RED CEDAR REVIEW

2007

Red Cedar Review (ISSN 0034-1967) is an annual literary magazine published in the spring by Michigan State University undergraduates in collaboration with Michigan State University Press.

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Address all editorial inquiries and manuscript submissions to:
Red Cedar Review; 17c Morrill Hall; Department of English; Michigan State University;
East Lansing, MI 48824-1036. Manuscript submission guidelines available on inside back cover or at *www.msupress.msu.edu/journals/rcr/.* ***Please do not send manuscripts to MSU Press.***

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Michigan State University Press, Journals Division
1405 S. Harrison Rd., Ste. 25
East Lansing, MI 48823-5245
Tel: 517-355-9543 x 130
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REDCEDAR
REVIEW

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Editor's Note

Teal Amthor-Shaffer

During my last year of undergraduate studies, I was suckered into taking an accounting course. I had the best of intentions; in this case I was after the elusive concept of being "well-rounded," and with graduation looming before me, "marketable." Having already successfully tackled undefined limits and the baffling nature of infinity in calculus, I did not think a class that never went beyond basic multiplication and division would cause me such angst. In introductory accounting, you memorize formulas and then you apply them. Sure you have to know *when* to use *which* formula, but you aren't responsible for writing the equations, and you certainly aren't responsible for explaining the source of the original data. Having spent the last two years almost entirely in writing workshops, I felt helplessly like someone had stripped me of my creative license. Worse yet, there was a very limited place for my curiosity. I was repeatedly reminded that I didn't need to know the data's origin, I just had to know where to plug it in.

I have since decided that stories are like reading an accountant's footnotes versus reviewing the numbers recorded in a ledger. For example, if Harold's Pâtisserie was audited, the number 37 in the inventory column "truffles" is far less interesting than its corresponding note, which I imagine could read, "Number including those laced with arsenic and intended for the Bower soirée; these truffles are unmarketable, but could potentially eliminate local competition, therefore are included to reflect their priceless value." While my imagined footnote would seem ridiculous for business purposes, it tells a much more engaging story than a list of quantities in the assets column on a statement of financial position.

Language, like mathematics, is a human system devised to quantify, organize, and— ideally—communicate information so that it can be universally understood. In stories, writers use words to explain their chosen line-items, essentially assigning them a more complex value through elaboration. It provides a human element that allows for more than the face value of "what," giving writers the tools to tell us how, why, and any other details they deem crucial to our interpretation and understanding of the story as a total unit.

Luckily, what might be considered fraudulent for accounting purposes is considered literary license in the realm of storytelling. It gives writers permission to edit reality, so long as it is not claiming to be factual history, and in granting this, opens the door for universal meaning; the kind of truths that apply to humanity, retaining relevance beyond the situation-specific context of their setting in a particular story. It enables a writer to take a personal experience and use it as a springboard. Whether or not something actually happened becomes unimportant, and a piece is able to transcend the boundaries of fact to be depicted in whichever way it will be most effectively conveyed.

Volume 42 of *Red Cedar Review* is a wonderful reminder that writers, unlike accountants, aren't obligated to "universal principles" for the success of a story, and there is no "basic equation" on which to construct literature. Whether it is Corrine De Winter's poem, "Holy Water," a beautiful declaration of humanity's interconnectedness, or Richard Mills's short story, "The Lake," which uses the perspective of an 11-year-old boy to examine both the presence and absence of family and the types of loneliness associated with both; all of the pieces in Vol. 42 operate under their own distinctly different, and equally effective, set of principles. Each piece in this issue writes its own equation to determine its own standards and norms, its own truths.

As you transition from a piece such as J. C. Dickey-Chasins's "Blue Jesus," which is set in the stark reality of an elderly woman's decision to end her stifling marriage, to Lawrence F. Farrar's "A Souvenir for Mama," which details one woman's daunting struggle with her mind's perception of reality, you will see that the writers featured here address very different topics, in a wide variety of forms. They appear together in this issue because they have all managed to tell a compelling story.

After three years of editing *Red Cedar Review*, I have been able to again and again count on the same people for support and inspiration. Volume 42 is the sum of our combined efforts, and it requires this last footnote. I cannot begin to thank Dr. William Penn for showing me that if I want to write, I had better keep my curiosity intact and fine tune my observation skills, or Margot Kielhorn, for showing me that if I want to edit, I had better know my grammar and pay attention to technical details. I would also like to thank assistant editor Lindsay Tigue, for her wonderful imagination and great sense of humor. Without the contributions of these people, you might be reading a very different *Red Cedar Review* Volume 42.

Holy Water

Corrine De Winter

We are declaring all water holy.
Even the snow thawing beneath our feet,
broken with each step.
Even the moisture
That passes between our mouths
as we kiss.
We are declaring all water holy.
Holy as my body is holy in your arms,
as the bird perched on the chapel eaves
who has taken in prayer after prayer
beneath its wings.
We are declaring all water holy.
Even the puddles on dirty tar
after the rain.
Even the sweat on the brow
of a convict.
We are declaring all water holy.

Blue Jesus

J. C. Dickey-Chasins

Mrs. Betts scraped egg remnants from the frying pan and filled it with water. Mr. Betts hummed the theme from *Camelot* in the bathroom. She gazed out the window as she scrubbed, watching two cardinals flit through the canopy of the Siberian elm.

In all my born days.

The phrase hung in her mind, a talisman conjured up from the depths of memory. From where? What did it protect her from? She rinsed the pan and placed it in the dish drainer.

Now Mr. Betts mixed in words from *Oklahoma,* mangling the melody as he went. Mrs. Betts had never cared for her husband's singing, humming, or whistling—he missed the notes by crucial half-steps, and his rhythm was irregular. She wiped her hands and stepped into the hallway to shush him.

The sound stopped suddenly. There was a grunt and the dry, sliding sound of fabric against wall.

Mr. Betts lay slumped against the bathtub, his head lolling as if he'd nodded off. His right hand gripped the tube of toothpaste, which had left a white, sticky trail from sink to floor.

"Harry!" She shook him by the shoulders.

His fingers loosened. The tube dropped to the floor.

His hospital room was 70 degrees, cool enough that Mrs. Betts sat with a blanket pulled tight around her shoulders and chest. She couldn't sleep the first night—just watched him doze under a plastic mask, the fluorescent light from the hallway tingeing his skin pale, making it look dead. Two tubes ran into his left arm, and six pads attached to wires dotted his chest.

After the operation—after Dr. Arantha told her everything would be fine—she thought of all the reasons her husband would die: he had retired just a year ago; hospitals were poisonous; his father had died of a heart attack at 59; he had chain-smoked until he was 52; he refused to

exercise; he screamed at televised football games; he put Tabasco in his coffee.

But the doctor's words pushed back: *Every reason for recovery; Remarkable shape for a man his age; Good vitals.* Mrs. Betts studied the backs of his hands, how the blue veins seemed to glow under translucent skin. Where were his thoughts now? Was he dreaming? Of what? Did he remember the thing he'd done to her?

How separate they had become. He was an old man singing show tunes and watching the NFL. And she was just a busybody. A nobody.

Mrs. Betts pulled away from the bed and settled in the corner, away from the physicalness of how they kept him alive. The nurses came every hour like nervous taps, glancing at her and asking how she was. Mrs. Betts fingered the silver and turquoise Jesus that hung around her neck. She closed her eyes.

The room was tacked on to her aunt's house, low-ceilinged and stifling in the Iowa summer. Great-Aunt Ethel laid covered in quilts and blankets, her monkey's head yellowed by years of smoking. Mrs. Betts had only been six, but she knew the woman was dying. She smelled it in the stench of urine rising from the linens and saw it in the milky corneas of Great-Aunt's eyes. Her mother pushed Mrs. Betts close to the bed.

"Hold her hand!" her mother said.

Mrs. Betts did so. Great-Aunt's palm felt like a cast-away snakeskin, soft and crinkly. Her fingers trapped the girl's hand. Mrs. Betts tried to pull away, but her mother wedged her tight against the bed.

"Sarah?" Great-Aunt said.

"Molly," Mrs. Betts said.

"Molly." Great-Aunt's mouth gaped, displaying toothless gums. "The painter."

Mrs. Betts nodded. She carried a reputation in the family for her watercolors of Great-Aunt's irises and daffodils. She'd begun as a finger-painter, then moved to a brush last year.

Great-Aunt's lids dropped, as if she would drift again into sleep. "What do you want?"

"To visit, Great-Aunt," Mrs. Betts said, unable to break loose of the old woman's grip.

Great-Aunt's eyes opened. "No, no," she said, suddenly irritable. "What do you *want?* Of mine?" She snuffled. "I'll be dead soon enough. Want my favorite girl to have something."

"But Great-Aunt, I don't—" Mrs. Betts stopped as her mother jabbed her in the back. "Okay."

"Anything at all, hon." Great-Aunt coughed and a speck of phlegm swung out, failed to break loose, and drooped across her lower lip.

Mrs. Betts looked down. She knew exactly what she wanted. But it was so nice, so expensive. Great-Aunt would *never* give it to her. She took a deep breath. "The blue Jesus on the cross?"

The old woman smiled. The phlegm sparkled. "Yes, yes," she said, "the blue Jesus, that's good. What else?"

"I . . . nothing," Mrs. Betts said.

"You sure? Well, it's in my overnight bag," Great-Aunt said, "under my panties."

Mrs. Betts blushed. Great-Aunt released her, and Mrs. Betts went to the luggage. It was exactly where the old woman said, wrapped in tissue paper. Mrs. Betts unfolded it. Jesus looked up from his sterling cross, his turquoise torso rubbed dull with the fingered prayers of 60 years. She slid the necklace over her head and turned.

"It's beautiful, child." Great-Aunt's eyes closed. Her tongue darted out, capturing the phlegm. "You remember me, hon. Feel that cross on your chest and know I'm roundabouts."

"Yes ma'am," Mrs. Betts said. Her skin warmed the metal and stone.

It was sullen and airless on the July night Mr. Betts proposed to her—a week into his first job, and already he was full of the things he'd buy. "A Fleetwood, navy with gray interior—sharp, understand? And one of those leather briefcases with the stitching around the corners." He cupped her hands in his. "And those chrome-edged tables—a red one for the kitchen, like we saw in Seward's last week."

She nodded. He was like a puppy, panting and wriggling enough to escape its skin. She let him squeeze her fingers, hoping his excitement would infect her. "I'd like that."

He leaned in close, almost suffocating her with Old Spice. "And when we're married, you can quit your job at the bank. Tell 'em to go to hell."

"But I like it," she said.

He frowned.

"I can introduce you to the guy that buys insurance," she said. "It could be your first big sale."

His face brightened. "That might work. Sure."

They smoked through the evening and sipped seven-and-sevens. When the sky lightened in the east, he made his move. She let him paw her. It was all right, after all, now that he'd asked. She didn't make a sound when he tore the bottom button of her blouse. His chest pressed the blue Jesus into her sternum. Her head was alternately spinning and glued to the earth below their quilt.

Afterward she wondered what they'd done.

The monitor beeped three low tones, then stopped. She straightened, straining to see Mr. Betts through the half-light. Was his chest still rising and falling? If it was serious, surely the alarm would be louder, more piercing. Mrs. Betts shrugged off the blanket and rose.

The blue Jesus bobbed against her breastbone. Mrs. Betts bent down and studied Harry's face. He didn't seem distressed. She glanced at the offending monitor. All lights were green. It was nothing. Nothing at all.

He'd given her just one piece of jewelry during 36 years of marriage: her wedding ring. He joked about it, said he didn't see the use in twisting expensive metals around expensive stones, and how could it make any sense to invest emotion in an object? Mr. Betts was not one for sentimentality in the best of times.

They had seen that in each other, at least. Two stoics, marching down the aisle, locked together in the belief that the world simply *was,* that you did what you would and then you died. No fretting over religion or legacies. Though Mrs. Betts thought she felt better when she wore the blue Jesus—as if the figure gave off a protective glow.

Mr. Betts twitched. His eyes opened and shut, blind and reflexive. Mrs. Betts's throat tightened. Mr. Betts had shrunken right in front of her—an old man tied to tubes and wires, pulled free of their life, and now a piece of the never-sleeping hospital. She felt with absolute certainty that he would never hum again. She imagined herself in his body, floating in

a fog of pain killers and antiseptic, refrigerated air. *But that's not right. He isn't aware of anything now. He never dreamed.*

The light flickered, and she felt someone behind her.

"What the—has it been doing that for long?" the nurse said, reaching past Mrs. Betts. She frowned, then turned a dial on the monitor. "Just a sec."

Mrs. Betts stepped to the right, bracing herself on the bed railing.

The nurse flicked on the overhead light. "Just some dust in the rheostat—keeps sticking one notch too high. Don't you worry, everything's fine now." The nurse patted Mrs. Betts. "You all right?"

Mrs. Betts nodded.

The nurse disappeared through the doorway. Mrs. Betts ran a finger down Mr. Betts's hand. She paused at the half-inch scar just below his index finger knuckle.

The bathtub water had cooled. The bubbles were gone. She lay back, feeling goose bumps rise on her legs, watching the afternoon light slant lower and lower through the glass-brick window. The boiler in the basement clicked on. The radiators creaked as they passed hot water.

She swallowed, hating the iron taste in her mouth. The clenching and grinding in her pelvis had finally stopped. She knew she should get out and change, get ready for Mr. Betts's arrival home from work. But then the image of the bloody clot going down the toilet reappeared. She began crying.

Three times now. Three.

Dr. Howell says I'm young enough to try again.

She closed her eyes and felt a shiver across her chest. The refrigerator hummed. She fought to clear her mind of the image. No red. White. A white, clean sheet. She opened her eyes and stared at the wallpaper.

Then her eyes drifted to the toilet bowl. She rose, splashing water over the side. *Damn it.* She toweled off, then dressed.

Tires crunched against gravel outside. A car door slammed. Mrs. Betts looked in the hall mirror and pulled her hair away from her face. *I look like hell.*

She met Mr. Betts in the living room.

"Hi hon." He pecked her cheek. "Why's your hair wet?"

She shrugged. "Took a bath."

"Huh." He glanced at the wall clock and looked quizzically at her, then tossed his overcoat on the couch. "Kinda late, eh? So what's for dinner?" He moved toward the bathroom.

"I don't know." Mrs. Betts wanted to crawl into the hall closet and hide behind her red wool winter coat. She'd just blend in, like it had never happened, as if it had never been alive.

Mr. Betts turned around, eyebrows raised. "You don't *know?* As in, here are three choices, pick one?"

She shook her head. "No. I just . . . let's eat out."

He frowned. "We did that last night."

Her uterus contracted. She grimaced and closed her eyes a second, waiting for the pain to pass.

"Are you all right?" Mr. Betts touched her shoulder.

She opened her eyes. "I lost it."

"Huh?"

"The baby."

"Oh Jesus. Crap." Mr. Betts turned away, his right hand tightening into a fist. "Again? Jesus."

"It wasn't my fault."

"I'm not *saying* it's your fault." He turned around. "Just seems like there was something you could've done. I mean, this is three times. It's not normal."

She stared back and the taste was in her mouth. She wanted to spit it out on him. *Not normal.*

She shoved him against the doorway, both hands against his chest hard, almost knocking him down.

His arms flew up, trying to brace against the sill. "Shit!" He yanked down his right hand and stared at it. "Why'd you—oh, Jesus, now look-it." A pearl of blood appeared just below one of his knuckles, growing, then collapsing and sliding down his hand. He grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped it around the cut. Red bloomed through the fabric.

Mrs. Betts watched, still breathing hard. *Three times. Son of a bitch.* She grew angry all over again.

He looked up, then backed away. "Listen, Molly, I'm sorry. Ok? Whatever it was I said. Sorry. Sorry. Alright?" He held up his hand. "Shit. Won't stop bleeding."

"I'll drive you to the emergency room," she said.

The doctor said Mr. Betts had hit the barrel of the door hinge, *a nice clean cut,* no real tearing, just a little dirt and grease. He said the wound would leave a tiny scar, and then he sent them home. Only three stitches.

They had not talked in the car on the way home. They had not talked for a week afterward. And then one day he came home from work and everything was as it had been.

Except at night Mrs. Betts would deny him. She feigned sleep when he approached. She stayed up until he collapsed on the couch. She joined two book clubs that met in the evening. And after four or five months, he gave up.

Her finger moved past his scar to the white tape covering the IV needle, which was connected to a tube, which fed into a plastic pouch filled with medicine.

Mr. Betts clacked his molars under the filmy white oxygen mask.

She knew he would die. She would face 20 or 30 years without him. He would die and she'd find something hidden in his workroom, a collection of dirty magazines, or confidential records of an insurance swindle, or a secret diary. The lawyer would uncover a new will that gave everything to his golf buddies. A woman would arrive unannounced on her doorstep claiming to be his illegitimate daughter. She'd have terrifying dreams of his dramatic arrival in hell and the reading of his sins.

She would hear his jaws clack in the middle of the night. She'd wake up and there would be a noise but no noise, and she would move to the center of the bed.

Mrs. Betts leaned over and pulled a strand of hair back from his forehead. His eyes moved under the lids, back and forth, back and forth. Feet tenting the blanket. Did she still love him? She looked away. No. The part of him she'd loved had evaporated the day of her third miscarriage. She'd gone all these years on habit.

She touched the oxygen tube feeding the mask. She rolled it between her thumb and forefinger. She pinched it shut and watched his mouth. His right arm began to rise and she leaned against it, pinning it down. His lips parted under the mask. She began counting, as if she'd dived to the bottom of the deep end, waiting out her opponents. He shuddered.

A buzzer sounded. Mrs. Betts jerked and released the tube. A red light began flashing on the panel behind the headboard.

The nurse appeared and pushed her aside.

"What's wrong?" Mrs. Betts said.

The nurse did not reply. Her fingers jabbed the panel. Then she leaned down, ear against Mr. Betts' chest. "Damn." She rose and punched a button on the electronic box that hung from her belt.

Mr. Betts' eyes were open. He stared at the ceiling. His mouth was agape, the clacking gone.

Another nurse arrived, and then a doctor. They enveloped Mr. Betts. They put two pads on the old man's chest. There was a thump. The doctor studied the panel, then nodded. The thump again.

Mrs. Betts retreated to the far wall. Shame washed over her, engorging her, constricting her. What had she done? Surely a few seconds—minutes?—what could it have done? It had been an impulse driven by the scar. She had been there, and yet she had not.

Another thump. The doctor frowned.

Was he thinking of her? Did he know? She fingered the blue Jesus, wanting him to talk, to tell her what Harry had said as he passed from flesh to ether. But instead she heard Great-Aunt.

"You had talent, Molly."

Mrs. Betts glanced at the doctor, but he was still staring at the console, frowning.

"Kept it locked up, girl. As if he had the key. But he didn't, now, did he?"

The voice seemed just behind her right ear. She smelled Great-Aunt's breath, a foul mixture of peppermint and garlic.

"Say your goodbyes, Molly. You're alive."

The doctor rose, sighing. He walked to the corner. "I'm afraid I have bad news, Mrs. Betts."

She looked up, fingers tight around the cross. *In all my born days.*

Mrs. Betts was cleaning his study two weeks after the funeral when she discovered a manila envelope sandwiched between a book on variable annuities and a notebook. She bent the two prongs of the metal clasp open and pulled out a sheaf of papers. They stank of cigarettes, and the top sheet had a half-moon coffee stain.

She fingered the onionskin paper. She remembered using them with carbons in the days before copiers. Had he hidden them? Or just forgotten? She smoothed out the first sheet and began reading.

Pros: *teach baseball*
take on trips
grandkids
Cons: *expensive*
no sleep
girl?
teenager someday

His underlining had perforated the paper.

My God. Mrs. Betts blinked and swallowed hard, the words lodging in her mind. She ran her fingers over the indentations left by the typewriter, a reverse Braille.

Doctor: *$975*
Hospital: *$900*
Baby bed: *$45*
Diaper svc: *$7/wk*

And so on, halfway down the page, lines of costs with occasional exclamation marks and arrows. Then a grand total, and words again:

Can't afford it, not now. Plus merger this yr means I'm gone more. Don't want it, really, and I think neither does Molly. Hit me but that was hormones. Things are fine now. Why mess them up? Thank God she doesn't cry over every little thing. Odds against it now, 3 times in a row. 4th times a charm. Nope, not working. Really all right. Is it worth $124,332.31 to toss a ball around with a kid? Too many kids anyway. Too

And the typing ended.

Mrs. Betts dabbed at her cheek. A tear splashed down, making the sheet translucent. She flipped it over, thinking he might have jotted a note somewhere. Nothing. Her side ached, as if he'd sucker-punched her. The blue Jesus bobbled against her neck.

Why had he written this? It was like an argument with himself. She heard his voice saying the words as he bent over the typewriter. After she had gone to bed. At night. Always at night. Not in bed with her, but in his study, adding numbers and arguing with himself.

