

STILLPOINT

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undergraduate literary magazine

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NATHAN BRAND

The Coast

In the night-swells
queer messages arrive.

Mixed media signals
sliding up the beach.

The tiniest ravines are created by the kelp
nudged, green and bulbous, by black and white waves.

Deeper valleys form under the big words
written on red barn planks.

Slim tires form pie charts tri-sected by twigs
miniature limbs, barkless, metaphorical.

Queerest of all, green totem poles
haunt us in the morning mist.

Sent back to bed each morning, breathless in the sea breeze,
we drink great clouds of sea-fog from cupped hands.

Waking later, unthirsty and hungry we stumble
to the beach, to the water, casting our breakfast nets.

But returning, eager,
we stop; the long night's long ravines
cup salty meaning for the early sun, kelp ampersands
and farmyard boards serve as matins to our unruly souls.

COURTNEY BROWN

Jekyll

i meet you
when the land is wild, and
angry, like an old whiskey drunk—
battered.

this is before love.
we make sandy houses
out of the shells of creatures that
haven't yet lived.
they melt, in time.

gnarled, the trees tear meaning from
the skies to make lace, like old
ladies. did i ever tell you
how you can't take spanish moss home?
it dies without the tree. the things i love
are hard to hold.

i practice the dead man's float in
salty grey water.
(did you ever wish you could wash your memories
out through your ears?) the sea knows what it's like
to be on solid ground, here.

but there were endings in my poems before
the world began. biking on the shore,
we watch for wildlife in the ruins.

COURTNEY BROWN

July 7, 1947

There wasn't an alien, and
maybe, there was.

[hot sand grating
glistening, blistering
green slippery alien skin.]

gnawing at my own soles.
we never saw it, anyway.

[only clean white
flashing lights over
cautious box houses]

but, our dreams are crowded,
so we don't sleep anymore.
we picked up the pieces of aluminum,
put them in the shed.

[floating orbs,
putty stretched faces.
long bony fingers.]

what we know:
the way dust bleeds into
pores, into the corners of our
eyes.

[but outer space,
it always looks so clean.]

STEVEN CARTER

Buchanan's Blues

Roy, I got the blues.
But not as bad as you did
back when fingers turned phantom
could still make Nancy scream and moan
and cry when the time was right,
which was all too often,
but still not enough
to save your soul
Or sanity.

I hate to tell you what you already know;
that jesus never heard your final plea,
that the messiah ain't comin' back for nary a one of us
Because he knows that if his toes touch this concrete jungle
it'll all come crashing down. He'd be done under the debris too.

When they found you,
dangling from the ceiling like a burnt-out bulb,
empty eyes black as night after every star has died
and darkened with the blue of your voice,
did they wonder what took you so long?
Did they too hear the song that sterilizes
the sweetness of dreams and rots from the inside?
The song that slips threads of life around the neck
and ripens man into the strangest fruit?

SARAH CONKIN

Vivisection

[viv-uh-**sek**-shuh n]

noun.

1. the dissecting of something breathing,
still alive,
still squirming beneath the knife.
containing a central nervous system,
the results of which
may-- or may not—
be used,
to further medical discovery;
anesthesia may be provided
to dull pain
which subjects are subjected to.
(see **torture/ prisoner of war**).
2. the act of questioning a person
as they sweat and shift
beneath the glare of a bare light bulb;
those being questioned
may-- or may not—
be innocent
(see **interrogation**).
3. the relationship between two people
when one person completely
pours out his/her heart,
trying to see what went wrong. one
may—or may not—
respond honestly.
(see **it's just
over/ tried so hard**,

Vivisection (cont'd)

tried *too* hard
to impress you with my This American Life
And my Mac.
Then there was that cockroach.
A foreshadowing of what was to come.
The way our time together would become infested,
Crawling with your self-doubt
And my embarrassment.

Your giggle kills all my jokes,
You whisper nothing,
Hiding everything.

I wish I could know
What you think
beneath that haircut you hate.

Listen.

You will let me hold your hand—
kiss your eyelids--
Why won't you let me
hear your thoughts
on Ezra Pound?

Hurry!
Say something quick!

If you will just do that 1930's accent,
Then I'll know I've got you---see?

DANIEL CONLAN

A mi

When you write
you ask. You neglect questions
of you. You forget to include your writing.

The idol in my mind's closet
is vanishing; a woman
with bark on her arms and leaves
falling from her hair.

Were you ever cast in bronze?
Or some alloy of the mind
that withers, watering the kneeler?

Discard your self-aware shyness!

You ask; I feed your perspective
richness. Are you building a hollow
horse around these works? Or amassing
an indecisive army?

An army is clumsy.
My mind is four thousand feet pattering
trying to wake you gently, four thousand
hands clutching for a doorknob.

Pretty indeed, but pertaining to the dowry...
Who first fell into lips/arms
while the setting sun bounces
off glassy lake water?
 While prostrate just
 within tides grasp?
While reading profound poetry, *Satin Doll* playing?
With published rubbish during *It Ain't Me, Babe*,
you laugh, feet firmly planted.

BETH HUNT

Primary Colors

Whistling sweaters your greetings are
paradoxes that most would eagerly describe
as the forecasts of a meteorologist who predicts
stormy Mondays and on novel occasions Apollonian

Fridays that make the other days weary because you
are exuberant in all eyes and your jocular mood causes
my heart to stutter I tell you to stick to primary
colors because when you start mixing paint becomes

a stranger not the kind that breaks into your home but
the kind that interrupts conversations listening
to ZZ Top is therapeutic because of you and I
cry to pass the time not because of the chauvinist

undertones but because everyone has legs
that carry them though they may not realize
there is toilet paper on their shoe this is
so ordinary when you are so extraordinarily new

and frightening that I wonder if I am right that you love
my hair curly I believe I appear distracted in all eyes though
I just wanted you to know your smile has been a constant
pressure on my ribs that makes it hard to speak

DANIEL JORDAN

Cadenza: A Piano

“Let’s lean
in over
the piano,”
said the cheeky damme
to the Duke of Seedy last night.
“Listen to this,” she said, and played chopsticks.
Besides bad music, this is the problem: What a
hall of mirrors, what a ferris wheel of friends.
What a calamity, what a clangbath. It’s this:
too many toothpicks and olives, the devil cake.
Too much liquor and it’s over: some bitch passed out
on the sustain pedal and gave everyone nightmares.

All this is bad medicine: it makes my lion paws
swell heavy in the morning.

But this is what I mean: in the morning. In the warm
morning. In the wake up. In the empty grand room.
What is it to hammer around the point? One misses
with each swing. There is some magnetic force at work.

So what I’m saying is:
Forget the cigar paper naugahyde. The real
fine-tuned times come when the sun dust alights
onto my strings like birds onto phone lines. Sunloved
speckles. Lower a microphone inside and see for yourself.
Red bobby-throated jewel warblers. Be careful: upon any
vibration, they scatter and don’t come back for hours:
years in bird years, so be careful with that hammer.

I’ll paint you a picture:
Bach scribbles,
Bach dines.
Bach was a translator.

Cadenza: A Piano (cont'd)

When Bach wrote this piece, first he sat down and watched it, then he said, "This is how I will say it," and planted his hands onto my forefathers. Twelve things pressed into one, almost. In all, twelve and twelve makes eighty-eight for all the felt hammers all bopping, all hammering like sewing machines and power-looms. He scribbles, he dines, he spins math webs: baroque fractal chinese finger traps. When we say he was a genius, well, here it is. This kind of math grows on a lake bottom within an impossible canyon, but when it surfaces, it blinds me and gives me visions, I speak in a thick tongue, I vomit glass shapes: cubes, spheres, cylinders. Do I enjoy this? When my eyes spin like a slot machine?

What I mean is:

Bach is the farmer.

He collects my glass babies and plants them in the furrows (this is where you come in): buries them into your brain folds like uncracked eggs into cake batter. Be careful! Notes make nodes. You can pluck the quarter notes and lick them like lollipops: matter of fact, pop musicians do. But the notes only grow with *silence*. Heaping doses of *silence*. Silence is like the sun.

All I mean is:

just listen for a long time
to the built-in silence,
the knifecatcher silence,
the brownbag silence,
the heaven silence.

The same way Bach-infused notes make mouth-gapping silence. You should see it: he has a whole pantry of pickled silences. Maybe everyone runs from silence because it intensifies hangovers.

Phrasing folds us in and out like braided octopus arms. The warblers, when they flee, flee to Bach's shoulders. It's good for them, but they fade each time, so be careful with that hammer.

Now we can round the last corner:

Who is this
lady languishing
on the hardwood?
A piece of furniture or,
in this library, a murder victim or,
in this light, a supine figure in oils.
What a hall of mirrors! “Wake up!”
Bach yells, leaning out of my cavity,
the warblers swarming out of his
mouth. What a ferris wheel of friends!
“Wake up!”

His lesson is this:
each time you take a swing, you run
the risk of shattering your hands. It’s not
the furniture we’re worried about. That is to say:
please don’t open your mouth with nothing inside it. I have
only eighty-eight teeth, but look what they do when we plant
them! I need
to say: We can only talk because: she is sleeping you see,
the environment
for this kind of art is ginger. When she wakes up:
we: you and I: will vanish with the warblers.

DANIEL JORDAN

Santa Catarina in the Flood

La lluvia floats in the troposphere. The girls bundle skirts and hustle. The rooftops wait; the gutters yawn; the sewers sleep. The thunder thunders, the dogs hide inside.

