school were jockeying for attention among themselves. To my right, a stout black woman hummed soft tones, warm and sweet. Her eyes were closed and she was just barely swaying in the late afternoon sunlight, I thought that with the right kind eyes of I could see where exactly her soul lived. Two yuppies said things loudly, I didn’t hear any words. My attention returned to my interrogator.

Is this IT? Had I been waiting for this man, this Irishman on the platform of the JFK T stop for the entirety of a lifetime? I thought I was waiting for a train. Could it be that it was he who would take me from certainty and into the pleasant terror of the unknown? And for what? To what? To ask me what language I spoke? It could be possible. After all, I had no idea what to make of this man or what he could possibly want with me, and what could come of his question. Certainty was nowhere in sight, and neither was the train.

I have to admit it was a very good question. As I searched my mind for a suitable answer I wondered what Dean Moriarty would say. I told him that I like to think I do, but that I have my doubts. He let out a scratchy but hearty, “Aha”, and his

eyes did a quick double take and then met mine again. They were as new marbles with a high gloss; desperate and aching. His were the eyes I would one day know though nothing will have changed in them, only how they see.

“Good! This country’s full of people don’t speak English.” His energy heightened as if something had told him he had perhaps found the right person to share this with.

Why he picked me I couldn’t say. What could have been the appeal? Or maybe the absence of an appeal, a mistake, a blind grab at unattainable territory that once acquired would leave him closer to nothing but death. The worst part about mistakes is that they have to be made. And the righteous decision becomes all the more obvious but is lost, somewhere deep within the order and clarity of the past and chaos of the future.

He stepped into me, maybe he couldn’t help it because of how drunk he was but he was no more than six inches away from my face. I kept my hands in the pockets of my coat trying not to look intimidated or as if I thought he was going to punch me. I studied his face. Everything about him was tough, from the boots he shuffled about in, his scarred knuckles and his tired, worn face. Everything except for his eyes. His eyes would keep me guessing.

“Now”, he began, “D’yeh know what a scooter is?”

“A schooner?”

“Scooter, ya know, a... a motorbike... er... Kawasaki, Yamaha... I ain’ one o’ them toughies, no Brando er nothin’, I’s just like em’ to zip about on”. He put his arms out, I had already stepped back before I realized he had only done so to place his hands on invisible handle bars and began to imitate riding a motorcycle, sound effects and all. I knew after the Brando remark that he was trying to let me know he didn’t ride Harley’s or Triumphs and wasn’t a member of a biker gang. I guess this was to intimate to me a kind of passivity and that I shouldn’t be afraid of him or worried he would attack me; but I still had my reservations about this drunken character on the platform of a T stop in Dorchester.

“Right”, I said, “not the big ones”.

“Right!” He looked at me like this was the first time anyone had understood what he was saying in a long time. He had made a connection.

“Right, so I’s got this skewter, nothin’ fancy but it’s a nice skewter and I enjoy ridin’ it. I’d gotten it to replace another one that I’d ‘ad stolen on meh ‘bout two months back.

"So I'm down Quincy one afternoon, there's an Irish festival there and I'm havin' myself a wonderful time. I'm drunk, good food, lovely ladies round every corner. And I'm coming back from that right true on top o' the world. I'm on meh way back to meh skewter, yeh know I've already got meh helmet on and I get to where I parked it and she's gone! Gone! Stolen on meh! I hadn't had it more an a couple o' weeks and just like that another fuckin' skewter gone!" He looked at me to make sure I was following his story, seeing that I was he continued.

"So I call the police an' file a report an' o'course there's nothin' they're to do about it".

At this point I only wished the train would come and take me away from this man, who for some reason felt compelled to share his story, but then again, who isn't? I felt bad for him and his 'skewter' but I couldn't help not care. He was after all a drunk and most everything in a person's life is of their own doing. There was no sign of the train so I lit another cigarette and kept listening.

"There's this place I know, in Dorchester... round where I used to live down there. Peter's Auto Body and Automotive Repair", his eyes shifted and his thumb and forefinger came together pointing at the air in front of my chest emphasizing syllables, trying to say that this was an integral part of the story, a corner piece to the puzzle. "So I'm ridin' the bus one day, not cause I 'ad the skewter stolen on meh, I's just on the bus, I got plenty o' money, well--", he stopped himself, "my brother 'as but..." He began to say something about his brother which I couldn't make out.

"So! I's ridin' by this place an' I notice there's a couple o' bikes chained up outside, an' I spies a blue one... the bastards... 'A blue one!', I says to myself, so I pull the cord and go runnin' up to it, sure 'nough, the same God-damned one I 'ad stolen on meh!"

We had reached the climax of his story, and now, I assumed, would be the kicker, the moral, the reason for this drunken recantation of what I probably shouldn't know anything about had I not been standing on that platform.

The train was now coming down the track and with great relief I flicked the half smoked cigarette onto the tracks where it was swallowed by the violent machine. When it finally stopped I stepped toward the open doors wondering if the Irishman would follow me. He looked around in his shifty mistrusting way, adjusted the two small bags he had strapped over his shoulders and around his chest and, determined to continue his tale, joined me into the train car.

Prompting what I knew was coming I said, "So, what did you do after you found the bike?"

"What did I dew? I'll tell yeh what I did, I did what anyone'd do, I called the fuckin' cops and tell em' where it is." He sidled up to me, his face once again very near to mine. He leaned into me as if he were going to let me in on a secret. "You know the ways o' tellin' whose whatever is whose don't yeh?"