She settled into his leather desk chair. It wobbled slightly, tilting back, and she grabbed the edge of the desk. The sheet lay askew. She straightened it, bottom edge parallel with the blotter. *Don't want it, really.*

Her stomach hurt. She pulled up her blouse and rubbed the skin until it pinked.

When she had said yes, his face lit up, as if he were surprised. He slid the ring over her finger, then smiled. He touched the second button of her blouse, then looked down.

She took his hand and kissed it.

He looked up. "You look like you were going to ask me something."

She smiled. "Where are we going?"

My Cat's Got Spring in Her Body

Lyn Lifshin

cat poems, with their limited
audiences, the ones who cry
at the title of a book, order
17 copies. The ones who
groan. I mean, I've been
there, done the book. But
with this one, Jete Pentimento
–I called her that for her
leaps, horizontally. And
Pentimento for my old cat
who died, Memento. I read an
art term that says pentimento is
a painting slashed over another
canvas, that eventually the
older shapes and colors come
thru. Not everyone cares
about animals I know
and especially poems that
smell of anthropomorphism.
It's more about beginnings,
moving away from what
decays to what is still full of
life, what could be like
the first time he slides down
your jeans and your thighs are
still marble. My old cat's death
was like my mother's: I
couldn't tell where death moved
in as I held them both. I put
the last photos of both where I
don't have to see them. Too

many people I know are
being stroked by death. That's
why I couldn't wait, brought
plum and cherry blossoms
to bloom in this cold

Nospaces.com

Martin Galvin

He wanted always to live in the empty places
Between words, talked only so he could pause
And settle down in that easy chair of silence.
The bigger the novel, the more the houses
Where he could rest and work the puzzle.

And then he grew up and the world hurried down
The clueless street and into his house.
The internet jammed his time with addresses
That didn't have houses, that didn't have pauses,
Just hurry-up words that didn't make sense

If you loved spelling, if you loved spaces.
He dot-commed and googled, he sighed for his loss
But sighing took time and sighing took space
That meant little and less as it wandered around
With nothing to do but continue the flow

Which threatened, that flow, to fill up the world
That used to be filled with comfortable places
Where a boy could hide and a man could go
To escape the babble that filled up the spaces,
To ponder in silence and empty the puzzles.

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The Vicks

Chris Moore

Every day, on his solitary walk home from school, Kyler Vick's heartbeat increased as he looked to his left, to his right, then slowly turned his head and checked behind him. When he was sure not a single soul was watching and no cars were visible in the distance, he spit his gum onto the sidewalk and hurried along. If you were to ask him why he performed this daily act, he would say something about messing with the system, sticking it to the man, or other rebellious phrases he learned from his middle school peers. But really, Kyler did it for the thrill. He committed all sorts of offenses. In class, if everyone's attention was averted, he threw his paper in the trashcan instead of the recycling bin. And occasionally, at lunchtime, he ate only dessert and threw out his sandwich and apple. Each of these crimes gave Kyler a rush. What would his teacher say? What would his mother and father think?

On days when Kyler arrived home from school and didn't have to volunteer at the old folks home, he went directly to his room to watch television. When his mother called him down to dinner, he found, as usual, his father at the table waiting to be served.

Kyler's father, Greg, worked as a hotel manager. He wore a suit to work every day and did not change until he was ready for bed. The man considered himself an expert on many things, particularly scotch. "I'm somewhat of a connoisseur," he'd tell people. Mr. Vick had once purchased a bottle of fine scotch. It cost two hundred dollars and he kept it a secret from Mrs. Vick for nearly a month—out of fear of repercussions—sexual or otherwise. Even after he told her, he hoarded the bottle. He never offered a drop to friends or family. Every night, he retired to his study to have one glass. And when he finished the bottle, he went out and purchased an eight dollar fifth. In the secrecy of his study, he filled the expensive bottle with the cheap scotch. Even then, he never shared the fake "good scotch" with a single soul. He went to his study every night and

poured one small glass and savored every drop. The decorated, dimpled glass of the two hundred dollar bottle, the cork top; these reassurances were all he needed.

Kyler's mother brought the meal out to her husband and son. Mrs. Vick was a plump woman, currently on the South Beach Diet. She tried every new available weight-loss method from twice-daily pilates DVDs to Slim Fast milkshakes. But the same weakness got her every time: cookies. She kept a clandestine stash of Oreos. And if no one was home, she made batches of chocolate chip cookie dough and ate it out of the bowl with her fingers, while watching Oprah.

She talked to her sister, by phone, on a daily basis. Each, on the same diet, confessed to the other what they had eaten that day that had been in violation of the rules. After these disclosures of fraud, they consoled, "You look so good, I can definitely tell you've lost weight, I'm jealous."

"Oh shut up, I had to lie down on the bed to zip these pants today. I wish I was as skinny as you."

"How was school today?" asked Mr. Vick, as he dished up a portion of dried-out roast beef. "You win that debate in class?"

"Yeah, it went fine."

"Well good, we should sign you up for the debate team. Before we know it you'll be the captain. You're a leader, boy."

"Now honey, don't pressure him; we have to let him make some decisions on his own. Maybe he doesn't want to be on the debate team," said Mrs. Vick.

"And how do you expect our son to become a leader if we don't make him try anything new?" he said. "Good leaders have a dream and a goal and they inspire those around them to follow that goal." Mr. Vick was fond of quoting speakers from the leadership seminars the hotel made him take before his promotion.

"Greg . . ." Mrs. Vick said to her husband slowly, with her chin down to the right and her eyes glancing sidelong.

Silence.

When the table was cleared, Mr. Vick went off to his study for a glass of scotch, Mrs. Vick seized her nest of Oreos and dialed her sister, and

Kyler went outside. After he was sure his parents weren't holding vigil, he crept over to his neighbor's front yard and kicked a pile of lava rocks; from the landscaping, into the street.

The Buzz and the Glow

William Winfield Wright

Buzz

They sell whole machines now
with fountains and smells and six varieties
of white noise for beside your bed.
I had a friend who could meditate
in the silence between the beeps of her alarm clock.
She got fired and moved to the ocean.

They put John Cage in a sound-proof booth
and he could hear his nerves buzzing
and the noisy plumbing of his blood.
That's funny.

Even far away I listen for you
and not just the phone or the way
you make a door move.

Glow

The sun makes light while
the moon only reflects it.
So what?
It's the same for Venus
each evening and morning
and we are not supposed to visit there
the days being too long and the clouds
full of acid and high winds
but why need to stand on a thing
that is so beautiful to watch?

Somewhere the earth is only a little blue star
a thing that comes between
this rock and that rock in the long dark sky.

When I fell in love with that woman
next to you on the bus
you were not surprised at all
wearing your half smile that morning.

Zester

William Winfield Wright

It rests in the drawer
waiting for lemons and oranges
like the eggbeater, archaic,
and then she comes
with, you guessed it,
limes, and her hands are covered
in the almost green juice,
the counter in perfect curls.

Mark has become fussy and precise

J. Alan Nelson

Mark became fussy and precise
prissy one would say
since his book on Saddam Hussein was published.
He turned fifty,
earned his long sought doctorate
started wearing suits
impressing his students
as a professor and television commentator
by his chilling self-assurance
of what to think on everything.
Then he fucked his wife's best friend
then divorced his long suffering wife,
changed his church
became conservative
backed compassionate conservatism
with a war of words.
He puzzles over the decisions he makes
his rationalization
the cliché free will is an illusion
his schedule for lunch,
whether it's too close to his breakfast
whether he should change his computing passwords
and schedule an hour to think good thoughts.
His alcoholic dad roams in his mental landscape,
as his ex-wife's comments
he should wear a collar with a bell to warn people
that he's a predator,
except he'd use the collar to elicit compassion.
He remembered when he dressed as a Jewish rabbi
believed himself to be a mystical Baptist healer.

He went to Iraq after Baghdad fell
before the real danger began.
He sees himself as a temptation to his female students
and thinks of the 72 virgins promised to the Muslim martyrs
and the reluctant death of Arafat.
He hisses at his students, eyes narrowed,
Arafat would have lost control years ago
except for the United States playing Israel and him against each other
He looked at a photo of an old graduate school class
sees the circle of seven friends
thinks how the others distanced themselves from him
since he became an expert who fucks around
and he laughs, asks himself why should he care
what his old graduate school class thinks
and tosses the photo in the trash for a moment,
then snatches it out,
and files it.

Without Windows

Margaret Hermes

Lydia had developed a sixth sense for adultery. Or her other senses, like a blind man's, became heightened in its presence. She could see it in the way an illicit couple stood side by side yet straining toward each other. She could feel it rise off of them, like steam. She could smell it, musky and pungent, like winter spices simmering on the back of a stove. She could hear it in the cadence behind carefully chosen words. She could taste it in her own mouth; acrid and sweet, the flavor of rust.

She was finding it everywhere. Last week she had gone to lunch with a friend and discovered it right there in the restaurant—a couple so exposed that Lydia would not have been surprised if the other diners had set down their forks to stare. Christine had said, "What's with you today? You haven't heard a word I've said."

Lydia leaned forward. "Christine, do you see those two over there? In the corner. She's wearing a green dress."

Christine turned and craned her neck. "Nooo. Yes. Should I know them?"

"No. I mean, I don't know them. I was just wondering if you notice anything unusual about them."

"I can't say that—yes, they both have widows' peaks, is that it?"

"Lord. No, forget it. I'm sorry."

Two days ago, Lydia had spotted it at the Art Institute. She shared the Beckmann exhibit with a young woman who was standing in front of the *Columbine,* transfixed by the contradiction of the massive, forbidding figure with its splayed, welcoming thighs. Lydia moved past as the young woman sighed, her padded shoulders rising and falling. Then a man in a banker's suit and gleaming black wing-tips came into the exhibition hall, and Lydia saw that the sighs were not for Beckmann.

The man had stolen away from a desk somewhere, from his wife and secretary, unless this was his secretary. The two traveled around the room, speaking in low voices, eyes examining each other, barely sparing a glance toward the walls. Lydia pretended to study a self-portrait of the artist until they passed her, and then she trailed behind them, watching.

She touched his cheek and he grabbed her fingers and pressed them to his mouth. Lydia felt flushed and dizzy as she made her way out of the museum, into fresh air.

Now this afternoon, as she was leaving the supermarket, she saw a man pull into a space in the parking lot and check his appearance in his rearview mirror. Lydia's eyes scanned the lot until she found the car with a woman sitting in it. The woman's car was parked at the far end so that there would be no public display of proximity, no guilt by association of automobiles. The woman got out of her car—she was wearing a white tennis dress—and pulled a green sun visor down to shield her face. As Lydia watched them drive off, she found herself sifting through the change in the pocket of her skirt, searching for a quarter. There was a pay phone right there by the store exit. Lydia, who could never remember her own social security number or her license plate number, could not rid her memory of either Jack's office phone number or his home number, which she had dialed only one time.

Why can't we just go on? she would say to Jack. Everyone else does. It's all around us. You must see it everywhere, too.

Her fingers closed around the large coin in her pocket and then released it.

It wasn't so much that she and Craig had drifted apart but that they were just drifting. Unlike many husbands and wives who stray, their interests had grown more, rather than less, alike over time. He had learned to enjoy her museums and she had learned to play his golf and so on. Their life together was placid and incidental. Their life apart was equally traditional: Craig achieved success in his law practice; Lydia tended to the needs of Bonnie, who was now three, and to those of Craig's eighty-six year old grandmother, and to those of the north shore suburban community in which they lived. Their house, which had held several generations of Craig's family, was regarded by Lydia as another museum, which she worked to preserve.

Their life together had become so predictable that Lydia had, some months ago, initiated small unsatisfying rebellions, little bursts of anarchy that fell far short of revolution.

"Would you like milk in your coffee?" she asked Craig one morning, as though he were a stranger in his ancestral home.

He frowned at her, taking some time before answering, "You know I always take my coffee black."

When Lydia wanted to discuss the general uneasiness she felt within their marriage, Craig would reluctantly consent, but the discussions were stillborn. In the face of Craig's insistence that everything was fine, Lydia felt like a relic of the Victorian age: overly sensitive, unstable, suffering from some vague female complaint. In fact, Craig showed substantial relief when PMS hit the newsstands and he could attribute her restiveness to something amuck in her own clockwork. Lydia probably would have continued on, taking megavitamins for hormonal imbalance and trying halfheartedly to pierce Craig's armor of contentment, were it not for her discovery that Craig was engaged in an affair.

Craig had volunteered his Saturday morning to drive his grandmother to the ophthalmologist. When they returned Lydia said, "What did Dr. Wolff say about your eyes, Gran?"

"They're just pussy-footing around. Taking their sweet time. She can't tell when they'll be far enough gone so's I can have the surgery. Meanwhile, my eyesight is so bad I couldn't make out my own grandson who is six-foot-something and says he was all the time in the waiting room."

Craig colored and said, "I was reading a magazine. In the corner."

"Then that young receptionist must have cataracts too." Gran stroked the loose skin underneath her chin.

Lydia was less surprised that Craig had lied than that he hadn't prepared a better alibi. She watched him go over to the coffeemaker, take down a mug from the glass-fronted cupboard, and dip into the pocket of his madras shorts to slip the wedding ring back onto his finger.

Lydia was not angered so much by his infidelity as she was by his falsity. Clearly he, too, had felt a lack, had wanted more, yet he had made her disavow these feelings in herself.

She didn't mention her enlightenment to Craig. She didn't know yet exactly what she wanted to do about it. She was surprisingly incurious about the other woman and she did not want to be propelled into a course of action by the momentum of revelation. Later, after she had met Jack, she was happy for any justification for having an affair of her own.

He had rear-ended her car at a stop sign near Bonnie's school. Lydia was jolted forward; she had not been wearing a seatbelt, and she was

thinking about how Craig's concern would find expression in a lecture, when Jack appeared at her window.

"Are you all right? God, I can't believe I did that. Are you hurt? Should I call someone? Do you think you can walk? I'm so sorry. What a klutz—I can't dance either."

Lydia began laughing and then involuntarily raised her hand to her neck.

"I'll get an ambulance."

"No. Please. I'm okay. I'm sure of it."

"Looks like whiplash to me."

"It's not that bad, really. If it still bothers me tomorrow, I'll have it looked at."

"I'm not comfortable with that."

"Yes, but I am." Lydia opened the car door and stepped out.

"Where are you going?"

"To look at my bumper."

"I mean, where were you headed when I hit you?"

"Oh." She walked to the rear of the car. "To pick up my daughter from preschool."

"And then?"

"Home," she said, climbing back in gingerly.

"All right, slide over. I'll drive."

"Thank you—I appreciate it—that's just not necessary."

But Jack insisted. He said he wouldn't be able to rid himself of the vision of her in pain and stranded on the road somewhere with her daughter. He parked his car on the street and chauffeured Lydia and Bonnie home, and that was how it had begun.

At the house, Craig's grandmother offered Jack a cup of tea made from sage and licorice mint from her herb garden—"This will put some stiffening in you"—but Lydia had already convinced him she was improving so he took a cab back to his car. *Back to his life* Lydia thought to herself, but later that night he telephoned. Bonnie pounced on the phone and then ran into the dining room. "It's the driving man, Mommy." Lydia told Craig she would explain later but she never did and he forgot to ask. As Lydia left to get the phone, she heard Gran say, "Ah, now that reminds me. I think I'll make a pot of tea."

"I just wanted to check how you're feeling." Jack said.

"Fine, really. How did you get our number? It isn't listed."

"I copied it down when I phoned for the taxi."

"You know my address and phone number and I don't know anything about you, except that you're not a lawyer."

"What makes you say that?"

It wasn't a reference to Craig, she wanted to say defensively, even though she hadn't told him her husband was a lawyer. "Lawyers never admit responsibility for anything," she said.

"But I am a lawyer. Probate mostly."

That's when Lydia fell in love, deciding love was no more improbable than their first meeting or his profession. She had never learned to flirt and she didn't think she was flirting now. "I'll be coming into the city tomorrow," she said. "If you're free for lunch I could demonstrate that I've survived our collision."

Jack was free for lunch but encumbered for everything else. He was married with a daughter nine months younger than Bonnie.

"Are you satisfied with Highland Preschool?" he asked over lentil soup. "Carol and I are thinking of sending Rachel there next year."

Lydia felt irony pressing in all around her like a sudden change in the barometric pressure.

They talked more than they ate, and they listened. Lydia heard that Jack's daughter was the center of his life. Jack heard that Lydia felt her life had no center.

Lydia touched Jack's sleeve. "Do you remember meeting Craig's grandmother?"

He nodded. "She told me I had the look of a pup that had been weaned too soon."

Lydia laughed, "What do you suppose that means?"

"I don't think it was flattery."

"She lives with us, or we live with her. It's hard to say which. Craig's parents moved to Arizona the year after we were married, but Gran couldn't go with them—she had never lived anywhere but that house, not even after she married—so she sold it to us."

"Ah. Looked like a cross between French Colonial and early Freudian. How old is it?"

"There've been two additions, but the original structure was built in 1853."

"You're kidding. I would have thought there was nothing but prairie there in 1853. In fact, I'd have guessed that, except for right along the lake, it was all pretty much prairie until the boom after World War II."

"The really exciting bit is that the house was built for Craig's great-grandmother by her father, Horace. That's one of the reasons I married Craig, I think. The house has stayed in his family so long it felt like a kind of marriage insurance—two fireplaces, a pantry, a porch swing, a great-great-grandfather named Horace—what could go wrong?"

Gran said, "You'd better change your clothes, Lydia. Bonnie and I have a surprise for you."

"Change up or down?" she asked.

"I don't know about that. All I know is you don't want to be wearing any dresses with lace collars on them."

"Maybe if you tell me what the surprise is, I can figure our what to wear."

"We're going to make soap, Mommy," Bonnie burst forth as though uncorked. She pressed her hands together in an attempt to contain her excitement.

"Soap? What do you mean? What kind of soap?"

"Lye soap," Gran smacked with satisfaction. "All our women have made it. You need to learn so's you can teach Bonnie."

"There's plenty of time to teach Bonnie, don't you think?"

"That's as may be, but who's to say how much time there'll be for me to teach you?"

"All right," Lydia relented. She would have to phone Jack and cancel her trip downtown. She took Bonnie's hands in her own and pat-a-caked them together. "Gran, why did you pick today?"

"Because," Gran said smugly, having prepared for the question, "because today I finally have enough good ashes stored up."

"I'd like to tour your house someday," Jack said.

"Did I tell you Craig's great-great-grandfather hand-carved the olive branches above the windows?"

But Jack never went to the house again and Lydia never invited him.

Instead, when they met for lunch once, sometimes twice a week, she would describe it to him, one room at a time with its furniture and family portraits and memories that had been handed down through generations.

"Listen to yourself, Lydia. Anyone would think it was you who'd grown up there."

"In a way, I did. My father was a robotics engineer so we were constantly moving from job to job. We never stayed in one place long enough to unpack all the boxes, except for Japan. And even there, we lived in a small apartment."

"How long did you spend in Japan?"

"From the time I was nine until just after my fourteenth birthday."

"A pretty big chunk of a child's life. You don't think of Japan as home?"

"I miss the landscape and the culture and the people, but they were never mine." She shrugged. "When American girls were experimenting with their mothers' lipstick, I was sitting in front of a mirror putting cornstarch on my face and slanting my eyelids." She illustrated, tugging at the corners of her eyes with her index fingers.

"I've gone back twice for visits," she said. "But those were before Bonnie was born. And I've taken some courses in Asian art. That's how I got involved at the museum. But my pictures of family and friendship and . . . home came from books. Louisa May Alcott. Gene Stratton Porter. Laura Ingalls Wilder."

"I'm starting to notice a pattern here."

"Old-fashioned? Romantic?"

"Three names per author."

Lydia laughed and then bit her lip, considering. "Not only is Craig's the first house I've ever lived in, but it's the very house, complete with family, I read about in all those books."

"What about your parents now? Do they finally have a place of their own?"

"A place, yes. When my father retired, they bought a condo in West Palm Beach."

"Hardly storybook. All right, I'm resigned. Tell me more about the house."

"Gran had three rooms added on during the Depression. She had started out wanting just one more bedroom and indoor plumbing, but

labor was so cheap the house just grew. I think she couldn't bear to put the workmen out of jobs."

"I suppose you had a full-time job redecorating when you moved in."

"Me?" Lydia frowned. "Do you picture that as the sort of thing I would enjoy? I haven't even rearranged the furniture. I've reupholstered a few pieces, but they were desperate cases. It's Craig who changed the house."

"Changed it how? You make it sound sinister."

"It was sinister. Craig put a big greenhouse window in the family room. That was the original dining room. Horace had built it without windows as a refuge from electrical storms—I guess that was pretty common—so the whole family would gather in that room at the first streak of lightning."

"What about the basement?"