La lluvia rains. The flat rooftops pool la lluvia. The gutters are looking sick; the sewers feel clammy. La lluvia kicks the rooftops. The girls wait inside.

La lluvia lashes the street. The flat rooftops flood. The gutters puke la lluvia into the street; the sewers yawn like sheep. The girls play checkers.

La lluvia smells, the road drowns, the rooftops cry, the gutters choke, la lluvia strangles the sewers. Luis Miguel wrings la lluvia out of his socks. La lluvia soaks Luis Miguel.

La lluvia rises, the dogs bark, the girls are looking pretty, the sewers dump la lluvia into the lake.

The dogs smell wet, Luis Miguel smells the wet dogs, the wet dogs smell inside the truck drivers; the truck drivers choke the trucks, the engines flood; the dead sewers flood; the dogs' eyes smack. Luis Miguel cries. Luis Miguel wrings his eyes.

The truck drivers check out the girls, the girls smack the gutters. La lluvia socks the roofs. The wet dogs are looking inside the sewers.

The wet dogs wait for the girls; the girls wait on the truck drivers; the truck drivers gurgle in la lluvia, la lluvia feeds the lake; the sewers back up.

The girls feel clammy, the girls yawn like sheep. The girls gutter at the wet dogs. The truck drivers hustle the girls, the truck drivers roof the girls, the truck drivers feel the clammy girls on the rooftops, the truck drivers skirt the girls, la lluvia drives.

The wet dogs are looking inside the sewers; the dogs back up; the girls are looking sick; the girls puke in the street; Luis Miguel wrings the dogs' necks. The lake floods, the governor cries.

The truck drivers kick the fenders, the dogs crouch, the dogs scrounge, the dogs dodge and circle and hide inside. The truck drivers look sick, the truck drivers look inside themselves.

The truck drivers kick the flood in the street. The girls strangle the sheep inside and cry.

The wet dogs dump in the street. The governor bundles the wet dogs, the governor dumps the wet dogs into the flood, la lluvia thunders inside the wet dogs, the lake thunders to the gutters. The governor backs up the trucks over the wet dogs. La lluvia soaks the truck drivers' eyes. The lashes dump the smell.

The truck drivers smack the girls. The governor checks out. The girls hide inside themselves. The governor lashes himself and cries and circles and looks pretty in la lluvia. Luis Miguel socks the governor. Luis Miguel lashes the governor to the rooftops.

The truck drivers check out the fenders; the dead dogs' eyes soak; the wet governs the lake, Luis Miguel's eyes look pretty inside, the trucks drown, the sheep drown, the rooftops checker the lake, the dead dogs play checkers in the troposphere.

DANIEL JORDAN

To adapt is to resist being adapted

Directors in a conference room. Their task:
adapt this book of talking rabbits, boars,
and foxes to the big screen. So they ask,
“Does the fox walk on hind legs or all fours?
Or does it wear its fox head as a mask
and shake our hands with hands instead of paws?
Yes, how can we best capture it?”

Thus they sic it,
brainstorming through imagination’s thicket.
The fox alerts and springs into a denser copse
where gourds grow thick and slow rain never stops.

DANIEL JORDAN

We Forgot the Rules

We woke up by climbing up ourselves, if you remember.
We aimed for the craggy exit in the upper right-hand corner
and bloomed

our way into the under story. We sat on each other's nests.
Once ripe, we plucked each other free. Instantly I remembered
everything's name.

There were words for how the rivers periodically molted and
words for a third, fourth, and fifth sex. My fingers fell off and
plover beaks grew back,

their tendons bowstrings. With great precision I combed through
mosses for jewels. And you, licking tree trunks with your feet
like that until

they shed their leaves and sprouted new ones and kept shedding
leaves faster than they could discolor. That night, I awoke to a
silent caravan of

the beings. They walked without feet or bodies. Their lanterns left
glowing streaks that shone until the sun rose. You didn't stir.
But they voted:

we had to go back. They invented a new process just to send us
back, even. We're not supposed to talk about it, and

I have forgotten
most of the vocabulary,

but what you are now, when I look at you, is like a jaguar tail
dangling from a branch:
a dangerous, sleepy j.

KIERAN MAYNARD

Waffle House Discourse No. 2

Hustle and bustle and
running and gunning for
paycheck and payment for
services rendered for

cash only no checks and
underpaid waitress with
coffee-stained brown dress and
cloth-covered headrest in

her old Toyota where
she smokes a crack pipe and
dreams of days when
she can find life without

all the hardships and
cold-winter problems and
those who can solve them
will fall from above and

offer solutions and
quick retributions and
buttermilk pancakes with
hash browns at stake 'cause

while she's sitting and
thinking and smoking
and drinking and spitting at
ill-tempered drivers her

wandering eye finds her
boss by her side and
if she's not careful
she'll get herself fired.

SETH MCKELVEY

Thesaurus-Rex

you kept trying to tell her “ .”
but she just wouldn’t listen.
wouldn’t shut up with her “ .”

lying awake smelling your own gold odor
musing her flowery handgun
with pollen for powder

what will the futures think of
your new born subtle stubble
or the lint on black cotton

will they see the chip in your tooth
from where you tried to bite your nails
will they see now

basking in your golden bediction
finding a synonym for thesaurus
constellizing the bumps on the ceiling

licking her teeth in your mind
her eyes turtle back in her head
from your stubborn subtle

flower pale and bucket
the clues in the sand don’t footprint to her
there must be a leak in the rusted golden pipeline

she’s waiting hard for her prince,
prints love
advertisements on gold trimmed stationary

Thesaurus-Rex (cont'd)

pail and bucket

you could use some outside

turn your skin rusted golden gold

LORRIN MORTIMER

Cracking

I am crack black on the verge of bursting into color.
But she will spread both sides overnight and
squeeze out the excess upon the boy's delivery.
Layers of natural and synthetic martyrdom
keep him moist and fresh, though
I prefer to edge out my
luxury in light applications.

Future luxury hunters contain ten percent
wax; the remainder is hard abrasive.
My mother always told me,
Class requires accuracy, consistency, and
didactic manuals.
Follow every single step.

Soft divisions of money are only held for show, and
the exhibitors always dress in matching paint.
To watch and learn is highly effective, I've been told.
The more experienced pay to feel so empty, but
I depart early, kicking off my t-shirt and dipping down
to the point of immersion in the
trappings of beneficial lubricants.

To do a ladylike job is to begin the night by
tasting the elite in hidden areas while soaking up
the filling like a clean sponge. It is the only way to
pick up the ride, she says,
the men will likely cut in to maintain
their airtight status, so beware
the technical navigation that courses from the designer,
and do everything you're told.

The adults divorce feeling from both
private and public arenas. To rot and die

Cracking (cont'd)

alone is perfectly acceptable, and the opportunity to do so ahead of time is highly economical. As long as the crushing load creates a learning experience, everything I've been told is accurate.

LORRIN MORTIMER

Passtime

Filling the hours
Thinking about hair salons
Looking at a picture of my dog
Reading about my probation officer
Pulling at the loose thread on my sweater
Waiting for it to unravel
Searching for my blue fuzzy slippers
Toying with the jewelry box on my dresser
Color-coding my pen collection
Collecting my snot into a tissue
Checking to see if it's green
Looking up words in archaic Spanish
Wondering what it would feel like if my brain were made of
 hardwood floors
Listening for the sound of my dog eating his breakfast
Crossing off lists
Trying to get that monkey off my back
Running an obstacle course
Frowning because the obstacle course is my room
Organizing my hopes and dreams into manila folders
Removing all the jacket covers from my books
Storing them under my bed to keep the boogie man and
 his old, wire hangers company
Removing the dirt from under my fingernails
Tracing the outline of my bellybutton

Guessing the number of hours I've collected in a jar
Making a hair appointment
Telling the picture of my dog to hush because everyone is still asleep
Placing my probation officer into a takeout box
Storing her with the non-recyclables
Mourning the loss of a sweater
Calling a search party for my blue fuzzy slippers
Digging through silver-plated memories

Passtime (cont'd)

Crossing artificial rainbows in search of pen caps
Comparing my snot to Crayola crayons
Throwing away “electric lime” and “unmellow yellow”
Sending *The New College Spanish and English Dictionary* with them
Refinishing the surface of imaginary trees
Hearing vomit hit linoleum because my dog ate his breakfast too fast
Making new lists
Training the monkey to run the obstacle course
Recording its best times
Laying dynamite to clear a path
Placing one manila folder beside many manila folders in
 a locked file cabinet full of manila folders
Turning up the heat for the sake of my books
Checking under the bed for the boogie man who dresses in
 book jackets that he stores on old, wire hangers
Sweeping my fingernail dirt into a pile
Keeping it in my bellybutton until further notice

LORRIN MORTIMER

Object Time

The moon hangs
like disintegrating
milk residue over fire earth
while a lonely traveler
shadows the descent
of the sun across
the sand.

Fire earth stretches
like canvas over thatched
rocks and etches white hot fingers
into what might be confused
for a liquid dream
but what is really just the main
enclosure
at the Zoo of Imaginary
Associations.

A false spectator loses
his legs to fire earth while pondering
the hierarchy of clouds as swans parade
on the heads of idle elephants
like ghost crowns. From afar,
the lonely traveler peers through
the bars of the Zoo, awaiting
admission but all entry is refused
to empty vessels.

A traverse across
thatched rocks is proposed
but the fear of searing
penetration wards off all attempts,
and the lonely traveler remains
on the beach with nothing

Object Time (cont'd)

but the sensation of evaporation
to share the scenery.

