A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

gulf coast

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GULF COAST

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A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS VOLUME 31, ISSUE 1

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Editors' Note

"The heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been to one's own."
—Willa Cather

"My friends tell me I have an intimacy problem. But they don't really know me."
—Gary Shandling

Dear Readers,

A young boy named Leonard was playing with his friends in the Bronx, circa 1928, when he started to lose feeling in his right hand. Soon the spreading numbness cost him his ability to write, then to walk, and finally to move at all without the assistance of a nurse. Forty years later, Leonard was one of several patients living in a Bronx hospital in what seemed like a permanent catatonic state. Because he never showed emotion or expressed any desire, doctors assumed that Leonard could not hear, feel, or really think—that any humanity Leonard had once possessed had been either buried or destroyed by a rare disease they could not treat. He was simply there.

It wasn't until 1969, when an intrepid researcher administered a new drug called L-Dopa, that Leonard suddenly "woke up" from his forty-year sleep. He and other patients like him began walking, talking, and socializing all on their own. It turned out that Leonard had not been catatonic but rather stricken by a severe form of Parkinson's disease, which—though not entirely curable—was treatable. This story is the subject of Oliver Sacks' book, *Awakenings*, which was later made into a film starring Robert DeNiro. Like many of the pieces in this issue, it gets to the heart of questions about how humans interact with each other, how we miscommunicate and misjudge, how our best guesses about one another's motivations or abilities amount to little more than stabs in the dark.

"What I wish the matching-algorithms could do is telescope into the nonvirtual and give us side-by-side bodies," writes this year's Nonfiction Prize winner Jessie van Eerden, in her essay, "Blessed be the Longing that Brought You Here." With cartographic skill, van Eerden renders the landscape of desire in all its variety—from the rocky texture of longing to the silver river of hopefulness. In an often unpleasant emotion that digital technology seems determined to eliminate, she finds deep waters teeming with life.

Approaching a similar subject with a wholly different set of tools, Alan Ruiz asks, "What is a screen? What does it do?" Like any good question, this one is deceptively simple and timely, and Ruiz deploys metaphysical and theoretical language to address it sufficiently. "The screen is a function, as much as an object, toggling between verb and noun," he writes, after distinguishing screen from one of the most hotly disputed verb/nouns of our time: wall.

"[And] just like that, we are talking about power," snaps Hanif Abdurraqib, in his poem, "How Can Black People Write About Flowers in a Time Like This," reminding us that the opposition between aesthetics and politics has always been false. Both are instruments of power, of choosing

one thing and not another—indeed, of screening our lives according to whichever "-ism" we find most compelling, or most convenient. How can we talk about approaches to understanding in a neatly sterilized academic laboratory, when meanwhile our lack of understanding for real human beings turns from dangerous to deadly? Like Leonard's doctors in *Awakenings*, stricken so obtuse by dogma, we might ask: Have our approaches outlived their usefulness?

And if so, what then is a better approach? Is it more art? Finer literature? Smarter science? In a roundtable discussion, Martin Rock invites particle physicist James Beacham into conversation with poets Kimiko Hahn, Kathryn Nuernberger, Tess Taylor, and Jaswinder Bolina. Too often, they find, differences in specialization receive more attention than shared values.

As new editors, we have been paying most attention to the new challenges placed before us—primarily, how to put together a journal that honors the vivid history and promising future of *Gulf Coast*. While we have inherited much wisdom from our predecessors, much more remains unresolved, even mysterious. Yet, as for our readers, we feel as though we know you. In many cases, this is literally true; we've met you at workshops and residencies, in panels and seminars, on flights to AWP and via the vast aqueducts of social media. On a broader level, though, we believe we know you, as we assume much about you on a daily basis — not just what you'd like to read but what you must; what kind of art will make the hair stand up on your neck; which stories, poems, essays, and interviews will make you swoon with lust or love, jealousy or admiration.

In reality, there may be very little we know about you, but in the coming years we hope to learn more. Write to us. Call us. Pay us a visit, if you can. Send us your Tweets and Instagrams. Tell us your hopes and fears. Express them in words, images, or emojis. And if you ever get the feeling that we're not hearing you, tell us that, too. We'll try to listen more closely.

Sincerely,

The Editors

Justin Jannise, *Editor* | Paige Quiñones, *Managing Editor* | Rob Howell, *Digital Editor*

2018 GULF COAST PRIZE WINNERS

Fiction Prize

Judged by Joshua Ferris

WINNER

Mi-Kyung Shin, "Rules of Engagement"

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Pankaj Challa, "The Bridge"
Anna Marschalk-Burns, "Cocodrie"

Poetry Prize

Judged by Chen Chen

WINNER

Josh Tvrdy, "Church Board Interrogations"

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Sara Fetherolf, "Drowning"
Osel Jessica Plante, "Self Portrait as Daughter Stuffed with a Sack of Pomegranates

Nonfiction Prize

Judged by Lacy M. Johnson

WINNER

Jessie van Eerden, "Blessed Be the Longing that Brought You Here"

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Christine Adams, "Trash Honey"
Dawn Newton, "Juglans Nigra"

Each contest winner receives $1,500 and publication in *Gulf Coast*. Each Honorable Mention receives $250. Submit one previously unpublished story or essay (7,000 words maximum) or up to five poems (ten pages maximum). All entries are considered for publication and the entry fee includes a one-year subscription to *Gulf Coast*. For more information about the upcoming contest, including judges, stay tuned at **www.gulfcoastmag.org**.

Mi-Kyung Shin

Rules of Engagement

I brushed snow off my coat and shook my hair. I checked the time. A few minutes past seven. I walked toward the two-seat table far inside the restaurant. My heels clomped pleasingly on the hardwood floor.

"Sorry I'm late," I said, sitting down.

"Haeri."

"It's been a while, Mr. Lee."

"Ten years, almost." He smiled, scanning my face. "You look the same, Haeri."

"Do I?"

"Still like a girl fresh out of college." He smacked my shoe lightly with his.

I cocked my head. "And you…still look good, Mr. Lee," I said. I let the sentence linger, recognizing his scent among grilled food smells.

I snapped up a menu. "Shall we order?"

I was in something of a limbo nine years earlier, having graduated from Harvard with a degree in literature but uncertain as to what I wanted to do next. So I took an internship at a media conglomerate in Seoul. My job was basically translating documents. The work was vapid but easy. The paychecks weren't much but helped me rely less on my parents. Mr. Lee was then a section chief in the Publicity Department and my main supervisor. He was 36, married, had two children. For the first six months of my internship, we flirted. For the next six, we slept together. The year over, I went back to the U.S. to get a Ph.D. Mr. Lee and I exchanged occasional email greetings but mostly fell out of touch, expectedly and preferably. Then in January last year, when I had just returned to Seoul, Mr. Lee wrote me a casual how-are-you. I wrote back a casual I'm-in-Seoul. He proposed that we meet for dinner. Perfect, I thought. I had a six-week break until the start of my teaching job at Yonsei University. I didn't like breaks. I decided that for those six weeks I would busy myself with Mr. Lee.

As I decided that, the only friend I have in Seoul, Soomi, called me and said that she was moving to Hong Kong soon because of her husband's job. "Would you be interested in tutoring?" Soomi asked me. The student was a high school boy, a junior entering his last year. A decent kid. His father was an executive at a pharmaceutical company. Soomi charged 150,000 won, or 150 dollars, per hour, but I could certainly negotiate. I said I would do it, but only for the next six weeks. In short order I was put in touch with the student's mother, Mrs. Hwang, and we set up a time for my first visit.

The Hwangs lived in an upscale apartment building in Apgujeong. The three of us sat in the living room, the mother and the boy on one sofa, me on the other across the coffee table. Every summer in college I had come to Seoul and made some cash tutoring, so I knew the protocol. Over a plate of persimmons and oolong tea, I presented a summary of myself, professional and personal. Mrs. Hwang nodded vigorously, repeating my words. A diplomat! Harvard! Yale! I could tell that Mrs. Hwang was one of those "skirt wind" mothers, so called because they bustle around so tirelessly for their children's education that their skirts create a wind.

"Starting March, I will be teaching at Yonsei University," I concluded, and sipped my tea.

"My greatest wish is for my son to enter a SKY," Mrs. Hwang said, referring to Seoul, Korea, and Yonsei, the top three universities in the country. She wanted me to give her son "intensive" English lessons in preparation for the University Entrance Exam in November. My timing was perfect, as schools were in winter recess and Jihyuk had extra time for tutoring. "Now is the critical period that will determine his future, Ms. Haeri Jo, you understand," Mrs. Hwang said. A skirt gale.

"I'm sure he will do well, Mrs. Hwang," I said, turning my attention to Jihyuk. The boy had been utterly silent. His glance dropped toward the carpet at my cordial smile.

The introduction over, Jihyuk and I went to his room for our first "intensive" lesson. He was a lanky boy, rickety-seeming, as though he had grown three inches recently and couldn't quite handle his body. He was wearing a yellow T-shirt and beige cargo shorts. His legs were pretty like a girl's. His bare feet fidgeted in the

same terrycloth slippers as I'd been given to wear. He smelled like a good child, like fresh laundry. The smell bothered me.

We sat side by side at a long wood desk overlaid with glass.

"Let me see the books you've been using with Soomi?" I said.

Jihyuk pulled out three books from the bookcase mounted on the desk, facing us, and placed them in front of me. Vocabulary, grammar, reading.

"How much have you covered?"

He opened each book to where they had left off.

"What's your name?" I asked to make him say something.

He glanced at me, hesitated, and answered, "Jihyuk."

"Where do you go to school, remind me?"

"Hyundai High."

"How long did you study with Soomi?"

He thought for a moment. "A year."

"How did you get to study with her?" Try *that* with a word.

Jihyuk scratched his head, clearing his throat. "One of my cousins introduced her," he said. His voice was low but creaky-edged. I didn't like teenage boys.

"All right, let's check your vocabulary first."

But a job was a job, I reminded myself. Fulfill your duty. Prove your utility.

So began my six-week break. Mr. Lee and I met whenever we could. Our past dynamic revived quickly. He still charmed me, I had to give it to my old boss. He looked years younger than his 45. He dressed sharp as befit a successful corporate worker. He had plentiful hair, no paunch, a fat wallet. He spoke with a canny blend of gravity and levity. He was charming all right, in a way that left my heart alone.

On the first weekend following our reunion, we went for a drive in his slick BMW. We saw a special exhibition of René Magritte. We browsed new releases at a bookstore. We dined at a French bistro. Did everything we used to do except sleep together. That should wait a little, we both knew, of course. How Mr. Lee excused himself from his family on a weekend, I didn't know, and didn't need to

know. I trusted his competence as a certain dissimulator. As did he mine. "You are a cool chick—a seductress inside, a prude outside," Mr. Lee had often said of me, the fresh-faced intern fucking him on the sly. As a child of a diplomat, I had learned to mold myself according to changing environments. Speak in another language. Observe other customs. Acquire other tastes. There was an art to living unsettled, a kind of masquerade. Disengage and forget quickly. If you aren't fine, pretend you are. Don't make a fuss.

I taught Jihyuk three times a week, each session three hours long. Our side-by-side seating didn't encourage eye contact, but when it occurred, Jihyuk looked away hurriedly. He had a tiny spot under his right eye. His nostrils bulged when he suppressed a yawn. He was aloof toward Mrs. Hwang but didn't have an attitude. He called her Mom while referring to Mr. Hwang as Father. His 12-year-old brother, Jihoo, was far more spirited, greeting me in the foyer, "Hello, Teacher!" "Goodbye, Teacher!" while Jihyuk silently bowed and scratched his head. He had a stubborn cowlick.

By the third session we had settled into a routine. We took a ten-minute break when Mrs. Hwang brought in a tray of refreshments. Having them, we made small talk. I asked, Jihyuk answered.

"So you are good at math and sciences, Mrs. Hwang tells me."

"I'm…not good at the other subjects."

"What major are you applying for?"

"Economics, if my scores are good enough."

"What do you want to do eventually? After school?"

"Um…probably work for a company, like Father."

"Is that what you want to do?"

Jihyuk balled up the white veins he had removed from a tangerine. "I don't know," he said. "It's hard to think about that kind of thing. I just have to get into a good university. That's all I know for now." He dropped the ball of veins on his saucer and sighed.

"That's all right. You will figure it out in due time," I said, smiling encouragingly.

Jihyuk blushed.

"How old were you in there?" I asked, pointing at a framed picture on a bookshelf.

Jihyuk inspected it. "Four or five," he said. "Mom is pregnant."

"Ah, I can see that now. Is that Japan?"

"One night Mom craved miso ramen so much, we flew to Sapporo that night. I don't remember it, but Father says so."

"That's nice." I smiled.

"Aren't you going to marry?" Jihyuk asked. He did that sometimes, surprising me with very personal questions or blunt remarks without coming across as rude.

"Someday, who knows," I said.

"Thirty-three is pretty old," Jihyuk said, thoughtfully.

I burst out laughing. "Well, you know, I thought that too when I was seventeen," I said. "Thirty-something was just too far away, hard to imagine being it." I sighed. I tossed my head. "What about you? Surely you have a girlfriend? A handsome boy like you?"

"I don't, I'm not, I…" Jihyuk gulped his tea and coughed, blushing.

"Easy, easy, I was just teasing." I tapped his back. I felt his spine. The warmth of his flesh rushing into my palm brought Suoh with it. He liked to doze off in the sun. *Subarashii*, he liked to exclaim. Splendid. Many things were *subarashii* for Suoh. Swiss-Japanese, lanky, with soft chestnut hair. Suoh started many books at once, rarely finished any. He swam like a dolphin, ate while walking, studied anywhere but at a desk. I liked to sit at a carrel desk in the library. Once I started a book, I finished the book. I played the piano methodically, dissected a frog precisely, tied my shoelaces in perfect 8 ribbons.

"I'm sorry."

"What?" I dropped my hovering hand.

"I said something wrong…"

"Oh, no. I'm sorry, I was just… Let's get back to work?"

Jihyuk scratched his head, meeting my eyes for a moment. For that moment I felt Suoh's hair on my fingers, sun-warmed, smelling of fresh laundry.

Mr. Lee had asked me to come to a barbeque restaurant. When I got there, I found him with three of his colleagues. The two men were a rank below Mr. Lee in their corporate hierarchy. The woman was a newbie, probably not older than 25.

"Miss—*Doctor* Haeri Jo here interned in our department a long time ago," Mr. Lee told his colleagues. "She was about Doyun's age then." He touched the shoulder of the woman sitting next to him. Doing so, he flicked the slightest wink at me across the table.

Doyun was a pretty young thing. Greeting her, I thought of the Korean joke I had once heard: "Women are like Christmas cakes. Past 25, nobody wants them. They go on the clearance shelf." It was one of those sayings that, absurd as they were, and distasteful, I couldn't altogether dismiss. I was 33. By that saying, had I been a Christmas cake, I must have long grown moldy. Doyun flipped pork belly squares before they charred and served them to the rest of us. The moment our *soju* glasses were emptied, she refilled them, and amiably accepted drinks from her senior colleagues. She called me "Professor Jo." I was no stranger to the customs of my birth country. I could follow them to a tee if I needed to. Even so, they didn't quite agree with me. Every one of the cultures I had grown up in felt like a pair of shoes a half-size too big. They were wearable all right, but never let me forget that I was wearing them.

One of the male colleagues, Mr. Koh, had gone to Yonsei University as an undergrad, so I talked with him about the school. I talked the talks and laughed the laughs. I knew the workings of my charm. Self-objectifying was second nature to me, hyper-perceptivity my primary tool in engaging with shifting rules.

"Chief Koh, aren't you being a tad too eager with Ms. Jo?" Mr. Lee said. "You are a man just two months into the bliss of matrimony, remember?"

"Why remind me, Director Lee!" Mr. Koh clawed at his scalp and guffawed.

Mr. Lee caressed my shoe with his under the table. I continued to talk with Mr. Koh.

A couple of hours later, I got up, saying I had an early start tomorrow. To the two Chiefs I bade, "It was a pleasure meeting you," and bowed. To Doyun I said the same without honorifics and touched her shoulder. "You are a lovely girl," I added, and looked at Mr. Lee.

He mock-pleaded, "Haeri Jo, don't go. It's no good without you," then mock-threatened, "Are you going to disobey your old boss?"

I picked up my coat, smiled, and left the table. The hall was murky from grill smoke and loud with drunk customers. I monitored my steps, making sure

no unsteadiness showed. Outside the restaurant, I put on my coat and muffler. It was -10 Celsius, 15 Fahrenheit.

"Haeri."

I turned around.

"Why don't you stay?" Mr. Lee held my waist, but very passingly.

"I should head home. Go back inside, it's freezing."

"Let's go someplace in a bit, just you and I. Say, you want to?"

He had a knack for such halfway remarks, declaration-questions in a serious-facetious manner, so he would lose nothing regardless of my reaction. If I showed interest, then he had been serious—of course. If I rolled my eyes, then he had been joking—of course.

"Good night, Director Lee." I bowed. I walked away, quite leisurely. I knew he was looking at my legs. I have nice legs.

"You need to be careful here." I marked the question with a star. "It's asking you the thesis of the paragraph, not the entire text. It's designed to trip you up."

"I hate this kind of question. It's a trick, not fair."

"Oh, the world is full of tricksters." I tapped his wrist softly.

Jihyuk smiled, blushing.

When we were taking a break, he asked me, "What kind of scent are you wearing?"

Four weeks had passed since our first session and Jihyuk had grown more comfortable with me—attracted to me. Without answering him I checked my cell phone. Mr. Lee had come by two tickets for a movie premiere. *Meet me at 8 at Gangnam CGV?*

"Who are you texting?" Jihyuk asked.

Ok, see you there. I hit Send and looked up. "My lover," I said.

"Really?"

I put my phone away. Jihyuk's face nakedly revealed his feelings. Surprise. Confusion. A stirring of jealousy. This will be entertaining, I thought to myself. Make the boy clamor for my attention, love me in that darling teenage way.

After the lesson, as usual, Jihyuk got up with me to see me off. As he turned the doorknob, I reached for his head. "This thing never lies flat, does it?" I patted down his cowlick, laughing, and walked past him out of his room.

The I who laughed. The I who flinched at the softness of his hair. The I who noted the discrepancy and bristled. The I I I's.

The movie was an anemic thriller padded with sex scenes.

"Aren't you hungry?" Mr. Lee asked, leaving the theater.

"Are you? It's kind of late but…should we grab a bite to eat?"

"I could grab a bite of *you*. I've been starving for years." He pinched my waist.

"Ah, well." I smiled genially. "Keep up the fasting. It has a purifying effect, they say." I strode ahead. "Thanks for the movie. Good night!" I waved without looking back and lost myself in the crowds of Gangnam Avenue.

Let him crave a little longer, I thought. Isn't that the fun of our game? The first time we had sex, it was on a couch in a DVD viewing room. The couch was leather. Only my panties were down. It was uncomfortable and quick. Subsequently we went to motels. They had three-hour stay deals, I suppose for the likes of us seeking expeditious sex. In the six months of our screwing around, no one at the company suspected it. Mr. Lee exuded a womanizer's aura, he couldn't help it. But the partner in his philandering couldn't possibly be me, the pristine-looking intern from a reputable family with an elite education and impeccable decorum. No one could imagine that girl spreading her legs for her married boss, I knew. I made sure they couldn't. I didn't feel shame or guilt, either toward Mr. Lee's wife and children or my parents who simply believed I was an exemplary daughter. I didn't feel much of anything. Maybe some vaguely vengeful satisfaction. Vaguely, because the object was uncertain. Revenge on whom, on what grounds? My parents? Suoh? Myself? Anyway, it was an irrelevance, what I felt. What mattered was that I functioned, however I could.

I got in a taxi and groped around in my head for my new address near Yonsei University. How many addresses had I passed through? Fifteen?

Twenty? I could recall one or two. My phone buzzed. I sighed, expecting some witty-flirty one-liner from Mr. Lee.

On my way home from cram school. Got 92 in the English mock exam. Sorry if it's too late. Just wanted to tell you.

I sat up. I checked the time. 11:04. I typed a reply, reviewed it several times, and sent it.

Good boy. I'll pat you on the head next time I see you.

Make him read and re-read those words, I thought. Make him smile and scratch his head and laugh and frown and smile again. Make him love you in his gauche and precious way. Feel good about your power over him. Then forget. Suoh was a boy you once loved, who once loved you. You once loved your slide in the yard. You once loved your hamster. You once loved Holden Caulfield and the old man at the cafeteria who served you couscous very nicely, too slowly. You once loved a lot of things. And you don't now. Shouldn't. They are gone.

Nostalgia. It may be natural. And I may be naturally prone to it. But I have no use for the natural I, the I steeped in irrational longing. That I can only spell dysfunction.

Jihyuk sent me a smiley face. I stuffed my phone into my bag and shut my eyes. We only had a few lessons left. Then it would be over. I would have made 8,100 dollars in six weeks.

On the last Friday of February I had my final lesson with Jihyuk. We had finished all three books. His mock exam scores had been consistently improving. I had done my job. Mrs. Hwang thanked me intensely for my intensive lessons of the past six weeks and expressed her intense wish that Jihyuk would make it into Yonsei University next year.

"Ms. Jo, if you aren't terribly busy this evening, why don't you have dinner with him?"

"Oh, that is a nice thought, Mrs. Hwang. But I know Jihyuk has his cram school soon."

"He has plenty of time till then. Oh I *insist*."

Mrs. Hwang gave Jihyuk her credit card, instructing him to "Treat your

teacher to a nice dinner of appreciation at Hyundai Department Store. Afterwards, since you are there, get yourself that new uniform you need. Then straight to your cram school. Understand?"

Jihyuk's kid brother whined that he wanted to come with us and eat a nice dinner too.

"Of course, we can all go together," I said.

"She's not your teacher," Jihyuk snapped, poking Jihoo in the back.

Jihoo stuck out his tongue, calling Jihyuk a meanie, a pig, a bully, "crappy panties," and relented only when Mrs. Hwang promised him pizza for dinner.

Jihyuk had good table manners and ate a lot more than I would have thought. His was a growing body. A malleable mind, intelligence yet to peak, character yet to harden. The way I operated, by contrast, was unlikely ever to change.

"Do you like living here?" Jihyuk asked.

"Here?"

"Korea, I mean."

"Sure."

"But would you rather be in some other country?"

I looked out the foggy window. Twilight. Colors were clashing in the sky. The high-rises were silhouettes. Korea, I pronounced in my head. I felt nothing particular about it.

"I'm fine here," I said. "But I'll be fine in some other place too."

"Do you have a lot of friends here?"

"Friends? No, not here, or anywhere. It's hard to keep friends when you move often."

Jihyuk put down his fork and knife diagonally on his plate.

"That kind of sucks," he said.

I smiled. "Yes. That kind of sucks."

"Must be kind of lonely."

I must have stared at him because Jihyuk blushed, turning his face to the window.

Without him noticing I signaled for the check and sent the server away with my credit card. Jihyuk griped this was unfair, Mom would be so mad at him, why would I do this to him… I sipped my coffee.

We got on the escalator going down.

"Next time I'll buy you dinner," Jihyuk said.

"All right, when you're all grown up and have your own bank account."

"Don't treat me like a kid."

Jihyuk stomped down a step. My eyes came level with his head. I stopped my hand reaching for the stubborn cowlick.

We got off at the floor that sold school uniforms.

"Don't you already have one?" I asked.

"I've grown out of it. It's the fourth one I'm buying in two years. Mom is getting mad."

I laughed. "Well, that's a good thing. You should do all the growing while you can."

I followed Jihyuk to the booth displaying his school's uniform on a pair of mannequins. I brushed my hand against the boy's, the mannequin's. While Jihyuk tried on a couple of sizes, I waited holding his olive-green parka. The goose down was docile in my embrace. The smell was pleasing without artifice, like fresh laundry. Like Suoh.

My phone buzzed.

How about sake *in Itaewon? 7:30?*

"I'm done." Jihyuk came up to me, holding a large paper bag.

I gave him his parka back.

"Off to cram school?" I said.

"Yeah, I'm taking the subway from here."

"Good, me too."

We headed for Apgujeong Station on the underground level.

"Where are you going?" Jihyuk asked me on the escalator.

"Itaewon."

"Oh. I'm the other direction."

We stopped between the opposite banks of turnstiles. It was rush hour. The ground vibrated from the mass of moving people. The turnstiles beeped at subway cards. The mechanical female voice announced the comings and goings of trains.

Geneva Airport. Departure. Our time together had run out. I was moving to the U.S. Suoh was staying in Switzerland. We whispered, our cheeks touching, that we would be together, we would find a way, soon. Did I truly believe those words we said? Believe that roseate vision of love? I might have. I was an 18-year-old girl and my operating system was still developing. Then, I could be uncool. Now, 15 years later, my system had been perfected.

"Well, be good, Jihyuk," I said. I smiled. I held his hand.

With the hand I had let go, Jihyuk pressed his forehead.

"I'll keep in touch," he said. "If that's okay."

"Of course," I said, and turned around.

In the train I received a message. *I will get into Yonsei.*

I deleted it. I deleted all the other messages from Jihyuk. I deleted his number. I had provided my service and received my remuneration. That was all. I felt a slight pressure in my chest. But that was okay. These things pass, I reminded myself. Everything passes. Trains. Airplanes. People. Time after time. I held onto a hanging strap and focused on the subway map. Get off at Yaksoo to transfer to Line 6 to get to Itaewon. Transfer correctly. That was important.

"What is lonely?"

"Why, you feel lonely tonight, Haeri?" Mr. Lee smiled.

"It's something my student mentioned today." I finished my *sake* in one gulp. "I tried to grasp that feeling, but couldn't."

Mr. Lee filled my cup. "That must mean you never feel it," he said. "Or always, so you can't tell."

"Do *you* get lonely?"

He shook his head, laughing like scoff-sighing.

"At my age, with two kids on my hands, if I moped in loneliness, that'd be plain unseemly." He sipped his *sake* and bit a grilled ginkgo off its skewer.

I filled his cup. Some kindly feeling bubbled up in me. Mr. Lee would make a very different kind of father than my own, I thought. The only time I saw my

father's equanimity break was when I had told him I wanted to go to a college in Geneva instead of Harvard. He knew it was for Suoh that I wanted to do that. "Your sense has gone out of your head," my father shouted. "If you intend to ruin your future for that clown of a boy, then you are on your own. Be out of my sight." And I couldn't shout back "Fine!" and jump on an uncertified track. So I hung my head, crying, and continued down the certified track. To an Ivy League. To the good graces of my parents. I hoped—probably believed—that if I couldn't, then Suoh would figure out a way to be with me. He studied hotel management at Les Roches, lived his life, loved and married another woman. I believe that woman might well have been me had the circumstances worked out for us. But since they didn't, Suoh moved on with his unflagging sunny spirit. *Subarashii!* He could embrace so much. Suoh's huge, unsystematic heart. How I love it. How I hate it.

"You know what, Haeri?" Mr. Lee squeezed my knee. "I'm feeling unbearably lonely right now."

"Ah, I wonder what we could do about that."

"I wonder."

I downed my *sake* and got up. "Let's go," I said.

He groped me under my skirt. I let him. The taxi driver drove impassively. Traffic was heavy with Friday night drinkers in transit. He nuzzled my neck, puffing sweet-bitter *sake* breaths. His Bvlgari crept up into my nose. A strong scent concocted to seduce. Caught in his grip, too hard and warm, my own hand felt unconnected to me.

The motel was precisely adequate. The bed was large with a purple duvet cover and didn't creak under our jerking bodies. I glanced at the bedside table. The digital clock on it beamed 10:13 in lurid green. The bottle of water was a brand I had never tried. A plastic tray held two squat glasses, rims down.

"I've missed you, Haeri," Mr. Lee said, flipped me, and fucked me from behind.

I liked that, when we made love, Suoh could turn forceful. I liked that the ever gentle boy clenched my breasts and shoved my thighs apart. The forcefulness let

me know that he was a man, that I was desirable, and that I could want something so badly. He taught me desire. Suoh was my desire.

Mr. Lee flopped next to me, panting. His hand limply cupped my breast.

"Let me take a quick shower," he said, took off his condom, and went to the bathroom.

Collecting my clothes, I saw the condom, flaccid in the trash can. I swallowed a reflux of acid mixed with *sake*. Mr. Lee's phone rattled on the bedside table. A message alert had popped up on the screen. The sender was Doyun. I quickly dressed and left.

I clutched the collar of my coat. The cold stung my hand until numbness set in. The wind slapped my face and flung my hair everywhere. Here and there street vendors sold roasted chestnuts and egg bread, casting flashes of warmth. In my head I was repeating, I need to find a taxi, I need to find a taxi… Taxis pulled up by the sidewalk and dropped off passengers. I kept on walking. At some point I came to a subway station.

Inside the train was toasty. Not many seats were occupied. My hands thawed, numbness turning to prickling pain. I pulled out my phone from my bag. 10:52.

Get home safe.

Revulsion surged up my throat and I thought I would be sick. But it went away. Then something else surged, I didn't know what. It filled up my chest and I bent forward. I looked through the text messages on my phone. I was looking for something, though I didn't realize it. When I realized it, I also realized what I was looking for, and that I had deleted him.

That's okay. Hold yourself together. This will pass. Everything passes.

I sat up and joined my knees tightly. I aligned my shoes. The seat facing me across the aisle was empty. I smiled at it. I kept rigidly smiling. But my body parts wouldn't sustain the tensions I had assigned them, and again, I slumped in my seat.

I got off at Apgujeong Station. I climbed up the stairs, passed a turnstile, climbed down the stairs, and entered the opposite platform. A small number of

people were waiting. The tracking board showed the next train's progression on Line 3. When the train arrived and let passengers out, I scanned the platform as far and fast as I could. I couldn't know which one of the four staircases he would take, granted he was among the people that had gotten off. He might have left his cram school early. He might have taken the bus instead.

The train left, trundling, then gliding down the track. For half a minute no one else was on the platform. I looked at the long, neat tunnel of emptiness.

I staggered and hit the wall behind me.

Pathetic. Get a grip on yourself. Haeri Jo, you are fine. Shut up. Stop saying fine. I'm fine, spectacularly fine, all the fucking time. Calm down. I am calm. Stop moping, it's unseemly. Let me get out of here. Where is the exit, I need to find the exit, the exit . . .

The alert bell rang and the mechanical female voice announced the approaching of a train. Cool air gushed into the platform. I shut my eyes.

. . . you are a cool chick . . . full of tricksters . . . your sense has gone out of your . . . *subarashii* . . . we'll be together, we'll find a way . . . must mean you never feel it or . . .

I opened my eyes. Slowly, I turned to the voice. I saw the olive-green parka. I saw the paper bag. He had grown out of three uniforms in two years, his mother was getting mad. I laughed.

"Are you okay?"

Jihyuk came closer to me. I tried to back away but hit the wall. I moved a step sideways. He stood awkwardly, chewing his lip. He glanced at me. He looked down. He looked up and stared at me.

Don't. Don't look at me. Don't come near me. I'm dirty.

Jihyuk looked away, scratching his head.

Don't. Don't look away. Don't go. Don't leave me.

I reached out and touched him. "This thing never lies flat, does it," I said, pressing down on the unruly sprig of hair. Jihyuk patted the same spot many times.

"I didn't know it caused you that much grief…"

I laughed. I held up my bag and hid my face behind it. I had forgotten how it felt to cry. Now I was remembering. The tingling surrounding my eyeballs. The sting in my nose bridge. The saltiness licking my throat. How hot the first tear. And how uncontrollable thereafter.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Jihyuk said over and over.
Then he stopped. He held my shoulders.
I dropped my bag.

A year later, on the first day of my third term, I take attendance. Thirty students are registered for the class. Toward the end of the list, the tip of my pen comes to a name. It makes me pause. I call the name. I hear his voice. I find him to my right in the front row. He smiles, scratching his head. Professor Jo moves on, adding a checkmark. The natural I, memory-bound, lingers.

Josh Tvrdy

Church Board Interrogations

Take 1

Growing up, did you ever feel compelled to wear women's clothing?

On Tuesdays I wore nothing
but sheen. In sunlight

I was one slick rainbow.

Did you like playing with cars?

One winter I sealed my lips
around the neighbor's beamer's

tailpipe. I was in the middle
of my snake-appreciation stage. Unhinged

jaws were in. Dad carried tomato soup
across the street, sponged me free

with a hunk of sourdough, then made me
eat my dinner in that frozen driveway

while the neighbor boys breathed heavy
behind their bedroom windows.

What about sports? Were you sporty?

I played pattycake till my palms ran
bloody. The recess boys called me

Pansy. The Jesus-boys, in the humid
locker room, reached out their hands

as I passed, mine dripping like a saint's.

Were you friends with other boys?

I was tight with Jimmy, tighter
with Greg, tightest with Titus

who never learned to relax
his sphincters. They don't

teach you that in school,
but some boys learn it in the dark

janitor's closet with the sweet
scent of lemon pledge

and a mop to clean our spills.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

A smooth elbow. A yellow yard
of sassafras. A neon pool noodle. A pillow

queen. An old bottle of piss
saved for a quiet afternoon. The sexiest

wrench. Daddy's little hockey puck.

Take 2

Tell us about your father.

He used to sneak inside my bedroom
late at night dressed as an artichoke—

a stick of butter in one hand, a knife
in the other. He named himself

Temptation. I was young. I didn't care
for vegetables. In the morning he was

wilted, his tender heart hidden away.

Did you have a healthy relationship with him?

My first word was
poolparty.

My second was
applebottomjeans.

Was he affectionate?

He threatened to wrap me in Christmas
tinsel and send me off to Grandma.

Did you ever do things to get his attention?

I fucked myself with a garden
carrot at seventeen. Zucchini

quick to follow.

How did he punish you?

He said I love you
and he wasn't lying.

He said You're still
my son, then wept.

Take 3

How long have you suffered these thoughts?

For years I've smeared
lipstick on my stuffed raccoons.

Straightforward answers, please.

Fuzzy Wuzzy wore cherry red
stilettos in the rest stop bathroom.

Who is Fuzzy Wuzzy?

Fuzzy Wuzzy was
a bear.

Don't be smart with us.

Fuzzy Wuzzy was an otter
named Brad

who pissed in my mouth
in a ditch at the edge of I-80.

Was Brad the otter a homosexual?

I tried to convince my father
to replace my arms

with spatulas. He shook
his head No. No

boy of his would ever be
a housefly's misery.

Did Brad the otter ever touch you?

My baby rides a watermelon
to the local Starbucks. He splits

the rind with his teeth, a circus
for thirsty baristas.

Tell the truth. Were you touched as a child?

His teeth aren't real bones—
twenty-two glinting bottle-openers.

He's my aluminum abomination.
If you stopped asking silly things

you could hear him—his every word
rings true like a tiny handbell.

Jessie van Eerden

Blessed Be the Longing That Brought You Here

Ted* is a ninety-two percent match. We both mention Nick Cave, IPA, dismay over webinars. We both write our profiles with enough syntactical variation to suggest a writing habit and with enough tongue-in-cheek to balance the sincere. We answer a third of the dating site's 1200 or so questions, lamenting at times, in the add-an-explanation box, the lack of nuance in the phrasing. You can offer your thoughts on pubic hair preferences, littering, humanity's primatal ancestry, meaningless sex. Ted has noted his favorite cuddle position and his views on gun control, Trump, and capitalism. I can sense his deal-breakers, I know his preference for a first date activity and whether he is likely to make me breakfast and maybe take me to Greece.

What I wish the matching-algorithms could do is telescope into the nonvirtual and give us side-by-side bodies, while also adding an accumulation of the next several years, to reveal to me, in the future graying and sagging and thickening, what our online profiles portend. Whether he would hold my hand if I were dying of cancer in a white hospital gown with no hair, and whether the gown's white would make him think of the Charolais calf, all snowy and silvery, raised on his family farm for a slaughter he disbelieved because it was too horrible to think real, and whether this would make him think of that Andrew Wyeth painting of the bull calf against the fence wall, and how Wyeth's whites have black in them, have textured shadow and a melancholy, like that white of the curtain he painted with the wind billowing it, how Wyeth tried to paint wind as it crossed yellow-green fields, and somehow tried to paint longing, too, such that Ted would intuit in the folds of the many-times-bleached hospital gown some kind of thing he had never known he'd longed for, welling up through time like a bubble from a gaseous fissure on the seafloor of him—and would he turn and tell it to me?

Ted is a Taurus, like me. Drinks socially, likes Tarantino always and dirty jokes only occasionally. He never litters. He lets those with one item go ahead of him

*The names from OKCupid profiles have all been changed in this essay, and the profiles described here are composites with some details invented so to maintain individuals' privacy. The title of the essay comes from a line from John O'Donohue's *To Bless the Space Between Us*.

at the grocery checkout. He prefers no drama. He prefers that my drama be so minimal it fits in an overhead bin. Does not have kids but might want them. Has cats. The most private thing he's willing to admit is that he once took the Love Languages test, though he is not willing to divulge the language he speaks.

A young boy hunts with his father and a guide and sees a hawk. The boy loves the bird's "dazzling speed and the effect of alternation of its wings, as if it were flying by a kind of oaring motion." It missiles into the trees, he asks what it is, the guide says it's a *blue dollar hawk*. And the boy feeds on the name that is almost so fully what the bird is, the boy is filled with the good thing of it, and filled even more so with his newly-known hunger for it, as the light of the hawk's being shines through the small tear made in the veil by the guide's naming. Later, in private, the father says, no, that is incorrect, it's a *blue darter hawk*, which is of course right. It's an accurate description of the bird's behavior, and the boy does not feed because the hunger no longer gnaws.

When Walker Percy recounts this moment from his boyhood in his essay "Metaphor as Mistake," he names the hunger an ontological one. He asks, "Is it the function of metaphor merely to diminish tension, or is it a discoverer of being?" Does it satisfy or create desire? Can a metaphor awaken a longing you did not know you had, to bring you the unnamable you were not aware you were trying to name?

I would like to know the origin of desire—the kind of desire that is not prefab, hackneyed, or sold—and so I start reading Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg's book *The Beginning of Desire* about the Book of Genesis, in which she mentions George Steiner's bit in *Real Presences* regarding the paradox of art: art is, on the one hand, "strangeness attenuated," strangeness made intelligible, its tension diminished, and yet, on the other hand, art—like Percy's beautifully wrong metaphors—also "makes strangeness in certain respects stranger." So, art slakes our thirst, but it also creates a new thirst.

And there is a space between thirst and slaking, hunger and being filled.

It is a not-yet space in which desire can ripen and you can get to know it.
It is a fertile space.

There were some psalmists who asked not for vengeance, not for wealth or throne or relief from leprosy, but only to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives. Head against the mossy wood of the tabernacle frame, the cool of it, open mouthed: "One thing have I asked, that will I seek after, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." To live always in the inquiry and not the answer. It's like asking for the roundness of hunger itself as you watch the light hit the acacia beam then travel slowly across the lichen, so slowly across the linen veil's blue and scarlet yarn with which somebody has sewn angels in refrain, a pattern of them.

Until two months ago, on my morning walks, I passed by two baying hounds that rightly belonged to a great heath, to impressive hunts for roe deer or wild boar, but who lived in a dinky backyard behind chain-link, crowded by a trampoline never jumped on. The dogs wore running paths that destroyed the grass, their big fleshy ears flapping discordantly with their bodies so taut and aerodynamic. I did not know the breed. Sometimes straw was strewn, presumably over grass seed, in halfhearted attempts to rehabilitate the yard. As I walked past, their big voices sounded their beautiful alarms, like sirens, with mournful tones, their longing far too big for their confinement. The neighbors' patience was surely strained, but I loved to walk by them, to hear those deep wakeful tones that said *fox* or *squirrel* or *rabbit* or *woman-shaped foe*, that sang the whole houndbody as braced with want. Hearts so set on having that tiny assemblage of flesh-fur-bone in the mouth—that chipmunk up there—that they would die for lack of it and so up curdled the howl, which was itself a thing and not only an indicator of a thing, perhaps in the way I'm learning that the hieroglyph, though it can be a phonetic

sound, is in some instances the thing itself: the owl in its staid glory and not simply the letter *m* the owl represents.

I listened all the way down the alley that borders backyards to the baying that said *may it be otherwise, may it be now, may it be thus.*

They're gone now. No doubt the neighbors are relieved. The grass is growing back. The silence, as I walk by, is palpable.

At five a.m. I was waked by a dream of a boy I should have loved. We got coffee once, in our twenties, and parted uncertainly at the street corner. He always tucked in his shirt until he didn't, kept his sandy hair cropped neatly until he didn't. One of four kids, like me, in a God-loving farm family in Minnesota, his heart the size of Minnesota. He went to India, he preaches now, I think. Facebook would tell me if I were to sign up, would satisfy that curiosity. We spoke in the kitchen where there were mice in the bread bag, with only the stove light on, his skin pale, his cheeks red from kitchen heat. We wrote letters for a few years. By all rights, I should have loved him, but I was young, early in the process of getting acquainted with desire. And his letters were penned neatly on the backs of once-used paper, his touch on the world, his press, that gentle and light. I could never tell what he longed for.

We are animated by desire the way consonants are animated by vowels. The Egyptologist Susan Brind Morrow says the vowels in hieroglyphs are not written, so you must sniff out the intent and lift and examine the leafiness of context: "The vowels, which pattern clusters of hard consonants into nouns and adjectives and verbs, are left out, leaving the consonants to stand for the word. Yet grammar resides in the vowels. Why are the vowels not written down?

"Who has seen the wind?"

You must get inside the interior of words, of names, inside the house of a name and feel the breeze blow through. Vowels are the longing of the word. Vowels

are the becoming. And so are we defined by the unwritten, the unpossessed, by this that we want which we did not know we wanted because it is unseen, it is unpainted even when painted, somehow secretly seeded in us.

Something in you is activated, vowels breathed into your hard, bony consonants.

There is space between Gus and me. Gus is the tiny gray stray whom I really should evict. Gus hungry and mewing and snug to the hot water pipes under the house when it's nine below. In subzero intimacy, Gus and me, except not, because I am allergic to cats (I need to break this news to Ted in my next OKCupid message) and because eventually the cat-shit smell in the crawlspace will be pronounced and my landlady will not abide it.

I was not looking for a stray to feed. He just showed up.

"You've been chosen," said my friend.

On my way to feed and water Gus, I pass my landlady's cheesy lawn-decor stone angel with its cupped hands broken off. I've kept it as a metaphor on the patio by the Weber grill left out in all weather, this decorative angel still trying to make (or receive) her offering, even with no hands. I have never liked cats, but somehow my heart stings for Gus like a cut unbandaided to cold air, and I worry about him. His right eye a little drippy, I should get him shots, neutered, get a carrier to the vet. His nose presses to my knuckle for a brief nose-kiss, then he scurries under the house. He is a fraidy-cat.

"Well, you can be overwhelming," says my friend.

I worry Gus is undersized and maybe the protein level is not adequate in the food I bought. He is probably picked on by the fat bully cat next door. I really need to call the Pet Rescue people, I'm allergic, this is not my house, he must go. I have the number on a Post-it but I keep stacking papers on top of it. I picture him in the carrier, looking at me through the cage mesh, betrayed, both of us baffled by this turn of events.

I put out food, break the ice in the water, replace it with warm water that won't freeze so fast. I fish out a plush throw from the blanket chest and stuff it

into the crawlspace, mostly impeding his passage, and it soaks in the snow and rain, and I eventually drag it out and throw it away. I offer another of the three tiny stuffed mice from Wal-Mart's pet aisle, twist-tied to the square of cardboard: Skitter Critters, catnips for stimulation, which is "1 of your cat's 10 needs," the cardboard says, and now I worry about the other nine needs I'm not meeting. Gus's voice a tiny essay of need.

Back at the laptop, I see they call them *essays*, the categories for filling out your profile on the dating site: what I'm doing with my life, what I think about, who I am in summary, the most private thing I'm willing to admit, movies I rewatch. The weather hits a warm patch. I complete my essays with the window cracked to let in the night air through the screen, along with the sound of the neighbor's tied-up dog, Perky, whose life is sad and circumscribed, and some answering sounds from Gus whose entry-hole to the crawlspace is directly under my study's window. The cheap curtains from Target billow in the space between us. *Voile*, the curtain fabric is called, the fabric of veils.

I worry about Gus. I worry, too, about Joe who taps the star that says he likes me and who poses unsmiling and shirtless with his ATV in his profile photo, also Rick in a selfie in poor lighting in the bathroom mirror with his shirt peeled up as if to have his abs assessed. I worry for Ed who berates himself for having nothing to *essay* about himself except he is *laid back, not much else to say*, and I wonder what on earth it would feel like to be laid back, also for WyldLover who messages me: "Dam your cute," and then my worry circles around to Ted who can spell and manage punctuation but can't manage much else, it turns out, is on half a Xanax daily now and, really, though I seem nice, he needs to regroup, he's going on a meditation retreat and disabling his account for a while. I worry for Shelby (whose handle is LonelyGuy) and Malik (OKCupidLifer), both of whom I want to give a quart jar of soup. I know it seems suspect, or insincere, this concern for the wellbeing of complete strangers, but dating sites expose one's underbelly such that one cannot help but be more attuned to the awful vulnerability of everyone roped into the whole enterprise. The worry becomes a hum that keeps me awake at night.

"Wanna fuck?" messages Philip from one town over, and, no, I don't really, but I want something that I can't even name and I start to feel as unable to receive it

as the handless stone angel, though I do think I'm trying. I shut off the site's app on my phone and carry the picture of Philip for some distance inside my head until he is free of the sports franchise attire and free of the large car against which he flattens his butt and free of, and prior to, the forty-six years of all of whatever, until he is back to his tender small newborn body when there is seeded in him something that will eventually lead him here to this epoch of screens when he will message with an impressively concise, if crude, attempt at a translation of the language of desire. In my sleepless head, he is an infant so small and flailing, so not-yet, and I think of him maybe like my friend's baby: maybe he, too, was born three months early and cupped in the palms of the NICU nurse, his skin so thin it could hardly hold in the zooming blood, lungs so *almost*, all the world's heat and light so feelable yet incomprehensible to his heart the size of a hickory nut. And the nurse maybe said, "You will live. This will be a heart to hold a whole lot." She wiped the yellow film from his face, suctioned out the mucus with the bulb from his pinhole nostril. She said, "All the machines and tubing, all the externalized respiratory system, you will shed. Live into your shipwreck, little one, into all your fierce desire, you'll find your way, bless you, you will be all right."

The scientific community, last time I checked *Scientific American*, finds the claims of algorithmic pre-screening for a unique and lasting match bogus. Still, Match.com has over two million paid subscribers. I myself authorized Paypal to pay $15.95 to OKCupid for one month on the A-list. We the people have bought in, and matching has proved easy to monetize. The match percentages quantify toward a goal of satisfaction and fit. And although the metrics do apparently account for the "opposites attract" adage by gauging compatibility as a blend of both similarity and complementarity (the measure of opposite values), I learn that there are sites that narrow options to very specific samenesses: to redheads only, farmers only, tall folks, kinky folks, Ivy Leaguers, Trekkies, whatever your criterion. I learn you can become a Vice President of Matching. I learn the algorithms themselves get smarter the more you use the

site; they are "learning algorithms" that are learning you, your preferences and your potential; they can advise you on proper cropping of a photo to attract the kind of person they know you seek based on how you tap Pass or Like, swipe left or right across faces.

And there are so many faces.

Well, images of faces, not faces. I'm taken back to the eagerness of my junior year at university, when I first read Walker Percy and, in a contemporary poetry class, read Ezra Pound for the first time, his "In a Station of the Metro." The two-liner about faces in a crowd, but not faces; instead, *the apparition* of faces, unreal ghosts never becoming faces but instead transfigured into metaphor in the second line: *Petals on a wet, black bough.* I shivered in my desk reading that in college, I fed on it, made newly hungry, I stored it until twenty years later I would log onto a dating site, recognizing something unnamable Pound was trying to name. Here are the petal-faces you pass on or like, selfies which are ghosts of selves, faces appearing up out of torsos of camouflage beside the six-point buck just shot.

Alan has kind eyes. I tap Like, and in the tiny rectangle that then appears for messaging I ask, "What is your favorite thing about Richmond," when what I mean to say is, "I am up at five a.m. inexplicably, after a dream of love for a boy in Minnesota that was not love and the latent regret fills the dark, it's still dark, it's still raining, the rain in the dark is gentler somehow. Also, Alan, I don't know what to do about Gus."

"Thanks for reaching out," messages Alan, which puts in my mind Gus's reaching paw batting the azalea leaves. "I see we both like the outdoors and travel. Richmond is nice," which does not answer my actual question. I see he has posted a photo of himself hiking in the Sierras, attesting to the fitness of the body, fitness for this, a fit for me. I have posted one of myself, though blurry, hiking with a daypack in New Mexico—See? See how I have caught myself in a moment when I have maybe been beautiful? Do you think? Don't pass on me. Alan's kind eyes appraise me. I notice in his profile he is looking for a woman who is laid back.

Scientific American cites studies that suggest we aren't very good at predicting what will even attract us to someone, despite our honed search criteria and checked

filters all saying: I'm seeking someone of this gender and this age range, located within this mileage radius, with these personality traits, with this education level and body type. Someone who is not messy, is okay with sex in the first month of acquaintance, prefers to split the bill, believes climate change is real.

(What if, like art, love makes strangeness in certain respects stranger? What if our percentage-match—yours and mine—is off-the-charts-low and your strangeness is out there like a citadel, unconquerable, and I pitch my canvas tent outside you—you, my other—and I curve toward your strangeness like a nervous cat watching your graying face and greening heart?)

Also, studies show the principles of similarity and complementarity can't predict long-term relationship potential as the sites claim they can. And, well, neither can getting a drink at a bar with someone, but bars don't promise you any match-predictors, and at least at a bar—at a chance meeting, unengineered—you chafe against the person and hear his skin and hair move, and he's not in an isolated test tube of self coded into ones and zeros that glow him onto your phone screen.

My friend told me users can submit match questions to OKCupid, and maybe they don't vet them very well and that's why some of the questions lack nuance. I don't know how to submit a question; perhaps one emails the Vice President of Matching.

Dear Vice President, I would like to submit: What will you do if I get cancer? If my spine snaps? What do you do with a word like *beloved*? Why can I not be more laid back? Why can I not stow my drama in an overhead bin that has that little door which the graceful flight attendant can click shut with the very sound of satisfaction?

What I'm trying to say is, the algorithms offer us a match that satisfies our criteria, but is it satisfaction we really want?

What I love about that Walker Percy essay "Metaphor as Mistake" is how he confronts us with a choice of two paths regarding our "cognitive orientation in the world": "either we are trafficking in psychological satisfactions or we are dealing with that unique joy which marks man's ordainment to being and the knowing of it." The knowing of it—of being. That you have to get to know it, which takes time. That when we mistake our longing for a lesser thing than it could be, we will, in the end, miss the point.

This year, 2018, the UK has appointed a Minister for Loneliness because epidemiological studies show that loneliness is lethal, connected to heart disease, diabetes, and so forth. Like the Vice President of Matching, this appointment is part of a new career field in management of the heart. More folks than ever live alone now, or estranged, on this planet, not as often in familial heaps and clans that talk over one another across tables of sausage and potatoes, as we used to live. We're more mobile, less rooted. We age alone, we touch our own throats feeling them clammy with accumulative untouch, we are migrant, fugitive populations who don't speak the dominant language, and we are people who live virtually in our bright screens.

And yet, though I'm not sure how one gets in touch: Dear Minister for Loneliness, I would like to submit: While I am in favor of the commission on loneliness because loneliness can kill and can hurt worse than biting aluminum foil, or than a hornet stinging a thud of poison inside your ear (unbearable), and we need to help each other not die from it, I do ask that the Minister take care with the nuances. We need the finest of distinctions, for loneliness can have as its birth-nest real longing, and longing that doesn't destroy you can feed you. The Minister will note that although loneliness is not so good, loneliness as born of longing is essential and more than something to be ameliorated. That we might preserve the smallest hollow. What I'm trying to say is, there is something about that smallest hollow.

That is: is desire itself a fullness? Or at least, is the space between the desire and the having more than empty space to be hurried through like a bad bit of interstate?

Think of it, landscape-wise, as perhaps something more extreme than the swampy drab plains flanking I-75—think of it as a deep and sudden canyon. Real and opened-out. Such that you sleep in the car like the desirous Georgia O'Keeffe so you can wake with such expectation, to paint the stages of the

sunrise above the land-gash, with an eye only for the living colors, everything in terms of ochre, verdant green, turquoise, emerald. You don't even know where these colors come from. You can't speak. No words beyond *indigo, rose.* All language pictorial and potent.

I hear this voice say, For what have you come to the temple? I cannot say, my Lord, my Other. To inquire maybe, with my head upon the acacia beam? Here is this chalice, this hat with a feather, a flask in my satchel, a handwritten prayer in a tongue I can't decipher or speak, in characters of hieroglyphic owl, bread, peregrine. Also, a map misfolded. Isn't it true that if I give all these to you, I will get what I want? Will you fill up my chalice? Isn't that how it works?

Well.

There's this line spoken like prophecy by the roving narrator of Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*: "For to wish for a hand on one's hair is all but to feel it."

The longing is a thing, is itself fertile, is not merely a preface for satisfaction. In apophatic prayer, for instance, one creates a hollow and does not fill it. "Silence is not just a precondition for the revelation," writes Cynthia Bourgeault in her book on the topic. "Silence is not a backdrop for form, and diffuse, open awareness is not an empty chalice waiting to be filled with specific insights and directives. It is its own kind of perceptivity, its own kind of communion."

And when Robinson's dear, waify Ruthie is left alone on the island by her Aunt Sylvie, the narrator taps Ruth's young-girl desire: "For need can blossom into all the compensations it requires. To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow. For when does a berry break upon the tongue as sweetly as when one longs to taste it, and when is the taste refracted into so many hues and savors of ripeness and earth, and when do our senses know any thing so utterly as when we lack it? And here again is a foreshadowing—the world will

be made whole. For to wish for a hand on one's hair is all but to feel it. So whatever we may lose, very craving gives it back to us again. Though we dream and hardly know it, longing, like an angel, fosters us, smooths our hair, and brings us wild strawberries."