"There isn't one. I guess they weren't building basements in the 1850s. Or maybe Horace would never have finished the house in time if he'd had to excavate a basement, too. I don't know. Anyway, that's where Gran would sit and rock in the dark—no lamps turned on, the TV set unplugged—every time there was a storm, right up until the glass was installed. Now, practically one whole wall is window so that's the room she's most afraid to be in during a storm."

"Poor woman. What does she do?"

"Wanders through the house, mostly walking the hallways. She's even afraid to go to the bathroom—it's not funny—because every toilet in the house is next to a window. God, I wish Craig could have just left everything the way it was."

"Like a shrine?"

"Like a Japanese tea house," she said. "No changes made ever."

"Not even for the better?"

She shuddered. "We're not talking about a mouse trap. You don't try to build a tea house better; you try to build each one the same. Whatever differences there are shouldn't be worth mentioning, or noticing. The wood used for framing is old and scarred so that a new tea house will look pretty much like an old tea house. Any tea house you enter should feel familiar after you've experienced your first one.

"A few years back, I went with Craig to a college reunion in Ann Arbor. While he was at his old fraternity house, I visited the Museum of Art on campus. They had a model tea house as the central feature of

their Japanese collection. The label said that two adjectives are typical of a tea house: *wabi* and *sabi.* They mean 'refined poverty' and 'antiquity,' respectively."

"So you're saying your house is like a tea house in that it's old and graceful?"

Lydia winced. "I wasn't trying to make a comparison with the house. When I was talking about *wabi* and *sabi,* I was thinking about Gran."

As the waiter approached, Jack pantomimed signing for the bill. "And what about you and electrical storms? Are you afraid of them?"

Lydia found herself more interesting in the light of Jack's curiosity. "No, I don't think so. And I guess Craig didn't inherit it." She raised her glass and then lowered it again, dipping her finger into the iced water. "Last spring, when we had all that rain and the Des Plaines River flooded, Gran told Bonnie she should hide so the storm wouldn't get her. We found them both in Gran's room. Bonnie under the bed and Gran sitting on the floor between the bed and the wall, holding Bonnie's hand. Craig told Bonnie there was no reason to hide and he took her out on the balcony to look at 'the pretty lights in the sky.'"

"What did Gran do?"

"She told me about the time her older brother threatened to tie her to a tree during a storm. She swung a coal scuttle at him and it caught him on the side of his head. I'm sure she told me the story because she thought Craig was tormenting Bonnie and she wanted me to make him stop. I brought her a glass of milk and she sipped it on the floor there between her bed and the wall, as far away from any windows as she could get." She turned her head slowly, as though counting the windows in the restaurant.

"Carol doesn't sleep with me any more," Jack said. "Not since Rachel was born."

"That's a long time," Lydia said.

"Before, I was always trying to solve it—trying to talk it out or rekindle the flame or get her to agree to counseling. Now I'm afraid I don't want it solved."

Lydia wondered, as if she were watching herself from a distance, how long it would be before she and Jack became lovers. She waited to tell him about Craig's involvement elsewhere. She waited because it no longer seemed a reason for her choice.

During those first weeks, Lydia neither hid nor revealed her meetings with Jack. She saw him in the most public places, but she never seemed to see anyone else she knew on those occasions. Magically, Craig avoided asking her precisely those questions about her day that would have included Jack in the answers. Lydia wondered if that meant he knew, or if he really believed all was as it should be—as it had always been—between them.

But Gran was sensitive to changes. Her bunion signaled a drop in the temperature. Her left hip warned of wet weather.

"Maybe you shouldn't leave Bonnie with me anymore, Lydia," Gran said one afternoon when Lydia returned from a meeting with Jack.

"Is something wrong, Gran? Is your arthritis acting up again?"

"No." She lifted her chin.

"Is something else bothering you?"

"Nothing's bothering me," she complained.

Lydia shook her head slightly. "I thought you wanted me to leave Bonnie with you. You were always suggesting it."

"It's different now." The hands in Gran's lap were gnarled and seamed, like tree bark, but her face was unlined, untouched by time except for a soft, powdery finish.

"Different how? Has Bonnie been difficult?"

"Bonnie? No." Gran waved both hands at Lydia, fanning away the suggestion.

"What then?"

"I don't know. I'm too old. Maybe she needs to spend more time with her mother."

"Well, I won't leave her with you. You needn't worry about that any more." Lydia was ashamed to hear the coldness in her voice.

"All right," Lydia said two days later across the white linen of the restaurant table, "I'm ready."

The hovering waiter approached to take their lunch order, but Jack signaled him away. "When?" he asked.

"Tomorrow," she shrugged. "Today if you like."

"Are you hungry?"

"Not at all."

They left the restaurant for a nearby convention hotel. Jack brought out a credit card at the front desk.

"Wait," said Lydia. She drew three crisp fifty dollar bills from her purse. "I think cash would be better. How much do we need?"

Lydia had known making love with Jack would be different from anything she had experienced, because talking with Jack was unlike anything she had experienced.

"Is that how you are with Craig?" he asked her as they lay side by side, their feet interwoven. "I'm sorry. Don't answer that."

"I wasn't going to."

"It was like I've imagined." Jack touched her shoulder shyly as though he had not touched her otherwise.

"I will bear in mind that whatever's said comes from a man who's been celibate for more than two years."

"I didn't know people could be this happy."

"Yes," she said.

"Or this unhappy," he said.

He sent her Frango mints, two dozen long-stemmed red roses, and a bottle of Chanel no. 5.

When Craig saw the roses, he said, "Is there a special occasion that's slipped my mind?"

"No," Lydia said and waited for the next question which never came. She felt a little sorry for Craig's lover, who obviously never received long-stemmed roses.

When she next saw Jack she said, "What exactly is it that you're trying to do?"

"Court you. I thought that was obvious."

"But candy, flowers, and perfume?"

"Absolutely. All the clichés. What could be more appropriate?"

"It's just because they are clichés that you're going to get us into trouble. Eventually Craig will have to notice."

They didn't lunch in restaurants or risk the large downtown hotels anymore. They found a small hotel on the city's north side where they picnicked in their room on tins of paté and jars of dollhouse vegetables or cartons of pork fried rice. Once, Lydia brought homemade chicken soup in a thermos after Jack confessed to a cold. The day after her birthday, he brought a bakery cake with her name and pink rosettes in sticky-sweet icing.

They ate Irish smoked salmon while sitting in a tub of hot water.

"How long can this go on?" Jack said, tempting fate as he licked his fingers.

"Not a moment longer," Lydia said and splashed him. "Or you'll be going back to the office all salmon-pink and prune-wrinkled."

"I think I'd better go with you tomorrow to the Loop," Gran said.

"Oh, Gran," Lydia whirled around, "I was planning to take the train."

"Well, I've been thinking I'd like to get some new Sunday shoes and that bald-headed young man at Fields' seems to do the best by my feet."

"Later in the week," Lydia said, "I'll drive you in. We'll have lunch at Berghoff's."

"You're a good girl, Lydia, but I worry about you. At least you don't smoke like some of them," she sighed.

"I want to marry you," Jack said. He had waited until Lydia was dressed again and stood fastening her thin, black leather watchband to her wrist.

Even though she had been expecting it, Lydia felt her heart constrict, her breath catch. "Oh, Jack, how can we?"

"Like ordinary mortals. We tell them. We get lawyers, we live through it, and then we live together, until death do us part."

"That easy."

"That hard."

Lydia shuddered.

"Think of it," he said. "Imagine going to the theatre together. Or the hardware store. Especially the hardware store. Spring in Mexico, fall in Greece. Winter in Disneyworld with Rachel and Bonnie."

"I'd have custody of Bonnie—Craig wouldn't fight me—but you'll lose Rachel, Jack."

"I won't lose her. It will be different, but I won't lose her. Look, I'm not minimizing it—that part is hell—but there's no choice. We have to be together."

"Sounds like a choice of hells."

"We'll tell them tonight."

"No, not tonight," she shook her head. "Craig has a late meeting. It would be impossible. Tomorrow," she said. "On Saturday. There will be more time." She bent her forehead to his shoulder.

"I guess the news will keep for another day."

Lydia flinched and Jack put his arm around her. "It will be all right." He rocked her gently back and forth. "It will be all right."

That night, as Lydia stood over the stove stirring bits of apple and onion into brown rice, she wondered how many more times she would stand here, how many more meals she would fix for Gran.

When dinner was finished, Bonnie said, "I want you to get a baby brother in your tummy like Jill's mommy."

Gran said wistfully, "I would like a nice bread pudding now and then."

It was past eleven when Craig came home. Lydia surprised herself by succumbing to sleep when she had expected to toss and turn. At one in the morning she was awakened by an explosion—a gunshot or a cherry bomb or maybe just a car backfiring. She left the bed where Craig slept to peer out the window, holding the curtain across her nightdress. The sky was suddenly slashed with white neon, so brightly electric it hurt her eyes. Then the thunder followed like the roar of a subway, propelling Lydia out into the hall.

She opened the door to Gran's room, which was quiet, bereft even of the low machinelike humming that attended Gran's sleep. "Gran," she said, opening the door wider, "are you all right?" even though she knew the room was empty. She hurried now to Bonnie's room, afraid that Gran had needed Bonnie's fear to ease her own. Bonnie's room, too, was empty. She called their names, "Gran! Bonnie! Where are you?" but the only response was Craig's. He lumbered out of the bedroom, out of his sleep, to say, "What in the hell's going on?"

"I don't know," Lydia said. "Gran and Bonnie aren't in their rooms and they don't answer. This couldn't be a game, could it?" Lydia was really frightened now, because she no longer knew what she feared, except that whatever was happening was somehow her fault. It was she who had brought chaos into the house.

Craig systematically searched the second floor while Lydia covered the first, her panic growing in each succeeding empty room. She caught

herself bargaining with God, offering in trade a life's mate for two transitory dependents.

"I've got her," Craig called from the second floor landing.

"Who?" Lydia asked, steadying herself.

"Bonnie. The little monkey was out on the balcony enjoying the fireworks. She couldn't hear you over the storm. Can you beat that? She's Daddy's girl, all right."

"And Gran?" Lydia called.

"I don't know. Bonnie hasn't seen her. Keep looking. What a household," he congratulated himself.

Could the old woman have been obliterated by lightning? Does there come a moment, somewhere down the road, when one's worst fears are realized? Lydia went outside to check the yard below the balcony. The rain stung her face, obscured her vision. Illuminated by another charge of light, Lydia suddenly remembered the walk-in storage closet in the laundry room, their modern, efficient substitute for a basement.

Gran was there, wedged into the small portable crib Bonnie had long ago outgrown. "Gran," said Lydia softly, but the old woman was sleeping soundly in this room without windows. Lydia drew a bath towel from the clothes dryer and laid it across Gran's shoulders.

She told Craig they would have to think of something. They had to make one room safe for Gran.

"This is crazy," Craig said.

"But that doesn't matter," Lydia said.

She dialed Jack's home number at seven in the morning and prayed for Jack to answer.

"Hello?" he said.

"Did you tell her?"

"Not yet." Jack's voice dropped. "She's still asleep. Rachel is going to play group later. I thought I'd tell her then. Are you okay? What did Craig say?"

"I didn't tell him." Lydia waited for something to suddenly change her mind, but nothing came. "I'm not going to tell him. It's not possible."

"Oh God, what happened? I'm coming over."

"No," she said, "that's impossible, too. You couldn't stand being a weekend father."

"I can't stand being a weekday lover. Tell me what happened last night."

"The storm." Lydia looked into the mirror that hung over the telephone table in the hall. She saw whose face?—Gran's?—No, her own mother's. Tired, hopeless, looking back at her. "If I left, Craig would put skylights in."

They saw each other two more times. On the first occasion, Jack tried to get Lydia to change her mind. "Who would get custody of Gran?" she said.

On the second, Lydia tried to get Jack to change his.

"We could go on like before, Jack. It's better than nothing. Does it have to be all or nothing?" She didn't know how to explain to him that she just couldn't be responsible for any more storms.

"Going on is worse than nothing," Jack said.

So she had promised finally that she would not call him again unless she left Craig.

Lydia took the change from her skirt pocket and dropped it into the canister held out by a middle-aged woman. The woman wore a yellow plastic banner draped over one shoulder and a white plastic straw hat with a yellow hatband.

"Thank you for helping cystic fibrosis research," she said loudly, prompting other passersby.

Lydia loaded her groceries into the car. She didn't know how long she had stood there in the parking lot. She had an appointment with a young man who would install wooden shutters in Gran's room.

"After the shutters are up," she told herself. "Then I'll call."

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Marrying American

Daniel John

I never thought about being a snowback—an illegal Canadian—until my money began to dwindle in 1983. I couldn't get a student visa because my massage and movement therapy school in Amherst, Massachusetts—the School for Body-Mind Centering—was too small to meet Immigration and Naturalization's definition of a "school." Yet I couldn't look for a real job because I had no social security number. So I posted "Housecleaner Available" signs everywhere and worked infrequently as a masseuse. Even when I was forced to live on a previous tenant's canned macaroni and Jell-O, I still preferred America to Canada.

In America I had the right to have feelings; in Canada I was obligated to notice other people's. In America I had the right to be different; in Canada I had to apologize if I acted without other people's approval. If I stood up for myself in Canada, turned-away faces and a tactful change of subject would let me know I should be ashamed of myself for being rude, conceited, or otherwise acting like an American.

But that summer, when my parents offered to send me a plane ticket for a family reunion in Saskatchewan, hunger overruled my sensibilities. I hitchhiked to Boston, picked up the ticket they had waiting for me, and flew to the Land of the Nice for a week of dull, nourishing food and fiendishly complex conversation. I hardly knew how to interpret the Canadian code anymore, the secret ways to probe what someone really means when they say "yes"; the thrust and parry of alternating apologies; and the many polite ways to avoid putting someone in the embarrassing position of having to say either yes or no. Once I'd gained a few pounds, I was glad to come home to the United States.

"Where do you live?" a young woman in a green uniform asked me as she examined my documents. The plane had landed in Toronto to put people and luggage through American Customs and Immigration before continuing on to Boston.

"Nova Scotia." That was easy. That was where my children lived, the ones I couldn't visit because my ex-wife and I couldn't agree on how many

were mine. She said I could see two or none. I said I had to see three or none. We'd settled on none—but without speaking, since we didn't talk to each other anymore.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I own a natural foods store." Close enough. I'd sold it two years earlier.

"Where did you buy your ticket?"

"Halifax."

She looked at me thoughtfully, then went through my backpack, taking out and examining each item. She pulled out my journal and thumbed through it, reading here and there. I was terrified she'd read about the time right before I left for Canada, when I made love to Janice when she was menstruating. I knew the punishment would be to keep me in the Land of the Bland.

"Excuse me, that's my journal!"

"I have the right to search anything to determine if you're telling the truth."

"Why are you looking through my journal?" Even to my own ears I sounded plaintive and defeated.

"To see if you really live in Canada." She continued to browse. Her eyes bugged out. Uh-oh. That was Janice. She angrily slammed my journal shut. "How long has it been since you were in Boston?"

"Three years."

"This plane ticket was issued two weeks ago in Boston. You have just lied to an Immigration Officer. This is grounds for deportation."

"Well, a lawyer told me that snowbirds who live in Florida for six months out of the year don't have to—"

"Lawyers have nothing to do with it!" She threw my stuff down on the counter as if it were garbage, then said angrily, "Next please!"

I stepped away from the counter and stood there like a refugee, belongings dragging down my arms, while she processed the next person. Then I asked her timidly, "May I speak with your managing officer, please?"

She didn't look up. "Go ahead. He'll back me up. You lied to me. Next, please."

I withdrew to the Canadian side of the border, pale and ashamed. I knocked on the door marked "INS." I was told to sit on a hard bench and wait. My nervous sweat cooled and I shivered. Hours passed. The plane to

Boston left without me. Finally, the American in charge called me in to his office and listened to me tell him about the school that didn't qualify.

"There's nothing I can do," he said when I was done. I had a swift vision of Irish mourners putting pennies on the eyelids of a corpse. They do this so the dearly departed won't see the devil first and end up going to heaven by accident. My subconscious was preparing me for death. All I had left in Canada were the children I could not visit. I had to live in a different country than my boys, or else I would die of grief. I forced myself to my feet and turned to leave.

"Wait!"

I froze, confused.

He went on, "If you've been a student in the States for nearly two years then you've got all your stuff there, right?"

I nodded.

"I'm going to give you two weeks to pack and move back to Canada." He paused, then added quietly, "But you must promise to return after two weeks."

We looked at each other. We both knew America had no internal controls on illegal immigration. We also both knew I would tell the truth. "I will return in two weeks," I said, trembling like a piece of paper in a breeze. He stamped my passport with a two-week visa. In 14 days I would have either a green card or Canadian pennies on my closed eyelids as they shipped my corpse back to Saskatchewan.

The next flight from Toronto to Boston didn't take off until the following morning. I spent the night underneath a bench in the airport, jerking awake in a sweat over and over again to the unearthly strains of fluorescent Muzak.

Once I was safely back in Amherst, I checked the INS regulations. If I was a Canadian brain surgeon I could get into the States after a five-year wait. Massage therapy wasn't even on the list. My only option was to marry an American. I had thirteen days to find a wife.

My sixteen fellow students at the School for Body-Mind Centering were mostly single women in their late twenties. One after another, each one told me she would have no trouble marrying a stranger so that he could stay in the country—but I wasn't a stranger. After two years of shared traumas, we had bonded like soldiers in a war, but each woman said she couldn't say "I do" to me unless it was to a real marriage. They

all knew what "real" meant. To argue was like talking to a TV set. No matter what I said, I got a 1960s sitcom for an answer. I had to be able to say to our future children, even if we never had any, "I married your mother for life." I had to promise future monogamy. In the state I was in, I couldn't even promise to stay alive. Lying was out of the question. I had given the Immigration Officer my word, and I was a Canadian.

On my last Friday in the United States I went to one of my favorite places, a weekly rough-and-tumble community party called Dance Jam. At halftime I sat on the steps outside and told a friend my border story. "So," I ended, "I have to go back to Canada. My friends like me too much to marry me."

"Oh, I'll marry you!" said a voice. I whipped my head around. A bright-eyed young blonde was coming down from the top step to sit next to us. "This country is so sexist! About the only power women have left is to get foreigners into the country."

After a pause to shut my wide-open mouth, I quizzed her. Her name was Jane, she was twenty-two, and nearly almost entirely sure she was a lesbian. She'd graduated from Smith College that spring and worked as a waitress so that she could stay in Northampton, the lesbian hub of the Northeast. Even though my heart was hammering with hope, I told her I'd wait three days, then call her to make sure she still wanted to do it. In fairy tales, true things always take three days, and before I acted I had to be sure I wasn't taking unscrupulous advantage of her.

For three days I held onto her phone number like a monk clinging to the relic of a saint. On Monday she said, "Yes, I'll marry you."

"Can you meet me tomorrow for the blood test?" In Massachusetts a blood test was required before a wedding license could be issued.

"I have to work. But I can take the rest of the week off." I fretted like a nervous cat for two days. I was sure we didn't have enough time to get all the documentation together for Immigration before Friday at 2 P.M., when I had to be out of the country or become a liar.

On Wednesday, Jane and I lay down next to each other and gave blood. It felt like premarital sex. On Thursday we arrived a few minutes after five at the courthouse in the small town in New York State where she was born. The clerks had just finished closing up, but everybody loves newlyweds. They opened up again just for us, to put the official seal on

her birth certificate that Immigration required before she could legally sponsor her husband into the country.

On Friday morning, wearing the stiffest clothes I owned, I married Jane. We walked out of the registrar's office and got in the car to drive to the INS in Boston. I had three hours left on my visa.

"That was such a joke!" Jane said, driving too fast. "'Do not enter lightly into marriage!'" she mocked the clerk, sticking her lips out like a duck. "It was all I could do not to laugh in her face. We get divorced in eighteen months, right?"

"Right."

"What a joke!"

She lit up a joint. I opened the window to let out the smoke. I'd better do all of the talking. Over there, marijuana breath did not have a winning attitude. A hot breeze licked my face. When the registrar asked me if I solemnly swore to take this woman to have and to hold from this day forth, my hands went clammy with fidelity. When I said, "I do," my heart moved all its cookies into her kitchen. I was about to swear to the government of the United States of America that this was a real marriage and not one entered into for purposes of immigration. That was a felony, punishable by two years in jail and then deportation. The car swayed as Jane zipped out from behind a huge truck. Being nearly almost sure she was a lesbian meant there was an infinitesimal chance she could fall in love with me—a bulldozer of hope ran me over. All of a sudden, her breasts were alarmingly perky. I wondered if she even owned a bra. I looked out the window at the trees flapping by like happiness in the hot and humid honeymoon air, as we zipped down Newlywed Pike to Boston in July. It was too late. I was going to have to tell INS the truth: this was a real marriage.