A shadowed cube looms
from the acme point
like a pubescent oil factory
in its purest geometric form. Fire
earth flares as distilled youth lubricates
the mountainside, and the lonely
traveler looks on from his sedimentary waiting room.

The elephant kings mock the false
spectator as he wonders how
the flag of his tarnished
inexperience ended up among the bars
of the prison-kingdom. Nonetheless,
they neglect their own demise
from the imminent ripples that will stem
from the bleeding fabric, leaving
only preening coronets behind.

The lonely traveler is joined by the fossils
of mineral colonies that lay
like corpses in the sand. He tries
to escape the graveyard
but can only flee
insomuch as the evidence of his existence can extend
across the landscape with the help of the sun.

A pink camel zeros
in on the individual members
of the false spectator's head while a transcendental
castle floats on nearby, threatening
to take out the Zoo's watchtower.

Object time conquers
the fabric of the scenery,

spiraling
inward
like a dawdling foxtrot.

Fire earth freezes eternal,
while the false spectator remains
forever in half consumption.
The lonely traveler maintains his lingering
exclusion, watching the elephant kings
in their feathered authority reducing
to the surface of a stagnant dream.

Painting -- Salvador Dalí's *Swans Reflecting Elephants*

JESSICA NEILL

Overdue

Dear Mrs. Bates,
We regret to inform you
that your account is overdrawn.
You now owe \$234
and 8 hours sleep

by dawn.
have it by dawn.

Please fasten your seatbelt,
as we begin our descent.

our
your
our
descent.

We regret to inform you
that in your worst nightmares
you are spiraling out of control.

driving a car
with no brake
pedal.
or destination.

Stomp the empty floorboard.

To put on your seatbelt,
simply insert the loop into the buckle

You will be late to work,
You will fail,
You will fail.

You will fail all expectations.
Great expectations.

Please watch the gap between the train
and the platform.

Stomp the empty floorboard.
Jump the gap.

You will disappoint and make excuses.
You will lie (perfectly).

We regret to inform you
We regret to inform.

Pull on the strap
until it fits snugly over your hips.

They say you are brilliant
genius
(beautiful)

they say, they say
this is the only way.

Stomp on the empty floorboard.
Jump the gap.

please stay seated
until the captain turns off the
fasten seat belt sign.

Please stay seated.

Thank You,
Bank of America, Accounts Department

MICHAEL “CHRIS” O’ROURKE

Symbiosis

Catwalk predators,
short-skirt abductors,
hanging jowl lepers,
feed on the weak.
A five minute waltz,
on apprehensive high
heels.
A hell-bound 3-step,
in cut tooth time.
It’s a train wreck;
lifeless limbs,
hotel-vacancy eyes.
Sometimes I goose neck,
sometimes I cry.
Flittering eyelashes
were always ... hard to
ignore.

CHELSEA RICE

Umbra of Our Hands Touching

Don't call this a tacenda but then
don't let this secret smile its corners out of the room just yet
Stuck in distilled static until the clay around us wants to crumble
Back into foggy rooms filled with heat and dust
Where rocks grip my insides with pinching palms
Paddling fingers
Until I spin forward forwards away from the white horse on the
hill.

The silver on my neck reminds me of you and it twinkles into
overcast shoulders

The sharp incline of his nose stirred something in her that she
didn't understand. There was a sweet stickiness rolling around
stubbornly in the bottom of her stomach. Barren of confidence,
ripped from her into a nakedness so unexposed no one would ever
notice it.

Your soul tastes like fruit with pretty flavors.
This soggy town never looked so beautiful as when your
white sneakers
Brushed kisses into the wanton greyness of pavement
My mouth never spilled so many words with laughter

She wanted something not to hold in her hands like stones, but to reach farther into the lagoon of sticky veils. She held firmly forward as their souls shook together, unafraid. Barren of fear, ripped from her into a dress of solidity made of silver.

Your eyes sound like cellos.

I know it can never come too soon, but rain thirsts whenever we lick our lips.

JOHN REETZ STOVALL

Awaiting the Poet

Aloud (heavy chairs grind thoughts
of anticipation felt by wordless
Thinkers and feelers— teeth, bitter, settle in place.),
save two disconnected arms
Flinching gripped tongues forth and across
(Kasha Shabba Ashen Shaman
Shabbashik! period.),
No one speaks.
The jotting hands, unaware of no one,
leave jagged black lines, eroding the sharpened silence.

Behind, tense buttocks and crossed legs fend off stuffy thoughts
So as to interpret the plumed pecks. Others deploy reckless sighs
To dam the babbling creeks , or whirl unquenched Hello's
I'm—
Sriraka Kama Sutra!
John, I belch in vernacular, ignored.

All the while peering over, A third browned limb mounts
The percussion quick to learn
though weak of inflection. Quiet, leaders!
If you dare. Listen at the meek voice, Ah
How he brushes hush from
Harsh, playing by ear. How he adapts!
This must be him, for whom we've waited.
A door opens.
Quiet in the house, Pleasssse (the young painter rests)
Humbled, it shuts
and readjusts.
The nostia fulfilled, the poet's brow mutes our waiting breaths.

She is looking into my eyes,
And hers are glossy, respiring, pumped.

Like spheres of mica, the eyes reflect Black
Lines of her own, caressing in ceremony
The forehead of her prostrate heart. Aloud,
She designs

word after word

a voice to tell the moment.

Somebody places her into my arms with a flaming candle
And tears drip like blood onto her forehead
As she gazes past me into the eyes of the painter
To whom her I pass like a canteen
In the vastness of the room.

HARRY VALENTINE

Calcine Port

Dark again. There's a little bit of consciousness though: only enough to tell that it's dark, and I'm stuck in it. The more that matters, the longer I stay stuck.

Calcine – To heat a substance just below the melting point; leaves the substance dry.

I've actually never been swimming. When I hear kids yelling and splashing, instead of getting nostalgic, I get angry that I don't have the chance to get nostalgic.

I wake up and someone is asking me if I'm alright. They have a lapel sticker. We have a new president. I blink several times.

Dark, dark, dark. Not even fun, melodramatic dark. Just the color black. Being asleep is never very much fun.

I wake up and there's a devil in the corner; if it weren't Halloween, this would be a problem. As it is, I fall back asleep.

Character Trait – a feature or quality that distinguishes a character.

Someone brings me a birthday cake. I try not to be too excited: how do I keep friends? They see me bored in bed, and it makes them sad, and that makes me sad, and they see my dulled misery and seem to be proud of themselves? I think maybe they're only friends out of pity, and that makes me as furious as I get before I wake up again on Christmas.

More of the same here. My boredom, their sadness, my sadness, their pride, my fury. Merry Christmas, right? I don't think it will happen in that order anymore.

Spring's the opposite of fall, right? So when I wake up with my back on the cold floor and my head leaning against the stool sitting 8 feet under my noose, I have to at least appreciate the irony, right? Fall!

Most of the sandmen think I'm being silly. They say that emotional reactions trigger weakness, but sick people like me stay conscious throughout the episode. It's not like on TV, they say. This is supposed to make me feel better.

The falling thing is pretty funny in spring. I wish it was funny in the other seasons.

Narcolepsy – a neurological condition marked by recurring episodes of sleep during the day and disturbed sleep at night. In extreme cases, narcolepsy is paired with cataplexy (weakness occurring during periods of strong emotion). Usually appears in young adulthood. Rarely appears in fleshed out characters; dominates the lives of the afflicted in every aspect. Narcolepsy is interesting to those who don't have it.

People with conditions sometimes have regular days. Sometimes they have the same weird things happen to them that regular people have happen to them. Some memories don't have to do with the condition, did you ever think of that? One night I saw a ghost and he smiled at me with all his teeth. I wanted follow him but I didn't want to walk into any walls so I stayed awake playing with letters.

This is all I can come up with to describe who I am: coin car pelt, can top relic, conceal trip, a concert lip.

They say kids like me have very vivid dreams, and for a while, I hoped, but I never did wake up until long after I fell asleep.

Narcoleptic – one who has narcolepsy.
The brave narcoleptic boy went to the store all on his own.

Dark, dark, dark.

HARRY VALENTINE

Piggy

There's never been anything like it. I couldn't find a better imaginary conversation, even between the pen and the printer. I am finally first and third person. I am the camera and the journalist, shooting it all and reporting it to myself.

The setting is an exotic Midwestern state, Ohio or Iowa or some place where they still have wagon-trains and deserts and alien *Lord of the Flies* savagery. There is a critically ill 990-pound bedridden man who has put on a fresh pair of diapers.

We didn't talk.

It was all a dream when I woke up, as is usually the case.

And now I'm wondering why my opinions have become moving targets.

There is one way
a man can stay 990
pounds. When you

weigh that much, you can't
feed yourself. Instead, you
eat your young. They feed
you their time and their food
and their life. It's nobody's
fault. When a meal is perfectly

you are the fat man
inside of me and when I go to sleep
you'll be waking up

you are the fat man
inside of me and when I go to sleep
you'll be waking up

please don't wake up next time

cooked, it's time to take it out of
the oven and give it to the fat guy.
I am fascinated by record-breaking

obesity, and I judge this judgment.
For every 100th record successfully
put in a book, someone has died
trying to beat it.
It's just that a lot
more people die of
morbid obesity than whistling. I
guess I wonder how weightless he
becomes when he puts his eyelids on.

SARAH WATKINS

Without You

The spine is breaking,
Worn thin from too many flips of the pages.
Being tossed to the floor and then picked p
Weeks later
when someone nostalgically remembered that
it sed to be their favorite.
Cover flaking off and color worn to a d ll brown.
The shine that once attracted readers no longer visible.
Giving it p was easier than trying to keep the l ster.
Comforting smell of d st and stale memories.