I think of that. Longing putting a hand on my hair. I can kind of sense it now, like my mother braiding it, or washing it in the tub with my head tilted back, rinsing with water poured from the big cup from Pizza Hut. And a one-time lover lifting my long hair from my throat, pushing it away, like a heavy curtain. This is memory but not only: it is also the round wakeful now. *For to wish for a hand on one's hair is all but to feel it.*

Longing is the angel-girl at the salon. I went to a salon this time, in the next town over, instead of the haircuttery inside Wal-Mart where I always go, not because the Wal-Mart stylist does a poor job, she's very good, but because at the salon they lay your head back and wash your hair in lemon sage and tea tree oil. And when the young stylist did so I almost broke out into tears at her touch and the girl said she was bound for Tampa soon, has an apartment with a friend on the Gulf and everything, and she is so ready to go, to get out of her hometown for the very first time, and because she, too, was brimming with want, she probably would have understood, had I let myself cry.

I'm trying to talk about the pause that is not a paucity, the silence that is not empty, the ache that is not only.

The night, of course, is the most difficult. The body is lain out, corpsish. The hand moves to the throat touching the accumulative untouch. And the skin is never as young as it used to be but is still young. Even so, at times, this thing can happen: it becomes enough to simply lie awake in the dark and not tear in even the slightest way at the fabric of the human community, of another fragile person also

lying in state. To, in fact, do more than *not* tear. To even mend, to sew the fabric back together, and to even sew it with stars. I read in Susan Brind Morrow's book of translations of the Pyramid Texts that as a young student of Egyptology she copied out earlier translations for practice, and there was this:

Sew emerald, turquoise, malachite stars
And grow green, green as a living reed

Written on the pyramid wall by somebody fluent in hieroglyphs, in our original writing which must somehow offer a key to our original desire. I copy out what she copied out.

Where, I wonder, does one get malachite with which to embroider? Emerald, turquoise, a yarn hued with the three greenest gems in the earth's crust? That's the thing. But then I think: maybe longing is generative. Maybe the source of such living color is longing itself transmuted. (Everyone knows it can also be transmuted to a lethal bitter black, but not only.) And you sew the stars all tessellated, in refrain, lovely like terracotta bath tiles in Marrakesh, ornately, extravagantly, painstakingly. This is a kind of prayer you make when you lie there and worry and weep a little. Out of you the colors come, as fluently as do your tears and entreaties, as if you're a silk worm, and you work, one by one, through the torn-apart, delicate people from your day. You sew them up with star patterns as you sleep alone with the tick of street light slanting in through the blinds and the tied-up neighbor dog in her complaint, the room so still but for your hands sewing. Try to believe it's possible, as dawn pinks up, that you might grow into a living reed, a green that is pungent and bright.

I was studying the Wallace Stevens poem "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," written in 1942, around the time God died. This was Stevens's epoch. This is mine: online dating and almost-weeping in the hair salon, mostly forgetting that God is supposed to have died, thinking God probably lives in the internet. The poet names Phoebus, a god dead like the others, though "Phoebus was / A name for something that never could be named."

Also:

"There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
There was a myth before the myth began,
Venerable and articulate and complete."

I think Stevens was looking for the desire before the desire. He wrote: "not to have is the beginning of desire." The line that gives Zornberg the title for her thick folios of reflections on the Book of Genesis.

Maybe the myth before the myth is God the concave, God who longs as we do. That is one idea that could have birthed one version of the revelation: that God moves in secret into the womb, beggar-like, and attaches to the uterine lining so Mother Mary's nourishment starts to become skin and bone and hair and heart smaller than a hickory nut. All God does in there is feed and web out toes and fingers and float and feel. God's hunger and feeding are one, simultaneous. Then, once born, that cord which renders hunger and satiation inseparable, is cut. Then, for God, as for us, they are forever separate things: there is a space between. An interstice. God is birthed first into longing.

And the great cry that it might be otherwise. The cry is synonymous with being.

So, I bless the Lord who longs, blessing being an echo of the original blood. *Bless* comes from the Old English *bletsian*, *bledsian*, "to consecrate by a religious rite," the Proto-Germanic *blodison*, "to hallow with blood," like on the altars. Maybe the etymological path traces not only to the sacrificial blood, but also to the mother-blood.

Bless you, Lord, bless the Lord—you, Other I Cannot Name. In my crumpled dress, my crumple-body of want and fear. On my morning walk past the yard where no hounds howl any longer, one day there is snow so I hitch up the dress above my boots, and I find tracks of bird feet in a curve of path that ends under the tree that I know to have red berries of some sort in the warmer months but not now. The tiniest feet in the large swallowing snow, wishing the berries there, under all the stuff. Little and big signs of longing that leads us. Bless.

There was this gap of time on Easter morning in my childhood, between the sunrise service held at church in the darkness, before the sun spilled into the sky and the fast was broken with biscuits and gravy and cantaloupe and buns slathered in cinnamon butter—between that and the full Easter Day in nearly blistering light, when the day was a thing I had—in between was a drink. Was when I knew the daffodils around the large-slab rock down by the road, their heads in droop, could almost drip yellow, with the tonnage of winter lifted. I knew without seeing it the dark somehow let them be bright under only the three-thousand-year-old light of the stars (incredible that the ancient light still reached, paw-like, to touch). And I was in the house, the rooms dark, already drinking in the daffodils through the window screen—like Alice in Wonderland at tea, with the daffodil cup and saucer: sip then eat the pulpy side—and this seemed to me, even as a kid, better than when I would later go out to cut a dozen for the Easter dinner vase from around the stone slab across which I would stretch out in my purple jumper and not have limbs hang over, not even reach the edges. Holding a handful of stems remembering how sweet it had been a few hours before, in the not-yet.

After his ten-day meditation retreat, Ted resurfaces, messages me on day eleven. He is less fragile these days, he says, but one day at a time. I think we might be friends. I think I will ask him about that Wyeth painting of the white bull calf against the stone fence, whether he knows it. I think I will ask his input on the algorithms and on Gus the Fraidy-Cat, who is less fraidy now and getting problematically bold, rubbing up against my leg with a low-motor purr. The weather has broken to a warm-springish sog of rain, the subzero nights a memory, and Gus has been tunneling; the landscaping around the azalea is compromised, the black mulch scattered on the grass, down to the dirt. He wants to walk with me in the morning now, but stays on the perimeter, like strays do, not getting their hopes too high but always hoping, keeping open to the possibility of warm love. Of otherwise.

All I'm trying to say in these little folios scribbled by my heart is that longing is a sign of the branch bending green and toward. And that there's a loaminess between the having and the not having, and from that fertile ground can come a thing you did not know you so deeply desired, and you will be hard-pressed to name it. Maybe you will write many pages trying to name it, and, still, it will, in certain respects, only grow stranger.

Emily Van Kley

Waste Recovery

She drives 2 hours to visit and can't stop yawning
while I've walked a mile in the rain's velveteen,
my dress adherent, boots deepening their brown—
working on my portfolio for being professionally glum.

Everything is more consequential than my face
curtailed when I'm alone in the trees, the cracked
violin my voice plays to the book's cover,
the pillowcase, back of hand.

The world is always sacrificing someone
misapprehended, systemically harmless. Despite
how little I matter, I am not excused. The rain toggles
from mist to maelstrom and we are so quenched already.

At times a person may go on a talk show to claim, in no
uncertain terms, that she is not a murderer. Still any one
of us at the department store in search of a stupid
pack of t-shirts ends up with blood on our hands.

Who don't I love, at least a little? But what a vapor.
I bought this card with a photo of cats in aviator glasses,
and signed it, *love*. I called myself to the call
to action, collected signatures, but so slowly.

Why be a person? Fraught figurine + appetite.
Universalist malfeasant. Sometimes my lungs
lose their place, keep prising out when
they mean in. There I go, making an emergency

out of anything autonomic. I'm sorry
to be on your side—clearly you deserve someone
more solvent. Less taffeta, more ardor. Ok but kiss
me anyhow; give me something to mistrust harder.

Heather Christle

Limited Use

I want to record
the burning out
of the light bulb
that soon they won't sell.
I want to have
some unreason.
The filament
gives a dry hiss
and then there is
no light and no sound
but for a few minutes
plenty of heat.
It is a small sound
like news
of a death.
In the quietness
you have to wait.
Maybe you put
your clean plates away
or turn on
a different device.
Then you unscrew
the bulb and bring it
to the trash.
On the way
you give it a shake.
This is the occasion
of a louder
higher sound

when filament pieces
hit glass and sing.
The feeling is one
of a holiday,
a little end of the world.
You don't have
to work now,
but still you
are not free.

Thomas Dodson

All at Sea

Lie and say you have to pee. In his bathroom, check your purse for the condoms and then list, in alphabetical order, every kind of lie you can think of: barefaced lie, big lie, bullshit, fabrication, fib, lying through your teeth. At "half-truth," relax the rules and make the list into a little tune set to "Ebony and Ivory": mendacity and perjury / self-deception, half-truth, and perfidy. Of course you're forgetting the worst one—no, not really forgetting. More of an omission.

You're about to tell him. You have to tell him. It's probably required by law or something. People are always making crazy laws. If you don't say anything and he finds out, would it just be a civil matter, or could they send you to prison? Prison … all that time to draw. Flush the toilet and fantasize about your new life as an inmate, how your story goes viral and launches your career as an outsider artist.

Don't forget to run the water.

In the living room, kneel at the foot of the couch and slip your hands under his shirt. His chest is firm and hairless. Wonder if he shaves it. Roll one of his nipples between your thumb and forefinger and savor his hoarse sigh. When his shirt is off and you're on top of him, just as he is fumbling with the clasp of your bra, that's when you brush your lips against his neck and murmur, "Wait."

Beneath the skinny jeans and hipster posturing, this man is tender, inexperienced, and at least five years too young for you. He has probably spent more time considering the qualities of craft beers than puzzling over the meaning of consent, but he has older sisters, and he is not a bad person. He stops when you ask him to.

Say: "Before we go any further." Tell him, "there's something I need to…" Anxiety, a prickly flower, blossoms in your chest. Say: "I'm positive."

His mouth opens and closes like a fish gulping air. His faux hawk is a khaki fin, bobbing gently on the tide. Wish you hadn't waited this long to say something, that you didn't like him so much already.

Take his hand. Trace the letters into his palm likes it's a secret message, a love note passed in health class: H - I - V.

Reach for his belt buckle. As you press your hand against the front of his jeans, ask: "What do you want?" It's like a fairy tale. You're cursed, and you can't break the spell yourself.

Someone else has to say the right words.

Ask him again.

It's what they all say, reciting from The Nice Guy Handbook, Chapter Thirteen, "How to Reject a Girl with the Plague": "I guess I'm just not feeling it anymore," "I have to get up pretty early tomorrow," "I think I'm still in love with my ex." What they don't do is give you a chance to explain what "undetectable viral load" means or how you've managed to live with this for so long.

Did you really think it would turn out differently this time? You keep forgetting, you're not the princess in this story. You're the poison apple.

Find your bag, delete his number from your phone, and take the Blue Line to the aquarium. It's free on Thursdays and doesn't close for a couple of hours. On the train, remember the way your grandmother used to squeeze your hand. Always three times, once for each word: *I — Love— You*. Wonder if you'll ever be loved like that again.

The shark tank is closed for renovations and the artificial reef, its hand-painted polyps, just reminds you of all those colonies bleached to bone by a warming ocean. Even Shelby the sea turtle lacks her usual buoyancy. She lurks at the bottom of her tank, a scuttled igloo, working over a scrap of cabbage with her fleshy beak.

Claim a bench in front of the coastal habitat case and begin to sketch the fairy penguins. A colony of pygmies, the birds are tiny, blue, and iridescent. Their feathers shimmer indigo as they preen in the floodlights, dimming to slate when they shuffle into their shady burrows (one for each mating pair, the label says). One of the birds thrusts out its chest, struts in a circle, and brays. Think this must be Franco, the one from the subway ads, his photo captioned "The Ladies Man."

But then again, maybe not.

Despite the aquarium's city-wide "Penguins with Personality" campaign, you have to confess, they all look pretty much the same to you. The same short

grey beaks and foam-white bellies, the same pink-cake-frosting feet. Close your sketchbook and consider the possibility that this is a symptom of a much larger defect, an inability to see world in its particular and manifold splendor—and isn't that what an artist is in the end, a person who can *see*?

And if you're not an artist, then you're just a "good drawer" and no different from those hacks at state fairs who make sketches of people with tiny bodies and enormous heads—people on rollerblades or skateboards, their attention divided between swinging tennis rackets and reading the Bible. Consider that you may be the same as your mother and your sisters and everyone else, with no special power to transform your private humiliations, the stupid suffering of your life, into something better.

For Christ's sake, will you stop crying?

"Excuse me," someone says. Then, "Maggie, is that you?"

Turn to find a spindly boy in a denim shirt staring down at you. There is a blankness to his look, like someone who has just been in a bicycle accident. But there's more to it than that. It's a receptive, good-hearted sort of blankness, a vacancy that suggests openness, a capacity to abide amongst uncertainties. He has a lop-sided grin and his hair is scruffy and blond. Decide that he is not un-cute.

"It's Zach," he says, sparing you having to ask. "From, you know, the place."

God, Zach. You haven't thought of him in months. Two years ago, Zach had been a mistake, a nuthouse romance you'd gotten yourself into during a seven-day stretch at McLean for generalized anxiety disorder.

"Gad," the intake counselor had said, reading aloud from your file. Funny, you'd thought, how that little verb could encompass so much of your life. Wasn't that just what you'd been doing? Gadding about, rambling idly from park to library to movie theater, your mind locked in a state of intransitive dread that refused to attach itself, directly or otherwise, to a single object.

And then, tonight at the aquarium, you compound the mistake. Freshly forsaken and near-psychotic with loneliness, you snivel and cry and spill your guts. Zach sits with you on the bench and agrees with everything—*yes, people do treat each other like wolves; and sure, that dating site, the one for people with HIV, it might be worth a try; and of course, if things get really bad, (well worse, anyway), you could*

always pick up stakes and move to Oregon or, in extremis, *do that thing you've been fantasizing about: leave everything behind, your apartment and all your possessions, and go off to live in a shipping container.*

Zach is so affirming, such a surprising source of comfort. When he leans in and puts his arm around your shoulder, you do not move away.

At home, change into sweatpants and order take-out. The radio is tuned to the college station, and the kid at the controls is playing a single album without commentary or interruption. It's Nirvana, you think, the one with the medical model on the cover, the indecency of her organs held in place by clear plastic.

Remember when those songs were new, when Marcus made you that first mix tape. Remember Marcus. *Marcus Calidus, Marcus Crispus Dorsuo*. Hot-headed boy, he of the curly hair and broad back. You used to steal glimpses of him in the lot across from the school, where he liked to stand with his friends, impudently smoking. Shifting his weight from one leg to the other, his elbow flexing as he brought the cigarette to his lips, he'd had the cool perfection of a Greek statue come to life. He finally noticed your looking, and within the month you were riding in his car, helping with his homework, and teaching him the Latin names for every part of him you loved: *musculus deltoidei, rectum abdominus, frenulum preputii penis.*

There were other girls: girls who took his hand at bonfires and allowed themselves to be led into the woods, and the ones he bedded on trips to see his cousin in the city. At least that's what you imagined. For a long time, you didn't really want to know. But then you did, and it was easy, insultingly easy, to catch him.

In his car, you shouted and cried, then ordered him to pull over and let you out. You went the rest of the way on foot, five or six miles along the shoulder of Route Seven and then a shortcut through the pastures to your house. You went straight to your room and didn't tell your sisters or your parents a thing about it. Instead, you pretended to be sick the last two weeks of school and, when summer came, only made trips into town to buy CDs from Second Spin and take out books from the library.

The rest of the story is almost too painful to remember. Marcus going away to join the army and then coming back to live in his parents' garage. The sound of his voice as he told you, between choking, child-like sobs, about the physical exam and why the army wouldn't take him, the desperation in his voice as he begged you not to tell anyone. Then your test, the cheap molded plastic of the waiting room chairs, the ringing in your ears so loud when the nurse gave you the results that you weren't sure if she was speaking or maybe just mouthing the words.

If you have to think about it at all, it's best to think about the sex. How the two of you, convinced that no one would ever want you again, fucked until you were sore. And then fought or cried, and then fucked some more. You're just starting to salvage a fantasy out of the wreckage of those memories, just beginning to consider going into the bedroom to get your vibrator, when the buzzer sounds—an ear-splitting, gut-clenching clang that sends you dashing for the door release button.

Take a look through the peephole and find something familiar about the delivery guy, some familiar essence untouched by the fish-eye effect of the lens—the way it flares his nostrils and stretches his ears to the antipodes.

"Maggie," he says when you open the door, "don't be mad, okay?"

It turns out not to be the delivery guy at all, but Zach, who, stepping inside, fills your apartment with the olfactory bouquet of a fresh-from-shift's-end aquarium custodian: the amoniac tang of seabird guano anchored to a foundation of brine-ripened lichen, and fluttering between these—heart notes of Murphy's Oil Soap, that not-unpleasant savor of freshly-polished horse tack.

"I guess I should have called first," he says now, "but I wanted to see you. And look, I brought you something." He unzips his coveralls and produces a lady's evening bag, a knock-off Fendi sort of number, its surface bristling with blue fur.

It is clearly a bag for a crazy person.

Is that how he sees you? Crazy Maggie? Maggie, the crazy bag lady? You're about to be offended, but then he turns the thing over and you can see that it's not a bag, but a stuffed animal: a bird with a white belly and puffy pink feet.

"It was like fate or something," he says, standing the plush creature upright on the coffee table, "seeing you again."

He'd been thinking of that night the two of you snuck out of the red-brick dorms (yours filled with neurotics, his a melting pot of borderlines, skin pickers, and the acutely impulsive).

Together, you'd stolen away to the shelter of an oak grove on the hospital grounds where you'd talked for hours and made out like teenagers. On the walk back, you'd worked together to wrench a plastic owl from its perch on a garden shed and, smuggling it into the group room, placed the decoy on a high mantle shelf. The next morning, during the mixed therapy session, you'd stifled giggles and shared secret looks, waiting for someone to notice.

And then tonight, alone in the aquarium, he'd been spraying out a chum bucket, emptying the contents into a grate in some non-public area, when the realization struck him like the bump and bite of a shark attack. He could feel it now, what must have been there all along, this cosmic connection between the two of you, a gene-deep imperative like the one that drives those little birds to make their nests together and pair up for life.

He'd dropped hose and bucket then, and instead of locking up the gift shop, absconded with a stuffed penguin from the window display. Taking a leap of faith that you actually lived at the address you'd given him on your last day at the hospital—the one to which he'd sent letters and postcards and hand-crafted mail art, all without reply—he'd fired up his Honda Civic and driven across town to your door.

Tell him he needs to slow down; he's talking so fast. Notice your own breath quickening and think how strange it is, this susceptibility you have to other people's moods. Know that whatever happens, you must not give yourself over to his unhinged energy.

Show signs of improvement. Tell him thank you for the stuffed animal and for listening at the aquarium—that helped a lot—but you're hungry now, and tired, and, to be honest, his showing up like this in the middle of the night is kind of scary. He's scaring you.

Ask if he remembers all that talk at McLean about setting appropriate boundaries. Say: "You can't just show up at my house. I mean it."

Boundary set.

Think you may have said the words out loud: "Boundary set." Wonder if that's how it's supposed to work, like casting a spell. Or is it a performative utterance, like when a judge says "guilty" or "not guilty"? Either way, at this moment, it doesn't feel like enough.

He looks hurt and bewildered, but he's going. On the front stoop, he asks if he can call you tomorrow, or maybe in a couple of days?

Say "maybe," and shut the door. Set all the locks and watch from behind the blinds as the twin beams of his headlights sweep across your door and into the street.

After he has gone, and the Chow N' Joy delivery guy has gone, and the world outside has been shut away behind the deadbolt and the door guard, you're finally free to unfold the take-out containers' white cardboard petals and consume your promised double portion of Hon Sue Gai with rooster sauce.

Brush your teeth and get ready for bed. Take one five milligram tablet of olanzapine, two forty milligram capsules of fluoxetine, and of course the ATRIPLA®, it's film-coated surface dyspeptic pink and stamped with the numerals 1-2-3. The clean-smelling immunologist had called it a "drug cocktail," a phrase that promised way more fun than swallowing a full gram horse pill every night.

Think of that Greek word for medicine, *pharmakon*, with its double meaning of "tonic" and "poison." Or are you mixing it up with *pharmakoi*, one or the other a term for those deformed people kept like pets in Hellenic city-states. Well, at least until a plague or some other crisis came along, at which point the townsfolk would march the *pharmakoi* (*pharmakeus*? well, whichever) to the edge of the city, and then beat them on the genitals with fig branches until the poor, cast-out things expired. Turn out the bathroom light, resolving to go online in the morning and sort out the mix-up.

Sleep through most of Friday and then, in the afternoon, finish falsifying the week's unemployment forms. In the Work Search Activity Log, indicate that you have, as mandated by the Massachusetts Department of Labor, engaged in multiple work search activities, on multiple separate days, using no less than three

different job search methods: Monday, answered a Craigslist posting for a job as a taxidermist's model. Wednesday, attended "Running with the Big Dogs" long haul truckers networking event at Natick Service Plaza Eastbound. Thursday, offered up holy hecatombs to the never-dying gods and prayed aloud for a position as an adhesives company sales representative.

The little penguin (Roxy, it says on her tag) still sits on your coffee table, accusing you with her shiny, black-button eyes. Unlock your phone and find the Wikipedia entry for fairy penguins. The page is full of useful information, some of which must be true. The birds are nocturnal, it says, and have a wide range of calls. Though not endangered exactly, they have a surfeit of natural enemies: sharks, seals, gulls, weasels, feral cats, oil spills, bottle packaging. Imagine the game of Clue, Fairy Penguin Edition: Roxy the penguin, strangled in the bathtub by the weasel with the ring from a Coors twelve pack.

List your natural enemies: insomnia, self-doubt, phone calls from your mother, your immune system, boys with cruel eyes. Click through to the marine conservation chart and decide that you are a G3: globally vulnerable and at high risk of extinction in the wild. Feel strangely comforted; you are no longer alone, but part of a tribe, your fate linked to that of the Mississippi pigtoe, the old prairie crawfish, the frecklebelly madtom.

Realize that you've been stalling, putting off leaving the apartment to meet Zach across town. Wonder why you agreed to the date in the first place. Though, on reflection, it's not hard to understand. It's nice to be wanted, even by the unbalanced, and whatever his issues might be, he already knows about your status and the trouble you have just being in the world, and he's never been weird about it. He's been great, in fact. Besides, you tell yourself, it's just a drink, a casual meeting in a public place. Nothing to get worked up about.

Unless, of course, this ardor for you turns out to be more than free-floating libido looking for a place to land, more than the passing mania of a boy who isn't taking his meds. It's unsettling to imagine that there might be something inside you that you don't know about and can't see, some *thing* that has set off these feelings inside him.

Arrive late and find Zach already seated at the bar. Take a moment to enjoy being unobserved, the one who gets to look. He is wearing a car coat from the

seventies, saddle-brown leather with too-short sleeves that ride up to reveal wrists ringed with freckles. Jeans cling to his runner's calves, tapering to bony ankles and frayed canvas sneakers. He is talking to a pretty twenty-something, a girl with green hair, tattoos, and surgical steel punched through her ears' lobes, each fleshless tunnel defining a void the size of a newborn's fist. Become aware of an immediate hatred for her.

Direct your attention to the long mirror behind the shelf of liquor bottles. Your face is still youthful—or, at least, not yet old—your skin tanned to a pale fawn from days given over to aimless strolls around the city. Your eyes, though, they seem duller and deeper-set than you remember, the skin below them blue-blotched and creased. One of your lids, the left one, seems to be drooping. A pretty face given all that, but expressionless, like a late-night cashier at a grocery store. Wonder when it was exactly that you started looking so hapless, so tired.

Zach glances over his shoulder, then vaults off his stool. He calls your name and hugs you for much longer than is proper. It's awkward at first, being held like this by a boy you hardly know. His arms are stronger than you remember, and after three seconds the first tingle of panic shimmers down your spine. It's like one of those UFC matches that Marcus used to watch, the kind that end on the ground in a tangle of limbs, one of the fighters writhing in the grip of some colorfully named submission hold—the Inappropriate Anaconda, the Uneasy Ascot, the Flying Double First Date. A moment later, the feeling changes again, to something like relief, the taut cords of muscles finally warming and untwining. But then it's all just too much, and you have to break away.

He has a fresh bruise on his cheek, just below his left eye. Remember two years ago, braced against an oak tree, touching that face in the light of a quarter moon. Experience a fresh surge of tenderness.

"It's nothing," he says, "I caught an elbow at a hardcore show." Be certain that he is lying.

Follow him to the dark-stained bench and squeeze in behind a table. As the waitress takes your order, trace your fingers over the pair of initials scored into the wood, the rough-hewn heart enclosing them.

Take sips from your stout and catch him up on the last two years. Your health has been good, and it looks like it might stay that way, at least for as long as you can keep paying for the drugs. The anxiety, too, has been mostly under control, despite a week last summer when it was just too frightening to leave the house, to take a shower, or to answer your phone. You lost your job at the deli after that, and then your favorite cousin—the one you told him about at McLean—well, he went alone into the woods one morning and shot himself. Mostly, though, you've been doing much better. You've started drawing again—sketching, really, but then he already knew that.

Take this opportunity to affirm that, despite evidence to the contrary, you are not prone to public weeping these days, nothing like before. He takes everything in, seemingly without judgment, his eyes never leaving your face. It's both validating and off-putting, this unremitting attention.

He doesn't ask any questions, but instead, apropos of nothing, informs you that the jukebox is broken, that it's been stuck on free play for weeks. Is there anything you want to hear? Leave the table and stand, hip to hip, in front of the old machine. Press its fat beige buttons and flip through the racks of postpunk standards. With his arm around your waist, lean forward and punch in your selections: "Pictures of You," "How Soon is Now," "Love Will Tear Us Apart," the maudlin anthems of your youth.

Have another beer, then switch to bourbon. Crack up at one of Zach's stories, something about dropping acid and a fountain in Las Vegas. When the lights come down, notice that the barroom, a single corridor, has filled up with people.

Lean your head on his shoulder and stare into the mirror above the bar. It is the wall of an aquarium, its shadow-smudged surface a portal into a place filled with unfathomable creatures. Watch them as they glide through a world in which you cannot breathe.

Finish your whiskey and instigate a pointless, one-sided argument. Say: "So, Roxy, what was that supposed to mean, anyway?"

"Who?"

"Roxy, the penguin with personality."

Inform him that you're nothing like that, and never will be—some flightless bird that he can spring from its cage, a mate-for-life that he can carry off to some grimy one-bedroom burrow.

He's making that face again. The wounded incomprehension of the wrongly accused. Guess that he is the kind of man ultimately incapable of seeing himself as anything but innocent, the sort of person who believes that, in the end, good intentions are all that really matter. Or maybe that's just how his face looks.

Kiss him before he says something stupid.

It's not as good as the first time, lacks the thrill of stealing away from your captors to meet in secret, the tartness of transgression. You can also discern an unpleasant eagerness in the movements of his tongue, its anguished probing. Why does he need so badly for you to feel him? Is it to prove that he exists? He should know by now that people can't do that for each other. At least not for long.

Outside, conceal yourself in a shadowed spot in the bar's backlot and share the joint Zach produces from his jacket. It takes only two puffs to discover that this weed—a variety of locally-sourced, hybridized and hydroponic kush—is a different vegetal entirely from the parched schwag of your dorm-room days. Try to wave off the offer of a third hit and find that there's been some kind of breach between volition and action, as if signals from your brain must now traverse a great gulf before reaching your limbs. When your arm does begin to move, the gesture has a flipbook quality, a consecutive layering of discrete frames, each overtaking the one before it, contributing its tiny variation to the global illusion of motion and time.

Become aware of a mouth moving over your neck, your ear, a tongue finding its way to your lips, pressing them open. Do your best to kiss the mouth back, even though it feels like a muscular worm in your mouth. Cold hands press up against your hips, move upwards to the wire of your bra. In a spasm of modesty, look over Zach's shoulder into the lot, scanning for any movement amongst the parked cars.

When he drops to his knees and moves his mouth against your bare belly, a mix of kisses and murmurs—"love you," "so hot," "make you feel good"—determine that things are moving much too fast. Kissing is one thing, but the weed is making you nauseous, and under no circumstances are you having sex with this boy in a parking lot.

Shake your head from side to side. Say "Mm-mm," the closest thing to "no" you're capable of articulating with this much THC in your system. Grope in the dark for his face. As he undoes the top button of your jeans, get hold of his chin and draw him up.

Off his knees, he rises into a crouch and lifts your shirt. Kissing his way up your front, he slips his hands up and under your bra. You're able to make a wider variety of noises now—the groan of a sleeper who doesn't want to wake, the whimper of a kicked dog, the snarl of a wolf caught in a trap. But words still won't come, and your muffled protests have no effect. How is it that he can't or won't understand?

His hands and mouth, they're so relentless; it's like fending off a predator. Wish you were an octopus, capable of releasing a cloud of ink. With a jet of water, you'd launch yourself away from danger, tentacles trailing behind you, your three hearts pumping hard in the boneless chamber of your chest. Or maybe a starfish, able to shed its limbs. If only you could detach your right arm and flee, leave it behind as a horrifying distraction. Remember reading somewhere that the abandoned arm can go on growing, eventually transforming into a new creature altogether. How cruel it would be, and sad, giving up this other you, this limb daughter, to fend for herself.

A car door slams, and then another. A few feet away, an engine is turning over. Headlights strike the side of the building, the beam's reflection illuminating your hiding place like a flash of lightning. Zach takes your hand and leads you onto the sidewalk.

Walk together for a few blocks without saying anything. When he asks if you're okay, yank your hand away and run into the street. Find, miraculously, that your legs are working again, well enough at least that you can stumble between the cars waiting at the signal light and make it down the stairs that lead into the subway station. You can hear him calling your name from the platform, his voice echoing through the station as you step through the closing doors of a Red Line train.

Wish tonight that you could be anything but human. How was it that you were born to this, to be caught up in all this needless complexity, to be both possessor

and object of so many desperate desires? How much better it would be to live at the bottom of the ocean.

Make up your mind that, in fact, the thing you'd like most to be is an anglerfish, a she-devil of the sea. She lacks the defenses of *Octopoda* and *Asteroidea*, but then again, she doesn't need them. She is not prey, but a carnivore, cruising the ocean floor and unhinging her jaw to swallow creatures twice her size. Her mouth, a cavern crowded with bands of inward-pointing fangs, prevents any escape from the smooth-walled cell of her stomach.

Evolution's darling, she doesn't waste time looking for a mate. The males of the species are stunted and parasitic and so tiny that she carries whole colonies fused to her flanks and fins. She is led on always by her body's own light, a blazing phosphorescence, both lantern and lure, beaming a path through the deep-water dark.

Decide that you could live in the world like that; you really could.

Sophia Holtz

drag

there's a certain kind of swagger I can't pull off in a dress.
people like to make me into a feather—

drop me off the table & I float down. I'm sick of grace.
I'd like to wear multiple costumes at once

& sometimes I don't want to fuck a person as much
as I'd like to inhabit them. I get halfway

to a different shape & I become a glass of water—
the light refracted, the spoon now a silver twist.

when I was a man, really I was a boy—it was still
more possible. I would like to be

so no one will ask me for anything & my body
will not be a fountain where everyone comes to drink.

when I stop wearing lipstick to work I miss being able
to turn myself fuchsia or purple velvet of a dark apartment.

I'm allowed to be a paper bag or lace, & little in between.
when I look too girl, everyone wants to see my teeth.

Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Good Husband

Forgive the hours you waited in paradise alone.
We always knew I was wild, wrecked
with wonder I could not bring into our house
without printing the floor with blood. My past
swung on a cord from the ceiling. The glare of light
in me crashed against the walls like a stack of Ikea plates.
Forgive the moment you came through the door
& found me for the hundredth time in a heap
of light next to the clump of my skin. Forgive
the fun we tried to have. Forgive the hours &
hours we worked. Why did we work so hard for each other?
Believing that work would be enough. Days & nights
we walked through Brooklyn, our happy dog leashed
between our shadows. Forgive me for being
a shadow for years. When I showed up
you were already someone else. Under a moon
in Mexico we ate white cake, danced, hoped.
Flowers in my hair, between my legs. Bouquet
we stashed in a suitcase then the refrigerator.
Forgive us for not knowing the kind of silence
that would make our voices strange, strained,
stranded in vicious loneliness, side-by-side
in bed. When my mother died I could not confess
I was no longer a daughter, a wife. How to tell you
I was merely nothing, a breeze or wave or word
blacked-out, gibbering against vows, ash, sand.
For six months we were newlyweds. One last joy
I remember is my mother in a long pink dress, fixing
the diamonds at my ears, dancing later in her body

that hadn't given up pleasure yet. Forgive how beautiful
we were at that collision of sea & moon & freedom.
Forgive me for the unborn children I couldn't have,
for the little girl you kept saving. A child clinging
the childhood where her stuffed grizzly bear smiled,
rocking in its broken chair of nightmares. Forgive
our devastation. We were devoted to a future
whose bright breath vanished upon our mirrors
before we could perform resuscitation. Forgive yourself
for being so good to me I told you farewell.
Wished you love, wished for you a life
far more faithful than this poem. I wish it for you yet,
my love. I wish you had not stood so closely
next to the grave where I had disappeared. Why did you
follow me? Forgive me for giving you a grave instead
of a home. We should have framed the ketubah right away.
For years I photographed myself
in a white dress. Terrified by my belief
that I might be a ghost. A barren veil. A figure framed
in reconciliation with my future & my past. Forgive
my estranged affair with the present. I'm consumed
with common hours & my mother's visitations. My bride
is solitude without ornament. Forgive the high wall of
our memory where the bulb finally shattered.

Amorak Huey

Dad Jokes

You're rolling your eyes already.
Nice to meet you, Rolling Your Eyes
Already, I'm Dad; did you hear
what the zero said to the eight?
Nice belt & also *I'm gonna need to see your passport*.
If you're American in the living room
& European in the bathroom
what are you in the airport holding cell?
Don't worry, I've got like a million of these.
You seem to have an allergic reaction on your skin
but let's not make any rash decisions,
health care is complicated. What
did the fish say when it swam into a wall?
What do you call an immigrant with no eyes?
What do you call someone
threatening to blow up Jewish daycares?
Why do I take peanut butter
on my morning commute?
I think you know. Sandwich
walks into a bar, bartender says
sorry we don't make gay wedding cakes
here. Secretary of Education
walks into a school, bartender says
sorry we're so poor. Chicago walks
into America, bartender says
look at all those black people killing each other.
Electoral college walks into November,
bartender says thank you for saving
us from Chicago. I'm starting to dislike

this bartender. You might think this
isn't funny. I get it. I didn't like the beard
either, until it grew on me.
At some point I came to understand
my job was to make the world
more bearable for my children.
It's possible I was wrong & anyway
I don't think I'm very good at it.
You pick your battles, you pick your nose,
but you can't pick yourself up
off the ground in a cloud of teargas.
No one's laughing. I'm not laughing.
I have broken my arm in several places,
now I'm thinking it would be best
not to go to those places anymore.

Kate Wisel

Mick's Street

I throw the keys at the mirror and they crash, a pitcher of water shattering during a high note. Applause-worthy. Mickey says I fight ghetto and I always say that's right like I'm proud of who I am.

"Why are you doing this," I say.

"I'm not the one doing it," Mickey says. He nods to the pile of clothes beside the suitcase. What I hear is *the one*. What I hear is the wind outside, snapping branches. Mickey says I'm a liar, that I hide things from him, from myself, too. He slips out a pack of 100's from his pocket then slow-claps them against his palm.

"Going through my stuff?" I say.

"That's my suitcase, Raffa," he says.

What I hear is *my*. What I hear is our wedding song, Elvis Presley. Mickey picked it and I panicked. New Year's Eve. I watched faces till they blurred, my head chained to his chest.

"You told me to leave!" I say.

I throw myself onto the bed and try to cry desperately into a pillow. It doesn't work, not at all. I hear him blending a protein shake in the kitchen. I want to be a list. Things that haven't been done yet on paper. Possibilities.

But then I pick up the keys. Mickey has a rental house at the Cape. We went there last winter and had sex in the loft, drunk and crying about things we'd never once talked about. I'd steal off to smoke on the porch. I felt him watching me from upstairs.

Now Mickey's standing on the front steps in his huge parka with his hair slicked back like a real estate agent. I roll my suitcase past him. At him. Why has he done his hair for our break up?

"Just get out," Mickey mouths.

He runs forward to catch up. He's in sneakers, and I'm thinking that he's worn these on purpose, to chase after me.

Now that I'm going, Mickey shouts, "Where are you going?"

"I could run you over," I say, rolling down the window. Mickey throws his

hands up. Then they're on his waist as I jerk the wheel, counting my luck that there's no one caught behind me as I swerve out. In the rearview he's already gone.

My car. The only thing in my name. One long stretch of highway, Xanax-smooth and soundless. The Cape, a weird place to go in winter. The Sagamore Bridge waiting in the distance. The water beneath it mirrors the sun, cracked as hairline fractures on X-rays. There's so much traffic, everyone honking and inching up. Profiles in the windows switching like a show of mugshots. I cross the bridge, pressing the window down for a smoke. The cold has teeth.

Cape houses are deceiving from the outside, little Monopoly pieces, all roof and rectangle. I'm carrying a twelve-pack of Heineken under my arm. I can smell my armpits even through my coat, some kind of hot sandwich with onions. I haven't showered since Friday, ever since Mickey sent me the divorce spreadsheet.

I remember the shrimp cocktail we ate, so fat the veins popped between my teeth. The night I'd said yes. And the way Mickey looked, self-possessed, satisfied. I snuck a cigarette out on the balcony. But where could I have crawled if not back to the table? If I were a movie, the credits would have been rolling up my face.

On the front drive, I take the wheezy steps of a Martian, sensing the quiet. Then I have to drop everything on the crushed shells of the driveway to search for the key Mickey leaves in the fake rock. The grass is cut but dead from the late March snow. A green hose is hidden behind the bushes. Water trickles out of the metal head, a sound like gasping. The nob is freezing and it screeches as I twist it off. Below it is the rock, gleaming plastic, broken open. Someone's been here.

I knock the top off a Heineken on the kitchen island, size of a paddle-boat and flecked with sparkling granite. If we get divorced, I'll get nothing. Maybe I'll get a couch, the piano Mickey bought but never plays. Where the fuck would I put a piano? I want a Steinway smashed through these floor-length windows so I can watch it hit, disturbing the skin of the lake.

On the dock two boys with their backs turned are casting lines into the water. With their hoodies up around their heads, their figures are small and slumped as shepherds. From the dock, the path is soft dirt up the hill to the house. I'm not afraid of whoever has been here.

After I check the fridge, tuck my clothes into the stained oak drawers, bring the mound of newspapers inside, spread out the obituaries then light a ghostly fire, I zip my coat and trudge down to the basement for a smoke. The glass glides open onto the grey slab but the screen is torn and taped shut with Band-Aids. Fresh butts litter the edges of the cement. Newports. I collect each one as I watch the boys, still standing with their backs to me on the dock. I shout to them and they turn, their hoods framing their faces.

"This is private property," I say, motioning to the floating raft they're standing on. The raft is anchored deep down in the muck. The lines are anchored to the boys, and their feet to the raft. The birds to the branches, their heads still as assassins. The boys gather their rods, leap from the dock to the shore, kicking sand on their way back up past the kayaks.

When they pass I see their faces, one so pale he glows. He looks down at my hand, at the cigarettes jutting out of my fist. It's only when I'm inside that I see it, a backpack, slumped in the corner of the basement. It sits by the mantle, right under the antique "Nude Beach" sign with its arrow facing the lake. The bag is just there like a basket outside a church.

I pick it up by the shoulders then stomp up the stairs. It's a black Jansport, jagged teeth for a zipper. I'm emptying its contents onto the kitchen island. I hold up an Angry Birds T-shirt then bring it to my nose like I'm sniffing a carton of milk on the sour. It smells like wood chips and must. I lay it flat.

In the front pocket is a crumpled pack of cigarettes. The Newports, nine of them left. I splay each cigarette out under the shirt's sleeves, skeleton fingers with a pinky missing. There's a pair of gardening gloves, and I scoop out candy wrappers and loose Band-Aids littered at the bottom, separating the Band-Aids from the candy and place the wrappers in the palms of the stiff gloves. Two lottery tickets, scribbled silver at the scratch. I set them down, slide them as if across a Ouija board beneath the gloves. Backpacks are for addicts.

In the basement, I'm a PI. From here, I can see the curved wooden couch legs, electrical sockets. I crawl closer. There's a Samsung charger snaking out the wall. I march back upstairs and pull open drawers at random. I drop the charger into a Ziploc, seal it shut then hold it up to the light. It's just a phone charger. It goes straight onto the counter with the rest of the things. On the counter, the whole of the mound focuses into the shadow of a running man, a scarecrow smoking his own fingers.

Back downstairs I pull on my winter driving gloves, which I never actually wear when I'm driving. The couch has a skirt and I flip it. It's damp and smells like Lysol. I reach out for a Coke can. In the natural light, it's dented and pocked, aluminum melted into a lip-sized hole. I seal it. It goes on like this: a side-glance at a single-edged razor in an open puzzle box, gleaming there against all the colored pieces. Next to it, a torn Suboxone packet which in my palm looks like a blue pack of two Advil you'd find in a hotel lobby, all the medical letters like a miniature resume on the back.

When Benny overdosed, I found Suboxone wrappers crumpled and hidden in his closet. I studied the back, Rx only, then buried myself in his sheets. Once, numb from vodka, I brought Benny up to Mickey. There was a bread basket set between us, two knives. He told me to get over it. It'd been seven years since high school. He sipped his water at me, his eyes still, the ice rattling.

"Would you be over it?" I asked, even though I knew the answer. Mick makes so much money selling first-rate health insurance. He doesn't give a damn about anyone else's life.

It's not everything. I'm back on hands and knees, a beach crab. In the floral basement bathroom, the shower curtain is askew. Slumped on the tile is a white towel. Under the sink, a spoon bent at the neck with a melted cotton swab in the center. An empty foil blister pack of Percocet. An oversized Ecko jacket in the dryer, the hood lined with sopping fur, folded aluminum tucked in the pockets, bright in the center with a gleaming burn. I seal it with the last Ziploc.

A Heineken cap cracks against the counter and I slug it. I tuck the T-shirt inside the Ecko jacket. Long arms, long torso, arms stretched out flat, cross-like. Through the floor-length windows, the lake swirls a sunset, NyQuil pink and pulsing. I rearrange the squatter's stuff, put his cigarette finger up by his shirt's neck. He'll be back. His things are here. I turn out the lights, the lake dividing itself into darkness.

In the morning, I go for a drive. Where is this guy? He could be anyone, but not anyone exactly. He's XL tall. I know that for sure. He buys lottery tickets. I pull into the parking lot at Liberty Liquors. I stay an extra minute before getting out, watch the clerk haul trash into the back bins. I have an insane thought. Is that his father? I hoist my twelve-pack onto the counter. The checkout girl's bangs block her eyes. It smells like powdered donuts in here.

"Is this it?" she says. I point to the Marlboro 100's. Then toss a Snickers in the mix. The surveillance is grainy and slow. The trash guy comes back behind the counter and his neon vest flashes like a caution sign. He undoes the Velcro.

I drive all the way to the ocean and sit in my car. I chew the Snickers and tap ashes out the window. I knew Benny was high when he ate sweets but towards the end it was better that way, seeing him at peace, his lifelines glowing orange. Cheap

off-season candy corn in the big bag, the waxy teeth in his palm. He'd eat them one by one, eyes closed and red-rimmed.

I roll up the window. I lied before. The water scares me. It's different from the lake, which stays the same. Maybe the squatter will be there when I get back. I'll have to shut off my car a few houses down, tiptoe in. Maybe he'll be shooting up in the shower, his hair dark and his tongue pearled in froth. His eyes too far gone to look distraught when I kneel down to touch his cheek.

In my windshield, the clouds hang low. I'm not scared of addicts. Real estate agents terrify me. Housewives, cheerleaders. I turn up NPR so it feels like someone is talking to me on purpose. Below, on the tiers of slate, the ocean rolls forward, a foaming mouth, then pulls back into itself. Such restraint. One more smoke. I roll the window back down a finger, tapping more ash onto the hardened sand of the lot.

I drive through Falmouth, unmarked roads. Trucks on blocks in driveways made of crushed white shells. Deserted restaurants, abandoned bookstores, old white churches, buoys on the lawns. A hangover starts late, the current blooming behind my eyes. By now I know my way around, so I'm just speeding down the narrow roads till I turn onto our street. Mick's street. Everything Mick's. I remember when he held my hair up to his face with his fist after I swore I'd quit. You can only smell nicotine on people who aren't you.

"Can I have one thing to myself?" I'd asked, oddly weightless.

In the driveway, there's a truck. There's a truck. I leave my coat on the seat and click the door shut. A leaf-blower drones in the backyard, the singular whine loudening as I climb down the path. Off by the trees, slimed leaves lift then hurl themselves against the fence. A tall guy wearing sagging Dickies holds the blower like a wand, turning it back and forth over the grass. He has big headphones over an orange beanie like an air traffic controller. He doesn't see me. Then he does. I wave my arm out. The blower groans as the dust lifts into the air. A whiff of spring. I can't help it. I smile.

"Hey," I shout.

"What?" he says.

"You the gardener?" I say. He slips off his headphones, then his beanie. Oversized diamond studs in both ears shine like a truck pulling up.

"You Mick's wife?" he says, swiping his hair back, tangled and tied. The leaf-blower looks like a toy in his hand. The tarp on the grill flaps.

"I asked you first," I say. I'm not afraid. He is an animal cooperating pre-catch. I'm already walking down the path. The blower hangs by his side. The wispy hair on his chin resembles the fuzz on a tennis ball.

"I might be," he says. Boston draws up thick in his throat.

"You want to come inside?" I ask. He turns to face the lake, the wind picking up. A chime on the porch crashes hard.

"I have to finish up," he says. He swings the blower and points to the sand at the edge of the water that mixes into oatmeal, the leaves and broken branches trapped on the shore. "It's going to start raining like a bastard."

His bottom lip twists as the arrogant wind picks up. He's young. He thinks he knows how everything's going to go. A top tooth juts out against his bottom lip like a loose blind zigged against the row. He kicks up the blower, it roars, and then he turns again, his shoulder blades jutting from under his shirt. Leaves circle overhead. Down at the shore he revs it, annihilating the debris. And then the raindrops begin to prick, needling the length of my arms then slipping fast through my fingers. I picture us inside as it storms, him on his knees, taping those Band-Aids down to my wrist. He cuts the blower like a murderer on Halloween as the rain makes a sheet between us. He struts his way up towards where I'm waiting at the sliding door.

I'm hiding my head in the fridge, rearranging bottles.

"I just have Heineken," I say. "And you left your things here."

I set two beers on the counter next to the stuff. His things spread into the distinct shape of a body outlined in chalk, the frame like a free-fall. He stands looking out at the water with his hands punched into his pockets, his shirt dark with rainwater.

"Are you going to call the cops?" he says.

I walk behind him with a beer then pick a clung leaf off his back. The back-belt loop to his sagging Dickies has come apart.

"No."

"I don't understand," he says.

"I do." I say. "You needed somewhere to stay?"

He smiles, a huff. "I don't have a place. Right now, I mean. I don't mean any harm."

"I don't either." I hold out the beer. He looks down at my hand then back up at me. He takes the beer and sits at the table, one leg out, his construction boots big and rimmed with dirt.

I join him, thumbing the side of my beer. "What's your name?" I say, twisting my hair up.

"Jordan," he mumbles.

"Where are you going to stay now?" He leans, his elbows on his knees, rubbing his palms together.

"Nowhere. In my truck. I'm from Bourne. Just up Route 6."

"I know where that is," I say. I read the obituaries. Cape Cod in winter. The land of overdoses. Cop bringing the same girl back with Narcan three times in one day. The narrow highway, empty liquor stores, the ocean swallowing hard as it draws back from the rocks.

"My boyfriend was an addict," I say. Jordan takes a swig, stays quiet. Breaking in, it's probably not the worst thing Jordan's done. I see Benny's clenched teeth, braces fresh off. His fist around a hammer and his palm flattened on the desk. The hammer pounds pounds pounds. I wait with him in the ER to score pills. Or in the parking lot at the pain clinics in New Hampshire, something to mend his anger. Driving home, waiting for the complete close of his eyelids, the jerk of the wheel to grab onto. I was a waiter.

"I was in sober living," Jordan says.

"What happened?"

"I don't know," he says. His palms shush together, eyes flitting from the counter to the door. "I stayed there awhile. I started working again at my buddy's construction company."

"That's hard work," I say.

"It's not. I like to be outside building houses, fixing roofs. Problem was his brother."

"Why."

"I went over to his place just to see if I could be strong, not use. I guess that's not true. Junkie etiquette is that you don't shoot up a guy in recovery because you don't want them to wind up back like you—unless they ask twice."

"You asked twice."

At Al-Anon long after Benny died I sat away from the circle in a church basement bubbling in the letters on the handouts. Women subdued, pink tissues damp in their clenched fists. And then they would start talking and they wouldn't for the life of them stop. Rage cut through my notebook, scribbling on its own like a lie detector test. I'd think, you don't run out on people. I'd think, when someone is suffering, when someone you love is hurt, you go to them.

"This place helped me let go of my son," a woman across from me said, her lips cracked down the center.

The wind overturned a kayak and rained twigs onto the grass. I have a life vest in my hands.

"Put this on," I say. We're outside the wet shed, the wood smelling like pencil shavings.

"Nah," he says.

"Fine," I say. "We'll do it your way."

We flip the kayak then pull it through the oatmeal of the sand. The water ices up around my ankles till we leap onto the rain-splattered seats and push ourselves out into the lake. I've never been on a boat. The oars bump up against the plastic and the handles are heavy as trash bags. I think of a drain gasping dry and what's at the bottom of all this. But there's a glittering stillness when we stop, the boat

spins in the center of the water, and we're far away from all the leaves and the trees and the houses. A low fog spills into the boat like karaoke smoke.

"It's nice out here," I say.

"I've come out here like every day, past two weeks," Jordan says, smiling. He's handsome when he smiles, like maybe if I turned his teeth back together one after the other, he'd have a chance.

"You just take the boat?"

He shrugs, chucks a tiny rock into the water and it breaks the surface again and again until the surface stills. I want to tell him that you can't go home, how I wouldn't recognize home if I woke up in my childhood bed.

"This is my house, you know," I say. "This is my boat, these are my oars, and this is my fucking lake."

Jordan looks at me crazily and I break into a cackle. We laugh hard and I reach out and slap at the water. The two boys are back on the dock, their heads the size of pennies. They whip lines that fly rib-like in white arcs then sink. Even if I shouted, *this is private property, I'll call the police!* they would never hear me. The kayak starts to spin. I pull out a cigarette and Jordan reaches over. His lighter snaps and the flame is neon and surreal, it colors his face with a glow that isn't there. Mick said he'd divorce me if I didn't stop smoking. I won't and he will.

The wind picks up harder. Jordan reaches out his other hand to cover the light. The boat bobs, gaining power, the water coming up over the edge, and then in one rough curve we're flipped. The cold is painless, at first. I swipe out to feel Jordan, slice my arms through the water then open my eyes against the muck. Above is Jordan's sneaker, and when I grab hold he kicks and the light sparks like power lines. We come up through the circle of water, choking and weightless. The water at the surface looks clear, like you could sip it if you were thirsty enough, which I am. Jordan's breaths are short, his eyelashes sparkling with beads of water. I wrap my arms around his neck. My thighs around his torso. Kiss his twitching eyelids like a mother.

Earlier, Jordan got up to go to the bathroom. I almost grabbed his arm. I was popping off another cap when he came out. He stood, looking out at the lake again. He laughed and it scared me. We faced each other on the dining room chairs. He was sweating through his hair. I saw it. His face looked like the delayed surveillance at the liquor store. He rolled up a sleeve and his forearm was scratched and purpled.

"Did you get high?" I whispered. I started to cry.

"Yeah," he said. His eyes swung lazily.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I said. I was in tears, and crazy.
His head bobbed back. He took me in with a squint and sucked in his breath. "Shit. I don't know," he said. "Sorry?"

"You're not sorry," I spat.

"You're kind of freaking me out," he mumbled. "Are you going to call the cops?"

His eyes flickered, chlorine-shot like he'd been staring at a penny for days on the floor of a pool. He was ruining it, this fight. Outside the rain slowed and I reached for his shoulder. I swept my hand up the solid curve beneath his tee shirt then pressed my thumb to his neck, felt his pulse jump.

"I would never do that," I said, my thumb unmoving. When the cops found Benny slumped against the tile in a laundromat bathroom, he was two hours dead. I wasn't with him, and never would be again.

I looked up at Jordan, "Shoot me up?"

The pressure from my thumb remained even as the beat from his neck raced on and on then broke in a twitch.

"No," he said, "let's go out on the lake."

But I asked twice. The lighter clicked under the spoon and the bubbles popped up tiny as Jordan flicked his wrist to shake them down. The kitchen filled with a sweet burning smell, candy in a bonfire. He took a Q-tip from his pocket and rolled it into a ball between his fingers then sunk the cotton into the bent spoon. The syringe drew up swirling and cloudy.

"Do some pushups," Jordan said so I got to the floor. Back on the chair, dizzied, he slapped the crook of my arm. I watched as my blood drew up dark, Jordan's lips by the needle. For a second I was stunned, something warm siphoning up my throat.

I threw up, spit and beer all over Jordan's shoes. Later, on the floor, the sun was out, my head was pricked with warmth but it was just Jordan's fingers in my hair.

We swim to the dock that sways afloat. The boys are gone. I'm sure of it now. We kneel on the raft, our clothes hissing out streams of water from all sides like piss. I tilt back my head. The sun warms my neck and spins little rhombuses on the surface of my hands. We jump off the dock onto the starch of the sand.

