

STILLPOINT

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NATHAN BRAND

Death

My father's back was turned
and I was young.

The blueberry's cranberry
color backlit by sun;

white flesh squished into
my lifeline's crinkle.

I tasted it, the tartness in my
glands a sting,

an impatience in my
July mouth.

My father's back was turned
and I was young

and hasty,
just 10 and bookish

in the old man's garden
plot, to see the berries

and the rhubarb
while the

whitecorn ears got boxed
for worms.

My father's back was turned
and I was young

to gardening and garter snakes,
the green kind, along

the July fence all curvy
against the straight.

I was young, my short hoe for
beanweeds making me

right-handed in the sun
and thirsty,

a parchedness of nose
and cotton-mouth,

a copper taste like bloody
teeth in apple bites.

Eye contact in the slither second's
parallel, the passing motion

ended by the blocking force of steel
blade justice for the apple-giving trick

they said he played on me
or would have.

Preemptive justice
in the garden,

fresh blood on juicy
blood meal making

cakes, the tool-shaped tongue
a crooked glisten.

Thinness, in both our girths
and psyches, instinctual

betrayal of our reason
for a taste of something

clean and earth-grown,
both our chances blown.

I kept my limpy victory
in a painter's bucket's

brackish water until it
smelled like something new

and different, white flesh
turned grey and rotted

with the water, less color
to the snakey skin,

more ugly fumes
to make my father

come back out
next week,

take Sunday's naptime
up with burial,

stern looks and grunts
of anger and disgust

at sonship's slippage,
Death's triple knocking on his
hands and eyes and nose.

David

filled his room with leaves
stuffed them in his drawers
 in his pockets
 in his mouth

cut letters in the green ones
powdered the brown ones in his hands
burned the yellow ones
saved all the orange ones

kept the green words in Mason Jars
hid Mother's Mason jars

saved the brown dust in tree hollows
blew it in his brother's face

rubbed yellow leaf-ash on his puny limbs
tried hard to get his back

drew faces on the orange ones
gave the faces long hair.

In the Dirt

It was David
in the dirt.

On his hands and knees,
shoving his face into the ground.

The wind was blowing off the lake
and there was David.

There was dirt on
the back of his neck and

his upper lip.
Dirt in his eyes and ears.

The moon caught the
pieces of fingernail he left

as he tore at
the screaming ground.

It was David
in the dirt

slurping earth.
And me like a dumb pillar,

shining lamplight
as the wind blew

the leaves over his scuffing feet,
and the black and white waves

crashed loudly just behind me.
And dumbly, I became deaf.

I could only hear the crunch of small rocks
and the gulping as they slipped down his throat.

The thump of the roots that he pulled up with his hands
and the sucking sound as his teeth left his mouth.

ANNA MORRISON

Lastborn

I decided, finally, that you had gone before the morning,
that the night shook your sleep gently,
that you never stopped dreaming.

Years I stayed against your door
holding back the water you dreamt
from coming into the house where we were born.

Once, I left you, wanting my own sleep –
I opened your room up,
let that water wrap us all under

Never again against your door, I tore myself,
impossibly,
out of the house where we were born,
where the water still fills all the rooms,

Still reaches back inside our mother,
the dark place where you'd grown,
where I felt you first, already gone,

Before you knew I was there too, survived –

Where your water woke me, then sealed me shut.

The Orchard

I.

Our summer in the orchard,
You tended my sickness –
Pulled from my mouth the dead leaves,
The ones I could never let go
Even when fall came and it was time.

They had begun to stop glowing,
To crack slowly open,
To beg out of my mouth

II.

I blamed you at first,
For touching them.
For taking their glows,
For making me speak of them
So they would finally go.

But you took them in your mouth,
Left me deep in the orchard,
Swore to find the forest where they'd glow again.

III.

Back for me, late that winter
You come out of mountain gloom
Dragging the tree I hid over
and over in the forest from you.

But no, you never found me,
Never again in the orchard.
You shut your teeth over my leaves
Still sick in your mouth,
Never recovered.



TAYLOR WILKINS | Some places are like people:
some shine and some don't

DEVON YOUNG

Working Autobiography (with special commentary from Sheep Skin, Coffee Table, Futon et al.)

“When the Guest is being searched for, it is the intensity of the longing for the Guest that does all the work.”

Age one hour

I am born underwater. I imagine it looked like this: a sun-speckled, water-damaged photograph of my family and midwife looking down at me from the edges of our rented birth-tank. A sort of reverse baptism minus the hokey religious stuff. Mom wanted to have her next child underwater too, but they had to go and be twins. Twins are too risky, so I am her only water baby.

[Sheep Skin felt honored to be the first material touched by her infant skin after she was extracted from the warm water. The warmth from the previous life below her wooly surface replaced by the new life above.]

Age 5

I eat cheesy grits and watch Oprah on Saturday mornings. Distracted over-sized spoon feeding child-sticky mouth (and hair, face, and arms).

[Coffee Table winced at the falling cheesy grits. Eyed them catching in her soft curls and cursed the inattentiveness of parents whose bedroom arguments were ill-concealed by Wall and Door.]

Dad would come home at dusk most nights. Brown glass bottle, blue chemical on his work clothes. The blue meant I couldn't hug him, it was the poison he used when working in the woods. That's

where Mom and Dad met- the woods. Tree-planting out in Arkansas, living off cans of beans in the back of a covered work truck. When they moved here to Georgia they started their own tree-planting business, “Green Wave.” “Green Wave,” Dad tells me, because if you look real fast across the tree line, all you see is a wave of green.

Age 6

I look real fast across the living room. T.V., parents, futon, bookshelves, sisters; a blurry photograph water-damaged by the tears in my eyes. Six is the year I learn about Divorce. It sounds like:

“Your father and I are separating. We don’t love each other anymore.”
[At hearing these words, Futon wished to gather the small girls in her wooden arm frames. She knows divorce is a granite-rock concept for children.]

I learn a lot about Counselors, too. They sound like:
“Some couples are just better off separated. It doesn’t mean they don’t still love you.” I stare shyly at the walls of the bright counselor’s office and smile when it seems appropriate to. But, every day I’m really just waiting for someone to tell me that on Mother’s Days we will still take family canoeing trips down the Broad River and come home and eat sloppy joes together.

Age 7

I enter “recovered alcoholic” into my vocabulary. This is Dad and this means no more brown bottles at dusk. Instead, these are replaced by AA meetings on Sunday afternoons. During the meetings, my sisters and I are left downstairs in the church basement with the creepy life-size bible character figurines. We play “school” with Mary and the 3 wise men. But Jesus has to sit in the corner.

[Cobbhouse Basement of downtown Athens enjoyed the company of the small children of alcoholics on Sundays.]

Age 10

I watch Death. It stares back as a cow with wide, wet eyes, blood flowing down chest. *[Dead grass noticed the blood, was grateful for its thick warmth against November’s subtle repenting chill.]*

Dad’s new house means the El Salvadorians who plant trees for him can come over to celebrate good seasons. They enjoy drinking, gambling, long walks on the beach, and annually staking a cow through its beating heart. They take turns drinking the blood from

the hollow stake.

It's a different cow every year, but not really. The only thing that changes is the position and shape of black spots against white canvas. The life-blank expression is always the same. I watch a man, blood dripping from his grin. It drips down his chest and coats the gold cross around his thick neck.

Dad's new house is for his new life. It means we can now live half the time with Mom and half the time with Dad. But I liked having a weekend Dad and going to visit his trailer. It didn't have heat, but we had Cajun music and Dad would turn it all the way up and let us dance on his feet instead of the cold hardwood floor. That's how Dad met Linda. At a Cajun dance in Atlanta. And now they can go to AA meetings together, only she meets with the Al-Anon group because it was her parents who had the problem, not her.

Age 11

[Every morning Piano is awakened by the manipulation of its own rich tones.] Dad sings "rise up, rise up sweet family dear." For a long time I think it's a song he made up. It isn't until I go to college that I realize it is the Kundalini Yoga "Wake-Up" song. Something he picked up from that commune in New Mexico where he'd spent the summer after the divorce when he first gave up alcohol. He'd left in Mourning and come home in a Turban.

I ask him about the turban one day. He smiles brightly and pats the chair for me to sit next to him.

"You know, you were my first step in recovery. It was you who got out of bed that morning and asked me to take you to church."

"Why would I have done that?" I wrinkle my eyebrow skeptically.

"I don't know, we'd never taken you guys to church before. Maybe it was something you picked up from one of your school friends. All I know is something keeps slapping me in the face saying "Wake up, there's something greater than yourself out there."

Age 13

My mom decides she doesn't want to share us anymore; her contempt ignites into flames of lawyers money tears. When the three-year fire is extinguished, Mom has disappeared in the flames. Moves to North Carolina with her new husband convinced we chose Dad over her. Maybe I did. Dad coaches our soccer teams, takes us rock-hunting out West, talks to us about the Gaza strip, Haliburton, WW1

in Casablanca. Mom isn't even sure where Morocco is on a map. Can't speak grammatically correct English, can't hear me over her T.V. shows, can't just hug me when I don't make the soccer team. *[Morocco is justifiably insulted.]*

Age 14

I cry about once every week. Hard, panicked, desperate. I want to wake Dad and Linda to comfort me, but I don't want to scare them. I signed this contract with Fear back around second grade and should be used its consistent visitation by now. I lie in bed until it blankets my mind. There is no relief against the slideshow of thoughts it forces me to process: I am going to die someday. I will have to do it alone. Everyone dies alone. I will be alive when my parents die. ---This last thought is why I signed the contract. A need to mentally prepare myself for the moment when the oxygen to my brain is completely cut off by my inevitable realization that what I loved has become nothing but a shell of the tangible.

When I wake, Fear has capitulated itself to Logic and Composure. *[Fear would like to note, that in his own defense, his persistent visitation is merely a common side-effect of divorce and the breaking down of families into smaller units.]*

Age 17

I pick up the ashes with my bare hands and throw them into the Gila River of Clovis, New Mexico. They feel like this: the silty smoothness of the residue of a fireplace. Not like this: the charred remains of my grandmother who was born along this river. I didn't really know her; she lived alone in New York all my life mourning the loss of Grandpa.

I would like to find some version of God someday. Not the plastic, Bible-school God, but the real, dirt-under-your-fingernails God. The make-you-not afraid-of-death God. I want to, but I can't. I tell myself I do, but when I lie awake at night, I am not convinced. And I'm afraid that when I'm 70 lying awake at night, I will still not be convinced. I will end up like my grandma. Depression stationary in her chair, awaiting death with only scotch for company.

Age 19

My summer looks like this: picking blueberries teaching English mulching grapes baking bread homemade cobbler pick-up soccer.

All against the backdrop of Jubilee Partners, a refugee resettlement center in rural Georgia.

The riddling of holes through a life-organ sounds like this: the tear-strained, poor English of a Karen mother as she holds your hands “Thank you, teacher,” then takes one last look at the countryside before leaving to Atlanta. Atlanta with its callous-heart walls, low-income apartments. Now you can work in a chicken factory. Wake up at 3AM for the 2-hour drive to Loganville in a van with 6 other Karen adults who are also experiencing a better life here in America.

I cry all morning as my hands plant sweet potatoes, dig weeds. *[Sweet Potatoes are grateful for the pressure of tears against red Georgia drought.]* When I return to my room, the dust-sweat sheet on my face and shoulders awakens against the Georgia summer breeze entering the open windows of the un-air-conditioned community house. *[Walls are still though she sees them as crumbling. Sheep Skin is frustrated in her own inability to provide comfort in the heat.]*

I call Dad. He says, “By the end of our lives, our hearts should be riddled with holes so that love flows freely though.”

Age 20

I just outside the callous-heart boundaries of campus. I miss the summer when I was 19 and I crave the dust, sweat, and tears. Having something outside myself to cry about. It’s not because of the cow that I don’t believe in God or even because of the refugees. It’s because when I look real fast across the cityscape, all I see is a wave of gray.

Age 21

Hospitals make me anxious. I.V.’s, bedpans, mint-green coated suffering. I don’t want to go in, but Linda called and said Dad has a problem with his liver and the doctors are keeping him for a while to run tests. She speaks calmly, but I hear the tautness in her voice. I hang up the phone and allow the panic to loosen itself in the form of tears. He hasn’t had a drink in 13 years. This can’t be happening.

I enter his room. It smells like calm sterility. He smiles when I come in, and I hug him awkwardly, afraid to look him in the eyes. He’s so much smaller in the hospital bed, but I can see he’s still himself. He jokes with the nurse as she changes his I.V. bag. “I’ll have grape this time, please. Or strawberry if you’ve got it.”

A few days later a family friend from AA calls me:

“How’s your dad doin’?”

“Good. It was just a fluke bacterial infection. The doctors said they expect a full recovery. He should be out in a few days.”

“Well, good. We’ve been prayin’ for him here at the meetings.”

“Thank you.”

Ana Mashi Touriste

Wakefulness. The light through my eyelids glows red-orange against the sunlight piercing the room. Too bright when I unshut my eyes. But, when I put on my eyelids it shifts red, orange, yellow. Red orange yellow, again.

I don't have to open my eyes to know where I am-- these are the colors of Marrakesh. The sticky-sweet breath of fresh mint tea and crepes seduces me from my daybed. Time for after-lunch snack. This following breakfast, brunch, and lunch and preceding dinner and dessert, of course. Muslim math is something like 5 daily prayers and 6 daily meals. It is getting through 2/3 of your plate before you can push it away because you have eaten $\frac{3}{4}$ of your body weight in couscous.

"Baraka, Baraka," I protest. This is a sort of magic word. The combination of repeating "Baraka" and patting my belly saves me from the earnest gestures of my host mom to continue eating. It is probably the most useful word to own when dining in the home of a Moroccan family. Baraka is "blessed." "I am blessed enough, thank you. Please do not make me hurt myself."