We sat on a long, wooden bench in a room filled with couples from all over the world. Jane opened her purse and pulled out a baggie of pot. "I'm not sure I should have brought this with me. Will you put it in your pocket?"

"Possession would get me deported," I whispered, incredulous.

She shrugged and put it back. Americans were so ridiculously entitled. She even sat like an American, sprawling her legs out any way she pleased.

My name was called, and we were led into a room. The agent looked through our papers. "Oh, right!" she said, rolling her eyes. "Get married then immigrate on the same day!"

Months afterward, I discovered the INS verified a real marriage by putting the husband and wife in separate rooms and asking them questions like, "What kind of underwear does your spouse wear?" then cross-checking. Most couples studied for weeks to make their marriages look real, even when they were. But to ask Jane and me those questions would be to imply we'd been living in sin, so she didn't.

However, she asked a lot of other questions, examining our faces carefully as we answered. I treated Jane with that special married mix of consideration and condescension. Since I was her real husband, I wasn't faking anything. Jane put on a performance as the Coy New Wife that was as good as anything on TV. After half an hour the interviewer stood up and said my green card would arrive in the mail in a month or so. I was legally inside the Land of Liberty! The truth had set me free. I exulted like a Canadian: invisibly. Showing off is bad form, because it might imply that you think you're better than other people.

Back in Amherst, I saw Jane once a week for a massage. Each time I rubbed her nude body down, love and yearning poured out my hands like honey. She talked nonstop about herself the whole time, and when it was over, dressed languorously in front of me like a movie star, then gave me a big hug and left. My husband-hope that she wasn't entirely lesbian glowed more certain with every delicious massage. Every week I'd ask her out to something innocuous like a group dance, a picnic, or an open-air play. Her face would light up with pleasure. She'd say yes, great, see you then. Then she would never show up. "I just forgot, that's all! Okay? *Okay!?*" she would say each time I asked her where she'd been. It was many weeks before my hope shrank to the point where I stopped asking her out. This marriage was turning out to be just like my first: there were only pictures of food to eat.

Months later, I moved and sort of forgot to give Jane my phone number. When I finally called her, she'd moved without leaving a forwarding address. I let sleeping wives lie, but every now and then, without warning, hope sang jingles to my heart like a TV commercial: Jane would only love me back if I loved her better. Each time this happened, plaque from the first marriage washed out of my arteries. The second marriage, the real fake one, was cleansing me of the first, the fake real one.

"Boston's a confusing city," my girlfriend Salley warned me as we turned onto the Mass Pike one early morning, a year later.

"I don't think it'll be a problem," I said. I was taking her to meet my parents in Canada, and my green card still hadn't arrived. I needed a temporary visa to make sure I could get back into America. I'd written the INS many times, and then switched to phoning, but that just meant being transferred from a clerk who didn't understand to one who didn't have a clue. Our plane tickets were for that evening, so I had to go in person. I was sure it was just a bureaucratic snafu, because they had all my original documents.

"Have you ever been to Boston before?" Salley asked.

"Just the airport."

"Immigration is nowhere near the airport."

"Oh. Well, I think it's downtown."

"Do you know where that is?"

"In the middle."

Her hazel eyes flashed anger. I admired the way she sat so upright. Driving a car, she looked like a figurehead on the prow of ship, plowing bust-first through the traffic. She had reason to be mad at me. I got lost inside office buildings. But I usually ended up where I needed to be, eventually. It didn't matter if Boston was a confusing city, because when it came to directions, I was pre-confused—if I drove west for long enough I would slowly become convinced I was heading east. We drove in silence until the buildings started standing up, announcing the city.

"This looks like a good exit," I said when we were almost past it. She swerved off the highway, supremely irritated.

"Park over there," I said, pointing to a small lot.

She did. "You're lost," she said, slamming the door as she got out.

"Let's walk this way."

"You're lost."

"Not yet." I had no idea where we were, but a few crooked blocks later there was the INS, looming like a headstone.

"So," the agent said, "you need a temporary visa so you can go back to Canada with your wife."

"Uh . . . no. Salley is not my wife."

"That woman out there in the waiting room is not your wife?"

"No."

"So where's your wife?"

"Uh . . ." My stomach lurched. This complication had never occurred to me. If it had, I might have thought to say it was, indeed, Jane out there in the waiting room, since Salley's first name was Jane. I might have gotten away with letting him think she was my wife Jane, but without having to actually lie.

"You mean you got married only in order to immigrate? It wasn't a real marriage?"

"No, it is real marriage."

"How?"

My heart went squish. This man could send me under police escort to the airport with a one-way ticket to Canada along with a deportation order forbidding me to enter the United States ever again.

"Because it's celibate."

"It's a real marriage because it's celibate?"

"Yes."

"Are we getting anywhere here?"

"Yes. I fell in love with Jane."

"Jane is your wife?"

"Yes. She's my Ideal Woman. Which means I don't have sex with her."

He blinked twice. "Do you and Jane live together?"

"No. My love for her is pure. I used to believe the natural state of a man is celibacy and his first 'honor and obey' is to God. I didn't realize until after my first marriage that the spiritual truth is not celibacy, but that Spirit is the Sexual Union of the Virgin and the Devil. By being celibate I was avoiding God, not honoring Him. By marrying Jane, but not having sex with her or living with her, I am acknowledging my psychological problem, while at the same time freeing up the rest of me to change. Salley is helping me with this."

"Does Jane know about Salley?"

"Jane and I are both clear on the nature of our marriage."

" . . . I'm not sure about this . . ."

"Could I write somebody a letter and explain it in detail?" My armpits were soaked.

"Well, you'd have to leave out all the stuff about Freud!" He rolled his eyes to the ceiling. "So . . . you were issued a green card?"

"You mean you don't know? But this is what bureaucracies are for!" I glared at him like a Canadian, with righteous indignation. He flushed with embarrassment, then stamped my passport.

Several months later, I darted onto Main St. at the exact moment Jane stepped off the curb from the other side. We met on the double-yellow center line, as if by appointment.

"It's about time, isn't it?" she asked, as if we'd arranged this meeting months ago.

"Give me your phone number. I'll make the arrangements."

The light changed. Cars roared past us on either side.

"You never told my parents, did you?"

"No." I didn't even know where they lived.

"Thanks. Bye!"

A month later, the clerk of the court read the details to the black-robed judge sitting high above us. He called on Jane. She stood up, obviously nervous. "Why do you want to divorce Daniel after only a year and a half of marriage?" She was wearing a ripped T-shirt and manure-smeared overalls.

"Your honor, I'm at a place in my life where I really need to get myself together and it's a good thing my friends said I could stay at their farm as long as I took care of the animals because I really need a lot of time to myself these days and I don't have any money." She paused, then added, "Your honor."

"You may sit down," he said, and turned to me. I stood up in my stiff wedding clothes.

"Why are you getting divorced from Jane after only eighteen months of marriage?"

I looked at my lawful wedded wife and let hope go. "Unrealistic expectations."

He nodded and banged his gavel. "I hereby pronounce you divorced."

In a small town like Northampton, I normally bumped into everybody I knew at least once a month, but I didn't see Jane, or even hear anything about her, for nearly a year after the divorce. That was so unusual it was

spooky. Then one hot summer day, I was waiting for a bus when something made me turn around. All I saw was my own reflection in the plate-glass window of an old small-town restaurant, until I shielded my eyes with my hand and looked within. All by herself in a back booth, sat Jane. I waved my hand big and slow, since I didn't know if she could see me. She waved back, moving her arm in a big, slow wave, a wry, sad smile on her beautiful face.

Popeye

Allan Kaplan

ever
since I
swallowed
Mega A's
stolen from
the old
man's
for-
bidden
cabinet,
my pee
sun-
yellow
strong—

not the
dribble of
the out of
shape
Whimpy
whose
bi-
ceps
do
not bulge
with
violence
and faith

Monster

Jason Tandon

for a high school buddy killed in Iraq

I stand in the drainage field behind my house,
which mounds into a small hill pinioned
with slender trees dropping weight for winter's regimen.
Their branches, bone-thin wings of angels.
I remember when we used to drink
on our old playground after dark
until the cops chased us away.

Beyond the hill, in the dun colored stalks
of dead cattails, a heavy thing drags through the leaves.
I yell. It doesn't scare. Is it the black bear
that made the neighbor's kid wet his pants
when he heard these young trunks snap?

I close my eyes. I've heard this sound before.
That wacko—pacing the gated bowels
of New York's Port Authority, newspaper
twined to his feet—muttering about pound cake.
He had made the best, sold thousands from his shop.
Who don't like pound cake? I don't. But he grabbed
a fistful of my shoulder, and I was taught always
to be terrified of those stranger than me.

Fire in the Great Hawk Colony

Jason Tandon

It broke on an August day
among the conifer hills of Moosalamoo,
while you and I sat across the way
unforgiving our faults and pride,
stubbing cigarettes in the lawn.
Only when we heard the sirens
Doppler up a mile of switchbacks
did we see the smoke loop above the dark spruce.
You drove us up the hill
K-turning out of every side road.
You wanted to see a charred child's body,
a parakeet's burnt beak thrust through cage bars,
a doll's head with looseygoosey eye.
All we found was an A-frame colony,
a private pond, a red clay tennis court.
We came from the shadows of branches
and pine cones to green sunshine and a thicket
by a bend in the road, raspberries still bursting.
You hopped from the car and filled your shirt
like they were the last fruit on earth.
We ate. The engine idled.
My tongue squnged in the sour mash.
My teeth tightened, seeds in their gaps.
I ground my molars and looked at you
in the driver's seat, dropping redblack berries
from fist to mouth, squinting up the hill
for a sign of smoldering ash.

Baking

Jason Tandon

A rainy morning
Has cooled the heat of the week.
All the fans have been shut off,
The airy white noise
We are accustomed to talking over
Silenced.
I hear you call from the kitchen
That we have an egg, flour, sugar,
But only one overripe banana—
Yet I recall, alive in the crisper,
A handful of strawberries
Left from the shortcake
I surprised you with
After your tearful announcement
Of a shitty day at work,
And at the bottom of the fruit bowl
A pear
Both of us have picked up
And passed on for God knows how long.
I hear you dice and mash
Mix and murmur
I don't know . . .
While I recline reading on the porch
In a banana chair of all chairs,
Enjoying perfect cross-ventilation
Engineered by variance of storm windows and screens,
Anticipating that smell
I believe even Gustave Flaubert once declared
Impossible to describe.

A Souvenir for Mama

Lawrence F. Farrar

Everything is very white, isn't it? I am so cold. A hot bath would be very nice right now. We have such a fine wooden tub in our house in Tokyo.

Mama and I have lived in our house in Aoyama-dori ever since I can remember. I think we have always lived there. But sometimes, remembering makes me a little confused. Perhaps we lived in another place. I don't know exactly.

I do not leave the house very often. Mama looks after everything so well. Besides, if I go out in the street, neighborhood children tease me. They dance about and call me names. And old ladies dressed in *kimono* titter and talk about me behind their hands. I am sure it is because they are envious that their own grown daughters do not live with them—like I do with Mama. I just give them a disdainful look.

Mama says they are low-class people and I should keep a stiff upper lip. Once she found me practicing in front of a mirror and started to laugh. I laughed too, and my stiff upper lip disappeared in a twinkling. Mama is so sweet.

I especially like our garden. It has a bamboo fence that goes all the way around. Before she fell sick, Mama tended the garden with great diligence, and it was oh-so-beautiful. Wisteria, oleanders, hibiscus, sweet osmanthus, fragrant olive, and roses. I can't remember all the names. In summer the fragrance of the flowers and blossoms flowed into our house through an open window, like a beautifully scented stream.

Now, Mama must rest, even in the daytime. She says she is sad because the garden has fallen into disrepair. It's true. The mottled red, white, and black koi that glided about beneath the lily pads are gone from the pond. Only some repulsive green frogs live there now. There is an old haiku about a frog. I don't know why. They are such ugly things.

Mama used to ask me to gather flowers from the garden, but the flowers are gone, like the fish. I cut them all off with scissors. That was rather silly of me.

Even though the flowers have disappeared, I like to venture into the garden to watch the birds and butterflies that gather there. But, I am a bit uncertain about going alone. You see, there is a fox that stares through the fence. A badger, too. Foxes can change into human beings and back again. There are many things that can change like that.

What I like best is when Mama combs my hair.

"Yukiko," she says, "you have such beautiful, long hair." Sometimes she cries when she says it. I don't know why. I cry because Mama cries. Then Mama smiles gently and pats away my tears with her delicate, little handkerchief.

"You have perfect, almond-shaped eyes, Yukiko. You are a true Heian period beauty."

That always makes me feel better, although sometimes I can't remember what Heian ladies looked like.

When I ask Mama who my father is, sometimes she says he is a movie star. Sometimes an important politician. Sometimes a *kabuki* actor. And sometimes the emperor of Japan. I like the Emperor idea best. He seems very aristocratic on television. Even if he doesn't look at me or answer my letters, I am quite certain he is the one. I see fathers on television who live with their wives and children. I suppose the emperor is too busy to live with us.

I like to watch television and eat sweets. Belgian chocolates are my favorite. Mama says if I keep gobbling them I will lose my slender figure. But once I start, I just keep popping them in my mouth. I like it when sometimes, instead of watching television, Mama and I huddle together on the floor and look at fashion magazines.

Best of all, I like American movies. My favorites are the old ones with Audrey Hepburn or Debbie Reynolds. I am in the movie with them. Once, Audrey Hepburn was in Rome and put her hand in a statue's mouth. Gregory Peck was with her, and he tried to do it, too. I think they were trying to win a prize. If I go to Rome I want to try putting my hand in, but it is frightening to think about.

Audrey Hepburn seemed so elegant. I cried when she died. Only a few people know she was really Japanese.

We don't have many visitors at our house, Mama, especially since Mr. Yamada stopped coming. I don't know exactly when it was. Time mixes me up. It comes and goes so quickly. I get lightheaded just thinking about it. The hands of the clock never stay in one place.

Mr. Yamada always arrived in a large, black car, and he wore suits that Mama said were made in London. I've been to London with Sean Connery. He has an old friend there who makes all sorts of curious gadgets.

Mr. Yamada always said hello to me. When I was younger, he used to say, "Yukiko, you are looking especially cute today. Some time we should go to the Ueno Zoo." But we never went. Perhaps another time.

Even if Mr. Yamada did not take me to the zoo, he seemed very kind. Once, he carried a straw bag brimming with *nashi* into our house. Sweet and juicy, I can taste those Japanese pears even now. Another time, Mr. Yamada brought *mikan;* reddish-yellow and fresh from Shikoku. Long after I peeled them, their tangerine odor still clung to my fingertips.

Whenever he visited, Mr. Yamada would place a thick, white envelope on a shelf in our parlor. As soon as he left, Mama would count out the ten thousand yen notes that were inside, snapping them crisply, one after another. Sometimes she would let me help.

"Yukiko, you are very good at counting," she would say. Other times she would say, "Yukiko, this is all we have. We must be very thrifty."

Mama's cardigan is quite old, and there are thin spots in the sleeves.

Sometimes we go to a movie in the theater. We disappear in the darkness, and nobody bothers us. Often, I stop watching the movie and stare at Mama's face. It is so beautiful in the silvery light shimmering from the screen. Mama is just a wonderful person.

But now Mama is ill, and she's lost her appetite. A long time ago, or maybe not a long time ago—I don't know which—she would make thick pieces of English toast with bread brought home from the Kobe Bakery. It went nicely with brown tea. We loved to heap the toast with apricot or strawberry preserves. One time the preserves dripped down on my chin, and Mama said, "Yukiko, it's as if you've become a sweet little girl again."

Mama tells me she is only a bit indisposed. I worry she is rather more feeble than she wants me to know. When she puts her thin arm up to touch my face, I think my heart will break into pieces. I wish I knew how to help her.

Because Mama doesn't feel well, we have stopped going to the movies. The last one we saw was called *Fargo.* I thought it quite exciting. It told the story of some bad men in America who kill some other bad men and steal their money. Then they hide it by a fence under the snow.

Movies are real. Mama says *Fargo* is just a story, but it's real. You can see it for yourself. Anyway, I think whatever we imagine to be real is real. Or it ought to be.

Lately, a man named Mr. Suzuki has been coming to our door from time to time. He has a twisted mouth and curiously disposed eyes—they look away from each other. Mama says such eyes are called London-Paris eyes. One looks to London and the other to Paris. If he catches sight of me in the entryway, Mr. Suzuki watches me with those eyes. I shiver with discomfort and move quickly away. I am certain his shadow is that of a fox.

Mama always says, "Yukiko, don't worry. He is just a bag carrier for Mr. Yamada. He is only admiring your classic beauty."

I think he looks like a kind of devil.

The other day, when I brought Mama some green tea, she was writing a letter.

"I hope the tea is not too hot," I said. Mama has a cat's tongue and cannot drink tea that is too hot.

"Oh, no," she said. "You make it just the way I like it." Mama is so kind.

"To whom are you writing?"

She seemed surprised by my question. She did not answer right away.

"Yukiko, I have something to tell you. It is not an easy thing to discuss. I must go into a hospital. I have been writing to your auntie in America. She says you can live with her in Minneapolis for a little while, until I am better. Isn't that wonderful?"

I did not know what to say. My auntie went away when I was very young. I did not know where Minneapolis was.

Mama told me it was in Minnesota. She said it was the place in the last movie we went to see.

I stood motionless, the tears welling up. I felt utterly lost.

"Why can't I stay here? Can't Mr. Yamada look after us?"

"I'm afraid not. His wife doesn't want him to see us any longer." Mama seemed sad saying this.

"I don't understand."

Mama did not explain. She just showed me a picture.

"This is your Aunt Sachiko, when we were in middle school. I know she will treat you well."

I hated Mama.

"I cannot go to America. I have no smart clothes."

Mama looked at me through red-rimmed eyes. I could not hate her. Her only concern was for me. *Mama, I wanted to stay with you forever.*

The days tumbled by. I tried to stop them, clenching my teeth and wishing as hard as I could. But I could not stop them.

Our happy life was about to fly apart. Wave after wave of sadness washed over me. Why did things have to change? It all made my head spin.

Some people say there is beauty in sadness. I think there is only sadness in sadness. Whenever I am sad, Mama says, "Yukiko, give me a smile, and don't act like such a poor thing."

I felt I surely was a poor thing.

Then, one afternoon, two big cars came to our house. Mr. Suzuki announced that one car would take Mama to a sanatorium in the Japanese Alps. The other would take me to the airport.

Mama left first. She put her soft hand on my face.

"Bye bye, my little Yukiko. We will be together again soon. Be brave." I saw her wave through the car window. Then she vanished.

I could not make my lip stiff; it trembled too much. The warmth of Mama's hand lingered on my cheek. I went one last time into the garden. A few wilted mums that had escaped my scissors hung their heads. They looked forlorn.

I sobbed all the way to Narita Airport. What had happened? Had I done something wrong? Riding in the back seat, my Boston bag teetering on my knees, I felt as if I were trapped inside a tortoise shell.

Mr. Suzuki, in front with the driver, watched me in the mirror. In that mirror I saw the face of a devil.

"Well, well. So the number-two wife and the daughter are finally on their own," he said. "No more envelopes for you."

"I do not understand."

"Your mother. You. No more money. Don't you know you're being shipped off to America?"

"I'm visiting my auntie."

I tried very hard to understand his words. What did he mean, a 'number-two wife?'

How could we live without money?

Narita Airport frightened me. The ceiling seemed so high. People carrying bags rushed about in all directions; tour groups, stretching in lines behind guides, crept about like giant caterpillars; hard-to-hear announcements about Jakarta, Säo Paulo, Cape Town, and other strange places filled the air, like static on our old radio. I covered my ears. I wanted so much to be back in our house in Aoyama-dori.

Mr. Suzuki spoke to a man at the counter and then came back to where he'd left me standing.

"Here's your passport and boarding pass. Don't lose them! Here's a paper with your aunt's name and phone number. She will meet you in Minnesota. And here is a thousand dollars and some travel money. The last you'll see from Mr. Yamada."

It was all so much to remember. The foreign money felt soft and small. I wondered if it was clean. I showed Mr. Suzuki cold indifference.

He led me to a gate and said to a young woman in a dark blue uniform, "Here she is."

The woman turned her head and spoke in a low voice. "Are you certain she is competent to travel alone?"

What a strange question. I am thirty-one years old. Did she think I was a child?

Without a word of goodbye, Mr. Suzuki spun about and quickly disappeared. I wondered if he really was a fox.

The young woman guided me through a passageway toward the airplane. She was like an usherette in a theater, although she had no flashlight.

In the airplane, she walked with me all the way to my seat. A flight attendant gave me a blanket and helped me with the seatbelt, trying not to wrinkle my two-piece suit. She was very pleasant. I was a flight attendant once in a television movie. It is quite a demanding job.

Across the aisle, a foreign man looked up from his newspaper and smiled. Whatever would I do if he spoke to me? I turned away, as if trying to see out the window.