The house waits for us as we trudge up the hill. Inside, beer, a fire, the warmth. A place to stay, though I'm more afraid than ever. Our sneakers squeak muck. I peel off my sweater and it slaps onto the concrete.

"Fuck," Jordan says. He's pulling on the back slider but its good and locked.

He pounds on the glass. He pounds and pounds. I tilt my face back, feel the specks of sun but can't climb inside its mouth. Its warmth caught and laced through branches. Anything out here could happen, the March rain switching back to snow. Even sheltered, the homicidal birds that own the trees call out into void as though possessed.

Hanif Abdurraqib

How Can Black People Write About Flowers at a Time Like This

Forgive me, for I have been nurturing my well-worn
grudges against beauty. I am hoping my neighbors

will show some mercy on me for backing my car into
the garden & crushing what I will say were the peonies.

a flower with a short season. born dying. some might say
it's a blessing to know your entrances & exits. forgive me, for

I have once again been recklessly made responsible
for the curation of softness & have instead returned with another

torrent of viciousness. in the brief moment of their flourish,
at the opening of spring, I drove across state lines to gather peonies for a woman

who loved me once. as a way of surrender, I pull the already
dying thing from the earth in a mess of tangled knots & I insist

that you must keep it alive for a year, even after it so desperately
wants to be done with the foolishness of its living. The last thing

I ask of this relationship is to burden you with another relationship.
it is so delicious to define the misery you are putting a body out of.

& just like that, we are talking about power. *how awful this must be for you*
I whispered as I closed my eyes & put the car into reverse.

Rosebud Ben-Oni

Poet Wrestling with Anything She'd Do for Love

All I want is something incredible & ridiculous
like dinosaur sex,
which must've taken no prisoners & no amount of sunset
sweet talk. Spare me your birds that mount & rock, your lizards
that bite & hook, sideways,
on common day, in public venue.
I just can't
with you—unless we are two spoon-
billed komodo dragons going at it
in the jaws of a t-rex. Imagine
that kind of dying & being
hopeful yet—

because as humans
we are all trying
very hard to connect
& mostly hating every minute of it. *Mostly*, I said. Most
lizards tuck their testicles inside their bodies to hide their sex.
But from what or who? As if we have a clue
about what the future's willing to do.
You're trying to connect with me right now
& it's ridiculous,
hosing me down in holy water.
When I get too incredible.
When I like my horses like death
metal & love is only as powerful
as its own destruction & no one else

can get me as godforsaken
as a monsta

ballad. Or rather: give it god*shaketh*. Oh I'd do anything, I would. For my off-key

ponies chewing me until rancid
& bitter. For my metal horse
piercing a hoof
with poison ring
filled with molted skin
& tallow feather.
Spare me
one more
melody.

Love me like fresh kill.

Love like a meteor ends a world.

& sway to our crash & din on the dark, dark hill.

Corinna McClanahan Schroeder

Fog

I am yellow fingers swabbing
your face at dawn and a ghost
breath blown on your wife's neck
when she's alone. Just try and keep me
out. I wither houseplants, settle
in the little berries of your infant's
lungs. Not even the spirits you pour
so generously will wash my phlegm
from the back of your throat.
That creeping premonition
that follows you, soot grazing
your cheeks like rotted snow?
That's me. Go ahead and fire
your gun. Startle the ducks, all squawk
and wing. I thicken like cold soup.
I cling for weeks, streets you've known
your whole life turning strange
maze. Hands out, calling a name
I wipe from your tongue.

Patricia Restrepo

Fibrous, Faceless Figures: Symbology of Hair in the Work of Julie Curtiss

Vibrant pigments skillfully employed to depict playful yet radical figuration, closely-cropped portraits replete with an idiosyncratic visual vocabulary, matte surfaces yielding to cinematic compositions, intimately-scaled work featuring signature perverse elements and unconventional depictions of women, often with gnarled fingers and pointed breasts, shielding their face from frontal recognition: there are many aspects of Julie Curtiss' painting practice that merit attention. Yet, I find one characteristic most entangling—her meticulously executed, wispy strands of hair, which she layers into hypnotic patterns. In addition to covering women's heads, textured troves of hair compose a variety of objects in Curtiss' paintings: hats, landscapes, torsos, entire bodies, and more recently, food items such as a slice of cheesecake and an oven-fresh turkey. Her paintings, gouaches, and recent sculpture work contain this recurring motif of hair, even where it is not expected, leading us to consider the significance of these fantastical filaments. Curtiss' focus on the female form, inaccessible and distorted by locks of hair, produces a distinctive reflection on feminism and reconsideration of hair's cultural symbology.

After all, hair can be much more than organ meets ornament; it has long been a symbol for gender, sexual, economic, religious, and racial dissent. The presentation of hair—who has it, and where—has lead to knotted situations for characters in a variety of art forms. In contemporary film, we can reflect on Adan Jodorowsky's cinematic voyage *La Danza de la Realidad* [The Dance Of Reality], wherein Alejandro's luscious locks are imbued with magical qualities and take on such a narrative focus that they in effect become a character of their own. The personality of Alejandro's hair leads his mother to believe he is a reincarnation of his dead grandfather, and it is this effeminate hair that causes his father to despise his perceived cowardice. We could also look to Mariana Rondón's 2013 film *Pelo malo* [Bad Hair], which depicts

the coming of age story of Junior, a Venezuelan boy who becomes obsessed with straightening his curly hair. He makes various attempts to control his unruly mop, from blow-drying to applying a mask of mayonnaise. The latter attempt infuriates his mother, who threatens to cut off all his hair. In a society where hair relaxing is supposed to be a woman's worry, Junior's quest for straight hair convinces his mother that he must be gay, leading her to inquire with his pediatrician if this hair obsession could be a signal for his sexuality. Both of these films utilize the symbolism linked in hair as a mechanism to explore issues of racism, colonial legacies, and homophobia. The treatment of both characters' obsession with their hair is placed at the core of the films, amid far more concerning aspects of society around them, thereby demonstrating gendered standards surrounding beauty.

In recent literature, we encounter Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, wherein Wambui explains, "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you. You didn't go running with Curt today because you don't want to sweat out this straightness [. . .] You're always battling to make your hair do what it wasn't meant to do."[1] A similar struggle with the complexity around the language of hair, this time due to a rub with religion, is found in Marjane Satrap's *The Complete Persepolis.* Satrap asserted to a mullah regarding her decision to not wear a hijab, "I have always thought that if women's hair posed so many problems, God would certainly have made us bald."[2]

There are also enthralling uses of hair as a medium in modern and contemporary art history, notably work tied to Surrealist legacies. Hair is a manifestation of the Surrealist fusion of the grotesque and sexual. Consider Méret Oppenheim's *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* [Breakfast in fur] (1936), a sculpture of a fur-covered teacup, saucer, and spoon. In this humorous object, selected by 1937 MoMA visitors as "the quintessential Surrealist object," Oppenheim fuses the domesticity and traditional femininity of the tea set with sexual connotations. Reflect on the use of hair in numerous pieces by contemporary artist Mona Hatoum. Her use of hair in *Jardin Public* (1993), a work made consisting of painted wrought iron, wax, and pubic hair crudely mirrors gendered sittings. *Keffieh* (1993–9), a headscarf delicately made of cotton embroidered with strands of dark hair, is a subversive play with gender roles and expectations surrounding appropriateness.

[1] Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. First edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. 247.

[2] Satrapi, Marjane. *The Complete Persepolis / Marjane Satrapi*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2007.

As life imitates art and vice versa, hair styling has also served as a simple but powerful symbol for societal struggles outside of artistic contexts. A social sensation, hair is the focus of intense fixation in practically all societies. After all, hair plays a powerful role in the "development of social constructs about the body… Hairstyles and rituals surrounding hair care and adornment convey powerful messages about a person's beliefs, lifestyles, and commitments. Inferences and judgments about a person's morality, sexual orientation, political persuasion, religious sentiments and, in some cultures, socio-economic status can sometimes be surmised by seeing a particular hairstyle […] Hair is also a symbol of the self and group identity, an important mode of self-expression and communication. Because of its versatility as an adornment, hair can not only symbolize social norms but also changes in social ideologies."[3] For instance, hair-styling customs can take on symbolic and religious significances, leading many societal taboos to be focused on hair presentation. Accordingly, rebellious acts can also be centered subverting expected hair grooming. African-Americans who sport Afros, beads or dreadlocks might do so to assert their refusal of European standards of beauty and thwart the implied white supremacy. Moreover, throughout history, the state has dictated the terms of how citizens can present their hair as a mechanism of social control and dehumanization. In Nazi Germany, for example, the government attempted to control the Jewish population through forced "hair taking" and other forms of hair-related humiliation. Germany's textile manufacturers even used hair forcibly taken from prisoners at several concentration camps to produce thread, rope, cloth, carpets, mattress stuffing, socks, and other products.[4] Beyond the economic gain derived from such atrocious efforts of social control, the state also stripped individuals of a critical sign of individual identity.

It is within this larger artistic and historical context that we must position the work of Julie Curtiss. Her interest in hair as a primary subject entrenches her in these histories, and her sumptuous depictions of patterned hair signal a wider symbology linked to feminism. With regard to her fascination with depicting hair, Curtiss said, "Hair was present in my works since the very start. Hair fascinates me because it's one of the most durable products of the human body, it's an organ you can sever without pain. It has a function but it is also an ornament, and that

[3] Deborah Pergament, *It's Not Just Hair: Historical and Cultural Considerations for an Emerging Technology,* 75 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 41 (1999).

[4] Ibid.

encapsulates two of my favorite subjects: nature and culture. Also, when it comes to women, I find it interesting that if it's on the head, it's beautiful, but if it's on the body, it's repulsive. I like this dance of opposites."[5] Ultimately, what role do the coiled tresses born from Curtiss's hand and imagination serve?

It is crucial to note that these works are ambiguous, and intentionally so, Curtiss reminds us. It is because of this provided ambiguity that arenas for the production of meaning are expanded in ways that can be generative yet contradictory. The non-explicit narratives in Curtiss's work, thanks in part to the obscuring hair, allow Curtiss to traverse between universal and individual chronicles. "To come back to the seeming contradiction between general and specific narratives, I could almost say I would like to capture the language of dreams. Dreams can be extremely precise and general at once. Sometimes, details seem so charged with meaning; it leaves an impression on you even after you wake up, and more than often the explanation still eludes you. Ideally, I would love to achieve this feeling when I work. I'd like to draw viewers in, with familiar ideas or imagery, and halfway into it, I kind of highjack the story with my own idiosyncrasies,"[6] Curtiss said.

Firstly, the abundance of hair distorts and veils, eliminating any potential identifying characteristics of a figure's face. While Curtiss's work might conjure references to European portraiture, unlike traditional 19th and 20th-century portraiture, the faces in her portraits are intentionally obscured. This allows the sitters to thwart the implied male gaze of the viewer, who has for too long been the default viewer of art history. By preventing their bodies from being readily accessible, and therefore readable, the shield of hair fights the feminine destiny that might be imposed on these women by societal standards. Although these women occupy domestic or suburban settings, their environment is not fatalist and does not determine them. Instead, the women are allowed to mirror the complicated and contradictory beings in the world beyond the picture plane. The motif of the coiffure speaks to female conditioning and conventionality, thereby creating room for dialogue about gender politics and expectations, as well as how to disable them.

The hair also confuses. Women's suggestive body parts become lost in curled tresses. Accordingly, this overabundance of hair allows for complexity and contradiction to abound, as the coils of hair simultaneously seduce and repulse. In

[5] Julie Curtiss interview with Emily Burns. See http://www.maakemagazine.com/julie-curtiss/

[6] See http://www.vsf.la/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017_FFFFFF.pdf.

Curtiss's case, a perverse representation of hair also is a clear manifestation of the Surrealist strategy of marrying sexual imagery with the grotesque. It disturbs. The thought alone of consuming the slice of hairy cheesecake in *Another piece of pie* (2017) might engender madness.

So much hair complicates a simple and straightforward reading of the work.

It envelops—the figures, the scenes—leaving little breathing room. Often times, even, it constricts. Restrained and bound hair, like the braids in *Shy Woman* (2016) or the tight bun in *Silent Bun* (2017), eludes to the censoring of the female body. "Hair is a natural asset women use to seduce. Sometimes, assets can define you. Women can get trapped, or trap themselves in representations. Beautification can become constraints, in other words, bindings. Women's bodies are objectified / commoditized by men and women themselves, by cultures [. . .] The tension between nature and culture is important in my work, and I find the negative aspects of it just as interesting as the positives. There is something to the mane / the wild, as opposed to the braid / the domesticated, that captivates me,"[7] Curtiss said.

It also references. The visual quotations in Curtiss's work abound, with some compositions bordering on pastiche. One notable reference is the work of the painter Christina Ramberg (1946-1995), who was part of the Chicago Imagists. Ramberg's explorations of the female form and partially represented female body, most notably the torso, no doubt inform Curtiss's hand. Ramberg's work similarly avoided depicted faces in her portraits, instead sometimes showing women from behind or concealed by hair. Ultimately, both artists source from a Surrealist vocabulary, thereby embracing contradiction to take an exceedingly personal approach to their work.

While the motif of the hair as a shield unifies her female protagonists, uniting them as depictions of women concealed, the faceless portraits also allow them to display their individuality and multi-dimensional nature. The representation of women's hair can thus also be read as a mechanism for providing agency. "I would like to present the viewer with an enigmatic puzzle, an invitation to reflect on the idea of an unfixed, ever-changing self,"[8] Curtiss said. Captivating and grotesque in equal measure, these surreal portraits demand that we view the female sitters as more than a single archetype. Hair becomes the material evidence of selfhood. She

[7] See http://www.vsf.la/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017_FFFFFF.pdf

[8] Julie Curtiss interview with Emily Burns. See http://www.maakemagazine.com/julie-curtiss/

imbues every female protagonist with a distinct identity, although that is identified as hers alone, as it is partly kept from the viewer. As Simone de Beauvoir theorized in *The Second Sex*, "Surely the woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual."[9] Curtiss imbues singularity in these sitters.

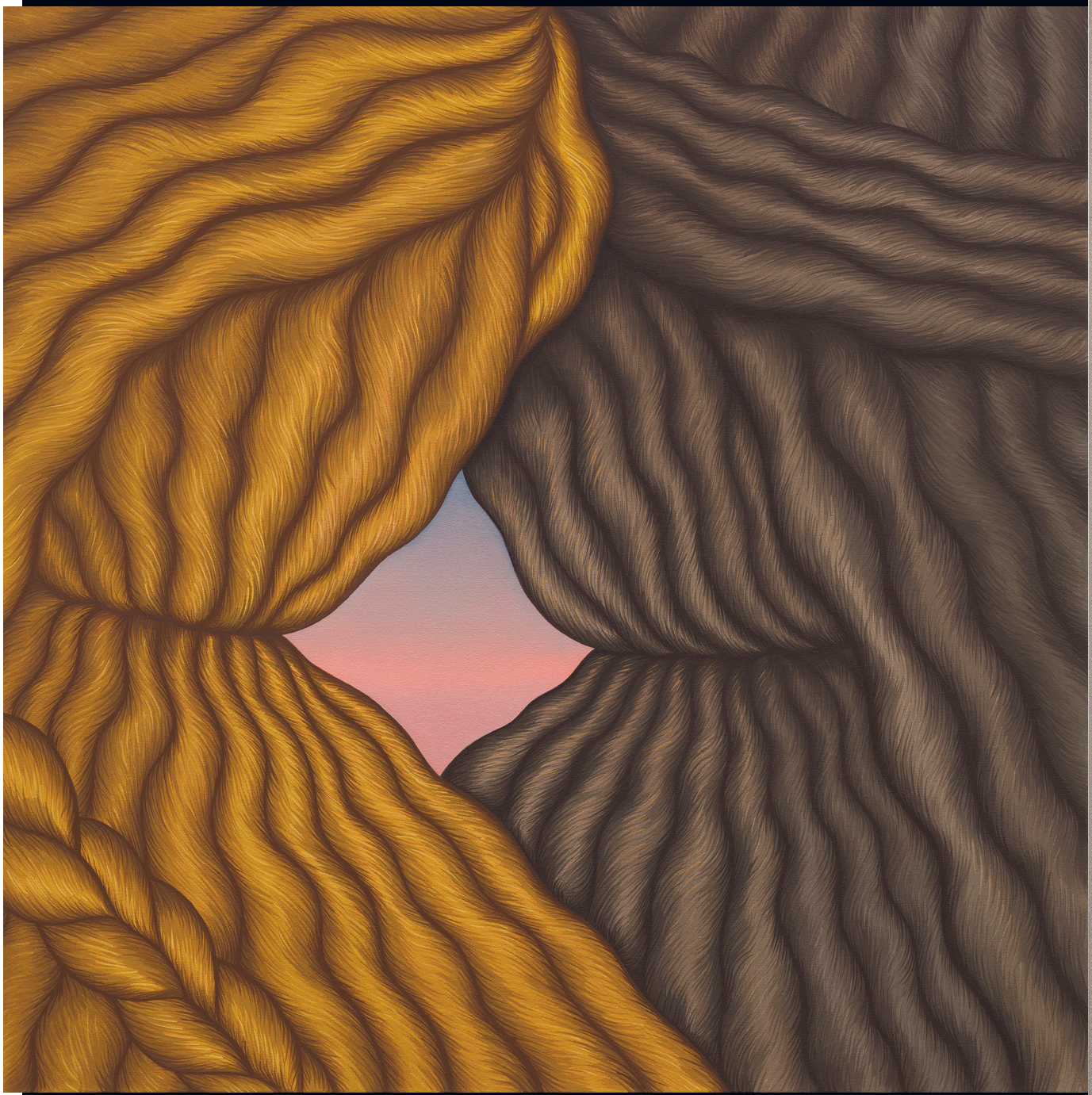
In a semiotic exploration, the abundance of hair could be decoded as a symbol for significant social struggles, especially the urge by women to have agency in their forming. Indeed, hair is *pars pro todo*, wherein a portion of a woman's body is used to reference her entirety. Curtiss addresses hair as a magnetism tool and, by extension, an indicator of gendered taboo. She confronts the societal demands of beauty, cosmetic upkeep, and warm accessibility often thrust on women.

Akin to any hip hairdo, there is artistry to the cut, or crop, of the content by Curtiss. Curtiss elaborated, "I avoided working overall complex compositions and instead cropped my subjects very intimately, leaving a lot of the action outside the frame. I wanted to convey a bit of a cinematic feel, and it ended up almost surreal. If you try to imagine the missing parts of the image, it doesn't make much sense."[10] Luckily for the eager viewer, there is much sense to be teased out from her nonsensical fantasies.

p. 97, Fig. 1.	*Chemtrails*, 2016. Gouache on paper. 19h x 14w in. 48.26h x 35.56w cm.
p. 98, Fig. 2.	*Another piece of pie*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 24h x 36w in. 60.96h x 91.44w cm.
p. 99, Fig. 3.	*D'aprés L'origine du Monde*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 23h x 28w in. 58.42h x 71.12w cm.
p. 100 Fig. 4.	*Party Down*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 40h x 32w in. 101.60h x 81.28w cm.
p. 101, Fig. 5.	*No Place Like Home*, 2017. 24h x 36w in. 60.96h x 91.44w cm.
p. 102, Fig. 6.	*Lateral Embrace*, 2018. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 30h x 30w in. 76.20h x 76.20w cm.
p. 103, Fig. 7.	*Red-faced*, 2016. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 18h x 14w in. 45.72h x 35.56w cm.
p. 104, Fig. 8.	*The Left Hand Woman*, 2017. Acryla gouache on panel. 16h x 20w in. 40.64h x 50.80w cm.

[9] Nicholson, L. J. (Ed.). (1996). *The Second Wave Feminism reader: Feminist theoretical writings.* London: Routledge. 12.

[10] Julie Curtiss interview with Emily Burns. See http://www.maakemagazine.com/julie-curtiss/



Claire Eder

On Vigilance

"Be careful," she called down to me.
"My rapist lives just up the street."

She called it from her balcony.
It was my street, too.

I was on my way to get tacos.
Her balcony, blue painted railing, warmth

clustering on terra cotta pots—
and inside them, I couldn't see

whether it flourished or withered.
To walk down that street, I had to be careful.

I had to step over the dead cicadas.
They had all died,

all at once, the whole brood.
If I stepped on one—well, it wasn't

nice. They looked so hard on the outside,
but they weren't.

She lived on my street.
Her hair was a kind, straw color.

She held a beer bottle, leaned casually,
like we were at a party.

I had never seen her before.
Then, I never saw her again.

Selva Almada

de *Chicas muertas*

1.

La mañana del 16 de noviembre de 1986 estaba limpia, sin una nube, en Villa Elisa, el pueblo donde nací y me crié, en el centro y al este de la provincia de Entre Ríos.

Era domingo y mi padre hacía el asado en el fondo de la casa. Todavía no teníamos churrasquera, pero se las arreglaba bien con una chapa en el suelo, las brasas encima y encima de las brasas la parrilla. Ni siquiera con lluvia mi padre suspendía un asado: otra chapa cubriendo la carne y las brasas era suficiente.

Cerca de la parrilla, acomodada entre las ramas de la morera, una radio portátil, a pilas, clavada siempre en LT26 Radio Nuevo Mundo. Pasaban canciones folclóricas y a cada hora un rotativo de noticias, pocas. Todavía no había comenzado la época de incendios en el parque nacional El Palmar, a unos 50 kilómetros, que cada verano ardía y hacía sonar las sirenas de todas las estaciones de bomberos de la región. Fuera de algún accidente en la ruta, siempre algún muchacho saliendo de un baile, los fines de semana pasaba poco y nada. A la tarde sin fútbol pues, por el calor, ya había empeza- do el campeonato nocturno.

Esa madrugada me había despertado el ventarrón que hacía temblar el techo de la casa. Me había estirado en la cama y había tocado algo que hizo que me sentara de golpe, con el corazón en la boca. El colchón estaba húmedo y unas formas ba- bosas y tibias se movieron contra mis piernas. Con la cabeza todavía abombada, tardé unos segundos en componer la escena: mi gata había parido otra vez a los pies de la cama. A la luz de los relámpagos que entraban por la ventana, la vi enrollada, mirán- dome con sus ojos amarillos. Me hice un bollito, abrazándome las rodillas, para no volver a tocarlos. En la cama de al lado, mi hermana dormía. Los refucilos azules iluminaban su cara, sus ojos entreabiertos, siempre dormía así, como las liebres, el pecho que bajaba y subía, ajena a la tormenta y a la lluvia que se había largado con todo. Mirándola, yo también me quedé dormida.

Cuando me desperté solamente mi padre estaba levantado. Mi madre y mis hermanos seguían durmiendo. La gata y sus crías no estaban en la cama. Del

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY SAMUEL RUTTER

Selva Almada

from *Dead Girls*

1.

The morning of November 16, 1986 was clear, without a single cloud in Villa Elisa, a town in the middle and to the east of the province of Entre Ríos, where I was born and raised.

It was Sunday and my father was preparing the barbecue in the backyard. We didn't have a proper barbecue then, but we got by with a metal sheet on the ground, with the coals on top, and the grill on top of the coals. Even the rain couldn't stop my father and his barbecue: another metal sheet to cover the meat and the coals was sufficient.

Near the grill, nestled amongst the branches of the mulberry tree, there was a portable radio, battery operated, always tuned in to LT26 Radio Nuevo Mundo. They played folk songs and a brief news bulletin each hour. The season of wildfires hadn't yet begun in the El Palmar National Park, which was around thirty miles away and burned every summer, setting off alarms in every fire station in the region. Besides some road accident or other, always some young man leaving a dance, little to nothing happened at the weekends. There was no football in the afternoons either, because the night championship had already begun, due to the heat.

Early that morning a gust of wind that shook the roof of the house had woken me. I stretched out in the bed and touched something that made me sit up suddenly, with my heart in my mouth. The mattress was wet and something slimy and warm moved against my legs. My head was still full of sleep, and it took me a few seconds to compose the scene: my cat had given birth at the foot of my bed again. In the flashes of lightning that came in through the window, I saw her curled up with her yellow eyes. I bunched up into a ball, hugging my knees, so I wouldn't touch the kittens again.

In the bed across from me, my sister was sleeping. The blue bolts of lightning illuminated her face, her eyes half-open, the way she always slept, like a rabbit, her chest rising and falling, unaware of the storm and the rain that had borne everything away. Watching her, I fell asleep too.

nacimiento sólo quedaba una mancha amarillenta con bordes oscuros en un extremo de la sábana.

Salí al patio y le conté a mi padre que la gata había parido pero que ahora no la encontraba ni a ella ni a sus cachorros. Estaba sentado a la sombra de la morera, alejado de la parrilla pero cerca como para vigilar el asado. En el piso tenía el vaso de acero inoxidable que siempre usaba, con vino y hielo. El vaso transpiraba.

Los habrá escondido en el galponcito, dijo.

Miré en esa dirección, pero no me decidí a averiguar. En el galponcito, una perra loca que teníamos había enterrado una vez a sus crías. A una le había arrancado la cabeza.

La copa de la morera era un cielo verde con los destellos dorados del sol que se colaba entre las hojas. En algunas semanas estaría llena de frutos, las moscas se amontonarían zumbando, el lugar se llenaría de ese olor agrio y dulzón de las moras pasadas, nadie tendría ganas de sentarse a su sombra por un tiempo. Pero estaba hermosa esa mañana. Sólo había que cuidarse de las gatas peludas, verdes y brillantes como guirnaldas navideñas, que a veces se desprendían de las hojas por su propio peso y allí donde tocaban la piel, quemaban con sus chispazos ácidos.

Entonces dieron la noticia por la radio. No estaba prestando atención, sin embargo la oí tan claramente.

Esa misma madrugada en San José, un pueblo a 20 kilómetros, habían asesinado a una adolescente, en su cama, mientras dormía.

Mi padre y yo seguimos en silencio.

Allí parada vi cómo se levantaba de la silla y acomodaba las brasas con un fierro, las emparejaba, golpeaba rompiendo las más grandes, la cara se le cubría de gotitas por el calor del fuego, la carne recién puesta chillaba suavemente. Pasó un vecino y pegó un grito. Él giró la cabeza, todavía inclinado sobre la parrilla, y levantó la mano libre. Ai voy, gritó. Y empezó a desarmar con el mismo fierro la cama de brasas, las corrió hacia un extremo de la chapa, más cerca de donde ardían los troncos de ñandubay, dejó apenas unas pocas, calculando que alcanzaran para mantener la parrilla caliente hasta que él regresara. Ai voy era pegarse una disparada hasta el bar de la esquina a tomarse unas copas. Se calzó las ojotas que andaban perdidas en el pasto y mientras se fue poniendo la camisa que descolgó de una rama de la morera.

When I woke only my father had risen. My mother and my siblings were still sleeping. The cat and her kittens weren't in the bed. Of the birth, all that remained was a yellowish stain with dark borders on one edge of the sheet.

I went out to the patio and told my father that the cat had given birth but that I couldn't find her or the kittens. He was sitting in the shade of the mulberry tree, at some distance from the grill but close enough to keep watch. On the ground he had the stainless steel cup that he always used, full of wine and ice. The cup was sweating.

She'll have hidden them in the little shed, he said.

I looked over in that direction, but I couldn't make up my mind to go and check. In the little shed, a mad dog we used to have had once buried its young. She had ripped the head off one of them.

The crown of the mulberry tree was a green sky with golden sparkles of sunlight filtering through the leaves. In a few weeks it would be covered in fruit, the buzzing flies would multiply, the place would fill with that bitter, sickly-sweet smell of rotten mulberries, and no one would feel like sitting in its shade for a time. But it was beautiful that morning. You just had to watch out for the caterpillars, green and shiny like Christmas wreaths, which sometimes fell from the leaves due to their own weight. Wherever they touched your skin, they burned you with their caustic sparks.

Then the news came over the radio. I wasn't paying attention, but nonetheless I heard it very clearly.

Early that same morning in San José, a town twelve miles away, an adolescent girl had been killed, in her bed, while she was sleeping.

My father and I went silent.

Standing there I saw how he got up from the chair and raked the coals over with a poker, leveling them, then striking and breaking up the biggest ones, beads of sweat covering his face from the heat of the fire, while the meat, thrown-on just recently, sizzled gently. A neighbor passed by and called out. My father turned his head, still bent over the grill, and raised his free hand. On my way, he yelled. And he began to break up the bed of coals with the same poker, he swept them over to the edge of the metal sheet, closer to where the logs of Ñandubay wood were

Si ves que se apaga, arrimale unas brasas más que ya vengo, me dijo y salió a la calle chancleteando rapidito, como esos chicos que ven pasar al heladero.

Me senté en su silla y agarré el vaso que había dejado. El metal estaba helado. Un pedazo de hielo flotaba en la borra del vino. Lo pesqué con dos dedos y empecé a chuparlo. Al principio tenía un lejano gusto a alcohol, pero enseguida solo agua.

Cuando apenas quedaba un pedacito, lo hice crujir entre mis muelas. Apoyé la palma sobre el muslo que asomaba en el borde del short. Me sobresaltó sentirla helada. Como la mano de un muerto, pensé. Aunque nunca había tocado a uno.

Yo tenía trece años y esa mañana, la noticia de la chica muerta, me llegó como una revelación. Mi casa, la casa de cualquier adolescente, no era el lugar más seguro del mundo. Adentro de tu casa podían matarte. El horror podía vivir bajo el mismo techo que vos.

En los días siguientes supe más detalles. La chica se llamaba Andrea Danne, tenía diecinueve años, era rubia, linda, de ojos claros, estaba de novia y estudiaba el profesorado de psicología. La asesinaron de una puñalada en el corazón.

Durante más de veinte años Andrea estuvo cerca. Volvía cada tanto con la noticia de otra mujer muerta. Los nombres que, en cuentagotas, llegaban a la primera plana de los diarios de circulación nacional se iban sumando: María Soledad Mora- les, Gladys Mc Donald, Elena Arreche, Adriana y Cecilia Barreda, Liliana Tallarico, Ana Fuschini, Sandra Reitier, Carolina Aló, Natalia Melman, Fabiana Gandiaga, María Marta García Belsunce, Marela Martínez, Paulina Lebbos, Nora Dalmasso, Rosana Galliano. Cada una de ellas me hacía pen- sar en Andrea y su asesinato impune.

Un verano, pasando unos días en el Chaco, al noreste del país, me topé con un recuadro en un diario local. El título decía: A veinticinco años del crimen de María Luisa Quevedo. Una chica de quince años asesinada el 8 de diciembre de 1983, en la ciudad de Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña. María Luisa había estado desaparecida por unos días y, finalmente, su cuerpo violado y estrangulado había aparecido en un baldío, en las afueras de la ciudad. Nadie fue procesado por este asesinato.

burning. He only left behind a few of them, figuring that they would suffice to keep the grill hot until he returned. On my way meant rushing off to the bar on the corner for a few drinks. He put on the sandals that had been left somewhere in the grass and at the same time began putting on a shirt that he unhooked from a branch of the mulberry tree.

If you see the fire going out, rake over some more coals and I'll be right back, he told me. Then he went out into the street, trotting along quickly in his sandals, like a kid who has just seen the ice cream truck pass by.

I sat down in his chair and picked up the cup he had left. The metal was freezing. A chunk of ice floated in the sediment of the wine. I fished it out with two fingers and began to suck on it. At first it had a faint taste of alcohol, but then it was just water.

When there was barely a tiny chunk left, I crushed it between my teeth. I rested my palm on the thigh that peeped out of the end of my shorts. I was surprised to feel it so frozen. Like a dead person's hand, I thought. But I had never touched a dead person.

I was thirteen years old and that morning, the news of the dead girl came over me like a revelation. My house, the house of any teenage girl, was not the safest place in the world. Inside your own house you could be killed. Horror could live under the same roof as you.

Over the following days I learnt more details. The girl was called Andrea Danne, and she was nineteen years old. She was blonde, beautiful, with blue eyes, she was dating and she was studying to be a psychology teacher. She died from a stab wound through the heart.

For more than twenty years Andrea was nearby. She returned every now and again with the news of another dead woman. The names that filtered out slowly, appearing on the front page of the nationally circulated newspapers began to grow: María Soledad Morales, Gladys McDonald, Elena Arreche, Adriana y Cecilia Barreda, Liliana Tallarico, Ana Fuschini, Sandra Reitier, Carolina Aló, Natalia

Al poco tiempo también tuve noticia de Sarita Mundín, una muchacha de veinte años, desparecida el 12 de marzo de 1988, cuyos restos aparecieron el 29 de diciembre de ese año, a orillas del río Tcalamochita, en la ciudad de Villa Nueva, en la provincia de Córdoba. Otro caso sin resolver.

Tres adolescentes de provincia asesinadas en los años ochenta, tres muertes impunes ocurridas cuando todavía, en nuestro país, desconocíamos el término femicidio. Aquella mañana yo también desconocía el nombre de María Luisa, que había sido asesinada dos años antes, y el nombre de Sarita Mundín, que aún estaba viva, ajena a lo que le ocurriría dos años después.

No sabía que a una mujer podían matarla por el solo hecho de ser mujer, pero había escuchado historias que, con el tiempo, fui hilvanando. Anécdotas que no habían terminado en la muerte de la mujer, pero que sí habían hecho de ella objeto de la misoginia, del abuso, del desprecio.

Las había oído de boca de mi madre. Una sobre todo me había quedado grabada. Pasó cuando mi mamá era muy jovencita. No recordaba el nombre de la chica porque no la conocía. Sí que era una muchacha que vivía en La Clarita, una colonia cerca de Villa Elisa. Estaba a punto de casarse y una modista de mi pueblo le estaba haciendo el vestido de novia. Había venido a tomarse las medidas y a hacerse un par de pruebas siempre acompañada por su madre, en el auto de la familia. A la última prueba vino sola, nadie podía traerla así que se tomó un colectivo. No estaba acostumbrada a andar sola, se confundió de dirección y cuando se quiso acordar estaba yendo por el camino que va al cementerio. Un camino que a ciertas horas se tornaba solitario. Cuando vio venir un coche, pensó que lo mejor era preguntar antes de seguir dando vueltas, perdida. Adentro del vehículo iban cuatro hombres y se la llevaron. Estuvo secuestrada varios días, desnuda, atada y amordazada en un lugar que parecía abandonado. Apenas le daban de comer y de beber para mantenerla viva. La violaban cada vez que tenían ganas. La muchacha sólo esperaba morirse. Todo lo que podía ver por una pequeña ventana, era cielo y campo. Una noche escuchó que los hombres se marchaban en el auto. Juntó valor, logró desatarse y escapar por la ventanita. Corrió a campo traviesa hasta que encontró una casa habitada. Allí la auxiliaron. Nunca pudo reconocer el sitio donde la tuvieron cautiva ni a sus captores. Unos meses después se casó con su novio.

Melman, Fabiana Gandiaga, María Marta García Besunce, Marela Martínez, Paulina Lebbos, Nora Dalmasso, Rosana Galliano. Each one of them made me think of Andrea and her unpunished murder.

One summer, while spending a few days in the Chaco region, in the northeast of the country, I came across a story in a local newspaper. The headline read: The crime of María Luisa Queveda twenty-five years on. A fifteen-year-old girl murdered on December 8, 1983, in the city of Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña. María Luisa had been missing for a few days and, finally, her raped and strangled body had appeared in a vacant lot, in the outskirts of the city. Nobody was charged for this murder.

Shortly after this I also heard about Sarita Mundín, a twenty-year-old girl, missing since March 12, 1988, whose remains appeared on December 29 of that year, on the banks of the river Tcalamochita, in the city of Villa Nueva, in the province of Córdoba. Another unsolved case.

Three adolescent girls from the provinces murdered in the eighties, three unpunished deaths that occurred at a time when still, in our country, we had never heard of the term "femicide." That morning I had never heard María Luisa's name before either, the girl who had been murdered two years earlier, nor the name Sarita Mundín, although she was still alive, but unaware of what would happen to her two years later.

I didn't know that a woman could be killed just for the fact of being a woman, but I had heard stories that, over time, I managed to piece together. Anecdotes that hadn't ended with the death of a woman, but which had made her the object of misogyny, abuse, and disdain.

I had heard these stories from my mother's mouth. One in particular stuck in my mind. It happened when my mother was very young. She couldn't recall the girl's name because she didn't know her. She did know that she was a girl who lived in La Clarita, a housing estate near Villa Elisa. She was about to be married and a dressmaker from my town was making her wedding dress. The girl had come to town to have her measurements taken and for a couple of fittings, always accompanied by her mother, in the family car. For the final fitting she came alone; no one could take her, so she caught a bus. She wasn't used

Otra de las historias había ocurrido hacía poco, unos dos o tres años antes.

Tres muchachos fueron a un baile un sábado. Uno estaba enamorado de una chica, hija de una familia tradicional de Villa Elisa. Ella le daba calce y no le daba. Él la buscaba, ella se dejaba encontrar y después se escurría. Este jueguito del gato y el ratón llevaba varios meses. La noche del baile, no fue distinta a otras. Bailaron, tomaron una copa, hablaron pavadas y ella volvió a darle el esquinazo. Él buscó consuelo en la cantina donde sus dos amigos hacía rato que empinaban el codo. De ellos fue la idea. Por qué no la esperaban a la salida del baile y le enseñaban cuántos pares son tres botas. Al enamorado le volvió la sobriedad apenas escucharlos. Estaban locos, qué mierda decían, mejor se iba a dormir. Cosas de mamados.

Pero ellos hablaban en serio. A esas calientabra- guetas habría que enseñarles. Ellos también se fueron antes. Y la esperaron en un baldío, al lado de su casa. Sí o sí, la muchacha debía pasar por allí.

Ella se fue del baile con una amiga. Vivían a una cuadra de distancia una de la otra. La amiga se quedó primera, ella siguió, tranquila, el mismo camino que todas las noches de baile, en un pueblo donde nunca pasaba nada. La interceptaron en la oscuridad, la golpearon, le entraron los dos, cada uno a su turno, varias veces. Y cuando hasta las vergas se asquearon, la siguieron violando con una botella.

2.

Desde la mañana temprano, el sol calentaba las chapas del techo de la casa de los Quevedo, en el barrio Monseñor de Carlo, de la ciudad de Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña, Chaco. Los primeros días de diciembre preludiaban el álgido verano chaqueño, con temperaturas de 40 grados, habituales en esa zona del país. En el sopor de su pieza, María Luisa abrió los ojos y se incorporó en la cama, lista para levantarse y salir a su trabajo en lo de la familia Casucho. Hacía poco que trabajaba allí, de mucama.

Para vestirse, eligió prendas frescas pero bonitas. Le gustaba andar arreglada en la calle, aunque, para trabajar, usara ropa de fajina, una remerita y una pollera viejas, desteñidas por el sol y las salpicaduras de lavandina. De su ropero de muchacha pobre eligió una musculosa y una falda de bambula, adornada con un cintito de

to travelling alone and she got the address mixed up. While she was trying to remember the way she walked along the path that lead to the cemetery. A path that at certain times becomes lonely. When she saw a car approach, she thought that the best thing to do was ask, instead of going around in circles, lost. There were four men inside the vehicle and they picked her up. She was kidnapped for several days, stripped naked, bound and gagged in a place that appeared to be abandoned. They fed her and gave her barely enough water to keep her alive. They raped her any time they felt like it. The girl hoped only to die. All that she could see through a small window was sky and open countryside. One night she heard the men leaving in the car. She gathered all her courage, managed to untie herself and then escaped through the little window. She ran cross-country until she found an inhabited house. There they helped her. She was never able to identify her captors, or the place where they had held her captive. A few months later she married her boyfriend.

Another of these stories had taken place not long ago, some two or three years earlier.

Three young men went to a dance one Saturday. One of them was in love with a girl, the daughter of a traditional family from Villa Elisa. She led him on and then she shut him down. He went after her, she let him get close, and then she slipped away. This little game of cat and mouse had been going on for several months. The night of the dance was no different to the other nights. They danced, they had a drink, they made small talk, and then she gave him the slip again. He searched for solace in the cantina where for a while now his two friends had been propping up the bar. It was their idea. Why not wait for her on the way out of the dance and show her what's what. Lover-boy sobered up just hearing them speak. They were crazy, what the fuck were they saying, he was better off going to bed. It was drunken bullshit.

But they were serious. You had to teach these cock-teasers a lesson. They also left the dance early. They waited for her in a vacant lot, next to her house. No matter what, the girl had to pass by there.

The girl left the dance with a friend. They lived a block apart from each other. They arrived at her friend's house first: the girl continued on, calm, taking the same path she took every night there was a dance, in a town where nothing ever happened. They intercepted her in the darkness. They beat her, and they both

cuero que se ajustaba rodeando la cintura. Se lavó la cara, se peinó los cabellos, ni largos ni cortos, lacios y oscuros. Agitó el tubito de desodorante en aerosol y luego de aplicarlo en las axilas, lo roció por el resto del cuerpo. Apareció en la cocina, flotando en esa nube perfumada y dulzona. Tomó los tres o cuatro mates que le cebó su madre y luego salió de la casa.

Había cumplido los quince hacía poco, el 19 de octubre que, ese año, había coincidido con el día de la madre. Era una chica menudita que todavía no había terminado de echar cuerpo. Tenía quince, pero parecía de doce.

La casa de los Casucho quedaba en el centro de la ciudad de Sáenz Peña y María Luisa hacía el trayecto, unas veinte cuadras, a pie. Esa mañana, 8 de diciembre, era el día de la Virgen, un feriado a medias, pues algunos comercios abrían normalmente. Pero la ciudad andaba a media máquina, así que se habrá cruzado con poca gente.

Estaba contenta porque era su primer trabajo. Entraba temprano, a eso de las siete, y se retiraba a las tres de la tarde, luego de lavar los platos del almuerzo. Si ese día pensaba quedarse por ahí, aprovechando el feriado, no se lo confió a su madre, Ángela Cabral, que, al ver que atardecía y María Luisa, la Chiqui como le decían en la familia, no regresaba del trabajo, empezó a preocuparse.

Desde que se había separado de su esposo y padre de sus seis hijos, Ángela vivía con las dos más chicas y con Yogui, el varón soltero de veintisiete años. Él era el hombre de la casa y fue a él a quién primero recurrió su madre.

Aprovechando la tarde libre, Yogui estaba en una pileta pública con unos amigos. Allí lo fue a buscar un primo para decirle que Ángela estaba llorando porque la Chiqui no había vuelto a la casa luego del trabajo.

El primer lugar donde la buscó Yogui fue en la casa de su padre, Oscar Quevedo, que vivía con su nueva mujer, una boliviana con la que los hijos no se llevaban bien. Pero María Luisa no había pasado por allí. A partir de entonces, la búsqueda fue intensa y, a medida que pasaban las horas, cada vez más desesperada.

Ni testigos ni la investigación policial pudieron determinar nunca qué pasó ni dónde estuvo la chica entre las tres de la tarde que salió de su trabajo, el jueves 8 de diciembre de 1983, y la mañana del domingo 11 cuando hallaron su cadáver.

penetrated her, taking turns, several times. And even after their dicks had grown sick of it, they kept raping her with a bottle.

2.

Since early that morning, the sun had been beating down on the metal sheets on the roof the Quevedo family's house, in the Monseñor de Carlo neighborhood, in the city of Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña, Chaco. The first days of September prefigured the high point of the summer to come in the Chaco, with temperatures of a hundred degrees, normal in that part of the country. In the somnolence of her bedroom, María Luisa opened her eyes and sat up in bed, ready to get up and go to work at the Casucho family's house. She had been working there for a short time, as a maid.

For her outfit, she chose light but beautiful garments. She liked to be well dressed when she went around in the streets, but on the job she wore work clothes: a little T-shirt and an old skirt that had been discolored by the sun and splashes of bleach. From her poor girl's wardrobe she chose a tank top and a seersucker skirt, adorned with a little leather belt that she tightened around her waist. She washed her face and combed her hair, which was neither long nor short, but straight and dark. She shook the can of deodorant and after applying it to her armpits, she sprayed it lightly over the rest of her body. She appeared in the kitchen, floating in a sickly-sweet perfume cloud. She drank the two or three servings of yerba maté that her mother prepared for her and then left the house.

She had turned fifteen not long ago, on October 19, which that year had coincided with Mother's Day. She was a slight little girl who hadn't yet finished growing into her body. She was fifteen, but she looked twelve.

The Casucho's house was in the city center of Sáenz Peña and María Luisa made the journey of about twenty blocks on foot. That morning, December 8, was the feast of the Virgin, a kind of half-holiday, since some businesses opened as usual. But the city was operating at half-pace, and so she didn't come across many people.

Sólo Norma Romero y Elena Taborda, dos amigas recientes de María Luisa, declararon que la vieron a la salida del trabajo, caminaron juntas un par de cuadras, pero luego se separaron.

La búsqueda por parte de la policía apenas había comenzado cuando, la mañana del domingo 11 de diciembre, sonó el teléfono de la Comisaría Primera. Alguien, del otro lado, denunciaba que había un cuerpo en un baldío entre las calles 51 y 28, en la periferia de la ciudad. De estos terrenos, ahora abandonados, en una época se había extraído tierra para fabricar ladrillos y había quedado una excavación de poca profundidad y grandes dimensiones que, cuando llovía, se llenaba de agua, formando una laguna que en la zona llaman represa. En esta represita con poca agua, abandonaron el cuerpo de la chica. La habían ahorcado con el mismo cinto de cuero que se había puesto la mañana que salió de su casa al trabajo.

Ese domingo, en Buenos Aires, a 1107 kilómetros, a esa hora recién se apagaban los ecos de las fiestas populares por la asunción de Raúl Alfonsín, el primer presidente constitucional de los argentinos después de siete años de dictadura. Los últimos en abandonar la fiesta cabeceaban en las paradas de colectivos, que pasaban de largo, cargados hasta el estribo.

En Sáenz Peña, todos habían estado pendientes de la televisión que durante el sábado había transmitido en directo, por Cadena Nacional, los actos y festejos que habían comenzado a las ocho de la mañana. Hacia la nochecita también habían salido a festejar a la plaza San Martín, la principal. Los que tenían auto habían armado una caravana por el centro, con banderitas argentinas flameando en las antenas, bocinazos, y medio cuerpo afuera de las ventanillas, agitando los brazos y cantando. Aunque el gobernador electo del Chaco, Florencio Tenev, era del opositor partido peronista y el flamante presidente era del partido radical, la vuelta de la democracia era más importante que el color político y nadie quería quedarse afuera de la fiesta.

Mientras todos celebraban, los Quevedo seguían buscando a María Luisa.

She was happy because it was her first job. She started early, at about seven, and she finished up at three in the afternoon, after washing the dishes from lunch.

If that day she had planned to stay there in the city, making the most of the holiday, she never told her mother, Ángela Cabral, who began to worry when she saw that the sun was setting and that María Luisa, or La Chiqui as they called her in the family, hadn't returned from work.

Ever since she had separated from her husband and the father of her six children, Ángela lived with the two youngest girls and with Yogui, her unmarried twenty-seven year old son. He was the man of the house and it was to him that her mother first turned.

Making the most of the afternoon off, Yogui was at the public pool with some friends. A cousin went to find him and tell him that Ángela was in tears because La Chiqui hadn't come home from work.

The first place Yogui looked for her was at the place where their father, Oscar Quevedo, lived with his new wife, a Bolivian woman with whom the children did not get along. But María Luisa hadn't gone by there. From that moment, the search was intense, and as the hours went by, ever more desperate.

Neither witnesses nor the police investigation were ever able to determine what happened, nor where the girl had been between three o'clock in the afternoon when she finished work, on Thursday, December 8, 1983, and the morning of Sunday, December 11, when they found her body.

Only two of María Luisa's new friends gave statements: Norma Romero and Elena Taborda declared that they saw her leave work, that they walked together for a few blocks, and then they went their separate ways.

The police search had barely begun when, on the morning of the 11th of December, the telephone rang at the First Precinct. Someone on the other end of the line reported that there was a body in a vacant lot between Fifty-first and Twenty-eigth Streets, on the outskirts of the city. In these plots, now abandoned, they had at one time extracted earth to make bricks. This had left behind a shallow but vast excavation that filled with water when it rained, forming a lagoon that in the neighborhood they called a reservoir. In this little reservoir, without much water, the girl's body had been dumped. She had been hanged with the same leather belt she had put on the morning she left her house

El último día que vieron con vida a Sarita Mundín, el 12 de marzo de 1988, también fue bastante habitual para la muchacha. Había estado algunas semanas fuera de Villa María, en la ciudad de Córdoba, cuidando a su madre en el hospital. De vuelta se la había traído al departamentito de calle San Martín, donde vivía con Germán, su hijito de cuatro años y Mirta, su hermana de catorce, embarazada. La madre estaba recién operada y necesitaba cuidados. Para las hermanas Mundín sería más fácil atenderla si vivían en el mismo lugar. Se acomodaron como pudieron, el departamento era muy pequeño.

Cuando su amante, Dady Olivero, la ayudó a alquilarlo estaba pensado para que lo habitaran sólo ella y Germán y para que Dady pudiera visitarla con comodidad, sin la indiscreción de los muebles de la ciudad, peligrosos para un hombre casado y empresario reconocido. Olivero y su familia eran dueños del frigorífico El Mangrullo.

Entre los días que había pasado en Córdoba y la presencia de la madre en el departamento, hacía un tiempo que Sarita y Dady no se encontraban.

Ese día él le avisó que pasaría a buscarla con su auto para ir a un lugar donde pudieran estar solos y tranquilos.

Ella no tenía ganas de salir con él. La relación con el hombre, más de diez años mayor y con familia, se había ido apagando. Al parecer, en Córdoba, había conocido a un muchacho y estaba entusiasmada. Sin embargo, esa tarde cuando él pasó a buscarla, pese a sus pocas ganas, Sarita agarró una toalla —irían al río—, una carterita y bajó el primer piso por escalera, yendo a su encuentro.

No se había preparado como hacía antes, cuando la relación todavía era prometedora y se presentaba como una posibilidad de cambiar de vida. Bajó vestida con una pollera larga, una remerita y unas ojotas. Arreglada o no, Sarita era una mujer hermosa: delgada, con el cabello castaño, cortado en una melenita ondulada, el cutis pálido, los ojos verdes.

Mirta y Germán la acompañaron hasta la vereda. El nene, cuando vio que la madre encaraba para el auto, estacionado en el cordón, quiso ir con ella. Pero, desde adentro, el conductor le dijo que no con tal seriedad que el niño se refugió en las polleras de su tía haciendo pucheros. Sarita volvió, lo besó y le prometió que le traería un regalo a la vuelta.

for work.

That Sunday, in Buenos Aires, 688 miles away, at that same time, the last echoes of the street parties for the inauguration of Raúl Alfonsín were beginning to die down. He was the first democratically elected president of Argentina after seven years of dictatorship. The last ones to leave the party nodded off at bus stops while the buses sped by, full to bursting.

In Sáenz Peña, everyone had been absorbed in their televisions. Throughout the whole of Saturday, the ceremonies and festivities that had begun at eight in the morning had been broadcast live on the National Channel. Towards the evening they too had gone out to celebrate in Plaza San Martín, the main square in town. Those who had cars had made a convoy through the city-center, with little Argentinian flags flying from the antennas, honking their horns, their bodies hanging out the windows while they waved their arms and sang. Although the elected governor of Chaco, Florencio Tenev, was from the opposing Peronist party and the brand-new President was from the radical party, the return to democracy was more important than partisan politics, and nobody wanted to miss out on the party.

While everyone else celebrated, the Quevedo family kept searching for María Luisa.

The last day that Sarita Mundín was seen alive, March 12 1988, was also just a routine day for her. She had been away from Villa María for a few weeks, in the city of Córdoba, looking after her mother in the hospital. Upon returning she had brought her mother along to the little apartment on San Martín street, where she lived with Germán, her little boy of four years and Mirta, her fourteen year-old sister, who was pregnant. Sarita's mother had recently had an operation and required care. For the Mundín sisters it would be easier to look after her if they all lived in the same place. They settled themselves in as best as they could, as the apartment was very small.

When her lover, Dady Olivero, agreed to help her with the rent, he was

Pero nunca más regresó de ese paseo.

Estuvo perdida casi un año. A fines de diciembre, el tambero Ubaldo Pérez encontró restos de un esqueleto humano, enganchados en las ramas de un árbol, a orillas del río Tcalamochita, que separa la ciudad de Villa María de la de Villa Nueva. Estaban en las inmediaciones de un paraje conocido como La Herradura, del lado de Villa Nueva. Por el estado de los restos, huesos pelados, es probable que haya sido asesinada el mismo día que salió con su amante, aunque nunca se pudo determinar de qué manera.

Cuando empecé la facultad me fui a vivir con una amiga a Paraná, la capital de la provincia, a 200 kilómetros de mi pueblo. Teníamos poca plata, vivíamos en una pensión, bastante ajustadas. Para ahorrar, empezamos a irnos a dedo, los fines de semana cuando queríamos visitar a nuestras familias. Al principio siempre buscábamos algún chico conocido nuestro, también estudiante, que nos acompañara. Después nos dimos cuenta de que nos llevaban más rápido si éramos sólo chicas. De a dos o de a tres, sentíamos que no había peligro. Y en algún momento, cuando ganamos confianza, cada una empezó a viajar sola si no conseguía compañera. A veces, por lo exámenes, no coincidían nuestras visitas al pueblo. Nos subíamos a autos, a camiones, a camionetas. No subíamos si había más de un hombre adentro del vehículo, pero excepto eso no teníamos muchos miramientos.

En cinco años fui y vine cientos de veces sin pagar boleto. Hacer dedo era la manera más barata de trasladarse y a veces hasta era interesante. Se conocía gente. Se charlaba. Se escuchaba, la mayoría de las veces: sobre todo los camioneros, cansados de la soledad de su trabajo, nos confiaban sus vidas enteras mientras les cebábamos mate.

De vez en cuando había algún episodio incómodo. Una vez un camionero mendocino mientras me contaba sus cuitas me dijo que había algunas estudiantes que se acostaban con él para hacerse unos pesos, que a él no le parecía mal, que así se pagaban los estudios y ayudaban a los padres. La cosa

thinking that only she and Germán would live there, so that Dady could visit her in comfort, without the indiscretion of the love motels in the city, which were dangerous for a married man and notable businessman. Olivero and his family were the owners of the El Mangrullo meat processing plant.