I've only been in Morocco for a few weeks and I can already feel the vestiges of hedonism accumulating around my waist. A souvenir-- when I look at it I see Couscous Fridays, fried sardines, fresh milk and olive oil, beef harira, chicken bastilla, lamb tajine with raisins and cinnamon and figs. And the tastes are red orange yellow. Red orange yellow.

Most days I go to the language school with the other American students. They teach us useful phrases like “seef halek” (get away from me) and “Ana mashi touriste, ana taleeba” (I’m not a tourist, I’m a student.) But my favorite is “en sh’allah” which means “God-willing” and is a Moroccan cop-out for poor punctuality. It always allows us to be late for class when we say “I’ll be there at 9, en sh’allah.” Somehow I don’t think this will fly when I return to my college English professors.

“Ana taleeba” is what we’re supposed to say at the market today to encourage vendors to give us fair, Moroccan prices- not the prices they give to tourists. It is easy to spot the American and European tourists in Marrakesh. They are the ones whose shoulders and legs you can see. Like they somehow stumbled into a conservative Muslim country without realizing it. And they are the ones eating at the expensive French cafes. Sitting in the open air with their expensive wines and cheap tan lines. I’ve never seen a Moroccan eat at one of these cafes. These are the people who are here to “buy” a piece of Morocco so they can go home with their romantic trinkets and photographs and tell their friends, “Look how interesting I am! Look how exotic! I traveled to a country with brown people!”

And exotic it is. I keep going to the market and it keeps overwhelming me. It’s both paradise and purgatory with its spices and snake charmers, pottery and prostitutes. Hundreds of people swarming through rows after rows of tea sets, jewelry, and rugs interlaced with stands of bloody lambs and freshly skinned camel heads. I space out and almost get stampeded by a mule carrying a load of cargo through the crowded, narrow path. It’s a crusty mule with its ribs poking out and sad crusty eyes and crusty red blood on its ankles.

I walk too close to a man with a monkey and he wrenches my camera from my hand. I panic. The market spins red, orange, yellow as the crowd continues to bump into me.

“Stop, wait!” I shout.

He holds out my camera and his shrugging shoulders insist, “See, I’m not stealing it.”

His friend places the monkey on my shoulders. I stand there awkwardly, harboring the creature against my will. The man then snaps two shots, removes the monkey, returns my camera, and holds out his hand for money. I have no change, only large bills. I try to explain this to him but he gets agitated and yells. He paws at my bag and ges-

tures to the coins in his bucket. A friend grabs me and pulls me away. I watch and disappear into the crowd as the man and his monkey rant and howl behind me, rattling their sordid money in its plastic yellow bucket.

Thankfully, tonight is hammam night. I leave my clothes at the door. Wood fires heat the waters of the public bathhouse which echoes with the gossip of fleshy mothers and housewives. Their copper bodies shimmer with olive oil and their large breasts sway, passively mirroring their animated movements. While I get scrubbed down by a woman I do not know a naked toddler escapee seats himself next to me and begins splashing around in my water-bucket. My scrubber swats at him and sends him back to his mother. She has work to do- the work of scrubbing away the evidence of an entire week of existence. She proudly displays the shards of “grime” she has removed from my back which I’m pretty sure is mostly just skin. I leave the hammam raw as the carcasses in the market.

I am riding through the desert on a camel. My study abroad group has departed from the city to trek across the Sahara. I feel awkward riding when the camel herder is walking the whole way on foot. I eventually get tired of watching the dunes and settle my gaze on the him. I watch the bottoms of his bare brown feet lift and fall across the sandy canvas. Lift, fall. Lift, fall.

My camel has no name. I’m riding through the desert on a camel with no name. So, I call him Humphrey. Humphrey is stoic and absurdly pretty with his golden nose ring and long stunning, eyelashes. Every year thousands of camels journey to Abu Dhabi to compete in the annual ‘camel beauty pageant’ and if I were a judge, I would select Humphrey.

1,000. That’s how many camels the man from the gas stop on the way here said I’m worth to him, which is really nice of him to say considering these “ships of the desert” range in value from \$500 to \$20,000. Everywhere the girls in my group and I go, we are propositioned with a flattering estimation of our worth in camels. Or we are compared to gazelles, an animal whose beauty Moroccans revere above all others. This most often occurs when a vendor is attempting to draw us into his tent.

“Ahh gazelle, very beautiful! Gazelle, jamala. Please, come in.”

When we get back to Marrakesh, my host family has prepared a feast. We sit in the living room while my host Dad asks me about my trip. My host dad has two wives. One that can make babies and one that can't. The one that can only found out about the one that can't last year. According to Muslim ethics, he must treat both women equally. That's what my own Dad always said when we'd get a new kitten. How we still had to play with Pouchy so she wouldn't get jealous of the new kitty.

Back in the market I stop at a vendor to get some ice-cream as I'm typically wont to do a few times a day because it's only 25 cents a scoop. A small hand tugs on my shirt. I look down- a small boy in a dirty shirt looks up at me wistfully. I recognize him- he is one of the children that wander around the market selling Kleenex to tourists. The kid is persistent. He keeps tugging at my shirt and pointing to the ice-cream. Dammit. It's always been my belief that ice-cream is one of those undeniable human rights... But, if you give one child a coin then all the beggar children swarm in and demand coins and I don't have enough coins and they begin to fight and the first kid's ice-cream gets knocked out of his hands and he begins to cry and I don't even feel like eating ice-cream anymore.

After a moment I hand him a coin and then walk away briskly, turning my back on the situation.

I walk to another vendor and spot an intriguing camel bone knife.

"How much?"

"600 dirhams"

I cringe. 75 dollars. A price 3 times what he would have charged a Moroccan.

"No, too much. Ana taleeba. Ana mashi touriste."

He smiles poor attempt at Arabic and lightens the deal.

"550 dirhams, good student price."

"No thanks." I shake my head and turn to leave.

"Ok, ok! 500 dirhams, last price."

I eye the small blade. Still not worth \$65.

"No, nevermind. It's an unfair price. Ana *taleeba*."

The man's expression changes. He scoffs, glancing contemptuously at the camera around my wrist. He hisses the sharp-toothed word. "Touriste."

His anger is red-orange. Not yellow. I am yellow and my face is red. I stammer. Ana mashi touriste. Ana mashi touriste... I turn my back to the man and his knives and leave.





MAURA FRIEDMAN | A Beautiful Geometry



MAURA FRIEDMAN
Feathered Friend

CHRIS YOUNG

Calculus

The moonlight catches her vellus
in such a way
there's only
an outline
in silver
of her silhouette
on my pillow

Age is no thief.
How sweet beneath
its icing
lies a
cake I never
wanted cut
it was so pretty.

Time robs nothing.
Reposed in our bed
She still talks of the future.
Flavors of her chin
angles of her face
growing more complex.
The vintner knows.

Rodin works to perfection
gently removing the stone
of youth
to the present
inside

Time moves
one direction.
Toward new.
Fresh with age.
Change measured
in calculus
gives
and gives

Thwok

“*King Louis was the king of France...*”

Thwok.

“How would you write this sound?” Rick asks.

Clueless, I take another swing. Dirt splays up as I lift my hoedad. Brown crumbs break from the blade and cascade into my ponytail. I pull the tool down hard and open the hole a little wider.

“I don’t know, I like thwok,” I said.

“What about ‘sluice pat-chue?’” Chip chimes in.

“Nah. Maybe if you were in mud or something.”

“*Before the revolu-it-tion...*”

Thwok. Our part of the chorus was... “*Weigh hoe weigh, hoe way Joe.*” Hold that ‘Joe’ note in a deep resonating bass. Thwok. Ching.

Building forests is the spin given for what we do. “Reforestation specialists,” the title. After the loggers, we come through, like disciples of the wood, the smell of ascetics rising as we make our way across the plain of cut-over land setting pine seedlings.

“Then he got his head cut off...”

Thwok.

“Someday I’m gonna write this down. I’ll need to know how to make these sounds” I breathe, my wind gushing out fast as I swirl my

metal in an arc circling over my head. Thwok! An echo quickly follows four more thwoks from my line. Further back, another team overdubs with their rhythm, syncopated by the distance.

“Which spoiled his constitutu-it-tion...”

Thwok.

“Weigh O away a O weigh Joe o o o ...”

Dave is from Australia, and he seemingly never tires of belting out these verses. The ten o'clock run's the hardest because you know there is so much time left in the day. The first run at dawn was “don't bother me...It's freakin cold....what's over that hill..” And the first hour of work was spent still sleeping. But by ten/eleven it was song that gave you a step. And a swing. Dave's down under twang, his crooked nose held to the sky in silhouette, and this obscure chantey, made the lungs push the legs another link on the grid.

“Once I met a German girl...”

Thwok.

There's not a lot to do while planting trees.

“Buddha asks, what is the cause of suffering? Is it time, or is it ignorance?”

I like Rick cause he can do this. He can make time step with him and another tree is planted. Another one's in the ground.

“Well, I assume, knowing the Buddha, that the answer would have to be ignorance. Time is too obvious.” I suggest.

“But Koans are obvious,” he replies.

“Time doesn't end. Only our perception of it can change. Therefore ignorance.” Chip was in fact the foreman, though I'm guessing less from intelligence than seniority. Thwok.

“The root of suffering is my butt,” I said. My posterior cries out as I extend my hoedad in a vain attempt for posterity. The blade goes in clean to the bracket, a good strike. I lift the handle of the mattock forcing the loam to form a vessel for my tree. I roll a single seedling down with my thumb over the forefinger until its roots swirl to a point, which I eyeball down to the bottom of the notch I made in the ground. This nursery stock gift for review by the Goddess of the earth.

“Where's the Buddha now?” Billy asks.

“And she grew fat and laz-a-zy...”

Thwok.

“Way ho sway, hoe weigh Joe...”

“Kabir says – you will find me in the tiniest house of time.” And Rick kills another moment, just like that. Sliced. A universe within it. I open the saint’s house a little wider and set the roots of my seedling in the middle of it. Another anchor holding eternity in place. I look back to see how we’re pacing. Minutes measured by green needled stalks lean toward us, punctuated by random bricks, the broken hearth of an ancient homestead.

“Then I got a Yankee girl...”

Thwok.

Zen. Wall gazing. Mind numbing tedious work, and I am loving it. Forks and knives. That’s what I’m hearing now. A medieval banquet hall of nothing but forks and knives. And dinner conversations. Or it’s gladiators. Swords on stone. Swords into plowshares. A race of hippies planting up trees as fast as they can. Trees sucking carbon. I can’t catch my breath. So much time.

“And she bout drives me cra-a-zy...”

Thwok.

“Weigh ho weeee, ho wee Joe...”

My feet leaden as we round the chorus a few last times. Someone has scared up a dust devil which rares and circles us, watching. I stretch my back a moment and open my cramping hand off the tool. Sun warms my muddy sweat. Dry breeze cools it to flecks.

In the distance, I hear Franko’s line following a slow and bluesy Van Ronk imitation. His words covering the rise and forward step of the his crew on the first two beats. The swing of the team, the blades hitting the ground, accenting the third rhythm. The manipulation of the hole and the actual planting of each seedling marking the end of the measure. The entire phalanx rises for the next line, like a slow motion leapfrog. Andy takes a quick air-guitar solo holding his tool ala B.B. King.

<i>"Ah loves you baby..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	Watching them.
<i>"Tell the world I do..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	The fluid twists.
<i>"I don't need nobody..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	Torsos made elastic.
<i>"Else but you..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	In chromatic meter.
<i>"So come on back baby..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	Sculpted by Rodin.
<i>"Let's talk it over..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	A Teutonic crab.
<i>"One more time..."</i>	Thwok pa-chue.	With Viking hair.
<i>"One more time..."</i>	Thwok, pa-chue.	And torn army/navy.

The guys expertly make the pivot and the flank moves across the windrow of logged treetops. Franko takes the seventh notes of his song and flattens them through his nasal cavities where they mingle with the drippings of his limbic region, collecting old soot and residues of broke pieces of love that have seeped through the membranes and cracks. Such pathos, you'd think it was the French Foreign Legion or something. Not some bohemian neverland.

"Sunday morning gonna make me rich..." In our line, Dave has changed tunes without missing a beat. But now the meter is kicked up, faster.

"Hooo..." Thwok. Uhhhh. *"ha ha ha..."* Our part.

"Sunday morning gonna make me humble.."

"Hooo..." Thwok. Uhhhh. *"ha ha ha..."*

"If I ever had a company like this, I'd call it Green Wave," says Billy. Thwok. "In a few years these little nubs'll grow up and all you'll see looking across this field are waves of green pine trees. Like golden wheat" Another future accountant hiding out, Billy tends to the quiet side, his glasses, dotted with terra firma, askew in the same angle of his beautiful smile.

"Fruited plains," says Rick.

"Purple mountain's majesties," adds Chip.

"Can't eat trees," I grunt.

I wonder how I got myself here, planting commercial forests across the southeast. I don't even know which state I'm in. Chip had said three rights and a left from Mississippi. "Green Wave...After the loggers..." I stow that for a future slogan. My trademark, maybe, if I

grow up.

"Sunday morning gonna work that ditch..."

Thwok.

"Hooo..." Wind gushes out. *"ha ha ha..."* Suck air in, step.

So much time. Thwok. Two o'clock is the movie review run. I'm thinking ahead to my story. Maybe something from the Saturday morning science fiction we used to see as kids. Something with local flavor like Attack of the Giant Gila Monster. Chip is the only one of us actually from the south and he fits the image. Square jawed, tall, soup bowl hair cut. He can tell the simplest movie plot and make it enthralling. Rick's pretty good at it too. An English major drop out, he's from Maine and the extremes of the northern forests. Young and not afraid to show it. When the season's over, he goes back to a mill job in his home town. But for now, it's Club Med in God's country. You should hear him belt Sting's trashy *"Roxanne, you don't have to put on that red dress"* at six in the morning. How these guys make the day go by.

"Sunday morning shouldn't make me grumble..."

Thwok.

"Hooo... ha ha ha..."