"The regis--"

"In the seat o' every bike.. you know how yer open 'er up an inside, yeh got the uh, uh... the license of ownership, the registration. And o' course it matches up wit' the one I gave the police before." His mannerisms had changed while he explained to me the intricacies of vehicle registrations to that of a professor.

The train was slowing into a stop. When it halted the Irishman was on the verge of falling over. Had I not grabbed his sleeve and the rail at the same time he'd have fallen onto a stroller with a sleeping baby in it. "Where are we?", he asked with bellicose and truculence.

"Andrew", I said.

"Andrew!" He returned to his shiftiness and peered around the car as if trying to single out who it was that had duped him into going to Andrew and what treachery was afoot now. "What the fuck am I doin' at Andrew, I thought I's s'posed to be goin' t' Quincy--Fuck! FUCK! Fuck it-- I don't care, fuck do I've to care for?". His voiced trailed off and his eyes racked focus, or what focus there was left in them, over my shoulder to the open doors. "Ay, look 'ere now". I turned to see a man with a Rod Stewart haircut accompanied with a tired looking blonde, both in their forties, walk into the train car. The story teller, stumbled toward them, and muttered something. The man with the Rod Stewart haircut said something meaningless, trying to give him the brush off. What was it about this man that I didn't know that this other man did which made him send him away so quickly. Why wasn't I able to have done that?

"Eh, it doesn't matter", the Irishman said to me as he turned away from those who wanted nothing to do with him, "doesn't matter one bit... so, right, meh skewter, the police siezed it, 'evidence' yeh know, and tells me I gotta pay five-hundred dollars t' get it outta storage, and to take these punks--that's what I call 'em, punks-- to court so I's could get fifty dollars a week off 'em. I says, 'five-hundred dollars!' The skewter only cost me eight fifty and now I'm to pay five- hundred to get it outta storage and take these punks to court?"

He harped on this point for a while. He told me that if it were up to him he'd have left the police out of it and found the

two 'punks' and beaten their faces in; placed their mouths on the curb outside of Peter's Auto Body and come down on the back of their heads with the heavy heel of bloodlust and vengeance.

By his point I understood that the man wasn't looking for a fight, a handout, a drinking buddy or even compassion. He wanted justice. Sure he was a drunk and a bit coarse but he like so many others were afflicted by the impersonal crimes of an indifferent universe. The police could do nothing, all the courts could offer was monetary compensation in exchange for time which to him did not appear to be an even trade off.

His justice, like all of humanity's is revenge. When it appeared that all of humanity had betrayed this man, including himself, it became clear that if any outcome with some semblance of redemption could occur, it would be the one where he makes revenge his bride. A tragic enlightenment occurs on the day a man discovers he can never again count on other people to be virtuous enough to create the truly free society of merit, or selfless enough to recognize the faults of the individual and look to the strength of the community without greed. There is no justice at all in a world where the only justice is vengeance. Justice is a concept beyond human understanding and classification.

As he drew nearer to my face, all of the lines became visible, the dark circles, the pock marks, the scares, everything; and it all told the story of a man who had been roughed up by

life and even rougher in return. But his eyes, my God his eyes. Each time he drew nearer to me, and further along in his story, they became as a new marbles, with each blink he waxed them, I wonder if it had been the drink which made his eyes appear so glossy, or it had been this particular story which he told me now, which made me believe it were tears welling up in them. I honestly thought he was going to cry. It was also in the way he told it. His voice would crack at all of the right moments, to give the story the kind of emotion it deserved. Perhaps he was a master of the craft, he only needed someone who spoke the same language as him to recognize his genius.

When the train had come to the next stop, he put his left hand out and shook mine awkwardly. I was glad to have listened to him. He turned and walked out of the train car past the man with the Rod Stewart haircut and his tired blonde. I heard her say something sarcastic about his being, "a wee bit shit-faced". I watched him through the window as he crossed the platform. He tried to say something to a tall man with brown hair and a black winter coat, the Irishmen didn't have much of a coat at all. The tall man wanted nothing to do with him and moved quickly passed him in silence. The train began moving again as the Irishman turned one way and the next, I suppose trying to find his way Quincy. He disappeared behind a column and the train did the same, with me in it, as it shrieked and squealed its way into the tunnel, further on into uncertainty.

—LUCAS SPIRO

WHISKEY AND HONEY

I'd been battling a cold that fall, so my father bought whiskey on the way back from the job site. My mother told him all I needed was some honey, and that I was too young to sweat it out. So my father popped the head off of a golden bear and drained it clear into a pitcher. Then he added the whiskey and poured two glasses. He told me to watch as he sipped. He never flinched but I could see he was surprised by the sweetness of the honey. Then he handed me my glass, excused me of mess duty with my mother and nudged me to follow him outside to the fire pit.

Framed in the kitchen window over my father's shoulder I could see my mother watching us closely. My father poked at the fire pit from the picnic table and groaned until comfortable. For a while we silently watched the flames crawl up and crack the pine. But as the pressure in my head mounted my father must have noticed because he clinked my glass with his. Then I had my first drink. The whiskey was a shock to me and I coughed until the honey coated my throat. Blinking through my watered eyes I could see my father smiling. I'd done good, he said, jocking my shoulder. Nobody he knew with a son my age could handle a drink. He was proud I was his girl.

From the porch my mother wiped her hands dry with a dishtowel and asked if we were all set. We were. She eyed me good and I pretended not to notice, then she asked my father directly a second time and he answered the same. She retreated and the lights in the house went out. Then my father leaned in level with me and told me I wasn't his only child.