Between the days she had spent in Córdoba and the presence of the mother in the apartment, it had been a while since Sarita and Dady had met up.

That day he let her know that he was coming by to pick her up in his car so they could go somewhere where they could be alone in peace.

She didn't feel like going out with him. Her relationship with Dady, who was more than ten years older than her, and who had a family, had begun to dwindle. In Córdoba, it seems, she had met a new guy and she was excited about him. However, that afternoon when Olivero came by to get her, despite not feeling like it, Sarita grabbed a towel—they were going to the river—and a purse and went down the stairs to meet him.

She hadn't dressed herself up like before, when the relationship was still promising and presented itself as a life-changing opportunity. She came down dressed in a long skirt, a small T-shirt and some sandals. Done up or not, Sarita was a beautiful woman: slender, with brown hair styled in long waves, pale skin, green eyes.

Mirta and Germán accompanied her to the sidewalk. When he saw his mother heading towards the car, the little boy wanted to go with her. But, from inside, the driver told him no in such a stern tone that he hid behind his aunt's skirts and pouted. Sarita turned around, kissed him and promised that she'd bring him a present upon her return.

She never came back from that trip.

She was missing for nearly a year. Towards the end of December, a dairy farmer named Ubaldo Pérez found the remains of a human skeleton, caught in the branches of a tree, on the shores of the Tcalamochita River, which separates the cities of Villa María and Villa Nueva. They were in the surrounds of an area known as La Herradura, on the Villa Nueva side. Given the state of the remains, bare bones, it's probable that she was murdered the same day she went out with her lover, although it could never be determined exactly how she died.

no pasó de esa insinuación, pero los kilómetros que faltaban para bajarme me sentí bastante inquieta. Cada vez que me subía a un auto lo primero que miraba era dónde estaba la traba de la puerta. Creo que ese día me corrí hasta pegarme a la ventanilla y directamente me agarré a la manija de la puerta por si debía pegar un salto. Otra vez un tipo joven, en un coche caro y que manejaba a gran velocidad, me dijo que era ginecólogo y empezó a hablarme de los controles que una mujer debía hacerse periódicamente, de la importancia de detectar tumores, de pescar el cáncer a tiempo. Me preguntó si yo me controlaba. Le dije que sí, claro, todos los años, aunque no era verdad. Y mientras siguió hablando y manejando estiró un brazo y empezó a toquetearme las tetas. Me quedé dura, el cinturón de seguridad atravesándome el pecho. Sin apartar la vista de la ruta, el tipo me dijo: vos sola podés detectar cualquier bultito sospechoso que tengas, tocándote así, ves.

Sin embargo, una sola vez sentí que realmen- te estábamos en peligro. Veníamos con una amiga desde Villa Elisa a Paraná, un domingo a la tarde. No había sido un buen viaje, nos habían ido llevando de a tramos. Subimos y bajamos de autos y camiones varias veces. El último nos había dejado en un cruce de caminos, cerca de Viale, a unos 60 kilómetros de Paraná. Estaba atardeciendo y no andaba un alma en la ruta. Al fin vimos un coche acercándose. Era un auto anaranjado, ni viejo ni nuevo. Le hicimos seña y el conductor se echó sobre la banquina. Corrimos unos metros hasta alcanzarlo. Iba a Paraná, así que subimos, mi amiga junto al hombre que conducía, un tipo de unos sesenta años; yo en el asiento de atrás. Los primeros kilómetros hablamos de lo mismo de siempre: el clima, de dónde éramos, lo que estudiábamos. El hombre nos contó que volvía de unos campos que tenía en la zona. Desde atrás no escuchaba muy bien y como vi que mi amiga manejaba la conversación, me recosté en el asiento y me puse a mirar por la ventanilla. No sé cuánto tiempo pasó hasta que me di cuenta de que sucedía algo raro. El tipo apartaba la vista del camino e inclinaba la cabeza para hablarle a mi amiga, estaba más risueño. Me incorporé un poco. Entonces vi su mano palmeando la rodilla de ella, la misma mano subiendo y acariciándole el brazo. Empecé a hablar de cualquier cosa: del estado de la ruta, de los exámenes que teníamos esa semana. Pero el tipo no me prestó atención. Seguía hablándole a ella, invitándola a tomar algo cuando

When I started university I went to live with a friend in Paraná, the capital of the province, about 125 miles away from my hometown. Neither of us had much money; even living in a boarding house we could barely get by. To save money, we began hitchhiking on the weekends when we wanted to visit our families. In the beginning we always asked around for a guy we knew, another student, who could travel with us. Then we realized that we'd be picked up quicker if it were just us, just girls. Travelling in twos or threes, we didn't feel there was any danger. And eventually, after we had grown in confidence, we each began to go by ourselves if we couldn't find a companion. Sometimes, because of exams, our visits to the town didn't coincide. We got into cars, trucks, pickups. We wouldn't get in if there were more than one man inside the vehicle, but apart from that, we didn't have many rules.

In five years I went back and forth from my hometown hundreds of times without paying for a ticket. Hitchhiking was the cheapest way to get around and sometimes it was even interesting. You met people. You chatted. You listened, most of the time: above all it was the truck drivers, tired of the loneliness of their jobs, who would tell their life stories to us while we prepared yerba maté for them.

From time to time there would be an uncomfortable episode. Once while a truck driver from Mendoza recounted his troubles, he told me that there had been some students in the past who slept with him to make a few pesos. That didn't seem like such a bad thing to him, because that way they could pay for their studies and help out their parents. It went no further than insinuation, but for the remainder of the journey I was very nervous. The first thing I did whenever I got in a car was to make sure I could see the lock on the door. That day I think I shuffled all the way over to the window and held directly on to the door handle in case I needed to make a jump for it. Another time a young guy in an expensive car who was speeding along the highway told me he was a gynecologist. Then he started telling me about all the tests that a woman should have done periodically, about the importance of detecting tumors, of catching cancer in time. He asked me if I had my tests done. I told him yes, of course,

llegáramos. Ella no perdía la calma ni la sonrisa, pero yo sabía que en el fondo estaba tan asustada como yo. Que no, gracias, tengo novio. Y a mí qué me importa, yo no soy celoso. Tu novio debe ser un pendejo, qué puede enseñarte de la vida. Un tipo maduro como yo es lo que necesita una pendejita como vos. Protección. Solvencia económica. Experiencia. Las frases me llegaban entrecortadas. Afuera ya era de noche y no se veían ni los campos al borde de la ruta. Miré para todos lados: todo negro. Cuando me topé con las armas acostadas en la luneta del auto, atrás de mi asiento, se me heló la sangre. Eran dos armas largas, escopetas o algo así. Mi amiga seguía rechazando con amabilidad y compostura todas las invitaciones que él insistía en hacerle, esquivando los manotazos del hombre que quería agarrarle la muñeca. Yo seguía hablando sin parar, aunque nadie me prestara atención. Hablar, hablar y hablar, yo que no hablo nunca, un acto de desesperación infinita.

Entonces lo mismo que me había helado la sangre, me la devolvió al cuerpo. Yo estaba más cerca que él de las armas. Aunque nunca había disparado una.

Por fin las luces de la entrada a la ciudad. La YPF adonde paraba el rojo que nos llevaba al centro. Le pedimos que nos bajara allí. El tipo sonrió con desprecio, se corrió del camino y estacionó: sí, mejor bájense, boluditas de mierda.

Nos bajamos y caminamos hasta la parada del colectivo. El auto anaranjado arrancó y se fue. Cuando estuvo lejos, tiramos los bolsos al piso, nos abrazamos y nos largamos a llorar.

Tal vez María Luisa y Sarita llegaron a sentirse perdidas, momentos antes de su muerte. Pero Andrea Danne estaba dormida cuando la apuñalaron, el 16 de noviembre de 1986.

Ese sábado había sido parecido a otros sábados desde hacía un año y medio, cuando se puso de novia con Eduardo. Había terminado bastante más temprano, sin ir a un baile ni a un motel como otras veces. El lunes siguiente Andrea tendría su primer examen final en el profesorado de psicología que había comenzado a cursar ese año. Estaba nerviosa, insegura, y prefirió acostarse temprano y estudiar un rato en la cama en vez de salir con su novio.

every year, although that wasn't true. And while he kept talking and driving he stretched out an arm and began to grope my breasts. I froze completely, the seatbelt across my chest pinning me to the seat. Without taking his eyes off the road, the guy told me: You can detect any little suspicious lump that you might have, by touching yourself like this, you see.

But there was only one time that I felt we were truly in danger. A friend and I were going from Villa Elisa to Paraná, on a Sunday afternoon. It hadn't been a good trip; we had been taken along in short stretches. We had to get in and out of different cars and trucks several times. The last one had left us at a crossroads, near Viale, about 60km from Paraná. It was getting dark and there wasn't a soul on the road. At last we saw a car approaching. The car was kind of orange in color, neither old nor new. We raised our thumbs and the driver pulled over to the shoulder. We ran a few feet to catch up to it. He was going to Paraná, so we got in. My friend sat next to the man who was driving, he was about sixty years old, and I sat in the back seat. For the first few miles, we talked about the same things as always: the weather, where we came from, what we studied. The man told us that he was coming back from inspecting a few rural properties that he owned in the area. From the back it was hard to hear well and when I saw that my friend was taking care of the conversation, I sat back in my seat and started to look out the window. I don't know how much time went by until I realized that something strange was happening. The man took his eyes off the road and leaned in to speak to my friend, he seemed livelier. I sat up a bit. I caught sight of his hand stroking her knee, then the same hand running up and caressing her arm. I started talking about anything and everything: the state of the road, the exams we had that week. But the man paid no attention to me. He kept talking to my friend, inviting her to go for a drink once we arrived. She didn't lose her calm or her smile, but I knew that inside she was as afraid as I was. No thank you, I have a boyfriend. And what do I care, I'm not jealous. Your boyfriend is probably just a kid, what can he teach you about life. A mature man like me is what a young girl like you needs. Protection. Financial security. Experience. The sentences reached me half-formed. Outside, night had already fallen and you couldn't even see the

Sin embargo estuvieron juntos unas horas, cuando él llegó en su moto a visitarla. Tomaron mate y charlaron sentados en la vereda, era un día de mucho calor y se anunciaba tormenta.

El sol había desaparecido atrás de las casas bajas del barrio y los pocos faroles de la calle Centenario se fueron encendiendo y llenándose de bichos. Pasó el camión regador, aplastando el polvo de la calle, levantando un vapor que olía a lluvia.

A eso de las nueve fueron a la cocina, se prepa- raron unos sánguches de milanesa, se sirvieron algo fresco y volvieron a la vereda. La casa era pequeña y cuando estaban los padres y el hermano, era más fácil encontrar un poco de intimidad afuera que adentro.

Mientras comían, llegó Fabiana, la hermana de Andrea y le pidió que la ayudara a elegir ropa para el baile de la noche. En el club Santa Rosa se celebraba la Noche de las Quinceañeras, que ya era una tradición en la ciudad de San José: todas las chicas que habían cumplido quince ese año, desfilaban con sus vestidos y se elegía a la más bonita.

Así que las hermanas se metieron en la casa y Eduardo se quedó solo terminando el sánguche.

Los vecinos fueron sacando las sillas y algunos giraban los televisores hacia la vereda, con el volumen bien alto para poder oír pese a los ruidos de la calle: pocos autos, más que nada bandas de niños jugando a la mancha o cazando bichitos de luz. No había cable en esos años, la televisión se captaba por antena y a la zona sólo llegaban el canal 7 de Buenos Aires y el canal 3 de Paysandú, así que se miraban más o menos los mismos programas. El olor de los espirales encendidos para espantar a los mosquitos, llenó el aire en poco rato.

Más tarde, Andrea y Eduardo salieron a pasear en moto por el centro. Alrededor de la plaza principal, el tráfico se ponía pesado con autos y motocicletas dando la vuelta del perro, a baja velocidad, como en procesión. Tomaron un helado y volvieron a lo de Andrea.

Los padres y el hermano estaban en la cama; Fa- biana se había ido al baile. La casa estaba silenciosa, apenas se filtraba, a través de las paredes delgadas, el sonido del televisor encendido en el dormitorio paterno. Los chicos estuvieron un rato

fields by the side of the road. I looked around: everything was black. When I came across the guns lying across the rear window of the car, behind my seat, my blood froze. They were long guns, two shotguns or something like that.

Composed and friendly, my friend kept on rejecting the overtures the man insisted on making to her, avoiding his hands, which were grappling at her wrist. I kept talking without pause, although nobody was paying any attention to me. I talked and talked and talked, although I've never been much of a talker. It was an act of infinite desperation.

And then the very same thing that had made my blood run cold set it flowing through my body once again. I was between him and the guns. But I'd never fired one before.

Finally, the lights at the edge of the city. The gas station where the red bus stopped that would take us into the city-center. We asked him to let us out there. The man smiled with disdain, pulled over and parked the car: yes, it's best you get out here, you fucking little bitches.

We got out and walked to the bus stop. The orange car started up and left. When it was far away, we threw our bags on the ground, hugged each other and began to cry.

Perhaps María Luisa and Sarita felt lost, in the moments before their deaths. But Andrea Danne was asleep when she was stabbed, on November 16, 1986.

That Saturday had been more or less like every other Saturday for a year and a half, ever since she began going out with Eduardo. But this time their night had ended quite a bit earlier than usual, without their going to a dance or to a motel like other times. The following Monday Andrea was to take the first of her final exams in the psychology teacher's course that she had begun studying that year. She was nervous, unprepared, and wanted to get to bed early and study for a while under the covers instead of going out with her boyfriend.

All the same they spent a few hours together, after he arrived on his motorbike to visit her. Sitting on the sidewalk, they drank yerba maté and chatted. It was a

besándose y acariciándose en la cocina. En un momento escucharon unos ruidos en el patio. Eduardo salió a mirar y no vio nada raro, pero el viento moviendo las copas de los árboles, la ropa en el tendedero de los vecinos, le advirtió que el tiempo se estaba descomponiendo. Cuando volvió a entrar, se lo comentó a su novia y decidieron que sería mejor que se fuera para que la tormenta no lo pescara de camino. No se fue enseguida, siguieron besándose, tocándose por abajo de la ropa hasta que ella se puso firme: mejor que se marchara.

Lo acompañó hasta la calle. El viento le alborotaba los cabellos largos, rubios, y le pegaba las prendas al cuerpo. Se besaron una última vez, él arrancó y ella corrió adentro de la casa.

Dejó abierta la ventana que daba al patio. Aunque había bajado un poquito la temperatura, las paredes seguían calientes, las sábanas tibias, como recién planchadas. Se tiró en la cama, en musculosa y bombacha, y agarró unos apuntes, fotocopias abrochadas y subrayadas y con notas de su puño y letra en los márgenes.

Sin embargo, se habrá dormido enseguida. Según el testimonio de su madre, cuando el viento se hizo más fuerte, entró a cerrar la ventana y Andrea ya estaba dormida. Era pasada la medianoche. Ella terminó de ver una película que estaban dando en *Función Privada*, un programa mítico de los años ochenta, conducido por Carlos Morelli y Rómulo Berruti. Presentaban una película y al finalizar el film los dos conductores la comentaban tomando sus vasos de whisky. Esa noche pasaban *Humo de marihuana*, una película que tenía unos veinte años, dirigida por Lucas Demare. La película no le interesaba, pero como no tenía sueño la vio hasta el final. Entonces apagó el televisor, sin esperar los comentarios de Morelli y Berruti, y logró dormirse.

Al rato despertó, salió de la cama, fue a la habitación de las hijas y encendió la luz. Andrea seguía acostada, pero tenía sangre en la nariz. Según dijo se quedó paralizada, sin moverse del vano de la puerta y llamó a su esposo a los gritos, dos o tres veces.

Vení, algo le pasa a Andrea.

Él se tomó el tiempo de ponerse un pantalón y una camisa de grafa, antes de entrar al dormitorio. Levantó a Andrea por los hombros y otro poco de sangre manó de su pecho.

very hot day and a storm had been predicted.

The sun had disappeared behind the low houses of the neighborhood and the few streetlights on Centenario Street began to light up and cover over with bugs. The sprinkler truck came by, crushing the dust in the street, stirring up a vapor that smelt of rain.

At around nine they went into the kitchen, prepared some milanesa sandwiches, poured some cold drinks and went back to the sidewalk. The house was small and when her parents and brother were home, it was easier to find a bit of privacy outside than inside.

While they were eating, Andrea's sister Fabiana arrived and asked her to help her choose an outfit for that night's dance. In the Santa Rosa Club they were celebrating the Night of the Quinceañeras, which had become a tradition in the city of San José: all the girls who had turned fifteen that year paraded by in their dresses so they could choose who was the most beautiful.

And so the sisters went into the house and Eduardo was left alone finishing his sandwich.

The neighbors began to bring out their chairs and some turned their televisions around to face the sidewalk, with the volume up high enough to be heard over the noises of the street: a few cars, but mostly gangs of children playing tag or hunting fireflies. There was no cable television in those years. Television came in via antenna and in the area all they got was Channel 7 from Buenos Aires and Channel 3 from Paysandú, so everyone more or less watched the same programs. In short order, the smell of mosquito coils lit to ward off the bugs filled the air.

Later, Andrea and Eduardo went for a ride on the motorbike to the city-center. Around the main square, the traffic became heavy with cars and motorbikes circling in the old provincial style, at low speed, as if in a procession. They bought an ice cream and returned to Andrea's place.

Her parents and brother were in bed; Fabiana had gone to the dance. The house was silent, the sound of the television barely filtering through the thin walls of her parents' bedroom. The young ones stayed up kissing and caressing each other a while in the kitchen. At one point they heard noises in the yard. Eduardo

La otra cama, la de Fabiana, seguía tendida y vacía. La tormenta estaba en su máximo esplendor. A las fortísimas ráfagas de viento, se sumaba la lluvia, el techo de zinc sonaba como una balacera.

Andrea se habrá sentido perdida cuando se despertó para morirse. Los ojos, abiertos de golpe, habrán pestañeado unas cuantas veces en esos dos o tres minutos que le llevó al cerebro quedarse sin oxígeno. Perdida, embarullada por el repiqueteo de la lluvia y el viento que quebraba las ramas más finas de los árboles del patio, abombada por el sueño, completamente descolocada.

went out to look and didn't see anything strange, but the wind moving through the crowns of the trees and the clothes on the neighbors' line warned him that the weather was getting worse. When he went back inside, he mentioned this to his girlfriend and they decided it would be best for him to leave so that the storm wouldn't catch him on the way. But he didn't leave straight away. They kept on kissing and touching each other underneath their clothes until she become resolute: it would be best for him to leave.

She accompanied him to the street. The wind messed up her long, blonde hair and made her clothes stick to her body. They kissed one last time, then he took off and she ran back inside the house. She left a window open that looked out onto the yard. Although the temperature had dropped a little, the walls were still hot, and her sheets were warm, as if they had been recently ironed. She jumped into bed, wearing a tank-top and panties, and picked up her study notes, photocopies that had been stapled and highlighted with annotations in her own handwriting in the margins.

But she must have fallen asleep straight away. According to her mother's testimony, when the wind grew stronger, she went in to close the window and saw that Andrea was already asleep. It was past midnight. She finished watching a film that was showing on Private Screening, a cult movie program from the eighties, hosted by Carlos Morelli and Rómulo Berruti. First they introduced a film and after it was over the two hosts commented on it, sipping on their glasses of whiskey. That night they showed *Humo de marihuana*, a film from about twenty years earlier, directed by Lucas Demare. The film didn't interest her, but because she wasn't tired she watched it to the end. Then she turned off the television, without waiting for Morelli and Berruti's commentary, and managed to fall asleep.

Shortly afterwards she woke up and got out of bed. She went to her daughters' bedroom and turned on the light. Andrea was still lying down, but she was bleeding from the nose. According to the mother's account she stood there paralyzed in the doorway and yelled out to her husband, two or three times.

Come here, something has happened to Andrea.

He took his time putting on a pair of pants and a work shirt before coming into

the bedroom. He lifted Andrea by the shoulders and more blood poured from her chest.

The other bed in the room, which belonged to Fabiana, remained made-up and empty. The storm was at the height of its fury. The rain combined with the strong gusts of wind, and the raindrops pelting on the zinc roof sounded like gunshots.

Andrea must have felt lost when she awoke to die. Her eyes, open all of a sudden, must have blinked however many times it took her brain to run out of oxygen in those final two or three minutes. She must have felt lost, confused by the fierce beating of the rain and the wind, that snapped even the smallest branches of the trees in the yard. She must still have been dazed by sleep, completely adrift.

Erika Meitner

Letter in the Time of Junkmail

Dear _____,

I've got the sky in my mouth so when I open it to speak
nothing leaks out except contrails. I order my coffee

& it comes to me in a robin's egg blue cup with my name
scrawled on it in black marker, almost spelled correctly.

Sometimes when we talk—I can't help it—I shake like
a carnival ride or an earthquake of minor proportions.

I've got years in my mouth too, waiting to be fished out,
laid across a table, & gutted. Sometimes at restaurants,

to entertain my kids, I twist paper straw wrappers into tight
snakes, then make them dance by dropping water on them

bit by bit. It's a slow drip, like an under-sink leak, & they
twirl up like pale strippers on a pole, like flowers unfurling in

time-lapse video, the way I'd like my heart to open, rote,
without hesitation. Look, I have trouble saying anything

aloud. Slit me open like a seed pod or an envelope.
Unfold me like a credit card offer, a recall pamphlet,

an explanation of benefits. If you can pull it out: a safety
deposit box from a bank vault's wall, a magician's knotted

scarf from my throat, this endless desire coming & coming
from somewhere, sprawling like all of suburbia across

a landscape, but different as I am not fleeing the bumping-
against energy & hard concrete. I am unafraid of the way

the heat rises from city sidewalks in July & August, the way
the curbs smell of piss & trash & unwashed skin ripening

with whatever makes us feral. I want to rub up against slick
subway tile, feel my back pressed to a bathroom stall door

in a bar where the band is playing no one's favorite song
about yearning, or nostalgia, or sadness with your

hand down my pants, all the unspeakable parts
of us rubbing until the contrails dissolve in the sky,

our paths untraceable, letters still arriving in bulk
& unbidden with my name mostly spelled right

in the see-through windows, with the amounts I still owe
out-of-pocket outlined in neat black type mass-produced

by some machine who knows the things only I do
about my eyes, my skin, my blood, my heart.

Sacha Idell

Translations, from the Japanese

1. The Japanese word for "foreigner" is "gaikokujin," but it is often shortened to "gaijin" in everyday speech. Literally translated, this means *outsider*.

2. According to a 2013 census, Japan has a population of 127.3 million people. Approximately 1.9 million of those residents are foreigners. I, a white American, have been inconsistently part of this statistic for the past decade.

3. The same census also states that over half the foreigners in Japan are either Korean or Chinese. This means that less than one percent of the population comes from a world other than East Asia, a figure which gives Japan a reputation as one of the most insular and homogeneous countries in the world.

4. Despite the nation's reputation for homogeneity, there are many minority populations. For example: most Korean residents of Japan are Korean by citizenship only. They are native Japanese speakers and have spent their entire lives in the country, but lack the right to vote. I find this fact particularly uncomfortable, bordering on appalling, but I also know that I have no say in the matter.

5. I have lived in Japan for three extended periods of my life. Collectively, these periods add up to five years.

6. Five years is longer than I've lived anywhere else, so long as early childhood is removed from the equation. But I've never cared much for early childhood anyway.

7. In the odd moments when I am inclined to pinpoint times where my life could have rocketed off in another direction, I wonder would might have happened if my best friend hadn't been Japanese when I was young. Or what things might have looked like if my mother hadn't been sick when I was that age, if she hadn't raised me alone—if I hadn't spent afternoons in a household where foreign language radiated the air like cosmic noise. Is it, in the end, all a matter of place and timing? How much does where we grow up determine who we become as people? And what does it say about me if, since then, I've rarely lived in the same place?

8. I've spoken some Japanese since I was seven years old. It didn't occur to me that this was something unusual until I was eleven.

9. The first Japanese word I learned was "dame," which essentially means *don't* or *off-limits*. I also learned, on the same day, that it is far more terrifying to have a friend's mother yell at you in a foreign language than it is to have her yell at you in English.

10. I have only broken one of Mrs. Hoshino's dishes since. As much as possible, I try to learn my lessons the first time.

11. My favorite Japanese word is "tsundoku"— an archaic phrase that refers to *the act of buying books and never reading them*. This is a crime I commit often and may be incapable of learning from.

12. I was never punished much by my mother. She was sick, or she was working; anyway, she wasn't there. Mrs. Hoshino, however, routinely scolded me for poor grades,

or for coming home too late, and then there was the time when her son and I were twelve, and she caught us drinking a bottle of vodka we had lifted from the corner store.

13. Before that incident, I didn't think it was possible to be grounded by someone else's parent. Apparently it was.

14. I have never been arrested in America. In Tokyo, however, I have been questioned in relation to several cases.

15. Some crimes the Tokyo police have spoken to me about:

- Bicycle theft
- Trespassing
- Espionage
- Littering
- Cotton smuggling

16. I originally thought "cotton smuggling" was some kind of euphemism, but the police assured me that it was literal, and a common crime perpetrated by Iranian and other Central Asian immigrants.

17. I have never met an Iranian in Japan, but perhaps I've never gone to the right place. The world is filled with people of all sorts of nationalities, living their lives in places I can't see.

18. Of all the foreigners I've met in Japan, only two have remained for more than seven years. One speaks Japanese fluently, and the other not at all. Both, somehow, have managed to navigate the world around them without difficulty.

19. In the last year, both of them have married Japanese women. Luckily, all parties speak English fluently.

20. While eating lunch on a rooftop in downtown Tokyo, I once overheard a conversation between three American men. The three of them were standing at the other end of a rooftop garden, away from the benches and ashtrays, probably on break from one of the many English conversation schools in the building. One had proposed to his Japanese girlfriend, and the other two were congratulating him. Towards the end of the conversation, the engaged man revealed that his fiancee spoke no English, and that he also spoke no Japanese. "But isn't that a problem?" one of the men asked, and the other two just looked at him blankly.

21. Situations like these are common, and though I've been skeptical in the past, maybe there's some truth to those sorts of romantic comedies. Both parties, after all, are getting exactly what they want out of the relationship.

22. I have only dated one Japanese woman, a nurse several years older than I was. She spoke very little English, and at the time my Japanese was still weak. I suspect the reason we stayed together for the six months we did was that our schedules were too rigorous for us to realize this was a problem.

23. I have always worked at least two jobs while living in Japan. Most of the time my primary employment was teaching English. This is the gaijin equivalent of a dead-end job, and typically a sign someone will move back to their home country one day.

24. Other jobs I have had in Japan: bouncer, housekeeper, editor, cameraman, and (briefly) tourism associate at the embassy of Afghanistan. None of these has lasted more than three months at any one time.

25. The average full-time English-teaching job in Japan pays anywhere from 250,000-275,000 yen per month, depending on where in the country you happen to live. This is roughly equivalent to $25,000 per year. I can't speak for the countryside, but in both Tokyo and Osaka this is not a luxurious wage.

26. The average salary of a Japanese worker employed by the same company tends to be closer to 200,000 yen per month. I've never understood how functional adults manage to get by on so little, but there are probably other mechanisms which make it possible.

27. The secretary at an English school I worked for in Osaka was a Korean single mother of two, and she made something in that ballpark. She was a very sweet woman, but had a rare medical condition which caused her hands to break out in hives when she nervous. Her desk was always organized so that the keyboard was hidden from view.

28. Most of the Japanese coworkers I've had have been very kind to me, but this may be owed to my ability to speak the same language. I've heard other foreigners theorize that their Japanese coworkers were constantly, somehow, conspiring against them. It might be the case that normal workplace gossip sounds a lot more sinister when you can't understand it.

29. My American girlfriend and I once invited coworkers from both our offices for dinner at our apartment in Osaka. We ate bad homemade appetizers and

drank and chatted for several hours. Towards the end of the night, the secretary from my office came up to me to say goodbye. She told me it was a wonderful thing to be happy so young. It wasn't until after she left that I realized she had worn gloves the entire evening.

30. There are many signs that, no matter how much Japanese I learn, I'm never able to understand.

31. On my nineteenth birthday, I took the final train of the night home. At the time, I lived in a small suburb of Tokyo. The ride was long and stretched out into the countryside. After several stations the light outside the train faded, and the windows became panels of black glass, clearly reflecting the train within. It was late and I was exhausted and slightly drunk. I spent the trip watching dark circles beneath my eyes through the tangle of other passengers.

32. The train jolted to a stop and for a moment everything swayed. Things were still for a long time. It seemed like hours, but was likely only a couple of minutes. There were several announcements made over the intercom, but the voice was too garbled for me to understand what it was saying.

33. When we finally pulled into the next station, the colors of the LCD tickers announcing arrivals were inverted. Where the time and line of the next incoming train are usually written was the phrase 人身事故. The best translation I have for this is *human accident*.

34. A lot of the foreigners I know have a story about a suicide they've seen in Japan, but I've never witnessed one directly. The closest I've come is seeing a pair of

empty white sneakers, neatly lined and abandoned, next to a river, and wondering if someone was trying to send a signal.

35. When I was twenty-one, Mrs. Hoshino's son came to Japan to visit me. It had been a difficult year for him, filled with the deaths of both relatives and relationships. We spent a month gallivanting around Tokyo, drinking with my foreigner friends and nurse girlfriend. I was trying to show him a good time, to make up for all the awfulness of the year. At the end of the month we had a long and protracted argument about my hospitality. He said that being in a foreign country had changed me, that we hadn't done any of the things he'd been looking forward to, that I was acting like I belonged in a place that wasn't mine to belong to, that I didn't and couldn't understand him anymore.

36. We have both since apologized, blaming the close quarters and exhaustion, but I think on some level he was probably right. I'm probably still pretending I belong somewhere that I don't.

37. While in Japan, I sometimes get the sensation that I'm standing on the outside of a giant pane of frosted glass, looking at people moving around within. There are a lot of dark shapes, and when they get close enough I can make out the details clearly, but inevitably before I can make sense of everything the shape recedes into the background again.

38. I'd like to say that there's a special word in Japanese for this sensation, but there isn't. The closest I know in any language is probably *loneliness*.

39. Japan and loneliness circle each other. There was the time, for instance, when I was eleven, and my best friend's older sister moved away for college. I

was in love with her in the strange way that only eleven year olds can be, and stole a copy of a Japanese novel off of her shelf before she left. I read the novel cover to cover without understanding the context for any of it, but for some reason I felt better about things afterward.

40. I once read the same novel, almost a decade later, in a coffee shop while I waited for the rain to clear. It was a very different experience, and not at all cathartic, but I'm still glad I did it.

41. One Japanese word that's taken me a long time to understand is "karamawari"— *empty spinning*. Or maybe *fruitless effort*. In any case, it is a word that indicates motion for the sake of motion. No matter how hard you try, there are some things that can't be won through effort or work. But for some reason, we go through the motions anyway.

42. One thing I've struggled a lot with is why, after so much moving back and forth, I return to Japan again and again. It seems silly to oscillate as much as I have. Shouldn't it be normal to want to stay in one place, to live there and be comfortable?

43. What does it take to be able to call a place your home?

44. On one occasion, right before I left Osaka to move back to America, to break up with my girlfriend and start over again somewhere new, I had a goodbye lunch with the office secretary and her two children. We ate at a cheap family restaurant close to their apartment. Her son and daughter were both very well behaved. The daughter was thirteen, the son eight. They were both half-British. I hadn't realized that their father was a foreigner, and this added another wrinkle

to my understanding of what was already an overcomplicated situation. I asked the secretary, in Japanese, if her children spoke English, and she answered that yes, yes they did. She was trying to raise them so that they could be comfortable in whichever environment they chose. I asked if, being Korean, she had grown up feeling comfortable in Japan and she stared at me for a long time. She took her hands off the table and set them on her lap. I felt as though I had asked something inappropriate, for her to sketch the moment in her life that had most terrified her. Suddenly uncomfortable, I retreated and asked her son and daughter if they liked their school. I wish I had waited for her answer instead.

45. We sat in a booth together for an hour or so, until it was time for the daughter to leave for track practice. I pretended that I wanted to stay in the restaurant a bit longer, so that I could take care of the check myself without her children noticing. The secretary and her children put on their coats and walked out the door. I rubbed the moisture off a nearby window and watched them until they were out of view. Soon, the heat from the inside of the restaurant fogged the glass over again and the outside world vanished; all that was left was an indistinct blur, dark shapes moving on the other side, somewhere beyond it.

GLORIOUS SITE OF TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE:

AN ACCOUNT OF TONY FEHER'S PROPOSAL FOR A HORTICULTURAL SCULPTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Josh Pazda

Some time in 2012, Tony Feher ate a handful of dried dates that he bought at the grocery store. He saved the seeds and planted them in a pot on the windowsill of his apartment on Second Street near Avenue A in lower Manhattan. The fact that he saved the seeds for another use should come as no surprise from an artist who saved nearly everything, and whose thirty-year career as a sculptor was principally founded upon making something out of nothing. His favored working materials were the stuff of everyday life, including glass jars, plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, marbles, and among other things, apparently date seeds. In the weeks and months that followed, Feher carefully tended to the seedling and cultivated a healthy young palm tree. As time passed, the tree outgrew its place on the windowsill, and before too long, Feher began to worry that the tree would not receive sufficient sunlight in his small New York apartment. Concerned about the future vitality of the tree, he called me and Hiram Butler and asked if we would plant the tree in the garden of our gallery on Blossom Street in Houston (Fig. 1, left: Tony Feher with the palm he grew from seeds on his windowsill, 2015).[1] We happily obliged, and one day a tall cylindrical cardboard tube arrived at the door. Scrawled on the outside of the tube in black magic marker were the words "I'm a Tree."

Over the next year Tony was sure to check in often about the status of his dear palm, and ended many emails with a gentle nudge: "How's the palm tree? If it's not yet planted please water it for me. And spin the pot 180 degrees so it won't grow crooked." (April 24, 2013) "PS what's up with the palm?" (May 7, 2013) "PS: please water my palm tree. There's no reason it should not be in good condition." (May 2, 2014) "You better make sure my palm is well watered" (June 19, 2014).

Since 2011, Feher had been spending a considerable amount of time in Houston, and planted yet another seed for what would become a proposal for a large-scale horticultural sculpture at the University of Houston.[2] Perhaps sparked by his excitement about the palm grown on his windowsill, Feher would draw on his career-long interest in using horticultural material towards sculptural ends, and conceived of a work that was comprised of a variety of palm trees. A short battle with cancer prematurely took Feher's life at the age of 60, and the project never fully came to fruition. However, Feher executed numerous drawings, digital renderings, and a handmade three-dimensional maquette that manifest the artist's

[1] Hiram Butler and I represented Feher at Hiram Butler Gallery, and exhibited his work from 2002 through his death in June 2016.

[2] Claudia Schmuckli organized his twenty-five year survey at the Blaffer Museum in 2012, in January 2013, Diverseworks mounted his installation *Free Fall*, and he mounted installations and exhibitions at Hiram Butler Gallery in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Houston was home to many of Feher's friends, and he visited often.

conception of what might have been. While this work was not ultimately realized in sculptural form, its imaginative potential and conceptual framing is made concrete through drawing.

Feher's interest in expanding the language of sculpture to include horticultural material began in the mid-1980s, and is made evident in several of his earliest drawings. Two of these drawings describe a work to be integrated into the landscape, presumably a Hudson River waterfront near the south end of Manhattan. In these drawings, Feher describes an irregular mound in the landscape, overgrown with a wide variety of cattails, reeds, and other aquatic plants, set against what appear to be elements of the New York Skyline. Feher annotated the image with simple directions: "Plant a few . . . Hudson River species. Let other plants blow in" (Fig. 2). Feher's circular mound is shown with dimensional notations: "6-8 feet is adequate to start, 10 feet is ambitious, 25 feet is huge." It can be difficult to grasp the totality of Feher's project beyond the basic information made available through these schematic drawings. However, they contain several key considerations about

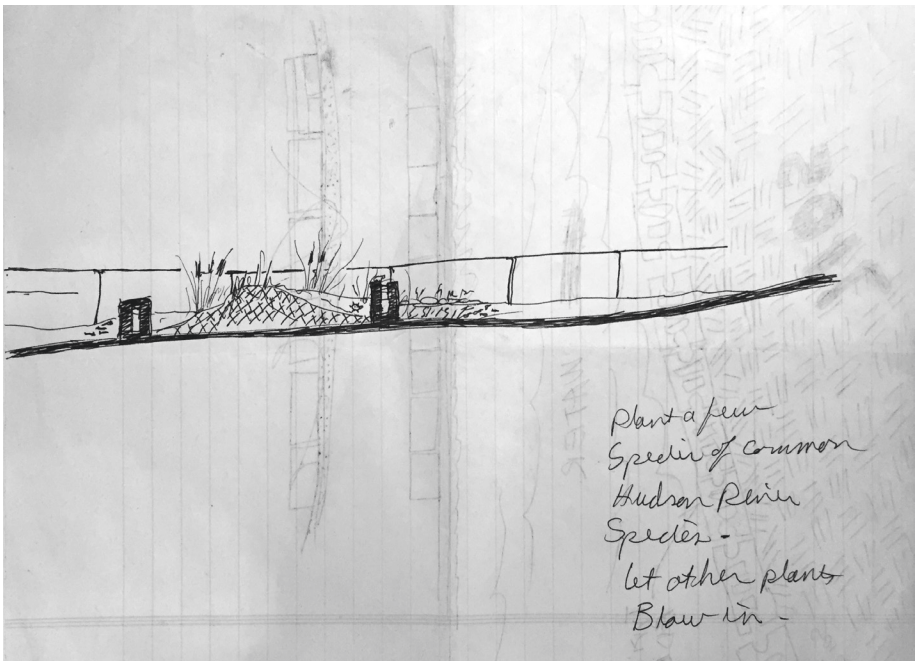


Fig. 2. Tony Feher, Untitled, circa 1986, ink on lined paper, 8 1/2 x 11 inches, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Gift of the Estate of Tony Feher.

Fig. 3. Tony Feher, *Super Special Happy Place*, 2011, United States District Court - Northern District of Illinois, Rockford, Illinois.

horticultural sculpture that he would continue to develop over three decades. These include: creating sculpture that is both made in the landscape and made of the landscape, employing plant material that is native to the site in which it is planted, and utilizing a variety of plants that display diverse formal characteristics.

Despite his long-term fascination with these subjects, Feher completed just one large scale installation of this type in his lifetime. Commissioned for the lawn of a courthouse in Rockford Illinois, Feher created a work called *Super Special Happy Place*, 2011, which consists of more than one hundred crabapple trees of five varieties (Fig. 3). As a result of the success of the Rockford installation, The University of Houston System curator of public art, Michael Guidry, commissioned Feher to submit a proposal for a horticultural sculpture at UH in 2014.[3] In consideration of what plant material might thrive in Houston, Feher took a keen interest in palm trees, which had captured his imagination from his Texas upbringing.[4] Feher

[3] Guidry's invitation for a proposal was not insistent on the inclusion of horticultural material per se, but it was very much of interest to both Feher and Guidry and had been discussed over many months before the proposal was developed.

[4] Feher grew up in Corpus Christi and attended the University of Texas for his undergradate studies.

set out to identify a selection of palm species that displayed a variety of formal characteristics, and remained hearty in Houston's climate. After consulting with a Houston-based arborist, Jack Swayze, and conducting his own research, he ultimately decided on the varieties of Washingtonia, Texas Sabal, Canary Island date, Pindo, and Sago palm trees.

The site that Feher chose for his proposal was an elliptical lawn that punctuates the end of University Drive, which was built as the main entrance to the university campus from the east (Fig. 4). Both the procession of the long driveway and its elliptical terminus convey an understated elegance and grandeur that culminate in the Cullen Performance Hall—a building in the art deco style from 1950. The site embodies an implicit welcome declaration that announces, "you have arrived." And indeed, a recently-erected Welcome Center sited halfway along University Drive now explicitly designates the area as such. However, after decades of construction, expansion, and campus reorientation, the elliptical lawn at the end of University Drive no longer functions as the stately entrance it once was. Rather than declaring the point of arrival, the lawn has become a bald island from which most students now perambulate, but rarely cross. Feher recognized this tension of former and current functions and in homage decided to title his proposed sculpture *Glorious Site of Tremendous Importance*. He hoped that by planting a grove of palm trees as sculpture, the public would traverse the boundaries of the driveway and occupy the island as a site of contemplation, discovery, and play.

Feher's interest in positioning nature-as-object in the public arena places his work in conversation with artists such as Meg Webster and Robert Irwin. Further developing tenets laid out by practitioners of minimalist sculpture and land art, each of these artists have made use of horticultural material as a basis for sculpture, which necessarily engenders a responsibility towards caring for the earth. On the subject of Meg Webster's work, one writer has similarly remarked that the artist's "use of living organisms that grow and die underscores . . . the need to care for things and to accept rhythms that are not easy to alter; the dependence on biodiversity, and the weakness shown by humanity in a situation that it claims should be changed."[5] Feher's proposal for a University campus seems particularly primed towards these considerations. Meant to be seen in

[5] Anna Bernardini and Angela Vettese, Meg Webster Opere-Works 1982-2015 (Milan: Silvana Editorale, 2015), p 23.

time and various stages of growth and decay, the work's placement at UH would have guaranteed that it was seen by a consistent body of students, professors, and university employees, among others. It is likely that this audience would have recognized that the work embodied a significantly different appearance in the amount of time a typical undergraduate student spends at the University from freshman orientation to graduation day. But beyond understanding the work in formal and experiential terms, Feher hoped that the installation would enter the consciousness of the university public as a site that was celebrated and cared for as a living entity.

A discussion of this project must hover between the poles of what exist and what might have been. That is to say that Feher's conception for *Glorious Site of Tremendous Importance* can be thought of in terms of horticultural material and the environment, but its physical manifestation must also be recognized as a form of autographic drawing—which occupies a unique and previously unexplored territory in Feher's oeuvre. Throughout his career, Feher took to drawing as a primary vehicle to give visual representation to his ideas and imagination. While drawing was a crucial component of Feher's working methods, his drawings were never exhibited in his lifetime, and consequently virtually none of the literature

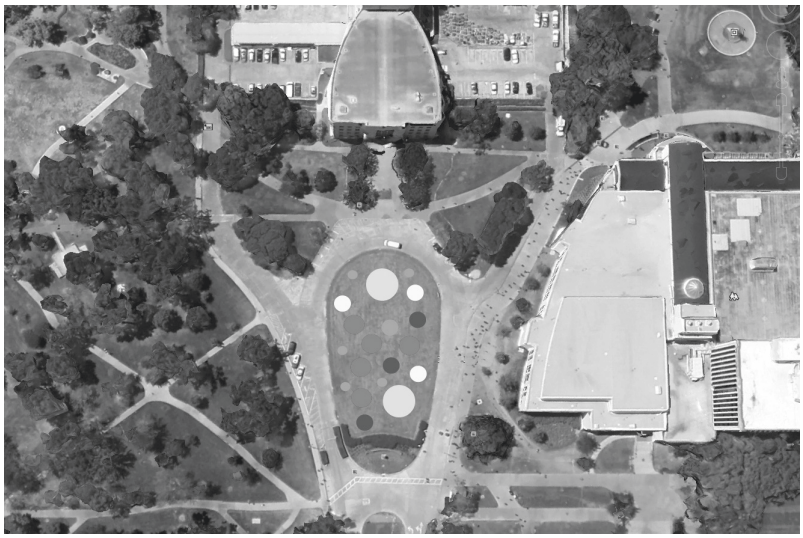


Fig. 4. Tony Feher, digital rendering over site plan, 2015.

on his work makes reference to drawing.[6] In an archive of nearly one thousand drawings, now in the collection of the Hammer Museum, Feher's ideas about horticultural sculpture are represented among both his earliest and latest drawings. In addition to providing visual access to a number of Feher's projects that were not fully realized, these works establish a through-line in his working methods that represent several of his core concerns as an artist.

In thinking through how he might arrange the palm trees at UH, Feher began by exploring the composition in a rectangular grid formation, like an ancient hypostyle hall. One can imagine the tall, slender trunk of a palm, and the flourishes of the fronds functioning quite like a Corinthian column. Undoubtedly, the language of architecture is never far from Feher's work. In addition to arranging objects in columns, rows, rings, and spirals, stacking objects and grid formations were fundamental to his visual language. While he was not an academic architectural historian, he took a number of architecture courses as an undergraduate at the University of Texas, which sparked an interest that he would continue to develop throughout his life. Despite his early compositional notations for UH that refer to Classical architecture, Feher ultimately decided on a more natural arrangement, in which each of the various palm species did not visually align on an X and Y

Fig. 5. Tony Feher, Untitled, 2014, marker and highlighter on paper.

[6] The text and illustrations reproduced in this essay are among the very first to enter the public discourse on the subject of Feher's drawings.

axis. He wrote: "Thinking now of using all four varieties . . . planted in a more naturalistic form. Different heights, textures and colors making a palm fantasy island. More ambulatory in a rambling way than the grid." [7]

To visualize his "palm galaxy," as he casually referred to it, Feher made conceptual drawings that frame the scope of the work as well as presentation drawings that describe the project in more fully developed visual detail. The conceptual drawings are in keeping with Feher's most typical drawing style, which convey the most direct information about the trees and their configuration. Feher's contour line drawings emphasize the variety of shapes and sizes of each tree's trunk and canopy, and are most often shown in elevation or three-quarter bird's eye views. One emblematic conceptual drawing shows the five varieties of palms in color-coding: red Washingtonias, turquoise Sables, blue Pindos, yellow Canary Island date, and orange Sagos (Fig. 5). Rather than naturalistically rendering each type of palm, Feher utilized color and line to convey the variety of scales, textures, and their irregular distribution on the elliptical lawn. Feher consistently reiterated this color-coding of trees in a number of other drawings. However, one representation stands out uniquely in that Feher added a single pink colored demarcation to the center of the site plan. This was a placeholder for the palm that Feher grew from seeds on his windowsill, and hoped to include as the heart of his palm grove.

As much as he relied on autographic drawing in his creative process, Feher's sensibility was incredibly tactile, and whenever possible, he preferred to also work with three-dimensional material that he could manipulate according to his intuition. In order to think through a project of this magnitude, he constructed a handmade maquette that could be flexible in representing his diverse conceptions about what the work ought to be. For a work of this kind, it would not be unusual to contract an architect or designer to fabricate digital renderings that spatially convey the arrangement of trees in comparison to the scale of the architecture of the site and its immediate surroundings. However, in keeping with his modest material sensibility, Feher insisted on hand-drawing and constructing a maquette out of paper, cardboard, and other various everyday materials such as chopsticks, paper towels, and coins. Working in this manner gave Feher the ability to manipulate objects as he would any sculptural material in his studio—even if the scale was incorrect,

[7] Tony Feher, email message to the author, 2 December, 2014.

or reflected an abstraction of what would ultimately be realized in the space. Demonstrating his ambivalence towards exact scale representations, Feher cheekily used Kachina figures from his collection to give scale reference to the palms (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Tony Feher, a palm tree from Feher's UH maquette, and Kachina figures from his personal collection.

Feher's model is a completely autographic and idiosyncratic representation of what he was proposing (Fig. 7). For the representation of university buildings in the model, he covered cardboard boxes with white paper towels and drew windows and doors in black marker (the texture of the paper towels remains prominently recognizable). The canopy of each of the trees was depicted by planar paper cutouts, and their chopstick tree trunks were secured with modeling clay to bases made of quarters. The elliptical expanse of the lawn is described by a single sheet of green construction paper. Patchy black marker scrawlings describe the asphalt driveway surrounding all sides of the lawn. Feher was considering several sources of ground cover, such as lantana and blue plumbago, which are represented by small circles of cut tissue paper that are speckled with colored dots. In the model, the scale and coloration of these elements resembles small candy wrappers. Given the handmade qualities of these elements, Feher's model blends the autographic nature of his drawings into the three-dimensional form of his sculptures.

Feher used this model and a number of drawings in his formal proposal and presentation to the UH Systemwide Public Art Committee. While they were

inclined to move forward, it is perhaps not surprising that they requested that digital renderings be provided that more accurately described the project before doing so. To Feher's initial dismay, he contracted fabrication for digital renderings of his proposal from two architects (Fig. 8).[8] The creation of these renderings functioned much like a second set of conceptual drawings and would ultimately help shape his vision of the project. While the renderings still convey an abstraction in that each of the palm species are not accurately represented, they nonetheless clearly describe the spatial distribution of palms, and it is evident that their individual sizes, shapes, and textures would have been discernible in a realized artwork.

The proposal for UH was being continually developed at the time of Feher's premature passing in June 2016. Before he understood the seriousness of his illness, two factors had caused the project to be put on hold indefinitely. Firstly, the site for which he had chosen and proposed his installation was deemed unavailable or inappropriate by the university, which would require him to reconsider his proposal for an alternate site—certainly not a small task for a site-determined installation. Secondly, a number of palm species that Feher proposed to work with were afflicted by a range of diseases, referred to generally as Texas palm decline. Tony's concerns about these issues, as well as the infrequent (but threatening) deep freezes that Houston endures, raise interesting questions about ecology and conservation, if an artist elects to work with natural materials. The winter freeze of January 2018 is a

Fig. 7. Tony Feher, Maquette for *Glorious Site of Tremendous Importance*, 2015, mixed media.

[8] The architects Edgar Villanueva (3Dit Studio) and Hans Tursack each made renderings for the proposal.

Fig. 8. Tony Feher, digital rendering for *Glorious Site of Tremendous Importance,* 2015, by Edgar Villanueva.

case in point, as enormous amounts of vegetation were wiped out all over Houston. Tony's palm in our garden (now twenty feet tall) began to show stress signals as the feathers of many of the fronds turned brown. Thankfully, it has survived. Feher privately vocalized his hesitations about the ethics of pursuing a project that was susceptible to an environmental failure, and even began to consider an alternative plan wherein the palms were replaced with wooden telephone poles painted in bright colors (Fig. 9).[9] Despite his hesitations, it was clear that he hoped to work with plant material in a gesture of life affirming optimism, which underlies so much of his work. Feher reminds us: "Life is vulnerable, not fragile. Life perseveres. It has a tenacious grip. My art may appear fragile, but it holds on."[10]

One of the great lasting lessons of Feher's work is due to the opportunity in which he allows us to see the world differently. Numerous writers have noted about Feher's work as such: the brilliant color of a plastic bottle cap, the twinkling light on the rim of a glass jar, and the magnificent shape of an unfolded cardboard box are all re-doubled with enormous potential and majestic beauty once we are shown a change in perception. Even more profoundly perhaps, in his later life, Feher was able to extend this lesson to trees—the most ubiquitous object of all. Any tree is certainly capable of capturing one's attention, but they may just as easily

[9] Feher explored an interation of this idea in a finished sculpture titled *The Nothing Before Something* at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in 2013.

[10] Amada Cruz, Bill Arning, John Lindell, and Adam D. Weinberg, Tony Feher: Red Room and More . . . (New York, Bard College, 2001), p. 62.

go unnoticed with the many distractions of daily life. Feher's art has always been about calling attention to the otherwise unnoticed things that surround us every day. To refer back to his proposal's tongue-in-cheek title: indeed, through Feher's sight, things take on a glorious and tremendous importance. As a result, we are reminded that once we are sensitive enough to see something, then we are equipped to care about it. Though Feher's horticultural sculpture for UH was never fully realized, his many drawings, renderings and maquette for the project give life to his creative vision, from which a similar attentiveness can arise. On your way home you may notice the glorious erect golden cone of a Sago palm in your neighbor's yard. And the sagging brown fronds encircling the trunk of a Washingtonia may look more like the beard of a Babylonian king than a tree trimmer's inattentiveness. The feathers and fans of palm fronds all over the city and the dried dates at the grocery store will all declare in their exceptional ordinariness: "I'm a tree."

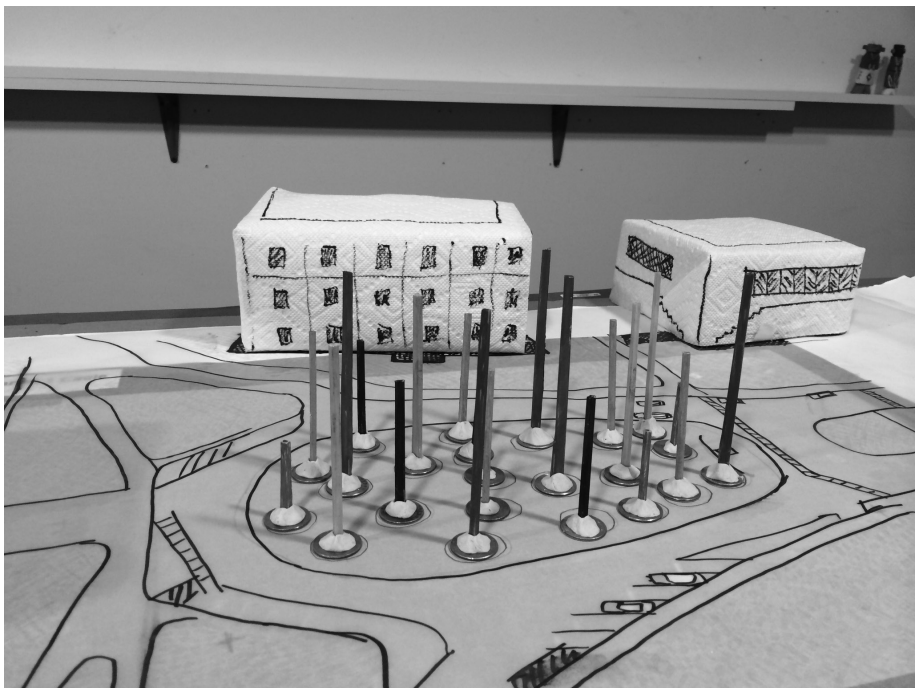


Fig. 9. Tony Feher, Maquette for *Glorious Site of Tremendous Importance*, 2015, mixed media.