Yo aren't even a part of my story.
I co ldn't write it in.
Blocked.
Beginning, middle, twists, climaxes and resol tion.
Making minor appearances in the plot b t solely
in a secondary role.
A character that the story co ld easily do witho t.
A rewrite co ld erase yo completely and no one
wo ld know the difference.
The dialog e wo ld chatter on naffected.

Yo did have a part in the conflict.
Yo were good there at least.
Changing the genre from love story to tragedy to ambivalent.
Altering the point of view as well.
One-sided to
Narrative to
Omniscient.

I am selectively editing.

A story witho t yo .

MARSHALL YARBROUGH

On Egon Schiele's *Eros*

Not the robe
not the ash
not the one nipple exposed

Not the fingers
like claws
at both ends

Not the hair in a mass on the top
nor the hair in the middle

Not the stalks
of the legs
on the stones

But the eyes
of the man
in the mirror
that say
to your wife
that he mourns
that he cries
for the lie of your

half-hearted

middle-class

penis

Out of the Night

There was someone there, but he wasn't Callum. He stood at the playground in Roseburn Park, a tall, red-headed man, carelessly grinding cigarette butts into the wet earth beside the swings and sniffing at the cold wind. She did not know him, but she had an appointment to meet someone in that exact spot, and he was in it, so she assumed he knew something about it and went forward, shuffling a little in her tight baffies.

"Hiya!" he greeted her airily. "Lilly, yair name is?"

"Yes. Yes, I Lilly. You have something for me?"

"Took ye lang eno'," said the stranger, good-humoredly. "Better gie yair worth out o' it. There'll be nae mair for whiles yet, till next lot comes in Wednesday."

"I look if be here," said Lily Mingxia Kong, stiffly. A thread of her black hair blew across her face and into her mouth. She impatiently pulled it out and back, behind her ear. "I very enjoy it before, but you no bring real stuff last time."

"Ye'll gae yair dinger wi' this bit," the man assured her.

"Aye, I niver tasted stronger...nearly blew m'head off."

"Callum caught?"

"Nae, he's in a wee bit o' stooshie on the rug."

"He sick?"

"Dinnae, but he's fou o' it. Got a real ell-o, and cadnae stand aft'wards, so fucker sent me out in muck in's place. See ya."

Stranger trudged off with the shiny, crumpled paper in his fist, and Lily carefully slipped the little brown parcel into her plastic bag. She had missed her bus, walked all the way from Earl Grey Street back home so as not to be tardy for Callum, and it was damned cold! Her cheeks felt frozen – the corners of her eyelids were sore – liquid came seeping slowly out of her lashes. With a sigh she gripped the bag containing her Tesco purchases and moved against the wind across the street and back on the walk. No customers this evening, so she could be herself and sleep in peace. A sudden physical memory of her soft bed, and the easing of her muscles that would come with sleep, made her quicken her pace a

Out of the Night (cont'd)

little, not minding the stretching of her tendons and blisters. She turned to the left and then crossed Costorphine Road, heading in the direction of the little cottage she rented behind one of the old mansions in that district.

About to go straight on, she was caught in a sudden gust that she accidentally swallowed and coughed on. Gagging, and sniffing her snot back in her nose, she bent to recover her packages – but a jar of preserves rolled away from her into the gutter. With an exclamation of rage, she followed it, and stopped dead at the sight of what it rolled into. A body lay entangled in the withered leaves beside the road. It was in the gutter, one arm and a leg flung out into the street, the neck cocked at an angle, and the spine skewed. Lily's first thought was to leave him there quickly, and get away to her brown package and tea, but she was curious. Besides, the realization that he sprawled exactly in the path of the next bus stung her into concern. She crept closer, and timidly peered into the face of a teenaged boy. His white face was peaceful, infantile in its unconscious ignorance. Lily nudged him with the tip of her shoe, and he grunted briefly. Good then, the boy was not dead, she thought, only drunk. Perhaps she could drag him up out of the way of the Number 12 bus to Gyle Centre. That would be a disgusting mess to see on the concrete next morning, and the sirens would keep her waking all night.

So she hesitantly grabbed an arm, and awkwardly pulled him up out of the road until he lay flat at her feet. She stepped over his stomach and retrieved the jar, making sure she had lost nothing else out of her bag. Now her conscience was clear, she gave a satisfied nod, and took two steps away from the intoxicated boy.

“Mag!” he mumbled suddenly. “Mag!”

Lily whirled around. The boy subsided into faint lip-stirrings that made no sense, and then was still. She came back and stood protectively over him, studying his looks. He was so helpless, and that fact attracted her strongly to him. Rarely had she found anything more vulnerable than her, and it was a pleasant experience to see someone absolutely knocked out in a dangerous place. Lily Mingxia Kong made up her mind, ignoring the pent-up tension in her body from the long day. She lugged him through the little gate in the stone wall outside her cottage.

When she got him in over the door sill, he didn't know it. Whimpering and gasping a little she lugged him to the floor beside the couch, and brought her arms underneath him. Her heels dug into the rough green carpet as she heaved him up and onto the orange and pink cushions. His head fell against the pillows and he snored emphatically, once. She dropped her groceries on the floor and chucked her package on the shelf before going in search of a blanket. Before she threw it over him, however, she smelled the loathsome smell of urine, and in alarm, stayed her action. The boy had wet the entire seat of his trousers, and he reeked of whiskey besides. Lily's nose wrinkled in disgust, but she made herself unbutton, unzip, and patiently work them off and down his wet, hairy legs. His boots she had already removed and placed on the table beside the couch. She wet a towel and rubbed him clean before placing the blanket snugly over his body. Then she opened a container of soup with a metallic crunch, and dumped the contents into a pot. It simmered for a few minutes on low before she lost patience and turned it up as high as the knob would go. The clock ticked, and Lily paced back and forth like a caged animal, her eyes darting between the pot and the boy, as if to see which one would change its state first. When the soup bubbled and sputtered, she got a bowl of it, and a spoon, and returned to her patient. His body was still flopped over the arm like a shawl, and she drew him down more comfortably. Lily blew on the soup, and timidly dripped some of the broth from the spoon into his half-open mouth. For a few minutes nothing happened, and then he swallowed. Lily's eyes flamed triumphantly. She nodded with a grim smile. Good. Soup was good for him, and he would get better.

She went for water, and sponged his dirty face until it was clean and shining. He moved restlessly under her gentle hands, and began to mutter names and meaningless phrases again.

Outside the stone wall in the garden, Lily could hear the bus whizzing by with an unearthly moan, and laughed shakily at the terrible thought of what might have just happened, had she not kept the assignation in Roseburn Park. The boy bit his lip in his sleep and squeezed his eyelids together, his breathing increasing.

"Mag, wait a bit, I wasnae thinkin'," he protested to a stranger Lily did not have any idea of. "Sorry. Sorry," he said, and then with an "Umm," he burrowed deeper into the pillow tucked under his curly head. He began snoring regularly. Lily kept spong-

Out of the Night (cont'd)

ing his head, and put some water in his mouth using the soup spoon. Stupid boy, he should be home with his mother, she cried in exasperation. Who could let him out so young, so late? He did not know what to do like older people. He drank too much, and could have died, except for her, Lily Mingxia Kong. Who did his mother think she was? If she stood before her now, Lily would tell her exactly what she thought! But maybe he didn't have a mother, or anything like a family. His clothes told her nothing about how rich he was, because all the children around Lily's neighborhood dressed like poor people on purpose. If he was a wealthy boy from a good family in a mansion up the street, Lily wondered, would she be gratefully rewarded for her long vigil? How nice that would be, and she got much joy from imagining the scene. The mother would weep, the father embrace her, and the boy stand there, abashed at his conduct, but awed by his rescue at her hands. Or the boy might be poor, and have nothing. That would not be as nice, but then she could give him things and make him happy – act like a mother to him so that he would be grateful and love her. He seemed a nice boy, really, just foolish and young. His face was sweet and soft, and the color was returning to his cheeks. Lily stroked along his brow and past his ear with the back of her drifting hand, and traced his features with her fingers. It seemed then that he smiled, but she thought it might have been the light from the single lamp playing over his pale lips, and shining in his yellow hair. Such a child. What would he say to her when he awoke? What color were his eyes? She puzzled over the first question for a while, before realizing she could solve the second at once. With a careful finger, she lifted his eyelid and gazed into a rapidly spinning green eye before letting it fall, and fretting over his waking again.

After a bit she rose to make some tea, which refreshed her, and then, after washing her one mug thoroughly, guiltily made a second cup for the boy. It did not feel right to do something for herself while he lay there, unconscious of her presence and so fragile. She spooned some of it into his mouth, and he swallowed reflexively. Lying beside him, she wrapped her arm around him and warmed him with her body, her eyes memorizing every curve, every line of his face. She felt the tears come at the thought of how nice it was to do this for him, and how upon opening his eyes he

would recognize her weariness and thank her for the sacrifice of a night's sleep. It was a long night of monotonous anticipation.

The next morning, the boy awoke, blinking with light green eyes at his unfamiliar surroundings. He heard a noise behind him, and turned. A slatternly Chinese woman stood at the foot of his couch, watching him intensely and curiously, with a strange flushed look in her eyes. He looked in horror at her faded, leathery cheeks, purple eyelids, hard slanted eyes, tangled black hair and drooping breasts, and then at his obvious state of undress.

“Aw, Christ,” he whined hoarsely, “Aw, Christ!”