When I did, I found I was sitting next to a dowdy, old woman with a face like a piece of dried persimmon. Her faded brown dress hung on her like a rice sack. And the padded shoulders and wide lapels of her gray

jacket struck me as being quite out of style. I could tell she did not read fashion magazines.

"Are you going to the Mall of America?" she asked. I had trouble deciphering her thick, North Japanese accent.

I did not know what she meant.

"You know. The big shopping center—in Minnesota."

She waved her hand happily toward some other women.

"We're all from the same agricultural co-op. In Aomori Prefecture. This is my third time to Minnesota."

I wondered if this country woman might smell of farm animals, but I detected nothing. *Mama, your lavender is my favorite fragrance.*

"It's so hard knowing which souvenirs to bring back," she said. "Everyone in the village expects something."

I closed my eyes, pretending to sleep. Souvenirs. What nice gift could I bring back to Mama? Soon I really fell asleep. I often drift off like that when Mama massages my neck.

After some time, the country lady tapped my hand.

"You'd better wake up, young miss. They are about to feed us."

I pulled away. I did not intend to be unkind. But, the touch of her calloused hand—so unlike Mama's—sent a chill running across my shoulders.

"Sorry to have startled you when you were asleep," she said.

While we were eating from little trays, the woman spoke to me again.

"Do you know a song called 'The Minnesota Egg Girl?'"

I shook my head. Whatever was she talking about?

"This trip always makes me think of it. It's a silly song. Teruko Akatsuki made it popular right after the war. We used to sing it all the time."

I wondered if Mama knew that song. Minnesota is where my auntie went with the American soldier. I could not remember my auntie's face.

KoKoKoKo, Kokkeko. The old woman sang to herself.

The old woman treated me kindly. She told me when the meals came, and she showed me where the bathroom was. I was afraid to flush the toilet. I suppose that was silly of me. I had been napping when she woke me again.

"We are in America. In Minnesota."

I trailed behind the Japanese ladies into the terminal. Once there, I searched for a face that might be my auntie's. But I saw no Japanese faces.

I saw only tall, white people. Everyone seemed so stout. And their bulky, plaid clothing was not at all chic.

My heart thumped in my empty chest. Where could my auntie be? I did not know what to do.

I tried to show a man my auntie's name on the piece of paper. He shrugged. When I tried to show it to a woman, who I think was Grace Kelly, she turned away. I just wanted to be home in our garden where butterflies land on my shoulder.

Then I saw the Aomori farm ladies marching off behind a guide with a small flag—just like in Japan. So I followed along. I felt happy being with these Japanese people, even if they were only country women. Out we went. *Brrr.* I had forgotten it was winter in America.

Before I knew it, we climbed onto a bus. We stopped very soon. The guide—not nearly as adorable as the flight attendant—spoke in broken Japanese. It made my ears itch.

"We are now at the Mall of America, for those who want to pick up orders or start shopping right away. The rest of you can stay on the bus until the hotel. The bus will be back here in three hours."

I did not know what to do. Then I saw the old lady from the airplane rush out the door with some others. Clutching my Boston bag, I chased after her. When I entered the huge building, she and her friends had vanished.

I sat in a stall in the ladies' room and wept large tears. When I could not find the paper with my auntie's name and phone number, everything became more confused. I wept again. Mama, you would have been quite unhappy with my lack of dignity.

I wandered about in the mall. Shop windows shone brightly on all sides. Far above my head, glistening beams and glass, going every which way, shut out the gray sky.

In the center of it all, there was an amusement park. It made me think of the time Mama and I went to Yomiuri Playland. Children in little cars spun about, a roller coaster rushed past, and a Ferris wheel went round and round. I watched for a long time. It was pleasant to see, but in time I became dizzy. I am, after all, a delicate person.

I searched for a noodle shop, but found none. Then I spied some golden arches, just like the ones in Japan. I gulped down two hamburgers and drank a Coca-Cola. *I'm sorry, Mama.*

You've told me such places are unhealthy. But I was hungry, and it all tasted rather delicious.

While I ate my food, I worried. Why had Mr. Yamada stopped bringing the envelopes? Were we poor? How could we live without money? I just got so mixed up. Mama says we all get mixed up at times and tells me not to worry. What is important, Mama says, is to have a good heart.

I was certain people in the restaurant must be staring at me. They likely did not know I was a good-hearted person. So I sat up quite straight and looked about good-naturedly.

Sometimes I forget what I am thinking. So I think about something else. Now I had a wonderful inspiration. It would be the best souvenir ever. I would find a way to fetch Mama home from the hospital. I could eat sweets and have her comb my hair. And we could go to movies again, when the one I am in now ends.

I was in the place called Minnesota. Fargo must be close by.

I went outside the mall and stood by a sign with a little picture of a taxi. The wind blew fiercely in Minnesota. In our garden in Tokyo there are only gentle breezes. Mama calls them zephyrs, and in summer they make the flowers nod ever so slightly. Here everything was whiteness. I did not know cold could burn.

My limbs shook in the frigid air, but at long last a taxi stopped. Without waiting for the door to swing out, as it would in Japan, I opened it myself and slid into the back seat. The emperor surely would chide me for being so unladylike.

When the driver laid his arm across the top of the seat and turned toward me, a most disagreeable odor assaulted my nostrils. Was this what people meant when they said foreigners smell of butter? It was a sour, salty smell. Not at all buttery.

The driver spoke to me in English. I knew he desired to learn my destination.

"Fahgo," I said.

"Huh?"

"Fahgo," I said more loudly.

"Fargo?" He shook his head.

Then I showed him the money Mr. Suzuki had given me at Narita Airport.

He grinned. "Okay. Fargo."

The driver had not cleaned the smeared windows of his taxi. In Japan, the drivers take pride in making their cabs shine.

The countryside rolled by; flat, cheerless, and dirty white. It seemed such a lonely place. At times, the cab chattered over icy places in the road. Yet, this all seemed quite natural. I remembered these scenes vividly from the film.

The driver listened to the radio. He whistled. He smoked cigarettes. When I coughed, he put the cigarettes away. As Mama always says, smoking is a vile habit.

But I know she savored the aroma of Mr. Yamada's pipe tobacco. Once I saw her holding a packet he'd forgotten at our house to her nose. Her eyes closed, her face showed a kind of happy contentment. I suppose that was because of the sweet, woody smell. It was called "Old Hickory." I can remember things.

I faded into sleep. But I kept waking up because I was shivering. The sun lingered low over the ground. The dark blue and orange sky shone so brilliantly, I had to clamp my eyes shut. Snow-covered barns and cottages had icicles hanging from them. I wondered who could live in such desolate places.

We finally halted before a motor hotel on the outskirts of a town.

"Fargo," the driver said. I gave him six of the one hundred dollar bills. He seemed quite pleased and drove off, waving to me as he went.

I entered the hotel and approached the clerk. He had a coarse face and a large nose, like those of foreign barbarians one sees in screen paintings. He peered down at me through eyeglasses taped together in the middle.

"I would like a room," I said in English. I had rehearsed this over and over in the cab. He looked at me suspiciously. Probably his hotel had not catered to many foreign guests like myself.

It did not seem like a high-class establishment; tattered magazines I would not want to touch on a little stand, a stained and worn carpet, a sand-filled container littered with cigarette butts, and a smell; like that of disinfectant in a public restroom.

When I placed a one hundred dollar bill on the counter, the clerk smiled, snatched it up, and stuffed it in his pocket. He handed me a key fastened to a piece of wood and gestured toward the stairs. Room 203. I wanted so much to take a bath. But, first I needed some food. I felt ravenous.

Again I dined on hamburgers, this time at a restaurant across the street.

The hamburgers seemed rather oily. Not only that. The cook handled both food and money without washing his hands, and his grease-stained apron cried out for laundering. It was all quite unattractive. Afterward, my stomach complained.

Later, I sat on the bed in my room and wondered if anyone suspected why I had come to this hotel. I had to be very cautious, so as not to attract attention. I made certain the drapes were tightly drawn on the room's windows. *Mama, you always say one can never be too careful.*

The tub turned out to be very shallow. And I could not make the water really hot. I like the water all the way to my neck and hot enough to make my skin turn red. Mama and I can chat endlessly in the bath.

Very early in the morning, I unpacked my things and laid them out on the bed. In the bathroom, I found a little bucket and placed it in my empty Boston bag. I donned my sweater, coat, and boots, then wrapped my muffler around my neck. It was the muffler Mama helped me knit.

I stole across the lobby. A television set flickered behind the reception desk. But no one was about. As I went into the street, snowflakes, big as blossoms, settled on my eyelids and melted on my cheeks. Boston bag in hand, I walked away from the town.

The snow was quite deep, but I marched forward with determination—like an Imperial soldier on maneuvers. The road stretched forever and ever into nothingness. The land seemed so wide, and I felt so tiny. *I missed you, Mama, and I became frightened.* I sensed the fox and the badger lurked somewhere in the neighborhood. I did not remember this part of the film.

The crusted snow pulled at my ankles. My Italian boots are quite stylish, but they failed to keep my feet warm. My breath made little clouds that chilled my face. *I tried to think of you, Mama.* I walked a very long time. I do not know how long. At moments the world seemed topsy-turvy, all white and gray. The wind blew so fiercely I could feel the sound of it as it wailed and screamed at me. *You know I am a good counter, Mama.* But I could not count the ice-glazed fence posts. Perhaps they were too slippery. I kept having to start over. Then I saw a tired-looking barn and a clump of bare-limbed trees. This had to be the place. I slogged through the snow to the fence.

Ever since, I have been kneeling here in the snow and digging with my bucket. It must have been for a long time. There are holes all about me.

I have set the Boston bag aside. I will need it to carry the money back to Tokyo.

Before, an intolerable coldness squatted over me like some malignant goblin. Now the blustering wind has stopped, the flakes no longer swirl 'round me, and a great stillness has sunk into the snow. Before, vaporous white birds—maybe cranes or egrets—appeared and disappeared above the fence. I think they wanted me to follow them. Now I cannot see them, try as I might.

I am resting, and the cold seems less cruel. It has softened and covers me like the folds of a robe. I should stand up and start digging again. But my movements are ungainly. And I am so tired. I think I will kneel here a few moments longer.

Mama, I'm sure you are nearby. Are you hiding in the whiteness? Stop teasing and come out. Are you the post? Or the tree? Mama, please call me when the bath is ready.

The Queer

Michael Evans

I don't remember signing any sort of social contract that required me to take part in elementary school. It must have been slipped in on the first day of class, during handwriting practice. They gave us a series of documents so complex that they may as well been Latin to our toddler minds. I imagine it must have begun as all legally-binding documents would:

Article I

01. Structure.

From September 14, 1990 to June 6, 1997, one (1) child (hereafter referred to as "Michael") enters into a social contract to be deprived from all (∞) possibilities of friendship (hereafter referred to as "enrollment at Chestnut Hill Elementary School"). During Michael's tenure at Chestnut Hill Elementary school, Michael accepts the responsibility for:

(a) Behaving like a loud-mouthed brat who thought he (Michael) owned the world. To these ends, Michael will:
   1) Never shut his mouth.
   2) Blindly dismiss his peers with or without provocation.
   3) Have a mean, hypocritical attitude towards those on his rung of the social ladder (hereafter referred to as "the bottom").

(b) Allowing himself to be treated as a running joke in all social relationships he (Michael) fostered with those under the age of twelve (12). To these ends, Michael will:
   1) Constantly be ambivalent about whether he is being ridiculed.
   2) Be unable to come up with an equally snappy reply, even by grade school standards.
   3) Cry either way.

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(c) Refusing to participate in all non-required (see Article III.02.) physical activities including but not limited to: baseball, soccer, football, basketball, hockey, skating, tennis, badminton, squash, horse polo, water polo, swimming, diving, cricket, tag, freeze tag, four square, and "heads up, 7-up" (see fig 1.1).
(d) Receiving merely "Satisfactory" or "Not Satisfactory" in his (Michael's) citizenship grade (hereafter referred to as "worthless bullshit").

There I sat in my ridiculously tiny chair, a kindergartener, my childhood signed away (and I hope I didn't waste my black crayon on something like that). Of all the bad luck, I got to play pariah for almost seven years.

Because of "problems" (I never quite figured out what was wrong with me, or what my teachers and peers thought was wrong with me, but everyone assured me it was something), I was sent to the school counselor during the lunch and recess hour every Friday. The counselor was an incredibly patient and smiley woman named Mrs. Boyse. Her name was either pronounced like the capital of Idaho or wasn't. I really should know considering how many recesses I would while away in her office, captivated by her poster of squiggly, peanut-shaped faces paired with various emotions. I was also in love with having a real grown up to listen to me and give me fun activities to do that all related to my favorite subject: me. She would ask how I was feeling that day, and I would point to the chart cheerfully and say, "Oh, today I suppose I'm a little 'smug.' And yourself?" This may have lead to talking about *why* I felt that way, but my mind was on the huge stock of Legos she had in her office. God, she even had green ones! I didn't even know they made green ones! While I tried to find a way to use those creepy yellow blocks with the eyes painted on them, I would spout whatever sounded think-y enough to satiate her, often entirely removed from the questions she would ask. Her forehead would crease as she would ask, "What do you think the other kids feel that would make them be mean to you, Michael?" She tried desperately to put things into perspective for me.

"I suppose people really, uh, ought to be nicer to each other and stuff. They can be mean. So do you, uh, have any other posters?" I credit her with my later interest in public speaking; this is where I first learned to bullshit.

After a few months of hemming and hawing, Mrs. Boyse released me back into the wild, harsh playground, a hopeless case. It was a transition I was not ready for; fall had yielded in the meantime to a Michigan winter, which never really has an identifiable pattern from year to year, but always means misery. My visits to Mrs. Boyse had saved me from the elements and the tedium of playground law.

Somehow, I survived the daily, half-hour of recess. There were all these metal contraptions with bars and tires welded on them that confused and horrified me. All the equipment was useless to me: the jungle gym, the other jungle gym, the balance beams, the broken tetherball pole, the iron maiden. There were even parallel bars on the playground like we were supposed to spontaneously arrange a gymnastics competition.

I usually vied against the girls for the swings. The swings let me imagine that I could fly away from recess, maybe to home, sometimes further. I imagined that wherever I went, there'd be beautiful rolling hills and giant trees, which I would dart in and around. When I finally got to my destination, I would lie down on the couch and take a long rest, proud of my ability to fly away when common grade-schoolers had failed.

Smear the Queer is essentially tag, only more ruthless. The goal is to hold onto one of those generic red playground balls for as long as possible until you're tackled or you've thrown the ball up into the air. Then someone else becomes the new queer. There is no score; there are no losers and no winners. Just a lot of running and tackling.

Now, I don't like running, and I've never been a fan of tackling either, so what drew me into that game? It was a catchy little name to a fourth grader, a Nipsy-Russell-esque rhyming couplet. The name, as I saw it, was also delightfully self-explanatory. Here's the queer. Smear him. I only knew of 'queer' in the Victorian sense: strange, weird, the odd one out. My classmates knew more than I did.

"Hey, Michael, are you gay?" asked Kyle back in second grade. He was with Dane, so I knew there could only be trouble in answering this question. I didn't know how, but I knew it was a trap.

"Um, you mean happy?" Good, question the terms first. I was naïve, but I wasn't dumb.

Already frustrated, Kyle lobbed the question "Are you gay?" at me again.

It never occurred to me not to answer directly. What was to be gained by ignoring someone? Only wrath, I thought. "Uh, if you're using gay to mean happy, then I guess I am."

Kyle and Dane smiled, but managed to keep themselves from laughing. I was still confused. Dane went on: "So you're a fag?"

A cigarette? (Yes, I actually knew the other definition of that first, too). Call it an anomaly). What were they talking about? "What?"

"Fag," he spat out, and then they moved on, giggling. My first concern was finding a dictionary. All I knew was that I was insulted, and that alone was enough to make a crybaby like me upset. Dane and Kyle sure were acting awfully queer.

The first day of the game was wonderful. I never realized that physical activity could be so invigorating during recess. For once, I wasn't cold, rocking back and forth on a ridiculous swing, the wind sapping me lifeless. Instead, I was living a Pinocchio dream; all this time I had wished I could be a real boy, and now I was finally being treated that way. When someone else had the ball, the rest of us moved as a whole to stop them. And when I happened to have the ball, I got to be the center of attention for the few seconds I got to hold it. There was no losing!

I didn't even mind the undesirable elements. The running, the tackling, or the people. Though apparently every boy was there, it didn't seem right to me that even Tommy got to play. Tommy was like me, though you'd never have caught me saying that aloud in fourth grade. Tommy liked computers, and if TV had taught us anything, it was that computer nerds were the real social outcasts, and we treated him as such. I was one of the worst to him. We had fought once on the big snow piles down by the parking lot when only the other boys were watching, placing bets on who would be the victor. Gaining the upper hand, I would push his face into the snow. This gave me the time to mark the looks on everyone's faces. They never rooted for either of us; either of us being humiliated would have been perfectly fine. It was a cock fight. I was a fucking cock.

Oops, am I judging myself too harshly? I'm getting ahead of myself, I apologize.

I told Mom all about the first day of Smear the Queer, how I finally felt recognized. I told her all of the details about the game—the name of it made her do a double take for some reason—how we played it and where. She seemed worried about the game, that we were playing over such icy ground. I said, "Mom, don't worry about it, okay? I think I'm finally a normal kid now."

She replied, in a tone more serious than I had expected, "Michael. You need to be careful out there, okay? I don't trust those kids, and neither should you."

There Mom goes, foreshadowing my life again. She should really become a fortuneteller, that one. She got all the foresight in the family, and I got the hindsight.

The second day was just as the first had been, I'd thought. The only thing different was that no one could hold onto the ball for very long at all. There were no grand dodges and no excitement. It was hostile. I managed my first tackle on D. J. Wilson, one of the Kings of Grade School. He was indignant, of course. The look on his face said it was unimaginable that someone like me would dare to touch him. It was a game, though, wasn't it? It was still fun. I got the ball again.

I was running. The ball was in my hands. Suddenly, like a candle, I was put out. Arms grabbed me around my sides, then I was down. There was no transition between that moment of contact and my head landing on the ice.

My ear began to bleed into the snow, and the pain was immediate, and indescribable. It was my first real hurt, my most vulnerable time. When you're hurt, you become a blank slate, your thoughts and emotions are replaced with pain.

They asked some of the other kids later if I had lost consciousness when my head hit the ground. I told them that I knew I hadn't lost consciousness. They insisted I couldn't be certain of that, but I was. I remember the hot tears that came to my face, I remember the weight that had pinned me down come off of me, and I remember Dane saying, "You should have given up the ball."

The irony was not lost on me, even in fourth grade, that I was the queer and that I had been smeared. Through the pain, which I was certain I was going to die from, I had reached a kind of lucidity that was completely unlike me.

"He said, 'you should have given up the ball.'" I explained to Mr. Spencer, the teacher who had practically dragged me in, refusing to carry me even though all I wanted to do was lie down and die. "That's not right. Do something about it, please. It's wrong . . ."

I felt the self-pity tears coming again, the start of the throes of self-pity that would last for two feverish days. I lay in my bed, Mom or Dad occasionally by my side. "I'm sorry, Michael," my mom would say. "I wish you never had to go back to that school again." When I wasn't sad, I was angry. For the first time, I plotted revenge. It was a silly, nebulous revenge, physical torture rather than mental. I wanted to see Dane hurt, to understand what his words meant and to have them burnt onto his forehead. I couldn't give up the ball. It was the nature of the game, as I saw it, to hold onto the ball as long as possible. Fooled again.

Up until fourth grade, I never really understood that my place in life was solidified. I was the victim, damn it. And as soon as everyone realized what a wonderful person I was, when they reached that after-school special epiphany, I'd be appreciated. The incident changed my perspective in two ways. The first: I was imbued with a sense of self-consciousness, class-consciousness. I understood my role for the first time as the spaz, the femme, the prick, the conniver, the witch, the Pollyanna, and now the broken mirror, all my many sides. The social contract was revealed to me, and it was binding.

The second: suddenly, I could not forgive the little boy looking up 'fag' in the dictionary. After failing to find any entry for it, he looks up 'gay.' He finds the word. Definition one: happy, to wit. Definition two. I can't see exactly what it is, but the boy seems befuddled. I remember the train of thought he had, though; I haven't separated myself that much yet. He thinks, well, I *do* love all my male friends, as few of them as there are. Doesn't he understand anything?

That boy will keep doing the same thing again and again, trying to prove he's right, because otherwise he's wrong. He'll keep fighting every battle whether or not it's worth fighting. He'll get hurt and fight more, and he'll become stranger and his features will become even more twisted and gnarled, and he'll fight more, and he'll keep losing, and when he sees the mistakes he's always made, he'll be a bundle of extremes too queer even for the queers. When they stop paying attention or when they stop trying to fix him, he'll be alone.