JoAnna Novak

Clambering Over Such Rocks

Perhaps we three shall only ever have in common the murder of Adler. And white garments, shoes, stockings, sleeves—even the body of the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse is shell-colored, if you ignore her black window.

We confer at the Point, calm ourselves, and consider what we have done, firing thrice into the husband and father we have left in our Oneonta cabin.

I still see his stunned eyes stuck on a hogshead of sardines.

My mother and sister's hands smell like buckshot.

A fine spray of grayish pink stains my blouse. My father's last sputum.

Yet even now, they flaunt their them-ness, asserting their alliance against the suspiration of the Atlantic.

I cannot be blamed for growing up untouched.

The rocks ribbed like roof tiles. Loud water mostly mist. Sky blue as a tepid bath. One rip of sand.

Up the coast is dented. Southward, fjordlike. Islanded. Our state has beachwoods. Artist's colonies. Shore dinners. Clams. Snowshoes. Watermelon tourmaline old Gepettos string on silk and fix around your neck.

My mother and sister stand at water's edge in matching wild berry: my mother's sweetheart sweater; my sister's maiden jumper, her billowing mutton sleeves. Flax-haired, fine-profiled, victimisses.

And me, a remove from the shore, arrogating a rather smooth stone. In my Bohemian brow and trousers. A roll of flesh at my elbows.

It is my task to tip the rifle, land it in a chasm of rocks.

Get rid of the foul thing, my mother instructed me, returned to her delicacy,

even after our hard travels, past Oshkoshed fishermen and seals bottling, pods of whales whose rubber heads emerge like enormous bowler hats.

Once more, to the court of women's vision, I go uninvited.

Sometimes, my sister's skirts inflated by the crush of crashing waves, I see my mother smooth her dress, to catch it from flying up.

It is a tale of a family in the woods: not so special to Maine.

I, for one, have always believed it must be hard for a man to bequeath his virility to women.

What might we do, knit him a cock's cap?

Crochet a sleeve for his casting arm?

I fed my father his tinsel when he tied silver streamers.

Learned the names of artificial lures: Brown hackle. Royal coachman.

I was his spread girl, the best at coating his biscuits with butter.

The best at proportioning a sandwich.

It is not that I ever disbelieved my mother and sister. Poulticing their thighs would find a disciple in anyone.

And Adler's fingerprints distinguished themselves, left bruises like kidney beans.

Things he announced, daily as grace, even now aim arrows at my mind:

Your apology is but a belated excuse.

You could drive a phaeton through that pie hole.

I wouldn't grope you with my rustiest fishing pole.

Only then did I realize the makeup of some women is more than a matter of pantalettes.

Other words organized when he took my sister to the spurrier's. When he took her out riding in a red coat. When he took her arm, held her wrist like a hatchling. She had warned me under the counterpane, how he said he wanted to spue inside her, to gild her insides like the dogwood in an ice storm.

He might have found me ready, if he'd ever come looking.

The coast thinks nothing of a woman helming a rifle. She is a sportsman, clad in smaller clothing.

My legs extend in front of me. The line of my ankle is visible below the hem of my porpoise-blue trousers. It is the thin part, before muscle swells my calf.

The rifle lays long, butting my crotch. It is not much more than a broomstick. Its barrel is black and matte. It has not buckles, but parts that buckle when touched.

In my mother, Adler found a wife and a wet nurse and a whimperer. When he loved her, I could hear her crying like our collie, still tender from the whelping.

A mallet, when pounding veal flat, makes a resounding bluntness. And that was the way my father's gut pummeled her rump.

"Bring your sulking down to the water," my sister calls, her face tear-wet and shining.

It would be salt to lick her.

It would scald to approach the limits of her love.

It was only once I was asked to witness.

He filled my tin cup with birch beer and set me in a kitchen chair he'd carried up the stairs to their lofted bedroom.

Midway, he flung a pillow in my lap and, grateful, I reinstated lady legs.

Unwelcome is not the word I feel for being a sister and daughter in this life. Unwanted is wrong, as well. More, I know I am unusable to either sex, the Adler fathers, the docile mothers, the sisters with hot-combed hair.

(I have always wanted to ask: Do you like me?)

It is for this reason that I reposition the rifle and wedge it between my knees. Nature has engineered me with long arms and I am relieved to finger the trigger. It feels like a latch, a hook, a malformed tack. It has known the flesh of everyone in my family. No wonder Heaven gave me such fortitude to free the shore of my disease.

The gulls overhead fight and scowl.

The black window in the Lighthouse darkens.

And yes the waves roll out, folding over on themselves, thrashing at the sky. It is dim, almost aluminum. Surely, on some other horizon, there is a sun, close and gold.

Kenji C. Liu

Notorious Rain

Frankenpo[1]: Mifune Toshiro in Manchukuo

Why weren't we told the rain
would trample our darkening fields?

To the disaster, there's only
wind to testify.

How do the dead say, this ruined temple
is my body?

Their docile leathers are drunk
with the eyes of insects.

In the vested woods
one of us is horse

a war heart crossing the midst.
An espionage.

Is August not a famine, December not a rope?
わしが。。。わしの心が分からない。
(I… I don't understand my own soul.)

And upstream, our national defense—
a crying kimono with eight eyes, a six-faced priest.

Why does the secretary of bodies
authorize such lavish feathers?

[1] Frankenpo: an invented method similar to a cut-up that mixes, erases, and rearranges two or more existing texts, in this case the screenplay and dialogue from Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) + US presidential Executive Order 9066 (1942), authorizing the incarceration of Japanese Americans.

分かんない。さっぱり分かんない。
(I don't understand. I just don't understand.)
We crouch with terrible faith. An enemy beautiful.

Nick Greer

The Ten-Year Plan

Year Zero The birds sing in a major key. Our leaders are draped in paper. Their teeth glisten carelessly. I am full of something that makes me weightless. We all are.

Year One We move forward with tremendous velocity and purpose. There are jobs to be done. This morning I woke to a new skyline. By this time tomorrow I will own my own vault. We enjoy many freedoms, but more than that, we enjoy that we earned them. Calloused palms. Greased sleeves. And then, at the end of each honest day, we return to our units where dinner is waiting for us. Cabbage soup, just like your grandmother made it, but with a hint of something you can't quite.

Year Two Our standard of living has reached an all-time high. I now have two vaults, two degrees, two twins. There are more arenas, more wives, more comedy, more hardware, more appetizers. More granite, more flora, more analytics, more flags, more more. The silos are full so we build more silos. You can never have too many containers. Industry experts project returns in the thousands. The hundreds of thousands. I tend to agree with them. I love my engine. My engine loves me. What isn't there to love.

Year Three It's morning again. Far as the eye can see. If you squint you can almost make out Year Seven, mounted on its obelisk. Year Ten is too good to be true, but this impossibility is larger than any fact. Behind us is Year One, much too proud of itself. Whatever came

before that is too bronze to touch. I fill up and head out to the quarry where the day awaits me. I can't complain. The markets give me no reason to. I meet my quarterly goals. I volunteer for first watch. I am good at being good.

Year Four

A time for the smelling of roses. A time for going abroad and then returning, content to have made the right choice. There are many choices to make. Which carriage. How many units. Rustic or modern. The naming of things occupies much of our conversation. Our conversation occupies much of our conversation. Our conversation digresses. Monorails are a must. Invest in yourself. The countryside is overrated. There, bees hop from flower to flower, no way of knowing that without them, none of this would be possible. We know the bees are a metaphor, but choose not to believe it.

Year Five

Is just like Year Two. The verbiage, the warmth, the acceleration. The radio plays my favorite anthems. Engines are back in style. Lawn games too. Jokes are good-natured. Many deals are done with firm handshakes. Everything is the same, except children no longer play in the streets. Their chalk has been replaced by canisters. Their caps with scalps. They are obsessed with tiny metal boxes that contain nothing. They talk to us like we're already statues. Like they know something we don't. They are the future, my neighbor says, barely looking up from the muzzle he's polishing. I have to agree with him. I read the same pamphlet. We all did.

Year Six

My dependents are depending on me. My best friend is aging faster than I am. My dreamcatcher isn't doing its job. I cannot

do my job. There are too many surfaces, too many snacks. Except when there are not. The mall is full of vacancies. The forums are full of slogans. Millions of men trying to shout off the rust that coats their lungs. Even more women made to whisper in the breaths between. Those at home watch with teeming ambivalence. Our leaders hear us. Alkaline levels are too high. Inflation is a real concern. Coyotes are breeding at an alarming rate. They threaten our very way of life. There is an epidemic of opinion, but we can all agree on one thing. Ours is the one that matters. Our leaders are sure of this.

Year Seven

And little has changed. There are new bureaus, fresh faces, moving targets. But not all parts are interchangeable. Laborers continue to labor away. Managers manage. Their managers manage them. And their managers. Righteous anger hardens into a stone that will one day need to be passed. But that day is not today. Industry experts predict it won't come until the next decade at least. Meanwhile, tomorrow arrives, gleaming and square and ready. The monorail is proof of this. I ride it to and from work each day, watching the lawns blur into glass and back, occupied by inefficient thoughts. The middle seat isn't the most comfortable, but it is the safest. I should invest in a good religion. Do you remember the jetty or am I thinking of a picture. That's what it is, a photograph. Sitting on the mantel. Above the fireplace. In your parent's living room. Where nobody has lived for years.

Year Eight

And so much has changed. There are new colors, new parties, new gadgets, new adjectives. All and each insisting on a seat at the table. Lives halve and halve again. And what of the pipelines overseas, free radicals, apologism. Targeted demographics, acid

rain, waste. I tell all of this to my representative. He is not impatient. The iodine supplements he prescribes greatly improve my constitution, but what of the iodine shortage. What of the reptiles and their ingenious holograms. I add five more locks to the door of my den. Then another eight. I maintain a system of locks. A system for that system. From my view up in the belltower I can see all the way to the shining sea. There, the citizens gather, hoping to catch their reflection on the great screen. At the base of every skull is an apricot, overripe, asking to be picked. Demanding. Who am I to deny them their wish. The answer, I'm told, is God. An old friend I haven't seen in years. I wonder what he's up to. Let's find out.

Year Nine

This is the part of the story where you realize it was all a dream. It is morning again and the focus is soft, just the way you like it. Your partner is up already. The kettle is about to boil, but you make it just before the whistle. This is the part where you count your lucky stars. There is your vault, safe and sound. There is your newborn, cradled and pure. Bless them and the shelter you can afford them. The simplicity of it. This is the part where you look out the window, content, knowing you did your part. You know a thing or two. You know your neighbors. The little girl across the street, blowing her bubbles. For her, that is enough. You have enough. You have had enough. You have always had enough. The bubble starts small, a shimmering plane at the end of a loop, and then it grows, gaining dimension with the girl's breath. Her expectant gaze. It grows larger and larger still, wobbling and sagging under the weight of its own improbable form. Impossible, and yet. You can see it is the girl's desire, her belief that keeps the bubble intact. Growing. She is too young to know that eventually she will run out of breath. That even if

she doesn't, the bubble must break free from its loop. That even if it doesn't, the bubble must break. That even if it doesn't, it does. This is the part of the story where you realize it was all a dream. A gorgeous, terrible dream.

Year Ten

The birds sing in a major key. Our leaders are draped in paper. Their teeth glisten carefully. They promise that this time, things will be different. Industry experts project returns in the tens. The tens of millions. I tend to agree with them. They tend to agree with me. I am full of something that makes me weightless. Aren't we all.

Tiana Clark

The Hardest Part of the Human Body

I want to love my teeth—
their crooked city skyline
and lemon-stained swagger.

Who wants to have a perfect smile?
I do and I don't.
I need to stay humble
on my knees
begging
for you to notice
one unique feature
about my face. The asymmetry, perhaps.

I lick my lips
at the world. I know.
I know I shouldn't say
I'm ugly,
but what if I just whispered it

to myself every now and then:
I'm ugly. I'm ugly.
What if I said it
when I passed a man
who looks away from me,
a man who might look like
my father (but I've never seen my father
so what I mean to say is when I pass anyone

on the street I want to whisper how ugly I am).

And what if I said it before I ate,
a simple prayer: *I'm ugly*.
Said it instead of *hello*
said it and said it
until I became each inscrutable flaw,
made a home for my pain with repetition.
I say touch me,
touch me
where I'm ugly
put your hands
inside my mouth
inside my wet teeth
touch my crowns
packed with porcelain
slide your fingers
around each uneven tooth
touch my body
in the not-perfect-places
tell me where I'm ugly,
say my new name—
tell me and touch and touch
—it doesn't hurt.
I take the word
the way I take a torso
sometimes a little bit,
sometimes all at once.

Isn't it strange to be crammed
with what can and cannot own you?

Pleasure toggles there like a whistle of tired skin and juice.

I'm ugly God told me once
and I believed and stared
at my hands wishing
they were mirrors.
I want to touch you
like a mirror,
a mirror touches
everywhere at once.

A mirror can be a God
creating every shade and shape of hydrangea:
frothy ocean at dawn/open-throated pink bird/slate then amethyst
and then my mother's key's
opening the door
so little-poet-me
can fall asleep again.
No longer afraid
of what the dark
reanimates.

I flash my teeth
like a beast.

I want to end this
like you end
a dying ghazal
penned inside
my own howling— Oh Tiana, I want to love you there.

Victor Yang

Momma's Boy

1.

"They're here!" My mother's voice would bellow through the house on Sundays. Everything about her was loud and unapologetic, her slippers slapping the carpet as her long legs raced toward the door. Like other Chinese folks, we never wore shoes in the house. Larry and his mother followed suit.[1] To take off his sneakers, Larry would let go of his mother's arm and sit down on the first step of our staircase. When he stood back up, the cuffs of his pressed khaki pants danced around his pasty white ankles, ready for a flash flood in the middle of landlocked Kentucky.

Every week since he was sixteen, Larry sat with my mother at our multipurpose ping-pong table. He hung his head over the books like a heavy bowling ball about to drop onto the alley at any moment. The sleeves of his dress shirt dragged along the pages of the textbook. My mom looked tense, too, her spine upright like a lightning rod. She was tall, taller than my dad, taller than any other Chinese woman I had known. But at that ping-pong table, she stiffened like a schoolgirl who wanted to do things just right, as if she had forgotten that she was her own boss in this job.

"How much time can you spend prepping for a two hour lesson, Mom?" I asked over her shoulder in Mandarin. She was alone at the ping-pong table, surrounded by books. She asked family friends who taught at the local Chinese school for texts; she combed through them for the perfect lesson for Larry; she had her sister ship her the latest flashcards from Beijing.

"It's not easy, you know," my mother said. According to the U.S. government, teaching Mandarin is especially hard. It ranks Chinese among the five most difficult languages in the world: 2,200 hours of study to master. Larry was a teenage boy, he might not have met another Chinese person in his life before, and his family had to make a one-hour round-trip from another city to our house. How long would they keep it up?

[1] Name changed.

As with many things in her life, the odds were stacked against my mother. As a kid, I filled out 200+ job applications for her. We did a makeover of her resume. It was like those reality TV shows that throw haggard-looking women into a car wash line of makeup equipment. The women are churned out fresh, twenty years of wrinkles erased and smiles slapped on. On my mother's resume, she had me drop the line about her degree in electrical engineering. I deleted her decade of work in the '80s as a computer programmer in Beijing. "It makes me look overqualified," she said. "And old." On her new resume in the New World, she came out a younger woman, if also a poorer one. She vacuumed hotel rooms; she decorated cakes; she pipetted chemical solutions. Jobs that didn't require English. Sometimes she got laid off; sometimes she quit. I knew the parts of her resume like the lines bad kids copied after school.

2.

When I was the one who got the door on Sundays, Larry's mom always struck up a conversation. "How's school?" or "How's your brother?"

I'd smile. My mother had taught me how to play nice with strangers. She started pushing my seven-year-old self to the customer service counter. My head could barely see over the counter I was so short. "It's good for you," she used to tell me. "You can't be shy. Americans like people who can talk. You've got to learn their ways to survive in this country." I hated speaking up. I was her translator runt. I just wanted to be a kid.

Larry's mom said I had good manners. If only she wasn't so nice. I wanted to resent her son in peace.

"Look, look, Victor!" When my mother started teaching him eight years ago, she would show me their lessons together. At first, they were pictures of apples and oranges. Then, it was cartoon Yuan Yuan with his stupid smile as he helped his mom fold dumplings at Lunar New Year. One time when I came home from college, she had me read an essay Larry wrote about Angela Merkel's foreign trade policy. I stumbled, one character after another, until my mother took the paper out of my hands. My mother's teaching was more than fine. My Chinese was not.

Learning Chinese is pain. Instead of twenty-six letters, you have radicals and stems that made an infinite combination of characters. A letter in English can be a swipe down of the pencil, an *I*, a swish in a circle, an *O*. *O*'s closest twin in Chinese is the character for "mouth," 口. Just a rectangle, right? No, it's a freaking choreography of the pen.

Fine, Chinese is pretty. Americans sometimes stop me on the streets to roll up their sleeves. I tell them the 水 or 风 on their triceps look nice. I don't mention that the tattoo artists etched the characters in combinations that make no sense. The ink might have been permanent, but it was meaningless. And what did a meaningless language do for me? Come to think of it, why did Larry ever bother with Mandarin? What appeal did it have for a white boy in one of the whitest states in America?

I didn't think it worth my time, and I was a native speaker. My dad spoke English fluently, with an accent. My brother could pass for an American on the phone like me. I have never had extended family in the States. It was just with my mother that I had to use Mandarin. Not that I didn't care about fully communicating with her—of course I did—but was it worth 2,200 hours of grunt work? I could barely stand two hours of Chinese class on Saturday mornings, especially when it was the sixth day of school every week that none of my other classmates were subjected to. Maybe I would have cared more if I had felt progress. But I didn't. I just shoved random stroke orders down my throat, not bothering to recognize their meaning. It was like eating unnecessarily gourmet food through a tube down my throat. No 口 needed.

In my American life, Chinese did no more for me than soy sauce stains or ginger-imbued rice. It just marked me as foreign.

Larry, on the other hand, was like the other white kids who came into my advanced classes at Chinese school. They would debate with the teacher about the symbolism in Li Bai's poetry, or the logic behind combining radicals into new characters. To them, Chinese had no stakes. If they spoke Chinese at school, they got brownie points. They were cool. If I did, I was fresh off the boat.

I resented the kids who learned Chinese just for the hell of it. Larry especially. His teacher wasn't just any old parent at Chinese school who volunteered her

time—it was my mother. I wanted to be closer to my mother, but she spoke mostly Mandarin, and I mostly English. Yet it wasn't me who she was teaching, but this random American kid. I watched as Larry progressed in Chinese, as the distance between my mother and him shrunk, as the chasm between my mother and me grew. How else could you feel about a stranger who speaks in your mother tongue, to your mother, and because of your mother, better than you can, and better than perhaps you ever will?

3.

In my mother's teaching portfolio, I was her Exhibit A. When she met me at age four, I couldn't utter a word in any language. My birth mother had died of stomach cancer in Canada before I turned one; my father sent me back to his family in rural China; and three years later, he dispatched the woman who would become his second wife—whom I now call mother—on a fifteen-hour train ride from where she lived in Beijing to where I was in Nanchang. She picked me up from whichever aunt was my caretaker at the time. "You were so dark!" my mother recounts, disappointed. "They didn't keep you out of the sun." She took me back to the snow-filled streets of Canada, where she had no job, no friends, no language skills. She became another parent who gave up everything in the name of love, first for my father, then for her kids. Isn't that what immigrants do: sacrifice the past and the present for the future? And who embodies the future more than your children? Her days of computer programming became diaper days, stroller struggles, muttering to the mute kid she adopted as her own.

Most toddlers eat morsels of words everywhere, whether it be curse words from sitcoms or the insults of naughty fifth graders. But I depended on my mother for Chinese. Taxi drivers asked me on my trips back to China's capital, "Did you grow up around here?" My Mandarin is peppered with the telltale "ers" that my mother adds to the end of her words, as Beijingers do. Even to strangers, the mark of my mother's Chinese was apparent.

But only in the vestibule of a taxi could I feign fluency, in the snippets of "good day" and "oh is it hot" as Beijing summers always were. Because when kindergarten started, Chinese escaped most of my waking hours. In months, I learned more

English than my mother had in her life. She knew it, too. The rest of us in the family rubbed it in.

4.

"How do you not know something so simple?" My dad yelled at her in when she fumbled over another English word on the phone, in a letter, at the store.

"You spend all day sitting at a computer," she shot back. "What am I doing? I barely can stand up after hours of housework."

"And how many years have you lived in this country? What language do we speak here in America? How big is your vocabulary? It can't be more than 100 words."

"He's so full of himself," she whispered to me. "He yells at you for five minutes. After it all, you still don't know what the word means. You're the only one that I can ask for help."

I began to understand my father after one high school psychology class, the day we learned about a concept called displacement. The cartoon boss in the textbook yells at his employee; the employee has no outlet at work, so he goes home and shouts at his cat. The employee was my dad. The cat was my mother.

"I hate writing so slowly," he'd tell me, throwing the weight of his body back into his chair. The menacing cursor of Microsoft Word in front of him, it took him two or three times longer than his colleagues to write in English. He landed his first job in academia at age forty. His American counterparts were a decade younger. Unlike my dad, they finished school straight through: no Cultural Revolutions, dead wives, or new languages to deal with. They played ball and cooked dinner. My dad never stopped working. In the decade before he got tenure, he'd hunch over his laptop every night, his desk piled high with spectroscopy readings.

"I used to sit for hours, saying the same sounds in English again and again. That's how you learn a language," he told me, pointing to the shelf of BBC tapes on our bookcase. Maybe that's why he was harsh toward my mother, because he couldn't bear seeing the same struggles in her, too; because he had to displace his own frustrations from work, how he worked twice as much to get half as far; or, like a mouthpiece for the American Dream, he thought hard work meant everything. "Your mom's not stupid. She's just lazy."

I would like to say I came to my mother's defense. I didn't. My brother and I used to snigger and make fun of her in English. I sighed and muttered "not again" when she asked me to translate another letter in the mail. When she spoke in English to strangers, I cupped my hands over my ears, hoping they were like noise-cancelling headphones.

"I can't do this for you forever," I told her in middle school. She had enrolled in the local community college. We spent too many hours in front of a computer together. She dictated her essay assignments word-by-word, and I translated from Chinese to English.

"I'm still doing the work," she insisted. "Am I not coming up with the ideas?"

I rolled my eyes. "How are you ever going learn English?"

She reminded me of her daily routine. Get up at 6 a.m. to make sure we ate breakfast, shuttle us to school, attend classes—she was taking double the usual course load—go to her part-time job, pick us up, send us to swim team and piano lessons, then cook and eat and help with our geometry homework and tuck us in and then collapse over her books when she finally had time for herself to study, at 11 p.m. She wasn't complaining, just reciting the facts of the life she had found herself in. Her hair was graying at the roots. "I'm trying, right?"

Maybe I nodded. I probably just ignored her and kept translating. "Next sentence, Mom."

One of her English 101 essays won a statewide contest and $500 in scholarships. To this day, she's still proud of the award. She didn't type a single word of the assignment, but it's the closest thing to official recognition my mother has gotten towards her dream of learning English.

5.

On a trip back to Kentucky a few years ago, I swung by the children's section of the public library for an Amelia Bedelia book. The last time I went to these shelves was with my mother when I was six and learning English. At the same ping-pong table where my mother gave lessons to Larry, I read aloud for my mother: "Amelia Bedelia changed the towels." Next to the text is the skinny housekeeper with squinty eyes snipping up the bath towels into various

designs. "It's a pun, mom. She 变 the towels when she should have 换 them. Isn't that funny?"

My mother gave me a blank look. She didn't understand the double meaning of "change." We stopped a page later. We tried again days later, but we never made it through one volume in the series, those thin thirty pages, just one line of text on a page, thirty lines total.

In the last five years since I've graduated college, this has become a ritual. I'd come home and offer to help with her English. She'd reciprocate and act like she was going to follow through on her commitment to learn more than ten words a year. But really, our farce never lasted long. We were going through the motions, trying to make up for the years I made fun of her accent, and for her decades of an existence in a country that didn't speak her language. It was an act so small that it could do nothing but assuage our guilt.

That time, I had picked Amelia Bedelia for the puns in the hope that corny jokes could keep her reading. But now I realize my choice of humor was in bad taste, like trying to show a starved person pictures of other famished people dreaming of red velvet cake. My mother lived Amelia Bedelia's life every day, the mix-ups in language that got everyone but her laughing.

But there were key differences between Amelia and my mother. In Amelia storyland, she enjoyed forever employment with a homey Mr. and Mrs. Rogers who never tired of her mistakes. In our reality, my mother's foreign tongue cost her any hope at a job that would pay her for her mouth and not her hands.

Once upon a time, my mother believed she could master English if she tried hard enough. That day long passed—it was twenty years ago, back in Canada, when my mother was still a sprightly forty-years-old. She sent applications to hotel chains left and right. Each job, she found out, attracted over five hundred applicants. Through another Chinese woman she met she got her resume pushed to the top. I don't know what my mother put as relevant experience. Maybe they didn't care about her resume, just her accent, enough to know that she'd gulp down complaints and keep quiet.

"They made me vacuum fifteen rooms the first day. I was sore by the third one," she told me many years later.

"Why'd you do it?" I asked.

"The Canadian government would pay for your English classes if you were working. Besides, I stopped feeling the strain in my back after a few days. Your body gets used to it."

While my mom applied to be a housekeeper, my dad was sending his resume to hundreds of universities in North America. He landed his one faculty offer not long after my mom started at the hotel. There was no deliberation to be had. I was seven. We moved from Canada to Kentucky, and my mom never started day one of her English course. Did she lose her best chance to learn the words that could buoy her to a paycheck and, even, out of the mercy of my father's temper? Or did she hush a secret sigh of relief knowing that she had dodged the same pains my father went through of forcing one's tongue into shapes and sounds, forever foreign?

6.

If housekeeping and Chinese teaching had anything in common, that'd be it. The two jobs are among the few that disregard—or overvalue—accents like my mother's, the scars of migration that never go away. When Larry's mom shoved more bills into my mother's hand than they agreed upon, I'd wonder: was my mother more capable as a Chinese teacher because she couldn't cheat her students with the crutch of English? Maybe this was how karma worked: how her greatest handicap granted one small concession, a part-time job on Sundays for another mother's son.

"I insist," Larry's mother said. "You gave him twenty minutes extra."

After they left, my mom would flash the green wad in my face. "I don't pay taxes on this money," she said with glee.

When I'd call my mother from whichever faraway place I was living in after college—Philadelphia, England, Boston—I'd ask about her weekend plans. "You know," she'd say. "Cooking, cleaning, what other chores." But then she'd remember that she was still teaching Larry, and her voice swelled with the upbeat tone of someone walking toward a destination.

"What does Larry want to learn Chinese for?" I asked her.

"I don't know. Maybe he wants to do business in China."

"Can you see that kid doing business?" We could hardly imagine him opening his mouth to a stranger. I had only see him talk in muted whispers to his mom or mine.

Larry graduated from homeschool with his mom. He was going to stay at home for college, at the same university my dad taught at.

"He's a good son and wants to be close," his mother said. "He'll stay with me at home."

"I wish you flew home more often," my mom would say to me in broken English.

I wanted to say, why do you care? You're still going to have Larry. But I, too, was relieved that she was going to keep her student. She was happy with him.

Larry's mother had the same exchange with my mom again three years later, when Larry went to law school, also at the same university. They kept on with their lessons. Larry would then graduate, and still stay at home, with his mom. In the years that my mother and I fretted about the teaching gig, his own mother knew her son wouldn't leave. He wasn't going to pack up his bags like I did a long time ago.

Sometimes my mom sends Larry home with videos that I don't understand, the nine-day drama of skits and comedies that air over satellite TV during Chinese New Year. In the class after, my mother answers his questions about the jokes and plot twists in the shows. At home, Larry must be filling his room with the screams of Beijing opera and mistresses crying about infidelity. Does he sit in front of the TV because it's his homework, or does he watch for escape to a world he will never know and his mother will never understand, no matter how tightly she holds him?

Still, Larry and his mom are the only Americans who have ever looked at my mother like she had something worth teaching. Dignity. Isn't that all a language is, a defining feature of what makes us human? As in English, a means for the 200th HR man to look my mother in the eyes, to give her a few seconds of consideration before they chuck her resume into the slush pile? Or, in Chinese, a way for my mother and me to have a relationship, human in the way that only human language has an infinite number of meanings from a finite set of sounds?

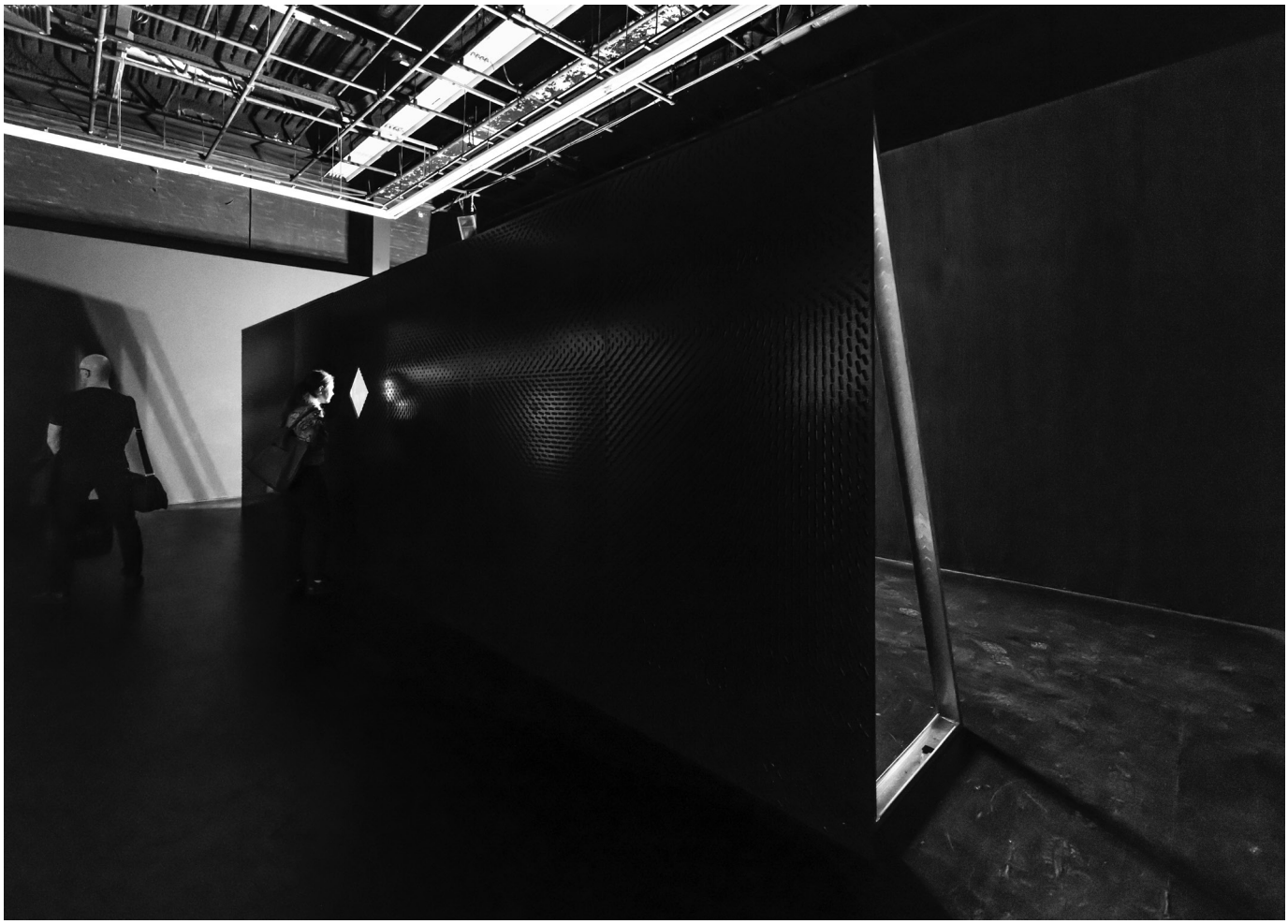
7.

A few weeks ago, a retired Jewish man across the table from me told me my mother was clearly smart and hardworking. But why did she not put in the time to

learn English? His question brought me back to the tears of a Colombian janitor, a member of the executive board at the labor union where I work now. She was showing me pictures of her grown children who had graduated from college and become engineers. "People ask me all the time why I still can't speak English. It's because of them," she said, pointing to the daughter she is embracing on the phone screen. "How did I have time to memorize vocabulary words all day when I spent years cleaning toilets at work, cleaning house at home, and putting my kids to bed and taking them to school?"

"There's nothing like a mother's love," I tell her back in Spanish. "And nothing like a child's love for his mother." I tried to write those spoken words in written Chinese not too long ago, sitting in front of Google Translate, a pen and a blank card in front of me, in my annual ritual pre-Mother's Day. I was too nervous to show my chicken scratch of Mandarin, the lopsided tables that my characters inevitably looked like, so I wrote a first draft on the computer. These were the baby steps in our adult relationship, grasping for speech in adjectives other than "good and bad," or "happy and sad."

My roommate, a Chinese American graduate student who combs Maoist documents for her PhD, rewrote the entire paragraph. "You can't just translate word-for-word," she reminded me kindly. Mind you, this was a grand total of three sentences—how many words can you fit on a 3x5 card? Fortunately, I didn't need too many characters to fill the silent space. My mom called to thank me days later. "An American's Chinese," she told me. "But I understood."

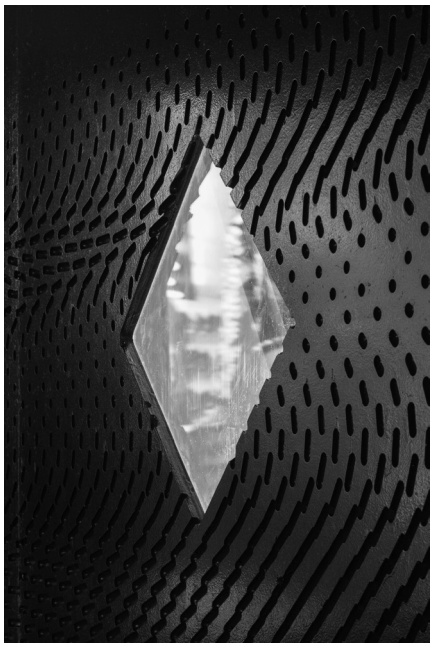


Alan Ruiz. Hunter Green 1390 , 2016 and 2018. Alkyd enamel on plywood, plexiglass, steel studs, 96 × 336 × 36 in. Photo: Andrew Uroskie.

Alan Ruiz

What is a Screen, What Does It Do?

A "screen" may conjure any number of associations ranging from ornamental sacred objects, film, television, and digital media. Certainly today we are inundated with screens that have become smart, offering a digital panoply of information responsive to human touch, rub, and swipe. This would suggest a departure from the history of the screen as one of technological support, a static surface for projection that relates to visual transmission and cinematic phantasmagoria. Yet independent of visual content, perhaps there are less conventionally rehearsed considerations of a screen's active and spatial potential. Beyond providing a ground for transmitting external images, less considered, perhaps, is the screen's ability to frame, reorient, animate, or exacerbate what is already there. While the infrastructure of smart technology implies the screen's newly animated life, one that increasingly conditions our own contemporary existence, screens need not be hardwired and hyperlinked to be active or intelligent. The seemingly benign, or dumb, analogue hardware of architecture such as windows, partitions, and walls, all constitute types of screens that carry the potential for action. A partition that bisects a room rerouting traffic flows and social dynamics is indeed doing something, however subtly, to the ecology of that room. Walls and windows often mediate the distinction, between interior and exterior, private and public, access and refusal, closed and open. Screens privilege the ground as much as the figure, the field as part of the object. In this sense, screens, which indeed make up most of our globalized



Alan Ruiz. *Hunter Green 1390*, 2016 and 2018 (detail). Alkyd enamel on plywood, plexiglass, steel studs, 96 × 336 × 36 in. Photo: Oto Gillen.

Alan Ruiz. *Western Standards A1x3*. 2016. Glass, aluminum. Variable dimensions.

built environment, may "determine our situation," to borrow media theorist Friedrich Kittler's dictum, which is to say, they reflect and reproduce social realities. Screens, in their many iterations, have long been media through which information is delivered, rerouted, amplified or muted.

Rather than autonomous or tautological, screens are contingent, networked and part of an array of unfolding dynamics. Consider one of the most ubiquitous examples of modern life—the television screen. Beyond the transmission of content, the television screen might be understood as a form that shaped the expanded blueprint of the American suburban home, structuring nuclear family time, eating habits, and a range of products such as chairs and folding-tray tables used to consume food in front of its surface. "Television," writes Marshall McLuhan, "demands participation and involvement of the whole being." In this sense, the screen was not only a medium for the transmission of images, but rather structured an array of relationships—both spatial and ideological—working to uphold the hegemony of American culture. Evoking McLuhan, architect Keller Easterling describes the potential of such performative objects as active in the sense that "the action is the form" further explaining that what the form produces is a system and logic for further development that "remains undeclared."

As relational forms, screens might be understood along the lines of Giorgio Agamben's definition of the apparatus as "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings." Agamben's formulation is drawn through Foucault's notion of the dispositif as the "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions" that produce subjectivity. The apparatus is a sort of matrix of forces, "the network that can be established between these elements." For Agamben, it is not only the discursively produced sites of the prison or factory (indeed Foucauldian sites of enclosure) but the cell phone, much like the television, as an object among objects that structures the lives of its users.

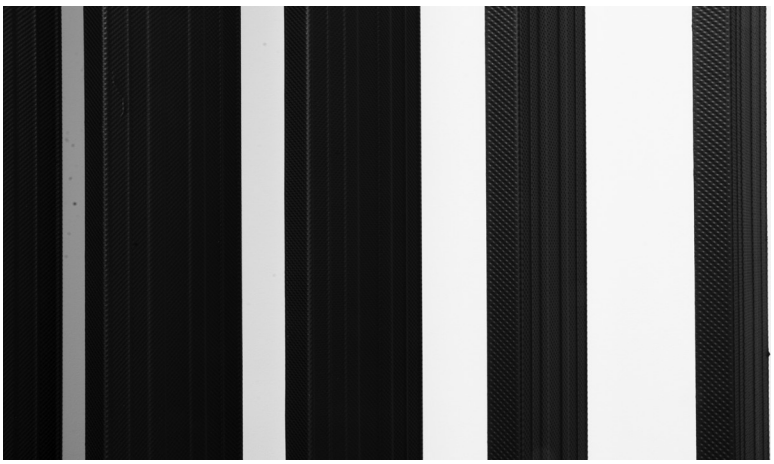
The screen's capacity to shape, to influence, to orient may range in scales from the hegemonic to the banal, the opaque to the transparent. What would it do to consider the border wall as a screen? That is, not only as an opaque obstacle, or object, but a matrix that redraws the spatial limits of national boundaries? To be sure, even in this capacity the border wall functions kinetically, to some extent constituting the parameters of citizenship on both of its sides. Following Thomas Nail, "the border is a history of vectors, trajectories, (re)directions, captures, and divisions, written

WHAT WOULD IT DO TO CONSIDER THE BORDER WALL AS A SCREEN?

Alan Ruiz. Western Standards A1 . 2016. Glass, aluminum. 4 x 4' x 6'

exclusively from the perspective of the material technologies of social division." For Nail, the border is emblematic of kinopolitics, or rather, a politics of movement, situated between the expansion and expulsion of social migration. Yet it is one's passage through this wall that is constitutive of the dimensions of global subjectivity—through a process of screening—that is, an architectural form that doubles as an ideological function. In this case, the border-as-screen triangulates the apparatus of citizenship through the interplay of the spatial, administrative and discursive powers of law, which as evidenced by recent policy, once traversed, may literally fracture families. One then could perhaps argue the screen's radiating power to transform a former Walmart warehouse into a child detention center, where commodities were previously stored with more rights and better tracking logistics than separated families.

Indeed, screens differ from walls in their porous ability to filter. While they may carry similar function in terms of spatial partitioning and blockade, screens regulate the filtration of certain elements over others, as well as certain bodies over others. Following Henri Lefebvre, "every spatial envelope implies a barrier between inside and out, but that this barrier is always relative and, in the case of membranes, always permeable." However semantic, this distinction between walls and screens is essential in underscoring their regulatory power. To reconsider the existing border wall, as well as recent prototypes developed by US contracting



Alan Ruiz. *Western Standards C-3270*, 2018. (detail) Steel studs, wood, existing architecture. Variable dimensions. Photo courtesy of TG, Nottingham.

firms commissioned by Donald J. Trump as screens might also animate the reality of the aspiration to cross over, to literally project one's self through this membrane. Conversely, the border wall has become a surface upon which radical right ideology and policy may be projected, a support to register the aspirations of a speculative future upheld by xenophobia, racism and nationalism, eradicating a criminalized and imaginary "other."

Yet screens more banal than the border wall may carry similar disciplining effects. For instance, a reflective surface indexes its shifting environment and the subjects who encounter it. Storefront windows have since the early turn of the 20th century produced forms of spectacle that worked to promote conspicuous consumption. Yet independent of their contents, these windows, much like the television, constitute a medium that produces a subject. The modern consumer was formed through a process of interpellation regulated by a thin screen of plate-glass. Situated between the space of the city street and bourgeois interior, the storefront window framed a public view inward, wherein as Anne Friedberg writes "the consumptive mode of 'just looking' had its own price." Consumers were thus the vanishing points of a reverse perspective of the commodities projected towards them . The display window was literally a medium for the advancement of consumer capitalism, shaping both architectural typologies and subjects alike.

THE DISPLAY WINDOW IS A RECURRENT TARGET OF DISSENT, A SITE OF COUNTER-IDENTIFICATION WITH SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

Given the display window's instrumental role in the technology of early capitalism, it is perhaps not surprising then that storefront windows are often shattered during periods of political unrest. Throughout modern history, from The Watts Rebellion, to G20 protests, and the more recent inauguration of Trump, the display window is a recurrent target of dissent, a site of counter-identification with systems of oppression under late capitalism. Yet even further back, Marxist historian E.P. Thompson identified window-breaking in eighteenth century England as an "act of darkness [of] the anonymous tradition." For Thompson, window breaking, along with examples such as "the anonymous letter, arson of the stock or outhouse" were forms of resistance made "in a society, where any

open, identified resistance to the ruling power may result in instant retaliation, loss of home, employment, tenancy, if not victimisation at law." Indeed, when a window is shattered, its ability as a screen to uphold capitalist phantasmagoria, is ruptured constituting a form of indirect action against hegemonic oppression, puncturing a hole in the very illusionism of commodity fetishism.

The screen is a function, as much as an object, toggling between verb and noun. Within the free-market logic of neoliberalism, for instance, exists an economic and ideological system made up of screens. Privatization is just one example of a screening process that privileges the individual over

Alan Ruiz. *Western Standards C-3270* , 2018. Steel studs, wood, existing architecture. Variable dimensions. Photo courtesy of TG, Nottingham.

the social. Under the laissez-faire rhetoric of deregulation, the market's so-called invisible hand functions as a screen which, despite suggesting the opposite of enclosure, masquerades as a system of open exchange that is anything but fair. As Jackie Wang notes, "while extraction and looting are the lifeblood of global capitalism, it occurs domestically in the public sphere when government bodies—out of pressure to satisfy their private creditors—harm the public not only by gutting social services, but also by looting the public through regressive taxation." In this light, the breaking

of the storefront window is a rather literal assault on this transparent boundary which casts a pale of financialized property over the world, establishing an array of hierarchies and enforcing a myopic condition of individualism. Yet how else might we read this scene? Perhaps the shattered window is not only an act of destruction but helps to realize the utopian promise of free and unmediated exchange, or commons. Amidst these screens—both material and procedural—that determine our situation, it seems worth imagining what such acts of creative-destruction against structural and systemic violence, might look like at the national, hegemonic, level.

Gabrielle Bates

How Judas Died

There's a bird believed to suck the teats of goats at night.
Flocks alight swollen on the slash pines while we sleep.

Here, in this dark field, among what's been cast out
from the body of birds, goats, and men, Am I late or early?

is a question. It asks the black grass against my face.
Without light, every color is a past someone decided

to believe in. The official account is this:
Judas's organs burst from his body in an open field

or he hanged himself from a tree. It was after dark
or it was day, and on the other side of the world,

a soldier's ear, severed from cochlea, was free of the mind
to listen properly to the dust. Cartilage coil in a street,

it spills, and this is silence. Or this is silence
betraying itself as currency. If Judas coughs up a coin

into my hand, let it be night—the birds, hungry.
If I put what was once liquid metal in my mouth, let my mouth

become a glossy orange arm reaching up out of the mold
back into crucible, then pouring out again.

Body from body, speech from speech.
Judas is there, fully eared, in the sunbright street

or he is the nightly sigh of a fat-uddered goat going dry.
The throaty creak of a branch, or the flapping of wings.

Which or both or neither, I am listening. As milk slithers back
from beak to nipple. He unbreaks his neck with a rope.

Mira Rosenthal

Memory Loss

My grandmother writes on a cardboard box
in Sharpie: *castors and shims / cherry dresser
without mirror*. She pauses as the words lock
into rhyme, *or–er–or*, then seals over the dark blur

where old tape along the seam leaves pock-
marked ridges. She tries for us to transfer
the gist of what remains inside the stock-
pile of parts in a basement she never enters,

fills index cards with lists in shaky scrawl
we find all over the house. And by her bed,
during the final time that time loosens

her mind like a skein of wool undone and balled
in knots, she pins a note in red pen, *L. is dead.*
Each day she wakes to it all over again.

Katherine Evans

House of Spies

Your parents work for the Central Intelligence Agency. You find this out in the fourth grade while conducting an interview assignment for your English teacher, Mr. Taylor. Before, your parents told you they worked for the government and you were satisfied with that answer. For you, government was synonymous with White House, and you imagined your mom and dad on either side of Bill Clinton, a parent for each ear.

Working for the CIA is not at all unusual, your mother explains. There are lots of girls and boys in Northern Virginia whose parents work at the Agency. She tells you that the CIA is not in the White House at all, but in a place called Langley. Langley is very secure. You picture a gray building with barbed wire and watchtowers and guards and your mother's blue Subaru driving through a large gate.

At school you discover that your classmates have doctors and lawyers and bankers for parents and that their interviews, when they share them with the class, are considerably more detailed. You panic. Mr. Taylor will not give you full credit. He will put your name on the yellow poster at the back of the classroom that's reserved for truants and students who do not turn in their homework. But Mr. Taylor is ecstatic. When you finish reading he applauds.

"Two spooks for parents," he says, "I better watch out on back-to-school night!" The class is intrigued. Trevor Wickstrom farts and they do not even make fun of his sudden gaseous emission. They want to know what CIA means. They stare at you with serious, pinched faces. During lunch break, Megan Roach gives you one of her mother's homemade cookies. "What are spooks?" she asks.

Be thankful you have an older brother. He lives in the basement of your suburban house when he's not attending a boarding school for wayward boys in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. His room is decorated with blacklight posters of psychedelic buses and Grateful Dead skeletons that frighten you, but

you understand you can consult him for answers. He loves you. He calls you Munchkin and you let him.

"Have you heard about the Cold War, Munchkin?" he asks.

You remind him that you're in the fourth grade. You haven't moved past that colonial stuff.

"They're not spies," he says. "They're analysts. They're in charge of information, the information that goes to the spies and comes back from the spies. Mom and dad have to sort through that shit."

The distinction here eludes you, but you want to know how he can be sure they're not spies, spooks.

"Do they seem like spies to you?"

Your mom heads a neighborhood book club. She doesn't cook and likes to say that her most famous recipe is boiled water. Sometimes she laughs so hard no sound comes out of her mouth and when she recovers she'll say *I'm a cheap date* or *You can't take me anywhere!* Sometimes she will let you play hooky from school and go to the movies. Once, she showed up at the secretary's office claiming you had an orthodontic emergency and instead took you to see the circus. She sings loudly and often even though your dad teases her, pleads for deafness.

You consider your dad and decide that he is similarly ordinary, a definite non-spy. He feeds your guinea pig, Tigger, fat carrots and lets you play bureaucrat with his old electric typewriter (a game which involves writing out the alphabet or your name or the forecast and delivering the resulting stack of pages to your father's nightstand with great haste). Also on the nightstand are several heavy books about the Civil War. He reads these to you when you ask him to and you pretend to understand the intricacies of the Battle of Bull Run. Your great-great-great-grandfather died defending the Union, and you know this history matters to your father so it matters to you, too. One weekend he took you to a reenactment. You remember a woman in a hoop skirt explaining, serenely, that there was no anesthesia on the battlefield and also, when a soldier died, they tied one end of a string to his finger and the other end to a bell above ground, in case they guessed wrong. The woman in the hoop skirt had smiled, explaining about the

bells, though she was dressed in black for mourning. You developed an intense fear of vivisepulture, which means being buried alive.

Your brother reclines in the glow of a bedside lava lamp, waiting on your answer.

Spies dress in black, you tell him. They carry guns and they're always running from someone or something. Spies have no families, no daughter like you. Spies are phonies, you explain. Fakers.

"Listen," says your brother, leaning in close so that you can smell the faint sourness of his breath and the boy scent that reminds you dimly of Tigger's shavings, "you should ask dad about the STU-III."

From 1995-1998 your dad keeps a scrambler phone in his home office. It's a big bulky gray machine stored underneath his roll top desk next to batteries and Krazy Glue and old coins from foreign cities. It's called a STU-III. A STU-III is a phone with an encrypting device. If someone wants to talk to your father over a secure line, they call him at the house and tell him to get on his STU-III. The STU-III plugs into the wall jack. There's a plastic key that must be turned at the top of the phone to activate encryption.

You want to know why your dad doesn't keep the phone plugged in all the time, why the men who call him at night don't just ring the STU-III directly, instead of waking everyone else up. Your dad answers: "Then you little buggers might pick it up. You're a security risk."

You'll talk about the STU-III at cocktail parties and on first dates, parading it out for your disbelieving friends. When they ask you why your father needed that phone for four years, say, with your readymade joke, "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you." Privately, you wonder if you'll ever know the answer. When you close your eyes and try to recall what was said, overheard, etc., you only remember your dad's shut office door and a strip of light falling across the brown hall carpeting.

The STU-III is only the tip of the iceberg, only the beginning of dad-related mysteries. Over the years you collect bits and pieces of intel, you scrounge for details—you learn that he was married before, at twenty, to a woman who did not want children and left him for a married physicist. You learn that the summer he turned nineteen he worked in the Merchant Marine, traveling to Vietnam on an ammunition ship.

"His parents sent him to Vietnam," says your mom. "Right at the start of that war. A nice summer job, right? He got fired at, too. By Viet Cong."

Your dad confirms this. He tells you that sometimes he was scared because the Viet Cong in the hills surrounding Cam Rahn Bay lobbed mortar shells at his ship and these often came uncomfortably close. He worked as a messman, a waiter, bringing food up from the kitchen to the officers' dining room, making coffee for them. You imagine him bowing under the weight of a loaded tray, spooning gravy over white meat.

When you ask your dad what he did for fun that summer he tells you, "They'd screen a movie. I remember they showed *Bunny Lake is Missing*."

"Was it any good?"

"There was a drunk on board who thought the title was *Bunny's Leg is Missing*. He was disappointed. He kept asking about the leg."

Sometimes your dad spoke to the garrison troops at Cam Rahn Bay and they told him grizzly stories from the frontlines. Later, in June of 1968, just shy of completing his first semester of graduate school, your dad was drafted into that same war, so he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He was assigned to Chanute Air Force Base in Champaign County, Illinois, where he worked as the editor of Chanute Wings, the base newspaper.

"What did you write about?" you ask him.

"Baseball scores, Air Force policy, social functions on base. Boring stuff. It was three years of my life. It was awful, waiting."

Waiting to be sent off, away, to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon.

"I was lucky," he said. "That day never came. Nothing ever happened to me."

Nothing ever happened except The George Tenet Story. It goes like this: during a family ski vacation in Vail, Colorado, your dad pulls you and your brother off the slope for hot chocolates. You're happy to oblige because walking through Vail Village's cobblestone streets in ski boots gives you great pleasure. You feel like a moon man, stuttered in all your movements. Underneath those many layers, the thermal underwear

and parka and neck warmer, you are invincible. You fall in a snow bank and don't even feel it. You ask your brother to punch your arm and when he does it barely hurts.

"Wait here," your dad says, installing you at a back table while he orders.

He brings you hot chocolate with extra marshmallows. He gives your brother a ten-dollar bill for incidentals, and he sits a few tables away with a man you do not recognize.

"You know who that is?" your brother asks.

You don't. Your brother doesn't either.

Years later, you discover that this man is/was George Tenet. He is The Head Honcho, The Big Kahuna, The Director of Central Intelligence who will resign under the shadow of Iraq's WMDs and the 9/11 attacks. Your dad insists that running into George Tenet was a coincidence. George Tenet needs to take vacations, too, after all. He also says he never left you and your brother at the table. You are uncertain on the details now, but there is one memory you cannot shake. George Tenet called your father by his name. He knew him.

Later, your husband will tell you that this one detail means something, that it points to your dad's standing in the Agency.

Sometimes when you ask your dad about The George Tenet Story, he laughs and jokes that the whole family vacation was engineered. All of it, down to your purple ski pants and pompom hat, was leading to one exchange in a café fashioned to look like a Bavarian storefront. You and your brother call this Operation Ski School.

Though of course, it is not only your father who beguiles you. Your mother is equally enigmatic. You know a few things. For instance, she was in Russia during the 1993 Constitutional Crisis, when Boris Yeltsin's forces fired on parliament, and in Romania three months after Nicolae Ceaușescu fell (this was when Americans were traveling to Romania in droves to buy children. Your mother could not walk down the street in Romania without people offering her babies).

The first time Gorbachev met Reagan the Agency prepared a film on Gorbachev's life.

"One of the higher-ups thought it would be a great idea on account of Reagan's short attention span. And he was a movie star, after all," your mom explains. "They got me to write the script."