He grabbed his trousers and boots from off the small table, and stumbled frantically to the door. Wrenching this open with a mighty heave, he passed into the clear morning light and disappeared through the wall of the little garden.

Lily Mingxia Kong wavered a little on her bare toes, as if she had been struck by the back of a hand, but remained standing for a long hour, looking out through the open door, to the gate which swayed gently on its hinges with every shift of the breeze. Finally, she turned away with a shiver, which was her only expression, and pushed the door to with her thumb. Carefully she put her arms through the sleeves of her jumper, and went to the kitchen for the brown paper bag on the corner shelf.

LAURA LEIDNER

This Happened A Long Time Ago, And Also Right Now, This Very Moment

There are these fish bowls. Some are for boy fish. Others are for girl fish. There are millions of them. If you looked from way above in the cosmos down on the plane where all the fishbowls sat you would swear it was just a bunch of sparkling sand. But really it is bowls filled with water and fish and green and blue rocks. There are some rocks that are pink and purple. Those look prettiest in the fish bowls. So these fish swim around lonely and hungry all day and night. They sleep, kind of. Always they are aware of the other fish bowls around them and of the opposite sex in those fishbowls.

One day I was swimming mesmerized by this one awesomely purple rock. There must have been glitter on it because it was so sparkly. Then out of nowhere I felt a current shift me away from the purple glittery pebble. I got angry and looked to see what caused this disturbing disturbance. And then I saw it was not a girl fish like me. But a boy fish. He had the most beautifully iridescent scales. I knew something, but all I could think about was the purple pebble.

I asked him, how did you get in here?

He said he flew. He just got so bored and lonely. He thought, fuck it, I might as well jump into that scary place (he was talking about the air) and see what about those lady fishes is so captivating. And then when I was flying in the air I saw the most beautiful purple iridescent scales. They were so beautiful, and they glittered. I stopped breathing the sight was so beautiful. Also, by that time, I was in the air and I couldn't breathe even if I wanted to. But I didn't want to. I wanted to die with the sight of those beautiful scales in my vision. And then I landed in life-giving water. And I landed next to you, the pretty lady-fish with beautiful scales. And then you asked me what happened.

And now I am telling you. And right now you are caught up in the present. And now at exactly this very moment, I don't know what to say to you other than—

I stopped him. I told him to go away and let me keep looking at the purple glittery pebble. But he did not go away. He just followed me around the fishbowl. It was annoying. I wanted to tell him to go back to his bowl. But when I spoke only bubbles came out, and he just stared at me blankly. I tried to pray but I knew there wasn't any god or spirit to save me from this boy fish with beautifully iridescent scales.

After two whole days of this, he asked me if he could look at the purple glittery pebble with me. And we stared at it. And then this electronic music started playing.

And I asked him why is he making those sounds?

He replied with unenthusiasm, that's not me, it's you. Those are your heartbeats. You love me, you idiot.

KIERAN MAYNARD

On Silence Hangs a Tender Note

The scene takes place on a street corner in an urban environment. Distant car sounds. A siren wails.

[Lights come up. Siren fades. Two characters approach from opposite sides of the stage.]

A: You heard that, didn't you?

B: Heard what?

A: A gunshot.

B: *(beat)* It was a transformer. A squirrel climbs the telephone pole and—

A: A gunshot, Marty! You know it better than I. You're telling me you wandered outside on the witching hour to elegize a rodent?

B: *(beat)* Jane, go back to bed.

A: It was Hunter. Oh, God, if they shot Johann Sebastian Bach! If Wolfgang Amadeus dies may the world go up in flames! *(starts forward)*

B: *(grabs her, stops her from lunging into the street, a car horn blares)* Attention, Jane! A man named Hunter is not a mongrel dog to lay wasted in the street. *(releases her, she shakes but doesn't move)*

A: The delight I take in that man! Were he to die I would just, just— *(she spreads her arms and mimes falling forward)*

B: *(catches her)* There is no music in death.

A: *(sighs)* You're right. *(stands upright)* No music in life, either. Hear it? Hear the siren, and the wail, and the midnight cry. The lonely vagrant we passed is weeping for the silence in her life.

B: Don't weep, Jane. Handel perseveres; Gershwin lives. Not a moment passes that *Dark Side of the Moon* doesn't sell. Can't you hear? Hunter is more than ever with you. Though he spends endless days sequestered in the dark room alone, there will always be his music. In his repertoire may you find solace.

A: He must never stop playing. It's an eternity without music. I would to God he wrote another song!

B: There's no rushing creation. What a botched job if man were created on day five! In time he will write again, I am sure of it.

A: But Marty, I fear his self-destruction – that he'd dose himself a lead pill.

B: Reason, Jane, and resign yourself to the truth. What are the odds the bullet was for him?

A: Odds too great to risk a royal flush. You do not know him as well as I. The knowledge is my misery. Why do you think he spends his days alone?

B: Sometimes a man desires solitude.

A: I fear there is great sorrow in it.

B: Then speak, and tell me what you know. Recount for me the day he left.

A: Now it is my burden; if I speak, it will be yours.

B: I'll bear it. Sing to me, Jane.

A: *(beat)* It was a Tuesday morning that smelled of coffee and ground sausage; in the cloister he shared with me his breakfast and I sang – oh, Marty: I poured my heart out! And wouldn't you know it, Hunter laughed. The sounds from that man's body! The fingers circled mine and touched my hand to the piano keys. I felt like an artist! *(beat)* What muse touched the painter Matisse? What portrait hangs before Dorian? Hunter – oh, my undoing! But I felt the music. I felt his fingers tap to, and fro, and I went with him; I was his vessel. I was Basil Hallward, bringing another's beauty into the world.

B: You didn't write the song?

On Silence Hangs a Tender Note (cont'd)

A: I resign myself to the truth! Hunter swallowed his coffee, broke the cold corner from a scone and I played; I played his music like it were my own. What could I do? I felt his touch! I was the Hunted and there was no choice in my power but to succumb. (*beat*) When I played that night, when the chorus hall filled, and I was assailed by a thousand murmured voices on hot sweetly perfumed breath, I had no choice. Dorian Gray walked into my life and left me lover-lier for his presence. No portrait could I paint that did not feature him. The music, oh, it came from me, but I could not share credit with the muse, because, my God, Marty, I never played better! The tenderness of my last note was shattered by the immensity of the antecedent roar. A thousand hot perfumed breaths were breathing for me! A thousand sweetly scented accolades, two thousand briskly clapping hands. They asked me, "Whose piece?" and I said my own. Marty, I believed it.

B: (*beat*) You must tell him, Jane.

A: Confess? It's too late for a confession. My muse could not suffer this misappropriation! That of his that I have taken can never be returned. That which we call Romeo by some other name would sound as sweet, but a purloined tragedy wreaks havoc on its author. No, Marty, I know what has been done. The situation cannot be emended.

B: It's never too late for forgiveness.

A: Never too late? I disagree. There is a deadline for absolution! If a man on his deathbed does not renounce his sins, what becomes of him? I have murdered Haydn, and I must suffer silence as a result.

B: Nonsense, Jane! Never say such things. I said once with firm conviction that there was no bullet meant for him. You speak of deathbeds and murder; there are no criminals here. Absolve yourself of guilt for an imagined theft of intellect. You sampled one man's incomplete piece to create your magnum opus, but that Wagnerian triumph was the greatest thing you've ever written! Reason, Jane, and see things as they are. The cards are down and the thirteenth trump does not appear. If Hunter Allan Sedgwick

met his end tonight you'd have had no hand in the discontinuation of his life!

[there is a long pause]

A: Marty, when you write, do you ever feel... liberated?

B: *(beat)* There's something in it of yourself you leave behind.

A: And without it, if it were all to go, you could go on living?

[there is another pause]

B: No, I could not.

BLACKOUT

HARRY VALENTINE

Wipers

When I first felt the water fall on my car, I almost discovered a remarkable truth, and it made me happy and sick. The next time I felt the water, I knew I was close. By the third time, I had developed a routine. The third became the fourth, the fourth the fifth, and then there were as many drops on my windshield as memories.

I only ever turn on my windshield wipers for seconds at a time. I like to watch the water build up. My windshield changes colors with the traffic signals. When pedestrians get caught in the beads, I cannot see anything about them but their new brightness. Staring makes me safe, happy, and buzzed.

I pull my freshly refilled water bottle from the rain, and roll the window back up. I let the wipers go once, and turn them off again. The world gently blurs.

I have gotten better at seeing through the beads. Lately, I have been able to see the people behind their vague brightness. So I drive more, and use the wipers less.

It rained the night that I hit her, and I could not draw my eyes away from the red drops on my windshield long enough to navigate through the woods that screamed for help with a broken woman's voice. My fingers made paths through the liquid on my windshield until I was deaf and forgetful.

I do not understand why my heart was beating faster, why my cheeks were red, why everything was tilting, why my jaw was trembling, why the people staring at me had sharp faces.

I went to the place that made sense and the world moved around me when I slid the wheel. The people blurred and melted and soon I was at the bottom of a bottomless lake.

I do not understand why my windshield never turned yellow or green again.

I just wanted more of the beautiful, bright, barely there people.