I was young but I knew my father had been in a war. He wasn't an easily excitable man or one to let on he suffered from a trauma, if he had. But it was in passing times when our family was fighting poverty that he would say things might not have been so bad, if he hadn't been drafted so young and needed all that time to fit back into this world. I don't know why my father chose that cold to cure but on that night he told me everything.

It wasn't my mother's son but a half-brother, twice my age. With whiskey and honey my father told me his girl tried to use my brother as leverage to keep him from going to war. But like his father and his father's father, he went. Unlike his father and grandfather, he explained, the draft gave him no choice. He said he thought he would marry that girl. He loved my mother; I shouldn't get him mixed up about that, but in a different way than he loved that girl then. He told me about the letter he received after boot camp. It wasn't hateful he said, but devoid of emotion,

like a grocery list counting out the moves in her life that she was clearly making without him. Then she simply said she couldn't love a man who chose Vietnam over her and that there were plenty of wombless couples praying every night for a miracle. Their son's adoption would be that miracle. And they never spoke again. He said it turned him inside out to be alone and dreamless in the jungle. But looking back he was sure that with nothing to lose was the only way he survived.

As he told me he drank, and like I imagined one of his old pals would do, I drank on cue with him. I didn't know it at the time but I was drunk. I asked questions. No my father never gave him a name. He didn't know where he lived. Of course my mother knew. No, he'll never try to find him.

At that moment I convinced myself that all my growing up would be perfect with an older brother and I told my father that. When I thought my head was clear it welled up again, and down my cheeks streaked tears that burned like the whiskey in my stomach. That scared my father. He stood and ordered me to stop. When I didn't, he told me to be a big girl. When I didn't, he finally sat and brought me close to him and we stayed like that until the fire burnt through.

Six years later, when I was eighteen, I was pregnant and single. The father was a three-month tour I never loved but who loved me because I was pregnant. He was from a big family with nice teeth and even worked an admirable trade. As good a man he was I don't regret leaving.

The day my son was born and put up for adoption started like every Sunday in the final weeks of my pregnancy since returning home. My mother and I were sipping hot water with lemon in the shade of their overgrown garden. I could see my father, fitted perfectly in his chair through the living room window, ignoring me. A small cluster of pine trees had been hit by lightning a few days before. Silently we examined the charred trunks until I wondered out loud how old they were. She told me my father had planted them as saplings right after their wedding, for coverage from the neighbors. So I guessed twenty, and my mother said nearly. Then I assumed nineteen, and she said "about." When I asked her directly she eyed me well from behind the rim of her cup. Then she simply gave me their wedding date. When I digested what she told me she was already laughing and patting my leg. She couldn't believe I'd just figured out my birthday was a month after their wedding.

GREG PAVLSKO

CREMATE ME PLEASE AND DON'T PUT ME
ANYWHERE NEAR A MANTEL

have you ever thought
about what color you want

your tie and panties to be
when they finally stick you

in your fancy
waxy
box?

I want mine both to be white.
the box too.

then burn me
like cabbage scraps.

I'm pretty simple
when it comes to things

like that.

so spread me
into a canyon
breeze already,

and get on
with the croquet
and martinis.

—JEFFREY TAYLOR

MAN WITH A BONER

~Inspired by Man with a Boner, by Dave Rankowitz

spasms of blue
erupt over
squirts of red
rushing
to meet
engorged orange
spilling
slippery bits
of juice
running
down
in between
over
bursting
with a
flood of
yes
no
no
yes

—RANDI ABEL

CARAPACE BRINKS

colluded and
contrived
polluted and
exiled
masquerading as
a true friend
a deep love
an acid bath
a fire-plume
rigid dust
a child's tomb
a haunted womb
a chiselled soon
nothing forgets
nothing resumes
take comfort in death
solace in perfect
quietude

—DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

DOG DAY BANSHEE OF MY WET DREAM

You could tie cherry stems together in your mouth--
Burts beez glazed, honey dipped,
Pillowy soft lips, marigolden skin,
Sweet as syrupy cider, nectar, ecstatic paste,
Strung together like sheet music, note-to-note,
Harmonious, completely tumbling together
In sweaty, sticky arpeggios
In waves of froth and foam,
Seas that softly moan--
Tracing stars along your moonlight form,
Kissing the shock of electric socket,
Big spoon pressed along spine, supine,
Everything you wore tangled on the floor,
Peeled petals of orange, cherry coke fizz,
Spanked apple bottom, your face flushed,
Cat's cream in the cusp, full and flowing,
Brimming over a mashed, dewy flower,
Juicy, trembling, taut, exhausted
After we came together.
There were no goodbyes, just a notion
In my peripheral vision,
Of shifty eyes, secret smiles
Cast furtively at ponies, bulls and stallions
Charging your gates, your tongue like a fork
Stuck in the hearts of beasts frenzied,
Tearing at your hem, pawing at the seams
Of a fragile dream, your eyes dimmed,
Faded like the last star of morning,
Dimly lit memories at dawn in the nebulae,
Half-hard, needing you, a ghost
That haunts dog days, frenzied, dishevelled,
Vomiting beautiful blue eyes, pulling
Long strands of hair from the drain, leaving
Them to dry on towels like wisps of lightning,
Against the grain in anxious sleep, turning
Over again, restlessly trying to smell
Any trace you left in these sheets' memory,
Chewing the old stains of love and lust
We left on beds, carpets and sofas,
A vulture in the remains of us
Picking the bones of every pornographic detail,
Filling pages bittersweet of shattered psyche,
Sour milk, dry leaves, and assfunk,
Bottles full of broken words, my muse got drunk,
And left me to try and catch the wind
That billows the curtains
Of the bedrooms where you arch your back,
Sigh and tremble, tease down zippers
And make your lollipop promises,

Mouth full of sugar...
Addicted and sick, sucking on strawberries,
Caramel penny candies, kiwis, nectarines,
Slivers of peaches, chocolate kisses
In the absence of any semblance of sweetness,
In towers ringing the bell through gloom
Of evenings, perched on pigeon shit benches
Watching the procession of flowers,
Dizzy butterfly panorama of faces,
Each you yet not, laughing at my broken tooth grin,
Mouth full of mirage sand, my Achilles' tendon:
A girl tying cherry stems together in her mouth,

Her lips opened like a pandora's box
With burts beez gloss, nimble tongue,
She found me too saccharine,
All aflutter among the forget-me-nots
And all those sweet things of summer.