But the defining moment of your mother's career happens stateside, when she briefs Shirley Temple Black, ambassador to Czechoslovakia and former child star, on Soviet leadership.

"What was that like?" you ask your mom. "Was she any good as an ambassador?"

"Oh, she was smart," your mom says. "She wasn't half bad. She was married to a very wealthy man who gave money to the Republicans, so Bush appointed her."

"What did you talk about?"

"I told you. I briefed her on Soviet leadership and then I sang her 'On The Good Ship Lollipop'."

"You didn't."

"I didn't. I saved that for afterward, for the office."

You tell her you don't believe her and that "Good Ship Lollipop" doesn't seem like the kind of thing her officemates would go in for.

"I tried to inject humor wherever I could, dear. That's probably why I never climbed quite as high as I might have."

There are questions only strangers can ask your parents. You are too used to growing up tight-lipped, too accustomed to hearing the answer: *I can't tell you that*. But your husband has a magic touch—when he accompanies you home for the holidays he asks your father questions and, miraculously, your father responds. You feel a little jealous, listening in on their conversation. How easily your husband can ask your father about work, about his life.

"Did you ever feel spied on? Did you ever think someone was watching you?"

"At home? In the States?"

"Yeah."

"No, never at home. In Israel, yes. When I'd go to Israel they'd follow me, sure. You had to assume that, when you went over there."

"Are they the best, the Israelis?"

"As spies, yes. Much better than us. We're not very good."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Did you ever feel responsible for someone's life?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean did you ever have that responsibility?"

"You mean was I ever the triggerman?" Your dad laughs.

"I mean directly or indirectly, did you ever save someone's life?"

Your dad is quiet. You pretend to be napping in the passenger's seat. You can feel your pulse and the sweat building under your bra. You swallow, trying not to make a sound. You believe that as a CIA child you've mastered the art of invisibility.

"I guess I can tell you I helped stop two countries from going to war. A lot of people would've died. I felt pretty good about that."

"Which countries?"

He won't answer, but agrees that your husband can guess and if he's correct, your dad will tell him.

You can hear the road outside the passenger window, the thunk thunk thunk of the freeway. You can hear the soft banter of a radio DJ emanating from the car's front speakers. You swallow.

Your husband makes two obvious guesses.

You open one eye and catch your father nodding in confirmation. Under your breath you whisper that familiar refrain: *I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you…*

When he drops you off at Dulles airport, you turn to your husband, exasperated. These are questions you have often wanted to ask, but your dad's answers reveal only so much, and leave a host of other questions in their wake. You explain to your husband that he will never be satisfied, probably, by any of these conversations.

"Disappointment comes with the territory," you say. "Better get used to it."

There are other cons to being a Langley brat. When you hit high school, for instance, your textbooks begin to list the various coups and regime changes that the CIA masterminded (Mossadegh, Lumumba, Diêm, the list goes on). You read about

Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz, deposed by CIA-backed military dictator Carlos Castillo Armas. Before he was allowed to leave his country, the ruling junta forced the disgraced Árbenz to strip before a jeering crowd. You look up photographs of this disrobing on the school computer. You see the soft swell of Árbenz's belly. This coup has nothing to do with your parents, you say, though you can't ignore your classmates knowing glances when your teacher lectures on CIA meddling.

You must field questions like, "Have your parents ever killed anyone?" Your Driver's Ed teacher (who carries a machete in his trunk and believes that the moon landing was faked) tells you that he knows for a fact your dad hasn't killed anyone. "Just by looking in a man's eyes I know," he says. "Your dad's no killer." Later, over dinner, you stare into your father's blue eyes, searching for some sign of homicidal capability.

Your dad calls the Driver's Ed teacher a crackpot.

People will assume your parents are neoconservative patriots. Do not be alarmed when your aunt, feeling sour over a lackluster Thanksgiving spread, calls your mom and dad murderers. She does not understand how two liberal academics became analysts by accident, how your father's survey work—measuring the extent to which non-elected bureaucrats in government agencies understood the principles of democratic government—led to a career evaluating Middle Eastern policy, or how your mother, who dreamed of teaching political science, spent over thirty years specializing in Eastern European policy. You do not understand this either.

For the most part this lack of understanding is like an itch, a mild annoyance. Nothing prepares you for Ms. Hunter's seventh grade English class. On this particular day, you are just starting to discuss Robert Frost (*Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it. No more to build on there*) when your best friend, Rebecca, appears at the open door and says, "A plane just hit the Pentagon."

You do not understand why she is telling you this, why Rebecca, polo collar askew, blonde hair mussed, seems to think you are implicated in this accident, this crash landing, this plane that has fallen out of the sky and into the Pentagon. The

Pentagon, which is not where your father works. He works for the CIA. He works at Langley. You explain to her (in a slightly condescending tone that will haunt you) that the CIA and the Pentagon are *different*. Even so, a little swell of fear rises in you. You push it down. You pretend to be absorbed in Ms. Hunter's chalkboard scribbling (*Rural life. Man and nature. Sound of a buzz saw!*).

Rebecca persists. The hallway is empty now, but she stands in the doorway, and says in a clear, unwavering voice, "My dad says your dad works there. He *told* me."

Ms. Hunter shoos Rebecca away. If she is concerned for your father's well-being, she does not show it.

You feel your heart beat. The sound is loud in your ears and you want to go get a drink of water but you are afraid to move. You do not know why Rebecca's dad knows where your father works, and you do not. You are confused. You are angry. You are trying to focus on the Frost poem.

Caroline Joyce, who sits in front of you, turns to face you and whispers, "If your dad was dead somebody'd tell you." Caroline, like most people, has unwavering faith in the swiftness of government bureaucracy.

You sit through English class. You stare at the mole on Ms. Hunter's chin and do not ask to be excused. Even in the face of tragedy, you are a dutiful student.

After class, you walk to the cafeteria even though you have no appetite. The smell of the lunchroom—disinfectant, adolescent perspiration, Saran-wrapped luncheon meat—nauseates you. Your friend Jillian suggests that you can call your dad, can't you?

You tell her you do not have the phone number for your dad's office. You poke at the turkey sandwich your mom packed you. You start to cry. Faculty take notice. Ms. Hunter approaches your table, her mouth a taut line. Megan Roach stares at you, leans over the table to tug on a friend's shirtsleeve. Someone tells Jillian to walk you to the principal's office. You do not protest. You forget your pink cheetah-print lunch box at the table.

The principal is known for being no-nonsense and authoritarian. Once, he made you change out of your chino skirt because of an errant hem. This afternoon is different. He pats you on the shoulder and offers reassurances (*you're safe here, your parents will arrive in due time…*). You find his stiff British accent strangely

comforting. It makes you think of order restored, makes you suddenly aware that your nose has been running for a while now. You realize, in fact, that there is snot all over the sleeve of your oxford shirt. The principal tells Jillian to run and get your backpack and to bring it to the library without delay.

The librarian is already seated at a table with another student, a boy younger than you, and you realize that this is a holding room. For a moment you believe that this boy's dad must work at the Pentagon, too—but the boy says his father is a pilot with Delta Airlines. You refuse to play Jenga with him and the librarian asks, in a bright, cheery voice, if you'd prefer crossword puzzles.

You wait. You wait until the boy who's been waiting with you gets picked up by his mom (his dad is now safe and accounted for) and it's just you and the librarian. She says everything will be fine but her voice is phlegmy and she keeps pulling a dirty hanky from her shirtsleeve so that she can blow into it.

"Can I use the phone?" you ask. You have finally worked up the courage to dial home. The not-knowing is no longer preferable now that the boy is gone, now that the librarian is crying openly beside you.

"The phone," she says, squinting. "You want to call someone?"

The librarian wonders aloud whether she ought to call the main office, whether this is proper protocol. Then she pulls a Werther's from her desk and hands it to you.

"Here," she says, guiding you into her office. "You've got to press one to dial out."

You call your mom at Langley (this is a number you do have). The line rings and rings. No one picks up.

"Is there another number?" the librarian asks. She pulls a school directory from the shelf. "The house, perhaps? Maybe they're home already?"

The house. Your house. You dial.

When your mother picks up, you can't say anything. You say something like *maaahhhrr* or *daaaaa* and then your nose starts running.

"Kat?" she says.

You wait for her to elaborate, to fill the silence.

"He's here," she says. "Daddy's here now. Let me get him." She calls his name and you wait for what feels like several minutes.

And then your dad says he is okay. He is all right. He says they are coming to pick you up from school. But like school is an afterthought, like it has not occurred to either of your parents that you will need to be picked up until this very moment. You cannot speak. You do not even say, *I love you* (the librarian is there, after all. You feel suddenly shy. You blush). You hand the phone back. The librarian's face is sooty with streaks of mascara. "Thank God," she says, exhaling. "Thank God."

You return to the kiddy reading corner. You let yourself sink in a clutch of pillows. You peruse titles. Baby books with big pictures. Little Golden Books. Touch and Feel books. *The Mysterious Tadpole*. You know this one. You pluck it from the shelf.

It's about a tadpole who outgrows his jar, outgrows the kitchen sink, and outgrows the bathtub, too, because he is not a tadpole at all but a monster. He is a monster from Loch Ness. But gentle. Orange-spotted. Puppyish. A loveable Loch Ness monster.

"That was one of my favorites," says the librarian, managing a smile.

Yours, too.

By the time your parents show, you have read *The Mysterious Tadpole* several times. When your dad walks through the door you still have it open in your lap. He has changed out of his suit. Your mom follows behind, her face blotchy and tired looking. You hug them sheepishly. You are embarrassed that you have already imagined your dad's absence, have so thoroughly envisioned the house dad-less. You have seen, for instance, the minivan that your mother is afraid of driving parked on the curb (who will drive it now?) and your father's books stacked on the nightstand, waiting to be finished and re-shelved in the study and his shoehorn lying beneath the bed, and Tigger nosing his cage wanting his nightly carrot, and you have seen yourself, too. You have seen yourself staring at your bedroom ceiling, the galaxy rendered in miniature above you

with glow-in-the-dark sticky stars, after not having said goodnight to your dad (non-dad, now. Dead dad). You have seen yourself hovering your finger somewhere over the constellation Perseus, wondering: *why*?

In the car you learn that your dad was 200 yards from where the plane hit. In the office above him, people died, but your dad was thrown from his chair. He assumed it was a truck bomb. The alarms did not go off in that part of the building. A female guard ran down the hall shouting, "Evacuate! Evacuate!" Evacuate, but not before securing sensitive materials, before locking safes. A woman in your dad's office was moving around on crutches from a prior injury, and he had to help her out, too. They left through the south entrance and stood in the south parking lot for a half hour, waiting. A guard with a megaphone told them another hijacked airplane was bearing down on Washington. "You all need to walk toward Pentagon City," he said. So your father waited there for three hours, wandering past the specialty boutiques and restaurants, past office complexes and high-rise apartments. He did not have a cellphone. The use of cellphones was (is) not allowed at Langley or the classified areas of the Pentagon. But it didn't matter. No one could get through, anyway. Be grateful that you are not your brother, who called from his boarding school thirty minutes too early, when your mom still thought your dad was dead, when she hadn't been able to reach him. Rebecca's mother saw him on television, wandering behind an anchorman, stunned. She saw him on television and left a message for your mother (*I saw him outside, Shelly. On the TV just now*).

When you arrive home, your parents tell you to put the dog on a leash. The three of you take him for a walk. It's a beautiful day. The sky is very blue and the grass very green and the dog scampers happily down the sidewalk, pausing to sniff one mailbox and the next. Nobody speaks except to say, *Good boy*.

At dinner you move the tuna casserole around on your plate but you are not hungry. Your dad has a bad headache and your mom wants him to go to the hospital. She says it can't be healthy, whatever he inhaled. But this is your dad—the same dad who will refuse morphine when he is rushed to the hospital with a severe case of diverticulitis a year later. He is stubborn. He insists he only needs sleep. In the living room, your mom has CNN playing on mute. She keeps getting up from the table to check the television. Your dad tells her to take her plate in there if she wants.

He looks at you across the table. "Please stop staring at me," he says, sounding pained. "Please. You're staring at me like I'm a ghost."

You don't realize that you've been doing this. You apologize. But now, sitting at the kitchen table, you understand a perverse truth—you have never felt gladder in your life. And tomorrow, when school is cancelled, you will lie in bed sensing that you've gotten away with something. You will promise that you'll never take anyone for granted again, that the love you feel building in you now, radiating out so that it includes the snarling poodle down the block, your piano teacher and her sitting room that smells like vinegar, the neighbor boy three doors down who bullies you and who once, you are reasonably sure, peed in the community pool—this love you feel can never diminish. It can only grow.

"I'm here," your dad says, "I'm not going anyplace."

In the next room your mother has unmuted the TV. Reporters are conducting tearful, disbelieving interviews. And you, you feel like a moon man again. You feel buoyant. You are so full of love you feel you might burst and you promise you will never yell again or slam your bedroom door or say *God, how embarrassing*. You will get to know your dad (really know him) and your mom, too, and what they are like apart from you, the dreams they had and what scared them—what still scares them—and what their lives were like before children and what their own childhoods were like and what toys they played with (or wanted most) and what music they listened to on summer evenings or why it is they got teary-eyed when the old forsythia in your front yard (ten feet tall!) had to be cut down, or what they worry about other than the mortgage or what they think about while sitting in traffic. You will learn the names of their aunts and uncles, their grandparents, their childhood pets (Lord Jim, a cocker spaniel). You will pay

attention. You want to tell everyone that they should do the same. *Pay attention*, you think. *Notice. I solemnly swear to notice*. Notice inflections and smirks. Notice scars and freckles and asides and laughter—notice stories. Write them in your diary. Take photos with your disposable camera. Listen. You will listen. You will let the radio station hover on whatever your parents want to hear, on whatever song strikes their fancy (*Oh Peggy, my Peggy Sue! All I have to do is dream! There goes my baby, there goes my heart!*)

You make these promises and you wonder how it is that a day can start one way and end so very differently. You are drunk on this surplus of time—so much of it—that you didn't know you had, that you thought you'd lost, but in the back of your head you have a competing thought that wasn't there before: *Careful*, you think. Because you know, even now, it's unspooling.

Jaquira Díaz

Carraízo

Years later, Toya would remember the boy's birth among the coca plants, how he'd arrived in silence, like some sort of harbinger announcing the end of the world. She would recall the girl's ghost face as she bent over the rows, both hands holding the bulk of her stomach, as if trying to carry its weight. And when she cut the girl's umbilical cord with her sickle, how the girl had looked into her eyes, arms extended, waiting for Toya to hand over the boy. He was ten now, his real mother long gone.

Together, Toya and the boy worked the coca fields along the sloped hills of Barrio Carraízo, and like every morning during the harvest, she chewed a small clump of coca leaves with llipta, made from plantain ash and burnt cane sugar. Most of the other jíbaros who worked for Don Joaquín did the same. Don Joaquín didn't mind a small handful each day as long as they kept working—it was the coca leaf that made them move faster. During the off-season, when Toya harvested coffee or cut sugarcane in the cañaverales, she craved Don Joaquín's small ration of coca. While she made sure the boy never went hungry, Toya often worked on an empty stomach. It was the coca leaf that kept the hunger pangs at bay, that took care of the fatigue. It was the coca leaf that sustained them.

Toya worked fast, one eye on the boy, plucking leaves and stuffing them in the pockets of her apron. This morning, having arrived ten minutes later than usual, Toya and the boy had to climb to the top of the hill. From their row, they could see all the other jíbaros, including Don Péno. She liked to watch him, his pava drawn low over his forehead, his hairy, muscular arms flexing under the weight of the sacks he lugged downhill. But she would never admit it. He was a forty-year-old bachelor, twice Toya's age. He'd told her once, flat out, that he would marry her one day, but Toya had ignored him, rolled her eyes. She'd been widowed at sixteen and was not interested in this old man. Her husband had been a soldier, killed by the Yanquis a week after he turned seventeen. She'd been left childless and alone, but Toya worked the fields to feed herself. She'd never needed any man.

Don Péno turned to Toya, as if he could tell she'd been thinking about him. He took off his hat, smiling, his dark mass of hair lifting in the wind like something wild, a tangle of thick curls poking out under his shirt's collar. Toya never understood how a man with so much hair thought he was desirable. She waved and kept working, pulling leaves and watching the boy.

In the next row, Doña Cusa filled her own apron with handfuls of coca. Her granddaughter, Celestina, plucked leaf by leaf and sang under her breath. She was a year younger and so much quicker than the boy.

"She's getting better, your girl," Toya called out to Doña Cusa.

Doña Cusa didn't even glance up, like it wasn't news to her. "I keep telling her it's not a race."

Toya moved over to the next plant, her mouth already numb with the wad of coca and llipta tucked in her cheek. It made Toya a little sad for Celestina, that this was all she had ever known, that this would probably always be her life. That she'd spend days working the fields instead of climbing flamboyanes, instead of running wild with the other kids, instead of swimming in the Río Carraízo, like *she* had done when she was her age, before the war. Before her boy—silent and steady, mouth like a fist. Soon they would come for him, like they came for every other boy.

The girl had been barefoot on the day he was born. She'd come out of nowhere, and somehow got past the western border of landmines, past the guerrillas in el monte. Toya had tried to pull her off the field, but the girl went down between the rows.

Not here, Toya told her. You have to get up.

She tried to explain about the dead, how many had fallen there, but when the girl would not or could not hear her, Toya saw that she was lost. El campo de coca, Toya knew, would take her. And Toya would let it have her. But not the boy. The boy she would take for herself.

Right there, in the middle of what had once been sacred land, Toya emptied her apron into one of the sacks at the end of the row. She shook off the leaves and

wrapped the boy in the apron. She would build a life for them. She would never again speak of the girl in the field.

She didn't like to think of the girl now, how she'd gone back for her hours later, the boy in her arms, the heat of him making her feel the weight of what she'd done. Toya had scoured the field for hours, had walked up and down the rows, searched every drying bed, every cart, opened all the storage silos, but found no sign of the girl or the afterbirth. The boy never cried. Not once. And in the ten years that followed he would not speak a single word. He would never laugh, never cough, never sneeze. He wouldn't sigh, or groan, or make a sound. Even his footsteps would be silent, his entire body mute, like el campo de coca had taken much more than his mother.

By midafternoon Toya and the boy had filled all the sacks at the end of their row. One by one, Don Péno heaved them over his shoulder and lugged them down the hill, where the leaves would be spread out and dried in the sun. As he came up for the last sack, Toya chewed on a fresh batch of coca and llipta. The boy was already starting on the next row, Doña Cusa and Celestina a couple of rows down, when Toya heard the rhythmic pulsing of a helicopter's blades above the fields. She didn't turn on her heel and run for Don Joaquín, or call out to Doña Cusa, or stumble down the hill yelling for the boy. Instead she watched as the helicopter released bursts of herbicidal powder. Some of it rained down in white flurries, or shot across the rows, propelled by the force of wind from the helicopter's blades, and splattered the jíbaros in the face. Toya got a mouthful before she tumbled forward onto the dirt, dry heaving, the whole time thinking of the boy. She spit out coca, llipta, powder, all of it, her throat feeling like she'd eaten a fistful of fresh-shorn wool. Then she heard the shots.

The first shot made her flinch, the second got her up on her feet. She couldn't see the boy through the cloud of dust and poison, leaves flying like projectiles, the helicopter blades, the wind pushing her sideways. She got on her hands and knees, rubbed the dirt from her eyes and started crawling toward the last spot where she'd

seen the boy. Then three more shots rang out and she froze, counted one second, two seconds, three. Did they think she was dead? Were they aiming for her? She'd been shot at before, more than once, but never in front of the boy. Four seconds, five. She started crawling again, faster this time, then a string of shots, each one louder than the last. They were impossible to count, so she went down, pressed her face into the dirt, covered her ears, waiting, breathing, waiting. She was trembling. She thought of her husband, Piri, what he'd think if he could see her in the dirt now, like some kind of animal, while the boy was dying somewhere, voiceless and alone. She opened her eyes.

Not like this, she thought. She would die anyway, but she refused to go like this.

This time she didn't crawl—she stood up. She heard one more shot and then nothing, and was surprised to find the boy standing among the rows, covered in white powder. As she ran for him, her feet heavy, her linen skirt flapping in the wind, she still heard only silence. And then, before she reached him, she saw *her*.

Six years, but the girl was the same—her ghost face pale, her mouth a bruise. And the boy with his powdered face stood there like a mirror.

Toya tried to speak, but the words didn't come. She wasn't sure if the boy could see her, his mother, reaching out to him with one phantom hand.

You can't have him, she wanted to tell the girl, but instead she pulled the boy against her like a mother would, her arms around his shoulders, his face against her neck. He's not yours, Toya wanted to say, and she held him there, his skin against hers, a prickling in her spine. The girl wouldn't take her eyes off Toya and the boy, a plume of white breath uncoiling from her mouth like a snake. And then, as the helicopter disappeared above the hilltops, the girl vanished, the world and all its sound returned to Toya.

Sometimes Toya found herself thinking of her husband, Piri. Except the memories she kept returning to weren't of Piri the husband, but Piri the boy. She saw those two children they had been, herself as a girl, hair parted down the

middle, braided, Piri and his ragged fingernails, hands always in the dirt, pulling up earthworms or catching lizards.

He'd lived two houses down from her in el Barrio Carraízo, before the war. Their fathers woke before dawn, walked down to the cañaverales with their machetes in hand and their stomachs empty, to cut sugarcane. Their mothers lugged their children with them to the fields, taught them to make llipta from plantain ash and lye and sugar, taught them about Naya, the goddess of the harvest, of the earth and sun and water. That was when la sagrada coca was still sacred, before the Yanquis and landmines and helicopters.

Then the guerrillas came, late one morning. Toya had been running around the coca plants with Piri when the soldiers advanced, spread out over the fields toward the women. There had been rumors that the Spanish army and their guerrillas would take the boys. In other barrios, they were already gone. Some went willingly. Maybe their parents had been too terrified. Maybe they really believed their only hope against the Yanquis was to send their boys to die in el monte.

Toya ran to her mother's side when she saw the men in their makeshift uniforms—which were supposed to look like the Spaniards'—automatic rifles and pistols in their hands. Piri ran too.

His mother said one word when they came for her son: *No*.

Then a soldier put two bullets in her chest. He picked up Piri, and carried him off toward el monte.

Other women screamed and they were shot down. And then women who hadn't screamed, who had already given up their sons. And then women who had no sons.

Toya's mother always said the coca leaf was sacred, the coca leaf was magic. When you drank the coca tea, Naya would infuse you with energy, with life. When you chewed the coca leaf with llipta, Naya would alleviate your hunger. Naya, warrior mother, who brought down rain for sugar, coffee, coca, who kept away drought, who flooded the earth and shook it, who could move mountains, erupt volcanoes, flatten terrain, who could heal your pain. Naya could perform the greatest magic of all.

As her mother lay in the fields among the other dead, Toya didn't cry. The guerrillas took the boys and headed for el monte, and Toya knew in her bones that she would see Piri again, that he would come back to her. But her mother…

Toya scooped up handfuls of coca from her mother's apron, picked out four perfect leaves, and placed them one by one over her mother's heart, mouth, and eyes. Then she spread the rest of them over her body and on the soil around her. On her knees, she bent forward, placing her forehead on the bed of leaves, and prayed for Naya, warrior goddess, keeper of the harvest, to give her back her mother.

It didn't rain. There was no lightning in the sky, no massive earthquake that cracked the world wide open. She was not engulfed in flames. She'd prayed for hours, but in the end her mother was still dead, and Toya would see her always as she was in those last moments.

Later, el Barrio Carraízo would be seized, along with all the other boys who had come of age. Her father and Piri's father would return from the cañaverales, head out to the fields in search of their families. They'd find Toya kneeling next to her mother's lifeless body.

The stories about what happened next would come back to her father, to the other women and girls left in el Barrio Carraízo: How in a rage, Piri's father had raced into el monte with his machete, demand to have his son returned to him. How with the force of a single blow, he would behead one of the Spanish soldiers. How he never dropped his machete, even after being riddled with bullet wounds.

Toya would recall how her father wept when he found her. She would remember how he dropped to his knees, how he took her mother's face in his hands. And she would remember, always, the swarm of butterflies hovering above the coca plants. How one of them floated down, how she opened her hand as it lingered in the air, how it perched on the tip of her finger, then turned to ash.

Toya dabbed at the boy's eyes and face with her apron, tried to catch her breath. His face was expressionless, his eyes the same six-year-old eyes they had been this morning, until he started to change: His hair, already dusty with powder, turned into a tuft of gray and white atop his head. Deep wrinkles formed at the corners of his eyes. His brown cheeks sagged and sprouted a

handful of sunspots. He grew a full mustache and beard, the kind a man like Don Péno might grow, gray and bristling.

Toya didn't recoil from the man her son had become. He was old and shriveled now, but he was still the boy, steady and silent as ever. She dried her face with her forearm and went off to search for survivors, the boy trailing after her.

They found Don Péno first, sprawled on his back in the middle of the fields, shot once through the bicep. She got to work on him, grinding coca leaf and llipta in her mouth until it was sludge, then slathering it over the wound in his muscle.

"Can you get up?" she asked.

Don Péno took her hand and squeezed. "I'm fine," he said. He winced, rolling onto his side, and pushed himself up with his good arm.

She wasn't sure if she should stay behind and search for the others, if there was anything she could do. When Don Péno started making his way toward Doña Cusa and Celestina's row, she took the boy's bony, weathered hand, and started downhill. She didn't look back. She didn't have to—she knew she would not see Doña Cusa or Celestina again.

The boy—the man—picked up his pace, his footsteps soundless, his beard growing longer with each step. They passed a few people who had been shot, and Toya prayed that Don Péno would get to them soon, that he'd be able to help them.

Once they reached the bottom of the hill, she slowed to a stop and let go of the boy's hand. There were people everywhere—shot down where they had been carrying sacks, or picking leaves, or spreading them on their drying beds. The Yanquis and the Spanish guerrillas didn't care who was caught in their crossfires, and it was the Jíbaros, Toya's people, who would pay the price. The war had already taken all the boys. It took the boy Piri had been and sent back a phantom in his place.

As she passed people covered in white powder and torn open by gunfire, she thought of reaching her hands out, covering the boy's eyes. But then she remembered that he wasn't the boy any more—he was something else.

It was the same when she saw Piri again for the first time after all those years. He'd come for her in the night. He had aged, but she recognized him as soon as she opened the front door to her house in el Barrio Carraízo. It was the same

house where she'd lived with her family all those years ago. They'd been allowed to return, except it was just Toya and her father then.

Drunk on cañita, her father was asleep in the hammock when the guerrillas came. He didn't wake when the boy soldiers burst through the door, or when they trampled her mother's clay Naya statue in la marquesina, or when they cut him down with their machetes. And after they used the chickens and goats for target practice, after they finished the last of her father's rum, after Piri took Toya into the bedroom, his child bride, her father's house, the spoils of war, after he bent her over the bed and pulled up her skirt and entered her, she could only think of how she'd spent all those years dreaming of his return.

Toya didn't find Don Joaquín at the bottom of the hill. She could not make herself call out for him, or look into the faces of the dead in search of him. She kept walking, past the drying beds and the tree line, past the edge of the clearing into el monte. She didn't look back to make sure the boy was following—she knew he was there, even if she couldn't hear him. In el monte, she heard peacocks, coquis, roosters, heard running water. Light filtered in through the canopy of flamboyanes and ceiba. She pushed aside gallito branches and the leaves of giant ferns, cutting through a path she'd never taken before, even though she'd lived in Carraízo her entire life. When she got to the river, she stopped.

She took the man's hand again. She remembered the other kids in el barrio. Children and all their noise, how they burst into fits of laughter as they chased each other among the trees, as they splashed around in el Río Carraízo. This was not what she wished for her son, this silent wilting. She wanted him to be a boy again. Once they took him, she knew, he would be lost.

She stepped into the river, feet soaking in water, silt rising in murky clouds. She didn't wait for any signs—thunder or rain or the earth shuddering and cracking beneath her feet. She didn't plead to Naya to give her back her son—she knew he'd never been hers. She let go of his hand, took him by the shoulders

and pushed him under. He gripped her wrists, trying to free himself as she held him underwater, kicking, jerking sideways and backward, the water splashing all around them, spraying her in the face. But Toya would not stop. She would not let them have him. She would hold him under until the beard and mustache ungrayed, receded, until the age spots disappeared and his face unsagged, until he was reborn. She would release his body to the river. She would watch him float away a man, a boy, a baby. She would return him to his mother unwithered. And it would be then, after the boy was already gone, after she had returned him, that Toya would realize she could hear his splashing, the bittersweet sound of it, finally, like a confirmation, like proof that he had been in the world.

NOTES ON CAMP: AN INTERVIEW WITH CARY LEIBOWITZ

"You're going to Cary's place in Harlem?" asks the gallerist at Invisible Exports in Manhattan's Lower East Side as he hands over a copy of Cary Leibowitz's *Museum Show* catalogue. "You're lucky. He rarely lets people visit."

Museum Show, Leibowitz's mid-career survey, opened at The Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM) in San Francisco in 2017. It showcased nearly three decades of the artist's work and traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia before making its last stop at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (CAMH). I had seen the exhibition a few weeks prior and was enchanted by the cotton-candy-colored panel paintings hanging side by side with handwritten quips and questions: *"Stop copying me", "Do these pants make me look Jewish?"* Spray-painted Japanese-style parasols dangled from the ceiling, and display cases filled with porcelain tchotchkes and a collection of brightly colored kippahs lined the room (Fig. 1). It is easy to dismiss Leibowitz's work as funny, self-deprecating Jewish humor, but as an early press release from Invisible Exports so succinctly states, "Leibowitz turns a critical eye on subjects of identity, modernism, the art market, queer politics, and kitsch—making the gestures and reflexes of self-doubt and social skepticism into pictures of self-awareness as a theater of radical and universal vulnerability." Exiting the subway station at 110th Street and Central Park North, I did feel lucky to meet Cary, who since his emergence in the 1990s has gone by the moniker "Candy Ass." I am greeted at the door by a perfectly groomed salt-and-pepper beard with a smile. Similar to the *Museum Show* exhibition, the Harlem townhouse is installed salon-style with artwork collected since the early 1980s. Cary gives me a quick tour, pointing out a few choice pieces by Peter Saul, Andy Warhol, John Kacere, Jonathan Borofsky, and a mutual favorite, John Wesley. Then we head downstairs to his studio for a chat.

Katharine Bowdoin Barthelme: Well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's pretty cool to be able to see the inside of an artist's home. You've acquired an amazing collection artwork and ephemera, and collecting is such a big part of your practice; when did you start?

Cary Leibowitz: I think I was always a collector of some sort. I always liked objects but the art collecting really didn't come into play until later. I had bounced around to different colleges but then ended up going to the University of Kansas in Lawrence, just because I had never been to the Midwest and it seemed exotic. I got there and was in the art department. They have a small museum on campus, The Spencer Museum of Art, which was almost 100 years of collecting and most of the works were gifted from different patrons, alumni, or people who traveled. I had never thought of any museum outside of New York museums and I never really thought about how collections are formed. So, it just got me really interested in the act of collecting and where does this stuff go at a certain point. I started writing, you know it was pre-internet, I started writing to galleries that had interesting things that I had read about in either *Artforum* or *Art in America* or things like that, they would send me slides, and I would do a payment plan and that type of thing. […] Now I am a slightly more passive collector, both because I've run out of space and I've seen more. I've tried to edit down, to become a little bit more of a connoisseur of what is a really good example, and things are more expensive now so it's kind of pushed me out of a lot of areas.

I'M USUALLY NOT SARCASTIC ABOUT THINGS. EVEN IF IT COMES ACROSS A LITTLE SARCASTIC, THERE IS SOME SORT OF SEED THAT I AM THINKING ABOUT.

KBB: Your first solo show at Stux Gallery in New York [1989] exhibited the 'I Love' series (Fig. 2), so obviously the canon of art history has always played a strong role; how much of that is ironic and how much of that is an homage?

CL: Those paintings are old. Of course, my mindset changes, sometimes not as much as I want it to, but I'm usually not sarcastic about things. Even if it comes across a little sarcastic, there is some sort of seed that I am thinking about. I might say, "Oh that Bernard Buffett thing is ugly and hideous," but I still might really like it. I am very critical of art by other people, but I think I am also a little bit generous in my loyalty. Once I like them, I stick with them. It's rare that I give them up.

KBB: There is also repetition and seriality, or variation on seriality in your work. When I saw your clipper ship paintings at the CAMH show in Houston (Fig. 3), I automatically thought of John Wesley and then later [when I realized he was an artist you collected] thought, "that makes perfect sense." How does seriality and repetition connect you with minimalism and pop?

CL: I think it does all of that. I was born in 1963, and I really started looking at art by 1985. Before that, in '81, I started architecture school, and that is when I was first introduced to Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Their whole ugly-in-ordinary and taking things in context of what they are [is] a very American aesthetic. It was the first time my eyes opened up to that way of thinking. I think before that I was more of a fussy neo-classic sort of person. That eventually lead to thinking about art. I didn't really know about Andy Warhol. I had no idea of Minimalism, but by that time I was making things and looking at more art history. Also, I would say another important thing that was going on at the time I was in school was someone like Sherrie Levine.

KBB: You mean her use of Appropriation[1]?

CL: Appropriation and just the act of making things. She was doing the watercolor after Stewart Davis or Mondrian and doing them in the same size and color as the reproductions she was looking at. So, if it was a black and white reproduction, the art was in black and white. Part of it was just that she was saying "I am an artist at this time and this is what I'm doing," and that all connected with my dilemmas of not knowing what I was about or what I was supposed to be doing. I think also Fluxus, almost the opposite of minimalist, this maximalist. You know, going to a gift shop and seeing things for sale and not needing it to be a unique, special, important thing. It could just be a Joseph Beuys postcard or a deck of cards, or whatever it was, it was almost like the holy grail of touching something that was a part of someone else's career. So, I think all of it together, but the idea that I

[1] "Appropriation art raises questions of originality, authenticity and authorship, and belongs to the long modernist tradition of art that questions the nature or definition of art itself. Appropriation artists were influenced by the 1934 essay by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The term seems to have come into use specifically in relation to certain American artists in the 1980s, notably Sherrie Levine. Levine reproduced as her own work other works of art, including paintings by Claude Monet and Kasimir Malevich. Her aim was to create a new situation, and therefore a new meaning or set of meanings, for a familiar image." See https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/appropriation.

could try and make something smarter by saying the repetition is a Carl Andre thing, but I could also say it is a neo-classic, Michelangelo architectural element thing. It all comes into play. Usually when galleries are writing press releases, I get self-conscious of them using the exact references for things because I think, "Oh everyone knows that so I'm not going to say it." Simple things like the brass belt buckles (Fig. 4), those are the same size as the Duchamp sink stopper. In the back of my head it is my own little homage, but at the same time it is not very heavy handed or it's not obvious to anyone, so I don't make it a part of it but at the same time, I've always liked the subject and now I'm making brass objects.

KBB: I am also interested in your use of language and text. I read in an interview that this was born out of a love of signage, but I feel like it is so much more than that. Especially in your early work, there is a kind of poetic prose. Can you talk more about that?

CL: I would say it's not so much born out of signage. I like signage, but I didn't really know about any of this stuff when I started. I ended up doing text work a little bit out of narrowing down what I thought I could allow myself to do. The act of painting, making a brush stroke, all of these things if you take art history too seriously, you could be terrified about what does *this* or *that* symbolize? At the same time, when I was in art school there were second- and third-generation abstract expressionists who were teaching mostly about an aesthetic more than the deep-rooted beginnings of abstract expressionism. So, I had a lot of anger and frustration toward that and did not want to be a part of that dialogue. There is a piece in the CAMH show that is on the orange cardboard about this guy who gets dressed up and goes out and gets beat up by rednecks (Fig. 5). That was one of the first text [pieces] that I did where I came into my own, that I thought, "Oh, this is where I should be going." There is no brush stoke on it, it is a solid-colored background and that was just magic marker. That is still what I try and do. I like when people bring a poetic reference to it because I've been doing this a long time now. I do try and have the text have a little more poetry. I mean, I never thought of myself as studying poetry or becoming a poet. I think in the same way I originally

never thought I would become an artist; it was never on my radar. You find that "Okay I am doing this text, it does also have to do what it should do or work a little harder to do something." Especially on the mugs, I think of them as more like my poetry, maybe because I also take my own handwriting out of that (Fig. 6). I like fonts and I like typesetting, so the poetry seems a little more straightforward than my handwriting. I have in the last five years given myself more of a challenge to make the poetry be poetry.

KBB: What is your approach to installation? It is such an important part of the *Museum Show*, and your aesthetic.

CL: This whole career survey thing was a bit weird. I've always tried to make new things for a show and so it was weird relying on old things. There is this other weird thing about museum architecture; since the 1980s it has been a box that can be manipulated. My work is physically not very large, and although it all looks the same, there are different periods. I've tried to make sense of bodies of work and also make it welcoming for the viewer. I've never really been in a show where it's a traditional museum with white box after white box or traditional architecture after traditional architecture, like an old building. I would love that, but it's never happened. So, in a way there is a part of me that has always tried to make these rooms, and museums have tight budgets so it's not like we could recreate a room after room setting. There are usually temporary walls that you are playing with. I usually try and take advantage of whatever show was before and use those walls to keep my budget bigger to add more walls. I do like the challenge of a given, so whatever walls were there before are usually a given, and that always helps. The more difficult an area is, the more fun it can be.

KBB: You came up in the '90s with Sean Landers and Mike Kelley in an era that was later coined "Loser Art."[2] What was the feeling at the time?

CL: Well, I think everyone was jealous of everyone else, as always. I knew Sean Landers a little, but we weren't friends. We saw only each other in passing once every

[2] "Leibowitz, who then also went by the name 'Candy Ass,' was a poster child of the über-popular burp variously deemed 'Pathetic Aesthetic,' 'Abject Art,' and 'Loser Art.'" Jerry Saltz, *Artist Schmartist, Village Voice* (2007).

couple of years. I liked his work a lot and I once bought a piece and it is still hanging up. So, he knew I was a fan. Mike Kelley I met once when I did a talk at CAL Arts and he was super nice, but I don't think any of us thought of ourselves as sitting down and writing a manifesto. I thought of Mike Kelley as a generation older than me and more rooted in a different type of "Loser Art". I think he was working with [the artist Paul] McCarthy and other people, and I think there was a different sort of thing going on from his perspective. Personally, like with my Jonathan Borofsky drawings, I think those were really formative for people like McCarthy and Mike Kelley because Jonathan Borofsky was in LA in the early 1970s. There is a part of me that is always connecting the dots. The "Loser Art" thing was kind of a funny thing. I was glad that someone put a word on it and I don't really think I knew the word Abject Art[3] before. Of course, I grabbed it and took it as a badge of honor.

THERE CAN BE SELF-DOUBT AT TIMES, NOT SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE MAKING BUT WHY YOU ARE MAKING IT.

KBB: Throughout your artistic career you've maintained a double life working at auction houses. First Artnet, then Christie's and now Phillips. How has working at an auction house, which in my mind is the furthest step away from the creative process, affected your opinion of the art world?

CL: Well, it some ways it makes it easier for me not to take things personally. I mean, I still take things personally, but I could pretty much separate. I try not mix the two together. There is a lot of great art that doesn't sell or doesn't sell well and then I'm not always an advocate of the things that are super hot or that are selling well. I have a few friends that either work in galleries or an auction house that are artists and make things and they all do what I do, which is try and really separate it. A job is a job, and what you are interested in is what you are interested in. I think we all start having self-doubt about the frustrations of the art world and what's so great about making art. Like, should we be making art and what do we expect out of it? What is the end result? It's not like you could quit and become a nun. There can be self-doubt at times, not so much about *what* you are making but *why* you are making it.

[3] "Abject art" is used to describe artworks which explore themes that transgress and threaten our sense of cleanliness and propriety particularly referencing the body and bodily functions. The term abjection literally means "the state of being cast off." The abject is a complex psychological, philosophical and linguistic concept developed by Julia Kristeva in her 1980 book *Powers of Horror.* In the 1980s and 1990s many artists became aware of this theory and reflected it in their work." See https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abject-art.

KBB: Some of your more recent work has been about our political situation. How do you feel about our current climate and will you continue to address this in your work?

CL: I think I've always tried to stay away from making any strong statements. I made a multiple once when George W. Bush was president. I don't know if we had just gotten into the Iraq War or how long it had been going on, but this woman Cindy Sheehan was camped out by his ranch and would protest outside there. Her son had died in Iraq. So, I made these Cindy Sheehan megaphones that said "Cindy Sheehan" on them, but in between they also said "CK," her son's name. That was a little bit of a political thing, in my own way. I usually still give them to friends on Mother's Day. For AIDS related things, I've always been very tip-toey about it. There is a piece in the CAMH show that I made back in the early 1990s and I think it still is one of my strong AIDS-related pieces. It was made in maybe 1990 or '91. It's the little teddy bear with the T-shirt on it that says, "One day I'll make a Cubist painting, but right now it's not important" (Fig. 7). I think with the whole Parkland teenager revolt I was really empowered both by their energy and also like, "Oh, there is a future." I was really happy that these kids rejected being a victim and being passive. I just hope they continue to do it. A few days before my show at Invisible Exports [there was] one of the big speeches, a lot of people spoke, and Emma Gonzalez[4] did a very gut-wrenching, timed speech based on how long the gunman was shooting down people at the school. Connecting with other work I've done in the past, I've always been obsessed with George Washington and I feel as though I am a very patriotic person, so I replaced Emma Gonzalez the person with George Washington the person, and made a painting called "Emma Gonzalez's Crossing the Delaware" (Fig. 8). So that was that.

RESPECT FOR THE CONSTITUTION IS A TURN ON.

Sometime last year, it was a Trumpian thing of course, but it might have been when the football players were taking the knee so, I just by luck came up with the phrase, *Respect for the Constitution Is A Turn On*. I made those as paintings, and I made them as mugs and that was when the show was going to the ICA in Philadelphia. I was also having a gallery show at Fleisher Ollman, which is

[4] American activist and advocate for gun control who survived the Parkland Shooting.

in Philadelphia. Also, because the ICA doesn't really have a gift shop, we were making all the gift shop stuff at Fleisher Ollman. I also made that as a mug and since it was Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love, I was selling the mugs […] two for $17.76. So, once again playing off the patriotic thing.

I would say my politics are a bit quiet. I'm very self-conscious about saying the wrong thing and I have always been a shy person as far as going out and yelling. I think my things are still a little tepid that way. Years ago, I heard an interview with Gerhard Richter when he had made a series of paintings based on the Berlin uprisings which had taken place in the '60s, and he was doing these things in the '90s, and the interviewer asked him "why are you doing that, it happened so long ago", and he answered, "Because I'm still thinking about it." That was an important thing for me, and I hope I do things that way too. A lot of things don't go away and now it is just so crazy it is hard to think as fast as the crazy happens. Those are the little things I have been doing.

p. 225, Fig. 1. Installation view of *Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2018. Photo: Tere Garcia. Image courtesy the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

p. 226, Fig. 2. I Love Robert Venturi, 1990, latex paint on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches.
I Love Marcel Duchamp, latex paint on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches.
I Love Jonathan Borofsky, katex paint on woon panel, 12 x 16 inches.
I Love Sherrie Levine, 1990, katex paint on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches.
Images courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS

p. 227, Fig. 3. Conscious Consciousness Clipper Ship Painting, 2003, latex paint on wood panel. 24 x 96 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS.

p. 228, Fig. 4. The Greenwich, CT. Ab-Ex'es Annual, 2013, brass belt buckle, 2.5 inch diameter. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS

p. 229, Fig. 5. Nov. 24, 1986, 1986, ink and acrylic on cardboard, 25.25 x 23.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS.

p. 230, Fig. 6. I Can't do This/ I Can't do That, 1994, glaze crayon on ceramic tea pot, 4.75 x 9 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS.

p. 231, Fig. 7. Cubist Teddy Bear, 1991, brown plush toy, fabric, stuffing, and printed T-shirt, 8.5 x 5.5 x 5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS.

p. 232, Fig. 8. Emma Gonzalez Crossing the Delaware, 2018, latex paint on wood panel, 32 x 48 x 1 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE - EXPORTS.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COMPLAINTS
Cary Leibowitz:
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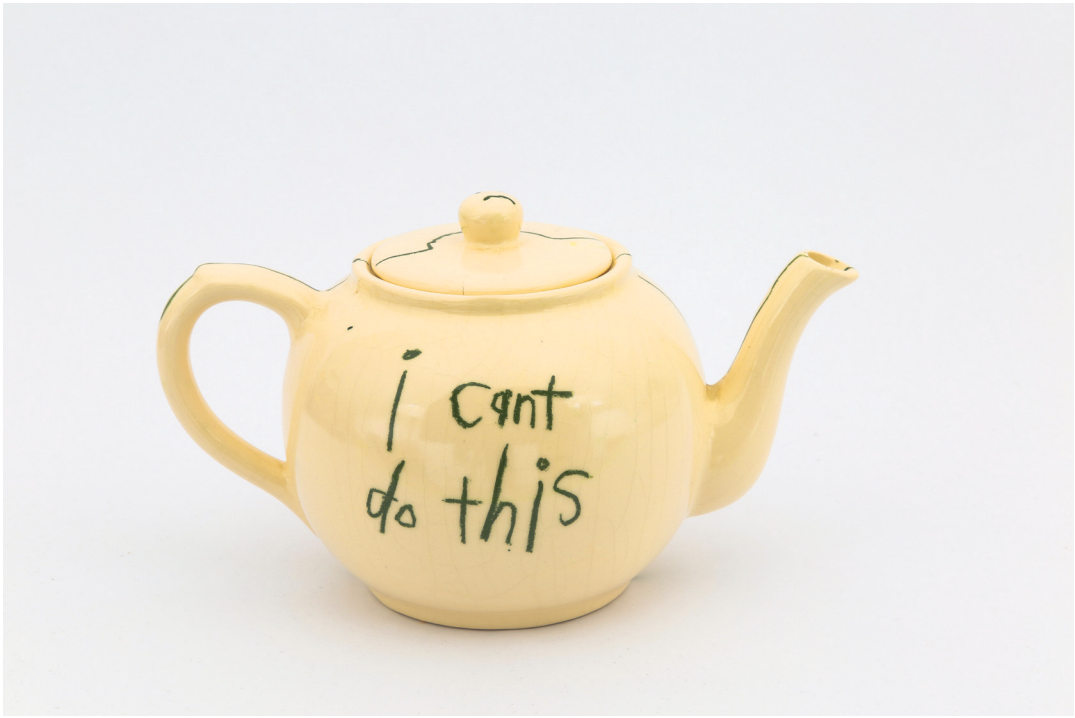
LEVINE


Conscious consciousness
by Gary Lebowitz
painted
Philadelphia Museum
of Jewish Art 2003


2013
CARY LEIBOWITZ
MANY A MUCKLE
BUCKLE
COLLECTION
THE
GREENWICH, CT.
Ab-Ex'es
ANNUAL
NOV. 8-10, 1974

Cary Leibowitz Nov. 24, 1986

he felt good.
he was all gussied up —
ready to have a
good time.
he got a flat tire,
and teenage rednecks made fun
of his faggot clothes.
the end.


i cant
do this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I WILL MAKE A
CUBIST PAINTING
SOMEDAY BUT RIGHT
NOW IT IS NOT
IMPORTANT


emma Gonzalez crossing the delaware

Ryler Dustin

In the Bones

The finback had beached a long time ago—
storm-scattered ribs,
vertebra polished by sand,
knucklebones caged in black grass.

All winter, as we fell out of love in the old barn,
I read the long story of whales—

how they were land-scavengers once, like small raccoons
hunger drove into the sea—

while you dreamed beside me
and wind worked the eaves into a song.

Mornings I walked past pines
growing stunted in sandy soil, head cocked
to hear the moaning made by the bones.

The last things they said: a vestigial hip
clicking on stone—

how the body wanders, writing its loss
from home to home,
how the bones hold hard to this history.

Helen Betya Rubinstein

At the Shiva

My first non-Jewish boyfriend is my boyfriend in 2006, the year that my grandfather dies. Like me, he has only ever known one of his grandparents. Her name is Mary, and that's what everyone in his family calls her—I've heard him on the phone with her on Sunday evenings, saying loud as he can, HI MARY. She is 100 and Grandpa is about to turn 95, that week in November when they both get sick, and he and I are standing on the corner of Fourth Avenue and President Street in Brooklyn when we realize the coincidence. We're each only a year into living in New York—if romance is a story you tell yourself about who you are, which is, for better or worse, how I've mostly experienced it, then ours is largely about our newness to the city and our desire to become artists there—and that corner of Brooklyn, as I remember it now, perfectly suits our relationship and that time: Fourth Avenue will forever feel to me like a place where young strivers stand, not yet aware of the gaucheness of that avenue's isolated ugliness; the subway stop on the corner of President will forever remind me of how, in the nighttime of a new New Yorker's connect-the-dots geography, a lit green globe could offer an illusion of orientation and thus belonging.

This was a set break from the café gig where my boyfriend's band was playing without pay, the same café where I'd first heard him play, and this day happens also to be the first time he's ever read any of my short stories. It's after he tells me how much he likes them that we begin to talk more mundanely, How was your day and How was yours, and so discover that both of our grandparents are suddenly sick. It's Friday and he's thinking of going home that weekend; I'm hoping Grandpa will make it until next week, when I'm supposed to fly to New Orleans for Thanksgiving. The overlap of their illnesses is a strange layer to add to my abstract worry and anticipatory grief: when I told him that Grandpa had had a heart attack—a minor one, they said, but still—I felt a physical pang of fear (talking to someone other than my parents about it had made it suddenly real); but after he tells me about his grandmother's fall and how it was likely caused by a minor stroke, I can't suppress a rising pleasure. It's as though, by getting

sick together, our grandparents are confirming our connection, giving our not-yet-year-old relationship some legitimacy. Whoa, we say; Weird, and we stand on that street corner loosely hugging, loosely holding each other, not talking—I try to focus on feeling an appropriate solemnity, but keep getting distracted by the familiar dust-and-sweat scent of my boyfriend's T-shirt—until the end of the set break, when we both go back inside.

That café is gone now, but I still think of that boyfriend, and that night, every time I walk past the equally anonymous café that now stands in its place. Back at my house after the gig, I wasn't sure if it was appropriate for us to have sex, given our circumstances, but soon I can't resist. This boyfriend's whole body, by the way, is long and beautiful in a way I'll later become convinced a Jewish person's never could be. Yes, a Jewish person could be tall, I'll concede, but not tall the way he is—not *delicate* and tall, not tall with skin that is porcelain-ishly translucent instead of pasty or dully opaque, not tall with loose easy smooth limbs, not tall with rich surprising birthmarks like paint carelessly dripped on a drop cloth. A Jewish person is thicker, I'll think, or if not actually thicker then at least sturdier, or if he is pale and delicate then he is pale and delicate in a way that is sickly, not refined. Our sex justifies itself, that night, by staying careful and slow and thus somewhat mournful; afterward we continue kissing each other, more in love than ever, I think, now that we share this nearness to tragedy—and in the morning, my phone, which I've left superstitiously on the floor just next to my bed (believing that if I'm prepared for the worst then the worst won't happen, then reprimanding myself for daring to think this at all), wakes us up with its loud and cheerful ring. I look at the caller ID, see that it's my mom, and say loudly, Oh shit.

There is silence after I answer, so that I have to repeat myself, my voice raw and groggy, Hel*lo*? Mom? *Mom*?

Then I hear my mother gasp raggedly, and moan—for an instant I fear that something unthinkably horrible, even worse than what I'm expecting, has happened, or is happening right now. But after some more groaning she manages to force it out: He died, she says, and then immediately, just as I hear the onset of another wail, hangs up.

He died, I repeat into my bedroom, not yet rolling over, just staring out into the little space, wishing the room were empty now so that, alone, I could fully remember my grandfather here. From behind an arm is thrown over me and its owner says, in his gentle and genuine and half-asleep way, I'm sorry. He begins drawing his hand up and down my bare shoulder, then stops.

The phone rings again; it's my mother again, this time to apologize for telling me like that. She's still crying, saying, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I just wanted you to know, I'll call with details later, okay? Are you okay? and I'm trying to tell her it's all okay, I'm fine, but she quickly says bye, and so I answer bye, and put the phone down, and, because he is still touching me anyway, his hand a neutral presence in that strange conversation, I turn over to face him.

It seems to me in retrospect that he nearly always did the right thing. For a long time we didn't speak. He held one of his large, steady, un-Jewish hands on the upturned side of my face and looked carefully at me, searching, I guess, for some sign of grief. I betrayed none: I've always been the kind of person who will react mightily to some slight emotional turn, but who, in the face of something big, stays stoic. Besides, Grandpa and my family were far away: from a distance, like Hurricane Katrina had been, this was hard to believe.

Soon he closes his eyes and falls back asleep. I resent him for that, and then I forgive him for it, and then I am grateful to him for understanding that what I want is to be alone. His hand is still trapping my face, though, so I ease out from under it and grope for some underwear. Are you okay? he says. I say yeah. He opens one eye: You sure?

Yeah, I say again, this time in the ambiguous, warbling way that I am always saying things around him, testing, I guess, how much he can see through my words. His eyes flash open and he pulls me close, into the whole strange length of him.

Then I don't know what to say, so I say, You never met him.

He says, I wish I could have met him.

Yeah, I say, again in the voice that means *no*, imagining him at the nursing home playing cards with us, me translating Grandpa's few remaining words—*heib* for cut; *shell* for diamonds, *eichel* clubs; *os de gevinnen?*, my mom asking if he's won; and the joking *pay up* gesture—thinking suddenly how absurd that

would be, realizing that I wouldn't at all want him to have met my grandfather, that he would never have understood him and that, in fact, he has no conception of what has just been lost.

Tell me about him, he might have said then, but everything—his wide mouth, the hint of Boston in his voice that when we first met had to me sounded Southern—every detail of his person has suddenly become alien and offensive, and I am trying to pull myself away. Tell me about him—but Grandpa, I'd have thought, Grandpa was not a person who could be *told about*! What a stupid and goyish American idea! The presumption that you could actually *tell about* a person! What audacity, what arrogance, how totally WASPy. Ha.