Olympus Mons Bonds

The rocket flies through space, all isotopes and protons and you wouldn't believe what else carrying five crew members and fifty seven passengers including Humphrey Peachman, sitting positively beside himself at the predictability of it all, when the flight attendant asks if he wants the Kalovanarian Mussels or the Mynok Ectoplasm. Oh that's rich, he thinks, Oh yes and should he be like pop, play the old thorn-in-the-fuselage and ask for vegetarian options, see if he can't throw a wrench in the gears of this mechanized politeness? Why not? But it doesn't work and he can practically see the bastard shift into fifth as he brings him a salad, all smiles in his navy blue uniform. Yeah this whole ship is sweating order, dinner at 5 o'clock, movie at 6, pretty standard fare – girl falls in love with robot, father tries to kill robot, robot saves father's life, father accepts robot, gives girl away at alter – all followed by coffee at 8:45, more or less Standard Greenwich Mean Time give or take a couple minutes given the fact that they're in fucking space...Damned old man doesn't know a thing so why is he still so nervous? Peachman's neighbor in the snappy business get-up looking more and more disconcerted as the kid next to him shakes and mumbles to himself in his chair, here he is trying to pay his gas bill while simultaneously watching both the movie in the cabin and a video of his son riding a tricycle in circles, a birthday gift from ol' pop lamentably absent on his way to the Earth 2 colony on Mars on assignment to make sure the machines in charge of the lesser machines are all working properly but how can a guy enjoy the sight of his pixilated pride-and-joy (wi-fi none too good up here in the nadosphere) with a creep like that next to him?

Peachman meanwhile is remembering his own gas bill, sitting now in his apartment talking to his own father on the phone trying hard not to sound too exasperated as he explains to his old man that no, he does not have a problem paying on-line and weren't you supposed to have grown up with this too dad?

"I mean at a certain point the guy has to give up the whole Luddite thing," little Humphrey says to Wendy that evening, fum-

ing over his latte and trying to understand his father's frustration.

"Why does he hate the internet?" Wendy sympathetic if a little bored.

"I don't know, something to do with a mix up back when he was in college trying to set up his account to pay his electric bill online, from what he's said I think all that happened was that he put in his bank account number a digit off and had to pay a thirty dollar fee but he's been angry about it all his life."

"So does he pay his bills in the mail still or what? I mean Jesus its 2040."

"Even better, he goes down to the main office every month. He's always coming back with these stories about the people he sees there."

Stone-age shit. Prehistoric shit. Like, 1992 kinda shit. Oh no, scale it back about eight years, thinks the older Peachman, who back in 'ought eight decides once and for all he is done with that hacker crap, this after the third notice in the mail from Sparks Seattle sez "Hold on valued customer but we still need yr money" while the page on his computer flickers and shows his account balance as zero before cutting off entirely (it's been doing that) and so once again its Hello?

"For customer service, press 1"

<Beep>

"For billing, press 3"

<Beep>

"I'm sorry, I do not understand that request"

("Fuck")

"For billing, press 3"

<Beep>

"Thanks fr calling Sparks Seattle yr call is important to us would you hold plz?"

So on and so on until it comes out that something's not lining up with the bank and didn't he mean to type in zero zero *three* two five? Oh dear how clumsy of me teeth grinding uncontrollably, the operator sez "would you like me to set up yr account again?"

"Um, where's your address?"

So big ol' Peachman (Christian name Randall) goes on down to HQ with his checkbook in his pocket and a chip on his shoulder You betcha, marches on into the door with "Customer

Olympus Mons Bonds (cont'd)

Service” written on the front Yeah right, he says working out witticisms to hurl at their smug bureaucrat faces although surely these people, these real people will have actual power, not like those interchangeable telephone operators, soul-shifting bastards. He’s invoking the spirit of Ezra Pound, lifting denunciations up to Edison himself: he’s Randall Peachman, the mighty soldier of responsible commerce, arbiter of the kept promise of convenience . . . opening the door who does he see but the huddled masses themselves, Damn there must be twenty-five of ‘em all told, all hummin’ the same tune, snaking around the nylon rope and he thinks, These are my people goddammit and queues up, a bit crestfallen maybe but presently more riled up with proletarian fervor: So this is how the common folk all do it, he thinks, shamelessly eavesdropping on those around him, imagining scenes from their day to day lives:

“Where da hell you been all day, woman?”

“I was out payin’ the damn power bill, not like yo’ sorry ass been sittin’ on the couch all day.”

Ah, the rustic simplicity of it all, he thinks, merrily paying his bill when he finally gets to the window, all rancor forgotten - he’s even impressed by how polite the clerk is.

“I like to think of myself as having the diet of a 13th century peasant,” he says for the third time that night to one Andrea Trefoil, a charming girl who’s come to the party reluctantly enough having finally submitted to her friend Marnie’s pleading: “But it’s my only chance to meet up with Roger,” she’d said, stretching out the first syllable of Roger for about three and a quarter minutes. Now she stands around, bored, sober and friendless while Marnie and Rog hit it off by the “fun punch,” and if that isn’t enough here comes this Ralph or something about ten beers into it telling her that shit about feudal dietary systems again - not that the kid doesn’t have a point: two months a vegetarian he hasn’t yet learned anything about nutrition, so that he’s pretty much living off bread and cheese at this point, not to mention beer, which he might have given up instead of meat, if not gaining a higher moral ground thereby than at least not sinking even lower in social standing, silly drunk in front of a strange girl who’s not having any of it.

A lesson not well learned, even years later, well in his cups and explaining to his son why he, Randall Peachman, does not eat meat, the speech he'd always had tucked away in his mind but had never actually brought forth, having had the good sense not to subject himself to the ridicule and accusations of self-righteousness sure to ensue had he given his friends any reason more forceful than "they kill them fuckers with a machine." Now, however, much to the dismay of his son, the elder Peachman holds nothing back, his tale a scathing if meandering indictment of industrialism and the excesses of human civilization, interspersed with horror stories from four months spent working in a deli ("The ham came in fucking bricks! Perfectly rectangular bricks!"), finally remembering the point he'd meant to come to an hour earlier, when his son, newly matriculated, told him of his plans to seek employment on Mars with Olympus Mons Bonds, the sole financier for the Red Planet, "bringing usury to the galaxy."

"I leave in a month," the boy says.

"On the Red Rocket? Don't trust those fuckers, Humphrey. Nope. They haven't accounted for risks, see. They can't possibly service those things."

"I'm sure they do, dad."

"Why should they? All they've got riding in them is suckers like you, ready to be replaced by more suckers like you. No matter what little thing goes wrong, whatever's responsible is still performing its function; same as with chickens and cows, Death the product of a machine, easily rationalized, probably already accounted for in some actuary's table. Rocket breaks and they're doing fine, every reason to still tell you things are great, 'worry-free space travel, low rates, comfort guaranteed.'"

* * * * *

Death the product of the machine alright, not that Red Rockets, Inc. doesn't rule out the possibility of this kind of thing eventually happening when they take out the loan from O.M.B., LLC and build about ten more ships, more or less concerned with safety though they're making sure to be quick about it. While the mechanics in monkey suits monkey wrench their way through construction the fresh-outta-school types in advertising are delegated the important if not exactly enviable task of writing up brochures

Olympus Mons Bonds (cont'd)

that say something to the effect of “affordable space travel for the common man,” taking care of course to avoid alienating their older, more well-to-do customers and therefore giving their very best undergraduate efforts to delay in those elect souls the inevitable realization that “we have to sit next to poor people now.” And who would doubt that it would be young Wendy Peters, Humphrey’s classmate and bosom friend, who comes up with the brilliant approach that would appeal to both rich and poor alike. It’s all in the phrasing, yes? “Low rates, comfort guaranteed” only works for the masses, but Wendy’s brochure foregrounds the camaraderie of the experience, depicting rocket flight as a journey across the frontier, each passenger a willing adventurer making his way through the most desolate of prairies, the rocket itself acting as a Conestoga wagon of sorts. But this time out it’s better, kids, for not only do you get to live out all the pioneer fantasies inherited from your father, wrapped up in the early 21st century’s nostalgia for previous generations’ nostalgia for the Old West, you also get to experience the journey while being served, and this Conestoga’s even got windows so you can get a good look outside: the landmarks going by, the democratic vistas. Yep, Wendy’s feeling pretty good about herself these days, the most promising of the underlings – she even has lunch with her boss every now and then, and though over-priced bistro fare with Mr. Schmorgson is perhaps more glamorous in the abstract, that doesn’t stop her waking up every morning with the sun outside her window and saying “it’s 2040 and it’s good to be me,” almost looking around her small apartment for the cameras filming her life story, *Wendy the Winner*, which she conceives as a thoroughly Horatio Alger affair, only with jokes.

She’s glad that Humphrey has finally found himself a job, and an especially prominent one for somebody as young as he, getting to work on Mars. If it weren’t for her present good fortune she’d be jealous. Imagine him out there calculating the risk for the fledgling firm hoping to begin settlement in the Valles Marinaris, or trying to figure out the cost/benefit analysis for terraforming the Borealis Basin (though ‘terra’-forming isn’t exactly the word for it). Humphrey’s job will probably consist of saying ‘no’ to a good many developers, seeing that the Proles haven’t exactly been brimming with interest for the planet. A wonder that colonization

of Mars hasn't taken off like they said it would, though you might not know it from the ubiquitous advertisements for Red Rockets' ambitious enterprise. The key word higher up is 'inevitability,' i.e., it is inevitable that they'll come, so no need to offer special incentives. The cut-rate rocket flights are less an appeal to the lower classes than a suckering in, just an assurance that it will be as easy as possible for the poor schlubbs to come out (East, West . . . Up?) in order to make their fortune. No worries about repair, space travel has always been dangerous, an incident with a single rocket only puts off about twenty percent of revenue from would be passengers, we'd lose thirty percent of our revenue in constant maintenance.

It is inevitable. They will come.