—J.R. HAMILTON

POEM

I write poem poem leave.
Poem get out get stuck in gutter cry wrench free.
Man grab poem and sneeze grab poem hold poem crumple and
throw.
Poem on top of apple core like a garbage letters and lines.
Poem unloved and dirty poem smeared and rotten.
Poem quiet sleep and poem die.
Bad poem.

I write poem poem sit.
Poem and she look come smile.
She come and she stay so poem go and I smile she smile.
Poem in book and poem seen and poem tired but happy.
Poem in book and poem seen she see poem see me.
Poem make me seen get me smile and skin love.
Good poem.

I write poem poem hit and bite.
Poem stuck on face poem kick and scream.
I not poem I at mercy of poem poem alive.
Poem in throat and poem choke on bus in street at home.
Poem draw blood poem loud and rip me up.
Poem grab arms bend them back poem scream victory.
Very good poem.

—ANDY HUGHES

EXODUS

The boy sat on his bike, his head turned up to gaze at the awe before him. Another rocket, monstrous, ascending through the sky. A massive white cylinder, with huge jets of flame screaming out the back as it kicks and struggles to get rid of gravity. It was no doubt ferrying more of the Chosen to their new home. He could see other rockets too, far off, and the criss-crossing contrails they left snaking through the day sky. A lot were leaving today.

"It's really happening. They're really God Damned leaving," he thought to himself before continuing on the bike.

The boy, not as much a boy as a young man, slowly made his way down a long empty street covered in thick cracks and old potholes. The town appeared pretty empty, and as he drove past the vacated and ransacked houses he scanned about for signs of life. Nothing. Eventually he arrived at a humble blue home. It had boarded up windows and the decaying look shared by the rest of the town. He got off his bike and left it leaning against the side of the house as he walked into the backyard. There his cohort, composed of three other boys somewhere near the second decade of their life, waited for him.

The bikeman spoke, "I dunno guys, this place looks pretty deserted to me," as he took his place in an empty chair. The backyard was fairly spacious, and fenced in. The grass was starting to get long, but there were some chairs and a lawn table that the group had managed to find. Two other boys sat in chairs at the table. One, the oldest-looking of them all, was leaning back in his chair and taking a long drag off a small, carefully wrapped joint. He had long black hair, which was very curly. Most of it was tucked under a ballcap, and he wore some faded black T-shirt and blue jeans.

"Well Phillip, when I told you we picked a choice town I meant it, but I guess now you're happy, right?"

Phillip, taking off his worn out coat, ran his fingers through his short, dirty hair, responded with irritation, "Let me apologize if I'm trying to watch your back for you Peter, but I'm just trying to make sure no cultists or psychos are gonna off us in our sleep or some shit..."

The guys, feeling as if the world were getting a little real around them, had decided to pack up their things and relocate to a more vacant town. The one that Peter had suggested they try out was an nice middle-American town, a good distance away from the nearest city, but still a member of suburbia. When the EarthLeague announced its plans for Exodus, people started moving like crazy, rats on a sinking ship. Many residents of this

particular town were lucky enough to be Chosen, that is, lucky enough to win seats on evacuation ships, and many others were rich enough to just buy their seats. And after a few years, as people made their way towards major cities or launch areas, many towns like this became totally deserted.

The other boy sitting with them at the table, who called himself Thomas, stood up and stretched his arms above his head. He looked strong, stronger than the others, and had the build and mass of a fighter. His skin was dark, darker than the others, and it was plain that somewhere along his lineage he could trace his blood to Africa.

He took his seat, still stretching, and in a yawn addressed his fellows, "We don't have anything to worry about, not yet at least. But once the last ships leave we'll probably want to relocate to a safer location. There's no telling what type of shit is going to sweep across this planet once the hotshots have left us to rot with it. I, for one, hope there's enough time for a huge battle before we all blow up."

Peter spoke up, irritated by his friend's lust for blood, "C'mon, Thomas, we don't know that we'll blow up. Nobody knows *what's* gonna happen. Well, nobody will tell us at least. We'll get along just fine once they're gone, as long as we stay away from the death cults and rojos and shit."

Nobody on Earth knew why Exodus had to happen, but the EarthLeague made it clear that it was necessary, and by how serious the evacuation process was going, people figured that something bad had to be on Earth's horizon. The fact that whatever was wrong had been kept such a secret for all these years was truly amazing, and horrifying to the boys.

"The death cults aren't here, yet. So you guys should quit talking like they are." Phillip had fear in his voice, and nervously glanced about the yard. "I, for one, don't think I could just agree to get onto some evac ship. Not being told why you have to leave Earth, and not even being told where you're going? Or how long it's going to take the Fleets to get there? That's crazy. For all we know, they could be getting sacrificed to some space monster. Count me out."