On the windowsill on the other side of the bed my boyfriend's phone waits for a similar dose of bad news, but it doesn't come; neither this weekend nor this winter will his one-hundred-year-old grandmother die. I have won the competition of poor fate, it seems, if there ever was one, and this feels appropriate: I would not have wanted to share the death of a grandparent with him after all, because the loss of my grandparent is too different from what would be the loss of his. The loss of my grandfather encompasses the loss of an entire culture, an entire way of being: the loss of my grandfather, I believe, is worse.

I will spend that day watching a rented DVD of *Fiddler on the Roof*. I don't remember how I got the idea—my boyfriend's left for Boston, a good friend has come over; maybe it was me explaining to her how not only was my grandfather now dead but also, even sadder, the whole world he had come from gone, too. In any case, she's never seen it before, and I have a craving. We sit together on my couch and she asks me questions like What's a *yenta*? and *What*'s her name? (Hava.) She says, What a pretty name.

It must be her non-Jewish company that makes me realize how wrong it is of me to be doing this right now, how very wrong for me to hold this up as an example of my grandfather's lost world. I guess it's been years since I've seen the movie, I guess I haven't seen it since college made me hyperconscious of these

things, but Tevye's accent has never sounded so fake; the dances in the "Tradition!" medley and the wedding scene have never looked so little like traditional dances and so much like a Broadway show. (For a few months when I was in sixth grade, my religious school class studied the shtetl, which meant that we watched *Fiddler on the Roof* while building cardboard models of Anatevka's landmarks in our classroom: maybe it was that experience which so delayed my questioning the movie's authenticity.)

Halfway through our viewing, my roommate comes home—an old friend from summer camp, someone I've known for years. She even knows my grandfather, because her mother has helped care for him in New Orleans. I pause the movie to tell her and she gasps, dropping her shopping bags and bringing her hands flutteringly to her mouth. This is how she reacts to things—she says it's reflexes—and it wouldn't be fair for me to be annoyed at her for it. But then she says, Oh, Mendel!, and comes over to give me a hug. I'm so sorry. Poor Mr. Mendel, she says again, so that I see him through her eyes, cartoon of a Yiddish-Polish *Mendel*, defaced by her Southern *mister*—and when she releases me my other friend, the not-Jewish one, asks, What are you guys saying?

Mendel, I answer. His name.

Mendel?

Yeah, I say, trying not to sound defensive, trying not to feel angry that she's never heard of such a name.

What a nice name! It's so manly.

For a moment I hear it her way—it is a nice name, nice how it includes the word *men* with the softening *del*—but I can't help wishing she didn't hear it like that. *Menachem Mendel*, I'm thinking, the old joke: his name isn't beautiful or manly, it's *ordinary*, an ordinary Yiddish name just like Pinkhas, the name of my grandfather on the other side. I can't sustain my aggravation, though, after my roommate comes and joins us on the couch to watch the rest of the movie—I feel too unlonely, loved. My roommate and I will replay the dream sequence twice waiting for Golde's howling scream which, we'll finally realize, is not in the movie at all, only on the soundtrack of the musical that we both grew up singing along to from a cassette tape turned over and over in the car.

If you had asked me, in the years before I met this guy, whether I would have dated someone who wasn't Jewish (in other words, whether I would have considered marrying a non-Jew), I would have answered yes, of course, there was no definitive rule, but that, honestly, I thought it would be hard to have a *deep connection* to someone who wasn't Jewish. That was my way of skirting the question in a way that was polite and socially acceptable, in a way that would not have my non-Jewish friends (invariably the ones asking) drawing back in surprise: But how can you *say* that! How can you exclude so many people just because of their re*lig*ion!, which, after hearing my answer, is how they would describe their own attitude toward those Jews who felt otherwise.

It's a fair way, I think, for someone to feel, a fair reaction, because any difference I perceive between secular Jews and non-Jews must be imagined (a cluster of ancestors hangs above the fellow Jew's head, holding hands in a hora with mine), as must be any difference the non-Jew perceives in the Jew. For instance, sometimes a friend jokingly connects my reluctance to spend money to my Jewishness. I forgive her for this—it means she feels close enough to me that she counts herself across some invisible, joke-permitting line—but I never laugh. The joke leaves me self-conscious about spending in her company, the way my last name makes me self-conscious about spending in the company of any stranger, the way the persistence of this unwanted narrative conditions me to wonder, about the Jewish friend who is counting out pennies for a tip-included bill, if it's an assumption about our shared company that leads her to do so without shame.

One night, walking around Prospect Park, I ask that boyfriend what his family's Christmas is like. What's it *like*?, he repeats at first, as if the question is absurd, but I hold my ground—Yeah, what's it like? I've never celebrated Christmas before (this last part I'm careful to say lightly, not defensively, as if I've only just realized it, which in a way I have)—so he proceeds to tell me, well, they all sit around the living room opening presents, and then they go to the candlelit midnight mass.

Because I love him, I'm able for the first time to perceive this familiar scene—warm glow from the fire in the hearth, everybody in a new pair of flannel pajamas—as I might perceive any other culture's holiday: as something other than a threat. That sounds beautiful, I say, and although I've never allowed myself to think of any part of Christmas as beautiful before (except, perhaps, oak trees laced over in tiny white lights), it does—he tells me how the mass begins with one candle, but how, soon, the whole cathedral is full of little cupped flames that, in half an hour, begin all to slowly die out. It *is* beautiful, he says.

In fact during the period of my dating him—and maybe that question was the beginning of this—my whole previous attitude toward Christianity reveals itself to have been paranoid and self-defensive. It's like the story Mom tells about the first time she ever saw a Christmas tree. I was *terrified*, she says. Terrified! Grandpa had taken her along with him to one of his employees' houses—Angie was the woman's name; she was a cashier at his dry-goods store in Red Hook, lived around the corner and had invited them over for some holiday cheer—and there it was, this big tree, Mom says, inside an apartment, with popcorn and all sorts of weird things hanging from it: It was just so *strange*! I was terrified!

That's the punch line, and we always laugh—it's a funny story, supposed to be, the idea of being scared by a tree, especially since the image of a Christmas tree is so familiar, iconic as the flag—but eventually it begins to sink in more seriously; it's the precursor to the way Mom will answer a salesperson's chipper Merry Christmas with a grim Happy Chanukah, precursor to the way she calls our teachers and complains when our classrooms are decorated with Santas and elves. I so rarely think about it that these kinds of boundaries tend to surprise me when they come up. And maybe that's why I so clearly remember the way I tried to explain to that boyfriend, one day early in our relationship when we were having lunch in Union Square, my keeping kosher for Passover (and thus turning down a piece of his sticky-rice sushi) as a means of connecting to my ancestors; how much I wanted him to respond like *aha*, like that totally made sense and now he understood, what an appropriate way to think about religion and maybe now he would think of it that way too, but how he only

nodded, and didn't say any more; and how after Grandpa's funeral I tried to describe the many Jewish mourning rituals I hadn't previously known about to him, saying, Isn't that cool? Isn't that smart? and how his response, again, was cautious and lukewarm: maybe he knew, more than I did, how much I'd have liked to convert him.

If you asked me now did I need to marry someone Jewish I would still say no, not necessarily—although this time I'd add that, one, if he wasn't actually Jewish he would need to be Jewish *in spirit* (that is, some sort of lifelong outsider); and, two, I didn't think I'd ever be able to marry one of those non-Jews who has grown up in a place with tons of Jews and so thinks he has an idea of what Jews are—because I am not that Jew, and would fear never being understood. Maybe I'd even add, to demonstrate my sincerity, that the kind of Jew who had grown up on the inside, always among other Jews, a New York Jew or a Boston one, was also a kind I could never marry.

Still, until sometime long after this boyfriend and I had broken up, I would have been reluctant to claim that being Jewish is central to who I am. The fact of it seemed to rise up silently, whitely, only a few times a year: Rosh, Yom, and Passover gently reminding me it existed. And if you were the sort of fellow Jewish friend who nevertheless insisted, come on, that being Jewish *was* central to my selfhood, then I'd smile placidly and note to myself that you were naïve enough to buy into the myth that being Jewish could be central to yours. You, my dear Jewish friend, would have become in my eyes stupid enough to believe in the myth that being Jewish—varied and spread out and fragmented as it is—could mean anything at all.

Late December in that winter of 2006, three Hasidic guys approach me in a bar. This is in the West Village somewhere near NYU—I'm here because my boyfriend has a gig and I'm flying to New Orleans tomorrow for a visit. Back at my apartment I've already packed and now it's late, maybe 2 a.m.; we think we might stay up all night. Anyway I'm just sitting at the bar, listening to them play and

feeling nostalgic and reflective the way I always do before I travel. Last year at this time was my first trip back to New Orleans after Katrina, and back then, I think with satisfaction, I wasn't in love. Back then, too, I realize, Grandpa was still alive, but at an "extended life care facility" in Houston where they'd taken him after the storm. (Here, as always when saying-thinking-writing *after the storm*, I realize I am on the verge of *after the war*, too much a sonic or memory resemblance.) Mom had thought that leaving Grandpa at the nursing home in New Orleans would be best for him, the closest approximation of his usual routine, and they'd been fine there on their generator until it became apparent the city's infrastructure had broken down; then they'd sent the place fleeing, on un-air-conditioned school buses. Initially I'd thought he was headed for the Astrodome, and, from my aggravatingly distant perch in New York, I'd had frantic visions of his confusion there (would the rows upon rows of beds, as I'd seen on TV, the mass anonymity, mass eating and shitting and sleeping, give him flashbacks to concentration camps, to hospitals and D.P. centers after the war?), but then they'd found a bed for him at this assisted-living place. I'd called and called—with so many phone lines and cell towers down, Mom hadn't been able to get through from Baton Rouge—until finally someone picked up and confirmed to me that he was there. Do you want to speak to him? she said, and I hesitated, knowing he wouldn't recognize my voice, not wanting to wake him if he was having a nap, but—yes.

I could hear him saying faintly to some stranger, Who is it? *Who*? before he finally consented to accept the phone and then asked, in his old majestic way, Hal*lo*?

I didn't bother trying to identify myself, just said HI GRANDPA loud as I could.

What?

HI GRANDPA. HOW *ARE* YOU?—I was already weepy with relief, working to control my voice so it would be easier to understand.

Who is it?

HELENKILO, I yelled. S'IZ HE*LENK*ILO. HI GRANDPA. And then, because I thought it might make things easier, VUS MAKHTS DE?

He began to speak in Yiddish, asking when I would come to take him home.

TOMORROW, I yelled, so habituated to this particular lie that it felt tender, loving instead of deceitful. MORGN.

Morgn? Ober—where will I sleep? I don't have money for this place—When will I see you?

LATER, I said; then, THIS AFTERNOON.

This afternoon you'll come get me?

YES, I said, berating myself for not choosing the more soothing version of the lie to begin with. I'LL SEE YOU LATER.

All right. *A bi gezunt*!, he said, and I answered as I knew to, KEN MEN GLIKLIKH ZAYN.

He didn't hear me, so repeated the old adage himself: *A bi gezunt, ken men gliklikh zayn*: As long as you're healthy, you can be happy.

This boyfriend always called them Ha-*sidds*, for which I had to correct him—it's *Hah*-sids, I'd say, hearing a regrettable Long Islandy-ness in my *ah*—but really it's Ha*si*dim. Three of them come up to me at this bar in the West Village and I can tell right away that they're from that group who go around the city asking whoever makes eye contact with them Are you Jewish? and trying to get those who say yes to perform some holiday ritual and thus accelerate the coming of the Messiah. I usually tell them no I'm not Jewish, but I'm bored, ready for the band to finish, so I say yes. They're pleased—I've made it worth it for them to have walked in here. They begin to tell me that it's Chanukah—I know, I say, cutting them off—and, unwrapping a menorah, they ask if I'll please light and bless the candles.

I already did it tonight, I say, which is true.

They're surprised: Did you say the prayer?, and then: You know the prayer? How many prayers did you say?

Two.

Which ones?

You don't believe me?

The Messiah only comes if you do it correctly. We have to make sure. Do you know which night of Chanukah it is?

I hold up five fingers, getting annoyed, and they are wowed. Soon they're offering me *sufganiot*—at first I think out of kindness, then I realize, as they pull a napkin from the stack on the bar and try to lead me in a blessing of the jelly doughnut, that it's the next step in the routine. Repeat after me, they say; *Baruch*—and they're amazed that I get all the way from *Baruch* to *ha'olam* without help, while I'm embarrassed I can't get any further. Take a bite! they instruct me afterwards. It's the worst doughnut I've ever tasted.

They leave me alone for a minute to confirm that there are no other Jews in the bar—there aren't; besides the bartender and me there's only one other person who's not in the band—and then return, wondering what am I doing here so late all alone. I'm not alone, I tell them. They want to know if my boyfriend is Jewish; then they ask, Do you kiss each other?

I hesitate, feeling a twinge of guilt, but I refuse to lie to these Hasidim now: Yes.

You shouldn't kiss him, one of them tells me. If you kiss him, the Messiah can't come.

I must have given him a skeptical look, because his friend amends that: A little kiss might be okay, once in a while. But nothing more. Promise, he says. Don't kiss him too much.

Sure, what the hell—I tell them I promise.

The set finishes, and my boyfriend walks over and puts a hand on my back. The Hasids offer him a jelly doughnut; he thinks about it, considers mine, and turns it down. And then they leave, calling back to me, Remember your promise.

I think the whole thing is hilarious—I can't wait to tell this story—but in New Orleans the next day, when Dad points out that they must have been flirting with me, I say *nahh*, they can't *flirt* with me. Of course they were! he says. I don't believe it until a formerly Orthodox friend also insists that's what they were doing, and after that I feel dumb. I am an asshole for not having been able to see past their shtetl costumes, for not having seen through to where they were just young guys with beards late at night in a bar near NYU. I am the same as my boyfriend, who, when I tell him about the not-kissing, will only make a face, like *what crazies*. He can't take them lightly, I'll think; he can't understand. And yet. The whole time I'm telling this story I'm thinking of how Grandpa is dead, of how I had the audacity to sleep with this goyish person the very night he died. I'm thinking of what it

was like to realize, after Mom's call, that the next generation will never know anyone like him: anyone who represented the Jewishness of the old days and the old country, a Jewishness that, by virtue of its origin—its *extinguished* origin—is more authentic than my own, than that of any American Jew. I'm thinking of the pinched faces in *Fiddler on the Roof*, thinking of how *Fiddler* is part of what killed my grandpa; of how, having been nostalgic, in the end, not for an actual shtetl or for Grandpa's Bedzin (at 60,000 people not a shtetl at all) but for a silly movie caricature of the shtetl, I am part of what killed him too. It does cross my mind sometimes—that, despite the survival of a few, the Holocaust worked.

That December, after all, is the December that I have decided no longer to be repelled by Christmas—in New Orleans, in the car, when "Chestnuts Roasting" comes on the radio, I will start to sing along. Mom will change the station, but I'll object: I like that song.

It's a Christmas song.

So? Put it back.

You really like that song?

When Mom goes back to the station, though, my fourteen-year-old sister says, Stop! You're not supposed to sing a Christmas song, and Mom says, Yeah. Don't sing it, so that we'll ride the last few blocks home in silence, just listening, the three of us, to the song.

Mom will say, It is a nice song.

I tell my boyfriend that Grandpa was buried in a plain unvarnished wood coffin, with a bottom that slides out so the body can lie on the soil. I tell him about the shiva—I like that I can use this word fluently, having experienced it at last; I enjoy being able to use the phrase *at the shiva*. At the shiva, all the mirrors were covered, and there was a pitcher outside for washing your hands. Uncle Joe told us he remembered my grandfather's first wedding, in Poland, to the wife who died in the war—Isn't that amazing? He remembered how their family's apartment had two rooms—a living room for the men to sleep in, and a kitchen for the

women—and how the wedding was there, in the living room, and how he, Uncle Joe, fell asleep on top of a pile of coats. He was only four years old.

My boyfriend listens politely, but his interest never feels to me like enough. And when he finally asks a question—What were the mirrors covered with?—the answer makes me cringe. Garbage bags, I admit; my aunt covered all the mirrors with white Hefty garbage bags taped neatly down. This is why I stop short of telling him about the three cardboard boxes printed in a tree-stump pattern that the rabbi brought over so that Mom, her brother, and Uncle Joe could, according to custom, sit closer to the floor. No one actually used them—they were afraid the boxes wouldn't hold their weight, or anyway were past the age when it's comfortable to sit on something so low; and all the younger people knew not to sit on the boxes or were told not to, bad luck. Besides, there was something too humiliating in the idea that it could be religiously appropriate—in fact the best and most Jewish course of action—to sit on a cardboard box decorated to resemble a tree stump. Sit, sit, the rabbi kept urging; You're supposed to, he said, but the cardboard boxes decorated to resemble tree stumps were something to grieve for in themselves: they were themselves the tragedy.

Megan Giddings

Watch Out, the World's Behind You

When your mother said that skirt is way too short for church, you said ugh, fuck you in a small voice. She said what did you just say and I couldn't tell if Tish hadn't heard or wanted to give you a second shot. And maybe if you had tried to find your kindest self—the one deep within you that all our friends told us probably wouldn't reemerge until you were twenty-four—and said, yeah, you're right, let me go change, then none of this would have happened.

And maybe everything would be different if I had just agreed to spend the money to get air conditioning for the house, or at least bought a box unit for all the bedrooms. But I didn't mind heat. I liked ceiling fans and sleeping with only a sheet on. But you and your mother were different. You needed to be almost frozen to sleep. And you needed a lot of it or you both started picking fights.

One thing about being a parent and being married that are the same is you love someone so much they are a part of you. Feeling that way is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. But when someone becomes a part of you, it's easy to dismiss their wants when they don't line up with how you live.

Instead you said, I hate going to church. And then the two of you fought. And I sat at the kitchen table and made myself be very quiet. I drank my coffee, I added extra lemon curd to my toast. I scrolled through news about E. coli in wheat-based products, read about an entire city that was sinking because of extraordinary geological factors while the two of you fought through the house. Yelling. Voices lowering. The thumps of you going up the stairs. Yelling. You locked yourself in the upstairs bathroom. And Tish changed for church. And I knocked on the door and told you we had to leave in the next ten minutes.

What if I had said, Your mom just wants the best for you?

What if I had told you about when you were a baby and all the conversations we'd had about raising you with or without religion. How much we wanted you to be a good person, and didn't feel like we could give you the right example? And we knew life would be better for you if you had a deep bedrock of good in your soul. So, we baptized you. And we thought it was a small gift we could give you:

What if I had asked, Are you okay?

What if I had said, You're only a year away from college. Then you can do anything.

What if I had offered, Let's go to a movie.

You said, I don't feel good; I'm pooping.

And Tish and I went to church. We held hands. We sang. Around us were families that all seemed to be color coordinated. Khakis and baby blues. There were babies who imitated what singing must have sounded like to them. Long oos and ohs. They giggled while looking at their own hands waving in the air. And I watched Tish smile at them and the babies smiling back. I thought about how even when you were a baby, you didn't like church. You would headbutt me, sometimes. So hard I would see stars, but somehow it didn't hurt you. It just made you laugh. I'm afraid at how strong Mercedes is I would say on the car ride home. By the time she's five, she'll be able to just break us both in half. You would throw cereal up into the air and scream alleluia. An old woman grew to hate you.

At home, you put on a bikini, a cover-up, shorts. You took a bottle of Aperol from the liquor cabinet. We listened to a rambling homily. It could be summed up as you are all sinners, but you're trying and that's all you can really do. The priest was a substitute: an older man who used the word like a lot. I had to stop myself from counting the times he said it. And you drove to the lake.

A shattered bottle of vodka.
Two roaches thrown on the lakeshore half-covered with sand.
Your heart-shaped sunglasses in your friend Marcy's bag.
A photo of you and Marcy laughing, a filter on it to make the world look more green.
The rocks you didn't notice.
You, found face down in the water.

Ben who took you to prom tried to revive you. And Marcy called 911. One kid didn't even notice what was going on. He was still in the water and seeing how long he could hold his breath. And they said Ben was crying as he did CPR. And when I heard that, I thought about coming out to the living room once and you were listening to your headphones. You were lying on the carpet and tears were on your cheeks. And for a minute, I was so impressed at how sensitive you were. Listening to music and being moved. I thought the sunlight and everything from the book near your feet to our old green couch was being imprinted on your soul. You might think about this moment for the rest of your life. Then your mother whispered in my ear, "Ben doesn't like her. She found out he likes Marcy." I thought Ben was an idiot. You blew your nose until it was pink. And I went to the store and bought your favorite luxury ice cream, raspberries, blueberries, and the dumb overpriced coconut water that all the celebrities in your magazines call a crucial part of their wellness routines.

What if someone had called us when it was happening? Would we have seen our cell phones light up while we shaking hands with the people around us? Would we somehow have made it to the lake? Or would it have been almost a joke: racing 90 miles per hour to see you somehow go off the road and the force and momentum of a car going into a ditch traps us? The car explodes before a fire crew can get us out in time.

Instead, we checked our phones after church. My mouth was dry with Eucharist and the blood of Christ that tastes like what I used to call bum wines. The very cheap, alcohol-high stuff I would never have wanted you to drink. We

were in the car, talking about going to the grocery store. One of the levels of hell, I said, was being trapped in a grocery store on a Sunday morning.

Marcy had texted us: *there was an accident we are the hospital come quick.* Her mother had called us three times. Your mother cried, I waited for her to say something, to calm down. I want to tell you I started driving right away. But I looked at my hands. There was still a bruise near my left thumb. I looked at my dad-brown loafers. Fear hammered boards into my chest. My mouth was fighting itself; it kept crumpling down, opening as if trying to let something out. I kept correcting it.

When my father died, you were very young. I didn't cry at all when I found out. Not at the funeral. Not when I gave the eulogy. Not when my mom said she was selling the house because he was everywhere. A week later, spur of the moment, we went to a minor league baseball game. You were sitting next to me. Your feet couldn't touch the ground. The mascot was a giant cartoon loon. Its whole personality was to be "a rascal." He took beers from people and tried to chug them. His eyes looked sinister: as if he was always trying to figure out the best ways to grift the person he was cuddling close to after they asked for a photo. And you said, Grandpa is being funny. Somehow, your four-year-old brain had decided my father was in the suit. He was pretending to kick people. He was dancing and preening. I laughed really hard. You said, no, no, it's him. It's him. Then, I cried. Put on my sunglasses so you wouldn't notice. The sun was hot on my face.

"Drive," Tish said. "Drive."

You were alive. A doctor with shoes you would have liked—iridescent black and purple sneakers—told us they were running tests. No, you were not awake. Yes, you had been resuscitated. But, you were young. The doctor's hair was down and

a beautiful mica under the lights. She kept touching it. Seeing her fingers grazing her hair made me think she was lying. No, we couldn't see you, yet.

Tish didn't say anything. We sat and laced our fingers through each other. I kept stealing glances, checking to see if her face said I need to talk or you need to comfort me. Her eyes were in the middle distance. Her mouth was a set line. I knew a million things were happening inside, and it was better to let Tish feel everything than make her focus on me. Any other time, realizing that might have made me feel good. It's advice I maybe should have given you: take pride in knowing others well. People talk about distance like it's a good thing, but intimacy can teach you the different ways to care for the people you love.

On Friday night, we had built a fire in the backyard. You hadn't felt like going to a friend's house. You and Tish looked so much alike in the warm orange light. All you had ever gotten from me was my ears. And you kept those covered most of the time. I put on a playlist I had titled Relaxing and you had retitled: Dad Party. The two of you were talking about one of the shows you watched together. You were laughing about the characters as if they were real people. Speculating about when Jane would find love again. The moon was waning. Lou Reed's voice on the speaker. I made us all s'mores. Roasted the marshmallows, let mine become sugar and ash.

A nurse stood in front of us. She said we could go see you. I wondered how she knew we were your parents. Your mom leaned on my shoulder as we walked down the hall. Her hair smelled like lavender. Her face smelled like sweat.

You were hooked up to several machines. Somehow, you looked taller than ever before. But maybe it was because I was hoping everyone had made a mistake. Maybe for whatever reason you had lent another girl your wallet. Maybe the weed Marcy had smoked was laced with something and she was hallucinating

that you were there. I wanted to be led through the hospital and have more and more of my time wasted. Become annoyed at the inconvenience and strangeness of it all. All the patients would be presented to me. Some, if I squinted, would be almost-yous. I would see so many horrible things, but it would be fine, because none of them were you.

Then the doctor and a man wearing a suit came in. And they told us and it was clear they were being as blunt and simple as possible. You might never wake up. They said it three times. If you did, it there would likely be severe impairments. Did we know how you felt about that? Her voice was almost musical. They told us to take time to think, but they thought it would be best to discontinue care. And your mother said, she wouldn't want her life to be this.

And what if I had said, yes, she would. She loved being alive.

What if I had come up with a scheme to fake miracles? Wine on the wall in the shape of a cross? A statue rigged up to cry olive oil tears? Hired actors to appear and say they were patients in the hospital and being in your presence had cured them? A cute little boy whose cancer you had cured. An old woman that was breathtakingly spry after two knee replacement surgeries. All those things would make her pause. God was speaking to her. God was speaking through you.

"Lee?"

"What do you think?"

I saw people driving from states away to touch the palm of your hand. To pray at your feet. Watched as we washed your hair and begged us for a lock of it. You would be the second Saint Mercedes. Another girl who suffered from a fall, and

in the aftermath, was suffused with good. They would write me letters about how you appeared to them in dreams. Could you be alive in those places? Were you sprinting and refusing to smile even if you won the race? It's just a high school race, not the Olympics, you would say. Did you tell them how you wanted to go to Hawaii and see a volcano? Were you still teaching yourself how to make your grandmother's peanut cake to taste exactly like hers? Would you sit at a table and ask what's a job that's brain-stimulating, but still lets you travel? Or would it all be serene smiles? A whispered blessing. You sitting in a giant tea cup that looked like one they had accidentally broken as a child. A frog in one hand and a chocolate chip cookie balanced on your head. And what did I think that meant? That you were somehow still alive?

"Please," I said and nodded, yes.

Saddiq Dzukogi

Marshmallow

Today Baha is not dead; she is six-years-old,
forcing marshmallows into my mouth.
says *I'm grown enough to feed you, Abba*,
with the future, that's what she calls me,
just like her brother. I force
the depraved cumin flowers back
into their seeds. The delight is that I have
pulled my shadows back into my skin
to salve my wounds and all the times
I have sat crying erased—able to side-step
the void just as I had wished. She is at my feet
playing with my toes as though they are
extension of her toys—I love it.
My image of love pronounced in the way
she holds on to my big-toe, rubbing her finger
across its nail—Grandmother says whatever I will
would become. I didn't understand until now how
over the years I have sat quietly and watched her grow
inside me, un-knotting my regret,
until it becomes loose like a house
made of smoke-bricks. Whenever a brick
is laid, the wind dispels it— and
the house exists only in blueprint.
I'm traveling inside grandfather's clock,
arrive at the garden where Baha
serves me honeycomb
in her mother's tea cup.
Thirty-thousand leaves are supplicating to nature
and the air is pure—and I pick apples

for my daughter. My cupped palms
is not an empty cave—a bowl of water
for my child. She is drinking into the future—
a transient hope deep inside me,
found by the girl in my body—
the real version of myself. I think
six years ago, Baha went inside me
to keep her company and they kept
growing like two trees in a sterile field, the dream
of marshmallows and my daughter still alive.

Derek Robbins

General Memorial Hospital and Clinic – FAQs

Where will I go to have the tests or procedures?

There are places and then there are states of mind. We recommend the latter. In the proper state of mind, borders are soft as cotton candy—you can lick your way right through them. We recommend the state of resigned acceptance, which is not much to look at. In fact, it's little more than a 10 by 10 room with walls the color of an overcast day, the kind where time is meaningless, ten and noon and three are all the same. In the corner there is a yellow beanbag chair. Sit there and wait. When the doctors are ready, a nurse will arrive with a bowl of chilled water and a horsehair brush. She'll dip the brush and paint your name in smooth, clean strokes on the wall. You should watch the drips run down from each letter. Please wait until your name has fully dried before you enter.

How can I prepare for the tests or procedures?

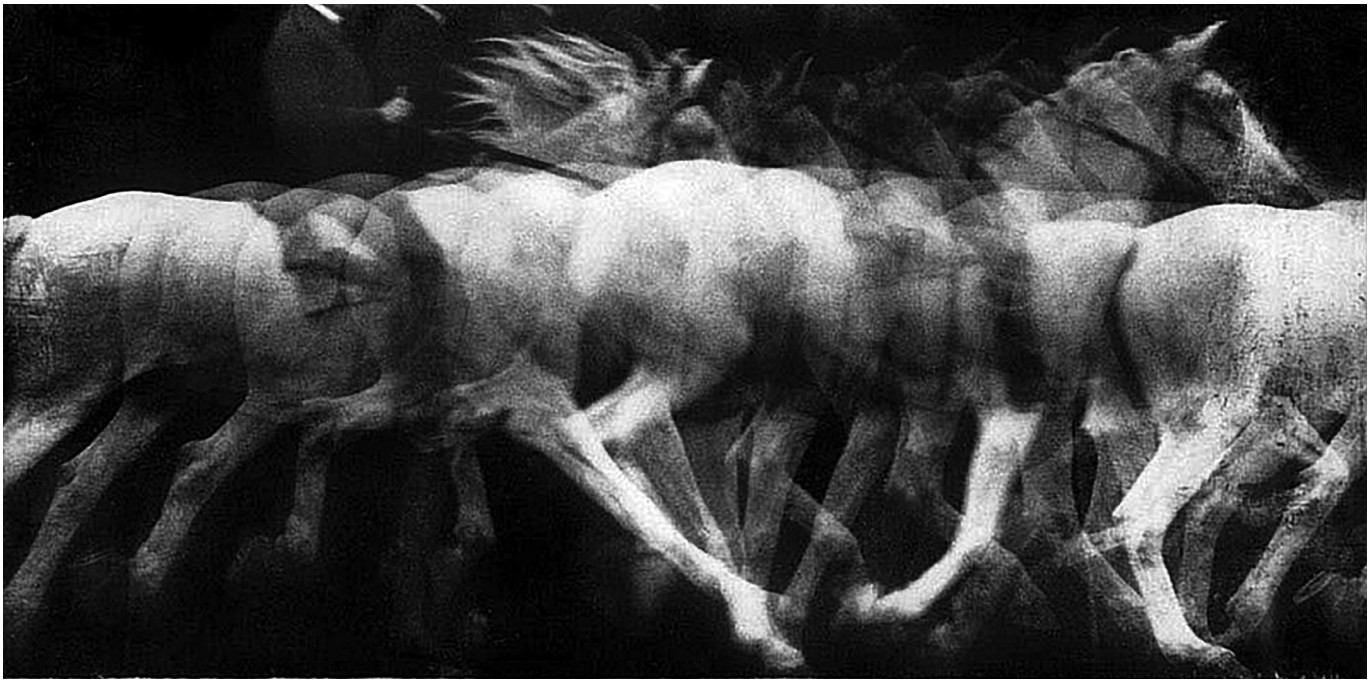
Does the mailbox prepare for the baseball bat? Does the tire prepare for the nail? Only in that each does what it's always done, standing or spinning, until rupture or puncture.

What can my pathology report tell me?

We lost it long ago, and since then we've been working with a copy your doctor scrawled by hand from shaky memories after the procedure. We can't be sure how much is your life and how much the doctor's dream. It's just a picture of a forest. There is long, hairy moss hanging from the branches of each tree. It always looked peaceful to us, but then one observer thought the

dark strands carried a hint of malevolence, and after that the moss looked heavy, not airy, and the light in the boughs looked strained. Once seen this way, we're afraid it can't be unseen.

Click here to return to the previous screen.



Five Poets and a Particle Physicist: Poetics as a Mode of Inquiry

In early 2018, Dr. James Beacham, a researcher and particle physicist at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, gave a talk at the Exploratorium, San Francisco's iconic museum of science, art, and human perception, to explore what he calls the most important open questions of physics and to suggest development of a particle accelerator that would wrap around the circumference of the moon. The talk was inspiring, edifying, and immensely poetic. I'd already been thinking about scientific and poetic inquiry as two distinct but relatable modes of observation and meaning-making that might serve one another; after James's talk, I was motivated to seek out a conversation between him and poets I admire who are attracted to science. This roundtable, between a group of extraordinary poets who all engage deeply with science in their work, and a single particle physicist, took place over the course of about a month in the summer of 2018 via email. Jaswinder Bolina, Kimiko Hahn, Kathryn Nuernberger, and Tess Taylor have all built science and scientific inquiry into their work in ways that push beyond merely adopting jargon or occasional references to research and scientific discoveries. They are among many other contemporary and historical poets to do so, and like our colleagues, they have developed their own systems, forms, and tautologies to investigate the world through poetics. All exhibit impressive knowledge and deep curiosity about the scientific fields that most interest them, whether that be physics, biology, the history of science, ecology, astronomy, etc. This conversation is admittedly meandering, with scientists and scientific fields being underrepresented in number if overrepresented in wordcount, thanks primarily to Dr. Beacham's generosity with his time and enthusiasm for the project. I've found this conversation to be immensely gratifying, and I hope it sets the stage for further discussion and collaboration between poets and scientists—a relationship that has a complex and fascinating history and an exciting future.

—Martin Rock

Martin Rock: Before we begin discussing the relationship between science and poetics, or even the ways in which you all incorporate science into your own work, I'd like to ask about your personal early experiences with science. What brought you to science as a mode of inquiry and when did your engagement begin? Was there ever a time you might have travelled a different path? It is also important to note early on that "science" encompasses an immense array of fields and methodologies. What does it mean to you as a poet to say that your work is engaged with science? And what fields are you most interested in?

Kathryn Nuernberger: As a young poet I was drawn to scientific answers to epistemological and ontological questions like "What does it mean for an octopus to think?" or "How do plants feel?" I find the effort to try and fail to think beyond human paradigms very helpful in terms of accessing lyrical insight and language. Kimiko, *Brain Fever* is often on my mind because of the elegant and profound way those poems engage these questions of what it means to have/be a mind.

I FIND THE EFFORT TO TRY AND FAIL TO THINK BEYOND HUMAN PARADIGMS VERY HELPFUL IN TERMS OF ACCESSING LYRICAL INSIGHT AND LANGUAGE.

Lately I'm most drawn to the history of science for some of the same reasons. Watching scientists struggle to conceive of and find language for concepts we take for granted alters my perception of reality in such exciting ways. For example, a major question among scientists first studying electricity was "Which of the four elements is it?" Whole books were written on whether an electrical current was on fire or wet. You might say asking whether lightning is water is the wrong question born of an incomplete framework, but it was a question that helped me understand electricity and other facets of physics in a way that felt like a revelation, the kind of revelation that necessitates a poem.

James Beacham: Agreed. The stories of scientists working through problems with their existing knowledge and methods—and then updating them and their conclusions with the advent of new information, insights, and tools—are a key window into what science really is. Science isn't a collection of facts—or genius flashes of insight by lone white males—but a way of asking and answering questions about the world to arrive at robust, trustworthy conclusions. In this sense, asking whether lightning is water was

neither the right nor the wrong question. At the time, given the information physicists had at their disposal, it was a valid question to ask, because it led to concrete, testable predictions. Experiments performed based upon those questions eventually led to a new and improved conception of the world. These false starts can be monumentally instructive and lead to groundbreaking, revolutionary new ways of thinking.

I also like how you say a revelation inspired by scientific discovery necessitates a poem. Part of the reason I'm interested in engaging with non-scientists (via public talks, music-meets-physics events, etc.) is that doing so compels me to immerse myself in an alternate method of asking and answering questions about the world, to compare what we do in scientific inquiry with what is often done by some of my favorite poets in various modes of textual, thematic, formal, rhythmic, ontological, epistemological, or syntactic inquiry. I find that poetry serves as a fascinating point of comparison to my work as a scientist.

PART OF THE REASON I'M INTERESTED IN ENGAGING WITH NON-SCIENTISTS . . . IS THAT DOING SO COMPELS ME TO IMMERSE MYSELF IN AN ALTERNATE METHOD OF ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WORLD

An especially memorable example of this is the day the Large Hadron Collider first achieved stable proton collisions at the highest energy in human history. This was a complete jump into the scientific unknown, with no idea what we'd find in this new data. After the champagne, celebration, and applause, I took a volume of Paul Valéry poems and walked away from the hubbub to a relatively deserted sector of the CERN campus, among some spare or discarded superconducting magnet casings, and in the hot, anticipatory sun, I read from *La jeune Parque*.

There have been a few other times when I've been stuck on a certain physics or data analysis problem and have found that by taking a break and inhabiting the words, images, and sensations of some of my favorite poets I've been able to allow my brain to explore the spaces created by them to the extent that I return to my problem and a solution readily presents itself, a solution that was there all along, cached behind concrete-like layers of code and usual expectation.

Tess Taylor: Kathryn, I love those questions too. I'm obsessed right now with Peter Godfrey Smith's *Other Minds*, which is a book about cephalopods. It explores how smart octopuses are, and their otherness, and other intelligence. I loved this book

particularly, and there's often a book about science on my bedside table—books about what we can learn from dinosaur DNA; black holes; language acquisition, and so on. Keeping these things alive in mind feels like kind of a passionate necessity for me. I'm fascinated by the history of science, too—I love *Frankenstein* for instance, and that whole strange period where collecting and wonder cabinets and emergent science overlap with art; and also with racism; and also with empiricism; and imperialism; and global exploration. The job we have as writers is to call the very terms of the search for knowledge to some kind of attention. What stories do we tell ourselves about what it is to come to know and to discover?

Anyway, I am a poet in love with the magic of scientific inquiry. I still remember my first time at a microscope: I was in the eighth grade and living in rural India, with my mother, who is a South Asia scholar. I was in a small English medium school in a small village that was very far in world and space from my childhood in Berkeley California. Anyway, somehow in this class we were given the chance to look at carrot cells under a microscope. I think they were stained purple. They were beautiful—the tubules looked like a fan of widening lace, and you could see the textured difference between flesh and pith. It seemed amazing to get to look so closely. And then the thing dissolved into something else. I remember feeling dizzy as I got up—which world really existed?

Did we exist, or the cells? At which scale should I feel the world? I am sure I felt this way partly because of the travel I was already undergoing. But even now I take delight and joy in the way that science is a form of transport! I love how it helps us find new ways to envision and feel the world. All this stuff that's happening at the level of epigenetics for instance, and realizing that there's this strange methylated staircase of twisted molecules that seems to hold some of our deep experience. Or the idea of the genome being this vast line of code, some of which is yet indecipherable fragments of our prehistory. How can we not be so excited by that? It takes us so far out of the daily—there's the miracle of getting to see the world in a different dimension entirely.

THERE'S THE MIRACLE OF GETTING TO SEE THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT DIMENSION ENTIRELY. THERE'S MORE THAN A LITTLE ARS POETICA IN THAT

There's more than a little ars poetica in that, if you will. The sense that an alternate scale of being can unsettle us and also reorient us into the wonder of our lives as lives, in bodies, on a planet, in a universe. I suppose that's a lot of it for me.

Kimiko Hahn: A part of me feels that science is yet another captivating subject—like pneumoconiosis (Black Lung disease), necrophilia, Kabuki, early childhood development, the Sandinista Triumph, the characters in *The Tale of Genji*, and on. But it is also true that after *Toxic Flora*, when I thought to turn away from science, I hit a creative wind-shield—so there is obviously a reoccurring something in science that continues to attract.

Perhaps that draw comes from how to express ideas, even to think philosophically: "What am I?" is a question that doesn't interest me, but I am bewildered by, for example, the role dust plays in the creation of stuff. Like the universe.

No matter the subject, what usually prompts creativity in my mind are words themselves. When I wrote about Black Lung, I was on assignment interviewing coal miners. In describing what coal dust does to the body, one of the miners made it sound like the lung itself was a coal mine. His metaphor was really a tour de force. As a victim and advocate, such a vivid description was a political tool against the mine owners. The images and words he used: "dust particles,""sponge," "cave in"—all incited creativity.

But, too, pneumoconiosis, like the dissipation of the ozone layer, for example, carries an ethical dimension. Political is often "occasional" (grounded by date as it is) while ethical is less bound to current news. It is a natural means to address societies, relationships, Nature, possessions, etc… What other topics offer so many facets?

IF I'M AT A LOSS FOR A WRITING PROMPT, AN ARTICLE ON SCIENCE OR LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW AT A TREE BRANCH WORKS WONDERS.

In regards to becoming a scientist: that was never possible in my family, never a choice given my parents' biases: my sister and I were fated to live the arts. Still, my husband and I are garden-variety (literally) naturalists, noticing praying mantis babies in our bushes and following their summer cycle; gathering monarch caterpillars outside the Frost House in NH, transporting them home and watching the whole cycle. Ditto bag worms. A few years ago we accompanied conservationists tagging horseshoe crabs. I love watching hermit crabs fight over a shell.

If I'm at a loss for a writing prompt, an article on science or looking out the window at a tree branch works wonders.

Tess Taylor: Kimiko, yes! Because I have a graduate degree in journalism, and still occasionally report pieces, I'm struck by how the inner reporter and the inner poet seem to interact here. It's as if science and fieldwork and journalism are all ways to excavate something that feels most real. It's a way of letting the poet-mind rest, perhaps? The fascinated, perhaps even somewhat impartial observer blunders forward, lost in looking or listening.

Except we report or look closely or listen to be pointed elsewhere, too. In the substrata of the so called real—in the report, or scientific figure, or interview, something often rises up that seems to point beyond itself into the vibratory or metaphoric. The process of mining the real points towards something that has wider resonance. And then the poet brain kicks in again. The figure seems almost metamorphic (and indeed metaphoric!)—both itself as well as an indicator for something else. I think the drive to capture this emergent resonance is probably where the poem comes from.

James Beacham: Part of me thinks poets are secretly scientists at heart, and perhaps vice versa — or at least the urge to do science and the urge to write a poem come from similar places in the heart and belly, even if the following through of those urges is very different and even if the criteria for evaluating the outcomes are distinct, as well. Often there's an ecstasy or urgency to the poems (or films, novels, paintings, buildings, sound installations, etc.) that grip me the most, a sense that the images, senses, feelings, and emotions are being explored primarily because the poets simply cannot help themselves.

POETS ARE SECRETLY SCIENTISTS AT HEART, AND PERHAPS VICE VERSA . . . THE URGE TO DO SCIENCE AND THE URGE TO WRITE A POEM COME FROM SIMILAR PLACES IN THE HEART AND BELLY

Not all science is like the kind of research I do, clearly, so my biases are showing, but the type of science we do at CERN comes from a similar place. Tens of thousands of people come to CERN to participate in the experiments and explorations here, and not because we're going to get rich (we aren't) and not because we're going to use science to build a better bomb (CERN was founded for explicitly peaceful purposes, and the Higgs boson is not weaponizable), but because we're drawn to explore the biggest open questions of physics. We can't help ourselves. Curiosity fires and drives so much in both art and science, although the next steps past curiosity for these two domains—the further intention and the execution—diverge wildly.

Martin Rock: Kimiko, this idea that creativity begins with words is a statement I imagine is true of all poets and wonder whether it is true of scientists as well. As James points out, beyond the curious chrysalis, poetry and science take very different paths, though there are poets, such as yourself, whose work embodies a scientific attention and deep awareness of the taxonomies and methods arrived at through science that constitute our understanding of the world.

THERE ARE POETS ... WHOSE WORK EMBODIES A SCIENTIFIC ATTENTION AND DEEP AWARENESS OF THE TAXONOMIES AND METHODS ARRIVED AT THROUGH SCIENCE

I find it interesting that you and Tess, and so many poets involved in science are gardeners enthralled and inspired by the cultivation of living things, and by the systems and self-propagating algorithms that move life forward. As any gardener knows, some elements of these ecosystems are simply and always beyond human control. In research laboratories, on the other hand, great pains are taken to control for every possible element of a system, and indeed to disentangle each object from its web to better understand it. In part for this reason, it seems that the sciences—or at least some sciences—hope to divide and taxonomize with the intention of controlling the hierarchical systems they identify/create. I don't mean to suggest that all science is scientific imperialism (just as not all poetry is linguistic imperialism), but I do think this question of control is important to discuss in the context of the relationship between science and poetics.

James Beacham: Your description of seeking to "taxonomize with the intention of controlling the hierarchical systems they identify/create" is certainly true for some sciences, I think, and perhaps used to be true for physics, but one of the hallmarks of physics—particle physics in particular—is that it's the place you find yourself as a thinker when you're not satisfied with lists or taxonomies but you really want to understand how anything happens at all. Ernest Rutherford was being a bit dramatic when he said, "All science is either physics or stamp collecting," but the point rings true: Physics is about understanding and describing how things actually happen in the universe. This means math, and this means mapping mathematical models to ever more precise experiments and data.

Furthermore, while I agree that some science/physics seeks to control (e.g., nuclear power) and although there is an element of control to the desire to understand, particle

physics seeks primarily to understand. And there's a profound, gut-level joy, a majesty, to the flash of understanding, the moment of realization that there was a point before when you did not understand something and now you do.

Jaswinder Bolina: A little late to the conversation, but as far as my recent reading tells me, time is proving itself largely irrelevant to the equations of physics so maybe there's no such thing as being late! I don't suppose time is all that relevant to the equations of poetry either except for the way we half-blind observers obsess over it. There is, after all, a certain perpetuity to great art, which is probably why we always refer to the events in the poem/novel/story in the present tense when we talk about literature.

Anyway, all of this brings me back to the gap between what we think we're observing and what's actually happening. As James offers, such gaps between our understanding and, well, our understanding seem to run rampant at places like CERN. I'd argue those gaps run through all our literary anthologies and art museums too. It seems that scientists and artists alike spend much of our time attempting to reconcile the truth with the truth without anyone able to claim serial rights to the capital "T".

SCIENTISTS AND ARTISTS ALIKE SPEND MUCH OF OUR TIME ATTEMPTING TO RECONCILE THE TRUTH

This leads me to why I find myself so deeply attracted to both art and science—by the former I tend to mean poetry and painting; by the latter, I tend primarily towards theoretical physics, cosmology, and anything to do with human evolution. For me, the common denominator here is a word that James mentions several times throughout this discussion: counterintuitive. If there is a feature shared by the arts and sciences, it's that both so often confront the obvious and challenge what we've been led to believe on first blush. Whether it's Wallace Stevens' ways of looking at a blackbird or John Wheeler questioning if the universe exists at all in the absence of an observer, the thing that most strikes my mind and my gut when reading a really great poem isn't all that different from the thing that strikes my mind and gut when I'm reading a really great article in *Scientific American*: my intuition is proven wrong, and I'm forced to revise my ordinary observations.

For me, it's this revision that makes the ordinary extraordinary and vice versa. At end, I want to know what I don't know. I want my intuition challenged daily in hopes

I might get the whiz-bang pop of revelation, that brief ah-ha that leads to the next question, the new confusion. I find a really great episode of *Nova* gives me that feeling just as often as a poem or a painting does.

Returning to some of the things others have said, one facet of this conversation I find interesting is that I don't consider myself to be naturalist at all. My parents are enthusiastic gardeners, and I like hiking and camping as much as the next person, but it feels like my engagement with the sciences is on a more theoretical register. If you're going to give me a microscope, make it an electron microscope. If you want me to observe an insect or animal, tell me how the individual relates to the evolution of the species or to the ecosystem at large; what's this small thing's place in the cosmos? I hope it's clear I'm not suggesting my focus is in any way superior to another one! It's more that I'm wondering why I have my inclinations and what they mean for my art. Why do I switch the channel from *Planet Earth* but find myself riveted by an almost 40-year-old (and wildly outdated) episode of Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*? Is it a quirk of personality? Is it too much of a life in the city instead of out in the woods? I wonder why some become engineers or entomologists while others delve eyes-deep into muons and quarks. Undoubtedly there's ample room in all that vast emptiness out there for all of us, but I guess I'm pointing at the diversity of what we mean when we say "science."

POETS ARE IN PURSUIT OF THAT HEAT, WHETHER IT'S FROM THE BREATH OR THE BODY OR THE EAR OR THE WORD HOARD OR THE EARLY UNIVERSE.

Tess Taylor: Since we're talking about physics, I just wanted to add—isn't it STRANGE that some groupings of words have some kind of kinetic energy to them and some do not? When I was in grad school Louise Gluck used to read our drafts and dismiss many as "inert"—the goal of course was to be lifelike. Of course, this is an expression (not a science) but there seems to be a truth to it. There are certain ways of grouping words and even sounds that seem to feel lifelike—or, if not lifelike, to be charged. As poets, we study the way words are grouped and think about sound and line and air and the body. There is, to put it lightly, no real science to it. It's something else, something elusive, which we think of as art, but which is truly elusive. How or why certain groupings of words seem to be "hot" and "highly energetic"—I suppose that poets are in pursuit of that heat, whether it's from the

breath or the body or the ear or the word hoard or the early universe. We're after that electricity, those conductive alignments.

Martin Rock: Tess, this quality of language that allows it to carry variable "energy" is something I think is crucial to this conversation, and I'm eager to understand whether this can be discussed in scientific terms. To get there, we'll need some background. James, can you briefly describe your work at CERN for us? I'm especially interested in how particle physics is described sometimes as "energy packets" interacting with "fields" to become matter, which is to say the use of metaphor in our understanding of science. How does science arrive at meaning when translating complex mathematics into language, and how does language have the capacity to organize matter without being matter itself? In many ways, this process seems relevant to the fact that elementary particles—those particles that make up all the perceivable objects in our world—are comprised of mass without volume, and yet those perceivable objects contain volume themselves. Language seems to be a kind of complex scientific metaphor not irrelevant to particle physics—how is "stuff" comprised of and organized by "not stuff"?

HOW DOES LANGUAGE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ORGANIZE MATTER WITHOUT BEING MATTER ITSELF?

James Beacham: I work at the Large Hadron Collider, which is a 27-km circular tunnel on the border of France and Switzerland, buried one hundred meters underground. In this tunnel, we use superconducting magnets colder than outer space to accelerate protons—you're made of protons, mostly—to almost the speed of light and slam them into each other millions of times a second for months and years and collect a record of the debris from these collisions, building up the largest unique dataset in human history. Then we carefully and laboriously sift through this data to search for evidence of new particles and thus possible answers to these most profound open questions of physics. What is 95% of the universe made of? Why is gravity so insanely weak compared to the other forces of nature? What happened just after the moment of the Big Bang fourteen billion years ago? Do we live in a multiverse?

With respect to the particular way you phrased the prompt, Martin, I think you might be trying to get at another key aspect of physics at its fundamental scales,

which is that we often have multiple different ways of describing the same physical phenomena. And in the case of the physics of the very small and very fast, I've used the description of particles as points, pieces of something that, although they have no spatial extent, still carry properties. But as you intimate, there's an equivalent way to describe what's happening by referring to particles as excitations in fields that permeate all of space rather than chunks of something flying through the cosmos. Depending upon what you're trying to do, which phenomenon you're trying to understand, it's sometimes more convenient to describe an electron as a particle and other times it's more convenient to describe an electron as an excitation of a field which then propagates around space. These are equivalent formulations.

IT MIGHT SEEM REASONABLE TO, AT FIRST GLANCE, ASSUME THAT MASS, THE HEFT OF *STUFF*, IS A KIND OF DISTINCT PHENOMENON

If you squint you can see a kind of relationship between this and language and meaning. It might seem reasonable to, at first glance, assume that mass, the heft of *stuff*, is a kind of distinct phenomenon, the physical form that we can interact with and that constitutes everything of substance around us, and that energy is the abstract, ephemeral thing behind the scenes that we need to translate into mass in order to have an experience or feel something real. In this sense thought is energy and language is mass, and a thought is indistinct and amorphous and only by translating it into language can we hope to exchange the intended meaning of the thought to others.

But one of the problems we immediately face any time we start talking about things at the smallest and fastest scales—those things governed by the sometimes counterintuitive rules of quantum field theory—is not only that the metaphors we use are intrinsically flawed, but the language itself is the language that we've developed for our experiences in the macroscopic world, and is therefore essentially always a heuristic. And heuristics will always suck, to a certain extent. The rules of nature at the tiniest scales—what it means for anything to happen at all—are indeed extremely, profoundly different from the rules that govern our everyday world. This remains true to the extent that using language to talk about the smallest and fastest scales is, at heart, a game of managing inaccurate descriptions.

But we do it because we have no other method of communicating how fantastically remarkable and awesome these phenomena really are, these amazing features of the

universe that we can't see with our eyes. You will never hold a Higgs boson in your hand. You will never stand on a cosmic beach and feel a gravitational wave crash over you. But from a mathematical and physical perspective, these things are completely wonderful and understandable, with precise definitions. So we indulge inherently sloppy, messy, inaccurate metaphors, with all their attendant frustration, because we can't stand that others—those who have not studied and understood the math and physics behind it all—shouldn't get a chance to understand and experience, even partially, how overwhelmingly gorgeous and awe-inspiring these discoveries really are.

Martin Rock: Tess, one metaphor that comes to mind in your extraordinary *Work & Days* is the representation of hands as metonym for human engagement with nonhumans. It is a book with its hands in the earth, but also thumbing through species identification guides, and gripping newspaper articles on global warming, and raised above the eyes to shield the sun. "Hands, everywhere," as you write in "Epilogue." You mention variations of scale in this conversation, and I love how "Time on Earth" begins with the constellations and ends with the short life of a frog. This attention to the full range of representation carries through linguistically as well. Though the book references the astronomical and the biological, it seems to live most fully in the field of ecology—the study of the complex relationships in and between ecosystems. "Here we are not self but species," you write in "Bright Tide," "breaking as we bend & also fruiting." What is your relationship to the field of ecology, and do you find more influence in direct experience of the natural world, or in the written word?