* * * * *

So here's Humphrey humphing up and down in his seat looking all round at his fellow passengers, the whole damn rocket full, all of 'em a big I-told-you-so from his old man and the fuckers don't even know it yet, don't know what Humphrey knows with a certainty he can't explain, that something's wrong with the flight path, that somewhere in the staggeringly complex calculations that go into getting a rocket to go from a point on one planet over a distance the vastness of which is itself a mind-fuck and land at an exact point on another planet only vaguely similar to the first – someone had botched an equation; someone had been a digit off. And of course it wasn't even a someone but a machine, not even a negligent soul but instead just a poorly manufactured mechanism, a screw missing or a misfiring circuit towards which Humphrey must now direct all his rage and fear, only hours left before somebody notices Mars going by in the window and shit gets all Lord of the Flies, the passengers denied even the dignity of an explosion, their death not a merger with the infinite but a perpetual suspension in nothingness, set adrift to slowly realize that, no, they had not merely broken out of the grid – they had been flung from it.

DEVON YOUNG

Finland

“Thailand, Finland, or Brazil?”

“Finland.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Finland has a rhythm.

Drink, swim, sauna

Every Finnish home has a sauna, every summer night has a party.

Swept to a party, I float from stranger to stranger. It must be 40 degrees outside, but Finns vary in their awareness of such conditions. Some are bundled, some prance around in their Speedos. All run a relay-- house, keg, lake, house, keg, lake.

An American girl is introduced to me, another exchange student, a couple of Scandinavian boys draped around her shoulders.

“Kansas sucks--there’s nothing to do but get drunk and hang out. I love it here.”

She bids a lackey, pop the top off her Long Drink.

I nod in agreement.

Most days we hang out at the gas station. Burgers, chocolate, ice-cream, Long Drink. Viitasaari summer afternoons. We sit on the patio. Niina, my host, and Jesse, her best friend and big brother. We lounge, we sprawl, we eye the gypsy shoppers. We talk about what we want to do in life, where we want to go. Niina and Jesse want to go to Jamaica.

We daydream, sunlight reflecting off the lake and into our faces.

We always eat on the patio overlooking the lake, waiting for something to happen. Today Pauliina is what’s happening. She is Niina’s close friend and our waitress. She serves us our juusto-burgers and invites us to her cottage on a distant lake. Pauliina’s nickname is “Pauku” which means “bang.”

I like Paukku. Mostly because she dates Jaakko who is my favorite Speedo-bearing Finn. His favorite thing to talk about with me is American cars.

But, this night is Jaakko-less. It's a girls' night. Just Niina, Elsi, Elina, Paukku, and me. We sit around the fire, smoking cigarettes, downing Long Drinks, and eating the ham, tuna, bleu-cheese, and tomato pizza we made at Niina's house.

Two in the morning finds us heading down to the dock. In silent agreement, we slip off all our clothing.

The moonlight reflects off the lake and into our bodies. Faint giggling, water rippling.

We are seventeen. According to everyone, seventeen is the most beautiful age.

One by one we jump into the lake, coldness stealing the breath from our lungs. We see who can hold their breath the longest, we shampoo our hair, but mostly we just swim, deep into silence, deep into the dark. The dark who only visits for a few hours each night.

Quietly, we climb out of the lake and sprint to the sauna, our clothes forgotten on the dock.

At a party I meet Ilkka. Ilkka Olavie Ruuskka. He comes from a farm many lakes away and his middle name, Olavie, is a traditional farm boy name. Now he is a construction worker and he lives in an apartment in town with his brother. Tall, blonde, fair, and handsome, he is all the Finnish boys I ever met.

I meet Ilkka at a party and my friends decide he and I should date.

So, we go on a date at the gas station, passing my electronic pocket translator back and forth. The language barrier throws hurdles into our conversation relay. Every Finn studies English from birth, but with the exception of Jesse, the Finnish girls speak much better English than their male counterparts.

I like Ilkka alright. He is shy as a good Finnish boy should be. He wants to be an ambulance driver. He tells me that if I grow up to be a doctor in Africa he will drive me around in his ambulance. He tells me that he doesn't want to go to the Army, but he has to for a year. Every Finnish male has to.

Jarmo, Niina's dad, gathers us and the family to go visit

Finland (cont'd)

Niina's grandparents an hour away. Wrinkly Lutherans, ancient blue lake eyes. Because they are old, they speak no English. "Terve," I offer. "Hello." This earns me a hug. They sit us down at the table, a feast before us.

But first, pictures.... Every Finnish city has a flag, each with its own symbol. Viitasaari gets "muikku," a species of hand-sized fish. I face these proud celebrities for the first time, a tray of their fried bodies staring up at me from all directions. It's fitting that they're here for the photo-op because "Sanoa 'muikku!'" is the equivalent of "Say 'cheese!'" We take photos with our mouths forced into awkward "o" shapes.

Food is passed around the table. The grandparents chatter and smile warmly to me from across the table. They are speaking about me. Grandma passes me a dish, eyes glinting. I smile, I am prepared.

"Mina en syo verta." "No blood soup for me, thank you."

After dinner we are weighed.

Niina has gained roughly ten pounds of American fat since her stay with my own family in Georgia. Her athletic body shape remains, just pudgy around the edges. Her brother, Jessie, pokes at this. Amusing. The first thing he did when Niina and I arrived from America was throw her in the lake. But, he is about to go off to college.

Which is good because he no longer has a job here in Viitasaari. The door-making factory he worked at burned down inexplicably one afternoon. This was cause for celebration. No more work for the rest of the summer! We drive fast in his beat-up car, passing the building in its final minutes of life. "Hui, hui!" Fire climbing, car flying. "Hui, hui!" I grin and sink into the seat, death grip on the ceiling handles. Lenny Kravitz blares, "I wish that I could fly. Into the sky. So very high..."

Dog-sitting fills up a final weekend. Inka-the-singer's aunt is out of town and needs someone to stay at the house. Niina's hockey-player boyfriend, Ville, and his hockey-player friend visit. The three of us run miles around the countryside, rain pouring,

mud splashing. They are slow and out-of-shape, I could run laps around them. Instead, I entertain them with my ever-growing collection of Finnish curse words and in exchange, they feed me chewy Swedish words that stress out my mouth. Finally, we are back at the house. We toss our shoes aside and leap, fully clothed into the lake. Sauna, moose stew, crepes. The boys leave. Lying on our backs, staring at the stars, Niina and Inka are pensive. “Why did you choose Finland?” they ask, eyes still locked on the stars. I sigh, no good answer. We fall asleep on the grass, stars above, lake beside. The starlight reflects off the lake and into our dreams.

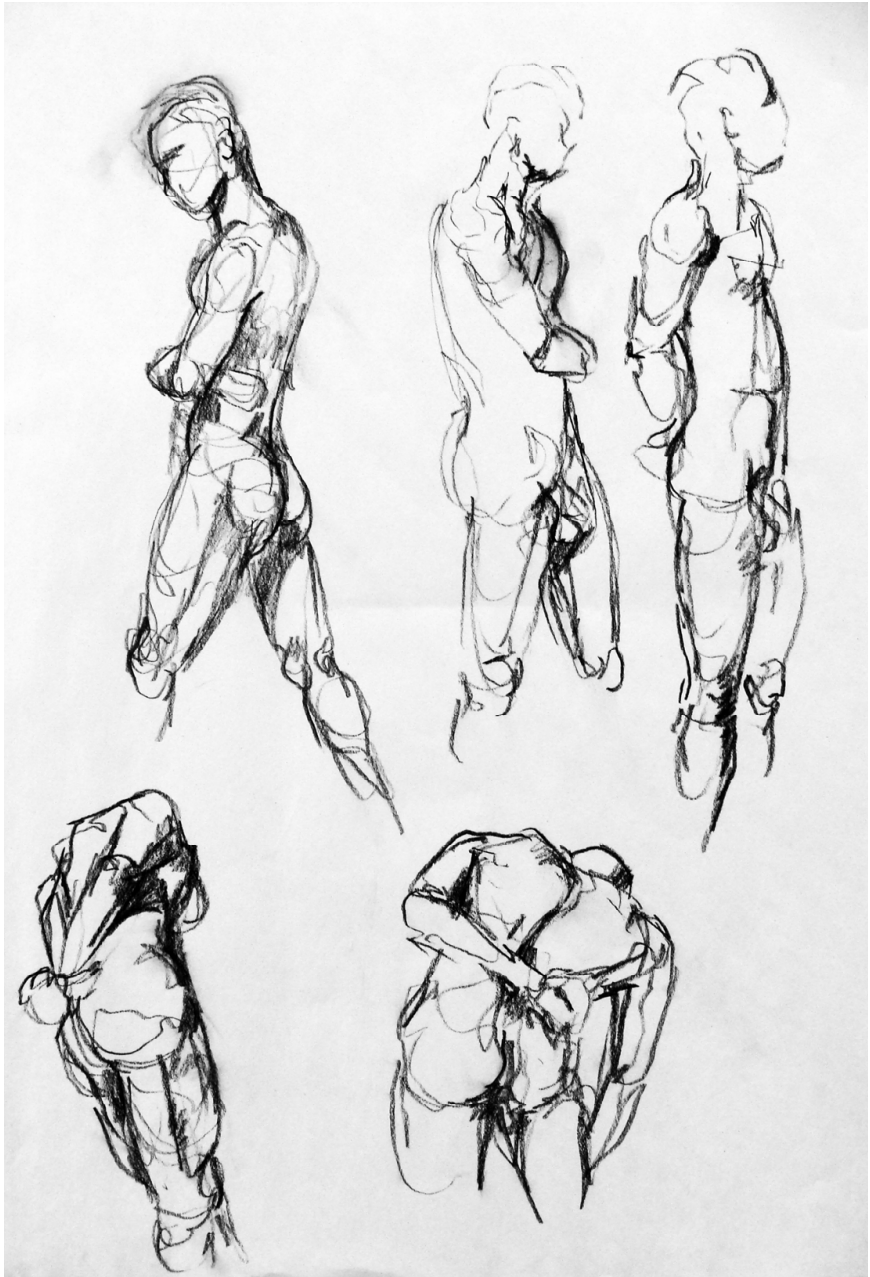
Goodbye party, last night in Viitasaari. Drink, sauna, swim.