"That's just the thing though. This ain't no casual event. People are taking any chance they get to get out, and EarthLeague is worried. They don't want to be here a damn day longer. Heck, evac ships are getting shot down left and right by Los Rojos, and they just keep launching. Dozens a day. The armed forces could spend a little time and make sure their flight paths were secure and safe, but they aren't. They don't *have* time, and they know it. So people scramble into evacs and risk getting blown to fuck trying to get off this rock, because in their minds they know

it sure as hell beats the alternative. And that sucks for us. Besides, Phillip, all the hotshots are going too, and I doubt they'd be dumb enough to sacrifice themselves to the space monsters."

Peter was always trying to be the rational voice. Too well thought out, and it bugged the others sometimes. But he had ideas, and they were hard to argue with. Their discourse and debates on Exodus could carry on for hours, and were often quite cyclical in nature.

"Oh dude, Phillip, guess who got iced by Rojos today!" Thomas had a tension of excitement in his voice, and Phillip thought he might know the answer. Thomas pulled the group's computer over and started reading from a news article. "In today's evacuation, only one rocket did not reach space. The USS. *Henry David Thoreau* was destroyed during its ascent by unguided missiles fired en masse by Los Rojos. The other evacuation rockets in *Thoreau's* group, the *T.S. Eliot*, *Robert Oppenheimer*, and the *Stanley Kubrick* were able to escape through the missile-fire into the safety of space. The US vowed vengeance on Los Rojos, who have been attacking evacuation vessels in greater frequency this month." Thomas was grinning at Phillip.

"I knew it. I just knew he wouldn't make it, didn't I tell ya? Poor *Thoreau*...at least he gets to stay here on Earth with us. I think that's what he would have wanted." Phillip said with a sigh.

The United States had, during the early stages of Exodus, began assigning its evacuation ships names they felt would remind the human race why it had to continue on, and quickly all countries attempting evacuation were following suit. When faced with the idea of mass evacuation of the planet, it must have seemed important to inspire people to carry the torch of human culture by reminding them what great things humanity had already accomplished. Maybe it worked, but the boys treated the ship names as if the historical figures were the pilots, and made bets and wagers on who would and would not make it offworld.

The fourth of the cohort, who had so far been lying in the grass, finally spoke. "You know, if they had the *J.R.R. Tolkien* with them, nobody woulda got shot down. But then again, if those schmucks were smart enough to name a ship *Tolkien*, we wouldn't be in this problem in the first place." His voice trailed off into the air. He was just laying in the grass, staring up at the sky, and had been most of the day. Sometimes the others weren't sure if he were participating merely as a listener, or if he was over there sleeping, but it didn't bother them regardless. He would get up and join them in passing a bowl around, and become involved in some conversations, but he spent many of his hours just staring up.

"Dude, quit rambling about that shit, Andrew." Peter

scolded, "You guys shouldn't be getting so damned attached to these rockets and whoever-the-fuck they're named after. All they're doing is reminding us what we are left with here. Nothing. They're even taking the damn culture with them. I'm glad they can afford to take Hemingway, Einstein, Cortes, and Plato on their trip, but chumps like us gotta sink with the ship."

"Damn, maybe we should start trying to stock up on more stuff. I mean, *Adam* and *Eve* are launching in what, 2 months? Day Zero, they all leave. After that it's lights out, all gone. Yeah, sure, they say we'll be comfortable and all that spit, but it's really gonna hit the fan. Really. That is, if Earth even lasts a damned day after the Fleet heads on out." Phillip sounded like he was thinking out loud.

The gang had a perpetual fear of running out of "stuff," and as the days-till-Exodus became smaller and smaller the fear became more and more real. They were located near enough to an old city that they could spend a few days to restock on food. The EarthLeague made sure commodities of life were easy enough to obtain. Keeping those left behind fed and clothed would hopefully result in less resistance movements to Exodus. Obviously everyone couldn't go, but at least those left behind were being left comfortable. That's what EarthLeague said at least.

Drugs were another thing the boys desired, and unfortunately EarthLeague wasn't nice enough to hand those out. Fortunately, the situation Exodus had thrown the world into was quite favorable for those seeking to buy any and all drugs. Dealers began fierce price wars, with hopes that by selling enough stuff they could secure themselves tickets aboard an evac. Others began experimenting and abusing vast amounts of stuff, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on. They all fried out, and lots would practically give away their shit to spread whatever messages the voices were telling them. In any case, the users won. The armed forces were too busy fighting with Los Rojos, and with trying to keep masses of people away from launch areas. This too worked to the advantage of those wishing to break the law.

"Yeah, we're getting low," Thomas started, "Maybe we should make one or two last, big pushes for stuff before the End. We can stock up on all types of goodies before It goes down."

"You know, I was reading that more and more people are heading into the Wilds. They're saying that they're going to try to live off the land and stuff, grow food and junk. Maybe we should try to go with them. It might be a safe shot, you know? I think they're just trying to build a stable society, using the land people did way back."

"You're not serious, are you Phillip?" Andrew asked, still staring up. "You want us to join the Wild Men? You really want

the Men of Gondor coming down on us? Besides, them psychos have already started worshipping the Old Gods and shit. Bad news bears. You don't wanna be on that boat. No Fucking Way."

"We'll head for the city tomorrow. It's been calm up that way lately. We can scope out the situation, but we'll have to get as much as we can. We need to start figuring where we're headed. We should have a safe destination in mind for Zero." Peter was always trying to plan.

"We can't run from the planet exploding, or the sun burning out, or whatever is about to go down. Long term goals are pretty futile. Think about what you said, hoss, if it made a lick of sense to stick around, they would be." Thomas laughed.