I THINK IN TERMS OF ECOSYSTEMS ALL THE TIME—ABOUT THE SLENDER ECOTONES THAT MAKE THINGS POSSIBLE

Tess Taylor: I think in terms of ecosystems all the time—about the slender ecotones that make things possible, like a streambed in an arid plane, or the subtle ways that disparate things affect each other. Just yesterday I was at the California Academy of Sciences, and they offered the story of the way that spider webs help young redwoods harvest fog to use as groundwater, and how in turn, much later, very tiny spiders launch themselves from redwood branches into the world and spread.

Who knew that tiny spiders and enormous redwoods were in such intense collaboration? That's a story whose filaments are light and fascinating, which shimmer

when we consider them. Poetry draws us into such unexpected proximities. But I also think that poetry itself *is* an ecosystem: one that we build, like a web, for our attention, for our focus, for our wonder. It's a place where we can both reflect our interconnectedness and also a place where we can catch sight of what fascinates us.

Kathryn Nuernberger: When I think about metaphors I always think about the surrealist idea that a metaphor should reveal the interconnectedness of all things. And the more absurd that connection can be the better, because that only proves how profound the web between, let's say an umbrella and an operating table, really is. An apt metaphor like that, Breton said in his manifestoes, awakens us to an underlying truth about reality that he called a web, which is a much less elegant metaphor than words like "dark matter" or "quantum mechanics" are. Enlightenment era scientists called an idea like this "luminescent aether," which is a term I'm very fond of, though the 19th century spiritualists "ectoplasm" is also pretty good if you don't mind hoaxes riddling your schema.

FIGURES OF SPEECH ENTER WHERE VOCABULARY FAILS OR WHERE AN ALIEN EXPERIENCE NEEDS TO BE CONVEYED, SAY, NEUROSCIENCE TO A POET.

To my mind, the best metaphor contains within it an encyclopedia.

Kimiko Hahn: Here's a roundabout way of answering this question. In Dianne Ackerman's marvelous book *The Natural History of the Senses*, she writes of smell: "Our sense of smell can be extraordinarily precise, yet it's almost impossible to describe how something smells to someone wo hasn't smelled it… Instead we tend to describe how they make us feel. Something smells 'disgusting,' 'intoxicating,' 'sickening,' [etc.]. . . . [We define] one smell by another smell or another sense." So, figures of speech enter where vocabulary fails or where an alien experience needs to be conveyed, say, neuroscience to a poet. (The section on smell, by the way, is sixty intense pages long.)

I also want to think about science and poetics in a way that is longer and deeper than I have so far. I recall when asked to write a piece on "motherhood and poetics" that I felt I'd hit on something very key: *intuition*. This age-old "weakness" laid on women but used wildly by men, of course, for creativity, felt like a radical find although I was and still am not trained in Theory so perhaps critiques had long regarded this ability. (I do know and love something of the French feminists!) I would like to hit on something, if only for my own sense of self, that feels key to "science and poetics."

Thinking out loud, so to speak, this is what comes to mind: the original epigraph for my collection *Toxic Flora* was from Marianne Moore:

> . . . the principle that is hid:
> in the absence of feet, "a method of conclusion";
> "a knowledge of principles,"
> in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.
>
> Marianne Moore, from "To a Snail"

Due to estate anxiety (her estate is notoriously difficult about using quotes), I decided to not use this gorgeous quote. My writing husband suggested I look at *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy*. This is what I finally used:

> We trace analogies; as if it were
> A joy to blend all contrarieties,
> And to discover
> In things the most unlike some qualities
> Having relationship and family ties.
>
> from *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy*

There is something in these two quotes that suggest, to me, a poetics. Certainly wonder is one synapse between whatever prompts (a chrysalid turning from translucent jade green to cellophane clear) to the pitiful, albeit brazen, self. My self.

Martin Rock: This attention to blending contrarieties feels like a good moment to move deeper into a discussion of form. The history of poetics (across languages and cultures, interestingly) is rife with the idea that language can contain more of this "heat" and "energy" that Tess brings up when it is forced into limited and carefully controlled forms. This is perhaps another point of intersection between poetic and scientific modes of inquiry.

TO PLACE CONSTRAINTS AROUND AN EXPERIENCE—THE EXPERIENCE OF WRITING A POEM, SAY, OR OF ACCELERATING PARTICLES—IS TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE..

To place constraints around an experience—the experience of writing a poem, say, or of accelerating particles—is to make the experience possible. Even one of the most fundamental acts of scientific inquiry, the act of measuring, seems a kind of formal limitation of the measured object. When I measure light to be a wave, as in the famous double-slit experiment, in that instance I prevent it from also existing as a particle, and when I measure an electron to exist in a single point in space, I am limiting its simultaneous existence in all other points within its probability field (all points at which, unmeasured, the electron is understood to exist simultaneously). This begs the question: Is measurement a kind of limitation of formal potential, or is form a method of measurement? Of course in poetry, as in science, measurement and form are inextricably linked. When we use the imperfect measuring device of language to describe complex mathematical principles, however, we're inevitably limiting certain types of meaning while allowing other types of meaning to flourish. Even in particle physics, it seems the existence of a particle is acknowledged not by measuring it exactly, but by analyzing immense amounts of data collected from what is left of the particle's dissolution. So whenever we step outside of the theoretical (in math or in language) and into the "real world," we are faced with messy methods of observation and imperfect results. We're always measuring what isn't there.

THE POEMS I MOST ADMIRE NEVER SAY EXACTLY THE THING THEY'RE SAYING, BUT MANAGE TO ARRIVE AT MEANING BY MANIFESTING THE VAPOR THAT CONDENSES AROUND IT

Another similarity between poets and particle physicists then, is that we must cultivate a kind of unfocused gaze around the thing we hope to see to measure what it leaves behind in its wake. One thing that fascinates me about both science and poetics is the degree to which constraints allow for the thinking mind to arrive at a wider and deeper understanding of the object of observation, while often also limiting the ontological experience of the object being observed—science limits objects to numbers while poetry limits objects to language. It also strikes me that many of the poems I most admire never say exactly the thing they're saying, but manage to arrive at meaning by manifesting the vapor that condenses around it, as in a cloud chamber.

James Beacham: One formal similarity between particle physics and poetry as modes of inquiry is that they both try to understand the seemingly uncontrollably

complex world around us by reducing everything to its most basic, elementary constituents. Human social, emotional, psychological, and political experience is described (and shaped) by language, and language can be reduced to constituent sounds, letters, and shapes. One way we can arrive at a better understanding of the hidden emotional and political structures and rules that govern the social world around us is by carefully isolating the constituent pieces of language and exactingly arranging them in particular ways, to better evoke or recall the feelings or sensations themselves. Is this what poetry does? What about different modes of poetry, to the extent that they can be delineated as different?

The formal differences among imagist, expressionist, and impressionist work are evident, but I find it difficult to determine whether one embodies a more "scientific" approach than any other. And what about the surrealist work of Paul Éluard, or, farther, automatic writing? Perhaps more experimental, so to speak, forms of poetry are more similar to what we do at the LHC—poems that start from the known letters, words, combinations, sounds, lines, puffs of air, movements of body and then push beyond, to see if other linguistic pieces, assemblies, motions may exist and may mean something. This implies that other kinds of poetry are more akin to the physics of nuclear spectroscopy or chemistry, where one attempts to map the edges of the known.

Perhaps we turn instead to something that Jaswinder and Kimiko both mention in this discussion—that of connections between intuition in science and intuition in literature and art, poetics in particular. Intuition is informed by experience, and scientific intuition can—and usually should—be followed. Even though dark matter, for many decades now, hasn't turned up in the places we expected it to be, looking in those places was indeed worthwhile, since our collective intuition—the weight of the experience and history of particle physics and cosmology—suggested we do so. In this case, the persistent lack of a discovery is compelling us to update our intuition right now. But by contrast, prior to the construction of the Large Hadron Collider at a much higher energy than ever used, all of our intuition suggested that the Higgs boson should be discovered well within the energy range at the LHC. And it was. Intuition in science is based on experience but is subject to updating based upon new information.

EVEN THOUGH DARK MATTER, FOR MANY DECADES NOW, HASN'T TURNED UP IN THE PLACES WE EXPECTED IT TO BE, LOOKING IN THOSE PLACES WAS INDEED WORTHWHILE

But these experiences and sensations needed a framework upon which to be expressed, which is language. This is what you were getting at, Martin, and I like very much this comparison between language and strictures in poetry and science, because what you're saying is correct: We do indeed increase our ability to understand the fundamental constituents and rules of the universe by placing strictures on how we think about and describe it, and thus on how we make statements of existence and knowledge. As you point out, there's a basic uncertainty built in to the mathematics of quantum mechanics—mathematics that nature seems to follow really well—that, for example, knowing the position of an electron very precisely immediately limits our ability to know how fast it was going and in which direction with high precision as well, and vice versa. If we need to know one of these quantities, we can do so, but at the expense of the other—our ability to know everything really well is limited. Only by imposing constraints on physical reality can we understand it.

OUR ABILITY TO KNOW EVERYTHING REALLY WELL IS LIMITED. ONLY BY IMPOSING CONSTRAINTS ON PHYSICAL REALITY CAN WE UNDERSTAND IT.

Martin Rock: James, your response to this question is fascinating, and it makes me especially interested in hearing Jaswinder's response to this question about form, particularly in the context of the remarkable poem "Operating Dictates for a Particle Accelerator." Jaswinder, what were your formal constraints in writing this poem? How is it formally inspired by your knowledge of particle accelerators?

Jaswinder Bolina: That poem is meant to be a sequence of "shattered" sonnets. Or, maybe it's more that I meant it to be a single sonnet that's been shattered into seven constituent parts. For anyone who's seen the poem, the convention of 14 lines is plainly visible there, and the layout of each of the sections attempts to render the roughly rectangular shape of a sonnet. I had a lot of fun with its approximation/appropriation of the sonnet form, maybe nowhere more than in the one line that simply repeats the word 'iamb' five times and—based on our standard pronunciation of the word—is thus rendered entirely un-iambic.

It's been a long time since I wrote the thing so my memory of the process isn't perfect, but I know I'd been reading a lot about particle accelerators at the time, and

several of the section titles as well as the title of the sequence as a whole came from one of the books/articles I'd been reading. I can no longer remember which book/article that was, but it gave me this idea to take my (at the time) numerous poems about failed romantic relationships and "smash" them into each other. I was just so sick of their adolescent angst and considered them to be largely failures, but I couldn't get away from some of the lines that still struck me as not half bad. There was also this idea that somewhere "beneath" or "inside" all those failed poems was something more fundamental to do with the experiences of love and loss, regret and angst, and maybe if I smashed them together in this way that thing would get revealed. One aspect in this that felt elementally important too was music. I'd been listening to a lot of Silver Jews and Pavement at the time, and I put the album *Brighten the Corners* on repeat and started writing down every word I heard there that had never appeared in a poem of mine. I included those in the final piece as a nod to how much of our love lives seem to have musical accompaniment and how much of our music is about romantic relationships.

All told, I wanted the poem to give the reader the experience of love and loss without clarifying the details. I think I meant to demonstrate how, at a fundamental level, those feelings aren't about a particular love interest or setting or moment in one's life. Rather, they're made of something more nebulous and general. I wanted readers to read the poem in any order—which is why the numbered sections are non-sequential—and come through it somehow knowing what had happened but not able to articulate exactly how they knew. This felt allied to me with the ways in which a particle accelerator smashes and deconstructs matter without actually calling into question the reality of that matter. Instead, the accelerator is attempting to reveal the not-so-obvious structures and constituent parts that comprise the matter itself.

THERE WAS ALSO THIS IDEA THAT SOMEWHERE 'BENEATH' OR 'INSIDE' ALL THOSE FAILED POEMS WAS SOMETHING MORE FUNDAMENTAL TO DO WITH THE EXPERIENCES OF LOVE AND LOSS

As for form, I initially tried to write the poem in iambic pentameter and then as a syllabic with ten syllables per line, but I eventually realized that if I took the notion of "poem smashing" as literally as we do "atom smashing," then all that rigidity of sonnet form should come apart. What should be left are words and punctuation, signifiers, signified, and significance all in apparent disorder. The

poem comprises the entirety of the third section of my first book *Carrier Wave* with each section of the poem appearing on its own page, and if I'd had my druthers, that entire section of the book would've been printed on transparencies, the kind we use for overhead projectors in math class. That way, when laid atop each other, we would've had the solid shape of the sonnet, but as you turned the pages, each strata would get revealed with more and more distinctions between the lines and words becoming apparent even as the apparent structure of the whole fell apart. Unfortunately, poetry publishers tend not to have budget for that sort of thing, especially not for first books, but I'm glad to be able to share my vision for it here so any interested party can at least imagine it.

Having said all this, it feels relevant, Martin, to the thing you said about vapor in a cloud chamber, but I worry that both my fellow poets and our physicist friend will find it an amateurish, hokey (and longwinded) way to "apply" science in poetry. Still, it brings me back to the idea that, as in science, art is often the effort to deconstruct, dissect, and taxonomize experience so that we might understand it in a new way. In poetry, and perhaps in physics too, we interrogate, challenge, and reinvent received forms to arrive at a different perspective on some otherwise old ideas, whether the atom or the love sonnet.

AS IN SCIENCE, ART IS OFTEN THE EFFORT TO DECONSTRUCT, DISSECT, AND TAXONOMIZE EXPERIENCE SO THAT WE MIGHT UNDERSTAND IT IN A NEW WAY.

Martin Rock: I very much like this idea that we must continuously interrogate, challenge, and reinvent received forms, in poetry, in science, and perhaps especially in our social interactions and political formations. Kimiko, your poems also often use an amalgam of forms and of language. *Toxic Flora* and *Brain Fever* especially, seem to revel in the inherently poetic nature of scientific language, and they appear to be an act of synthesis that arrives at meaning through accretion, much in the way that scientific theorems and postulates build always on existing knowledge. You weave science into poetry in a way that fascinates, which is to say literally, through a kind of seamless linguistic suture. Can you share with us how those books were written, and what kind of formal constraints you put around your engagement with science writing to arrive at such powerful marriages of science and poetry?

Kimiko Hahn: Accretion—I like that description. But, there's also dovetailing, sheer juxtaposition (which I especially learned from Japanese poetry), and outright ambiguity (ditto Japanese poetics and the many kinds of word play).

Thank you for your question. The poems in *Toxic Flora* were written over a ten-year period. I'd bring clippings (*real* clippings) to a coffeeshop, hold the article in my left hand, and scribble with my right. (These were writing prompts similar to those I've used for other work.) Back home I'd type them onto a doc and at some point begin revising. Ultimately, the great difficulty (unlike drafts on other subject) was how much to cut: I was holding on to material because the information and the language was so exciting. Finally, I listened to a friend who told me to take stuff out that didn't benefit the poem. Wrenching. But the cuts really made the pieces art instead of lineated information.

ULTIMATELY, THE GREAT DIFFICULTY . . . WAS HOW MUCH TO CUT: I WAS HOLDING ON TO MATERIAL BECAUSE THE INFORMATION AND THE LANGUAGE WAS SO EXCITING.

Brain Fever was a different creature: I was sure I was finished with the subject of science but found myself in a creative doldrums. So I gave myself prompts and exercises, this time, all in the area of cognitive science. For example, after reading "The Riddle of Consciousness" by Benedict Carey, I wrote half a dozen or so poems with the rules: start with a quote; write a piece twelve lines or less. From the quote *Theologians have likened this state of pre-awakening to sleep, to darkness, to life underground*, I was prompted to write about Demeter and Persephone and the draft became the poem "Porch Light." Reading an article on time and the brain, I decided to use a quote as working title then respond with dozen "items." All associations. (The form based on Japanese zuihitsu.)

I didn't set out to write sequences, but for each of the sections I did use a single article and "rules" to write as many poems as I could. (By the way, the title was originally *The Clipping Morgue*, but no one liked it except for me. The term came from my days as a research assistant.)

Even as *Brain Fever* was published, I thought I had a third book of poems "on science," but the collection turned out to be too weak. Still, some of the long pieces such as "Cryptic Chamber" figure into what I hope to be my new collection *Foreign Bodies.*

Martin Rock: I almost mentioned your chapbook *Cryptic Chamber* as well, which of course I love. That poem, in its movement between the social and the biological, the human and nonhuman, the immense and the miniature, reminds me in some ways of what Kate said about "trying and failing to think beyond human paradigms." How can this be achievable? It seems the empathy this kind of thinking requires points toward the empathy we must first develop in the way we interact with our fellow humans. It also points to Tess's thoughts about the "terms for the search for knowledge"—terms that are as relevant to the ways in which we describe and apprehend one another as they are to the ways in which we describe and apprehend the universe.

Kathryn Nuernberger: Martin, you're touching on one of my anxieties with this question about the role of empathy in writing about the inner lives of microbes or plants when this world is clearly so much in need of more empathy towards humans. I am aware of, but unsure what to do about, the fact that I am a person who can imagine her way into an octopus's neuron-rich tentacles but cannot do the same very well when it comes to humans.

To answer this question, I have been thinking on that common adage about how you go to a place for a week and you write a book, you go for a year and you write an article, move to a place and never write a word. Other people are places of such beauty and endurance and anguish and hope—how do you write that?

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT WRITING ABOUT OCTOPUSES AND OLMS AND OTHER CREATURES THAT ASTONISH ME IS THAT I CAN SAY HOW THEY EVOKE A FEELING OF THE SUBLIME

Personally, I get stumped by humans. I feel like I know just enough about the human algorithm to know what I don't know. Which is not to say that I've given up on understanding people and retreated into science, only that I feel a sort of reverent silence regarding others. Unless I'm really pissed off, and then I can say some words.

What I like about writing about octopuses and olms and other creatures that astonish me is that I can say how they evoke a feeling of the sublime: "I understand you, Red-lipped batfish, in that I understand you are beyond the reaches of my own understanding, which is profoundly humbling and thank you for that." In my experience, if you say to another human person: "You, in your simple going about your business in this grocery store, awe and humble me in a way beyond understanding, like

a Humboldt squid," that person would be displeased. I think because we all really want to be known and understood as the beings we are, which is paradoxically, that we are unique almost the point of unknowability and also very much identical to each other. But when I say "we," I just mean "I" and maybe also the handful of humans I know well enough to hypothesize about. Also, I understand that nobody wants a wacko axolotl empathing all over them in the bread aisle, and I think folks also prefer not to get that sort of thing in their poems either. So writing about science can be a way of both contemplating empathy and enacting one's empathy in a way that is within the realm of what is a possible for limited and imperfect beings.

Martin Rock: This question of our (and the universe's) un/knowability is also important in considering the relationship between science and poetics. It seems that the methodology of science comes from a place of believing the world is in fact knowable—that if one can dissect and disentangle enough or collect enough data one will reveal the mechanistic workings of all things, or at least fully understand or encounter the thing-at-hand. There are poems that operate in this way as well, but many of my favorites seem to acknowledge, and even to celebrate the ultimate unknowable complexity of the universe (and of the thing-at-hand, be it human, cephalopod, axolotl, or Styrofoam cup).

POETRY HAS THE CAPACITY TO HELP US GATHER OURSELVES IN THE FACE OF IMMENSE AND UNKNOWABLE CHANGE

I wonder if this celebration of the unknown is one reason James snuck away from the group at that monumental moment in history, involving some of the most brilliant physicists in the world and a multi-billion-dollar instrument that spans two countries, to read a book of poems. Poetry has the capacity to help us gather ourselves in the face of immense and unknowable change, to confront the breakages in our knowledge, and indeed to draw connective tissue between the known and the unknown, to help light the way.

Kate, *The End of Pink* is an extraordinary example of this. In your devastating and brilliant poem, "Rituals of the Bacabs as the Strange Case of Kate Abbot" you join, through blood and poetry, a 17th C. case study of an English woman ("also named Kate"), rituals of 17th C. Mayan medicine men, and your own experience. You trouble historical lines of science and ritual, self and other, madness and rationality. In this poem, I think you *do* arrive

at something universally and deeply human, by bringing together these two disparate but contemporaneous texts through the medium of the speaker's bodily experience. If science works to divide things into smaller and smaller packets so that we may understand them, sometimes poetry must identify where understanding is impossible, pick up those packets from their place in the catalogue to press them together to seek a different kind of truth, as Jaswinder indicated. Can you tell us a bit about the process of writing this poem? Was it an attempt to know or understand the world, or something else entirely?

Kathryn Nuernberger: In the past year or so I've seen a lot of public attention paid to the fact that medical care for women is often poor, in part because so many members of that long-standing patriarchal system we call Medicine make a habit of not believing women when they describe the experiences they are having in their own bodies. This problem is particularly perilous for women of color. It is also a challenge for those who live in remote rural regions, because you get the doctor you get, or you drive several hours in an emergency hoping to find someone you trust better at the end of a long road. Both times I was pregnant in Appalachian Ohio, I experienced medical care that has been described by some as malpractice. One time my pregnancy ended with a healthy baby, one time it ended with a second trimester miscarriage. Both times my postpartum concerns about how much I was bleeding were dismissed, and both times I would later end up hemorrhaging under terrifying circumstances, once on a side of a road, another time in front of a classroom full of my students.

SO MANY MEMBERS OF THAT LONG-STANDING PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM WE CALL MEDICINE MAKE A HABIT OF NOT BELIEVING WOMEN WHEN THEY DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCES THEY ARE HAVING IN THEIR OWN BODIES.

I wrote this poem as a byproduct of my struggle to make some kind of peace with the fact that not only do I not know for certain, even now, why these things happened in my body, but neither do the medical professionals who were so confident in one dismissive diagnosis after another. Truly, none of us knows what happened or why, because I eventually just gave up on the whole mess of head-scratching specialists and test after test that left me sicker than the one before and walked out of their care. I was lucky that once home I got better instead of worse, again for reasons that remain inexplicable. When I wrote this poem I was four months out of the hospital

and starting to believe I really wouldn't have to go back any time soon. Stumbling on these parallel accounts of illness in medieval Europe and colonial South America that had such divergent epistemological systems but such similar depictions of pain and fever and bleeding, seemed like a powerful lesson for me on how very scientific not knowing is. I mean, it's easy to forget sometimes, given the way so many doctors talk to their patients, that Western medicine is predicated on uncertainty, on questions, hypotheses, experimentation, and the necessity of embracing error. It might also be, though often it isn't, predicated on compassion and kindness and listening. It seemed to me that the language of those Mayan incantations was rooted in compassion and kindness and listening. I wished, reading them, that I lived in a world where such care had been possible for me.

THE UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING IN IT IS FUNDAMENTALLY UNKNOWABLE, BUT THERE IS WONDER AND BEAUTY AND HUMAN DECENCY

My poem was written in the moment when I was realizing that I had learned something important from my experiences about uncertainty and vulnerability, something that felt like a theory about our bodies within our ecosystems. My theory, if I had to try to put it into words that are different from the ones in the poem, is that the universe and everything in it is fundamentally unknowable, but there is wonder and beauty and human decency in really trying to know anyway, particularly if you do so with the humility of anticipating your own certain failure and with gratitude for being given whatever little understanding you might find.

I want to end my answer to your question by acknowledging that I had one doctor who did embody everything I wished for in the rest of that hospital. One night I woke up with another of my 105 degree chills and sweats, pained by the tube into my vein, to find him sitting in the dim light of my room, in the uncomfortable chair where my mother had been all afternoon. He apologized for waking me and said he thought he might be able to figure it out if he just sat near me for a while. He didn't "figure it out," but it's still a gesture I pull out and remember from time to time, almost like a shot of some unlikely elixir. That this doctor sat beside my bed in the late hours after his shift was over listening to my sickness and to me in the hopes that he might understand what help was in his power to offer.

Martin Rock: Kate, you bring up so many elements of science and medicine that are necessary to acknowledge, even (perhaps especially) in a conversation that celebrates scientific inquiry—patriarchy, the dangers of acting on incomplete knowledge, the frailty and limits of what we do know, and still the striving to know more, to do something to ease suffering in the face of not knowing.

Thank you for sharing the terrible experience behind this poem with us; thank you for the poem. I want to finish by asking James one last question: why the Gregory Corso poem on your website? In many ways, it is the existence of this poem on your site that led me to believe you might be interested in this conversation, and I'm curious to know why you have it there, and what it means to you.

James Beacham: I hadn't thought too much about why I originally put Gregory Corso's 1955 poem, "Requiem for 'Bird' Parker, Musician," on my website. It was a spontaneous decision. I'd stumbled upon that photo of the nicobar pigeon by a photographer named John White and the dark background behind the bird evoked a passage from the Corso poem in my head:

> in early nightdrunk
> solo in his pent house stand
> BIRD held a black flower in his black hand
> he blew his horn to the sky
> made the sky fantastic!

So my first inclination is to say that its appearance there has nothing to do with science or particle physics beyond its function as a counterbalance to all that research—or beyond something unconscious. But over the course of this conversation, I've realized that perhaps there is some kind of global thematic comparison to be made.

Charlie Parker was an explorer. All my favorite musicians are. After you learn all the chords, all the scales, all the chord progressions, all the note combinations that are written in stone with the word "Music" attached to them, you begin to feel them and inhabit them—and finally you realize that, as beautiful and explanatory and invigorating as they are, there's more out there. What do you do? When you realize that the standard music simply doesn't reflect or mirror your lived experience—that

the Music isn't you—and you suspect, you *know*, that there's more out there, you only have one choice: Go find it. Explore.

Parker and his jazz contemporaries in the 1950s did this and discovered new realms of expression via improvisation. Charlie Parker broke down the social structures around him by deconstructing the music that was respectable at the time—Big Band and classical—into its constituent parts and then he used these parts, arranged them in ways he'd developed and invented on the spot, and he reconstructed them into an evocation of his lived experience.

WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT THE STANDARD MUSIC SIMPLY DOESN'T REFLECT OR MIRROR YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE—THAT THE MUSIC ISN'T YOU—AND YOU SUSPECT, YOU KNOW, THAT THERE'S MORE OUT THERE, YOU ONLY HAVE ONE CHOICE: GO FIND IT. EXPLORE.

Gregory Corso's poem, about what people around Bird might have said when they heard that Bird had died, tries to do this with language. This poem sings with a similar, somewhat unrefined, blazing fire: the desire to understand the oppressive structures around us and to somehow put poverty, counterculture, and inequality into a broader context.

I grew up with Parker, Monk, Miles, Mingus, Coltrane, Dizzy, Bud, Milt Jackson, Clifford Brown, and later taught myself Hank Mobley, Kenny Dorham, Archie Shepp, and beyond, as well as clarinet and alto saxophone. I can't possibly quantify what I've learned from Jazz, but I can certainly quantify the number of proton collisions we perform at the Large Hadron Collider, seeking to deconstruct the world around us into its elementary, unbreakable constituents. I can quantify how we work to arrange them 100 meters underground in a 27-km tunnel on the border of France and Switzerland. The particles we know exist can explain a lot about nature, but we suspect—we *know*—there must be more out there. And we go in search of these new particles—gravitons, quantum black holes, exotic cousins of the Higgs boson, dark matter—simply because we have a curious fire in the belly, an overwhelming, driving desire to know more about the structures of the universe—the hidden structures of the world around us.

> wail for BIRD
> for BIRD is dead

Bird lives.

Contributors

Hanif Abdurraqib is a poet, essayist, and cultural critic from Columbus, Ohio. His first collection of poems, *The Crown Ain't Worth Much*, was released in 2016 and was nominated for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award. His first collection of essays, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*, was released in fall 2017 by Two Dollar Radio.

Selva Almada is a writer from Villa Elisa, in the province of Entre Ríos in the north of Argentina. She is the author of six novels and story collections, as well as a volume of poetry. Originally published in 2014 and a finalist for the Premio Rodolfo Walsh, *Dead Girls* is a nonfiction account of a spate of unsolved murders of young women in Argentina in the 1980s.

Katharine Bowdoin Barthelme holds a BA from Santa Fe University of Art and Design, and an MA from Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. With over a decade of experience working with artists, advisors, collectors, and commercial galleries in New York, Los Angeles and London, she returned to Houston in 2013 to found the private art advisory firm, Bowdoin Projects. Katharine is passionate about Houston's art and literary organizations, participating in Menil Society's Steering Committee, and since 2016, serving on the Inprint Advisory Board. She is also the current Arts Editor for *Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts.*

Gabrielle Bates works at Open Books: A Poem Emporium and edits for the *Seattle Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Broadsided Press*, and *Bull City Press*. The recipient of support from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Hugo House, and Artist Trust, her poems and poetry comics appear in *The New Yorker, Poetry*, *New England Review,* and *jubilat*, among other journals. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, she currently lives in Seattle. You can find more of her work at www.gabriellebat.es.

Dr. James Beacham searches for answers to the biggest open questions of physics using the largest experiment ever, the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. He hunts for dark matter, gravitons, quantum black holes, and dark photons as a member of the ATLAS collaboration, one of the teams that discovered the Higgs boson in 2012. In addition to his research, he is a frequent speaker at popular sci/tech/art events around the world, including the American Museum of Natural History, the Royal Institution, SXSW, and the BBC. His talk, "How we explore unanswered questions in physics", was featured on TED.com and has been viewed nearly 1.5 million times. He contributes to podcasts, radio shows, and documentaries, and has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Wired*, and *Gizmodo*, among others. Beacham trained as a filmmaker before becoming a physicist and regularly collaborates with artists. In 2015 he launched Ex/Noise/CERN, a project exploring the connections between particle physics and experimental music and film.

Rosebud Ben-Oni is a recipient of the 2014 NYFA Fellowship in Poetry and a 2013 CantoMundo Fellow; her most recent collection of poems, *turn around, BRXGHT XYXS*, was selected as Agape Editions' EDITORS' CHOICE, and will be published in 2019. She writes weekly for *The Kenyon Review* blog and is an Editorial Advisor for VIDA: Women in Literary Arts. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Tin House*, *Black Warrior Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Arts & Letters*, among others; recently, her poem "Poet Wrestling with Angels in the Dark" was commissioned by the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City, and was published by *The Kenyon Review Online*. She teaches creative writing at UCLA Extension's Writers' Program. Find her at www.7TrainLove.org.

Jaswinder Bolina's new collection of poems, THE 44TH OF JULY, is forthcoming from Omnidawn Publishing in April 2019. His previous books are *Phantom Camera* (2013), *Carrier Wave* (2006), and the digital chapbook *The Tallest Building in America* (2014). His poems and essays have appeared widely in the U.S. and abroad and have been included in several anthologies including *The Best American Poetry* and *The Norton Reader*. He teaches on the faculty of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Miami.

Heather Christle is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *Heliopause*. She lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where she is working on a book about crying.

Tiana Clark is the author of *I Can't Talk About the Trees Without the Blood* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), winner of the 2017 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize, and *Equilibrium* (Bull City Press, 2016), selected by Afaa Michael Weaver for the 2016 Frost Place Chapbook Competition. Clark is the winner of a Pushcart Prize, as well as the 2017 Furious Flower's Gwendolyn Brooks Centennial Poetry Prize and 2015 Rattle Poetry Prize. She was the 2017-2018 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute of Creative Writing. Her writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The New Yorker*, *Kenyon Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *New England Review*, *Best New Poets 2015*, *Lenny Letter* and elsewhere. Clark is the recipient of scholarships and fellowships to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Sewanee Writers' Conference, and Kenyon Review Writers Workshop. She teaches creative writing at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. You can find her online at www.tianaclark.com.

Born in Puerto Rico and raised in Miami Beach, **Jaquira Díaz** is the 2016-18 Kenyon Review Fellow in Prose, and recipient of two Pushcart Prizes and fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. Her work appears in *The Best American Essays 2016*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, *The FADER*, and *Tin House* online, and is forthcoming in *Longreads*, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, and nytimes.com. This year she'll be a Writer in Residence at the Summer Literary Seminars in Tbilisi and Nairobi. Her first book, Ordinary Girls, is forthcoming from Algonquin.

Thomas Dodson is a writer, librarian, and web developer. A finalist for the Glimmer Train Award for New Writers and a recipient of the Iowa Arts Fellowship, his stories have appeared in *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Consequence Magazine*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. "All at Sea" is dedicated to the memory of Abi Rupp.

Ryler Dustin's poems appear or are forthcoming in *Iron Horse Twentieth Anniversary Issue*, *The Southern Review*, *American Life in Poetry*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA from the University of Houston, a PhD from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and has performed on the final stage of the Individual World Poetry Slam. His book, *Heavy Lead Birdsong*, is available from Write Bloody Publishing. You can reach him via his website, www.rylerdustin.com.

Saddiq Dzukogi is the author of *Inside the Flower Room*, selected by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani for the APBF New-Generation African Poets Chapbook Series. His recent poems are forthcoming in *Kenyon Review, DIAGRAM, Spillway, Crab Orchard Review, Boxcar Poetry Review, Crannog Magazine,* and elsewhere, while others have appeared in P*rairie Schooner, New Orleans Review, South Dakota Review, Best American Experimental Writing,* and *Verse Daily*. He was on the 2017 Brunel International African Poetry Prize shortlist and also a fellow of the Ebedi International Writers Residency.

Claire Eder's poems and translations have appeared in the *Cincinnati Review*, *[PANK]*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Guernica*, among other publications. She holds an MFA from the University of Florida and is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at Ohio University.

Jessie van Eerden is author of two novels, *Glorybound* (WordFarm, 2012), winner of the Foreword Editor's Choice Fiction Prize, and *My Radio Radio* (Vandalia Press, 2016), as well as the essay collection *The Long Weeping* (Orison Books, 2017), winner of the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award in the essay category. Her work has appeared in *Best American Spiritual Writing*, *Oxford American*, *Willow Springs*, and other publications. Jessie holds an MFA in nonfiction from the University of Iowa and directs the low-residency MFA program at West Virginia Wesleyan College.

Katherine Evans holds an MFA in creative writing from the Ohio State University, where she served as an Associate Fiction Editor of *The Journal* literary magazine. She was born and raised in Virginia and currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two Siamese cats. Her nonfiction and fiction have appeared in the *Portland Review* and *Jabberwock Review*, where she won the Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize in Fiction. She is at work on a novel.

Megan Giddings is a fiction editor at *The Offing* and a contributing editor at *Boulevard*. She is a 2018 recipient of a Barbara Deming Memorial Grant. Her work is forthcoming or has been recently published by *The Adroit Journal*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *The Iowa Review*. More about her can be found at www.megangiddings.com.

Nick Greer holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Arizona. He edits *Territory*, a literary project about maps, and *Goodnight, Sweet Prince*, a digital literary zine about side characters in movies and other media. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Rachel Eliza Griffiths is an artist. Her most recent collection of poetry is *Lighting the Shadow* (Four Way Books, 2015). A Cave Canem and Kimbilio Fellow, Griffiths' visual and literary work has appeared in *The New York Times, The New Yorker, The Georgia Review, American Poetry Review, Guernica*, and many others. She lives in New York.

Kimiko Hahn is the author of nine collections of poetry, including *Brain Fever* and *Toxic Flora* (both W.W.Norton). Both of these were prompted by fields of science in much the same way previous work was triggered by Asian American identity, women's issues, black lung disease, and personal grief. Honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, PEN/Voelcker Award, Shelley Memorial Prize, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. Hahn is a distinguished professor in the

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Sophia Holtz is a writer, illustrator, and performer. Her work has appeared in *decomP*, *H_NGM_N*, *glitterMOB*, and other journals. She received her MFA from NYU, where she was a Goldwater Writing Fellow. Born and raised in New York, she currently lives in Boston.

Amorak Huey is author of *Ha Ha Ha Thump* (Sundress, 2015) and two forthcoming books: Seducing the Asparagus Queen (Cloudbank, 2018) and Boom Box (Sundress, 2019), as well as two chapbooks. He is co-author with W. Todd Kaneko of *Poetry: A Writer's Guide and Anthology* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and teaches at Grand Valley State University.

Sacha Idell is a writer and translator from Northern California. His stories appear in *Electric Literature*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. His published translations include stories by the Japanese writers Toshirō Sasaki and Kyūsaku Yumeno. He holds an MFA from the University of Arkansas, and lives in Baton Rouge, where he works as coeditor and prose editor of *The Southern Review*.

Kenji C. Liu is author of Monsters I Have Been (2019, Alice James Books) and *Map of an Onion*, national winner of the 2015 Hillary Gravendyk Poetry Prize (Inlandia Institute). His poetry is in *American Poetry Review*, *Action Yes!*, *Anomaly*, Split This Rock's poem of the week series, several anthologies, and two chapbooks, *Craters: A Field Guide* (2017) and *You Left Without Your Shoes* (2009). A Kundiman fellow and an alumnus of VONA/Voices, the Djerassi Resident Artist Program, and the Community of Writers, he lives in Los Angeles.

Erika Meitner is the author of five books of poems, including *Holy Moly Carry Me* (BOA Editions, 2018); *Copia* (BOA Editions, 2014); and *Ideal Cities* (Harper Perennial, 2010), which was a 2009 National Poetry Series winner. She is currently an Associate Professor of English at Virginia Tech, where she directs the undergraduate and MFA programs in creative writing.

JoAnna Novak is the author of the novel *I Must Have You* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2017) and the book-length poem *Noirmania* (Inside the Castle, 2018). She is a co-founder of the literary journal and chapbook publisher, Tammy.

Kathryn Nuernberger is the author of two poetry collections, *The End of Pink* and *Rag & Bone*. Her collection of lyric essays is *Brief Interviews with the Romantic Past*. She is a recipient of fellowships from the American Antiquarian Society, Bakken Museum of Electricity in Life, Spring Creek Project at the H. J. Andrews Research Forest, and the NEA. Recent work appears in *32 Poems*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Field*, and *Paris Review*.

Josh Pazda is the director of Hiram Butler Gallery. He holds an MA in Art History from the University of Houston.

Patricia Restrepo is the Assistant Curator and Exhibitions Manager at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. She has curated exhibitions at the Houston Center for Photography, Alabama

Song, Hardy and Nance Studios, and Northset Residency. Restrepo has worked at arts institutions and publications in Germany, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Derek Robbins is a PhD candidate in creative writing at Ohio University and the editor of *Quarter After Eight*. He holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Washington. Originally from western Montana, he now lives in Athens, OH.

Martin Rock is Associate Director of Communications at the Exploratorium, where he works with a community of scientists, artists, and tinkerers to cultivate confidence and push through barriers to learning. A recipient of fellowships from NYU, University of Houston, and InPrint, he is the author of *Residuum* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2015), *Dear Mark* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2013), and a collaborative chapbook with Phillip D. Ischy, *Fish, You Bird* (Pilot, 2010). With Kevin Prufer and Martha Collins he edited the Unsung Masters book *Catherine Breese Davis: On the Life and Work of an American Master*. Recent poetry can be found in *Best American Experimental Writing 2018*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Colorado Review*.

Mira Rosenthal, a past fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts and Stanford University's Stegner Program, publishes work regularly in such journals as *Ploughshares*, *Threepenny Review*, *Harvard Review*, *New England Review*, *A Public Space*, and *Oxford American*. Her first book of poems, *The Local World*, received the Wick Poetry Prize. Her second book of translations, Polish poet Tomasz Różycki's *Colonies*, won the Northern California Book Award and was shortlisted for numerous other prizes, including the International Griffin Poetry Prize. Her honors include the PEN/Heim Translation Fund Award, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. She teaches in Cal Poly's creative writing program.

Helen Betya Rubinstein's essays and fiction have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Rumpus*, *The Paris Review Daily*, *Witness*, and *The Collagist*, among others, and her opinions in T*he Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Millions*, *The Forward*, and *The New York Times*.

Alan Ruiz is a visual artist whose work explores the way space is produced as both material and ideology. His work has been shown in exhibitions at the Queens Museum, The Storefront for Art & Architecture, TG, Nottingham, and The Kitchen. His writing has been featured in *Archinect*, *ED*, *TDR*, *BOMB Magazine*, *InVisible Culture*, and *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*. Ruiz received an MFA from Yale University and was a fellow in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program.

Samuel Rutter is a writer and translator from Melbourne, Australia. Recent and forthcoming translations include novels by Julián López and Mario Vargas Llosa, and in 2015 he received an English PEN Translates award for his work on Cristina Sánchez-Andrade's novel *The Winterlings*. He currently resides in Nashville, where he is a fiction candidate in the MFA at Vanderbilt University.

Corinna McClanahan Schroeder is the author of the poetry collection *Inked*, winner of the 2014

X. J. Kennedy Poetry Prize. She is the recipient of an AWP Intro Journals Award and a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and her poetry appears or is forthcoming in such journals as *Blackbird*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Poet Lore*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Mississippi and is currently a PhD candidate in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Southern California.

Mi-Kyung Shin grew up in South Korea, Switzerland, and the US. She works as a translator and an editor. Currently, she lives in New York City. She earned her MFA in writing from Columbia University.

Tess Taylor's chapbook, *The Misremembered World*, was selected by Eavan Boland for the Poetry Society of America's inaugural chapbook fellowship. *The San Francisco Chronicle* called her first book, *The Forage House*, "stunning" and it was a finalist for the Believer Poetry Award. Her second book, *Work & Days*, was called "our moment's Georgic" by critic Stephanie Burt and named one of the 10 best books of poetry of 2016 by *The New York Times*. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Boston Review*, *Harvard Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and other publications. Taylor chairs the poetry committee of the National Book Critics Circle, is currently the on-air poetry reviewer for NPR's *All Things Considered*, and has taught at UC Berkeley, St. Mary's College, and Whittier College. She was most recently a Distinguished Fulbright US Scholar at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University in Belfast. This spring she is Anne Spencer Poet-in-Residence at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Josh Tvrdy was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. He received a BA in Creative Writing at Knox College, where he coached cross country and track & field upon graduation. A fellow at the Bucknell Seminar for Undergraduate Poets, he will begin pursuing an MFA in poetry at North Carolina State University in the fall of 2018.

Emily Van Kley's collection, *The Cold and the Rust*, was awarded the Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize. Her poetry has also been honored with the Iowa Review Award, the Florida Review Editor's Award, and the Loriane Williams Prize for Poetry from *The Georgia Review*. You can find her recent work in *Prairie Schooner*, *RADAR*, *Narrative Magazine*, and *Best American Poetry 2017*, among others. Raised on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, she now lives in Olympia, Washington with her partner, where she also teaches and performs aerial acrobatics.

Kate Wisel's Pushcart Prize-nominated fiction has appeared in *Redivider* as winner of the Beacon Street Prize, *New Delta Review*, *Bartleby Snopes* as "Story of the Month" and elsewhere. She has received scholarships to attend the Wesleyan Writer's Conference, The Juniper Institute, The Squaw Valley Writer's Workshop, and the Writing by Writer's Fellowship at Methow Valley and Tomales Bay. Her collection of linked stories *Driving in Cars With Homeless Men* was recently selected as runner-up by judge Benjamin Percy in the Santa Fe Writer's Project contest.

Victor Yang is a Chinese American writer by way of Canada, China, and Kentucky. He spends his days as a labor organizer with immigrant workers at the janitors' union in Boston. His essays are published or forthcoming in *Fourth Genre*, *The Rumpus*, and *Tahoma Literary Review*. He has been awarded residencies at the Blue Mountain Center, the Iceland Writers Retreat, and the New Orleans Writers Residency.

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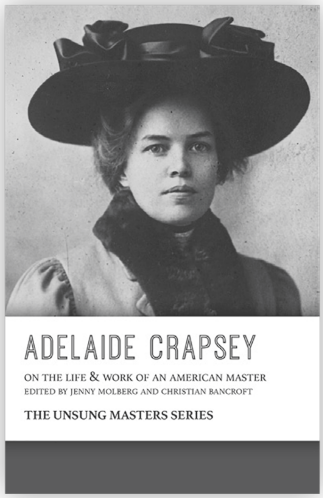

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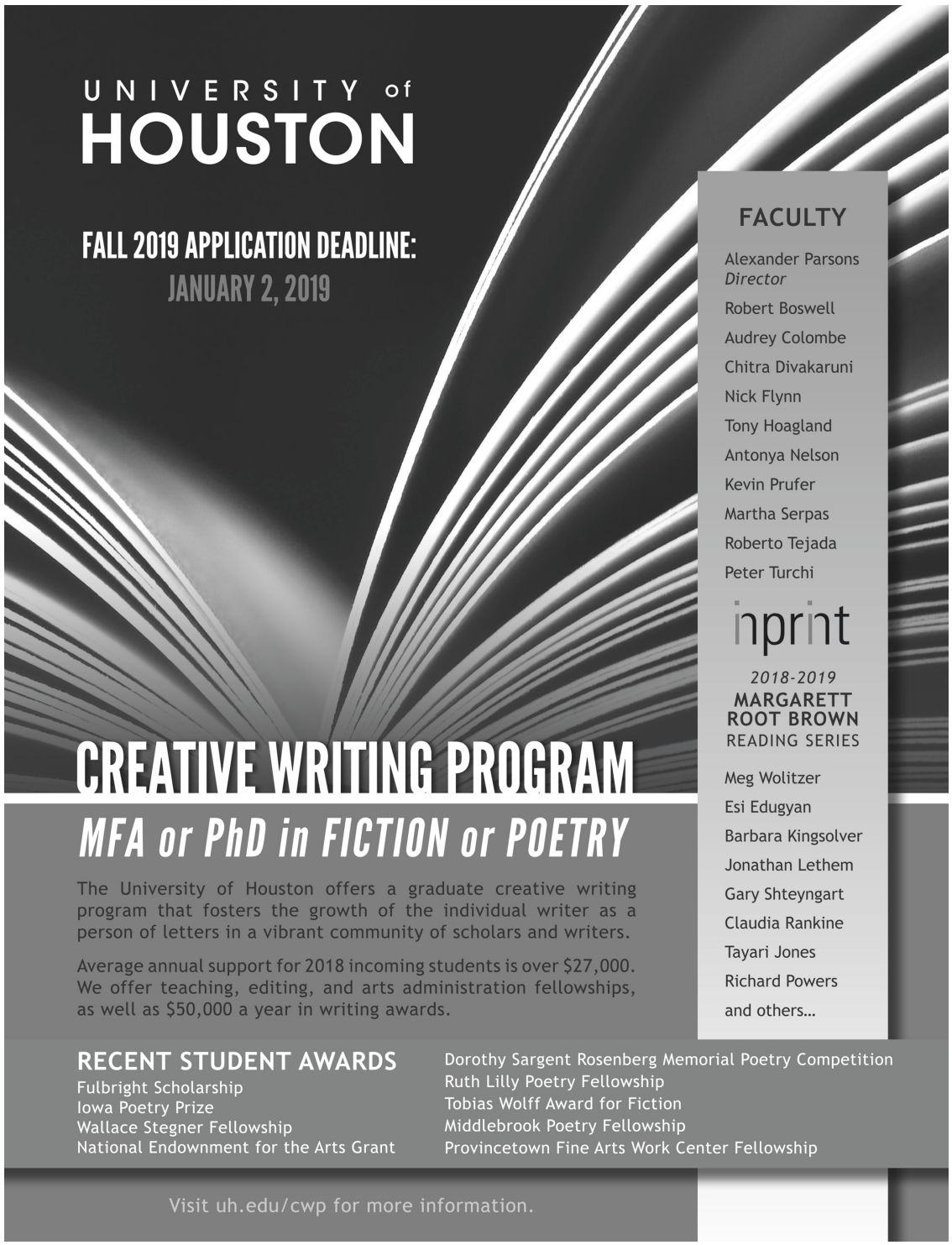
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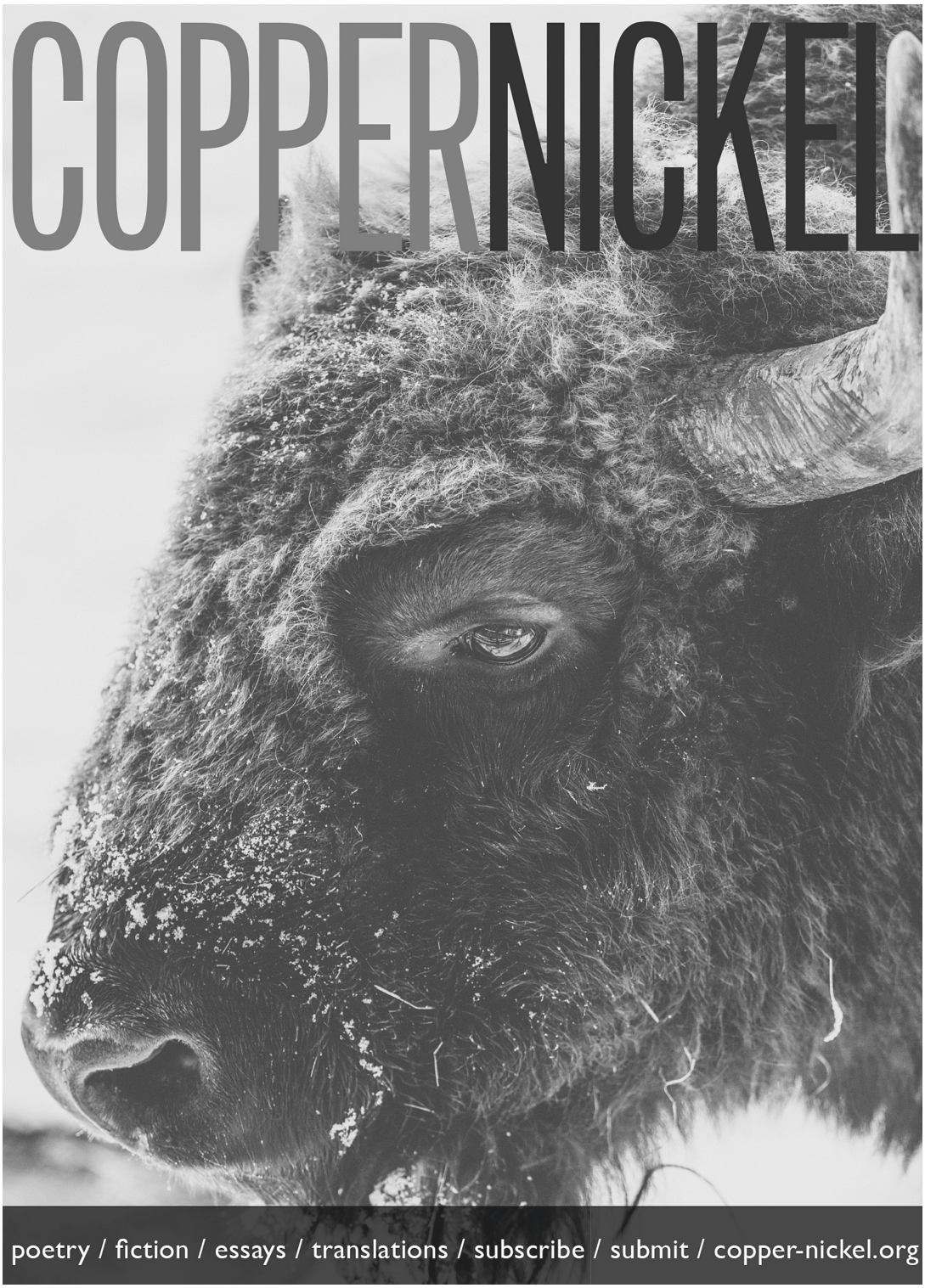
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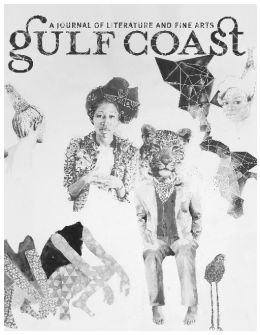

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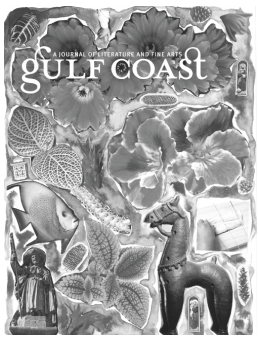

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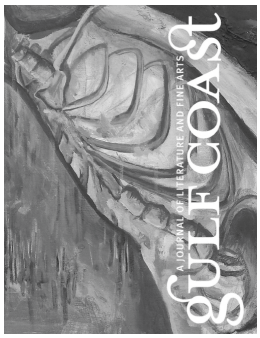

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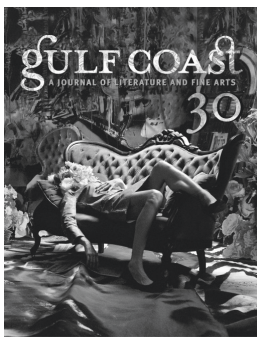

Volume 29, Issue 1

Winter/Spring 2017

Featuring work by Beth Ann Fennelly, Robin Coste Lewis, Donika Kelly, Cortney Lamar Charleston, Alex Lemon, Amy Meng, Lincoln Michel, Rajiv Mohabir, John Plueker, Khadijah Queen, Danez Smith, and more.

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FICTION BY JAQUIRA DÍAZ, THOMAS DODSON, MEGAN GIDDINGS, SACHA IDELL, JOANNA NOVAK, & KATE WISEL.

POETRY BY HANIF ABDURRAQIB, GABRIELLE BATES, ROSEBUD BEN-ONI, HEATHER CHRISTLE, TIANA CLARK, RYLER DUSTIN, SADDIQ DZUKOGI, CLAIRE EDER, NICK GREER, RACHEL ELIZA GRIFFITHS, SOPHIA HOLTZ, AMORAK HUEY, KENJI LIU, ERIKA MEITNER, DEREK ROBBINS, MIRA ROSENTHAL, CORINNA MCCLANAHAN SCHROEDER, & EMILY VAN KLEY.

NONFICTION BY SELVA ALMADA (TRANSLATED BY SAMUEL RUTTER), KATHERINE EVANS, HELEN BETYA RUBINSTEIN, & VICTOR YANG.

ART AND ART WRITING BY KATHERINE BOWDOIN BARTHELME, JULIE CURTISS, CARY LEIBOWITZ, JOSH PAZDA, PATRICIA RESTREPO, & ALAN RUIZ.

2018 GULF COAST PRIZE WINNERS MI-KYUNG SHIN (FICTION), JOSH TVRDY (POETRY), & JESSIE VAN EERDEN (NONFICTION).

ROUND TABLE WITH MARTIN ROCK, JAMES BEACHAM, JASWINDER BOLINA, KIMIKO HAHN, KATHRYN NUERNBERGER, AND TESS TAYLOR.

COVER ARTWORK BY JULIE CURTISS.

$12

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