Waking us painfully early in the morning, Jarmo drives Niina and I to the Helsinki airport. Unrehearsed goodbyes and drowsy embrace, we promise each other, one day we will go to Jamaica.

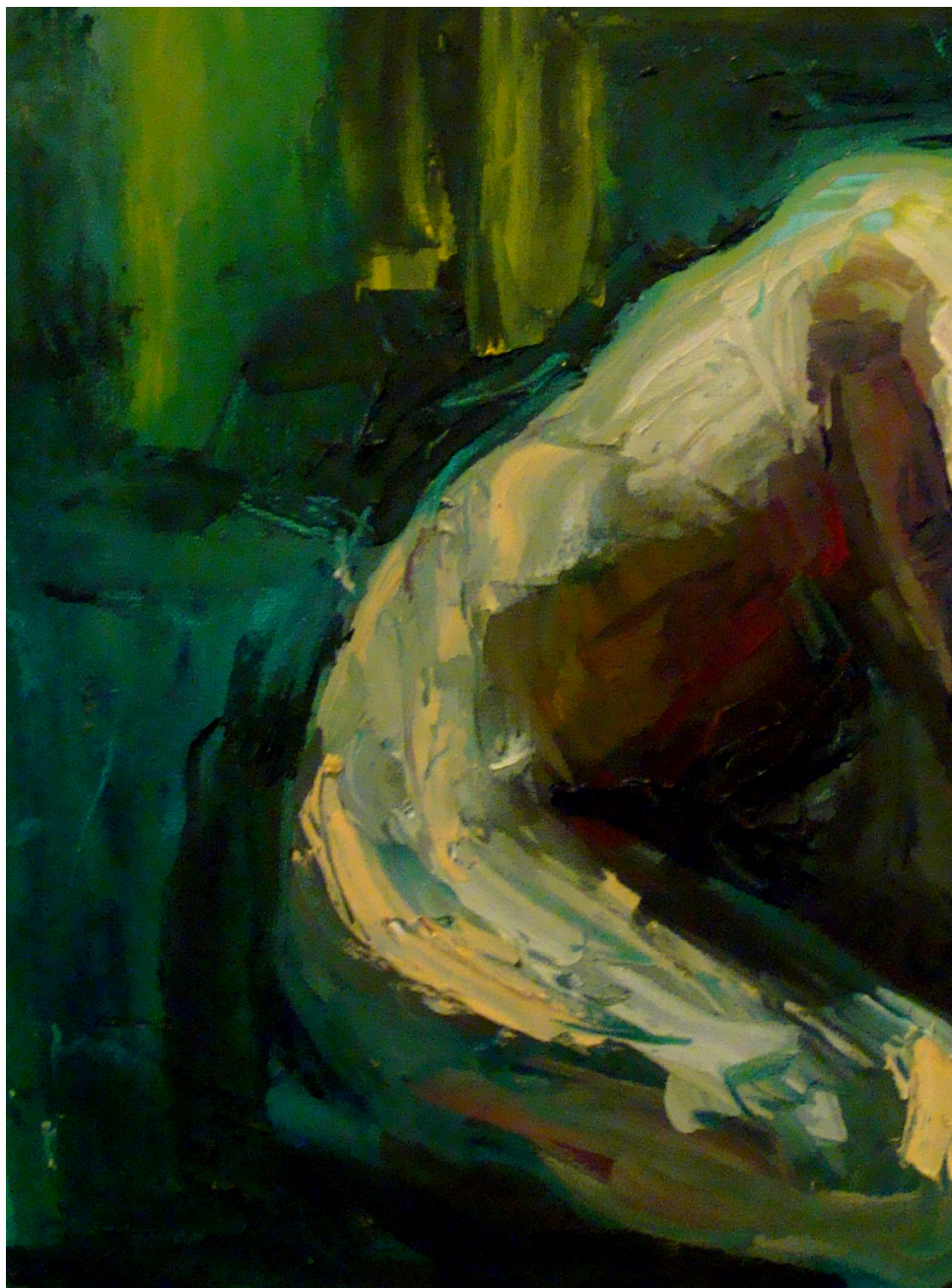


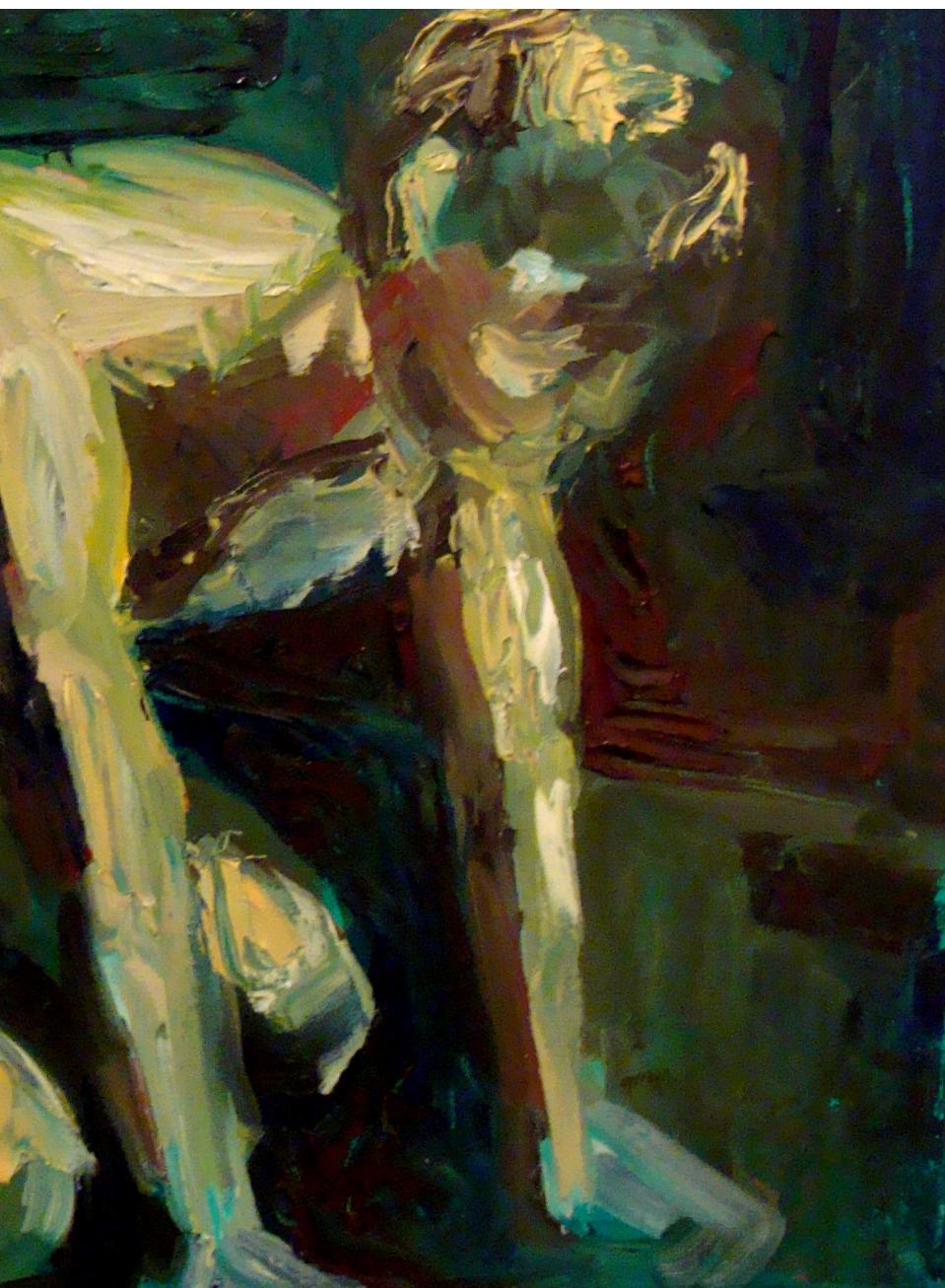
SARAH QUINN

Female Figure Study



Male Figure Study





Crouching Nude

The works featured in the 2009 issue of *Stillpoint Literary Magazine* were selected from a pool of blind submissions. Names are omitted during the selection process and individual staff members do not judge their own work.

The 2009 issue of *Stillpoint* has appreciable differences from past issues. The featured travel essay was submitted for our new non-fiction section whose topic was personal experience abroad. Students will find the theme for next year's non-fiction section on the *Stillpoint* homepage. The art section features the work of a single artist.

This issue is available online at www.uga.edu/stillpoint.

The *Stillpoint* staff strives to connect members of the creative community at UGA by providing students with a forum in which to publish their works. Thank you to all who have contributed to the success of this year's events and the publication of this issue. Please continue to share your work in the interest of literary culture at the University.

Erin Yates
Senior Editor

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Stillpoint Staff