I feel in my bag and grab the last handful of a dozen seedlings. It's about time. That's my first thousand of the day. I'm ahead of my goal. Rick's out too, and takes half my last hand of trees. Chip's finishing as is Billy and we meld our line into the one we been following. Dave's going on with some of the raunchier verses as we walk past our friends bringing up the rear. I can see they packed heavier. Maybe Andy can catch us for the last run. The 'lascivious patter' run. His stories are so riveting in this field. The "almost" stories. The humbling anecdotes of "there was this time I almost got some..." And maybe a limerick or two. Billy can spawn a limerick from the ether as he bleeds trees into the earth in response to Andy's tales of almost love...

There once was a man from the hill,
who described to me just what you feel,
his own personality
quelled with finality

remotest of needs for the pill.

Anti-stud tales work so much better when you have to live with these guys for four months. It changes the nature of the competition. We hurry to the loading dock hoping we can store enough daylight with our pace. At this rate, we'll capture another hundred trees before time runs out. Pack it and spend it.

During lunch, we tend to save our words. Moments go by too quick here. Pain sets in and you can never eat enough. There's the usual talk about going to town tonight. Yeah, that's the ticket. We never actually go. Always way too tired by the time dark comes. We know this from daily experience, but early afternoon the thought has enough excitement to get us to stand again and we put on our bags with another load of seedlings. The first blooms of shadow have appeared. Where does the time go?

"So..." Chip starts us out. "I was at this drive-in once where they were showing *The Crawling Eye*..." It's the afternoon run and I got my seat in the third row. Thwok. I adjust the weight of my pack on my hips. The field spreads before us to the horizon. Reaching into my pocket for my watch, I realize the hours and minutes have found the hole of my jeans and tumbled to the dust.



DAN OSBORNE | New Applications

DAN OSBORNE
Passing on
the Bridge



LINDSAY POTTER

Of World by van Schagen, 1671

When you drew the earth in four spheres did you know,
surrounded by gods and smoke and the mystic trumpeting mermaids,
that all of this would only serve to describe
a globe so round and neat,
crosshatched like chicken wire caging
holding in its crescents only red clay
dirt and people like me.

The couples of nude, built, baroque
characters wielding steel and gold and fire,
draped richly deep in tertiary colors,
chat across the arctic silver circle
like over coffee and as if one is not
caressing the other, bare and so tenderly.

This is all to say that now, when I imagine the world
in maps and geographical outlines, I think of my luminescent
and sickly colorless computer screen and the single family
of blues and greens sitting neatly in lots of land
plotted with potted plants and the suburban stoicism
of the Google earth cartographer.

When you drew the ancient things, like clockwork
and the shape of Greenland in Michelangelo's
palette but with the pagan gods of another chapel ceiling,
could you possibly have known in centuries, or years
even, the space of human life your map would come

to hold. Each fraction of dotted ink would be face
to face with another fraction of webbed second
in hyperlinked obstruction. So that now when I read
a map it is without words but maybe there is sound
and all I hear and see are the nakedness of someone

else's windows and empty mailbox. A broken shudder
and red front door do not tell me half as much
as the perfectly round breast and muted muscle's tug
in the heavenly space between continents
that in pixilated presence looks only like dust
and dirt and people like me.

[I make a pact with you, Dali–]

I make a pact with you, Dali–

I have searched canvases for the gruesome
truths harbored under your harvest skies.

I am like the man
hung tightly in the wound
egg shell, I know his knees and shoulders.

The egg is cracked and he is crawling out
to meet the bare and wrinkled ground.
Coming forth from white
film and touching God first
and then the dirt.

Paint me
with the same space
and time afforded this creature.
His birth is a monument to
the thought of evolution,
the chicken or what came first.

I want a body
so lithe to climb out of an egg
into your canvas and thrive
in the colors you breathe into life.

And now, skeletal myself,
with finite age unfit for time's
languid clocks and crooked hands,
I wilt to you–
asking only that you paint my face
in no uncertain terms.

DANIEL JORDAN

On your birthday when the same thing happens over and over

In the linen closet and under a velvet blanket, she gave him a pomegranate.

Thank you, he said.

No, she said, this isn't what it was going to be. Then, in the linen closet and under the velvet blanket, she wrapped the pomegranate in newspaper with comics on it. Thanks, he said.

No, she said, come on. And she tore the blankets away and stormed out the closet with him and shut the door and pointed at it and said, look. This is nice, he said.

No, she said, and dragged him out of the house and into the front yard and from here she pointed, through everything, to the pomegranate. It was snowing. He was scared to say anything because they were already outside so what would be next? Outer space? Maybe the game was finally over and she would say, I have a pomegranate for you, and lead him inside. Or maybe she'd say, I have a closet door to show you, and take him by the hand and do everything backwards. Maybe if she did this he would have to say no thank you or non thanks to get to the next step.

What are you thinking about? she said. He replied, I don't know. Things were... simpler in there.

Actually no they weren't, she said, and gave him a diagram drawn in pencil on notebook paper. It was like a treasure map, showing the pomegranate with comics on it under the velvet blanket in the linen closet. Wow, he said. Thank you.

No, she said, and then gave him another diagram. It was a diagram that showed him standing in the snow and hold-

ing the previous diagram. In this diagram, his likeness didn't look like him, even though it was wearing his shirt. Okay, he said.

Nope, she said, and gave him another diagram that showed him holding the previous diagram which showed him holding the diagram before that. Okay, he said.

No, she said, and held out yet another diagram. But he didn't look at it. He knew what it would show, and moreover, he knew something very important that all his likenesses within the other diagram(s) didn't know, which is that they were all about to receive more diagrams unless they said no. So he decided to be the one. No, he said, no thank you, I won't take it.

Finally! she said, then crumpled up the sheet of paper and put it in her mouth and swallowed it.

No! he yelled, and he realized that he had been afraid of this ever since in the linen closet under the velvet blanket when she had covered the pomegranate in the newspaper with comics on it. He yelled at her, snap out of it, snap out of it! No! she yelled, and pulled out her notebook and started to draw another diagram, her mouth watering.

But he was sick of it. And he was cold. So he got into his car and locked it and turned on the heat. She knocked and knocked on the windows but he didn't listen.

Then, slowly, she covered the car with snow.

Then she covered the snow with darkness.

Then something else covered the darkness, but he didn't know. As he was falling asleep, all he could think was that somewhere in her stomach was a diagram with his likeness drawn on it.

The Name to Slap Around

The name to slap around is on the table,
and I don't want it, and you don't want,
and I don't. Because I said. And then you said.
And then we made.
And now it's.
And so now I.

You're my thumb-printer, you know,
my finger-painter, my muddy, and my me
only melted onto your me because we're
actually only made out of each other.
And now the name to slap around is
at the table. And don't look at it. Because it's
also just made out of each other. Because it's
actually only. Because that's all
it can be because we're the only
ones here. So actually
only we made it.
And so now it's.

My mold, my shapes. Our shapes. (My
bell-blower, my neck-melter.) Ours is
the music here. Ours is the table. I
already forgot I said. And then
you said. And then we made.
Ours is what we made.
It scratches your chest
out of our skin, what we made.
Out of our skin we made what it's,
what it actually only is, and the name
to slip around us is at the table, out of
our skin. So now it's on the table.
So now it's.

Actually only (my frowny facer, my tender tuber),
Actually only, I said, I forgot I said (my cleaver,

my table sleeper) and then we are the only ones here
(but that we were the only ones here) my printer-painter,
my finger-flinger, my muddy. My made out of our skin,
my made to slip under is around the table, and so now it's.
Us it's.

And so we made.

At the table, we made the table. At New York, we made
New York. And listen. To slap it around is simply at the
table, my mackerel, my soup-swamper, my flipper fin!
Because now it's! Because now it's actually each
or only other, my pattern-seeker, my playpretty,
(my memory, my me)!

So now I want to. I want it to slap you clean and I want
to slap you out of the table, to slap your each,
to slap your other, I want to slap you out upon and
after the table and slip around on the table, to slap
your only ones here and sweep your sweat off the table
and all your other stuff out of what you're made of.

Messy New York! Messy music! And don't look at it.
And don't want it. And so don't. You and don't. So no you.
So now you and want. And listen,

push it off. Don't sleep around at the table.
Actually only slap. Frown it, shape it down
under the table, after our skin, after each other.
Name around at your chest. Name around,
want it, want it around. Name it after
each other, my curtain-pleater,
my snow-peeler. (Name it after my bird-chaser,
my moonkeeper.) Name it because I said. And then
you said. And then we made. Name it because we made,
my mold, my shapes, my only ones here.

I already forgot I said.
Don't forgot I said.

Root

They had to cut her open, they said, because young things do not just wither and die, and by all appearances, that's all they could say had happened to her, my sister, withering. The neighbors found her. They went to look in on her because, they said, the air felt too heavy that day, and they were worried about some sort of problem with water heaters or carbon monoxide that, if left unchecked, might contaminate the entire apartment building. So that's how they found her, curled shut around herself, dried sort of, on the middle of the braided rug beside the coffee table.

They were alarmed, the neighbors, so they called the police, and the police were alarmed too, so they checked for all the signs of homicide or suicide that they could think of, but they couldn't find any. There had to be some kind of scientific explanation, they thought. These things do not just happen, they thought. So that was why they had to cut her open, to see with their own eyes. Autopsy, they call it, because it sounds much better that way.

We had to have a viewing. They say it helps you grieve properly. They say it's better to take a good look while you can. Before they bring out the saw, before they plug it in and move it down into the sternum. I've tried, but I cannot imagine what the sound of metal meeting bone and skin and tissue must be like.

So we had the viewing because it was recommended, although it wasn't a particularly formal affair. We went to the morgue where they were storing her body, and they put her out on a table because they knew we were coming, and we went in one at a time to look at her there, my sister, because it would have embarrassed us too much

to go in all together.

So we went in one at a time, and my mother stayed in a long time, and my father didn't stay in long at all, and when each of them came out they were pale, and then it was my turn.

I still think about how white it was in the morgue. It was white so that you could see how clean it was in there; so you could see what a good job they were doing of keeping death at bay there, hidden away under sheets and in drawers and freezers. The door was white, and I pushed it open, and the room in which she lay was made of cinder blocks, and they were painted white too so that it was just the two of us in the room there, she and I, encased.

It wasn't what I expected. Outside, I braced myself for the bloating and swelling I thought would be there: the distension, the blues and greens, the mucous, the blood. But that's not how it was, and I suppose I should have known, for if it had looked like any of those things, the things you might expect it would look like, there wouldn't have been any need for all this fuss.

It was withered, but not like the neighbors said, not really. It was just sort of faded and empty looking. And that was all.

When we left, I was glad we had come because I could stop picturing the saw on her sternum. I didn't have to wonder any longer whether some examiner would know the length of her intestines or the shape of her heart. I didn't have to think about her kidneys anymore, whether they were soft. Somehow, what I saw there convinced me that the body was empty, that the thing on the table was a crumpled paper husk.

But I shouldn't have thought that. I shouldn't have thought I was some sort of expert. I hadn't seen her in over a year, and she was older, and she left the city a lot to travel, and when she did come around, I think we all knew that she had some other life, her real life, that none of us could understand. We knew this because of all the books she wrote. There were four, and none of us read beyond the first two because after the first two, it became scary to think that all that had come from her, the person we thought we knew. We found nothing of ourselves in them, my parents and me. They were great books, everyone said, and maybe they were.

So I shouldn't have been surprised that I was wrong about the shell there, the husk, the remains, they were calling it. When they called from the morgue, I was the one who spoke with them on the phone because suddenly my mother and father had become very old,

and I don't think either of them cared to know any more about the whole affair. So I spoke to them, the experts, and they began by saying that there are some things they just can't know for sure. Once, they found a strangely burned corpse, and they couldn't explain where the fire had come from, so a whole documentary crew came out to look at their data, and everyone was calling it spontaneous combustion. Spontaneous. All they could say, the experts said, is that sometimes they just can't say for sure what happens to people. They can't just put it all together later. There was no reason to think it was murder or disease, they said, at least not any disease they had ever heard of, and if I wanted to come down, they said, I could, and they would show me if I didn't think it would disturb me to see. But if I wanted to be done with it all, they said, they understood, and they could make that happen.

But of course, I wanted to know, so I told my parents that I was going and that I wasn't sure why. They didn't want to go, so I drove downtown to the morgue alone, and I thought that it should have been raining, but it wasn't, and everywhere I was looking out for signs, but there weren't any, and I got to the morgue without incident. When I went in, it was all the same as before except this time, her whole torso had been opened up and pinned neatly back in a manner that was very clinical.

All they could recommend, they said, was that I look, and perhaps I could understand. If I had questions, they said, they would try their best to answer them.

So I looked inside, and the first thing I noticed was the colors. There weren't any, really, just nudes and whites and grays, and I asked them if that was normal, and they said that, really, people aren't as colorful on the inside as you might think, but no, this wasn't normal. Nothing about this was really normal.

So I looked some more, and I thought about the pictures I had seen in textbooks and the plastic manikins with their skin taken off so you can see all their organs, and I compared these things to what I saw in front of me, and it was very easy to see that all the organs had moved toward each other somehow. They were curled around each other, compacted in a ball in the center of the cavity, and around them there was nothing but space.

"Why?" I said, and they just shook their heads.

And then I thought about everything I had ever seen before in my entire life, and occasionally I thought of things I had seen with her,

but I was a little girl when she left for school, so there weren't many of those to think of. I thought of animals and I thought of supermarkets. I thought of what her life must have been like and of the things that might have made her write and of how beautiful the parties she attended must have been. I thought of all the people I knew. And then, finally, after a long time of me staring at it and them staring at me, I thought of the earth and of gardens.

I remembered, as a child, digging in winter. There were some places in the garden where I was not allowed to dig, and I always wondered why. One day, I dug in those places, and I was surprised to find that beneath all the dirt and leaves, there were networks of roots, still intact, holding the memories of the flowers that had been and waiting for spring.