"You know..." Andrew had sat up, "the Earth will still be here after Zero. Nothing bad is going to happen. I blame Pan. Look, some guy waaaaaaay high up on the ladder was probably tripped out on some whack shit, and the god of panic and fear, bad trips essentially, gets in under his skin. The guy is like 'We gotta go. Now.' and then he goes and drums up plans for Exodus with all the other big wigs, except for he doesn't tell them what the actual problem is. This whole shebang is the result of some guy's bad trip. They'll figure out eventually, sure, but in the

meantime we'll be chilling happily on Earth. It'll all be gravy, I'm tellin ya."

The troop didn't speak for awhile. They sat in silence, as the sky grew dark and the moon rose. Above them the sky became filled with dots and speckles of the thousands of ships above Earth, waiting to leave on Zero. The last day. Somewhere, Los Rojos were planning on how to effectively sabotage *Adam* and *Eve*, and prevent the first humans from leaving their prison. But the boys just sat around, Andrew's words lingering on their ears. The stuff was getting into them deep, and all that could be heard in the empty night of a deserted town in some fucking place, America, was the soft cackle of a pipe being drawn on, and the flickflickflick of a lighter trying to spark the good stuff. After a long time, one spoke.

"You're fucking *spaced* dude..."

They shared a good laugh. Some were still trying to figure out the warped ideas being passed around, and some trying to figure out where the conversation had started. Then, they started to discuss which summer movie they looked forward to most. The night passed, and up above some dudes were leaving them behind.

—KYLE CLARK

BEREFT

I.

The city of Boston was overwhelming this morning. It affected me as serene hallucination as I walked around Copley Square, outside the hotel, hung over, and watched the whole world wake. I saw the angels and devils of everyday rise and I moved in circles around those strangers, smiling at times, at other times choking back my tears. I saw powerskirted, powerful businesswomen so businesslike and sexy in tight blouses, the dumpster men strolling greasy down wretched piss-smelling alleys, the worker bees lined along the BPL waiting for myriad buses to myriad miserable destinations, the coffee shop crowd at Starbucks so snooty, the bums waking beneath the opulent arches, the saints and martyrs of Trinity church, after a long sleep drearily probably on the stone portico floor, and I saw God. And why not? I feel so close to death at times, at a certain point the sky opened up around that cross, in azure marigold gold, leaning against the sky some prayerful forgiveness this morning, and I, atheist, saint, martyr, sinner, poet, felt some love in my heart- I have felt so cold, so very cold, repugnant and foolish of late- even my family is sick to death of the weak man I am- even if this were some pang of romantic self-love of which I generally feel I don't have a trace, then this was God within, loving even me. Oh, I'm crying again even now in my reminiscence, my dim anamnesis. Lovesick for life. I want to make the whole world cry and fall in love, cling to the transitory, forsaken, dreamt-up ephemera and mental jewelry that transcends this prison, but my words don't reach you. Forever child, forever fickle, forever wandering in my ruminations, in my musical madman way, forever trapped in a fantasy outside the bleak reality so many have come to accept as real and unchanging- I could be Lazarus come to sing to you, to tell you all, or some sick Rasputin muttering obscenities and prophecies, either way it all falls on deaf ears, like a cold rain falling pointlessly on snow-caked lanes just to make your workday more difficult... but I long for it. It is all I have ever wanted... if I cannot have love, or myself love, then I want it for others; I want to make the whole world fall in love, all I ask is... please... *please remember me*. I try, I really do, or I've got to try. I walked around with the smoke in my lungs and 90-dollar scotch remnants making my deranged, sorrowful brow woozy, I stumbled wondering at the immensity of waking, at the immensity of dawn and wondered *do dreams manifest? Does the quintessential coalesce?* But my whole life seems to drift as dew down a silken spider web. The frail thread I walk had me missing the black blues jazzman on the corner, the forlorn wail of Coltrane's "Spiritual." That is what I most needed to hear, but you don't see those ghosts anymore... A thought occurred to me as I waited feeling blue while my buddy Chunka got a coffee, as I crouched down low in downtown crossing with all this ramble tangle in my bushy hair, thoughts knocked about and punch-drunk spiraling I thought: *Alas, Hyacinthus, the*

boy most loved by Apollo, the bent flower wept, sprouting from the pools of your misfortune. I have forgotten who I am. So often I pray good angels will wrest me from this dream.

II.

I stared into the coffee shop window while I waited, and saw a face I could not recognize. Tracing the sagging cheeks, furrows of the forehead, and hollowed-out eyes, bleary with hangover, and with ashen fingers, I saw that I had grown ugly. I screwed up my face and spat at my reflection, and the spittle ran down the glass as well as my chin, making me feel all the more repugnant and contemptible. I walked a little ways away, so that I wouldn't be yelled at or looked upon with scorn by the snooty coffee jockeys or their clientele, and waited for Chunka. He walked out holding a latte, and with an expression of disappointment said:

"Why the fuck are you spitting on windows?"

"Does it matter?" I replied. "The past is the past."

"Anyway, we headed out?"

I looked around the busy square and decided not to go home. Though I have a roof and my family's loving scrutiny, I have no home. "I think I'll find my own way back."

"Can I get a pack of reds?"

I eyed him suspiciously, and his face twisted in anger.

"I bought you the fucking carton, not to mention paid for a two-bedroom at a swank hotel!"

Throwing him a pack, I said half-contemptuously, half joking, "smoke one for me."