My return to school was marked by no one, as I expected. Dane was forced to apologize to me, and I was forced to forgive him. My teacher, Mrs. Glawe thought she gave us resolution.

"Dane has been in counseling with Mrs. Boyse for the last few days," I was told. Oh, I'm sure he's a changed person, I thought. She and her magical Legos will make him understand sympathy. *"You should have given up the ball."*

Where do you go from there?

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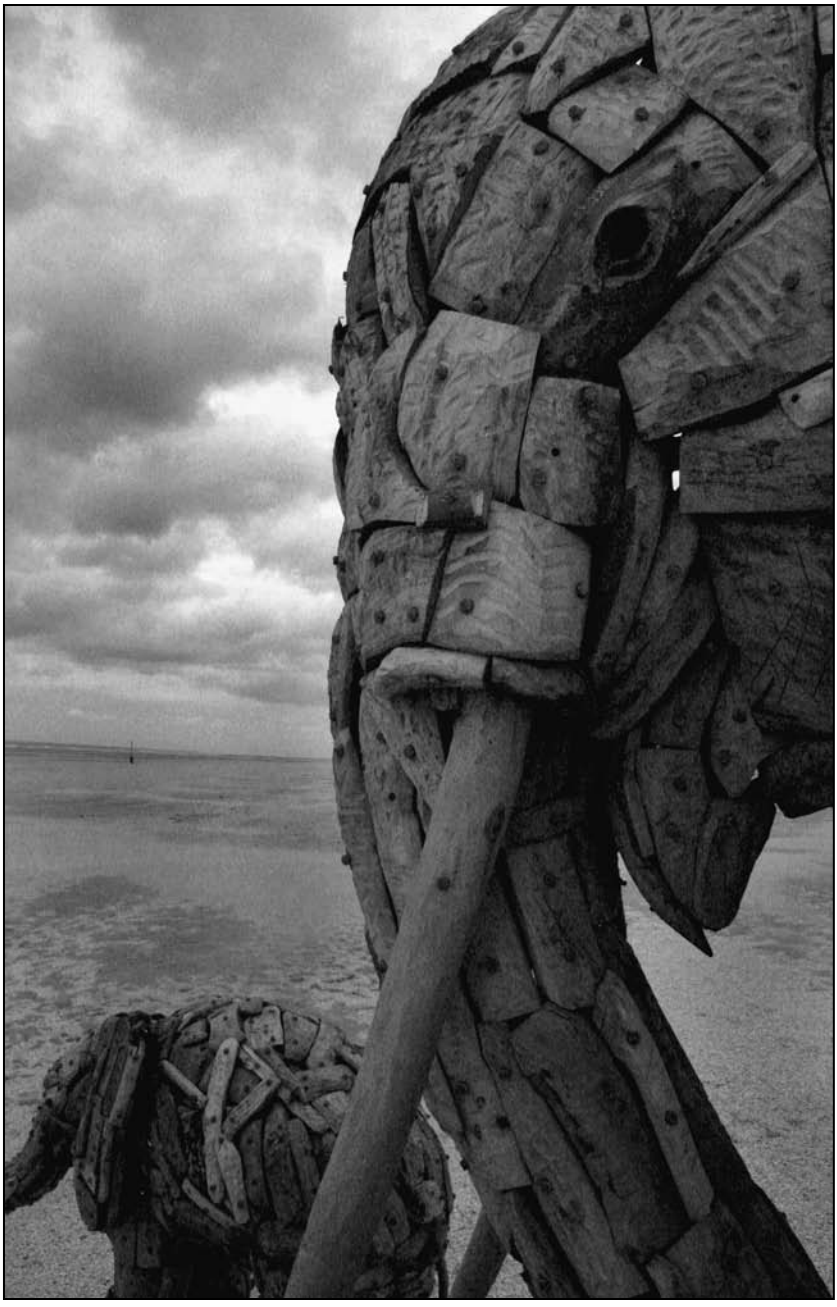

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Counterpoint

Caroline Du Pree Le Guin

If not you, who then? Who
would I have groped my way towards,
stumbled into, dumb and blind, who
would I have played my clumsy counterpoint against?

A musician, maybe, an Englishman with
fine-boned hands and straight
dark brows who
would always avoid eye-contact but
whose touch would hum
like vibrato in my belly. I would
worship him and on a concert tour of France he
would leave me
for a younger blond oboist, a severe
Scandinavian beauty who could cook
pork roast like his mother. I would
fall into black despair, rage,
nurse treacly hatred for years.

Or perhaps a bushy-haired
activist in faded corduroy, fearless
in bright conviction. I would
march with him to the world's capitals, chanting
justice. I would become
angrier on the outside, visualize peace within, give up
my car, eat organic vegetables. I would
take in foster children and be nurturing
between protests. And he would be
accidentally shot
in Pakistan, building a school for
refugees, and I would

never forgive myself
for not being good enough, for not
forgiving him for being
too good.

Or it might have been a college professor,
ten years my senior—a Romanticist who could
deconstruct Keats and bake rye bread
in a large house with heavy wood trim.
He would be proud of his dahlias,
possessive of me, understand me
too well.
Eventually, worn down
by an ego that kept me
perpetually tethered, an orbiting satellite,
my light a reflection of his
bright mind, I would
cut myself loose, drift off
into dark space.

But I found you.
And busily, each day, we compose
this imperfect union.
You do not read me poetry or
cook me cassoulet; my mind
goes blank when you explain
steering dampeners.
Your heart is often heavy, my patience thin.
Against your ragged, stumbling bass
I carve a shrill and querulous melody.
The left hand ignores
what the right hand plays until
suddenly fearful we rush together
and sing in this fierce unison.

Rats with Wings

Jason Kaleko

We went to England on a vestigial family vacation, a trip
that might have been a good idea once, now aged and tired,
slipped quietly into the luggage under my mother's eyes.

Outside Heathrow, my brother told me that pigeons can't
walk without bobbing their heads, that their every movement
is limited by a strict connection of leg to neck. I playfully
disagreed: "They bob by choice." He called me an idiot
and a cab pulled up.

On a grey bench in Trafalgar Square, we watched
pigeons and people move about in throngs, herding one
another with reproach. I strayed to climb the towering
statue of an imperial lion. Below, there were dozens,
all bobbing, circling, occasionally ducking down
to pick at worn concrete.

I left and returned with seed in hand, offered it eagerly
to one emaciated, fragile bird. It hobbled toward me,
and then, flapping its broken-umbrella wings crookedly,
its body rose with surreal elegance until bent claws
caught the edge of my thumb and it perched.
As it pecked furiously at ten pence worth
of surviving London, I spoke to it.

"You know why you're a pigeon?"
"'Cause you can't even walk
without bobbing your head."

It kept eating.
You know why you're a person?
'Cause you can't even fly.

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Possibly Somnambulists

Jason Kaleko

I have adventures in mind
'cause I'm playing the undercovers
agent tonight . . .

I'll stalk dark streets,
pocketing all the lamppost light,
keeping underfoot

all my feats
and stumbling softly, I'll put
danger in routine

and wear your worry
until it's worn and falls off me.
Sometimes our rhymes

don't match up perfectly.
In fact, when I bypass your window blinds
things might slant entirely:

We might be downshifting fast
off onramps, on offramps,
amping awfully our heart-
beat basslines and opening
eyes to blurred buildings
as we fling stolen moon-
light out the sunroof
and let the city
short-circuit
our dreams
alive.

Take a breath
from my airbag, stop worrying
about the rest

that you're not getting
sitting up in bed distressed.
You're the coolest

upper this side of a down
pillow and I'll keep you pressed
underneath

with my other donations
to maturity like lost hair and teeth.
We may be conversely tied

but if we play on words
enough, we can turn any downside
up and in slumberous strides
make it through
our dreams
alive.

The Path

Sam Wilson

A flashlight comes in through my window, pauses on my dresser, then crawls up the bedspread to my face. Even though my eyes are closed, I know it is on my face. I can feel it. I am doing my best to appear asleep, but I think the person with the flashlight knows I am awake, because he leaves the light on my face for so long. My nose itches. I concentrate on not twitching.

After a while, the light leaves my room. I listen for the sound of crunching gravel on the path outside. I look for a breath mark on my window. There is nothing, but I know I am not dreaming. I get out of bed and go to the window. Outside, nothing is unusual. I try to relax.

I am back in bed, watching the window, when I hear the floor outside my bedroom creak. Someone is in the hall. The floor creaks when you step on it, which has been invaluable in detecting parents.

The floor creaks again. My door starts to creep open, and the hand with the flashlight comes in. Another hand follows, a hand covered by a sock and holding a knife. I recognize the knife; it came from our kitchen. The man's face is uncovered. He has a thin greasy beard, dirty yellow hair, and sunken cheeks. He is looking at my dresser when I begin to scream.

"Shut up!" he hisses. "Shut up!"

He runs at me, crawls onto the bed, reaching. He looks scared, his eyelids peeled back. I think maybe he means to cover my mouth with his hand but when we struggle his knife cuts the top of my head. Suddenly, I can't see and the man is clamoring off of me. I scream and kick and everything becomes wet.

My parents rush in and turn on the lights, my mom goes into hysterics. There is blood on the sheets. My dad calls the paramedics who take me to the hospital to get sixteen stitches and give a police report. They send a bald policeman in a white jacket who draws a picture of the man based on my descriptions. At first all I can remember are the eyes, but gradually I remember the rest. The greasy beard, the sunken cheeks, the sock, the yellow hair that looked like it hadn't been washed in a week.

The bald man draws the picture which is put on file. The case is never solved. Six years later I am a legal adult. I get a photocopy of the drawing from the precinct where the unsolved records are stored. I move to college and pin the drawing to the corkboard above my desk.

When I should be studying, I study the picture. When I walk around my apartment, he studies me. We share a secret. People ask me who he is. A portrait of my brother, I say. My dad when he was a kid. A drawing I did in school. Nobody.

When I graduate four years later, the picture has moved with me three times. I have put him in a frame after he began showing fingerprints and wear. It felt weird to consider other people touching him. It felt weird that the man in the picture would have aged ten years.

I challenge friends who can draw to age the man on paper. Secretly, I keep all these drawings. I take them out when no one is looking and arrange them in rows in front of me, staring at all the possibilities. It is strangely comforting to see that this man could have turned out so many ways.

A decade later, I am married and pregnant. We are clearing out our junk room to make a bedroom for the unborn child we call Jack. I find the drawings in my old desk. I sit on the edge of my bed and study each page. I cry. I don't know why. I feel like I miss this man, or I miss myself as I was when he knew me, which was never.

At thirty-four I feel too old to have a child. I feel, at times, like a water balloon. Everybody knows something that I don't know. I get out of breath when I walk up hills. People tell me things—when you are pregnant the world wants to give you advice. I tell them my body is filled with syrup.

When my water breaks we are at home, watching TV. We are reasonably calm, a suitcase has been packed. Gary drives. Jack is born healthy and proves to be an independent child. He is precocious, if a bit disrespectful, and seems more socially adept than his parents. Gary and I discuss a second child for many years, but at some point the opportunity has been passed without us having to acknowledge it, and neither of us speak of it again.

Jack is accepted to a college in Chicago and leaves in the early summer to find a job. We help him, but for the most part he supports himself and we gradually lose touch. We call and talk from time to time, and see each other on holidays, but we are no longer a daily aspect in each others lives.

I am only fifty-seven years old when my hair begins to thin. It makes me more aware of the scar on my scalp, but I don't think other people notice. The scar is pale and thin like thread. I can't even see the stitch marks that tied one side of the wound to the other.

The man has assumed, in my mind, an ominous importance. There are things that happened, people I have known, lovers, jobs, homes that I cannot remember anymore. But the one man, one night, one minute in my room is burned into my brain. I feel unsafe.

Gary teases me about it; I let him. I realize the man should be less important to me and I do what I can to keep him away. I stay busy. I exercise. But after a while I believe he is appearing in my dreams.

When I wake up in the morning, I keep my eyes closed and try to make sense of each dream before it gets away from me. I can't remember these dreams, but I recognize the feelings they leave behind. There is anxiousness and possibility, and sometimes a thing that feels like freshness.

I begin to have problems falling asleep. The doctor gives me a muscle relaxant and sleeping pills that make me almost comatose. I put them in the medicine cabinet with the rest. On Jack's suggestion, I go to an acupuncturist who sticks needles near my kidneys and gives me a bag full of foul-smelling Chinese herbs to make tea. I drink the tea as recommended, twice daily, for three days. On the third night I have the dream.

The flashlight pokes through my bedroom door. My legs beneath the covers are thin and smooth. My chest is as flat as a young boy's. I pull the blankets toward my chin. The man enters and stares directly at me. He says my name and reaches towards me. His hand is covered in a sock and in the dream I know it is to keep his dirty nails from touching me. I am pristine, an ivory carving. He wants to touch me before I become tainted.

I wake and can't catch my breath. Gary is worried. I don't want to talk. I want to keep the feeling that the dream has left behind. There is a freshness. My skin, smooth.

The feeling fades quickly and only the memory of the dream remains. I need to shower. I wash every inch of my body with a rag. For many years I have avoided touching my toes. I don't know why. I wash them with the rag, but even in the shower I don't touch them with my fingers.

I let the water hit my face. I think of water as time washing over me. I resist it, I push my face closer to the faucet. The water chokes me. I do not dream again.

Gary and I retire soon after, when we are both sixty-five, and it takes the next few years to figure out how to fill the time. We begin taking trips. In each part of the world I am amazed how much people can look the same. I find people that look like other people in the least likely of places, but never people that look like the man in my room.

We get tired of being on the road. I always imagined gardening through my retirement, growing strawberries and irises in our backyard. But my knees and back can't take all the bending, and I begin spending more time inside.

I read magazines and start baking more. I've always enjoyed baking, but now there is only Gary and me, and it makes no sense to bake very much. I do it anyway, and think there is something poetic in spending so much time on something that will go to waste.

On Sundays, I bake desserts. They last through the week and on Sundays I bake again. Saturdays I bury the leftovers in the compost heap. Gary, meanwhile, watches TV. He stops reading, he follows sports. I have never known him to be a betting man, but now he tracks the statistics of every team, every player, every game. Sometimes he goes to games at the high school where Jack graduated twenty years earlier. The students call him Sir and walk quickly around him.

The value of our house has climbed steadily for almost forty years. We decide to sell and move into a smaller condo, living off of the equity. Who knows? we say. We might live another thirty years. We might need the money.

A year later, Gary passes from colon cancer. We know for three months what will happen before it happens. Shorter than many, perhaps longer than most. We spend the time remembering things we had done, people we had known, places we had been together. Later, the condo doesn't feel like my own.

I begin visiting the house we sold, at first just driving by, then sometimes stopping to eat lunch in the parked car or read a book across the street. I feel safe in the places I have been before.

The house where I grew up is still standing—it is less than an hour across town. I don't know why I begin going there. I have not been for many years. But one day at noon, I am standing in front of the house.

Many things have changed. Neighboring houses have been remodeled, razed, erected. Trees and shrubs have been replaced. The color of my

house has changed and the cracking wood of its eaves are filled with what looks like moss. But it feels good to be there. It feels like visiting a younger version of myself.

I am surprised to find that although I can't tell you what I ate for breakfast, I can remember clearly the things that happened in this house fifty and sixty years ago. It strikes me that the memories themselves, alive somehow inside of me, are fifty and sixty years old. I wonder how the memories have aged. I wonder if the memories have become part of me, like my blood, or are something passing through me.

I stay at the house for an hour, occasionally more, visiting the old memories, then go back to the new condo on the other side of town.

I am driven by patterns. Tuesdays I visit my old house. Tuesday afternoons at first, but the afternoons stretch longer and one day I see my house at dusk. The sun goes down, the shadows lengthen. In the dark, it is hard to see how weathered the house has become. It looks as though little time has passed at all.

I decide I would like to touch the house. I don't want to leave fingerprints, and it seems obvious, poetic even, that I should cover my hand with my sock before I touch the house. I take the sock off my left foot. My toes have been in it; it is not a place for my hand. It is with great will that I insert my hand into the place where my toes have been. There is a feeling of triumph. When I get out of the car my legs feel ten years younger. There is a flashlight in the trunk.

The window that I should touch is on the left side of the house. I remember this. I remember. I walk beside the house, along the corridor where my mother once grew peonies and irises. As I walk along the side of the house I imagine what's inside. I pass the part of the hallway in front of my old room, and in my mind I hear a creak I haven't heard in fifty years.

I reach my window. I do not remember it being so high, but I can still peek in. I shine the flashlight on the wall of my old room, across a new dresser in a new place, across new paintings, new fixtures. The bed is in a new place. I point the light and see a man's gnarled feet extending beyond the covers at the base of the bed. The toenails are filled with black soot.

I move the light over his bony knees, a small, rounded belly, the sharp bumps that must be his elbows, and before the light reaches his face my breath fogs the window. I wipe it with my sock and find a man staring at

me. It is the man from many years ago, the man with the knife. His skin hangs like old drapes and he is watching me. He has been waiting. He has never slept.

I wipe the window again as he climbs out of bed. There is a clutching at my chest and suddenly I have no strength. I have no strength to breathe. I can't expand my chest. The man walks toward the window as I fall to the gravel path and stare upward. There are stars next to my house. I hear my name.

He is there, in the window, where he has always been, watching. My bare hand is in my mother's gravel path. It is a Tuesday, I think, a cold Tuesday in November. I grab a fistful of pebbles and squeeze them as tight and as long as I am able, and as my hand relaxes, the pebbles stick, reluctant to leave the warmth of my skin.

Psych 101, Revisited

Curtis Smith

I didn't usually claim my three-year-old from his twice-weekly preschool sessions, but my wife had chipped a tooth, and both this week and next, I was to pick up our boy while she sat white-knuckled in the dentist's peculiarly angled chair. A warm spell, early March, and the first curious shoots of lilies and daffodils had poked their green nubs into winter-brown flower beds. I'd snuck in a short, up-tempo run after work, and when I spotted the children on the school's fenced-in playground, I was relieved I wouldn't have to wait in the narrow hallway outside his classroom and subject the other parents to my stink.

The play area sat atop a tiny hill. A number of parents had already arrived, and as was custom, one of the aides guarded the exit, calling for the children one at a time, the gate squeaking open and shut as she bid each child goodbye. Behind her, a boy emerged from a plastic-tube tunnel, his hair puffed in a staticy display. Two girls peeked out the windows of a princess's castle. And in the nearest corner, I spotted my son's yellow and blue coat. I smiled at the sight of him, the unruly mop of his fine blond hair, the jacket he insisted on unzipping the moment it was put on, but as I neared, an unwelcome scene came into focus—my boy roughly yanking a classmate from a little plastic car. The other boy cried, but his shrieks were muffled by the twisted coat my son had pulled over his head. With a final huff, my son extracted him, and the other boy's rear end landed with a soft thud on the playground's woodchip surface.

My first inclination was to reach over the fence and snag my own fistful of coat, but his teacher was standing nearby, gently addressing both boys, so I swallowed my mortification while trying to avoid the gazes of the other parents. Kneeling to his level, the teacher offered my son another car. She swung the door open, and my boy took the bait, pushing off and abandoning the scene of his transgression, his victim still sobbing, his coat and hair dotted with woodchips. I smiled apologetically as the aide handed him out to his mother.

Ever since being exposed to the nature versus nurture debate in freshman psych, I'd been a regular Henry Higgins, an ardent believer in the tabula rosa, that personality is merely human clay shaped by experiences and environment. Yet here was my child—a boy whose TV viewing had been carefully monitored, who'd fallen asleep to classical music every night since coming home from the hospital, who'd only heard my tweaked Goldilocks story, one that ended with the three bears exchanging hugs with the poor lost girl they'd helped out of the woods—assuming the role of playground bully.

Only two children remained in the fenced-in area when my turn came at the gate. I asked my boy's teacher about his day's behavior. *They've all been a bit rambunctious,* she said, offering an exhausted sigh. *It's probably the weather.* On the ride home, I twisted the rearview and delivered my familiar speech about pushing and grabbing and sharing, and in his most distant voice, my son echoed the answers we'd trained him to give—sharing is good, grabbing and pushing are bad. I offered a new twist, the trying to imagine what it would be like to be the boy pulled roughly out of a car, but my son just stared blankly out at the window's sun-flickering scene.

Before becoming a father, I'd envisioned a child's milestones differently. I thought of birthdays, heights notched on a kitchen doorway. I pictured first steps, first words . . . and true, such events are noteworthy, but they're also expected, and what's touched me most have been the surprises, the unexpected gems that have arisen organically from the chaos of his days.

The frustrated artist in me has striven to provide my son with an adequate supply of paper and writing implements. We've no doubt consumed a half dozen artist's pads, broken most of our first box of crayons, dried out a few sets of markers, their caps lost in the nooks of our house, buried beneath couch cushions or planted in the dirt of our houseplants. Our boy is the proud creator of finger-paintings mucked into gray tempests; other paintings brushed on so thick the pages have dried in rippled waves; crayon-scribbled masterpieces where his only objective seemed to be the elimination of every last patch of white.