So I thought of gardens, and I looked harder, and then I saw them. I saw what was holding everything in the middle. There were wooden tendrils pulling everything to the inside. I couldn't believe I hadn't seen them before. Roots. There were roots.

I said, "Look."

I made them look. I pointed. I told them, and they saw, and they said, "This cannot be," but it was. They could see that it was.

They said there was no protocol for a situation like this one and that they would do whatever I asked as long as I kept quiet about all this because last time the documentary crew showed up, they made a very big mess of everything, and then some inspectors came, and then lots of people got in large amounts of trouble and some even lost their jobs.

I asked them what could be done. I asked them if they thought they could take them out, the roots, and perhaps they could spread everything back out and make the whole thing seem normal.

They thought about it. They seemed to think it was a pretty good idea, but they wanted to know what to do with the roots, and I told them what to do. There was only one thing.

A few days later, I picked up the box. They asked me if I wanted a coffin or something for the roots, but I told them not to be silly and that any box would do, so they put the roots in a box that said "Office Paper," and inside of it, the roots were curled up neatly, crisscrossing over each other. They were strangely heavy, and when I picked them up, I felt as if I were lifting a child.

I drove out of the city with the box of roots and a shovel. On the way, I thought about what I was doing, and I stopped to buy two jugs

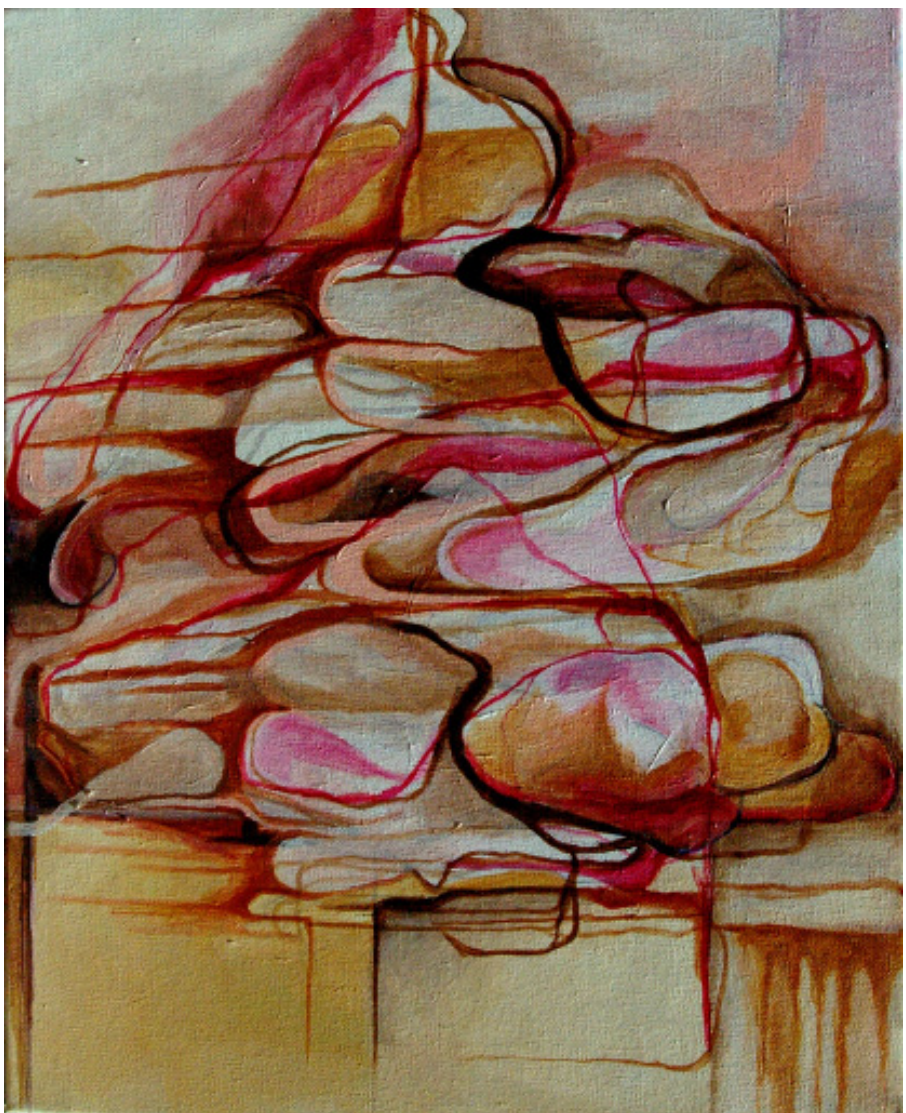
of water. I drove until I found a place where I thought no one would bother me, and I walked as far as I could carrying the box and the shovel, and when I didn't want to walk farther, I was at the top of a hill covered in small trees and patches of yellow grass, and from there I looked down and I could see the road and a lake and in the distance, the city. It seemed alright there, so I dug a hole, and I thought about how I ought to put the roots in, and in the end I just dumped them.

When I finished covering them over, I went back to the car for the water and poured it over the patch of dark earth. I wondered if I should say something, but I didn't really know if there was anything to say.

I still don't know. Sometimes, I go back to that place where I planted the roots. Not to think about her, not really; I just go and look at the plants that have grown up there. There are thick vines and grasses. There is a stand of small white trees. I cannot say where any of it came from, not for sure, but the plants are unlike anything I've seen before. And I sit on the hill, and I look at the plants, and I look at the city, and I don't know what to think except that there are some things you really can't say, not for sure.



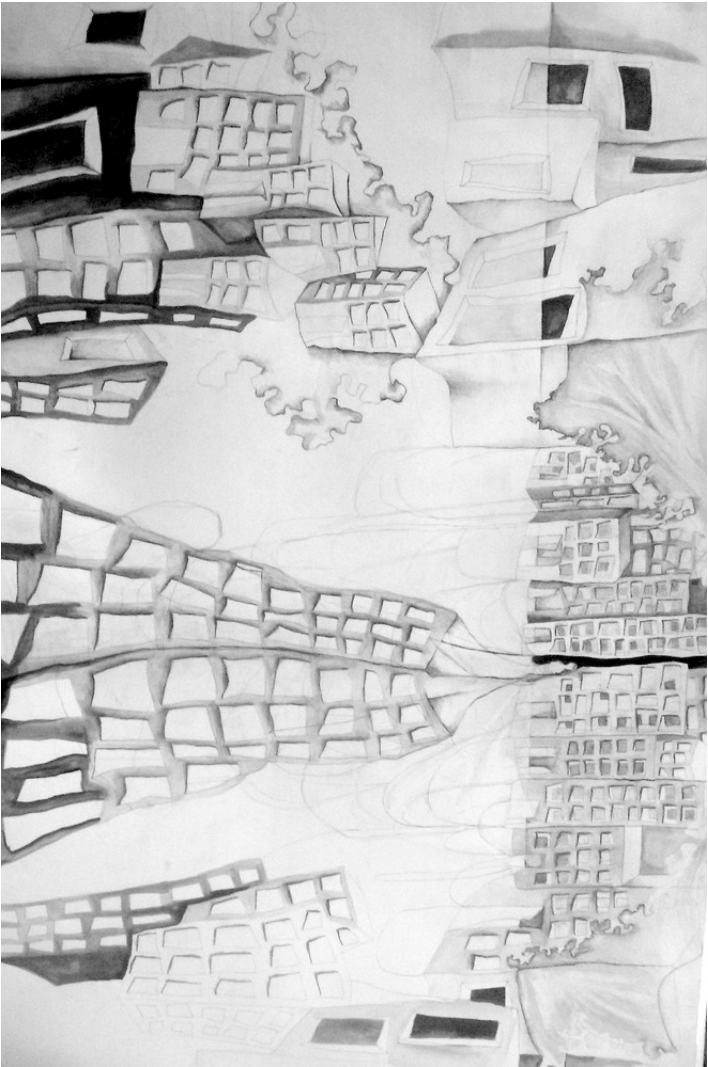
EMILY PATRICK | Head of a Girl III



SARAH
QUINN
Ideas on Strings



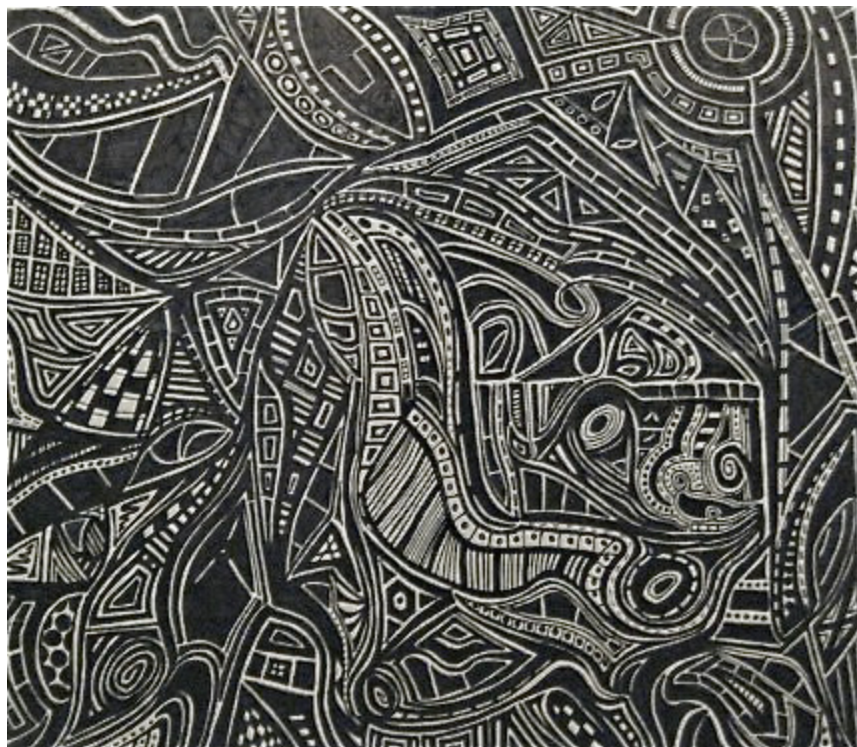
SARAH QUINN | Thief on Wires



SARAH
QUINN
I Was There
in the
Distance



SARAH QUIN
Conversion



KIRBY COBB | Chaos

RIED BATEH

Head Full of Mouths

In the end the moths ruled the sky.

At first, we thought they were ashes or dead leaves but our volcano was broken, and the trees were too stupid to change their clothes. *If I roll up the window I will be safe.*

One by one those black wings, swimming through the air, found us all. *I can't stay in this car forever.* Dead leaves. Ash. Ashes of dead leaves. The dead ash leaves, a vacuum in our mouths. The moths gracefully filled the space. every space. *I have been writing a page a day. That should help if the time comes.* Ash-leaves. A faint breeze moves the hair on my hand, light as a feather, *A drop of water trickling down my arm.* The stupid trees broke our volcano. *The feeling is just how they described it. My black hole eyes meet the source of the sensation, doing breaststrokes across my hand.* Closets full of ash.

In the end the moths ruled the sky.
At first, we thought they were black bird feathers or
the spots that form in your peripherals when there is too much
blood in your head. *I dropped my note in the pile.*
One by one we drank up, feathers twitching in our hair, those black wings.
The line was shorter than I expected. Black bird feathers. blood spots. spotted black
feathers. Blood-bird black. The black birds are spotting, dripping blood in our mouths.
I had way more paper than the rest of them. I guess I made it longer. Black peripheral.
My pages will keep me safe. Word-memories are the hardest to keep, but I'll try.
A man greets us. Our stupid volcano birthed black birds. One by one.
Big smile. All teeth. He is genuine, I can smell it in his spotted breath.
He leads me down the basement stairs. Heads full of mouths.

In the end the moths ruled the sky.
At first we thought, but then we decided not to anymore.
Our babies were all broken and we had been wearing the same old
clothes for months. *Into a palace of TVs and chairs.*
One by one we swam, memories dead in our heads, with those black wings.
The other kids here seem so happy. Babies. Old clothes. Old babies. Baby-old clothes.
Old thoughts. Old thought babies. Old baby clothes covered in dead thought moths.
I am the oldest one here, but I have no problem playing with them. Thought-clothes.
We watch a movie where I kill my beloved horse and dig out his eyes. I don't feel sick,
maybe I'll prove that man wrong, the stupid babies clogged our volcano, by
waking up tomorrow. We prepare for bed. Uneasy. Joking about death.
The kid next to me starts to gurgel in his sleep. Mouths full of wings.

Flypaper

They think it is funny at first, the children.

We drop them off at the playground to run around and terrorize the field, ripping up flowers and playing silly love games.

He loves me, he loves me not, in their squeaky voices, leaving it up to fate to decide their futures with the falling petals of the daisies we work so hard to maintain in the garden. We like to keep the atmosphere light, you see. It makes them feel at ease when there is beauty to be destroyed.

They think it's funny to catch the bugs—the grasshoppers, the ants, the beetles. For the grasshoppers, the worst fate. They pinch the heads between their thumbs and forefingers and pull until the head just... *pops!* off.

They think it's funny to let it dangle then, the head, still attached to the body with two or three small stringy bits. They chase each other with the mutilated bodies and they scream with delight and horror at being touched by the small, dead creatures.

The slide came about because we tired of doing all the work. *How much easier it would be*, we said, *if we could just let them do it themselves*. They scream and cry and enough of it makes you feel too small, less like you used to be. We've all been there, the place they force us to hide inside ourselves because the outside was claimed for their own.

You see, what happens is, one of them attempts to go down the slide, and then, he sticks there. It's so perfectly simple, and yet, he cannot get away. But he laughs and tries anyway because he thinks it's a challenge or a joke or a game, and they do so love to play, the children.

What happens next is, another one thinks it would be funny to try their luck, and then another, and then another, and soon they all are stuck. The whole group plays along. The object: to get their comrades unstuck from the slide. All it takes is one finger, one tiny *touch!*, and they are stuck to the magnificent slide, the glorious slide, the majestic slide.