He could only laugh as I asked for ten bucks; I would need a drink to end the banging in my temples. He handed me a crumpled bill from his wallet.

"Fun night," he said. "I can't believe I had the balls to walk right up to that girl."

"Yeah," I replied, lighting up. "Well, I'll see ya."

I walked to the end of the street and turned, he strolled into the station. *Alone*, I thought, as I leaned once again against the wall and crouched low, closing my eyes, heavy with the weight of my throbbing head, and missing the morning's beauty, washed away with the day's coming onslaught of heat and crowds, shoppers and strollers, destinationless rides on buses and trains, the forecast of summer sun and sultry rain, the many-limbed

city stretching and yawning, the concrete covering nature's gift, drowning it in rivers of cracked pavement and garbage, reaching to the sea. There was a war on televisions lined in the window of a store, slaughter over God and greed in a façade of brick and glass. The world may very well be composed of greater and lesser loves intertwined, or lila, a play of light as Brahma unfolds softly, or it could be a cosmic turd, a collective brainfart, we just dreamt ourselves up and proceeded to bump each other off like angry lemming monkeys. Is there any escape from this pain? The water works started again, so unmanly to cry. By the park I sat for a while, resting on a bench. Lovers were there, a lovely woman with long, pale legs was teaching a young man to waltz, bare-foot in the dew. I looked upon him with jealousy, and admired her graceful deft motions. He was clumsy in his movements and laughed, falling backwards into the soft, wet grass, and she followed suit and lay on top of him, pressed breast to breast and they rolled around, their lips touched. I decided to write, and rifled through my bag, finding in it a blank notebook, pens, old letters, a book by Hesse, another by Miller, and another by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I pulled out an old letter and opened the envelope. Within were the remains of singed rhododendron, reminiscent of spent containers of lip gloss, blue eyes of sky, marigold hair, like wheat wild in sun and wind, honey of lips, and dew on thighs draped over my shoulder, drawing me in. I poured out the petals, forgetting her and on a blank page of the notebook I tried to puzzle out my thoughts-

M-

Strange day today. Hung over. How are you?

I stopped, making ellipses as I pounded the page with the pen. An Asian girl sat on a bench across from me, her eyes a beautiful mystery, flying saucers of dark shiny obsidian and hair black as the shimmering canvas of night; she wore a skirt and jeans and her glance destroyed me. *So ugly*, I thought, *I am so ugly*. She gazed a moment, and went back to her crossword in the paper which was folded in her lap. I tore the letter and began again, longing so for an embrace that wants to know. Everyone needs that, but so many just fizzle out, sparks in pellucid ponds, or waiting in bramble dream tendrils, piercingly bitter, alone, and that is the worst part. I began again.

M-

I love you. Why can't we...

I stopped, letting the letter fall on a cracked jaded path running through the park, and passed out on the bench, taking with me an opalescent soft skin I will never for a moment feel supine and pressed against my soft belly, or heartfelt words of longing that will never fall from her lips, designed in heaven, meant to

kiss.

III.

Outside the bar, a place I frequent called the "World Weary," the rains began to pour and blow about. I only had enough for a half-glass of bourbon and a beer. I left a one-dollar tip on the bar and nursed my drinks. The bourbon helped my headache, but heartache remained. I felt like I was missing something, some part of myself. There were strangers all around, drinking heavily and muttering at tables, umbrellas floated by outside, and the barkeep continually washed the counter as I tried my best to puzzle it out. *If I don't know who I am, how can I love? What is it anyway, and who needs it?* It seemed to me quite a conundrum, and perplexing. I slammed down my shot glass, and the bartender asked if I wanted another.

"No," I said grimly, though indeed I did. "No thanks."

On a TV suspended over the bar, men were running in circles with balls. *The plight of any man*, I thought, *to a greater or lesser degree*. Death loomed nearby, drinking an appletini through a fanned out flamingo straw. He handed me a hyacinth and a watch; I took them and smiled broadly. Life was in a dark corner; I walked over to her; she was doing poorly, drunk as always, and having a miscarriage. The blood poured on the lacquered wood floor. "Talk to death," I said. Finishing my beer, I strolled out in the rain. No coat, no umbrella, I was drenched before my new watch ticked off a minute, and it went around rapidly, so I ran, I ran to catch up with Time. The heavy storm clouds swathed the streets in menacing darkness, lonely streets, desolate, rainswept streets. Empty coffee cups and moldy newspapers floated beside the greasy curbs, downstream making gutter puddles gathering oily, fallen rainbow remnants.

I came to Copley; it was Sunday but mass was over. The door was open and dimly lit; I could see light in the cracks, welcoming candlelight. I was soaked to my socks and underwear, the warm summer rain left me with chills and my genitalia shriveled and curled as a plum in sun. Bleary, haunted eyes looked out from the stone porch of the church, beneath worry waterfalls streaming down the faces of biblical figures carved above the arches. I ran into the church and sat in a pew at the back, water dripping from my face and hair. The candles at the foot of the nave were being blown out by the wind that swayed the electric lanterns above, and the wooden door slammed continually. I sat defeated with my head down and admired my hyacinth. I pulled out my notebook and tried to begin my letter, it had indeed been a strange day, and I wanted to tell her about it, I wanted someone to understand... if she could only love me I wouldn't be in this damn temple, the love cult of suffering and nails in martyr hands... *martyr for love* I thought, as a priest approached me on

tiny, silent feet.

"Our doors are closing, you'll have to go," he said politely, mockingly, in the quiet lilting manner of haughty chastity and repentance. "Try to stay dry, my son," he said, as I rose from the pew, leaving my flower in a puddle there on the tiled floor.