Yet suddenly, our boy began drawing circles, and one evening not long afterward, he started filling them in, shaky eyes dotted more or less in the

center, oval mouths and triangular noses that resembled a jack-o-lantern's cutout features. *Hooray,* we said, encouraging each piece. We pointed to the faces, asked questions. Were his people happy? Sad? Our boy just smiled, and crayon in hand, assaulted his own creations, his frenetic scribbles submerging them beneath a colored sea.

Flashback again to freshman psych, and I now understand Freud may have been a crackpot with more issues than his patients, but I have no doubt he was right about one thing—the smooth functioning of civilization depends on suppressing our true expressions of anger and desire, despair and lust. Each day we don our stage smiles, chant our mantras, and embark on the display of decorum that is the modern suit of armor. This second skin is confining and clunky and awkward, but its outward engagement with our overly mannered society (do you *seriously* want to know how your coworkers are doing when you greet them each morning?) allows us to shelter our vulnerabilities and peculiarities and filthy little fantasies beneath a protective, light-eclipsing layer.

We understand our armor isn't stronger than the forces it guards against. There will always be the blows that send us reeling, the late night phone calls and the positive lab results, the tornados and floods and other acts of God, and while these traumas may take us off guard, we're still—at one level or another—braced for them. We know accidents will happen; we recognize the frail, frail nature of flesh; we've long since accepted that we are owed nothing by the world. We watch the nightly news, read the newspaper's horrific stories, and we've surrendered to the fact that someday, whether as a result of violent outside forces or a cellular mutiny within, the delicate neuron-fire encased in our skulls will short circuit and we will fall into the humbling darkness that awaits us all. Until that moment, we wait, braced and ready beneath our suits of armor.

Yet nothing can protect us from the upheavals that originate in the uncharted regions of our hearts, and it's here, in ambushed moments of clarity and honesty, my guard down and my armor rendered useless that I sometimes discover myself reduced to tears. I have grown misty gazing out the windows of a train while thinking of the thousands of anonymous lives throttling past. I became choked up at the Met standing before a vibrantly immense Rothko and another time while sitting alone in my living room

and listening to "Moonlight Sonata" on my headphones. How fragile I felt in those moments, and the fact that these emotions arose from within, rogue waves which I could no more explain than resist, made me feel absolutely brittle, as if I could have crumbled before my next breath.

These urgings and mystery tears, while no more frequent, have at least achieved a focus in the activities of my son, finding me in much the same way his unexpected milestones do. I feel it when he sits by my side, his fingers intently twining mine as we read a picture book we've read a hundred times before; feel it when I wake to discover him nestled between my wife and me, a night invasion I recall with the misty uncertainty of dreams. There is no single word, no daisy chain of descriptors to paint the colors in my soul at these moments, and I believe it is this stunted vocabulary, this inability to categorize and explain, that I find so overwhelming.

My wife and son and I stretched out across his bedroom floor and read our stack of the night's post-snack, wind-down books. He pointed to one of the pages. "There's the happy dog, and there's the sad dog."

Show us your happy face, we asked, and he broke into a toothy smile. *And now your sad face,* and after a bit of mental redirecting, he complied, complete with cartoonish whimpering and a rubbing of his squinted eyes. The three of us experimented with anger, thoughtfulness and surprise. Last was disappointment, and our son toiled over his frown, his pouting lower lip jutting in and out.

As we laughed at his face-contorting antics, I was struck by the notion that what he was really doing was trying on the many masks he would need in this life, attempting to understand the uniquely human gifts that so consumed Freud and Erikson and Piaget.

A fellow teacher poked her head in my door as I was starting class, and when I joined her outside, I heard the angry voices. We hurry-stepped down the nearly deserted hallway until we arrived at the spot where two teenage boys had squared off.

I pushed my way through the blood-lusting knot of onlookers, and drawing a high-diver's breath, I stepped between the two young men with

puffed chests and defiant, jutted chins. There was nothing heroic about my actions for I was little more than a barrier, a tie-wearing authority figure, a deliverer of even-toned appeals to cool heads, my words careful not to insult already ruffled egos. Two or three times a year, I find myself separating hallway brawlers; multiply that by twenty-three seasons in education and I've gathered enough first-hand experience to formulate my own stratagem—I speak softly yet forcefully, my gaze fixed on the chest's center of gravity, the telling pendulum-weight of balled fists. But at that tense moment, I couldn't divert my attention from the boys' faces—one hushed and scowling and simmering with a cool malevolence, the other feral-eyed and flushed pink. Here, I thought, were two more expressions waiting to be mastered by my son.

Later that day, I pulled into the preschool lot. The waiting parents made small talk in a hallway whose walls were divided into distinct eye-level layers—the children's world of bright colors and clumsy crafts below, and above, reminders to the adults, sign up sheets for classroom projects, requests for field trip chaperones, the bake sale, and silent auction fundraisers. I said hello to the mother of the boy my son had roughhoused the other day, and we chatted about the recent cold snap and the unpredictability of spring, laughed a bit at the door-window glimpses of our boys fumbling through the steps of their teacher's spunky hokey pokey.

The song ended, and then it was time for coats to be donned and backpacks zipped. Again, there was the one-at-a-time exiting production, and even a sarcastic pessimist like me couldn't resist the game's element of innocent anticipation. *Here comes Mattie . . . and Andrew . . . and Kate,* and then . . . my son, who barreled right past me, his arm already tugging its way out of his coat sleeve, his backpack dragging over the carpet. I scooped him up, and his teacher tussled his hair and offered a smile, and how wonderful, this wordless shorthand that let me know today was a better day.

In the parking lot, my boy slipped his hand into mine. On the ride home, I tried again to engage him, but he had settled into his post-frenzy lull, his eyes blank, his mouth slack. There were books and books filled with theories on how we become the people we are, and who knew what

forces and images and uniquely personal myths were taking form in my son's head at that very moment? Traffic snarled, and caught in the puttering stop-and-go, I reached back and squeezed my son's knee, doing my best to fill this shared, silent moment with something good.

In Apartments

Laura Madeline Wiseman

I'd listen to the awkward moments
the incidents never shared with strangers
but there I was strange, as a man

punished his wife by the metal box
of a phone, the coiling mouth piece skittering.
I never knew how many inches of

my ceiling/their floor there was
but I imagined it was no thicker than plastic wrap.
Her face pressing down into the floor

her mouth open endlessly, how each strike
shook her there on the ceiling.
You might think I never called the cops

or took the broom handle and jammed it up
where I knew she stood, knees wide
a sweat butterflying the folds of chest

or left hotline numbers in the laundry room.
But all that still didn't save me
I couldn't unhear, I couldn't unknow

how close I'd come to yanking her through
of my hands on her face
of seeing the mouth slacken and close.

© 2007 Brian Hildebrand, “Quad 3”

The Lake

Richard Mills

In the middle of the afternoon—no, it's toward the end, just at the point where you should begin saying 'evening' but it's still warm and it's still light—my uncle very nearly kills them.

He's drunk and unsteady, pouring more wine for the doctor and his wife. The two of them have been sitting on lawn chairs for two hours waiting for food, looking around to see if anything is going to be done, if there's a possibility of it happening. But there's no sign that dinner will be coming any time soon.

In any case, as my uncle tries to walk into the cabin to fill up their glasses again, he hits his shoulder hard on the doorway, giving lie to my aunt's claim that yes, yes, he can drink all day, alright, but he never shows it—he's been at it since first thing this morning and it's more than evident now—but she's in the kitchen as drunk as he is and she can no longer be quite sure of what's happening around her. Still, she surfaces for a bit and, as he's pouring the wine into the doctor's glass (one of the big tumblers that we use at the lake because expensive things are broken if they hit the floor, as they sometimes do), she suddenly reaches out and knocks it out of his hand, shouting my god, my god it's bleach that he's almost given the guests.

"Bleach! God almighty, Sam," she says, laughing and watching it running down his arm and onto his shirt. "My god! Not this one," she says, both of her hands up covering her mouth—pressing them against her red cheeks. "Not this one," she says, holding up the bottle that's been left on the counter and shaking it at him. "Not this!" she says.

She keeps an old wine bottle on one of the shelves for those occasions that she gets around to doing washing in the little tub of a machine that's outside the back door. It's this that my uncle has taken hold of, using it to fill the glasses to the brim. Convulsing with laughter, the two of them have to hold each other up, absolutely paralysed by it—and then the doctor and his wife outside join in a bit awkwardly when they hear the story, when they finally make out what my aunt is saying.

"We're trying to do you in," my uncle shouts through the open screen door to the wooden deck outside. "Trying to do in the doctor! Do in the doctor!" The doctor is from Edinburgh (which is close enough to Irish for him to be invited out here to the lake for dinner with us) and he says that it's not like him to drink, and not this early, and he says now now he wouldn't know the difference if he *did* have the Clorox.

His wife is beside him. They met in Edmonton when she arrived to work in the cancer ward that he used to run. (The dust of Manila hardly off her skirt and feet, she says to my aunt, and there she was a married woman!) There's some story about him having had to leave the city and move his practice out here, some irregularities or indiscretions that my mother whispered about but I can't remember. All I know is that we're not to mention his arriving in so small a place as this—nor are we to ask questions.

Hearing them laughing behind me, I run to the top of the flight of stairs that leads down to the lake and stand looking out.

Later, I'm kneeling in the kitchen and, staring up, the only thing I can see is the vein in my uncle's forehead, large and purple along his temple. I've been seconded to help him fix the stove so my aunt can boil water for the corn that she's finally found in the bottom of the refrigerator.

He's pulled the oven away from the wall and the door is propped open and I'm to stick my head in. My hands are small enough, he says, fumbling behind it with the canister of gas and the matches. He has great trouble focusing on it, on me. The pilot light won't come on and I'm supposed to be holding down a button with the tip of a spoon, leaning inside the oven while he dials something or cleans something else or tries to get the cigarette lighter that he's using to stay lit. He burns his fingers and shouts at me because damn-me it's taking too long, and no son of his would be so useless—though all three of them have refused to answer when he shouted at them from the top of the steps, refused to come up to help.

The metal cuts into my fingers, and I drop the spoon when the gas finally, quietly explodes, and we leave the stove sitting in the middle of the linoleum floor.

But he's already away again. He's gone—and *well into it,* my mother would say if she were here. "Have another. Have another!" he says, dancing

out on the deck. The bottle of bleach is back in his hand, and he's ready to offer it round, pantomiming and laughing uproariously at what could've happened. Raucously. "They'd find us all in the morning."

"Murder suicide, Sam! These crazy Irish, eh Scotty!" my aunt laughs. "Eh?"

My cousins are down on the pier—there isn't a beach, you have to go to the boat launch on the far end of the lake for a proper shore. At the public site, there's a rocky, sandy stretch, and green-painted washrooms, and campsites put up by the Provincial Parks Board. Though I've never seen anyone use them, there are dirty barbecue grills standing upright or tilted sideways where teenagers from town have gotten drunk and fought each other and pushed them over. And on the rocky shore, you can always kick at the perch with bloated stomachs that have washed up on the pebbles, or see the rings of ash left behind by the bonfires. But all that is at the government campsite, three-quarters of a mile away, a long trek through the trees and the stubbly open field that runs along the road.

Here, at the cabin, there are steps that come down to the water and no soft shoreline. The bluff rises straight out of the lake, a hundred feet up, and we're at the top of it, looking all the way across to the far side—a quarter of a mile away.

When you sit halfway down the long flight of wooden stairs, you can see the roots of trees that are exposed, trailing down the cliff, and there's mossy bark and the tangle of weeds along the edge of the water. As you climb down the steps, the handrail comes away in your hands, at the points where the rusty nails have worked their way out through the rotting wood, and for one long, frightening moment sometimes there's nothing to hang on to.

My cousins are in the sun on the pier. Other than my brother Michael, they're the only family that I know. I go to school with people who have nephews and uncles and second-cousins and sometimes they don't know everyone in town they're related to, *he's someone, I don't know, he's someone from my mother's family. On my father's side.* But I have only these three, and it's a pity that we don't like each other more. It would stand us all in good stead, I think, and it would help us unite our front.

David and Stephen, who are younger than me, are lying on their stomachs and looking into the water. Joseph is fifteen, and he's getting into the rowboat now and heading toward the low patch of yellow water lilies that

lie at the very centre of the lake. He's still angry with me from this morning when I wanted to go fishing with him, so I sit on one of the rubber half tires that are tied along the side of the pier to cushion the boat as it docks. Joe pushes off with the oar, slapping it on the water. The wet smell of fish comes in on the wind from the lake. When you lie low, the wind doesn't rub at you and you can almost be warm.

Squirrels are running across the uneven flagstones in front of the cabin, making noise in the tree above the doctor and his wife. She wants to feed one, and she's holding out a handful of nuts that she's scooped out of the saucer beside her drink.

"You want to be careful of those," my aunt says, talking directly to the woman for the first time in the afternoon. "Don't you have those back home?" *Don't you know any better?* is what she means. And the woman shakes her head and quickly draws in her hand, startling the squirrels as they run along the roots that come above ground and rise like thick ropes across the path.

My aunt packs jigsaw puzzles and books into the back of the station wagon and comes out here on the Victoria Day long weekend every year. She stays the whole summer until Labour Day, only going into town to pick up the mail at the end of every week or to do more shopping and buy another bottle of whiskey or two. My uncle arrives on weekends, and every summer he picks some project to work at in fits and starts. Last year it was the rabbit hutch that sits swinging open and piled with empty beer bottles now, and this year it's repainting the second-hand rowboat that he bought from the people in the cabin next to us. (You can just see the peak of their roof through the trees.) There's silver and brown and gold paint on his hands and on the flat cap he wears. He's at it every weekend. All summer, he stumbles as he carries it down the stairs to the lake and puts it in the water, carrying it up again the next weekend and painting it over again. The wooden grill lies across the bottom, and under it there are gills and bits of guts and pieces of bacon that Joe used for bait this morning. It all smells like warm, fishy water.

I heard Joe get up at six when it was still cold, and I stood for a while at the outside screen door to see if he'd ask me to come with him. In a thermos, he had hot chocolate that my aunt made last night, and he was

back at the cabin by nine when the rest of them were still just thinking about getting up. He brought in a pike with a fishing line strung through its open mouth—a strong, bony lunch for anyone who wanted it, though it ends up being thrown out with the jackfish he caught last night. You can see the stinking pile of them on the compost heap that my aunt tried to start last summer.

The walls of the cabin are made from telephone poles that have been chopped into pieces and set unevenly into a clumsy mortar of grey cement. Each piece is six or seven inches long and quartered like kindling. There's dust in the cracks and, inside and outside, spiders run across the uneven ends of the wood that come out of the wall.

Through most of the long afternoon, bluebottle flies hit against the inside of the window glass without hurting themselves much, and then they circle around trying to find where the breeze is coming in from. On the coffee table Stephen and David have put the horsehair that they found in the lake yesterday. They carried it up to the cabin in a bottle and poured the water into one of the pans from the kitchen, reaching in and tying it into knots a dozen times and watching it untie itself. But it seems to have died overnight—I'm prodding it, but it won't move and now it looks like a *real* horse hair floating on the top. And the minnows that they caught with the fishing net are darting about in groups, hitting the side of the empty wine jug that David filled with lake water.

I'm here for the summer while my parents are away. I'm told not to answer the phone when it rings—even if it's for us (one long and one short on the party line.) But if I *do* pick it up—I am prepared for all eventualities—if I *do* pick it up and someone asks for my father, I'm not to tell where he is. Neither he nor my mother. I'm not supposed to let on. Do you understand? Not. A. Word. (I don't know, in any case.) Something with taxes, and my aunt says, "Until this blows over."

By seven in the evening, the sun has come through the trees and my cousins, who have climbed into the water for a swim (the water is warmer than it's been all day), are sitting back on the dock and huddling in the towels, their hair plastered to their scalps, their arms rickety and brown. Stephen has juvenile arthritis and a woman who does the books for my uncle's store says that it's from swimming in cold water, *that's* what's brought

it on, *that's* what's done it!, though my aunt tells me that's only the sort of thing that ignorant people say to hurt you. Still, she stands at the top of the bank now and then and shouts down fifty feet to us at the bottom, "Out of the water!" But Stephen has escaped, long gone, too far out, out past the loons' nest and the water grass in the shallow reaches of the lake.

We're still waiting for dinner. My aunt has finished all the beer that's been sitting in the tub of ice, and she laughs and says to the doctor's wife that she just doesn't have the energy to get the food. "Isn't it awful!" she says. "Isn't it god-awful! But you're not pushed, are you? You're not on any timetable?"

She doesn't say that for most of the morning she was with the Guildermans, who have the cabin beside us. I was floating next to the dock in inner tubes while Mrs. Guilderman and my aunt drank tumblers of rye and ginger ale and talked, sitting in deck chairs at the end of their pier, until she saw how late it was and said that, bloody hell, there isn't enough time to make anything now and the doctor and his wife will be on their way by now and they'll just have to take potluck. Running back home through the trees with her arms rigidly at her side, and I watched the back of her and I pushed off from the dock and floated across the water, listening to the fish as they come up to the surface around me to catch water spiders and flies that swam too close.

I'm eating potato chips that my uncle brought out from town in the cooler, packed with the steaks and the hamburger and the hot dogs and bottles of beer. Crushed to pieces—he's put them at the bottom—underneath the heavy icepack. I'm running to the field at the bottom of the road with a bag of cookies in my hands and a bottle of pop that was cold when I picked it up at the house, but that's warm and fizzy now.

Looking at the barbecue, my uncle says that it's going to be a long time before the coals are ready. He says, "Can I get you another drink, Scotty," and the doctor's wife hits her glass with her foot and the wine runs across the wooden platform and onto the dirt underneath. She laughs, pulling the side of her skirt down where it's ridden up her leg. David and Stephen are running through the stand of trees that separates the houses. (I'm afraid to go out there when it's dark, eleven-thirty or midnight.)

As the evening grows cooler, more insects fly up, leaving the grass in droves and clouds. There are always droning black flies that come out of the trees in the late afternoon and dragonflies that hover over the lake and

hide in patches of bush, but now the mosquitoes are starting, and David lights the coil that's going to smoulder all night, and he leaves it beside the front door of the cabin beside the doctor's wife. The smell of burning comes across to us. He lights another ring and puts it beside the tent in front of the picnic table where he and Stephen sleep sometimes, carrying out their air mattresses and sleeping bags.

The cabin is cool and damp, with dinner finally over and the dishes brought in and piled in a tub on the counter beside the water tank. They'll still be there in the morning, and tomorrow afternoon, greasy and cold, until someone runs a cloth over them and squeezes on dish soap and wipes them with a damp paper towel.

There's a huge fireplace in the center of the room and my aunt's standing staring at it, throwing in coffee bags because they blaze up and burn yellow and green and blue for a few minutes. Yesterday morning when I got up, she was already there ahead of me, raking out the ashes and drinking coffee and talking through the curtain to where my uncle was still in bed. She was wearing the same pink elastic hairband and summer dress that she's got on now. "Ellen Martin is coming next week," she told him. I know that Ellen Martin is a woman who was with her at university in Toronto.

More to herself than to him, my aunt added, "Too long ago."

I'm standing at the entrance to my bedroom—a corner of the cabin has been partitioned to make two rooms, my cousins' and the one I'm in, and a thin cotton sheet has been strung on a rope across the common doorway. The walls are made of plywood and chipboard, and the floors are always sandy and gritty. Pulling the drape closed, I sit on the bed to take off my shoes, because I'm afraid of getting slivers in my feet. I'm shivering. We're far enough north that the days are warm but never hot, and the sun comes up at four in the morning and lasts until nearly midnight—there are sheets of aluminium foil taped over the window so that it'll be dark enough for us to sleep, though part of it has been blown in by the wind that comes through the ridge of pines behind the cabin, and I hear the edge of it hitting against the frame all night long.

Outside there's a moth batting against the screen on the window, trying to get at the light bulb. I can hear the voices of my aunt and the doctor's wife as they pass by my window. *This country. So so much. Working.* Just the

briefest of words. *For all of.* My aunt is walking her to the toilet at the bottom of the hill, and then they're making their way down to where the doctor left the car on the grass under the trees, just at the end of the property. I can hear his voice calling good night and the door slamming, the engine turning over, and the noise of the tires on the gravel. The generator is still humming in the hut at the end of the path.

I'm lying in bed, on the bottom bunk. I'm the guest for the summer so I have a room of my own—I have the lower bunk, and I've inched the whole frame out into the center of the floor so that it won't touch the spidery wall. I'm afraid I'll brush against the webs in the middle of the night.