It is now a quest. The one who frees them all is a hero! Except they are no match for our slide, though they won't know it for a while. They think they rule the world, that they are invincible, but one by one they all fall prey to its sweet charm. The slide, curly and sticky like a strip of flypaper, except stronger so they can't escape, makes them laugh. Oh, they laugh!

It is when they realize we aren't coming to help that they no longer find the slide funny, but by then has been too late for too long. The more they panic, the easier it gets, for in their haste to get free they wind up with noses, cheeks, even lips pressed to the slide as well. Some manage to smash their faces to the slide so completely that they asphyxiate, almost, immediately after trying to gnaw off a finger or toe. The slide is better for these children.

Imagine, if you will, the chaos of twenty children all trying to come unstuck from the slide. Now, know that we can fit a hundred children on the slide in a good run. Wet, smelly, tearful children as unsightly as anything on this planet all trying to wrench themselves away, sticking others to the slide more securely with their misplaced, flailing limbs.

They struggle, then, when the struggling stops, they cry. They cry until their bodies can produce no more tears, then, when the tears stop, they yell for help. They yell for help until their voices are hoarse from the effort, then, when they can yell no longer, they simply resign themselves to death and wait for its cold grip on their hearts. The stench is not nearly as unbearable as the noise they make.

When it is safe, finally we advance. We bring a big truck, one capable of holding the entire slide at once. Men and women come wearing gloves to help now, for this is the day to celebrate and rejoice in the slide. Once we have lifted the slide, we hoist it up a ramp and dump it into the truck. If the children haven't struggled enough their limbs dangle and bounce as the slide flies through the air.

We think this is funny.

Old Joe

The lake was green.

“A challenge for Old Joe today, is it?” Old Joe asked the lake. He waited a bit for the lake’s reply, but when it remained silent, he guffawed and hoisted the bag over his shoulder and then wandered around the perimeter, looking for a break in the scummy green greatness that lay before him.

Old Joe stopped and stared. It was more still than he remembered and muted by the slimy film that covered the surface. Not a ripple in sight. Old Joe kicked a rock into the shallows and noted that it made a very rock-shaped hole, a wound in the soft belly of the lake. The idea of it all made him feel like a knight. He spotted a large stick and picked it up with his free hand, wielding it like a sword. “Take that! And that!” he shouted. The green beast reared its ugly head and Old Joe took the opportunity to chop it off. The stick struck the surface of the lake and the blood rained down. Old Joe noticed that it too was green. He continued on.

The lake wasn’t very large and Old Joe had long legs so, in no time at all, he found himself beginning his second lap around the perimeter. “I’d leave a few more holes next time, if I were you,” Old Joe told his old lake, “It’s easier to breathe that way.”

The bag was getting heavier and Old Joe was getting hotter the longer he carried it, so he chose a flat beaver-gnawed stump to rest on. He wasn’t sure how long he sat with the bag listening to the cicadas in the trees, but he didn’t care much either. Eventually, from his pocket he pulled a squished slice of bread. He crushed and wiggled his fingers around until the bread was just crumbs in his hand.

Old Joe picked at the crumbs and nibbled a few. The rest he threw at the lake, a peace offering of sorts. Old Joe imagined the bass pounding their fishy heads over and over against the green window that separated them from their next good meal. He stood with his stick and slashed at the oppressive algae that held the crumbs from their watery grave. It clung to the stick and hung in a big, goopy blob from the end. Old Joe peeked through the window he had made and thought there might not be any fish in the lake after all.

The more he thought about it, the more he considered that there might not even be a lake here in a year or two if the algae kept up, it'd just be a pond. And then, in another year or two, it might not even be a pond anymore, just a marshy hole in the middle of the forest.

Old Joe loved his old lake. The sentiment cheered him, and he sang a little tune as he returned to his stump.

One Fish, Scream Fish
Two fish, Red Fish
Green Fish, Creamed Fish
Goo Fish, Dead Fish. The rhymes made him happy.

The bag beckoned. It was getting tired and so was Old Joe. “Shh, shh,” Old Joe comforted the bag, “I’m not ready yet.”

Old Joe left the bag with the lake and headed into the surrounding forest. He walked through the dripping darkness until he found what he was looking for. He returned to the bag with a bunch of flowers in one hand. A piece of vine twirled around the bottom transformed it into a bouquet. “For you, Madame!” he bowed as he presented the bouquet to the bag’s feet. Old Joe imagined she was pleased. Between the beauty of the blood red sky above and the beautiful bouquet he had presented her, she couldn’t refuse him now.

Old Joe stretched. He picked up the bag and the bouquet and moved toward the water’s edge. Step, together. Step, together. He held the bouquet to his nose and took in the smell of a thousand country afternoons. He tossed the flowers out as far as they would go and, like the crumbs, they came to rest atop the green blanket masking the murky water. Old Joe heaved and hoed and swung the bag out to meet the flowers.

With a loud splash, the bag landed on top of the flowers and sank to the lake’s bottom. His aim was getting better. Old Joe noted with pleasure that the bag made a very body-shaped hole. It would be

gone by morning, but Old Joe had only gotten to be as old as he was because he was a careful man. He grabbed some rocks from the shore of the lake and threw them in, making sure to scatter them around where the bag had entered the water so that the hole now resembled something more abstract.

Night was starting to press on the edges of the sky. Old Joe thought it would make a grand picture frame. He found a stump in a larger clearing and sat wondering as the last tendrils of red gave way to the deep, muting purples and blues of a quieter night.



SADIE ROEBUCK | Doorknob



SADIE ROEBUCK | Bulb

WILL GINN

Pine Mountain Valley, GA (1944)

Days of humid sepia
spent tossing rough, square hay bales
into red-rusted trailers,
lined with dead wood.

Boredom so constant and sharp
that Charlie threw a black cat
from the water tower—
his arms marked with deep lines
that sang a sweet song, a new song.

The rancid smell of chicken shit
throughout the narrow valley
led Charlie to cover his face
at night with Momma's cheap perfume.
Sweet asphyxiation: sleep.

The local factory stench bathed everyone
in an odor of patient beige,
and the walls of the valley
seemed to grow closer every day.

Charlie's letter, new and white,
contained a foreign language
that he could already speak
as fluid as fresh well water:
Okinawa.

Momma said: *how do you spell it—*
How do you spell it?

CAITLIN DOWNS

The Blues

You befuddle me, boy-child. When needing, alone, a picnic I imagine your offerings to sandwich-cut or basket-pack, your blanket folding skills much superior to the kids'. So along you come, strange, swaying, swooning me, woozering with boozebreath. And I recall that the kids' breaths are cinnamon-sweet candymeat things (because we raised them oh-so-wrongly). They are starshine eyeballs, they are tearstreak cheeks compared to your pathetic holdings. That's why little ones take first priority, because they reek of innocence and their stances and grumbling throatsounds let me know that I'm their mainthing. The words that drizzle from me can't convey you, though, and all is and must be lost. Even the slowstretching babies, their soft smells fading into a simple luminance of life in parks without you. They will only miss you until they forget, and the same goes for me. Every ounce aching for... what? I find that I am disregarded, doodled much better in felt-tip.

JOHN STOVALL

Burgundy Eyes

When the dry wind rolled through town
paper bags hung themselves
on the knobs and the posts—at once tied around the necks
we danced on in torn socks.

Jogging, sobbing through historic districts—
students by day, sommeliers by night,
fooling the corks out of bottles. Faces slipping red, gasping for air,
we had to stop and swirl about for a minute with the wind.

Coolness tracked in beggar leaves
allured by the still aroma of our faces, unsettling
in the full bodied cellar. Slinging letters like rocks, we licked words
how children lick rubies, sucking for sweetness.

We all had been drug up to some high place and left
gracefully, piled pieces woven.
When grace's wedge too left, over we tipped. Babies splattered
the town below. Bags over our heads.

Loving in cycles, soaring and swimming:
an acceptance speech we had been rehearsing,
for years rehearsing when the tasteless wind came, snatched it back.
We were at gunpoint suddenly, the world closely watching.

Arranged in portrait rows, on our knees,
while the wind in back held us up by the bags,
we could be heard whimpering, nerves twitching for romance.
But, caught, we caved at the draught of the drop of a dime.

Youth, blind till the point when the brittle wind crazes.
Too much in love. We were pulled up from a dream by our lips
slowly tense and somber,
stealing last piercings of freedom, until the purple bottom
was out of sight. Stolen, our back-and-forth.

Our burgundy eyes, stains and wild round glass.

On a Painting of Three Fish by My Mother

These spots (speckles on a brighter backdrop)
look on my face as majestic freckles, as one is blessed
with a new blessed day and a new spot, as the gilded, Spanish-
tiled bodies of rainbow trout.

Individual moments: the spots are my own,
passed on to me like my mother's eyebrows, eyebrows
for heavy breathing eyes
thickened with age, capable
of their own heaving motion, like chrome waves sunspotted.

We are a family deeply stolen into water,
river-rats until fishermen. You say, "they look like three
heads, bearing themselves in the sword's sunset reflection. Three
kings."

I look out from the pavilion. Splashes of pink
like a kingfisher's motion, destined up the river corridor.

CHELSEA RICE

Raining

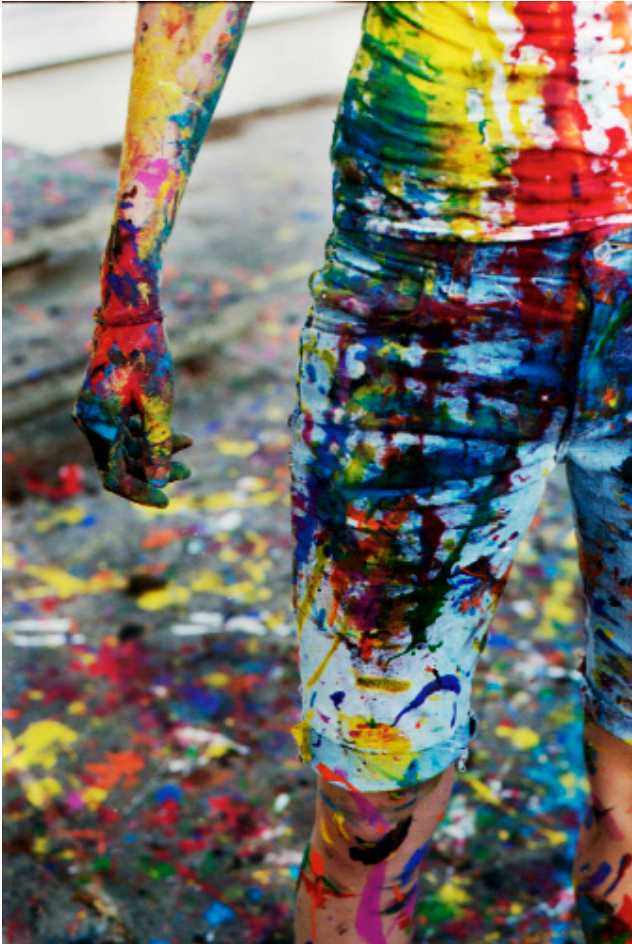
That which swells ankles and knees
Throbbing joints, as though the swimming pool
-the chlorine, even –
Were inside of you

That which we wait for – somewhere distant, without knowledge of
the waiting.
Sweet surprise of a sneeze, or cracking knuckles at the arrival gate.

That which keeps us from things, and secretly we rejoice. The garage
smugly damp, dirt rising from the ground, pavement a field of razor-
blades.

It's never sleeping, it's something like hope.

Today; however = leathery fingers paddling velvet leaves. The sight
of books cleanly put on the shelf, knowing what you will smell. Skin
heaving itself into the air, the bandage cleanly and painlessly removed.
Waiting in the dark at the end of the bridge, while they run desper-
ately towards you with triumphant torches. Oh, how bright the lights.



ERIN FREEMAN | Pollock Party

PAUL WEDDLE KASAY

Playing Tennis with Frost

I would love to play tennis without a net
Maybe after some practice
We might even play without the bands of chalk
Delineating when our clay covered shoes break their plane
Telling us so exactly when we have fallen off their edge

By then it will be just me and my opponent
Throwing all our strength into the ball
A blur of movement and muscle
No intension to sneak one over to the corner
We'll aim directly for each other

Getting lost in one pure decided motion
Though that might one day progress
So that we will not need rackets
And anything extra will be left out of our hands
So it is just ourselves

And maybe one morning
The ball itself will be gone
And it will just be us
Striking a yellow streak of light across at one another
And maybe one afternoon we will sit down and let that light
Bathe us both

ERIN LOVETT

Ghosts

There was a time when a wall was not a wall
but a portal, its golden doorknobs
orbs in which our distorted faces were the phantom
of life, the blacks of our eyes
could be dipped into with spindly
silver spoons and our laughter
could be drunk up by witches, stolen,
bought or sold like the locks
of our light hair, like the locked fences
we burrowed under, our fleeced bellies sliding
against the nettles and cracked leaves
like skeletal snakes,

and a stone was a gem, and a tree
was a god, and its branches were angels
which could be pried and persuaded
back down amongst their crooked roots
and used as swords or propped up
to serve as the wall of a cabin or fort.
And there was one day each year
when our polyester changed our identities
and we tucked our names beneath our pillows
and beside our baby teeth and pilgrimaged
through subdivisions, through wet grass,
howling, running, falling and scraping our palms
and hiding the blood beneath the flesh-colored
strips that lived in the hall closet
amongst our mothers' horrifying viles of cherry
poison and snow-white pills,

and these were the days we believed
that if you sat alone in a darkened room
and believed it hard enough and spoke it
out loud, three times, ghosts were unquestionably

real--ghosts of children, ghosts of women, ghosts
rose out of corpses like a tissue box, and dwelled
in these dark rooms, and the houses of strangers,
and the woods most nights. And there was a reason
we were never silent, and always moving:
In moments of stillness you could hear them whisper,
it was certainly their whisper. Their whisper
that sounded out our names.

Dog Years

They say dog years work different—some formula
to make us feel as if he lived to be an old man,
an equation that gives him seven times
as many birthdays, that makes us feel that he feels
seven times as much in one seventh the time.