On the portico there were homeless men keeping dry, ragged beggars all strange and sleepily somnolent, saying nothing in particular. I nodded to them, checked my watch, and moved on. I was running out of time, and felt nothing could save me. A long fall out of grace remained. I ran and ran, grates lined the fronts of stores, bars, restaurants and train stations. The streets were empty save the dirtnapping dreamers, laying supine in graveyards, sleeping forever, *my brothers and sisters*. Was I dreaming?

I came to the water, and watched the rain dapple its surface. I saw M there, musing, I whispered *I love you, I think I do, I do love...* can I love? I said an our father and breathed the heart sutra mantra. Many faces formed in the pouring rain, familiar faces and strangers, black, white, gay, straight, men, women, angels, and devils, they plunged into the sea below, catching a dim luminous glow that burst through the storm clouds, which parted

for a moment, revealing a sea of stars. From the bridge I saw them as a million flickering wishes and good angels, "God help me," I said, and plunged downward, and was suspended above 20,000 leagues of faith, a pillar of salt or a hollow tree against the horizon, leaning, remembering 1000 horizons at dusk, for all eternity.

IV.

The first sprinkles of rain opened my eyes as I lay on the bench in the Common. Everyone was gone. I was half inside a dream, barely slipping out. I had hoped the good angels would take me away, but it seems I cannot even die in my dreams. The initial rains reduced my attempts at letters to blue ink blotches, *M- I love you, why...* and the wind blew them down the path to be forgotten. *Maybe that is best.* My longing is a paltry thing, worthless as these words, an obsession for what could never work. Dreams don't manifest. Not by the weight of a heart, nor the strength of will.

I walked a ways as the storm picked up, and turned into the first bar I came to.

—J.R. HAMILTON

This five-year
old boy is looking
at the two art
students sitting next
to him. The girl has
her septum pierced and
large headphones.

"Stop staring," his young
mother whispers.
His eyes are old.
He eats French
Onion Sun Chips
carefully, with purpose.

He is mixed—
curly hair, creamy skin.
His mother's dyed
hair is tied up in a messy
bun. She talks
to the train conductor.

He notices me
smiling at him, and smiles back
(minus a front incisor).

"He is so cute," I remark to
his mother. She acknowledges with
an unsurprised, "Thank you."

He waves to me. I wave
back and watch him
eat, entranced. He devours
a chip, forcing it comically into
his small mouth. I giggle.

His mom wipes the
crumbs off his face and
shirt, opens a Pepsi
and gives him a sip.

"I like soda," he says.

We all get
off at Brigham Circle.

He grabs his mother's
hand. He turns and
waves, with

BUILDING 19

A GHAZAL

Your carpet from Building 19- I tried to wash my adolescent
blood from it. For you, mom.
I grabbed the dirty dishtowels you kept next to the stove, got
what I could from it. But still, mom.

And when you yelled my glasses fogged. I recoiled from the
vitriolic vortex your storm spit.
Encumbered by ephemeral blindness, I found my way from your
gaze to the hardwood. Fuck, mom.

I bottomed out of the bathroom floor. I could hear your voice
through the keyhole- seeping through.
So, I taped my knees with Band-Aids because I was sure you
wouldn't wanna. Momma, mom.

You left your sound with the carpet, and empty bottle of bleach,
and Springsteen playing from the TV.
I dragged myself from the bathroom once I heard your footsteps
flood and flee. Jesus Christ, mom.

Your carpet from Building 19- I tried to wash my
disappointment from it. For you, mom.
And when I loved you I lied because I was trying to be good-
maybe. But still, mom

—KENDRA WHITE

DISPLAY

In the hall of glass flowers,
man's belabored recreations bloom
modestly, oversized pistils
and ovary cross sections.
Glass under glass.

We walk human and in love.
The mammal room is dark,
it smells of meat.

I'm tickled; a plasticine tongue
between tiger incisors,
many types of hummingbirds
pinned in flight,
a jarring crack divides
the leather of a rhino's neck,
and you, camel eyes,
heavy lids and long lashes,
pointing out the seams.

The sloth and other
New World mammals
go mostly unnoticed.
There is no honor
in the taxidermy
of torpid game.

Whales, you tell me
are conscious of their breath.
They breathe voluntarily
and rest partially.
If they sleep fully
they drown.
The cows squirt milk
the texture of toothpaste.
They grieve, and sing, and scheme.

I look up and see
a mangy hanging baleen
made to capture
krill, and other tiny things.
It's strung from ceiling rigs.
It's too big.

Amidst the schismatic mammalian spectacle,
you hold my hand and listen
when I babble that I'd rather
be of another substance,
subhuman, flat and thin, new

matter, stretching far
over barren Utah rock,
hugging porous stone,
invading each crevice,
but tenderly, unified,
and, by its own volition,
I'd like the rock
to hug me back.

—JACUIN GERSTEL-FRIEDMAN

ADIEU

We shall be happy.
You forgot
the exclamation point!

Frankly,
I'm a little surprised.
How's New York?

They buried you
in that long sandy island—
humming, humming.

O'
you were snubbed suddenly
like a thin white Gauloise.

And still your smoke rises
into the angel
airs

of animal cities.
I wish I were reeling
around Paris; and you

were in a trench coat
with cashmere lining,
knocking at my window—

holding a switchblade
and some oranges—
in mischievous stance,

sipping
a half-empty bottle
of moonlight.

—JEEFREY TAYLOR

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Ian Blake Newhem, Cliff Garner, Eds. / 145 College Road Suffern, NY 12518

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