My sleeping bag is as damp as the curtains, and the heavy pillow that I'm using is full of feathers that work their way out through the pillowcase, the sharp curls of them scratch at me, and I come out of a deep sleep sometimes, thinking something is walking across my face. It could be the spiders or the little centipedes, and I madly try to brush it off. My cousins share the other room that's been made by roping off our corner of the cabin—and my aunt and uncle have the bedroom on the other side of the living room. Some mornings when I get up, though, they're still in the chairs where they fell asleep the night before, sitting in front of the cold fireplace. Their room is just large enough for a bureau and a mirror—the only one in the house—and a cardboard closet that used to be in my aunt's basement.

I can hear Stephen breathing asthmatically and laughing, falling asleep. I fall asleep, too, and when I wake up my aunt and uncle are drunkenly arguing, and I fall asleep again. When I wake up for a second time, I have to go to the bathroom, but I'm afraid to walk into the living room where they still might be—and, more, I'm afraid of having to take the flashlight down to the outhouse at the end of the driveway where there's a trail that the deer walk along. (I don't realize that I'm always going to remember the smell of the wood and the coolness there.) When I wake up for a third time, there's blackness outside the window and it's the lights of another car pulling in that have woken me. Unexpectedly, I hear my brother's voice calling out, "Auntie Anne?"

My brother Michael has been away in Edmonton for months—since Easter—but now here he is. He arrived back in town and there was no one at home so he drove out here, he says to my aunt. Finding the right

road in the dark was the hard part, three or four driveways coming off one trail. That was the trick, *eh?,* he says to her. Then he remembered to turn at the place where the gravel road divides, the little grassy patch where you can kneel and get down on your haunches to pull the tiny, wild strawberries off the plants and eat them. Tart and gritty. They're sandy and sour like the raspberries and the rhubarb at the bottom of my aunt's garden, behind the cabin. (It's beginning to grow over, except for the narrow lane by the half-finished rabbit hutch and the dog house.)

I can hear my brother and my aunt talking—my uncle is probably asleep in the chair and he misses it all. The doctor and his wife have gone hours ago, and I don't know how long I've been asleep, but I know it's my brother coming into the room now even if I can't see his face.

He undresses halfway and gives up. He just stands in the middle of the floor for a long time in his T-shirt and jeans. The room is so small that I can hear him breathing as he's there beside me—and he turns and, from the light that comes through the curtain from the living room now, he sees that I'm awake, but he doesn't say anything. He climbs up to the bed that's above me, the frame shaking and squeaking as he goes, and I can hear him kneeling on the bed to roll out the sleeping bag that my aunt has given him, his head just below the dusty rafters and beams."Are you awake?" he finally calls down to me, though he's seen that I am.

We talk about the day, and he tells me that he arrived home—and he waited and waited in town, sitting in the car in the driveway in front of the house—but no one was there, and no one came back and he didn't know what else to do. The grass needs cutting, he says. But where are Mom and Dad? *Where are they? Where have they gone?* he asks me. He was going to break in, crawl in through the window. "It was locked," he says.

"Don't you have keys?" I ask. I don't know if I'm supposed to tell him about the taxes.

He didn't know what to do and, finally, he thought about coming out here. Of course, that's where we must be. He hasn't been here for two or three years—at least three, he thinks, because the last time was when he was in high school. Or maybe he came out the summer that he began university—but not since then. Maybe four years. But the cabin's still the same. Alder and ash. I say, "At four o'clock, it rained so hard, you should have seen it. There was thunder for half an hour. Did you see it in town?"

He beats his hand on the bed, and I can feel the whole bunk shaking, and he tells me, "You don't see thunder."

I kick up at him from underneath, kicking up my leg and hitting at him. (My aunt made us macaroni and cheese, and she had a drink as we sat by the window and looked across the lake and watched the sheets of lightning lighting up the clouds. We could hear the wind in the top of the trees but, by five, it was clear again when the doctor and his wife arrived.)

My brother's quiet, and then he says that we'll go out places together now that he's home again. *We'll go for pizza and maybe to movies, how would that be?* he says. You see he's going to be at home from now on, he tells me, he's not going back to university. Never. Not now. No.

He wants to know how school was for me—it's been over for a month, this is July. And do they remember him? The teams he was on. The teachers he had. Do they know that I'm his brother. Do they? And he tells me about the time he went out with Donnie Perrino and Dwight Taylor after basketball practice and they pushed Dwight into a snow bank beside the bridge and he disappeared down into it, and all you could see were just his feet kicking up. Kicking up through the snow. *You should have seen it, you should have been there.* In a darkened room, each of us staring out and not able to see the other, this is the kind of conversation that we never have. *Are there many girls?* he wants to know.

But I'm eleven and afraid to go to the outhouse because there are moths at the door, and there are ants that come walking across the seat. He's left Edmonton behind—*in my dust*, he'll say. I don't know yet that he's been named as the correspondent in the divorce case that his therapist's husband has drawn up. We are safe and protected here, far away from the city where there are psychiatrists and high rises and transit buses and restaurants, and where he's been trying to go to university (though it never really works out.) And tomorrow morning or the next day—by the end of the week for sure—he's going to leave for Europe, to escape all this, I'll hear him tell my aunt in the morning as they stand at the stove and fix breakfast together. I'm sitting pushing at the burnt end of logs that have fallen into the corners of the fireplace. *That's the plan,* he says.

Pulling the bacon apart, they lay it in the frying pan and the whole cabin fills up with the smell of it. He's going to put everything behind him, he says, as quickly and as far as possible. And eventually, years from now and years after the fact, we'll shake hands when we meet in Paris for

a while—while he's waiting for the train to take him back to London—and we'll talk about my work and his and have a drink in a café near Trinité and talk about the lake and sitting on the pier and wrapping your arms around yourself to keep warm, and how the wind in the afternoon can make you feel so tired and lazy that there's nothing else in the world that you want to do at all except sit there and wait.

About the Contributors

Nick Dentamaro's two greatest passions in life are traveling and photography. He was introduced to 35mm photography at a young age, by a fellow photographer and friend of his father. Nick started traveling at an early age as well; trips and photography go hand in hand for him. A firm believer in classic black and white printing, Nick now mainly uses his Canon 30D and Rebel XT for personal and freelance work. He is currently working with MSU's yearbook, the *Red Cedar Log*, as Photography Managing Editor.

Corrine De Winter has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her poetry, fiction, essays, and interviews have appeared worldwide in publications such as the *New York Quarterly, Imago, Phoebe, Plainsongs, Yankee, Sacred Journey, Interim,* the *Chrysalis Reader,* the *Lucid Stone, Fate, Press, Sulphur River Literary Review, Modern Poetry,* the *Lyric, Atom Mind,* the *Writer,* and over 800 other publications. She has been the recipient of awards from Triton College of Arts & Sciences, *Writer's Digest,* the Esme Bradberry Award, the Madeline Sadin Award, the Rhysling Award, and has been featured in *Poet's Market* 1995–2004. Her work is featured in the much-praised collections *Bless the Day, Heal Your Soul, Heal the World, Get Well Wishes, Essential Love,* the *Language of Prayer, Mothers And Daughters,* and *Bedside Prayers,* now in its eighteenth printing. Ms. De Winter is a member of HWA (Horror Writer's Association) and is a resident of Western Massachusetts. She is the author of seven collections of poetry and prose including *Like Eve*, the *Half Moon Hotel,* and *Touching The Wound,* which sold over 3,000 copies in its first year, and the latest "The Women at the Funeral," winner of the 2004 Bram Stoker Award for superior achievement in poetry.

J. C. Dickey-Chasins's stories have appeared in *Lullwater Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, the *North Atlantic Review*, the *Apalachee* Review, the *Portland Review, Gulfstream, Emrys Journal, 580 Split, Lumina, Taproot, Owen Wister Review,* and other publications. Dickey-Chasins is currently working on a historical novel about Kansas. The author works and lives in rural Iowa.

Caroline Du Pree Le Guin lives on the outskirts of her home town, Portland, Oregon, where she juggles a semi-rural lifestyle—five acres, three horses, two dogs, a cat, tomatoes, blackberries, etc.—with her writing and the ever-absorbing work of teaching writing and literature at Portland Community College. Her poetry has been published in *Stringtown, Poetry Motel,* and *Verseweavers.*

Michael Evans has been in school for as long as he can remember. He is currently fretting over his pending graduation from Michigan State University. He spends his free time twitching in anticipation of being busy again. It's a vicious cycle. His heroes include his parents, Pablo Picasso, Diane Rehm, and Prince.

Lawrence F. Farrar is a former career diplomat who has served in Japan (five times) as well as in Germany, Norway, and Washington, DC. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he holds a Stanford MA in Japanese history, studied at the Inter-University Center in Tokyo, and is a Graduate of the National Defense University. Since leaving the government, Farrar has produced two draft novels, both set in Japan. He has also written several short stories, one of them published in *Red Wheelbarrow* and another, more recently, in the *G. W. Review.*

Martin Galvin's *Wild Card* won the 1989 Columbia Prize, judged by Howard Nemerov. His narrative poem "Hilda and Me and Hazel" won first prize in a national narrative poetry contest sponsored by *Poet Lore* in 1992. He has been published in many national magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Republic*, *Commonweal*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Texas Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *OntheBus*, and *Poetry.* His poems have been included in numerous national anthologies including *Best American Poetry 1997* and *Poets Against The War* edited by Sam Hamil. In addition to *Wild Card*, he has two chapbooks: *Making Beds* and *Appetites.*

Margaret Hermes's works include a novel, a stage adaptation of an Oscar Wilde fable, and several essays. Her short stories have been published in numerous journals, such as the *Missouri Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Phoebe*, the *Laurel Review*, and the *Green Hills Literary Lantern.* "Transubstantiation" was chosen for the anthology *20 Over 40* just released by the University

Press of Mississippi. "Her Second Lover" appears in *Under the Arch,* a collection of St. Louis writers from Antares Press. Another short story, "Primo Class," appears in the 2006 issue of the *South Carolina Review* and "Two Marias" in the 2006–07 issue of *New Millennium Writings.*

Brian Hildebrand was born in the Metro Detroit area, where he spent his childhood until becoming a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, in 2003. He is currently a fourth-year student in the Department of Architecture. Says Brian of the two photographs appearing in this issue: "'Quad 3 is one in a series of over eighty images taken last year of the Rhode Island School of Design freshman Quad. At the beginning of every fall, the small freshman class of around 400 moves into, and occupies these spaces. As the project developed, knocking on one door after another, the photographs seemed to capture both the differences and similarities of the inhabitants' belongings, and the way in which they were kept. The last images developed were taken not by me, but by a friend with whom I left my camera, an addressed envelope, and five dollars for shipping. 'Bubble Pond' captures one of those remote places that you never quite expect to encounter more than once. It can be found somewhere between 44.3165 °N, 68.2001° W at an elevation of approximately 450 feet above the Atlantic. In this image, a group of young children play in the cold water, with whom I might consider to be their mother. My interest in taking this photograph was simple—to capture a wonderful moment spent with my sister, after our short hike up the trail, and to later share it with my friend with whom I had explored the mountain weeks before. The photograph was taken using a Polaroid camera that my sister and I had bought late at night, at a K-Mart along the way."

Daniel John was raised in Saskatchewan, Canada. He is a dancer, movement and massage therapist, poet, writer, actor, and playwright. He has ten children. He is a garden and landscape designer by trade and teaches Intuitive Gardening for Brookline Adult Education. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in, among others, *Ocean City*, the *Amherst Review*, the *Comstock Review*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Mindprints*, the *Owen Wister Review, Phantasmagoria, Phi Kappa Phi Forum, Rio Grande Review, Soundings East, Thin Air, Valdosta Voice,* and the *North Dakota Quarterly.* His essay, "Dust to Dust, Ashes to Children" was one of the winners in

the 2001 Campbell Corner Essay Competition sponsored by Sarah Lawrence College. He was a finalist in the Ruth Stone Hunger Mountain Poetry Contest and the Comstock Review Annual Poetry Contest.

Jason Kaleko has been described as subtle, but deliberate, by his colleagues. Although his middle name is just Thomas, he tries to take risks and leave readers speechless. He longs for financial stability through screenwriting and is a Jets fan who thinks aloud when Pennington throws picks. Jason doesn't dare to dream, but dreams about daring, and occasionally inks these ideas onto paper, in stanzas. He enjoys designing T-shirts, playing guitar, and freestyle rap. He attends Carnegie Mellon University and is 5' 10," dirty blonde with blue eyes, probably single and loves to be googled.

Allan Kaplan's interests include: enthusiastically cooking for wife Almaz, feverishly writing poetry, and passively watching late-nite movies, while growing older in NYC and in the Catskill mountains. Books: *Paper Airplane* (Harper & Row), *Like One of Us* (forthcoming from Untitled). He has appeared in many journals over the years, including *Oyez, Apalachee Quarterly, Slant, Hubbub, Washington Square, Fine Madness, Half Tones to Jubilee, Wind, Gulf Stream, Sulphur River Literary Review,* and *Widener Review.*

Lyn Lifshin's recent prize-winning book *Before It's Light* (Paterson Poetry Award) was published winter 1999–2000 by Black Sparrow Press, following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997. *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was published by Black Sparrow-David Godine in July 2006. Texas Review Press has published her poems about the famous, short-lived, beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian.* Also recently published is *A New Film About a Woman in Love with the Dead* (March Street Press). She has published more than 100 books of poetry, including *Marilyn Monroe, Blue Tattoo,* won awards for her nonfiction, and edited four anthologies of women's writing including *Tangled Vines, Ariadne's Thread* and *Lips Unsealed.* Her poems have appeared in most literary and poetry magazines and she is the subject of an award winning documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass,* available from Women Make Movies. Her poem, "No More

Apologizing," has been called, "among the most impressive documents of the women's poetry movement," by Alicia Ostriker. An update to her Gale Research Projects Autobiographical series, "On The Outside, Lips, Blues, Blue Lace," was published Spring 2003. New chapbooks include *When a Cat Dies, Another Woman's Story, Mad Girl Poems, Barbie Poems, The Daughter I Don't Have, Upstate: An Unfinished Story* and *In Mirrors.* For interviews, photographs, more bio material, reviews, see: www.lynlifshin.com.

Richard Mills was born in Ireland and raised in Canada. His work has appeared in journals in both Canada and the United States, including: *Other Voices, Descant, Dandelion, Grain,* the *Massachusetts Review,* the *Dalhousie Review, River Oak Review, Sou'Wester, Crazyhorse,* and *Ascent.* He currently lives and teaches in New York City.

Chris Moore is a recent graduate of Michigan State University's creative writing program. He lives in the suburbs of Metro Detroit with his Mommy and Daddy and pretends to be a writer when he is not looking for a job. Although unemployed, he currently has interviews lined up for prestigious positions within many fine companies (Taco Bell, Pottery Barn, and Wal-Mart) in which he may use his valuable "people skills," learned from majoring in English, on a daily basis.

J. Alan Nelson, a former journalist, is currently a lawyer in Texas. When he was a reporter, Nelson more than once avoided Vernon Howell (who history remembers as David Koresh) trying to be a rock'n roll star, and George W. Bush, (who was then only son of a President) marketing The Ball Park. Nelson has been published in an eclectic array of publications ranging from *Cottonseed Digest* to the *Wittenburg Door* to *Federal Lawyer* to the *Baylor Law Review.* He's also been published in the *South Carolina Review,* the *Wisconsin Review,* the *Pegasus Review* and has upcoming publications in the *Hawai'i Review* and *Illya's Honey.*

Curtis Smith's stories and essays have appeared in over forty literary journals including *American Literary Review, Mid-American Review, Mississippi Review, Passages North, Hobart, Bellingham Review, West Branch,* and many others. His work has been cited by the *Best American*

Short Stories, the *Best American Mystery Stories,* and the *Best American Spiritual Writing.* His second novel, *Between Sound and Noise,* and his story collection, *The Species Crown,* will both be released this year.

Jason Tandon's poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poet Lore, Euphony,* the *Bitter Oleander, Del Sol Review, Regarding Arts & Letters, Folio, Columbia Poetry Review,* and *Pavement Saw.* He holds degrees in English from Middlebury College, and is completing his MFA at the University of New Hampshire where he teaches literature and composition. Since August 2005 he has served as an intern poetry editor at the *Paris Review.*

Sam Wilson grew up in Southern California and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1994. After college he worked for years as a geek in the computer industry and now equally long as an employee in a bicycle shop. This is his first publication and the first thing he's done that is remotely related to his English degree from UC Berkeley.

Laura Madeline Wiseman is working on her dissertation in creative writing at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She is currently working on a collection of poems on the Juarez murders. Her works have appeared in the *Minnesota Review,* the *South Loop Review, Tar Wolf Review,* and elsewhere. She is an *e4w.org* editor and a *Prairie Schooner* reader.

William Winfield Wright was born in California, educated in Oregon, New Hampshire, and Arizona, and now lives in Grand Junction, Colorado. He has published in the *Beloit Poetry Journal, Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review, Field, Permafrost,* the *Ninth Letter, Phoebe,* the *Seattle Quarterly,* the *South Carolina Review,* and elsewhere.

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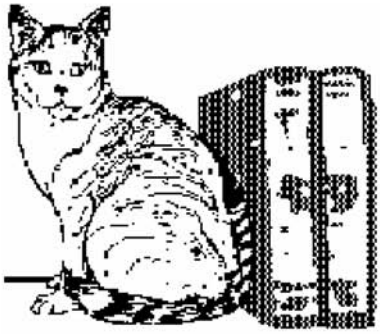

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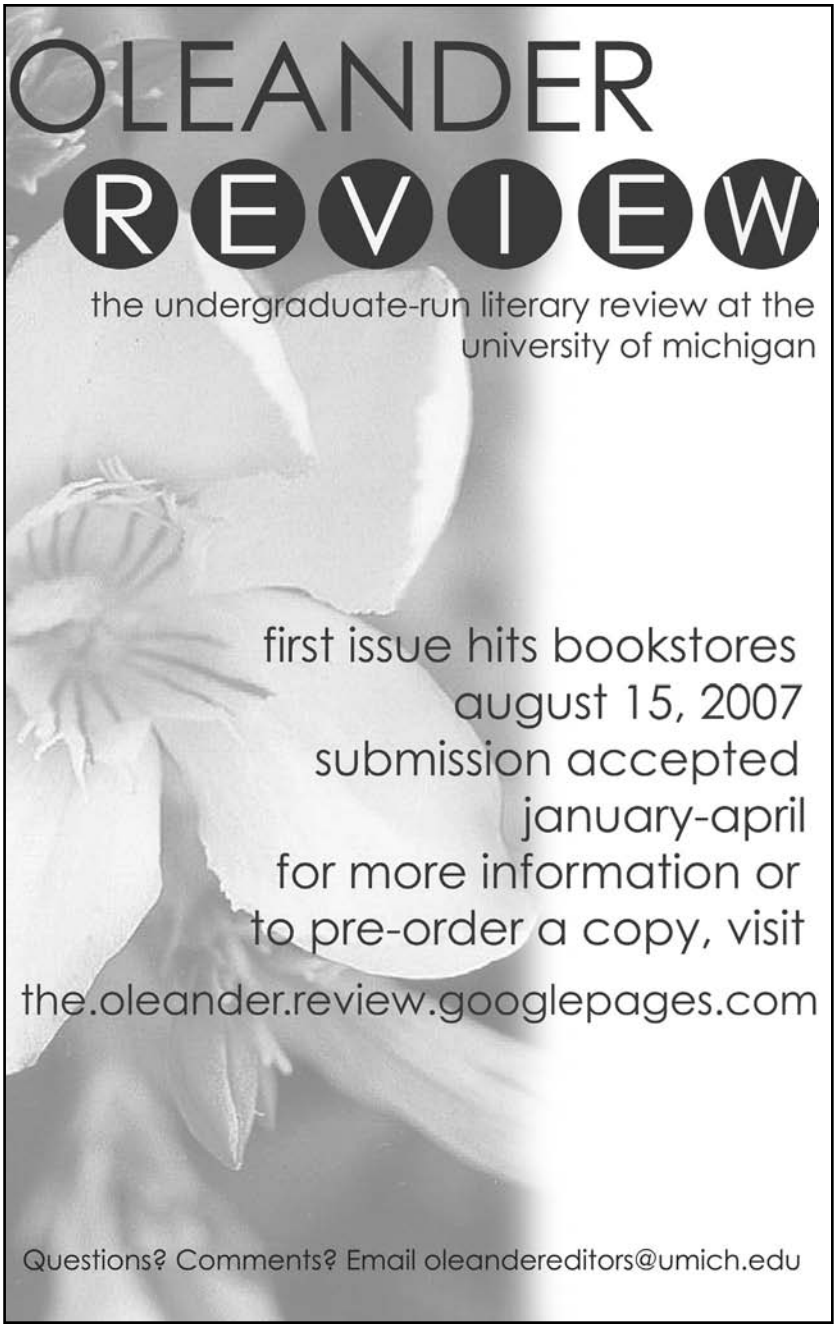
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