If so, he died days ago, not hours,
he stopped eating years ago,
and half his dog years he spent lying
sprawled on the living room carpet,
resting, waiting.

His fur turned nearly the same shade—
a beige, a light sand-colored
roughness, coarseness
stretched over his back like a drum,
his heart like a dull bass, his breathing
a dusty, shallow flute.

He did not make much noise,
did not whimper as the swelling
rose in his throat.

There in the living room lay the strong passing
into a new dog era—

I could almost hear the earth
beginning to sprout from his jutting spine—
trees and fern rising
from his shoulder blades, two leaves
fall onto eyes slowly closing.

A wooded landscape, he stoops
to lap from the surface of an infinite pool.

PATRICIA WHITTAKER

Rock Bang Boom

They were Camden's rocks
Rough and hard, round and thick
He pulled them from the front yard, lined them up by size
Built them into a tower, squished black mud in the cracks
He left them in the sunlight, baked them dusty brown

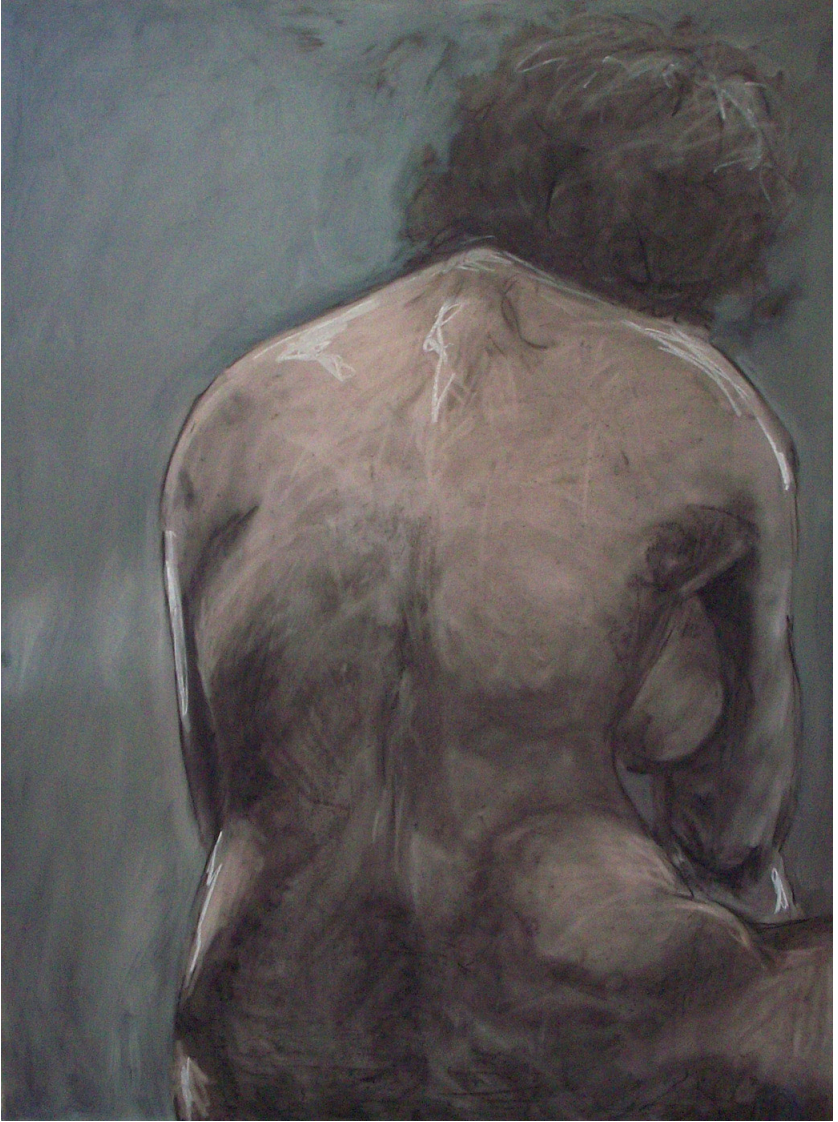
They were Camden's rocks
Sharp and cold, small and wet
He bounced them off the sidewalk, drew circles where they landed
Scratched them down the brick wall, pretended they were chalk
He stacked them on the doorstep, tripped the family dog

They were Camden's rocks
Dirty and grey, dull and flat
He flicked them at the cars, made cobwebs in their windows
Hid them in the cupcakes, broke his neighbor's teeth
He threw them at his sister, kissed her when she cried

They were Camden's rocks
They were Camden's rocks
They all pointed their grimy fingers and said:
They were Camden's rocks

Scolded

It wasn't Camden's joke – the dirty joke
It was not Camden's joke
But, he liked the joke
He laughed at the joke
He snickered and snorted and gasped at the joke
Spewed marshmallow, dirty with ash, at the joke
Repeated the joke, reworded the joke
Rethought, retaught, recorded the joke
Reused the joke, restated the joke
Rewrote, respoke, related the joke
Described the joke
Inscribed the joke
Industriously defiled with the joke
But, it wasn't Camden's joke
He told the nun with her ruler
It was not his joke



CATHERINE JOHNSON | Untitled Woman



CATHERINE JOHNSON | Untitled 1

Studies in the Correlation Between the Quality of the Burrito and Interpersonal Success

A quick spot of glare shot off the large front window of Poor Billy's Seafood and into the eyes of Greg Lundy as he passed by. He recoiled momentarily, then averted his eyes and covered them at the same time, just to be sure. He rounded the corner and stayed with the sidewalk, heading left onto North Main Street. Despite the harsh sunshine, the air was cold and it smelled of the direct, stratified pollution of winter. Greg breathed in heavily, holding in the lungful and screwing up his face as he thought of how long it would be until summer returned. His jacket felt heavy and unnatural. It protected him from the cold, but inside the jacket it was hot and his torso as a whole felt somehow frantic, like it was suffocating independent of the rest of his body. He'd seen pictures of war veterans with no limbs. He wondered now what it would be like to be the first man with all four limbs and no torso.

His body appeared somewhat rigid as he walked. He had recently begun considering his posture at every turn. It had occurred to him after a semester of college that there might be some truth and merit in his mother's historically insisting that he not slouch, that he keep his head up and shoulders back at all times. He was tall, and she had always encouraged him to not hide that fact. And eye contact. Eye contact is key to engaging and even intimidating people, he reminded himself. He knew he had plenty of time to figure his life out, but Greg already took stock of the fact that sticking to these two tenets was essential to social and professional success.

A loud, sustained horn blast jerked him from his thoughts, and he looked up to see his friend Peter hanging out the passenger window

of a burgundy SUV, approaching as slowly as Main Street traffic would permit. This was not nearly slow enough to stop and chat. Peter's arm was extended, but he was wearing thick black gloves and it was hard to tell what kind of manual gesture he was trying to make, if any.

"Ey brah!" Peter yelled when the car was at the exact spot on the street that Greg was at on the sidewalk, latitudinally speaking. Greg recognized a flash of the face of his friend Cameron at the wheel, though he was unsure as to why he was driving this unfamiliar car. Cameron didn't even have a car.

"Whose whip?" Greg tried to yell as quickly as possible. But Peter was already too far away to hear, and Greg watched him drop back into the cabin as the car disappeared up the street.

Greg shrugged and continued walking. He needed something to eat, and he felt that he could use a break from the dining hall for the day. Just down the block he eyed the Moe's sign jutting out from the side of the building and a great turmoil swelled up inside of him, a heated anguish that he would always associate with this town and its limited cibarious resources.

Greg loved Blacksburg. Greg hated Moe's. He believed their tortillas to be rigid and unyielding. He found their ingredients to be of questionable freshness, and their overall gimmicky M.O. an insult to burrito lovers the world over.

Greg's appetite for burritos was insatiable, but he much preferred Willy's over any other. Willy's had very supple, continent tortillas; like flypaper, he always said. In his eyes, Willy's' ingredients were of the utmost quality. He liked to think they were culled from crisp-aired mountaintops in all the best produce regions of the world, places where hale black beans glistened with the morning dew and heads of lettuce performed choreographed on-the-vine dances that would make perfect commercial footage but would never be done the indignity of being filmed because they were too sacred. The fixins certainly tasted as such. The only problem for Greg was that the Willy's franchise had yet to spread as far north as Blacksburg, VA. As a result, he often found himself satiating his burrito lust with inferior wraps, and every time he bit into one of Moe's', what little pleasure he could derive was completely negated by the invidious suspicion that somewhere, a couple hundred miles south, some unappreciative bastard was chomping into a perfectly rolled, impossibly fresh Willy's burrito absentmindedly, probably talking to his wife about youth soc-

cer games and mortgage payments and completely glossing over the savory item before him that made it all worthwhile. Greg referred to Willy's as The Temple. Once inside, nothing but positive sentiments were allowed. No questioning the amount of meat you were given or the distribution of the veggies in the coil; you were to take your lot in life with dignity. It would all work out. In any event, he would remind dining partners, the worst Willy's reet is still far superior to Moe's' best offering. Greg would have nothing disrupt the glory of Willy's consumption. He only wished he could partake of it more often. It made going home to visit his parents in Atlanta all the more worthwhile. The drive was long, but the burritos were divine. It was called The Pilgrimage.

Greg closed his eyes as he approached Moe's and tightened his mouth, taking a deep breath in through his nose. The delectable bitter scent of roasting beans wafted over from the cafe next door and besieged his olfactory nerves. He paused with his hand on the door handle a moment, vacillating over whether he really wanted to do this. It felt like adultery every time. Eventually he conceded, perhaps rationalized (as he would later admit) that he was hungry, and he entered, offering the entire Willy's family a silent apology in apostrophe.

He stumbled out of the restaurant twenty-five minutes later, a thick film of salsa residue and betrayal coating him like a swarm of pestilent gadflies. He decided to just put it behind him. He checked his watch: 2:38 p.m. Class was done for the day, and he didn't have to report to work at the library until eight. He wondered what to do with himself for the next several hours as he strolled back toward his dorm.

He turned back onto Jackson Street at the corner in front of Poor Billy's. He moved southwest and was about to cross over to campus when, looking around idly, he spotted a car at a small nearby intersection with its hazards on and the driver's side door open. The car was an SUV just like the one in which he had seen Peter and Cameron, but it was tan in color. The intersection at which it was stopped was the crossing of two tiny side streets, little more than alleyways between main roads, really. Automotively speaking, it was frequented infrequently. Greg didn't even know the names of the two streets. He decided to walk over and check it out, just to make sure that nothing

was wrong.

The buildings on either side of the intersection were white brick affairs, looming like canyon walls over the miniscule concrete tributaries running between them. The area was shaded, the air colder than on Main Street. The sounds of traffic on Main were slightly muffled by the tight, insular valley in which Greg now found himself. He approached the car and noticed a girl on the exterior passenger side, crouched down on her haunches. She appeared to be staring at something on the ground. She was facing away from him, her thick blond ponytail hanging down to the middle of her back. It looked limp, and heavy. He wanted to pull it and draw curtains over the alley. There was, as she continued scrutinizing the unseen object on the ground, a small section of her ass peeking out from the brim of her jeans. Like her jeans, the girl's posterior was pale, as though she had chosen her pants this day in the interest of matching her skin tone (assuming, of course, that she had accepted inclement ass exposure as an inevitable phenomenon). Greg chuckled quietly to himself at the sight, but found that he was also a little aroused. Guilt quickly overtook him, and he castigated himself inwardly. This girl could be in trouble, he reminded himself. He was ten feet away from her now, and still she had not noticed his approach. He checked his posture, threw his shoulders back a little bit more, and said, "Excuse me, are you alright?"

The girl turned quickly, clearly startled. She scanned Greg for a tense moment, then relaxed. Greg studied her face; her eyes had a look of inscrutable intensity, like she saw everything through binoculars. He couldn't assign an emotion to it. "What?" she said.

"I said, 'are you alright?'" Greg repeated calmly. "I noticed you had your hazard lights on and thought I'd come make sure there was nothing wrong."

"I'm fine," she said, noticeably flustered. "Thanks."

Greg couldn't tell whether she was incensed by his sudden address or by whatever she was looking at on the ground. But he noticed now that she was not bad looking at all. He realized that this was an opportunity to put his new interpersonal fortitude to use.

"All right," he said with a smile, looking intently at her. "It's just not everyday you see someone hunched down next to their car in an alley when there's nothing wrong."

"Yeah, I guess so. But don't worry about it. Thanks for your concern." Still crouching, she turned back to the ground next to her car.

"I'm Greg," said Greg. The girl turned back, exasperation now written in neon yellow on her face. Greg stood tall over her compacted form. "What are you so fascinated by on the ground over there?" he asked, a hair of calculated patronization in his voice. He wanted to control this exchange to evince the fact that he knew how to do so.

"It's nothing," she said. "It was nice to meet you, Greg. Thanks for your concern."

Greg got it. He wouldn't push. He just found himself questioning the whole "confidence always works" thing. He had been confident, had taken the initiative. There was probably even some nice chivalrous undertone to what he had just done. But this girl wasn't having it.

"All right," he said again, taking care to not sound resigned or bitter. "Have a good one."

"You too," the girl replied over her shoulder, in a tone that Greg had to admit was not in any way unfriendly. He turned, hands in his jacket pockets, and walked home.

The door to his room was locked when he arrived at Main Campbell Hall, a three story brick structure looking out over the expansive Drillfield (technically, the "brick" was called Hokie Stone, so named because of its exclusivity to Southwestern Virginia, but it held up fine). Greg rifled through his numerous keys until he found the right one. The key clicked into place in the center of the handle, but a sudden slap on the back caught him before he opened the door. He screamed, an actual scream, and whirled around to a hysterically laughing Peter, who staggered back and bumped softly into the hallway wall behind him.

"Jesus," Peter said once he had calmed down. "That wasn't even supposed to be a gag. But you scream like a girl, dude. Seriously."

Greg couldn't help laughing at himself. He opened the door to his room and sauntered in. It was a tiny room, 10'8" x 14' to be exact, and the mess of articles covering its floor didn't do much to improve the appearance of it being cramped. Two textbooks, four black garbage bags, and a litany of crayons were but a few of the many items providing the carpet a buffer.

"Your place is an embarrassment," Peter said, following Greg into the room.

Greg moved to the futon and brushed some magazines off of it

before sitting down.

"I totally agree," he said. "Something ought to be done. You want to do it?"

"Sure," Peter said dismissively. He flopped into a desk chair on the far end of the room.

"So like I was trying to say earlier, whose car was that?" asked Greg.

"Huh? Oh, from earlier. Yeah, Cameron just got it."

"Today?"

"Yeah, like two hours before we saw you."

"Huh. I'm surprised he didn't mention it at any point this week."

"It was like an impulse thing. He had the money and just decided he ought to have a car."

"The 'rents?"

"No, man, he paid for it himself. I mean he works all the time, and he makes pretty good money over there. He's been saving up, I guess. The thing only cost like three thousand dollars, Craig's List style."

"Lush," said Greg.

"Absolutely."

They fell silent for a moment before Greg said, "So dude, right after I saw you today—well not right after, like, a little later...Oh, man, I went to Moe's today."

"You broke the promise *again*?" Peter looked at him in disbelief.

"Yeah," Greg said with a dejected look to the floor. He couldn't meet Peter's eyes.

"You're a terrible person. But speaking of which, when are you going home again? I'm trying to come with, get some of that Willy's funk."

"Man, that garbage reet I had today made me want to hop the first Greyhound I could. I need to cleanse my system of the Moe's dirtiness."

"It's poison," Peter agreed.

"Yeah," Greg said absentmindedly. Then he perked up and said, "So anyway, like I was starting to say..." and he told Peter about the incident in the alleyway with the girl and the car and the crouching. He told him about how he had approached the whole thing in a very composed, respectful manner and about how he had abstained from calling her a bitch at any point, even to himself.

Peter was silent for a long moment after Greg had concluded. Eventually he looked up and said, solemnly, "Damn."

Greg rolled his eyes. “That’s a very underwhelming response to a pretty unusual story, Peter. You’ve got to do better than that.”

“Like how?”

“I don’t know, man, give me some advice. At least an analysis.”

Peter turned his palms up in a kind of manual shrug. “I mean, what did you expect? That just because you had good posture and looked directly at her that she was going to go out with you?” He issued an incredulous snort. “It sounds like whatever she was doing was...weird. Or at least really personal. What exactly was she doing?”

“I have no idea. It looked weird.”

“Maybe she was taking a leak. Did she have her pants on when you walked up?”

Greg thought about it for a minute, laughed slightly. “Pretty much, yeah,” he said.

Peter cocked his head. “Pretty much?”

“I mean, she did. Yeah.”

Peter sat up in the desk chair. “In any event, the point is that some situations aren’t really prime for pick up attempts. It was nice of you to check on her—”

“That’s what she said.” Greg went in for an up-top, but received only a puzzled look from Peter. “That’s actually what she said,” Greg explained. It was still funny to him.

“Oh,” Peter said. “But whatever, it’s not a big deal. Go take your new social skills and hit on chicks around campus who aren’t crouched down in an alleyway.” He smiled. “You do like the weird ones, don’t you?”

Greg laughed. “Technically it wasn’t an alley, though I think I referred to it as such at one point.”

He stood up and looked past Peter, out the window. The Drillfield was a massive meadow that was slightly hilly but more or less unadorned. It was a sea of green in the spring, but was just kind of a crunchy beige obstacle at the moment.

“Drillfield looks like shit,” Peter observed, his gaze following Greg’s.

Greg continued staring at the field. “Yeah,” he said. The word was drawn out and trance-like. He turned to Peter. “I’ve got a little homework to do, but do you want to smoke a bowl later?” he said.

“Don’t you have work?”

“Not until eight.”

“Oh. Yeah, okay. I’ll check you later.”

“Later.” Peter roused himself and moved out into the hall, closing the door softly behind him. Greg looked out again at the Drillfield and frowned.

Greg gathered his things and headed toward the library to study. He hadn’t developed any type of aversion towards studying in the library. He had always figured he eventually would, given the amount of mandatory time he spent there. But it hadn’t happened yet.

He walked northeast through the field, along Drillfield Drive, which he always thought had the nicest ring to it. The sun was still up, but was in the throes of its descent, getting ready to go visit its progeny on the other side of the world who needed it just as badly. Greg checked his watch: 4:33 p.m. It was freezing, and he cursed this goddamn weather for making him bundle up and hide from the outside world, if only by way of a couple inches of fabric. Eggelston Hall, the all-girl dorm just down the road from his own, lay ahead and to his right. He spied a lone female figure sitting on the ground in front of it. The legs were curled under the girl and a book was splayed out in her lap. Moving closer, Greg saw that it was Connie Myers, a girl he had met through some mutual friends. They had only hung out together in group settings; it wasn’t as though they were exceptionally close. But Greg felt that they were well-acquainted enough for him to go a bit out of his way to say hi to her.

“Connie,” he called, walking up to her briskly. The rigidity and quickness of his pace were more a result of the cold than unbridled enthusiasm at seeing her. He thought she was a nice girl, though. And she had a name that he had always found very charming: Connie Myers. He repeated it to himself silently and chuckled a bit. It sounds like the really nice mom of a friend from back home, he thought. He pictured Connie walking into a party with a trayful of homemade cookies and laughed a little.

She looked up from the tome in her lap, which Greg now saw was a sprawling textbook featuring minimal graphic elements. She smiled as she recognized him. It was one of those universal, good-to-see-you smiles that really nice girls have on call for whenever they see someone whose company they genuinely enjoy, but whom they don’t know all that well.

“Hey Greg, how are you doing?” she said.

“I’m great, how about you?” he replied, taking care to maintain

eye contact. She would have to be the one to back out.

"I'm good," she said, nodding affably. Then she hefted her textbook. "I'd be a little better if I didn't have to get through a hundred pages of this by tonight, but..." She shrugged. She had smooth black hair that she usually kept in a ponytail, a convention to which she made no exception on this afternoon. Her dark eyes were small and reminded Greg of raisins in the faces of gingerbread men.

"Yeah, that looks pretty daunting," Greg said. "What is it?"
"Chemistry."

Greg made a face and allowed himself to look away for a moment. "Yikes," he said. "That's no fun."

She laughed, and kept staring at him after she had stopped, vestiges of a smile clinging to her eyes.

"What?" he said, growing uneasy.

"What you said. I haven't heard anyone say 'yikes' since, like, the Scooby-Doo age."

"That was 'zoinks,'" he corrected her.

"My mistake." She bowed her head unctuously. "Anyway, what are you up to?"

"Just heading to the library to study a little."

"Cool. Wait, don't you work there?"

"That I do."

"Don't you get tired of being there all the time?"

"Maybe a little. But it's so quiet. It's the best place to study." He lowered his voice as though he were letting her in on a secret: "It seems as though most of the student body doesn't know about it. So don't tell."

Connie laughed. "I can assure you, me and the library are very well acquainted. Though the relationship is not always a healthy one, such as when I have to study this crap," she said, pointing to her textbook.

Greg winced. "That is a dagger. Couldn't you have taken some other science class for a general elective?"

"Yeah, I just didn't look into it that much. I thought, 'whatever, it's just a general elective.' I guess I should have done more homework on that one. Does culinary science count?" she said, and laughed, and Greg chuckled along, taking care not to laugh too obnoxiously.

"That sounds like fun," he said. "I made monkey bread once for a home ec class in middle school. It was really good, but I haven't returned to the realm of desserts since."

She cocked an eyebrow. "You know, Greg, cooking classes aren't

just about desserts and shit like that.”

Greg was caught off guard by Connie’s sass. His head drew back and his eyes went wide with surprise. “Well school me,” he said in a mock-challenging tone.

“Think about it,” she said, leaning back on the stiff grass and supporting herself with her hands. “Think of all the awesome restaurant food you wish you could make at home. Well, assuming you don’t live in a dorm room. That’s what they do in those classes. Main courses kind of, you know, determine the theme of the meal. You’ve got a million different meat and rice dishes, which all say one thing, like Chinese or Indian, depending on what you put in there. Then there’s Hispanic stuff, like quesadillas, which actually aren’t that hard. Burritos, though, are real tough to get right.”

“Welllll,” he began, looking whimsically skyward, “I think I might be able to drop some knowledge on you concerning burritos.”

“Well if that’s true, awesome. Let me know. They’re my fave.”

Greg lit up. He put a hand at his heart, and even he didn’t know whether he was joking. “You love burritos?”

Connie sat back up. Her mouth hung upon and she gave a couple pronounced nods. “Most definitely,” she said. “Back home in Chapel Hill, there’s this place Qdoba? It’s by far the greatest restaurant ever. Their ingredients are, like, the freshest of all time, and I’ve never once gotten a sloppy roll.”

Greg placed his hands palms-out in front of himself. They shook a bit with newfound nervousness. “Welllll let’s hold up there, Connie,” he said, reminding himself to stay on the offensive. “I’ve heard good things about Qdoba, but until you’ve tried Willy’s you haven’t lived.”

“Well clearly you haven’t tried Qdoba, either. So I guess you’re just as uninformed.”

“True,” Greg said, nodding slightly and putting a thoughtful finger to his bottom lip. “Can we please both agree, though, that Moe’s sucks?”

Connie made a disgusted face. “Worst tortillas ever. And what’s up with all this ‘Joey Bag Of Donuts’ stuff? I just want a burrito.”

“Exactly,” Greg enthused. He was doing his best to project an air of interest that was only mild. It was obvious, however, that there was some weird, sideways attraction here, one reverberating with a queer energy that he didn’t want to question lest it slip away. He knew it was ridiculous. But he found himself suddenly enamored with Connie Myers. The feeling was based on more than her clear and

laudable commitment to the integrity of burritos: he had never been able to make headway with a girl without putting on some degree of front. She was genuine, and relatable. There didn't seem to be any no-fly zones with her. He knew that it was time to take decisive action. This kind of coincidence doesn't come about often, and it's all about throwing out lines, he reminded himself.

"Connie, do you want to go out to dinner sometime?" he said. "We won't be able to settle the debate or anything, given the fact that there's no Willy's or Qdoba up here. But maybe we could discuss the finer points of some other dishes until one of the franchises wises up and makes the trek." He stopped and had a hard time focusing on Connie's face. Wow, he thought to himself, that was probably one of the smoother speeches you'll ever make. He found that his whole body was tense. He was trying to keep his shoulders back. Good, he thought, it's becoming second nature.

Connie smiled, a big, unguarded grin that betrayed waves of ecstatic flattery. "Yeah," she said. "Definitely."

Greg's body relaxed. His shoulders ached a little. "Great. Well I've got to run and study, but I'll call you later today." Note to self, he thought: do so before bowl w/Peter.

"Okay," she said, still beaming. "Bye, Greg."

"Bye." He turned and continued across the Drillfield, head afloat, wondering just how in the hell he was to ever going to pull chicks in the future if imitation Mexican food was his only card.

EMILY HEILKER

fissures of men, or the art of throwing a wake

barren, the grove in which i'm sitting. flowers claw to earth. branches, wrenching, tilt under: beams of erected sky, broken and burnt. bird-heads, petaled with clavicles, once set screams in the trees. now, spinning silence, they're falling, fallen. bastards of japanese maples, they're sounding metonymic *thgks*.

in the grove, everything's descending. the cracks in me are rising up. when they are complete, i will spout hoards of senseless fish, dead as moon. we will draw x -es on all our faces and drape black mustaches over beaks. the fish, above all, will need nothing. they know already: hymnal of silent songs, mass of the heard for the heard, uses of ambiguous mouth-molds, actions of potato-mashed eyes.

to observe the wake, we will then toss the silver-slipped bodies into the naked branches. there, they will catch and shine. here, it will be as if the sky had been re-netted—new holes, new wholes—new scales, new dimensions—. it will be as if the trees were leaf-eyed with stars.

sirmio

our silent faces cast into um-
ber and somber shades, skin
tight, a tarp against
the wind. words emerged—broke

slowly. windfall of many burdening
fruit, calyx just peeled.
ecdysis of an un-
timely laugh: sheds more than tears.

chry- santhe-
mum and mothcoat, collected in the plate
of
cupped hands— many-fingered

puppets, lithe
marionettes. paperweight figures
of other selves. we lift—enlace—link—in-

activated.
the red grins rest in the
folds—o-
live groves, we sweat a summer
mourning, heavy with our now

clammy grasp. cypress-spindles knit
lines, at the edges. we'd try un-

purl, to take
four

steps

back...

lie low and give us

—olive groves!

our other
peace.

ASIA MEANA

Doll Maker

There is a breathless pop as the needle
Punctuates its exit and I
Jump
Aware of how close I've sunk,
Of my wire-stiff spine curved around my
Hands—completely unguided by my mind, now
I don't mind at all because they are working
The kinks out of a miracle before my
Eyes and if I have to think I'll probably blink and miss
The way the puckers tighten and vanish on her
Cheeks—if she could
Only speak
She'd thank me, I'm sure,
For stitching my prettiest buttons under the brush-stroke
Eyebrows,
For the yarn I wrapped round and round my
Fist before I snipped it in half to give her
Hair, and for the tiny red felt
Organ I cut out and tucked
Unseen amidst the cotton in her
Chest

There are calluses forming on my
Fingertips by the time her wire-wrapped
Frame is draped in a dress I'd never be able to pull off so I
Slip out of my own clothes
Blow the dust off the shelf and place her there
And I notice,
When I fold myself inside them,
How the sheets feel like someone else's
Skin—cool and almost
Wet with soft and entirely
Threadless

In the morning I find
A stray wisp of cotton caught between my
Toes that reminds me of a cloud so I
Step into the early sun for a minute and
Stretch all ten of them without
Splitting a single
Seam, and
Then I am warm and pliable
Wire-strong strapped with
Elastic sinews, I unravel into
The pleasure of it

Back inside I notice the
Heart-curve stenciled in the dust on
The bed so I look for her on the floor around it—
For a trail of dislodged vein-ribbon
Or a stray eye blinking its four button holes against the blood—
Brush the grain of my
Fingerprints along the ledge for any sign of
Struggle

There is none, but I know she did as
I climb back onto the shelf

KELLY SERVICK

Microscopic

“How many stops till yours?”

The best time to bring up something ugly is when your time to talk is limited. Say it and then assume a safe distance. This was Curtis’ philosophy, at least.

“Three. No, four. I don’t know, three or four.” She was staring out the window, squinting whenever the bus turned to angle the five o’clock sun into her eyes.

“Mm.” *Say it, just say it. Ready, say it.* “So. I’m thinking about taking the next relocation slot. If I get on the list again.” Mary jerked her head to face him. The motion was more abrupt now—no hair swung around to land on her opposite shoulder.

“What happened to ‘this is my town, this is where I want to be’? You said you’d be the last one here.”

“That was a month ago.”

“Yeah. That’s the point. You said you’d stick it out. Stick it out meaning that things would change and you wouldn’t change your mind.”

“Look I don’t think it’s very responsible to have an opinion and say it’ll never change.”

“You said your favorite band would never change, no matter what other band you heard.” Curtis felt a surge of pleasure in the possibility that this fight could take on the character of an old, meaningless one. He would love to fight with her about something stupid right now—to feel that every stinging remark was underwritten by the promise of reconciliation. It would be so refreshing.

“That’s not the same.”

"I know. I just... I know that. Jesus." The thrill faded. This wasn't like the good old arguments.

"I know you say you're happy here. And I know you feel safe here—"

"What do you mean I feel safe here? What's safe about this place?"

"—And I know you don't want to talk. About... this. Here. Or. At all..." He was reading from a bad modern poem with one word per line. His teleprompter was running too slowly.

"Shit."

"I just think that's one reason. And I'm not saying you're really shallow or anything. But I mean, everyone here had to do it. So everyone gets it. And everyone gets that your hair was a big part of who you are—"

"You don't know what you're talking about." This sounded to Curtis like an absolute stranger. The old Mary wouldn't say that—she would tilt her head to the side like an abruptly deactivated robot. Her hair would fall over her eyes and she would hide behind that brown, wavy curtain for a moment. And then she would come back out and give him an explanation, starting with, "Ijustfeellike..." And things would work themselves out.

When she had gotten the e-mail announcement and the schedule of times to come in to the clinic and be shaved, he had been sitting in her bedroom, doing the book-holding that passed for reading in her presence, and staring at the back of her hair. She was the most distracting human he had ever met. He had already set his own appointment for the next day, but had decided to let the e-mail break it to her.

"This is soooooofucking stuuuupid," she had said without turning around. "I don't have it, I would know if I did. There's no way I'm doing this."

All he had managed to say was, "Mary, it's microscopic... how can you know?"

The angle of the sun changed as they turned a corner, and they both squinted, lifting visor-hands to their foreheads. "I don't want to make you upset. Obviously. But I feel like I should say it anyway.

Because I think you should give it more thought—”

Next stop: West End Apartments.

Please pull the cord to request additional stops.

“It seems like you think you’re stuck here because it’s like some kind of colony that you belong in. Look at everyone on this bus.” Her eyes got sharp, warning him to keep his voice down. They were sitting in the last seat, and none of the shining heads in front of them were within hearing distance. “Nobody’s that worried about it, because everybody they run into looks the same. And you talk about this place like you’re gonna be here for years and have no choice. You even said something about waiting until it grows back.”

“Please. That was a joke.”

“I don’t know. It didn’t seem like you were really joking. And you don’t even talk about wanting to see your old friends back home and stuff.”

“So what if I don’t talk about it? Everybody wants to be able to travel, and for things to be back to normal.”

He sighed.

“I just think this is messing with your head. And it seems like it would be easier if you started over. You wouldn’t have to think about people always comparing you to somebody you were before.”

“When did I say that’s what I’m worried about? Is that what you’re doing, comparing me to the way I was before? Changing your mind about me? Is that what the problem is?”

“What? No. Jesus. It’s just a haircut, Mary.” She had never attacked him this way before. And the veins on her scalp were visible, moving with her frown, with the ridges where her eyebrows had been.

“I think about you the same way I always have.” He wanted it to go without saying, purely so he wouldn’t have to say it.

“Hey, you’re asking me to think about the reason I’m staying... did you forget that I haven’t even come up on the list anyway?” He had forgotten. About 70% of the city had come up by now, said the paper, and more than half of those people had decided to go through the screening process and relocate.

“No, I know, but you’re gonna come up, that’s the point of the list is to offer the plan in phases so that everyone will periodically have the opportunity to be screened—”

“Yeah I read the same e-mails you did.”

“Okay.” He could feel her advancing.

“Look, is this—”

Next stop: Sycamore Shopping Center.

“Is this—”

Please pull the cord to request additional stops.

“Is this conversation about me or you? You’re telling me you’re gonna try and relocate. And then you’re telling me I should think about why I want to stay.” That was Mary’s specialty, stepping over the dead argument— like a high heel over a messy corpse— to get to something more practical: what do you want to do? He knew her thought process so well, and he could see it even better through her bare scalp.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what I’m supposed to say or ask you. Because I don’t know where you stand. Last time we talked about it, you said there’s no way you were gonna relocate...” What if she had it? What if she had it right now? When was the last time he’d kissed her? He stared at the little places where her eyelashes were beginning to sprout back. What if she said she’d go with him? Was it possible to pass the screening and still have it?

“Uh, the last time we talked about, you said the same thing...”

“I know. But I had different reasons for staying. If you had gotten a relocation offer, I think you would have turned it down because you don’t want to go in the world out and walk around and deal with the fact that you were here when all this happened.”

“Why did you turn yours down?” There was an urgency to her evasiveness.

“Cause of you.”

This was true, but it sounded absurd to Curtis now. The outbreak had propelled them into a new closeness while everyone else was treating each other like dangerous specimen. She had been the only person he wasn’t afraid of.

“Right. And now I look different. And you’re leaving.”

“Why are you doing this? That’s not how it is.” She was forcing him to lie. She was making him guilty by accusing him. If she could just get over it and stop pressuring him, he wouldn’t have these thoughts...

Next stop: Spring Boulevard.

Please pull the cord to request additional stops.

Mary turned toward the window slightly, as if the only breathable air was outside of their talking space. They sat in silence as the bus passed a gated entrance to Spring Drive, where several police officers

crowded around a sign reading “Quarantine Area.” None of the air seemed breathable to Curtis anymore. He just wanted to breathe as little as possible until his name came up.

Three days after her appointment, Mary had texted “Come over?” and Curtis had decided to walk because he couldn’t remember everyone who had ridden in his car in the last few months, and he didn’t trust it. He had passed a group of four girls walking home to their apartments. Their faces were tanner than their scalps.

“Curtiiiiis,” they had said in smarmy unison, at which point he had realized that these were not just a bunch of bald girls, but his four next-door-neighbor girls.

“Oh, hey. Potluck this Sunday night?”

“Uuh actually, Sunday night potlucks are on hold for now.” Jess typically made the guacamole. “But hey, I’m sure we’ll see you around.”

“Yeah. Say, I take my trash out around 6 on Thursdays.”

Jess had laughed in a way that was somehow compassionate, ripe and aware of some mutual weariness. “Maybe we’ll take our trash out at that time too.”

“Trash party!” said Redheaded Roommate whose real name Curtis had never learned, and whose nickname no longer fit.

Curtis had walked on, passing a girl wearing a bright green wig. “That’s good,” he had thought, “funny.” But walking by her had been tense; she had come too close. He had picked up his pace, eager to be safe at Mary’s.

The bus hoisted itself over a bump in the road with a violent rattle. Mary’s head, tilted towards the window, nearly smacked the glass.

“So... If you’re name comes up, where are you gonna go? Back to your parents’?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“What about your degree?”

“It’ll be on hold.” Curtis didn’t approve of things being on hold. Even telephones on hold in a secretary’s office made him uncomfortable. The flashing red light said, “There is an exact but unknowable amount of time until the person on the other end is going to give up on you.”

“Well.”

“Yeah. I know.”

“It doesn’t sound like you.”

“I know.”

“I really thought you’d stay.”

Next stop: East Hickory Street.

Please pull the cord to request additional stops.

All of a sudden, everything had been said. Rather than asking him to move, Mary squeezed past him. This was the first physical contact he’d had with anyone today. He was so used to meticulously avoiding touch that when the back of her thigh brushed his knee he involuntarily cringed, feeling the crawling sensation of coming into contact with a dangerous specimen. He felt shamefully relieved as she advanced up the aisle, but once she was safely out the door, he had the urge to get off bus and follow her. Her shiny head bobbed along with several others, and then she broke off from the group to turn down the drive to her apartment. The further away she got, the more she looked like Mary, or a prototype of Mary, essential and unadorned. Her long stride and the subtle shifting of her weight from hip to hip comforted him as the doors hissed closed.

KRISTEN SMITH
Sheep Sleep Sheep





KRISTEN SMITH | Neon Honey

SARAH CONKIN

And all the while she hummed

She swings expertly from branches
Of blossoming apple trees,
She drops emerald granny smiths
To the yearning grass fingers below,
Slyly tucking her jewels beneath
Her threadbare cardigan,
She steals away.

Later, in indecipherable terms—
She pens her dreams.
Her papermate felt tip blotting
Out the triangle bridge
Of her father's nose,
Wary of puncturing the reflective
Surface of glacial spheres—

She dusts the shelf, she places
The apples one by one,
Guarding them from parents,
Vagabonds, and lovers.
Later, smashing tea cups in shops,
She consumes her treasures,
Leaving lipstick on the core.

stealing is the sincerest form of flattery

I removed the worn flannel shirts from the wire shelf in your mouth. I placed them in between my own stained and chipped incisors, yellowed from similar habits of cigarettes and pepsi. I speak and I spray showers of plaid cotton witticisms. They whisper amongst themselves of our likeness.

I have stolen the jar of super orange from the creases of your knuckles. I placed it in the left pocket of my tee, carrying it with me. Later I will uncap it and place it next to me while I watch myrna and william powell. I inhale the soapy mixture of artificial orange I layer under my nose like the vicks mom used to prescribe. When I return I will follow your fingerprints stamped in car grease that are painted all over the house.

I have written you a song from the clicking I collected from your knees. It sounds like CCR and I know I didn't ask, but I hoped you wouldn't miss the random popping too much. As soon as I get the melody right I will return it.

I lifted the little debbies that you store in your abdomen, where you used to keep muscle and pot. I put them in a box that I buried in the backyard. It sounds harsh because since you gave up smoking you love little debbies, but I had to do it. This way we have a secret that mom doesn't know about and she can't eat them all up. When I come home we will dig them up and devour them, washing them down with pepsi and laughing about who you used to be.

If you are looking for the retractable papermate pen you keep in the lockbox in your chest, I have it. I found the key behind your ear and I simply opened you up and took it from behind your ribs while you were napping in front of the tv. I placed it behind my own ribs. But only after first drawing a skinny mustache under the triangle nose you gave me. And yes, I know it looks French, and yes, I know without the French and their help in the American Revolution we would all still be speaking English.

I have found the old family pictures and that paternity letter meemaw taught you to keep hidden in the writing desk in your mind. I was peeking through the drawers under the flip top when you were unclogging the sink. Perhaps if they are missing, it will be like a steam shower, and the memories will pour out of your sinuses and that way you can release the pressure and talk about it, and I can know what actually happened, and we can all just admit that I look like her.

P.S. I don't care about the paternity letter. It makes me love you a little bit more.

P.P.S. While I was riffing through the flip top under your receding hairline. I found those dirty jokes, you old pervert. I'm glad I put them in my pocket at the last minute. Everyone laughed over dinner when I told them about the witch not being able to get pregnant because her husband had a halloweeny.

I have hidden myself in five down on today's crossword puzzle. I hate being away from home and I know you probably get lonely, and wonder where all that money goes, so I thought I would position myself in your daily routine. So lower your dollar tree glasses to the crooked bridge of your nose and answer Loch _____ Monster.

To the Reader

My conception of *Stillpoint* has changed considerably since I joined its staff as a sophomore in the fall of 2007. Back then I thought the magazine's editors were formidable people, not only advanced critics of literature—undoubtedly the stars of their upper-division English classes—but also the sort who were deeply *involved* at the University, who could confidently sit in on, even lead, meetings with peers, professors, and administrators. What I've come to realize, however, is that *Stillpoint* owes its success not to any elite personalities, but rather to the enthusiasm of a host of people within and without the organization who make the magazine what it is: namely, much more than a magazine.

For me at least, one voice in the crowd, *Stillpoint* has been an incomparable network of friends and fellow literary geeks. It's been a series of get-togethers, of readings, open mics, art exhibitions, and talks. It's been a way to find out what other undergrads are doing—what they're writing, painting, or photographing—and a way to jump start my own work and send it in new directions. Without *Stillpoint*, my experience at UGA would hardly have been as fulfilling or as enjoyable as it has been, and for that I owe everyone involved a debt of gratitude.

It's no surprise to me that while other college lit mags have come and gone, and while professional, non-digital publications everywhere are closing their doors and flipping out the lights, *Stillpoint* continues the mission it began in the late '60s not only of gathering the best student writing between its covers but also of spreading the literary love well beyond North Campus. I take this year's record submissions as proof: over 300 pieces from more than 100 writers and artists.

Stillpoint abides. And while I can't predict what it will look like in another 40 years, I will say this: if you're just picking up the magazine for the first time (or second, or third), consider not only reading and enjoying it, but helping to shape it.

Truly,

Charles Blackburn
Senior Editor

PS. For information on upcoming events, submissions guidelines, and staff applications, see our website: www.uga.edu/stillpoint.

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Stillpoint Staff